

A WHITE UMBRELLA IN MEXICO.

BY F. HOPKINSON SMITH, WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR.



MADAME CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA, the Scotch wife of the first Spanish minister sent to Mexico after the achievement of her independence, in her delightful book of travels published over forty years ago says: "There is not one human being or passing object to be seen in Mexico that is not in itself a picture."

The country has not degenerated since. It is to-day, in its varied scenery, costumes, architecture, street life, the most marvelously picturesque land under the sun—a tropical Venice, a semi-barbarous Spain, a new Holy Land.

Until the opening, some five years since, of the present system of railroads, the inhabitants of much the larger part of Mexico had been for 350 years completely isolated from the world at large except through such limited channels of communication as the bridle path and the desert trail afforded. So it naturally happens that this vast population, numbering some 10,000,000, have adopted but little from America and Europe, and the Mexican is still the Mexican of a hundred years ago, *sombrero*, *zarape*, and all, and the Indian *peón* is the same patient, mild-eyed, gentle savage whom Cortés found and enslaved.

To study and enjoy a people thoroughly one must live in the streets. A chat with the old woman selling fruit near the door of the cathedral, half an hour spent with the sacristan after morning mass, and a word now and then with the donkey-boy, the water-carrier, and the padre, will give you a better idea of a town and a closer insight into the inner life of a people than days spent either at the governor's palace or at the museum.

If your companion is a white umbrella, and if beneath its shelter you sit for hours painting the picturesque scenes that charm your eye, you will not only have hosts of lookers-on attracted by idle curiosity, but many of them will prove good friends during your stay and will vie with each other in doing you many little acts of kindness that will linger in your memory long after you have shaken the white dust of their cities and villages from off your feet.

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 tired out the night before, 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 my 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 delighted me that I spent half the night elaborating its details in my sleep.

The tide of worshipers in the streets carried their prayer-books and rosaries and 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 which faces 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 stood out in dark relief against the blue sky beyond.

I mingled with the crowd, followed it into the church, listened awhile to the service, and then returned to the Plaza and began a circuit of the square, to 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, stepping backwards and sidewise after the manner of painters similarly perplexed, and attracting, by my unconscious performance, a curious throng, who kept their eyes upon me, very much as if they suspected I was either slightly imbecile or was about to indulge in some kind of heathen rite entirely new to them.

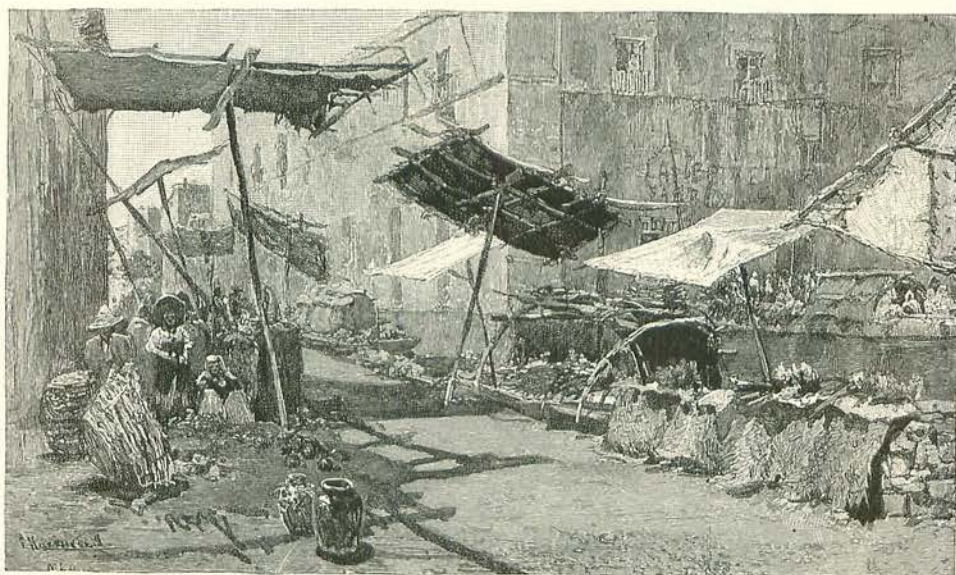
Finally it became plainly evident that but one point of sight could be relied upon. This centered in the archway of a private house immediately opposite La Parroquia. I determined to move in and take possession.

