

a sort of Indian beer. All these drinks are alcoholic and intoxicating. On holidays the men collect themselves around a pot of liquor, and carouse till late at night. This is their greatest delight. They do not give themselves up to gaming like the Creoles and Mestizoes, but are fond of company, in which the women join, and also understand how to play their part at the cup, as it goes round the circle. If they once get excited, the soiree ordinarily ends with a grand disturbance.

The children continue to render obedience and service to their parents till they come to form families for themselves. As soon as the son marries, he removes to a house of his own, and then the father troubles himself no more about him. The attachment of children to parents seems to me on the whole not to be very great; they are bound together rather by habit, than by any profounder principle: a natural consequence of that obtuseness of nature which arises from their want of culture.

The Indians stand at the lowest point of intellectual development, and that which has already been done for their improvement scarcely deserves the name. It is provided by law that every Indian village shall have one or more elementary schools; but since the districts must provide teachers for themselves, they generally choose the cheapest, and these are such as are in most instances unable to write correctly. They attempt nothing further than to teach their pupils a little reading or spelling, and by daily recitations to beat into their thick heads the catechism. This teacher is commonly in addition the parish scribe, indeed the only person in the village who can write at all: and by this means the amount of his instruction is very much diminished. Of course these evils cannot be remedied till the government provides for the education of competent instructors. This end would be best attained by providing from the Indians themselves a large number of elementary teachers capable of giving instruction in their own language and of teaching Spanish properly. The government of the state of Vera Cruz indeed made an arrangement by which every Indian village should support such a school and furnish a certain number of pupils; but this failed in the matter of funds, inasmuch as the villages declared that a tax of fifty pesos (dollars) a month, was more than they were able to raise. The indifference of the Indians in this respect is exceedingly great, and is often increased by the priesthood, who give themselves no trouble about scholastic matters, because it is rather for their interest to keep the people in ignorance, that their own authority may not suffer.

The majority of the Indians get their living by cultivating their fields and gardens, and do the work in precisely the same way as their forefathers three hundred years ago, except upon the table-lands, where the plough is used to some extent. In the mountainous regions and upon the coast, they till their little fields without the aid of the plough. They cut down the trees and under-wood, and when dry, burn it; and then plant the maize in little drills which they make with a sharp stake without further loosening the soil. In the course of the summer they pass over it twice with the hoe. On the borders of the fields they plant beans, squashes, Spanish pepper

and tomatas. As soon as the maize ears are half ripe they begin to pluck them. Roasted or boiled they form a favourite dish of the Indians, and little cakes prepared from this green corn, called *elotlaschal*, are regarded by them as pastry. The harvest in December and January is a festival at which young and old take part, and when their crops are all properly housed, a few weeks are given up to the 'dolce far niente' until the preparation for the coming seed-time again calls forth their activity.

Not all the Indian villages have territorial possessions of any extent, because the conquerors divided the lands according to the right of the victor, and the original possessors were obliged to cultivate the fields as serfs; just sufficient land being left them for their maintenance. This was especially the case in the vicinity of the capital and on the neighbouring plains, where only those tribes that allied themselves with the Spaniards for the subjection of their brethren were left in the quiet possession of their territories.

