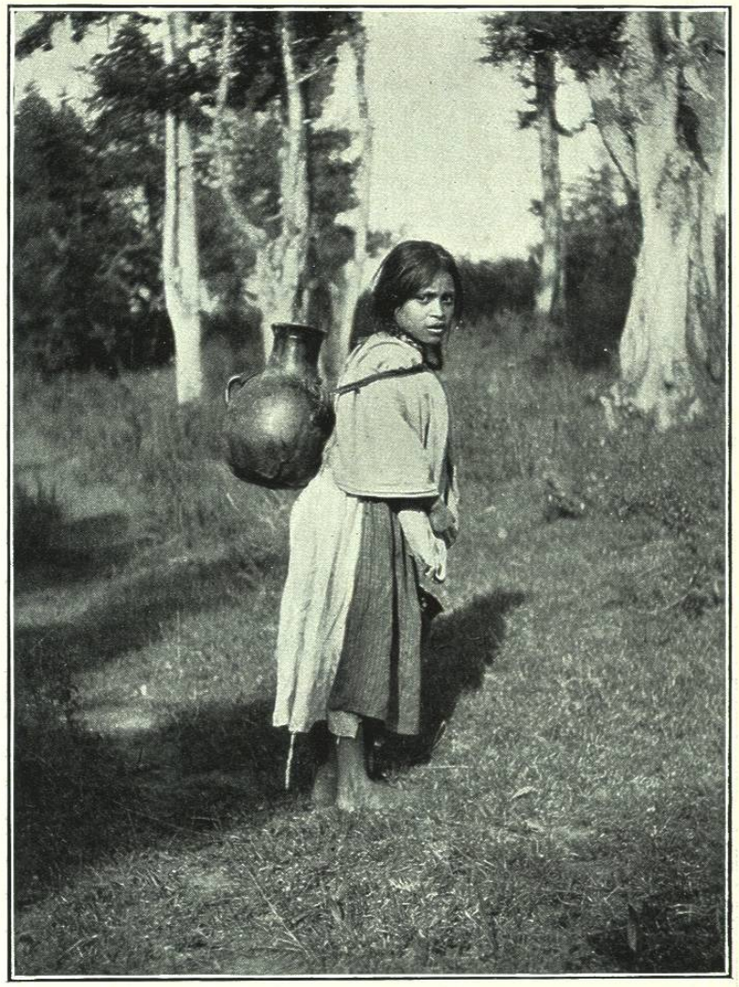


Photo by MRS. LUCIEN JEROME.]
Carrying home the water.

[*Page* 49.

the heavens. Falling stars are very common and add beauty to the scene, while the tropical mosses and hanging creepers look like lace against the moonlight.

As they marched during the cooler hours of the night, the men would sing to themselves in an under key, to the accompaniment of the tramp, tramp of hundreds of feet, but they never forgot to cross themselves as they passed a little wayside chapel, or touch their hats as they marched in front of a church. Sometimes the soldiers would pass a baby's funeral, and then they felt they were with the angels themselves. It is an old superstition in Mexico that if children die under a year old they are "angels" who have merely passed a few months on earth and then returned to their sphere in heaven.

As a rule the mother carries the empty coffin to the cemetery while the father bears his "angel" on his head. The child is laid out on a board, dressed to resemble some saint, such as San Antonio de Padua, El Santo Nino de la Dolorosa, or San Luis Gonzaga, and flowers and festoons hang all round the infant, while above the little body is an arch of blossoms. When they reach the cemetery, the "angel" is put into the coffin and buried. 'Tis a touching scene.

Or again, a child dies; it is only a baby—eight or ten months old, perhaps—still, its little life is ended. It has opened its eyes on the beauties of this world merely to close them again. Its pale little cheeks are now reddened and its eyes darkened in weirdly theatrical style. Its ears have heard the note of the mocking-bird, smiles have played upon its features; but that note will never cause another flicker of pleasure. The child is dead, and the mocking bird's song is its funeral dirge.

Poor mother! She is only a child herself, little more than fourteen, and yet the chord of maternity has been struck, deeply, oh, so deeply down in her woman's heart. Was ever more pathetic scene enacted in this world than the child-mother bewailing the loss of her baby doll? The little thing lies stretched out on a grass mat ready to be lifted into its tiny coffin, and sitting on her heels beside it is the poor mother who has given it life. She is not crying. Some grief is too deep for tears; she is barely

moaning as she sways herself to and fro and clenches her hands till the blood almost gushes from her slim brown fingers.

