

## THE QUEEN OF THE MEXICAN GULF.

BY CATHERINE OWEN.



ALVESTON, Texas!

There at least will be something of the wild Western life of which we have all read so much, and of which no hint is to be found in New York, Philadelphia, or any city I had as yet been in; something that would remind me that Dickens' "Notes" were not an exaggeration.

I had been told by unprejudiced Americans that when those notes were written, they were but very slightly exaggerated, but that the manners described could only now be found in Western cities. This, of course, was not told to me by Western people.

I had gone to Chicago and St. Louis, therefore, in full expectation of finding a specimen of the American, so familiar to our reading, who says, "Wa'al, stranger," who expectorates tobacco-juice in all directions, as he sits, with feet above his head, in railway waiting-rooms and elsewhere, and would flourish a bowie-knife on small provocation. I was very anxious to see a bowie-knife; I had been several years in the country, and had not seen one yet.

But I was doomed to disappointment. At the Chicago station I found just the same sort of crowd as I might have done in New York, or—except that the women were better dressed than in a similar London gathering—such as I might have seen at Paddington or Victoria. Eager men in tweed business suits, well-cared-for women in handsome travelling-dresses and linen dust-cloaks, and the usual sprinkling of the less well-to-do—Irish or German workmen, or shabby gentility out of employ—but no sign of the specimen I sought, and I was discontented that it was so.

Chicago I found as near an imitation of modern Paris as circumstances would allow. There were, of course, Western men in abundance, keen, cheery, business men, of polite, genial manners; but their trousers were not tucked into their boots, and if they chewed tobacco they did it too discreetly for the casual observer to be able to testify.

Here we turned off from the due west course; we were bound for Texas, *viâ* Memphis and Little Rock. Little Rock, Arkansas (pronounced *Arkansaw*), promised great things in the way of desperadoes, and expectation rose again.

Memphis, Tennessee, is a beautiful city, and of a mingled Western and Southern character; here the

business seemed more languidly carried on, and here, too, one began to meet dark, Spanish-looking men, whose faces needed only to emerge from a red shirt, and whose extremities, instead of being clad in cool linen trousers and easy cool boots of soft leather, to have been adorned with "butternut" pants thrust into high boots, to realise somewhat the ideal of handsome desperadoes.

The journey from Memphis to Little Rock, Arkansas, is of the most uninteresting kind. Every now and again, that is to say at intervals of some hours, one comes on a village; and the centre of the village, answering perhaps to our market-place, seems generally round the station; the general shop is close to it; the "real estate" agents' and whatever other commercial business the village may have—though often the general store comprises all—are grouped round the depôt.

To this spot, also, in the cotton country, negroes come with a few bales of cotton, which they are probably going to send to some common centre. The most lazy, and evidently the most comfortable, people now-a-days are the negroes; and if servitude and ill-usage leave their impress on a race as we are told, then it is difficult to believe that the wrongs of the negro have ever caused him much pain.

Little Rock I found to be, outwardly at least, as proper and respectable as any other city I had seen, although a lady living in the city assured me that it was a very rough place; but in the few hours we stayed there I saw no signs of its roughness. We reached the city at nine o'clock in the evening, and everything seemed silent and dark in the main street, and the waiters at the hotel were very much surprised that we could need to do anything but go to bed at that late hour. This bespoke a state of good morals I thought, and next morning the prosy quietude of the streets seemed to confirm the idea, and after a few hours for rest we were *en route* for Texas.

But while looking out for the crude specimens of American humanity, in this two thousand and some odd miles we had come, I had observed one thing particularly: we had stopped at mere villages—settlements a "hundred miles from a lemon," it would seem.—but I had seen no genuine *rustics* at the stations. I have since learnt that there is no rusticity in America. Fashion-books and plates and the dissemination of newspapers may account for this; but the fact is that every one looks more or less "cityfied." The farmer might be a hatter or a storekeeper, for all that there is in his appearance to indicate his calling, and the women are dressed as nearly like the fashion-plates as their own ingenuity will permit. The village store contains, with its groceries and dry goods (drapery), the latest Paris cut-paper fashions, with "full directions," so that American country girls are

not dependent on a rare visit to a city, or a glimpse of gentry visiting the village, for a knowledge of the changes in dress.

Now, of course, we were to see "Texan rangers," "cowboys," and "ranchers." After all, we had come through very civilised parts hitherto; Texas must be the place to see "characters."

