Madame Diaz, the queen of Mexican society.

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CHAPTER XVI.

SOCIAL DOINGS.

BEFORE leaving the subject of Madame Diaz, it may be well to give some idea of Mexican society, whose acknowledged queen she is. Therefore this chapter will deal with habits and customs, street life and daily events, rather than with war, politics, mining, or agriculture.

The City of Mexico has been likened to Paris, and in many ways the comparison is good. It is not as bustling as New York, nor yet as conservative as London. The gayest society, the smartest frocks, the prettiest women are to be found; but the restaurants are indifferent, and the hotels worse. Advanced civilisation, great refinement, beauty and talent can be seen in the capital itself, yet barbarism exists outside.

There is great wealth in the city, palatial homes where the occupants do not even enjoy the luxury of a want.

Society is very exclusive. The families are wonderfully united, and spend most of their time together; that is to say, the women folk do, for the men, until last year, had a way of slipping off to the Jockey Club, where they played baccarat, which began at five o'clock every afternoon, and did not always stop at five next morning. The baccarat tables are now closed, and other forms of gambling do not prove quite so alluring.

The day begins with coffee, taken in the bedrooms—a custom that enables people to go about in négligé attire for the greater part of the forenoon, as in France. The ladies slip mantillas over their heads, and black cloaks about their bodies, and start off to early Mass, but on their return they disappear into dress-

ing-gowns and slippers and are seen no more till the mid-day meal, usually served about one o'clock, when soup, fish, entrées, meats, puddings, and numerous sweets always appear at table in the better houses. This banquet is the event of the day; visitors are invited, and sociability ensues. Formerly everyone indulged in a siesta after dinner; indeed, all houses of business are still closed from one to three, but nowadays the siesta itself is going out of fashion, except among servants and the poorer classes.

When the important business of lunching is over, each gentleman offers his arm to a lady, and conducts her back to the drawing-room. Cigarettes follow. Society dames in Mexico scarcely ever smoke; but among Indian women the habit is universal. Cigarettes in the north, and cigars in the more southern tobacco-growing districts, are constantly to be seen.

As regards house decoration, one seldom finds flowers about in this land of beautiful blossoms. Perhaps the Mexicans do not care to have them in their rooms because they die so quickly at that high altitude; but whatever be the cause, one just as often sees artificial flowers in the drawing-room as real ones. The prettiest bloom has not always the sweetest scent, just as the softest speech often hides a cruel heart.

After coffee, which is always strong, but generally good, for Mexico is producing excellent coffee nowadays, the visitors depart. It is the custom for the host and hostess to walk to the top of the staircase, where the châtelaine says "good-bye," and the gentleman offers his arm to his lady guest, takes her down to the patio, and puts her into her carriage. I had no carriage, and it was no uncommon thing for the host to send me home in his. The women have pretty manners and dress charmingly —everything they wear comes from Paris—and their politeness and amiability surprise a stranger.

The courtesy of Mexico is wonderful; for instance, at a dinner party a man will hand a glass of wine to a woman, and with a bow say:

"*Endulcemela*," meaning "Sweeten it for me." She raises the glass to her lips, and then passes it back for the gentleman to enjoy.

Again, when paying a first call on a friend, I was amazed at the following remark:

"*Ya tomó ud. posesion de su casa.*" ("You have now taken possession of *your* home.")

One admires a watch or a cabinet. "It is yours," is the prompt remark, which means nothing; it is only a figure of speech like "I hope you are quite well."

In reply to the question, "Where do you live?" a Mexican will say:

"*Su casa de usted no.* 10," etc., meaning, "*Your* house, the house at which you are welcome, is No. 10," etc.

When writing a letter, instead of putting the address they often write, "*C. de V.*" (Casa de V.), meaning "*Your* house," or "*my* house at your disposal."

The Mexican must learn to be more parsimonious in promises. He is so generous in thought that he gives away all he has, only to draw back in deed.

In spite of great wealth, there is none of that vulgar, ostentatious display of riches which betrays humble origin. Of course there are miserably poor folk in the city as everywhere else; and doubtless there are miserably rich, for although money shuts the door on want, gold alone never brings happiness.

It is always said that high Mexican families are exclusive, and there is no doubt but that this is the case—even to those bearing good introductions—for they are so taken up with their own affairs that beyond a stately dinner they seldom extend hospitality. Individually, I found them charming, however, well-read, well-educated, pleasant-mannered; in every way cultivated gentlefolk, extremely hospitable and courteous.

Speaking of that curious trait in the Spanish, want of hospitality of any kind to a foreigner, a man who was Ambassador in Madrid for nearly four years said to me:

"They dined at my house, came to balls and parties, asked for invitations for their cousins and aunts, but only *once* during all the time I spent in Madrid did I ever dine at a Spaniard's table. That was the only invitation I ever had with a date and hour affixed. 'Will you come and dine one night?' was continually

asked, and equally continually I replied : ' I should be delighted ' ; but nothing ever came of such invitations."