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 tapering fingers; but the bars will be too close for much else. To the heart of

of vantage paint the most sacred cathedral 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



THE CANAL MARKET, CITY OF MEXICO.

every Spaniard, however, there is a key that has seldom failed me. It is 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.

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 in a few hours' time 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

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.

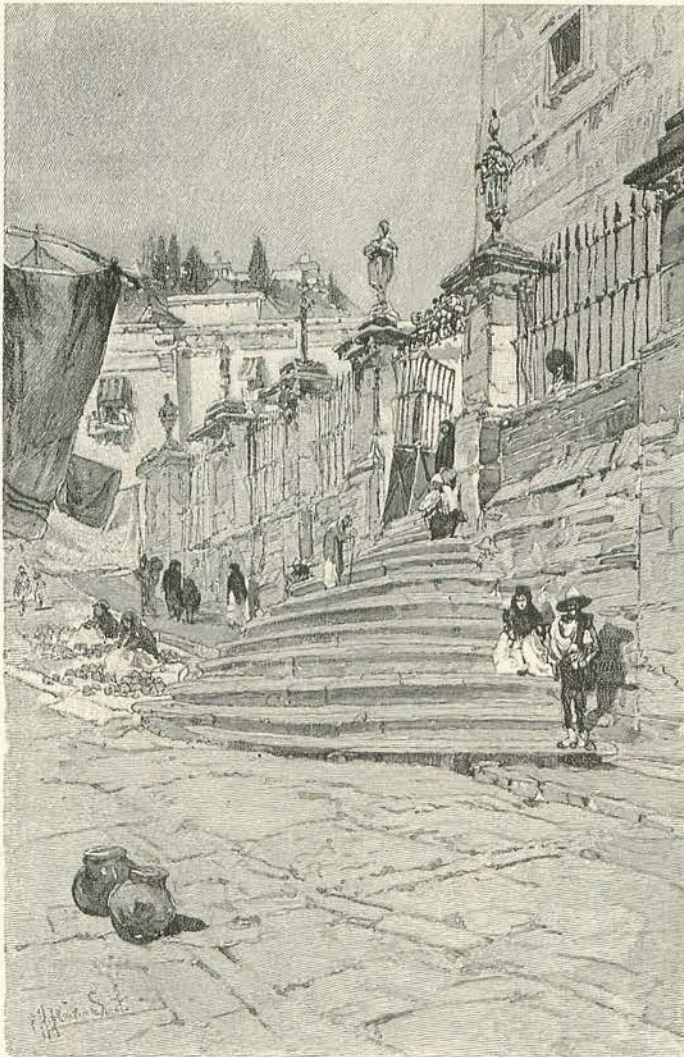
“With the greatest pleasure, Señor,” he said graciously. “You can use my doorway or any portion of my house; it is all yours. The view from the balcony above is much more extensive. Will you not ascend and see for yourself? But let me present you to my friends and insist that you first come to breakfast.”

But I did not need the balcony, and it was impossible for me to eat his breakfast. The sun was moving, the day half gone, my stay in Guanajuato limited. If he would permit me to sit and paint in comfort and peace 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 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. In one of these friendly

raids the populace began to take an interest, attracted by the gesticulating group within, and soon blocked up the gateway so that I could no longer follow the outlines of the church. I

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



CHURCH OF LA PARROQUIA, GUANAJUATO.

remonstrated, and finally appealed to my host. He grasped the situation in a moment, gave a rapid order to the porter, who disappeared, and almost immediately reappeared with an officer, who saluted my host with marked respect, listened attentively, and was then lost in the crowd. In five minutes more a squad of soldiers cleared out the archway and the street in front, formed two files, and mounted guard patiently 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

my host, but all of his guests, following his example, rose to their feet and welcomed me heartily, crowding about the chair against which I propped the picture.

Then a door opened in the rear of the breakfast-room, 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 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



THE "PATIO" OF MY BENEFACTOR.

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 diminutive Chihuahua dogs, and lastly I must ascend the flight of brick steps leading to the roof and see the view from the top of the house. It was when leaning over the protecting iron rail of this lookout, with the city below 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 an *agricultor*. Behind yon mountain lies my hacienda, and I am a *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-bye to my miner, benefactor, and friend, I called a sad-faced 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 a 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 knees, 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.