Upon the remote mountain-ranges and upon the unhealthy sea-coasts, the inhabitants retained their lands, because the conquerors feared in small and scattered bodies to settle among the conquered people. The abuses which were practised upon these serfs called forth, in the course of time, from the Spanish monarchs several enactments in favour of the Indians. They were no more to be treated as slaves; and a law required that a free possession should be granted to each village extending 600 varas or 1800 feet from the church in all directions, and in addition to this a square tract of 3600 feet base-line. All the villages which were formerly thus robbed of their estates, have this possession; and since this is usually not sufficient for their purposes of cultivation, they hire, at very moderate rents, smaller fields from the neighbouring estates. Many of the Indians upon the table-lands prefer to work as day-labourers upon these larger estates, where they are provided with a house to live in, and a certain measure of corn for every member of the family, in addition to the wages in money which every one receives who is able to work. Since they enjoy exemption from all church and parish taxes, their condition might be supposed to be preferable to that of those who inhabit the villages. But in general this is not the case, for these very Indians who constitute the *quadrillas* (day-labourers) of the *Haciendas*, are among the most miserable portions of the Indian population, and never will arrive at a state of independence. They are in reality a sort of *glebae adscripti*, not because they must, but because they will. Their household affairs in most instances hardly deserve the name; only those things which are absolutely necessary to existence are provided, and whatever ready money they are able to get is squandered in drink. When any special event is to take place, such as a baptism, wedding or funeral, or if rendered incapable of work by sickness, the employer must advance money upon their wages.

There is no lack of inducements for running in debt, for these people are not capable of saving money enough to procure for themselves the slightest article of clothing. The employer must give it them on credit, and deduct the amount from



their weekly wages. In this manner every labourer gets himself into debt; the children as soon as they can labour must help to work out the debt, which was partly contracted on their account, and the son must be responsible for the father in case he should die or become incapable of labour. One must not however suppose that this is an advantage to the employer; on the contrary it is a great annoyance and constantly attended with loss; for thus a considerable capital stands upon paper without bearing interest, and one has no means of sending away worthless hands without losing the debt with them; however from scarcity of help the land-owners are obliged to get along in this manner. The people are free to go wherever they choose, as soon as they have paid their debts. In many parts a full settlement is made once a year at Easter; in others, once a quarter, or once in six months. Then the labourers are at liberty to go to other estates if the proprietor will be responsible for their debt. Thus there commonly takes place an exchange of labourers, so that their accounts are reciprocally carried over and balanced.

Some writers, who have not come into immediate contact with this class of men, and are not well acquainted with the relation they stand in to the whites, have affirmed that the unfortunate Indian nations are really in a state of slavery, that people attempt to evade the law which forbids slavery, that the Indians are abused etc. This however is not true; the service is voluntary and conformable to a duly accepted compact.

This state of things we have mentioned, is oftenest observed upon the tablelands where it now and then may happen that the overseers urge on the idle with some severity; but nowhere is there any relation of ownership, as for example in the Dutch colonies in respect to the Budak, neither are the labourers ever mortgaged for debt, only the working men are required to fulfil their obligations, *i. e.* to work, while on the other hand the women are never bound unless they have expressly made themselves security for their husbands.

In other regions the Indians work as day-labourers, but live in their own villages instead of living upon the estates. In the state of Vera Cruz for instance, it is a very usual thing for one to order a number of hands from the Alcalde of an Indian village. These receive money in advance, but the whole village is security for it, and the authorities must send workmen till the debt is liquidated.

Some branches of agriculture are carried on almost exclusively by the Indians. Their patience and perseverance, together with their traditional predilection for these pursuits, alone prevent them from being abandoned, since they cannot be profitably carried on by more extensive planters. To these belong the culture of the vanilla and cochineal, which I shall speak of more at length in another chapter. Many plants are raised and used for food among the Indians which the Creole scarcely knows by name, such as the 'arum esculentum' a species of chenopodium, the tiger-flower (called by the Indians Ozeloschutschil, 'feraria pavonia'), the bulbs of which when roasted are not unlike chestnuts, a species of oxalis, some sorts of leeks and onions, and many others. To the historian a knowledge of these plants is of importance in throwing light upon the migration of races and progress of culture in general

