

In every town, even in every larger village, one meets with living proofs of the truth of this proverb; people, who by colour belong to the higher class of society, unacquainted with work, and without the least desire to exert themselves. They play the guitar, dance, sing, are skilled in games of hazard, even to the minutest detail, talk of horses in the most masterly style, of fighting-cocks as connoisseurs, are unscrupulous seducers of young females, are never missing at a dance, or a festival, and yet every one knows, that they possess nothing but what they carry on their backs. Their constant endeavour is to obtain a 'destinito', that is, a place, a situation. Through the recommendation of friends and relations they are employed as shop-men, but rarely keep their places long, as they share the receipts with their principal, who is so little satisfied with the proceeding, that he soon dismisses them. As clerks and copyists in the courts of justice, in the town-council, and in the major's office, they are often smuggled in, and if nothing else will succeed, they must try for a place as sub-overseer in agricultural or mining operations; or as schoolmaster to the Indians. Wherever they are, they bring nothing good in their train; they are dissipated immoral scoundrels, who strew tares amongst the wheat.

Many of this description never quit the cities, and these are the genuine swindlers. Gaming, and usually with false dice or secreted cards, is their principal resource; but this can only be carried on by night, so that by day, they have time to think of other matters. They are for the most part dressed like the whites, though poorly perhaps, have very glib tongues, and leisure enough to study every imaginable part. Under the piazzas, in the coffee-houses and inns they find opportunities of ensnaring strangers. They talk of business, conduct those who are desirous of making purchases to the shops, help them to choose, bargain for them, and are obliging in every way. The tradesman is satisfied with the business done, and duly receives his payment; the purchaser wishes to keep up his connection with the house, and promises to send further orders. The swindler is present the whole time, and the tradesman fancies him a relation of the customer. The latter now returns to his village, exceedingly grateful towards the kind friend, who has so disinterestedly served him. The friend, however, has asked for his address, is in possession of his hand-writing, and takes advantage of this to forge letters, in which more goods are ordered, which the tradesman is to hand over to the cousin. He receives the goods, and disappears from this quarter of the city. Even should the cheat be recognized, the property is irrecoverably lost.

Bills and receipts are forged in a similar manner, and the money obtained for them. Usually small sums are borrowed of their new acquaintances; only five piastres for an hour, as they have unluckily forgotten their purses. "I don't want to go all the way home, you need feel no anxiety, you shall have it again almost immediately." If you give it, it is lost; but if you say positively: "I never lend money" they resume: "I would offer you my watch as security, were I not afraid of offending a gentleman like yourself. My word is sacred; but it is true, I have not the honour of being known to you; I could name you some of the first men in the city,

who would unhesitatingly advance me a thousand pesos, and you are anxious about a trumpery five, which I should not refuse my lackey. Give me at least three."

Whoever is curious to hear all the turns and shifts resorted to by this industrious class, should quietly refuse, and the amount required will gradually diminish to a dollar. Should one then angrily reply: "I'll lend you nothing at all; here you have two reals, and now leave me in peace and quietness", he will haughtily wrap himself in his cloak with the words: "I am not accustomed to receive alms!" Nevertheless he will take it, with the remark, that he will give it to the first beggar, and returns thanks in his name only.

Inexperienced countrymen, who have to fight out a law-suit, may thank their stars, if having fallen into the hands of these fellows, they escape without being ruined. They constitute themselves lawyers, employ legal phrases, read highly interesting documents to their clients, and let themselves be well paid for it. First there must be an advance for stamps and dues, then fees for looking at the acts etc.; thus the matter is spun out for months, and if chance should not open the eyes of the dupe, the careful lawyer devours all his goods and chattels. Roguery of this description is naturally punished, if it can be proved; but the cheats are cunning, and generally know how to keep out of sight, when a storm threatens.

The right honourable guild, which we have just described, give birth to a posterity which is almost invariably lost, and even the fathers frequently end as bandits or highwaymen. I should be unjust towards them, did I not observe that occasionally a nobler ambition induces them to struggle upwards, and by diligence and honesty to regain the position in society, which the levity of the parents has sacrificed.

