

## THE ROMANCE OF A MEXICAN CANAL.



OMALIS! Tomalis! Tomalis!

For a moment I closed my eyes and had to think where I was. Reminiscences and memories of a day surged over my mind like a mill-race. It was a day of days in my life. Fraught with pleasure, yes, a great deal of pleasure, and excitement, too, more than is usually allotted by the Divine Creator to one in a single rising and going

down of the sun.

And the shouting of his wares by that street vendor, here in Atlanta, brought it all back to me.

It has been two years, and 'poco mas o menos,' more than two months, as the inhabitants of old Mexico, where the scene of this incident is laid, would say, since I was sitting on a tall stool in the auditor's office of the Mexican National railroad.

The agony of trying to add up 'unaddable' figures, the fact that I hadn't heard from one in the 'States' in whom I took an absorbing interest, and the possibility of my having to remain in that land of cactus, pulque, and greasers for a long time did not contrive to put me in a humour of great benignity.

When the day's work was finished I shut up with a slam the big book of red and blue cross lines and small figures. The picturesque City of Mexico, with its wealth of things antique and its dearth of things beautiful, had grown tiresome, and I was suffering from a malady that has been called everything under the sun, and which I, for a lack of something more applicable, will call 'home-sickness.' The inspiring strains of the famous Mexican band, playing the beautiful airs of the Republic, on the socalo, in front of the Nation's Palace, as I wandered along to seek the seclusion of my hotel, did not have the effect of taking the dull, cold, sorrowful edge off my spirits.

No one had written me. Of that fact I was positively certain. For didn't all of my correspondents send my letters to the office of the railroad? I didn't know anybody in Mexico, and didn't want to. At least that's what I said to myself.

But I was mistaken. There was a letter. It was sent from somewhere in the city, too. But then I didn't thrill. I had a faint suspicion that it was a bill. I had bought some clothes in the city, and, though they had not been sent to me, I suspected that his tailors, with the usual suspicion that Mexicans have of 'grin-goers,' had sent the bill first.

I opened it without excitement, and my only sensation in doing so was one of extreme loathing for the poor innocent tailor.

For he was innocent.

The missive was an invitation of a Mexican gentleman to visit his home and meet his family.

Senior Don Jose Correa little thought what an amount of pleasure his note of invitation had given me. That night I could hardly sleep in anticipation of the joy galore I was to experience on the following evening.

Visions of beautiful, black-eyed sirens, with hair, raven-like in colour, and falling in graceful folds over the shapely shoulders of Mexican girls, flitted through my mind. All during the night I gave vent to little ejaculatory expressions of enthusiasm, which brought down upon me the imprecations of my sleepy-headed room-mate (who hadn't been invited).

My happiness was unalloyed.

For was I not to penetrate the seemingly impossible seclusion of a Mexican home, to which seldom Mexicans are admitted, and only once in a thousand times Americans are allowed entrance.

The time finally came for me to present myself. I must confess that the first feelings I had experienced had worn off and a spirit of timidity came over me. Not that I didn't want to go. Oh, no; but I had never been into a Mexican home and knew nothing of the social customs of the country, and my state of mind was not one of extreme tranquillity.

Calling the roll of my courage I found that it was all there, and catching hold of the long brass knocker I smacked it against the tremendous big door with all my strength, just to keep up that aforesaid courage.

In a few moments a mozo appeared, and, telling me in Spanish to follow him, I proceeded to tramp through the patio and up the stone stairs. In a few moments we reached the floor of the parlour.

He opened it and ushered me in.

Coming from the poorly lit patio, at first I was rather blinded by the light. But I almost immediately became accustomed to it, and while the servant was gone I had a chance to compose myself and take a look around me.

All I remember of the room was that it was illuminated by, it may have been hundreds, it seemed to me thousands, of wax candles. They diffused different coloured lights through shades of paper and glass over the pinkish frescoed walls and low brass-legged furniture, producing a weird yet pleasing effect.

On the floors, rugs innumerable were to be seen, and over an upright piano, which though beautiful to me now, then looked gawky and out of place, was a plaster image of the crucifixion.

Senior Correa was a dark-skinned, handsome-looking man. He looked—not foreboding—yet there was an air of coldness out of his small black eyes, surrounded with the heavy, bushy Spanish eyebrows, that made one keep his distance.

As he entered he grasped me cordially by the hand and said, 'Senior, a la casa de l'd' (sir, this is your home), the usual Spanish phrase, which means exactly the opposite of its translation.

By his side was his sister, Senorita Silvia Correa—a tall, striking-looking woman. I took her to be twenty-two; she may have been eighteen. Who can tell those things, any how?

A moment later his daughter entered. Her name was Leonora. She was sixteen. Her figure was the rounded perfection of womanhood. Her eyes were as black as the feathers on a heron's plume, and her skin was fairer and softer looking than the first white crocheted sack a loving mother makes for her young infant.