The Indians carry on but few branches of industry in connection with their agriculture, yet they show both capacity and inclination for the arts and manufactures. I need only mention their beautiful works in wax, their imitation of fruits, figures representing scenes from the life of the people, ornaments for the churches and the like; also their taste for decorating the altars, for erecting triumphal arches before the churches or houses on marriage occasions etc. Everywhere throughout the country they manufacture ordinary unglazed pottery, like that found in excavations of their ancient graves, and often of elegant form. Candlesticks and toys they ornament with grotesque figures of animals, and show their craft in counterfeiting ancient idols, which they dispose of for good pay to British antiquarians, as the Romans do their newly baked antiquities. The Indians braid mats and baskets of palm leaves, prepare the filaments of the agave, which they twist into cordage and ropes, varnish drinking-cups from the fruit of the cocoa tree, carve all sorts of vessels and household utensils out of soft wood, and make guitars and violins, which are ugly enough to be sure, but are very cheap, have proper proportions and a good tone.

Upon the rivers they constitute the fishers and ferrymen, and in the neighbourhood of the cities they furnish the wood and coal for the inhabitants. Early, at break of day, and till late after sunset one hears in the streets of Mexico, a melancholy long-drawn "Onsior", and sees the collier trudging in with a tall coal sack upon his back, who with his inarticulate croak designs to say: "Carbon señor (coal Sir!). Whoever has not seen the canal of Santa Anita (las vigas), has not yet an adequate comprehension of Indian industry. Unnumbered craft of all kinds come rowed along, from the clumsy flat boat, to the light canoe which can hold but one. The little Indian girls row lightly on with their double-bladed paddles; their boat is filled with vegetables, the outside decorated with flowers as if it were a bridal-boat, and the young people are gaily laughing and singing, while the old frog-catcher paddles, past with his booty, solemn as a baboon and equally ugly. Everything hurries and rushes along towards the market: whole loads of wild ducks and strand-snipes come from the lakes; fowls, eggs, fruits etc., from the villages, in order to supply the daily necessities of the great city. In the neighbourhood without the city lie the vegetable fields of the Indians, and those Chinampas called the floating gardens. These garden lands have been won from a marsh; a simple turf covering under which the water stands. On a strip of this land brush has been thrown, whilst at the sides deep ditches have been dug and the earth thrown up over it. As often as the ditches become filled, which is pretty often, the earth is again thrown on the bed. When the soil is a foot thick over the water, it is planted; and the plants flourish well because they never lack moisture. These gardens rest upon insecure foundations and totter beneath the tread; and we can well imagine that in earlier times, before the artificial draining, when the valley was often inundated, that such little islands may have been detached in a storm, and floated off. However, at present they all lie at anchor, and the wind is no more able to blow them adrift. They look right cheerful,

