

follow the soldiers to the field, hindering the manœuvres, consuming the provisions, and facilitating desertion.

All these evils have been repeatedly acknowledged by discerning officers, and proposals made for their abolition; but it is extremely difficult to effect innovations, because the best will of individuals is insufficient to overcome the inertness of the mass. The mixed population is also in the way. The Indians are attached to the soil, like the domestic animals to their stable, but they have no patriotism. They will not move unless by compulsion, their lives and way of thinking are stereotype, they find it impossible to extend the limited circle of their ideas.

The war with North America afforded the most distinct evidence of this. There was no talk of a popular rising, for the Indians remained wholly indifferent; in the larger cities only, some of the educated Creoles displayed a lively interest in the result. If the people had risen in defence of their country, Scott's army would have been annihilated. Old Elias Taylor advanced as a cautious soldier, carefully secured the possibility of retreat, and protected his flanks. But Scott penetrated from Vera Cruz into the interior by the sole high-road, across a difficult country, with numerous narrow passes, across a chain of mountains rising from ten to twelve thousand feet above the sea, some seventy leagues distant from his reserves and supplies. He would have been cut off from the coast, an insignificant guerilla party could have intercepted his communications, he must have been lost if the somewhat numerous population of the plateaux had united to attack him, or had refused to supply his wants. An incomprehensible military mistake turned out luckily for Scott; for more than a month he was left unmolested in this critical position, and had leisure to bring up his ammunition and reinforcements, and again take the offensive. The laurels which Scott gained, were owing less to his tactics and bravery, than to the weakness and indolence of his opponent. In the decisive struggle near the capital, several divisions of Mexicans fought with great bravery and resolution, namely at Churubusco; but the favorable moment was lost, the chief command without energy, and what was worse, without confidence, on account of its being in the hands of Santanna, who was incapable of exciting the least spark of enthusiasm.

The experience of late years force upon us the conviction, that the Indian population are unfit for war, as long as their intellectual development is not more cared for. They have therefore been as much as possible exempted from service, even in the national-guard, and doubtless the consideration may have had some weight, that it would not be altogether adviseable to arm this numerically larger portion of the population, who have not wholly forgotten that they were once the dominant race.

In general it is the Spanish-speaking portion of the inhabitants who have to bear arms, consequently the Creoles and Mestizoes, and as these have the greatest objection to military service, there will never be a good militia. In the state of Durango for instance, which for some years has had much to suffer from the Apaches, and still suffers, three hundred well-mounted men cannot be brought together; and these would be sufficient to seek the savages in their mountain-lairs, and render them

for ever innoxious. These predatory tribes never appear in large numbers; they come like the wind, thirty or fifty strong, attack the farms and villages, murder the men, carry off the women and children, and flee, driving the herds of cattle and troops of horses before them, as quickly as they came. The whole state trembles at this plague, mining and agriculture are at a stand-still, because nobody ventures to go far from the towns, and still there is not sufficient unity of purpose, to equip an efficient troop capable of protecting the general interests. For the very thinly populated state of Durango there may be some excuse owing to the great distance of the inhabited places from each other; but in the districts which are better populated the same thing is observed, which can naturally be caused by nothing but the most disgusting selfishness. If the people would act in concert, these annoyances would shortly cease; but every one fears to put himself forward, he has no wish to be on bad terms with any one; and even the authorities do not act 'ex officio', partly for want of support, partly fear for of incurring the hatred of the culprits.

This is not alike in all parts of the country; in the state of Vera Cruz, for instance, no suspicious people can settle, as the villagers and peasants quickly combine to hunt them down. In this state alone the guerillas fought incessantly against the North Americans, cut off many a convoy of food and ammunition, and hindered their operations by attacking them whilst on the march. Here, too, the Indians took no part in the struggle, but like jackals, prowled about the enemy's camp by night, to carry off their horses from the pasture.

XVIII.

THE PROLETARIANS OF MEXICO.

