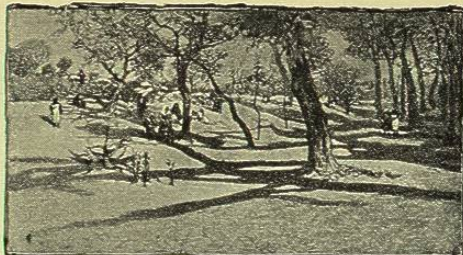


We have the pulque, the old man drinking my share, and on our way to the station pass through the market-place. My last view of this delightful old city is across this market-place, with the domed buildings in the background silhouetted



against the evening sky. All over the open space where the rush and traffic of the morning had held

sway now lounged and slept hundreds of tired people, some on the steps surrounding the square stone column centring the plaza, others flat on the pavement. Here they will doze until the sun looks at them from over the *Cerro de las Campanas*. Then they will shake themselves together, and each one will go in search of his daily avocation. It is safe to say that not one in ten ever finds it.



#### CHAPTER IV.

##### SOME PEONS AT AGUAS CALIENTES.

BLINDING sunlight; a broad road ankle deep in dust; a double row of great trees with branches like twisted cobras; inky blue black shadows stencilled on the gray dust, repeating the tree forms above; a long, narrow canal but a few feet wide half filled with water, from which rise little whiffs of hot steam; beside it a straggling rude stone wall fringed with bushes. In the middle distance, through vistas of tree trunks, glimpses of brown fields fading away into pale pink, violet, and green. In the dim blue beyond, the dome and towers of a church, surmounting little spots of yellow, cream white, and red,



broken with patches of dark green, — locating bits of the town, — with orange groves between.

Long strings of burros crawl into the city along this highway loaded down with great bundles of green fodder; undulating masses of yellow dust drift over it, which harden into droves of sheep as they pass.

Shuffling along its edges, hugging the intermittent shadows, stroll groups of natives in twos and threes; the women in straw hats with plaited hair, their little children slung to their backs, the men in zarapes and sandals carrying crates on their shoulders packed with live poultry and cheap pottery.

Such was my first glance at Aguas Calientes. But there is something more. To the left, along the whole length of the canal or sluiceway, as far as the eye can reach, are scattered hundreds of natives of both sexes, and all ages, lining the water's edge and disporting themselves in every conceivable state of *deshabille*. In fact, it might as well be stated that the assemblage is divided into two classes, those who have something on and those

who have nothing. Five hundred of the descendants of Montezuma quietly taking their baths at high noon on a public highway, with only such privacy as the Republic of Mexico and the blue sky of heaven afford!

Old men hobble along the roadside, turn off to the left, select a convenient bush as a clothes-rack, scale off what scanty raiment they carry with them, and slide turtle-like into the warm water. Young Indian girls in bunches of half a dozen sit by the canal and comb out their wavy black hair, glossy with wet, while they chat merrily with their friends whose heads bob up over the brink, and whose bodies simmer at a temperature of 90°. Whole families soak in groups, sousing their babies in the warm water and draining them on the bank, where they glisten in the dazzling sunlight like bronzed cupids. Now and then a tall, straight young Indian turns aside from out the dust, winds his zarape about him, and protected by its folds unmakes his toilet, and disappears over the edge.

Up and down this curious inland Long



Branch rows of heads bob up from the sluiceway and smile good-naturedly as I draw near. They are not abashed or disturbed in the slightest degree; they are only concerned lest I seek to crowd them from their places; theirs by right of occupancy.

Even the young women lying on the bank in the shade, with one end of a zarape tossed over their backs, their only other garment washed and drying in the sun, seem more interested in the sketch trap than in him who carries it. It is one of the customs of the country.

It is true that near the springs above, within a mile of this spot, there is a small pond filled from the overflow of the baths adjoining, which they can use and sometimes do, but the privacy is none the greater. It is equally true that down the road nearer the city there are also the "*Baños Grandes*," where for one peseta — about twenty-five cents — they can obtain a bath with all the encircling privacy of stone walls, and with the additional comforts of a crash towel, one foot square, and a cake of soap of the size and density

of a grapeshot. But then, the wages of a native for a whole day's work is less than one peseta, and when he is lucky enough to get this, every centavo in it is needed for the inside of his dust-covered body.

