



**T**HE place is Cuernavaca—that beautiful, remote, semi-tropical Mexican town of Morelos : the month is March, balmy, flowery, and lovely : the day a great fiesta one, which all the peon-Indian world, his wife and family—as also the animals—are hasting to celebrate, for the occasion is nothing more or less than the now almost obsolete “Blessing of the Animals,” seen nowadays in Mexico only by those who live in or visit the remote and isolated pueblos or towns.

For many days preparations have been in swing for the joyous occasion : this you would realize had you been with us in the Mexican hotel in Cuernavaca, for not only does that hotel’s landlord possess several “animalitos” himself, but our windows overlook a great poultry yard and corral, the inmates of which have been duly washed, brushed, painted, and decorated for the ceremony of to-day—to our great amusement and entertainment. The final adornments and finishing touches were given early this morning ; so early, in fact, that at five o’clock, when the first bells began to chime out, we had to give up all hope of slumber : the lowing, bleating, cackling, quacking, baa-ing, squealing, and crowing was more than enough to “murder sleep.”

Even when breakfasting two hours ahead of the usual time we can hear sounds betokening that the procession is already on its way to the cathedral yard, where the blessing is to come off. In the dining-room

our waiter Felipe rushes distractedly about, for he has two dogs, a small brother, and a small donkey to escort to the ceremony, and with all the lazy people who will not take their chocolate and “pan dulce” for two hours more, how can he expect to get there in time for even one small word of blessing?

From the hotel windows, a few moments later, we are just in time to get a good view of mountain Indians and charcoal-burners who are trotting down the street, driving before them their rough little burros, all spick and span, and ready to be blessed. Being too suspicious to walk on the side-walks, as the rest of the crowd are doing, these charcoal-burners trot steadily along in the middle of the road, all shoulder to shoulder, while their flop-eared little burros keep close in front.

All of these little burritos have some sort of adornment, though of humble origin—for there are few ribbons and such decorations to be found in the charcoal-burners’ remote mountains ! One little grey-and-black donkey, however, jingles merrily a collar of tiny tin bells ; his companion is brave in a necklace of pine-cones, while another little brown fellow trots along proudly in his saddle and necklace of fern and pine leaves. They have all been decorated as well with bright tail and head knots of the yellow mountain flowers, on all of which the blanketed charcoal-burners keep careful watch, for on no account must a donkey lose his decorations before he reaches the churchyard and the priest.

The procession is waxing thicker and thicker, now: in the middle of the road come horses, bulls, and the poor old patient oxen, the latter chewing steadily at their cud, and now and then looking up and about, as if to say: "What does all this foolishness mean, and why aren't we at work in the alfalfa fields, with our wooden yokes on our necks instead of these silly flowers and leaves? What is going to happen, anyway?"

Just as we ourselves join the procession (for if we don't hurry our "reserved seats" on the cathedral wall will be gone!) the waiter Felipe, in his best fiesta clothes, and accompanied by his "little brother" and two dogs, joins us. Pancho, the burro, has gone on some time ago. The little brother also wears his best holiday clothes and a very fine silver-trimmed sombrero; but the finest of all sights is the small, fat puppy which he carries proudly in his arms and keeps careful watch of all the time; for, surely, never was there such a beautifully decorated "perrito" (little dog).

The puppy is a white one, to begin with, but one would never guess it from his present appearance. He has been washed and scrubbed until he fairly shines. His curly locks have been trimmed and combed, and he has been painted in the most elaborate and bewildering fashion—even his own mother doesn't quite recognise him, and circles about him with amazed stares and indignant "yaps."

Around his fat little stomach are three bright red stripes, around his neck a blue one, his tail has been dyed pink, and his ears yellow! A collar of tiny brass bells jingles and clicks as he wriggles his curly, dazed head, and on the tip of his short pink tail a bow of white and blue ribbons has been tied. At intervals the puppy's bearer pats and squeezes him, telling him to be a good perrito, for soon he is to be blessed by "*el padre!*" But poor puppy whines all the more, and wriggles pitifully in his efforts to find his mother. "Nasty ribbons and nasty collar," he mourns. Why can't he be left

quietly at home, and why doesn't his mother come to him? Yap, yap, y-a-p!

