

CHAPTER II.  
MEXICAN CLASSES.

DIVISION OF POPULATION—WHITES—INDIANS—AFRICANS—LEPEROS—RANCHEROS—CHARACTERISTICS—INDIFFERENCE—PROCRASTINATION.—FEMALES—BETTER CLASSES—THEIR SOCIAL HABITS—ENTERTAINMENTS.—LEPEROS—THEIR HABITS—EVANGELISTAS—THIEVING.—THE RANCHERO—HIS CHARACTER AND HABITS.—THE INDIAN RACE—AGRICULTURISTS—TRADITIONAL HABITS ADHERED TO—IMPROVIDENCE—SUPERSTITION—DRUNKENNESS—INDIAN WOMEN—SERVILE CONDITION—LOCAL ADHESIVENESS—PEONAGE—WHIPPING.—PLANTER-LIFE—ITS SOLITUDE AND RESULTS.—MUHLENFORDT'S CHARACTER OF THE INDIANS.—INDIAN TRIBES AND RACES IN MEXICO.—TABLE OF CASTES IN MEXICO.

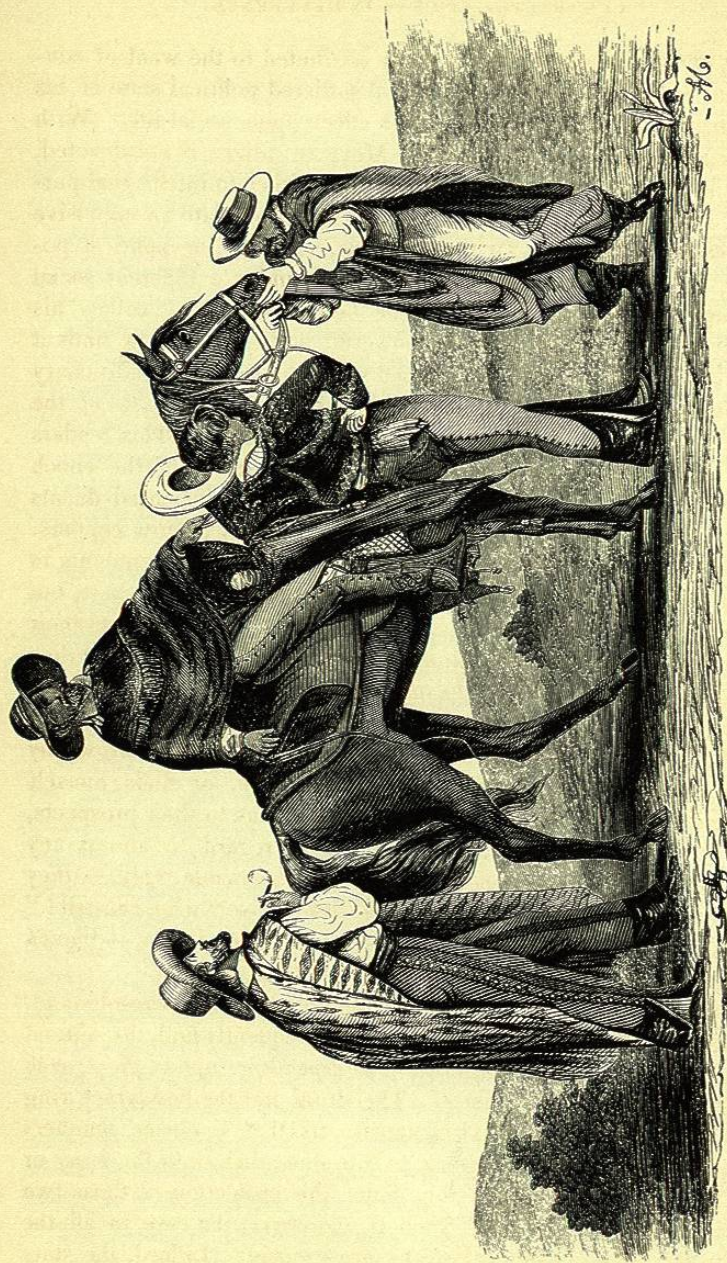
An adequate and proper classification of the Mexican population, for descriptive purposes, may be made under the general heads of: Whites, Indians, Africans, and the mixed breeds, who are socially sub-divided into—1st, the educated and respectable Mexicans dwelling in towns, villages or on estates; 2d, the Leperos; and 3d, the Rancheros.

