

LITERATURE, &c.

The American Magazines.

From the New York Spirit of the Times.

WAY SIDE SKETCHES OF MEXICO.

AND now to explore that vast ruin; already considerably excited by the morning's ride, which being greatly increased by the good cheer of our guests, each one sallied forth confidently expecting to encounter an adventure of some kind or other. Crawling along a subterranean corridor, I was almost suffocated with the damp, musty atmosphere, which seemed stagnant in those tenacious and death-like apartments, when I came upon one more remarkable than any of the others which I had observed, and determined to explore it more fully; there was yet to be seen in perfect preservation a narrow stone seat, or more properly a sharp prolongation of the stone wall, upon which the miserable and blinded devotees would sit for hours, as one of the many species of castigation used by them to chastise the physical man for the faults and immoralities of the mental—it was near this means of torture I observed by the dim light which I carried, that one of the large rocks which composed the wall of the cell was loose, and by a very little effort upon my part was dislodged, exposing an artificial vacuum of some foot or foot-and-a-half square, which had evidently been chiselled out for some purpose; into this I thrust my light, and commenced throwing out some rubbish which had fallen down, when my fingers came in contact with—oh my God! a small box—gold! gold! gold! the ounces! the ounces! I immediately rose, trembling from head to foot, and crept to the entrance to see that no one was watching me, and satisfied of this, I returned to snatch from their secret hiding place and hug to my bosom the precious treasures which I had so miraculously discovered. I seized cautiously hold of the box, which from the ages it had laid buried was considerably decayed; with much effort I hauled it forth, and when entirely released from the rubbish which had surrounded it, it certainly felt too light for gold. Oh the sickening thought, the heart paled, and the hand trembled, for now perhaps instead of yellow glittering ounces, my eyes would encounter the hideous spectacle of a human skull, or something yet more appalling. I hesitated a moment, yet only for a moment; the box must be opened and the contents examined whatever they might be, and with the assistance of my sabre I very soon wrenched the mouldering lid from its fastening, and to my relief discovered nothing more or less than a lot of old soiled and discoloured papers, and among the rest a parcel neatly folded and tied up. The thought instantly flashed across my mind, this then is the last will and testament of some miserable old miser, who in his frantic zeal has severed asunder the ties of family and friends, and left this precious document to point out to the fortune-finder, the immense treasures which a life of abstinence and penury had accumulated. I immediately wrenched the outer covering from the package, and there read in large Spanish letters, the following

A TRUE SKETCH OF THE VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE.

AND was this all? Decidedly dissatisfied with my treasure, I thrust the soiled package into my pocket, determined at some future time when in a better mood, I might philosophise and soliloquise with the lonely writer upon the vicissitudes and ups and downs of human life. I now thought of rejoining the company, and soon emerged into the pure fresh mountain air again. I said nothing of my adventure; and the order was soon given to mount, when we all left those sacred ruins to their solitude again. Arriving at the city, I hurried to my quarters, and there determined to quietly follow the wanderings of the author of my package. And now 'Dear Spirit,' should it suit your convenience and inclination to follow with me this Mad Priest in his denunciation and recriminations against our good and happy world—here they are.

My clerical name is Juan de Madrid, and I was born in old Spain, in the province of Malaga, of noble patronage and to great possessions. I was the only son of my fond and dotting parents, who looked upon me as the only stay of our ancient and honorable house, with none other than a younger sister share their joys and favors; I very young learned to feel my importance, and at eighteen I begged my fond parents to permit me to enter upon the profession of arms, which had long since been marked out for me; my father himself having served with distinguished honor in the wars of—, had only to ask to obtain for me the rank of sub-lieutenant in the Queen's Guard; here I soon became very popular, for with (and I may now mention it without a show of vanity) a sufficient good personal appearance, and moderate mental acquirements, added to a large fortune which I expended with a lavish hand, I soon drew around me a host of sycophants and admirers. I also now rose rapidly in my profession by means of an adventure, which has been the precursor of all my after misery and ruin.

