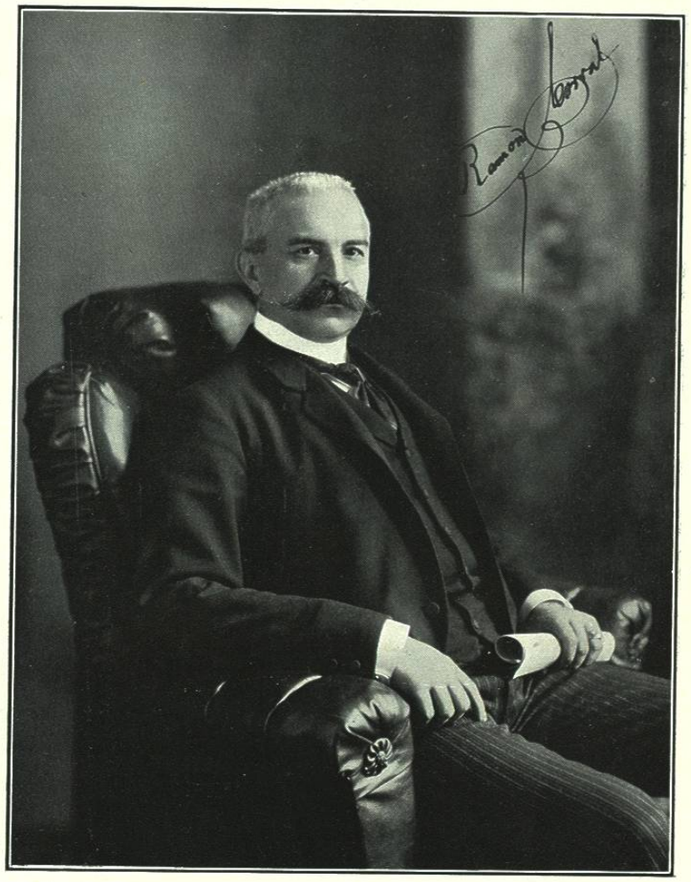


Photo by F. CLARK.]
Señor Ramon Corral, Vice-President of Mexico.

[*Page* 371.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LEGISLATURE AND A VICE-PRESIDENT.

THE country would not let Diaz retire from the Presidency.

He realised that a time had come when it would be well for Mexico to have a Vice-President. The institution of this office would tend to relieve him of the constant strain of duties he had already borne for a quarter of a century, and also make it possible for him to pay those visits to the United States and Europe which he had so ardently looked forward to.

Only twice has the President been out of Mexico in all his life, as recorded earlier in these pages, and those two trips put together cover but a few weeks.

Diaz also felt that the election of a President every four years was disturbing to a country. He saw that in the United States of America, no sooner was a man in office and master of his duties than he had to begin working for his next campaign. He realised that four years did not give a President long enough to exercise his talents to his own or his country's advantage, and thus it came about that he suggested a six years' plan.

As soon as it was decided that there was to be a Vice-President, the name of Limantour was at once noised abroad.

He naturally seemed the man for the office because of his high personal standing, his striking success in the management of the Department of Finance, and his wide acquaintance with prominent bankers and financiers in Europe and America.

Señor Limantour has always denied any possibility of being President or Vice-President, assuring his friends that he was a financier and not a politician. However much General Diaz may

have wished him as understudy, the Minister of Finance would neither be bullied nor cajoled into office. Limantour has a wondrous head for figures. He manipulates millions with dexterity and ease, sees *pros* and *cons* of a monetary scheme at once, bnt does not care for the stress and storm of the life of the Chief of State. Limantour being therefore out of the running, General Diaz had to turn his attention to someone else.

Men who are too well known in politics have their enemies as well as their friends. In Mexico there are two distinct parties—both of which bow to the wisdom of the President, but neither of which cared to accept a man from "the other side" as Vice-President.

