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Our Adventures in Tampico

ONE must go and see in order to know. My advance impression of Tampico, for one, was of a typical Mexican port infested with smallpox, yellow fever, and a few American adventurers of pernicious activities and doubtful antecedents. There were also oil wells, I understood, in and about Tampico, operated by the aforesaid adventurers. And that was about all I knew of the place until I went and saw.

Aboard my steamer were oilmen returning after being driven out to our warships by the Mexicans the day our forces landed in Vera Cruz, and after being shanghaied by our State Department to the United States. A big steel barge, swept by every breaker, was pounding to destruction on the end of the breakwater that projected into the Gulf.

"That's our barge," one of the oilmen told me. "When the Federals fired our wharf, her mooring lines burned away and she drifted down the river."

He looked at me grimly when I remarked that they had got off lightly.

"Wait and see," was all he said.

A Massed Front of Industry

ONCE in the mouth of the Pánuco River, the landscape on either side sprouted into the enourmous, mushroom growths of the tank farms. I was quite impressed, not having dreamed that our adventurers had done so much work. It was a creditable showing, a very creditable showing. But as we continued up the river, more and more terminals and tank farms lined both banks of it. This was the Corona terminal, and that was the Aguilla on both sides, and adjoining were the huge solid buildings of Standard Oil. And still the names of companies were rolled off to me. There was the National Petroleum, there the Waters-Pierce, the Gulf Coast, the Huasteca, the Mexican Fuel, the Magnolia Petroleum, the Texas, the International Oil, the East Coast Oil — and thereat I ceased taking account of the companies and realized that there was quite something more to Tampico than I had anticipated.

"Ah," I remarked, "there's the city at last," indicating great masses of buildings on the north bank. But I was informed that the city was yet miles away, and that what I had mistaken for it was the boiler stacks, still stacks, warehouses, paraffin plants, and agitators of the refineries.

Ocean Tankers in Long Procession

THE ruined walls of a huge building were pointed out. "Six hundred thousand dollars went up there," I was told. "Two hundred and fifty box cars went up with it. The shells from the Federal gunboats did it."

We hoisted the doctor's flag and dropped anchor off a quarter of a mile of burned wharf.

"You see," it was explained, "the rebels were working two machine guns here and a bunch of sharpshooters, and the Federals from the Zaragoza let us have it good and plenty. That was all brand-new wharf. In fact, we hadn't quite finished it. Three of our barges were sunk by the shells. Right there at the bottom lies the Topila and the Spindletop, and, just beyond, the Santa Fe. See what the fire left of that tank on the top of the hill. It gave us a hot time. While it was burning we fought to keep it inside the fire wall, and all the time the Zaragoza was shelling us. Don't talk to me about the peon. I was right there with a gang of them. They were working for a day's wages, but no trained soldiers could have behaved better. As soon as we'd jump up to fight the fire the Zaragoza'd loosen up on us. Inside ten minutes we'd have to lie down until the shells and machine guns slackened, and then we'd up and go at it again. And not a peon showed the white feather, and we held that burning oil where it was until it burned out. Some peons, hombre, some peons."

And while we waited for the port doctor, big ocean tanker after big ocean tanker in long procession came in from the sea, flew the doctor's flag and dropped anchor.

"They come in, load, and go out all in the same day," I was told. "The *Huasteca* can load 9,000 barrels an hour. Why, there are tankers that have been coming in here for a year whose crews have never set foot on land."

Statistic of Pernicious Activities

I BEGAN to gather statistics of the pernicious activities of our American adventurers. One company alone had two roofed concrete tanks holding 1,250,000 barrels along with 120 steel tanks holding 55,000 barrels each. Since a steel tank costs 30,000 pesos, the cost of the 120 steel tanks will total 3,600,000 pesos. At the rate of exchange prior to Mexico's present troubles, this investment in mere steel-tank equipment means 1,800,000 American gold dollars. When it is considered that this is but part of the one item of oil-storage equipment of one company, and that there are many other equally expensive items of equipment, the grand total of the equipment of the many companies is vaguely adumbrated.