The whites are still classed in Mexico as *creoles*, or, natives of the country; and *gachupines* and *chapetones*, who are Spaniards born in the Peninsula. The Spanish population yet remaining in the country, its immediate descendants, and the emigrants from Spain, form a numerous and important body. Her Catholic Majesty's Consul General in Mexico derives a lucrative revenue from supplying this large class of his countrymen with annual "protections," or "*cartas de seguridad*," granted by the Mexican government, but procured from it through the instrumentality of this functionary.

The Spaniard no longer holds his former rank in the social scale of the ancient colony. There are many wealthy mercantile families in the republic, who owe allegiance to the crown; but among the mechanical classes there are numbers of poor Castilians whose fate would be melancholy in Mexico, were they not succored and protected by their wealthier countrymen.

The Mexican native, in whose veins there is almost always a few drops of indigenous blood, is commonly indolent and often vicious. The bland climate and his natural temperament predispose him for an indulgent, easy and voluptuous life; yet the many





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faults of his character may be fairly attributed to the want of education, early self-restraint and the disordered political state of his country which has produced a bad effect upon social life. With quick and often solid talents, the Mexican citizen is not devoted, early in his career, by thoughtful parents, either to intellectual pursuits or to that mental discipline which would regulate an impulsive temperament or fit him for the domestic, scientific, or political position he might attain in other countries, under a different social régime. He recollects that in the best days of the colony his family had been distinguished, powerful and rich, and he finds it difficult, in his present impoverished state, to forget this traditionary position. Accordingly, he acts upon the memorial basis of the past, as if it were still within his grasp or control. This renders him thriftlessly improvident. Mexicans still speak of the epoch when they or their parents "swam in gold," or dispensed ducats to the dependants on whom they now reluctantly bestow coppers. Besides this, their indolent indifference, which almost amounts to Arab fatalism, makes them not only subservient to the past, but idolators of a hope which is quite as fallacious. According to their belief, better times are continually approaching. Something, they imagine, will shortly occur to improve their broken or periled fortunes. "*Paciencia y barajar*," — "patience and shuffle the cards," is a maxim on the lips of every one who is overthrown by a revolution, loses his friends, incurs censure, or finds himself starving for want of a dollar. If you enquire as to their prospects, their friends, their interests, or, indeed, in regard to almost any subject that requires some reflection for a reasonable reply, — they answer with the habitual — "*Quien Sabe!*" — "who can tell!" which in the vocabulary of a common Mexican is the — "*quod erat demonstrandum*" of any social or political problem.

Such qualities and habits do not prepare a nation for resolute action upon progressive principles. We consequently find, throughout Mexico, an universal predisposition to *dependence* upon others, or to a blind reliance upon *chance*. The drum and the bell which ring forever in our ears in Mexico, apprise us that immense numbers who possess sufficient influence to introduce them into the army or the church, repose comfortably under the protection of those two eleemosynary institutions. Such is, moreover, the case in all the administrative departments of the government. Indeed, the state seems only to be constitutionally organized in order to supply the wants of those it employs, or to found a genteel hospital in which intriguing idlers are supported either at the expense of industrious



men or by contracting national loans which may finally overwhelm the republic.

The church, the army, and the government, are thus three permanent resources for young persons who are too indolent to engage in mercantile pursuits, or too proud to stoop from their hereditary family rank either into trade or the workshop.

