

CHAPTER XIX.

The trip from Puebla to Oaxaca is a tiresome one, and only good travelers, with a philosophical disposition to make the best of things, should attempt it. We rose as usual by starlight, nibbled our crusts in the crowded station, and ensconced ourselves in the narrow-gauge cars. The first-class cars were shabby and dirty, but when we saw the second and third class ones we held our peace, and pondered on our mercies. And after all what did it matter, when outside the two white volcanoes were flushing in the dawn, when old Malintzi was catching the first glimmer of light on his snowy head, and, far, far away, across the plain, Orizaba was beginning to show his white peak like the tip of an angel's pinion?

For more than fifty miles we rode silent in the midst of this grandeur, and then all at once we entered a cañon where a little brook, bordered with green banks and waving boughs, cascaded beside us. In spite of our feasting eyes, however, we

found the time from five o'clock in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon a long fast, and were glad to break it with a sponge-cake which we bought of an enchanting dark-eyed maiden at one of the stations. The cake would have been really excellent if we could have forgotten the Indian woman who probably made it. We dined at last in a Chinese cabin with a dirt floor. The ceilings



A ZAPOTEC WOMAN.

were decorated with hams, bacon and graceful festoons of sausages, dried apples and onions. Outside the little brook chattered briskly, and the birds

in the branches endeavored to drown its voice with their songs.

After leaving the dinner station we entered the cañon of San Antonio, and rode until dark between mountain walls lifting themselves thousands of feet above us. In our day's journey we descended into the torrid zone, with its coffee fields and waving palms and bananas, and rose again to the grain and corn fields of the temperate zone. We saw the natives washing gold from the bed of the cañon stream, and the husbandmen tilling with crooked sticks their little patches of ground, whose new-turned soil, pricked by the springing grain, curiously resembled porous-plasters upon the mountain side. We passed through quaint Indian villages whose picturesque inhabitants brought their wares to the station to sell, and watched the long burro trains patiently climbing the weary mountain passes. It was late in the evening when we at length reached Oaxaca and were met by a blessed American landlord, who took us to a blessed American hotel, where we ate once more the delightfully indigestible fried potato and drank our fill of the pure mountain water. No vintage in France or Italy knows the secret of that bouquet—the nectar of the gods—which after our long thirst we quaffed with the appetite of modern Jupiters. And here, too, in Oaxaca, we found the first really perfect

climate we had seen in Mexico. All our heavy wraps came off and I reveled in the sunshine and in shirtwaists.

In spite of this eulogy, which sounds somewhat like the advertisement of a climatic resort, I own no springs and no real estate in Oaxaca, neither did I go there a wretched consumptive and return an athlete. I was not even the fortunate one to discover the peculiar advantages of the Oaxaca soil and climate. That first-class judge of real estate, Cortés, was there before me, and among other trifles he obtained from the Spanish government a grant of the whole valley; and here, for a time, he made his home. But an older and a greater than Cortés and his band of adventurers has lived here—a nation whose civilization is forgotten, but whose ruined cities cover the hillsides around Oaxaca. This is the paradise of the archeologists, and the representatives of the New York Museum who had been prosecuting the researches in Yucatan were, at the time of our arrival in Oaxaca, endeavoring to unearth the secrets hidden in these mighty ruins. Some of the traditions concerning the buried cities are very interesting. On St. John's Day it is said that bells can be heard to ring from buried towers, and the Indians are very anxious to have the debris removed that they may find the bells.

Oaxaca was formerly the place to find genuine Aztec idols, but the Indians are beginning to understand their real value, and do not offer them so freely as formerly. Indeed, we were told by the intelligent woman who made the collection purchased by the New York Museum that many of the Indians love these sacred amulets and idols, and refuse to part with them at any price. "What?" exclaimed an old Indian to whom she made a proposition to purchase some of his treasures, "do you think I have no sense that I should sell my gods?" Poor benighted savage; he did not know that in a land, not far distant, there were people so anxious to get rid of their gods that they deliberately threw them away. But he will know better when he is civilized.

