IV.

THE SKIRMISH AT BUENA VISTA.

MR. MANGAN BROWN and Mr. Gamboge investigated the tanneries of Leon with much interest. In regard to the quality of the raw-hides, they expressed entire approval; but their strictures upon the tanning process, and upon the product in dressed leather, were severe.

"I am glad that the late Mr. Orpiment is not with us, Brown," Mr. Gamboge remarked, with some feeling. "The mere sight of such sole-leather as we have been looking at this morning would have given him an attack of bilious dyspepsia; it would, upon my word! I regard tanning like this," he added, slowly and impressively, "as positively immoral. I am not at all surprised, Brown—not the least bit in the world surprised—that

a nation that accords its tacit approval to tanning of this sort is incapable of achieving a stable government. I may add that I am sure that Mexico will lag behind all other nations in the march of progress until its leather business has been radically remodelled and reformed." And in this possibly extreme opinion Mr. Mangan Brown, who also was deeply moved by what he had seen, entirely concurred.

But the rest of the party, being blissfully ignorant of the tanning iniquities of Leon, were disposed to think the bustling little city altogether charming. Rowney Mauve described it happily as a mixture of the Bowery and the Middle Ages; young Orpiment delightedly made the studies for his well-known picture, "A Mexican Calzada"—the picture that made such a sensation when it subsequently was exhibited in New York; and while Brown was disappointed by his failure to discover so much as a single good picture in any of the churches, his heart was gladdened by finding all around him a rich abun-

dance of material out of which good pictures might be made.

On the whole, the verdict of the party already was strongly in favor of Mexico; and after its several members had enjoyed the perfect picturesqueness of Guanajuato—where the noble paintings by Vallejo in the parish church, and the still finer work by Cabrera in the Compañia, suddenly opened the eyes of the artists to the greatness of Mexican art—this pleasing sentiment expanded into and thereafter remained (with the exceptions noted below) one of unmixed approval.

Mr. Pemberton Logan Smith avowedly pined for the flesh-pots of Philadelphia. "I am not at all particular about my food, you know, Mauve," he said, plaintively; "but hang it, you know, I do like a solid meal now and then; and except at that queer little place at Lagos, where things certainly were capital, I'll be shot if I've had a solid, well-cooked meal since I came into Mexico."

"Haven't you, though?" Mauve asked,

with a slight air of scepticism. "Now, I was under the impression that I had seen you several times doing some tolerably serious pecking. Anyhow, you stowed away enough at Lagos to last you till you get home again."

"Yes," Pem answered, "I did have some satisfactory feeding there. Jove! what a heaven-born genius in the cooking line that jolly old Gascon is! And don't I just wish that I knew where I could get as good a claret for as little money in Philadelphia or New York!" And Pem smacked his lips feelingly as he remembered Don Pedro's inspiring food and drink. But even sustained by this cheering memory, it was not until he was come to the City of Mexico and reposed, as it were, in the culinary bosom of Father Gatillon, at the Café Anglais, that Pem really was comforted.

The other exception in the matter of entire approval of Mexico was Mrs. Gamboge; and the point of issue in her case was a delicate one. To state it plainly, it was the bare legs of the agricultural laborers. In confidence

she confessed to Verona that had she been informed of the custom of excessively rolling up their cotton trousers prevalent among the lower classes of male Mexicans she certainly would have remained at home. What with this and the equally objectionable custom prevalent among the female Mexicans of the lower classes of insufficiently covering the upper portions of their bodies, Mrs. Gamboge declared that the average of dress among the lower classes of Mexico was reduced to a point considerably below that at which inadequacy of apparel became personally shocking and morally reprehensible. And all the way from Silao to the City of Mexico — which journey, from point to point, was made by the day train—Mrs. Gamboge sat retired within her prison-like "drawing-room," her face resolutely turned away from the windows, and both the blinds close-drawn. Not even the beautiful cañon south of Querétaro, not even the extraordinary loveliness of the Tula Valley, could tempt her forth from the rigid propriety of her retreat.

"Either the railroad company should take the necessary legal measures to compel these men to wear trousers as they are intended to be worn," Mrs. Gamboge declared, "or else it should build a high board fence on each side of the track." And neither from this decided opinion nor from her self-imposed seclusion could she be stirred.

It was with a feeling of some slight relief, therefore, that Mrs. Gamboge found herself, at the end of the long run from Querétaro, delivered from the prominent presence as a feature of the landscape of unduly bare-legged laborers by the arrival of the train at the Buena Vista station, in the City of Mexico. She thought it highly probable that other shocks might here await her; but she had at least the sustaining conviction that the male members of the Mexican lower classes dwelling in cities as a rule kept their trousers rolled down.

