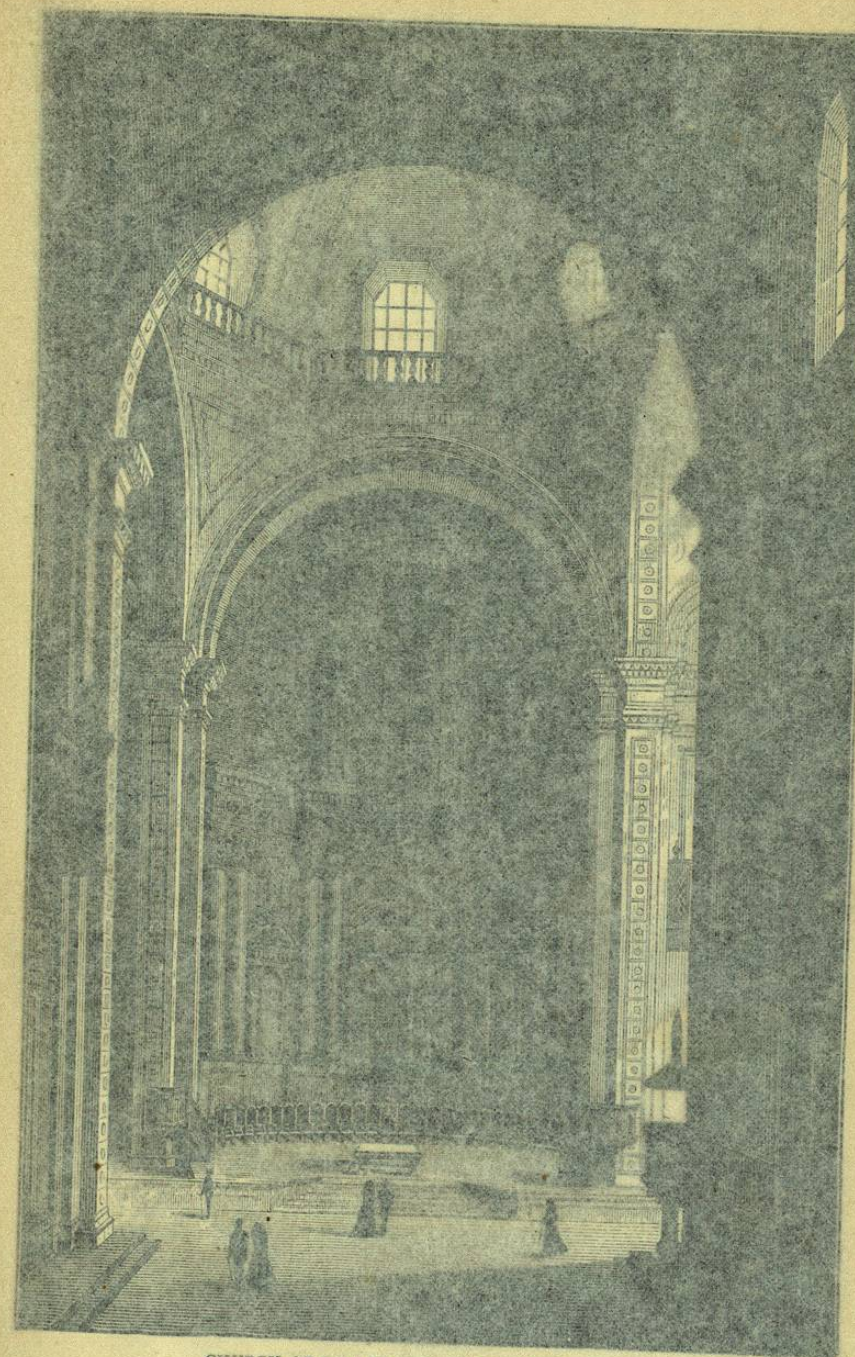


## XV.

## CHRISTIAN WORK IN MEXICO.

Not yet.—The First Last.—A Telegram and its Meaning.—Perils and Perplexities of Church purchasing.—Temptation resisted.—Success and Dedication.—Curé Hidalgo and his Revolution.—Iturbide and Intolerance.—Beginning of the End.—The Mexican War, and its Religious Effects.—The Bible and the Preacher.—The first Revolt from Romanism.—Abolition of Property and of Institutions.—Invasion of the Papacy through France and Maximilian.—Expulsion thereof through America and Juarez.—The Constitutionals the first Preachers.—The first Martyr: "Viva Jesús! Viva Mexico!"—Francisco Aguilar and the first Church.—The Bible and his Death.—First Appeal abroad.—Response.—Rev. Dr. Riley and his Work.—Excitement, Peril, Progress.—President Juarez, the first Protestant President.—The chief native Apostle, Manual Aguas.—His Excommunication by and of the Archbishop.—A powerful Attack on the Church.—His Death.—The Entrance of the American Churches in their own Form.—Their present Status.—The first American Martyr, Stephens; and how he was butchered.—San Andres.—Governmental Progress.—The Outlook.—Postfatory.

Not quite yet Good-bye. A journey undertaken solely for Church purposes should not omit the consideration of that work from its pages. It has not been largely thrust into the body of the work, brief and infrequent references only having been made to the subject. The aim has been to give a transcript of the land and people, apart from all especial views or ends, so that those who sought light upon the country or sought the country itself should not have too much, to them, extraneous matter set before them. It seemed better to put such matter in a chapter by itself, so that those who wished it not might avoid the dish entirely, and those who wished for it might enjoy it all by itself. At the risk of slight repetitions in minor points, let us glance at the story of Christian Work in Mexico, and put that which was first in its appropriate place, the last.



CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO, CITY OF MEXICO.

