

CHAPTER XV.

THE INFLUENCE OF A WOMAN.

THE story of the Consort of the President is a romantic one. We were driving one afternoon out to the summer castle of Chapultepec, when I asked Madame Diaz how she first met the General.

"When I was a little girl I had an American governess," she replied, "but after some years she married, and an English one took her place. We used to go for long walks together, and talk in English on many subjects. I was only a child then, and my father was a warm follower of President Lerdo, and therefore altogether against General Diaz, but I knew all about him, and my governess and I used to discuss how brave he must be, and we both grew very fond of him—in theory. His name was not allowed to be mentioned at home, so I gazed at his portraits and the pictures of his battles, where he was represented riding at the head of his troops, and felt sure he must be nice, because he looked so kind, and yet so strong and brave; but I never saw him.

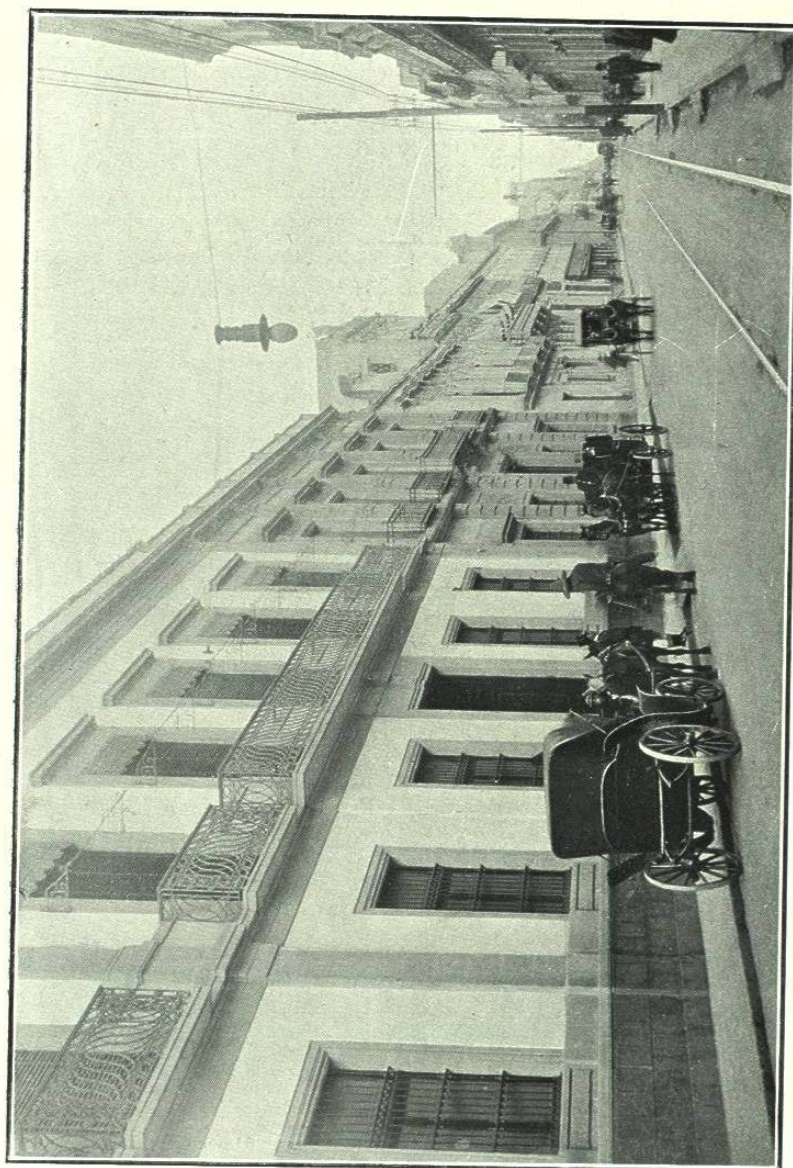
"Time went on. He made his entry into Mexico City in 1876. Señor Lerdo was turned out, my father's party was overthrown, and General Diaz elected President. Oh, how interested I was in it all! The governess used to read the papers, and tell me all about that famous ride into Mexico City and the subsequent events, and as we walked to and from Chapultepec—the very road along which you and I are now driving—I always hoped that chance might place me in his way. My childish enthusiasm for him grew, but still we did not meet.