Bad as are these social features, there is another which may be reckoned still worse. There are thousands in the republic whose daily reliance is exclusively on fortune, and for whom the turn of a card decides whether they are to return to their comfortless families with a plentiful dinner, or without a cent upon which they may, to-morrow, recommence their contest with luck at the gambling table. This is a dreadful vice when it becomes habitual among a naturally susceptible, thriftless and procrastinating people like the Mexicans. Prodigal not only of their gold but of their time, they squander the latter without ever reflecting that it is the capital of industrious men. They regard business as a burden, and put off, whenever they are permitted, a debt, an engagement, or a duty, "*hasta manana*" — until to-morrow!

We are perhaps wrong in alleging that every duty is procrastinated, and life given up exclusively to pleasure; for the genuine Mexican is strict and punctual in the performance of, at least, the externals of religion. The pious observances of the church, are, however, even more generally rigorous among the women than the men.

The Mexican females in the upper ranks are badly, if at all, educated. Few foreign modern improvements have been engrafted on the old Spanish system of teaching, whilst the subjects taught, and the text-books used, are quite as primitive. At home, the Mexican lady is obsequiously served by devoted domestics, but is brought up without a personal knowledge of a housewife's thrifty duties. The evil influence of such vacant minds upon the male sex must, necessarily, be very great. If the intellect does not suggest topics for conversation, it is natural that the instincts will supply the deficiency. Thus it is that the life of large numbers of Mexican men is summed up in devotion to their horses, their *queridas*, and their favorite gambling tables; whilst the existence of Mexican women is as easily divided between mass, meals, dress, driving, and the theatre.

Yet we will not be tempted by an epigrammatic sentence, into condemnation of the whole of Mexican society. It would be un-

just to convey an unqualified idea that such are the characteristics of the entire white race whose birth or rank entitle it to an exalted social position. Nevertheless, it is a true picture of perhaps the most numerous class. The Mexican revolution — its struggles, endurance and success, — disclose many manly features of national character, and prepare us to appreciate that patriotic and cultivated body of men and women who form the national heart and hope of the republic.

The Mexicans have been so harshly dealt with in the descriptions of foreigners, that they are not always disposed to welcome them beyond their thresholds. This arises neither from fear nor jealousy, but from the natural distrust of persons whom they imagine visit their country with but little sympathy for its institutions and less consideration for their personal habits. Nor is this repulsiveness to strangers exhibited so much in the fashionable circles of society as it is among that loftier description of persons we have already referred to. Yet there are occasions upon which the houses and hearts of this very class are cordially opened to intelligent and discreet foreigners, and it is then that an opportunity is afforded of seeing the best phases of Mexican character. The fine benevolence of ancient friendship, the universal respect for genius, a competent knowledge of the laws and institutions of other countries, a perfect acquaintance with the causes of Mexican decadence, and a charming regard and care for all those domestic rites which cement the affections of a home circle, may all be observed and admired within the walls of a Mexican dwelling.

When a stranger is thus received in the confidential intimacy of a household, there is no longer any restraint put upon the inmates in his presence. The courteous expressions which are ordinarily used in the commerce of society, and whose formal but excessive politeness have induced careless men to imagine the Mexicans insincere, are now only expressive of the most cordial devotion to your interests and wants. "*Mi casa esta á su disposition*," "*my house is at your disposal*," means exactly what it says. You are at home.

