

1891 XMAS 1891

P. A. Macgowan

WRIGHT'S BUILDING,
207 MAIN STREET, MONCTON, N. B.

During the balance of this month we have reduced the prices on all Winter goods. The weather up to the present time being very mild, sales in these goods have not been what they should, we therefore reduce prices.

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"The Review."

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"Are they not delicious enough to eat?"

exclaimed Vergoney.

"I grant it," answered the creole smiling, proof against the attractions of brunettes, "but I do not believe that our uniform captivates these people. They avoid us as if we were pest-stricken."

"Because those hidalgos, warming themselves in the sun along the walls, are watching them. Let us push on to the central plaza."

"I warn you I am not going to spend my day in rambling the streets. I have a call to make."

"On whom, for goodness sake? the mayor?"

"No, on the governor of the bank."

"To draw some money? my compliments, you lucky dog!"

"Merely to procure some information."

"I hope that will not prevent you coming to a café I have discovered by the Puerta del Sol, where we shall find some less forbidding faces and delicious ice-creams."

"Have it so! I will learn my way there to the bank."

They were not slow in arriving at this

puerta; not a door as the name implies,

but an open place, or rather crossways,

tolerably animated. All the life of van-

quished Madrid seemed concentrated in

this central point. In the middle rose a

paltry fountain adorned with a poor

statue of Venus which the populace call

the Mari Blanca. All around, rows of vile

buildings deprived of any marked charac-

teristics. Some Spanish were stalking

gravely to and fro; others sat before re-

freshment houses, which were not appe-

tizing. Water-carriers were running

about, each with a jar under one arm,

shouting: "Water!—who wants water?"

Not one French soldier was to be seen.

They were kept in barracks, as a measure

of prudence; but, at the Calle San Ger-

onimo corner, two pieces of cannon,

guarded by the Imperial artillerymen, showed

their menacing muzzles to remind the

people that any attempt at rioting would

be pitilessly repressed.

"Only to think that this is the Palais-

Royal gardens of Madrid," sneered Ver-

goney. "The arcades are lacking—but it

is warmer than in Paris, which puts me in

mind of your going to have refreshments

before you went off upon business."

Fontenay let himself be conducted into

one of the cafés, where the two officers had

no difficulty in finding room as their en-

trance created a vacuum. In a twinkling

all the tables were left free.

"Clearly enough, we are not beloved in

the capital of all the Spains," muttered

the sub-lieutenant. "They run away like

sheep that spy a wolf. But what is this

printed paper they have left behind? how

very curious! it makes it plain that we

are not liked. Listen to this pretty cate-

chism, which I will translate literally—"

"Yes, you know Spanish," remarked

Vergoney, who was thus at a disadvan-

tage.

"When no Spaniards are by," returned

the cautious creole, enigmatically.

This strange and historical document

named the Emperor Napoleon, Prince

Murat and Godoy, the "prince of peace,"

as the enemies of Spain. The spirit of the

paper was represented essentially by

the conclusion that the French were "re-

creant Christians whom it was no more a

sin to kill than a dog."

"Oh, the monsters! where are they that

I may cut off the ears of those who print

insults on my Emperor!" shouted Ver-

goney, hammering on the table with the

hilt of his sabre.

This noise had the effect of putting the

waiters and master to flight out of the

saloon, so that the two officers were alone.

"I have had enough of Madrid," said

Vergoney. "I have no business at the

bank, so I am going back to Chamartin,

and I will never set foot in this lair of banditti until the day when the Emperor orders it to be blown up!"

Fontenay could not refrain from smiling

at this violent outburst of his irascible

brother-officer. He thought this ridicu-

lous broadside odious, which the occult

leaders of the insurrection had disseminat-

ed throughout Spain, but he understood

the Spanish people had good reasons to

hate the French. They were defending

their independence and acting like fanatics

but fanaticism is often one form of patri-

otism, and while carrying on war against

them, in a quarrel not at all his own, Fon-

tenay did not disdain them. He did not

try to induce Vergoney to share his philo-

sophical ideas, and he allowed him to de-

part without regret, knowing that misad-

venture would not befall him in Madrid,

occupied by the French and overawed by

French cannon in the mouth of the principal

streets. He was not sorry to be re-

lieved of the companion whose rashness

would end in bringing some awkward af-

fair upon them, and he had no need of him

to counter with the bank president.

Fontenay applied to the French gunners

of the Calle San Geronimo battery for the

address of the financial establishment. Not

one of the honest fellows could inform

him as he knew only their barracks and

had never used a bank from their surplus

not being heavy enough for investment.

