

A WHITE UMBRELLA IN MEXICO

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A white umbrella in Mexico by F. Hopkinson Smith

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F. HOPKINSON SMITH

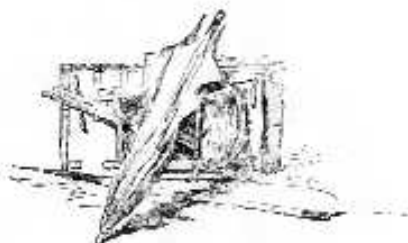
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BY

F. HOPKINSON SMITH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

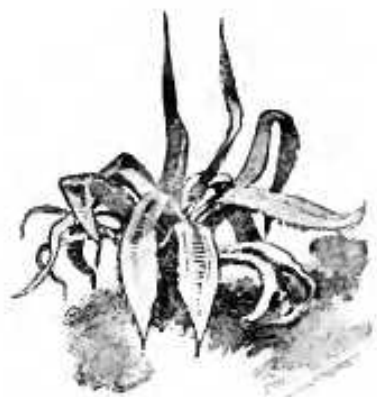


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INTRODUCTION.

My probe has not gone very far below the surface. The task would have been uncongenial and the result superfluous. The record of the resources, religions, politics, governments, social conditions and misfortunes of Mexico already enlarges many folios and lies heavy on many shelves, and I hope on some consciences.

I have preferred rather to present what would appeal to the painter and idler. A land of white sunshine redolent with flowers; a land of gay costumes, crumbling churches, and old convents; a land of

kindly greetings, of extreme courtesy, of open, broad hospitality.

I have delighted my soul with the swaying of the lilies in the sunlight, the rush of the roses crowding over mouldy walls, the broad-leaved palms cooling the shadows, and have wasted none of my precious time searching for the lizard and the mole crawling at their roots.

Content with the novelty and charm of the picturesque life about me, I have watched the naked children at play and the patient peon at work; and the haughty hidalgo, armed and guarded, inspecting his plantation; and the dark-skinned *señorita* with her lips pressed close to the gratings of the confessional; and even the stealthy, furtive glance of the outlaw, without caring to analyze or solve any one of the many social and religious problems which make these conditions possible.

It was enough for me to find the wild life of the Comanche, the grand estate of the Spanish Don, and the fragments of the past splendor of the ecclesiastical orders existing side by side with the remnant of

that Aztec civilization which fired the Spanish heart in the old days of the Conquest. Enough to discover that in this remnant there still survived a race capable of the highest culture and worthy of the deepest study. A distinct and peculiar people. An unselfish, patient, tender-hearted people, of great personal beauty, courage, and refinement. A people maintaining in their every-day life an etiquette phenomenal in a down-trodden race; offering instantly to the stranger and wayfarer on the very threshold of their adobe huts a hospitality so generous, accompanied by a courtesy so exquisite, that one stops at the next doorway to reënjoy the luxury.

It was more than enough to revel in an Italian sun lighting up a semi-tropical land; to look up to white capped peaks towering into the blue; to look down upon wind-swept plains encircled by ragged chains of mountains; to catch the sparkle of miniature cities jeweled here and there in oases of olive and orange; and to realize that to-day, in its varied scenery, costumes, architecture, street life, canals

crowded with flower-laden boats, market plazas thronged with gayly dressed natives, faded church interiors, and abandoned convents, Mexico is the most marvellously picturesque country under the sun. A tropical Venice! a semi-barbarous Spain! a new Holy Land.

To study and enjoy this or any other people thoroughly, one must live in the streets. A chat with the old woman selling rosaries near the door of the cathedral, half an hour spent with the sacristan after morning mass, and a word now and then with the donkey-boy, the water-carrier, and the padre, will give you a better idea of a town and a closer insight into its inner life than days spent at the governor's palace or the museum.

If your companion is a white umbrella, and if beneath its shelter you sit for hours painting the picturesque bits that charm your eye, you will have hosts of lookers-on attracted by idle curiosity. Many of these will prove good friends during your stay, and will vie with each other in doing you many little acts of kindness which will linger lovingly in your memory

long after you have shaken the white dust of their villages from your feet.

It is in this spirit and with this intent that I ask you to turn aside from the heat and bustle of your daily life long enough to share with me the cool and quiet of my white umbrella while it is opened in Mexico.

F. H. S.

NEW YORK, *December, 1888.*