

Let us listen to the girls a bit, and hear what they are talking about. "Oh! if you only knew, Doña Jesusita", whispers the maid, "what the handsome young gentleman with the black beard said to me to-day, when I fetched cigars for your mama; oh! he's quite distracted with love for you." — "Name him not, Felipa; he is faithless and ungrateful! Does he suppose the enamoured glances he cast at Carmelita escaped me, or how their eyes met?" — "A mere accident, miss; I swear he has eyes for you alone." — "Be silent, I say! You must not listen to him again in the street; do you hear? He must feel that I am angry with him. But what had he to say to you?" — "What! Lord help me! if I could only say it as beautifully as he said it, that he should never be happy, unless the saint he adored would listen to him, that he" — A noise in the corridor interrupts the confession; visitors have come, a lady with her daughter, intimate friends it seems; for they look first in the saloon, and finding it empty, go straight to the room of the lady of the house. Here the customary salutations are exchanged: "Good morning Doña Fulgenica, how have you passed the night? well? how glad I am. And you Doña Manuela? how have you slept? badly! I'm sorry for that; but you should have rested longer. You certainly come from church already." — "Oh! no we're on our way there. And your children, how are they?" — "All well! But sit down; would you not rather go into the saloon? Girls, do you hear, come directly, friends are here. Now, do take a seat, and let us smoke a cigar. Alas! I can offer you nothing good: since my Havannahs are gone, I can't find a cigar to my taste."

The daughters now make their appearance, with the shawl thrown over their heads and shoulders. The mode of salutation is an embrace; kissing is not in fashion, as in Europe, where it is often excessively annoying.

All sit down; the cigars which are held with small gold nippers, so as not to stain the fingers, send forth their little clouds, the conversation treats of the health, the church, the theatre, and dress; here there is a difference between the old and new world, for whilst in the latter they talk incessantly about the ball, in the former they exhaust themselves with complaints about the servants.

We will leave them thus occupied, and meanwhile glance at the domestic department. The laundress's room is open, there is linen on the table ready for ironing the irons are being heated on large earthen chafing-dishes; but the motive power has just gone into the kitchen to smoke a cigar in company. There are the cook, two house-maids, the errand-girl, and the footman, pleasantly chatting and finding fault with their employers. A glass of sherry circulates, affording the party a slight morning restorative. It seems to issue from the bottle which the footman has just brought from his master's room to lock up in the pantry. They are joined by the water-carrier, a friend of the house, who has just brought the water for drinking, and is now taking breath. The man knows much, for he conveys water to houses of distinction, and hears at the fountain all the news of the town. Unfortunately it strikes twelve, and the visitors must attend the last mass; the kitchen-meeting si

therefore adjourned, and we may as well take the opportunity of making our escape at the same time.

It is a duty I owe to the ladies, to add a few words about the housekeeping of the Creoles. I have already remarked, that they are not very early risers. About 8 o'clock a small cup of chocolate with sweet bread is taken. The family do not assemble for this refreshment, but each person receives it in his bedroom. At 10 o'clock there is a hot breakfast of roast or stewed meat, eggs, and with all classes the never-failing dish of beans (frijoles), which are first boiled soft, and then fried with fat and onions. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon dinner is served, which has certain unvarying dishes. First a cup of clear broth, then 'sopa', of rice, paste, or some kind of bread-fruit, cooked in broth, till the fluid has completely evaporated, and highly seasoned with tomatas. The 'olla' is the third dish, and is met with on every table. It consists of beef, mutton, a little pork, ham, fowl, small sausages, cabbage, French beans, parsneps, turnips, pear, banana, onions, celery, a little coriander and parsley, all cooked together. The vegetables are placed on the table apart from the meat, and each person helps himself according to his taste. The 'olla' is followed by some 'principios', mostly ragouts with strong-flavoured broth of meat or fish; then comes a sweet dish, and finally some dried sweetmeats. Wine is rarely drunk at table: but the sweetmeats are succeeded by a large glass of water.

Most Creoles allow themselves a siesta after dinner. At 6 o'clock chocolate is drunk, or in hot weather, ice or fruit-jelly with water; a little walk, a ride or a drive is taken afterwards, and it is then time for the theatre and the 'tertullas'. The latter are the evening parties of the ladies, gentlemen being also frequently present. The guests sit round the saloon, which is wretchedly illuminated with two tallow candles. Here they smoke and chat. Sometimes there is music, or even a dance; refreshments are rarely offered, unless it be perhaps a few sweetmeats and water.

Supper is usually taken about 10 o'clock, consisting of roast meat, salad, beans, and a sweet dish. Immediately after supper, the family go to bed.

