

besides valuable real estates all over the republic. Almost every person leaves a bequest in his will for masses for his soul, which constitute an encumbrance upon the estate, and thus nearly all the estates of the small proprietors are mortgaged to the Church. The property held by the Church in mortmain is estimated at fifty millions.

The streets in Mexico are exceedingly wide,—much more so than is necessary, considering that they are not obstructed, as is the case in many cities, by drays and wagons.

The sidewalks are uncommonly narrow. The streets are all paved with round stones, the sidewalks with very rough flat ones. The houses on the principal streets are all two or three stories high. The elevation of the rooms from the floor to the ceiling—eighteen to twenty feet—gives to a house of two stories a greater height than we are accustomed to see in houses of three. The roofs are all terraced, and have parapet walls three or four feet high. The walls are built of rough stones of all shapes and sizes, and large quantities of lime mortar. They are very thick,—in ordinary buildings from two to three feet, and in the larger edifices of much greater massiveness. The foundations of most of the largest buildings are made with piles. Even these foundations are very insecure; and it is surprising that they are not more so, with such an immense weight of stone upon such an unsteady foundation. The streets cross one another at right angles, dividing the whole city into squares. Each of these squares is called a street, and has a separate name. In most of these streets there is a church, which gives name to the street in which it stands. In many instances these churches and convents (that of San Augustin, for example) cover the whole square,—not with separate buildings, but one single edifice, with the usual patio or court, an open space in the centre. There is not, I believe, a house in the city without this court, of greater or less dimensions, in proportion to the size of the building. There is only one door on the lower floor, and none on the outside of the upper story. The door is very strongly built, and high enough for a coach to pass through. It opens into the patio, through which you pass to the steps leading to the upper stories, where almost everybody lives, except the lowest classes.

At the period of the conquest the water of the lakes flowed through all the streets of the city, which were crossed in canoes or on bridges. Inundations of the city to the height of several feet were of frequent occurrence. These inundations were caused by the overflowing of the lakes San Cristobal and Zumpango, and the rush of their waters into the bed of the lake of Tezcucuo, on an island in which the city of Mexico was, and near the border of which it is now situated. The city has been drained, and there is no longer the disadvantage of overflow.

Since the establishment of Mexican independence the city has been the scene of several revolutions and insurrections, and a number of important battles have been fought in the vicinity, the most noted being those of Contreras and Churubusco, August 20, 1847, and of Chapultepec, September 13, fought between the American army under General Scott and the Mexican army under General Santa Anna. After this battle the Americans occupied the city and held it until the ratification of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in May, 1848.

CHAPTER VI

CHURCHES AND SHRINES

MOST of the churches in Mexico are beautiful pieces of architecture. Although they often mingle the Italian, Moorish, and Gothic schools, they yet preserve a delightful harmony of design and do much toward accentuating the picturesque beauty of the country. The façades are exquisitely finished in fine carving cut by loving hands into the delicate soft stone. The domes are either brilliant or soft with burnished tiles, and the light and graceful towers and belfries against the sapphire Mexican sky, make up a picture never to be forgotten by the artistic soul.

Inside there is often to be seen some fine hand-carving; silver railings and candelabra, rare old Spanish paintings, rich tapestries, and dainty ornamentations give a matchless *tout ensemble*. The high altar always rises under the great cathedral dome; the choir-room is in the nave, handsomely wrought in carved woods and furnished with wrought-metal screens. From high up on the wall the dim light filters down through small windows, while the slow monotone of a Gregorian chant floats from dawn till dark among the arches of the great building. And all the time reverent and loving worshippers glide in for a moment's prayer in the solemn hush, or glide out again to the world outside with souls refreshed and strengthened; for over all is a mystical, religious atmosphere so natural to the place that many a weary soul gladly welcomes a sanctuary here, and in the solemnity and hush girds on its armor anew.

"Our Lady of Guadalupe" is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. Of course it is not so large or imposing as the cathedral, but it is artistically perfect. Instead of the balustrade of gold it has one of pure silver, and of the same size as that in the cathedral. Most of the vases, waiters, candlesticks, and other service are of silver also. The legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe runs thus:

In the year 1531 an Indian, Juan Diego (John James), was going to Mexico early in the morning, and as he was passing over the mountains three miles from the city he saw a female descending from the clouds. He was terribly frightened, of course, but the figure, which turned out to be the Virgin Mother, told him not to be alarmed, that she was the Virgin Mary; that she had determined to become the patron saint of the Mexican Indians, and to take them under her special protection; and that he must go to the city and tell the bishop that she wished to



THE CROWN OF THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE.

have a church built at the foot of the mountain and dedicated to her as the patroness of the Mexicans. The poor Indian flew to the city, and when admitted into the presence of the bishop delivered the message. The bishop was incredulous and drove him off. The next day he met the Virgin at the same place, and told her that the bishop would not believe him. "Very well," said she: "do you meet me here to-morrow at the same hour, and I will give you a proof which the bishop will not doubt."

