

CHAPTER III

MEXICO IN GENERAL

MEXICO, the fairy-land of tropical flowers and majestic, snow-capped mountains, opens to the view of the tourist, who has hitherto followed the beaten paths of travel, a mine of unexpected delight in its natural wealth of scenery, historic associations, marked race characteristics, and evidences of steady advancement in the van of progress. A wonderful country it is indeed, where Nature has been so lavish that she causes to grow upon its surface a vegetation so varied that it includes almost every plant of tropical lands, together with the sturdy firs of the farthest north. Some strange magic seems to hold one within its gates. Perhaps it is the dreamy poetic strain of old Spain whose traditions still tinge the country with the romance of the Cid,



CORRECTIONAL SCHOOL, CITY OF MEXICO.

Manrique's lays, and the last sigh of the Moor. Echoes of the Alhambra still linger in the graceful Moorish arches of the public buildings, while the gardens of King Boabdil live again in the beautiful Alamedas with their stately trees, luxuriant vegetation, gorgeous flowers, graceful monuments, elaborate fountains, and cool shady walks.

In every city of any size is always the Alameda for the people; that of the city of Mexico being especially artistic in arrangement and the profusion and beauty of its flowers. Side by side with the pushing needs of modern civilization and progress are to be seen evidences of the artist's instinct, which finds expression in beautiful forms of architecture, instead of the solid but unsightly blocks of stone which so disfigure our large American cities.

Wonderful has been the progress of Mexico in these last fifteen years; but it has not been the rapid mushroom growth of mere sordid money-getting, which leaves no time for beautifying the cities or ministering to the artistic sense of the people. While railroads,

canals, and telegraph routes have been built, the beauty of public buildings, churches, monuments, and great public squares is not forgotten.

In its museums are stored the antiquities of the Aztecs; in its libraries are the songs and annals of its old Spanish writers; in its statues are reproduced the features and forms of its heroes. With so much "local color," variety, and picturesqueness, it is strange that this rich mine has not been more worked by the novelist, poet, and dramatist of America. Our artists journey to Spain, Algiers, and Egypt, when they might find quite as rich material at their very doors in this wonderful land of picturesque types, tropical vegetation, and splendid atmospheric effects.



FOUNTAIN IN THE ALAMEDA, CITY OF MEXICO.

True, French fashions have come among the upper classes and almost crowded out the graceful Castilian dress; still, the *mantilla* and high comb are seen to-day at high mass; the *ranchero*, or planter, is gorgeous in his short jacket elaborately embroidered, his slashed trousers ornamented with gold and silver lace and buttons, his wide-rimmed and sumptuously adorned hat, and his shining spurs.

The black-eyed señorita, with a rose in her hair, still peeps coquettishly from her latticed window or balcony at the cloaked gallant who twangs his lute and casts languishing glances toward his inamorata, not being permitted in any other way to voice his passion.

There are still in the moonlit nights the tinkle of guitars, the sinuous fandango, and the gypsy dance; and, above all, the towering peaks of mighty mountains, the glow of volcanic fires, and the sunsets of a tropical land.

Every one who goes to Mexico has in his note-book something like this: "Don't forget to see a bull-fight." Under the humane rule of President Diaz this brutal and revolting amusement is passing into disrepute; but still it exists, and is largely attended.

Pedro Romero, in the eighteenth century, established rules and regula-



ENTRANCE TO THE PASEO DE LA REFORMA.

tions which are still followed in conducting a bull-fight. The company is made up of the principal espada, or swordsman, four mounted picadors, four banderilleros, who manipulate the



IN RIDING COSTUME—CHARO SUITS.

sharp, barbed goads, and two capeadors, who distract the poor beasts by waving and fluttering their cloaks. The gorgeous trappings of these men make a brilliant spectacle as they ride into the ring. The foreign visitor generally shudders and says, "How horrible!" but ends by going to see the fight and staying it out. "It is one of the institutions of the country," he says, "and one must see everything."

Among the higher classes social life in the republic is most charming. While there is considerable of ceremony and conventionality, there is also much of refinement, culture, unflinching courtesy, and delicate gallantry. The scholar, the artist, and the *littérateur* may all find congenial society. Hospitality is as generous as it is proverbial. One has only to be properly introduced to be the recipient of lavish attentions. Often gifts of flowers, birds, curios, and even valuable relics are offered with princely generosity.

The women who adorn the upper circles of society are justly noted for their personal beauty, their virtues, and their accomplishments.

ments, while their charm of manner seems a part of the poetry of this romantic land of song and story.