Poor, pretty little soul, how sad she is! Her baby, her angel, is dead. There seems nothing left now. It was all she had; what are the few reeds composing the hut, or the bits of family pottery? What is even the little picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe above her altar, when her babe lies dead? The men will be in from the fields presently, and then the singing and noise and death rites will begin in the village. Rockets and fireworks will be sent off to tell Heaven another child's soul is soaring to the angels. Now, however, she is alone; these precious moments are hers, all hers; she is growing from a child to a woman over the corpse of her own baby!

Such a scene the soldiers often witnessed, and never passed without crossing themselves devoutly and offering a prayer for the baby's soul.

The whole country was devout and the priestly power immense.

Salado's premature revolt in Jamiltepec, which ended in his death, was speedily put down, but it proved only the precursor of greater events. The centre of intrigue was not in the country districts, but in the capital itself. Liberals and Reactionaries were already fighting in the streets of Mexico City before the time came to put the Constitution of February, 1857, into effect. Comonfort nevertheless duly promulgated the law, and obtained a vote confirming him in the Presidency.

That he, at heart a devout religionist, had any real sympathy with measures against the Church of so sweeping a character is doubtful. A man of vacillating temperament, he pleased nobody. Ten days after he had sworn to maintain the Constitution he was persuaded to set it aside, dissolve Congress, and declare himself Dictator. In an effort to conciliate the Clericals he threw Juárez, who had become his Premier, into prison, then speedily released him. In open rupture by this time with the Liberals, and abandoned by the Conservatives and Clericals, who had used him temporarily for their own ends, Comonfort

fled to the United States, and remained in exile until the French invasion called him back to Mexico.

The Reactionaries, now masters in the capital, installed General Miguel Miramón as President. An element of romantic glamour still surrounds his name, for Miramón was one of the two hapless men shot by the side of the Austrian Archduke Maximilian at Querétaro, some years afterwards. A daring soldier and political intriguer, elegant in figure and manner, and extremely ambitious, he in many ways resembled Santa Anna, but on the testimony of Prince Felix Salm-Salm* was "no scientific general, and rather an indifferent strategist." He was at this time twenty-five years of age. By law, he was too young to hold the Presidency, which by virtue of his office devolved upon Juárez. In fact, he was at that time little more than a cypher in the hands of a more notable man, General Zuloaga, who was the real leader of the Reactionaries.

A plot to arrest the Liberal Deputies was disclosed too early, and seventy of them escaped to Querétaro—the city still famous for its domes and opals. Here they recognised Benito Juárez as constitutional President of the Republic. Henceforward not only was Mexico distracted by the sanguinary strife which is known in her history as the War of Reform, but by rival Presidents, both of whom assumed to rule the country.

Juárez pledged himself to fight for the Constitution of February, 1857, and for the destruction of the power of the Church and confiscation of its property, which some years later he accomplished by the laws that are associated with his name.

Establishing his Government, after many changes, at Vera Cruz, Juárez obtained recognition from the United States as the legitimate constitutional ruler of Mexico early in 1859, and held that position during the years in which a succession of "anti-Presidents," as they came to be called, were put up and thrown down by the different factions of Clericals, Conservatives, Reactionaries and others, which from time to time secured mastery in Mexico City.

* "Diary in Mexico in 1867." Vol. I., p. 34.

It is not necessary to follow all the battles, skirmishes, and troubles of those exciting years. A vast theatre was involved, extending across the centre of the country. The Constitutionalists, or "Juárists," held the eastern slope of the Sierra Madre, between the capital and Vera Cruz. At the outset, the fortune of war was adverse to the men whose cause was that of the freedom of Mexico against tyranny and anarchy. Juárez won the adhesion of some of the Mexican States, but lost men and leaders in encounter after encounter with the Reactionaries—many of his leaders, if truth be told, by open desertion to the enemy.

Miramón, emboldened by his successes, attempted to capture Vera Cruz and the Constitutional Government at one blow. A great number of men were uselessly sacrificed, but he failed to break down the resistance offered by the port, and hastening back to Mexico City, he arrived in time to join forces with General Márquez, and near by, at Tacubaya—famous for its beautiful old church and the rough heap of stones in the graveyard, beneath which the wife of Cortéz lies buried—inflicted a crushing defeat on the Juárists who were threatening the capital.

Diaz had not yet fully recovered from the severe wound he had received at Ixcapa when occasion again demanded his services for the defence of his birthplace. Oaxaca was besieged by the Reactionary General José María Cobos. In a desperate attempt to seize provisions from the enemy, of which his men were badly in need, he reopened his old wound, which had not thoroughly healed. In spite of this he maintained a gallant defence of the quadrants of the city entrusted to his command, and finally won a victory. General Rosas Landa, in command, impressed by the superiority of the besiegers in men and material, had talked of abandoning the town and cutting a way through the enemy's lines to the mountains.

