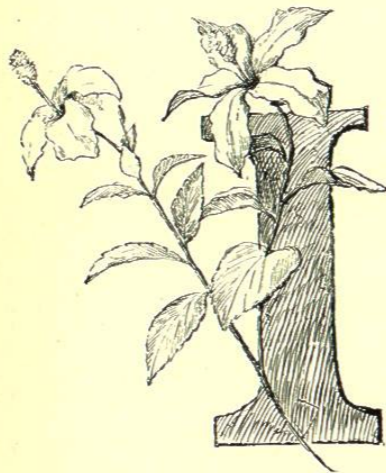


## CHAPTER VIII.

## FASTS AND FESTIVALS AND SOCIAL FORMS.



It is not my purpose in this connection to dwell upon the past history or present status of the Church in Mexico, except as it is connected with the actual lives of the people.

The propriety of blending social events, household customs, and religious ceremonies, as one subject of description, may seem questionable to the uninitiated reader. But when it is understood that the feast-days of the church are holidays for the people, and that these feast-days are numerous, and without these holidays there would be but little social life, the harmony of these subjects will be at once understood.

I have been assured by devoted Mexican Catholics, who have resided both in the United States and in Europe, that the feast-days in Mexico are, in a large measure, quite different from those observed in other countries, while they are so numerous that to a stranger it seems as if there is one for every day in the year.

The bold and uncompromising policy of Cortez left the Mexicans no alternative but to adopt the Christian religion, which was made acceptable by the soothing influences of the early missionaries.

Then, too, the striking ceremonies of the Catholic Church, with its

grand language in an unknown tongue and its mysterious symbolism, rich vestments of the priests, its lights, incense, and strange, unearthly chants of the tonsured clergy, seemed to harmonize with the singular rites of the pagans, though so different in spirit.

The transition from the native ceremonies to the ritual of the Catholic Church was easy to a people who loved outward show and symbolism; and who were perhaps more attached to form and display and mystical devotion, than to spiritual elevation and humane sentiments. But these remarks apply only to the primitive races who so soon and readily adopted the purer faith taught by the Gospel, and abandoned those horrible, sanguinary rites that characterized them as pagans.

They have passed through many phases of mysterious and severe misfortunes, but still they present evidences that their ancient traditions have not been wholly lost; and at the present time dim traces of them are manifested in their religious symbols. Generations have glided by, with the tales of their sorrows, joys, and calamities; despotisms have held their iron sway; some of the most magnificent structures—relics of an art superior to our own—have passed away; another faith is theirs; but one may discern in the rites of catholicity, as practiced to-day in Mexico, a tinge of the Indian worship of the Aztecs. It is said that even recently garlands have been placed by them on the idols in the court-yard of the National Museum, and that also in the remote caves of the mountain regions the ancient deities are still secretly worshiped.

This is not strange. We may well imagine some remote wilds, where the old races still exist, with their endless legends and traditions; where the light of Christianity has never beamed. In these secluded fastnesses still dwell their old men and women, who keep the young in awe of the grim deities their forefathers were wont to worship.

The government of New Spain went on under the viceroyalty for nearly three centuries. At last the War of Independence came, and the yoke of foreign usurpation was thrown off. But the influence of



the old Church was thoroughly imbedded in the hearts of the people. Mexico was free politically from a foreign power; but, nurtured in absolutism, the mastery of Church over every legal power was complete. The two elements—that of religious domination and of civil liberty—arrayed themselves against each other. The former was allied with the most powerful ecclesiastical body in the world; the latter, though few in numbers, was of untiring zeal and determination.

The wealth of the Church had so accumulated that it owned all the best property in the Republic, both in the city and country. A clerical writer of good authority estimates this wealth to have been 861 *haciendas*, or country estates, valued at \$71,373,000, and 22,649 lots of city property, consisting of churches and convents, valued at \$113,241,530—a total of \$184,614,800.

Other estimates have been made giving an aggregate of the Church wealth at \$300,000,000; and, regardless of the correctness of these estimates, this vast wealth was handled by the ecclesiastical body, who were in every instance able business men.

The rupture of Church and State, and their complete divorcement, came about by the ponderous weight of the former. It had gone on gathering influence and power, until, like an over-full river, it broke its bounds. The time in human economy had come when this event was a necessity.

