The presiding bishop then advancing, without his mitre, to the right hand of the archbishop, said, "May thy hand be strengthened! May thy right hand be exalted! May justice and judgment be the preparation of thy see!" Then the organ pealed forth, and they chanted the hymn of "Gloria Patri." Long and solemn prayer followed; and then, all uncovered, stood beside the gospels, at the altar.

The archbishop rose, and with mitre and crosier, pronounced a solemn blessing on all the people assembled. Then, while all knelt beside the altar, he said—"For many years." This he repeated thrice; the second time, in the middle of the altar, the third at the feet of the presiding bishop. Then all rising, the archbishop bestowed on each the kiss of peace, and the ceremony concluded.

When everything was over, our carriage not being visible amongst the crowd of vehicles, I returned home in that of the — Minister, with him and his attachés; after which, they and C—n returned to dine with the new archbishop in his palace. A dish of sweetmeats was sent me from his table, which are so pretty, (probably the chef-d'œuvre of the nuns,) that I send them to you, to preserve as a memorial of the consecration of the first Mexican archbishop—perhaps of the last!

LETTER THE NINETEENTH


June 3rd.

You ask me to tell you how I find the Mexican servants. Hitherto I had avoided the ungrateful theme, from very weariness of it. The badness of the servants, is an unfailing source of complaint even amongst Mexicans; much more so amongst foreigners, especially on their first arrival. We hear of their addiction to stealing, their laziness, drunkenness, dirtiness, with a host of other vices. That these complaints are frequently just, there can be no doubt, but the evil might be remedied to a great extent. In the first place servants are constantly taken without being required to bring a recommendation from their last
place; and in the next, recommendations are constantly given, whether from indolence or mistaken kindness, to servants who do not deserve them. A servant who has lived in a dozen different houses, staying about a month in each, is not thought the worse of on that account. As the love of finery is inherent in them all, even more so than in other daughters of Eve, a girl will go to service merely to earn sufficient to buy herself an embroidered chemise; and if, in addition to this, she can pick up a pair of small old satin shoes, she will tell you she is tired of working, and going home to rest, "para descansar." So little is necessary, when one can contentedly live on tortillas and chile, sleep on a mat, and dress in rags!

A decent old woman, who came to the house to wash shortly after our arrival in this country, and left us at the end of the month, "para descansar." Soon after, she used to come with her six children, they and herself all in rags, and beg the gardener to give her any odds and ends of vegetables he could spare. My maid asked her, why, being so poor, she had left a good place, where she got twelve dollars a month. "Jesus!" said she, "if you only knew the pleasure of doing nothing."

I wished to bring up a little girl as a servant, having her taught to read, sew, etc. A child of twelve years old, one of a large family, who subsisted upon charity, was procured for me; and I promised her mother that she should be taught to read, taken regularly to church, and instructed in all kinds of work. She was rather pretty, and very intelligent, though extremely indolent; and though she had no stockings, would consent to wear nothing but dirty white satin shoes, too short for her foot. Once a week, her mother, a tall, slatternly woman, with long tangled hair, and a cigar in her mouth, used to come to visit her, accompanied by a friend, a friend's friend, and a train of girls, her daughters. The housekeeper would give them some dinner, after which they would all light their cigars, and, together with the little Josefita, sit, and howl, and bemoan themselves, crying and lamenting her sad fate in being obliged to go out to service. After these visits, Josefita was fit for nothing. If desired to sew, she would sit looking so miserable, and doing so little, that it seemed better to allow her to leave her work alone. Then, tolerably contented, she would sit on a mat,
doing nothing, her hands folded, and her eyes fixed on vacancy.

According to promise, I took her several times to see her mother, but one day being occupied, I sent her alone in
the carriage, with charge to the servants to bring her
safely back. In the evening she returned, accompanied
by the whole family, all crying and howling; "For the love
of the Most Holy Virgin, Señora mia! Por la purissima
concepcion!" etc., etc., etc. I asked what had happened,
and after much difficulty discovered that their horror was
occasioned by my having sent her alone in the carriage.
It happened that the Countess S— was in the drawing-
room, and to her I related the cause of the uproar. To
my astonishment, she assured me that the woman was in
this instance right, and that it was very dangerous to send
a girl of twelve years of age from one street to another,
in the power of the coachman and footman. Finding
from such good authority that this was the case, I begged
the woman to be contented with seeing her daughter once
a month, when, if she could not come herself, I would
send her under proper protection. She agreed; but one
day having given Josefita permission to spend the night at
her mother’s, I received next morning a very dirty note,
nearly illegible, which, after calling down the protection
of the Virgin upon me, concluded—"but with much
sorrow I must take my child from the most illustrious
protection of your excellency, for she needs to rest her-
self, (es preciso que descansen,) and is tired for the present
of working.” The woman then returned to beg, which
she considered infinitely less degrading.

Against this nearly universal indolence and indifference
to earning money, the heads of families have to contend;
as also against stealing and dirtiness; yet I think the
remedy much easier than it appears. If on the one hand,
no one were to receive a servant into their house, without
respectable references, especially from their last place,
and if their having remained one year in the same house
were considered necessary to their being received into
another, unless from some peculiar circumstances; and
if on the other hand it were considered as unjust and
dangerous, as it really is, to recommend a servant who
has been guilty of stealing, as being “muy honrado,” very
honest, some improvement might soon take place.