The Mexican cities have their numerous and peculiar proletarians, as well as Naples and Seville; and the well-known lazzaroni have perhaps more skill in devouring maccaroni, but will scarcely represent their class so worthily as the Leperos (also called Pelados) in the west. In Europe it is very hard to be obliged to belong to this class, in Mexico it is deliberately chosen; no pressure of circumstances can hinder

the freedom of development, talent can display itself to the greatest advantage. In a country where the population is inconsiderable, and the territory extensive, strong arms are naturally at a premium. Whoever is willing, can find work; whoever wants land can have it; whoever pays Mother Earth some attention is richly rewarded for it. There ought therefore to be no proletarians in Mexico, it is not a necessary evil, and by means of good schools and a strict police might long since have been eradicated. But it would have been a pity; for a highly respectable part of the community would have been wanting, and the reading public had lost the ensuing sketch, doubtless to their profound grief.

The leperos are the proletarians in the strictest sense of the word. Epicureans on principle, they avoid the annoyance of work as much as possible, and seek for enjoyment wherever it may be obtained. The possession of house and farm produces cares, and it is inconvenient to lock up boxes and chests; therefore they decline troubling themselves about it. The whole individual, with all that he has about him, is not worth a groat, and yet he is in the best humour in the world, and ready to sing and dance. When evening comes, he rarely knows where to lay his head at night, nor how to fill his empty stomach in the morning. A shirt is an article of luxury, but agreeable as a reserve, in order to be able to pawn it, or to stake it, according to circumstances. If he is in luck he buys one, and a pair of trowsers of *manta* (cheap cotton-stuff). His chief possession is the 'frazada', a coarse striped cloth, protecting him against stabs or blows, his bed and counterpane for the night, his state-dress for church and market. This, his 'toga virilis' the lepero throws over his shoulder with more pathos, he produces a greater effect with it than formerly Cicero and Pompey, and should he eventually fall by the knife of an irritated foe, he does so with as much dignity as the great Cæsar on the ides of March. Sympathizing friends then wrap him in his royal robe, passing a cord round him like a bale of goods, and thus he wanders to the grave, simply as he lived. The lepero wears no shoes, first, because he has none, secondly because they cramp his motions, especially when he sees fit to run away. An old straw hat shelters him from the sun, a plaited carrying-girth and a rope protect him from the police, as they clearly shew him to be a porter. A rosary with a cross or a scapulary, worn on his bare chest, proves him to be a good Christian, and besides he attends mass, unless prevented by important business. Those who speculate on the contents of strange pockets never fail to appear at the great religious festivals, and are said to do a good stroke of business there. They are distinguished by their excessive piety and mortification, but nothing escapes their lynx-eyes, although they seem to be exclusively occupied with the prayer-book in their hands. But the arm is false, the hand holding the prayer-book is made of wax so as to defy detection, whilst beneath the cloak they operate freely with both hands, like the most practised juggler.

The wedded lepero has usually a little room in one of the suburbs, where he passes the night; the unmarried one trusts to chance. If he has had a good afternoon, or won at play in the evening, he remains in one of the numerous dens, if

not, he reposes under the church porch, or in one of the less frequented halls, unless the police convey him to the lock-up. Should the lodging be under the bright stars, society is usually to be met with, who huddle together to keep each other warm, for the nights are cool. Having stretched themselves and rubbed their eyes next morning, a visit is paid to a pulqueria or liquor-shop. Their means sufficing, a morning-wet is taken; if out of cash they seek by their wit to induce others to stand treat. Perhaps, too, there is a knife or a pocket-handkerchief (the latter is indispensable with all classes) to pawn, in order to break one's fast. The second desideratum is a cigar, and there these threadbare rogues stand, closely enveloped in their rugs, and hold council whither they shall direct their steps.