Having been passing a few days of absence with a messmate at his father's residence in shooting, angling, &c, I received an order which compelled my immediate return to my regiment. I at once complied, accompanied by a single attendant; we had not proceeded more than three leagues when the heavens began to lower, and very soon the threatening storm broke forth with terrific violence. We put spurs to our horses and endeavoured to reach some friendly cottage where we might

protection from the raging tempest; at this moment I descried a horse without a rider dashing furiously by, yet sufficiently near to dash over that he was caparisoned with the Queen's livery; which was always worn upon her hawk-ing excursions. I immediately checked my steed and gazed wildly around; and Oh God! what was my horror to see dashing directly on towards me, a carriage drawn by six white Arabian steeds, who in their mad fright were furiously dashing over rocks and precipices, threatening at every moment to hurl the carriage and its inmates (if any there be, for driver and postillion there were none) to atoms—what was to be done—was there no rescue? My determination was at once formed; those mad steeds should pass on but o'er my dead body, as I would oppose it as a bulwark for the preservation of my gracious majesty, the Queen; for I at once discovered that the carriage and livery were hers. I ordered my attendant to seize and make ready one of his pistols, and at a signal from me to shoot one of the leading horses; I at the same time unloosed from my saddle-bow a rope, which I always carried, known as the Lasso; and when all was prepared, which occupied but a moment, we silently awaited the approach of the frantic beasts; on they came with terrific speed, and at the proper moment I cried out now's our time, and with it the sharp crack of my attendant's pistol—down tumbled one of the foremost horses, and whirling the Lasso, the fore legs of the other were soon tightly bound within its coil, and he too 'hors de combat,' the others rushing upon the prostrate bodies of their companions were completely entangled and forced to yield themselves unwilling prisoners of war. We immediately rushed to the carriage, wrenched open its doors, and Oh God! what was the spectacle which there met our view; there lay the Queen with one of her maids of honor, senseless and prostrate. The storm having partially abated, we lifted them upon the green sward, which was completely saturated with water, having spread my cloak to receive them, and using all the means which were at our disposition. It was some time ere we discovered the least signs of returning animation; at last the Queen opened her eyes and gazed wildly around her, but immediately closed them again, and with a shudder, as if to shut out some horrid reflections which were forcing themselves upon her mind. I was kneeling by her side, chafing her hands when she again opened her eyes, and in a feeble voice asked me where she was, what had been the horrible scene through which she had passed, or was it a dream? I endeavored to tranquillise her and begged her to quiet herself; assuring her that when she became composed, I would explain all to her satisfaction—but this was impossible; she again demanded, 'Who are you, Sir, that rescued me from the horrid death which yawned before me? Speak, Sir, I implore thee, I command you?' I saw from her manner it would irritate, rather than benefit, to attempt to parley any longer, and at once told my name and rank; and that having, as the reader already knows, been passing a few days with a friend in the country, and was returning when I accidentally discovered a carriage without driver or postillion madly dashing across the plain; to check the mad career of those wild horses and rescue if possible the inmates, was the first impulse which crossed my mind; and that having most happily succeeded, I begged that her majesty would return to the carriage and allow me to accompany them to the palace. The fair countess of—was also fast recovering, and we happily learned that neither of the ladies, with the exception of some severe bruises, were seriously injured. I again urged her majesty, as the ground and atmosphere was exceedingly damp, to return to her carriage; 'not before, Sir, I have at least rendered a trifling return to our deliverer; accept, Sir Captain, this small token of our favor and esteem,' at the same time taking an elegant gold chain from off her own neck and throwing it over mine; she now turned and presented me to the beautiful creature, her companion, and told her to thank me as their deliverer, I replied that I had been already sufficiently repaid by the honor of having been instrumental in rescuing them, to require any other thanks or acknowledgments; yet the fair countess, with a smile so bewitching that I could not resist, said 'I must be permitted to join our gracious Queen in thanking you for your generous self devotion in rescuing us from the most terrible of deaths.' I bowed my head in silence, my lips refused utterance to the feelings of the heart, and I felt that I would have encountered dangers ten thousand times as imminent to have received another such smile from that fair face. To me it was more gracious than all the gifts and honors of the Queen; and even now, although far off from the land of kindred and birth, shut out from contact with the world in this miserable cell, the recollection of times provokes a return of memory to that fair face as mantled with a timid blush, she thanked me as her deliverer.

The Queen now signified her readiness to return, and as my assistant and myself were reharnessing the horses, up came dashing several of the Lords in attendance on the morning's excursion, expressing in earnest tones their congratulations at her Majesty's almost miraculous escape. 'My lords,' said she, 'I have only to thank this gallant young officer, Capt.—, and his faithful attendant, for this poor life and that of my dear little Countess. They, at least, my Lords, were not frightened in the hour of danger, but nobly perilled their own lives to check the mad flight of my treacherous Arabs, and rescue that of their Queen.' I at once read in her Majesty's tone a rebuke to those Lords for a conceived want of proper attendance in the morning's excursion. The Queen then signified to an elderly, dignified gentleman to approach closer, and said, in an

