

## XII.

## THE ABORIGINES (INDIANS).

In order to be consistent I ought to proceed with the former chapter describe the life of the Creoles in town and country, delineate groups at church and at the theatre, at the ball, and at the Chambers: but a picture of the checkered life of the people never presents us with Creoles alone, the coloured people\*) being never absent. I must therefore first describe the component parts of the people separately. The Indian claims attention before the others; he is the original lord of the soil, of the purest full-blood, original in appearance, life and manners.

The aborigines of America, from Canada to the mountains of Araucania, have fundamentally the same type of features, greatly modified of course by position and climate, mode of life, and peculiar customs. The aborigines of Mexico, too, though divided into many races, separated by totally different languages, exhibit at the first glance the peculiarities of a race.

The colour is reddish-brown, the skin smooth and soft, consequent upon the cellular tissue being thicker, and preventing the marked development of the muscles, or the appearance of the veins. Red cheeks are occasionally met with in the young females. The hair is coal-black, thick and sleek, the forehead low and not prominent, the back of the head large, and seemingly pressed upwards. The face is a pleasing oval, the cheek-bones are somewhat broad, the eyes large and dark, and, as in the Caucasian race, are placed horizontally (not slanting as with the Mongols). The white of the eye is yellowish, and affords a singularly wild expression, especially when inflamed with passion. The nose is slightly bent, broad at the lower part, the mouth usually large, with thick lips, but not pouting as with the African race. Two rows of dazzling white teeth are an enviable addition to the Indian physiognomy.

The chin is round and full; the man having but little beard, which is only now and then seen on the upper lip. The neck is short, the nape broad and strong, the chest prominent. Unlike the Caucasian race, the breast of the woman is not spherical, but parabolical, almost conical. The hips are strong, the leg muscular and firm, more so than the arm; the hands and feet are small, in females usually round and graceful. The appearance of the men is sturdy, and they are seldom above the middle height; the women are short and fat.

\*) Coloured people, 'gente de color,' in America, are all who are not white, consequently black, brown and mixed.

One often hears, that the children of the Indians are born white, and become brown in the course of time; this is incorrect. The infants are certainly lighter than their parents, but not white; they have a yellowish tinge; only the palms of the hands, and the soles of the feet are white, and remain so all their lives. Many handsome children are seen with large animated eyes, and long eyelashes; but they do not long remain thus, the features becoming hard and dull. The Indian has mostly a peculiar sorrowful appearance, a melancholy expression about the corners of the mouth; at least so it appears to us. But he is not so in reality. I never saw a gayer people than these Indians among themselves; they chat and jest till late in the night, amuse each other with jokes and puns, play tricks and laugh. Towards the Creoles and Mestins indeed they are cold and reserved, they have no confidence in them, nor do they understand the language sufficiently to express themselves fluently; for amongst themselves they invariably employ the Indian tongue. I shall afterwards refer to the character of the Indian; for the present I only intend describing his exterior. In the whole corporeal 'habitus,' a finer nervous organisation is less evident than a predominant development of vegetative life.

The child is born with a thick head of hair, and even in extreme old age the scalp does not become bald; the hair, too, very seldom turns grey. The teeth remain sound to the last; and I have often seen skulls that had lain several decenniums in the earth, in perfect preservation, and with all the teeth. The skin of the Indian appears to be less sensitive of heat and cold; external injuries, even deep flesh-wounds, heal with incredible celerity, and without any wound-fever. This remark is not founded on superficial observation, as I have seen many cases of the kind, and have heard the opinion of physicians of acknowledged experience, who have made numerous observations on the spot. With my own eyes I saw an Indian's skull fractured in a quarrel, so that he lay without sense; constant vomiting seemed to indicate a concussion of the brain; and although his comrades applied their customary remedy, washing with brandy, he recovered. A severe sabre-cut in the head, which cleft the bone, so that the brain was visible, several stabs through the lungs, with an inward discharge of blood, a cut through which half of the spleen protruded, which, as it could not be restored to its proper place, was cut off, and many other dangerous wounds healed rapidly without any wound-fever. The most dreadful injuries of the extremities, such as crushing the fingers and hands in the sugar-mills, never produce lock-jaw in the Indian; he suffers the mutilated part to be amputated with as much indifference as though he felt no pain, and the wounds usually heal in a short time. If this exhibit an inferior degree of sensibility, it becomes still more evident in the effect produced by immoderate potations of brandy. The Indian never has delirium tremens, and yet many of them are habitual drinkers; one may even say that they are intoxicated half their lives; whilst drunkards of Caucasian race are in a short time irrecoverably lost by the poison of the alcohol. With nervous fevers, however, it is the reverse: the Indian succumbs to this more readily than the white; he neither rages nor becomes delirious, but all energy is wanting, and in a few days he expires of exhaustion.

