



LITERATURE.

WHAT IS POETRY?

- 'Tis the warm and ready swelling of the springs in Pity's dwelling,
Till, up through its channels welling, tear-drops tremble in the eye;
- 'Tis youth's enchanted dreaming; 'tis bright glances gladly beaming,
When hearts with mirth are teeming, and when voices swell with joy.
- In the deep sea wave it glanceth, up the rainbow it advanceth,
On the lightning's flash it danceth, and it glitters in a star;
Lurks in the midnight's scowling, in the tempest's howling,
And, in the hollow growling, in the black cloud path afar.
- 'Tis the merry rills ringing down the hills from whence they're springing;
'Tis the thousand voice-harp singing to the brisk winds as they play
Through deepening dells before us, while birds and leaves make chorus,
And clouds go floating o'er us to the plaintive roundelay;
- 'Tis ruins, wreath'd and hoary, crumbling relics of their glory,
That, in some oral story, floateth down Time's murky stream;
'Tis in Morning's blush of brightness; Eve's brow of florid light-ness;
Night's airy clouds of whiteness, bathed in the pale moonbeam;
- Winter's hurricanes and floodings; spring, with all its dewy bud-dings;
Summer boughs, with blossom-studding; autumn's sere leaves in the blast;
- The beauteous; the romantic; rocks, caves, and hill gigantic,
That Nature, in a frantic mood, hath made to start aghast.
- 'Tis the heaving of the ocean in its darkly-writhing motion;
'Tis the spirit of devotion that within the bosom springs,
As, wrapt in meditation, we gaze upon creation,
Till fervid adoration flies, on pure Religion's wings.

The Matchlighter of San Adrian.
A TALE OF THE MEXICAN MINES.

The sun had not yet attained its meridian height above the bare and rugged mountains of Zacatecas, when a man in the garb of a miner descended slowly a narrow and tortuous path winding along a steep declivity. At length he reached a small platform or shelf jutting from the mountain side, and covered with vegetation, which seemed to invite him to rest; and he turned aside and seated himself on the green sward beside a fountain that gushed from the overhanging steep, and created by its moisture the verdure that surrounded it. His first act was to take a long draught of the refreshing wave, and then he proceeded to bathe his face and hands in the running water. When the earth-stains which covered his visage were removed, he appeared a young Creole of some twenty-two or three years, with a bright black eye and gay, fearless expression of countenance. He sat for a time, whistling carelessly, with his eyes fixed on the descending path.

Presently a wide covered basket became visible in this direction, with a small hand grasping it on one side.—Then a pretty face, with a pair of sparkling black eyes, and two small ruddy lips parted in a smile of pleasure and surprise, came into view. Then followed the erect and shapely figure to which the pretty face belonged, gaily attired as became a miner's wife, in a gorgeous petticoat, whereof the upper part was of a bright yellow, and the lower of a flaming scarlet; an equally brilliant *reboso* or cotton shawl was thrown over the shoulders, and the small feet were daintily encased in sky-blue satin shoes.

"*Enhorabuena*—in good time, Margarita," said the miner, showing his white teeth. "I am here before you."

"Yes, in good time," replied the young woman, laughing; "and I was afraid all the time that I might be too early, and the tortillas and frijoles would get cold. But now they will be a dinner fit for a governor."

With this she deposited her burden at his feet, and removed the covers. There was a plate of tortillas, a bowl of fiery red pepper and tomato sauce, and one of stewed frijoles or small black beans. This was the miner's simple dinner. Tearing off a piece of one of the tortillas, he twisted it into a sort of scoop, (called in Mexico *Montezuma's spoon*;) and taking up in this a mouthful of the beans, he dipped it into the burning sauce, and swallowed it, spoon and all.

"How is it that you are so early to-day, Manuelito?" asked the female, who watched him with an affectionate smile while he was thus satisfactorily engaged.

"Because, my little heart," replied the young man, "there is to be another blast to-day, and the *administrador* wishes to have it fired while the men are at dinner."

The smile instantly disappeared from Margarita's face. "Santa Maria!" she exclaimed, "another blast! Oh Manuel, how long do you mean to continue in this dreadful duty?"

"Until I can find a better, my life," replied he, gaily.—"Would you have me go back to my old employment of *barretero*—of simple miner—at six dollars a week, when here, as *pegador*, as the sole and trusted matchlighter, I earn sixteen?"

"Alas!" returned Margarita, "of what use will the money be if it happen to you as to Pedro Bravo only three months ago? Ah, I think I see the mangled body, as it was carried by our cottage, with poor Inesita crying over it. And then there is Juan Valdez, stone-blind now for five years, and old Anton, a cripple from his youth. Of what advantage was their high wages to them?"

"None, sweetheart, because what they won by boldness and skill they lost by carelessness. If a man will persist in firing matches when his brain is muddled with *aguardiente*, he must expect to suffer for it. However, I shall not be a *pegador* always. In good time, if it please San Francisco, I shall be captain of a mine. And who knows but one of these days I may be *administrador*—an overseer—and a rich man, as well as others?"

"To be sure," replied Margarita, "why not you as well as Miguel Gomez? Don Miguel, forsooth, as he must be called now. And yet I remember when he was only a poor *bascon*, a common mine-hunter, and always in debt to my father for *aguardiente* and tobacco. Yet because he happened to light on a good vein, and sold it to the English company for ten thousand dollars, and was made overseer, he thinks himself now a great gentleman, and that everybody must give way to him."

"Poor Don Miguel!" said the miner, laughing, "you are too hard upon our *administrador*, Margarita. First you refuse his hand and heart, not to speak of his dollars, and then you abuse him behind his back."

"Ah!" said Margarita, hastily, "if you knew—" and then she stopped suddenly, as if she had said more than she intended.

"What is there that you know, my little wife, that I do not?" asked Manuel, looking up in surprise.

"It was something that happened before our marriage," replied Margarita, seriously. "I promised then to conceal it; but I have often been troubled since with the thought of my promise. I'll sin in breaking it now, I will beg Padre Isidro to absolve me. It was Anita, the wife of Juan Padraza, the poor drunken *corgador*, who told me what she heard from her husband. When you and Miguel were quarrelling for love of me, Juan said that Miguel promised him the place of captain, with twenty dollars a week, if he would commit a dreadful crime. It was to follow you when you were coming down from the mountain, and push you off the precipice at the Riconada, so that you might seem to have fallen by accident. Juan would not be guilty of such a horrible act for the world, but he was so afraid of the overseer that he dared only speak of it to his wife. I did not know of it till after we were married, and then I would not tell you because it could do no good; for Gomez knows now that if I were free to-morrow I would rather jump off the Riconada myself than take him, with all his money."

"The villain!" said Manuel, while his eye sparkled and his hand clutched at his knife, "it was well for him that you did not tell me this a year ago. But perhaps he has repented of it since; he has been very good natured to me of late. However, I think his time is up. The English director, Don Jayme, came this morning from Mexico, and seems very much dissatisfied with the working of the mine. It is whispered among the men that the overseer is certain to lose his place."

"Ah, that is good news, indeed," said Margarita.

"And so this was the reason why you preferred the poor *barretero* to the rich *administrador*?"

"Of what use is money," returned Margarita, earnestly, "without happiness? Riches fly away, but the good heart remains."

"That is as true as though Padre Isidro had said it," rejoined Manuel, as he rose from his seat. "But time flies too, my dear little preacher, and they will be waiting for me."

The young couple separated, with many affectionate injunctions from his wife, who, as she replaced the basket on her head, heard the clear manly voice of her husband far above her, singing the refrain of a popular ballad.

Manuel's song ceased when he reached the Riconada, a sharp angle in the path, beside which the precipice sank plump down, a sheer descent of more than five hundred feet. The recollection of what his wife had just told him sent a cold shudder through his frame, and he had not recovered his usual gaiety when he reached the mouth of the shaft. Here, in the *galera*, or great shed surrounding the pit, he found the English director, Don Jayme, the overseer Gomez, and several clerks, miners, porters and mule-drivers. Don Jayme seemed to be in a bad humor, and the overseer looked black and sullen.

"In good time, my man," said the director. "We were all ready for you; and now let every one here be attentive to his duties. There has been too much carelessness heretofore, particularly in the blasting. Many complaints have been made of the accidents which occur here. You, I am told, are a very skilful and quick-witted workman," said he, turning to Manuel. "It is well that we have some one on whom we can rely."

Gomez listened to this significant speech without venturing to reply; but his swarthy face grew livid, and his eyes flashed with a baleful fire. Two horses, especially trained to the duty, were now attached to the *malaquite*, a machine by which the buckets were raised and lowered in the shaft. Manuel then placed upon his head a conical hat, having a socket on the top which held a lighted candle. He took in one hand a small rope, of which the other end was held by the overseer, by shaking which the matchlighter was to give the signal when he was ready to ascend. On the promptitude with which the ascent took place depended of course his safety from the explosion. Manuel now stepped into the bucket, which was slowly lowered down the shaft, a distance of about a hundred yards. Two drivers held the horses' heads, and waited in anxious silence for the signal from Gomez.—All was still as death in the *galera*.

"Let go!" shouted the overseer.

The drivers loosened the heads of the horses, who dashed off at once, and brought up the bucket at full speed. In a minute it rose to view, but—empty!

"Back! down with it! For life! for life!" exclaimed the director, stamping with impatience and anger. "Oh, what idiocy, what insanity, is this?"

