

CHAPTER XVII.

Inns.—Shops.—Trades.—Dresses, &c.

A STRANGER, on his arrival in Mexico without an introduction, and with little knowledge of the language, will be unpleasantly situated, as the inns do not supply his table, and it is very difficult to procure private furnished lodgings. Apartments are to be hired unfurnished, but till they can be made ready, he must repair to the Gran Sociedad, or some such place, where an ordinary is kept; though even here they supply no beds nor furniture, and the guest must make a positive bargain for his room, and pay every day for whatever he has, or he will be grossly imposed upon. The influx of foreigners who are

likely now, however, to visit Mexico, will naturally produce an improvement in this respect. In the Sociedad are several billiard tables, dining and coffee rooms, ice and confectionary rooms, shops, &c.; which, in the evening, are crowded with company of every description, and greatly infested by importunate beggars, blind and crippled, of the most disgusting description, crawling and rolling on the floors of the apartments, or carried on each others' backs. I have never seen so many miserable objects in any other city, without even excepting Milan; and yet there are persons who say it is a rare thing to see a lame Indian!

The appearance of the shops in Mexico affords no indication of the wealth of the city. Nothing is exposed in the windows; all are open, in the same manner as in London till the sixteenth century; few have signs or even names in front; and

most trades are carried on in the shops in which the articles are sold.

Silversmiths' work is done here in the same tedious manner it used to be in England. All the ornaments are finished by hand; there are some good chasers, but in general the production is clumsy and very heavy.

I inquired about precious stones and pearls, but there were few good, and those much dearer than in Europe. Rubies appeared to me the only jewels worth importing from Mexico.

The manufactory of gold and silver lace, trimmings, epaulets, &c. is carried on in the greatest perfection, and the articles sold at a much lower rate than with us. It is usual with our naval officers, on their arrival at Vera Cruz, to lay in a stock of such requisites.

The tailors here make great profit, as

clothes are 300 per cent. dearer than in England, and are seldom well made. Cloth coats are only beginning to be generally used, but will very soon supersede the printed calico jacket, till lately universally worn. The workmen follow their employment seated on stools, and not with their feet under them as in Europe.

The first sight of a milliner's shop must always raise a smile on the face of a newly arrived foreigner. Twenty or thirty brawny fellows, of all complexions, with mustachios, are exposed to the street, employed in decorating the dresses, and sewing muslin gowns, in making flowers, and trimming caps and other articles of female attire; whilst perhaps at the next door a number of poor girls are on their knees on the floor, engaged in the laborious occupation of grinding chocolate, which is here always performed by hand.

Confectionary is in much demand in Mexico, and made in great variety, and at reasonable prices. The number of different kinds of dulces, or sweetmeats, exceeds five hundred, and yet they have few like ours. A good artist from this country would soon make a fortune; but it would never repay the speculation to send the manufactured article where the price of sugar is so low.

The druggist's and apothecary's trades must also be excellent ones; their prices are exorbitant.—I paid in Mexico a dollar per lb. for the article used in making the composition for preparing my birds, which in Europe is sold for four-pence, and yet the ingredients are the produce of the country. Hops sell here for two shillings and six-pence per ounce, and other drugs in proportion.

An apothecary's store generally occupies six times the space which a similar establishment does in England. I was

shown one at Puebla, belonging to an intelligent gentleman of the name of Cale, which engrossed the whole apartments of a very large house. Thousands of boxes, drawers, cases, bottles, and jars, were arranged in the greatest order, together with an extensive chemical apparatus. Among the drugs we observed many long exploded in Europe; such as parts of various serpents, numbers of living tortoises, &c. &c.

Barbers here seem to retain the importance which their calling formerly held in England;—their shops are numerous, and generally make a handsome show with the display of the utensils of their trade, mixed with pictures and prints, grinding stones, and burnished brass basins, resplendent as the helmet of Mambrino on the head of the knight of La Mancha. The price of shaving is 1000 per cent. dearer

than in England, and equals half a physician's fee.

Cabinet work is very inferior and expensive in Mexico: they have few of the tools employed in Europe, and mahogany, or a good substitute, is scarcely known. Most of the chairs in the best houses are made in the United States. It will be learnt with surprise, that in this country the saw (except a small hand-frame,) is still unknown: every plank, and the timber used in the erection of all the Spanish American cities, is hewn by Indians with light axes from the solid trees, which make each but one board. We are at a loss to conceive whence, considering this sad waste, the immense supply for Mexico can be derived. The construction of sawing-mills in the woods near Toluca would be productive of great profit.

In turnery, the mechanic sits on the

ground, and uses his feet as well as his hands in the operation of the lathe, which is of very simple construction.

