



## CHAPTER I.

### A MORNING IN GUANAJUATO.

THIS morning I am wandering about Guanajuato. It is a grotesque, quaint old mining town, near the line of the Mexican Central Railroad, within a day's journey of the City of Mexico. I had arrived the night before tired out, and awoke so early that the sun and I appeared on the streets about the same hour.

The air was deliciously cool and fragrant, and shouldering my sketch-trap and umbrella I bent my steps towards the church of *la parroquia*.

I had seen it the night previous as I passed by in the starlight, and its stone pillars and twisted iron railings so de-



lighted me that I spent half the night elaborating its details in my sleep.

The tide of worshippers filling the streets carried prayer-books and rosaries. They were evidently intent on early mass. As for myself I was simply drifting about, watching the people, making notes in my sketch-book, and saturating myself with the charming novelty of my surroundings.

When I reached the small square facing the great green door of the beautiful old church, the golden sunlight was just touching its quaint towers, and the stone urns and crosses surmounting the curious pillars below were still in shadow standing out in dark relief against the blue sky beyond.

I mingled with the crowd, followed into the church, listened a while to the service, and then returned to the plaza and began a circuit of the square that I might select some point of sight from which I could seize the noble pile as a whole, and thus express it within the square of my canvas.

The oftener I walked around it, the more difficult became the problem. A

dozen times I made the circuit, stopping pondering, and stepping backwards and sideways after the manner of painters similarly perplexed; attracting a curious throng, who kept their eyes upon me very much as if they suspected I was either slightly crazed or was about to indulge in some kind of heathen rite entirely new to them.

Finally it became plainly evident that but one point of sight could be relied upon. This centred in the archway of a private house immediately opposite the church. I determined to move in and take possession.

Some care, however, is necessary in the inroads one makes upon a private house in a Spanish city. A watchful porter half concealed in the garden of the patio generally has his eye on the gateway, and overhauls you before you have taken a dozen steps with a "*Hola, señor! ¿quién busca usted?*" You will also find the lower windows protected by iron *rejas*, through which, if you are on good terms with the black eyes within, you may perhaps kiss the tips of her tapering fingers.



There is a key to the heart of every Spaniard which has seldom failed me—the use of a little politeness. This always engages his attention. Add to it a dash of ceremony and he is your friend at once. If you ask a Cuban for a light, he will first remove his hat, then his cigar, make you a low bow, and holding his fragrant Havana between his thumb and forefinger, with the lighted end towards himself, will present it to you with the air of a grandee that is at once graceful and captivating. If you follow his example and remain bareheaded until the courtesy is complete he will continue bowing until you are out of sight. If you are forgetful, and with thoughts intent upon your own affairs merely thank him and pass on, he will bless himself that he is not as other men are, and dismiss you from his mind as one of those outside barbarians whom it is his duty to forget.

In Mexico the people are still more punctilious. To pass an acquaintance on the street without stopping, hat in hand, and inquiring one by one for his wife, children, and the various members of his

household, and then waiting patiently until he goes through the same family list for you, is an unforgivable offence among friends. Even the native Indians are distinguished by an elaboration of manner in the courtesies they constantly extend to each other noted in no other serving people.

An old woman, barefooted, ragged, and dust begrimed, leaning upon a staff, once preceded me up a narrow, crooked street. She looked like an animated fish-net hung on a fence to dry, so ragged and emaciated was she. A young Indian one half her age crossed her steps as she turned into a side street. Instantly he removed his hat and saluted her as if she had been the Queen of Sheba. "*A los pies de usted, señora*" (At your feet, lady), I heard him say as I passed. "*Bese usted las manos*" (My hands for your kisses, señor), replied she, with a bow which would have become a duchess.

I have lived long enough in Spanish countries to adapt my own habits and regulate my own conduct to the requirements of these customs; and so when



this morning in Guanajuato, I discovered that my only hope lay within the archway of the patio of this noble house, at once the residence of a man of wealth and of rank, I forthwith succumbed to the law of the country, with a result that doubly paid me for all the precious time it took to accomplish it; precious, because the whole front of the beautiful old church with its sloping flight of semicircular stone steps was now bathed in sunlight, and a few hours later the hot sun climbing to the zenith would round the corner of the tower, leave it in shadow, and so spoil its effect.