Punctual to his appointment, Juan Diego went the next day and had another interview with the Virgin. She told him to go up to the top of the mountain, and he would find the ground covered with roses, with which he should fill his apron and carry them to the bishop. The Indian found the roses, and, as none had ever grown there, they were, of course, placed there by a miracle; he filled his apron and went again to the bishop, confident in the miraculous evidence of the truth of his statements which he carried with him. When he opened his apron of coarse maguey cloth to exhibit the roses he found that there had been painted upon it, by another miracle, a portrait of the Virgin, dressed, not like the poor carpenter's wife, but in a gorgeous cloak of blue velvet with stars of gold all over it. The bishop could hold out no longer. The church was ordered to be built. The Indians all contributed whatever they had, and came into the fold by thousands. The patron saints of the Mexicans were not mere common mortals: the Mother of God herself was theirs. The original miraculous portrait in a rich frame of gold inlaid with diamonds and pearls is still to be seen in the church which was built, and every Mexican has one of more or less value in his house, and of every variety, from the cheap engraving to the most costly painting; below the picture are these characteristic Latin words: "*Non fecit taliter omni nationi.*"

The material on which the image is formed is a coarse product of the maguey plant, such as is still used by the Indians for their wraps and for other domestic purposes. The image is painted on this rough canvas, without any sizing or preparation. In fact, the canvas is transparent, the same image showing on both sides. At various times the picture has been examined by a committee of experts, composed of distinguished artists and scientific men, and they have deposed under oath that they could not account either for its production or for its preservation. The image exhibits peculiar characteristics of painting in oil, in water-color, in distemper, and in relief. In fact, these four dissimilar kinds of painting are discernible in different portions of the same canvas; and, in addition to this, the gilding which appears in the stars embroidered on the garment and in the texture of the robe itself, as well as in the rays of light which issue from the figure, is not applied according to any known process, and seems rather to have been woven into the fibre than painted on it. Besides the curious commingling of dissimilar kinds of painting on the same canvas, there is another peculiarity about the picture: for years it was exposed, without any covering, not only to the smoke of censers and innumerable candles, but to the damp air, charged with saltpetre, which continually arises from the neighboring lakes and marshes, and which affects and corrodes the hardest substances; and yet, after a period of more than three hundred and sixty years, this product of the maguey plant, which ought to have perished long ago, is still in a state of perfect preservation.

At this day you can hardly enter a shop in the city of Mexico without finding a lamp burning before a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. You can hardly enter a church without seeing an altar erected in her honor. Indeed, the Provincial Council of Antequera or Oaxaca specially ordains that no church shall be built in the entire province without its special altar in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Every diocese in Mexico dedicates the 12th of every month to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and every year sends thousands of devout pilgrims to her shrine. When the patriot priest Hidalgo, who is called the Washington of Mexico, began the fight for independence in 1810, his standard and his battle-cry were "Our Lady of Guadalupe." The revolution itself, although it despoiled every other church in Mexico, has ever respected this shrine of Our Lady. In one word, the Virgin of Guadalupe has taken such hold on the Mexican people that to attempt to dislodge her from their affections would be to tear out their hearts by the roots.

The church has now become the Lourdes of Mexico. From the time of the opening of the little chapel which first housed the painting it has been a favorite object of pilgrimage to the Mexicans, and many are the miracles of healing through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Holy See, however, was slow in giving official recognition of the miraculous nature of the picture. It was not until the year 1663, one hundred and thirty years after the apparition, that Pope Alexander V. granted the petition of the Mexican bishops that the 12th of December should be set apart forever as the feast of the Madonna of Guadalupe in Mexico. But the final triumph of Our Lady of Guadalupe came when the sovereign pontiff Leo XIII. granted the petition of the Mexican bishops for the public coronation of the miraculous picture. This was the event which brought together thirty-eight archbishops and bishops, of whom seventeen were from the United States, hundreds of priests, and fifty thousand of the laity from all parts of Mexico, as well as from the States, on the morning of October 12, 1895.

It was, indeed, a remarkable occasion. The archbishops and bishops, arrayed in cope and mitre and bearing their crosiers, took their seats in the chancel of the church. At the appointed hour the rich crown prepared for the occasion was borne from the sacristy into the church and sanctuary by twelve of the first ladies of Mexico, and formally presented to the canons of the basilica. The crown was formed of gold and gems contributed by the Mexican ladies of wealth, who for this purpose parted with jewels which were not only of high intrinsic value, but were prized on account of having been long in their families.

The crown is what is termed an "imperial diadem," and stands two and a half feet high and measures four feet in circumference. The rim at the base consists of twenty-two enamelled shields, representing the twenty-two dioceses of Mexico. Above this is a circle of angels issuing from roses of massive gold. Between the angels and supported by them are six enamelled shields, on which are emblazoned the arms of the six archbishops of Mexico. Behind the angels, and extending to the apex of the crown, forming the imperial diadem, are alternate



THE HOLY WELL AT GUADALUPE.