

CHAPTER XXIII

Mexican domestics—Chinese the best servants—Scarcity of female help—Strikes among hotel staffs—Servants in Government offices—Mexicans and Egyptians compared—Types of street vendors—Seller of *dulces*—The ice-cream vendor—Street cries—Callings, costumes and customs retained from generation to generation—Native courtesy—Extravagance among working-classes—Some near resorts and their attractions.

THOSE of us who may yet remember the ancient but kindly tyranny of the good old family servant, of the "mammy" who loved and chided us at uncertain intervals, who would have gladly sacrificed her life to our safety and comfort, and who tended us in sickness and pain with a devotion no less beautiful or real than that of a mother for a child, can but regret that the days of such household treasures have flown, never more to return.

It has, ever since the days of one's childhood, been customary to hear the ladies of one's family deploring the shortcomings of the domestic help, bemoaning the wickedness of the cooks, the depravity of housemaids and the shocking propensities of "John the footman" or "Charles the coachman," to say nothing of that imp of darkness the page-boy. That many of these complaints were frivolous and insincere seems certain in the light of latter-day experiences, and many a worried matron of to-day who turned adrift some helpless menial for this or that breach of propriety or for some slight dereliction of duty, would give much to have that same delinquent back again, her failings notwithstanding.

If the servant question is acute in England, as we are being continually assured—and I well believe—is the case, it is no less real or serious in Mexico. Every writer who has visited the Republic, and especially the many lady authors, have

descanted upon the domestic problem; but none of them have said all that they might have said or have been able to suggest any remedy for the one great drawback which succeeds in robbing home and hotel-life of real comfort.

It may be said with truth that the best servants to be found in Mexico are the Chinese. There is here, as elsewhere, a fundamental prejudice against the yellow man (such a thing as a Chinese female servant is not to be found outside of China itself), the idea still prevailing among the majority that—

"For ways that are dark
And for tricks that are vain
The Heathen Chinese is peculiar."

Personally I do not share that prejudice, having found the Chinaman in all parts of the world equal in honesty, sobriety and kindness of heart to most servants, and infinitely superior to many. In Mexico, Chinese cooks are very often met with both in hotels and private houses, and many ladies of my acquaintance declare them to be the best obtainable. "Cheap Asiatic labour" may be denounced by the Socialist abroad and misrepresented by the ignorant Member of Parliament at home; but it would be a sad day for Mexico if the Chinamen were banished from the home of the private individual or from the ranks of the railway contractor. Orientals are welcomed in the Republic as useful and peaceable citizens, even if they are not cherished as "Christian brothers."

Servants of all classes in Mexico are growing more independent. I have the assurance of innumerable housekeepers for that. The factories and shops as well as commercial offices are bidding for female labour, and domestic service suffers accordingly. The average woman-servant is often untidy in appearance and uncertain in temper. Rarely does she evince any interest—even of the most academic description—in her daily tasks, and any—if even the mildest—reproval sends her to join the ranks of the "*revoltosas*." If a cook she spoils your expensive food; if a housemaid she ruins your good furniture; if a laundrymaid she destroys your beautiful linen—there being no finality to the damages which she accomplishes nor the worry which she occasions. The

wealthiest are just as badly off as the humblest of house-keepers, and high wages are no safeguard against bad service, dishonesty or ingratitude.

Wholesale strikes among the staffs at both hotels and at private residences are not uncommon, the servants leaving their employment without any previous warning, and being entitled by the law of the land to demand the wages due to them up to the time of their voluntary departure.

In handling their female servants, one of the greatest difficulties experienced by ladies is to induce them to wear their hair dressed. The prevailing fashion among Mexican female domestics is to allow their coal-black, well-oiled hair to flow in luxuriance down their backs, unconfined even by a single comb. Sometimes it is divided at the back, and falls down in two long, ugly plaits; but either style is unsuited to a well-ordered servant, and is strenuously objected to by most employers. The neatly-attired domestic, in simple black dress with a clean white cap and apron, is sometimes met with, especially in British and American households; but these cases are rare.