As the party moved away from their car toward the gates, at the farther end of the station, they passed the night express train

that in a few minutes would start for the north. A little group stood by the steps of the Pullman car, and the central feature of this group was a young woman whose travelling-dress betokened the fact that she was about to depart on the train. "See what stunning eyes she's got, Rose," Vandyke Brown said, in a discreetly low tone, "and look how well she carries herself. I'd like to paint her. She'd make no end of an exhibition portrait."

Just at this moment Violet, who was a few steps ahead of them, gave a little shriek; and then the strange young woman gave a little shriek; and then they rushed into each other's arms. Rowney, from whom Violet had broken away to engage in this rather pronounced exhibition of affection, stood by placidly until it should come to an end. He was accustomed to Violet's rather energetic methods, and in the present instance his only regret was that he was not in the running himself. But even Rowney's placidity was a little disturbed when Violet, having detached herself

from the young woman, proceeded, with a similar vehemence, to cast herself first into the arms of an elderly lady, then into those of an elderly gentleman, then into those of a middle-aged gentleman, and finally into the arms of two quite young gentlemen, all of whom embraced her with what Rowney considered, especially upon the part of the young men, most unnecessary fervor, the while patting her vigorously upon the back.

If Rowney had contemplated lodging a remonstrance in regard to this, from a New York standpoint, abnormal exhibition of friendship, he had no opportunity to do so. Before he could open his mouth Violet seized upon him and dragged him into the midst of the little group, where his demoralization for the time being was made complete by finding himself passed rapidly from one pair of arms to another, and embraced by these friendly strangers with quite as much enthusiasm as they had manifested in embracing his wife. During this confusing experience he was conscious that for a moment he was clasped in

the soft arms of the handsome young woman, and realized, as he remembered his wish of but a moment before, that the fulfilment of human desires is not necessarily attended with perfect happiness.

"O Rowney!" cried Violet, "do be glad to see them; don't look so scandalized and horrified. They are ever so glad to see you. Don't you understand? This is my very dearest, dearest friend, Cármen Espinosa, and this is her uncle, Señor Antonio Ochoa, and this is his younger brother, Señor Manuel Ochoa, and this is her aunt, Doña Catalina—Don Antonio's wife, you know—and these are her cousins, Rafael and Rodolfo. Oh! isn't it perfectly delightful! And to think if our train hadn't come in exactly on time we should have missed them; for Cármen and all of them are going to Guanajuato to-night! And Violet once more threw herself into her friend Cármen's arms.

Meanwhile the American party had halted and had gazed at Violet's demonstrative proceedings with a very lively astonishment, that

became a less serious emotion as they contemplated the ill grace with which Rowney suffered himself to be inducted into the amicable customs of Mexico.

"Upon my soul, Gamboge," said Mr. Brown in some alarm, "we'd better get out of this or Violet will be turning her friends loose at hugging us too. I hope that I should get through with the performance, with the pretty girl, anyway, better than young Mauve did, but there's no telling; and, I must say, I don't want to try." That Violet would have introduced her friends is quite certain, but just as she was about to begin this ceremony, and while Rowney was endeavoring to atone for his want of animation during the period of the embraces by making such civil speeches as were possible with the limited stock of Spanish at his command, the starting-bell sounded, and the Pullman conductor summoned the party with a firm civility to enter the train. This time, greatly to his relief, Rowney found that nothing more than an ordinary shaking of hands was expected of him; and

as he knew in a general way the proper speeches to make on such an occasion, he got through with the business of leave-taking in fairly creditable form.

"Only you oughtn't to have said '*adios*,' Rowney," said Violet, correctingly. "That is the same thing as the French *adieu*, you know. You should have said '*hasta luego*,' for that means *au revoir;* and they had just told you that they would be back in the city in a week. It is dreadfully stupid the way in English you say just as much of a 'good-by' to a person you are going to see again in two hours as you say to a person who is just starting on a journey around the world. But isn't it lovely that we met them? And don't you think, Rowney, that Cármen is the dearest dear that ever was? It's the Cármen I've told you of a thousand times, Rowney; the one who was in the Sisters' school with me. If I were good at letter-writing I should have written to her every week; but I'm not very good that way, you know, and I don't believe she is either, and

so we've never heard a single word about each other in two years. She didn't even know I was married; and when I said I was married to 'that handsome man there'—yes, I did say that, and you ought to be very much obliged to me, Rowney—and pointed to where you all were standing, she actually thought I meant Mr. Smith! Wasn't that a funny mistake? Mr. Smith certainly is a nice-looking man; but he is not so nice-looking as you are, Rowney, even if I do say it myself and puff you all up with conceit. And now do let us hurry to the hotel. I know that we'll get something good, and I'm so hungry that I could eat trunk-straps and top-boots, like the people who are wrecked and spend forty-seven days in an open boat at sea."