Within this door sat a fat, oily porter, rolling cigarettes. I approached him, handed him my card, and bade him convey it to his master together with my most distinguished considerations, and inform him that I was a painter from a distant city by the sea, and that I craved permission to erect my easel within the gates of his palace and from this coign of vantage paint the most sacred church across the way.

Before I had half examined the square of the patio with its Moorish columns and

arches and tropical garden filled with flowers, I heard quick footsteps above and caught sight of a group of gentlemen preceded by an elderly man with bristling white hair, walking rapidly along the piazza of the second or living floor of the house.

In a moment more the whole party descended the marble staircase and approached me. The elderly man with the white hair held in his hand my card.

"With the greatest pleasure, señor," he said graciously. "You can use my doorway or any portion of my house; it is all yours; the view from the balcony above is much more extensive. Will you not ascend and see for yourself? But let me present you to my friends and insist that you first come to breakfast."

But I did not need the balcony, and it was impossible for me to share his coffee. The sun was moving, the day half gone, my stay in Guanajuato limited. If he would permit me to sit within the shadow of his gate I would ever bless his generosity, and, the sketch finished, would do myself the honor of appearing before him.



Half a dozen times during the progress of this picture the whole party ran down the staircase, napkins in hand, broke out into rapturous exclamations over its development, and insisted that some sort of nourishment, either solid or fluid, was absolutely necessary for the preservation of my life. Soon the populace began to take an interest, and so blocked up the gateway that I could no longer follow the outlines of the church. I remonstrated, and appealed to my host. He grasped the situation, gave a rapid order to the porter, who disappeared and almost immediately reappeared with an officer who saluted my host with marked respect. Five minutes later a squad of soldiers cleared out the archway and the street in front, formed two files, and mounted guard until my work was over. I began to wonder what manner of man was this who gave away palaces and commanded armies!

At last the sketch was finished, and leaving the porter in charge of my traps I seized the canvas, mounted the winding staircase, and presented myself at the large door opening on the balcony. At

sight of me not only my host, but all his guests, rose to their feet and welcomed me heartily, crowding about the chair against which I propped the picture.

Then a door in the rear of the breakfast-room opened, and the señora and her two pretty daughters glided in for a peep at the work of the morning, declaring in one breath that it



was very wonderful that so many colors could be put together in so short a time; that I must be *muy fatigado*, and that they would serve coffee for my refreshment at once.

This to a tramp, remember, discovered



on a doorstep but a few hours before, with designs on the hallway!

This done I must see the garden and the parrots in the swinging cages and the miniature Chihuahua dogs, and last I must ascend the flight of brick steps leading to the roof and see the view from the tip-top of the house. It was when leaning over the projecting iron rail of this lookout, with the city below me and the range of hills above dotted with mining shafts, that I made bold to ask my host a direct question.

"Señor, it is easy for you to see what my life is and how I fill it. Tell me, what manner of man are you?"

"*Con gusto, señor.* I am *un minero*. The shaft you see to the right is the entrance to my silver mine. I am *un agricultor*. Behind yon mountain lies my hacienda, and I am *un bienhechor* (a benefactor). The long white building you see to the left is the hospital which I built and gave to the poor of my town."

When I bade good-by to my miner, benefactor, and friend, I called a sad-faced

Indian boy who had watched me intently while at work, and who waited patiently until I reappeared. To him I consigned my "trap," with the exception of my umbrella staff, which serves me as a cane, and together we lost ourselves in the crowded thoroughfare.

"What is your name, *muchacho?*" I asked.

"Matías, señor."

"And what do you do?"

"Nothing."

"All day?"

"All day and all night, señor."