There is a fine Cathedral in Oaxaca which has fallen into the hands of a so-called decorator, and bids fair to be ruined. One of the most interesting of the churches is the ancient church of San Dominguey, which has a carved front and interior decorations of the most florid style. Florid decorations must, however, be expected in Mexico, and indeed they are suited to the people and the country. San Dominguey was confiscated by the government, and was for a time used as a barracks, and horses were stalled in its beautiful altars. It has, however, recently been returned to the Church, and

at present is undergoing the painful process of restoration and redecoration. It is to be hoped that



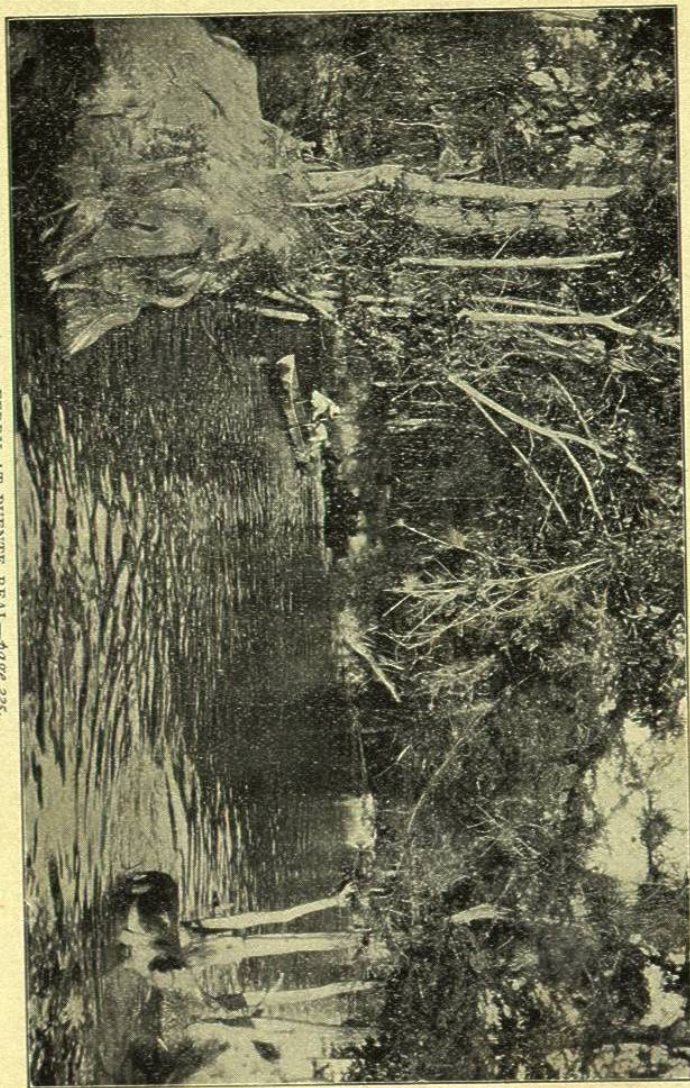
PRESIDENT BENITO JUAREZ.

the fine bas-reliefs and other unique features of the interior will be spared.

One of the advertised charms of these tropical regions is the constellation of the Southern Cross.

The tradition of the Indian watchman, who at midnight calls "The Cross begins to bend," is a pretty one, but if the would-be astronomer wishes to see the Southern Cross in Oaxaca he must rise at some uncanny hour between two and four o'clock in the morning—an hour not at all adapted to star-gazing. Personally I am sufficiently loyal to my own latitude to consider the constellation of Orion far more beautiful than the vaunted Southern Cross.

Some of the greatest men in Mexico have been born in the State of Oaxaca. General Porfirio Diaz, the present president, was born in the little house on the outskirts of the town which is marked with a plaque. The great Juarez was a full-blooded Zapotec Indian. Until he was twelve years old he never heard a word of any language except his own Indian dialect. To learn the coveted Spanish tongue he bound himself out as a servant, and afterward in order to gain an education he entered the priesthood. But his path broadened before his feet, and he was called from the cell to take up the burdens of his people. He became governor of his state, then chief justice, and finally the president of the republic during her stormiest days. He repelled the French invasion, shot Maximilian, and gave to the world notice that Mexico would submit to no foreign dictation. He was the Mexican Washington who saved his country, and who, like



FERRY AT PUENTE REAL—page 235.

Washington, started it on a career of progress. He was the Mexican Bismarck, who, although himself a good Catholic, overthrew the political power of the Church, and established the public schools. He was the Mexican Lincoln—a conqueror, yet no soldier; a ruler, although scorned by the aristocrats; a hero, yet a simple man of the people, who understood him and supported him and loved him. I never see his plain, dark face without a thrill of the same reverent affection I feel for Lincoln, and I am persuaded that among the great names of the earth the name of Benito Juarez should stand very near the head.

CHAPTER XX.

