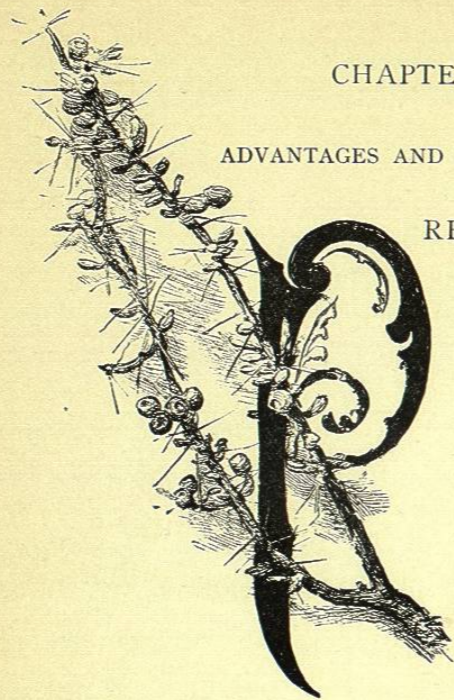


CHAPTER XX.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES.



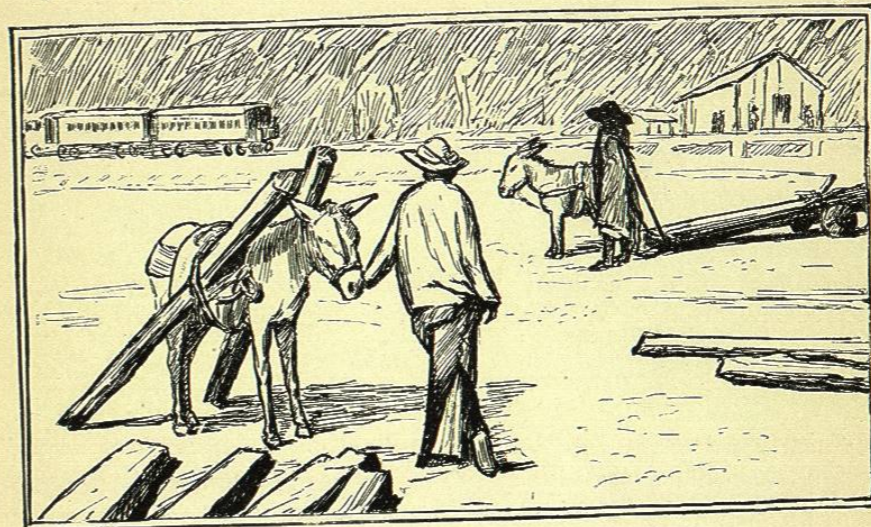
REVIOUS to the advent of rail-ways, and especially the completion of the Mexican Central, Mexico was a sealed book to the majority of Americans. To take up an abode there at that time, one was as securely bottled, corked and labeled for utter isolation from kindred and friends, as though banished to Kamtchatka or the South Sea Islands.

Without railways, telegraphs and their attendant blessings, Mexico was left to her own internal strife and commotion; the incentives to progress were wanting; while Texas, only across the river, possessing these advantages, has, in an incredibly short period, grown to be one of the foremost States in the Union, basking serenely in the sunlight of an unprecedented prosperity.

Considered geographically and topographically in the great federation of nations, the United States and Mexico should be on better terms, commercially and socially, than any other people. The one is situated mostly within the tropics—in the torrid zone; the other in the temperate; and together they produce all those commodities which are necessary to the comfort and convenience of their respective inhabitants. Their shores are girdled by the same vast water belt, and by nature they were intended to be the full complement of each other. Mexico can produce enough coffee of every grade to supply the world, to say nothing of her sugar, India-rubber, indigo, dye-woods, vanilla, as well as numerous other articles of prime export. She has also

a large and varied assortment of delicious fruits and an unlimited supply of the precious metals which regulate the commerce of nations.

But Mexico is not a manufacturing country, and, perhaps, will never be, while the United States has great need for a wider market for her manufactured goods, which Mexico can purchase of no other country to the same advantage. But as yet our trade is not one-tenth part of what it should be. Lamentable the fact, we have been the very last foreign power to place ourselves on a proper footing with our



THE OLD AND NEW CIVILIZATION.

near neighbors. A deep and subtle influence lies at the foundation. In the fullness of our well-earned greatness and self-esteem, we constitute ourselves teachers and judges of customs, business relations and social intercourse, under conditions far different from our own. We have made a high standard for ourselves, and if other people do not approximate it, they must be at fault.

