Photo by MRS. LUCIEN JEROME.]

Old Indian hag.

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CHAPTER II.

DEFIANCE OF SANTA ANNA.

PORFIRIO DIAZ' birthday is an occasion well remembered throughout Mexico, for it falls on the eve of the anniversary of Mexican Independence. Only nine years before he first saw the light the Spanish rule had been thrown aside, so that his life practically covers the whole period during which the country has struggled out of prolonged disorder to the final attainment of assured peace.

Southern Mexico claims the honour of having produced the two makers of the modern State. Both Diaz and Benito Juárez were natives of the Oaxaca Valley, and were reared near the historic site where the ancient Maya-Zapotec tribes built those wonderful temples of Mitla, and where the greatest discoveries of all the hidden cities now promise to be made at Monte Alban.

In the Oaxaca Valley yet remain traces of a vast civilisation existing two, perhaps three, thousand years ago—and, wonderful to relate, the people of the district themselves still closely resemble the types found on the carved idols and pottery. Strangers remark the characteristic nose of the Jew, the thick lips and heavy eye-lids of the Egyptian, and on the pottery, even the wig-curl of the latter over the ear.

These ancient Zapotecs wore breastplates, ear-rings, necklaces and other ornaments of stone or gold, some of which are of fine workmanship. They were not a rude people; indeed, on looking at some of their mural paintings, the stone masonry of their walls, and many of their idols, one realises they were a

people of an advanced civilisation. Juárez was descended direct from these Zapotec-Indians, while Diaz has the blood of the Mixteco tribe in his veins.

Amid these ancient records of stone Juárez and Diaz played as children. So little were the ruins of Mitla appreciated or cared for during the last two or three centuries that the stones were taken out to build churches, or to repair the village dwellings. The whole valley is riddled with tombs, among which, from Mitla to Oaxaca, the President of Mexico built his boyish castles, and marched his imaginary soldiers represented by ancient arrow-heads, knives of obsidian or painted bits of pottery, while the old tombs served as fortresses in which to hide. Now he regrets the sacrilege and destruction he committed in those mischievous days, and is doing his best to preserve these relics of the ancient past from further harm.

In the brief period between the declaration of Mexican Independence. September 16, 1821, and the birth of a son, Porfirio, to José Faustino Diaz nine years later, Mexico had made no progress along the path of liberty. Indeed, the country had been the scene of continual conflict.

Leader after leader rose and fell. The people, divided into many factions, or parties, all inspired by different motives, fought desperately for their particular opinions, though ignorant of the first principles of political government. The most powerful of these parties was still, of course, the Spaniards, and equally of course, amongst them was to be found the immensely powerful body of the Priesthood, who, after the arrival of Cortéz early in the sixteenth century, had introduced the Roman Catholic religion among the native Aztecs of Mexico, then a Pagan people addicted to the most horrible rites.

Before going further with the life of Porfirio Diaz, however, it may be well to take a glance back—even if the succession of events is bewildering—at the extraordinary condition of the country and the growth of the nation over which, in after years, he found himself called upon to rule. At least a rapid survey may assist the reader to better appreciate the welter of turbulence, despotism, and revolution into which Porfirio Diaz as a

young man was thrown. His work has been to unravel the tangled skein.

A period of three centuries passed before Mexico threw off the Spanish yoke first imposed upon her by the conquests of Cortéz, and began an era of independence. They were for the most part centuries of the basest degradation for the native inhabitants of the country, and also gradually for the children and descendants of white settlers, Mexican born, who in time began to form the nucleus of a new nation ; for all, in short, save the immigrants who came direct from Spain to govern the land.

These last, grandees of diminished fortune, military adventurers, traders with the lust of gold whom the fabled wealth of the Indies had attracted, left the plains of Andalusia to accept a temporary exile in Mexico with two chief objects in view ; first, their own enrichment, and secondly, the increase of the gold and silver poured into the royal treasury in Madrid.

The Mexican Indians are still composed of one hundred and fifty different tribes, each speaking its own tongue, seventy-five of which have actually a written language, to say nothing of the numerous dialects. Among these tribes the most important are Aztecs, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Otomi, Tlaxcalans and Juaves.

These were the conquered people, and the Spanish colonial system at no time troubled itself to recognise any rights on the part of those whom it held in subjection. To serve the all-powerful Catholic Church and enlarge its authority and world-wide dominion was a further end sought by the new rulers who settled in the country.

