

Truth's Contributors.

LIFE IN MEXICO.

TROPICAL HOSPITALITY—A MEXICAN CASA—LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY.

("Truth's" Special Correspondence.)

MONTREY, Mexico, March 1st.

I wish I could present this queer city—capital of the state of Nuevo Leon—to your mind's eye as it really is! But we can judge of things only by comparison, you know—and as there is nothing else like it anywhere else in the world, I fear that my pen can convey but an imperfect idea. It is strange that so little is known of Mexico—a country whose authentic history dates back eight hundred years, which was old and weary before that lusty infant, the United States, was born, and which had poets and painters, art schools and conservatories of music more than three centuries ago! We have no end of information upon Syria, Hindostan, the source of the Nile—but this Lotus Land lying at our doors has been a veritable *terra incognita*, till within the last half-dozen years. Until the railroads have recently begun to lessen the difficulties and dangers of travel, it was almost impossible for the most venturesome tourist to visit more than its ancient capital, and the few unimportant ports which are all its enormous water-line can boast. Not only was there no means of getting about, except by leg or donkey transit, with here and there a robber-infested stage line over the worst roads it is possible to conceive—but the language offered a no less formidable barrier than the strange habits and customs of a totally different race; not to mention the incessant revolutions which for two hundred years rendered human life of little value. But, although the outer world knew little and cared less about Mexico,—this unknown land of the Monterumas has no "pent-up Utica," so far as its own knowledge of other countries is concerned.

THE "GILDED YOUTH"

of Mexico are generally educated abroad, in the universities of France, Spain or Germany, to a degree which Anglo-Saxons seldom attain—especially in the languages, all Latin people being natural linguists; and education is not considered complete until it has embraced extensive travel.

Unlike other countries, there is no middle class in Mexico—only the rich and educated, and the poor and densely ignorant, the former class, though in an infinitesimal minority as to numbers, rules the swarming serf population with an iron hand.

The wealthy and cultured Mexican, representing centuries of refinement and good breeding, is a most charming creature—but reserved, proud and suspicious to a degree. Every trace of the home-life of the higher class is religiously hidden from the public gaze; and it is as impossible for a stranger to penetrate this reserve in a spirit of idle curiosity, as to gain admission to a Turkish harem.

The Mexicans have other reasons than their pride, however, for extreme reserve toward foreigners, and especially—I regret to a id—toward Americans. Perhaps it is the case with all countries that the men and women who drift over the border are generally the scum of society—the failures, cranks, and disappointed ones, or if not those whose actual misdeeds have exiled them for their country's good. The arrogant and aggressive

SONS OF UNCLE SAMUEL

have been proverbial for their abuse of hospitality, ever since the days when King Philip saved the Puritan Fathers from starvation, and was repaid by fire and sword.

Mexicans are by nature extremely hospitable, but again and again has their generosity been abused, their trust betrayed by foreigners whom they have received into their homes, till they have been forced to the wise determination to admit none unless vouched for beyond question. It is not surprising, therefore, that this feeling of distrust has grown to undue proportions, and as—

"In Adam's fall
We sinned all—"

the innocent are forced to suffer for the sins of the guilty. Should I undertake to tell you, ever so delicately, the doings of some Americans (of both sexes) in this city, our good editor would refuse to print, and you to read, the recital.

Having once gained the confidence of Mexican aristocrats, and the *entree* to their homes, one finds them delightful friends—social, sympathetic and generous to a fault. But one must always remember to allow a wide margin for the

EXTRAVAGANT GALLANTRY

of Southern races, and the exuberant politeness which says far more than it means. For example, when you visit a family for the first time, your host is sure to say (in musical Castilian, which loses its fine shades of meaning when translated to our colder tongue)—"My house is yours—I am your guest—all here is at your disposal;" you are not expected to take my lord at his word, however, but must have some equally polite reply at your tongue's end. Frequently, on being introduced to a stranger, he says impressively, over the prolonged hand-shake at parting—"Remember that your house is number—, street so-and-so," giving you his own address. But you are by no means expected to move over to "number —," and the chances are (if you are a man) that should you take advantage of his invitation to make a friendly call, you would be received by the master of the house with every expression of courtesy, but never permitted one glimpse of the female members of his family. If you chance to express admiration for a Mexican's horse, his watch, the garment he wears—anything but his wife or daughter—he immediately says,

