

procure the tapers, others engage penitents, pay for the sermons, or for the music. The clergy in Mexico do nothing *ex officio*; on the occasion of a festival, the president of an association (*majordomo de la Cofradria*) bargains with the priest for a mass, which is paid for according to the luxury displayed, for sermons, for the procession etc. The good old times are at an end even there, and the Indian now often enquires the reason, when he has to put his hand into his pocket!

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Corpus Christi, which in Mexico, as everywhere in Catholic countries, is celebrated with uncommon splendour, always comes at the warmest season. In the larger cities there is nothing peculiar in the mode of celebration. In the capital only a small proportion of the inhabitants join the procession; but every one desires to see it pass; the fashionable world wishes to exhibit itself in full toilette, and to criticize the toilette of others. The solemnities begin with high-mass, performed in the cathedral by the archbishop, at which all the clergy of the city, including the monks, are present. From the cathedral the procession goes through the nearest western circuit of streets, about a thousand paces. The whole way is covered with a canopy or awning of white linen, with a red border, high enough to leave the balconies of the houses free, which contain the most superb toilettes that the city can produce. The spiritual and the temporal power display all their splendour, the symbol of the divinity is radiant with diamonds. The Light of the World has an escort of honour, consisting of grenadiers with Turkish music; the President appears with his ministers and all his council, the supreme authorities, the administration, the universities, the schools, the municipality, generals in their different uniforms, with a brilliant staff and the corps of officers. The clergy, with the bishop and his imposing train of prebendaries at their head, exhibit the well-disciplined sons of the church in their different garb, who with waving flags, and glancing crosses and standards, afford a prospect equally brilliant and varied.

The number who take part in the procession is so arranged, that, when the last pair leave the cathedral, the first pair re-enter by the great gates. The city exhibits a festive appearance, the houses being decked with carpets and garlands, flags and streamers being hoisted on the palaces and towers, whilst the bells peal and the cannon roar — just as in Europe. The European spectator would be more attracted by the crowd; for nowhere can such diversity of complexion, race, costume and manners possibly be met with.

Let us glance at the same festival in one of the large Indian villages on the plateaux, or in the mountains!

On the four sides of the square in front of the church, the Indians construct a green avenue of trees and branches, an arbour, closely interwoven at the top and at the sides, and lavishly decorated with flower-wreaths. In the four corners of the

square, flower-altars are constructed, where the responses are sung, the ground is profusely covered with flowers, and earthenware basins are seen on all sides, in which copal and storax burn. That which is most singular, and a relic of ancient times, which the Christian priests have permitted to be continued, as a harmless amusement, is the sacrifice of sylvan beasts, which the Indian offers to the divinity, as his ancestors offered to Quezalcoatl or Tlaloc. Every living wild beast that can be procured, is bound and suspended in the green alley. The jackal and the fox, the armadillo and the opossum, the raccoon and the *nasua* are seen struggling in their bonds; birds of prey, ravens, wild ducks and turkeys, quails and turtle-doves flutter in the snares by which they were caught, and a quantity of small singing-birds flutter and twitter in cages of bamboo from all sides of the green foliage. Even in the church, before the festively decorated high-altar, the melodious song of the mocking-bird is heard, and the metallic notes of the brown *silvia*.

This innocent gratification may well be conceded to the child of nature! The Indian generally, and more especially the inhabitant of ancient Anahuac, exhibits in his life many traces of the primeval nature-worship of the Toltecs, to whom subsequent generations owed their civilisation and religion. Mountains and springs he still conceives tenanted by tutelary genii, the goddess of the clouds still draws her nets over the sky to fertilize the earth (*Matlacuey*, *Matlaquiahuatl*) and the tutelary genius (*Tonal*) appears to the new-born child on his entrance into life, just as the *Tecototl* announces the end of his days. His love for flowers, too, his selection of them to adorn churches and altars, his skill in decorating religious performances was not taught by the Spaniards, nor is it accidental, but since many centuries interwoven with his life, and derived from another race than that of the Aztecs with their bloody rites. The offering of living animals on Corpus Christi may also belong to an earlier form of worship.

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Another festival which is kept by the whole population, but which is of peculiar significance for the Indian, is that of All Saints and All Souls. With the Germanic tribes it is the Christmas festival which has received its popular impress from ante-Christian habits and traditions. The Romanic tribes are strangers to the Christmas tree and the children's games of the Germans, to the Christmas log of the Britons, and other souvenirs of the yule night. They have received instead, the carneval and other relics of Roman paganism. With the Mexicans the festival of *Todos santos* received a national colouring, dating from the aborigines, but gradually adopted by the Mestizoes and even by the Creoles. It is not the festival of the Roman Church, for this is here only a secondary consideration, it is an ancient Indian festival, which the prudence of the Christian priests, who found it too deeply rooted amongst the neophytes, added to the Christian holidays.