Nor can he utilize his surplus clothing as a shield and cover. He has but one suit, a white shirt and a pair of cotton trousers. Naturally he falls back upon his zarape, often handling it as skilfully and effectively as the Indian women on the steps leading to the sacred Ganges do their gorgeous colored tunics, slipping the dry one over the wet without much more than a glimpse of finger and toe.

All these thoughts ran through my head as I unlimbered my trap, opened my white umbrella, and put up my easel to paint the curious scene.

"*Buenos días, señor,*" came a voice over my shoulder. I looked up and into the dark eyes of a swarthy Mexican, who was regarding me with much the same air as one would a street peddler preparing to exhibit his wares.

"Does everybody hereabout bathe in the open air?" I ventured to ask.



"Why not? It is either here or not at all," he replied.

I continued at work, ruminating over the strange surroundings, the query unanswered.

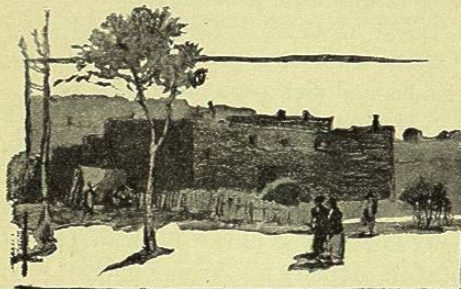
Why not, in fact? A tropical sun, clouds of dust dry as powder and fine as smoke, air and water free, nothing else in their life of slavery.

One has only to look into these sad faces to read the history of this patient, uncomplaining race, or to watch them as they sit for hours in the shadow of some great building, motionless, muffled to the mouth in their zarapes and rebozos, their eyes looking straight ahead as if determined to read the future, — to appreciate their hopelessness.

From the days of Cortez down to the time of Diaz, they have been humiliated, degraded, and enslaved; all their patriotism, self-reliance, and independence has long since been crushed out. They are a serving people; set apart and kept apart by a *caste* as defined and rigid as divides society to-day in Hindoostan — infinitely more severe than ever existed in the most

benighted section of our own country in the old plantation days.

They have inherited nothing in the past but poverty and suffering, and ex-



pect nothing in the future. To sleep, to awake, to be hungry, to sleep again. Sheltered by adobe huts, sleeping upon coarse straw mats, their only utensils the rude earthen vessels they make themselves, their daily food but bruised corn pounded in a stone mortar, they pass their lives awaiting the inevitable, without hope and without ambition.

"As a rule," says Consul-General Strother (Porte Crayon) "none of the working classes of Mexico have any idea of pres-



ent economy or of providing for the future. The lives of most of them seem to be occupied in obtaining food and amusement for the passing hour, without either hope or desire for a better future."

David A. Wells, in his terse and pithy "Study of Mexico," speaking of the haciendas and their peon labor, says:—

"The owners of these large Mexican estates, who are generally men of wealth and education, rarely live upon them, but make their homes in the city of Mexico or in Europe, and intrust the management of their property to a superintendent who, like the owner, considers himself a gentleman, and whose chief business is to keep the peons in debt, or, what is the same thing, in slavery. Whatever work is done is performed by the peons,—in whose veins Indian blood predominates,—in their own way and in their own time. . . . Without being bred to any mechanical profession, the peons make and repair nearly every instrument or tool that is used upon the estate, and this, too, without the use of a forge, not even of bolts and nails. The explanation of such

an apparently marvellous result is to be found in a single word or rather material,—rawhide,—with which the peon feels himself qualified to meet almost any constructive emergency, from the framing of a house to the making of a loom, the mending of a gun, or the repair of a broken leg."

It is not, therefore, from lack of intelligence, or ingenuity, or capacity, that the condition of these descendants of the Aztec warriors is so hopeless, but rather from the social isolation to which they are subjected, and which cuts them off from every influence that makes the white man their superior.

