

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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Lesson from the Camel.

The camel at the close of the day
Kneels down upon the sandy plain
To have his burden lifted off,
And rest again.

My soul, thou too shouldst to thy knees
When twilight draweth to a close,
And let thy Master lift the load,
And grant repose.

The camel kneels at break of day
To have his guide replace his load,
Then rises up anew to take
The desert road.

So thou shouldst kneel at morning's dawn,
That God may give thee daily care,
Assured that he no load too great
Will make thee bear.

MEXICO AND THE MEXICANS.

BY JAMES W. STEELE.

I.

Mexico, save to the very few, has until very recently been an almost unknown country. Among the latest achievements of engineering enterprise must be counted the construction of the Mexican Central Railway, forming a continuous line through the heart of the country from Paso del Norte to the Capital. The republic is now open for the entrance of whomsoever will, and her chief cities are connected by a continuous line with the entire railway system of the continent. Fenced by impassable barriers for some three hundred years, this old, rich, quaint and isolated empire has suddenly become the coming country of the capitalist and the tourist. Mexico is accessible, as she has never been before, hopeful, expectant, and abandoning all the ancient antagonisms of race and custom, asking for no passports and making no inquiries, she invites every comer from the land of her ideals and hopes, to the palms and pyramids, the gray towers and tropical gardens, of a capital that may be as old as Thebes, is as quaint as Tangiers, as foreign as old Spain, and as new as the newest Canadian territory to all modern things.

Winter and summer the climate remains nearly the same, a region of tropical latitude, but immense elevations. Mexico is pre-eminently the land of mountains. Ragged sierras, towers, castles, cones, seamed and scarred



MOUNT POPOCATAPETL, MEXICO.

veterans of the age of fire, fence the horizon in. Among them lie valleys where the vertical sun shines scarce half the day, where villages nestle and mysterious waters flow, and where the only aspiring thing is the tower of the inevitable church, shapely and beautiful even in the most squalid village. You may go from the Capital by rail to Yantepec, at the foot of his serene and smoky majestic, Popocatepetl. If you are adventurous you may even climb that elevation of some 19,000 feet, standing amid eternal snows, you may look down into the fervid heart of our common mother earth. But everywhere you will encounter a primitive, slow and picturesque people.

THE MEXICAN AT HOME.

stands as the sixth race; unlike all others in appearance, gait, language, and probably blood itself. Street and village scenes afford the stranger a panoramic amusement which does not fall him in weeks of association. Customs, industries, habits, mechanical operations, with industrial contrivances unknown to all the world beside, are everywhere. But everywhere and always you are wrapped in a climatic brilliance that never fades, save when it gives place to the flashes of stars that seem nearer and brighter than ours. It is the perpetual glow of a land where winter never comes, and whose people, time immemorial, worshipped the sun.

Four-fifths of the people of Mexico are Indians; that is to say, pure Aztecs. The remainder are of mixed descent, and, in a few cases, Castellians. Spain, her glory, her tyranny and her dominion, have seemingly left but the faintest marks upon Mexican personal characteristics. Religion somewhat modified, language,

and the Moorish architecture are her bequests to Mexico, and are apparently all that is left to mark the brilliant conquest of Cortez.

Of the whole number, a larger proportion of the population than of any country except Italy, seem to be very poor. Every Mexican toiler is so from early youth. Boys are stone-cutters and burden-bearers from twelve years. The peasant's gait is quick and all his movements active. He is a notoriously fast walker. Slight in figure, and thick-set,

he will, and often does, carry a burden of three hundred pounds, and go off with it at a jog-trot. Three men, and sometimes two, will carry a piano a dozen squares. A crate of crockery, of vegetables, of fruit, of anything, may be discerned jogging rapidly up some steep road, so huge that the bearer is quite invisible, and he has tirelessly borne it across mountain and valley in a country where leagues are notoriously long.

Every Mexican, of every grade and class, is a courteous man. Ask him a question, and he invariably gives you the best answer at his command. He is generally willing to spend time and effort for your accommodation. He is never embarrassed. Look at a Mexican gentleman, and he is wont to smile and salute you. Ask him a question on the street, and he will shake hands with you at parting. People whom you never saw before, and will in all probability never see again, will willingly show you through museums and libraries, give you their time for an hour, shake hands and bid you good bye, merely because you are a stranger, and during the whole time never ask you a personal question.

In outlying towns the idea of what constitutes a hotel is, to say the least, unique. It is a building into whose open court the diligence drives through a castellated gateway. Mules, pigs, and domestic fowls occupy the place together. A water-tank is in the centre. Around the sides are the rooms. Each has one door, no windows, no beds, no furniture of any description. The wayfarer furnished everything and carries it with him, and rents the

room for a single night. It reminds one of the scenes in Don Quixote.

Nearly all of Mexico that the tourist will wish to visit has an elevation of from five to seven thousand feet, and though far within the tropics, may be said to be never oppressively hot and never really cold. It is always warm in the sun, always cool in the shade, always chilly at night-fall.

It may be at first a matter of surprise that with an advancement in art that surprises every visitor the country has no literature. So far as I have been able to discover, there is not a publishing house in the republic, and the three or four book-stores of the city are filled with French works, either scientific or novels.

Go Up Head.

A mighty hush is o'er the land,
That's different to the regular rule,
A stillness reigns on every hand,
The boys and girls are all at school,
There is no shouting in the yard,
They have their books and slates instead,
And every one is trying hard
To get up head.

Hark! "I love, thou lovest, he loves!"
What sweet familiar words are they!
Work hard! old Time relentless shoves
To-day far into yesterday.
Work hard, my lad—the reason why,
You soon will have to earn your bread,
And so it's worth your while to try
To get up head.

There's splendid prizes to be won,
They're every one in sight to-day;
There's splendid deeds that must be done,
You wish to do them? Then you may!
The solemn bench with judges ermined,
Wreaths to fit your clever head,
Go to work and be determined
To get up head.

"Three and three is six and three's nine"
Good, my little kindergartner,
Good, thou little friend of mine,
Fortune has thee for a partner
Toddle home now with your brother,
And before you're washed and fed,
Go and tell your happy mother,
"I dot up head."

—The Khan



TYPICAL MEXICAN.



THE CONVENT GATE.