All Saints' Day is everywhere preceded by vast purchases. On this day a new dress must be had, new ribands and shoes; the women buy new crockery of all kinds, fine, parti-coloured mats, elegant little baskets of palm-leaves (*tompiall*), and bright-coloured schikales (the fruit of the *crescentia alata*). But above all the purchase of wax tapers causes much head-breaking in every house. For several weeks beforehand great activity is observed amongst the retail dealers. Every shopkeeper endeavours to procure wax at a reasonable figure, candle-makers work in his house preparing tapers of all sizes, and in the evening the whole family is occupied in ornamenting these tapers with strips of coloured paper. There is no house, no cottage without some dollars' worth of tapers; the poorest labourer would rather go without bread, than without wax; and the Indians devote the earnings of weeks to its purchase.

In the larger cities this is less known; the higher classes as they are called, withhold themselves as much as possible from plebeian habits, and we must wander to the villages, if we desire to see this festival in its ancient form.

Whoever is fortunate enough to have a godfather among the Indians — and one can easily attain this good fortune — should visit his *compadres* (god-parents) on the first of November. The street in front of the house is swept very clean, and before the door is a large cross covered with immortelles (*tagetes*). The Indian calls them *sempasochil* and always plants them near his cottage. The house is in festive order, the old saints on the wall are laden with flowers, a wreath of flowers is between them, and two tapers burn in clay candlesticks. No one is at home, but close by, in the kitchen, we distinctly hear the thumping and shaping of the tortillas. Let us look through the doorway into this sanctum of the women. Three stout lasses are preparing the maize on stones, but our *comadre* (godmother) stands there with a knife in her hand, like Judith over Holofernes; happily, though, her victim is only a large turkey. Another, doomed to the same fate, is tied up in a corner; and close by are at least six fat hens, all ready for the pot. "Who would be so cruel, *comadre*," we exclaim, after saluting her: "what are you going to do with this mass of provision? Is one of the girls to be married?" The three look roguishly at each other and laugh. "*Ojala*," says the old woman chuckling, "I should then be rid of one of my cares; but the fowls are for the dead, and you will afterwards do us the honour of trying the *ilatmile*."

Should the reader think of accepting the invitation, we must warn him not to fill his mouth with the proffered dish before trying it; this *ilatmile* looks like a very innocent ragout, but burns like fire, being the genuine extract of unripe Spanish pepper, and none but mouths that are fire proof may venture on it. But we must now explain the meaning of the festival.

The ancient Aztecs held annually a great festival in honour of the dead, and offered the departed death-sacrifices. In walled sepulchres of the olden time I have found the thigh-bones of turkeys, covered with a dish, and on the pavement surrounding the tombs the bones of little birds, with small pilasters built over them. The

sacrifices were probably of various kinds, accordingly as they presumed their dead to be in the lustrous house of the sun, in the shady abode of Tlalloc, or in the gloomy Mictlan. Even human sacrifices seem to have taken place, sacrifices of slaves, as in front of a large funereal pyramid, in a round walled hollow, numerous skulls were found. It is beyond doubt that at these festivals, death-sacrifices, and death-meals took place. The Christian priests suffered these rites to be combined with those of All Souls, and thus the heathen, probably Toltec custom has maintained itself till the present day. The name would lead one to suppose it a gloomy festival, quietly reminding of all the loved ones, whom the earth covers. Neither the Indian nor the Mestizo knows the bitterness of sorrow; he does not fear death; the departure from life is not dreadful in his eyes, he does not crave for the goods he is leaving, and has no care for those who survive him, who have still the fertile earth, and the mild sky. Is it indifference, is it frivolity which a rich tropical nature bestows on her children? I know not; but it is certain, that in the eyes of the people, death does not appear as a black, dismal spectre, that sorrow for the dead does not absorb all the joys of life. The first outbreak of grief is violent, copious showers of tears are shed, but are soon dried. Like the Mussulman, the Mexican says: "God has willed it, we must all die." Every Indian thinks thus, and regards it from the practical side. On the occasion of a death the relations and neighbours come and share in the grief, especially throughout the night; when the body remains in the house. The tribute offered is a taper, and something to drink. Prayers are offered up for the repose of the deceased, and the night is then passed in social games and merriment in the same apartment where the corpse lies on the floor surrounded with tapers. When death befalls a child under seven years (*parvulos*), it is celebrated as a day of rejoicing, because the soul ascends direct to heaven, without undergoing the transitory state of Purgatory. The little corpse is gaily decked with flowers and ribands, fastened to a board and placed upright in a corner of the cottage, in a sort of niche formed of branches and blossoms, and lighted up with many tapers. On the approach of evening, a few rockets proclaim the *velorio*, music resounds, and the whole night is passed in dancing and merry-making. The god-parents of the children do not altogether approve of it, as they have to pay the reckoning. At these wakes, the company remain assembled till the morning (with children as with adults), and then proceed immediately to the churchyard. The bier is quickly formed of a few sticks, a mat serves for a coffin; if a priest is at hand, preceded by three cross-bearers he hastens to the spot, gives the benediction, and the body is lowered into the earth, to return to earth. Every one present casts in a handful of dust, the grave is filled in, and the mourners depart without any extraordinary impression being produced. If a mother is pitied for having lost her child, she replies: "I loved the little angel; but I am glad that he is happy, without having had to experience the bitterness of life."