And as Violet's condition of incipient starvation was that of the whole party—for they had breakfasted at one o'clock in the afternoon at San Juan del Rio, and it was now after eight o'clock in the evening—the move toward the Café Anglais and dinner was made with the least possible delay.

Pem sat next to Violet at dinner, and before she had swallowed her soup he began to ask rather pointed questions about her charming Mexican friend.

"Now, I tell you frankly, Mr. Smith," Violet declared with much positiveness, "that until I have had something to eat I shall not say a single word. I have a perfectly clear conscience, and that means, of course, that I've got a good appetite; and I have. If you've got a bad conscience, and consequently a bad appetite, that's no fault of mine; and I don't intend to suffer for your sins. So, there!"

But even when Violet, having satisfied the cravings of hunger, was disposed to be communicative concerning her friend, her communication was eulogistic rather than informing. Beyond the fact that Cármen Espinosa belonged to very nice people whose home was an *hacienda* up in the Bajío, she had very little to tell. They had been together in the school of the Sagrado Corazon for two years. Then Violet had gone back to her father's

hacienda in Michoacan; and a year later had gone on her expedition to New York, that had ended in keeping her there as the wife of Rowney Mauve. A letter or two during the first six months after their separation had been their only attempt at correspondence. Of her friend's life during the past two and a half years she knew nothing. But she was the best and sweetest and dearest girl that ever lived—and so on, and so on.

Pem was silent as he sat smoking with the other men over their coffee, after the ladies had retired up the corkscrew staircase to their rooms. There was some talk among the artists about the work that they intended doing; and presently Pem roused up and said:

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to Guanajuato to paint that view of the Bufa from up by the highest of the *presas*. It's the finest thing I've seen in Mexico, and I mean to get it. I'm going to-morrow."

There was a stir of astonishment at this outburst of vigor on the part of Mr. Smith,

and his announcement was met, not unnaturally, with comment tending toward skeptical criticism.

"I did think that you was resolvéd, Mr. Smeeth, not to touch one brush while in thees land," said Jaune d'Antimoine, seriously.

"And so did I," added Brown. "What's got into you, old man, to break down your virtuous resolution to be lazier than usual?"

"Look here, my dear fellow," Rowney Mauve put in, "I'd like to know what's to become of me if you take to working? Don't you see that I rely on you for moral support? But you don't mean it, I'm sure."

"I do mean it, and I tell you I'm going to-morrow. I've always meant to take home one picture from Mexico; at least I've always rather thought I would. And the more I think about that view of the Bufa, the more I'm determined that that shall be what I'll paint."

Pem had been known to make resolutions of this sort before without any very startling

practical results ensuing, and not much faith was placed by anybody in his stout assertion. But faith was compelled, early the next evening, when he stated that he was about to have an early dinner in order to catch the northbound train, and then bade everybody goodby. And off he went, with the parting shot from Brown that Saul among the prophets wasn't a touch to him.

In the privacy of their respective chambers that night Brown and Mauve expressed to their respective wives their astonishment at this extraordinary manifestation of energy on the part of their Philadelphia friend.

Rose smiled in a superior way and said: "Really, Van, I sometimes think that you are about as stupid as even a man can be! Why, don't you see that Mr. Smith has gone after that pretty Mexican girl?"

And Violet, in response to very similar utterances on the part of Rowney Mauve, very similarly replied: "What a thick-headed creature you are, Rowney. Mr. Smith has gone after Cármen, of course. I knew what

he was up to at once, and I thought I'd help him a little, and so I—I asked him if it would be too much trouble, since he was going to Guanajuato anyway, to take a letter from me to my friend. And you just ought to have seen how very grateful the poor fellow was! But you mustn't tell, Rowney; that wouldn't be the square thing."

V.

THE AFFAIR OF MOLINO DEL REY.

MR. PEMBERTON LOGAN SMITH returned from Guanajuato five or six days later, bringing his sheaves with him. But his sheaves did not amount to much.

He arrived from the railway station in time to join the party at dinner; and although dining was about at an end, they all waited while he ate his dinner and at the same time gave an account of himself.

"What a blessing it is again to get something to eat," he observed with much satisfaction as Gilberto—"the best waiter I ever came across anywhere," Mr. Gamboge had declared approvingly—took away his empty soup-plate and filled his glass from a bottle of Father Gatillon's sound Bordeaux. "I stayed at Doña Maria's, of course, and the