"After he had been President four years he went out of



Photo by VALETTI.]

Madame Diaz, wife of the President of Mexico.



The President's private house in Cadena, Mexico City.

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office, and as soon as his duties were lightened he moved a good deal in society. Then, at one of my first balls, I met my hero.

"I was still very, very young, and I hardly thought he would even take the trouble to look at me. But he did. We were introduced, and I remember now my excitement over that meeting. I was tongue-tied with shyness; but he seemed so kind and gentle that I liked the human man even better than I had liked the phantom one."

In this psychological hour, at the most critical moment of the President's career, the right figure crossed his path. Diaz had already attained enormous success in pacifying the country and laying the foundations of its present strength, but he was surrounded by people on whom he could not always rely.

Parasites were on every side. Those who were openly hostile to him were less to be feared than those whose enmity was concealed, and there were men whom he had raised to positions of trust in his first term of office who would have hesitated at little to put themselves in his place. It was a trying position for any one, even a man of such reserve, such nerve force, a man so strong. His was a strenuous life, without any relaxation or repose. Now, although he enjoyed greater liberty, he did not really care for society; he dared not trust society in which he was an alien. And so, in the midst of his great success, of his popularity and power, General Diaz appears to have stood absolutely alone.

In the same town lived an able and distinguished lawyer, Don Manuel Romero Rubio. This man had three daughters, all good-looking girls. One, the eldest, was dark and Spanish in appearance; but instead of the languishing sleepy eyes of many Spanish beauties, the child Carmen had a quick glance, in keeping with her quick intelligence. She was particularly well educated for a Mexican of Spanish descent, for alas! it is only of recent years that much time and thought have been spent on the education of women. Of medium height and pretty figure, with neat hands and feet, and swan-like neck, Carmen walked daily with her English governess.

It was the fashion in Mexico at that time to have weekly gatherings known as "Cotillon Balls," and it was at one of these that Porfirio Diaz met Carmen Rubio. His friends declare that he fell in love with her at first sight, for from the moment he saw her he was most assiduous in his attentions, and by the third or fourth ball every one felt sure he had met the wife of his choice.

She was a dainty, well-born, highly educated girl; he a rough soldier of humble origin and simple ways.

Naturally Carmen appeared to him the very embodiment of grace and charm. Her pretty interest in the hero of the hour flattered him, her lovely eyes and delightful manners fascinated him; she seemed to have everything that he had not. But still, drawn towards her as he was, he felt he had no right to think of her other than a pretty child and the daughter of a political adversary.

Fate is stronger than wisdom. These two people were made for each other. Thus it was chance brought them together, and at the time when Porfirio Diaz was necessarily much alone, although constantly surrounded—and there is no such loneliness as the loneliness experienced in a multitude—he met dainty, bright, cheery Carmen Rubio. There is no doubt he at once felt the superiority of the girl over all others in Mexico City; superiority of looks, superiority of education, superiority of temperament; and he fell in love. Yes, fell madly, desperately, passionately in love with a young girl considerably less than half his age.

It was a veritable romance. It overwhelmed him like an avalanche, swept him from his feet, and drove him swiftly along with an overpowering passion. Love is a bundle of incongruities. Love and hate are the light and shade of human existence. Diaz experienced both at that time.

She was caught up in the meshes of her childlike hero-worship, for Carmen Rubio had adored him in a girlish, romantic sort of way before they ever met.

He had felt the want of the love and sympathy of a bright companion, and yet one who was more educated and in

a higher position socially than himself, during those four burdensome years of office. No woman ever influenced a man's life more gradually, and yet more completely, than Carmen Rubio did that of Porfirio Diaz. In her he found that sympathy he wanted, in her he could confide, in her he realised that gentle refinement of thought and manner lacking in the rough camp life he had experienced. Nothing could have been more fortunate than their marriage, nothing more happy than their union. Each strengthens the character of the other, both are full of love and sympathy. Porfirio Diaz to-day would not be the refined, gentle, human, kindly, sympathetic being that he is, had he not linked his life with Carmen; a fact which he himself is the first to acknowledge.

They have been married now for nearly a quarter of a century. Matrimony often expects too much and gets too little, but they are chums and friends to-day, companions and helps in a way it is truly delightful to see. All their thoughts are in sympathy; the wife brings the sunshine into the husband's life. She is an excellent housekeeper, and runs her homes with the best taste and strictest economy. She knows just enough of the affairs of State to be interested, but not to bore by questions.