Just as we are entering the churchyard gate we hear pitiful and heartfelt "meows"—some poor pussy-cat is lifting her voice in lamentations *this* time! At first it is impossible to locate kitty: there are only birds and parrots in cages, close to us, where the "meows" seem to originate from. But as we continue to peer about a little girl carrying a huge parrot-cage utters a reproving cry, "Afe, que gatito!" ("What a naughty cat"). And then we find that pussy has reason to cry and object, for *she* is shut carefully up in the parrot-cage, out of a crack of which her be-ribboned tail is hanging, unknown to her mistress, and to the great glee of several small boys, who are taking advantage of the opportunity to sily tweak and pinch it!

Having reproved the naughty boys and tucked pussy's tail safely into her cage, we hasten to ascend to the big, flat-topped cathedral wall, from which good Padre Tomás has assured us we will get a fine view of all that goes on.

The cathedral yard is a very huge one, but it is crowded now with animals of all

sorts, sizes, and conditions, as well as social ranks, from the Jefe Politico's magnificent thoroughbred horse (which objects very much to being blessed) down to the meek, ragged little burro of Timoteo, the charcoal-seller.

There is a perfect sea of rebozo'd and tilma'd Indian and Mexican forms down below one, and every man, woman, and child of them has brought to be blessed one, two, and even three animals! There arises a perfect Babel of sounds: the lowing of cattle, the angry bellowing of a fighting-bull; horses neigh shrilly and prance about in fright; there is the pitiful, helpless baa-ing of goats and sheep; dogs bark loudly, while the cackling and crowing and jabbering of the poultry contingent is almost deafening. The crowd is so dense that, until the blessing commences, little can be distinguished; there is merely a view of a struggling, packed mass of people and animals, all working eagerly toward the stand from



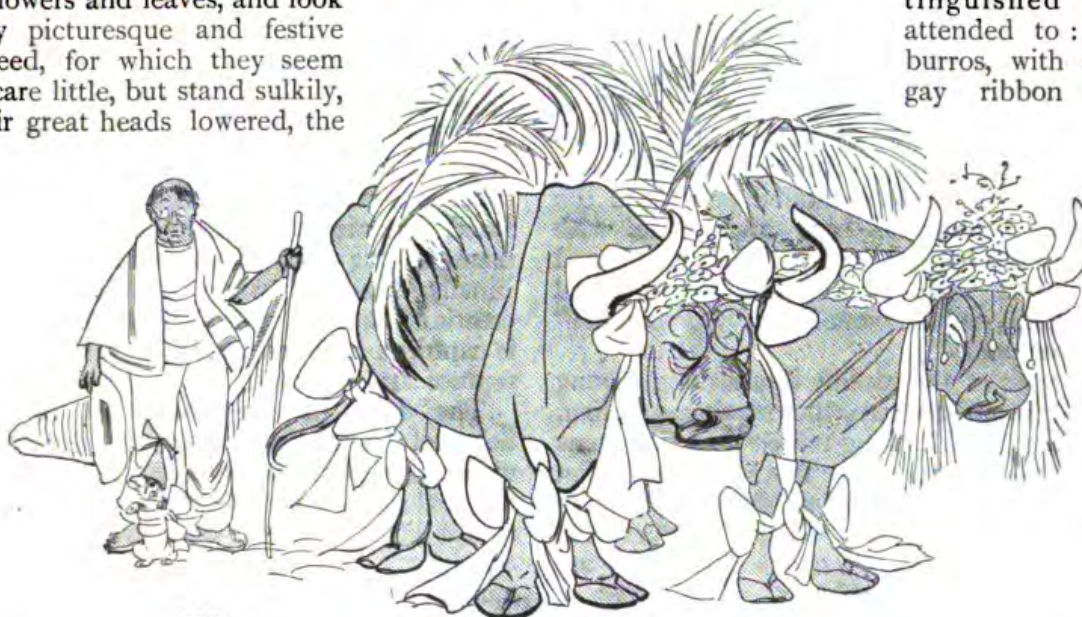
"A BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED 'PERRITO.'"

which Padre Tomás, with two aiding acolytes, is to sprinkle and bless the "animalitos." Finally, however, silence and order have been enforced, and the cathedral yard gates are shut and locked. No more animals will be allowed to come in until the ones now present have been blessed and sent out. Padre Tomás, in his robes of office and attended by his two acolytes, ascends the steps to his stand; a great bowl of holy water is placed ready for him, and he beckons that the first animals be brought forward. So that now we can see the animals and their decorations.