The physician will know what weight is to be attached to these intimations, which I am only imperfectly able to judge of. An impartial consideration and observation of the Indians during many years forced me to the conclusion: that, according to their bodily organization, they are incapable of so high a degree of intellectual development as the Caucasian race. Not that they are deficient in keenness of perception, in distinctness of apprehension, or faculty of combination: but they want the broad and lofty forehead, they are devoid of that ideality which is the inheritance of a higher nervous development, of that subtle element which in Asia and Europe for thousands of years have put forth the finest blossoms of human cultivation. What has the American race done, under the most favourable circumstances of soil and climate in their vast continent? In the north and south, from time immemorial, hunting-tribes wandered hither and thither, like the beasts of prey, through the prairies and forests, opposed to all civilisation, mutually destroying each other, confined to a most narrow circle of the simplest religious ideas, their knowledge of art limited to producing the most indispensable weapons or utensils. On either side of the equator, in Peru and Mexico, where a higher degree of civilisation was developed, where the wandering tribes were rendered stationary by agriculture, and social union had procured a footing for intellectual cultivation: even there the culminating point of civilisation never attained to the practice of humanity. The religious systems of the Incas and Aztecs, their knowledge of astronomy, works of art, and mechanical labours for the purposes of every-day life, are the result of their powers of understanding, of the undeniable imitative talents of the whole race, of their aptitude and artistic skill; but the loftier ideal genius, the speculating Pallas Athene of the Greeks, and the beautifying Charis are wanting.

As yet we know not whether influences from the east may not have sown the first seeds of civilisation. Do not the two children of the sun of the Incas, does not the white man of the Mexicans, Quetzalcoatl, indicate the early influence of the Caucasian race? To the west lay the Hvitramannaland (the white man's land), which was known to the Icelanders as early as the tenth century; who can say how the threads of the civilisation of the east are attached to those of the west?

I shall leave it to others to solve this problem; and continue to speak of the Indians as they are now, as they have appeared to me in every-day life. Willingly do I acknowledge their aptitude in learning, and even the children exhibit much handiness, and practical sense. Intellectual creation is not the distinguishing feature of their race; they have little imagination, but diligence and perseverance. The educated Indians, and there are many who devote themselves to jurisprudence and theology, learn their respective sciences, but never get beyond their compendium. We find in them the talent of imitation and comparison, perhaps humour and wit, but no poetry.

The character of the tribes that I had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with, is in general not frank and open, but close, distrustful, and calculating. The Indian does not merely erect this bulwark against the members of another tribe or against



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the posterity of his oppressors, which would be natural enough; but also against his own people. It lies in his language, his manners, and his history. Thus the salutations of the Indians among themselves, especially of the women, are a long rigmarole of wishes and enquiries after health, which are repeated monotonously and unsympathisingly on both sides, often without looking at each other, or even stopping. The Indian who is desirous of obtaining something of another, never asks for it directly, or without beating about; first he makes a small present, praises this or that, and at last brings forth his wish. If an Indian has a request to make of the judge or burgomaster of his village, who, like himself, is an Indian, and perhaps a relation, even though perfectly justified in making his demand, he first sends an intimate friend with a bottle of brandy or a fat hen (this is called sending the nose-gay), in order to ensure the request a good reception. Deputations often came to me from Indian villages, to ask my advice about their local affairs; they always consisted of ten or twelve persons, fearing that one deputy would seek to profit by the matter in some way. The whole train then came into my room, one after the other, a grand dignitary or speaker at the head, each with a present in his hand. The leader commenced complimenting me with many bows, saying: "Good day, father, how are you? how is our mother, your lady, and the children. See, we come to bring you a trifle, it is little, for we are poor; but you must take the will for the deed." Now the whole troop approach with fowls, eggs, and divers fruits. It is useless to refuse: "You know my sons, I can't suffer this! If I can be of use to you, I serve you with pleasure. Keep your gifts, and say what you desire." — "Nay, father, we will not speak if you reject these trifles, etc." This ceremony being over, and the right honourable embassy invited to sit, the elders of the community squat on the floor in a semicircle, though there is no lack of chairs; only the spokesman stands erect, and in a carefully digested speech gives utterance to his wishes, the suite gravely nodding their heads from time to time, as if to lay more stress on the words. In their negotiations they are true diplomatists, and are fond of speaking ambiguously, in order to be able subsequently to interpret to their own advantage. In transactions with them, one must be careful to have all the conditions precisely specified.

If after a transaction of the kind, you offer them a glass of rum, every face beams, and significant glances are exchanged; they prefer drinking it outside the door, and he who returns with the empty glass certainly knows how to express his gratitude in such a way as to ensure a further supply of the nectar. If their character be displayed in matters of this kind, it becomes still more evident in numerous little features. The language itself abounds in ambiguous expressions, which they employ in order not to pronounce themselves too definitively. I have heard from priests, who spoke the Aztec tongue with great fluency, that they frequently were incapable of understanding the sense of a confession, as the penitent spoke in riddles and metaphors. An Indian can seldom prevail on himself to tell a stranger his name; and usually gives a false one, lest he should be compromised. He rarely