"I never ask anything about politics or that sort of thing," she said to me one day. "If my husband tells me, I know he wants me to know, and if he does not, or seems tired and bothered when he comes in from the Palace, I feel instinctively that something has gone wrong, and the best medicine is change of thought, so we talk of other things."

This shows the wisdom of the woman, but then, tact is her strong point, and therefore it is that so many tales of woe are poured into her sympathetic ear, and she heals as many family breaches in a year as he negotiates affairs of State.

Numerous romances hover round the name of Diaz, but unfortunately the pretty little story of his being married by proxy in his early youth is but fiction. Such marriages were formerly quite common in Mexico before the days of railways, and are not uncommon even now. A certain well known lawyer lived in

Mexico City, and a certain lovely girl, named Agustina Castallo, lived on the borders of the Gulf of Mexico at Tampico, famous for its port and its tarpon fishing. There was no communication by train in those days, and they were married by proxy. That is to say, a great friend of the man represented him with a power of attorney in Tampico, and a civil and ecclesiastical marriage by proxy took place. On the arrival of the bride in Mexico City many days later, she and her husband went to the registrar together and signed the books, being again united in person by the priest.

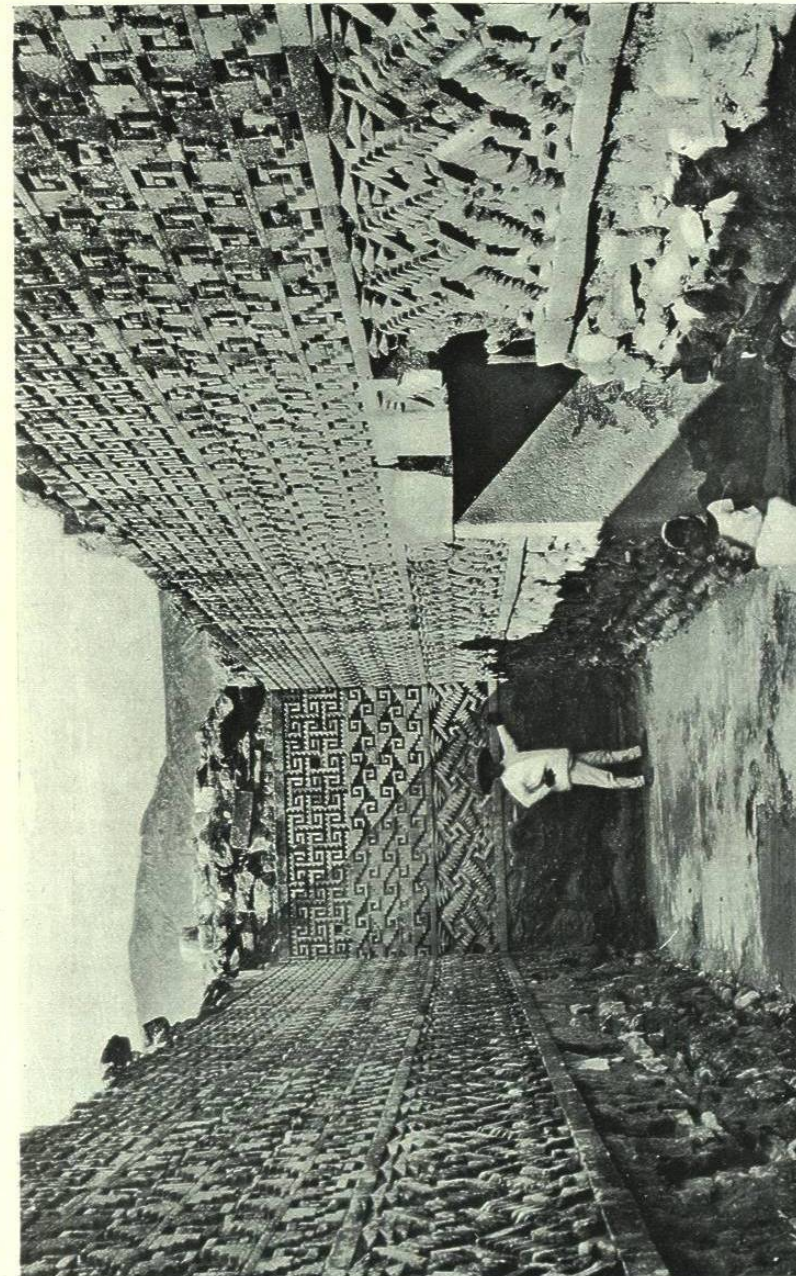
That man and that woman were the father and mother of the present wife of the President of Mexico.