In 1857, Comonfort issued the edict that eventually laid the Church power, strong as it was, trembling in the balance. But his policy was not completely carried out until the iron hand and fearless nerve of Juarez grasped the whole body politic, in 1867, on the fall of the empire. After which period this vast property was applied to the uses of the state and government. The cathedrals and churches were sold or converted to public uses, and by courtesy only the clergy became their occupants. Even the wearing of the clerical dress in the streets was forbidden under penalty of fine and imprisonment.

Religious parades, which had before been so imposing and magnificent, were suppressed.

Both sisters of charity and Jesuits were sent out of the country





EL FLOR DE LA NOCHE BUENO  
CHRISTMAS FLOWER.

HATHORN & WYLLIE LITH.

with their *personnel* and property, and even the ringing of the church bells was regulated by law.

The civil law was upheld in every particular, even in prescribing all those holy sacraments which the Church has always held as sacredly her own.

It registers births, performs the marriage ceremony, and buries the dead. While the Church ceremony is not prohibited when desired, it is legally superfluous, and without the civil law null and void.

But with all this curtailment of power, the Church has reached a higher moral plane, and one of greater dignity. It has been purified by fire. It required the blood of a pure Indian to bring to terms this great power. It was unquestionably a bold stroke to have been made by one man, with only at first a few adherents.

The government still watches closely the movements of the Church party, which is represented by the cathedral, while the National Palace is the domicile of the liberal party.

The soldiers marching to and fro in front of the latter furnish a solemn warning that not even a bell may be rung in those grand towers, if any attempt be made to override the civil authority.

It should be, and no doubt is, the earnest desire of every Catholic that the Church in Mexico be placed on the same footing as that in the United States. At present there are many indications pointing to this end.

The November feasts, beginning with All Saints' Day, were the first of interest that I witnessed, and the brilliant capital never saw a finer inauguration of these festivities. The rainy season was ended, the atmosphere was bracing, as is always the case at that time of the year, and these happy effects harmonized with the smiling faces of the multitude, as they moved back and forth, bearing in their hands flowers as lovely and delicately tinted as though blushing from the kisses of angels.

Strains of delightful music were wafted to my ears upon the early morning air from organ and choir, and the stronger and more martial notes of stringed and brass instruments. Hundreds, even thousands,



of women and children in their best clothes wended their way to the various churches. Business was suspended, even the school children having a holiday; though the public schools, fostered by the government, make no allowance for holidays in their regulations.

The Alameda, the great central figure of every outdoor social event, presented a picture that the mind loves to recall. A more enchanting scene was never opened to the appreciative eye in even the gay and beautiful realms of Fairy Land. In splendor it recalled "The golden prime of good Haroun al Raschid."

The great central pavilion was illuminated by iridescent lights, which were rendered more fairy-like and bewitching by numerous moss-draped mirrors, Chinese lanterns, brilliant growing plants, the magnificent fountain with its silvery showers, and the basin with its dainty, bright-colored fishes, streamers and flags with the national ensign, the whole making a gorgeous Oriental picture, vibrating under the modern electric light.

The Zapadores, of Exposition fame, assisted by other bands, played alternately on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, and on special feast-days. At night grand concerts took place, which were enjoyed by the most cultured and elegant society. Occasionally benefits were given for charitable purposes.

The play of Don Juan Tenorio, that is known throughout Spain and Spanish America, comes in among the November celebrations, being placed on the boards on All Souls' Day, and is kept there as long as public taste approves.

But to return to the feast. The highest testimonials of remembrance were on that day given to the beloved dead. Every cemetery was filled to its utmost capacity with mourning relatives and friends. The humblest grave at Dolores (cemetery of the poor) was not forgotten, and at the French cemetery the scene was most impressive. The clergy celebrated mass with full orchestral accompaniment; lights burned everywhere, while the glorious tropical sunshine was shut out by the towering forest and ornamental shade trees.

Pictures of deceased friends and relatives were placed at the head-

stones, while garlands, wreaths, and floral emblems encircled them, almost concealing the tomb; and as the priest passed from grave to grave, with solemn intonation and pathetic music, there were few dry eyes in that vast concourse. For whether we be in a foreign land or on our own soil, any tribute to the lost ones, even in an unknown tongue, unlooses the pent-up, silent grief of our hearts, and the pangs of to-day are those of long ago. We "weep with those who weep." Our tears are for them, and for ourselves, and for the griefs of humanity. It is a recognition of the universal brotherhood—that "touch of nature" which "makes the whole world kin."

