

gling with the drowning wail of the wild musician who played as though in a frenzy, were in keeping with the whole scene. The circles, with all their varied colors, danced in opposite directions with a slow, bouncing step that was half a waltz, half minuet, and as they proceeded they grew more excited—more frenzied—the musician seemingly more infused with his awful duty, and the dancers stepping higher and higher, the circles wheeling more rapidly, until the ear was overpowered and the eye confused with the endless changes of faces, colors, and sounds. It was the wildest, most mournful dance that mortal could invent; and it seemed as if the souls of the devotees were in the movement. It was a sort of paroxysm of physical devotion, and seemed to exhaust its votaries.

Having concluded the dance to the honor and glory of Guadalupe, they filed into the church chanting a low, monotonous hymn. I was the first to enter after them, followed closely by my friends. When they reached the altar, where a large picture of the Virgin was suspended, all dropped down on their knees in regular lines of fours, and began crossing themselves and murmuring their *pater-nosters*. Catching the spirit of the occasion, and unwilling to wound their acute religious sensibilities by the close proximity of idle sight-seers, we followed their example and knelt for a few moments. But so absorbed were the devotees, or so natural our movements, that we remained unnoticed among the worshipers.

The man who played on the *jarana* (harana) recited prayers, the others responding. After this they sang a litany, accompanied by low moaning sounds, as if in anguish of spirit, while every eye was fixed steadily upon the patron saint in mute appeal, and tears streamed spontaneously down these bronzed and hard-used faces.

After half an hour thus spent upon their knees, they arose, and still accompanied by the strange music from the ghastly instrument, that seemed to have taken on a more unearthly character, moved backward, making a low courtesy at each step, and, as they filed out noiselessly in their strange tongue, sang in chorus:

I.

"From Heaven she descended,
Triumphant and glorious,
To favor us—
La Guadalupana.

II.

"Farewell, Guadalupe!
Queen of the Indians!
Our life is Thine,
This kingdom is Thine.

III.

"Farewell, Guadalupe!
Queen of the Indians!
We who leave you to-day
Know not who may come again."

When they withdrew from the church, our party following closely, the dancing was resumed with added fervor. Before I was aware of the fact, my feet were going up and down, out and around, in imitation of the Indians, and greatly to the amusement of my friends and the spectators, some exclaiming, "*Que chula! Mira la niña bailanda!*" ("How pretty! Look at the child dancing!") which broke the spell, recalled me to myself, and joining my party, we went down the hill. But before we had gone down ten of the almost countless steps, one of the most picturesquely attired of all the Indians was walking by my side, making a bargain with me for the sale of his crown and feathers.

While the scene I had just witnessed had, at times, an effect to excite merriment, the contrary feeling of sadness and almost reverence prevailed. I could not but feel awe in the presence of those dark children of the wild mountains as they performed their mystical devotions and sang the rude barbaric songs that had in their tones the strangeness of another world. They were so earnest, so devout, so loving to the Mother of the shrine, and their grief so deep, when

they plaintively looked on her image, and bowed in a sorrowing farewell, that they excited a sympathetic feeling in the coldest heart.

I was forcibly reminded of the lines of our great American poet, who so fully appreciated the mystery of Indian character, religion, and tradition:

"Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
Who have faith in God and Nature,
Who believe, that in all ages
Every human heart is human,
That in even savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not,
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened."

At the sacred shrine of Guadalupe, eight days after the feast has been duly celebrated by the Indians and common people, the wealth, beauty, and fashion of the capital wend their way thither to tender their renewed obligations to the patron saint.

I was a guest at a sumptuous celebration in honor of the Señora Doña Guadalupe Bros, who invited me to participate in the ceremonies and festivities of her *día de santa*.

At seven o'clock in the morning mass was celebrated in the chapel, with the administration of the Holy Communion, followed by an impressive sermon from the young *cura* of the church of Santa Vera Cruz—Daniel Escobar. A full orchestra dispensed the sweet and solemn strains of Mozart.