A dozen paces distant, leaning with his

back against a house-wall, and wrapped to

the nose in a brown woolen mantle, stood

a man, covered with a broad sombrero. All

one saw of him was blazing eyes and two

fingers holding a papito, or cigarette; he

eyed the officer with much attentiveness.

As he had to inquire his road to the bank

of some citizen, this one would answer, he

hoped, as well as another, and, bowing to

him politely, he put his request in very

good Spanish. The man appeared sur-

prised to hear a Frenchman speak Castilian

so well, and kept his reply in abeyance,

probably to gain time to recover himself.

"Senor," he said at length, "the bank

is in an out-of-the-way quarter—near the

Royal Tobacco Factory and the Casino de

la Reina—almost at the further end of the

town."

"I thank you, senor, and if you will

only start me in the proper direction, I

will ask again on the road."

The Spaniard again reflected before

speaking as follows:

"Senor, it so happens that I dwell in

that part, and I was about going home."

"How marvellously into one's wishes

that falls! I will be delighted to take the

stroll with your honor!"

"Beg your pardon! I must entreat

you to limit yourself to following me."

"Good! I understand you! you do

not want your fellow-citizens to see you

arm in arm with a Frenchman?"

"That is it, indeed, and I will be much

obliged to you if you do not speak any

more to me; when we arrive, I will point

out the bank to you and continue my

road."

"As you please, senor."

Fontenay could not recover from his

surprise at finding at the outset so oblig-

ing a grandee, but he had no reason par-

ticularly to distrust a stranger and he es-

teemed himself very happy in the opportu-

nity to profit by his willingness. He

followed him in consequence without any

misgiving.

The man went through a street per-

pendicular to that of San Geronimo, walk-

ing with measured steps and a gravity be-

seeming a Castilian, without stopping or

turning round, and almost brushing by the

shut-up houses. Fontenay regulated his

pace by his, resolved to observe the treaty

concluded with this courteous Madridian

who consented to do an enemy service.

They proceeded eastwardly. The further

they left the Puerta del Sol behind, the

more deserted became the thoroughfares.

They met nobody but hags squatting on

the pavement before baskets of Spanish

walnuts, and at longer intervals, muffled-

up men who exchanged a glance with the

silent guide.

One street succeeded another, with a

cross-road here and there, surrounded by

squalid dwellings. The journey lasted

three-quarters of an hour with no appear-

ance of reaching its termination, for on

went the Spaniard with the same slow and

even tread.

Fontenay wondered if he were not be-

ing trifled with. It would be a good

trick to play a foreigner, to lead him

through Madrid, to cast him adrift in an

out of the way region where nobody

would set him on the right road. He went

no further in his surmise, not suspecting

an ambush. It was daylight, and,

while superior order kept the soldiers

from showing themselves in the streets,

there were pickets in various places.

Besides, Madrid was much less extensive

than Paris, and the route would have to

come to an end before long, as the then

existent wall could not be far.

So Fontenay marched onward, lured by

the hope of learning soon what had be-

come of Mlle. de Gavre's estate liquidated

into gold. He would have gone to the

world's end to restore it to her; hence he

might endure a little fatigue to gain news

of the sum constituting the greater part

of his fiancée's inheritance.

At last at the end of an almost inter-

minable street, the Spaniard, of whom he

had not lost sight for a single instant,

halted briefly, pointed to a house on his

left, and strode on, without looking back

to be assured that the sign had been un-

derstood.

Fontenay saw him turn to the right and

vanish down a lane where he was not

tempted to follow him.

The edifice designed as the bank was a

heavy one with nothing striking about it,

but the front bore an escutcheon in stone

showing the three lily-flowers of the royal

house of Bourbon. All the windows were

closed in with iron shutters, but the car-

riage door-way was open, and no sentinel

guarded it.

Did this signify that there was nothing

worth protecting in this massive structure

which might sustain a siege? The lieuten-

ant put this question to himself and was

the more inclined to believe so from

nobody passing in or out. Ordinarily

there is some stir about houses where

money payments are made, and however

precarious credit was then in Spain, one

might fairly be astonished at the national

bank receiving so few visitors on a business

day.

Had it suspended payments? But in

this case there would be people about,

perhaps more than customary, for those

ruined by a bankruptcy hover round the

scene of wreck as if in hopes of fishing up

the wails of their engulfed fortune.

Whatever the reason, it was easy to en-

ter to make enquiries, as it was open to

all comers.

Fontenay passed under an arch into a

court-yard where he found nobody. He

saw a janitor's lodge, but it was empty,

and, farther on, grated wickets, behind

which no clerks were seen, and no silver

chink was heard.

It was a bank without life—the mere

shell.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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