smiths' street, which with its multitude of splendid shops, as well as customers and sight-seers, presents a very animated appearance, and is regarded as the first street of the capital.

As we enter the unusually large square, we have opposite us on the east the national palace, which embraces an entire side of the parallelogram. On the left stands the great cathedral, upon the spot where the great temple of the god of war saw its countless human victims bleed. The chief portal is towards the square, which is separated by pillars and chains from another square shaded by acacias, and properly called the cathedral square. On the two remaining sides of the quadrangle are palaces with arcades. One of them is the senate house (la diputacion), opposite the cathedral and on either side of this stand the archiepiscopal palace, and the former dwelling of Cortes the Conqueror (casa del estado). Within the circuit of this immense square was once concentrated the highest splendour of the Aztec empire. Here stood the pyramid of Huiziliposchtli which overlooked the highest pinnacles of the city and bore upon its spacious platform the huge idol-towers; here surrounding the temple were far-extending palaces which served as dwellings for more than a thousand priests, and adjoining these, were the cloister-like schools for both sexes. Here finally rose the splendid citadel of the rulers, where a small army of attendants, officers and warriors found room. A single stone of this splendid structure is still to be seen, a great round block of porphyry walled into the north-west corner of the Cathedral, and representing in deeply cut figures the Aztec calender.

Where formerly from the platform of the pyramid the big drum of the war-god sent forth its dismal tones, the grave tolling of the bells in two stately towers is now heard. A battalion of grenadiers is drawn up before the palace, a considerable crowd surges backwards and forwards in the square, whilst the organ peals through the lofty aisles of the cathedral, and the "ite missa est" is followed by the Amen of the choir. The gates are thrown open, and in solemn procession issues from the sacred building the President of the Republic in the uniform of a general, accompanied by the ministers and a brilliant staff, in addition to the diplomatic agents of friendly powers, who are always invited to these festivals. Two beadles with long talars and silver sceptres open the procession of deputies of the senate and congress, headed by their president, followed by the alcaldes, the judges, the prelates, the generals and the superior civil officers. Accompanied by regimental music, the procession repairs to the great festal-hall of the palace, which is tastefully, even splendidly adorned. At the northern end, on a raised floor, furnished with a carpet, is the chair of the president, in front of a red velvet drapery, with the arms of the republic embroidered in gold. On either side, somewhat lower, the secretaries of state are seated. The seats of the deputies form a vast semi-circle opposite the president's chair, behind which are the boxes for the diplomatists and guests. A gallery, supported by pillars, is reserved for the public. The hall is adorned with portraits of the American heroes; the portrait of Humboldt is also exhibited, for he

it was who with the pen did more towards attaining the liberty of the country, than others with the sword. Humboldt is an honorary citizen of the capital.

As soon as the honourable assembly is seated, the president rises and reads his message, that is to say, a summary of the results of his presidentship, a review of the position of the country, both in regard to home and foreign politics, and a list of the objects, which require the immediate attention of the legislature. A detailed account of the state of the finances will be laid before the chambers by the ministers. As usual the address concludes with a compliment to the honourable deputies, remarking that the country had never better reason to anticipate that beneficial laws would be promulgated, than during the ensuing session, where men of such distinguished capacity etc. etc. The compliment is naturally returned by the chambers, on which the session is declared to have commenced. A few greenhorns in the galleries are possessed with the innocent notion that the fine speeches are to be taken literally, and shout with stentorian lungs: "Viva la republica, viva el sobrano congreso." In Europe we know better how such oratorical displays are to be interpeted, and spare our breath.

For the first day the farce is at an end, and we can go; but let us first cast an eye over the groups, in order to carry away with us an idea of the whole. Did we not here and there perceive in the galleries a brawny individual of the inferior classes, of brown complexion, and in the picturesque costume of the country, we might deem ourselves in a South-European capital. Here and there, the outward forms are nearly the same: the soldier and the priest in their respective uniforms, the remainder of the civilized portion of the community in black dress-coat, and with the crush-hat under the arm; the consuls in naval uniform; in short, all according to the European cut. The deputies are collected in groups, according to their politics. The comfortable old gentlemen there, have evidently battled through many a session and are here quite at home. They salute the president, speak a few words with the ministers, shake hands with an old acquaintance, and casually glance at the new members. These are men of the old régime, men of a former generation, conservatives, well-informed, and well-meaning ancient fogies, who have always been opposed to sweeping reform; men who are opposed to railways, because carriers would lose by them; and who oppose the introduction of gas, because they themselves cultivate oil, or possess large *flocks of sheep.**

The group of young men gesticulating so powerfully in the middle of the hall, consists of lawyers, physicians, government-officials, and landed proprietors from the provinces. You see at once that they are men of progress and prepared to oppose the fat old gentlemen. Some of them have acquired experience in foreign countries, and know that many inveterate abuses must be remedied, before the republic can

* In sheep-breeding the principal object is to procure tallow. Great quantities of tallow are used in the country, candles being invariably burnt in the mines.

prosper; and labour therefore energetically for the reforms the country stands so much in need of.