Again and again we made ready for our trip to Mitla; again and again we rose at an untimely hour in the morning and sat patiently waiting for a carriage that never came. In vain Ahasuerus pleaded and offered bribes; in vain the friendly landlord argued, threatened and uttered maledictions; not the least ripple was stirred on the current of Mexican movement. But at last, as I sat one morning forlornly watching, a rattle as of the dead bones of a nation was heard afar down the street, and soon after, with a clatter and a jangle, four desiccated mules were reined up at the door. In an instant two sombrero-hatted figures descended, each seized a stone, and crawling under the carriage began vigorously to hammer at the crazy bolts. We, with a firm determination to trust the bolts to Providence, climbed joyfully to our seats and finally persuaded the reluctant coachman to drive on. At last *mañana* was come and we were on our way to Mitla.

The drive of twenty-five miles from Oaxaca to

Mitla is not a comfortable one. In these regions we are only seventeen degrees north of the equator, further south than either Cairo or Calcutta. A tropical sun beats down upon the head, the air swims with dust, and the jolt of the cobblestone pavements which extend to the outermost limits of Oaxaca is bone-racking.

As we advanced into the open country we found



ON THE ROAD TO MITLA.

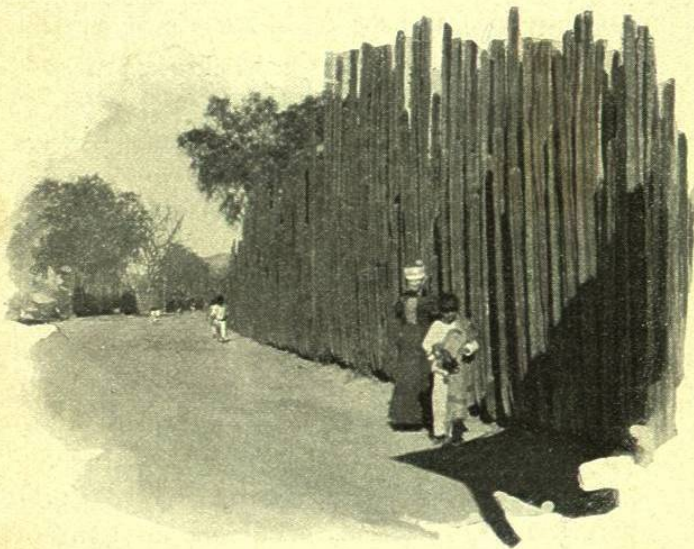
the road lined with Zapotec Indians bringing their produce to market. The Zapotecs, although the degenerate descendants of a nobler ancestry, are nevertheless a much finer race than the Aztecs of the valley of Mexico. The original Zapotecs were

an arrogant people who claimed descent from the rocks and the lions. At the time of the coming of Cortés they were waging successful warfare with the powerful Aztecs, but they as well as their Indian foemen were compelled to bend to the yoke of the Spaniard. The graceful, veiled figure of the modern Zapotec woman perched between the high-piled panniers on the donkey's back resembles the pictures we see of the Jewish women of the Old Testament. When she walks she goes, even when carrying the heaviest burdens, upon a fox trot. To see one of these lithe figures advancing, her head held splendidly erect under the jar or basket, her garments fluttering in the wind, her willowy body undulating, and her bare feet scarce touching the ground is to see Greek art embodied.

A few miles from Oaxaca we passed through Tule, which is, with its rows of mud huts, its nearly naked children, and its hordes of half-starved dogs, a typical Indian village. The little town is famous for its big tree, a species of cypress, which in diameter exceeds the far-famed California big trees. The half-obliterated inscription upon the trunk is said to have been cut by the great Humboldt. As we drove through the village we saw the municipal school gathered in the cloisters of the church, studying aloud with a buzz like a hive of bees. The little garden plots and fields of this region are

hedged with the organa or organ-pipe cactus which sometimes grows twenty feet high, and is said to yield delicious fruit.

By the advice of our big-hatted coachman, who seemed to exist for the purpose of shutting off the air and the view, and to speak for the purpose of misleading us, we stopped for luncheon at the vil-



AN ORGANA HEDGE.

lage of Tlacolulu. Everything was very convenient at Tlacolulu. The washstand, flanked by a row of soiled towels tastefully arranged, stood at the head of the table in the dining-room, so that we could

wash, eat, drink and be merry with the least possible loss of time. There is a church in Tlacolulu which, according to the guide-book, is famous for its antiquity. I really believe that it antedates the towels, but it is no less ugly for that; and the women sitting on a heap of sand, called by courtesy the market place, were pictures of sordid and unromantic misery. On the whole Tlacolulu seems to possess all the objectionable features of a poor Mexican Indian town with none of the picturesqueness which makes such a village tolerable.

