

Harry L. Foster



*A Gringo
in Mañana-
Land*

Harry L. Foster

A Gringo in Mañana-Land



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066419196

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I ON THE BORDER

I

II

III

CHAPTER II BANDITS!

I

II

III

IV

V

CHAPTER III IN SLEEPY HERMOSILLO

I

II

III

IV

CHAPTER IV AMONG THE YAQUI INDIANS

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

CHAPTER V DOWN THE WEST COAST

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

XI

CHAPTER VI THOSE DARK-EYED SEÑORITAS!

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

CHAPTER VII IN THE DAYS OF CARRANZA

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

CHAPTER VIII THE MEXICAN CAPITAL

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

CHAPTER IX INTERMISSION

I

II

III

IV

CHAPTER X THE LAND OF THE INDIAN VAMPS

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

CHAPTER XI THOSE CHRONIC INSURRECTIONS!

- I
- II
- III
- IV
- V
- VI
- VII
- VIII

CHAPTER XII UP AND DOWN GUATEMALA

- I
- II
- III
- IV
- V
- VI
- VII
- VIII
- IX
- X
- XI

CHAPTER XIII IN SUNNY SALVADOR

- I
- II
- III
- IV
- V
- VI
- VII
- VIII

IX

X

XI

CHAPTER XIV THE REVOLUTION IN HONDURAS

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

XI

XII

XIII

XIV

CHAPTER XV WHERE MARINES MAKE PRESIDENTS

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

XI

XII

XIII

XIV

CHAPTER XVI A LONG, LONG WAY TO COSTA RICA

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

CHAPTER XVII ADIOS!

I

II

III

IV



A CHIEFTAIN DRESSED FOR THE EASTER CEREMONY OF THE
YAQUI INDIANS

FOREWORD

Table of Contents

The term "*gringo*"—a word of vague origin, once applied with contempt to the American in Mexico—is now used throughout Latin America, without its former opprobrium, to describe any foreigner.

The Spanish "*mañana*"—literally "to-morrow"—is extremely popular south of the Rio Grande, where, in phrases suggesting postponement, it enables the inhabitant to solve many of life's most perplexing problems.

This book covers various random wanderings in Mexico, Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. It deals with a romance or two, a revolution or so, and a hodge-podge of personal experience. The incidents of the earlier chapters precede, while those of the later ones follow, the author's vagabond journeys recorded in "The Adventures of a Tropical Tramp," and "A Beachcomber in the Orient."

The chapter on the Yaqui Indians is published with the permission of the editor of "The Open Road." The photographs of the Guatemalan revolution were taken by Roy Neil Bunstine, of Guatemala City.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Table of Contents

- A Chieftain Dressed for the Easter Ceremony of the Yaqui Indians
- In Those Days Trains Did Not Venture to Run at Night Across the Sonora Desert
- An Escort of Soldiers Occupied a Freight Car Ahead as a Precaution Against Bandits
- A Burro Train Laden with Bullion from the Mines
- La Colorada, Once the Home of Gold Mines, Now Served Only as a Depot for Trucks That Crossed the Desert
- Indian Women, Pounding Clothes upon the Rocks Beside a Shallow Brook, Ceased Their Work to Stare
- The Christ Was Represented by a Cheap Rag Doll Cradled in a Wicker Basket
- For Three Days the Indians Neither Ate Nor Slept, Refreshing Themselves Only with Mescal
- The Mexican Señorita Has Always Been Portrayed in Our Fiction as a Wild Vampire
- In the Days of Carranza One Frequently Saw a Bandit Hanging Around the Railway
- Pedro Zamorra Had Removed a Few Ties Where the Train Came Around a Bend
- So Worthless Were the Federal Troops That Many Americans Professed a Preference for Bandits
- The Orange Trees in Guadalajara's Plaza Were Golden Throughout the Year