The most touching mass that I witnessed that day in the French cemetery was celebrated before a monument that had been erected to the memory of "All the mothers and the fathers who have died in other lands, when separated from their children, who lived in far-off Mexico."

The American dead were not forgotten, and the last resting-places of the humble and unfortunate, as well as the wealthy and influential, were over-laid with lovely floral tributes.

The Alameda, with its indescribable attractions, continues nightly, throughout the month, to be filled with an elegantly dressed crowd, who revel in this gorgeous and bewildering realm of beauty. The holiday look everywhere is kept up in anticipation of the most universally celebrated of all the feast-days of the country, that of the Virgin de Guadalupe—the patron saint of Mexico—which takes place on the 12th of December.

She is venerated in all Spanish-America, and the story of her mysterious appearance to Juan Diego is firmly believed by thousands of every grade and class. The most ignorant Indian may not know of the President, Congress, or machinery of government, but he is sure to be well informed as to the merits of "Our Lady of Guadalupe." No doubt the tradition with its fascinating sentiment has been the means of inducing many wandering and scattered tribes of Indians to enlist themselves in the service of the Church.

We are told that when the patriot Hidalgo placed the image of



the Virgin Guadalupe on his banner, the royalists bitterly persecuted those who worshiped at her shrine; and at once stamped on their own banners the representation of the Spanish Virgin, "*Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*."

These two ladies, as representing the different causes, were bitter rivals throughout the War of Independence. But the native blood and determination were the stronger, and when Augustin de Iturbide became Emperor, the Indian Virgin resumed the absolute sovereignty which she this day holds. So dear is her name that thousands of children are annually christened by it.

For days before the inauguration of the festivities in honor of Guadalupe, both the capital and the highways leading to this sacred shrine were alive with people making preparations for the occasion. Platforms to be occupied by bands of music were erected at every

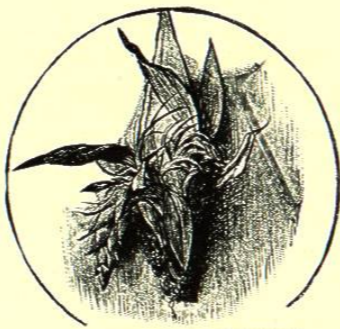


READY FOR THE FIESTA.

prominent street corner, and every garden and *plaza* showed signs that something unusual was about to transpire.

Indians had tramped a thousand or more miles in order to be present. They had brought with them the various wares and products of their own labor peculiar to their respective sections, and sold them through the streets—among them many articles of rare, beautiful, and skillful workmanship.

In the Zocalo the palm huts and rush-covered booths suggested an affinity between the native Indian and the banks of the Nile, but the novelty and variety of the surroundings precluded prolonged speculation. The bazars, shaded by cypress boughs, were presided over by Indian maidens endowed with great versatility of talent and with an abundant supply of small talk for every customer. Their stock in trade was unique—*Nascimientos*, representing the birth of Christ, in figures of wax, candy,



AN ORCHID WITH PINK CENTER.

and clay being the principal ones, though one may also find many other specimens of curious and ingenious handicraft.

Everything and everybody took on a holiday look in their new clothes, which none had omitted except the Indians. The *azoteas* were also enlivened by thousands of people, who enjoyed the brilliant display of pyrotechnics, and every imaginable species of illumination.

A party of Americans of which I was one, with a few Mexican friends, went to Guadalupe the night before the grand *fiesta* was to take place. To adequately describe the scene would require the pen of a Dickens. The poor, the lame, the halt, the blind had been here congregated, as well as the hale and hearty, with their *petates*, vessels of pottery and other things needful for the occasion. While the architectural beauty of the cathedral was displayed, the grotesquely attired multitude was also thrown into relief.

Inside the inclosure of the church the stillness of death marked the sleeping multitude. Overcome, perhaps, by the fatigue of the long journey from their homes, hundreds of women and children slept peacefully, undisturbed by the gaze of the curious foreigners who stepped over them to enter the portals of the cathedral.

It seemed to me that hundreds of poor women, wrapped only in their *rebozos*, with occasionally a blanket, were asleep, and in their immovable postures transfixed to mother earth. Now and then one might be seen upon her knees, devoutly offering up the prayers of her faith, while tears stole gently down the weather-beaten faces of others. Here as everywhere, making himself conspicuous and well known, was the ever-present, insatiable papoose.