Coachmakers excel all the other mechanical arts practised in Mexico; their vehicles are firmly put together, of handsome forms and well finished: the best painters of the country are employed in their decorations, and the gilding and varnish equal what is done in Europe, from whence the handles and ornamental parts in metal are procured.

Of coopers I saw none. The skins of hogs, blown up like bladders, being substituted for barrels, and sold through the streets by itinerant venders, whose light load, suspended on each end of a long pole, occupies as much space as a loaded cart.

Bakers' shops are large establishments, and nowhere can better bread be had than here; but I am informed that the people

who make it are absolutely slaves, are never permitted to leave the place in which they work, and are, to all intents and purposes, prisoners.

During the late revolution the people insisted that this degrading system should be abolished; it was so, and the city remained several days without the means of procuring wheaten bread, when the old arbitrary mode of preparing it was again resorted to.

Tortillos are soft cakes made of maize, or Indian corn; they constitute the principal food of the poor, and resemble our pikelets: they are wholesome, nutritious, and good, when eaten warm, I considered them a delicacy.

Shops for the sale of native and Spanish brandy, (aguardiente,) and other spirituous liquors, wines, &c. are too common; and by the gay display of their various-coloured poisons, in handsome decanters, present

such a temptation to the poor Indians, that few who possess a media can carry it home.

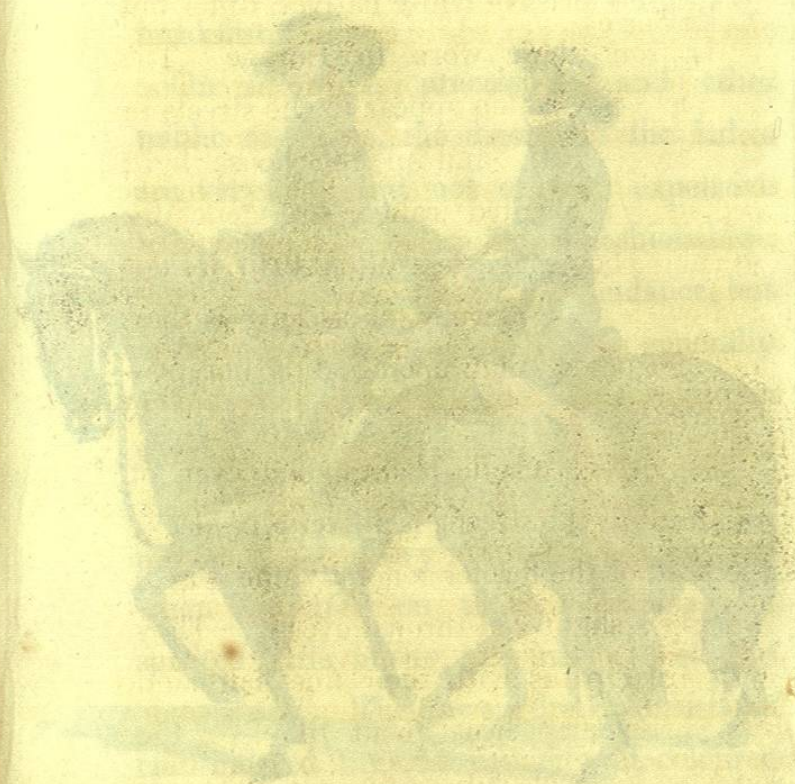
The water-carriers of Mexico are a numerous body, who bring this necessary article from the deposits of the aqueducts to private houses in large globular jars, poised on their backs, and supported by a strap from their heads, from which is suspended another smaller one, to serve as a counterpoise to the larger.

These men seem to have a great aversion to the article in which they deal, for at an early hour they may be seen in a pulquefied state, stretched on the bare ground in the fullness of enjoyment: few of them have any settled place of residence; but, like the Lazzaroni of Naples, sleep under the first place of shelter from rain that presents itself.

The costumes of the various classes of inhabitants of the city of Mexico vary con-

siderably. The dresses of the Spaniard, and higher class of white natives, differ but little from those worn in Europe. The men and boys often appear in the streets in the long cloak; and in the house light jackets, of printed calico, are generally worn. They shave less often than we do, and when on a journey, or as long as they are indisposed, that operation is not performed.

The dresses of the ladies, and even of children, in the streets, is universally black; the head of the former generally uncovered, or only a slight veil thrown over it. They take great pains with their fine hair, and are particularly neat about the feet, the stocking being usually of fine silk. This is their morning appearance, in which they are seen going to or returning from church, to the duties of which they are very attentive. No well regulated family omits





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J. Clark sculp.