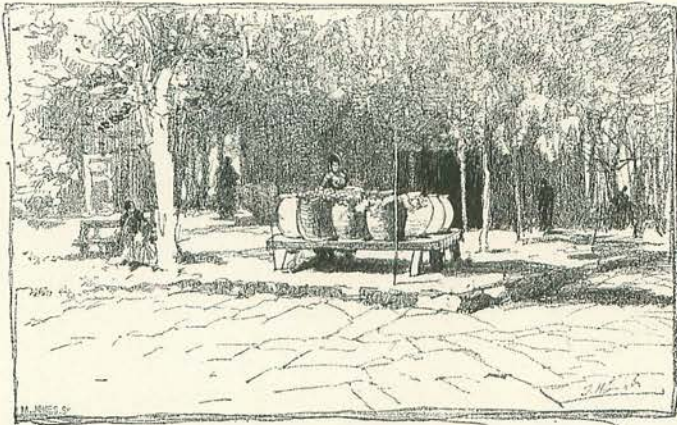
"Every stone, Señor."

"Show it to me."

In the old days this crooked, tortuous, snake-like 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 croaking reptile, but because the Tarascan Indians, according to Janvier, "found here a huge stone in the shape of a frog which they worshiped." The city, at an elevation of 6800 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 the channel runs a sluggish, muddy



THE WATER-JARS IN THE PLAZA.

stream into which empties 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. Into this mire wallow droves of hogs blistering 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.

On you climb, looking over the roofs of the houses you have 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 center of the city.

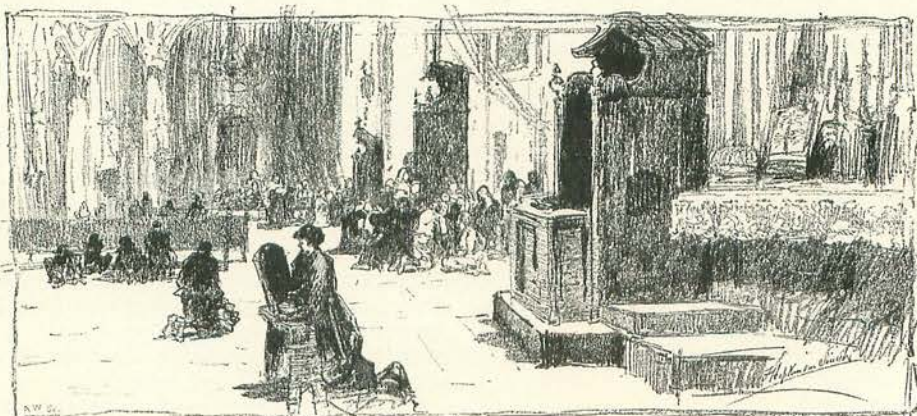
This was my route, and here I sat me down on a stone bench surrounded by flowers, waving palms, green grass, and pretty señoritas and listened to the music of a very creditable band perched in a sort of Chinese pagoda in the park's center.

The transition from the hot road below with the bustle and noise of the tramway, muleteers, and street venders of the town to the cool quiet of this retreat was simply delicious. 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 stone 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 María, who had been married at the cathedral the month before with great pomp.

"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



AROUND THE CONFESSIONALS.

the horses are stabled. The señoritas walk to church and wear black, 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. 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.

tents 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 Tacón in Havana. It was not to me this time, but to a devout young fellow kneeling on the other side of 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!



THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS.

Seeing me divide an orange with Matías she touched the arm of her companion, an elderly woman carrying a great fan, pointed to me, and they both fell to laughing 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.

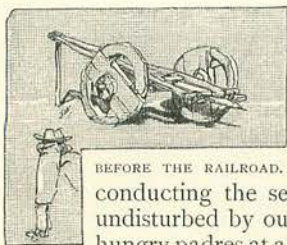
"The caballero will *now* see the church?" said the boy slowly, as if the incident settled the breakfast at once.

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 peni-

"SEÑOR, vespers in the cathedral at four."

So we wandered about in the sunlight and joined the throng in holiday attire, drifting with the current towards the Church of San Francisco.

The service had already begun. I could smell the burning incense and hear the tinkling of the altar bell and the bursts 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 came the sounds of the service so distinctly that every word could be understood. These openings proved to be between the backs of certain saints and other carvings



BEFORE THE RAILROAD.

overlaid with gilt and forming the reredos.