A small minority, with several military men amongst them, standing there to the right, near the pillar, are Santanists, *parvenus* dating from the era of the military dictatorship, morally at the very lowest ebb. They would gladly smuggle back their banished leader, in order that the days of their *golden* age might return.

The gentlemen there in black robes (secular priests, for monks are not eligible) have a strong party, and keep to it more consistently than all the others. Priests may also be observed in the other groups, for many of them entertain the most liberal opinions; but those we have called attention to, represent the strict clerical party, and oppose every innovation, fearing that *their* interests might otherwise be endangered, and property change hands. It is the Spanish party, who still secretly adhere to the aristocracy, which has long since been abolished and forgotten by the people; the monarchical party, supported by Spanish and Franco-Bourbon intrigue, and provided with several Jesuitical abbés. Their ideal is: a Spanish or French prince on the throne of the Aztecs. They hate the Santanists, but are frequently hand and glove with them, when the object is to defeat a motion of the republicans. Interest often enables them to bring the old constitutionalists over to their side, whom we have already alluded to as conservatives, or rather conservators — of their wealth and places. The monarchical party is small, and would long since have ceased to exist, had it not been supported by a class, who, while possessed of great influence, are cunning enough to conceal their real plans.

These are the chief parties we are able to recognize in the assembly of deputies; and at every fresh meeting of congress they are reorganized and recruited. The Santanists are at present hardly worthy of consideration; in reality there are only two great parties; the republican and the hierarchical-monarchical. In the new world as in the old one, the same great questions are constantly being agitated.

The majority of the Mexican population interest themselves little enough for public affairs. Two thirds of the people consist of Indians or labouring Mestizoes, who are wholly indifferent to politics. They take part, however, in the elections, because they are fond of exercising their right. The elections are indirect, and moreover double. Every citizen has the right of voting, that is to say, every man who has completed his twentieth year, who is independent (not in service as labourer, domestic servant, or clerk), who has been convicted of no crime, is not a notorious gambler etc. The elective sections are formed where the population numbers five hundred souls at least. Each section chooses an elector. In the chief town of the canton the electors meet, and choose according to the amount of the population one or two cantonal-electors, who, in the principal city of the individual states, elect the deputies for the general congress in the proportion of 1 to 50,000 souls. By this threefold mode of election, the intrigues which might easily arise in many places, are in a great measure neutralized, and the elections are mostly in accordance with the desires of the people.

The constitution is in the main like that of the United States. It is a federal republic, consisting of twenty states, three territories and the federal district. The legislative power of the union is exercised by the chambers, which constitute the congress and senate. The senate, half of whom are chosen from the congress, half from the assembly of the separate states, revise and confirm the laws which have passed the congress. Should they reject a law, the subject is not to be brought forward again the same session, that is to say, not till the beginning of the following year.

At the head of the government is the president with his responsible ministry, who commands the forces, concludes treaties with other nations etc. The administration of justice is separated from the executive power; two instances are in the states, the superior court of judicature for the whole republic is in the capital.

The individual states have their special congress and their administration. The constitution of the states is confirmed by the general congress. The receipts and expenditure of the whole republic are determined exclusively by the general congress which has to decide on all matters appertaining to the general interest, and permits the individual states to attend to the further development of the local interests merely.

I had no intention here of analysing the constitution, but simply of presenting some of the features, in order that the notes might be spared, which would otherwise be necessary for comprehending many of the expressions. We now return to the festal-hall of the palace; but the session being closed, and the members all streaming forth, renders it impossible to continue our physiognomical studies. At the doors we greet some deputies of our acquaintance, and it being early, accept their invitation to drink a glass of beer with them in the Gran Sociedad. "Well, and how do your European friends here like our city, our hall of congress? It's not so bad, I imagine; and might even pass for something in Europe!" remarked Mr. A. the clever Licensiado (advocate). Every nation is vain; and we may therefore forgive the lively Creoles for feeling themselves flattered when Europeans praise their public institutions. Many even believe that nothing superior to their capital and all it contains can be met with. True, it is a handsome city, but there is much room for improvement. Of this later: let us now look round in the coffee-house, where many people are seated at the marble tables, some conversing, others absorbed in the newspapers; others again are occupied with chess or dominoes. The opening of congress naturally forms the chief topic of conversation, in addition to the results of the elections, the probable majority, the tactics of parties, the most important motions to be put, and so on.

"Nothing sensible will come of it", said a man at the next table, whose marked features had struck us on entering. "Nothing sensible will come of it", said he, stroking his coal-black moustache, which, installed beneath his aquiline nose, was almost an ell in length, "for the priests and law-twisters will chatter like magpies,

and know about as much what is wanted as my poodle. There are not three military men of any talent in the chambers, and as long as the military does not occupy another position, all is good for nothing." Once more he strokes his beard, and takes a hearty draught from his foaming glass.