- Mexico City, One of the Most Ornate Capitals in the Western Hemisphere, Somewhat Resembled Paris
- The Mexican Pyramids Probably Antedate Those of Egypt by a Thousand Years or More
- In the Gardens of Xochimilco, Relics of an Aztec Paradise, Only the Cabbages Were in Bloom
- Mexican Policemen in White Spats
- No Latin-American Village Is So Tiny But That It Has a Square Devoted to Bartering
- The Mexican Peon So Loves the Excitement of the Market That He Refuses to Sell His Goods Elsewhere
- The Tehuana Maidens Regarded a Man as a Luxury Rather Than a Necessity
- The Abundant Central-American Volcanoes Fertilize the Coffee Fincas with Lava Dust
- Guatemala's Population Includes a Million Pure-blooded Aborigines
- Occasionally the Resultant Earthquakes Knock Down a City or Destroy the Guatemalan Cathedral
- When Orellana Started a Revolution, President Herrera Made No Strenuous Objection
- The Only Casualties Were a Few Policemen Who Mistook the Revolution for a Disorderly Demonstration
- A Banana-Boat Loading on the East Coast
- In These Pleasant Tropical Countries No Peon Girl Escapes Maternity
- From His Palace the President Could Watch the Treasury to See That No One Stole the National Debt

- Soldiers Stopped a Pedestrian at Every Corner to Search for Weapons
- The Warship *Rochester* Had Anchored at Amapala on What Was Described as a Courtesy Visit
- The American Intervention Had Brought Peace, but Managua's Dusty Streets Suggested no Prosperity
- If the American Marines Were Withdrawn from Nicaragua a Revolution Would Transpire Over-Night
- For Three Days the Boatmen Poled the Launch Through Shallows Framed in Rank Green Jungle
- Greytown Was a Typical East Coast Port—Low, Swampy and Unattractive—With Black Complexions Prevailing
- San José Contains the Most Delightful Plazas and the Most Beautiful Women in the World
- A Machine-Gun Tower Built by the Tyrant Tinoco
- In Its Interior Decoration the Costa Rican National Theater Equals Any Theater in the United States

CHAPTER I ON THE BORDER

Table of Contents

I

Table of Contents

It was my original plan to ride from Arizona to Panama by automobile.

In fact, I even went so far as to purchase the automobile. It had been newly painted, and the second-hand dealer assured me that no car in all the border country had a greater reputation.

This proved to be the truth. The first stranger I met grinned at my new prize with an air of pleased recognition.

“Well! Well!” he exclaimed. “Do *you* own it now?”

So did the second stranger, and the third. I had acquired not only an automobile, but a definite standing in the community. People who had hitherto passed me without a glance now smiled at me. There was even some discussion of organizing a club, of which I was to be the president, my term of office to continue until I could sell the car to some one else.

When I announced that I meant to drive to Panama—down through Mexico, Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and any other republics which I might discover along the way—every one who heard of the idea offered encouragement:

“You’ve got the right car for *that* trip, my boy. Since you’ll find no roads down there, you’ll need a companion to walk ahead and chop down the cactus or level off the mountains, and if you step hard on the gas, you’ll just about be able to keep up with him.”



[Table of Contents](#)

I suspected that there was an element of insincerity in this encouragement.

I was rather young, however, at the time of that first venture at foreign travel. It was only a few months after the Armistice, and I felt disinclined to return to cub-reporting on a daily newspaper. I elected myself to the loftier-sounding profession of Free-Lance Newspaper Correspondent. I purchased a palm-beach suit and an automatic pistol. I was going south into the land of romance—of tropical moons glimpsed through whispering palm-trees—of tinkling guitars echoing through Moorish *patios*—of black-eyed *señoritas* and red-nosed soldiers of fortune—of all the many things beyond the ken of mere cub-reporters.

Despite the encouragement, I tacked my banner to the back of my car, and set out upon a round of farewells.



[Table of Contents](#)

My departure was very dramatic.

Men shook hands with an air of finality. Two or three girls kissed me good-bye with conventional little pecks that

seemed to say, "I'll never see the poor devil again, so I may as well waste some osculation on him."