At last we reached Houston, Texas, having come nearly three thousand five hundred miles from New York. The sight of Houston (pronounced *Heuston*), so green, so tropical-looking, and its streets so clean, was refreshment and rest. Here the umbrella-trees shaded the streets, the tea-berry tree, and huge orange-trees, loaded with golden fruit; oleanders, as tall as the houses, made me forget for a moment that I was expecting something very different. The daily life here seemed to be provokingly like a tropical Chicago: the new houses were built on the same plan, with a little more piazza (or galleries, as they are termed in the South) outside. The aspect of the place was redeemed from utter common-place only by the horses. Yes, the horses were decidedly different from any we had seen elsewhere; they were spirited little mustangs. The "horse-cars" were drawn by mules, but for most other purposes the mustangs seemed in general use; and every man appeared to ride; and when one sees a tall man wearing a long linen coat in a Mexican saddle on one of these little animals, the effect is certainly not at all common-place; and when I had seen several gravely ambling along to or from business in this way, I felt at last that I was far away from New York and all imitations of it.

A bayou runs between Houston and Galveston; and on this narrow, winding, sluggish water ply steamers which seem huge in comparison with the bayou. As a matter of fact, they are almost as wide as the water; and during our journey the deck was many times brushed by the trees on either side. In several parts the course of the bayou is so winding that the steamer can only be manœuvred by tacking from bank to bank, a man being on the look-out with a pole which he plants on the bank to prevent "bumping."

At the first sight of Galveston Bay I gave up all hope of "Texan rangers," and other heroes. The masts of shipping in the harbour; the prosaic business aspect of the quays, on which were great bales of hides and cotton, waiting for shipment; busy men going to and fro; the prosperous warehouses around—all this was not suggestive of the kind of things one associates with that "last jumping-off place"—Texas.

Galveston is, like New York, an island city; but, unlike the latter, it has no elevation. At no point, I believe, is it more than twelve feet above the sea; and that part is facetiously called "the hill." It is really very little more than a sand-bar. Its streets are ankle-deep in silvery sand, except the business streets, and those occupied by the wealthy, where, as in most American cities of later growth, wooden pavements are laid down.

In this semi-tropic city the only trees that grow freely are the fragrant oleander, which is almost the only shade-tree, and grows to a great height, and the

orange, many houses being almost entirely concealed by these two trees. Probably the salt sand—which is the only natural soil—prevents the healthy growth of others; but it certainly seems to agree with these, for nowhere else have I ever seen orange-trees grow to such great size.

Although Galveston may be termed a beautiful city by reason of its handsome houses and oleander-shaded streets, it has only one natural claim to beauty, and that is its magnificent beach of hard, firm sand, along which one can drive for thirty miles; the tepid waters of the Gulf just breaking on the beach with a gentle lapping sound.

The climate of Galveston is, of course, almost tropical; in winter it has a balmy temperature of about seventy-five degrees, except during a "norther." These come very suddenly, the only premonition, so far as I could find out, being the roaring of the Gulf. The houses in the city are built to be cool, and when a norther comes they are ill-adapted to keep it out; and then, though the thermometer rarely goes down to freezing point, the norther possesses a certain marrow-searching quality of its own, not be equalled by any east wind I ever experienced.

Now, as I have said, in Texas I did expect to find a rough life at last, something that should give colour to some of the stories I had heard and read; but instead I find the same high-pressure civilisation, the same Paris fashions, only more decidedly Parisian, and quite as new as on Broadway—for Galveston is only "across the Gulf" from New Orleans, that very centre of French life in America, whose women claim to be infinitely more French than the Parisians who only live in Paris—the same mansard-roofed houses, plus the galleries and the orange-trees, as in any city near New York; the same carriages, and receptions, and life altogether as in a Northern city, only less of it; but when I saw the carriages driving off in a long stream, when the heat of the day was over, for the regular evening drive by the Gulf, it was difficult to realise that I was between three and four thousand miles from New York, and about the same distance from London.

And yet the household details of life do remind one that they run in a different groove, for one has to be up very early indeed to order one's dinner, the butchers', fish, and poulterers' shops being all closed at eight in the morning, and the principal hours for marketing are from four to five.

The pleasures of life in Galveston are its climate—for its greatest summer heat is tempered by the winds which rise at regular intervals that may counted upon—its fine open sea, and magnificent beach. Its disagreeables are more numerous. The worst, perhaps, is the plague of insects and reptiles, especially the former. Here the common little red ants become a dreaded scourge, swarming everywhere, devouring everything, even choking the life at times out of caged birds by forcing themselves into their beaks by thousands; and a piece of fruit or bread dropped on the ground, a few minutes after assumes the appearance of a small mound of red pepper. Still more disgusting, however,

are the huge cockroaches, which infest the houses by millions, their odour perceptible everywhere.

