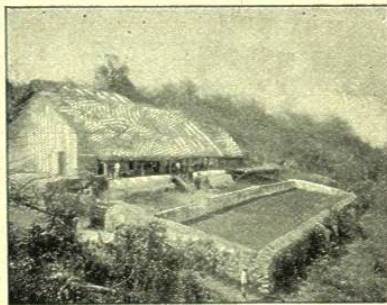


CHAPTER XVIII.

I think the matter has not been before mentioned, but to me the Mexican commercial traveler seems to have round eyes of an owl-like sagacity and a voice that is almost a hoot. These peculiarities I credit to his living so much in the half-light. I am persuaded that if I should for two years catch the early trains and travel on the late ones I should develop circular visual organs, a coat of feathers and a desire to roost in a tree-top. The morning we left Jalapa we rose at four o'clock, and took our breakfast from the obnoxious oil tablecloth, decorated for the occasion with coffee and beer rings. We could not obtain from the flinty-souled mozo, even for a consideration, the boon of a plate—we were the parting guests and our nimble nickles were worth only their face value. We felt that our reign was indeed over, and sadly and humbly we gathered up the crumbs scattered over the brown oil-cloth and swallowed them with an abject spirit. Mexican movements are slow. It seemed to us

that we got up to catch the train about bed time, but the sun was tinting the sky with salmon and gold when we finally steamed out of the station. For long hours we rode through the black ashes of the dead volcanic fires with which that great peak, the Coffre de Perote, has strewn these regions. There must have been troublous times here once, and one cannot help fearing that Mexico will some-time again see the fires kindled upon her mountain tops; but the shimmering mists are seemingly anxious to hide the desolation, and as we climbed upward



A MEXICAN HACIENDA.

the black waste was buried under blankets of fleecy clouds. Over this same mountain road, above these floating masses, and through these burned-out ashes, went Cortés before us; and we see his handiwork in the immense fortifications of the Castle of Perote, which was built to defend the highway over which the Spanish army, marching into the interior, received all its supplies.

As we slipped down the last range of mountains the valley, with its waving grain fields and the white

ception to the rule, although, as in the Capital, there is no visible reason for such a condition of affairs. The streets of the city look clean and the



HOTEL CORRIDOR, PUEBLA

watering - pot and the cactus-fiber broom are everywhere in evidence. From the top of the hill of Cinco de Mayo the town, with its white walls and domes of shining tile, is really a dream city, and perhaps it is unkind to mention that there are other spots where Puebla seems to be another kind of a dream—a nightmare.

We could forgive Puebla everything, however, because of its salads. These salads are compounded of waxy white and green lettuce so daintily tinted that it feeds the eyes as well as the stomach. Upon the delicate greenery are piled little mounds of scarlet tomatoes and ivory slices of alligator pear, and over the whole is sprinkled, in exact proportions, a dressing of salt, pepper, and delicious oil. I never ate like salad elsewhere and I am inclined to believe that such gastronomic perfection is impossible except when mixed in a low, dark room clouded with tobacco smoke, and by a Mexi-

can boy clad in a velvet jacket and with his hair dressed a la pompadour.

Puebla is highly esteemed of the guide-books for her tiled domes and buildings, which are certainly curious, much resembling the sample cards of the new spring styles of shirting. The city has been the battleground of Mexico. Here Iturbide, before he saw the star of liberty, met the army of Mexican patriots, and here General Scott's troops encamped after capturing the city. The hill of Cinco de Mayo is a historic mound. Up its rocky sides swarmed the French attacking the Mexicans, who, under General Zaragoza, had intrenched themselves in the little church of Guadalupe on the summit. The French army, at that time repulsed, was, four years later, besieged on the same hill and captured by General (now President) Diaz. At the foot of the hill is an equestrian statue of Zaragoza. It should have a companion one of Diaz, who not only fought for his country, but, like the good Juarez, has lived for her.