As she was introduced to me she simply lifted her soul-stirring eyes, and walked forward to shake my hand. She did it awkwardly. She was inanimate, too, but, oh, so beautiful.

I forgot to mention that there was a son, Juan by name. He did not cut a very large figure in my thoughts, though he should have done so, for it was through him I met his family having been introduced to him at the American legation.

He was like all other of the 'lagartijas' (dudes), well dressed and senseless.

I soon knew the Correas very well. Leonora grew, to my vision, less awkward and inanimate, and more beautiful—and soon I was prostrate. I worshipped her, at a distance necessarily, for we were not allowed to be alone together.

To the president's ball, to the circus, to the theatre, and sometimes to church—frequently to dinner—I was with the Correas. The Leonora knew of my devotion, for, though I never expressed it in words, I know my tell-tale face showed it a thousand times.

At meeting and parting I would do more than give her hand a gentle pressure—I would squeeze it. She did not return it; but then she didn't seem to object to my testing my grip power, and with the usual enthusiasm to which youth is prone I was not disheartened.

For a period of three months this state of affairs continued. I was dining with my pleasant friends one Sunday, and the discussion was what we should all do on the following Sunday. It would be Leonora's birthday.

Juan suggested that we take a trip up the 'La Gran Vega,' the grand canal, and as it seemed to please the young lady immensely, it was decided that we should go.

That night, as I tossed about in my small, uncomfortable iron bed-steel, I resolved that on the following Sunday I should declare my love to Leonora, and if she accepted, live forever in the land of the Aztecs. I fancied that I was desperately smitten, and that until my declaration had been made, I could never again draw a semi-happy breath.

Everybody that goes to Mexico buys at the border a book of phrases. Utterly useless they are, for they are never heard. But this time it was the exception. At the back of the book I noticed a glowing, heart-warming love passage.

This I committed to memory, intending to spring it on the not altogether unsuspecting Leonora, on the day of the picnic, when the propitious moment should have arrived.

A trip up La Gran Vega, is one impossible to forget. Our party was a gay one. There were an even dozen of us—six men and six women. The women had a boat to themselves in which they carried all the delightful delicacies for a repast, which the dark-eyed daughters of the south know so well how to prepare. In the men's boat there was a plentiful supply of pulque, tequila, cognac and cigarettes.

The Grand Canal, at the early hour in the morning which we started on our picnic, was not yet filled with the thousand of small craft that later in the evening covers its surface.

The snow capped volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtacihualt seemed to be right in front of us. On either side there was a low, green flat country, teeming with luxuriant vegetation. Under the skilful guidance of the Gondoliers, our two tiny boats were propelled through the shallow, limpid water at a rapid pace.

We swept by the old Spanish fortress, now tumbling in ruins, but as grim and cruel looking as the pictures of the old Spaniards themselves.

By the home of the patriarch bull-fighter, Zacatecas, who had planged his sword to the hilt in the hearts of two thousand brave 'toros,' we shot like a flash.

Through and alongside of the floating gardens, with their little patches of earth covered over with myriads of sweet-smelling roses, we kept along.

Under the old bridge of Santa Maria on which a troop of cavalry, always drawn up in battle array to collect toll, stood, the boat skimmed.

And by the old walls of the city we passed.

But I was dead to the beauties of scenery that morning—and looked more at the deane little miss in the boat on the other side of the canal than I did at the beautiful sights we were flitting by.

In the boat with me was Federico Carvajio, a youngster of eighteen, in love with Leonora. He was said to be wealthy and handsome. I thought him rich and ugly. He had made me uncomfortable three or four times by saying things in Spanish that I did not understand, and because of the looseness of my trousers had nicknamed me Senior 'Pantalenas.'

The stopping place, twelve miles from the city was finally reached, and we disembarked for lunch.

Under the trees the eatables were spread.

The lunch seemed to me would never end. The abominable old Spanish custom of everyone making a toast, had to be gone through with. When my turn came I stood up, stammered out two or three words, blushed and sat down.

Finally the lunch was over.

Now, I thought, the time has arrived.

One of the features of the entertainment was to ride some burros up a near-by mountain. By taking a long time to put Leonora on to the back of one of the little animals, which is not as tall as a common sized donkey, I managed to get a little behind the others.

My burro was naturally lazy, and I gave him full permission to be a little lazier than his wont.

As soon as the last of the preceding party had disappeared around a curve in the road I jumped eagerly off my burro.

Rushing up to Leonora and taking both her hands in mine, I told her of my love. My studied phrases flew to the winds, and with feminine articles for masculine nouns, I poured out my tale.

Without her my life would be a weary blank. 'Only tell me that you care for me,' I pleaded, 'and I will be happy.'

Leonora looked alarmed and cast her eyes down.

Growing desperate, I snatched her to my arms and straining her to my breast, imprinted burning kisses on her brow and cheeks.