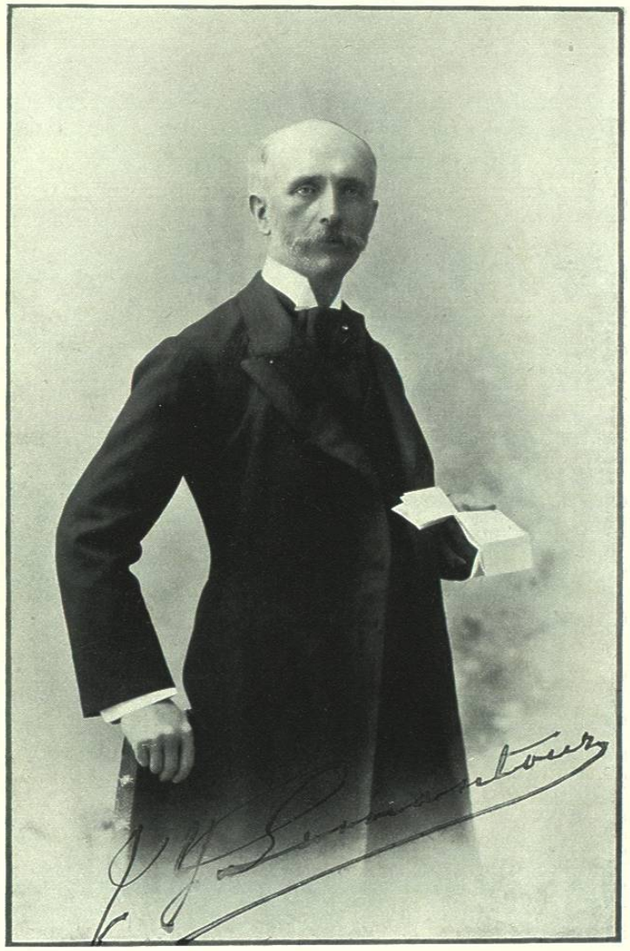
This was probably the reason that General Diaz looked about for someone among his governors who had ruled his State well, was favourably known for his honesty and integrity, and yet was not well enough known to have political enemies. Added to which he seems to have thought it better that his assistant should not be a military man. Anyway, his choice fell upon Don Ramón Corral. "Who is Corral?" everyone asked outside Mexico.

In June, 1904, the Convention met to name a candidate for the Vice-Presidentship. Congress was crowded to overflowing. Party feeling ran high. The proceedings began by the reading of the list of delegates present. Nearly every seat in the house was occupied, those who attended including persons of prominence, both socially and politically. The gathering was in itself a sufficient answer to those who suggest that Diaz has only to express his will and Congress to submit.

Congress first voted for Limantour, Mariscal, and Mena, in turn; but in the final ballot, after a hotly-waged contest and entire re-arrangement of votes, Corral obtained the required majority on a poll:

Corral (Governor of the State of Sonora)	118
Mariscal (Foreign Minister)	72
Limantour (Minister of Finance)	5
General Reyes (Ex-Minister of War)	1

Although General Reyes only received one vote at this last



[*Page* 372.

Governor of the State of Nuevo Leon.

[*Page* 373.

shuffle in the ballot, he played a very important part in Mexico a few years ago.

Another name likely to be heard of in the future is a nephew of the President, viz., Colonel Felix Diaz. The resemblance of the two men is remarkable. The Colonel is Military Head of the Mexican Police, but was formerly consul-general in Chili. He is a man of strength and ambition.

Don Ramón Corral was born in the city of Alamos, Sonora, January 10th, 1854. He made his appearance in the political world as editor of two newspapers—*El Fantasma* and the *Voz de Alamos*. Both of these publications were opposed to the administration of General Ignacio Pesqueira, who had held the highest official posts of Sonora for twenty years. In 1875 he exchanged the pen for the sword, and when the revolution of August 11th of the same year broke out in the State, with the patriot General Francisco Serna at its head, Corral took an active part, and maintained on the field of battle the same principles that he had proclaimed in the columns of the press.

There is one thing worthy of note: later, when the tomb had been closed on General Pesqueira, Corral wrote a "Historical Review of the State of Sonora," in which he stifled his political passions of other days and did justice to the citizen, who in his later years became the paladin of national independence. If those pages honour the hero of that trying period, the words in which they are penned do honour to the biographer of Pesqueira.

Elected to the legislature and afterwards appointed Secretary of State, Ramón Corral assisted in the elaboration of many of the laws that are to-day in force in his native State, more especially those relating to fiscal regulations.

When Corral was elected delegate to the Federal Congress he defended the agricultural interests of Sonora in the tribune, as well as through the press, by his "Flour Question." The committee of the Treasury had presented a schedule exempting foreign wheat imported into the States of Sinaloa and Lower California from the payment of duties which would have ruined the most important industry of Sonora. Corral charged himself

with demonstrating this by speeches and a series of written articles, which were afterwards condensed in pamphlet form. The committee was convinced, and withdrew its plan.

In the Assembly of 1887 he was elevated by public vote to the Vice-Governorship of Sonora, and he virtually had charge of the executive power during most of the time. His efforts for the establishment of public instruction were incessant, and it is to him, and to him alone, that the State owes its prosperity and its excellent system of public schools. Corral retired from his position in 1891, acted as Secretary of State until 1895, and was then unanimously elected Governor for two terms, filling the position with conspicuous ability.