Within this 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 lunch. 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 his 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 certainly was a queer sight to see behind the altars of a great cathedral during vespers.

When I look into Matías's sad eyes and think to what a life of poverty and suffering he is doomed, and what his people have endured for ages, the 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 courtesies there lurks, like the deadly miasma of the ravine lulled to sleep by the sunlight, much of degradation, injustice, and crime, still I will brook none of it. So I fill Matías's 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 with its roof fringed with rows of prisoners manacled together and given but this hour of fresh air because of the sacredness of

the day, I forget their chains and the intrigue and treachery which forged many of them, and see only the purple city swimming in the golden light and the deep shadows of the hills behind it.

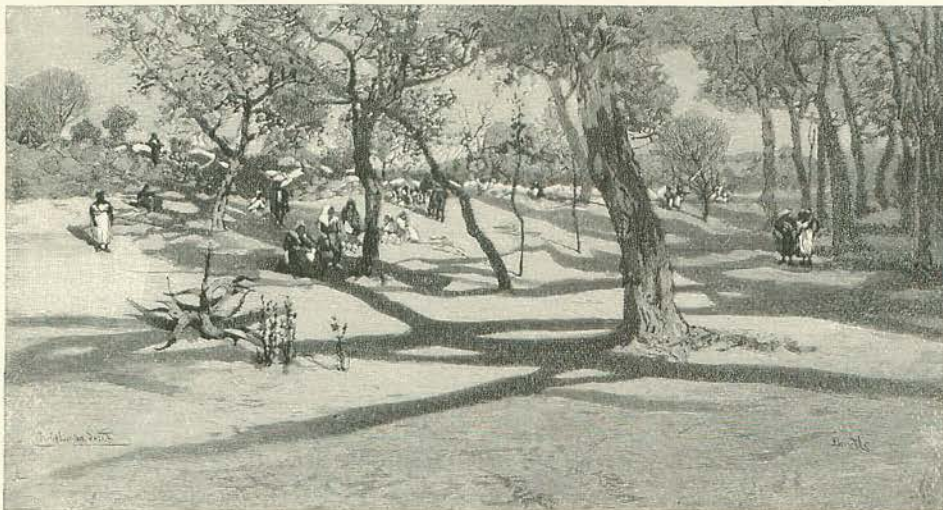
SOME PEONS AT AGUAS CALIENTES.

BLINDING sunlight; a broad road ankle-deep in dust; a double row of great trees with branches like twisted cobras; inky blue-black shadows stenciled on the gray dust, repeating the tree-forms above; a long narrow canal but a few feet wide half filled with water from which rise little whiffs of hot steam; beside it a straggling rude stone wall fringed with bushes. In the middle distance through vistas of tree-trunks glimpses of brown fields fading away into pale pink, violet, and green. In the dim blue beyond the half-round towers of a church, surmounting little spots of yellow, cream-white, and red, broken with patches of dark green, locating bits of the town, with orange groves between.

Long strings of burros crawl into the city along this highway, loaded down with great bundles of green fodder; undulating masses of yellow dust drift over it, which harden into droves of sheep as they pass by and become clouds of gray mist floating on the gentle breeze to the horizon line.

Shuffling along its edges, hugging the intermittent shadows, stroll groups of natives in twos and threes—the women with plaited hair and straw hats, their little children slung to their backs; the men in zarapes and sandals, carrying crates on their shoulders packed with live poultry and cheap pottery.

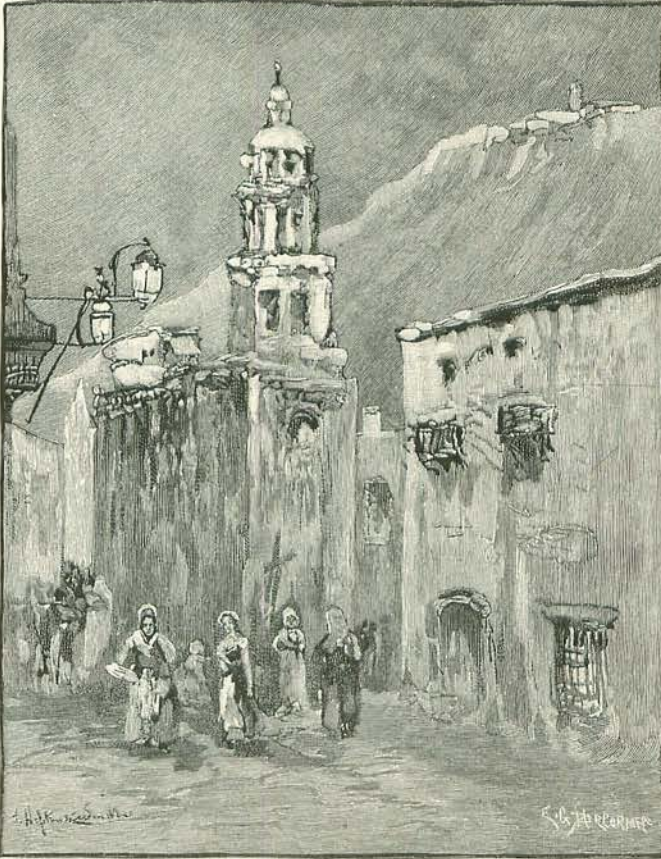
Such was my first glance at Aguas Calientes.