Whoever in the morning twilight has traversed the suburbs of Puebla, Mexico, Queretaro or Toluca, must have seen groups of these men, shawled up to the eyes, earnestly deliberating. Others are observed leaning against an angle, or seated on a stone, motionless as a statue. These last have their regular employment, or as old hands, disdain all counsel. The others disperse to the east and west, and commence their industrious career. Some place themselves before the gates of the churches as beggars, feign lameness, and endeavour in pitiful tones to excite the compassion of the church-goers. Others have made an agreement with certain blind men, whom they fetch, and lead through the streets. They take care of the funds, of course to their own advantage, but feed their menagerie well, as the receipts are not bad. Others wander about near the coffee-houses and shops, and pick up all the stumps of cigars thrown away by the smokers. They are dried and converted into cigaritos, which, the sale of tobacco being monopolized by the state, they secretly dispose of at a lower price. The greater part of the pickpockets and thieves push on for the market-place, the churches, the courts of justice, or wherever there is likely to be a sufficient crowd to offer a field for displaying their skill. Their prizes wander to a kind of bazar (*baratillo*), conducted by friends and colleagues.

One class of leperos make a better appearance than those already mentioned; they wear shoes, even a jacket, but are not a whit better than the others. They are the numerous brokers, who for a consideration offer all kinds of stuffs, cravats, hats, boots and shoes, spurs etc. for sale. They intrude more especially at the inns, where they enter the strangers' rooms, praise their wares, persuade the inexperienced to countenance them, steal whatever comes in their way, and are accomplices of the robbers, whom they acquaint with the time of departure, the probable amount of property, and the road of the unsuspecting travellers.

The best description of proletarians seek for work; they present themselves wherever building or other necessary labours are being carried on, in order to earn something as helps or day-labourers. These people, compared with the others, have a good fund of 'humbra de bien' or morality; they say of themselves: "God be thanked, hitherto we have not wandered from the right path; who can tell whether it will continue so?" With such principles they often have the good fortune to be engaged as porters, messengers, water-bearers etc., and if they are not led astray by bad

companions, who tempt them to play and lead a dissipated life, they occasionally become wealthy peasants or shopkeepers. He who has succeeded in becoming water-bearer (aguador), is on the way to higher dignities. For the water-carrier is admitted to the interior of the houses; he must be a decent fellow, and of comparatively refined manners, in order to remain in favour with the kitchen population. This is not over easy, when we consider the whims of Mrs. Cook and Miss Kitchen-maid. If he come too soon, it is not right, if too late, he is overwhelmed with reproaches, and must extricate himself skilfully from the difficult position. Thus: "Ah! you may well talk Donna Crispina; but the fountain was so beset with my colleagues, that one couldn't get near it, and still not one drew water, because they all wanted to hear the singular story which old Hilario had to tell, and in which he had himself played a part. I didn't hear it quite to the end, filled my pitchers very quickly, and ran here lest you should be angry." — "Oh! tell us the story!" exclaim the maids. But the cook who has lost no time in putting a little pot of water on the fire to make chocolate, which has been asked for by her mistress, has not yet got over her bad humour, and angrily observes: "I want water in my kitchen and no stories". The prudent water-bearer is careful not to answer in the same tone, and says: "As you please. I will bring water and be silent." Like a practised psychologist he slings his pitchers across his shoulders, convinced that the curiosity of Donna Cook is greater than her anger; nor is he mistaken. The cook stands in his way as though by accident, saying: "So sparing of your words, master! True, I have my whims, but you know me well enough to be aware, that it's not meant so badly. Look, there's your champurrado* in the porringer; sit down and drink, and then let us hear the news." — "That's just the way with you women", returns the waterman, "always on the high ropes, and finding fault with every one. Am I not here every morning with the sun, and don't I know everything that is going on in the whole town? Yes, when I have to carry messages to Don Juliano, then I am the good master and the dear master; but if the ladies are in a bad humour, then they don't even wish me good morning. Even I have a spark or two of ambition, and am now going; in fact I have already lost so much time on your account, that I could have served two customers." He pretends to be going, but the sight of the porringer, and the entreaties of the maids overcome his modesty; the water-jars are set down, there is a convenient seat on the hearth, and now the anxious public hear the last number of the Scandalous Chronicle.