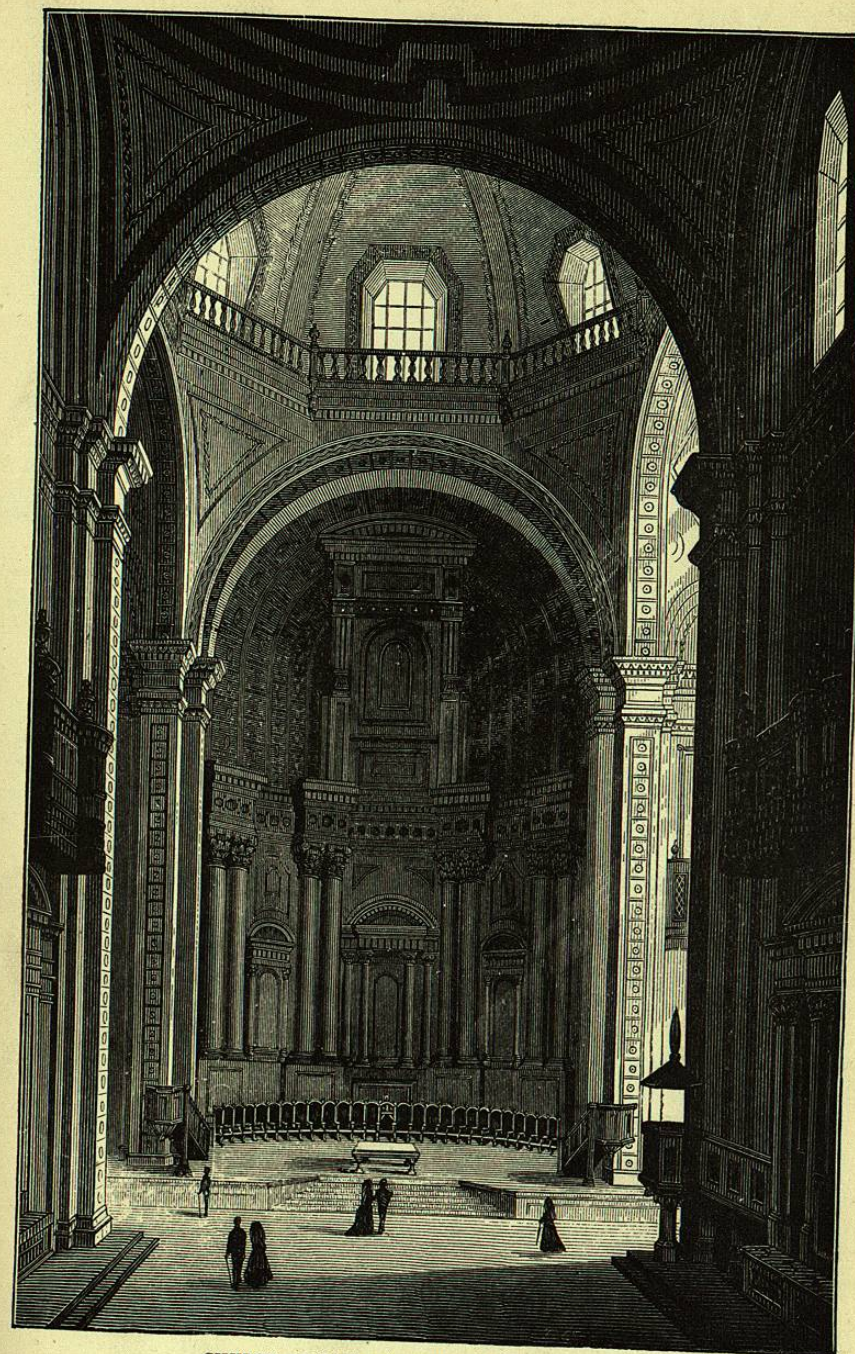


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CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO, CITY OF MEXICO.



At the very close of the journey, in the little village of San Antonio, where the grateful husband acknowledges the lordship of his lady in the painted confession along the ceiling of his casa, I received a telegram, which drew my eyes and soul far away from the handsome family, obedient husband, and horrible breakfast. It was an electric shock in which was more than magnetic currents; for it foretold a future of unmeasured and immeasurable vastness, a future of spiritual currents of divine magnetism, that shall permeate, thrill, revive, and renew this whole land. Its enigmatic words were these: "Puebla business closed. Mexico will be to-day."

The brief line was inexpressibly grateful; for doubt had hung over the last purchase. Foes were many and sharp. One effort had failed through treachery, a priest appearing before the judge the day the papers were to be passed, and getting the property (the Church of Santa Inez, then used as a cotton warehouse) transferred to minor heiresses, and another portion of the estate set off to the youth to whom this church had been already assigned, and who was going to sell it to us. What might happen between the beginning of the effort to purchase these more central quarters and its completion, even to the frustration of that completion, it was impossible to tell. Had any priest suspected the possibility of this attempt, every member of his guild, and, primarily, its primate, the archbishop, would have put forth every effort to have prevented success.