Thus accustomed to make light of that which is inevitable, to dance about the yawning grave, we shall not be surprised to find, that the rites in honour of the



departed have rather a joyous than a melancholy character. We repeat that only the Indian and the Mestizo observe this ancient practice, whereas the white Creole rarely imitates the Indian custom.

In the Indian villages the proceedings are as follows. On the evening of the last day of October, the house is put in the best order, and when it is dark, a new, parti-coloured, woven mat is spread out on the floor of the dwelling. The whole family are assembled in the kitchen, waiting for the meal being prepared, which consists of chocolate, sweet maize porridge, stewed chickens and little tortillas. A portion of each is put if possible into new vessels, and conveyed by the members of the family into the house, where it is placed on the mat; to this is added a peculiar kind of maize-bread, called *elotlascale*, and death-bread, a kind of wheaten-bread without fat, sugar and salt, which is baked for this day only, shaped like a rabbit, a bird etc., and prettily ornamented. On clay candlesticks, corresponding with the number of dishes, thin wax-tapers are lighted, not much thicker than a quill; roses, marigolds, and the blossoms of the *datura grandiflora* are laid between the plates; and now the head of the family invites the dead children, that is to say those of his own immediate house (his own children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters) to come and regale themselves with the offering. The whole family now return to the kitchen to consume the remainder of the meal, which has been prepared abundantly enough to regale also the living. This is the offering of the children, and every child, according to the age it had attained, has its dish and its taper. Saucers with incense are placed around the mat, and fill the chamber with a dense cloud.

The following day offerings are prepared for the adults in a similar manner; but all on a larger scale, from the mat to the tapers. Other dishes, too, are added, which would be too hot for the children: turkey in red-pepper broth, tamales, and other highly seasoned dishes; there is moreover a good supply of drink in large mugs, brandy, pulque, castile, and other favorite liquors of the Indians. With the adults less care is exhibited for adorning the room with flowers; but things are added which belonged to the deceased: their sandals, their straw-hat, or the hatchet with which they worked. The whole house is filled with incense, which is placed before the pictures of the patron saints, who were undoubtedly introduced, three centuries ago, in place of the house idols.

The belief, that the souls of the departed visit the places that were dear to them in life, that they sometimes flutter about their dwelling as bright humming-birds, sometimes float above their former home as clouds, was doubtless handed down by the Toltecs to the subsequent lords of the soil, namely to the Aztecs; and we may assume that it still obtains among the people, although we have never succeeded in gaining confirmation of the same from the mouth of an Indian. They are reserved in everything bearing reference to the religion of their fathers; perhaps, owing to their long subjection, their traditions are unconnected, and only here and there to be recognized.

The meal, dedicated to the manes of the departed, is not usually consumed by those who offer it; but is sent to relations and neighbours, from whom a similar

donation is received. In the villages where there is a mixed population, the young fellows on the look out for fun, go to the dwellings of the Indians, and offer to tell their beads for the repose of the souls. They are welcomed, and the offerings intended for the ghosts, are in part devoured by the living. Let us join a party of them, consisting of young Creoles and a few Mestizoes. They laugh and jest at the silly Indians, who prepare a meal for those who are long since dead. "Do you recollect, Felipe, how we told our beads in old Mizcoat's house, and had nearly burst with laughter when long Nicholas filched a glass of sweet liquor from the *ofrenta* (death-meal) and emptied it, and then made the old heathen believe, the shade of his son had drunk it?" — "To be sure", returned the other; "but last year he managed better, and would not admit us until all the liquids had been placed in safety. We made up for it, however, by carrying off a contribution from his fat *huajolote* (turkey), which was not to be despised; and there was drink enough at his neighbour's."

Talking in this way, the mischievous rogues knocked at the doors, and muttered prayers, feasted at the expence of the harmless superstition of the poor Indians, and in addition, carried away a tolerable supply of boiled and roast. We quit them, to do honour to the comadre's invitation, and are hospitably entertained. We there learned that only white ragouts were cooked for the children, which are but moderately spiced, but still burn like a decoction of pepper; further that few families spend less than from six to ten dollars for this feast, and that it is their greatest delight to consume all their favorite dishes on this day. The following day, the church-festival of All Souls, mass is attended, and the women light whole rows of little wax tapers which they stick on the floor before them. This is a harvest-day for the priests; for every Indian has a short prayer said for the souls of his departed after divine service, for which he has to depose two reals (about one shilling) on the altar.

In the evening the women and children proceed to the cemetery, strew the graves with flowers, sprinkle them with holy-water, burn incense, and light innumerable tapers, which are suffered to burn until they go out of themselves. In the clear, beautiful November nights, these grave illuminations afford a magical appearance, when the tapers light up the dark cypresses or orange-trees of the cemetery, and the gloomy walls of the chapel. All is hushed; no sound is heard near the abodes of the dead save the chirp of grasshoppers, like the breath of nature; whilst the expiring flame of the tapers reminds us of the soul quitting its frail earthly tenement.