Within the cathedral, the soft tones of the organ, aided and enhanced by the youthful voices of the choristers, filled the vast temple with solemn harmony.

An indescribable multitude of worshipers had assembled there, among whom Indian women on their knees, with candles in their hands, and children strapped to their backs, moved down the grand old aisles murmuring their "*Ave Marias*."



A contrasting scene was presented as we passed through the great doorway on our way out. Two men—one of them very old, with a pair of green spectacles which looked as if made by a blacksmith—were deeply engaged in singing from a home-manufactured book, as I discovered by peeping over, a rude chant, without rhyme, reason, time, tune, or ending. They sang with *gusto*, oblivious of the interest with which we regarded them, and each utterly regardless of what the other was singing. It was the strangest duet that was ever framed—two cracked voices, in utter discord, the singers as serious as pictured saints. The faces of the men, the spectacles, the book, the rattling discord of the duet, seen and heard by the dim light of a tallow dip, flickering in the December wind, formed a woe-begone scene that should be painted by a Hogarth.

The chapel on the hill of Tepayac can be reached only by a tiresome tramp up, perhaps, two hundred steps, cut in the side of the mountain, and here we were held in unbroken admiration of the scene below. The valley, bathed in the chastened light of a glorious full moon, lay serenely at our feet and stretched beyond to its mountain limits in the dim distance. The air was sweet, balmy and refreshing, even on that mid-December night. All this was the handiwork of nature in her sublimest moods. But what a contrast when we turned to the little *plaza* in front of the grand cathedral and beheld the multitudinous assemblage of human beings on grand parade, in fatigue suits and undress uniforms! True, the mellow moonlight was over them, as over us; but nearer were the flare of torches; the flickering of camp-fires, by the lights of which the crowds moved about like characters in pantomime, and with the Babel of voices, the songs of the Indians, the fire-crackers and sky-rockets, suggested to us on the height, instead of a vast religious congregation, rather a demoniacal pandemonium. Now and again the swelling notes of the organ were heard above the din, but these were soon lost in the pealing of bells from the towers as they revolved rapidly in the gay lights of the national colors, until the valley was filled with their deep-toned utterances.

We went down the steps and were soon lost in the variegated concourse, but our interest was undiminished. Confronted on every hand by gambling booths, tents, palm huts, and a motley multitude, cooking, eating and drinking, to open the way for our exit required the strength of a Hercules. We had glimpses of men and women in the booths who played on harp, guitar, and bandolin, and if their faces



A FEW OF THOSE WHO ATTENDED THE FEAST OF GUADALUPE.