The great staple of Puebla is onyx. It is made into all sorts of useless and foolish articles which by no means tempt the purchaser. By the time an American has reached maturity, he is not inclined to throw away money on fat pears, diminutive flat-irons and absurd animals, even if made of the beautiful Puebla onyx. The Mexicans, however, thor-

oughly delight in childish toys, in beaded sombreros, tiny stirrups, gaudy dolls, and antique gods fresh from the factory. The markets of Puebla, like those of other Mexican towns, are delightful in the morning, and decidedly unappetizing later in the day. It was in the Puebla market that I first comprehended the real outwardness of tamales. I saw women gathering from the dirty floor the trodden cornhusks which had enveloped the tamales eaten in the market that day. These, we were told, were washed and served for another day. I ate no more tamales in Mexico.

As Puebla is a holy city, it is naturally filled with churches. The Cathedral is, in my opinion, much finer than the more famous one in the City of Mexico, although like the latter the beauty of the interior is marred by the choir in the middle of the nave. Still the size of the church prevents it from looking crowded, and the side altars are particularly fine. We were so unfortunate as to reach Puebla Easter week, and the constant clanging of the bells nightly broke our slumbers, for Puebla is sufficiently holy to defy civil law, which, for some reason, does not enforce its statutes against so-called church prerogatives. In spite, however, of the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the city, the sentiment of the people does not seem to me really religious. Indeed, the Holy Week services, with the clanging

of meaningless bells, the high, dreary intonations of the priests, the swinging of the censers by irreverent boys, and the flashy music, seemed more like an auction than a religious service, and I could not help contrasting it with some most beautiful and impressive Holy Week services I once heard in the famous Cathedral of Amiens. Evidently the Mexicans have more pride in their national glory than love for, or belief in, their national religion. Neither have they that artistic sense which the Catholic Church has always delighted to foster. In the beautiful Church of the Soledad we were moved almost to tears at the sight of a bevy of workmen who were busily and contentedly covering the magnificent old gilded altars of the Chapel of the Rosary with shining white paint. The lovers of art on this continent should form a secret society for the purpose of stealing the paint pots from Mexico.

In the Church of San Francisco I found a new saint. I had already a patron saint—St. Barbara—who protects from all my individual terrors—thunder, lightning, gunpowder, and I hope also kerosene lamps. But she is a guardian saint, while my new one, who is called St. Sebastian de Aparicio, is a saint for imitation. He first introduced into Mexico oxen and wheeled carts, and for many years he drove the Cannon-Ball, Limited, Ox Express from Puebla to Vera Cruz. A series of pictures in

one of the side chapels of the San Francisco represents the important events of his holy and useful life. In one picture we see him walking, dry-shod, over a river, while the heads of his swimming oxen are just visible above the surface of the water. In another picture angels are pulling the ox cart out of the mud. Heaven bless you, dear old work-a-day saint, and heaven bless your angels, for your creed of pious labor is the only one that will ever redeem this benighted land. You were the true apostle of civilization and enlightenment, the forerunner of the railways and the public schools. Let us hope that your saintly prayers will prevail upon those winged angels of the Lord, Knowledge and Industry, to come again, and pull this land out of the mire of sloth and ignorance.

We shall always remember Puebla on account of the remarkable adventures we had there while searching for baths. The guide-books speak with unctiousness of the fine baths in the city, so we started out to find them. The first place we entered had good rooms, fine tubs and snowy towels—but ice-cold water. As we were already congealing in our furs, we did not care for that, so we drove in the teeth of a bitter wind at least two miles, to another part of the city, where there were said to be vapor baths. At the end of our Arctic expedition we were conducted by way of a miry cow-yard to a

collection of dungeons, through whose grated floors ascended clouds of steam and incense which was not holy incense. The attendant said it was sulphur, but I fear it was a Mexican product, and not honest American sulphur. The maid also hazarded the opinion that the baths were good for all kinds of diseases, an assertion I did not question, for when I inhaled the steam I felt as though I had been exposed to yellow fever, smallpox and typhus, all at once; so with a shiver we wended our way back again through the cow-yard. I am glad to record that we did, in the end, find well-equipped baths in one of the hotels. I had a distinct impression, however, that the people of the place considered it highly indelicate for a señora to want a bath. It is a strange thing that in a climate where water is a necessity, and among conditions where only repeated and thorough soakings are effective, the bathtub is lacking in almost all homes and hotels, and the use of it is regarded, to say the least, as unusual and eccentric.

