

HOW TO LIVE

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Down on the Beach:

A STORY OF THE SOUTH.

BY E. F. LOVERIDGE.

(CONTINUED FROM OUR LAST.)

VI.

AT MATAMORAS.

MR. Mentor and his young companion reached Brownsville, in safety, on the morning of the fourth day after their departure from Corpus Christi. As soon as the elder gentleman had attended to the more pressing business of his visit, Lansing hurried him across the river, which is very narrow at this point, desiring to visit the Mexican city which is on the opposite bank of the Rio Grande—for, like most people of the poetical temperament, there was a charm to him in being in a foreign country.

Matamoras is not a large city, but there is much that is picturesque in its appearance, and as the two gentlemen wended their way to the inn, as it must be called for the want of a more expressive term, Lansing revelled in the novelty of the scene.

The word Indolence he now realized in its full expressiveness. Surely this was the Paradise of lazy people. There were no locomotives steaming and snorting fire and smoke; screeching in the night time and disturbing honest people's slumbers; nor were there any rapidly-walking brokers, bankers, clerks or shopmen hastening as if they expected to crowd two years of life into the next few moments. The clock striking three would produce no sensation like you see in Wall Street among the Slaves of Mammon every week day in the year. *Dolce fur niente*, and *quies non movere* seemed the mottoes of these Mexicans.

In complexion you could find all shades, from the fairest Castilian to the most mongrel mahogany color. There were squat little Greasers, and tall, stately-looking cavaliers. Hans was not absent, and the Emerald Isle had her representatives, and John Bull was portly and presentable in the motley mass. Of course Jonathan was present, as well as his more dignified brother of the far South.

The canine race seemed to have a *carte blanche* of the city. Such mangy, miserable, woe-begone little dogs, some of whom seemed inclined to snap at the sunshine, but desisted from pure incapacity to get up a respectable growl, and who were doomed never to die a natural death, because it would be too much effort to draw a final long breath. It amused Mr. Mentor to see Lansing's face as he scowled at the puppies. "Young man," said he, "they are not worth so much scorn."

Providence seems to believe in the doctrine of compensation. The women were all studies for a great artist. Whether they had deep blue eyes, and brown glossy hair, and fair white skins, or were dark, with raven tresses and eyes like night, all, high or low, rich or poor, pure or mongrel, all dressed with exquisite taste, and walked as gracefully as fawns. In carriage and innate politeness, no

women in the world can equal them. They seem to monopolize all the beauty of their clime. Although half of their brothers are as ugly as monkeys, an uncomely young Mexican girl is an exception to a general rule. They have not all regular features or intellectual faces, but they have beautiful eyes and are as full of airy grace as the visions raised in the dreamings of a warm mid-summer night.

The city lay sweltering in the August sun, and our friends were not disinclined to rest in the thick walls of the inn, where dinner soon greeted their delighted vision, although the superabundance of pepper made Lansing wonder if they occasionally diversified the monotony of this fare by eating live coals.

Mr. Mentor had been far into the interior of Mexico, several years previous, and the conversation soon turned on this peculiar people. Like most of the citizens of the Great Republic, Mr. Dacre had some of the prejudices of his countrymen regarding these "poor heathens of the great South-West," while his poetical imagination was, nevertheless irresistibly attracted to the land of the Montezumas.

As the gentlemen were drinking a bottle of Mustang wine, Lansing said: "Do you know, my dear old friend, I am so delighted with this clime, I so enjoy these warm suns, that I do not believe the old plantation and Chester Hall will ever content me again?"

"Lansing," said Mentor, and his voice trembled a little, "do you know I would give nineteen-twentieths of all I have, could I set back the clock of time twenty-five years, and re-live my life. I see in you something that reminds me of what I was at your age."

"You are right, young man, in loving the far South. It has been balm to more than one wounded heart. Who can die of the grief that cankereth, when the warmth of God's smile forever surroundeth us with a golden brightness? Do you know I was born in the northern part of England? It was not until," and his voice faltered, "your father married, that I ever saw the glory of a Southern noon."

"Why, your surprise me. I thought you were born in Louisiana."

"No. I sometimes think that a man must be born in more genial climes to know how good God is to those who dwell under semi-tropical skies. Blessings we are accustomed to, we do not always prize."

And Mentor was silent some moments, and there was a moisture in his eyes, as he turned his head and feigned to cough.

DACRE.—But, Mr. Mentor, is there not some memory behind all this? Pardon me: I would not be intrusive, but something in my inmost soul tells me, deep adown your heart, even now, there was a mournful echo of the Past; it rang in your tones. I am young, my dear friend—young enough to be your son. Father has often told me you were the truest man he ever knew. When mother died, four years ago, I know one of the last things she said was, 'Georgie, do not forget to give that brooch to Egbert Mentor.' I asked papa, why she said it so earnestly, and he said you had been very kind to both of them, many years ago.

Here Mr. Mentor had another and more violent cough, which he laid to the red pepper, and, rising, handed Dacre one of the two cigars he drew from a jeweled case, saying, "Lansing, I shall have to go over to Brownsville again, but will join you this evening, as I want you to see a Mexican fandango, and there is to be a great gathering here to-night. Take care of yourself till I return."