The water-bearer is the confident in the houses of his customers; not only the porter converses with him, not only does the cook reserve a slice of the joint for him, and the kitchen-maid and parlour-maid entertain the highest opinion of him; but even the children of the house are fond of him, and the mistress consults him when she intends changing a maid, or taking a footman. He knows everything that happens in the town, and can give much information of what is going on

*) Champurrado is a mess of pounded maize and chocolate, which is drunk in the morning instead of coffee.

in the bosom of families even. Many a perfumed note is entrusted for delivery to his hand, many a pretty chambermaid gives him orders by word of mouth. But he never abuses this confidence, and stands up for the unsullied reputation of his patrons.

In the cities of the table-lands, especially in Mexico, the water-bearers have their peculiar dress; and are distinguished by a short leathern apron, a leathern back-piece, and a round leathern cap. The heavy water-jar is carried on the back, and held by a strap, passing over the forehead; a smaller jar is carried in front, attached to another strap, which is passed round the neck. The water-bearers of the coast-towns take it easier: they employ an ass or a mule to carry four small barrels, which are held together in a separate frame placed above the pack-saddle. All are desirous of procuring well-fed, handsome beasts, and appear themselves clean and well-clothed. It may therefore well be said: "that the profession of water-bearer is the noblest part of proletarianism, and the boundary-line of vagabondism."

For beneath the working leperos are the street-porters (cargadores). They stand either at the corners of frequented streets, surround the custom-houses and hotels, exhibit themselves in the market-place, tendering their services to all the passers-by. In the streets they call after every one who appears to have business in contemplation: "Do you want a servant", or "Voy mi (Shall I go, Sir)?" They are speedy and useful, but mostly complete rascals, who, if employed, should never be lost sight of, lest they should suddenly disappear with the bundle they are carrying. Like John Caspar Lavater of yore, they are skilled in physiognomy, and can tell at a glance whether their customers will suffer themselves to be cheated. The inexperienced stranger, the countryman who comes up to town for the first time, village pastors and such like folks are agreeable acquaintance for them; they must assuredly pay their footing, and buy their experience at an unsatisfactory price.

These street-porters are a vicious race, dirty, dissipated, impudent in the highest degree; nothing is sacred in their eyes, they jest at everything, and have something to object to in every passenger. They kiss their hands to the ladies in the balconies, and make love to the nursery-maids. Brandy and gaming are their delight, and when in the noonday-heat they take their siesta in the shade of a high convent-wall, or stretched at full length enjoy their 'dolce far niente', then the cards are pulled out, and when these are wanting, some of their private stud of six-legged racers of the class *Apteridæ*, are pitted against each other, and betted upon just as an Englishman would bet on his full blood race-horse.

Here and there an honest fellow is met with among these vagabonds, who is abused by his comrades as a stupid devil, because he is occasionally so inconceivably absurd, as to carry purchases, entrusted to him by an unsuspecting peasant, to the place indicated, instead of casting them as a godsend into his own locker.

During the tropical rains in summer, it sometimes happens in the capital, that the drains get stopped up, when all the streets become inundated. On the raised foot-paths one can walk dry-footed, but from one street to the other the communi-

cation is interrupted. This is harvest-time for the street-porters; as living ferry-boats they carry across on their backs, from one corner to the other, all who are not bare-footed like themselves; the lepero becomes the successor of St. Christopher, and for a *medio* wades through the troubled waters. After the theatre it is delightful to see these flying bridges (the heavy showers generally fall from eight till ten o'clock in the evening); there is no choice, even ladies must mount this two-legged horse, at the risk of exposing a pretty calf. This would be a trifle, if other awkward inter-mezzoes did not frequently happen. In the middle of the water (especially with ladies) the porters haggle about the price, and if their demands are not complied with, threaten an involuntary bath. Or perhaps friends of these beasts of burden, equally rogues, take advantage of the defenceless state of the burdens, to lighten them of their shawls, bonnets, pocket-handkerchiefs, or whatever else a practised angler may catch with his five fish-hooks, whilst in the confusion, splashing and rush of waters, no one hears the protestations of the victims.

These rascals, too, sometimes employ genuine fish-hooks, which, attached to a strong cord, they let down from the flat roof of a house; unobserved, his accomplice hooks it into the cloak of a passer-by, and suddenly, as if by magic, the garment mounts into the air. Once I saw this, on issuing from the theatre: a cloak soared heavenwards, and the unlucky terrestrial, who beheld it quitting his shoulders, leaped despairingly into the air, stretched forth both his arms, and cursed his hard fate, which was rendered still harder by the shouts of laughter and jests of the lookers-on. Before the police could be found, and the roof examined, the fortunate angler had long since escaped.

The wandering cobblers (*remendones*) also belong to the class of genuine proletarians. They have seen better days in their youth, and have now arrived at the conviction, that the whole earth is vanity. They hold liberty in great estimation, and therefore work under no master; neither can they bear to sit long, and wander from choice. Early in the morning, Crispin sets out with a little basket on his arm; he enters the court-yards of the larger houses, and cries with a deep, brandy-voice, and with long-drawn tones his *remendár* (mend). The house-porter and the other servants know him. "Sit down, master, under the portico", cries one, "there is something for you to do." The old fellow now empties his basket, producing nippers and awl, pieces of leather, thread, bristles and the indispensable cobbler's wax. While dressing a gaping wound in the coachman's boot, he tells the story of his misfortunes, a story purely imaginative as may be supposed. "I was with General Bravo", he says, "when he beat the Spaniards, three days after I had made the general a fine pair of boots. 'Tiburcio' says he, tapping me on the shoulder, 'look', says he, 'to-day I've got on my new boots, which fit like a glove', says he; 'to-day the Spaniards shall feel my sword, and you shall ride near me, and if you fight well, you shall be made a lieutenant.' That was a glorious day, and I might now be a general, or at least a colonel, if my confounded hack had not fallen with me, and

broken my leg. So you see, I wasn't able to display my bravery, and there was an end of my soldiership, for my leg remained twisted, as you now see it."

More shoes are brought, which receive vast patches, whilst he relates anecdotes, which delight the public. He utters many a soft speech to the maids, praises the cook's little foot, who gratefully supplies him with a piece of bread and meat.

Having placed the house on a better footing, he removes, and his 'remendar' is again heard, gradually receding, till its mellow tones are lost in the distance.

Full-blood proletarians hawk newspapers, pamphlets, play-bills and lottery-tickets. They push on usually with rapid steps through the main-streets, crying their wares, often with exceeding humour or even satire, as:

"Fivepence for the great deeds of Santanna!" Similar gentry are engaged as 'coymes' or croupiers in the small gaming-houses; at horse-races or cock-fights they offer the bets, carry the cocks in and out, fasten on the steel spurs, in short anything and everything pertaining to gambling.

The worst description of proletarians are the ruined sons of wealthy parents, pettifogging lawyers, discharged copyists, broken lieutenants, and bankrupt shopkeepers. These people are a thorough plague for the country, the cause of frequent disorders and abuses, even of revolutions. Formerly, still, when the Spaniards held undisputed possession of the colonies, it was no uncommon occurrence for Gachupines*, owing to the great advantages enjoyed by Europeans in commerce, to acquire large fortunes. Many of them could neither read nor write; they usually married the daughter of a Spaniard, possessed of some dowry, and increased their property by diligence and perseverance, but never thought of teaching their children anything worth learning, or of seriously rendering them acquainted with business. At the same time the old man was miserly and surly, the young man, as a Creole, thoughtless and fond of pleasure. In his childhood he was constantly with the servants, learned every kind of vice, was always defended by the feeble mamma, even when he had robbed his father; and when at length the latter closed his eyes in death, the son hastened at full gallop to ruin. The children of these unfortunate sons enjoyed some years of opulence, and learned nothing but what was bad; their education was limited to reading, writing, and simple arithmetic, and the parents speedily becoming poor, rendered them genuine proletarians. Hence the Mexican proverb:

El padre comerciante
El hijo paseante
El nieto medicante.

That is to say: The father a merchant, the son a walking-gentleman, the grandson a beggar.

* In the popular dialect 'Gachupin' means Spaniard; from the Aztec 'Cactli' shoe, and 'chopinia' prickle, consequently 'cacthopin' prickleshoe, a name, which the Indians gave to the spurred Spaniards.