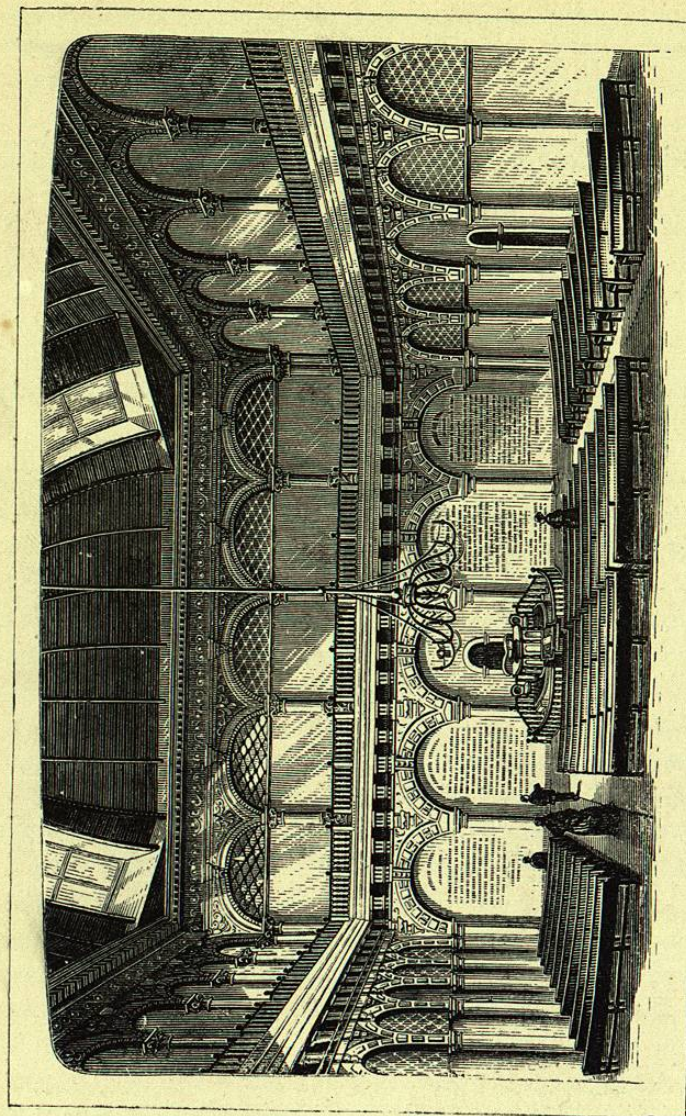
And such efforts could have hardly failed of success; for there were so many parties to negotiate with, that it seemed well-nigh impossible to preserve the secret. The real owner was in Paris. His administrador was a warm Papist. The holder of the first mortgage was a widow lady, residing in San Luis Potosi. The holder of the second mortgage was a carpenter in the city. Besides these proprietary interests, a person held it under a written lease for two years, for a theatre. Here were four, if not five, parties to be consulted; for possibly the administrador might not have power to sell without a legal authorization from the actual owner.



A more perilous adventure was never more successfully executed ; thanks, and thanks only, under God, to the sagacity and shrewdness and patient push of Dr. Julius A. Skilton, our consul-general, James Sullivan, Esq., and Señor Mendez, their attorney. To them the whole business was intrusted. A glance at the spacious quarters on the Monday after my arrival, which was the previous Saturday night, was sufficient. I have never seen them since. I hardly dared glance at them as I passed the street, for fear some Jesuit looker-on might notice a too fond expression in the eyes, and report the danger to the high-priest. So great is this peril, that Bishop Keener, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who was at the same time negotiating for suitable quarters, informed me that he had made his selection, but only by riding by the place in a carriage, he not daring to inspect it more thoroughly. I regret to add that he failed in securing this spot, perhaps because the man he rode with or the man who drove him was in his secret, and put the priest on the track. The difficulties in my case were increased by the distance at which the first mortgagee lived, and the fact that it was a lady who held the claim as a portion of her husband's estates. She must be corresponded with in the slow process of the mail. A telegram would have quickened her fears and her covetousness. She must consult her compadre and all her family. The least conception that it was being bought for the Protestants would have probably cut off all negotiations at the start, or would certainly have leaked out and cut them off very soon thereafter.

The lessee was left out of the transaction. His case would have to be managed after the purchase was completed. The other three parties were slowly and softly approached, and after nearly three months from the date of that ten minutes' visit, and the issuing thereupon of the order to secure, if possible, the property, I had the supreme satisfaction of receiving the above telegram at the hot and dusty and desolate San Antonio. Is it any wonder the spot blossomed into beauty? The white dust turned to lilies. The hot sun tempered its blaze seemingly to the most genial warmth. Perhaps this event increased the comeliness of the family, and





FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, CITY OF MEXICO.