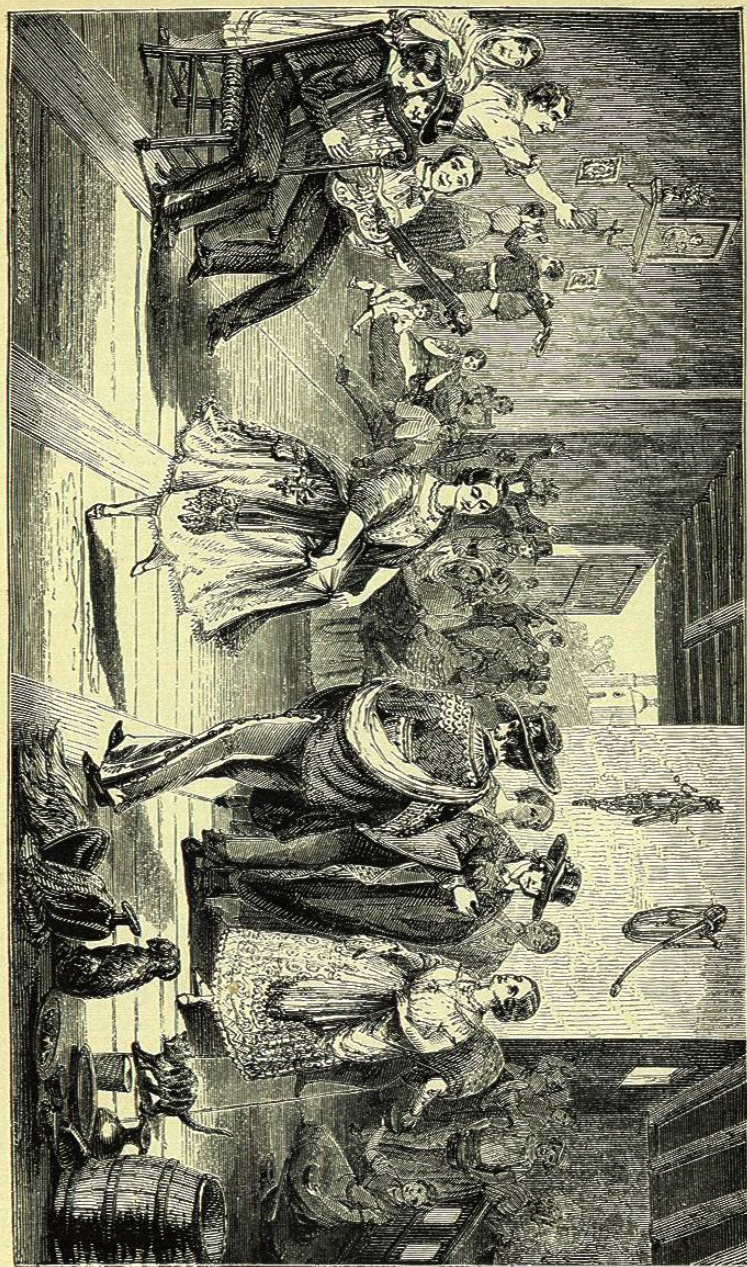
As the Mexicans are not a people addicted to the same mode or extent of informal social intercourse among themselves as the Germans, the English, or the Americans, it is not strange that they should guard their doors so carefully against foreigners who visit their country for the purpose of acquiring fortunes rapidly, in order to enjoy them in the society of their native land. The reception of a stranger upon an intimate footing is therefore the greatest



compliment he can receive from the meritorious classes. It is not alone with public affairs or purely intellectual discussions that we are entertained in such re-unions of cultivated society. In the free conversation of the intimate circle there is always a cordial display of sincere interest for the welfare of each other. The aspirations of the rich or the hopes of the poor, are always tenderly discussed. There is abundant evidence of *heart*; and, even after years have elapsed, and the sojourner in Mexico has returned to his home, he will find by his correspondence that he is still remembered by the intelligent friends, who made him forget that he was "a stranger in a strange land."