The port doctor finally boarded and passes us and we continued up the river to Tampico. The Pánuco is a noble stream, deep of channel, swift of current, and wide; and as we rounded a grand bend between the interminable tank farms a whole fleet of anchored merchant steamers appeared, as well as warships, flying the flags of various nations. The *Des Moines* flew the only American flag.

Passing the customhouse and emerging through the Fiscal Dock, a long line of mounted Constitutionalists made me for a while forget oil and oil tanks. Before I knew what was happening, I found myself in the company of 500 of the Constitutionalists, dispatched to aid in the pursuit of General Zaragoza and his 4,000 Federals.

The Harum-Scarum Warriors

NEVER on the warpath have I encountered a bunch of warriors so harum-scarum, so happy-go-lucky, so brimming over with good food and high spirits. Everyone was mounted. Every horse was stolen. On the horses were the brands of every ranch and hacienda from the Rio Grande to the Pánuco. Occasionally there was a grizzled oldster. But the big percentage was youthful. There were boys of ten, eleven, and twelve, magnificently and monstrously spurred,

astride lifted broncos, with pictures of saints in their sombreros and looted daggers and bowie knives in their leggings, with automatics and revolvers at their hips, bewaisted and beshouldered with belts and bandoliers of cartridges, and with the inevitable rifle across their saddle pommels. And there were women, young women all, mere soldaderas as well as amazons, the former skirted and on sidesaddles, the latter trousered and cross saddled, and all of them wickedly armed like their male comrades, and none of them married. When a soldadera comes along I should not like to be a stray chicken on the line of march nor a wounded enemy on the field of battle.

Crossing the Pánuco to the south bank on a barge, I tried to take the picture of a coy and skirted soldadera. But all was vain until I won the good services of the Lieutenant Colonel by snapping him and his fellow officers. They were so delighted that all that they possessed was mine, and the soldadera was commanded to face the camera. The proud Colonel even interrupted proceedings in order to decorate the soldadera with his own cartridge belt, knife and revolver. She was young, strong, uncorseted, cotton-frocked, all Indian, and she had ridden, as I learned, for two years with the revolutionists. She came from far in the North, and her near goal was Mexico City.

Ashore on the south bank, endeavoring to catch two or three of the rebels with my camera, I suffered from an embarrassment of riches. All the soldiers crowded into the immediate foreground—there were half a thousand of them—and my lens was not wide-angled. In twos and threes they struck the most bloodthirsty attitudes, and I could only escape them by patiently faking a pressure of the bulb and a rolling on of the film. They were as proud as peacocks, as excitable and naive as children. Just as I pressed the bulb on a long row of them on horseback, one of them, beside himself with too much valor, accidentally discharged his rifle. His fellows laughed at him. His officers did not even frown. It was too common an occurrence. They were merely skylarking boys on the rampage, these rebels who had exchanged the tedium of the day's work for a year-long picnic. Picnic was what it was with a horse to ride, a peso and a half a day, good grub, a chance to loot, and, best of all, a chance to shoot their fellow men, which last is the biggest big-game hunting that ever falls to the lot of man. Through the fires of sunset—men, women, and small boys—they rode up the winding trail in single file and disappeared south on the road to Mexico City, their hearts high with the hope that they might overtake and terminate the lives of some of some of the unfortunate, limping, poor devils of Federals lagging behind the beaten army of Zaragoza.

"Klondike Faded to a Fare You Well!"

RETURNING by launch, I found that Tampico was mostly surrounded by water and was half a Venice. The backyards, or patios, rather, of the water-front dwellers overhung the canal, which teemed with dugout canoes and chalans (the open, native boat), on which lived many families. But in addition to all this was the evidence of the activity of our American adventurers. Everywhere boat building and repairing was going on. There were paint shops, machine shops, and shipways; and there were river steamers, barges, and launches, not by the score, but by the many hundred.

