

or cloth beset with leather, are fastened with a bright silk girdle (*banda*), wound three or four times round the body; down the sides are many buttons, but they are closed only to the knees, so as to fall over the peculiar leggings, which are fastened under the knee, and consist of large pieces of pressed deerskin, twisted twice round the lower part of the thigh. The foot is protected by leathern half-boots, on which the large jingling spurs, whose sharp rowels are often two inches in diameter, are fastened with straps.

The horseman is never without his cloak, in rain or sunshine, be it the parti-coloured 'sarape', or the sober 'manga'. Both are pieces of woollen stuff, two fathoms long by one broad, furnished in the middle with an opening longways (this slit which is two feet in length, is usually trimmed with velvet, several inches broad, and bordered with gold and silver fringe), through which in rainy weather the head is thrust, the cloth thus covering the whole body. In good weather the cloak is merely flung over the shoulder; but without it no Mexican leaves home, on horseback or on foot; it is a mark of his dignity, the toga, which accompanies him to market and to church, and which is only laid aside at home, or when at work.

In the towns the younger Creole, belonging to the educated classes, is dressed in the European style. The desire to play the dandy is unmistakeable in the young people; whilst the old Creole, as well as the Spaniard, never quits his dwelling without his long dark cloth cloak (*caba*), even though the sun be in the zenith.

The Indian invariably retains his national dress, which is as simple as the whole mode of life of these children of nature. The man wears short, wide drawers of coarse cotton, or brown deerskin, which seldom reach to the knee, and a sort of frock of coarse woollen cloth, fastened round his hips with a belt. A little straw hat and sandals complete his dress, which is devoid of all ornament. The females wrap themselves in a piece of woollen stuff, that passes twice round the body, but is not closed with a seam; this is girded round the waist with a broad, coloured band, so that it forms a sort of gown, reaching to the unshod feet. The upper part of the body is covered with the 'huipile' a wide garment, closed on all sides, reaching to the knee, and furnished with two openings for the arms. The hair, tied up with a bright riband, is either wound about the head in a thick roll, or hangs down in two plaits. Large earrings and bead necklaces complete the toilette. The Indians distinguish their tribes by the colour and fashion of their simple clothing, like the Scotch Highlanders. Wearing shoes is considered by them a departure from the good old fashion.

So much for the outward appearance of the popular groups, as they present themselves at the first glance. The description of the life and manners of the separate classes of the population will afford these slight outlines colouring and shade.

## XI.

### THE CREOLES.

The word Creole (*criollo*) means in general "native", and is employed thus in Mexico; in a more limited sense, the meaning: native of white or European descent, is attached to it. We are about to make acquaintance with the Creoles in the latter signification.

The white Mexicans represent the intelligence of the country, and may therefore be regarded as the nobility and gentry. The Creoles constitute a seventh part of the population, about 1,200,000. In outward appearance they approach the Spaniards; and yet a peculiar type is unmistakeable. Men and women are seldom above the middle height, of slender growth, with dark hair, lively dark eyes, and little hands and feet. We find many faces of an oriental cast, with the curved nose and fine mouth. The complexion usually is not very fresh, especially in the warmer districts; in the colder parts, however, rosy cheeks, and even fair hair are not uncommon. Both sexes soon arrive at maturity; the young man is completely developed at seventeen, the girl at fourteen. The Creole is very animated; he learns with facility, is of active habits, a graceful dancer, a skilful horseman, but not very muscular, and unfit for a continuance of heavy labour. His speech is quick, and accompanied with most animated gestures. This, though a peculiarity of all southern nations, is specially cultivated by the Mexicans; and the northman, who hardly accompanies his speech with more than a slight movement of the hand, wonders at the thousand motions which as dumb show sometimes award more emphasis to what is said, sometimes serve as a commentary.

If, for instance, I desire to indicate the height of an object with my hand, for inanimate things I employ the horizontal position of the whole hand, for an animal, the upright position of the whole hand, for a human being, the raised forefinger. If I beckon some one to approach, I move the palm towards my body in a descending curve; the contrary motion, from the body, means: "Go away!" If I move the hand vertically downwards, the meaning is: "Stand still." The language of a people is not thoroughly understood, unless their looks and gestures are also comprehended; but it requires long practice to render one's self acquainted with this dumb show, especially if the parties are desirous that it should not be understood, as with the telegraphic communications of lovers, etc.

In general the Creole is passionate and easily moved; but he is able to govern his emotions. His warm blood often runs off with his head; anger, love, or jealousy drive him to inconsiderate actions; but he is soon restored to his usual equanimity. Treachery is foreign to him; he seeks not to revenge himself by hired bandits, as in Italy or Portugal. Though we are informed by many tourists, that when offended

he sheathes his knife in the breast of his opponent, and though this frequently happens in the lower classes, it is never the result of deliberation, but an act of extreme passion, and commonly a sort of duel with short weapons. With the Creoles it rarely occurs, but more with the Mestizos, and I shall again have occasion to refer to it.