under tone, 'My Lord—, see that this young officer is confirmed in the rank which he deserves, and which I have given him; and that his faithful attendant be promoted to the rank vacated by him, and that they both be placed over the department of the Queen's Guard which is always nearest our person.' My mind was so bewildered with the events of the morning that I could neither reason or reflect, at was only after arriving safely at the palace, and retiring to my own room, that I endeavored to calmly survey my own position. What was it? But yesterday comparatively an obscure individual, to-day prominently in favor with the great source of all favors—the Queen. Yesterday an inferior, the very lowest officer in my regiment—to-day, the chief of a distinguished command. Yesterday a being without a thought or an aim for the future—to-day one whose very soul wildly throbs at its mention. All my leisure hours, all the energy of my character, all the faculties of my mind must, henceforth, instead of being squandered with reckless and idle companions, be centered in one great object—for the happy termination of that which had been so gloriously begun.

'Tis useless to dwell upon events as they occurred—'tis sufficient to say that I became day by day more highly honored and favored; 'twas like a dream, so smoothly and happily did life then glide away, and I only awoke to find myself the affianced of my lovely Countess. Yet her stern old father had decreed, ere I could call her mine, I must carve a name high in the "niche of fame," which should not only honor his noble house, but descend to the latest posterity.

'Twas now that the newly discovered continent of America was filling the civilized world with such startling adventures—'twas here my own countrymen were performing deeds worthy of demigods, and there I determined to seek my own career of glory and renown. I immediately communicated my plans, with my reasons, to the Queen, and prayed her co-operation, which she reluctantly yielded, and I set sail a few months after for the New World, with a special commission, and as fine an armament as ever left old Spain. The enthusiasm and romance of the new country had drawn around my standard some of the most distinguished Cavaliers of the old world. My mission for a time proved more successful than my most ardent or enthusiastic wishes had anticipated; in the language of the great Roman—"I came, I saw, I conquered." Among my band of followers there was a young Arragone, a cavalier of an ancient and noble family, and of a most promising character. Upon this young man I lavished more than ordinary kindness, and of the whole band he alone at all enjoyed my confidence, for with a gay and cheerful disposition, he carried a heart, for danger, as brave as ever throbbed in Roman's breast; and for these, with other good qualities, I loved him. Sitting alone one evening, deeply absorbed in reflections, I had unconsciously taken from its hiding place the miniature of my affianced wife—there I sat gazing wildly upon it, and so deeply chained were my faculties, that I had not discovered that my young Arragone had silently entered the room, and had been for some moments gazing with fascinating eyes, and as much absorbed in contemplating the miniature as myself. I at last discovered him, thrust the miniature into my breast, and in a stern voice demanded, 'How is this, sir, that you intrude yourself without being announced, upon my privacy?' The young man, taken by surprise, stammered an apology, and left the room. Loving the youth I soon repented me of what I had done, and when a few days after, he entered my room with 'Patron, mi Capitan, for conduct a few days since, which must have appeared both rude and ungentlemanly, but wishing to consult you on business, I announced myself in the usual mode by knocking at your door, and receiving no reply, I opened the door, and seeing you, entered; observing you deeply engaged in reflection, I hesitated about disturbing you, and was about retiring, when my eye accidentally fell upon the miniature which you held in your hand, and oh! kind sir! the resemblance it bore to a fond and absent sister, so completely fascinated and attracted my attention, that I entirely forgot the object of my coming. I again beg your pardon, mi capitan, and ask as a favor, (if possible), that you will again permit me to gaze upon that miniature?' I could not refuse after his very polite and satisfactory apology, and handed it to him; he seized hold of it, and seemed for several moments to gaze with a most devoted and brotherly affection. My heart expanded towards him, and I asked 'If he thought the likeness as striking as he first imagined it?' He replied 'No,' although he had always considered his sister the most perfectly beautiful creature living, he was forced to confess that, if possible, 'that miniature was still more beautiful, and, sir, may this not possibly be the work of the imagination—a fancy sketch?' 'Oh, no,' I replied, his flattery having completely mastered me, 'this, sir, is a living and true likeness of my affianced wife, the Countess of—.' A slight shudder seemed to pass over his frame as he quickly returned the miniature, thanked me, and left the room. From that moment the young man's manners entirely changed; hitherto always buoyant and happy, he now seemed sombre and sad, seldom if ever coming into my presence, and when so his manners always seemed constrained and uneasy; none could account for this sudden, yet palpable change, in one usually so happy and contented; day by day he grew worse and worse, until at last he solicited permission to return home, I represented to him the impossibility of returning except by a special commission, which I was not then prepared to despatch at that time, but assured him at the earliest opportunity one should be