A carriage, drawn by the thinnest, boniest, mangiest, pair of horses I had even seen, took me to the hotel. The reason for the condition of the horses was obvious. Only such animals could have escaped for half a year the horse-stealing Federals and rebels. The hotel was modern, five-storied, had elevators, and was in every detail — from the café tables copied after Sherry's to the Tom Collins glasses that were duplicates of Martin's — a New York hotel. Mine host even had

cold beer, having added to his stock by purchase from the Constitutional officers of a carload which they had confiscated at Monterey, and which they had run into Tampico over the Mexican Central railway, also confiscated.

But the hotel was not the interesting thing. It was the men in it — Americans all, who were already gathering back after their enforced journey to the United States. The atmosphere was of the West, of the frontier, of the mining camp. I was more nearly reminded of the men of Klondike than of anywhere else. In truth, within an hour I encountered a dozen sourdoughs. Two of them I had known in the old days in Alaska. Said one from whom I had parted seventeen years before in Dawson City:

"Jack, this ain't no Klondike. It's got Klondike faded to a fare you well and any other gold camp the world has ever seen. You know my old claim on Eldorado, from rim rock to rim rock and 500 feet up and down steam — well, that was a humdinger and it cleaned up half a million. But shucks, that ain't anything alongside of these diggings. Why, there's the old well at Ebano, the first in the country, a gusher when they struck it twelve years ago, and still a-gushing. They ain't had to pump it yet. It just naturally gushes.

"And the Dutch up above Pánuco, have got an ornery eight-inch hole, nothing to look at, but it can throw 185,000 barrels a day when it ain't pinched down. Figure it up. Say oil at 50 cents, that makes $90,000 gold a day; in ten days $900,000; in a hundred days $9,000,000; in a year, allowing sixty-five days for delays and accidents, $27,000,000 — and that's gold, United States gold coin with the eagle and the Indian. Eldorado and Bonanza together, mouth to source, bench claims and all, didn't turn that much out in the first two years of skimming the cream."

I learned that the Pánuco field alone was estimated by conservative expert oil men to contain at least $2,000,000,000 worth of oil. One really conservative expert put it at $2,500,000,000, but after a moment, without prompting, amended his figures to $2,000,000,000. And the Pánuco was only one of three big fields, the other two being Ebano and Huasteca, while there were two lesser fields, the Chila and the Topila, each with its noteworthy producing wells, and all five fields as yet scarcely scratched.

And from oil and oilmen I drifted into war and soldier men in the shape of a couple of rebel officers. One, a colonel, with no English, presented me with a handful of Federal money confiscated at Monterey and declared worthless by the Constitutionalists. That was why he gave it to me, and, promptly and absent-mindedly, I bought cold beer with it for all of us and received good Constitutional money in change from the large bills. The other officer, a major, was soft voiced and gentle faced as a woman, and at the same time as sanguinary as any hero of the bull ring. He had been in the field four years. He had fought under Madero. He was now fighting under Villa and Caranza. Two of his brothers had been killed in battle. All his property was destroyed. He had but recently recovered from a bullet which had perforated him just under the heart, right side to left, in and out again. "We shoot our men who loot," he said softly, with no more emphasis than if he had announced that they slapped looters on the wrists. "We shot four of our men here in Tampico. It is true we are civilized. At Monterey we shot one colonel and one captain for looting. No, it is not permitted. We are not savages."

Yes, he was a four years' veteran. It had been a long fight, with many a day and week of hunger when the very thought of a tortilla made one sick with longing. And straight beef after a month, cooked hot from the hoof, did sometimes make one tired. Had I heard how Huerta shaved? Well, Huerta stood erect while the barber shaved him, one hand in his pocket on a revolver with which to get the barber if the barber cut his throat.

It was lies about the Constitutional atrocities. All such things were committed by the Federals. They dragged their wounded enemies to death with lariats, while the Constitutionalists took their wounded enemies to hospital and nursed them. It was true they did sometimes execute captured Federal officers, but only when such officers were known assassins and traitors.

"Zaragoza?" he repeated, after my question at parting. There was a white flash of small, even teeth, and the soft voice enunciated ever so softly: "He is in the trap. He cannot escape."

