

observed on huge fires, in which bubble red broth and black beans. Crowds of people flock in and out of a little apartment near the kitchen; mule-drivers in their leather collars, rancheros, soldiers, labourers etc. These are feeding establishments termed *fondas* (eating-houses), for the lower classes, where for a real, about sixpence, a meal may be had, including a large glass of pulque.

Usually other dingy abodes are close by, in which whole rows of brown women, the upper part of the body quite naked, or but indifferently covered, kneel on the floor, and crush maize on flat stones, whilst others prepare the mass with their hands for tortillas, and bake them in flat earthen pans. Precisely the people who are cramming in the neighbouring cook-shops, object to wheaten bread; the tortilla is absolutely necessary for them, and in point of fact, it is more palatable than bread with the highly-spiced ragouts and the frigoles (beans).

Dinner is got through without knives and forks, the table-cloth is none of the whitest, and the napkins acquire a peculiar colour from the ragouts, and smell not exactly of *eau de mille fleurs*, but make you sneeze, consequent on their being so strongly impregnated with capsicum. The diners of this quarter have a singular habit, *viz*: after the meal (which always concludes with something sweet, though it be but a morsel of raw sugar) they drink a large glass of water, cross themselves with the words "bendito y alabado sea Dios", and then with open mouth and much noise allow the stomachic gas to explode, which is modulated with a certain degree of virtuosity, if the expression may be allowed. The common people deem the practice very wholesome, and even those occupying a higher position do not disdain it, at all events *en famille*, especially the villager and small tradesman. Don Quixote orders his page not to speak of it; but does not forbid the practice.

Many of the people take their meals in the street, and then enjoy their siesta. Bricklayers, masons, paviours, porters etc. have their dinner brought them, and now sit with wife and children on some raised portion of the foot-pavement, or on the steps of a church, and appear to relish their food as much as if they were reclining on a Roman triclinium. Different groups even bring their dishes to the same spot, and thus effect greater variety. What compliments they pay each other about the excellent manner in which the viands are prepared! "Really, Doña Mariquita", says a not over clean bricklayer's labourer, "you know how to prepare the most delicate tid-bits, better than any one in the city; it is delicious to eat of this dish." — "You flatter me (*favor que Vmd. me hace*)" replies the person addressed, "my husband reproaches me, that I never prepare such good things for him as your lady, Doña Camilla cooks" etc. These people treat each other with a degree of politeness, as if they had studied it in drawing-rooms. We who come from the north are surprised at the small quantity of food these hard-working people require. A stout English countryman would devour at one sitting what would suffice a whole family of Mexicans for the day.

The last groups we glanced at belong to the class of the Mestizoes, who constitute in great measure the inferior part of the population in the cities. The

actual Indians form separate communities in the suburbs, and differ but little from their fellows in the villages. Where they depend on agriculture they are independent after their fashion; in the capital itself, the Indians at the extremities of the city carry on the same occupation as their forefathers at the time of the conquest by the mightier tribes of the Acolhuas and Tepauecos; they seek a subsistence in the swamps and lakes and on their sterile shores. Like the herons they are seen wading in the ditches which transect the swamps, catching with their little nets white-fish, frogs and acholotes, that strange Proteus-species, forming the connecting link between fish and lizard. In small canoes they row along the broad canals and sedgy lakes, collecting fish and frog-spawn, flies' eggs, water-cresses and water-lilies, or chase the aquatic birds and sand-pipers, which cover the lakes and their shores in incredible numbers. In addition to this they plait reed-mats, boil salt from the water of the salt-lakes, increasing their store by repeatedly washing saline earths, or collecting natron *tequesquite* in the fields, which flourishes after the rainy season. Their little gardens, which they reclaim from the swamp, produce good vegetables and flowers; these chinampas are said once to have been floating, but at present they are aground, because the lakes have become smaller. All these little articles of commerce and many more\*, they convey to the market of Tlaltelolco, which three centuries since — when Cortes first marched into the capital of the Aztecs — was so large, that 30,000 persons traded there daily. These Indians of the capital are for the most part poor and dirty. When their traffic is ended, and a few glasses of pulque have somewhat roused them from their torpidity, they are often seen located in the shade of a high wall or of a church, consuming the remainder of their *iacate* (provision carried with them in a net). Stale maize-bread (*totopo*), boiled beans wrapped in leaves, or little salt-fish with Spanish pepper, constitute their simple meal; and be the sun ever so high they take their siesta on the bare ground. The hours from 2 till 4 are, as already observed, the quietest in the cities; the streets are deserted, the inhabitants are occupied with the process of digestion, or peaceably smoking their cigar. Even the tedious loungers seek the shade, until the cool evening calls forth more activity, and about six o'clock the streets have as busy an appearance as in the forenoon.