And Lansing watched him from the doorway, as Mr. Mentor walked in the sunshine to the ferry.

VII.

THE FANDANGO.

Were you ever in a slaughter-house? I went there once, just as I visited a dissecting room, to study the Philosophy of Death. I did not sleep for several nights afterwards, and loathed animal food for a month.

I remember one little lamb brought to the shambles. It was a pet creature. It had a blue ribbon about its neck, and seemed a part and parcel of some childish existence. I felt, on seeing it, as if it were a girl's plaything about to be destroyed by some savage. Indeed, if I had not then been so wretchedly poor, I should have bought the lamb. Its soft, sweet eyes looked wistfully and innocently into mine. I did entreat for its life to be spared a few moments, and the butcher, laughingly, acceded to my prayer. If Pythagoras' doctrine of the transformation of souls were true, which you and I, sir, as fervent Christians living in the glare of a high pressure civilization know it is not, then that little creature had the soul of some bright child that died too early, ere it knew what Sin, and Carking Care, and Human Vanity and Pride, and Oppression and Mortal Vices meant.

Do not be alarmed, ye churches! This is only a pretty fancy. I am not going to bombard your orthodox piles of granite truth with my daisies and violets. Let me have them. Look at them. They are so sweet, and loveable, and tender they will not do the young, nor even the old, any harm. The loving are the truly brave and daring. You have facts enough, Messieurs of the Gradgrindian School; do not complain, nor snarl at me for peddling clever Fancies! It is my trade: I am Poet and Philosopher of a School yet, in its infancy,—that of Passional and Intellectual Harmony.

When the pet lamb came up to die, how innocently she looked up in the butcher's face. Such a glance Marie Antoinette might have turned to the glittering axe of the guillotine when the monsters who screamed "*Liberte, egalite, fraternite*," doomed the best blood of France to die.

I shut my eyes. I could not see the blow, which was a merciful one, for the little pet never stirred again. Sick to the soul, I turned away: I would not have eaten of that pure flesh for all the gold in the Indies.

Afterwards, I thought it was better so. The pet might have grown to be a coarse old sheep, whose slaughter would have awakened no compassion in any one. For all we know, madam, that sheep might have had the dirtiest fleeces in the flock. It was better so. I think Fate has more mercy than the Fools allow.

When Mr. Mentor received from Schrieff's

courier the packet, containing Emily's letter to himself, her letter to Dacre, and a bunch of letters written by Lansing to her within the past year or two, with little boyish notes, dated longer back, and, crossing over to Matamoras, met the young man coming to the ferry, where he was hastening to meet him, and saw so much happiness, and brightness, and tenderness and youthful hope on his thoughtful face, and knew that the letter in his coat-pocket was to change all this—making the boyish lover older, sadder, wiser, more care-worn—destroying all the freshness, tenderness and beauty of first love, do you marvel, gentle reader, that like the butcher, he did not hasten to drive the blow, and strike down his young friend?

Were there chambers in Egbert Mentor's heart that even now, when nearly thirty years had passed, echoed with the sounds and love-music of early days? Should he unlock the rusty doors of his own soul, and take the young man into that cemetery where a green grave was hidden? Should he tell Lansing Dacre that he had known, also, all the agony of a broken vow?

And that, too, to the son of the woman he had so wildly worshipped when he was young and blithe, and his heart was free from dull satiety. Tell this to the fruit of the union that had made his own life, if not a desert, yet a chilly moor—only watered by the consciousness of doing good for evil. Should he bless the Child, as he had blessed the Wife and the Husband? Must he even re-open the old sores that had never seen light or been known, save to the Great Physician of all wounded hearts?

How terrible the Nemesis of the Actual! Her son stood where he himself, the discarded lover, had stood twenty-seven years ago. Before him too, the jilted suitor. For a moment pride dilated his nostrils, and his haughty head lifted itself up in self-elation to quaff the subtle vengeance, but a voice from that Maryland grave said to him, "Egbert, shield my child!"

Beautiful grave! holy, holy, Death!—the voices from the Tomb are the whispers of angels, and bless us, and right our wrongs when the cold world only curses us, or still worse, dares to pity our affliction. Madam, does your dead son's tomb tell you no tales in the gloaming? Rough, gritty merchant prince, can you go to that graveyard and hear no voice from your wife's turf? Wayward boy! does that mother's coffin have no tongue to make you weep? Wordling! is there never, in the silent watches of the night, a silver, childish whisper from the Little One's grave, whose birth shame made you hide from human eyes? When the ancients made death a skeleton, they were blind. Death is an angel, and the kindest friend the poor, and lonely, and unhappy penitent can have.

Egbert Mentor could not cast a shadow on that young man there, in the sunshine. He would wait till the inky night spread her curtains over earth: wait for soft moonlight, and silence, and holy rest, and quiet. Let the young man enjoy a few hours more of his bright dream of love and happy days with her. The mortgage Fate had on those *chateaux en Espagne* would be soon enough foreclosed. There was no occasion to be