

THE ROMANCE OF A MULE-CAR.

BY FRANK R. STOCKTON.



IT was early summer in the old French quarter of New Orleans, and they walked side by side along the narrow street of Toulouse toward that little harbor shut up and secreted in the very heart of the old town, and known as the Basin.

He was not a native of the Crescent City, although it was his purpose to make it his home, and he had never seen the Basin. She was a Creole of the Creoles, and her twenty-two springtimes had all been passed on the shores of the great river. Of herself she never would have thought of making a visit to the old Basin; but as he wished to see it, she was glad to see it with him. There were so many other places in this beautiful city which he had seen but seldom or not at all, and which were far more attractive than this little piece of town-inclosed water, that it might have seemed strange to her, had she not known him so well, that he had asked her to walk with him along this almost deserted street to the quiet harbor.

They had met by accident that afternoon, and it had been a long time since he had had such an opportunity of having her for an hour or two all to himself. He considered this opportunity such a rare piece of good fortune that his strongest present wish was to banish every fellow-being from the vicinity of himself and of her. The life and gaiety of the town were, at that moment, distasteful to him. The crowded streets of the shops, the beautiful promenades, the smooth Shell-road, the shores of the glittering Pontchartrain, lively with bright eyes, bright colors, and merry voices, were all places to avoid. In the old street of Toulouse there was not a living being but himself and her.

But the distance from Rampart street to the Basin was very short, and almost before he knew it they stood by the side of the little harbor, which reaches forth to the outer world of water by means of a long and slender canal stretching itself away, almost unseen, among the houses.

Here were some of those quaint vessels which dreamily float down from the inland

waters of the State, and, having reached the widened surface of the Basin, drop into a quiet nap by the side of the old gray piers. With their cargoes piled high up on their sterns, and the shadows of their masts stretching far, far down into the tranquil water, as if they were endeavoring to reach a bottom of mysterious and unknown depth, they lay, with the houses and the streets around and about them, as quietly as if they had been resting on the surface of a lagoon far away in the depths of the forest.

But the Basin was not entirely devoid of human life. A man in a straw hat sat in a shaded spot on one of the vessels, smoking a cigarette, and apparently waiting for some one who had been sent for. In the middle of the street, on the other side of the dock, were two men talking, one of whom was probably the messenger who had been sent for the person who was expected. There was a woman's head at the window of one of the houses which overlooked the water; and from an open doorway came a little child toddling in the direction of the Basin.

This was not the place he had expected it to be. From what he had heard of it, he had imagined it a lonely spot with trees upon the water's edge, and in the air that perfume of roses which had helped to make the city dear to him. But there were people here—people with eyes and leisure; and in the air were many odors, but none of roses. There were scents of tar, of sugar, and of boards warmed by the sun, but none of these were in tune with his emotions.

They stood silent, and looked down upon the water. His soul was on fire to speak; but how could he stand here and say what he had to say? That man upon the vessel had already looked at them; and suppose, just as he was in the middle of what he had to say, that toddling child should fall into the water!

She saw that he was ill at ease, and that he did not care for basins.

«You have never seen the old St. Louis Cemetery,» said she. «It is just over there; that is the wall of it. Shall we go and see it?»

But his mind was not attuned to ceme-

teries; he had never felt himself so much alive; his soul was like a panther drawn together for a spring.

«It is like the olden time, that cemetery,» she said. «It is so still, so lonely; there seems to be nothing there but—»

«Let us go,» he said eagerly.

They turned their backs upon the Basin, and, crossing the street, approached the gateway in the brick wall which surrounds the quaint and venerable resting-place of so many of the ancient inhabitants of the Creole quarter.

The gate was open, and they saw no one in the little lodge. They passed in, and walked among the tombs, which reared themselves on every side as if they might have been habitations for living people who had shrunk small, requiring but little room. He had never seen such tombs, all built above ground on account of the watery nature of the soil; and as they walked along a narrow avenue bordered on each side by these houses of the dead, many gray with age, and some of them half covered with clinging vines, she pointed out to him how nearly all of the names inscribed upon them were French or Spanish, and how far, far back were some of the dates beneath them. He had the tastes of an antiquarian, and the quaintnesses of history were a joy to him. The whole scene appeared as foreign to him as if he had been in another land, and all his sympathies stood ready to be called forth. But they heard no call; his soul was still full of a desire to speak of something which had nothing to do with the past, nothing to do with tombs, gray stones, or clinging vines.