Mexican men-servants will seldom consent to wear livery, preferring to perform their duties in ordinary costume, and frequently in their shirt-sleeves. Even in some aristocratic households, such as the establishments of high Government officials, wealthy bankers and others, the indoor men-servants are found in undress, as are the coachman and footman out of livery when on the box.

In the Government offices some of the most decrepit and seedy-looking attendants are employed, being, no doubt, some worthy old pensioners, and well-trusted on account of long years' faithful service. But there would seem to be no sufficient reason why a clean collar, a respectable pair of boots and a coat free from rents and grease-spots should be incompatible with a pensioner's respectability or integrity.

As against the disadvantages in domestic servants to which I have referred, must be mentioned many instances of faithful and loyal service, and long, uninterrupted years of devotion upon the part of some Mexican dependents, especially of the *mozo* class, men who have, perhaps, grown up as children upon certain estates, and from which only actual banishment

or death could remove them. Such are still to be met with, but I am afraid that they are becoming more and more obsolete.

The Mexicans of past generations have been compared by experienced travellers to the early Egyptians, and many points of striking similarity undoubtedly exist between these two widely-separated people. No less remarkable is the similarity of this interesting race to the Indians, both in their personal habits, their appearance, and the persistency with which they follow their family callings. In India a fruit-seller is always a fruit-seller, and aims at being nothing else. The same may be said of all trades—potters, water-carriers, jugglers, masons, bakers, and undertakers. In the East it is largely a matter of caste, and no Vaisy'a (husbandman) would think of following the calling of a Sudra (agricultural labourer), any more than a Shatri'ya would wish, or be permitted, to enter the ranks of the Brahmins (the sacred order). All the thirty-six inferior classes, who are known by the different-coloured seals painted on their foreheads, follow from generation to generation the callings of their fathers.

The Mexicans, without attaching the same semi-religious importance to this congenital custom, observe to a great extent the same traditional laws. A *cargador*—the man who carries heavy furniture and luggage about the town—if he has a dozen sons will bring up each and all of them to become *cargadores*. The seller of *dulces* (sweetmeats) hands down his calling and his little tray on wheels to his male successor, if he has one; only rarely will you see a woman selling *dulces* in Mexico. The carpenter and the mason, the butcher and the baker, the tinker and the tailor, proceed upon the same unwritten law, from father to son, from one generation to the other the immutable custom is observed.

Moreover, the same curious fact in connection with trades is to be observed in towns and villages from one end of the Republic to the other. While this town is occupied entirely with the plaiting of straw hats, in which pursuit every man, woman and child is engaged, the next one is devoted to the making of baskets. A third is composed of cotton-spinners, a fourth of makers of artificial flowers, and a fifth of manufacturers of saddlery and harness. Never will you find any one

town or village competing in the same line of industry with a close neighbour, and for the past three hundred years and more this strange observance of traditional industry has been in force. Historians record the same thing of the ancient Egyptians, and, as I have mentioned, throughout the East the custom also prevails to-day. Even in their costumes and styles of head-gear they remain faithful to their forefathers' examples, and while a certain monotony is thus undoubtedly occasioned, it serves to facilitate identification, more especially when the different trades and callings followed have their peculiar street-cries.

These latter are anything but musical, and indeed one class of street-vendor, the seller of ice-creams, which confections enjoy considerable vogue throughout Mexico, utters a long, mournful wail, which, when first heard, conveys the idea that the possessor of that voice is in mortal agony. Every one of these ice-cream vendors wears precisely the same costume, carries the same coloured pails on the head and the same tin frame with glasses in the hand, utters his cry at the same stated intervals and parades the streets at exactly the same hour every day of the week, not varying any one of his habits by a hair's breadth from one day to another. One may almost tell the time of day, indeed, by the appearance of the man, always heralded by his dismal voice, so punctual is he in his wanderings through the town. Thus firm is tradition's hold upon the Mexicans.

