



## Whether Common or Not

By Will M. Maupin.

Matamoros, Mexico, December 10.—We—meaning the Little Woman and myself—donned our seven-league boots and stepped back about 150 years today. It wasn't such a long step, either. At Brownsville, Texas, the place made famous by a certain little shooting bee indulged in by some colored troopers of Uncle Sam's, we found a thriving, stirring little city inhabited by thoroughly progressive Americans. Just across the Rio Grande river we found a city of about the same size that is no further advanced in civilization than it was 150 years ago—and it was a mighty medieval old place then.

We were ferried across the historic Rio Grande in a skiff christened "Theodore Roosevelt" by a Mexican whose command of the English language was confined to the words, "three centavos, Americano." He meant that we had to dig up three American pennies, or six Mexican pennies if we wanted to ride with him. We dug the "three centavos Americano"—or rather I dug twice—and we were rowed across. On the Mexican side we boarded a street car propelled by mule power. That is, the car was hauled by a mule about as large as a Nebraska jack rabbit, but a swart Mexican with a blacksnake whip exerted more Mexican power on the mule than the mule exerted mule power on the car. After noting the brutality displayed by that Mexican driver I was sorry a bullfight was not scheduled for that day, because I wanted to see a bull make three or four good Mexicans. But there was no bullfight on, so we had to extract what comfort we could by loudly expressing our opinion of the driver. Of course he didn't understand a word we said, and smiled as if we were paying him a compliment. If that mule driver is a fair sample of the average Mexican, the worst thing we could say about him would really be complimentary. I was told that a few weeks before one of those mules kicked a driver to death in the feed lot. I offered my informant a dollar for the proof and a sight of the mule, but he couldn't produce. He offered to show me where the driver was buried, but I wasn't interested in him. I was thinking only of presenting the mule with a medal.

Matamoros is populated by beggars and souvenir sellers. I saw but two Mexicans today that I thought would refuse a "centavos." One was the mayor—alcalde they call him—who was a very courteous gentleman who spoke good English and who had spent some years in the United States in connection with the Mexican embassy. To him we are indebted for several favors. The other was a handsome young woman who is a teacher in a mission school. She had her little pupils sing several songs for us, two or three of which were familiar as to tune but wholly without meaning as to language. I asked her if her pupils could sing "America" and she said they could not. Then she asked us to sing it. The Little Woman started off and I and several of our companions joined in. Before we were fairly started that teacher jumped at a pocket edition of a melodeon and played the air for us. As we left the school room the pupils shouted something that sounded like "Viva Americanos!" We were told that such mission schools were not uncommon, but I am of the opinion

that about a million such would be needed to lift Mexico up far enough to get within hailing distance of the United States in point of education.

Of course we went to the cemetery and saw how Mexicans are buried. It may sound brutal, but we really enjoyed that. I tried to locate the graves of some mule drivers but was unsuccessful. This marred the pleasure of the visit somewhat, but I solaced myself with the thought that even Mexican mule drivers must die sometime, therefore it was a cinch that the cemetery contained some. There was no bull fight on, but we went to the bull pen. I wouldn't witness a bull fight unless assured that the bull would get a few of his tormentors, but he never does. You'll never catch a Mexican giving a bull any show at all.

On our way back to town from the cemetery we passed the barracks. It was full of soldiers, and a half-dozen patrolled up and down in front of the open gates. I attempted to walk right in but was halted by a gentleman with enough gold braid and feathers on him to make him look like a colonel on some governor's staff. He was a lieutenant. I learned afterwards. In excited Spanish he erupted a long string of words which I didn't understand, but took from his signs that I couldn't go in. I wasn't feeling very spry so I didn't undertake to whip the whole garrison and go in anyhow. I'll do that the next time I go down. But I did do a little vocal erupting myself, confident that he couldn't understand me any better than I understood him. I told him just what I thought of him and his whole bunch of imitation warriors, and ended by promising to send a couple of my Irish friends from Lincoln some day to whip the whole Mexican army. Then I tossed a handful of Mexican pennies through the barracks gate, and blest if that gorgeous lieutenant didn't scramble for them just like the private soldiers. I've been mad about it ever since because he actually got three or four of them.

Of course the Little Woman dragged me around where she could purchase some Mexican drawn work. Every Mexican woman executes drawn work, therefore we had no trouble in finding it. We also bought some decorated pottery, a cane for the Little Woman's father and some other things. In fact I looked like a walking delivery outfit when we boarded the mule power car to return to Brownsville. The same swart Mexican ferried us back—and the trouble began. As we walked up the narrow walk from the river bank to the top of the bluff, a gentleman clad in high boots, adorned with spurs—and other habiliments of course, walked down to meet us. He politely poked his finger into one or two of my bundles and then waved me towards a small frame building over which flew the flag of Uncle Sam. Of course I tumbled. I was going to pay tribute. I was trying to import some pauper made goods, and Uncle Sam won't stand for that you know. A gentleman clad in a blue uniform bedecked with brass buttons impudently poked into all my bundles, asked me a lot of insolent questions, then coldly informed me that I owed Uncle Sam a lot of money, and if I didn't pay he'd take the whole smear I'd brought over. Having lugged most of it around all day I was rather attached to it, so I coughed up to Uncle Sam. Then I backed off the porch of the customs

house until assured I was not on government property, then proceeded to make a red hot free trade speech which was loudly cheered by a big bunch of fellow sufferers who had been caught as I was.