It was during the time he was out of office, in the spring of 1883, that General Diaz married the beautiful Carmen, now the idol of the Mexican people, by whom she is known as "Carmelita," or the "dear little Carmen."

Attached to the Palace is an official residence for the President. Lerdo had lived there; and Diaz had lived there. González, too, lived there; but when Diaz came back to power the newly married couple were so comfortably settled in their own home in the street known as Cadena, that they decided to remain where they were, as the Presidential term of office was only four years. Now those four years have drawn out until General Diaz has been elected for his seventh term, and for a period of six years.

Shortly after their marriage they went back to his native town, where Diaz had accepted the post of Governor.

They led a very happy life during the nine months spent in Oaxaca in those days. They were not well off, and had a simple home. The ex-President spent his spare hours in the saddle, or shooting in the mountains. In these expeditions Carmelita did not join him. It was not the custom for Spanish women to share in men's sports, and although Madame Diaz was educated far in advance of the majority of Mexican women, and was a most capable linguist and well read, she had no knowledge of how to handle either a horse or a rifle, and no inclination



Hall of Mosaics, Mitla.

skins, the leaf of the aloe, or a composition of silk and gum. It is a collection of these ancient writings that Lord Kingsborough reproduced in his wonderful work on Mexico. The pictures give some idea of the gorgeous colouring of those days, the fantastic dress of the Indians, and a wealth and splendour that rivalled ancient Rome.

Yes, we seemed to see it all in the evening glow. We could almost hear the cry of the victims whose blood was poured out on that central stone at Mitla, ere their bodies were taken behind the temples to the great banqueting halls for the subsequent feast. We could picture that gorge of human flesh, in which women, alas! joined—for women were well treated in those days, and shared all the joys (?) of their husbands; they were not shut up in any way. On the contrary, they were as free and independent as the Zapotec women of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec are to-day. Polygamy, though permitted, was only usual among the ruling classes.

It is odd to think that when Confucius was teaching the inhabitants of China respect for their already ancient customs, when these Toltecs, Aztecs and Zapotecs were well advanced in civilisation, we northern peoples of Europe were more or less barbarians.

Along that Oaxaca valley are strange caves where people live to-day, just as they do in the centre of Sicily at that old Greek city of Castrogiovanni, the Henna, or Enna, of the ancients. Madame Diaz often visited these cave-dwellers, and it was during those days in Oaxaca she learnt so much of the inner life of the people.

The village of Mitla is almost as interesting as are the ruins themselves. Here dwell the descendants of the very people who built those great temples. They are still most primitive in their manners and customs, chiefly employed in cultivating the soil and tending cattle and sheep. Tiny huts made of bamboo form these Zapotecan dwellings, which contain but one small room, eight feet by twelve being the average size. If these Indians are rich they build a kitchen adjoining, just a tiny place shaped like a tent, on much the same principle as



Photo by The AUTHOR.]

Washing at the stream.

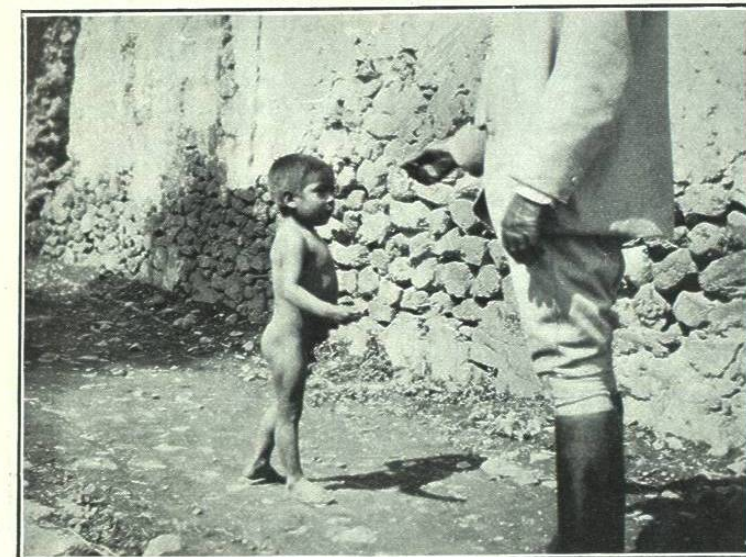


Photo by MRS. JEROME.]