The Mexicans have generally supposed that it was impossible to entertain their friends without an extravagant expenditure which was perhaps the standard that measured the value of their guests. They have still to learn that a simple style and a cordial welcome together with the refined conversational intercourse are more valued than imported champagne and "*pâté de foie gras*." As soon as their society becomes less old fashioned and formal, they will find themselves more comfortable in the presence of strangers. In Mexico, as in all countries, there are notorious specimens of egotism, haughtiness, ill-breeding, and loose morals, both among men and women; and although we find these worthless elements floating like bubbles on the surface of society, they must not be regarded as exclusive national characteristics. "A nation, in which revolutions and counter-revolutions are events of almost daily occurrence, is naturally prolific in desperate and crafty political adventurers;" but the evils that have been begotten by the past, must not be considered as permanent.

The *Lepero* is a variety of the Indian, and combines in himself most of the bad qualities of the two classes from whose union he derives his being. He is the inhabitant of cities, towns or villages, and, in Mexico, what the *lazzaroni* are in Naples. Neither white, black nor copper colored; neither savage nor civilized; neither an agriculturist nor a mechanic, the *lepero* occupies an equivocal position upon the boundaries of all these characters. His existence is altogether a matter of chance. He has scarcely ever a permanent home. His wife and children, or his *amiga*, are lodged on the ground floor of a hovel in the outskirts of the town, from which he is often expelled in consequence either of his poverty, intemperance, or quarrelsome behavior. If unmarried, he finds a resting place, in these delicious climates, on a mat beneath the sky, or within the friendly shelter of a wall



FANDANGO.



or portico. He is devoted to *pulque* and music; for, whilst he drains his social glass in the *pulqueria* amid a crowd of companion *leperos*, he is ever ready to sing a stave or make a verse in which a spice of wit or satire is certainly found. When he has earned a dollar by toil, he quits his labor even before it is completed, in order to spend his enormous gain. His wants are so small that he may be liberal in his vices. He regards work as an odious imposition upon human nature; and, created merely *to live*, he takes care only of to-day leaving to-morrow to take care of itself. Prudence, he thinks, would be a manifest distrust of Providence. His food, purchased at the corner of a street from one of the peripatetic cooks, consists of a few *tortillas* or corncakes, steeped in a pan of Chili peppers compounded with lard. A fragment of beef or fowl sometimes gives zest to the frugal mess. His dress, of narrow cotton or leather trowsers, and a blanket which is at once, bed, bedding, coat and cloak,—is worn season after season without washing, except during the providential ablutions of rain, until the mingled attrition of dirt and time entirely destroy the materials. An occasional crime, or quarrel, which is terminated by a resort to knives and copious phlebotomy, sends him several times every year to the public prison, where he is faithfully visited, fed and consoled by his spouse or *amiga*. As he passes along the streets with the manacled chain-gang to sweep the town, he begs a *claco* with such bewitching impudence that the man who refuses the demanded alms must be insensible to humor. Like the Indian, he is remarkably skilful in imitation, and makes figures of wax or rags, which are not only singularly faithful as portraits, but possess a certain degree of grace that is worthy of an artist. Some of the tribe read and write with ease and even elegance. Among this class are to be found the *evangelistas* or letter writers, who, seated around the *portales* and side walks of the *plaza*, are ready, at a moment's notice, to indite a sonnet to a mistress, a petition to government, a letter to an absent husband, or a wrathful effusion to a faithless lover. Another branch of this nomadic horde is engaged in the profitable occupation of "thieving," which requires no capital in trade save nimble fingers, rapid action, and a bold look with which detection may be defied. The narrow streets and lanes of towns are the theatres in which these accomplished rogues perform. No man in Mexico dares indulge in the luxury of carrying a handkerchief in his pocket. The attempt would be useless, for a *lepero* would appropriate it before the stranger had walked a square. Upon one occasion a hat was actually taken off an Englishman's



head by a *lepero* in a dense crowd; but the act was so adroitly done, that the jolly foreigner joined in the shout of laughter with which the hero was hailed as he vanished among the masses. Should the priest pass at such a moment with the *host*, on his way to the chamber of a dying citizen, the *lepero* would fall on his knees with the rest of the townspeople, yet whilst he beat his breast with one hand, he might be seen to keep the other tenaciously in his victim's pocket. If caught in the felonious act, which rarely happens, the *lepero* takes the inflicted blows or choking with craven humility, and, whilst he shouts — “*ya esta, Senor amo, — ya esta!*” “enough, my master, oh enough!” he is seeking for another opportunity to pilfer his punisher's watch or purse, during the conflict.