Upon our arrival in Mitla we were hospitably received by the dark-faced Mexican Don who is the fortunate proprietor of the hacienda and the Indian village in which are found the ruins of Mitla. The front of the hacienda house is used as a shop for the supply of the simple needs of the village. We passed through an arched entrance to the beautiful court beyond, upon whose broad corridors all the rooms of the house opened. An enormous bougainvillea vine draped one side of the court with a mantle of purple. On the opposite side of the patio a group of Indian women and children were industriously engaged in hulling and sorting green coffee beans. Apart from its beauty I shall always remember this hacienda as one of the few hostleries in the rural districts of Mexico where we were given clean table linen. At Don Felix Quéro's we had

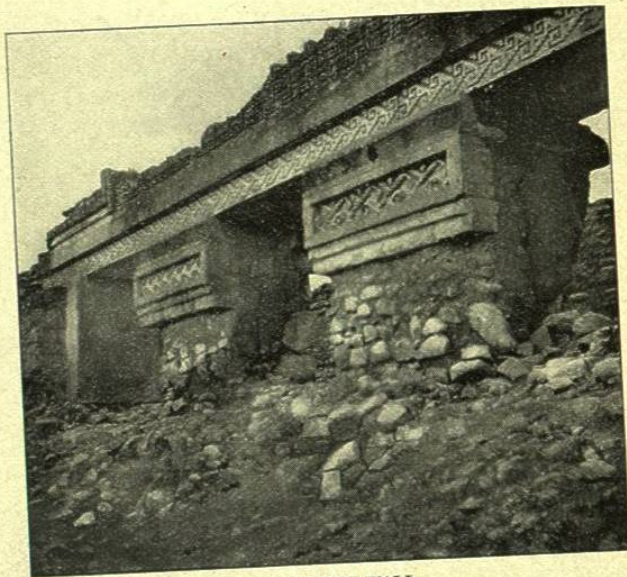
not only snowy linen, but well-cooked, well-served meals, sweetened by the most hospitable welcome of the master and the mistress of the house.

The sun's rays were level when we waded through the deep sand, past the thatched huts and the dirty stable yards, decorated with queer wooden-wheeled carts, to the ruins. An ignorant custodian led the way, endeavoring to impart in a villainous dialect as much misinformation as he thought we could be induced to bear, while a crowd of persistent and pestilent Indian beggars dogged our footsteps. As we were conscious, however, that the foolish alms-giving of our own Americans was responsible for the latter annoyance, we endured the attacks of the pertinacious rabble with what grace we could.

The ruins are more extensive than at first sight they seem. Many of the village huts are built upon the fallen walls with fragments stolen from the temples. In spite, however, of the work of the vandals, enough of Mitla remains to give a distinct idea of the original beauty of the edifices. Indeed, some of the structures are almost intact, presenting a style of architecture at once simple and majestic. Nothing in Rome thrilled me as did those solid windowless walls, glistening in the level rays of the sun.

The walls, which are about six feet thick, are of

small pebbles bound together with lasting cement. Upon this is laid a veneer of carved stone, and immense blocks of the same stone form the sills and the lintels of the doorway. Both the interior and the exterior of the buildings are ornamented



A CRUMBLING WALL.

with broad bands of the stone overlaid with stone mosaics cut in geometrical and fantastic patterns. The Toltecs, the supposed builders of Mitla, had no arch in their architecture; consequently the doorways are all square, a style which gives one

the impression of massiveness, as, indeed, does every detail of the huge piles. The Hall of the Monoliths, which Humboldt pronounced one of the wonders of the new world, contains six gigantic stone columns without base or capital.

One of the temples is occupied by an Indian family, who cook their food on a smoky brazier in one corner of the room, and stable their donkey and cow in another corner. The walls of this unique dwelling are covered with whitewash, which, at the command of the custodian, was in one spot rubbed off, revealing a glistening band of dark-red cement. This band, which encircles the room, is covered with hieroglyphics, which are crumbling and rapidly disappearing. Before the archeologists succeed in finding the key and deciphering the records, the records will be gone, and with them will go the secrets of the great temple builders.