I had made the entire circuit, until there remained only a couple of village school-marms, who happened—most unfortunately—to live on top of the highest hill in town. Half-way to the summit, I perceived that my car was never destined to climb that hill. It slackened speed. It stopped. It commenced to roll backward. I was forced to throw it into reverse, just as the school-marms appeared in their doorway. The situation was humiliating. I became slightly flustered. I meant to step on the brake, but I stepped on the gas.

Wherefore, after some one had picked me out of the débris, I started southward by train.

CHAPTER II

BANDITS!

Table of Contents

I

Table of Contents

I crossed the border at daybreak.

In the manner of a Gringo who first passes the Mexican frontier, I walked cautiously, glancing behind me from time to time, anticipating hostility, if not actual violence.

In the dusk of early morning the low, flat-roofed adobe city of Nogales assumed all the forbidding qualities of the fictional Mexico. But the leisurely immigration official was polite. The customs' inspector waved me through all formalities with one graceful gesture. No one knifed me in the back. And somewhere ahead, beyond the dim line of railway coaches, an engineer tolled his bell. The train, as though to shatter all foreign misconceptions of the country, was about to depart on scheduled time!

II

Table of Contents

Somewhat surprised, I made a rush for the ticket window.

A native gentleman was there before me. He also was buying passage, but since he was personally acquainted with the agent, it behooved him—according to the dictates

of Spanish etiquette—to converse pleasantly for the next half hour.

“And your *señora*?”

“*Gracias! Gracias!* She enjoys the perfect health! And your own most estimable *señora*?”

“Also salubrious, thanks to God!”

“I am gratified! Profoundly gratified! And the little ones? When last I had the pleasure to see you, the *chiquitita* was suffering from—”

The engineer blew his whistle. A conductor called, “*Vamonos!*” I jumped up and down with Gringo impatience. The Mexican gentleman gave no indication of haste. The engineer might be so rude as to depart without him, but *he* would not be hurried into any omission of the proper courtesies. His dialogue was closing, it is true, but closing elaborately, still according to the dictates of Spanish etiquette, in a handshake through the ticket window, in an expression of mutual esteem and admiration, in eloquent wishes to be remembered to everybody in Hermosillo—enumerated by name until it sounded like a census—in another handshake, and finally in a long-repeated series of “*Adios!*” and “*Que le vaya bien!*”

What mattered it if all the passengers missed the train? Would there not be another one to-morrow? This, despite the railway schedule, was the land of “*Mañana.*”



[Table of Contents](#)

On his first day in Mexico, the American froths over each delay. In time he learns to accept it with fatalistic calm.

As it happened, the dialogue ceased at the right moment. Every one caught the train. Another polite Mexican gentleman cleared a seat for me, and I settled myself just as Nogales disappeared in a cloud of dust, wondering why any train should start at such an unearthly hour of the morning.

The reason soon became obvious. The time-table had been so arranged in order that the engineer could maintain a comfortable speed of six miles an hour, stop with characteristic Mexican sociability at each group of mud huts along the way, linger there indefinitely as though fearful of giving offense by too abrupt a departure, and still be able to reach his destination—about a hundred miles distant—before dark.

In those days—the last days of the Carranza régime—trains did not venture to run at night, and certainly not across the Yaqui desert. It was a forbidding country—an endless expanse of brownish sand relieved only by scraggly mesquite. Torrents from a long-past rainy season had seamed it with innumerable gullies, but a semi-tropic sun had left them dry and parched, and the gnarled greasewood upon their banks drooped brown and leafless. Even the mountains along the horizon were gray and bleak and barren save for an occasional giant cactus that loomed in skeleton relief against a hot sky.



IN THOSE DAYS TRAINS DID NOT VENTURE TO RUN AT
NIGHT ACROSS THE SONORA DESERT

This was the State of Sonora, one of the richest in Mexico, but its wealth—like the wealth of all Mexico—was not apparent to the eye of the tourist. The villages at which we stopped were but groups of low adobe hovels. The dogs that slunk about each habitation, being of the Mexican hairless breed, were strangely in harmony with the desert itself. And the *peons*—dark-faced semi-Indians, mostly barefoot, and clad in tattered rags—seemed to have no occupation except that of frying a few beans and selling them to railway passengers.