«Let us go this way,» said he, turning into a narrower path.

At this moment the form of one of the inhabitants of the tombs seemed to rise up before them. It was very tall and very narrow, and the upper part of it was the head of a very old negro, bony, and adorned with patches of gray hair. Its osseous frame appeared to be covered by loose, hanging clothes instead of flesh. It took off its little cap, and saluted them in Negro-French. It was the guardian of the cemetery.

The young man was astonished and disgusted. If he could have done it, he would have hustled this intruding apparition into an empty tomb. But his companion smiled, and greeted the bony sexton in his own queer dialect.

This ancient keeper of the ancient tombs was as courteous as if he had been one of the stately personages now resting in his

domain. He would show them the cemetery; he would take them everywhere; they should see all. He knew it all, he had lived here so long; with his own hands he had put so many of them away.

The two young people followed him. In the soul of one of them there was bitter impatience.

«Must that creature go with us?» he whispered to his companion. «Is it necessary? Can I not give him some money and send him away?»

«Oh, no,» said she, softly; «that would not be right; we cannot do that. This is his kingdom; he is very proud to show it.»

They walked on, his face clouded.

«But the place is small,» he said to himself, «and there must soon be an end to these avenues. Then he must leave us, and we can rest.»

No young mistress of a newly furnished house could have exhibited her possessions with more satisfaction and delight than did this undulating structure of bones and clothes show forth the peculiar features of his mortuary establishment. Many of the tombs were made up of rows of narrow tunnels, each wide enough to receive a coffin, one row above another, the whole as high as a tall man could reach. These were family vaults; but the old sexton explained, that, although they had so many apartments, the families often became so large, as time went on, that the accommodations were not sufficient.

When one of the tombs happened to be full, he explained, and there was another applicant for admission, the oldest tunnel was opened, and if any part of the coffin was left, it was taken out, and the «remenz» (by which the old sexton meant the bony residuum of the occupant) were pushed to one side, and the new coffin thrust in and sealed up. Then the ancient coffin was burned, and the new and the old inhabitant of the tunnel dwelt together in peace.

She listened with gentle attention, although she had heard it all before; but, standing by her side, he fumed. How utterly irrelevant were these dreadful details to the thoughts which filled his brain!

They passed a tomb smaller than some of the others, and so old that she stopped to look at it. The stone slab on which was the inscription was so covered with moss and shaded by vines that the words could scarcely be read; but she stooped, and he stooped with her, and they saw that this was the last resting-place of a noble Spanish

gentleman whose virtues and lineage had never been obscured except by the lichens and ferns which spread themselves about the lower part of his tomb.

The sexton was happy to see them interested in this tomb; it was his favorite sepulcher. He spoke to them in broken Creole-French, in broken English, and in Negro-French—the very dust and debris of the different languages. The young man could understand scarcely a word the old negro said, but she picked out his meaning from the shattered lingual fragments.

He had been a great man, this ancient Spanish gentleman, the sexton said. Once everybody in this town looked up to him. Grand family he had. All people looked up at them too. Now family all gone; nobody come here to take care of tomb. Tomb would have disappeared, as the family had gone, had not he himself looked to it that the storms and the vines did not destroy it and cover it up out of sight. A very noble man he had been, this Spanish gentleman. Then, suddenly turning to the two young people, the old man inquired if they would like to see "him"; and, without waiting for an answer, he stepped to the back of the tomb.

"Come," said she to her companion. "The gentleman receives; we must not be impolite."

Unwillingly he followed her.

The top of this tomb was low and of a dome-like form, and at the back of it many of the bricks were loose. Looking about to see that there were no intruders near, for the receptions of the Spanish gentleman were very select, the old man removed a number of the loose bricks. Pointing to the large orifice thus made, he invited his visitors to look in and see "him." The vault was rather spacious, and on the dry and dusty floor the Spanish gentleman was reposing in a detached condition. The sexton thrust in his long arm, scarcely less bony than those of the hidalgo, and took out a skull, which he handed to the lady. After this he presented the young man with a thigh-bone, which, however, was declined. The day was becoming a hollow tomb to this lover; its floor was covered with dismal bones instead of the life and love which he had hoped for on this bright and sunny afternoon in early summer. He was morose.