Away with grave reflections! The sky is blue, the air is mild, no winter with its snow, no desert with its simoom! Where nature is so hospitable and produces in such abundance, where even the birds build slighter nests than in the rude north, how can man do otherwise than lead a more careless life than elsewhere! In the tropics to-day is enjoyed without any thought of to-morrow; and he who is possessed of the happy temperament to enjoy the fleeting hour, should perhaps be left to enjoy it undisturbed.

The proletarian of a tropical country does not consider his lot hard; he has no desire to change, and a festival is for him a day of the golden age. Enter the cities of Mexico at Christmas, or on All-Saints' Day, look well at the people who at night crowd into the squares, and the wrinkles of care, the demon of want are not perceptible. On Christmas-Eve the public squares are lighted with pine-torches, the handsome and the ugly move backwards and forwards between long streets of booths, which are covered with flowers and green leaves, and contain a delicious selection of fruits, confectionery, spirituous and refreshing liquors. The Christmas-tree and the presents for the children are not known to the people of Romaic origin, scarcely even among the Britons, and still old and young rejoice in Christmas-Eve. Thus it is also in Mexico.

The stars shine so bright in the cloudless sky, that a walk through the town is gladly undertaken for the benefit of the children, who are very anxious to proceed to the market-place. In most cities Christmas-Eve would be incomplete without games of chance, and these, licensed by the police, are carried on at numerous tables both in and outside the booths. Here and there you try your luck at roulette, cards or lotto, but the 'polacas', a description of lotto, are most liked. The prizes are ribands, pocket-handkerchiefs, little rings and chains, glass, china, and even sweet-meats. Music resounds on all sides, singing and dancing are the order of the evening, rockets are sent up, and every one is in his best humour.

The lepero is enthusiastic for these classical festivals: he dresses himself almost like a bridegroom, his hat is adorned with a new riband, or a silk handkerchief is passed round it instead, his shirt has actually been washed, his otherwise tangled locks are partially combed, and are certainly less elf-like; he has spent a *medio* (about twopence-halfpenny), in order to convert the crusts of dirt, dust and soot which had stood in bold relief on his face, neck and hands, into the natural brown. His toga is thrown over his shoulder with regal dignity; he has his buskins on, for at his side is the idol of his heart, his *China* his *Chata* (his curly-head, his turn-up nose, or *nez retroussé*), the flower of the street, his worthy Dulcinea.

Hitherto we have not mentioned the dualism of the proletarians, and yet it is absolutely necessary to speak of it here. Whilst striving and labouring throughout the day, he appears alone, and is never seen in female society except perhaps at dinner. Many of them are duly married, according to the rites of the church; but the majority certainly not. They feel, however, the necessity of sharing their lot with a gentler being, and surely this may be achieved, as there are plenty of damsels of their class, who, like the male leperos, are enamoured of freedom. Their fortunes are easily united. They meet after the fatigues of the day, and share whatever they may have picked up. Without the blessing of the priest, they live perhaps happier than with it; for as both parties are free, they remain united only so long as inclination prompts. This is the social philosophy of the lepero. In general matters, much as he is inclined to communism, his jealous nature renders him an opponent of the system on this point. If, therefore, the proletarians are met with at the nocturnal festivals, as if they had issued from Noah's ark, we know what is meant by it. Friends are greeted, the most formal and polite speeches are made, as though they were so many mandarins. "Cavalier, how are you, how is your amiable lady? Your grace seems to be in an ill humour, you look like a week in Lent! Oh! Señorita, rouse him a little! Let us drink a glass of something sweet, something that the ladies will like, etc." In the liquor-booths, these happy couples become very animated, their faces become flushed, there is abundance of wit, the fair sex lay aside every appearance of prudery and coldness, are always ready with an answer, and although they modestly conceal their faces with their shawl, when the glass is raised to their sweet lips, the inferior quality of the liquid proves that they imbibe no small quantity of it, to produce so striking a result.

They now begin to play; the gallant cavaliers put down the stakes, and the winnings are handed over to their charmers. The latter also act independently, and shew that they are emancipated; they stake *medio* after *medio*, and with cigar in mouth, take their places at the play-table. The vile conversation carried on by this scum of society, may easily be imagined.