At each infrequent station they were awaiting us. Aged beggars stumbled along the side of the coach, led by tiny children, to plead in whining voices for “*un centavito*”—“a little penny”—“for the love of God!” Women with bedraggled

shawls over the head scurried from window to window, offering strange edibles for sale—baskets of cactus fruit resembling fresh figs—*frijoles* wrapped in pan-cake-like *tortillas* of cornmeal—legs of chicken floating in a yellow grease—while the passengers leaned from the car to bargain with them.

“What? Fifteen *centavos* for that stuff? *Carramba!*”

“Ten cents then?”

“No!”

“How much will you give?”

Both parties seemed to enjoy this play of wits, and when, with a Gringo’s disinclination to haggle, I bought anything at the price first stated, the venders seemed a trifle disappointed. Everybody bought something at each stopping-place, and ate constantly between stations, as though eager to consume the purchases in time to repeat the bargaining at the next town. The journey became a picnic, and there was a child-like quality about the Mexicans that made it strangely resemble a Sunday-school outing at home.

Although an escort of *Carranzista* soldiers occupied a freight car ahead as a precaution against the bandits which infested Mexico in those days, the passengers appeared blandly unconcerned.



AN ESCORT OF SOLDIERS OCCUPIED A FREIGHT CAR AHEAD AS A PRECAUTION AGAINST BANDITS

Each removed his coat, and lighted a cigarette. From the car wall a notice screamed the Spanish equivalent of "No Smoking," but the conductor, stumbling into the coach over a family of *peons* who had crowded in from the second-class compartment, merely paused to glance at the smokers, and to borrow a light himself. Every one, with the friendliness for which the Latin-American is unsurpassed, engaged his neighbor in conversation. The portly gentleman who had cleared a seat for me inquired the object of my visit to Mexico, and listened politely while I slaughtered his language. The conductor bowed and thanked me for my ticket. When the *peon* children in the aisle pointed at me and whispered, "*Gringo*," their mother ceased feeding a baby to "Shush!" them, their father kicked them

surreptitiously with a loose-flapping sandal, and both parents smiled in response to my amused grin.

There was something pleasant and carefree about this Mexico that proved infectious. Atop the freight cars ahead, the escort of federal troops laid aside their Mausers, removed their criss-crossed cartridge-belts, and settled themselves for a *siesta*. As the desert sun rose higher, inducing a spirit of coma, the passengers also settled themselves for a nap. The babble of the morning gave place to silence—to silence broken only by the fretting cry of an infant and the steady click of the wheels as we crawled southward, hour after hour, through the empty wastes of mesquite.

And then, as always in Mexico, the unexpected happened.

The silence was punctured by the staccato roar of a machine-gun!

IV

[Table of Contents](#)

In an instant all was confusion.

Whether or not the shooting came from the Carranzista escort or from some gang of bandits hidden in the brush, no one waited to ascertain. Not a person screamed. Yet, as though trained by previous experience, every one ducked beneath the level of the windows, the women sheltering their children, the men whipping out their long, pearl-handled revolvers. The only man who showed any sign of agitation was my portly friend. His immense purple

sombrero had tumbled over the back-rest onto another seat, and he was frantic until he recovered it.

After the first roar of the machine-gun, all was quiet. The fatalistic calm of the Mexicans served only to heighten the suspense. The train had stopped. When, a few months earlier, Yaqui Indians had raided another express on this same line, the guard had cut loose with the engine, leaving the passengers to their Fate—a Fate somewhat gruesomely advertised by a few scraps of rotted clothing half-embedded in the desert sand. The thought that history had repeated itself was uppermost in my mind, and the *peon* on the floor beside me voiced it also, in a fatalistic muttering of:

“*Dios!* They have left us! We are so good as dead!”

We waited grimly—waited interminably. With a crash, the door opened. A dozen revolvers covered the man who entered. A dozen fingers tightened upon a trigger. But it was only the conductor.