"The Spanish gentleman must have had two heads," he said to his companion. "See; far back there is another skull!"

"Hush," said she; "we must not notice that; we must be polite at this reception."

The old man put the skull back into the tomb, replaced the bricks, and they passed on.

In one corner of the cemetery they came upon a charming little inclosure, a true garden of greenery, which adjoined a small chapel. There were a fence and a gate, and there was a suggestive shadowiness in the rear of the quiet chapel which seemed to strike a note of perfect accord with the young man's emotions.

"Ah," said he, "let us go in here; it will be pleasant to rest in the shade after so much walking. Will you tell the sexton that we do not care to see any more tombs just now?"

She did not answer, but the old man spoke quickly. He had something to say. His voice was raised; he became excited. He declared that it was true what he was going to tell them; hardly could they believe it, but it was true. One day two young people came to the cemetery, and they went into the garden of the chapel, and they sat down in the shade and made love. He saw them, and he told them that they must not make love in the garden of the chapel; but they would not listen to him—they would not regard him at all; they sat and made love; and when he insisted that this was not the place to make love, they still made love. Then he went for the police, and when he came back with the officer, the love-making was over, and they had gone; but the priest he locked that garden gate, and no visitors went in any more. Was it not dreadful, he said, all his bones quivering with earnestness, that Christian people should do that? The young man turned disgusted to her.

"I cannot bear any more tombs or skeletons, alive or dead. Let us go out into the world of life."

"Yes," said she; "the hours slip on; it is time that I go to my house."

The old sexton took the money that was offered him,—far more than he had expected,—but he was not satisfied; there was so much of the cemetery which they had not seen. But they would come again, he said, as he raised his little cap; then he would show them the rest.

"If it is not to be," the young man said in his heart, "then will I gladly come again, and stay; but otherwise never."

Now they walked together in the broad and beautiful street of the Ramparts, and they moved slowly in the direction of Canal street, that great central artery of movement and life. It should have been a joy to walk with her, but he was disappointed. There

were people on the sidewalks, there were people on the piazzas, electric cars passed them; and she talked to him about the houses, some of which had little histories; but houses, histories, electric cars, and the people they met and the people who looked down upon them, were all as the taste of bitter herbs in his mouth. This was the first time he had been so completely alone with her, and the afternoon was passing. If he had had his day to live over again, he would have stopped short in the old street of Toulouse, and would there have said what he had to say. There had been absolutely nobody in the street of Toulouse.

They reached Canal street, and they stood together, waiting until a car should come which would take her to her home. With whirring and roaring the cars passed this way and that, but the one she waited for did not come. He would have been glad to stand there waiting for the rest of the day. He could not speak as he would speak, but he was near her.

Presently there was heard the gentle tinkling of a bell. She almost clapped her hands.

"It is a mule-car!" she said. "I will go in a mule-car. It will not be long before the mule-car shall disappear. Look at it as it comes; see how that it is funny!"

Slowly the mule-car jingled toward them, and as it came it was truly funny. Among the last of its kind which once circulated placidly all over the old city, with its mule trotting deliberately in front of it, and its shabby sides suggestive of no memories of fresh paint, it formed a striking contrast to the swiftly rolling electric cars, shining in bright colors, and gay with signs and lettering.

He stopped the car, and helped her in. As he seated himself by her side she raised her eyebrows a very little, as if she would say to herself that although it was not absolutely necessary for him to come with her,—for it was out of his way,—yet that was his affair, and she would no more interfere with him than she had interfered with the Spanish gentleman who had received that afternoon.

There were not many people in the mule-car, for most persons preferred swifter methods of transportation; but it carried some passengers. All these persons—there were four of them—sat on the opposite side of the car; none of them had a newspaper to read, and they seemed to have nothing upon their minds but the two young people who were seated quietly side by side not very far

from one of the front windows. It must have been a pleasure to look at them, for in countenance and raiment they were prepossessing in a high degree; but there are pleasures which should be pursued with moderation—at least, the young man thought so. He knew that if he said to her anything which was not commonplace there would be a gleam of intelligence in the faces opposite.

