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CACTI AT HOME.

THERE is a charm for the most of mankind or womankind in those acts which tend to dissipate the mysteries of the unknown. It was with something of this feeling that the writer followed a couple of Indians, out of a quaint old Mexican town, past ancient Spanish water ways, through narrow lanes bordered with vine-covered walls and mango trees, into a part of the world that might well represent an oriental land. Rare tropical beauty rested on the world around us; brilliant and fragrant flowers grew about us; and a restful feeling seemed to fill the air—to judge from the languid motions of my companions.



We followed an illy defined trail around a steep hillside, under oak trees festooned with Spanish moss, air plants, and other vegetable growths of epiphytic habits. Resurrection plants, in dried balls so familiar in florists' shops, but larger, and impressing one with greater possibilities, grew on the rocky slopes above us. High, overhanging precipices, covered with vegetable productions new to me, furnished a foothold for *Mamillaria spinosissima*—a cactus so completely enveloped with fulvous, hair-like spines as to resemble a dormant bat. Some of the plants were as nearly inaccessible as could be imagined, hanging, pendant from the cliff in a most tantalizing fashion, and many had thus grown for a foot or more—specimens that would make a cactus-fancier turn green with envy to see in a collection not his own.

Here too, was growing a very pretty Agave, known to dealers as Agave Gilbeyi—but to botanists as a variety of *A. horrida*—a name which it least deserves.

Returning to the quaint Spanish-Indian village I found "La Flor de San Diego," (*Lælia autumnalis*), growing luxuriantly on the trees, and found it highly appreciated by the flower-loving inhabitants. Plumieras



ECHINOCACTUS MCDOWELLII.

were brilliant with blossom in the small gardens, beside the coffee and the mango, and a solitary ash grew in one of the streets, like a majestic guardian of the public peace.

Night came on, the village of some 1,500 inhabitants, which had once boasted of 15,000, did not possess a single hotel. But a jolly-looking fat woman, living with her aged mother, welcomed my companion with the greatest effusion, and we were allotted a platform of boards in one corner of the one-roomed house—she and her mother occupying an opposite corner similarly provided with a rough board platform. By advancing a few "tlacos" we secured a modest repast of bread, herb tea, milk and eggs, and in the evening a party of travellers with a burro train, from the City of Mexico, sought hospitality beneath the same roof. Their train of burros, loaded with merchandise, were driven singly through our apartment into a small yard in the rear, where they were unloaded, and later fed with corn-stalks which some of the men finally secured of some of the villagers. The six or eight Mexicans that accompanied the train, made their repose in the ruined leanto, which served our hostess for a kitchen.

It may be incidentally noted here that in Mexico chimneys are all but unknown—cooking being carried on in small furnace-like arrangements, even in the City of Mexico, where charcoal is mostly used for fuel. Nowhere in Mexico did I see a fireplace or a stove. The poorer people use the ground for their fireplace, or boxes filled with earth sometimes.



ECHINOCACTUS No. 79.

We have thus found one cactus at home, and I have referred to it as *Mamillaria spinosissima*—but thereby hangs a long tale. Prince Salm-Dyck was the first to name this, one of the most beautiful of all known cacti, but it has also received a multitude of other names since—such as *M. pretiosa*, *splendens*, *Uhdeana*, *polycentra*, *polyacantha*, *polyactina*, and nobody knows how many more. Now, all the *Mamillarias* have to be transferred to the Old Linnæan genus *Cactus*—because that is an older name than *Mamillaria*, and also because the name *Mamillaria* was first applied to a genus of seaweeds. Hence, our plant would naturally become *CACTUS SPINOSISSIMUS*, and Otto Kuntze actually has given it this name, though very unfortunately, since that name was given years before to a very different plant, and of course cannot be used again without confusion. Now comes the question as to what specific name is next available in point of age, a question by no means easy to answer, for dozens of books will have to be consulted, and some of these books may not be found nearer than London, where we shall have to find some botanist who will look at them for us. So this muddle of names will have to continue, and until we learn the name that it can be called by most properly, we can call it by Kuntze's name, *Cactus spinosissimus*.

Well, the last thing that night we were given notice that the biggest official of the town wanted to see us at his office the next morning by 9 o'clock. Now, we wanted to be at the nearest railroad station by that time, and so we tried to find his honor and learn what act or acts of lawlessness we had been committing. We did not dare to leave until he had given his permission, and we did not wish to stay, but fortunately my assistant found him easily, and after much talk, we learned that he had discovered that day, by looking over the old records of the town, that eleven years before a party had been in the town on the same errand as ourselves—after plants and seeds—and he wished to know if the seeds that the villagers traded off had grown well! My assistant fortunately remembered the name of the principal, who was once a seedsman in the City of Mexico, and by explaining that the firm no longer existed, and that I was from the United States of America, way off in California, we were finally given permission to depart the next morning in peace. And the next morning we set out, following a new route to the railroad, at noon reached the "Bunker Hill of Mexico," charming Cuautla, and that night I was again in my quarters in the City of Mexico.

A few days later, securing horses and saddles, I started from the City of Mexico, following much the same line of march over which Cortes, centuries before, marched in triumph from the sea. Snow-clad Popocatepetl loomed over us like a white-capped cloud—rising nearly 10,000 feet above the valley at its base. Through silent, sweet smelling pine forests lay the pass through the mountains, and remembrance of the past history of this region recalled those lines of the Spanish war song—

" Their pines murmur song

Where bright blood hath been shed."

As dusk approached I was urged to make greater speed, while my companion regaled me with tales of cruel robberies, and mentioned that certain places we had yet to pass possessed unsavory reputations. Hastily passing over these interesting days on horseback, the views of the pyramid of Cholula, the city of Puebla, etc., I pass on to the rancho of Santa Rosa, where we arrived one afternoon. Near the railroad station I climbed a little hill and collected the most beautiful cactus I have ever found in its home—the lovely *Mamillaria elegans*—which we must now call *Cactus supertextus* for reasons already given in previous remarks—a neat ball of short white spines, bearing lovely pink flowers, exquisite in every part.

The surroundings much reminded me of Californian landscapes. Many pretty flowers were in blossom on the seemingly dry, barren hill, and around the station, and near the little pond close by were the last zephyr flowers of the season (*Zephyranthes atamasco*), of a lovely shade of rose-purple, springing like fairies out of the ground.

C. R. ORCUTT.

CACTI, SUCCULENTS,

TREES, SHRUBS, AND FLOWERING PLANTS.

Special Offers, August, 1894.

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ECHINOCACTUS.

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 Haw.

See *Cactus*.

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<i>Grahamii</i>	25
<i>leptocaulis</i> (<i>frutescens</i>).....	10
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<i>microdasys</i>	25
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