affords information respecting a third person, about whom he may be questioned; for example, if he has met him on the road; the customary answer is, that he has seen no one. In the commerce of life they are distrustful, and constantly fear being taken advantage of, because they are themselves inclined to cheat in a small way. Their little plantations are often in the midst of forests, or in concealed ravines, so as to have nothing to do with other people; they go thither by circuitous paths, that the track may not be found; and if a hunter chance to meet with the secluded settlement, they are highly displeased. It would fatigue the reader were I to continue describing these peculiarities; there are features in their character, reminding one of closely related hunting-tribes. We remark the prowling of the beast of prey in the obscure recesses of the forest, the restless eye, the keen perception, the crouching for the leap, but also the cowardice. Too much importance, however, must not be attached to this comparison, as it might easily lead to false conclusions. The present Mexican Indian is not tiger-like and wild; but his forefathers may have been, and in the northern country the Apaches and Comanches are so still. All the Christian Indians are submissive and servile, owing to the long dominion of the Spaniards, wherever they deem themselves likely to come off second best; but if they know themselves to have the upper-hand, they are arrogant and impertinent. They have the advantages of numerical superiority, constituting about five-eighths of the population, and one might fear their awaking to the consciousness of being a conquered race. This, however, is scarcely possible, as the history of their fathers is extinct with them; and only here and there a meager tradition existing. They are, moreover, not oppressed, as they enjoy the same rights as the other inhabitants of the country, are free citizens, and regulate the affairs of their communities themselves. Consequently no cause for discontent exists. Besides, there is a want of union among them, as before the Spanish rule; the numerous smaller tribes having been subjected by the sword of the Aztec. This variety of tribes still exists; more than four and thirty different Indian languages are spoken, which have as much resemblance to each other, as the Slavonian and German; the Aztec does not understand the Otomite, the Maya the Migo, nor the Tarraske the Totonak, etc.; many of the tribes even hate each other. The people are, further, uncultivated and without energy, brutalised by intoxication, and confined to the narrow circle of a stereotype existence and train of thought. There is, consequently, no reason for apprehension; which has been proved by partial insurrections, caused by disputed territorial claims, and encouraged by the Mestins for party purposes; but which never assumed the character of a national rising, not even in Yucatan, where the revolt merely extended to the eastern villages of the Mayas, whilst those of the west fought against their kinsmen.

In the densely populated districts of Mexico, between the 18th and 20th degree, north latitude, in the ancient Anahuac, the constant intercourse with Creoles and Mestins has rendered the Indians more accessible, and their character less stubborn. They take service as labourers on the larger farms, are diligent and frugal,

and for the most part faithful, and devoted to their masters. Indolence, however, is the inheritance of their race, the etherial spark of reasoning perception has imparted no warmth to the incrustation of their intellectual being, they are confined to the same circle of ideas as three hundred years ago, but more stultified by their fondness for spirituous liquors, and by the set forms of a religion they are incapable of comprehending.

As far as we are informed by the early traditions and history of Mexico, the country was peopled by an agricultural race, dwelling in permanent settlements, and cultivating maize and the agave, cotton and indigo. In the twelfth century, after prolonged wanderings, the roving tribe of the Aztecs came from the north, founded Tenochtitlan, and by a singular concatenation of circumstances became the rulers in Anahuac. The conquerors gave up the nomadic life of their fathers, and adopted the customs of the conquered; the fishermen and hunters became tillers of the soil.

Even now all the aborigines of Mexico are tillers and gardeners, who live in communities, partly in villages, and partly also in the towns, where they have their separate quarters, for instance, in the capital, the quarter Santiago Tlateloko, San Antonio and others. It is a peculiarity of the Indians, that their communities hold so firmly together. The elders will not suffer the members to disperse, nor to remove to other villages; and if during the summer they are forced to live near secluded fields, in order to guard against depredators, they are all bound to appear in the village on certain festivals, and to abide there after the harvest. This is not the case with the Creoles and Mestins, who frequently dwell in isolated plantations and farms.

The Indians are all citizens of the republic, and choose their municipal authorities according to law. In the genuine Indian villages, nevertheless, one cannot fail to observe the existence of the authority of certain aristocratic families, whose credit is rendered sacred by custom, and whose decree in all local matters is considered decisive. They keep the flocks together, manage the funds of the community (often to their own advantage), influence the choice of the communal authorities, punish the youth, and arrange marriages. All the Indians are Catholic Christians; the churches belong to the village, and many of the priests are full-blood Indians, as it is necessary for them to be perfect masters of the language. In the larger Indian villages, the community always let one of their number study theology, in order to have a priest of their own race. The priest must harmonize with the nobility of the villages, if he wish to maintain a position; if he live on bad terms with them, he is tolerably sure to get the worst of it. In another chapter I shall speak more at length on church matters, and will only observe here, that the Indians pay fewer church dues than the other natives, but are bound to furnish the pastor with a man and a maid-servant, and with messengers as often as he may require them. On numerous holidays, too, they have the privilege of tilling their fields, and their attendance at mass is dispensed with. Most of the Indian communities have their funds and land-