

THE SOFT BLACK EYES



HAT a trivial thing will color the whole of a man's life! How small an incident, compared to the large future he has mapped out for himself, may make or mar it! I learned all this, and more, one sultry May day in Mexico, five years ago.

I had been sent to Mexico, as chief of a surveying corps, to establish the boundaries of the Santa Antia grant, which lay along the Rio Clara just outside the city of Chihuahua. It was a responsible position for a young man and I held my head high.

It was the day of La Fiesta de Guadalupe. The saint himself had been dead, I understood, several hundred years, but in Mexico that doesn't make any difference; the longer folks are dead there, the more they seem to be thought of, and the bigger a birthday party they have. Almost every other week contains the "feast day" of some dead saint or saintess, and trade and commerce are suspended to do the occasion justice. The natives of Mexico are the most perennially pious people on earth. Why, I have known them—men in my employ—to be so enthused over the posthumous birthday of some long-dead saint that they would get up in the gray dawn to go about celebrating it. This morning—the morning of Guadalupe's feast day—the whole force of peons under me had struck. No Chinamen, no flagmen, no axmen, were left me. Only Sims and Bailey, my two American assistants, stayed behind. When I began abusing them for the customs of Mexico, they said while they did not care even remotely for the saint to whom it was dedicated, still they were glad it was a holiday, and they thought they would go up-stream and fish awhile. They were only indifferent laymen, without any religious feeling.

When I was left alone in camp, I spent a short time on my field-notes, when it came over me that I was wasting the day. Just outside the chaparral the river was laughing and murmuring in the open. It seemed to ask me to



AS WE TALKED WE WASHED.

walk beside it. The adobe huts along its bank were tenantless; their inmates had gone to the feast.

But, strange sight, there at the end of the river where the waters were the merriest, was a solitary worker, and whatever it was she was doing, she was doing it with a vim. A dark-eyed, dark-haired, dark-shawled daughter of Spain she seemed to be, and yet she was working—and working hard—on a "feast day." A fit of curiosity seized me to know what she was doing, and why she was doing it. I approached her with the question on my lips; at what did she work, and por-kay? (I spell it as I said it.) Softly she raised a pair of melting orbs, and sweetly and eloquently she answered me. From her reply, in the most musical language in the world, I gathered that she would be at the feast, but that she must cleanse the soiled linen that lay around her on the sand, for the owner of it, a gentleman who was staying at the United States hotel, wanted it by noon, and to-morrow would not do (she said this plaintively). If it were not done by noon, she finished most pathetically, she would get no dinero, and that she needed in the superlative degree. Dinero! Ah, the most potent thing in Mexico to saints' days is money!

As her red lips told me this, her great black eyes wandered from the soiled clothes at her feet to the spires of the cathedral in the distance and the waving foliage of the plaza where the feasting and merry making were going on. There was a look of sadness and longing in them as she gazed. Being a tender-hearted man, I asked her if there was aught I could do for her. In a wonderful mixture of Anglo-Spanish, which I invented while in Mexico, and which no one could ever master but myself, I assured her I was at her service if she so desired, and asked how I could assist her.

The black eyes flashed gratitude ere the scarlet mouth said, in silvery sweet tones: "Would I sit on a rock beside her and rub the shirts of the gentleman on a large rock with a very small rock?"

Looking back now in the light of maturer wisdom, I can see that I should have declined that job on the grounds that it was unaesthetic. But—I didn't. On the contrary, I accepted it effusively. There was a touch of romance about it that appealed to me—the day itself began to appeal to me for the first time. I began to feel something of the enthusiasm for feast days that had taken my men out before day-break. I would not be so hard on them again, I thought. Truly it was a very pretty custom, and I began to sympathize with it and to understand it better. If San Guadalupe had not been so long interred, in the gladness of my heart I would have sent him a bouquet.

All this I tried to confide to Lucia. It touched her; it sounded, she said, like stories she had read in the convent. Her name was a poem in itself, Lucia Eulalia Garcia y Valdez. And mine? After that poem it seemed common to say that I was plain "Jack Biggs." But she anticipated me; she pointed to one of my business cards that had escaped my vest pocket when I threw it on the sand. "Meester Beegs, que no?" she lisped, and it did not sound at all badly from her lips.

It was pleasant to know that she did not dislike my name; this was one way of saying, as everybody knows, that its owner was not disagreeable to her.

As we talked, we washed; and long before noon the gentleman's shirts were all floating in the breeze from the low chaparral along the river bank.

Lucia Eulalia glanced gratefully and alternately at the snowy linen and at me. My natural thoughtfulness led me to suggest that we might as well do the family washing while we were about it. Her brother, Antonio, the shepherd, whom she had mentioned with sisterly affection—did not his things have need of water? "There was no time like the present," I said; "it might set in to-morrow and rain for months—who knows?"

Lucia Eulalia looked at the contracting blue of the skies, and laughed at my weather prophecies, but she ran to her adobe dwelling a few rods away and brought from it a bundle of Antonio's "things." They had apparently been waiting for me for years. His wardrobe ranged from dingier overalls. As I warmed up to the ambitious task of cleansing them, under Lucia Eulalia's approving smiles, all nature seemed to smile; the sun shone warm and warmer; the river ran blue and bluer—for Lucia had "blued" it. She had also "allowed" the root of a whole soap-tree to Antonio's garments. She was right in doing this, but, somehow, in my struggle with the sheep-herding stains of six months, I had distributed a good deal of lather over my person. When this unaccustomed fatigue began to show on me, Lucia Eulalia asked softly if I "had tire."