MEXICAN GENTLEMEN.

hearing mass every morning, mostly before breakfast.

On holydays, processions, and other public occasions, the dresses of the ladies are very gay, but not of such expensive materials as those worn by our fashionables; artificial flowers are used in abundance, but ostrich feathers sparingly. It is generally in their carriages that the ladies appear in public, and very seldom on horseback.

The dress of the country gentlemen, or paysanos, is showy and expensive; and, when mounted on their handsome and spirited little horses, they make an elegant appearance. The lower dress consists of embroidered breeches, chiefly of coloured leather, open at the knees, and ornamented with numbers of round silver buttons, and broad silver lace; a worked shirt, with high collar; and a short jacket, of printed calico, over which is generally thrown an elegant

manga or cloak, of velvet, fine cloth, or fine figured cotton, the manufacture of the country;—these are often embroidered, or covered with a profusion of gold lace. On the feet are soft leather shoes or boots, over which is tied a kind of gaiter, peculiar to the country; they are commonly of cinnamon-coloured leather, wrapped round the leg, and tied with an ornamental garter: these are a very expensive article, the leather being cut in relieve in a variety of elegant patterns—which is done by the Indians, in the interior provinces, in a manner that it would be difficult to copy in Europe. They are sold from eight to forty or fifty dollars the pair, and at that price yield a poor remuneration to the makers. Yet they are an article of great consequence in the fitting-out of the Mexican beau, who often appears in this kind of boot, richly embroidered in gold and silver, which costs

upwards of one hundred dollars. The stirrups and spurs correspond, in magnificence and workmanship, with the boots. The hat is of various colours, large, and the crown very flat and low, bound with broad gold or silver lace, and with a large round band, and fringe of the same. They are elegant, and well calculated to guard the sun from the head and shoulders. The decorations of the horse are also expensive; the great Spanish saddle, with its broad flaps, is richly embroidered with silk, gold, and silver, and the high-raised front covered with the same metals. The stirrups are often of silver, while those of the lower classes are of wood. The bridle is small, with a very large and powerful bit, by means of which the riders suddenly stop their fine little horses when at full speed.

The dresses of the country ladies are

showy, but not elegant:—worked shifts, with a light open jacket, and a richly embroidered or spangled petticoat, of bright coloured soft cloth (often scarlet or pink), seem to be the unvarying costume.

The dresses of the poorer classes and Indians vary in the different provinces. The mixed descendants of the Spaniards, in the capital, and in Toluca, and other cities, have little more than a blanket, worn much in the fashion of the Roman toga; whilst the garb of the Indian men consists of a straw hat, close jacket with short sleeves, of different dark-coloured coarse woollen or leather, and a short pair of breeches, open at the knees, also of leather, sometimes of the skin of goats, or of the Peccary, with the hair side outwards. Under this are worn full calico trousers, reaching to the middle of the leg, with sandals of leather on the feet, much in the form of the ancient

Romans. The women appear in little more than a petticoat and short jacket, with their long raven-like tresses plaited on each side of the head with red tape. When seated on the ground for hours in the market-place, exposed to the sun, I have often seen them place a cabbage, or other large leaf, on their heads, to defend them from its influence. They are generally clean in their appearance, and orderly and modest in their behaviour. Indians are seldom seen on horseback, or walking, on the roads; their ordinary pace being a kind of trot, or short run, in which manner they proceed to the town, carrying heavy loads. In returning from the market they are not so expeditious, being sometimes a little pulquefied, and in high spirits; they are, however, always respectful and polite to strangers. While these are passing they stop, take off their hats, and salute them;

and are much pleased to be spoken to, or noticed.

The Indian huts vary much, according to the situation in which they are placed. Those in the warmer parts are a mere bird-cage, made of canes or sticks, and roofed with leaves. In the mountains, near the snow, as at las Vegas, they resemble the houses of Norway, and Alpine Switzerland, and are composed, like them, of solid logs of wood. Some are of split boards; many of unburnt brick, with flat roofs; and, near Mexico and Toluca, of stone. They have always a neat little garden attached to them. The villages, in favorable situations, are so enclosed and screened by the luxuriant foliage in which they are enveloped, that a stranger may pass without observing them. Their neat simple residences have often afforded me much pleasure:—their bed, a mat spread on the floor, or a net suspended

from the ceiling—a few earthen vessels and calabashes—with the stone for preparing their tortillos, or bread of Indian corn—form the bulk of their earthly goods. The rude figure or print of a Saint, and generally a few toys of earthenware, serve as ornaments, and constitute their finery;—yet I have never seen a people more happy or contented.