The Creole, even though uneducated, has a degree of natural refinement, a certain politeness and ease; he is ambitious and vain, and if the basis of sound instruction is wanting, which by the way is not very often found, he is presently discovered to be superficial. Vanity often leads him to esteem his own value too highly, not only personally, but also nationally. The war with North America has in this respect afforded him severe lessons, and convinced him that blustering speeches cannot make head against bold attacks.

Thoughtlessness and love of enjoyment characterize southern nations, and the Mexican Creole is no exception. True, he is exceedingly moderate in the use of spirituous liquors, drunkards being rare exceptions, neither does he practise gastronomy to the same extent as the northman, but he is fond of sweetmeats and confectionery. He is above all passionately attached to every kind of festive amusement, is a great admirer of the fair sex, and addicted to gaming. The love of gaming is common to all classes, the Indians excepted, and is the bane of whole families. Gaming-houses are found in towns and villages, where 'monte', a sort of faro, is played, and in which every one takes part. No laws, no police regulations have as yet succeeded in extirpating these hells, there being too many who do all in their power to promote them. On every festive occasion gaming renders itself prominent: at cock-fights and horse-races it is practised, even in the billiard-rooms and coffee-houses betting is constantly observed. Passionately devoted as the Mexican is to gaming, he bears his losses with stoical indifference. He loses large sums, his watch, his clothes; does not, however, shoot himself on that account, but hopes to win back his property the next evening. The ruin of countless individuals is the inevitable consequence of this wretched passion: it not only undermines the prosperity, but also the morality of families. Whilst the husband passes his nights at the green table, seduction enters his house; and with his property, peace of mind and domestic happiness vanish.

By no means do I venture to affirm that there are no exceptions to this vice; some of the men avoid play altogether, many take part in it occasionally only, and then with moderation; these, however, are the minority of the nation. Remarkable changes of fortune, are consequently more frequent than in other countries. Families dating from the old Spanish aristocracy, who, a quarter of a century ago, were still in possession of colossal fortunes, are completely ruined by gaming; the posterity of the Counts of Regla, Valle, and others are beggars, whilst their splendid estates are in the possession of young upstarts, who prefer mercantile speculations to the mad ventures of the green table.

The Creoles are not merely gamblers; but are passionately devoted to the sex. The dwellers in southern climates are unacquainted with the sentimental love of the northmen; he terms it poetical enthusiasm, and laughs at it. No difficulties, no barriers are insurmountable to him. If the electric spark ignites, and his passion is returned, opportunity will soon be found. Boldness, cunning and bribery must all be employed, and the endeavours are seldom fruitless. In England and Germany, public morality, and a general feeling of propriety serve in a great measure as the guardians of wives and daughters; in Mexico, however, the females are sadly in want of a good moral education, and are limited to the catechism, which is learnt, but not felt. The admonitions of mothers are for the most part preached to deaf ears, as example effects more than precept, and passion more than laws. The morality of the women is everywhere regulated by that of the men. No mother considers her daughter secure unless she be under her own eye; she never goes to church, or in company without her, and should it occasionally be requisite to devolve this care upon a relation, or a trusty servant, it is always done with repugnance; and quite naturally, for the mother knows well enough how, in her youth, she eluded the vigilance of her Argus.

These hints are, of course, to be taken in a very wide sense; intrigue does not enter every family; it is more frequent in the luxurious capital than in the country. Taken altogether the morals are more lax even than in Spain, and yet less corrupt than in the large cities of Europe.

The Creoles constitute the chief part of the population of the cities; they are government officials, physicians, lawyers, merchants, manufacturers, mining-proprietors, and artificers. The great landed proprietors, the country traders, and the higher orders of the clergy, also belong to this class.

They are not distinguished by any national costume, but usually wear the European dress, as prescribed by the mighty decrees of Parisian tailors and dress-makers. In the country, only, the round jacket is still used in the house, over which, when in the open air, and especially when they go to church, the Spanish cloth cloak, trimmed with lace, is thrown. The short jacket is also worn on horse-back. Poor and rich are much given to fine and clean linen. In their toilettes, the ladies are guided more by the Paris 'Journal des Modes' than the men. The newest patterns in silk, woollen and cotton-stuffs are seen sooner in Mexico than in Russia; and the daughter of the official in the distant mountain village, decks herself with the showy productions of Lyons and Manchester, with the embroidery of St. Gall, and jewellery of Paris, just the same as the idlers at Baden-Baden. The female Creole, however, adheres to her morning-dress for the church, which is always black, with the graceful mantilla, trimmed with broad lace, attached to the back of the head and falling below the shoulders. In the country-towns and villages they go also in coloured dresses to church, but the silk mantilla is invariably thrown over the head. In the country, too, the uncomfortable restraint of stays is less usual than in the large towns. Silk stockings and light silk shoes protect

the little foot; the hand is provided with a fan, which is constantly in motion, and often serves to telegraph an interesting message across the street.