This is not a history of Mexico, and I shall not attempt so hopeless a task as to describe the Spanish ascendancy within the limitations of a few pages. But in those three hundred years Mexico as a nation was in the moulding. The influences then brought to bear explain much in Mexican character during the first half of the last century which might otherwise seem inexplicable ; its shiftiness, inconstancy, and cruelty, the anxiety to profit by any act of treachery which underlay the unquestioned courage of the people ; the ease with which their loyalty swung round from one cause to another ; and, more

than all, the incapacity for peaceful self-government which they displayed when the struggle for freedom against the Spanish oppressor was at length crowned with success.

In England we are accustomed to take pride in the results of our "little expeditions," but all our record of expansion contains nothing which will fairly compare with the achievements of Hernando Cortéz. With an army of five hundred and fifty-three foot soldiers, sixteen cavalrymen, one hundred sailors of his fleet, two hundred Cuban Indians, and a battery of ten small cannon and four falconets, he landed at Vera Cruz, on April 21, 1519, and accomplished the Spanish Conquest of Mexico and the subjection of its native races, probably numbering upwards of two millions. The horses of his soldiery especially struck the natives with terror, for they had never seen such a thing as a horse before, and took the steed and its rider to be one being.

Cortéz remained in the country as its first Governor, and was succeeded by other Royal Officers, Audencias, and Viceroys. Some few—but very few—have left names revered to this day. Others are commemorated in churches they erected which are still the glory of Mexico, and in the remains of great aqueducts and highways they inaugurated, relics of a time of past grandeur when the riches of the Mexican mines were carried by galleons of Spain on every sea.

The pomp of the Spanish Court established and maintained in Mexico through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries was not, however, for the Mexicans. The Viceroys ruled wholly without responsibility to the people they were sent to govern. The Indians were enslaved. They had no rights in their own land. It was no man's duty to protect them; they had no claims to justice. Don Luis de Velasco, the second of the Viceroys, in 1554 earned for himself the honoured title of "The Emancipator," by freeing a hundred and fifty thousand Indians held as slaves by the Spaniards, but the change was more in name than in condition. When many years later there was a re-division of the Royal demesne, the Indians were handed over with the land.

We get a glimpse into their actual life in some of the decrees which were intended to ameliorate their unhappy lot; in that, for instance, which attempted to secure for Indians employed in mines "regular hours of repose and some time to breathe the fresh air on the surface of the earth," and in the Royal ordinance which purported to abolish the system of assigning slaves to each colonist.*

The Spanish colonial empire might have played a yet larger part in the world's history but for the extraordinary fatuity with which the governing race clung to the doctrine that none but Spaniards fresh from the home country should take any part in colonial affairs. "To the victor belong the spoils," and that idea was carried to the utmost extremity. The end of colonisation, as then understood, was to divert the wealth of the conquered country to Spain. The Spanish monarchs may well have thought that purpose would be best accomplished by their own emissaries rather than by those, Spaniards though they might be by race and tradition, who had been born on Mexican soil, and might foster some affection for the land of their birth. The original settler retained his privileges, but his children and his children's children became outcasts.

They had no place in the army, which was filled exclusively by Spanish officers. They were debarred from holding office in the civil government. Socially they were despised by the haughty grandees from Castile and Seville whom they saw land from every ship that sailed into Vera Cruz—then the only port open—and who fattened upon the industries which the enterprise of the settlers had created. The Spaniard of Mexican birth, though of pure blood on both sides, was classed as a Creole, and no distinction was made between him and the product of the union of Spanish and Indian parents.

An utterance attributed to one of the latest Viceroys, that "So long as a single Castilian remained in the country, though he were no more than a cobbler, he ought to be its ruler," throws a flood of light on the contemptuous position to which the native-born colonists were relegated.

* Dr. Noll, "From Empire to Republic," p. 15.

Such a system of government as that established in Mexico necessarily led to the grossest abuses. Offices were created merely to find places for men who came from across the seas. New Spain, as Mexico was then called, became before its fall the most over-governed colony on the globe. "The worst features of the two worst governments in the world," says one writer, "the Gothic rule and that of the Spanish Moors, had been combined to form the government of Spain; and then the worst features of this mongrel government had been carefully preserved to oppress the native population of Mexico, in the code sent out to it by the Supreme Council of the Indies."

With the conquering race came a number of Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite Friars, who overran the country, parcelling out large areas of the territory as their possessions, and enforcing the Church's tithe. These Orders amassed enormous wealth and influence, and in later years became the most potent factors in fomenting and lending support to the revolutions which for so long distracted the country. The people were controlled by fear and impoverished by threats. Practically all that now remains of the religious Orders are the hundreds of deserted monasteries. They are fine buildings with stone ceilings, walls, and floors, built in the sixteenth century with great skill and taste, and are now used as schools, hospitals, and for other public purposes, such as railway-stations.