Several huge ploughing-oxen come up first, very unwillingly, to be blessed. They are garlanded from hoofs to horns with wreaths of flowers and leaves, and look very picturesque and festive indeed, for which they seem to care little, but stand sulkily, their great heads lowered, the

with wreaths of flowers and vines, while the blooded fighting-bulls have their horns gilded and wrapped about with gay ribbons. Everyone breathes more freely when these latter creatures are taken away, for they are very vicious, bellowing and pawing furiously all the while, and it requires strenuous efforts on the part of their owners to keep them quiet. Some of the cows are also very frisky, and leap about in the most alarming manner; everyone is glad when the last is seen of these horned and heeled creatures, and a large space is left for the bringing-up and blessing of the more peaceful burros, goats, sheep, and lesser animals.

The yard has so thinned out now that all of the remaining animals can be easily distinguished and attended to: the burros, with their gay ribbon and



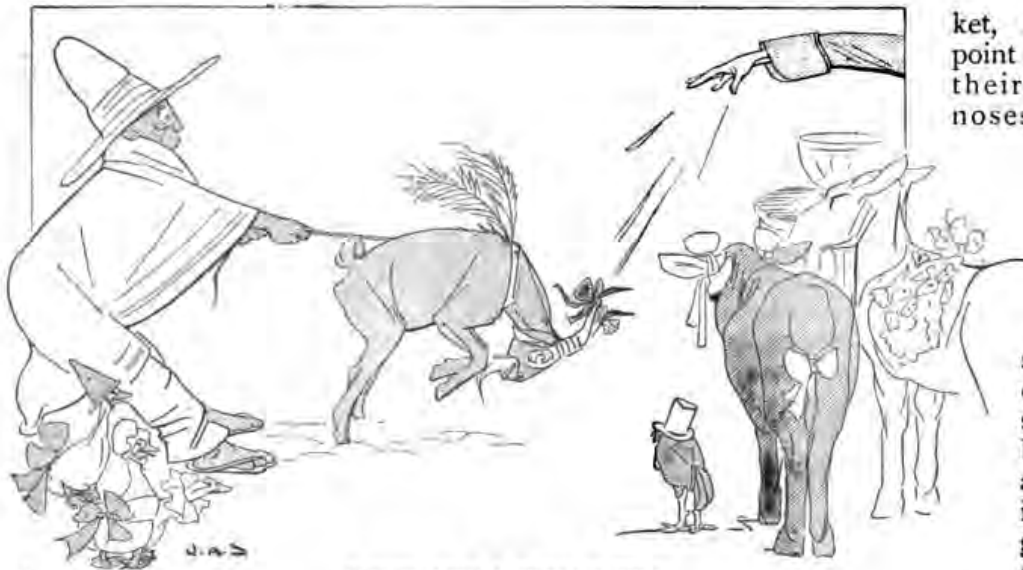
PLOUGHING-OXEN WAITING TO BE BLESSED.

while Padre Tomás sprinkles and blesses them, adjuring them in Spanish to be good and faithful to their several tasks, as the good saint who loved and blessed animals (St. Anthony) would have them be. And then, the ceremony (so far as they are concerned) being concluded, the huge beasts are taken away, and their place at the stand given up to two mules, these latter kicking and squealing and objecting both visibly and loudly to the holy water sprinkling and the blessing of Padre Tomás.

Then come, after these mules, more oxen, cows, several wicked-looking bulls, horses, more mules, and all the larger animals. There are so many of them that nearly three hours are consumed in their blessing alone. All of them are decorated in much the same way: the cows, bulls, and oxen are garlanded

flower decorations, receiving special sprinkling and blessing at the hands of the priest. For these patient little animals are both beasts of burden, companions, and dear friends to the labouring classes of Mexico, and well deserve St. Anthony's blessing.