"Well spoken captain", ironically replied our neighbour the advocate; "it certainly is a crying wrong not to have elected a man of your merit. Your profession is unpardonably neglected, and is sadly in want of good soles, which are somewhat worn by running from the Yankees. The people still think of the happy days when the military budget devoured four-fifths of the whole revenue, to support an army that was useless against the foreign foe, and unable to maintain tranquillity in the country itself, seeing that they alone were the cause of all dissensions. Even the security of the high-roads could not be entrusted to the troops; for your heroes made common cause with the robbers, were never there when the travellers were attacked, but as soon as the prey was in safety, they well knew where their share was to be sought."

"Oh! you saints", retorted he of the moustache; "and how is it with you? When the brave soldiers have succeeded in capturing the robbers, they apply to you with a well-filled purse, and you let them off scot-free, quite according to law; or when the custom-house official has cheated the revenue of enormous sums, and merited the gallows, you prove, in return for a thumping fee, that the poor man has completely sacrificed himself for the good of the state, and is noway culpable, all according to law; or if a rebel who has betrayed the constitution, and who every one acknowledges has richly deserved the honourable distinction of the iron collar* privately favours you with certain hints, you know how to make it appear, that the rogue has acted from pure patriotism and is perfectly innocent, all according to law; or if — —"

"Dios santo, captain", shouts the licentiate, "spare our ears and your lungs; your delightful voice might otherwise be sadly injured and a compression of the larynx be brought on, and when it comes to the push leave you in the lurch. Consider that you will soon be a colonel, especially if they get wind of your parliamentary talent. Thence it is but a step to become minister of war, and then you will have it all your own way. But joking aside, fancy you had already attained the distinction, how could you with our shattered finances restore the army, how could you form an efficient body of officers?"

"Money", returned the captain; "I'd soon have that. The lawyers should procure it for me, and should there still be a deficit, I'd take it from the church. I swear to you, that with the sixty millions of piastres, which the monks are worth, I

* The iron collar refers to the garotte. An iron ring, attached to a post, is passed round the neck, and suddenly tightened by a powerful screw. This is a privilege enjoyed by the Spanish nobility.

would raise a corps as superb as Napoleon's old guard; and if I paid the officers well, who now have precisely enough to keep them from famishing, they would regain sufficient strength to entertain honourable feelings without losing their balance. We could take our choice, and there is no want of excellent material."

The faces of the listeners indicated the amusement the conversation afforded them, although an occasional hint was thrown out by some of them, that it might be adviseable to cease, lest the strangers present should believe that matters really were in so desperate a condition. The captain comprehending what was required, turned to us, and enquired with much urbanity (for the Mexicans are polished in manner, and invariably highly attentive to their guests) how we liked the country, the city, and whether he could perhaps be of use to us in visiting the curiosities. Being already well acquainted with the place, I was able to decline his offer with thanks; but the man pleasing me, I said that it would afford me infinite satisfaction to be admitted frequently to his very agreeable society. "I am always at your service", he returned, "you will find me here or on the promenades daily, and mayhap I shall be able to tell you much, that you will not easily find in the guide-books." We parted excellent friends, after having received from all an invitation to dine with them — a mark of attention that is rarely omitted.

I have introduced my readers to this society, in order that they may obtain some idea of public affairs. Such speeches, however, are only heard amongst acquaintances; for the Mexicans are here discreet, and are not fond of speaking out of school — a laudable custom, not always met with in Europe, among the Germans especially, who not unfrequently fall foul of their country when in a foreign land. Having once looked behind the curtains, we may venture to add that neither the lawyer nor the officer were altogether wrong. The judges have often been reproached with bribery; the public journals have frequently recorded the fact, and sometimes I have had opportunities of remarking it myself. The reproach applies less to the judges, than to the clerks and subalterns, and the judges are chiefly to blame for not keeping their subordinates under stricter control. The flight of criminals frequently occurs, and usually it may be attributed to some clerk who has been bribed. We shall allude somewhat later to military affairs.

It is impossible to become accurately acquainted with a town, unless one lounges through the streets at all hours of the day, and observes the proceedings of the people. The usual dinner-time of all classes is between two and four o'clock in the afternoon. This is the quietest time in the streets; every one is housed, many shops and warehouses are closed, and even the day-labourer has an hour to himself, which he devotes to smoking his cigarito, and enjoying a nap. On Sundays only are the streets animated at this hour, partly owing to the numerous country-people who visit the town, partly owing to the promenaders, who start early to the neighbouring villages. The dinners at the hotels offer nothing remarkable, and are sufficiently European; but in many of the inferior houses one sees on the ground-floor smoky places, where queer cookery is going on. As the street-doors stand wide open, earthen vessels are