Diaz and other younger officers obtained consent to a final assault on Cobos' troops, which was delivered with such force and effect that after several hours' fighting they were obliged to retire in the direction of Tehuantepec, and the siege was raised.

Rarely has a young officer at the outset of his military career

chanced upon such a school of training in actual warfare as fell to the lot of Porfirio Diaz. In the ten years which followed his first serious engagement at Ixcapa, not a single year passed—often not two months together—in which he was not in conflict with an enemy; men of his own country during the long agony of the War of Reform, and after its close with the French.

It is quite impossible to enter in detail into all the numerous battles in which he participated; the victory against Cobos at Jalapa in February, 1858, when Diaz was for the first time entrusted with the supreme command of an expeditionary force; the night march and daybreak assault upon Las Jícaras a few months later, when José Conchado, the Reactionary General, was killed, and Captain Diaz, for his distinguished services on that day, was promoted major of the National Guard; the fight at Mixtequilla, in June, 1859, when the Clerical leader, Colonel Espinosa, was killed; the actions at Márquesado, Mitla, and Ixtepeji.

Early in the course of these operations Diaz was selected for an important post. He was made Governor and Military Commander of the District of Tehuantepec.

It thus became his duty to uphold the Juárist cause in this somewhat remote corner of the country on the most slender means. The Constitutional Government was too much harassed and beset elsewhere to lend him assistance. The State was hostile and troubled. He found only a remnant of troops at hand, and being forced into almost daily skirmishes with bands of Clericals and Reactionaries, had the greatest difficulty in maintaining even his small force at full strength.

Not only, however, was he able to hold his own for a couple of years, but in this time of daily struggle he gave the first evidences of his administrative skill, straightening out the tangle into which the State's affairs had lapsed, purifying its civil government, and introducing, timidly and cautiously, education for the populace—a cause which, in later years, has become the passion of his life.

Marching through these regions of Tehuantepec, which is about a hundred miles over the mountains from Oaxaca, was a

serious matter. I have traversed the country on horseback, by boat, and by train, and can realise a little what all that fighting and marching meant in the heat of summer in a tropical land.

The undergrowth—six, eight, or perhaps ten feet high—was so close, so jumbled, so interwoven, that no human being could find space to stand. A lofty palm here, a bamboo there, an orchid or a mistletoe clinging to tall cedar or mahogany trees, while graceful tendrils descended from the boughs and took root in the ground below where wondrous yellow and black or scarlet and black snakes found shelter. All things grew so thickly together that it seemed impossible they could find room even to take root; and every variety of vegetation appeared to thrive. To-day much of this land has been brought under cultivation, and a railway crosses the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a distance of two hundred miles.

This underwood is not so difficult to clear as might be imagined, when it is simply ignited and burnt. In the hot season everything is dry, and whole spaces of virgin forest are quickly cleared. No one could penetrate that jungle to cut it down, and yet these soldiers had to pass through it at times, or circumvent it by long marches. It is dangerous for pedestrians because it is difficult to get into at all, and is the home of snakes and lizards, scorpions and reptiles of all sorts, to say nothing of larger animals, such as the ocelot or large spotted tiger, wild cat, pumas (called in Mexico "el leon") and jaguars. Venomous mosquitoes add to its terrors. However, firing is comparatively easy, and can to a great extent be guided and controlled. The ash forms a manure, and a year later crops may be raised on what was previously primeval forest. Soldiers had no time to clear a road, however, and many fell sick and died of fever by the way.

Even to-day, at certain seasons of the year, Mexican Indians live entirely on the wild produce of the forest. Natives find bananas, pine-apples, cocoa-nuts, and dozens of tropical fruits, such as Manilla mango, anona, aguacate, sapote grande, and a variety of plums unknown in England. They can shoot with their blow-guns—bamboo tubes with a poisoned dart—game