The night rarely ends without quarrelling and bloodshed; rival ladies meet, or one rascal rouses the jealousy of another; they sneer at each other, become excited and proceed to abuse, until two fierce champions, their cloaks wrapped about their left arms, draw their knives on each other. No one interferes; the fight is quietly regarded, or the combatants incited, until one suddenly falls, exclaiming: "Jesus me valga (Jesus protect me)". The other coolly wipes the blood from his knife, saying: "I didn't want to quarrel; for I'm uncommonly peaceable; but consider, he abused my mother, and I can't stand that!" All disappear incontinently, in order not to fall into the hands of the police; only the mistress of the wounded man remains, embraces him, sobs bitterly, and with her handkerchief endeavours to stop the effusion of blood.

No popular festival, no church consecration, no marriage takes place in the suburbs, without some of the leperos wounding or killing each other. The magistrates are at a loss to find quarters for all those who are arrested, and as there are no Houses of Correction, the prisons become perfect seminaries of vice. At the bar they speak with as much eloquence as if they had studied at the Paris Court of Assizes; they are so innocent, so candid, so modest. "Your worship", they say, "I am not fond of speaking of myself, and detest singing my own praise; but, here I must say, I am a thoroughly honest man, and would rather speak against myself, than inculcate another." Whoever begins thus, is an undoubted rascal, and every word he utters a lie.

Police matters, and the administration of justice demand a thorough reform. Nothing is done to prevent crime, and punishment so rarely ensues, that it can hardly be wondered at if vice and crime flourish to an extent that does incalculable injury to the healthy portion of the community.

It would be easy to complete these *genre* pictures of the lower classes, by various groups, which would offer a better subject for the pencil of a modern Teniers, than market-scenes and drinking-bouts. Hither belong the evangelists, whom we have already mentioned, the flymen and the muleteers, who are said, in their manners and language, to have been materially influenced by their four-footed charges. They are, however, a stout race: not up to all the tricks of the urban leperos, and therefore often victimised by them, especially at play. If a troop of *arrieros* (muleteers) have put up their *recua* (string of mules) at an inn, they are sure to find some leperos, who apparently take no notice of the guests, and sit in a corner playing with a greasy pack of cards. Presently some of the guests look on, are soon induced to take part in the game, and the unsuspecting leather jackets mostly yield up the fruit of a long journey to these rogues. Knowing every card in their pack by some outward

sign, they boldly launch into expence, call for liquor and consume no small quantity. To be sure, it now and then happens, that a *latino* (an old practitioner) is among the *arrieros*, who discovers the cheat, and now the *leperos* are overwhelmed with a shower of blows and cuffs, more even than an ass could endure; their pockets are emptied, and they unexpectedly find themselves in the open air.

Before closing our account of the honourable guild of *leperos*, we ought not to omit mentioning that there are many quiet harmless groups; under this head belong the gatherers of candle-ends, scavengers, convent-porters, factory labourers, and many others. It might fatigue the reader to enter into particulars, we will close the chapter, therefore with a brilliant episode of their public life.

On the 16th September, the anniversary of the acknowledgment of independence (or on some other holiday), a great bull-fight is advertised. The *lepero* deems this the acmé of felicity, and lays aside all thoughts of work. Several hours before the entertainment begins, dense groups besiege the gates of the great circus. In many cities stone buildings are erected for the purpose, after the model of the ancient Roman amphitheatre, mostly oval, and large enough to accommodate many thousand persons. It would be superfluous to describe the bull-fight, which differs not materially from those of Spain. In the great circus of Mexico, the arena is enclosed by a strong partition of beams and planks, about seven feet high; beyond the partition is a space five feet in width, and then come the tiers of boxes and benches. All the unwashed are admitted into this intervening space for a mere trifle, and many of them, as may be well imagined, are cunning enough to slip in for nothing. They see very badly, and must content themselves with peeping through the cracks in the boards, or through holes which they have effected by pushing out an occasional knot. Some of them climb up the beams or poles, and these are well off. The trumpets announce the beginning of the fight; the heroes on horse and foot exhibit their skill; the clown cracks his jokes, and finds a multitudinous echo among the proletarians, who envy him his distinguished position; the *matador* ends the disgustingly cruel scene, in order to begin it anew. The bulls play their part nobly, they have already killed several horses, and two or three men have been carried from the arena. Here comes a bull who declines to attack, and who is hooted for being a bad actor. "A la cola (to the tail)" shout the multitude, and the *picadores*, or mounted champions follow him round the circus; one seizes his tail, others wound him with the lance, until the frightened animal, rendered desperate, bounds, with a terrific bellow, over the high barrier. Here the knights of the *pavé* are densely crowded; no courage can avail against the monster; all seek safety in disorderly flight, and whole rows are overthrown, trampled upon and gored. The activity with which the mob clamber up anything that offers the remotest chance of escape, the shouts and cries proceeding from the crowded barrier, can only be compared with the flight of a troop of apes, amongst whom a shot has been fired, whilst they were harmlessly at play in the forest, on the ground. The delight of the public is unbounded, the clapping of