There is a good system of public schools and academies for higher education, and many benevolent institutions, all of which receive the earnest and substantial support of the government.

Railway and diligence lines have eliminated distances and made travelling comparatively easy, and now there is no interesting portion of Mexico that is inaccessible to the tourist.

Of the great natural resources of this country in its mines, fruits, woods, stone and marble quarries, and products of the soil, there is so much to say that further mention of these must be left to succeeding chapters.

"Mexico has a world-wide reputation for its mineral wealth," says one writer. "It has given Spain untold millions, and made it one of the richest nations of the world. It has made

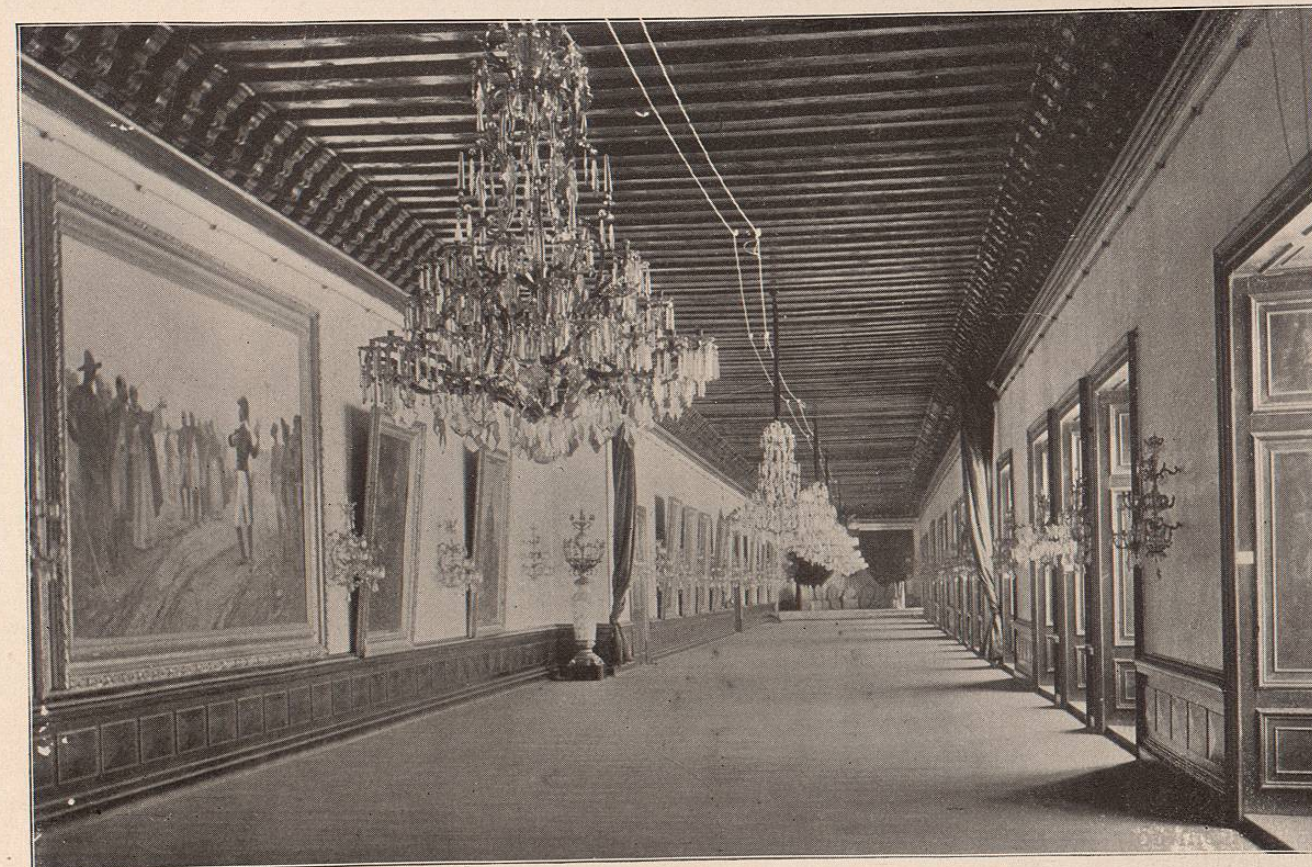


ENTRANCE TO THE ALAMEDA, CITY OF MEXICO.

individual millionaires in great number. It has produced since 1821 one hundred thousand tons of silver and five hundred tons of gold, of the value of four billion three hundred and twenty million dollars. When discovered by the Spanish it promised them great mineral wealth, and has kept that promise."

