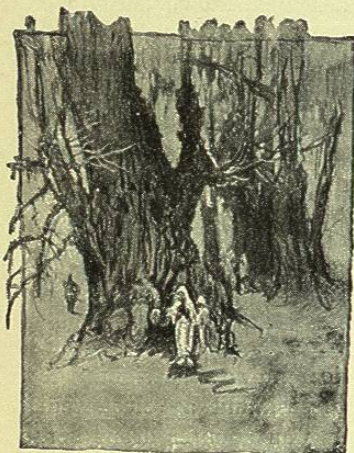


"This, my son," said he, "is the last relic of value in San Hipólito. It is, as you see, very precious, and very old. A present from Pope Innocent XII., who sent it to the brotherhood, the Hipólitos, in the year 1700. The pieces that came with it, the chasubles, stole, and other vestments are gone. This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

evident that in the larger cities the contagion is spreading, and that in a few years it will become epidemic.

Nowhere should the calamity of a change in national habits and costumes be more regretted than here. Stroll up the Paseo de la Reforma at sundown, — the Champs Élysées of Mexico, — and watch the endless procession of open carriages filled with beautiful women with filmy mantillas shading their dark eyes, the countless riders mounted on spirited horses, with saddle pommels hung with lasso and lariat; run your eye along the sidewalk thronged with people, and over the mounted soldiers in intermittent groups, policing the brilliant pageant, and tell me if anywhere else in the world you have seen so rich and novel a sight.

A carriage passes, and a velvet-eyed beauty in saluting an admirer drops her handkerchief. In an instant he wheels, dashes forward, and before you can think, he has picked up the dainty perfumed cambric from the dust without leaving his saddle, and all with the ease and grace of a Comanche.

Should a horse become unmanageable and plunge down the overcrowded thoroughfare, there are half a dozen riders within sight who can overtake him before he has run a stone's throw, loop a lasso over his head, and tumble him into the road. Not ranchmen out for an afternoon airing, but kid-gloved dandies in white buckskin and silver, with waxed moustaches, who learned this trick on the haciendas when they were boys, and to whom it is as easy as breathing. It is difficult to imagine any succeeding generation sitting back-a-back to a knee-breeched flunkey, and driving a curtailed cob before a pair of lumbering cart-wheels.

Analyze the features of a Spanish or Mexican beauty. The purple-black hair, long drooping lashes, ivory-white skin, the sinking, half-swooning indolence of her manner. Note how graceful and becoming are the clinging folds of her mantilla, falling to the shoulders, and losing itself in the undulating lines of her exquisite figure. Imagine a cockchafer of a bonnet, an abomination of beads, bows, and ban-

gles, surmounting this ideal inamorata. The shock is about as great as if some scoffer tied a seaside hat under the chin of the Venus de Milo.

Verily the illustrated newspaper and the ready-made clothing man have reduced the costume of the civilized and semi-barbarous world to the level of the commonplace! I thank my lucky stars that I still know a few out-of-the-way corners where the castanet and high-heeled shoe, the long, flowing, many-colored tunic, the white sabot and snowy cap, and the sandal and sombrero, are still left to delight me with their picturesqueness, their harmony of color and grace.

All these reflections came to me as I strolled up the Reforma, elbowing my way along, avoiding the current, or crossing it, for the shelter of one of the tree trunks lining the sidewalks, behind which I made five-minute outlines of the salient features of the moving panorama. When I reached the statue of Columbus, the crowd became uncomfortable, especially that part which had formed a "cue," with the head looking over my sketch-book, and so I

hailed a cab and drove away towards the castle of Chapultepec. The Paseo ends at this famous spot.

The fortress is built upon a hill that rises some two hundred feet above the valley, and is environed by a noble park and garden, above which tower the famous groves of hoary cypresses. On this commanding eminence once stood the palace of Montezuma, if we may believe the traditions. Indeed, Prescott dilates with enthusiasm upon the details of its splendor, and of its luxuriant adornment, these same cypresses playing an important part in the charming extravaganza with which he delighted our youth. The records say that when the haughty Spaniard knocked at the city's gate and demanded his person, his treasure, and his arms, the vacillating monarch retired to the cool shadows of these then ancient groves, collected together a proper percentage of his wives, and wept. This may be fiction, and that pious old monk, Bernal Diaz, Cortez's scribe, inspired by a lively sense of the value of his own head, and with a loyal desire to save

his master's, may alone be responsible for it.

For this I care little. The trees are still here, the very same old gnarled and twisted trunks. The tawny Indian in feathers, the grim cavalier in armor; fine ladies in lace; hidalgos in velvet, all the gay throngs who have enlivened these shady aisles, each bedecked after the manner and custom of their times, are gone. But the old trees still stand.

What the great kings of Tenochtitlan saw as they looked up into their sheltering branches, I see: the ribbed brown bark sparkling with gray green lichen; the sweep of the wrinkled trunk rushing upward into outspreading arms; the clear sky turquised amid matted foliage; the gray moss waving in the soft air. With these alive and above me, I can imagine the rest, and so I pick out a particularly comfortable old root that curves out from beneath one of the great giants, and sit me down and persuade myself that all the Aztec kings have been wont to rest their bones thereon. From where I lounge, I can see away up among the top branches

the castle and buildings of the military school, and at intervals hear the bugle sounding the afternoon's drill. Later I toil up the steep ascent, and from the edge of the stone parapet skirting the bluff, drink in the glory and beauty of perhaps the finest landscape in the world.

There are two views which always rise up in my memory when a grand panoramic vision bursts upon me suddenly. One is from a spot in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, in Granada, called "La Ultima Suspira de Mores." It is where Boabdil stood and wept when he looked for the last time over the beautiful valley of the Vega,—the loveliest garden in Spain,—the red towers and terraces of the Alhambra bathed in the setting sun. The other is this great sweep of plain, and distant mountain range, with all its wealth of palm, orange, and olive; the snow-capped twin peaks dominating the horizon; the silver line of the distant lakes, and the fair city, the Tenochtitlan of the ancient, the Eldorado of Cortez, sparkling like a jewel in the midst of this vast stretch of green and gold.

Both monarchs wept over their dominions. Boabdil, that the power of his race which for six hundred years had ruled Spain was broken, and that the light of the Crescent had paled forever in the effulgence of the rising Cross. Montezuma, that the fires of his temples had forever gone out, and that henceforward his people were slaves.

Sitting here alone on this stone parapet, watching the fading sunlight and the long creeping shadows and comparing Mexico and Spain of to-day with what we know to be true of the Moors, and what we hope was true of the Aztecs, and being in a reflective frame of mind, it becomes a question with me whether the civilized world ought not to have mingled their tears with both potentates. The delightful historian sums it up in this way:—

“Spain has the unenviable credit of having destroyed two great civilizations.”

Full of these reveries, and with the question undecided, I retraced my steps past the boy sentinels, down the long hill, through the gardens and cypresses, and out into the broad road skirting the great

aqueduct of Bucareli. There I hailed a cab, and whirled into the city brilliant with lights, and so home to my lodgings overlooking the old convent garden.