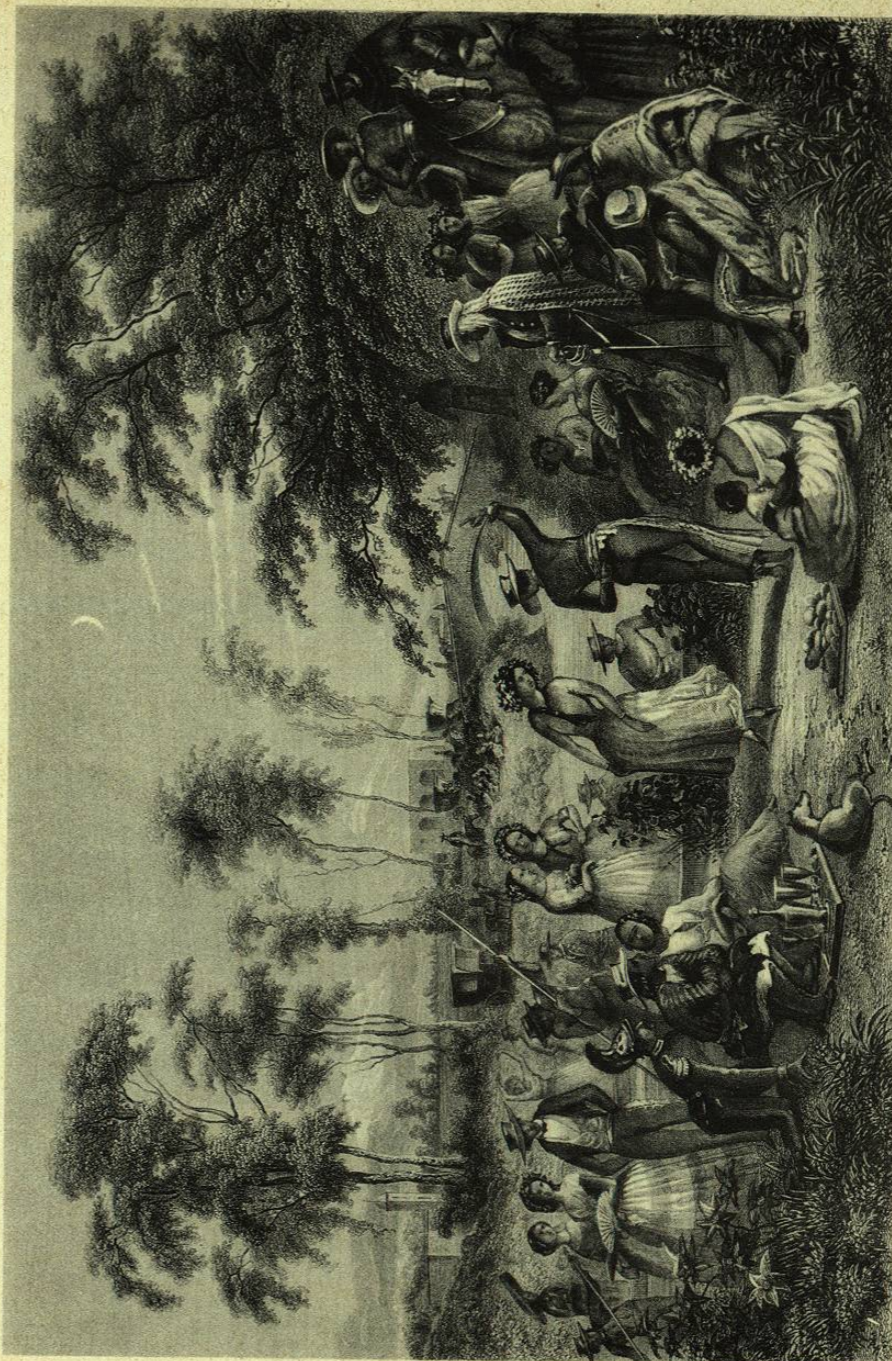


surrounded with balsams and pinks and border flowers, and planted with plump cabbages, lettuce or parsnips.

The broad way along the canal, as well as the canal itself, is crowded with market people — all Indian — men, women and children — some driving loaded asses before them, others with great burdens upon their backs, but all moving at a short trot. This sort of dog-trot is peculiar to the Mexican aborigines; laden or unladen they always keep it, and never get out of breath, even in climbing the steepest mountains. There can be no better messenger than these Indians; with a tompiate, with topto or roasted maize bread, they undertake the longest journies, travel from forty to fifty miles a day, and spend nothing upon the way but their scanty supply of provisions. Over rugged mountains and through the ravines they carry burdens of seventy five or a hundred pounds for journies of many days. They undertake the transport of goods for considerable distances, as, for example, from Tabasco to Chiapas, over roads which are impossible for beasts of burden; and indeed they often carry travellers upon their back, up these almost perpendicular precipices. They are so accustomed to carry something upon their back, that when one, in Oajaca for instance, wishes to send one of these Indian messengers with a letter, he makes up a package of stones of ten or twelve pounds' weight, to which he adds the letter, that by this means the bearer may not forget that he has a commission to execute.