There are six thousand English-speaking people in the City of Mexico, and not a dozen of their families have the entrée to Mexican homes. This is conservatism indeed, and the Mexicans would do well to follow the excellent example of their President, and be a little more gracious to strangers with good introductions.

Mexican families are most amiable and united among themselves. The better classes own houses which are perfect palaces. In one of them dwells Señor So-and-So with his wife and children ; but madame's mother and sister joined the establishment on the death of madame's father, and in addition Señor So-and-So has a mother and brother who make their home with him. This is not the exception but the rule. They all seem to agree splendidly ; the family life appears to be of the happiest nature.

It struck me that little entertaining of a " friendly " kind was enjoyed. Big luncheons and dinners, or nothing, were the fashion. No one apparently ever " drops in." No attempt is made to keep open house.

When invitations are given, the entertainments are costly and well done ; but then the usual formality accrues. Mexicans so far have not realised that the poorest morsel offered with love and sympathy is far more welcome than the grandest feast without them ; they only entertain on a grand scale.

Mexicans are very Latin by temperament. They become wildly enthusiastic over some person or thing which excites their interest for the time ; but they soon weary of the new hobby, and the passion dies out almost as quickly as it was kindled. They are excitable in conversation, gesticulate freely to emphasise their words, and one feels that the warm blood of a southern race is tingling in their veins.

Many of these beautiful Mexican homes contain rare old Spanish furniture, bric-à-brac, pictures, and things that have been in the family for generations. Most of them, alas ! are stowed away in the nurseries or servants' quarters. All the houses are modern French in appearance ; but hidden away are

countless treasures, the value of which is only just beginning to dawn on the present generation.

The winter is the season for entertaining ; then balls and parties are given, and everyone is prepared to enjoy himself. The invitations are generally short because, as everyone is more or less related to everyone else, it is pretty well known when So-and-So's birthday will take place, or when the celebration of some couple's silver wedding will occur.

As President of the Republic, General Diaz never dines out except at purely official functions, but as Porfirio Diaz he often takes a meal with friends, and enjoys himself thoroughly. Although royal in bearing at times, he is not surrounded by any court etiquette ; friends do not have to wait for him to speak first, or stand in his presence. I have seen him extraordinarily dignified and majestic, Diaz the unapproachable, and I have seen him in a blue serge suit playing with baby children—Diaz, the grandpapa. He is two men in one, a great ruler and autocrat and a kindly, gentle, homely man. He excels in both, and it is hard to believe the other possible when in the presence of either. The greatest personality in the history of our modern world, and the most romantic, forsooth.

Even when elected President for the second time, General Diaz avoided all show. He did not wish the people to think he was tending to self-aggrandisement, or in any way wished to copy royalty. Therefore, although he started a carriage and pair, for many years he did not let his coachman wear livery. That coachman was an Englishman, but on the box he appeared in a Mexican costume, and a big black felt sombrero hat. It was only about 1887 that the President put his servants into livery, and had a second man on the box. To-day they wear small cockades of the Republican colours in their hats, otherwise the whole turn-out is absolutely quiet and excellent in style.

Although General Diaz is not a rich man and lives a quiet, unostentatious life, he does an immense amount of public work.

To show what the General can and does accomplish in twenty-four hours, I must give an example of a day I passed with him.

I, who am barely half his age, was dead tired at the end of it; he as fresh as possible.

Saturday, the 19th November, 1904, began a series of festivals in honour of his re-election to the Presidency for the seventh time.

The first of the series was given by his daughter Amada, who is the wife of Ignacio de la Torre.

The following invitations were sent out:

"Ignacio de la Torre y Mier
y Señora,
tienen el gusto de invitar á Vd.
á tomar una taza de Thé,
en esta su casa,
el próximo Sábado 19 *del corriente,*
á las 9 *p.m.*
México, Noviembre de 1904."

The only strange thing about the invitation, with its fine crest, good paper and printing, was the fact that the guests were invited to "take a cup of tea," although the hour mentioned was nine o'clock.

When I arrived upon the scene, driven there by Captain Diaz, we found quite a line of carriages before us. The handsome road in which the de la Torres have their palace is that leading to Chapultepec, up and down which society drives every afternoon at dusk. The de la Torres live in one of the finest houses of Mexico, far, far finer than the President's. When we arrived it was to find the usual entrance through which carriages drive to the patio (courtyard) carpeted in red, and ornamented with palms. The entire patio had been covered in and converted into a theatre.