Indian child.

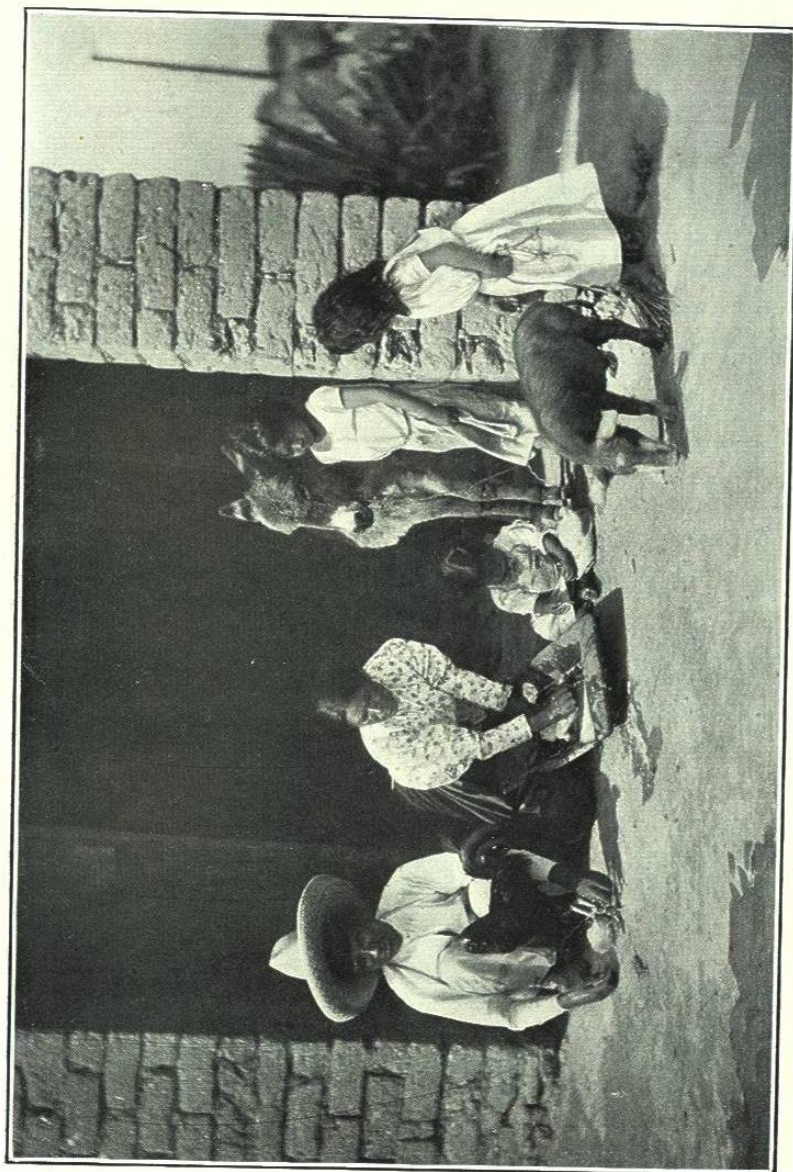


Photo by GARNETT.]

A happy family. The woman is making tortillas (the Mexican form of bread).

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their hut, and here the wife makes her tortillas or does her washing.

One family we visited was quite remarkable. The mother, presumably about thirty, was a well-preserved, handsome woman for her age; and the eldest daughter, a girl of seventeen, could but be considered lovely. She was very small, five feet at most—as are all the Indians—and dark-skinned, her complexion being of a rich nut-brown hue. She was attired in a sort of chemise low in the neck and short in the sleeves, which showed a perfectly-modelled bust; round her throat she wore red coral for luck and some curiously-coloured beads. Her long black hair hung in two plaits, into which red braid had been twisted, so that what fell below her waist was really a tassel of braid. The mother, on the other hand, wore her plaits coiled round her head, and as they were interwoven with bright green wool, this gave the effect of a laurel wreath.