Many distinguished society people were there, among them the wife and daughters of General Corona. The ladies all wore black dresses with lace mantillas.

The numerous lighted tapers were gifts from foundling and orphan institutions, of which the Señora Doña Guadalupe is a benefactress. All were deeply moved by the solemnity of the services, the more

evidently so that their noble hostess and relative was weak and infirm in health.

After mass a light breakfast was served in the grand dining-room, consisting of coffee, chocolate, and breads in great variety. The sumptuous and elaborate dinner took place at three o'clock in the afternoon. The orchestra in the corridor, supplemented by the singing of birds in the aviary, filled up the pauses with sweet sounds. Covers were laid for a hundred guests, the *élite* of society, among them many of the most distinguished men in Mexico—writers, orators, statesmen—including Altamirano and the venerable Guillermo Prieto.

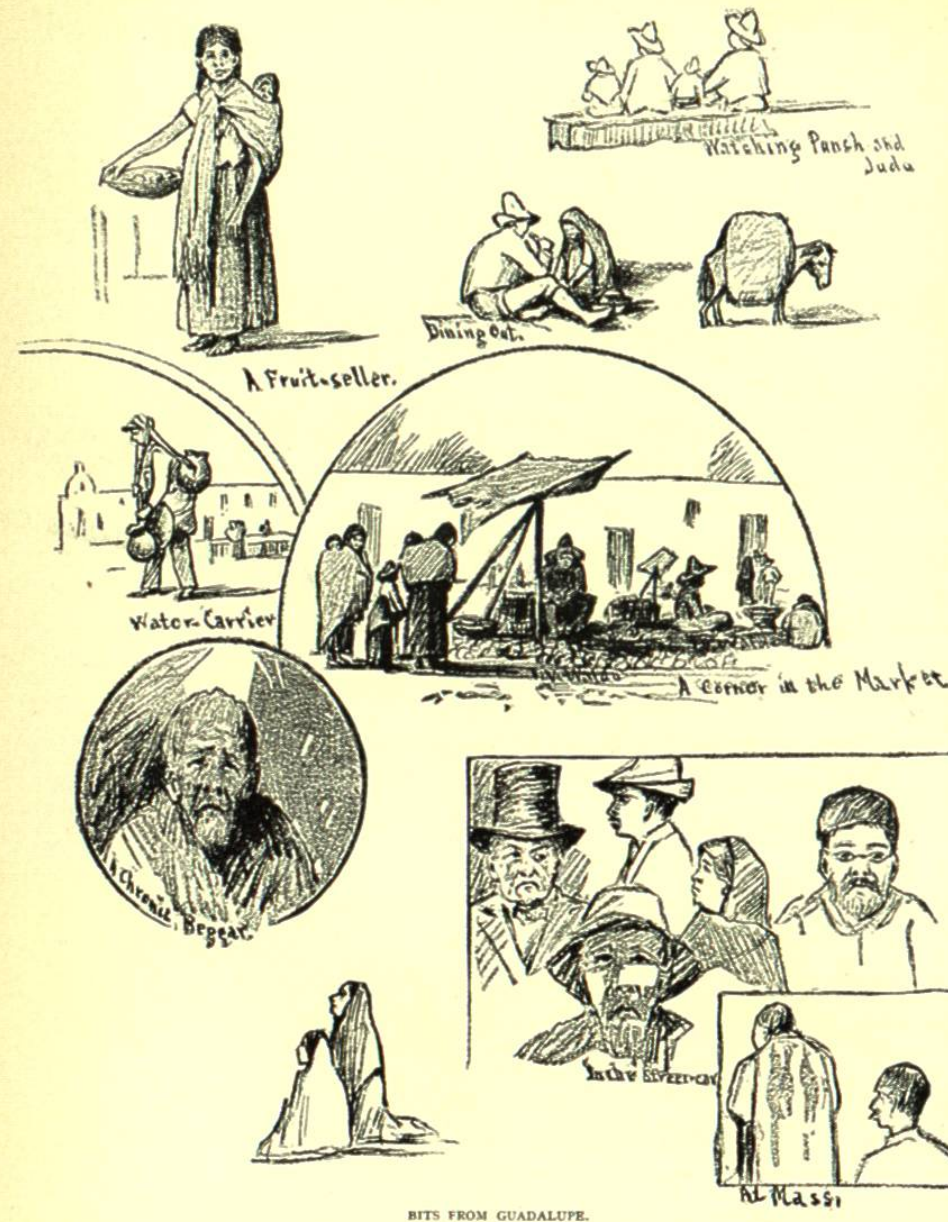
In the evening a brilliant ball was given in the *sala grande*, and for several days dinners and balls and general rejoicings followed. The gifts received by the Doña Guadalupe were numerous and elegant, and had the additional charm, in most instances, of being useful, hand-wrought articles of every imaginable kind. One chair alone, the gift of Doña Josefina, had required six months to embroider.