"TAKE IT, IT IS YOURS,"

and the situation is sometimes very embarrassing. But when—through mutual friends or by rare good fortune—you become possessed of their confidence, they love to wine and dine you and load you with gifts—always, however, expecting an equal return. And then they will pet and coddle you to an unprecedented extent, and open their hearts so entirely that you may read the innermost secrets of Mexican character like an open book. And vastly interesting reading it is—but be careful that the fur is never "smoothed the wrong way!" The sharpest of claws are hidden under that velvet exterior, and those same manners cover depths of passion, pride, anger, jealousy, revenge past all sounding—as cruel and relentless as the grave.

The streets of Mexican cities are as exactly alike as so many peas in a pod—one-story houses of plastered adobe, with flat roofs stretching in unbroken rows from end to end, the side of each house forming a partition for the next. The outside fronts—which are often as smooth and beautiful as polished marble, are generally inlaid sky-blue, pale yellow or strawberry pink, with painted patterns at top and bottom, like our inside "dado" decorations; while others are painted in striped, plaided, or figured patterns, precisely like printed calico. The roads are the worst in the world, paved with sharp, irregular stones piled in pell-mell. The side-walks being thus all "ups and downs" no two houses are ever exactly

the same height, and the effect of interminable lines of flat roofs so "out of plumb" would drive a Yankee mason crazy. But however much

MEXICAN TASTE

may run to decorated adobe, they have no fancy for painted wood-work. Each house has but one outer door, an enormous one which serves also as gate to the court, the corral and the garden. It opens in the center, both ways, like that of a barn—but is generally such a very shabby door that a Northern farmer would scorn it for his stable. Sometimes—especially in the ancient houses of interior towns—the doors are elaborately carved, but are always guiltless of paint or varnish. They are necessarily very wide, because serving alike for the ingress of guests and donkeys, carts and carriages. Think of a load of hay, driving in at your front door, oh fastidious housewives of the North, or

A TRAIN OF DONKEYS

laden with sacks of charcoal! If the family possesses a carriage, it is kept just inside this great, barn-like door, and on entering, one is obliged to pick his way over the sharp stones and around a curious conglomeration of articles which, in Northern ideas, are least expected in the "front hall." If *pater familias* be a merchant, a tailor, a shoemaker, or engaged in any sort of trade, his business occupies the street side of the casa, and his family the rear. Or in those comparatively rare instances where the house is two-storied, the family invariably live above, and "the business" occupies the ground floor. In those few Mexican cities where two storied houses are general, it is considered in good form for the wealthiest people to live above, and to rent the despised first-floor to the meanest artisans or tradesmen, reserving only enough of it to stable their horses.

The windows also are immense, reaching from floor to ceiling, always with heavy iron or wooden bars before them, and unpainted barn-door like shutters inside. Outside of the few great cities, such modern frivolity as window-glass is seldom indulged in, except in the brand new houses of upstart "veneerings." The walls being of great thickness, the adobe window-ledges form deep, commodious recesses, wherein the mistress of the manse and her daughters are wont to squat in the cool of the day. Pardon the inelegant word, expressive of sitting on one's heels—I use it advisedly, for chairs are considered a luxury as superfluous, almost, as window-glass.

As you may imagine, all this looks gloomy and desolate enough when viewed from without, and one can only guess at bloom and verdure and human happiness within these solid walls, by the broad-banana and giant fig-trees that tower above the house tops, the scent of roses and orange-flowers in the air, and

TANTALIZING GLIMPSES

of dark-eyed señoritas imprisoned behind the bars. Despite the forbidding aspect of the entrance, a Mexican interior is most delightful, each casa having a wide, square, unroofed-court in its centre, with its fruits and flowers and murmuring fountain. All the rooms open into it, and under the bright-hued awnings of its surrounding corridors, the family sip their morning coffee and evening chocolate, and loiter away many hours of the day.