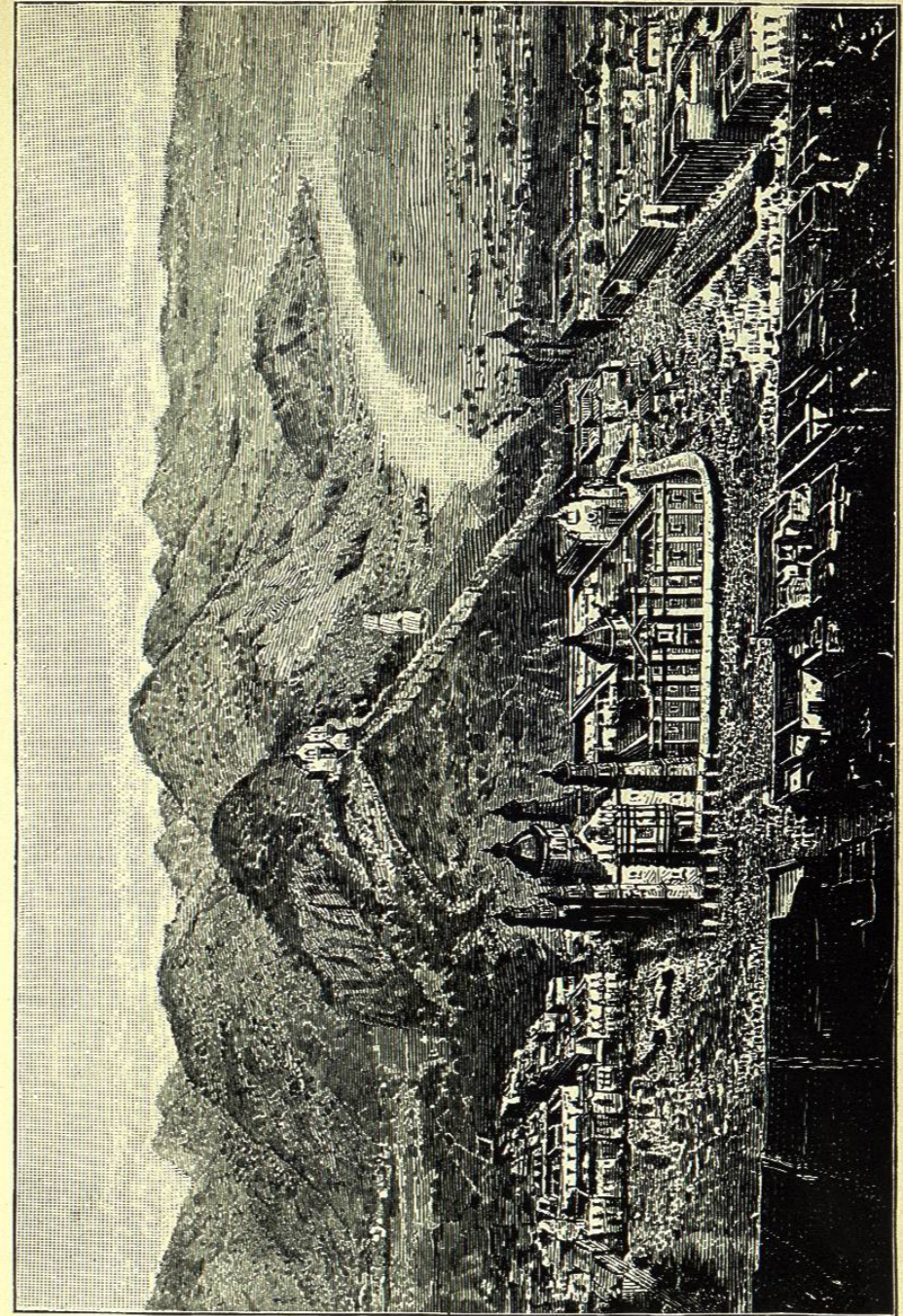
had been carved from wood or stone, they could not have been more immobile or expressionless.

The defects, by night-time, in a picture so realistic, were concealed in a measure by the glamour of moonlight and torchlight, but the longing of unsatisfied human nature urged us to return on Sunday afternoon to take a more prosaic view of it in the broad, open daylight. It was a cruel and a crucial test. An army of beggars in



rags, hundreds of children — faces unwashed, hair unkempt — sallied around, gnawing on great chunks of meat, playing in huge basins of soup, scooping up *frijoles* with *tortillas*, or screaming and fighting with the myriads of dogs. Gambling was in full force; women were cooking in every way known from the time of Adam, selling everything, screaming their prices, and, like the tireless venders they are, seldom failing to secure a purchaser. Some presided in booths, gayly lined with fruits and flowers, and danced, sang, and patronized you, while generously overflowing with pulque. The air was filled with an indiscriminate jangle of most unearthly sounds, from a variety of very earthly instruments, which, with the dust, the odor of meat cooking and the fumes from the crowd added, made us hurry along to the chapel on the hill, where a treat was in store for us. The Indians from the fastnesses of the Sierras, in the far north were to dance in their peculiar costumes.

Animated by insatiable curiosity, and anxious to witness the entire ceremonials, I pressed through the crowd of *pobres* to the inner circle. What a scene! The wildest, most fantastically decked beings that mortal eye ever beheld were in the inner space. The old men, adults, and boys, with their immense *panaches* of variegated colors that towered to startling height; their curiously wrought dresses that were strongly marked with the national colors, somewhat resembling the kilt of the Scottish highlanders; their ornamented moccasins; the women and little girls with their curious masks of coarse gauze, in black and white, crowned with immense wreaths of feathers, of every variety, intermingled with flashing tinsels, with tawdry dresses of many colors, and in fashion not unlike the kilt of the men and boys, made a scene that was grotesque and fantastic beyond description. Then the dance! They formed circles—the men on the outer circle and the women on the first inner circle—and again other circles of the younger Indians of both sexes, forming one within the other. The everlasting jangle and trum-trum of the ghastly *jarana* covered with the skin of an armadillo, looking like an exhumed skeleton, with the finery of flaunting ribbons floating around it, its harsh notes min-



CATHEDRAL OF GUADALUPE AND THE CHAPEL ON THE CERRO DEL TEPAYAC.