General Palacio and wife, the noble Josefina, gave their aunt a *funcion particular*, in the way of a theatrical performance in the house, which was again a brilliant affair. Three short plays were presented, a melodrama, a tragedy, and a comedy.

The players were amateurs, friends of the family, and acquitted themselves admirably. I was particularly impressed by the talent displayed by a young comedian, Francisco Cardona, who continually brought down the house with his hits on the times.

The feasts of Guadalupe at Morelia were unusually brilliant. Thousands of the faithful attended the matins in the cathedral. The houses were decorated and the pyrotechnical display was very fine. At sunset, and as soon as the bells chimed, an allegorical car, representing the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, started through the principal street from the portico of the cathedral toward the San Diego Church, followed by great crowds. Fireworks crossed the sky, giving it the appearance of a dome of fire.

In Queretaro these feasts were equally splendid. The city was converted into a great garden. Triumphal arches spanned the streets.



The capitol was covered with fluttering streamers, banners and bunting of tri-color, stretched from balcony to balcony, from post to post and from roof to roof. At night the illumination was general. Queretaro seemed wrapped in a mantle of fire. The towers of its church and the roofs of its highest buildings were crowded with flames of different colors that oscillated in the winds. Fireworks were kept up till midnight.

A Mexican Christmas is very unlike one in the United States. No merry jingle of sleigh-bells is heard in this sunny land where the rigors of winter are unknown, and the few lofty peaks, where alone snow is ever seen, would hardly tempt the most adventurous tobogganist.

As there are no chimneys, Santa Claus is deprived of his legitimate and time-honored entrance into households, so the delightful and immemorial custom of hanging up stockings is unknown to Mexican children. But perhaps they enjoy themselves quite as much after their own fashion as ours do. One circumstance in their favor is the long-continued celebration, which, beginning on the evening of the 17th of December and continuing till New-Year's Day, is one long, delightful jubilee.

The celebrations in honor of Guadalupe extend from the 12th until the *posadas*, or nine days' festivities. The last prayers on the lips of the faithful and the last tones from organ and choir in praise of the patron saint, hardly die away ere the Christmas rejoicings begin.

The word *posada* signifies an inn, and the whole observance is a relic bequeathed by the Spaniards. The celebration is limited almost exclusively to the capital and the larger cities, and may be considered more as a social feature than belonging specially to the Church—though really combining the elements of both.

It is a reminder of the Nativity, based on the Gospel narrative, but with additions. When Cæsar Augustus issued the decree that "all the world should be taxed," the Virgin and Joseph came from Galilee to Judea to enroll their names for taxation. Bethlehem, their city, was so full of people from all parts of the world that they wandered

about for nine days, without finding admittance in either hotel or private house. As nothing better offered, they at last took refuge in a manger, where the Saviour was born.

The first act of the *posada* represents the journey of the Virgin Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and the difficulties they experienced in finding shelter. The family and invited guests march in procession through halls and around corridors, holding in their hands lighted tapers and singing solemn litanies. Before the procession, the figures of Mary and Joseph are borne along by servants or young boys. Each door they pass is knocked upon, but no answer or invitation to enter is given, and so the procession continues to move around, singing and knocking, until, at last, a door is opened, when they all enter and mass is said and hymns are sung with all possible solemnity, after which the other interesting features of the *posada* are presented, as hereafter related. Sometimes a *burro* is introduced to represent the faithful animal that carried the holy family in their journeyings.