I had not heard the sound of approaching footsteps, in my frenzy to tell Leonora of my love.

As I turned her loose, she gave a shriek and said in Spanish, 'Look there.'

Not thirty feet away stood Federico Carvajio, an insolent smile upon his face.

He advanced towards us, and shaking his finger in my face exclaimed:

'Sir, you are no gentleman to take advantage of an unprotected girl in that way.'

'She loves me,' I replied, 'and when out of this girl's presence I shall cowhide you for your words.'

'She does not love you,' he sneered.

'Leonora,' I said in an imploring voice, 'did I not speak the truth?'

'No,' she said smilingly, 'Federico is my betrothed, and I love him dearly.'

The trip back over the canal is a blank to me. Thousands of boats with merry parties surged past us. And as we approached the city, there was but one cry that could be heard over the shrieks of laughter of the jolly crowds, and that was, the cry of the enterprising vendors, saying:

'Tomalis! Tomalis! Tomalis!'

## MADE GENTLE UNCONSCIOUSLY.

A WORKMAN in a pottery factory had one small invalid child at home. He wrought at his trade with exemplary fidelity, being always in the shop with the opening of the day. Every night he carried to the bedside of his 'wee lad,' as he called him, a flower, a bit of ribbon or a fragment of crimson glass, something that would lie out on the white counterpane and give colour to the room.

He was a quiet, unselfish man, and said nothing to anyone about his affection for his boy. He simply went on loving him, and soon the whole shop was brought into half-conscious fellowship with him.

The workmen made curious little jars and cups, and painted diminutive pictures upon their sides before they stuck them in the corners of the kiln at burning time. One brought some fruit and another a few engravings on a rule scrapbook. Not one of them whispered a word; this solemn thing was not to be talked about. They put the gifts in the old man's hat, where he found them; he understood all about it. Little by little all the men, of rather coarse fibre by nature, grew gentle and kind, and some dropped swearing as the weary look on their patient fellow-worker's face told them beyond mistake that the inevitable shadow was drawing nearer. Every day some one did a piece of work for him and put it on the sanded bank to dry, so that he might come later and go earlier. So when the bell tolled and the little coffin came out of the lonely door, a hundred stalwart working men from the pottery, all in their clean clothes, stood just round the corner. Most of them had given a half day's time for the privilege of following to the grave that small burden of a child, though probably not one of them had ever seen him.

## THE VAST STONES OF BAALBEC.

THE temple and the wall encompassing it is made with stones so monstrously huge that the natives attributed its building to Satanic influence. Another curiosity of this place is the large piece of an old wall. Three of the stones of this wall measured 61 yards in length; one 21, and the other two each 20 yards, and in breadth of the same dimensions. These three stones lie in one and the same row to the end. . . . That which added to the wonder is that these stones were lifted up into the wall more than twenty feet from the ground. At the bottom of one of the quarries a single stone was found, seventy feet long, fourteen broad, and in thickness fourteen feet six inches! Its weight must have been more than one thousand one hundred and thirty tons, and it has been calculated that to raise it would require the strength of sixty thousand men!

The stones of Baalbec are indeed the largest that have ever been moved by human power, and how they were so closely fitted and conveyed to their places is to this day an insoluble mystery. It is not too much to say that the task would be impracticable even in these modern engineering days. The difficulties faced us in relation to many of the immense stones in the buildings of antiquity; but in this case my conjecture as to the mechanical means employed is fairly balled. They are cut with faultless precision, and so closely joined that the finest needle could not be forced between them. On this point M. Lamartine says: 'When it is considered that some of these blocks of hewn granite are raised one above another to the height of twenty or thirty feet from the ground, that they have been brought from distant quarries, and raised to so vast a height to form the pavement of the temple, the mind is overwhelmed by the mere idea. The science of modern times cannot help us to explain it, and we cannot be surprised, therefore, that it should be referred to the supernatural.'

## FROM OUT THE VOID.

You were fairer than summer roses,

You were stately as lilies white;

Your voice was like music ringing

In the silence and dusk of night,

But your soul was that of the lily—

Your heart was cold as the snow

That covered the fields and forests

In that winter of long ago.

I had knelt at your feet in pleading,

I had given my heart's best love—

It was yours through Eternity's courses—

It was mine as the stars above.

But you tossed it by like a flower

That had pleased you for a day,

And you laughed at my woe that evening,

In the twilight, dim and gray.

So now, on this wild shore standing,

With the l'unknown face to face,

I send you a ghostly greeting

O'er the measureless fields of space;

I am dead, but my soul is living—

You will know it, once for all,

For I'll be at your side each evening

When the twilight shadows fall.

You will feel the touch of my kisses

On your soft cheek, warm and bright;

But you will be my caresses,

You will deem them the winds of night.

And in some dark, starless gloaming,

When the sands of your life run low,

Through darkling realms of mystery

Your soul and my own shall go.