Numberless goats and sheep are here, too, for holy water and good words: there are long-horned old patriarchs among both the sheep and the goats, which have butted off most of their tissue paper and flower adornments, and by dint of hard efforts only are restrained from making for the priests, who bless them very warily and from a distance *only!* And then come the mothers, with their gay collars, bells, and ribbons, the cunning little lambs and kids frisking at their sides. Some of these *babitos* (little ones) are very prettily decorated, one jet-black kid



BLESSED FROM A DISTANCE ONLY.

being particularly noticeable in his collar, *waist-band*, and tail decorations of brilliant red flowers, with red ribbons tied to his sharp little horns. And then there is a white woolly lamb, decorated entirely in the Virgin's colours of blue and white, with forget-me-nots tied to his meek little head and neck. He is a beautifully behaved little lamb, and everyone cries, "Que bonita!" ("How pretty").

In spite of the rapidly diminishing throng of people and animals, the crowing, cackling, quacking, and barking noises seem to be as loud and strong as at first; but all of a sudden even louder and shriller sounds arise above the confusion. This is when the "pig-animals" (as the peons call them) are driven forward to be blessed.

A poor peon who lives miles away near Iguala has with untold trouble and difficulty brought an old mother pig, with her five small ones, to be blessed. The mother has rubbed off most of her decorations, and now chases wildly about, with loud and despairing squeals. "No," she shrieks; "I will *not* be blessed!" After her rushes the poor peon, with five small piglets wrapped safely up in his *tilma*, or blan-

ket, from which point of vantage their wee pink noses poke inquiringly. "What *can* be the matter with naughty *mamma-cita*?" they seem to wonder. But, in spite of her babies' ashamed and inquiring glances and all the desperate efforts

of her poor, perspiring master, the obdurate *mamma* still flees wildly in every direction but the right one, squealing and grunting. It is a very comical sight, and the spectators laugh and applaud poor, hot, red-faced Antonio, as he cajoles and threatens *mamma pig* with both voice and whip. Finally, however, when all the other pig creation has been sprinkled and blessed, she is captured and led up to Padre Tomás for reproof and blessing.

The dogs, on the whole, are the best-behaved "animalitos" present. Seeming to understand just what is meant, they go quietly up to the stand with their masters, and only frisk a little when the cold water is thrown on them. One dog, in particular, is very cunning, and "brings down the house" by standing up straight and begging, in the



THE PEON AND THE FIG.

most gentlemanly and approved fashion, when his turn comes. He is a very nice curly dog, having a blue body and red legs, with a big spotted sash tied about him, and his small owner carries him from the scene proud and rejoicing.

The sun is high in the heavens now, and warned by that and pangs of hunger (for we breakfasted early) we look to see what time it is. If one will believe it, the blessing of the animals has been going on for seven hours! Even yet many "creatures" remain unblessed: all the chickens, ducks, turkeys, and other small beasties, both four and two-legged, are still awaiting their turn!

"last, but not least." For of all the truly comical things to be seen anywhere, in any land, the geese, ducks, turkeys, and other "criaturas" brought here for St. Anthony's blessing surely surpass all else! On their decoration has been expended endless labour and ingenuity. Murmurs of admiration and shrieks of laughter arise as the poultry are driven up to the priest's stand: not even Padre Tomás, tired and worn out as he is, can restrain his amused smiles. For the sight is such a truly comical one.

Every turkey present wears an elaborate paper frill about the neck, with large bows tied in front; paper caps, of all colours and



"EVERY TURKEY PRESENT WEARS AN ELABORATE PAPER FRILL."

Of the cats and kittens there seem to be hundreds, all elaborately adorned with neck and tail ribbons, and painted in stripes, spots, and figures. Several white rabbits have also been brought to be blessed, and they are very cunning and pretty, their long ears decorated with vari-coloured stars, and tissue-paper scarves tied about their necks. And, towards the last, one very weeping, red-eyed boy stumbles forward, carrying tenderly in his arms a very quiet and much-decorated rabbit; it is so still and quiet that people turn to look at it. Then they all murmur, pityingly, "Pobre" (poor one), for the bunny is dead! He had been sick for two days, but Roberto (his master) had hoped that he would at least live long enough to be blessed by the padre. But not so: on the very morning of St. Anthony's Day poor Bunny departed this life, but is still brought, in the decorations gaily prepared before his demise, for his first and last blessing.