All over the city is heard the litany of the *posadas*, sung in a hundred homes, as the pilgrimages wind in and out of the rooms and round the improvised shrines. Venetian lights hang in the *patios*, and fireworks blaze skyward in every direction. One of the most interesting features is the infantile resort set up in the southern part of the plaza. The Zocalo is a bewitching place; lights flash through the branches of pine and cypress, and the place is alive with children of the first families of Mexico.

The breaking of the *piñate* is the chief sport of the *posada*. The *piñate* is an oval-shaped, earthen jar, handsomely decorated and covered with bright ornaments, tinsel, gay flowers, and flaunting streamers of tissue paper. The common people are experts in the manufacture of these curious objects, and when a vender of them is seen perambulating the streets, it is worth while stopping to examine his stock in trade. There are turkeys, horses, birds, monkeys—in fact, every beast, bird or fowl of the air that is known. In addition, there are children almost life-sized, and even brides, with the trained dress, veil and

orange blossoms. But oh! the hapless fate of these earthen brides! They are soon beaten and smashed into atoms by the fun-loving crowd.

The holy figures are left in the chapel after the litanies are ended, and then, either in the *patio* or a room selected for the purpose, the fun of breaking the *piñate* begins. It is suspended from the ceiling, and each person desiring to take part is, in turn, blindfolded.



HIS STOCK IN TRADE OF GAY PIÑATES.

Armed with a long pole, he proceeds to strike the swinging *piñate*. Often a dozen people are blindfolded before the final crash comes, and the *dulces* go rattling over the floor. Then such racing and chasing!

The first *posada* that I attended was impromptu without the procession, litany, or Mary and Joseph; the *piñate* was a monkey, and my young Mexican friends insisted I should be the one to break it. Being duly blindfolded, and armed with a long pole, while the crowd

of Spanish-speaking people looked on, asserting that I could and would not fail in the effort, I set confidently about my task. But no sound came of broken crockery or falling *dulces*.

The rule was, that every one should have three trials. After the third stroke imagine my chagrin, when the handkerchief was removed, to see the monkey above my head, slowly descending, grinning and wriggling his tail. A wild and clamorous burst of laughter went up when I discovered the trick. They insisted that I should have another stroke at his monkeyship; so, acting on the rule, "If at first you don't succeed," blindfolded and pole in hand, I advanced, and, with one vigorous stroke, shivered it, amid shouts of laughter and rounds of applause. No *dulces* were ever so sweet to me!

A happy event for me was an invitation from General Palacio's household to attend the *posadas* in their house, affording me the opportunity of witnessing a distinctively national custom in all its true elegance.

Mary and Joseph were represented by two wax figures, placed upon a flower-wreathed, moss-embowered vehicle, made for the purpose, and propelled by an enthusiastic youth. The procession, consisting of the family and invited guests, formed on the corridor, which had been profusely decorated for the occasion. The *posada* began with the singing of a hymn, in which all participated with due solemnity. We marched around the corridor, with candles in our hands, preceded by the images, knocking at a door each time, but were always refused admittance by some one inside the rooms. At last we knocked at the chapel door, where we sang a petition, as if Mary and Joseph themselves were imploring admittance. Questions from within called forth the natural responses from the wayfarers without, who sang, "The night is cold and dark, and the woman who seeks a night's lodgings is the Queen of Heaven, having not where to lay her head."

The door at once opened, the weary pair entered, and the procession moved into the chapel singing a ringing anthem, which to me had the spirit of our ever-familiar "All hail the power." The litany

and prayers followed, after which we went down stairs to the theater, where the fun and merry-making began in earnest, leaving Mary and Joseph alone in the chapel.