"And when you catch him?" I queried.

"He is an assassin," came the answer, indirect it was true, but a complete, straight-out answer.

In the morning, in a speed boat, accompanying the general superintendent of an oil company, I went up the Pánuco River. Except where there were wharves for loading oil, or where the cut banks were too steep, the rich alluvial soil was farmed by the Indians to the water's edge. And here, amid coconut palms, banana trees, and trees of the mango and the avocado, I saw demonstrated the statement that soil and climate were such as to permit the raising of three crops of corn a year. Side by side there were patches of corn just sprouting, of corn that was in the tassel, and of corn that was being harvested.

The Vivid Mutifarious

IT WAS amazing to see the cattle drinking knee-deep in the river, and horses and mules along the bank. Not all the stock had been run off by the soldiers. From time to time our swift craft swerved in nearer to the bank in order that the superintendent might try to identify familiar-looking animals. In this he was occasionally successful, the animals having escaped from the fleeing Federals and drifted back to their own pastures.

Where the Tamesi River flowed in we passed the drawbridge wrecked by the Federals, and the sunken gunboat, the Vera Cruz, abandoned with open sea cocks when the Constitutionalists took the town.

We continued up the Pánuco, passed the tiled roofs of Americans who farmed the land, past the grass huts of the natives, and past many brown-skinned September Morns bathing in the shallows. The American farms were deserted, the owners not yet having come back from their forced trip to the United States. One such holding consisted of 1,300 acres, 1,000 of which were in bananas. Other Americans had gone in for grapefruit, and all ran stock in the rich pastures. No hay is cured in this land, nor do the natives feed grain even to their work animals. The horses and mules are grass-fed and leaf-browsed, and grass and leaves are green the year around. Rain falls every month in the year, the "rainy season" merely connoting the period of excessive rain.

The Pánuco River was alive with traffic. The first returning adventurers were already moving oil. River steamers and ocean tugs moved up and down with long tows of tank barges, and here and there, against the banks, barges were loading oil from the pipe lines of near-by wells. Also, we passed the sites of ancient towns, whose totality of inhabitants in numbers of from twenty-five to fifty thousand, had been massacred by the Aztecs or taken up for the sacrificial festivals in the lake city of the Montezumas.

There were, on the river, many hundreds of the chalans, or long poling boats of the Indians, going upstream with purchases from town, coming down on the current loaded with chickens, vegetables, charcoal, corn, raw sugar, bananas, pineapples, sugar cane, and all manner of things from the soil that fetch a price in Tampico. The honesty of these Indians is proverbial.

From the headreaches of the Pánuco they are sometimes months in making the round trip, and they are often trusted with thousands of pesos with which to make purchases in Tampico.

From every foreigner in Mexico, comes the same testimony of the rock-ribbed integrity of the Indian. It is always the mixed breed who is unveracious, dishonest, and treacherous. It was the mixed breed who composed the mobs in Tampico that cried death to the gringos. And many of these half-breeds, so crying, were the very employees of the gringos they wanted to kill and whose property they wanted to destroy. And it was the peon, the Indian, who remained faithful to his salt.

Indian Faith

AS AN example of this, part way on our journey in the Topila field, the superintendent ran the boat in to a small wharf where an Indian was loading two barges with oil. When the Americans were driven out, this Indian, without instructions, threatened by the soldiers, had stuck to his post and moved the flowing oil from wells to tanks and to the emergency reservoirs. Nor had a barrel of oil been lost. Yet three times the Federals had strung him up by the neck in an effort to persuade him to volunteer in the army. As he told them, and he is legion:

"I don't want to fight. I have trouble with nobody. I don't want trouble. When I first came to work here for the gringos I had nothing. I went barefooted. Now I wear shoes. When I worked I got sixty centavos a day. Now I get four pesos a day. I have a nice house. There are chairs in my house. I have a talking machine. Before I lived like a dog. No, I won't be a soldier and fight. All I want is to be left alone."