Slowly the mule-car trundled along the shaded avenue into which it had turned, and then, at a cross street, it stopped, and, wonder of wonders! two of the passengers got out. It was hard to believe that such persons would be willing to pay their money for so short a ride, and yet perhaps they had come up all the way from the river-front.

Now the bell on the mule tinkled again, and again the car rolled on. The passenger who was nearest the door was an elderly woman, very stout, with a dark and lowering visage. The other was a man, thin and nervous, who frequently looked out of the front window near which he sat. He had been the least objectionable of the four original passengers, for the reason that he had sometimes turned his eyes away from the couple on the other side of the car.

It was not long before the car began to go slower and slower, and then it stopped. The man in the front corner turned quickly, and stared out of the window.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "it is a ship!" and with that he rose, picked up a paper package by his side, and left the car.

The other occupants all looked out of the windows, and they saw why the car had stopped. It had reached the little canal which stretches along between the houses from the Basin to the bayou of St. John, and the drawbridge was open to allow the passage of one of the queer, stern-freighted vessels pursuing its sluggish way toward the little harbor. Its bowsprit had barely reached the draw, but it was moving.

The mule, the driver, and the car now settled themselves into a condition of repose. Repose was pleasant on such a warm and breezeless summer afternoon, and the driver, his back resting against the front of the car, dropped into a doze. These incidents of enforced inactivity were familiar to him, and he knew how to take advantage of them. But the mule, although glad to rest upon his four motionless legs, had no desire to sleep. He gazed upon the slowly advancing vessel, and then, turning his head from side to side, he glanced first into one and then into the other of the front windows of the car. Now

he looked again at the vessel; he cast his eyes upon the drawbridge, which seemed glad to rest for a time in a new position; and then he stood reflective, but not for long. The occupants of the car seemed to interest him, and again he turned his gaze upon them.

The faces of the two young people had undergone a slight change since the mule had first regarded them. They were evidently under the influence of emotions which were growing upon them. She was very quiet, gazing straight before her; but in her cheeks there were some slight indications of the pallor of expectancy. It was different with him: he was clearly agitated. His eyes moved quickly and anxiously from the vessel in the canal to the stout woman near the door of the car. He said but little, and one might have supposed that his heart was beating more rapidly than usual.

The woman with the basket was very much annoyed, and did not take any pains to conceal it. Even the mule could see that she was growling inwardly, and now and then she gave vent to an exclamation of impatience; but she showed no signs of intending to get out. Even had she lived but one short block on the other side of the canal, that woman was a woman who wanted the full value of the five cents she had paid for her passage to her home. She could now cross the canal on another bridge if she chose. If she were in such a hurry, why did she not get out and walk the rest of the way? Her basket was a little one.

But although her face grew darker, and her muttered exclamations became more frequent, she did not move. To the eyes of the young man, she looked as if she had been pressed upon the seat in a partially melted condition, and had hardened there. His heart was heavy as he turned his eyes away from her. How could he have expected that such an opportunity should *almost* have come to him! No one would get into a car that was standing still by an open draw. The driver was asleep. If he could have hired a carriage to take that impatient, fretting woman to the bosom of her family—aye, if he could have bought a carriage to take her home, he would not have hesitated in this supreme moment.

Few words passed between the two young people. He was very restless. He looked out of the open door, fearing, he could not have told himself why, that another mule-car might soon come along. Then he looked out front. The vessel was nearly through the draw. Of himself he wished that it had

stuck fast, that it had gone aground, that it could move no more for hours; then that she-demon must get out and walk. The mule again looked back into the car. He saw the agitation of the young man; he saw the steady gaze and the now fluctuating pallor of his companion; he saw also the indignant irritation of the stolid woman with the basket. He turned away his head, and gazed reflectively before him.

The vessel moved entirely out of the draw; the bridge came slowly and noiselessly back into its position; the man at the draw went away. Everything was quiet and still; an additional hush seemed to have come upon the scene. The mule gazed straight before him at the bridge now ready for his advance, but he moved not even enough to give the slightest tinkle to his bell; the driver slept.