Here at least was a fellow Bohemian with whom I could loaf to my heart's content. I looked him over carefully. He had large dark eyes with drooping lids, which lent an air of extreme sadness to his handsome face. His curly black hair was crowded under his straw sombrero, with a few stray locks pushed through the crown. His shirt was open at the throat, and his leathern breeches, reaching to his knee, were held above his hips by a rag of a red sash edged with frayed silk fringe. Upon his feet were the sandals



of the country. Whenever he spoke he touched his hat.

"And do you know Guanajuato?" I continued.

"Every stone, señor."

"Show it me."

In the old days this crooked old city of Guanajuato was known as *Quanashuato*, which in the Tarascan tongue means the "Hill of the Frogs;" not from the prevalence of that toothsome morsel, but because the Tarascan Indians, according to Janvier, "found here a huge stone in the shape of a frog, which they worshipped." The city at an elevation of 6,800 feet is crowded into a narrow, deep ravine, terraced on each side to give standing room for its houses. The little Moorish looking town of Marfil stands guard at the entrance of the narrow gorge, its heavy stone houses posted quite into the road, and so blocking it up that the trains of mules must needs dodge their way in and out to reach the railroad below.

As you pass up the ravine you notice that through its channel runs a sluggish, muddy stream, into which is emptied all

the filth of the City of Frogs above, as well as all the pumpings and waste washings of the silver mines which line its sides below.

Into this mire droves of hogs wallow in the hot sun, the mud caking to their sides and backs. This, Matías tells me, their owners religiously wash off once a week to save the silver which it contains. As it is estimated that the summer freshets have scoured from the bed of this brook millions of dollars of silver since the discovery of these mines in 1548, the owners cannot be blamed for scraping these beasts clean, now that their output is reduced to a mere bagatelle of six million dollars annually.

On you climb, looking down upon the houses just passed on the street below, until you round the great building of the Alhóndiga de Granaditas, captured by the patriot priest Hidalgo in 1810, and still holding the iron spike which spitted his head the year following. Then on to the Plaza de Mejía Mora, a charming garden park in the centre of the city.

This was my route, and here I sat down



on a stone bench surrounded by flowers, waving palms, green grass, and pretty señoritas, and listened to the music of a



very creditable band perched in a sort of Chinese pagoda in the park's centre.

Matías was equal to the occasion. At my request he ran to the corner and brought me some oranges, a pot of coffee, and a roll, which I shared with him on the marble slab much to the amusement of the bystanders, who could not understand why I preferred lunching with a

street gamin on a park bench to dining with the *élite* of Guanajuato at the *café* opposite. The solution was easy. We were two tramps with nothing to do.

Next Matías pointed out all the celebrities as they strolled through the plaza—the bishop coming from mass, the governor and his secretary, and the beautiful Señorita Doña María, who had been married the month before with great pomp at the cathedral.

“And what church is that over the way where I see the people kneeling outside, Matías?”

“The Iglesia de San Diego, señor. It is Holy Thursday. To-day no one rides; all the horses are stabled. The señoritas walk to church and wear black veils, and that is why so many are in the streets. To-day and to-morrow the mines are closed and all the miners are out in the sunlight.”

While Matías rattled on there swept by me a cloud of lace encircling a bewitching face, from out which snapped two wicked black eyes. The Mexican beauties have more vivacity than their cousins



the Spaniards. It may be that the Indian blood which runs in their veins gives them a piquancy which reminds you more of the sparkle of the French grisette than of the languid air common to almost all high-bred Spanish women.

She, too, twisted her pretty head, and a light laugh bubbled out from between her red lips and perfect teeth, as she caught sight of the unusual spectacle of a foreigner in knickerbockers breakfasting in the open air with a street tramp in sandals.

Seeing me divide an orange with Matías she touched the arm of her companion, an elderly woman carrying a great fan, pointed me out, and then they both laughed immoderately. I arose gravely, and, removing my hat, saluted them with all the deference and respect I could concentrate into one prolonged curve of my spinal column. At this the duenna looked grave and half frightened, but the señorita returned to me only smiles, moved her fan gracefully, and entered the door of the church across the way.

“The caballero will *now* see the

church?” said the boy slowly, as if the incident ended the breakfast.

