

CHAPTER XIII

THE JOCKEY CLUB



ONE of the most prominent buildings in the city of Mexico is the handsome club house of the Mexican Jockey Club. It is unique, and there is an air of old Spain all through it, with Moorish architecture and Venetian oddities. It was formerly the palace of the Count del Valle, and the main floor of the curious little chapel which served for family orisons is now used for games of *tresillo*. One feature about this building that impresses itself alike upon the tourist and upon the older inhabitants is its massiveness of outline.



GENERAL PEDRO RINCON GALLARDO,
PRESIDENT OF THE JOCKEY CLUB.

The façade of the Jockey Club building is entirely encrusted with porcelain tiles of blue and white, which have been so firmly fastened into the walls that even the fingers of old Time have failed to dislodge them. The entrance is massive and elegant, and the varnished cedar doors with copper ornaments, with interior sweep of open courts, are suggestive of some palace old and deserted. Superb cylindrical columns sustain the first floor. The first impression on entering is that one has wandered into a deserted Andalusian palace.

To the left is the Jockey Club library, and at its door-way stand two bronze warriors, whose lances are tipped with light. Gilded lamps with snowy crystal globes, afire with the witchery of electricity, turn their light upon the tables and book-shelves, devoted to the literature of the club. This includes every legitimate sporting paper of note published in the world, also novels and books devoted to horse-racing, horse culture, and like topics. There are tables, willow chairs, and an exquisite cabinet of rosewood, carved in relief.

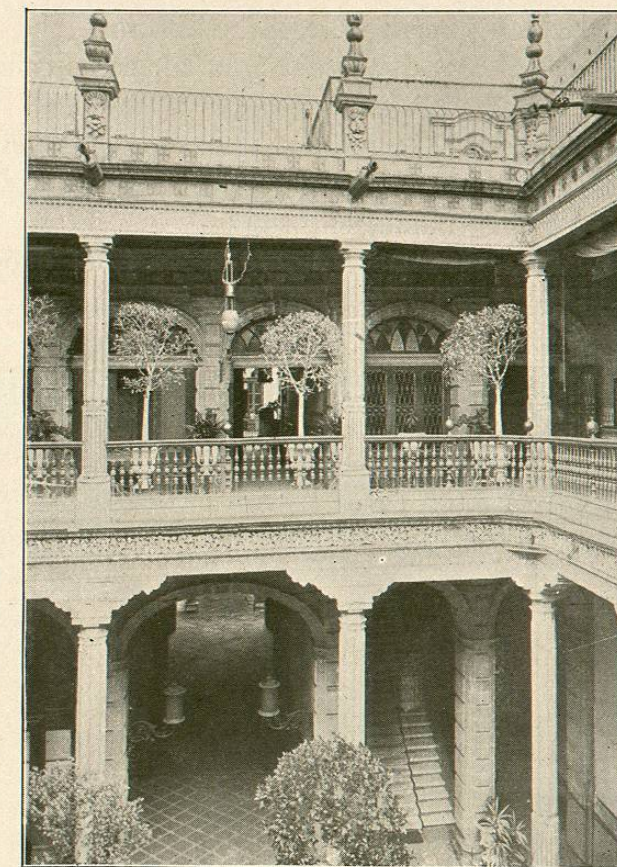
There is in the open court-way a relic of the old days of Count del Valle and millionaire Martinez de la Torre; it is a fountain, curious and delicate, a chef-d'œuvre of sculpture from the magic chisel of the sixteenth century, and looks like a bit of the Alhambra in Mexico.

THE JOCKEY CLUB

In the two patios are rare flowers, hortensias, camellias, azaleas, gardenias, and roses, with palms and precious plants.

The grand stairway and its surroundings are practically unchanged from the olden times. A large lamp with alabaster globes is at the turn of the landing; it was under its shadow that the Count del Valle met his death at the hands of an assassin. Venetian mirrors hang high up on the vestibule walls, and octagonal windows with curiously designed panes of stained glass are set deep into the granite walls. The ceiling over the stairway is of cedar and porcelain tiles in alternate rows.

On the main floor the corridor is tiled in white and blue, and around it sweeps a splendid railing made of the old-time "tumbago," a bronze composite brought from China in Spanish galleons. This composite was considered worth its weight in silver, and is of the same material as the railings in the cathedral. The balconies of the Jockey Club facing San Francisco Street



PATIO OF THE JOCKEY CLUB.

and Callejon Condesa are of this material. On this corridor and on the landing of the grand staircase, surrounded by porcelain lights, is the coat of arms of the Count del Valle, with his motto,

"Fuerza agena ni le toca ni le prende
Solo su virtud le ofende."