Mexico has all the climates of the earth, from the frozen regions of the pole, in her snow-clad mountains, to the equatorial heat of her *tierras calientes*.

What stirs the traveller to his depths when for the first time he looks down upon Mexico from afar? Beauteous she is, bathed in light, set in her lakes like some jewel in burnished



HALL OF AMBASSADORS, IN THE NATIONAL PALACE.

silver. But it is not alone nor chiefly her beauty that draws him to her, that fills him with irresistible emotion; it is that he knows himself to be looking upon another "Thebes of the hundred gates," upon a theatre of mighty events which succeed one another down the long vista of the centuries till they are lost in the mists of antiquity; it is that gazing up at Popocatepetl, where he rears his snow-crowned head like some grim despot, he realizes what bloody dramas, what idyls of love and happiness, have been played and sung at his feet in times when the pyramids of Gizeh were not so much as dreamed of. Not in sumptuous buildings, not in the beauties lavishly scattered by the hand of Nature, does that attraction consist which certain cities and places have for us; it is a something which lies deeper below the surface, a mysterious essence which makes attractive their very ugliness and defects.

Its antiquity and its variety together make Mexico endlessly interesting. The archaeologist and the ethnologist both find here an inexhaustible field for their inquiring spirits. And what diversity in the views it offers, from the interminable table-land of Anahuac to the luxuriant

forests of Yucatan and the picturesque ranges of Lower California! What variety! And all enriched and ennobled by the historic reminiscences evoked at every step by those mute witnesses of a civilized past which lie everywhere.

Science, commerce, and the arts draw many visitors to Mexico, but for the artistic or poetic visitor she holds treasures far exceeding those material and inexhaustible ones which in all times have roused the cupidity of the entire world. Here some little town, the time-blackened walls of its ancient church showing through the surrounding trees, melancholy, dreaming over the



STATUE OF COLUMBUS, ON THE PASEO.

past; there some castle, proud, poised upon its rock like an eagle, half hidden in century-old cypresses, whose boughs, hung with paxtle, sigh sadly to the breeze; there, again, some fortress rising from coral beds, within whose walls more tears have been shed than there are waves in the salt sea around it. Buried cities one finds, the green corn waving above them; pyramids of time-worn stone; broken columns; baths where kings have sported, carved in the solid rock; grim idols, half hidden in the prickly pears, and whose weight is calculated by tons. Gloomy temples are there like those of India and Egypt, palaces of an architecture monstrous and superb as that of Assyria, hidden in savage and virgin forests whose ever-renewed youth mocks at cities and civilization as Eternity mocks at Time.

CHAPTER IV

CUSTOMS AND CHARACTERISTICS

MEXICO was christened by the conquerors "New Spain," and to this day it has many Spanish characteristics. The city of Mexico is nearly as large as Madrid or Barcelona, and far surpasses both in novelty and interest. Outside of its wonderful picture-gallery, the finest in the world, Madrid is only an imitation Paris, while Barcelona is a bright, attractive modern business city. Mexico is all these, and, in addition, interests with Oriental scenes and suggestions. It has many of the sight-seeing attractions of Madrid, Barcelona, and gay Seville, with touches of scenes from the streets of Cairo. Guadalajara and Puebla are nearer the size of Seville, and each has manifold attractions. Guanajuato is the Mexican reminder of Toledo and Granada, perched on the rocky hill-sides, terraced, quaint, and picturesque. You hear the same language spoken as in Spain; in both countries you pay separately for each act at a theatrical performance; men smoke constantly and everywhere, as, in fact, some of the women do; while in no other country except old Spain is the bull-fight so popular an institution.

And, after all, bull-fighting seems more or less appropriate to the peculiar civilization of Mexico. The picturesque setting that is given there calls up vaguely the bouts in the amphitheatre in the days of Roman glory, and the more modern jousts and tournaments of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers.

The best place chosen in Mexico City for the contest is in Tacubaya. The amphitheatre is enclosed by a wall of adobe.

The sunny side of the enclosure is furnished with rows of wooden benches, but the shady side is provided with boxes for the accommodation of the grandees of the city and of distinguished visitors. The audiences are composed of all classes of society,—from the proud swell, with his four-in-hand, to the barefoot, dark-eyed, patient-faced Castilian lad. About one-fifth of the gathering is composed of women. In the boxes are beauties with olive skin and peach's bloom,



PATIO OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL.