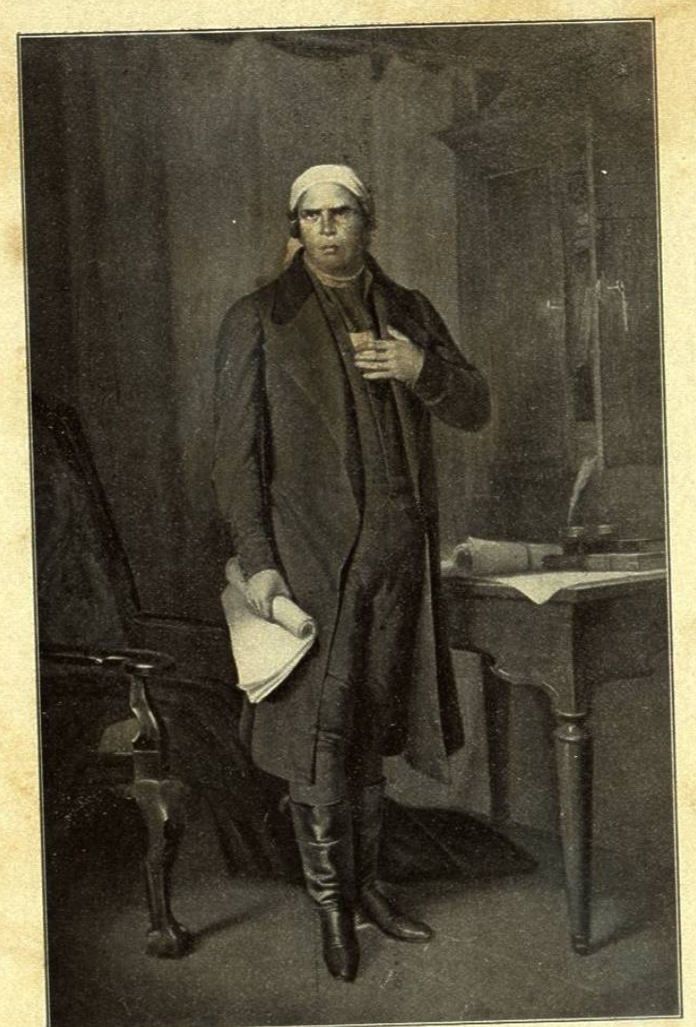
CHAPTER XXIII.

The morning after our arrival in the village we went with our host to the Sunday services held in the little adobe church, which during the week serves him also for a schoolhouse. Our friend—a graceful and fluent speaker—preached to the little flock in Spanish; although, as many of the people know only the Aztec, the services of an interpreter are often called into requisition. The congregation seemed teachable and intelligent, and we noticed many handsome faces among the women. We were exceedingly interested in the school which we visited next day. There were ninety scholars—a fine beginning for a school so recently established. The school and the mission, which are supported by the Methodist Church, are under the supervision of our friend and host.

The dream of this good man is the establishment of an industrial school and farm for the training of these mountain Indians. The Jéfé Politico, or



17 MORELOS—*page 248.*

head man of the district—a man of wealth and cultivation—sympathizes with him in his ambition, and will doubtless give him practical aid. The high-class Mexicans are mostly Protestants, or rather protesters against the Romish Church, and this prejudice against Catholicism extends to the Indians of the entire district; so that in a population of 29,000 souls there are but three priests, and these are by no means welcome. How far this sentiment against the faith of the Spaniards will carry the mountaineers remains to be seen; but certainly at present there seems to be a decided inclination to affiliate with the Protestant church, and to lend to our friend a helping hand in his work. This sentiment was most kindly shown on the occasion of the baptism of the missionary's baby boy. The Jéfé Politico of the district, who with his wife acted as godparents to the little American, came, accompanied by two Indian orchestras, thirty miles over a rough and dangerous mountain road, to the ceremony. The wife, who was not able to come, in accordance with Mexican customs sent her sister to represent her, and to bring the christening offering of a cloak and hood for the little one. One hundred and fifty guests were present, and the festivities lasted three days. The pretty baby received from his friend, the Jéfé Politico, a copy of a Spanish Testament around which were knotted the Mexican

and American flags fastened together with clasped silver hands.

We went one day upon the invitation of the schoolmaster to visit the municipal school. This is one of the schools which the paternal policy of the Mexican government has established in every town and village of the republic. When we presented ourselves at the schoolhouse, the scholars were enjoying their recess upon the shaded playgrounds. We were received with the most graceful and gracious hospitality by the schoolmaster, who wore ragged trousers and a soiled shirt, through whose torn sleeves his mighty arms shone like polished bronze. His massive head, with its close-cropped, clustering locks, was poised upon his columnar neck, with that combination of strength and freedom that we see in the statues of the Greek gods. This simple Indian, who knew nothing of the world beyond his mountains, except what he had learned from books, was an impressive and a majestic figure.

The walls of the schoolroom were hung with French plates, geometrical, mechanical, physiological and scientific. Pictures of the birds, beasts, flowers, shells and insects of all lands were there, as well as those of the organs of the human body, designs of modern machinery, lithographs of domestic and prehistoric animals, mountain ranges,

river courses, and portraits of famous men. The collection was a picture book on a magnificent scale for the fortunate children.

