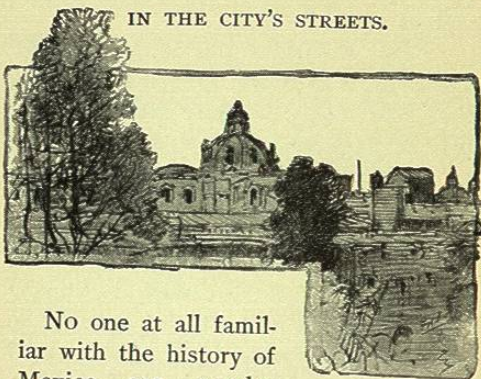


## CHAPTER VI.

### IN THE CITY'S STREETS.



No one at all familiar with the history of Mexico can wander about the streets and suburbs of this its principal city without seeing at every turn some evidence of the vast changes which have marked its past, and which have made its story so thrilling.

If Prescott's pleasing fiction of Teocallis towering to the stars, the smoke of whose sacrifices curled upwards day and night; of gorgeous temples, of hanging

and floating gardens, myriads of feather-clad warriors armed with spear and shield, swarms of canoes brilliant as tropical birds, and of a court surrounding Montezuma and Guatimotzin, more lavish than the wildest dream of the Orient, — if all this is true, — and I prefer to believe it rather than break the gods of my childhood, — so also is the great plaza of the cathedral, and the noble edifice itself with splendid façade and majestic twin towers, the hundreds of churches about which cluster the remains of convent, monastery, and hospital; the wide paseos, the tropical gardens, the moss-bearded cypresses four centuries old under which the disheartened Aztec monarch mourned the loss of his kingdom, the palaces of the viceroys, the alamedas and their fountains.

If you push aside the broad-leaved plants in the grand plaza you will find heaped up and half covered with tangled vines the broken fragments of rudely carved stones, once the glory of an Aztec temple. If you climb down the steep hill under Chapultepec and break away the matted



underbrush, you will discover the mutilated effigy of Ahuitzotl, the last of Montezuma's predecessors, stretched out on the natural rock, the same the ancient sculptor selected for his chisel in the days when the groves about him echoed with song, and when these same gnarled cypresses gave grateful shadow to priest, emperor, and slave.

Stroll out to Santa Anita; examine the *chinampas*—the floating gardens of the old Mexican race. They are still there, overgrown with weeds and anchored by neglect. As in the old times so now on every feast day the narrow canal of *las Vigas* leading to the *chinampas* is crowded with boats; the maidens bind wreaths of poppies about their heads, and the dance and song and laughter of the light-hearted race—light-hearted when even for a day they lay their burdens down—still rings out in the twilight air.

The two civilizations, the pagan and the Christian, are still distinct to those who look below the surface. Time has not altered them materially. Even to-day in the hollows of the mountains and amid

the dense groves on the tropical slopes, the natives steal away and prostrate themselves before the stone images of their gods, and in the churches of the more remote provinces the parish priest has found more than once the rude sculptured idol concealed behind the Christian altar. To the kneeling peon the ugly stone is his sole hope of safety and forgiveness.

Important changes are taking place, however, which predict a happier future for Mexico. The monastery of San Hipólito, once the palace of Bucareli, now contains a printing press. The convent of Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion is a public school. The church of San Agustin, a public library, and through the silent arches of many cloisters, and through many a secluded convent garden run broad avenues filled with the gay life of the metropolis. Moreover to-day, every man, be he pagan, Christian, or Jew, may worship his particular god according to the dictates of his own conscience, in any form that pleases him.

Nothing so pointedly marks for me the strange contrasts which these changes



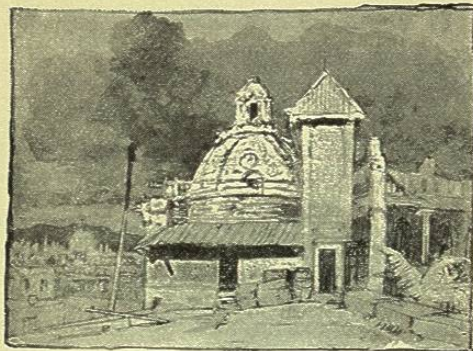
have brought about, as my own quarters at the Hotel Jardin.

I am living in two rooms at the end of a long balcony overlooking a delicious garden, redolent with azaleas, pomegranates, and jasmine, in full bloom. I am at the extreme end of the balcony, which is several hundred feet long, and next to me is a stained and battered wall, incrustated with moss and lichen, supported by buttresses running sheer into the poppy beds. This wall sustains one side of a building which is surmounted by a quaint tile roof.

My rooms are high-ceiled and spacious, and floored with red brick. The walls, judged from the width of the door jambs, are of unusual strength.

At the other end of the balcony, from out the roof, rises a dome which glistens in the setting sun. It is covered with exquisite Spanish tiles of blue and yellow, each one of which forms part of a picture telling the story of the Cross. Beyond the garden, several squares away, cut sharp against the afternoon sky, curves the beautiful dome of the cathedral of San

Francisco, beneath whose frescoed roof once rested the bones of Cortez.



Scarce twenty-five years ago the square bounded by this little dome with the Spanish tiles, this great dome of the cathedral, and the outside of the mould-stained convent wall, formed the great religious foundation of San Francisco, the richest and most powerful of the ecclesiastical holdings in Mexico. From this spot radiated the commanding influence of the order. Here masses were heard by Cortez. Here through three centuries the great festi-

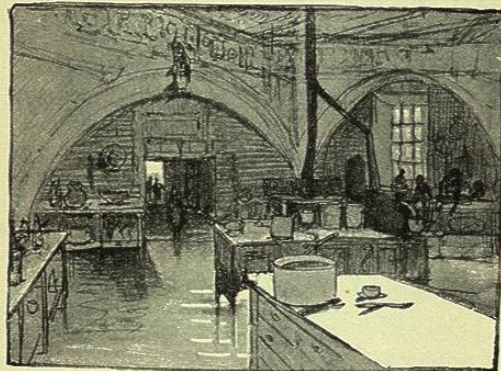


vals of the church were taken part in by the viceroys. Here was sung the first Te Deum of Mexican independence, and here seventeen years later were held the magnificent funeral services of the liberator Yturvide.

How great the changes! To-day a Protestant congregation worships in the grand old cathedral, its interior a horror of whitewash and emptiness; a modern hotel supplants the old infirmary and palace of the commissioners general of the order; a public livery stables its horses in the refectory, and four broad streets traverse the length and breadth of the sacred ground, irrespective of chancel, cloister, or garden. Through the top of the exquisite cupola surmounting the little glazed tile dome covering the chapel of San Antonio is thrust a sheet iron stove-pipe. Within this once beautiful house of prayer, the space covered by the altar is now occupied by an enormous French range, upon which is ruined all the food of the Hotel Jardin. In the delightful arched windows piles of dirty dishes replace the swinging lamps; near an exit

where once stood the font, a plate-warmer of an eastern pattern gives out an oily odor; and where the acolytes swung their censers, to-day swarms a perspiring mob of waiters urgent to be served by a *chef* who officiates in the exact spot where the holy archbishop celebrated high mass.

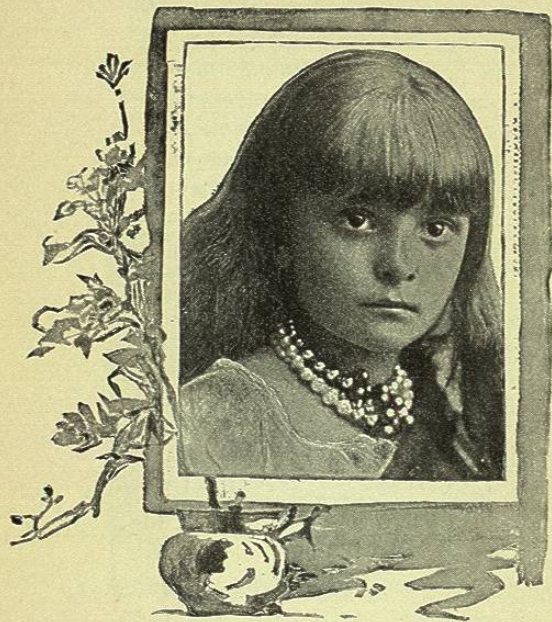
High on the cornice of the dome still clings the figure of San Domingo. His



wooden bones and carved teeth should rattle and chatter themselves loose as he gazes down upon the awful sacrilege, for above him, where once the wings of the



Dove of the Holy Spirit overspread the



awe-hushed penitents, now twists with a convenient iron elbow a rusty pipe, that carries the foul breath of this impious

range into the pure air of the heaven above.

As I sit on my section of the balcony and paint, I can see within a few yards of my easel an open window, framed in the mouldy convent wall. The golden sunlight streams in, and falls upon the weather-stained stones, and massive iron bound shutter, touches a strip of dainty white curtain and rests lovingly upon the head of a peon girl who sits all day sewing, and crooning to herself a quaint song. She watches me now and then with great wondering eyes. As I work I hear the low hum of a sewing-machine keeping time to her melody. Suddenly there is a quick movement among the matted leaves clinging to the festering wall, and from out a dark crevice creeps a slimy snake-like lizard. He listens and raises his green head and glides noiselessly into the warm sunlight. There he stretches his lithe body and basks lazily.

I laid down my brushes, and fell into a reverie. The sunlight, the dark-eyed Indian girl, the cheery hum of her shuttle, and the loathsome lizard crawling from



out the ruins of a dead convent wall told me the whole story of Mexico.

The old church of San Hipólito stands within a stone's throw of the spot where Alvarado, Cortez's greatest captain, is said to have made his famous leap on that eventful night of July 1, 1520, the Noche Triste. Indeed, it was built by one of the survivors of that massacre, Juan Garido, in commemoration of its horrors. Not the present structure, but a little chapel of adobe, which eighty years later was pulled down to make room for the edifice of today. You can still see upon the outside wall surrounding the atrium of the present building a commemorative stone tablet, bearing alto-relievos of arms, trophies, and devices of the ancient Mexicans, with this inscription:—

"So great was the slaughter of Spaniards by the Aztecs in this place on the night of July 1, 1520, named for this reason the Dismal Night, that after having in the following year reëntered the city triumphantly, the conquerors resolved to build here a chapel, to be called the Chapel of the Martyrs; and which should

be dedicated to San Hipólito, because the capture of the city occurred upon that saint's day."

Janvier says: "Until the year 1812, there was celebrated annually on the 13th of August at this church a solemn ceremony, both religious and civil, known as the Procession of the Banner (*Paseo del pendon*), in which the viceroy and the great officers of the State and the nobility together with the archbishops and dignitaries of the Church took part. Its principal feature was the carrying in state of the crimson banner formerly borne by the conquerors, and still preserved in the National Museum."

There was nothing to indicate the existence of any such ceremony the day I strolled into its quiet courtyard. The wooden gates, sagging and rotting on their hinges, were thrown back invitingly, but the broad flags of the pavement, overgrown with weeds and stubby grass thrust up between the cracks, showed but too plainly how few entered them.

Some penitents crossed the small inclosure in front of me, and disappeared



within the cool doorway of the church. I turned to the left, hugged the grateful shadow of the high walls, reached the angle, opened my easel and began to paint.

It has a very dignified portal, this old church of San Hipólito, with half doors panelled and painted green, and with great whitewashed statues of broken-nosed saints flanking each side, and I was soon lost in the study of its ornament and color. For a while nobody disturbed me or gave me more than a passing glance.

Presently I was conscious that an old fellow watering some plants across the court was watching me anxiously. When I turned again he stood beside me.

"Señor, why do you sit and look at the church?"

"To take it home with me, *mi amigo*."

"That cannot be. I will tell the padre."

He was gone before I could explain. In five minutes he returned, pale and trembling and without his hat. Behind him came an old priest with a presence like a benediction. Clinging to his hands were two boys, one with eyes like diamonds.

Before I could explain the old man's face lighted up with a kindly smile, and he extended his hand.

"Nicolas is very foolish, señor. Do not mind him. Stay where you are. After service you can sit within the church and paint the interior, if you like. If the boys will not annoy you, please let them watch you. It will teach them something."

The little fellows did not wait for any further discussion. They both kissed his hand, and crept behind my easel. The youngest, with the diamond eyes, Pacheco, told me without drawing his breath his name, his age, where he went to school, that the good padre was his uncle, that his father had been dead forever almost, and that they lived across the way with their mother. The oldest stood by silently watching every movement of my brush as if his life depended on it.

"And do you love the padre?" I asked, turning towards him.

"Yes." He replied in a quick decided tone as if it was a sacrilege to question



it. "And so would you. Everybody, *everybody* loves the padre."

"Is it not true?" This last to the sacristan, who had come out to see the painter, the service having begun.

The sacristan not only confirmed this, but gave me a running account of the misfortunes of the church even in his day, of its great poverty, of the changes he had seen himself. No more processions, no more grand masses; on Easter Sunday there was not even money enough to buy candles. He remembered a lamp as high as this wall that was stolen by the government, — this in a whisper behind his hand, — all solid silver, and a pair of candlesticks as big round as the tree yonder, all melted down to pay for soldiers. *Caramba!* It was terrible. But for the holy padre there would be no service at all. When the padre was young he lived in the priest's house and rode in his carriage. Now he is an old man, and must live with his sister over a *posada*. The world was certainly coming to an end.

I let the old sacristan ramble along, wishing the service over, that I might see

again the good padre whom everybody loved.

Soon the handful of people who, during the previous hour, had stolen in, as it were, one by one, crowded up the doorway and dispersed. It was a meagre gathering at best.

Then the old priest came out into the sunlight, and shaded his eyes with his hand, searching for me in the shadowed angle of the wall. As he walked across the court I had time to note the charming dignity of his manner, and the almost childlike smile that played across his features. His hair was silver white, his black frock faded and patched, though neatly kept, and his broad hat of a pattern and date of long ago. The boys sprang up, ran to him, caught him about the knees, and kissed his hands. Not as if it was a mark of devotion or respect, but as if they could not help it. The sacristan uncovered his head. For myself, I must confess that I was bareheaded and on my feet before I knew it. Would I come to his house and have a cup of coffee with him? It was but across the



street. The sacristan would see that my traps were not disturbed. At this the boys danced up and down, broke through the gate, and when we reached the narrow door that led to the balcony above, Pacheco had already dragged his mother to the railing, to see the painter the good padre was bringing home.

It was a curious home for a priest. There were but three rooms, all fronting on a balcony of the second floor, overlooking a garden in which clothes were drying among and above the foliage. It was clean and cheery, however. Some pots of flowers bloomed in the windows, and there was a rocking-chair covered with a cotton cloth, a lounge with cushions, a few books and knickknacks, besides a square table holding a brass crucifix and two candles. In the corner of the adjoining room was an iron bedstead and a few articles of furniture. This was where the padre slept.

"The times are changed, good father?" I asked, when he had finished filling his cup.

"Yes, my son, and for the worse." And

then clearly but without bitterness, or any other feeling apparently, except the deepest sorrow, he told me the story of the downfall of his church in Mexico. It is needless to repeat it here. The old father thought only of the pomp, and splendor, and power for good, of the religion he loved, and could not see the degradation of the days he mourned. Within a stone's throw of where we sat the flowers were blooming, and the palms waving in the plaza of San Diego, over the exact spot where, less than a century ago, the smoke of the *auto de fé* curled away in the sunlight. I did not remind him of it. His own life had been so full of every good deed, and Christian charity, and all his own waking hours had been so closely spent either at altar or bedside, that he could not have understood how terrible could be the power of the Church he revered, perverted and misused.

When he ceased he drew a deep sigh, rose from his chair, and disappeared into the adjoining room. In a few moments he returned, bearing in his arms a beautiful cope embroidered in silver on white satin.

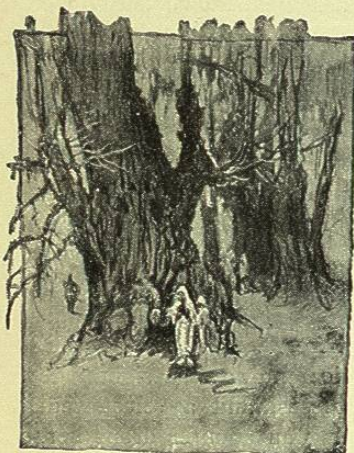


"This, my son," said he, "is the last relic of value in San Hipólito. It is, as you see, very precious, and very old. A present from Pope Innocent XII., who sent it to the brotherhood, the Hipólitos, in the year 1700. The pieces that came with it, the chasubles, stole, and other vestments are gone. This I keep by my bedside."

He folded it carefully, returned it to its hiding-place, and accompanied me to the outer door. I can see him now, his white hair glistening in the light, the boys clinging to his hands.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ON THE PASEO.



THE English dogcart and the French bonnet have just broken out in the best society of Mexico. The disease doubtless came in with the railroads.

At present the cases are sporadic, and only the young caballero who knows Piccadilly and the gay señorita who has watched the brilliant procession pass under the Arc de Triomphe are affected. But it is nevertheless