All Mexican cities are built according to certain rules, unless the nature of the ground render it absolutely impossible. As the streets cross each other at right angles, square blocks of houses are formed, which stand close together, and thus have the appearance of a compact mass. Each side of this square is 200 *varas* or 600 feet long, and the square of forty thousand square *varas* is called a *Mansana*. Each *Mansana* chooses annually from its inhabitants a justice of the peace and a police-inspector, who have to arrange the trifling quarrels and disturbances. A number of *Mansanas*, ecclesiastically considered, form a parish, politically a quarter, which is represented in the town-council.

\* They sell maize variously prepared, fowls, living sand-pipers, humming-birds in little cages of grass, earthenware, baskets, toys of wood or feathers, gourds, string, tape etc.

The town-council (*ayuntamiento*) is chosen by the people, and consists of burgo-masters (*alcaldes*) and regidores, who have to attend to the management of the municipal funds, to education, the police, building-matters, lighting etc. The elections take place annually, and can only be rejected on legal grounds; refusing to accept the election without cause may produce a suspension of the rights of citizenship. An immediate re-election may be declined. The chiefs of the quarter and *mansanas* are subject to the authority of the town-council. All municipal offices must be undertaken gratuitously; the clerks and inferior officials are of course paid.

In the police arrangements are great desiderata, which are more apparent to the European than to the natives. True, care is taken that the town is provided with water, that the market is well supplied with provisions (in most towns are fruit-markets and slaughter-houses), that the prices are regulated, weights and measures correctly observed. The streets are kept clean, the lighting is pretty good, and after sunset the watchmen (*serenos*) with spear and lantern are at every street-corner. The cemeteries are removed without the walls, hospitals are there for the reception of the poor, and a thousand things besides are attended to. Strict control is, however, wanting. The police have not yet succeeded in suppressing the demoralizing games of hazard, in compelling the idle *lepero* to work, in quickly detecting thieves and cheats and handing them over to the authorities, in preventing the disgraceful scenes with the drunken Indians, and hindering the lower classes from carrying short arms, the source of so much bloodshed. The rabble are in the habit of carrying a knife in their belt or in their riding-boots, and should a dispute occur, the knife is always ready to afford strong conviction. The law threatens these matters with severe penalties, but little is done towards carrying the laws into effect. Thus it is in many things; every one knows the grievance, but impunity is so general, that nobody ventures to interfere, for fear of acquiring universal odium. The yearly change of the municipal authorities contributes materially to this state of affairs remaining thus neglected: and every one seeks to get through his year of office as quietly as possible, and to leave to his successor the reform of all that is objectionable, who, in his turn acts in the same manner.