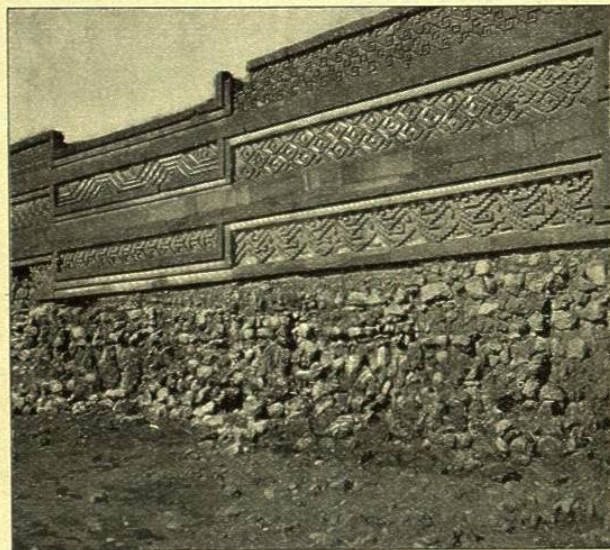
A flight of crumbling steps leads to the hill which was once crowned by the teocalli and the sacrificial stone of the Toltecs, where they offered to the gods human hearts torn from the bodies of their writhing victims. The proselyting Spaniards destroyed the temple with its valuable records, and with the material from the ruin built upon the same spot a shabby church. The mutilation begun by the Spaniard is continued by the Mexican and the Indian. A year ago a tomb containing human re-

mains was found and thriftily turned by the villagers into a corn bin. The former custodian—an old priest who fully appreciated the beauty and value of the ruins—endeavored to protect them from injury. In retaliation the Indians—who consider themselves entitled to all the benefits accruing from the possession of so great a treasure, cut off his water supply, stole his fruit and chickens, and in other ways made his life so miserable that he was only too glad to resign and leave Mitla to its fate.

It is much to be wished that the proprietor of Mitla would employ as custodian one who has some intelligent knowledge of the remains, and who could speak some other language than the half-Indian, half-Spanish dialect of the present caretaker. When the old man discovered that we could not comprehend his jargon, he inquired rather superciliously if we spoke French; but upon hearing our delighted affirmative, his enthusiasm waned, and I found that his French vocabulary consisted of "Oui, Madame," and "Non, Madame."

It is now conceded by archeologists that Mitla was the seat of the hierarchy and the burial place of the kings. The people who built these massive piles, cut the huge stones, and carved the mosaics must have been of a high type of civilization. When Cortés came to Mexico he found in the country no beasts of burden. The quarries, from which the

stones used in the construction of the temples of Mitla doubtless came, are five miles away. How did men, by their own unassisted efforts, raise these huge stones and transport them a distance of five miles? Surely not enough men to lift one of the blocks could find place around it. The ancient



SPECIMENS OF MOSAIC.

builders, then, must have possessed some machinery for lifting heavy weights, the knowledge of whose construction might be valuable even to us. We of these golden days, when confronted by the mysteries of past civilizations, may well doubt if we are

really the heirs of all the ages. There may be hidden codicils which, if ever discovered, will prove to us that we have not yet inherited all the wisdom of the centuries.

We ate our supper in the little dining-room looking out into the darkening court. The maidens of the household came, with their gracefully poised water jars, to the fountain, and a troop of horses plunged through the arched entrance and curveted across the court to get their evening drink. One by one the swinging lamps blazed out along the garlanded porch; the children's evening hymn floated up from the little shrine at the end of the corridor, and from the servants' quarters across the court arose the sweet strains of the Ave Maria. We sat among the blossoms until the moon rode high in the heavens and the stars stooped almost to the touch of our fingers. Then we went into the thick-walled, barred-windowed cells which served as sleeping rooms, and throwing ourselves upon the hard pallets, slept until morning. I was awakened by a gentle neigh, and opening my eyes I saw an inquiring pony and a velvet-nosed donkey gazing timidly and curiously through the grating upon my slumbers. I arose, caressed my gentle visitors, and went blithely out into an ungrateful world, which has blotted out the memory and trodden down the handiwork of the ancient builders.

CHAPTER XXI.

The impressions of a traveler are not always reliable, but for those journeying as we journeyed, often the only English-speaking people on the train, staying at Mexican hotels, riding on Mexican street cars, and in all ways affiliating with the native population, there are opportunities for hearing both sides of vexed questions that escape the hasty tourist or one who journeys in his private car. Then, too, as I was generally the only woman in sight, I personally received a great deal of courteous and kindly information from members of the superior sex, who, whatever their nationality, were always willing to enlighten my ignorance according to the most improved kindergarten methods. We also talked much with railroad men—conductors, ticket agents and engineers—who, in the dearth of responsible native workmen and officials, are sent from the United States to Mexico. These men are generally wan-eyed and baldheaded, having lost their hair in the fever, and most of them are homesick