The high price of living, the smallest coin in use five years ago (and I presume still) being a five-cent piece, makes life, except for the very wealthy, full of small privations, not of course of food, for work is plentiful, and crops coming from four to six times a year makes everything grown on the spot cheap; but clothing, furniture, groceries, are very costly, and servants not only very highly paid, but difficult to get; therefore to the refined, to whom some of the luxuries of life have become necessities, life in Texas is hard.

Being asked by a Texan what I thought of Texas, I spoke of the impression I had had that here at last I should find something of the rough life I had heard of. He laughed heartily.

"Ah," he said, "you must go a few hundred miles further; on the frontier you would see plenty of it, and

even nearer than that; they are a pretty rough lot about Dallas and Marshall, and if you were a man you might see some samples of it here. You see, *you* don't go into the saloons and low places where the real rowdy life exists."

But that was just the point. I had been led to suppose that in the West, and especially the South-West, rowdyism was rampant, that bowie-knives were as common as penknives, derringers openly worn in the streets; and after nine months' residence in Galveston I left it without having ever seen the terrible knife, and indeed I have never yet seen one anywhere, and know a great many American women just as ignorant. At the same time I must confess that two or three times in the main street of Galveston I did see figures, men with faces so desperate and hard, who had evidently come from a distance, that I had some belief in the rowdyism existing "nearer the frontier."

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### OUT OF PITY.

BY LILLIAS CAMPBELL DAVIDSON, AUTHOR OF "ONE SPRIG OF EDELWEISS,"  
"FAINT HEART NE'ER WON FAIR LADY," ETC.



HE was just seventeen: the very youngest little bride that any one remembered ever coming to reign at Arnwood Towers: the sweetest, daintiest little Lady Fielding that the county had ever welcomed.

To herself it was all like a dream, it had come so fast: it seemed as if all her life had lived itself in those six months; the leaving her English school, and going out to her father's plantation in Ceylon, so proud to be his housekeeper and companion; the strange brief life on the up-country coffee estate. Then the young English stranger who passed through Lindoola, in his rather vague wanderings for adventure's sake, and who was received and entertained at Holme Harcourt with the delightful open-handed hospitality of the colonies.

And then the awful night when the sudden terrible stroke of cholera left her fatherless, and life seemed one great black void; and the chaplain's wife had been good to her, and kept her from dying in despair; and Sir Harry Fielding had been still more good; and then—and then—she was resting her poor little orphaned head on a heart that was kind and true as her own father's, and a strong arm was close round her slender waist, and the voice she liked alone to hear of all the voices around her, was telling her she should never know another sorrow he could guard her from. He seemed the only real thing in all that dream-time: the sad past, and the present that was so happy, but just as unlike reality. Was it really herself, simple little Nesta Harcourt, that people were fussing over and petting and welcoming home as if she had been a royal princess?

Perhaps it was as well she could not realise it, or her

head might have been turned. Why, had not the whole week Harry and she were spending with his sister, Mrs. Mostyn, to present Nesta to the countryside, been one round of festivities, of which she was the queen? This evening they had all driven to a grand concert in the county town, to hear a famous singer; and Nesta, in her wonderful golden satin gown, rich with embroidery and lace, with her eyes outshining the diamonds on her white neck, and her cheek flushed with its pretty shy pink, had been an attraction only second to the queen of song herself. She felt a little weary with the excitement and the happiness, now that they had reached home and were having supper in the great hall, for the concert had forced them to dine rather earlier than usual.

The house was crowded with guests, and they were all vehemently declaring that the night was hardly begun yet, and they meant to finish it with a few games. The furniture in the blue drawing-room was being hastily moved, and Nesta's heart sank at the thought of further exertion: her head ached and she was worn out. She would slip away quietly to bed, and leave Harry to make her excuses to Eleanor. Where was Harry, by the way? She had not seen him since they sat down to supper, and he and that beautiful Miss Trafford were talking in the door-way. A hasty search through the nearest rooms had no result, and Nesta stopped by an open door to glance in at the half-cleared drawing-room.

Two portly dowagers were deep in conversation, their heads bent together behind their fans: but their voices rose above the music Eleanor was playing, and Nesta could not help hearing what they said.

"Gladys Trafford; yes, indeed!" cried the black velvet gown to the purple brocade. "A very, very old love affair that, my dear. He and she were perfectly