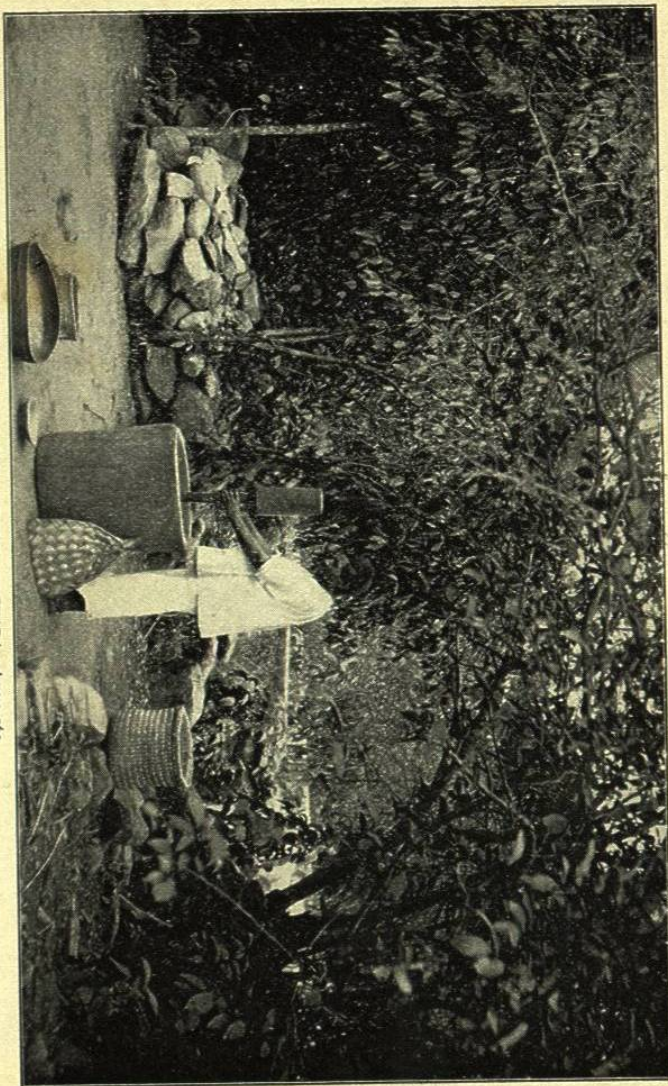


CHAPTER XVI.

"Early to bed and early to rise," is the motto of the Mexican railroads, whose trains start out at daybreak and stop for the night. As if the early wakening were not discomfort enough, no hotel or restaurant in any city furnishes breakfast for the departing traveler.

Innocently unconscious of this eccentricity on the part of Mexican landlords, we wandered one morning, in the half-light, through the streets of the Capital seeking our matutinal meal. The Iturbide, the Sanz, the Jardin and the French and American restaurants presented to us closed doors and darkened windows. A policeman, carrying a dying lantern, to whom we at last appealed, told us that we would find breakfast at the *estacion*; so calling an early rising, shabby, yellow-flag cab, we hastened thither. We found outside of the station a group of tables covered with coffee-stained towels, and surrounded by a motly throng of shabby Spaniards, Mexicans in dirty serapes, Indians,



IN A COFFEE GROVE, ORIZABA—page 100.

dark-faced women with their babies hanging to their backs, and pert dandies in golden spurs and velvet jackets. Eggs and coffee were cooking over a smoking brazier of burning charcoal, whose feeble glow was kept alive by the energetic use of a fan of cactus fiber. We ate our sour bread and drank our inky coffee with humble and contrite hearts, for our meal was made a most mournful one by the supplications of a pack of half-starved dogs who eyed each crumb wistfully.

The Mexican R. R., or "Queen's Own," was built and is controlled by an English company. The first-class cars, which are poorly ventilated and uncomfortable, were crowded with commercial travelers. As usual I was the only woman. The Mexican women do not travel, and no arrangement for the comfort of the señoras is made on the railway trains or in the hotels. Our poor sisters must have a very dull life. They are expected to go to church and pray for their husbands who will not pray for themselves, take care of the countless babies of the household, and keep their faces properly powdered. As a reward of merit they are occasionally treated to a street-car ride, but the idea of public duties or public life in any form for women, fills our neighbors with horror. Fortunately the men are generous and chivalric and are always ready to toil for their female relations.