So I worked on, pondering over this hopeless race, outcasts and serfs in a land once their own, and thinking of the long account of cruelty and selfishness which stood against the Spanish nation, when suddenly from beneath my white umbrella I noticed three Indians rise from the ground near the canal, stand apart from their fellows, and walk towards me. As I lifted my eyes they hesitated, then, as if gathering courage, again advanced cautiously until they stood within a dozen



yards of my easel. Here they squatted in the dust, the three in a row, their zarapes half covering their faces. I laid down my palette and beckoned them to me. They advanced smiling, raised their sombreros with an "*a Dios, señor,*" crouched down on their haunches, a favorite attitude, and watched every movement of my brush with the deepest interest, exchanging significant and appreciative glances as I dotted in the figures. Not one opened his lips. Silent and grave as the stone gods of their ancestors sat they, wholly absorbed in a revelation as astounding to them as a vision from an unknown world.

Presently a great flock of sheep wrinkled past me shutting out my view, and I reversed my canvas to shield it, and waited for the dust to settle. During the pause I slipped my hand in the side pocket of my blouse, drew out my cigarette case, and, touching the spring, handed its open contents to the three Indians.

It was curious to see how they received the slight courtesy, and with what surprise, hesitancy, and genuine delight they looked at the open case. It was as if you had

stopped a crippled beggar on the road and, having relieved his wants, had lifted him up beside you and returned him to his hovel in your carriage.

Each man helped himself daintily to my cigarettes, laying them on the palm of his hand, and then watched me closely. I selected my own, touched my match-safe, and passed the lighted taper to the Indian nearest me. Instantly they all uncovered, placing their sombreros in the dust, and gravely accepted the light. When I had exhausted its flickering flame upon my own cigarette, and taken my first whiff, they replaced their hats with the same sort of respectful silence one sometimes sees in a crowded street when a priestly procession passes. It was not a matter of form alone. It did not seem to be simply the acknowledgment of perhaps the most trivial courtesy one can offer another in a Spanish country. There was something more that lurked around the corners of their mouths and kindled in their eyes, which said to me but too plainly:—

"This stranger is a white man and yet he does not despise us."



When the sketch was finished, the trap packed, and I turned to retrace my steps to my lodgings, all three arose to their feet, unwound their zarapes, and trailed them in the dust. I can see them now, standing uncovered in the sunlight, and hear their low, soft voices calling after me:—

“*Con Dios va usted, mi amigo.*”

I continued my rambles, following the highway into the city, idling about the streets and jotting down queer bits of architecture and odd figures in my sketch-book. I stopped long enough to examine the high saddles of a pair of horses tethered outside a *fonda*, their owners drinking pulque within, and then crossed over to where some children were playing “bull fight.”

When the sun went down I strolled into the beautiful garden of San Marcos and sat me down on one of the stone benches surrounding the fountain. Here, after bathing my face and hands in the cool water of the basin, I rested and talked to the gardener.

He was an Indian, quite an old man, and had spent most of his life here. The garden belonged to the city, and he was paid two pesetas a day to take care of his part of it. If I would come in the evening the benches would be full. There were many beautiful señoritas in Aguas Calientes, and on Sunday there would be music. But I must wait until April if I wanted to see the garden, and in fact the whole city, in its gala dress. Then would be celebrated the *fiesta* of San Marcos, their patron saint, strings of lanterns hung and lighted, the fountains playing music everywhere, and crowds of people from all the country around, even from the great city of Mexico, and as far north as Zacatécas. Then he tucked a cluster of azaleas into the strap of my “trap” and insisted on going with me to the corner of the cathedral, so that I should not miss the turn in the next street that led to the pottery market.

All the markets of Aguas Calientes are interesting, for the country round about is singularly rich and fertile, and fruits and vegetables are raised in abundance.



The pottery market is especially so. It is held in a small open square near the general market, surrounded by high buildings. The pottery is piled in great heaps on the ground, and the Indian women, sheltered by huge square and octagon umbrellas of coarse matting, sit all day serving their customers. At night they burn torches. All the other markets are closed at noon. The pottery is very cheap, a few centavos covering the cost of almost any single piece of moderate size, and one peseta making you master of the most important specimen in a collection.

Each province, in fact almost every village in Mexico, produces a ware having more or less distinctly marked characteristics. In Guadalajara the pottery is gray, soft-baked, and unglazed, but highly polished and often decorated with stripings of silver and gold bronze. In Zacatécas the glaze is as hard and brilliant as a piano top, and the small pulque pots and pitchers look like polished mahogany or highly-colored meerschaum pipe bowls. In Puebla a finer ware is made, something between good earthenware and

coarse, soft porcelain. It has a thick tin glaze, and the decoration in strong color is an under-glaze. Here in Aguas Calientes they make not only most of these coarser varieties, but a better grade of gray stoneware, covered with a yellow glaze, semi-transparent, with splashings of red flowers and leaves scattered over it.