Invitations to dinner are seldom; if strange gentlemen only are invited, the ladies are frequently not present. The Mexican is hospitable, and it is a point of honour to entertain the guests well. The number of guests at country festivities, which are not unlike the feasts of the Homeric heroes, is often very great.

Domestic life is very different from that of the Germanic races. The life led by the ladies in their boudoirs savours somewhat of the Oriental; they work beautifully with the needle, weave and embroider, play and sing; the intellectual element, however, is wanting, the understanding and the heart are uncultivated, and sensuality therefore easily obtains the upper hand. The mistress of the house has few cares; no supply of provisions is laid up for the winter, and the washing is done every week. No provisions being stored up, the servants are not led into temptation, and the mistress has not the labour of measuring out the supply from day to day. The requisites for each meal are purchased in the booths (tiendas) by the cook or her satellites, just as they are wanted, for instance: meat, suet, spices, bread, etc.; the

vegetables are bought at the market every morning; and the coals are brought daily to the house by the coal-merchant, for everything is cooked at coal-fires.

The ladies have thus fewer household labours, and many of the present generation devote the time to improving themselves by reading. In company they are amiable and animated, and whatever European ladies may have to object to, it is certain that the gentlemen who are masters of their beautiful language, will invariably find their society attractive, and praise their charms.

It would be wrong to conclude these cursory glances at the life of the Creoles, without alluding to a prominent feature, which does them much honour. This is the respect paid by the children to their parents. The sons remain under parental authority, until they have established a family of their own, and even among the labouring classes, the son deposits his earnings in his father's hands, or at least makes no disposal of it, without his consent. A child never outrages his parents, or treats them with indifference; and this praiseworthy custom has been adopted even by the Mestins, being as strictly observed in the cottage as in the palace. From their tenderest youth upwards, the children when called by their parents, never ask: "What?" or, "What do you want?" but always: "What are your commands, Sir, or Madam?" When they speak of their absent parents, they employ either the confidential: "my papa, my mama!" or they say "Señor padre, Señora madre", or even "Su Merced" (his honour). The son never permits himself to smoke tobacco in the presence of his father, not even when full-grown, or married. The mother, who always sits at home with her daughters, is more indulgent in this respect, perhaps even encourages them to smoke: but in presence of their father, they never venture it. The son takes off his hat, when his father speaks with him; if seated, he rises on either of his parents entering the room, and offers his chair; he avoids turning his back to them, and does not even pass in front of them, if it be possible to pass any other way, and when compelled to do so, he invariably says: "Pardon me!" or, "With your permission."

In Mexico there are no orphan-asylums, but the orphans are nevertheless provided for. At the christening, the god-parents undertake to care for the child, if it should have the misfortune to lose its parents. This is not an empty form as in Europe, but is literally observed. It is not necessary for the authorities to interfere in the matter; even the poor man fetches his orphan god-child, as soon as he learns the death of the parents, and brings him up as a member of his own family. If the god-parents are also dead, there is invariably a dispute between several families, as to who is to receive the child. Often have I heard poor people say: "I bring up a dog, or some other animal; should I not rather undertake the care of a fellow-creature?"

This compassionate feature extends also to the suffering and indigent. In the war with North America, I saw persons tend and conceal their wounded enemies, incurring thereby great risk, and subsequently convey them back to their countrymen.

The Mexican is kind and indulgent towards his servants, and looks upon them as part of his family. Consequently one finds in many families old domestics whose counsels are gladly listened to. The nurses, as in the case of the ancients, often have the care of several generations, and the porter relates to the grandchild what horses he has led up for the grandfather.

As the Spanish language has been retained by the Creoles, so also many customs of the mother-country remain among them.

In the course of three centuries, this has been developed in a manner peculiar to the climate and soil, and the character of the Creole is no longer that of the Spaniard. A fertile country, producing abundance almost unasked, a clear sky, a mild climate, where the hardships of winter are unknown, have spoiled the Creole; and rendered him more indolent and thoughtless than his transmarine relations; but he has retained the liveliness, the excitability, and the romantic sentiments of the latter. The Spaniard is essentially conservative, the Mexican Creole is for progress; he is liberal and tolerant even in religious matters, whilst the Spaniard never quits the established forms in church and state. The Spaniard labours perseveringly, seeks also to profit in detail, and saves what he has earned for old age; the Mexican earns with facility, but just as easily lets it slip through his fingers; he seeks to enjoy the fleeting moment, and leaves Providence to care for the future.

I could easily continue these parallels, but an allusion to them is sufficient. Separate pictures of popular life will best complete the universal lineaments, and animate them with light and colour.