Forty-seven miles above Tampico we came to the superintendent's wells in the Pánuco field. Two days before, his handful of American employees had returned to the looted camp and began moving oil and building new emergency reservoirs against the time when they might again be driven out. The foreman in charge, a lean, low-spoken Texan, in reply to the superintendent's query for news, said:

"Oh, everything's moving along slowly. The trouble is that our peons have taken to the brush and there'll be some time getting confidence into them to come back. You know so-and-so — well, the cuss was out here this morning, with a few drinks in him, and throwing the fear of God into the few peons I have gathered in, telling them that we'd soon be gone and that every one of them that had worked for us would be shot. Oh, and he cussed us out good and plenty to our faces, telling us that what would happen to the peons wasn't a circumstance to what was coming to us."

The superintendent turned to me with a weary smile. "That man," he explained, "is the Mexican, the same old half-breed type, with no virtues and all vices. He runs one of the biggest stores in Tampico. Our books will show that we have spent in his store in the last twelve months over $100,000 gold. And he has been invariably courteous and friendly to us. And now he selects our particular camp in which to voice his threats."

The Blunder at Tampico

THAT a blunder was made in not landing our troops at Tampico the same time we landed them at Vera Cruz cannot be doubted by anyone who has gone over the ground and studied the situation. To make matters worse, our American warships were withdrawn from the river and anchored in the open Gulf, ten miles away. The Mexicans, inflamed by the invasion of their

country at Vera Cruz, took this withdrawal of our naval forces from Tampico as a sign of timidity. Mobs formed in the streets, and the Americans — men, women, and children — took refuge in the hotels, while the mobs tore down and spat upon American flags and cried death to all Americans.

It is a curious sort of reasoning that brings about a conclusion that the only way to save the lives of our countrymen and countrywomen is to run away and leave them in such a city under such circumstances.

To make matters worse, the United States, by virtue of the old Monroe Doctrine, had warned the other powers off and announced her ability to deal with the situation. The captains of the Dutch and English war vessels declined to interfere for the deserted Americans even when the captain of the German warship approached them to join with him in a shore party to rescue the besieged Americans. This was on the night that succeeded the day of the landing at Vera Cruz.

That night, for an instance, over a hundred Americans, including their women, were sheltered in the Southern Hotel. Those who did not have guns had armed themselves with machetes and clubs for what looked like the last stand. The mob roared in the street and repeatedly attacked the doors with battering rams. And at one in the morning two German officers arrived from the battleship. The English and the Dutch captains had declined to cooperate, and the German commander was acting on his own responsibility. And so, thanks to the Germans, the Americans in Tampico were rescued.

But there were several hundred men, women, and children far up in the oil fields. From Tampico to the Pánuco field was forty-seven miles by the winding river, and ten miles away, in the opposite direction from Tampico, lay the American warships. A superintendent, accompanied by a young Texan, braved the streets in the early morning of the second day. They were spat upon and reviled, and were only saved by an armed guard. But they managed to win across the river and to get the crew of a stern-wheel steamer to volunteer to go up to Pánuco. Fired at by soldiers and looters, followed by troops of Federal cavalry along the banks, they nevertheless cleaned up every camp and brought back with them some three hundred adventurers of their kind. Yes, somebody blundered in this Tampico affair.

Salvation in a Threat

WHEN General Zaragoza, with his 4,000 Federals, evacuated Tampico, he retreated on a number of long railroad trains. But beyond Ebano the tracks were blocked by the rebels. Abandoning the trains, General Zaragoza retreated across country to the Pánuco oil fields. On this march he shot fifteen of his lagging men as a spur to the rest to keep up. In the old town of Pánuco he rested while getting horses and provisions for his men. He was a beaten man, and, but for one thing, he would have been destroyed. He sent a message to General Pablo Gonzales, commanding the rebels that had driven him out of Tampico.

“I am a beaten man,” was the tenor of Zaragoza’s message. “My men are exhausted. I am short of ammunition. If you attack me, I am lost. But the moment you attack I shall fire the oil wells.”