The surroundings of the grand staircase are unique, and the finest in Mexico. The porcelain tiles cost at the time of their use more than silver, for the reason that silver was superabundant. Among these unique relics are the quaintly carved cedar door-way and the sculptured arch of the old oratorio or chapel of the Count del Valle, which is on the main floor adjoining the reception-room; this chapel once held the sacred relics and paintings of the noble family and served as a place of retreat and prayer.

The Jockey Club was started in the year 1881. General Pedro Rincon Gallardo and



CORRIDOR OF THE JOCKEY CLUB.

Francisco Somera were the initiators. The club was established under the auspices of the municipal council of the city of Mexico on the 8th of June, 1881. At that meeting Francisco Somera was elected president of the club. Later, the Honorable Manuel Romero Rubio, secretary of the interior, was elected president of the club, and remained in that capacity until his death in October, 1895, when he was succeeded by General Pedro Rincon Gallardo, then governor of the federal district.*

There are two seasons for the races, spring and fall respectively, beginning generally on Easter Sunday and on the first Sunday in October. The club pays stakes and purses each



SALA IN THE JOCKEY CLUB.

year. The city council also has a standing prize (premio de ayuntamiento), and the Department of Encouragement of the federal government puts up two annual prizes. Horses can be entered from the stud-books of England and the United States, the Bruce stud-book being a much-consulted authority of the club.

On these occasions all the wealth and beauty of Mexico are out in full force. All the "four hundred," in their best finery (and nowhere in the world can be found more beautifully dressed women), are there; in short, the Jockey Club races form the grand gala-days of the year.

* To the secretary, Señor Manuel Nicholin y Echanova, I am indebted for many handsome photographs and interesting data.

CHAPTER XIV

LA VIGA AND THE SUBURBS

LA VIGA and the floating gardens or markets form another diverting and intensely interesting phase of life in this unique and poetic land. They are easily reached by car from the Plaza. The canal makes a circle of over eight miles, and presents a scene of unequalled activity and unusual features. One need not look for gardens, as the name suggests, but rather for an aquatic market-place. The gardens are made up of countless boats in motion, filled with every imaginable growth of farm, orchard, and vineyard, with garden flowers, fruits, chickens, birds, and all other living and growing things that can be sold. As soon as you leave the car the crowd surges around you, imploring you to hire their boats.

At first they are high in their ideas of the return desired, but they are apt to reduce their prices to less than one-third if the new-comer exhibits the proper amount of patience and reserve. These boats are low, long, and flat on the bottom, with an awning overhead, and gayly decked with flags and streamers. The boatmen use only one long oar, with which they pole or scull the craft along. In no other way can one gain so accurate an idea of the varied population of Mexico; in no other way can so many charming effects in costume and personal ornamentation be studied; and certainly nowhere else can such a marvellous array of products of this most marvellous of all countries be seen.

One might almost go blindfold through Mexico, uncovering his eyes for two or three hours only at La Viga, and be able to give a fair account of the almost incredible resources that are the heritage of this nation.

Santa Anita is a peculiar little spot, Mexican in every detail, and a favorite pleasure-resort for the people of Mexico City. Hither come in shoals the lower and middle classes on Sundays and feast-days. It is a town of reed-thatched houses, and everywhere there is a tempting odor of Mexican culinary dainties. Excellent specimens of Mexican dishes may be had here, which are wonderfully toothsome even if they are served in rude fashion.

Pulque may be had in various wonderful and insidious styles in which the original flavor is merged in something far more agreeable. There are swings and lively games with typical Mexican music, and flower-stands where the merry people buy garlands of bright-hued poppies. Surrounding the town are the chinampas, the so-called floating gardens. Perhaps they did float once, but they are now simply gardens separated by narrow canals. Here are grown vegetables for the city market and flowers for the Sundays and saints' days at home.

The church of Santa Anita is a quaint old building, with a fine tower, and a little plaza in front, where all the world and its wife take pleasure at holiday times.

At Ixtacalco are more chinampas, with less gayety, a little market, and a very handsome church. A fine old stone bridge crosses the canal at this point, with a ruinous old chapel at