The men hastened to obey his order, but before the bucket had descended a dozen yards the roar of the explosion smote upon their ears, and a cloud of smoke and dust was driven violently up the shaft. When it cleared away, the faces of all present were seen pale with horror.

"You villain!" cried the director to Gomez, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Upon my life—as I am a Christian—the rope shook in my hands," replied Gomez, whose teeth chattered, and whose whole frame seemed to tremble with nervous agitation.

The director did not waste another word upon him, but seizing a shovel, he sprang into the bucket, along with two of the miners, and was quickly lowered down the shaft. Here they set about removing the pile of earth and stones with which the explosion had filled the bottom of the shaft, not doubting that they should find the mangled remains of the matchlighter beneath.

While they are thus engaged in a fruitless search, let us follow the actual course of Manuel's proceedings. He had just lighted the match, and was on the point of stepping into the bucket, when it was suddenly drawn up.—A conviction of the overseer's perfidy flashed upon him, and with it a sense of the horror of his position. But Manuel was, as the director said, a quick-witted fellow. He knew that the workmen employed in the shaft had, a few days before, come upon a small side-cut or passage, barely large enough to admit the body of a man, and that it was found to lead to an immense chamber in the old mine of San Adrian. This famous mine was worked shortly after the conquest of Mexico, and, having yielded immense wealth, was abandoned about the end of the sixteenth century, on account of the difficulty experienced in its drainage. The workmen who explored this passage had reported that the chamber was nearly full of water, and was so large that the light of their candles did not penetrate to the farther extremity. The recollection of this discovery now occurred to Manuel, and seemed to offer a chance of escape. Looking eagerly around, he observed the opening about three feet above his head, and gaining it by a desperate spring, he drew himself up, and plunged into the passage. Rushing eagerly on, to avoid the dreadful explosion, just as the roar of the blast filled his ears he fell headlong into a sheet of water which spread about three feet below the extremity of the passage. He sank beneath the surface, and when he rose, confused and breathless, it was to find himself floating in utter darkness, without the slightest idea of the point by which he had entered, and with hardly a chance of discovering the opening. A more horrible situation can hardly be conceived. Still hope did not desert him. After reflection, he fixed upon the direction in which he judged the passage to lie, and swam carefully towards it. He was soon convinced, by the space passed over, that he was mistaken in his judgment; but considering it better to keep on until he found the wall than to waste his strength in swimming at random, he proceeded steadily forward, as he judged, about two hundred yards. At length he encountered the wall, which rose perpendicularly far above his head, as he found by the splash of the water which he threw against it. Coasting along, and occasionally touching it with one hand, he advanced about a hundred yards further, by which time his limbs were becoming stiff and benumbed in the ice-cold water, and his heart had almost failed him. But he was not destined to perish thus. He suddenly came upon a passage, the opening of which was a little lower than the surface of the water. It was evident from this fact, as well as from the size of the passage, that it could not be that by which he had entered. However, it offered him at least a respite from death, and he promptly availed himself of it. After sitting for a time, to recover from his exhaustion, he proceeded to explore the passage. It proved to be a sort of vaulted chamber, about his own height, and just wide enough for him to touch its sides with his outstretched hands. A soul-cheering idea suddenly flashed upon his mind. There was a tradition of an ancient *socabon*, or adit, which had been driven at vast expense through the mountain, to effect the drainage of the old mine of San Adrian. When the mine was abandoned, the adit, of course, was no longer attended to; its external opening became closed up, and, in the space of more than two hundred years which had passed, its locality was forgotten. Manuel well remembered to have one day heard Don Jayme say to a Mexican gentleman that he should consider the discovery of the old *socabon* an inestimable service, as it would probably save the company an immense expense for draining in their new works.

The further the miner advanced, the more assured he became of the truth of his supposition. The adit was—as from its situation it must be—of great length; and Manuel walked, as he supposed, nearly five hundred yards before reaching the extremity. The water all the way was just up to his ankles, and he thought he could perceive at times that it had a slight current in the direction he was going. The passage was closed, as he had anticipated, by a solid mass of earth and stones, which he at once set about removing. Making good use of his long knife, he worked indefatigably for more than an hour.—At last he struck the roots of a tree, a circumstance which assured him that he was approaching the surface. The conviction gave him renewed strength; he cut with his knife, and dug with his torn and bleeding hands, until he at length, by a lucky push, loosened a large stone which was enclosed between two of the roots of the tree. It fell forward, and the bright rays of heaven poured in upon his dazzled and enchanted vision. He felt a thrill of delight, such as one entombed before his time might experience when the doors of his sepulchre flew outward, and gave him back once more to warmth and light. With a little additional labour, he enlarged the aperture until he was able to force himself through it. But what was his