The woman with the basket had been looking out at the back. Perhaps she thought that if another car came something might happen to hurry matters; but now she turned, and beheld the vessel clearly past the draw, and moving on to conceal itself between the houses. Why did not the car go on? She did not see that the bridge had come into its place. A thought flashed upon her.

"They wait for another ship!" she exclaimed. "This is terrible! It is that life has not enough of length for this." And with a sudden snap of her teeth, she rose and got out.

The motion given to the car by the descent of the heavy woman awoke the driver, who suddenly opened his eyes, stood up straight, and seeing that the way was clear before him, started his mule. This animal, slowly turning his head backward to look at the stout woman, who was indignantly making her way toward the sidewalk, went off at a great rate, as if he were impressed with the idea that he must make up lost time; then, when it was impossible for the woman to overtake the car, he slackened his speed. As he did so he turned his head, he gazed into the front window of the car, he saw the young people side by side and alone; then, with a gentle wave of his long ears, as though he would say, "It is all arranged, my children," he discreetly turned away his head, and trotted on.

The pallor on the face of the beautiful Creole changed to a flush. If she had obeyed the dictates of her heart she would have clapped her hands, exclaiming, "What a beautiful mule!" But she knew how to control the dictates of her heart, and said nothing. He moved quickly in his seat, like a man

who would make a bound into paradise as the gates were closing; and as she, at the same moment, turned her head, he looked into her eyes. There was a light in those eyes—a tremulous light which shone inward, so that he looked back and back and back into the very innermost recesses of her soul. There he saw what he wanted to see! He said no word, but he clasped her right hand in both of his own. She did not withdraw it; her face was still turned toward him.

Gently the mule moved his head; with a backward glance of one eye he saw everything. Then again he looked in front of him, and lowering his ears, he let them drop between his eyes and the front windows of the car, so that it would be impossible for him, even by accident, to see what was going on within. If the young man perceived this considerate act, he did not appreciate the fact that he saw it, but there came upon him the feeling that for a moment he was free to forget everything in the world but himself and her; and folding her in his arms, he gave her the first warm kiss of love. Yes; thus it was, in broad daylight, and in a mule-car, these two plighted their troth!

Now the car rolled on, but it seemed no more to move on iron rails. It might have glided over soft masses of fleecy clouds, so gentle, so joyous was its motion. The tinkling of the bell on the mule changed into sweet strains of music from the harps of angels; the waters of the little branch canal, which ran along the middle of the wide avenue, sent up, in all their original fragrance, the odors of every flower or fruit which had ever fallen upon their tranquil surface, and the leaves of the tall live-oaks overhead changed their dull summer green, as if they had been suddenly transmuted, by a wind from some magic sky, into delicate sheets of sparkling emerald. For him there were no people in this great world except themselves. But she, as they sat there with their hands still clasped, threw over those hands a corner of her light summer wrap. Even in this sudden heaven she did not forget the world.

The mule looked back again. He saw both their faces, and he raised his ears to their normal position. Even to those ears his bell had never sounded so musical.

Suddenly, in the midst of all the fleecy clouds, the angel music, the delicate fragrance, the emerald green, and the low, impassioned speech, she started to her feet.

«We have reached the Esplanade,» she said; «I must get out.»

As they stood together upon the sidewalk, the mule gave them one last look, and then moved on upon his tinkling way.

«No,» said she; «you must not walk to my house with me. It is not right that I should promenade with one so happy.»

With one long look, more effulgent than the overhanging sun, he left her. Like a swift stag breathing the strong wind of the hills, he ran after the mule-car, quickly caught up with it, and sprang inside. She was gone, but he would sit where she had been sitting; so long as he might, he would ride on in that heavenly car. But the young man could not sit still; he went out on the platform, and talked to the driver.

«Yes,» said the man; «it will not be long that I shall drive this car. It will soon be taken off. The people here now have no use for mule-cars.»

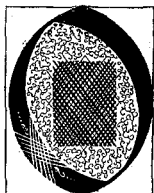
He did not know why it was, but, for some reason which he did not try to comprehend, the heart of the young man warmed toward that mule. He wished that it had a more comely tail.