hands, the shouts of bravo and the laughter are incessant; whilst even the involuntary actors, as soon as the enemy has disappeared, jeer at the sufferers.

But now the important moment approaches, when on a signal given by the first *alcalde* of the city, the trumpets sound, and announce, that our *leperos* may appear as *volunteers* in the arena. Like a swarm of ants, the whole population of the *lobbies*, if we may so term the space already frequently alluded to, climb over the barriers, and the arena is completely filled with a choice selection of ragged vagabonds. Each of these brown, shabby fellows, holds his cloak in readiness, as the *toredores* hold their red cloth, in order to cast it over the eyes of the intruding bull. The trumpets sound again — and through the opened gates rushes an enormous bull, who shews plainly enough, that he has no mind to let himself be teased with impunity. To prevent accidents the tips of his horns have been sawn off, and the ends carefully and securely padded. Like the corn beneath the scythe of the reaper, the *leperos* fall beneath the blows of the animals. The practised hands attack him with all the skill of the *toredores*; they parry the blow with their cloaks, but the crowd and the confusion are so great, that they and many others are overthrown. The timid prudently fly towards the raised *spina*, in the centre of the arena, but the foe often overtakes them, and the shouts and jeers of the others exhibit their intense delight. The most ridiculous accidents occur: in spite of all his hard blows and knocks, the *lepero* is always on his legs, and is never tired of trying his luck again. At length whole masses of *leperos* hang on to the tail and horns of the bull; they are shaken off like chaff, and dispersed; and if the mayor did not at length give the signal to close the sports, they would get the animal down, even though it cost more broken ribs, bleeding heads, and extraction of teeth without the aid of the dentist.

The whole entertainment is like a vile dream, like the struggle of the gnomes and dwarfs against a savage giant; but in the mode of performance the invincible humour of the people is evinced.

The same theme is varied in numerous ways. For instance a number of tables are placed in the arena with all kinds of dishes, such as the *leperos* patronize; they take their seats and begin to feed heartily. All at once ruin breaks in upon them: the grim bull gallops among the tables, overthrowing *leperos*, dishes and benches, and compelling all to seek safety in hurried flight. The funniest part of this is to see how each endeavours to save something from the wreck: a plate, a piece of roast meat, or at least some sweetmeats; delay brings the foe upon him, and the dishes with their bearers roll in the dust.

Occasionally instead of the tables, well greased climbing-poles are erected, at the top of which are handkerchiefs, watches, shoes etc., as prizes. When the crowd about the climbing-poles is densest, the ox is admitted, and now fear and avarice produce the drollest struggles.

Jumping in sacks also occasionally constitutes part of the amusements. But the blind hunt throws the *lepero* into ecstasies of delight. Half a dozen blind *leperos* enter the arena, and the same number of pigs, each with a little bell about its neck.

The blind men have sticks in their hands, and if they can succeed in striking a pig, they receive it as a prize. The sound of the bell betrays the whereabouts of the pig; and it frequently happens that several blind men go after the same pig, and let their blows fall on each other, instead of on the porker, which is, of course, the climax of the joke in the eyes of the proletarian public.