"Oh no!" I was declaring, "I have no tire," when some approaching American voices were heard. Lucia clasped her hands tragically, and, running to the chaparral, began hastily to gather the linen therefrom. I caught from her manner that the owner of the shirts had tired of waiting and was coming for them. I had divined aright, but I had not divined far enough. As they emerged from the alameda to the west of the river, I could see they were a lady and gentleman. I had almost managed a look of industry and innocence, as they approached us, and raised my eyes to impress them with it, when—gracious saints! Guadalupe and great Jehosaphat! Was that Maxwell! The man I had robbed of the valedictory in '87 at Ann Arbor? True, I had no grudge against him on that account, but my dream of meeting him again and "making it right" had not been like this. Maxwell it was, with his stylish bride. He threw me a careless glance at first; then I began to dawn on him, slowly but surely. He quizzed Lucia in miserable Spanish, in a cowardly way, I thought.

"Quien es?" he said, indicating me. Smilingly, as if pleased so to honor me, Lucia presented me to Maxwell and his wife as "Mi amigo, Senor Beegs." I could feel that the blueing, and the soap root, and the river water were all mingling in one grand river of perspiration toward the collar of my negligee shirt. I could feel that all the constellations in the heavens and all the mundane landscape around me were waiting giddily together. An intense longing for home and mother came over me that mere words cannot depict. For one wild moment I thought I would rush into my old chum's arms and tell him "all," like the wronged hero in the last act. I would say vehemently: "This is not me regular-business-I'm-a-civ-a-engineer-at-two-fifty-a-month—I'm-only-doing-this-for-fun" etc. But while I was doing this—how often are our best intentions thwarted thus!—Maxwell coughed. It was not a consumptive cough. It was just a little grating sound that contained more painful surprise, and pity, and regret than a volume of Browning could. That froze me as I stood—or sat. Fixedly I gazed at the Sierra Madres over his head, as if trying to fathom the "lost" mines hidden there.

Maxwell's watch ticked in the painful silence.

"Alice," he said, sternly, "we must not miss that train."

Out of my life they went, with the clothes I had washed for them, as suddenly as they came in. I strained my ears to hear them say "Poor fellow! To come to that—rather bright at college, but this country seems to rob a fellow of ambition." Maxwell, I knew, was never a secretive man; they are going east, and, well—

Lucia Eulalia gathered up the extra coins he had thrown for me, and said, softly: "Have you sad, senor?"

"Yes," I said, "I have sadness, also sickness; I would go back to camp at once."

As I drew on my spattered coat and vest over tired arms, I said, most earnestly: "Lucia Eulalia Garcia y Valdez, I shall never forget this day of the fiesta of San Guadalupe."

Nor have I.

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A safe and prompt remedy for the cure of diarrhoea, dysentery, colic, cholera morbus and all forms of Summer Complaints and Loosening of the Bowels. It is PLEASANT TO TAKE AND ESPECIALLY USEFUL FOR CHILDREN.
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RESTORES VITALITY.
Made a Well Man of Me.
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THE GREAT FRENCH REMEDY.

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Notice to Non-Residents.

STATE OF INDIANA, JASPER COUNTY—
In the Jasper Circuit Court, January Term, 1896. David B. Nowels vs. Joseph Davis et al. No. 498.
Comes now the plaintiff in the above entitled cause and by his attorneys Ferguson & Wilson files his complaint herein together with an affidavit that the following named persons to-wit:—
Joseph Davis, Mrs. Davis wife of Joseph Davis and all their unknown heirs, devisees and legatees and all the unknown heirs, devisees and legatees of the unknown heirs, devisees and legatees of each and every one of the above named defendants are non-residents of the State of Indiana.

Notice is therefore hereby given said defendants that unless they be and appear on the first day of 11th January term 1896 of the Jasper Circuit Court, to be held on the sixth (6) day of January 1896 at the Court House in Rensselaer, Jasper County, Indiana, and answer or demur to said complaint the same will be heard and determined in your absence.

In witness whereof I hereunto set my hand and affix the seal of said court at Rensselaer, Indiana, this 21st day of October, 1895.

WM. H. COOVER, Clerk of the Jasper Circuit Court.

Ferguson & Wilson, Pls Attys.

First publication Oct. 24, 1895.

Notice to Non-Residents.

STATE OF INDIANA, JASPER COUNTY—
In the Jasper Circuit Court, January Term 1896. Grant Davison vs. Edgar V. Burt et al. No. 491.
Comes now the plaintiff in the above entitled cause and by his attorneys Ferguson & Wilson files his complaint herein together with an affidavit that the following named persons to-wit:—
Edgar V. Burt, Mrs. Burt wife of said Edgar V. Burt and Mrs. Burt widow of said Edgar V. Burt and all their unknown heirs, devisees and legatees and all the unknown heirs, devisees and legatees of the unknown heirs, devisees and legatees of each and every one of the above named defendants are non-residents of the State of Indiana and that their residence are unknown and upon diligent search and inquiry are believed to be without the State of Indiana.

Notice is therefore hereby given said defendants that unless they be and appear on the first day of 11th January term, 1896, of the Jasper Circuit Court, to be held on the 6th day of January, 1896, at the Court House in Rensselaer, Jasper County, Indiana, and answer or demur to said complaint the same will be heard and determined in your absence.

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WM. H. COOVER, Clerk of Jasper Circuit Court.

Ferguson & Wilson Pls Attys.

First publication Oct. 24th, 1895.

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Eating It, Isn't It?
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CHAMPION Binders, Mowers and Reapers.
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