Courtesy with the native Mexican is inherent, whether he be peon or patrician, and even when declining to grant a request he can be as polite and gentle as a veritable Chesterfield. I have heard travellers complain that all this exhibition of courtesy is superfluous and unreal, thus disagreeing with Emerson, who declares, in his "Social Aims," that "life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy." They even find fault with the Spaniard's formal expression, "This house, sir, is yours," declaring that the speech is meaningless and empty; probably nothing short of a bill-of-sale over it and its contents would satisfy them. Anyhow, the Spanish gentleman's declaration, "Su, casa, señor," is as sincere as our social greeting, "I am so glad to see you," or "I hope you are quite well," both of which expres-

sions, in the majority of cases, are pure humbug, uttered by individuals who don't care one rap whether they ever look upon our face again, and feeling not the remotest interest in our physical condition.

Considering their intercourse with foreigners and their ready assimilation of foreign manners, it is a little surprising to find how the Mexicans maintain their national courtesy and politeness. With all due respect to the foreign element in Mexico, and while acknowledging their many excellent qualities, it must freely be admitted that the majority that one meets are not of the *crème de la crème*, and consider suavity of manner and the practice of the more gentle methods of intercourse unbinding upon them. The difference between the Mexican and the Anglo-Saxon is that while the latter is as a rule polite and considerate, even he can on occasions be abject to the class he considers his "superior," the former is invariably courteous to all classes alike, and only cringes when he fancies that he has done wrong and is about to be punished.

I have witnessed the most touching acts of deference between the peons, and have sometimes yearned that such exhibitions of native politeness could be brought before the notice of those critics who condemn the peons of Mexico as a despicable people.

Young persons almost invariably kiss the hands of the more elderly in bidding them adieu, and I have seen young men respectfully raise their hats and touch with their lips the hands of the more elderly among them when parting from or meeting with them. True, the hands have mostly been dirty, and, personally, I should not have liked to have touched them; but that is mere fastidiousness, a sentiment which has little significance or vogue among the peon classes of Mexico.

Upon another occasion, while seated in a Pullman-car waiting at a country railway-station, I witnessed the arrival of a party of Indians, wild, dirty and unkempt in appearance, dressed in mere rags, and each carrying a huge bundle or a baby. They were pedlars, and of the lowest class; probably strangers to the town and entirely unaccustomed to town ways and manners. One of them, a woman, depositing her bundle upon the platform, went to the railway restaurant and purchased

a large pitcher full of pulque. Bringing this to her thirsty companions, it was first offered to the most elderly; but she declined the courtesy with a graceful wave of her hand. Still insistent, the bearer of the pitcher pressed her companion to drink, which she then did, carefully wiping the rim of the pitcher with her tattered shawl before passing it on to her neighbour. Thus it went round the circle, and at the termination of the carouse the two men of the party, who had imbibed last, bid adieu to the others, holding their battered hats in their hands, and lightly touching with their bearded lips the hands of their companions before departing. The spectacle might have amused many people, considering the grotesquely ragged appearance of the actors; but to me it was intensely pathetic, and made a deep and lasting impression upon my mind as well as serving as an object-lesson.

The love of ostentation, especially in regard to religious ceremonies, is not confined to the more wealthy classes of Mexico, any more than to those of European countries. In England, a working man has been known to expend his last shilling in giving a "first-class funeral" to his departed relative; and many a humorous tragedy of this description can be told by the average East End clergyman, whose remonstrances in the majority of cases are vain. While I was in Mexico City, the same day witnessed the lavish expenditure by two different members of the community upon religious ceremonials connected with their Church, one a baptism and the other a burial, an expenditure which I am convinced neither of them could afford.

The first was that incurred by a clerk, or "shopwalker," in the employ of a furnishing establishment, earning but a few hundred dollars a month, and who requisitioned the costly services of the Apostolic Delegate (Monsignor Randolph) to baptise his son.

Possibly his Eminence may have graciously given his services free of charge; but the expenses involved in decorating the Church of San Hipolito with costly flowers and 3,000 extra electric lights, providing handsome purple hangings for the altar and choir, and the co-operation of eight different priests, must have meant a heavy outlay, and one which no ordinary furniture-shop clerk could well withstand.

The second instance of extravagance was even more remarkable. Here the spendthrift was a common railway labourer, named José Reyes, who actually paid over \$400 (£40) to bury his father with becoming grandeur. The coffin cost \$200, the Government had to be paid \$100 to enable the body to be removed out of the Federal District, and other incidental expenses amounted to \$105.00 odd. The man who died was an ordinary peon, and so was the son who buried him, and paid all the expenses. The latter earned less than \$1.00 (2s.) a day, and it had taken him over 1,000 days, or nearly three years, to save up the amount necessary.