WHEN he and she were married they went to live in a little house far out upon a wide and flowery avenue. This cottage stood but one story high, but it spread itself here and there upon a grassy lawn, and lilies and roses and all manner of fragrant flowers and sweet-smelling bushes crowded about it, as though they would look into its windows, and so imbue themselves with fresh fragrance and fresh beauty. Love sat upon the little doorstep to say «not at home» to every inharmonious visitor; and if there were but one blue patch in the sky, it hung tenderly above that roof. Rearward of the house there nestled a little yard of green, and above its odoriferous shrubbery there often raised themselves a pair of long, soft ears; these belonged to the mule of the mule-car. «Since they have use for him no more,» she had said,—it was not necessary now for her to control the dictates of her heart,—«he must come to us; he must be our own.»

Even though in the mule-car she had sat gazing straight before her, she had seen far more than her companion could see. She could appreciate, she could understand; and when, sitting together on their piazza in the quiet moonlight, she would hear the tinkle of a bell from behind the house, she would take him by the hand, and they would both remember how the angels once played their harps under the live-oaks of Claiborne Avenue.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SULTAN ABDUL HAMID.

BY THE HONORABLE A. W. TERRELL,
Lately United States Minister at Constantinople.



IN the nineteenth day of March last, while attending the ceremony of the Selemlik in Constantinople, near the Yildiz Palace, I was informed by a master of ceremonies that I would be received in audience by the Sultan of Turkey after he had finished his devotions in the mosque.

On entering the palace at the appointed time, attended by Munier Pasha, the introducer of foreign diplomats, and by Mr. Gargiulo, my official interpreter, my reception was cordial; and during a conversation which lasted more than two hours many things were said by the Sultan regarding the treatment of the Armenian race by the Turkish government which he desired should be made known to the people of the United States. An expression of that desire was renewed by him on the fifteenth day of June last, on the eve of my departure for home. He was assured that his wishes would be observed in such manner and at such time as would be proper after my official relations with his government had ceased.

In now complying with that promise, it is deemed proper first to introduce to the reader Sultan Abdul Hamid, by quoting from an article in the January, 1895, number of the «Contemporary Review.» That article was written by one who is recognized by missionaries as the ablest and most scholarly American divine and educator in Turkey, and who has resided in Constantinople more than twenty years. The extracts are as follows :

«He [the Sultan] has never failed to win the heart of any European who has been admitted to any degree of intimacy with him. All find in him the noble and attractive qualities which they cannot help but admire. . . . Except in religion, he is more of a European than an Asiatic. . . . He is no more of an Oriental despot than the late Czar; and many of the fine qualities discovered in the Czar after his death are equally characteristic of the Sultan. In personal

ability I should say he was the Czar's superior. . . . It is true of the Sultan, as it was of the Czar, that his policy was not adopted through personal ambition or the love of power, but from a sense of duty to religion and country. . . . In Asia Minor the Sultan has had some excuse for the persecution of Armenians in the establishment of their revolutionary committees. . . . He deserves the highest praise. . . . It is a new thing in the world to see a Turkish sultan attempting to cleanse his empire from filth and disease, and rivaling the most advanced countries in the world in his efforts to care for the health of his people. . . . He has done more for the education of his people than all the sultans who have gone before him.»

The tourist who visits Turkey finds in Constantinople a resident colony of fifty-two native Americans, all of whom are missionary educators, or Bible-hours people, except two, one of whom is a dentist and the other a saloon-keeper. None of these has ever been presented to the Sultan, or admitted to the Yildiz Palace, which few except diplomats ever enter, and which is, perhaps, more exclusive than any palace in Europe. Over thirteen centuries of fierce attrition between the crescent and the cross have not tended to develop among rival religionists a spirit of mutual love; but, on the contrary, have even made it difficult for them to speak charitably of each other. Whatever may be the cause, certain it is that published descriptions of the Sultan, and of his habits, which have appeared in the American press, usually contain as many errors as sentences.

The Sultan is over fifty years old, of medium height, with clear olive complexion, dark hair, high forehead, and large dark-brown eyes. The habitual expression of his face is one of extreme sadness. Though the pashas who attend his palace when ministers or ambassadors are entertained are decorated with regal splendor, he always appears in plain garb, wearing a red fez, a frock-coat and trousers of dark-blue stuff, and patent-leather shoes. A broad service-