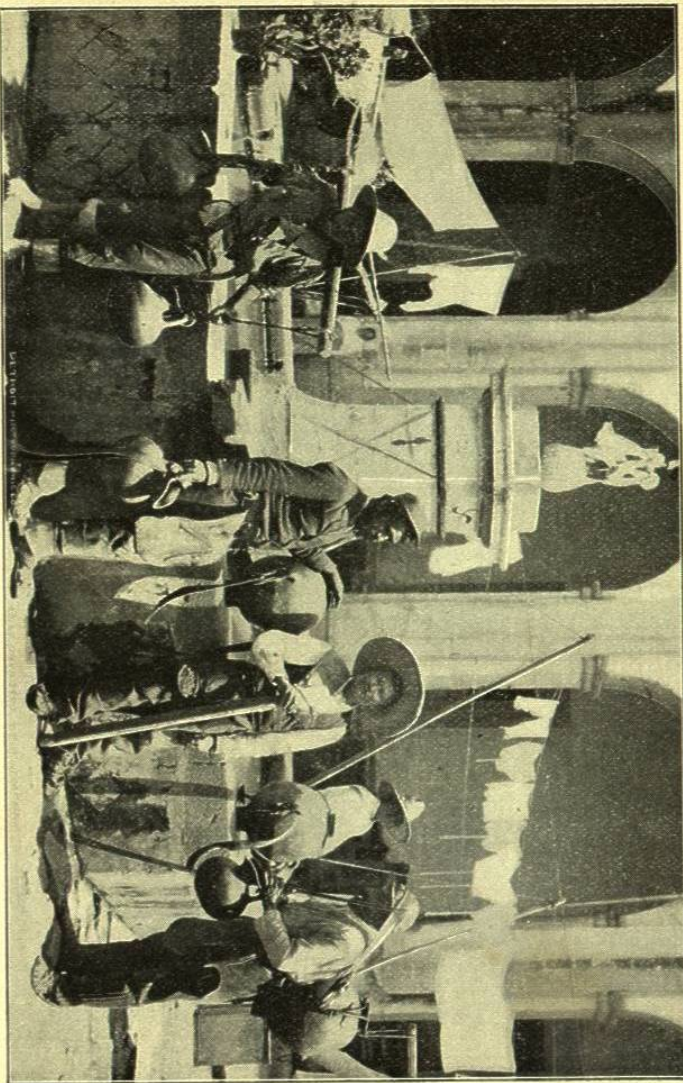
One autumn morning in the year 1519 the inhabitants of the sacred city of Cholulu rose early. For many days strange guests had tarried among them, whose marvelous fire-spitting weapons, awe-inspiring animals (horses were until that time unknown to the Mexicans), and personal prowess had kept the whole city in a state of terror. The time had

now come when they were to be delivered from the presence of the feared and detested Spaniard, and the Cholulans, filled with joy at the prospect of their release, gathered in the plaza, under the shadow of the holy pyramid, upon whose summit the sacred fires were blazing. But in a moment this scene of joyful anticipation was turned into one of terror and anguish. Cortés and his army, affecting to doubt the faith of the people whose guests they had been, fell upon the gathered multitudes and put them all to the sword. The Indians, clad only in their cotton garments, offered little resistance to the sharp blades of the conquerors, whose heavy mail was proof against the light missiles of the Cholulans. Those who did not fall by the sword were mown down by the artillery or trampled under the feet of the horses, and the evening of the day that had opened so brightly saw smoking and blackened houses, and streets choked with dead bodies. The ruin of the city completed, Cortés ascended the pyramid to the teocalli, freed the victims awaiting sacrifice, burned the temple, and erected a cross in its stead. Thus in carnage and cruelty was inaugurated the first great missionary enterprise in America.