Once seated in the theater, two of the gentlemen guests, dressed in the uniforms of *gens-d'armes*, presented themselves, bearing silver trays—one loaded with brilliant badges in the national colors, and the other with handsome finger rings, ornamented with settings of various stones. These badges and rings were passed to each guest with the most courtly grace by the pompous, sham *gens-d'armes*, who could ill conceal a smile on their sober faces. My ring was of seed-pearls and sapphires.

A long chit-chat followed, as we adorned ourselves with badges and compared rings. The ladies were seated in a circle, and the men passed around in groups, or singly, and all being acquainted, the liveliest sallies and repartee were heard on every side, and good humor and mirth to overflowing filled every heart.

At length a bell rings, the curtain rises, and an enchanting scene greets our wondering gaze: a vine-embowered stage covered with a wealth of tropical plants and flowers; mossy grottoes, sparkling fountains and mimic cascades, which seem a part of nature's own handiwork; ornaments of precious metals wrought in most elaborate patterns, gorgeously attired characters; all under the blaze of the dazzling lights, form a scene which might have been produced by the Genii of Aladdin's Lamp.

Two gentlemen in costumes of the time of Louis XIV., richly overlaid with gold and silver embroidery, were discovered. One was dressed in blue coat, with white knee-breeches, while the colors of the other were pink and cream color. Both wore flowing, curled wigs. They stood on opposite sides of a richly carved table, on which was a glittering display of magnificently wrought silver, comprising not only the plate of the Palacio family, but also the service presented by the Emperor of Austria. Two servants dressed as pages in satin suits, wigged and powdered, stood near the cavaliers, and with profound respect presented salvers loaded with fruits and flowers.

The tableau was broken by the cavaliers and pages passing down from the stage and serving each guest with *liqueurs* and wines in tiny glasses, and delicious sweets prepared in the household.

This *posada* sprang from the fertile brain of the General himself, and all the actors therein were members of the household and invited guests. He proved himself an adroit "stage manager," as few of the participants knew the extent of the varied and humorous programme.

Two young ladies of the household, dressed as nuns, then presented us with those curious and grotesque rag dolls—the invention of the natives—almost as large as real babies.

We had scarcely recovered from the effects produced on our risibles by the dolls, when the *gens-d'armes* entered bearing trays. On one, dainty little parcels were arranged, tied up most artistically in bright-colored silk handkerchiefs. The other contained lovely bouquets and *boutonnieres*, and cornucopias of what we supposed to be sugar plums, but on our opening them proved to be hair-pins! The silken bundles enveloped the homely peanut and *tojojotes*, the most insipid fruit in Mexico.

Thus did our genial host keep us constantly amused and entertained with his rapid and ingenious transitions from the grand and gorgeous to the mirth-provoking and ridiculous.

One of the elegant courtiers who figured upon the stage, came to me at this moment stating that in the *patio* there was another *posada* of a still more interesting nature, and he wanted me to witness it. We there found assembled a crowd of excited children with the servants of the household, in addition to those who came with the guests, all eagerly enjoying the sport of breaking the *pinate*, which was in the form and about the size of a five-year-old girl. This figure was clothed in a white dress of some diaphanous material decked with tinsel; long black hair, plaited and tied with ribbon, hung down her back. Suspended by wires she swung in mid-air, calmly unconscious of the severe castigation in store for her. I was politely invited to join in the drubbing, but all my efforts failed to demolish her. When

she finally became dismembered, I was presented with the legs to take off as souvenirs of the occasion.

On our return to the theatre we heard in the distance a peculiar music. As it approached, the unusual sounds were accounted for by the appearance of a band of forlornly dressed Aztecs with their ancient musical instruments, followed by a train of attendants of the same race. In the rear came a hand-wagon laden with boxes of *bonbons*, fruits and sweets. When this singular band entered the brilliantly illuminated theater, the contrast excited boundless merriment. Our host appeared at the door and was greeted with shouts, when he entered and made a humorous little speech. The Indians continued their car-splitting strains in stolid impassivity, apparently quite unconscious of the grandeur of their surroundings. To look on their emotionless and expressionless faces would extract a smile from an Egyptian mummy.