The Indian race has produced some fine men. Mejía, perhaps the best of the Emperor Maximilian's fighting generals, was an Aztec of pure descent. That Juárez was a Zapotec-Indian has before been mentioned. Few people realise that there are over half a million of Aztecs left in Mexico at the dawn of the twentieth century. They were conquered by Cortéz, but not exterminated. But the Indian, as he was in those days, untaught, uncared for, without a leader, and with no ideas of government, might have been held down for centuries longer.

The danger to the State, and the instrument of its final overthrow, was the Mexican colonist of Spanish blood, wedded to the land, whose numbers increased every year, and who saw the country of his birth exploited for the sole benefit of a foreigner

Type of Mexican.

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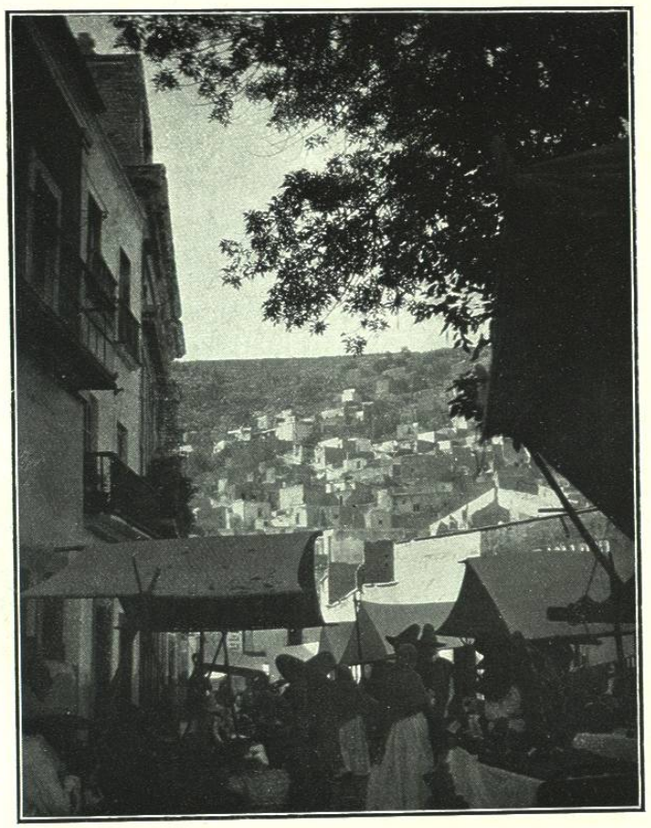

Photo by The AUTHOR.]

Guanajuato.

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whose arrogance filled him with intense hatred. The white Creole population of about a million at the close of the eighteenth century outnumbered the Europeans by twenty to one. Surrounding them were Indian tribes twice as numerous as themselves, and a horde of half-breeds.

A system of such exclusive centralism could only exist where the core was sound. When Napoleon I. sent Murat's armies marching into Spain, and Carlos IV. abdicated his throne, the whole of the Spanish-American Empire from Louisiana to Cape Horn was shaken to its foundations.

The first decisive blow for Mexico's freedom from the Spanish yoke was struck by the patriot priest, Miguel Hidalgo, in September, 1810. To this day the anniversary is commemorated by the President ringing the Bell of Independence from the balcony of the National Palace in the capital, a somewhat thrilling scene described in a later chapter.

Hidalgo, the first prominent figure in the history of modern Mexico, was a man of sixty when he started the revolt. Himself a Creole, he had been deeply moved by the oppressed condition of his race and of the Indians committed to his spiritual charge. From the pulpit of his church in the little town of Dolores, near Guanajuato, he proclaimed the revolution, and marching at the head of a small band of patriots, undisciplined and armed only with clubs and knives, soon gathered round him a large following. He met with astounding success. San Miguel, Celaya and Guanajuato—the most flourishing mining centre in Mexico to-day—fell successively into his hands.

Hidalgo marched to Mexico City, but when within five miles of the capital withdrew his army into the hills, fearing a repetition of the fearful scenes which had attended the capture of Guanajuato, when his half-savage Indians, burning with revenge for their wrongs, threw off all restraint, and for three days gave the town over to indiscriminate carnage, which the priestly leader was powerless to subdue.

This withdrawal was fatal to his cause. His adherents fell away. The fulminations of the Church cowed the weaker among them. His army was overpowered, and Hidalgo, made a prisoner,