In conclusion we may observe that the proletarians consist almost exclusively of Mestizos, and that the Indians, poor as they seem to be, as peasants, landowners, mechanics, and as members of a community, are not to be regarded as proletarians. The Indian honestly supports himself and his family, pays his taxes, lives in wedlock, and does not leave his village to wander about at random like the lepero proper, whose numbers are mainly recruited by illegitimate children, and who are decidedly worst in the larger cities!

Two men proved during their excellent administration, that this description of proletarianism may in a short time be eradicated, and rendered useful to the state; they were Count Revilla-Gigedo, viceroy in Mexico from 1789 till 1794, whose memory is still held in the greatest esteem, and General Miguel Tacón, governor-general in Cuba, some twenty years since. The position of the latter was uncommonly difficult, as in the Havannah he had to do with a most vile description of proletarians, consisting of negroes and mulattoes; and with a dissipated unruly nobility. With severity, but with impartiality, he compelled both to submit implicitly to the laws; and brought forth results, which astounded everybody.

Fortunate, indeed, were it for Mexico, if at the head of her government, she had a president boasting of the wisdom of Revilla-Gigedo, and of the firmness of Tacón!

XIX.

THREE FESTIVALS.

PASSION-WEEK, CORPUS-CHRISTI, ALL SOULS.

With most nations, festivals are connected with their religious worship, and such occasions offer the best opportunity of studying the manners and customs of the country. In Mexico, the religious festivals have assumed a peculiar character; Indian customs have been in part retained, and are most singularly interwoven with the

ceremonies as practised in Europe. These peculiarities, however, must not be sought for in the cities, for on the whole surface of the earth, civilization there levels ancient customs, and fashion scorns that which in distant country towns and villages is still regarded as sacred. Let us therefore proceed to the mountains, and there, in a mining-town of the lofty Andes, take part in a festival in all its ancient pomp.

In order to celebrate Passion-Week, every one seeks to return to his native place, but not with empty pockets. When the time approaches, even the idlest work hard; for it is considered sad indeed not to be able to spend a few dollars during the festive season. The different villages vie with each other in their preparations, in order to surpass each other in splendour. At length Palm Sunday arrives, and with it a succession of entertainments. A procession represents the entrance of the Saviour into Jerusalem; a wooden image of Christ, seated on an ass-foal, is borne through the village to the church at the porch of which it is welcomed with triumphant hymns, palm-boughs and flowers being strewn before it. The Indian calls his image "San Ramos", and esteems it highly, perhaps on account of his favorite animal. Every one takes home a palm-branch, for it has wondrous power, and in the form of a cross, is fastened to the cottage-door, to ward off evil, more especially lightning.

The Holy Week has begun, the confessionals are occupied from morning till night, every one seeks to fulfil the duties imposed upon him by the church, few, unhappily, endeavour to avoid frivolity. In order that a solemn frame of mind may be induced, early in the morning and late in the evening, the most lugubrious music is heard in the village; it is a little Indian drum, and a fife, which accompanies the monotonous beat with long-drawn tones. This the simplest of plaintive music (the fife has but three notes) is relieved by the solemn tones of the chirimia, a kind of trumpet, eight to ten feet in length, with a large mouth-piece at the thin end. The peculiarity of this instrument is, that the tone is produced by drawing in the breath; there are no holes or keys, and the modulation is effected by compressing the lips, forming thus a kind of musical ventriloquism. The performer on this original instrument must have good lungs, and, by reason of the length of the trumpet, be tall and strong. Whilst in motion the breath cannot be drawn in, he therefore halts, leans far back, in order to obtain a horizontal position for his instrument, and brings forth the most doleful notes, quite calculated to wake the sleepers in their graves.

The village streets have all been swept, and the roads repaired, horse and foot exercises have been undertaken; the schoolmaster is almost in despair at some young fellows, whom he has endeavoured to teach a dialogue in verse, but who have invariably forgotten in the morning what they have learnt in the evening; and the priest sighs in confidence to his curate: "How I wish there were no holy weeks!" The women, in a state of excitement, hurry to the house of Donna Philomena, who as the highest authority in taste, must give her advice about the costume of the angels. The Mater dolorosa has her hair dressed, the Jesus Nazareno is brushed and varnished; in short everybody has something to attend to, as the whole village