prepared, and that he might accompany it. I furthermore besought him, that if he was unhappy, and if I could possibly assist him in any way, that he might confidently rely upon me to do so. He thanked me kindly, and assured me that it was out of my power to render him any assistance, except to return home as soon as possible. An opportunity presented itself much sooner than I at that time anticipated. For some days I had discovered a spirit of discontent and insubordination among the soldiery, and only by the merest accident possible, discovered in time to frustrate and punish one of the darkest laid plots of treason and villainy ever conceived—and would you believe it, reader, this Arragone, this youth upon whom I had lavished kindness upon kindness, was the instigator; yet at that time I did not know it. Punishing as they deserved the ringleaders, I determined to send several others back to old Spain, and there have their trial, and for this purpose despatched a vessel under the command of the Arragone; but the seeds of rebellion had taken root, and the vessel was still seen hovering in Port, when another and more successful attempt was made, which resulted in my complete overthrow and being made a prisoner. Here I lay in the most wretched state of confinement, whilst the Arragone was making his way safely back to his native land, and immediately upon arriving presented himself at court, having previously liberated the prisoners, who, to gratify their revenge, readily joined him in the scheme of falsehood to effect my ruin; they were to represent that I, by a course of cruelty and oppression, had alienated myself from the whole band, and had fallen a victim to their just indignation, presenting a petition purporting to be signed by every member of the company, and praying that my second in command, (a cavalier of distinguished family,) he confirmed as their leader, whilst he, the Arragone, was to represent me to the Queen as being very kind, brave and generous, his true and much lamented friend, that I had been basely assassinated by a band of murderers, having, as he represented, been my most devoted friend, barely escaped their murderous knives himself, and under a well devised pretext returned to vindicate my honor and bear a last message to my affianced wife, and prayed the Queen that she would bring him before the Countess for that purpose.

The Queen, deeply affected by this recital, for she truly loved me, complied with his request; and the villain played so well his part that he left both the ladies deeply sympathizing with him for the dangers and trials he had encountered in my behalf, assuring him of their future interest and protection, and permission to visit them at his pleasure; this he did not fail to do, and when alone with the Countess would describe again and again the scene over the miniature, and how he had struggled to bear that precious treasure back to her own hands, which her Lord had treasured with such devotion, but that the murderous villains had discovered it and ground it to atoms over the corpse of his dead master. 'Tis madness to dwell upon the subject long, suffice it, his villainy triumphed—they were married. Yes, that heart which had been pledged to me upon the altar of true affection, by a villain's arts—another's—and that other the villain himself who had been so highly honored and loved by the one so basely wronged.

There is a retributive justice which follows close upon the tracks of human crimes and wickedness, and when the villain least expects it, he is hurled from his seat of conceived security into an abyss more terrible, more withering than devils incarnate themselves could devise; such was the fate which awaited my false and treacherous betrayer, as well as my own self. Linger in my damp and pestilential dungeon, without a ray of hope for the future, when I was aroused from the torpor and gloom which had settled upon me by the announcement from my jailors that upon condition I would pledge my honor not to attempt a prosecution against them, I would be immediately set at liberty and carried back to old Spain. Too eager to regain my liberty upon any terms, I at once complied, and again breathed the free air of heaven. A vessel was in readiness, and I lost no time in leaving a country where I had known so much of misery and wretchedness. Our voyage was prosperous, and I once again set foot upon my dear native land, but only, reader, to experience in its fullest extent, and full to the brim, the cup of misery which awaited me. Immediately upon reaching shore I repaired to a 'Fonda' to obtain some refreshments, and whilst it was being prepared eagerly devoured the contents of the newspapers—a pleasure which had been so long denied me. And there, Oh G—! my eyes first beheld the infamy and misery which had been heaped upon me—yes, there I first read the fatal marriage announcement of the only being I ever truly loved, and for whom alone life was worth preserving; married, too, to him whom I had most befriended. Could it be possible? Perhaps some hideous dream; or was I not again a prisoner in a miserable dungeon? So shocked was I at what I had read, that I was totally unconscious of everything around me, and was only aroused from my painful reverie after several announcements that the refreshments I had ordered were ready. I had no longer any disposition to eat or drink; I threw the waiter a half crown and again read the fatal paragraph. 'Twas, alas, but too true. I seized my hat and rushed from the house, going I knew not whither. Yet, O, no! I could not believe her false; they had imposed upon her by rumours of my death. I now called to mind the singular conduct of the false villain who betrayed me, the first time he beheld he