But this failure to understand each other is due to several causes. In the first place, we have made no effort to understand them, and, again, unworthy representatives of our country do not hesitate to denounce, publicly upon the street, both the government and the people, and declare in boastful fashion the ability, if not the immediate inten-

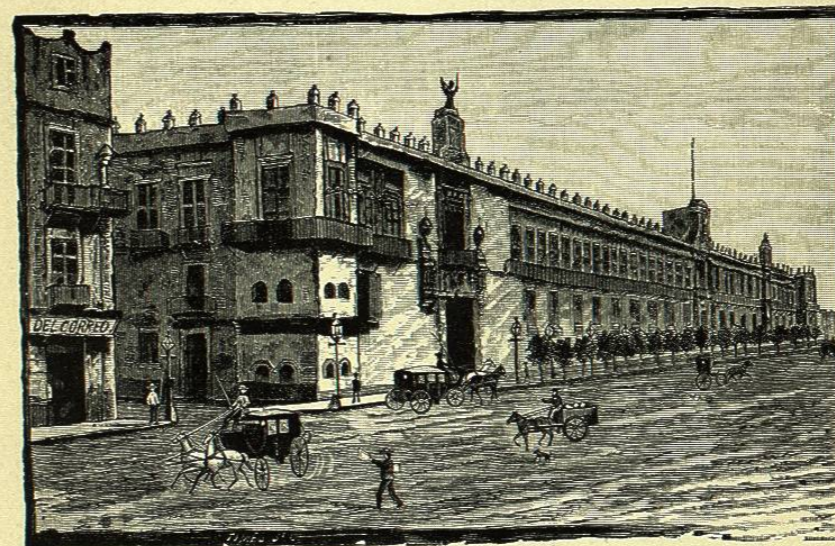
tion, of the American eagle to swoop down upon them and "wipe 'em out in sixty days." They talk unreservedly and offensively about the prospects of a speedy annexation; of a protectorate, and the gigantic scheme of absorption, all of which cannot fail to engender much ill-feeling and animosity. It recalls afresh to the sensitive Mexican mind the "North American invasion"—the loss of valuable territory, and the general distress that pervaded the country.

Then again we have been full of unjust doubts as to the integrity of our neighbors. The consequence has been that the keen discrimination of our friends across the water has long since gathered to themselves the friendly relations as well as the profitable emoluments of trade which legitimately belong to us.

To compete successfully with the diplomatic methods of the English, French and Germans requires tact and skillful manipulation. Of the many Americans who gaze from afar with longing eyes on the prospect for business investments, it is safe to say that not one in five thousand has the slightest idea of the nature of the difficulties to be met and overcome in order to realize these prospects. In endeavoring to establish business relations, it must be borne in mind that it is not with one race he has to do, but with various shades, mixtures and types; with sentiments and prejudices, diverse and in common, all to be met, pandered to, and softened into harmony.

The average American has the impression that, should he locate in Mexico, and exercise his accustomed force and energy, much sooner will he reach the acme of his hopes and the realization of his golden dreams. Delusive thought! It does not require much time to undeceive him. He finds that no push whatever is expected or required; in fact, the less he has the better, for he must learn to bend to the slow—very slow—methods of the Mexican; to accept the *dolce far niente* of the country. Business customs and habits confront him which yield but slowly to modern ideas, while the necessary schooling in the *mañana* system, and the still more difficult lesson that, Toots-like, time is of "no consequence," must chafe his restless spirit, and dampen his impassioned ardor.

It requires a discriminating eye and a suave, agreeable manner to obtain and hold the trade. So many things must be consulted and considered that in other countries have no relation whatever to business; but without which everything is tame and void of interest to the Mexican. It is necessary to study carefully the language, customs, habits and sentiments of the people; to familiarize one's self with the business methods, custom-house laws and the tariff. Usually in the haste to acquire a foothold, the smaller and more important



NATIONAL PALACE AT THE CAPITAL.

details are lost sight of, but it is only by observing them that success will follow.

The prejudice of Mexicans against Americans is not so strong as the enemies of American interests would have residents of the United States believe. The various concessions, granted Americans both in the past and present, by the State and Federal Governments of Mexico, are proofs of this fact. But a wider and more extended communication between the two countries—more travel through Mexico by Americans and *vice versa*—would conduce to a better understand-

ing. Let our people make an effort to know the "Mexicans in their Homes," and an open hospitality be tendered to them when they visit our country. No diplomacy could be so effective.

As an American woman I am justly proud of our institutions, of our prowess, strength and unity of purpose. We have indeed left behind us in our onward march of progress every other nation, and are pre-eminently the "heirs of all the ages." No country nor clime can compare with ours, and our representative men and women take rank and precedence wherever they come in contact with those of other countries. Perhaps it is the consciousness of our greatness that makes us less adaptable than others.

But our modern progressive institutions cannot thrust themselves unceremoniously and without caution upon a country whose civilization dates back more than two hundred years before our own. We must learn to "apply our hearts unto wisdom and pass into strange countries, for good things were created for the good from the beginning."

We must educate ourselves up to the point of believing that we can attribute the frailties and defects of any people as much to human nature as to national forces.

Whatever our differences of race, training and feeling, we can all do something for the happiness and well-being of those around us, and if other opportunities fail, there is always room for the bestowal of a helpful and sympathetic word.

But in no country do fame and friends come to us unless we have earned as well as desired them. Usually, like success, they come as the hard-bought recompense of persevering effort, and of patient waiting, and at last must rest with ourselves. We must carry into our common lives that grand and ennobling sentiment that unless we trust we will not be trusted.

In brief, if you go to Mexico, do not hope to effect radical changes, or constitute yourself judge and reformer, but rather be prepared, instead of teaching, to be taught. Go determined to see things in a just light, to make liberal allowances for whatever does

not coincide with your own habits and training, and accommodate yourself with becoming grace to what you will there meet.