Cholulu, at the time of Cortés a very old city, must have been a holy place even before the coming of the Aztecs, for if the archeologists are right the

By Detroit Photo Co.

AGUADORS, CITY OF MEXICO—page 27.



pyramid was built not by the Cholulans, who were the contemporaries of the Aztecs, but by those great mound-builders, the Olmecs or Toltecs. Indeed, if we may believe Ignatius Donnelly, we may refer the hill to unknown antiquity; for this eccentric and enthusiastic investigator believes Cholulu to be the original Tower of Babel. The Aztec tradition credits the founding of the city to the god Quetzalcoatl, the greatest and best of all the Aztec divinities. It is related that Quetzalcoatl, fleeing from persecution, found an asylum among the Cholulans to whom he taught agriculture, weaving, architecture and the practical arts of peace. The mild creed of Quetzalcoatl was opposed to human sacrifice, and fruits and flowers were the offerings he taught the people to lay upon the altar. There is a legend among the southern Indians that the "bearded god," as the fair-skinned Quetzalcoatl was called, was in reality St. Thomas, who, fleeing from persecution, trusted himself to the unknown sea and landed on the coast of America. It is certain that the Spaniards did not first bring the Cross to Mexico, for one of the most amazing sights to the conquerors was the stone emblem which so often rose beside the teocalli. It was called by the natives the "Tree of Life," and its four arms pointing toward the cardinal points were supposed to be

an appeal to the four winds of heaven to bring the wished-for rain.

The good and peaceful god Quetzalcoatl remained with the Cholulans for a season and then disappeared, promising to return again some time in the future. Although his flower-decked altars were soon desecrated with human sacrifice, the gentle god himself was not forgotten, and his second coming was looked for with much the same anticipations that the ancient Jews watched for the coming of the Messiah. It is not strange, therefore, that the superstitious Montezuma mistook the fair-skinned Cortés, with his bearded cavaliers, for the long looked-for god, and was not undeceived until too late to save his kingdom.

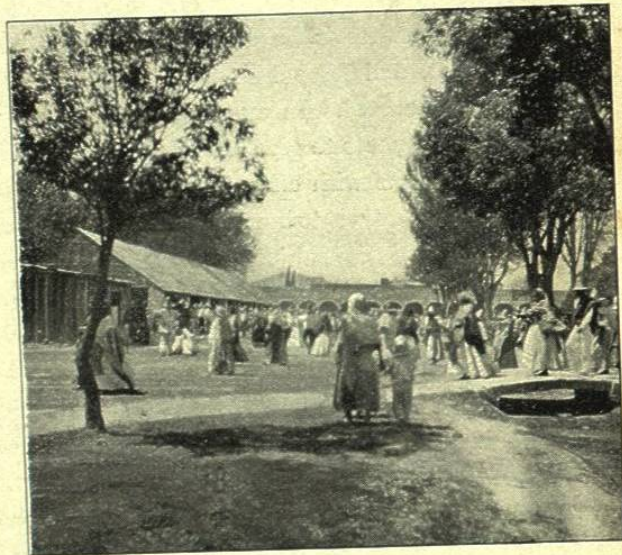
The mule-cars, which jolt along the rough road from Puebla to Cholulu, are comfortless and dirty; but the country through which they creak, with its reaches of waving grain, picturesque haciendas, and fields of maguey, is, when the dust lifts, really charming. As we climbed the long, winding way to the top of the pyramid, we saw the same landscape that Cortés, in his day, saw—the three volcanoes and the wind-swept plain. We saw also the shining domes of Puebla, that holy city founded by him in the place of the one he had so ruthlessly destroyed. The church which Cortés built on the site of the *teocalli* was destroyed by an earthquake,

so that the chapel on top of the pyramid is, the location considered, more modern than one could wish, although its spiritual atmosphere seems positively archaic.