Just inside the President and his daughter, Señora de la Torre, who resembles him strangely in appearance, were receiving the guests. Madame Diaz, with her usual tact, feeling that the party was given for her husband, and that her daughter-in-law was the rightful hostess, had passed on to her seat in the front, leaving the President and Madame de la Torre to receive alone.

They spoke a few kindly words to all the guests, who were then ushered to their seats opposite the temporary theatre.

It was a splendid sight, the good looks of the women, the magnificence of the jewels, the Paris gowns, the diplomats in their orders, all tended to make it appear like a Court function.

The stage itself was quite large and most professional, with moss-green plush, pale pink and gold embroidery, and electric lights cleverly arranged as flaming torches.

A military band played during the arrival of the guests, who all assembled before 9.30, when the following programme began:

1°. SINFONIA.

2°.

Diálogo.
Escribidma una carta
Señor Cura ... ...
Señorita Paz García
Dn. Luis Torres Riva

Monólogo.
Le solo de flûte.
Viconde de Latour

3°. EL SUEÑO DEL ARTISTA.
(cuadro vivo.)

(Señora) Da. Leonor Torres de Sanz
(Srta.) Da. Maria Rincón Gallardo
(Srta.) Da. Mercedes Berriozábal
(Srta.) Da. Luz Cortina
(Srtas.) Da. Luisa y Da. Teresa de Iturbide
(Srta.) Da. Maria Rivas Fontecha
(Srta.) Da. Concepción de Suinága
(Srta.) Da. Paz García
Dn. Luis Subervielle

4°. La Comedia en un acte y en verso original de Don Tomás Rodriguez Rubí, titulada:

"DE POTENCIA Á POTENCIA."

CARLOTA.	Da. Leonor Torres de Sanz
DON VALENTIN.	Dn. Luis Torres Rivas
DON LEON.	Dn. Nicolás Dominguez Cottilla
DN. GABINO.	Dn. Francisco de Suinága
DN. ENRIQUE.	Dn. Alfonso Rincón Gallardo

5°. MINUE (EPOCA LUIS XVI.).
Música del Maestro Rafael Gascón.

Parejas:

(Srta) de Rincón Gallardo	Teniente: Sommerhoff
(Srta) de Suinága ...	... Sr. Búlnes
(Srta) Luz Garcia...	... Sr. Berriozábal
(Srta) Teresa de Iturbide...	Sr. Guinága
(Srta) Luisa de Iturbide ...	Sr. D. Enrique F.dezCastelló
(Srta) de Berriozábal	... Sr. Barros
(Srta) Ma. Rivas Fontecha	Sr. D. Alfredo F. dez Castelló
(Srta) Da. Luz Cortina	... Sr. D. Alfonso RincónGallardo

Dirigido por la Profesora Amalia Leprí.

They were all amateurs, and I don't remember ever seeing better, or any private performance done in a more professional style.

General Diaz, with General Clayton, the senior Ambassador (U.S.A.), General Mena (Secretary of War), and various ministers and diplomats, sat in front and enjoyed the evening thoroughly.

The performance lasted about two hours, and at 12.30 the

"tea" announced on the invitation, which really meant a buffet-supper, was ready upstairs. I met many old friends; Governors of States, with whom I had ridden through the mountains three and a half years previously; ministers who had been with the party when I crossed the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in a private train; and endless old Mexican friends whom I had not seen before during that second visit to Mexico, so I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

The performance over, every man gave a woman his arm, and upstairs we all filed to supper. While that was going on all the seats in the patio were cleared, and the younger people danced till four or five o'clock in the morning.

It was a magnificent affair from first to last. There were about two hundred people present, composing the highest society of Mexico and the representatives of foreign countries; but not a single foreigner from any country unless as its representative.

I unfortunately had a very bad cold with loss of voice, rather a serious business unless checked at such an altitude, where pneumonia is so prevalent, so I left early. Before going the President, who had been a most energetic host all the evening and had laughed and applauded with real enjoyment, asked if I would care to go to a school inspection and prize-giving the next morning (or rather that morning, for it was then past one a.m.) at nine o'clock.

"Of course I should."

"Very well," he said, "my son will drive you home now and fetch you at twenty minutes to nine to-morrow morning to go to the Art Schools. If you can be ready?"

Certainly I could be, and was.

It was 3.30 a.m. before the President left for home—but would that deter his being up early? No, not a bit of it—before seven he was telephoning Captain Diaz to be sure and call for me at 8.40 as arranged, and even before that hour he had done some official work.

"My father never forgets anything," said Captain Diaz when he arrived in his equerry's uniform. "So here I am."

We drove off in his carriage to the Academy, where the General with another equerry, Major Escandon, had just arrived.

A guard of soldiers lined the street and patio and played a military march on the arrival of the President who, as he passed, acknowledged their salutations. Four equerries, some ministers, and the heads of the Academy formed the little procession.