The much-desired first step toward the establishment of a mutual understanding and an international interest was taken at the New Orleans Exposition of 1884-5, which marked a new era in the history of Mexico, and throughout succeeding time will be turned to, as a beneficent agency, having brought before the public mind in the United States the various resources, the taste, skill and ingenuity, as well as the musical talent and proficiency of the Mexican people.

Following closely upon this was the Mexican Editorial Excursion to the United States, when the men who wield the instrument "mightier than the sword," were feasted and toasted everywhere. Being thus enabled to see the representative American on his own soil, either with the *entourage* of high position in political and social life, or at home with his household gods about him, they each and all returned with a better feeling toward our people.

One of these editors, Señor Alberto Bianchi, has published a book with illustrations, descriptive of the journeyings and impressions of the excursionists. Since their return they have interested themselves largely, in their different sections, in the cause of public education, and some have established normal schools.

But the future greatness of Mexico depends more upon the development of her internal resources than upon the introduction of foreign manufactures; more, too, upon her agricultural and domestic industries than on mines, mining, or the now widely scattered factories and mills. An untold wealth lies dormant in her bosom, an uncomputed richness in her veins. The seemingly insignificant agencies which by cultivation have given impetus and strength to our own internal greatness, are to-day in their infancy in our sister republic.

With a population of ten millions, Mexico cannot, strictly speaking, be called a consuming country, for the reason that the majority of her people are the humble poor who live solely on home product; who neither know nor ask anything beyond *manta*, *tortilla*, *chili*, and *cigarette*. It is quite manifest, however, that trade with the United

States is yearly increasing. There is now a market for hardware of all kinds ; agricultural implements, axes, wagons, carriages, harnesses, pianos and organs ; also for prints, fine cottons, mill and mining tools and machinery, hosiery, flannels, woollens for ladies' and gentlemen's wear ; glassware, lamps and gas fixtures, furniture, leather, hats, trunks and valises, fire-arms, scientific and surgical instruments, etc.

England and Germany have heretofore controlled the trade in hardware and agricultural implements, while France has maintained the supremacy in fine fabrics. But the superiority of American machinery and manufactured goods has been recognized, and it is now evident that in these lines we are driving other competitors to the wall.

The fact is generally conceded that temporary traveling agents, unless already acquainted with the language, tastes and habits of the people, can effect no good. A permanent residence is necessary, whereby they are enabled to study the all-important details. Great care should be exercised, in the selection of these agents or commission merchants, that they be of a genial, conciliatory disposition, steady habits, and gentlemanly address, never in a hurry, and give attention to dress and personal appearance.

The enterprising North American commercial traveler, always in a hurry, rushes in upon a quiet Mexican business man, opens his grip, exhibits his samples, and fails to effect a sale. The reason is obvious: he has disgusted the merchant by his too eager and energetic manner. How different with Europeans! They have caught the spirit and habit of the Mexican to a nicety. Not alone in the outside world of business, but in the home life also, are they more in harmony with him. They have learned what we have yet to learn, to make haste slowly. The German or French agent will negotiate through diplomacy, and seek by social courtesy first to enter the good graces of the Mexican merchant. When they come in contact, both are probably well aware what the ultimate aim and object is, but of trade or business not a word is spoken. The agent inquires after the health of the merchant and his family. They smoke, chat of travels, and other

kindred topics. The pride of the Mexican is naturally gratified when he finds *one man at least* who knows how to take things slowly and pleasantly and without *brusquerie*. Perhaps half a dozen such interviews occur before a word is spoken about business, but the agent, beyond all doubt, has secured his victim.

The apostolic injunction to "let patience have her perfect work" must here be heeded in the business world no less than in the higher discipline of life.

Good faith in all transactions is a prime necessity ; therefore it is essential that goods supplied should be according to samples. Two intelligent Mexican merchants with whom I became acquainted, informed me that their own experience had been unsatisfactory in buying from traveling agents. Goods furnished not only did not correspond with samples in color or texture, but even the prices were different. They also said that in such matters other foreign sellers were careful to send exactly what was ordered, even if it required much time and labor. European importers cater to the popular taste, even to the packing and shipping of goods, making a reduction in bulk and weight by shipping in bales instead of boxes, giving long credit on all bills, and by every available means endeavor to save trouble to their customers. Calculations are also made that the native railroads, in the shape of *burros* or carts, may readily transport the goods to interior cities. Americans generally overlook these details, and ship their goods in heavy wooden boxes, in every way objectionable.

Besides, the fastidious taste of the Mexican as to color and texture is lost sight of ; they forget his whole nature is antagonistic to dull colors, coarse wool, and unseemly assortment. The French have caught the popular fancy in taste and delicacy. Light and airy fabrics with cunning devices, adding unique effects to the artistic arrangement, catch at once the Mexican eye.

Foreigners from the old country are content to make a very little headway at a time, and to utilize every facility they can command to the very best advantage. If they prosper in business, the young brothers and cousins at home are not forgotten, and as soon as cir-