Such is the Mexican *lepero*. The sketch may seem broad or even caricatured to those who are unacquainted with the country, but its accuracy will be acknowledged by all who have resided in Mexico and been haunted by the filthy tribe.

The RANCHERO comes next in our classification of the Mexicans. He is a small farmer, or *vaquero*, who owns or hires a few acres on which he cultivates his corn or grazes his cattle. He is not an Indian, a white man, an African, or a *lepero*, yet he mixes the qualities of all in his motly character. He is a person of lofty thoughts and aspirations; — a devoted patriot; — a staunch fighter in all the revolutions whenever *guerillas* are required; — a hard rider and capital boon companion over a bottle or in a journey among the mountains.

On his small estate he devotes himself to the cultivation of the ground, or leaves this menial occupation to his family whilst he goes off to the wars or to carousals and *fandangos* in the neighboring village *pulquerias*. He is an Arab in his habits, and especially in his love and management of the horse. Dressed in his leather trowsers and jerkin; with his serape over his shoulders, his broad brimmed and silver corded *sombrero* on his head; his heels armed with spurs whose three-inch rowels gleam like the blades of daggers; his sword strapped to the saddle beneath his *armas de agua*, and, grasping his gun in his hand, — the Ranchero is ready, as soon as he mounts, to follow you for months over the republic. He is the *nomade* of the country, as the *lepero* is of the town. His devotion to his animal is unbounded. The faithful quadruped is his best friend and surest reliance. His *lazo* lies curved gracefully in festoons around the pommel of his saddle. Thus, with his trusty

weapons and his horse, the mounted *ranchero* is at home in the forest or in the open field; on hill side or in valley. Few riders, elsewhere, can equal him in speed or horsemanship; and few can excel him as a herdsman, a robber, an enemy, or even a *friend* whenever you hit his fancy or are willing to understand his character and pardon his sins.

#### INDIAN RACE OF MEXICO.

Notwithstanding the brilliant pages which Aztec history contributed to the annals of America and the civilization which prevailed, not only in the valley of Mexico, but also in other portions of the territory now within the limits of the republic, we find that the indigenous descendants of these heroic and intelligent ancestors have degenerated to such a degree that they are at present in general, fitted only for the servile toils to which they are commonly and habitually devoted. Three hundred years of oppression may have done much to produce this sad result. Without union among the tribes; without community of feeling, language or nationality; the Indians became an easy prey to the Spaniards after the conquest of the great central power. Old prophecies were accomplished, according to the Aztec belief, by the arrival of the Spaniards. “It is long since we knew from our ancestors,” — said Montezuma to Cortéz, — “that neither I nor all who inhabit these lands were *originally* of them, but that we are strangers, and came hither from distant places. It was said that a great lord conveyed our race to these regions and returned to the land of his birth, and yet, came back once more to us. But, in the meantime, those whom he first brought had intermarried with the women of the country; and when he desired them to return again to the land of their fathers they refused to go. He went alone; and ever since have we believed; that from among those who were the descendants of that mighty lord, one shall come to *subdue this land, and make us his vassals!* According to what you declare of the place whence you come, which is *toward the rising sun*, and of the great lord who is your King, we must surely believe that he is our natural lord.”

Such were the superstitious opinions amongst the most civilized of all the Indian nations at the period of the conquest. It is not surprising therefore to find the other nomadic, predatory hordes, — whose ferocity was not so keen as that of their northern kindred, but had been tempered and softened in some degree by the genial climate of the tropics, — soon yielding to the superior will of a