And the rebels did not attack. It was a pretty situation. The rebels planned to add to their treasury by shaking down the oilmen. If the oil wells were ruined, the oilmen would have nothing for which to be shaken down. Zaragoza took his time ere he drifted away south across the hot lands in his effort to find a way up the mountains to the great tableland.

Child-minded men, incapable of government, playing with the weapons of giants! A $2,000,000,000 oil body, a world asset, if you please, at the pleasure of stupid anarchs! And all that saved it, the desire of a portion of the anarchs to loot, by forced contribution, the gringos who had found and developed the oil fields!

Two thousand feet under the surface lies the Pánuco oil body. The formation overlying the oil sands is so broken and creviced by ancient upheavals that the casings are not tight. To seal a well under such conditions would force the oil to rise to the surface outside the casing. At the best, with the wells "pinched down" to the limit of safety, the flow of all the wells could not be reduced below a daily run of 100,000 barrels. From the time when the oilmen were driven out and shanghaied to the United States this great volume of oil accumulated in the tanks and in the open emergency reservoirs. A wad of cotton waste, saturated with kerosene and ignited and tossed into the oil, could have started the $2,000,000,000 bonfire. General Zaragoza could so have started it. So could any drunken peon.

Marvels of the Oil Field

PERHAPS no oil region has been tapped that will compare with the Tampico region. The wells on all the five fields are gushers, and, unlike most gushers, are slow in gushing themselves out. The well at Ebano, previously mentioned, has been flowing for twelve years. In the Huasteca field is a well that has gushed 23,000 barrels a day for four years. Today it is still gushing its 23,000 barrels, the oil has the same twenty-two gravity, has yet to show a trace of moisture, and carries less than two-tenths of 1 per cent of sediment.

In passing, it may be remarked of the last-mentioned well that, when the Americans were forced out and the half-breed employees had gone to rioting, an old Indian employee took charge of his fellow Indians, and in twenty-two days handled the 500,000 barrels of oil and pumped it over the pipe line to the tank farm and terminal, 105 kilometers away. Not a barrel of oil was lost, and when the Americans returned they found it ready to load into the ocean tankers.

But, while the Tampico oil region is unthinkably big and rich, so much time and money have been required in development that, out of eighty-nine oil producing companies operating during the last fourteen years, only three have so far paid dividends. One particular company has invested $38,000,000 and has paid but a dividend and a half. There are other companies that have invested more than this one. A single company, which has so far paid one dividend, has 4,000 men on the pay roll, a monthly wage list of $100,000 and a monthly grocery bill of $10,000.

I spent a quiet Sunday with the chiefs of one of these companies. The superintendent and I had last parted at the tail of a glacier on the lope of Chilcoot Pass. He was a mere adventurer, of course but just the same I desire to describe just a little of this, his Mexican adventure.

We sat in a hot room. The afternoon breeze had not yet sprung up. The house stood on a hill. All about were the visible evidences of pernicious activity. The low hills were crowned with steel tanks and reservoirs. The slopes down to the river were covered with machine shops, carpenter shops, warehouses, an ice plant, an electric-light plant, a foundry, and parks of wagons, auto-trucks, road scrapers, graders, and rollers. The river was wharf-lined and the wharf was lined with tankers loading oil. There were dredgers, pile drivers, launches, barges, river steamers, harbor tugs, huge ocean-going tugs, and a fast stream yacht (bought a year before for the purpose of rushing the American employees away to the safety of the sea in case of need).

And there was more than could be seen. This particular company ran truck farms, chicken farms, and orchards of avocados, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, and figs-all for feeding its employees. I knew that to the west, in the Ebano field, were this company's hospitals, clubhouses, and railroad shops. Oh, yes, it possessed two railroads which it had built as well as run. Also, at Ebano, was its asphaltum refinery, reckoned the largest in the world, and a mere stock farm where imported Hereford bulls, Percheron stallions, and Missouri jacks graded up the inferior stock of Mexico, and where 10,000 head of animals had run prior to the raids by Federals and Constitutionalists.