“*No hay cuidado, señores,*” he said pleasantly. “The escort was shooting at a jack-rabbit.”

V

[Table of Contents](#)

The passengers sat up again, laughing at one another, talking with excited gestures as they described their sensations, enjoying one another’s chagrin, all of them as noisy and happy as children upon a picnic. They bought more *frijoles*, and the feast recommenced, lasting until mid-afternoon, when we pulled into Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora.

A swarm of porters rushed upon us, holding up tin license-tags as they screamed for our patronage. Hotel runners leaped aboard the car and scrambled along the aisle, presenting us with cards and reciting rapidly the superior merits of their respective hostelries, meanwhile arguing with rival agents and assuring us that the other fellow's beds were alive with vermin, that the other fellow's food was rank poison, and that the other fellow's servants would at least rob us, if they did not commit actual homicide.

I fought my way through them to the platform, where another battle-scene was being enacted.

Mexican friends were meeting Mexican friends. To force a passage was a sheer impossibility. Two of them, recognizing each other, promptly went into a clinch, embracing one another, slapping one another upon the back, and venting their joy in loud gurgles of ecstasy, meanwhile blocking up the entire platform.

Restraining *Gringo* impatience once more, I stood and laughed at them. In so many cases the extravagant greetings savored of insincerity. One noticed a flabbiness in the handclasps, a formality in the hugs, an affectation in the shouts of "Ay! My friend! How happy I am to see you!" Yet in many cases, the demonstrations were real—so real that they brought a peculiar little gulp into one's throat, even while one laughed.

Be they sincere or insincere, I already liked these crazy Mexicans.

CHAPTER III IN SLEEPY HERMOSILLO

Table of Contents

I

Table of Contents

A little brown *cochero* pounced upon me and took me aboard a dilapidated hack drawn by two mournful-looking quadrupeds.

“*Hotel Americano?*” he inquired.

“*No. Hotel distinctly Mejicano.*”

He whipped up his horses, and we jogged away through narrow streets lined with the massive, fortress-like walls of Moorish dwellings, past a tiny palm-grown *plaza* fronted by an old white cathedral, to stop finally before a one-story structure whose stucco was cracked and scarred, and dented with the bullet holes of innumerable revolutions.

The proprietor himself, a dignified gentleman in black, advanced to meet me. Were there rooms? Why not, *señor*? Whereupon he seated himself before an immense ledger, to pore over it with knitted brows, stopping now and then to stare vacantly skyward in the manner of one who solves a puzzle or composes an epic poem.

“Number sixteen,” he finally announced.

“Occupied,” said a servant.

Another period of intellectual absorption.

“Number four.”

There being no expostulation, a search ensued for the key. It developed that Room Number Four was opened by Key Number Seven, which—in conformity to some system altogether baffling to a Gringo—was usually kept on Peg Number Thirteen, but had been misplaced by some careless servant. The little proprietor waved both hands in the air.

“What *mozos!*” he exclaimed. “No sense of orderliness whatsoever!”

A prolonged search resulted, however, in its discovery, and the proprietor himself led the way back through a succession of *patios*, or interior gardens, the front ones embellished with orange trees, and the rear ones with rubbish barrels, to Room Number Four, from which the lock had long ago been broken.

It was a large apartment, with brick floor. It contained a canvas cot, a wobbly chair, and an aged bureau distinguished for its sticky drawers, an air of lost grandeur, and a burnt-wood effect achieved by the cigarette butts of many generations of guests. The bare walls were ornamented only by a placard, containing a set of rules—printed in wholesale quantities for whatever hotels craved the enhanced dignity of elaborate regulations—proclaiming, among other things, that occupants must comport themselves with strict morality.

“One of our very choicest rooms, *señor,*” smiled the proprietor, as he withdrew. “It has a window.”

A window did improve it.

From the narrow street outside came the soft voices of *peons*, the sing-song call of a lottery-ticket vender, the tread of sandaled feet, the clatter of hoofs from a passing burro