Later I did, and from behind a pillar where I had hidden myself away from the sacristan who frowned at my sketch-book, and where I could sketch and watch unobserved the penitents on their knees before the altar, I caught sight of my señorita snapping her eyes in the same mischievous way, and talking with her fan, as I have often seen the Spanish women do at the Tacon in Havana. It was not to me this time, but to a devout young fellow kneeling across the aisle. And so she prayed with her lips, and talked with her heart and fan, and when it was all thus silently arranged between them, she bowed to the altar, and glided from the church without one glance at poor me sketching behind the column. When I looked up again her lover had vanished.

Oh! the charm of this semi-tropical Spanish life! The balconies above the patios trellised with flowers; the swinging hammocks; the slow splash of the fountains; the odor of jasmine wet with



dew; the low thrum of guitar and click of castanet; the soft moonlight half-revealing the muffled figures in lace and cloak. It is the same old story, and yet it seems to me it is told in Spanish lands more delightfully and with more romance, color, and mystery than elsewhere on the globe.

Matías woke me from my reverie.

"Señor, vespers in the cathedral at four."

So we wandered out into the sunlight, and joined the throng in holiday attire, drifting with the current towards the church of San Francisco. As we entered the side door to avoid the crowd, I stopped to examine a table piled high with rosaries and charms, presided over by a weather-beaten old woman, and covered with what was once an altar cloth of great beauty, embroidered in silver thread and silk. It was just faded and dingy enough to be harmonious, and just ragged enough to be interesting. In the bedecking of the sacred edifice for the festival days then approaching, the old wardrobes of the sacristy had been ransacked, and this

piece coming to light had been thrown over the plain table as a background to the religious knickknacks.

Instantly a dozen schemes to possess it ran through my head. After all sorts of propositions, embracing another cloth, the price of two new ones, and a fresh table thrown in, I was confronted with this proposition:—

"You buy everything upon it, señor, and you can take the table and covering with you."

The service had already commenced. I could smell the burning incense, and hear the tinkling of the altar bell and the burst from the organ. The door by which we entered opened into a long passage running parallel with the church, and connecting with the sacristy which ran immediately behind the altar. The dividing wall between this and the altar side of the church was a thin partition of wood, with grotesque openings near the ceiling. Through these the sounds of the service were so distinct that every word could be understood. These openings proved to be between the backs of certain saints



and carvings, overlaid with gilt and forming the reredos.

Within the sacristy, and within five feet of the bishop who was conducting the service, and entirely undisturbed by our presence, sat four hungry padres at a comfortable luncheon. Each holy father had a bottle of red wine at his plate. Every few minutes a priest would come in from the church side of the partition, the sacristan would remove his vestments, lay them away in the wardrobes, and either robe him anew, or hand him his shovel hat and cane. During the process they all chatted together in the most unconcerned way possible, only lowering their voices when the pauses in the service required it.

It may have been that the spiritual tasks of the day were so prolonged and continuous that there was no time for the material, and that it was either here in the sacristy or go hungry. Or perhaps it lifted for me one corner of the sheet which covers the dead body of the religion of Mexico.

These corners, however, I will not

uncover. The sun shines for us all; the shadows are cool and inviting; the flowers are free and fragrant; the people courteous and hospitable beyond belief; the land the most picturesque and enchanting.

When I look into Matías' sad eyes and think to what a life of poverty and suffering he is doomed, and what his people have endured for ages, these ghosts of revolution, misrule, cruelty, superstition, and want rise up and confront me, and although I know that beneath this charm of atmosphere, color, and courtesy there lurks, like the deadly miasma of the ravine, lulled to sleep by the sunlight, much of degradation, injustice, and crime, still I will probe none of it. So I fill Matías' hand full of silver and copper coins, and his sad eyes full of joyful tears, and as I descend the rocky hill in the evening glow, and look up to the great prison of Guanajuato with its roof fringed with rows of prisoners manacled together, and given this hour of fresh air because of the sacredness of the day, I forget their chains and the intrigue and treachery which