The Mexican art students undoubtedly show talent. Many of their studies were excellent; but then they have a clever man at the head—Señor Antonio Fabres.

Now for a specimen of the thoroughness of the President of Mexico. Once a year he inspects everything everywhere, apparently, and judging by the proceedings that day, nothing escapes his eye.

For one hour and a half we walked round those class-rooms. Diaz made remarks on everything, even to noticing that the porter had a better room to sit in than the lady students to dress in, a matter which he at once suggested should be changed. He talked with the professors, discussed alterations with ministers, chatted pleasantly to students, but for one hour and a half he never sat down.

This man was seventy-four; he had been at a ball till the small hours, had risen before seven, attended to his letters and telephoned, and had walked round those buildings, formerly an old convent, from nine to 10.30.

Amid a blast of trumpets and waving hats he then drove off to the Tivoli garden, about a couple of miles away, to attend the festival of the scholars of the Normal Schools. Here more soldiers, more National Anthems, more ministers, and as the General passed the Mexican flag I noticed he always raised his own hat; during the anthem everyone else kept theirs off.

The Himno Nacional, which somewhat resembles the *Marseillaise*, was composed by Señor Nuno in 1850. Fifty-five years later he returned to Mexico at the age of ninety, to write an heroic march, named *Porfirio Diaz*, in honour of the President's seventh return to power. This march was played for the first time on December 1st, 1904, when Diaz took the oath.

It was a remarkable thing that the composer of the National Anthem fifty-five years before should, at ninety years of age, be able to compose another march in honour of such a patriotic occasion.

Two hours more were occupied in walking from daïs to daïs at the Tivoli to see the different sets of scholars, boys and girls from four to eighteen, at drill, reciting, marching, doing physical exercises, dancing, etc. There were about three thousand pupils present, and probably twenty thousand people.

As we went from one pavilion to another the enthusiasm of the crowd became intense, and it was quite difficult to keep order; they rushed in upon us, nearly crushing the poor President, who smiled and nodded, and looked as if he liked it. Again I realised how difficult it must have been to bring Spanish and Indian blood to any sort of subjection, for they easily get excited and unruly.

The crux of the entertainment was a little play given by the scholars, denoting the arrival of Cortéz, and his meeting with Montezuma and María. This luckily was indoors, for the heat in some of the tents had been rather overpowering on that hot November Sunday morning. By one o'clock the President looked at his watch, and said he was sorry he must leave, as he was due at the bull fight at three.

Thus we passed out under floral wreaths, hanging moss, decorations and flags; while soldiers, police, dressed-up children, and a vast crowd of people bowed and cheered.

Education is one of the great factors in Mexico to-day, and Diaz has done almost more in that direction than in any other; education with him is a perfect craze. The public schools in every State of Mexico are looked after by its Central Government, and there are normal schools well supported by Government funds where teachers are trained. As for the art schools, industrial schools and technical schools of all kinds, they are too numerous to mention. There are night schools in every town of importance in Mexico. General Diaz says: "The State must teach scholarship, industry, and patriotism; religious teaching must be done at home."

Every sort of thing is taught in the schools—stenography, typewriting, tailoring, dressmaking, telegraphy, cooking—in fact, there is no knowledge the Mexican-Indian cannot acquire. And, curious to relate, in every public school above the primary grade, English is a compulsory subject. Because, says the President:

"English is the language of commerce, and therefore the language of the world."

Diaz never attends bull fights. In fact, he would rather they were discontinued, but they are "too national a sport for drastic laws," he says. This, however, was a particular occasion, for it was the last public appearance of a famous old matador, Mazzantini, who had personally begged the President to honour him by appearing.

Accordingly, after a lapse of many years, Porfirio Diaz again entered the bull ring.

At three o'clock, when he arrived, twelve thousand spectators rose to cheer him; they stood upon their seats, roared themselves hoarse, waved hats and handkerchiefs, while the band played the National Anthem.

The gorgeous though bloody pageant began.

Let us glance back for one moment. The President had had a family dinner on Saturday evening; at nine o'clock he was at a ball which he did not leave until half-past three. Five hours later he was at the San Carlos School giving prizes, and at the Normal Schools doing much the same sort of thing, the two occupying four hours. After a hurried luncheon he reached the bull ring by three o'clock, and did not leave until five, when he went home to attend to business until dinner time, and then enjoyed a quiet game of billiards before going to bed.

Not a bad twenty-four hours' work and play for a man who is nearing the eighties, a man who has lived many lives and worked hard—been poor and struggling, energetic and brave, and has now become a diplomat and cultured gentleman, able to take the head of affairs and act in the manner of an Emperor.

Yes, with the exception of five hours' sleep that man was