The modern Cholulan differs from his progenitor in one respect—he is not so anxious to speed the parting guest; rather is he desirous to bind him hand and foot, and keep him until his store of shekles be exhausted. In exchange for the coveted silver he proposes to give bits of colored glass, small pebbles, idols with effaced features, and obsidian blades. But why should we judge harshly this poor offspring of a subject race. He has been so long himself a victim of robbery that it is little wonder that he has learned some of the lessons taught in the school of oppression.

The Cholulans are very poor, there is no doubt of it, and as we stood on the Pyramid, we saw the reason for this poverty. Rising above the valley, which has a population of about 5,000 souls, are the spires of twenty-seven churches—some of them in deserted fields distant from town and seemingly abandoned—a sad commentary upon the state of religion in Mexico. Evidently the new belief is not so vital as the faith it superseded, for in Cortés' day the temples were filled with worshipers, and here, upon this holy mount, the fires of the sacrifice were continually burning. Upon the

pyramid of Cholulu alone twelve thousand victims were each year offered. The modern church has, however, only itself to blame for the present condition of affairs. It has wasted its revenues in needless church building, and puts its consolations,



ON THE STREETS OF CHOLULA.

even its holy sacraments, beyond the reach of any but a well-filled purse. We were constantly informed that marriage, on account of the attendant expense, was almost unknown among the poorer classes, and was unpopular among the middle classes. Indeed, a wise economy rules even so im-

portant a duty as the registration of births. A stringent ordinance was passed last winter requiring parents to register the births of all their children, and the Mexican public was treated to the amusing spectacle of fathers registering the births of grown-up and married children, and of young men themselves presenting their own birth certificates for record.

To study the modern Cholulan one should sit as we did in the sunny plaza, which is on the very spot where the ancient Cholulans were massacred, and gaze upon the loitering crowds. The markets, especially on Sunday morning, do a thriving business. The little piles of peas, beans, coffee, fruit and nuts, the tiny mounds of bacon, steaks and chops, the baskets of struggling, suffering poultry, and the squeaking pigs vainly tugging to free their legs from the cruel rope, are like those seen in all the Mexican market places. On the four sides of the plaza extend the churches, and under their holy shadow—but not always in accordance with their divine ordinances—the buying and the selling, the struggling and the squeaking go merrily on.

As we sat this bright morning in the market place, all at once, above the din, the church bells clanged. In an instant everything was dropped, the whole throng moved in solemn procession toward the church door, and Ahasuerus and I were

left alone in the sunshine of the deserted plaza. We could hear the roll of the organ, the droning voice of the priest. A light breeze moved through the place, scattering the fragrance from the flower stalls; a little bird in the pepper-tree above our heads burst into song. "Truly," we said to each other, "Cholulu is a holy city."

The notes of the organ died away, the droning chant ceased, the church doors opened, and with an air of relief the bustling throng moved to their places, where the squawking of the cruelly handled fowl and the squealing of the bartered pigs began again—religion was done with, and business was on hand. And now came the Sunday bull-fight procession. This particular day it was a burlesque bull-fight, a sport which nevertheless meant torture and death to the poor dejected bull, who, covered with wreaths and garlands, headed the column. The toreadors who followed were clowns, with the familiar painted faces and the wide trousers of the American buffoon. They were succeeded by a bevy of hard-faced circus riders wearing their full skirts of the Mexican national colors, and by female charioteers, exchanging gibes with the crowd. As eagerly as they had flocked to the church at the sound of the bell, the crowd now flocked to see the fun, and the erstwhile devout church-goers disappeared under the arch of the bull-ring.

Ahasuerus and I, finding ourselves once more alone in the plaza, decided to enter one of the empty churches. But no sooner had we seated ourselves before the grand altar, beneath the cool shadow of the vaulted ceiling, than a crowd of beggars entered and surrounded us. They were evidently the impecunious ones who had not the price of admission to the bull-ring, and who saw in us the fore-ordained ministers to their pleasure. In vain we turned deaf ears to their solicitations. They became earnest, pressing, and finally even threatening in their demands, and we quitted our sacred retreat, saying to each other with a disgusted air, "Who is it that says Cholulu is a holy city?"