At this juncture General Palacio whispered in my ear that very soon he intended to give an entertainment *mas serio* (of a more dignified nature), in order that I might witness in his own house every form of social life known to the capital. The *Velada Literaria*, mentioned in the chapter on Mexican Literature, will give some idea of the elegance of this convivial reunion.

The scenes were interspersed with dancing, and now the witching strains of the *danza* again rose from the orchestra, and away went the gay señoritas and caballeros, responsive to its intoxicating measures.

This ended, again the curtain rose and our eyes were greeted by the representation of statuary by several of the gentlemen guests. Their superb physique, clad in stockinet, posed in the most graceful manner, imitated to perfection the sculptured forms of the Dying Gladiator, Brutus and the Conspirators, and many other classic and historical groups.

A señorita then entered, dressed in one of the prettiest costumes of the country, called *La china Poblana*.* Nothing could have

* Described in chapter on "The Common People."

been more striking and brilliant or more becoming to her dark, rich beauty. A bright crimson skirt, embroidered with white,



THE PRETTY "CHINA POBLANA."

reached partly to the waist, where it was supplemented by an upper portion of green. The bodice was simply a white chemise, exquisitely wrought, leaving neck and arms bare. Around her form was twined in graceful fashion a silken *rebozo*, combining in its gay stripes the national colors which marked the rest of her costume. Green slippers were on her dainty feet, and white silk stockings showed to where the petticoat began below the knee. She was a harmony in red, white, and green—a patriotic symphony.

She held one end of a long pole, while a friend, also in national costume, held the other. Dozens of pretty little baskets decked off with gay ribbons were suspended from the pole. Each guest was given one, nobody suspecting its contents, until a live chicken made its presence known by fluttering in its futile efforts to escape.

At that moment General Palacio appeared at the door, when the company greeted him with much applause, singing out, "Long live Riva, Riva Palacio!"

The next scene revealed to us a single carved column, surmounted by a richly ornate capital. It seemed singular, and we wondered what it meant after the splendid scenes we had just witnessed. Suddenly, as by magic, a swarm of mocking-birds emerged through the top of the column, each decorated with ribbons of the national colors, and fluttered through the hall.

Little shrieks of delight went up from the ladies, and all eagerly

pursued the frightened birds, making captures. Order being restored, we turned our eyes again to the stage to behold the mysterious column slowly opening, revealing to our astonished vision exquisite articles of vertu, bric-à-brac, curios, and magnificent ornaments of every description, all glittering against a crimson background. These were distributed as *regalos* to the guests.

The entertainment closed with a *grande finale*. Upon the stage were assembled in one heterogeneous but effective tableau, gentlemen of the court, nuns, *La bonita china Poblana*, pages, flowers, silver, grotto, and, in the background, our genial host. This was the prelude to a *recherché* collation in the *comedor grande*.

Dancing was kept up until sunrise, but those of us who reluctantly withdrew were gently reminded by our host that we were expected to carry home our chickens.

On that glorious Mexican, moonlit night, with all our bundles, *regalos*, and chickens squawking at every step, we must have looked like the remnant of a Mardi Gras procession, as our figures were thrown full length on the broad street in exaggerated silhouette.

Posadas on so grand a scale are given in comparatively few houses. But the litanies, wax figures and procession are generally a part of the programme, varying according to means or taste.

Every night for more than a month, and for a month longer, at regular intervals, in this hospitable mansion, entertainments of various kinds were given—grand balls, dinners, and brilliant theatricals. My invitations were as numerous as the entertainments, where, whenever possible, I found myself, ever at home, an honored guest.

In rural districts, where *posadas* are not given, one of the chief Christmas recreations is the *pastorela*. This signifies an idyl, and is used symbolically to represent the announcements of the birth of Christ to the shepherds. A little girl dressed in white, with wings attached to her shoulders, represents the angel, while the shepherds are furnished with crooks, with which they beat time to their chanting. The infant Jesus, represented by a doll, is rocked in a cradle or