There are but few countries which offer more numerous or more delightful resorts for City residents and visitors than Mexico. It may be said generally that each large City in the Republic has its own attendant suburban resort, such as Popo Park for Mexico City, Lake Chapala for Guadalajara, Topo Chico for Monterey, and charming Cuernavaca for everybody. A great many foreigners resident in the capital find its elevation, 7,349 feet above the level of the sea, somewhat trying after a few months' continuous residence, and a change to a lower altitude becomes desirable, if only for a few days. For these individuals there is, then, a variety of beautiful spots not any great distance away—if I except Lake Chapala, probably the most agreeable of any—among which to choose for a short or long stay.

Very different is this agreeable possibility to the comparative isolation of the residents of Buenos Aires, in the Argentine, who have no place to which they can fly except Mar-del-Plata, on the shore of the Rio de la Plata, an ugly, sandy and barren spot, twelve hours' train journey from the City, and whose only attraction is a gambling-hell. The Valparaiso residents have one resort only, namely Vino-del-Mar, which is also a desolate and unattractive place, and closed for six months out of the year. The Mexicans themselves, and the numerous tourists who now visit the country from all parts of the world, find an ever-changing delight in such beauty-spots as I have mentioned—Popo Park, Topo Chico and Cuernavaca; but there are many others—Tehuacán, Orizaba, Córdoba, Lake Patzcuaro, Cuátula, etc., etc. Most of these resorts were the favourite places of residence of the old Aztec kings, the

Spanish Conquerors and the ill-fated Emperors Yturbide and Maximilian. There is nothing new about any one of them, and that fact, in my mind, constitutes one of their principal charms.

For my own part I would just as soon reside in Mexico City in the summer as in the winter months, for I have found both seasons of the year very agreeable. There is a popular notion, born of ignorance and lack of experience, that Mexico City is in a tropical region, and therefore abnormally hot in summer. As a matter of fact, a more temperate climate than that throughout the Mexican Plateau could not be found in the wide world—and let me add that I have lived under every kind of clime from Dan to Beer' Sheba. Blankets are necessary at night all through the so-called "hot-season." The early mornings are cool, crisp and invigorating, and when rain does fall, it is almost invariably in the late afternoon and passes away within an hour or two, leaving the sky free from clouds and the atmosphere almost intoxicating in its purity and freshness. The most delightful months of the year are June, July and August, September being the fag-end of the rainy-season, and usually finishing up with several wet days consecutively. For the rest of the year, the rainfall is only intermittent, and never very troublesome on the Mexican Plateau.

CHAPTER XXIV

Street nomenclature—Difficulties of identification in Mexico City—Latter-day improvements—New style of building—Avenidas and Colonias—Clubland—Jockey Club—American Club—British Club—Foreign Clubs—Native Clubs—Casino Nacional—Casino Español—Some distinguished members—Chinese clubs.

THE Mexicans, like all Spanish-American nations, perpetuate in the names of their streets, squares and public places, the honoured names of their patriots, their statesmen, and great national events in their history. In every Spanish-speaking country in the Americas you will find the "Cinco de Mayo" (5th of May) distinguished by at least one and probably several streets thus named; while warriors, both military and naval, have all their memories kept green by the busy thoroughfares being named after them. In Buenos Aires there is the Calle Bartolomé Mitre; in Valparaiso and Santiago the Calle O'Higgins; in Venezuela, Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador, the number of streets named "Trente-Tres" (*i.e.*, Thirty-three), called after the body of patriots who helped to free those Colonies from the thralldom of the Spanish Crown, is strikingly large.

In Mexico the custom of naming thoroughfares has been singularly erratic, and it would seem that the privilege accorded to the civic authorities or the local government have been greatly abused in the past, with the result that in Mexico City particularly the greatest difficulty has been experienced by strangers in finding any one locality, and any assistance from residents has been just as hard to obtain. Heretofore the districts of the City have been divided into North and South, or East and West, with numbers and alphabetical denominations attached. Thus, one would have