The Indian carries his burden upon his back by means of a rope and a broad strap which passes over the forehead. The broad shoulders and strong legs seem as if made for this kind of labour. Many Indians are employed in the mines as carriers, and since they are paid by the job, according to the weight of ore which they bring out of the mine, they come to be virtuosos in this sort of business. One would hardly believe it possible that a man could thus drag a load of more than five cwt. of ore, from a depth of over a hundred fathoms, up ladders consisting simply of round trunks of trees, in which steps have been cut with an axe, and yet I have seen those who day by day could bring out such enormous burdens. At the foundry of Arcas there lived (or is probably still living), an Indian, who carried a weight of sandstone of six hundred pounds, from the quarry to the smelting house, a distance of about three quarters of a mile.

With such an inborn capacity as beast of burden, we need not wonder that the Indian carries the produce of his field or garden many miles to market, to bring back for it a few pence in return. Times without number I have seen the Indians of the mountains travelling twenty five or thirty miles to a market, over paths whose difficulties one can hardly conceive, bearing a heavy basket of apples or potatoes upon the back, in company with their wives, who are laden in the same manner. Tired out, and perhaps wet through by showers of rain, they arrive at their destination, and pass the night in an open porch, in order early in the morning to offer their products for sale, the whole receipts of which are ordinarily not half the sum they might have earned in the same time as day labourers. Nevertheless they are not to be turned from their beaten track, for they are able to obtain in exchange their little necessities, and have not sufficient forethought to see that they



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may be procured more advantageously some other way. Soap, sugar brandy, and salt\*) are the usual articles which they bring home with them in return, and a good drunken frolic into the bargain.

By going out in the afternoon to one of the gates of Mexico, either that of Belen or San Antonio or San Cosme, one can observe the trains of Indians wending their way home to their villages. What a contrast with all that surrounds them! Splendid houses, magnificent carriages, elegantly dressed ladies and gay dandies; and close by, these poor half-naked Indians, the men in front, the women in the rear, the children upon their backs, speaking another language, wearing another dress, and of a different colour from their fellow-creatures who promenaded the streets. There they are trotting along towards their home, joking and laughing among themselves, caring little for the world about them, a distinct people within a people. Yonder, under the tall poplars stands a pulqueria, a shop where their favourite drink the pulque is sold; there they must stop to take one drink more. Dense groups are standing round; godfathers are greeting each other with hat in hand and making profound obeisance; the well-filled cup goes round from mouth to mouth and the discourse grows eloquent in praise of the precious nectar. The wives sit down upon the ground and take the children from their backs, give the little one the breast and stop the mouth of the bigger one with a cocole (a kind of small, sweet, dark coloured roll), but all the while keep an eye to the pulque bowl, if perchance the husband or a gallant neighbour should hand it them. Want and toil and the long journey are forgotten; louder and louder grow the assurances of friendship among the men, oftener and oftener they come to the wife for another quartilla (a quarter real or about three cents), for she has the proceeds of the market tied up in her girdle, and after every new drain upon it, she reties the lessening bundle with a sorrowful look. Now the mirth grows boisterous; in some groups the women begin to follow the example of the men; here is a crowd making merry and dancing to the strumming of a farana (a small stringed instrument), yonder the rising hilarity makes them tender, whole drinking circles embrace each other, lose their equilibrium and fall, to the infinite delight of the others. The bestiality is now under full sail, and no one notices that the sun has already set. Jealousy brings the women in contact, who commence a vigorous conflict, tug at each other's hair, scratch and bite each other; even the men get to blows, excited by their fellow-lazzaroni: the uproar becomes fearful, till at last the police are among them, who take the combatants to the watch-house, and dis-

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\*) The salt-works of the interior are mostly carried on by Indians. There are many rich salt springs in Mexico, for example those of Istatala, Istapa, Chautla etc. They convey the brine into flat stone vessels, where the water evaporates in the sun; or make a rim of clay upon a broad flat stone, upon which they pour the salt water, and let the sun do the rest. The same is done on a larger scale with sea-water, both on the Atlantic and Pacific coast, especially on the coast of Yucatan.