We took a long drive into the country this morning—and oh! for the pencil of a Nast, to make you see the queer scenes en route! For miles we were overshadowed by the giant Sierra de la Silla (Saddle Mountain) a peak of the Sierra Madre, which stands guard over this quaint old

city, while the bare, hot fields on the left of the high road are dotted with the cane stalk, palm-thatched huts of the Mexican poor. There are not many large trees in this part of the Republic, and few of any kind inside the well-irrigated haciendas (landed estates) except palms and Spanish daggers. The meadows bear no grass worth mentioning, but grow an endless variety of cactus and wild-flowers. The waysides are lined with a luxuriant growth of flowering bushes, planted for hedges, over which wild climatis climbs in rank profusion, mixed with purple heliotrope, agrotatum, mignonette, nasturtiums, and other floral favorites which require careful cultivation in our colder climate. There are no fences in Mexico, but

VINE-DRAPE WALLS OF DRY ADOBE, upon which "the insidious tooth of time" makes small impression. Each little hut—which has only mother earth for a floor, and neither headstead, stove, chair nor table among its furnishings, is hedged with tall magney (the "century plant,") and set in the midst of roses and magnificent oleanders in perpetual bloom; while a few fruitful bananas also shade his humble roof, and a fig-tree spreads its protecting branches over all. These *jacals* (pronounced hoek-ala) line the outskirts of every Mexican city. They are huts which a respectable jackal would disdain to enter, too low to permit a grown person to stand upright, and certainly not large enough to "swing a cat" in. They have never any windows, and seldom anything in the shape of a door. Sometimes an old blanket partially conceals the inmates from the public gaze, and anon a board, or a few branches of chapparral affords them a slight sense of privacy, if not of security.

BESIDES THE HUMANS, (which are always numerous) the low-class Mexican reckons among his immediate family an astonishing number of dogs, and invariably the poorer he is, the greater the number; while if he is the proud possessor of a few pigs, goats or donkeys, these beasts range the premises at will—being rather accorded the posts of honor, as these four-footed inmates are of greater value than wives and babies who cost nothing.

The happy proprietor of this "Home, Sweet Home," never dreams of such a thing as snatching up a little of the unoccupied land lying all around him and planting therein a few potatoes and cabbages. Why should he humble himself? *Tortillas* (cakes made of pounded corn, mixed with water) and *frijoles* (red beans) suit him well enough for food—and for five cents he can buy enough to feed his whole family an entire day. If there are any unreasonable *Oliver Twists* in the household who clamor for more—why there is the never-failing fig-tree, and an occasional banana, while endless garlic and Chili-pepper grows wild in the hedges. If he is rich enough to own a goat, his wife makes a tiny cheese now and then (something like Swiss case, and not to be eaten till you can smell it a mile); and he can imagine no greater delicacy than that curdled goat's milk mixed with his garlic and beans. What more could a well-regulated Mexican desire?

FANNIE BRIGHAM WADE.

TROPICAL TRIPS.

3. "UP-COUNTRY" IN CEYLON.—(Continued)

BY "ALBATROSS," TORONTO.

In crop-time the lines of a Ceylon coffee-planter are not cast in pleasant places. The rain pours incessantly, and the planter must be out of doors from day-break, or soon after, till night-fall, for if he be not dodging about from one gang of pickers to another, the coolies will skip bushes on which are but few berries in order to get at those which are heavily laden, for they are paid by the amount picked, a good gatherer being able to pick two bushels a day, at sixpence a bushel. Each coolie is allotted a line of coffee-bushes to pick, and from this line he or she must not stray. The pickers carry a small bag at their waist—and this sack is about all the clothing a good many of them wear!—which they fill, and as fast as it is