Among the results of his efforts is the College of Sonora, an important establishment at the capital city of the State, numerous schools, and a multitude of industrial enterprises throughout the State. It may be said without exaggeration that to Corral Sonora owes much, and by his administrative endowments and progressive spirit he has shown himself to be an official who does honour to the Republic of Mexico.

Señor Corral became Governor of the Federal District of Mexico City on December 19th, 1900, and on January 16th, 1903, he was sworn in as Minister of the Interior.

Such was the man chosen by the people as Vice-President of Mexico. I had never seen him, and yet I was about to write a book on the President of a country which he was shortly to help govern.

I confided my distress to General Diaz.

"Why not prolong your stay?" he asked, "and then it would be easy for you to meet him in the capital."

"No, that is impossible, I must be in England for Christmas."

"Well, well, I will see what can be done," he replied.

May I be forgiven a little personal vanity, for human nature is vain, although it does not care to own a disease in itself which it points at with such ruthless fingers in others.

When I left Mexico for the second time on the dawn of 1905, the wife of the President wrote me a four-page letter in English without a mistake, in which she said:

"Good-bye; we hope to see you soon in England, or Mexico, and be sure that you have true friends here who will always remember you. . . . . My husband telegraphed to Señor Corral to El Paso and to La Colerado, and he will meet you on the road. Hoping you will find your children in perfect health . . . . . and a very happy voyage.

"I am, your sincere friend,

(Signed) "CÁRMEN R. R. DE DIAZ."

A letter like this is only a little thing, but it shows the womanly nature of the wife of the President, evinces her interest not only in others, but in their belongings, emphasises her education to be able to write so well in a foreign tongue, and also shows how General Diaz, busy though he was, had taken the trouble to personally arrange for me to meet his newly-appointed Vice-President, Señor Corral.

Corral may be called upon to play a very important part in Mexican history; and in any case high duties of State have already fallen on his shoulders. By his election he became the second man of importance in Mexico.

It so happened that Señor Corral was absent in the United States during my visit to Mexico, but as I was most anxious to see him—for I had never even heard of him four years before, when he was little known—the President thought out a plan by which we might meet, even if only for a quarter of an hour.

The probable future ruler of the country was travelling south from Texas and El Paso; I was travelling north towards New York. The journey from the frontier to Mexico City takes fifty hours, but by a little planning the meeting-place of the two trains could be arranged, and, thanks to the courtesy of the Mexican Central Railway and Mr. A. A. Robinson, the president of that line, it was done.

We left that quaintest of cities, Zacatecas, which people say resembles Jerusalem so closely, with its square, flat-roofed houses and grey and white adobe walls. Zacatecas is probably the highest inhabited town of any size in the world (as it has 45,000 inhabitants), and stands 8,500 feet above sea level;

although so high it is almost in a plain, for Mexico is a strangely mountainous and volcanic country, as people with weak hearts soon find out.

My train pounded along through vast prairies with mountains on each side as far as the eye could reach, prairies where herds of tens of thousands of cattle and hundreds of bunches of horses (a " bunch " is twenty-four mares and one stallion) roam at will ; where the sand, white as the beach, is interspersed with prickly pears, cactus palm, or crab-apple trees, but where grass is so scarce one wonders that the animals can find food at all.

The dreariness of the prairie is indescribable. It is impossible to realise—unless one has seen it—that there are hundreds and thousands of square miles of land in the southern States of America and northern States of Mexico where nothing grows. Miles of sand, oceans of dust, rarely a hill or even an incline, dried-up, parched, rank grass with a prickly pear at intervals ; the loneliness, the desolation and want of life are beyond pen or pencil to depict. For days and days the train pounds through such waste. For days and days in Sonora, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona or Arkansas, the eye wearies with the grey monotony. An occasional whitened skeleton by the roadside denotes the fact that a horse, or a cow, perished of hunger or thirst at that spot, and that its flesh was torn from the bones by some prairie wolves (coyote), whose midnight howl is so weird, wild, and distressing that it can only be likened to the uncanniness of the prairie itself.

Irrigation has done much, but will irrigation ever redeem all that dried-up desert waste ? The land seems too poor for anything to grow, although when the tropical rains fall flowers spring forth in wondrous-wise for a few weeks, and the cattle nibble fresh green grass.

The worst possible opinion of Mexico is gathered from the north, which is simply an arid plain, a land of desolation, like Texas or Arizona. Therefore, it is sad that many tourists only go as far as Mexico City, and never see the real wealth of Southern Mexico, never penetrate east or west to gauge its possibilities. That brilliant writer Prof. Bryce unfortunately seems to have

formed an impression of wilderness and poverty from his remarks on Mexico in his great book on the American Commonwealth.