The Mexican R. R., one of the scenic routes of the country, owing to the difficulties of construction and operation, is, perhaps, the costliest in the world. It may be said to be a holy railroad, as it was commenced under the auspices of the Church, and before making its first trip received the solemn blessing of the ecclesiastical dignitaries. As we leave the city behind us, the churches and sacred shrine of Guadalupe come into view. Then from the plain arise the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon at San Juan Teotihuacan, the former of which is more than half the size of the great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt. Between the two pyramids the Street of the Dead can be distinctly traced from the flying train. Otumba, several miles further on, was Cortés' battleground, a few days after the defeat of "Noche Triste." We soon enter the maguey country, and if we drink pulque at all, it is well to drink it at Apam, where the pulque is considered the best in Mexico. If we are sufficiently recovered from the dose by the time we reach Apizaco, it is our duty as orthodox tourists to descend from the train and buy canes. At Apizaco we had an experience which contradicted—as many of our experiences did—the assertions of those Americans who contend that the Mexicans are all dishonest. A Mexican commercial traveler, a courteous and intelligent man, offered his advice on the subject

of canes, and rebuked the vender for selling them of unseasoned wood, which is liable to warp and change color. This sale of unseasoned wood is, by the way, as we afterward discovered, a common fraud in dealing with tourists. Our Mexican friend, although himself a resident of the city, also had the honesty to advise us not to stay any time in Vera Cruz, as he knew of several cases of yellow fever in the town; and this, too, in spite of the fact that the railroads and hotels were constantly asserting that Vera Cruz was entirely free from the scourge.

After leaving Apizaco the road skirts the base of the volcano Malintzi, while on the other hand rises Orizaba, his head buried in the clouds. Here is a stretch of country that is a veritable desert. The dust powders everything, and choking, perspiring humanity sees no beauty in Mexico. At Esperanza we slipped over the edge of the high plateau down into the chasm, dropping 4,000 feet in about thirty miles. The rush down grade, with brakes set, from the temperate to the torrid zone, was exciting. As we whirled, rocking around curve after curve, we looked down into deep, garden-like valleys, and up mountain slopes covered with blue and white ageratum, scarlet mimulus, gorgeous crimson tulips, and countless tropical blossoms unknown to us. We saw at last the little town of Maltrata, its

red-tiled roofs shining in the sun 2,000 feet below us, and when, after a long detour, we steamed into the pretty station, we found women selling, in a really tropical climate, strange tropical fruits and orchids. To our amazement we also recognized the same Indian peddlers who had besieged us at our last stopping place on the mountain side. These unregenerate sons of the soil had taken the short cut, and while we were writhing and twisting around the curves they had rolled comfortably down the slope and were at the foot ready to greet us, as noisy and as aggressive as ever.

After leaving Maltrata we entered the cañon of the Infernillo—little hell. The stream that rushes through the cañon accompanied us down into the green valley, and thence to Orizaba, where it sang all night under our windows lulling us to happy sleep. There are two hotels in Orizaba, the Diligencias and La Borda—both of them good. We chose the latter one, and were rewarded by a little bit of French life, which, after so much of Mexico, was charming. We ate our well-cooked dinner of *potage, poulet, salade jardiniere*, and wholesome *vin ordinaire*, with thankful hearts. We intended to drink a gallon of the tempting water, but were immediately warned that the last guests had been made very ill by it, so that we were obliged to content ourselves with the song of the brook under our

windows and the dash of the blessed rain against the pane. After the high, dry air and the choking dust of the plateau we reveled in the soft, damp, atmosphere of the lower levels.

The great industries of Orizaba are the cotton factories—situated in the green valley in the neighborhood of Nogales—the sugar mills and the coffee plantations. The cotton mills, like those of Querétaro, although in a climate peculiarly adapted to raising cotton, obtain most of their supply from New Orleans. These mills, which are very extensive, are equipped with modern machinery, and have altogether a most un-Mexican nineteenth century air. We visited one of the sugar houses and saw the cane crushed, pressed into syrup, and then boiled and strained. The finished product is very sweet and pure, but the dark-colored cakes weighing several pounds each are not tempting. Behind the sugar house that we visited is a beautiful garden with a gorgeous display of hibiscus.

Orizaba is one of the great coffee centers of Mexico. The coffee plant, with its smooth, shining leaves, and red berries, somewhat resembles a dwarf cherry. The red fruit, when split, is found to contain two coffee berries lying face to face. As the common belief is that the coffee plant suffers from the direct rays of the sun, it is generally grown under the shadow of a banana or some other fruit

tree. Nevertheless a successful coffee grower assured us that such a shield is unnecessary, as he had raised the finest coffee without any covering. So it seems that the rules governing coffee culture are like those governing politics and religion—every man chooses his own. In Orizaba the coffee grows in an orthodox fashion under the banana. These broad-leaved plants, with their great clusters of fruit ending in the huge swinging tassel of the purple blossoms, attain a height of twelve or fifteen feet.