Another daughter's tresses were so long that they lay upon the ground as she stood erect, a by no means uncommon thing with the Indians. Both mother and daughter wore the usual long strip of skirt round the body, and as they had just finished weaving a new one, they exhibited it with great pride. The coarse black material was woven in three narrow strips, which were stitched together with coloured wool; when completed it was nearly a yard wide, its length about eight feet. It had no shape. The girl caught one end between her knees, quickly bound it round her body and caught it in at the waist by a sash-band. This is the usual skirt; but made in a shorter length it does not always fold over so well, hence one often sees the bare leg of an Indian woman. They wear nothing on their feet.

A small personage of two—the youngest of the woman's five children—was dressed in the quaint old fashion of the babies of the district. He had on long white linen trousers and a coat like that of his father; indeed, boys and girls, as soon as they can stand, are dressed exactly like their elders.

He was told to say, "How do you do?" to the lady.

I gave him my hand, and the tiny creature kissed it. His

little lips and hands were so cold that that kiss really gave me a shock ; but I suppose Indian blood must be thin and poor, for I never shook hands with any native who felt warm—they always seem to be icy and clammy. There is something almost uncanny about them—snake or fish-like—although they are beautiful in shape and remarkable in carriage. They are poorly clad, and yet they cannot surely feel the cold as we do, or presumably they would alter matters and do something to warm up that chill, thin blood of theirs, and set it circulating more freely through their veins.

Juárez, it will be remembered, was one of the Zapotecan Indians from this particular valley, as were also many of the generals who fought against Maximilian.

It was in those Oaxacan days that General Diaz visited the United States, the second occasion only during all the seventy-five years of his life that he has ever been out of his own country ; on the first, when he started from the northern frontier on his campaign against President Lerdo, he only touched at New Orleans, and his return journey nearly cost him his life when his identity was discovered by his fellow-passengers on board the ship.

Such an expedition was naturally an important one, and the object with which it was undertaken was to visit St. Louis and see the bridge built by Captain Eades, who was then negotiating to carry out a plan of his, to put entire vessels on to trains and so run them across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.

Eades died, and his plan was never carried through. Thus it is that to-day an English firm, Messrs. S. Pearson and Sons, has re-built the railway from Coatzacoalcas to Tehuantepec, and Selina Cruz.

Although General Diaz was no longer President of Mexico, he had done so much good during his four years of office, and there was such a strong possibility of his return to power, that he was treated in the United States almost as if he were a representative President. He and his wife travelled by coach and carriage to Tehuacán, thence by mule-tram some twenty or thirty miles to Esperanza, where they took the train for

Vera Cruz, continuing the journey by sea to New Orleans. Here they were joined by the Hon. John W. Foster, on behalf of President Arthur. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Foster several times in Mexico, where he had formerly represented the United States. One of the ablest diplomatists of his day, he took a prominent part in the negotiations for peace between China and Japan. There are few men more popular or better known in the United States.

General Diaz and his young wife were met at New Orleans by a private train, with its cars and its drawing-rooms, sent there by the courtesy of the President of the United States. Diaz still speaks enthusiastically of that journey.

"We had a beautiful reception in Chicago," he said to me, "the warmest welcome, lovely flowers, and decorations made with the Mexican flag. Then we went to Washington, where we spent three days, dining at the White House and seeing something of that very beautiful city. We visited New York, Niagara, and Boston, but unfortunately the trip was somewhat hurried, and I did not see as much of America as I should have liked." He hopes to gratify this desire of seeing more of the United States, and something of Europe, at no very distant date.

This second visit with all its pomp and grandeur, its magnificent receptions and warm welcomes, was a very different affair from Porfirio Diaz' former trip across the frontier, with a price offered for his head, ten years before.

Madame Diaz has done much to help the President build up modern Mexico. Her tact, her learning—for she is the most educated woman in Mexico—her charm of manner, her gentleness and kindness of disposition, have won the love and sympathy of the people, and forged still stronger the chain that holds the Republic of Mexico together. She has been her husband's right hand in everything, a fact he unceasingly acknowledges.

Madame Diaz is perfectly delightful. Tall for a Spaniard, possessed of a beautifully slight, graceful figure, extremely good-looking, with dark hair and eyes, pretty manners and gracious ways, she wins all hearts, added to which "Carmelita" speaks English and French fluently.