Telegrams had been sent along the line to arrange this strange, unwonted meeting between Corral and myself. If the trains did not come in time to pass one another at La Colorado, then they were to be " held up " for a quarter of an hour wherever they did pass.

No one was to know of this meeting until it actually took place, for Señor Corral was coming to the capital officially to take his Chair of Office, and was being met at all the bigger stations *en route* by soldiers, bands, and great enthusiasm. Thus it was General Diaz had said :

" It is no good your meeting him at a station, surrounded by hundreds of people, so I will arrange some quiet place where you can actually make each other's acquaintance."

It was a funny idea for the two most important mail trains of the day to be " held up " miles from anywhere, so that two people might meet one another and then speed away north and south, perhaps never to meet again—who knows ?

The guards and darkie porters were most excited. The Vice-President was a stranger to them, and they were as keen to see him as I was myself.

I put on my hat, tried to feel tidy after a journey of two days and two nights—and waited.

We reached La Colorado " on time," not bad after a seven hundred mile run on a journey of twelve hundred and twenty-five miles to the frontier ; but the train from the north was a little late, so it was wired. Accordingly, it was arranged that we should wait for the appointed interview at the next passing point on the prairie, for single railway tracks are the rule on that vast continent almost everywhere west of St. Louis or Chicago.

It was hardly a romantic spot for a meeting. Not a habitation of any sort or kind, for La Luz is merely a place for passing or for shunting a freight train. Almost at the same moment the two engines' whistles sounded, and we steamed in together.

The Presidential saloon stopped immediately opposite my carriage, and all the darkie porters and Pullman conductors

jumped down from both trains, heads popped out of windows, and enquiries rent the air from endless voices.

"What is it? Anything wrong?" was asked along the cars.

Before I could step to the ground, Señor Ramón Corral, Vice-President of Mexico, had jumped down and was walking forward to meet me.

"Mrs. Alec Tweedie, I suppose—I have had two telegrams from the President, and am so glad to meet you. Come into my car; we can talk more quietly there," he added, as he handed me up those steep steps.

"I saw by the papers you were in Mexico, writing another book," he continued in excellent English.

"Yes, and now I must add something about Mexico's first Vice-President, but our time is so limited. Have you any little pamphlet or history of yourself which would help me?"

"No, I have had no history," he laughed. "First a miner, then a journalist, and there has been nothing to write about me—yet."

"History in the making," I retorted.

"The real history of Mexico and strife is over," he replied; "General Diaz has finished all that, the history to come will only be of peace, success, and wealth, I hope. Not only has our President made modern Mexico, but he knows more about the land than any living man."

I was glad to hear him say that, for it always appeared to me that Diaz knew more than anyone about everything connected with his country. Corral spoke with the greatest enthusiasm of his chief, repeating his own desire to become a good second, and relieve Diaz a little of the immense weight of affairs he was carrying on his shoulders. Indeed, it was delightful to hear his admiration for his President, and see the earnest desire to be of use to him and his country.

"Have you been much in Europe?" I asked.

"Not much, but General Diaz sent me to Germany to study postal matters when he wanted to make some alteration in our postal service, and I went to the Paris Exhibition in 1900, so I know Europe a little, and would like to see more European

capital invested in Mexico. There have been enormous investments in this country these past few years. We always welcome foreign capitalists, and the benefit is generally mutual," he laughed.

Then he spoke charmingly of President Roosevelt's kindness during his trip to St. Louis, from which he was then returning, and the conversation drifted into more personal matters.

"Time's up" came the unwelcome call from the conductors standing on the prairie, for platform there was none. "That is, if you are ready," one of them added politely, but I could see watches in both their hands as I peeped from the window.

It is a strange fact that all the porters, conductors, engine-drivers, in fact, everyone in a position of trust on railways in Mexico is English-speaking. The Mexican Indians have not yet learnt to fill such responsible posts.

Señor Corral insisted on helping me down, and walking the few steps back to my own car, when with a friendly handshake he turned and flew, for steam was up, whistles going, and in a second both trains were on their respective journeys north and south.

What was the impression left?

A man of medium height, with swarthy skin, greyish white hair, and dark penetrating eyes, with something of the same merry look as the man under whom he is to serve. A man of physical force, well-built and thickly-set, affable in manner, cheerful in countenance, he has yet a certain air of authority, and one could easily imagine him in a position of command. There is considerable determination in the face, which is rather lined for a man of fifty. In fact, Corral at fifty appears as old as General Diaz at seventy-five.

He looks the sort of man who would be a warm friend or a bitter enemy, a man of strong emotion and warmth of heart, a man easily beloved, and kindly in his acts—characteristics more prominent on the surface, perhaps, than great strength of character.

In short, an attractive personality.

And so into the distance faded the train bearing the first Vice-