The drive to the Four Cascades is along a pleasant road leading through a plantation, between the pale green files of the waving cane fields and the shining coffee plants. A pretty little dark-faced elf of a child came running from one of the cane-walled, palm-thatched huts to beg of us, and then, half-frightened at our strange faces, ran back again to the sheltering arms of her liquid-eyed mother. The pair would have delighted the pencil of a Murillo. All along the wayside grew bright-hued flowers; the scarlet honeysuckle tangled the grasses and the Four Cascades were literally set in blossoms. We were told, to our disgust, that the power in these waterfalls was to be utilized for manufacturing, and that the beauty of the spot was to be destroyed.

As we turned to leave the Cascades we saw on

the ground what looked to be a moving mat of verdure, which upon investigation proved to be composed of small leaves about the size of watercress leaves. Each little leaf was borne upon the back of an agile ant. There was an army of these little insects, all in active motion, seemingly with some point in view. It was evident that the apathy of the climate had not crept into the veins of this army with the green banners. In view of the destruction of the waterfalls we at first expressed a wish that the industries of mankind could be carried on with as little injury to the beauties of nature as the industries of these tiny earth-toilers. But as, upon closer examination, these busy ants seemed to us to resemble the *bebhanas* of Cuba, which dismantle an orchard in a few hours, we concluded to be satisfied with the destructive abilities of our kind.

There is the usual equipment of churches in Orizaba, several of which contain creditable pictures by a local artist, Gabriel Barranca, who seems to draw his inspiration from the old masters. Naturally, however, his isolated life imposes upon him serious limitations. There is a good monument in the pretty plaza, and over on the hill is a cross which marks one of the battle grounds of the French invasion. The city is, on the whole, a charming place, but to us, after the dry, treeless,

plains of central Mexico, the most glorious things in Orizaba were "God's first temples," and his blessed rain.

CHAPTER XVII.

We reluctantly left Hotel La Borda in the dimness of an early morning and were bounced through the muddy streets of Orizaba to the station. The route between Orizaba and Vera Cruz is even more picturesque than between Esperanza and Orizaba. The Barranca or Cañon of the Metlac, with its leaping river 1,000 feet below the rails, and its moist, tropical vegetation, is one of the finest bits of scenery on the Mexican railways. The road leads on, always descending, through jungle-like forests and fields of gorgeous bloom to the curious old town of Cordova. Cordova was formerly a very important place, but as white men find the unhealthy climate unfitted for labor the town has, since the emancipation of the slaves, declined greatly in importance. The quaint streets of the old city have a foreign and almost a ghoul-ish air, but it is in Cordova that one sees the tropical fruits in their fullest perfection. Here we were served with the only real pineapples I ever ate out

of Cuba. I will not go so far as to say that they equaled the creamy Cuban pineapple, but they were not in the least like those hard cones, seemingly soaked in sulphuric acid, which we of the north call pineapples. Of course travelers in Cordova are, sooner or later, inveigled into buying one of those immense bushel basket bouquets of scarlet or white camelias which are sold on the street for about ten cents of our money.

After leaving Cordova we slid off from the last of the mountain benches into the *tierra caliente*, or tropical lands near the coast. The ride through the dank jungles and over the dazzling reaches of white sand to Vera Cruz is a hot one, and the end of it all is discomfort and extortion. Our experience in Vera Cruz was that of most travelers. The birds of prey—not the feathered ones, which fortunately we escaped—picked our bones. The street-car line, which is owned by the state, allows no carriages in the city. In addition to this sin against the traveling public the company seems to be also in league with the *cargadores*, or porters, and no car meets the trains; so the tourist, fresh from a cool climate, is obliged to walk through the noon-day heat of a tropical sun to the hotel. I headed the perspiring and eloquent procession, bearing a huge white bouquet of Cordova camelias, which gave me the appearance of a bride carrying