THE HIGHWAY AT AGUAS CALIENTES.

But there is something more. To the left, along the whole length of the canal, or sluiceway, as far as the eye can reach, are scattered hundreds of the descendants of Montezuma, of both sexes and all ages, quietly taking their baths at high noon on a public highway, with

from the overflow of the baths adjoining, which they can and do use, but the privacy is none the greater. Down the road, nearer the city, there are the "Baños Grandes," where for one *peseta* — about twenty-five cents — they can obtain a bath with all the encircling privacy of



IN THE AFTERGLOW.

only such privacy as the republic of Mexico and the blue sky of heaven afford.

Up and down the curious inland Long Branch rows of heads bob up from the sluiceway and smile good-naturedly as I draw near. They are not abashed or disturbed in the slightest degree; they are perhaps more concerned lest I crowd them out of their places, theirs by right of prior occupancy. Even the young women lying on the bank in the shade, with one end of a zarape tossed over their backs, their only other garment washed and drying in the sun, seem more interested in the sketch-trap than in him who carries it. Their great gazelle eyes express only curiosity — nothing more. It is one of the customs of the country, and they must bathe here or not at all.

It is true that near the springs above, within a mile of this spot, there is a small pond, filled

stone walls and with the additional comforts of a crash towel one foot square and a cake of soap of the size and density of a grape-shot. But then the wages of a native for a whole day's work is less than one *peseta*, and when he gets this coin every *centavo* in it is needed for the inside of his dust-covered body.

Nor can he always use his surplus clothing as a shield and cover. He has but one suit, a white shirt and a pair of cotton trousers, so he falls back upon his zarape, handling it as skillfully and effectively as the Indian women on the great steps leading to the sacred Ganges do their gorgeous colored tunics, slipping the dry one over the wet without much more than a glimpse of finger and toe.

From the days of Cortés down to the time of Díaz this people has been humiliated, degraded, and enslaved; all its patriotism,

self-reliance, and independence has long since been crushed out. It is a serving people; set apart and kept apart by a caste as defined and rigid as to-day divides society in Hindustan, infinitely more severe than ever existed in the most benighted section of our own country in

tethered outside a *ponda*, their owners drinking *pulque* within, and then crossed over to where some children were playing "bull-fight."

When the sun went down I strolled into the beautiful garden of San Marcos and sat down on one of the stone benches surrounding the



ARCADES OF AGUAS CALIENTES.

the old plantation days. It has possessed nothing in the past but poverty and suffering, and expects nothing more in the future except to sleep, to awake, to be hungry, to sleep again. Sheltered by adobe huts, sleeping upon coarse straw mats, their only utensils the rude earthen vessels they make themselves, their daily food but bruised corn pounded in a stone mortar, the natives pass their lives waiting for the inevitable, without hope and without ambition.

It is not, therefore, from lack of intelligence or ingenuity or capacity that the lot of these descendants of the Aztec warriors is so hopeless, but rather from the social isolation which they are subjected to and which cuts them off from every influence that makes the white man their superior.