But I had one satisfaction. Walter George, treasurer of the great state of Nebraska by virtue of republican votes and his own pleasing personality, had to stand and deliver as I had done. The fun of it was that on the way down he and I had talked tariff a little and he assured me that the tariff wasn't intended to discommodate such people as ourselves, but to get the big importers. George bought a couple of pin trays in Matamoros. He paid 15 cents each for them. Uncle Sam made him dig up 45 cents duty on them—whereat I applauded vigorously. The porter of our sleeping car bought a quart of something good for what ailed him, but Uncle Sam confiscated it. I am afraid that colored gentleman is not so good a republican as he was a week or ten days ago. He shows signs of talking about that confiscation all the way home.

There was some excitement in Brownsville while we were there. Some of Uncle Sam's sleuths were looking for General Reyes, who was reported as having dodged across from Mexico. Later it was learned that Reyes had played a cute trick. He pretended to slip across into the States but really scuttled off into the interior with a band of insurrectos and performed a few stunts of pillaging. Any man with a dozen antiquated old Springfield muskets, a few dingy forage caps and seven dollars in United States money can start an insurrection in Mexico. I went back across the river with a government agent, and "assisted" him in quizzing some of the Matamorans. That is, he talked Spanish to them while I stood by his side and looked wise and fierce. Then I came back. This is written under a Matamoros date line, but I am really writing it while speeding northward in a Pullman car. But it sounds bigger to date a letter from a foreign country.

If filth and dirt makes a Mexican happy, then these Matamorans must be the happiest people on earth, for they certainly are the dirtiest and the filthiest I ever saw. All day we were followed by a horde of dirty, half-naked children, all pleading for "centavos." The only good things we saw were the plazas. They are pretty and well kept, and every summer evening the bands play. The only clean and neat house we saw was that of the alcalde, and he has been in the States so much and so long that he has acquired some of our habits. Having seen this little bit of Mexico I am puzzled to understand why President Diaz exhibited so much regret over having been banished.

But the little Woman says the clatter of my typewriter is keeping everybody awake, so I'll quit. But I do wish I could, before I quit, chronicle the sudden and merited death of that Mexican mule driver.

—MAUPIN.

### Brain Leaks

The trouble with a lot of "old saws" is that they need re-sharpening.

Appearances are deceitful. Ask anybody who ever purchased a gold brick.

For every gossip there is at least one listener, else there would be no gossiping.

The real value of the Christmas gift is not in the gift but in the heart of the giver.

Calico paid for may not look so well but it certainly feels more comfortable than silk not paid for.

When the high water mark gets three inches above a boy's wrist, it

is high time that some girl's mother be looking him up.

Seemingly it is the "fall season" for aviators at all times of the year.

### ARIZONA TO ALABAMA

Bisbee, Ariz.—Editor The Commoner: I was so pleased to see the letter of Mr. Bellangee in The Commoner that I could not help writing him my approval and letting him know how pleased an Arizona democrat was with the sentiments that he expressed. From the howl of the politicians in congress that went up in behalf of Mr. Underwood (according to our information from the Associated Press, which never lies), we, away out here in Arizona, had presumed that he at least had captured all of the democrats of his own state; so great is our rejoicing when we learn that some have escaped him and refuse to be led astray by his shout of dictator. I enclose a copy of the letter to Mr. Bellangee. Very truly yours,

M. J. BROWN.

Bisbee, Ariz.—J. Bellangee, Esq., Fairhope, Ala. My Dear Sir: I just read with much pleasure your letter to the editor of "The Register" and published in The Commoner, wherein you discuss with so much force and aptitude the position that Mr. Underwood has taken against Mr. Bryan. I am particularly glad to see this sentiment expressed by an Alabama democrat, the state where my happiest boyhood days were spent; also, Mr. Underwood's own state.

I glory in your sentiments and I am glad to know that Mr. Underwood has not been able to turn the Alabama democrats from Mr. Bryan by shouting dictator and all of the other tommyrot that he, along with others that are falsely bearing the democratic label, have vomited forth upon the great champion of democracy and the whole people. Who is there in this great country of ours that has a better right to speak forth to the democratic party than has Mr. Bryan? What democrat is there in the country that has done half as much for the party and the citizens of the United States as has Bryan? Therefore, I say he has a right to speak, no one has a better right, and when he speaks the democratic party would do well to listen attentively and follow his advice as obediently as the good child obeys the commands of a loving parent. Bryan is the greatest, and in his private and public life one of the best men that the United States numbers amongst her citizens today. He enjoys a remarkable distinction, not shared in by any of our other great men of today—that of always being right. I have followed him for many years and I am utterly unable to recall a mistake that he has made in matters political. This should give his utterances and advice a greater weight with the people of our country than that of any other living man. Who is, and has been, a more consistent adversary of the predatory interests that are exploiting our country and damning her glorious institutions than our great champion? Who has been more abused, maligned and excoriated by these interests than has Bryan? Who deserves more from the American people? To abuse and slander Bryan is to exhibit a most contemptible and dangerous brand of democracy.

With Taft on the one side and Harmon on the other, the issues would by no means be clearly drawn, the vote would be badly mixed, the voters confused as to the real issues, with the probability of the democratic party and the people losing, and with Harmon as the standard bearer, or any other man of his ilk, the party would deserve defeat. With sincerest regards, I am, very truly yours,

M. J. BROWN.