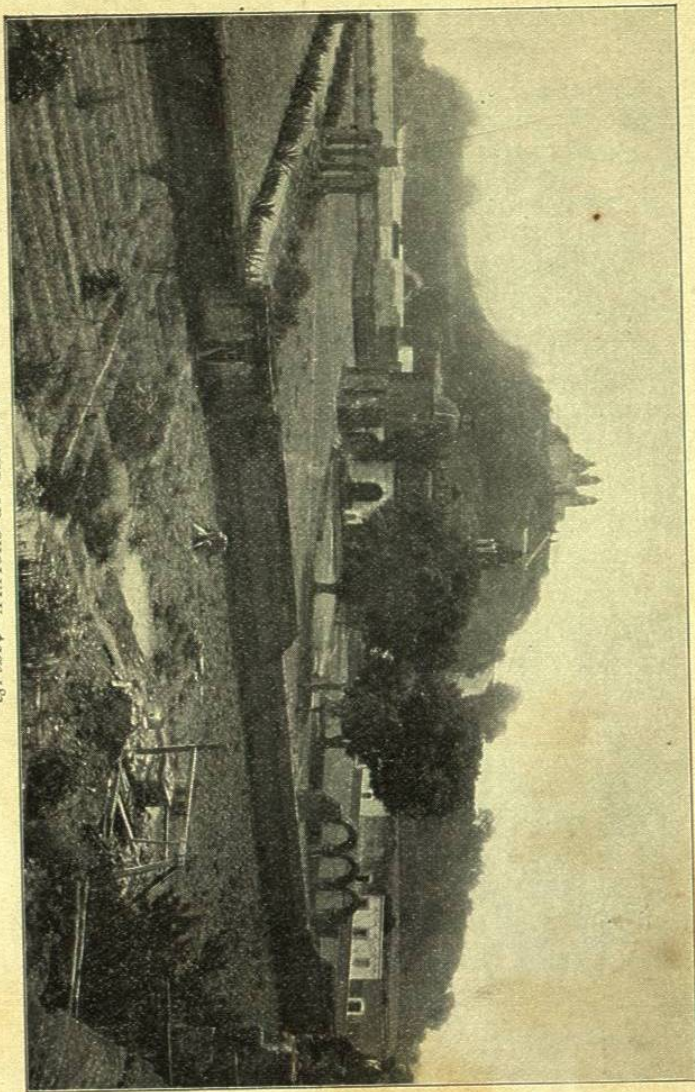
my wedding cake to the church. The camelias bore the ordeal better than I did, for I think I should surely have fainted had not three big turkey buzzards followed me with hungry eyes, and I was afraid to fall lest they should pick me up.

Cortés landed at Vera Cruz, just south of the Island of San Juan de Alloa. Upon the sandy beach of that most beautiful of all seas, the Gulf of Mexico, he established his camp and planted his artillery. His little army suffered fearfully from the heat of the spring sun—it was in the month of April—and the swamps and marshes in the vicinity pouring out their deadly exhalations soon brought the now-dreaded *vomito* or yellow fever, until that time practically unknown. Undeterred, however, by the heat, by pestilence, by venomous insects, the terrors of a savage foe, or the dangers of a strange country, the conquerors built the town, which they called Villa Rica de Vera Cruz—the Rich City of the True Cross. In August the army quitted the new town and moved forward across the beautiful lands of the *tierra caliente* and up the mountain sides to the table lands of central Mexico. Three hundred and twenty-five years later General Scott landed on the same spot, and from the City of Vera Cruz started on his victorious march to the City of Mexico.

There is little to see in Vera Cruz except the

dirty streets, the turkey buzzards, which act as general garbage commissioners, and a horrible black figure of Christ, which blemishes one of the churches. The Vera Cruzans dwell with ecstasy upon the fact that there is only one other like it in the world. I should hope not. The other one, which is in Havana, is fully as ugly as that in Mexico, and neither of them has any spiritual significance. The town of Vera Cruz has every reason to be the unhealthiest place in the world, for, in addition to the deadly climate, the sewage runs in open gutters by the side of the street, and the pedestrian and the burro alike stir up the living mass. To add to the other discomforts, numerous energetic insects abound which eat everything, even to wood, so that the telegraph and telephone poles are made of iron.

For the foregoing, and a few other reasons, we were only too glad to turn our backs on Vera Cruz, where everybody, from the waiter to the express company, swindled us, and join the triumphal procession on its march to the station. I will add, for the benefit of future travelers, that it is best not to take heavy baggage to Vera Cruz, for the railroad charges enormously for the smallest trunks, and that if you trust your hand-baggage to a *cargadore* it is better to have the contract with him as to price sworn to before a public notary. We neglected



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this wise precaution, and were obliged to pay just four times the tariff demanded for such service in the City of Mexico. It is useless to appeal to the authorities, for they are all in league with whatever enterprise puts a little unlawful money into the purse of the Vera Cruzans. It was therefore with a feeling of exultation that we at last got off, and from all accounts got off cheaply, from the Rich City of the True Cross. The fresh sea breeze blew through the car, and swept from our garments and from our minds all bitter thoughts of Vera Cruz, its intolerable odors, its yellow fever, and its birds of prey. After all, this was the only unpleasant, if not the only uncomfortable, experience we had in Mexico.