I continued my rambles, following the highway into the city, idling about the street and noting queer bits of architecture and odd figures in my sketch-book. I stopped long enough to examine the high saddles of a pair of horses

fountain. Here I rested, bathing my face and hands in the cool water of the basin, and talked to the gardener. He was an Indian, quite an old man, and had spent most of his life here. The garden belonged to the city, and he was paid two pesetas a day to take care of his part of it. If I would come in the evening the benches would be full. There were many beautiful señoritas in Aguas Calientes, and on Sunday there would be music. But I must wait until April if I wanted to see the garden—in fact, the whole city—in its gala dress. Then would come the *fiesta* of San Marcos, their patron saint, and strings of lanterns would be hung and lighted, the fountains playing, music everywhere, crowds of people from all the country around, even from the great city of Mexico and as far north as Zacatecas.

When I left the gardener he tucked into the strap of my "trap" a cluster of azaleas and insisted on going with me to the corner of the cathedral so that he could show me the turn in the next street that led to the pottery market.

All the markets of Aguas Calientes are interesting, for the country round about is singularly rich and fertile, and fruits and vegetables are raised in abundance. The pottery market is held in a small open square near the general market, surrounded by high buildings. The pottery is piled in great heaps on the ground, and the Indian women, sheltered by huge square and octagon umbrellas made of coarse matting, sit all day serving their customers. At night they burn torches. The other markets are closed at noon. All the pottery is very cheap, a few centavos covering the cost of almost any single piece of moderate size, and one peseta giving you possession of the most important specimens in a collection.

Each province—in fact, almost every village—in Mexico produces a ware having more or less distinctly marked characteristics. In Guadalajara the pottery is gray, soft-baked, and unglazed; but highly polished and often decorated with stripings of silver and gold bronze: the carafes, examples of which are common with us, are made here. In Zacatecas the glaze is as hard and brilliant as a piano top, and the small pulque pots and pitchers look like polished mahogany or highly colored meerschaum pipe-bowls. In Puebla a finer ware is made, something between good earthenware and coarse soft porcelain. It has a thick tin-glaze, and the decoration in strong color is an under-glaze. Here in Aguas Calientes they make not only most of these coarser varieties, but a better grade of gray stoneware covered with a yellow glaze, semi-transparent, with splashings of red flowers and leaves scattered over it.

The potters are these much-despised, degraded peons, who not only work in clay, embroider in feathers with exquisite results,—an industry of their ancestors,—but make the finest saddles of stamped and incised leather made in the world, besides an infinite variety of horse equipment unknown outside of Mexico. Moreover, in Uruápam they make Japanese lacquers; in Santa Fe, on Lake Patzcuaro, Moorish iridescent ware; and near Puebla, Venetian glass. In a small town in western Mexico I found a glass pitcher, made by a Tascalan Indian, of such exquisite mold and finish that one unfamiliar with the handiwork

of this downtrodden race on seeing it in its place of honor in my studio collection would say, "Ah, Venetian!—Salviati, of course."

From the market I sought the Church of San Diego, with its inlaid wooden floor and quaint doorway richly carved, and as the twilight settled entered the narrow street that led to my lodgings. At the farther end, beneath an overhanging balcony, I espied a group of children and natives gathered about a band of wandering minstrels. As I drew near I heard the tinkle of a triangle and the thrum of a harp accompanying a weird chant. The quartet, both in appearance, costume, and bearing, were quite different from any of the Indians I had seen about Aguas Calientes. They were much lighter in color and were distinguished by a certain air of independence and dignity. The tallest and oldest of the band held in his left hand a short harp, quite Greek in its design; the youngest shook a tambourine, with rim and rattles complete, but without the drum-head; the third tinkled a triangle; while the fourth, a delicate-looking, large-eyed, straight young fellow, handsome as a Greek god, with teeth like rows of corn, joined in the rhythmic chant. As they stood in the darkening shadows beating time with their sandaled feet, with harp and triangle silhouetted against the evening sky, their zarapes hanging in long straight lines from their shoulders, the whole effect was so thoroughly classic that I could not but recall in the group one of the great friezes of the Parthenon.

I lit a cigarette, opened the windows of my balcony, and, placing the bits of pottery I had bought in the market in a row on my windowsill with the old gardener's azaleas in the largest jar, listened to the music, my thoughts full of the day's work and experience.

The music ceased. The old minstrel approached the balcony and held up his wide sombrero. I poured into it all my stock of copper coins. "*Muchas gracias, Señor,*" came back in humble acknowledgment. Then they disappeared up the narrow street, and the crowd dispersed. I looked after them long and musingly and surprised myself repeating a benediction of the morning, "*Con Dios vayan ustedes mis amigos.*"

F. Hopkinson Smith.