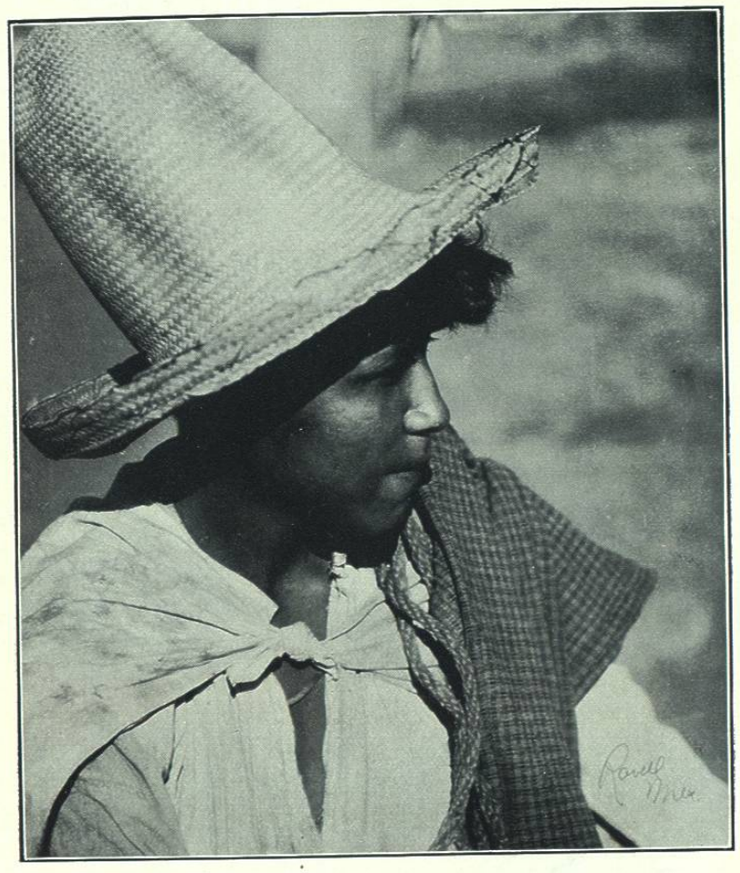
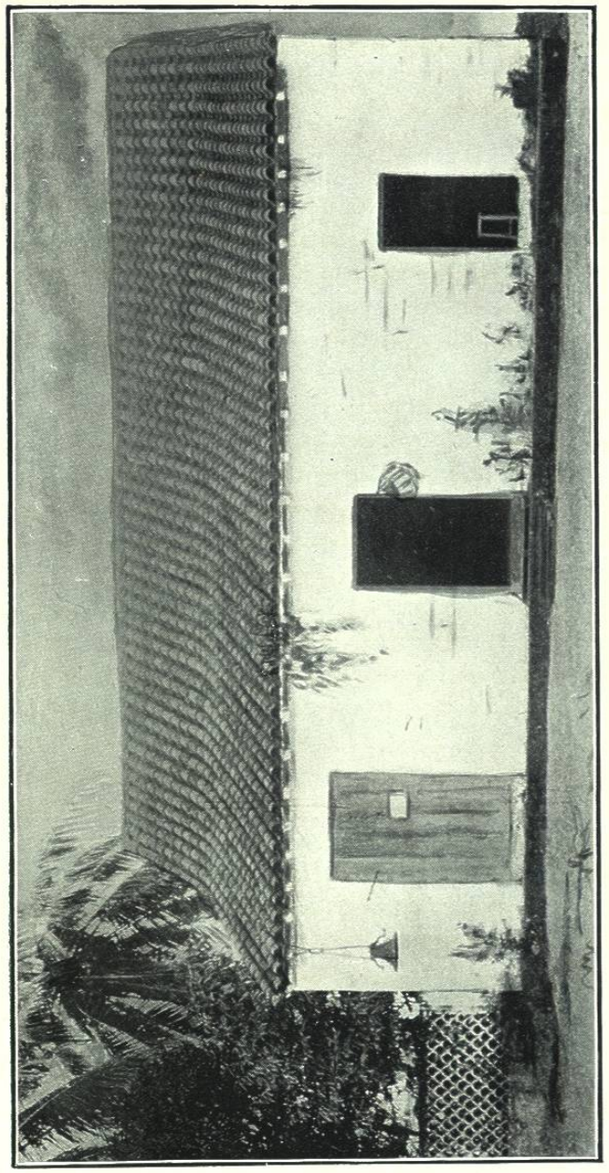


Photo by RAVELL.]

A Mexican Indian.



Diaz' little home at Tlalcotalpam when he turned farmer. [*Page* 55.

for their larder, and, being lazy by temperament, prefer to live by the chase and the chance of the forest rather than by steady work. I saw many splendid figures and lovely faces among these Zapotecans when I was on the Isthmus. Tehuantepec is in the tropics. It lies in the most southern corner of Mexico, bordering on Yucatan, and is the narrowest strip of land between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Many quaint habits, customs and costumes still remain.

"Women's rights" are undisputed at Tehuantepec, where ninety per cent. of the trade is done by women, and a wife has to stand bond for her husband before he can get credit. Woman reigns supreme, and these good ladies prove beyond all doubt that because a woman can earn a livelihood it is not necessary for her to be either ugly or mis-shapen.