When the setting sun nears the horizon, the streets of the city become animated with all those who are desirous of breathing the fresh air. In carriages, on horse-back and on foot the Alamedas are visited, those simple avenues of trees, which are expected to afford shade. Here one sees and is seen; the young dandies salute the fair girls in their carriages, or offer their hand to conduct them to the park. Appointments are made for the evening; at the theatre, at the *tertulla*, at the gambling-house, they agree to meet. There is as much bustle as at the market-place, the children run shouting backwards and forwards, all is hum and noise, when at the approach of twilight the sound of a bell is heard from the great tower of the city, succeeded by the bells from all the other steeples. As if by magic, all motion is arrested, all the pedestrians halt, all the men uncover, many lips pronounce an Ave Maria; a second and a third stroke resound, and when the last has ceased to vibrate,

life returns to the multitude. Before the men have replaced their hats, they wish their acquaintances good evening; even at home this is done after the vesper-bell has rung; nor would the domestics as much as bring a light into the room without wishing good evening. I must here remark, that in Spanish America, as in Spain, the people wish each other good day (*buenos días*), from the early morning till noon, from noon till twilight, good evening (*buenas tardes*), and afterwards, good night (*buenas noches*). The time of day is always employed in the plural.

When the "oracion", or evening bell has rung, all hasten back to the city, where the streets are filled with people sauntering leisurely up and down; we join the throng, and with them respire the pleasant evening air. Suddenly a little bell is heard: "nuestro amo" is whispered on all sides, many hasten their steps and pass into the by-streets. It is a priest with the host, seated in a carriage drawn by two white horses, and the coachman is one of the notabilities of the town, of the guild of "the coachmen of Our Lord." Chorister boys precede him with lanterns on staves, and where the little bell sounds, all in the street or in the balconies kneel; if it be night, lights are placed in the windows. In the country towns this is still customary, in the capital and in the sea-ports Lucifer has effected great changes; the coachman's guild is in want of recruits, and many of the passengers become hard of hearing when the little bell is rung. Were He who governs the universe not infinitely more patient than his ministers here below, many of the cities, like Sodom, had long since disappeared from the earth.

It not unfrequently happens, that the shock of an earthquake is felt; and when the mighty volcanic throbs shake the foundations to their centre, threatening to overthrow man's feeble works, all rush forth into the streets, into the squares, cast themselves into the dust and supplicate for mercy. The hymn, "Libra nos Señor" resounds throughout the city, whilst all are befallen with fear and trembling, lest the mighty spirit, whose voice they recognized not in the sighing of the spring-breeze, should claim them as his victims.

The vesper-bell calls the families home, the bachelors to the coffee-houses to enjoy their chocolate. Even the labourer is accustomed to this luxury, and the women are not always willing to dispense with it. The business of the day is at an end; the merchants only, still enter their accounts, and prepare their correspondence for the post, which closes at 8 or 9 o'clock (Postal communication is arranged for the whole country, even for the most distant villages). The artizan puts his work-shop in order, many booths are closed; those who have worked all day, go to the market-place, to the *portales*, in order to hear and be heard. Most visits are paid in the evening. Those who do not go to the theatre are to be found at the *tertullas*, where several families join: they talk, smoke, amuse themselves with music and dancing, without troubling themselves about tea, confectionary, wine or punch. At most a glass of sweet wine is here and there presented, or *sangria* (negus) and lemonade. The Creole is temperate, and in order to be merry does not require the excitement called forth by spirituous liquors. The men frequently leave the

ladies to themselves, in order to play a game at Malilla or Tresillo, or generally to get up a little bank. The young bloods of course remain with the ladies; the conversation is easy, wit and repartee follow each other in rapid succession, inflammable natures ignite and burn fiercely; but outward decorum is never lost sight of. Here in familiar circles, the Spanish dances, boléros etc., are still met with; they are invariably accompanied with song, and are rendered highly significant by the gestures of the performers. The lovers understand the art of expressing their feelings by the eye and tongue, by piano and forte, by approaching and fleeing, and all without coming into contact with each other; whilst those who are jealous cast in thorns, in order to give vent to their bitterness.