The wealthy Creole is a friend to luxury, he has showy equipages, beautiful saddle-horses, numerous servants, but no comfort in his house. In order to give an idea of the mode of living, I must describe the house itself. The plan of the house is as in ancient Rome, which the Spaniards have transplanted across the ocean, and which is adapted to the climate. From the street we enter through a great gate, beneath the archway of which is the porter's lodge, or the counting-house of the proprietor. We then arrive at a square yard, surrounded on all sides by a piazza; in the middle is usually a fountain, with flower-vases. The wide balustrade of the piazza is also mostly adorned with flowers. The doors of every room open on this fore-court. The chief apartment, the saloon, looks on the street, and is met with even in the villages, decorated with the best furniture, a looking-glass, corner-tables with flower-vases, the picture of a saint in a silver niche, or something else of the sort. One end of the saloon, the wall here having neither door nor window, is the seat of the ladies (*estrado*); it is frequently raised some inches, laid with carpets or mats, and furnished with low sofas. Numerous chairs are placed against the other walls. The saloon communicates either directly or through the corridor (*piazza*) with the other rooms, *viz.*, the bed-rooms (*recameras*), the dining-room, the kitchen etc. Opposite the entrance, a smaller gate usually conducts into the second yard, which is surrounded by the stable, coach-house, apartments for the men-servants etc. One-storied houses are mostly arranged in this manner; in large towns, the houses are generally two-storied, and frequently there is an '*entresol*'. In this case the ground-floor is for warehouses, shops, or servants' rooms, whilst the family dwell in the first floor; the colonnade, however, is met with in the different stories, and the disposition of the apartments is in a great measure the same.

The ladies would perhaps like to take a peep behind the curtains; but I scarcely know if I may indulge them thus far without being deemed indiscreet. The thing must be duly considered, for the room is perhaps not yet in order, the bed not made etc., and ladies are apt to criticise their own sex very severely. A passing glance, nevertheless, may be permitted; but not too early in the morning, as the Mexican ladies are no friends to rising betimes. We will proceed to the house of a man, who has a tolerable income; there are many better, but also many worse; and therefore I make choice of one of a middling description. The floor of the whole house is paved with flags, carefully cemented. In the saloon and some of the rooms, the flags are painted so as to resemble mosaic. The walls are unpapered, plastered, and painted with arabesques; the ceiling is the same. The master's study or office, on the right, under the gateway, has a sufficiently smoky appearance, is full of bundles of deeds or acts (I believe he is a lawyer), whilst several clerks, with very subaltern faces, and important office-frowns, scribble away for their lives. The furniture is extremely simple, of course; but the adjoining cabinet,

where the licentiate (here called Doctor, the usual title of a lawyer) himself works, has a handsome writing-table, a glass-case with books, and a few arm-chairs.

Let us enter the colonnade to the left; the folding-doors of the saloon are open, nobody is within, so we can just look round. The seat of honour is laid with fine mats, over which is a carpet, about four feet wide, before the sofa, which extends right across the upper end of the oblong apartment. Corner tables of japanned pine-wood are adorned with flower-vases, behind which we have here a '*mater dolorosa*'; there an infant Christ in glazed niches. A modern sofa stands opposite the '*estrado*'; several tables, and a few dozen chairs occupy the other walls. The windows reach to the ground, but are protected from without by iron bars, bent outwards, so that we can look on the street without inconvenience.

In an adjoining boudoir is some embroidery, a prayer-book, and one of Eugène Sue's romances; a silver brazier with burning coals, and a bundle of paper cigars near it, indicate that the lady of the house is fond of smoking her '*cigarrito*'. A half-opened door affords us a sight of the interior of a sleeping-apartment; a large bed stands against the wall, the head and foot of the bedstead are rounded off, and exhibits in oval panels, Adam und Eve, and the Landing of Noah's Ark, painted in oil. It seems to be an inviting place of repose, with a woollen damask counterpane, and pillows of embroidered muslin. A somewhat stout señora sits on the bed on a fringed tiger-skin, in the Turkish fashion (with her legs doubled up under her), enjoying a cup of chocolate, whilst a maid is seated before her on the ground, holding a silver plate, with a glass of water on it. The good lady has a cloth thrown over her head and shoulders; but the curious will not fail to remark that she wears no cap (invariably the case with the Creole ladies), but that her hair hangs down her back. Her morning-gown too is not plaited, but hangs about her much like a sack.

Merry peals of laughter in the next room lead us to the presumption that the young people are there. Sure enough they are the daughters, but strange to say, not one has her dress closed; one has her arms out of the sleeves even, which are tied round her waist, like a sash. Their plaited hair hangs down their backs, the feet are encased in silk slippers, but the stockings are wanting. Of what use would they be in so mild a climate? The blue and white cotton wrappers are worn; but they conceal little. The young people gaily smoke their cigars, whilst one of them is seated on a mat on the ground, having her long glossy hair combed by the maid. The room is not over tidy; the stockings lie about on the ground, on the bed are silk dresses, which are evidently for attending mass, on the chairs are crapes, and other articles of dress. There is no chest of drawers visible, but several boxes, standing against the wall on wooden tressles, replace the numerous cupboards etc., which in luxurious Europe are deemed indispensable in a lady's boudoir. The dressing-table is not well supplied with brushes, soaps, essences etc., but with a complete assortment of rings, earrings, bracelets, brooches, chains, and pins.