In this agricultural and feminine paradise Diaz fought for a long time, and he still speaks with enthusiasm of the beauty of the girls. They are dark-skinned, with glorious soft eyes and masses of wavy black hair; possess exquisite features and lovely teeth. They are the most beautiful women in Mexico, and their carriage at once attracts attention. Small in stature, they are fine in limb, and seem born models for an artist. They have changed little since Diaz' young soldier days, for only now, through its railway and its harbour, is Tehuantepec becoming known to the world.

General Diaz was often back on the Isthmus during his military career, and at one time, after much fighting, he settled himself in a little house at Tlalcotalpam, which I saw many years later. Tlalcotalpam is only about fifteen miles from Alvarado, on the Vera Cruz side of the country, and is a delightful old Spanish town with a fine plaza, round which the populace walk every evening while the band plays. All the men walk one way and all the women on the reverse side, so that they may look at one another as they pass, when there is much opportunity for mild flirtations. They are very beautiful types of women, too, and to add to their attractions they leave their hair hanging down.

Porfirio Diaz' home was in a small street in the north-eastern

extremity of the town, and while he lived there he became quite an agriculturist, sugar being his chief cultivation. Report says that he was also such a good carpenter that he made the doors and windows of the house with his own hands.

But to return to the progress of the war. Only with the greatest difficulty were the impoverished Liberals able to maintain the struggle in the centre of the country, and in time the tide of ill-fortune came sweeping over the remote corner of Tehuantepec, where Diaz was keeping the cause alive. The defeat of a Liberal army under General Mejía at Teotitlan left the south-eastern States cut adrift and helpless before the Reactionary forces. Diaz received peremptory orders from the Juárist Government to abandon Tehuantepec, destroy his war material in order to prevent it falling into the enemy's hands, and retire upon Vera Cruz. He obeyed the spirit rather than the letter of his instructions, for he safely passed with the precious ammunition and stores through a hostile country, and did not leave them until he had seen them safely into the town of Juchitán, which was loyal to the Liberal cause.

Late in the year Diaz organised another daring enterprise. Placing himself at the head of a little column of three hundred men he marched through the night upon Tehuantepec, delivered a surprise assault upon the town at the first streaks of dawn, and, profiting by the confusion and misconception of the size of his force, drove out General Alarcon and the Conservative garrison and captured seven-hundred rifles.

This was the beginning of greater things. The Liberal cause in the South and East awoke to new life. Before many months had passed Diaz felt himself strong enough to take the offensive against the Reactionary leader, Cobos, and, having defeated that general's forces in two or three encounters, he set to work to organise a column to attack him in the city of Oaxaca.

Crossing the mountains Diaz found himself confronted by an army led by Marcelino Cobos. He fought throughout the day against unequal numbers, and for the first time in his career suffered defeat. With his surviving force, however, he effected a junction with a column of Juárists advancing from Ixtlán under

Colonel Salinas, and came within sight of Oaxaca. The combined force, numbering little over seven hundred men against two thousand, was still in insufficient strength to encircle the town, but they seized the most important strategical points in the neighbourhood, and held their own against constant attacks.

The recovery of Oaxaca by the Liberals not only marks an important page in the War of Reform, but in the fortunes of Diaz himself, as will be seen from his diary. The whole tale of stratagem and counter-stratagem, the attack with its unexpected developments, and the final victory are told by President Diaz himself as none other could tell them:

"The inferiority of our numbers," he says, "compelled us to plan a bold stroke such as the enemy could not foresee. This was a difficult task, for our civil friends who formed the local government and who lived among us, not understanding the importance of secrecy in military affairs, told their families in Oaxaca what were our intentions, or what they suspected we were going to do. By this they meant no harm, and merely wished to give consoling news to those concerned. But none the less it caused all our plans to miscarry. The stories went from mouth to mouth as such stories invariably do, until they reached the ears of the enemy.

"We were, therefore, obliged to confine ourselves to a few villages in the mountains, where there were no soldiers' quarters, and guard ourselves more against indiscreet friends than against our foes.

"While we were occupied in preparations for an assault on the town my brother Félix received a letter from Colonel Montero, who was commanding the 9th Battalion of Cobos' Army in Oaxaca, and whose friendship Félix had made when he was himself fighting with the Conservatives.* Montero proposed to assist us in taking the town in consideration of a reward of ten thousand pesos.

"In order to find out what service Montero might be able

* Don Félix Diaz had left the Conservative army and joined the Liberals five months before these events, as General Diaz explains in the personal references to his brother quoted from his diary in the next chapter.