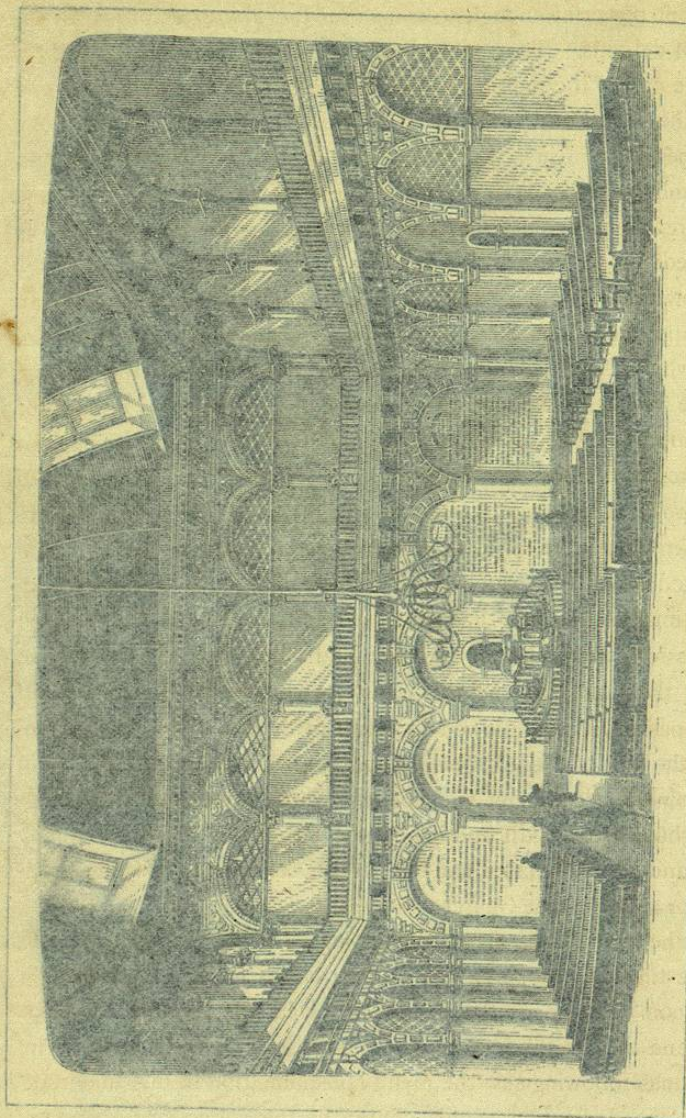
made Peg of San Antonio more beautiful than she really was. It was not powerful enough to transform the *abnegado* into a breakfast of delights. There were limits to even its ability.

The end of the journey and its objective end are reached at one and the same time. The cause of our coming puts its doxology and benediction in at the end of our going. Against unseen and unnumbered foes, against Mexican prostration, against possible treachery, against perils without and from within, success is assured.

How great this peril was, a single fact illustrated. Mr. Sullivan was approached, the very day he had consummated the purchase, and when he yet held the titles in his own name, by the leading native broker of the city with an offer of five thousand dollars for his bargain. The offer was undoubtedly from a higher source, for the property had laid idle for years, and was of no possible use to the broker, there being acres of like convent *resaca* at his command over all the city. It was instigated by the archbishop, undoubtedly, who had watched the coming and going of these invading ministers, and who had supposed as they left the city, with no possessions secured, their mission had failed, and who only woke up to the fact after their departure, when the papers having all been passed, it was allowed to creep forth that this Irish gentleman, the fear of every brigand, whom he had more than once made to know the accuracy of his shot, and whose protection at El Desierto showed like skill and pluck, the successful *rebosa* manufacturer and silver operator, had bought this central and spacious property for a Protestant Church.