From this house on the hill ran a graded wagon road through the jungle, Huasteca country, connecting with the terminal of the company's railroad at Dos Bocas. All this distance, and more, to a hundred miles away, ran the company's telephone lines. Two pipe lines for oil, one for water, and one for gas paralleled the wagon road.

Under Stress of War

IN that hot room of the house on the hill the telephone was never idle. Now the superintendent, now one chief, and now another answered it. A call would come from some distant station. Two horses had been run off by Constitutionalists. Another call: the Federals had just killed five cows and a bull for food, and the superintendent, in return, desired to know if his pony was still safe.

An employee arrives on the porch with the news that four of the auto-trucks lifted by the rebels have been recovered in Tampico and are being brought across the river on a barge. Another employee brings the word that the launch *Doodle-bug* has just been commandeered by the rebels.

Over the telephone comes word that General Zaragoza, with 3,400 men, has burned a village and is lifting every horse and mule in sight. The Federals are drifting toward Amatián the voice over the wire goes on.

"Getting close to our mules," remarks one of the chiefs, and then to me: "We've got 600 mules down there — 200 of them from the States."

A tidy item that — sixty to seventy thousand dollars' worth of mule flesh; and the superintendent, over the phone, orders the moving of the mule herd to another potrero away from the line of Federal driftage.

The water station at Tamcochin sends in word that he Federals are reported drifting down on Tamcochin.

"All right," advises the superintendent. "Keep the tanks full to the last moment, and be prepared to run for it. Have a horse saddled for each one of you, and run the rest off now."

Like Job's Calamities

IN a lull one of the chiefs begins inquiring over the line for the pursuing rebels, and locates a station through which 500 of them had passed two hours earlier.

A call announces that the 600 mules are on their way to portreros green and hidden.

The chiefs try to reason the drift of the Federals. It is concluded that so far they have failed to gain the tableland, but that they are bound to try again because, to the south, they are blocked by the rebels, who have captured the port of Tuxpan.

"It does hurt to be called an adventurer," one of the chiefs begins, but is interrupted by the hoofs and the eruption of a splendid specimen of an Indian who dismounts and reports that after recovering thirty of the company's horses he has just had them taken away by a bunch of rebels.

Another station telephones a rumor that the 500 rebels have run into the 3,400 Federals and are having a hot time of it.

One of the chiefs telephones a subordinate to hire a launch to take the place of the commandeered *Doodle-bug*. Scarcely is this done when a slender half-breed presents himself with a fresh commission to be a colonel and to raise a regiment of 500 men for the rebels. The superintendent shows the new Colonel every consideration. He is compelled to, or else the Colonel will enlist the men from the company's laborers. Also, the Colonel wants to borrow a launch for a couple of days. It is blackmail, but the superintendent smilingly lends it, and as soon as the Colonel is gone sends orders to hire another launch for the company at Tampico. Following that, at his suggestion, a chief telephones a lone man in a lone station in the path of the Federal drift to be ready to disconnect the wires and cut and run for it.

Between telephone calls a broken conference is held on the problem of moving the Ebano oil. A chief states that the company's shop at Ebano is occupied by seven engines which the rebels have captured from the Mexican Central and are repairing. Another chief, whose activities are patently diplomatic, is instructed to attempt to persuade the rebel leaders to use the repair shops at Tampico. It is decided, since the Ebano oil must be moved because of lack of further storage, to get the rebels to move it over the captured Mexican Central.

"If they won't or can't," the superintendent concludes, "then propose that they let us move it over their lines. We can furnish our own trains, crews, and everything."

Pleasant Dreams

AND the foregoing is just a sample of what went on for all that blessed day and half the night in that hot room of the house on the hill. One last thing I must give. Over the telephone came the verification of the earlier report of fighting. The 3,400 Federals had pretty well cut to pieces the 500 rebels, who were dropping back. Also, the Federals had ceased drifting and were making fast time for the mountains. And in the evening I fell asleep in my chair while the telephone rang on and on, and while the superintendent and his chiefs conferred and planned and considered immediate problems vastly profounder than any I have mentioned here.