We were taken first to a little room set apart for manual work. Here the clay molding, the wood carving, and the paper cutting filled us with astonishment. We went next to the garden where the children playing under the trees greeted us courteously, and withdrew to a distance that they might not seem to listen to our conversation. This school also numbered about ninety scholars, all intelligent and vivacious. Playing quietly and modestly among the others was the great grandson of a famous Mexican general who had served with distinguished honor in the armies of the republic. This little scion of a noble house was a pretty five-year-old boy, with a bright manly face. Around the garden were rows of blooming flower-beds cared for by the children, who were each given a garden plot to cultivate, and thus learned to associate with the school curriculum that expert knowledge of agriculture which will in the future be so important an interest to them.

When we returned to the schoolhouse the master blew upon a whistle, and seating himself at a melancholy, wheezing melodeon, played a spirited march. The children entered in a procession, clapping their hands together to mark the time, and after various

evolutions and some creditable singing, took their places at their desks, after which the regular routine of the schoolroom went on, while we sat by and marveled. A class in drawing copied the figures on the walls, and drew the chair and inkstand, which the master placed for the purpose in different posi-

THE MISSION CHURCH.

tions. The work was naturally of various degrees of excellence, but none of it was absolutely poor.

A class of beginners in geography was called up. Each of the children—aged from eight to ten years—was asked to give the number of his house (every

house on every crossroad in Mexico is numbered), then the name of the street on which he lived, and the name of the municipality. "Who are the officers of the municipality?" was the next question, and then "What are the duties of those officers?" The duties of the municipal officers as defined by the children are first, to provide water; then make roads; furnish street lamps, afterward build bridges, and keep the streets clean. No mention whatever was made of sewers, for the Mexicans have not yet learned the necessity for them. From the municipality the children were led on to the district in which they lived, its officers and their duties, and finally to the officers of the republic. "In time," said the teacher, "they will make excursions into other countries, thus learning geography, history and national law from the starting point of their own front doors. My methods of teaching in all branches," continued the schoolmaster, entirely unconscious of our ill-concealed amazement, "are Socratic. I never tell a child a truth; I let him find it out for himself. When his premises are wrong I question him until he sees where his argument leads him." Please bear in mind that this man was an Indian—one of the race we are accustomed to call savages.

It is also well to remember that the children, until the age of six years, had heard and spoken the

Aztec tongue only, and that knowledge came to them through the medium of the acquired Spanish language. Yet the geography class showed an intelligent interest in the duties and responsibilities of official life that augurs well for the wisdom of the future aldermen and governors of Mexico.

The writing class, composed of twelve-year-old boys and girls, wrote at the dictation of our host, a rapid script, as clear as engraving. One of the boys, at the dictation of the master, wrote the following sentence in Spanish upon his slate, and presented the slate to me. "We are glad to have the Americans come among us and bring the refining influences of civilization." I blushed, as I read the kindly sentiment, remembering some of the influences of civilization brought by my people to his race further north.

The schoolmaster listened to our encomiums with an air of modest doubt. "If I could only go to your country," he said wistfully, in his rich Spanish—"but I never shall; so I must work it out myself." As we went down the street, we looked back, and saw him standing thoughtfully in the doorway—a grand figure in his shabby garments—and I thought of the many Americans I had known to whom years of college and foreign university life had not given that discipline of the intellect, that real education which had been acquired by this poor

Indian "working it out" in his lonely home on the distant mountain.

The time came all too soon when we were obliged to leave this peaceful valley. At the time of our departure we had another experience of the procrastinating policy of the Mexicans. The head

THE "DECENT FONDA."

man of the village, who was deputed to engage the chairmen for our trip down the mountains, had done nothing in the matter, and as we were not disposed to wait for his slow bargaining, I made the descent on horseback. If the ascent had been hard on the Indian bearers, the descent was hard

on me, for the combination of comfortless Mexican saddle and constant downward pitch reduced me, mentally as well as physically, to a jelly-like consistency. The night overtook us long before we reached the plains, and we rode in the dark, seemingly for endless hours, along the edge of a bottomless abyss, while the mountain whip-poor-will made mournful music to our misery. When we, at last, arrived before the door of the decent little fonda, which our host had recommended to us, I slipped, a boneless mass, from the saddle and bewailed my fate. But everybody was very good to me; the horses and the donkeys rubbed their velvet noses sympathizingly against my face, the Indian dogs rallied to my support, and the Indian woman of the fonda stayed me with flagons and comforted me with apples—in other words, she brought to my room a cup of varnish-like coffee and a crust of hard bread, and I slept as sweetly upon my wooden pallet as if it had been a bed of down.

We had upon our journey to San Marcos the next morning some fellow-passengers who were very different from our former traveling companions. The youngest member of this party of four had a face like that of one of Raphael's young saints. From their conversation we learned that the men were cock-fighters returning from a *professional* trip in the mountains. They drank

whisky incessantly—not at all a common custom among the Mexicans—and their conversation and manner showed the greatest depravity. I grieve to say that the saintly faced young fellow was the most reckless of the company. One cannot always judge the flavor of an apple from the color of its skin.