These dances have quite disappeared from the balls; the pretty Spanish contredance has alone been retained, which occasionally replaces the dull French quadrille, and the endless succession of galoppades, polkas, and other lung-destroyers, void of character and grace. The young dandies who frequently visit the United States, France or England for a year, and as travelled lions return to their admiring cousins, instead of sound information, which might render their country good service, bring with them naught save a new dance, a bold cut for a dress or frock-coat; and all the fashionable world dances and dresses in the same manner. Our European lions do similar things!

It is now time to terminate our first wandering; about ten o'clock every one is at home, with the exception of the rakes and gamesters, and those who, screened by a pillar, wait for the opening of a balcony-door, whence the sun of their existence is to rise. The families take their supper late, and proceed incontinently to bed. Let us do the like, and fortify ourselves for a further sally.

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## XVI

### COMMERCE, SCHOOLS, ARTS AND SCIENCES.

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Life in towns is everywhere distinguished by trade and commerce, which as they determine the physiognomy of towns, I shall here treat of generally.

Mexico's foreign commerce is carried on from the sea-ports; on the east coast by Matamoros, Tampico, Vera Cruz, Tabasco and Campeche; on the west coast by Acapulco, San Blas and Mazatlan (Jamiltepec and Mansanillo are insignificant).

The houses which carry on the trans-marine business are mostly foreign; they receive the wares, dispose of a portion of them on the spot, and forward the remainder to the interior, or rather the principal depôt is in the interior, and the branch house on the coast. The capital, Mexico, is to be regarded as the centre of commerce, whither proceed the wares from Vera Cruz, Tampico, and Acapulco; Tampico, however, has branch-houses in San Luis and Potosi, Matamoros, in Monterey and Saltillo, San Blas in Guadalajara, and Campeche in Merida. The wholesale dealers procure what they require from the store-houses of the towns, and in their turn supply the petty merchants of the towns and villages.

Of the ports, none is strictly speaking a free-port, where ships can put in; and if they find no market for their cargoes, they again set sail. They can put in, indeed, only on paying the port-dues, and under certain restrictions, a measure of incalculable injury to the interests of commerce. The dues are high, and an ill-comprehended prohibitive system, intended to promote native enterprise, for which no elements at present exist, renders all manufactured goods dear. This is especially the case with manufactures required by the poorer classes, such as inferior cotton and woollen goods, iron wares etc. A country, which has still an enormous extent of arable land lying uncultivated, which might bring forth every vegetable product on the face of the earth, which is blessed with vast mineral wealth, and is in want of hands only: such a country should not dream of manufactures, but of promoting agriculture, and cultivating the raw produce for barter with the countries which are compelled to have recourse to manufactures. In order, for example, to maintain a small number of cotton and cloth factories producing ordinary stuffs, the importation of yarn and muslin is prohibited, although scarcely half the raw produce for these factories is produced in the country, but must be imported from North America. The consequence is, that the poor man, the Indian, must pay 300 per cent more for his sackcloth (manta), than if he were to procure it from abroad,\* and that these high prices present great inducements to smuggling, which, with such an immense line of coast, and with so extensive a frontier is hardly to be prevented. It is precisely the same with cheap woollen-stuffs, blankets, carpets etc., also with iron-wares of the most indispensable nature. The manufacture of iron can scarcely be said to have commenced; and nine-tenths of what is required in iron and steel are imported. Tools of all kinds pay a heavy duty, in order that the smiths may benefit. At present the forges, especially the good ones, are few and far between, so that the labourer requiring an axe or a hoe, must often travel forty or fifty miles to find a good master-smith. Five or six days elapse before he can return to his work, which may be calculated at three dollars out of his pocket, including his expenses; for the new axe he pays from three dollars to three dollars and a half, which thus costs him between six and seven dollars, and breaks perhaps at the first blow. Owing to the duty, the excellent

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\* The best sackcloth can be sent to Vera Cruz for threepence the Spanish yard, which allows the dealer a fair profit. At present it costs one shilling.