The country between Vera Cruz and Jalapa, where the train stops for the night, is rich and capable of a high cultivation. In these fertile wastes are hidden mines of gold waiting to be dug out by a race with the energy for the work and the physique to endure the climate. The International R. R., a narrow-gauge road, is in some places a marvelous piece of engineering. Within a distance of a few miles there are nearly one hundred horse-shoe curves, and at Harumbo, the deepest railway cut in Mexico, there is a complete loop. Just before reaching Jalapa we crossed the battlefields of Cerro Gordo, and National Bridge, where Scott

won notable victories in the Mexican war. Soon after crossing the bridge we saw a glow ahead of us, and out of the darkness and the rain we rolled into the electric-lighted station of Jalapa.

Jalapa is remarkable for several things. To the weary traveler the most important of its many advantages is the fact that it has one of the best hotels in Mexico, with electric lights and a court filled with tropical bloom. If I mention also the fact that the breakfast table is spread with brown oil-cloth and that only tearful supplications will move the stony-hearted *mozo* to indulge the breakfaster with a plate, it is not in a spirit of carping criticism, but merely to remind myself that even a sugar-coated pill has a bitter heart, and that life—especially in Mexico—is full of vicissitudes.

Jalapa was an old town even in Cortés' day, and since his invading army marched through its narrow streets many other armies have come and gone. The Americans, after the battle of Cerro Gordo—which was fought on that round-topped hill over yonder—and the battle of National Bridge, marched through Jalapa, and in their victorious ranks marched Grant and Thomas, Longstreet and Lee. Down these streets went also a retreating army led by Marshal Bazaine, the great French Retreater, who, afterward, in the Franco-Prussian war, surrendered a force of 125,000 full-grown men;

Bazaine took the road to Vera Cruz, where he embarked with his troops for France, leaving poor Maximilian to his fate.

An important source of revenue to Jalapa is that old-fashioned drug, *jalap*. We hear little of it in this generation, but it doubtless enters into the composition of many of the patent "liver invigorators" of the present day. The bitter *jalap* is a near relation of our sweet climbing morning-glory, so we see that even the flower families have their unpleasant connections. The principal business of Jalapa seems to be gambling, and in the evening the little plaza is given over to the white tent and the white umbrella, under whose shade *keno*, *monte* and other games are extensively patronized. The government receives twenty per cent of the revenues, and in addition has a lottery of its own which yields immense profits. One day while we were in Jalapa an official drawing took place, and the winning numbers were posted in all the public places.

We went one afternoon, between the showers, to the neighboring village of Coatepec, where one sees the coffee haciendas of Mexico in their fullest perfection. The funny little tramway runs through a New England hill country, and a New England brook chatters beside the way. There is a pretty plaza and the usual church in Coatepec, but I could not fathom the secret of its attraction for bridal

couples. Four happy pairs accompanied us on the trip and made Ahasuerus and myself feel like hard-hearted worldlings—without love and without ideals. It is evident that Mexican bridal couples, except for their richer tints, are much like American brides and bridegrooms.

There is a charming trip down a picturesque ravine to Jiltopec, which, if one appreciates scenery from the point of view of the back of a dripping burro, is well worth taking. The old town, too, with its torturing pavements of sharp cobblestones, its narrow streets washed clean by the rain, and its quaint overhanging roofs, is romantic enough to tempt the stranger to a long sojourn; but unhappily Jalapa is most of the time in the clouds and its skies continually do weep. It rained and rained, and after listening to the woeful tale of a commercial traveler who had been waiting in the hotel eighteen days for fair weather to take a mountain trip, we went our way. But fate was kind to us, for, the morning before we left, the skies cleared for a time, and we saw the beautiful mountain Orizaba rising before us like a white spirit. At the right, in the golden clefts of the burned-out volcano Perote, were heaped masses of fleecy clouds which overflowed and dripped down the mountain side in snowy garlands; but while we looked, holding our breaths lest we should lose something, the gray

curtain dropped down again, and Orizaba and Perote became once more invisible to the eyes of moist but enraptured flesh.