Last, but not least, of all the "animalitos" come the poultry. When we enumerate their decorations you will understand why one says

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designs, on the head; huge bows, of many-coloured paper or cloth, decorate their astonished legs; and some even wear flowing tissue-paper sashes. One very pompous bird not only wears, in addition to his other finery, a large paper-frilled night-cap, but blue goggles protect his small and thoroughly bewildered eyes. No wonder he gobbles indignantly and hysterically as he is dragged forward, along with his wife and children, to the blessing of Padre Tomás.

And the other two-legged "animalitos" are quite as comical and absurd. Nearly all of them are dressed and decorated just as are the turkeys, with the exception of the hens and gallos (fighting-cocks). The old hens, in particular, we do not think we can ever forget, so perfectly ridiculous are their make-up and general appearance. There is one clucking, distressed mother hen, attired in a short red Eton jacket (made of paper) and a pair of full and flowing bloomers; on her bewildered head rests a very coquettish nursemaid's cap, which has worked down over one eye, and her wings are tied, carefully and elaborately, with white and blue ribbons!

Behind her scurry several small chickens, with many gold and silver stars pasted on their fluffy wings; ribbon bows adorn their clumsy, tottering legs, and tiny peaked caps their heads. Just behind these, in their turn, come a batch of fighting-cocks, most of them dressed in little suits of clothes, so cut as to leave the wings free. Around their necks the poor birds wear tall, stiff paper collars, and high hats or gay sombreros put the finishing touch to a bird-costume that is certainly about as odd and truly ridiculous as one may expect to see.

There are still many queerly costumed birds about which we could tell funny things: the geese, waddling along in their paper trimmings and large caps; the ducks, quacking loudly and angrily in their unwonted decorations; guinea-fowls, frightened

almost into fits and shrieking discordantly; while from their cages and perches green and yellow parrots chatter and shriek, and make, upon occasions, loud and impolite—not to say profane—remarks.

Very nearly every Mexican or peon owns a parrot, not to mention one or more mocking birds, and little green scolding "love birds." All of them have been brought for a blessing to-day, though we think that, for politeness' sake, the parrots should have been left at home, and forced to go without blessings! For, while prettily decorated, and their cages gilded and flower-adorned, these wicked birds cannot be made to appreciate the nature of blessings or holy water, and behave most disgracefully even while under the watchful eye of Padre Tomás and his assistant priests.

One big handsome "Loro" nods sleepily

in his cage until he feels the first touch of holy water, but then he gives vent to a deafening torrent of yells and naughty Indian words. As this evil behaviour has no effect on the padre, who goes steadily on with his blessing, this unregenerate parrot proceeds to

perform all sorts of acrobatic tricks, swinging himself upside down in his cage, balancing on his yellow head, and then on first one leg and the other, amid delighted roars of laughter from the audience! So that Padre Tomás, unable to hear himself speak, cuts short the blessing and has the wicked bird taken away.

It is late in the afternoon—long after four o'clock—before the last bird or beast is blessed, but we watch to the very last, and the big cathedral yard is entirely deserted when we climb down from our perch on the wall.

As we go wearily

and hungrily hotel-ward we see many painted and decorated "animalitos" frisking about the streets, and Felipe's white puppy, with his rejoicing mamma, meets us in the hotel patio. He (the puppy) no longer wears his ribbons and bell collar, but his mother is trying hard to lick him clear of his various stripes and streaks, and has partially succeeded, with the result that he is as non-descriptly coloured and odd a little object as one can imagine!

For a long time, too, you must be reconciled to seeing purple and pink cats about, red and green dogs, and even vari-coloured pigs, burros, sheep, and goats! Because all this paint and decoration goes with the blessing of St. Anthony, which is bestowed only once a year in Mexico—in other countries not at all, which cannot but seem a pity!



"A DISTRESSED MOTHER HEN."