The potters are these much despised, degraded peons, who not only work in clay, embroider in feathers with exquisite results (an industry of their ancestors), but make the finer saddles of stamped and incised leather, besides producing an infinite variety of horse equipment unknown outside of Mexico. Moreover, in Uruápam they make Japanese lacquers, in Santa Fé on Lake Pátzcuaro, Moorish iridescent ware, and near Puebla, Venetian glass. In a small town in western Mexico I found a glass pitcher, made by a Tarascan Indian, of such exquisite mould and finish that one unfamiliar with the handiwork of this down-trodden race, seeing it in its place of honor in my studio, would say, "Ah, Venetian — Salviati, of course."



From the market I sought the church of San Diego, with its inlaid wooden floor, and quaint doorway richly carved, and as the twilight settled, entered the narrow street that led to my lodgings. At the farther end, beneath an overhanging balcony, a group of children and natives were gathered about a band of wandering minstrels. As I drew near, the tinkle of a triangle and the thrum of a harp accompanying a weird chant rose on the air. The quartette in appearance, costume, and bearing were quite different from any of the Indians I had seen about Aguas Calientes. They were much lighter in color, and were distinguished by a certain air of independence and dignity.

The tallest and oldest of the band held in his left hand a short harp, quite Greek in its design. The youngest shook a tambourine, with rim and rattles complete, but without the drumhead. The third tinkled a triangle, while the fourth, a delicate-looking, large-eyed, straight young fellow, handsome as a Greek god, with teeth like rows of corn, joined in the rhythmic chant. As they stood in the

darkening shadows beating time with their sandalled feet, with harp and triangle silhouetted against the evening sky, and zarapes hanging in long straight lines from their shoulders, the effect was so thoroughly classic that I could not but recall one of the great friezes of the Parthenon. I lighted a cigarette, opened the window of my balcony, and placing the bits of pottery I had bought in the market in a row on my window-sill, with the old gardener's azaleas in the largest jar, listened to the music, my thoughts full of the day's work and experience.

My memory went back to my three friends of the morning, standing in the sunlight, their sombreros in the dust; to the garrulous old gardener bending over his flowers; to the girl selling pottery; to the almost tender courtesy and gentleness of these people, their un-





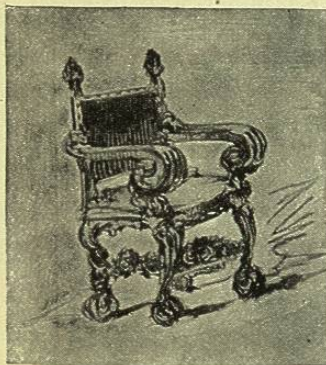
changing serenity of temper, their marvellous patience, their innate taste and skill, their hopeless poverty and daily privations and sufferings; and finally to the injustice of it all.

Peons and serfs in their own land! Despoiled by Cortez, tricked by his successors, enslaved by the viceroys, taxed, beaten, defrauded, and despised by almost every ruler and usurper since the days of Spanish rule, the whole history of the life of the Aztec and his descendants, from the initial massacre at Cholula down to the present day, has been one long list of cruelty and deceit.

The music ceased. The old minstrel approached the balcony and held up his wide sombrero. I poured into it all my stock of copper coin. "*Muchas gracias, señor,*" came back the humble acknowledgment. Then they disappeared up the narrow street and the crowd dispersed. I looked after them long and musingly, and surprised myself repeating the benediction of the morning, —

"*Con Dios vayan ustedes, mis amigos.*"

## CHAPTER V.

THE OLD CHAIR IN THE SACRISTY AT  
ZACATÉCAS.

It stood just inside the door as I entered from the main body of the church. Richly carved, with great arms broadened out where the elbows touched, it had the air of being especially designed for some overfed, lazy prelate. The hand rests were rounded in wide flutes, convenient spaces for his fat fingers. The legs bowed out slightly from the seat, then curved sharply, and finally terminated in four grotesque claws, each clutching a great round ball, — here his