But he mistook his man. The splendid bribe was spurned, and in due time the property was transferred to the real owners. It was soon fixed up as the residence for its missionary, *señor* girls, and the beautiful audience-room of the Trinity Church. The Christmas following saw the joyful consummation of this undertaking in the dedication of this church by the services of Rev. Drs. Butler, Carter, Cooper, Ramirez, Guerra, and Señora Hernandez Pascoe, and Morales. A large audience filled its handsome and





FIRST METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, CITY OF MEXICO.

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torium. The dome of wood and glass lifted itself over the once open patio, erected by the first purchaser for his circus performers. Screens inclosed the area behind the pillars. The desk and platform and melodeon, with its simple style of sacred service, reminded the auditors that a new day had dawned in Mexico, or, at least, that a new hour of the day had struck. That day began to dawn and to shine before this glad hour arrived. Other men labored, and we were entering into their labors, not in any spirit of envy or strife, but with a desire for their enlargement, and with a purpose to unite with them in common love and labor for the recovery of this heritage to our common Lord and Master.

The Church planted by Cortez on the ruins of the Aztec superstition, with its horror of human sacrifices, existed unchallenged, so far as organized effort went, over three hundred years. From 1523, when Zaragossa, appointed to the headship of the Mexican Church, two years after the subjugation of the state, had exterminated the ancient worship, unto 1823, there had not been an organized, hardly a visible protesting to the absolute sovereignty of that Church. Men had been burned at the stake, but more because they were Jews and Portuguese than as heretics, though heresy was the charge under which they were slain. The native had no disposition in his peonage to assert his religious liberty, not even his civil. And but few Spaniards ever emerged into the heights of faith and of martyrdom; though undoubtedly some, brethren of those whom Torquemada burned in Spain, avowed here like precious faith, and received like honored torture and burning.

Out of sheer malice they slew those that dared profess a higher and better faith; nay, they slew them on suspicion of such faith. The history of the Inquisition in Mexico remains to be written. We hope some missionary or native Christian will give to the world the story of this tribunal from year to year, its victims and its crimes.

In 1811 the Curé Hidalgo raised the standard of independence from Spain; but though of the priesthood, he had no countenance from the Church; and so, after terrible slaughter, his enterprise fail-

ed. He is remembered now, and a superb statue of heroic size, "in form and gesture proudly eminent," stands in the walls of the Church of San Francisco, executed by two young brothers, awaiting its transfer into marble or bronze. It is most apt and fit that the moulded form of this earliest hero of emancipation and independence should be placed in the walls of a church which has also secured its independence from an oppressive and foreign faith.

The cause of independence lay sleeping, but not dead, for a dozen years, when the General, Iturbide, who had been chief in suppressing the revolt, headed it, and made it a speedy and almost bloodless triumph. But he succeeded because he recognized the supreme authority of the Church. His declaration of independence began after the Jeffersonian sort: "Mexico is and of a right ought to be free from the throne of Spain." His second declaration how different: "The Roman Catholic Church is the religion of the state, and no other shall be tolerated." Had that been in our Declaration, our path upward had been equally slow and bloody. It, however, secured him the alliance of the Church, and was a wise political measure, viewed in the exigencies of the moment; unwise, viewed in the light of the future.

So rigidly was this state of intolerance maintained, that in a treaty made with our Government ten or twelve years after, while we granted perfect liberty of worship to their citizens resident in our territory, Mexico granted such liberty to ours only in their own private residences, and then "provided that such worship was not injurious to interests of state." And that treaty, I am told, on high official authority, remains unmodified to this day; so that now, were Romanism in power, it could suppress even private worship in an American family, and there could be no redress under our treaty stipulations. So rigid was the grasp of the Church over the whole state.

The first ray that shot its solitary light across the dark was the bold act of Mr. Black in burying the poor shoe-maker, assassinated for not sufficiently respecting a kneeling Mexican's prejudices, in