A porter was recommended to us as “muy honrado;”
not from his last place, but from one before. He was a well-dressed, sad-looking individual; and at the same time we took his wife as washerwoman, and his brother as valet to our attaché, thus having the whole family under our roof, wisely taking it for granted that he being recommended as particularly honest, his relations were “all honourable men.” An English lady happened to call on me, and a short time after I went to return her visit; when she informed me that the person who had opened the door for her was a notorious thief; whom the police had long been in search of; that she had feared sending a servant to warn us of our danger, lest guessing the purport of her message, he might rob the house before leaving it. We said nothing to the man that evening, but he looked paler and more miserable than usual, probably foreseeing what would be the result of Mrs. —’s visit. The next morning C—n sent for him and dismissed him, giving him a month’s wages, that he might not be tempted to steal from immediate want. His face grew perfectly livid, but he made no remark. In half an hour he returned and begged to speak with C—n. He confessed that the crime of which he concluded he was accused, he had in fact committed; that he had been tempted to a gambling house, while he had in his pocket a large sum of money belonging to his master. After losing his own money, he tried his fortune with what was not his own; lost the whole sum, then pawned a valuable shawl worth several hundred dollars, with which also he had been entrusted; and having lost everything, in despair made his escape from Mexico. He remained in concealment for some time, till hearing that we wanted a porter, he ventured to present himself to the housekeeper with his former certificate. He declared himself thoroughly repentant—that this was his first, and would be his last crime—but who can trust the good resolutions of a gambler! We were obliged to send him away, especially as the other servants already had some suspicions concerning him; and everything stolen in the house would in future have been attributed to him. The gentleman who had recommended him, afterwards confessed that he always had strong suspicions of this man’s honesty, and knew him to be so determined a gambler, that he had pawned all he possessed, even his wife’s clothes, to obtain money for that purpose. Now as a porter in Mexico has
pretty much at his disposal the property and even the lives of the whole family, it is certainly most blameable to recommend to that situation a man whose honesty is more than doubtful. We afterwards procured two soldiers from the Invalidos, old Spaniards, to act in that capacity, who had no other foiblesse but that of being constantly drunk. We at length found two others, who only got tipsy alternately, so that we considered ourselves very well off.

We had a long series of galopinas, kitchen-maids, and the only one who brought a first-rate character with her, robbed the housekeeper. The money, however, was recovered, and was found to have been placed by the girl in the hands of a rich and apparently respectable coachmaker. He refunded it to the rightful owner, and the galopina was punished by a month's imprisonment, which he should have shared with her. One of the most disagreeable customs of the women servants, is that of wearing their long hair hanging down at its full length, matted, uncombed, and always in the way. I cannot imagine how the Mexican ladies, who complain of this, permit it. Flowing hair sounds very picturesque, but when it is very dirty, and suspended over the soup, it is not a pretty picture.

The reboso, in itself graceful and convenient, has the disadvantage of being the greatest cloak for all untidiness, uncombed hair and raggedness, that ever was invented. Even in the better classes, it occasions much indolence in the toilet, but in the common people, its effect is overwhelming. When the reboso drops off, or is displaced by chance, we see what they would be without it! As for the sarape, it is both convenient and graceful, especially on horseback; but though Indian in its origin, the custom of covering the lower part of the face with it, is taken from the Spanish cloak; and the opportunity which both sarape and reboso afford for concealing large knives about the person, as also for enveloping both face and figure so as to be scarcely recognizable, is no doubt the cause of the many murders which take place amongst the lower orders, in moments of excitement and drunkenness. If they had not these knives at hand, their rage would probably cool, or a fair fight would finish the matter, and if they could not wear these knives concealed, I presume they would be prohibited from carrying them.

As for taking a woman-cook in Mexico, one must have
strong nerves and a good appetite to eat what she dresses, however palatable, after having seen her. One look at her flowing locks, one glance at her reboso, et c'est fini. And yet the Mexican servants have their good qualities, and are a thousand times preferable to the foreign servants one finds in Mexico; especially the French. Bringing them with you is a dangerous experiment. In ten days they begin to fancy themselves ladies and gentlemen—the men have Don tacked to their name; and they either marry and set up shops, or become unbearably insolent. A tolerable French cook may occasionally be had, but you must pay his services their weight in gold, and wink at his extortions and robberies. There are one or two French restaurants, who will send you in a very good dinner at an extravagant price: and it is common in foreign houses, especially amongst the English, to adopt this plan whenever they give a large entertainment.

The Mexican servants have some never-failing good qualities. They are the perfection of civility—humble, obliging, excessively good-tempered, and very easily attached to those with whom they live; and if that rara avis, a good Mexican housekeeper, can be found, and that such may be met with I from experience can testify, then the troubles of the menage rest upon her shoulders, and accustomed as she is to the amiable weaknesses of her compatriotes, she is neither surprised nor disturbed by them.

As for wages, a good porter has from fifteen to twenty dollars per month; a coachman from twenty to thirty—many houses keep two or even three coachmen; one who drives from the box, one who rides postilion, and a third for emergencies. Our friend — , who has many horses, mules, and carriages, has four; and pays forty dollars per month to his head coachman; the others in proportion. A French cook has about thirty dollars—a housekeeper from twelve to fifteen; a major-domo about twenty or more; a footman six or seven; galopine and chambermaid five or six; a gardener from twelve to fifteen. Sewing-girls have about three reals per diem. Porter, coachmen, and gardener, have their wives and families in the house, which would be an annoyance, were the houses not so large. The men-servants generally are much cleaner and better dressed than the women.

One circumstance is remarkable; that, dirty as the women-servants are, and notwithstanding the enormous
size of Mexican houses, and Mexican families, the houses themselves are, generally speaking, the perfection of cleanliness. This must be due either to a good housekeeper, which is rarely to be found, or to the care taken by the mistress of the house herself. That private houses should have this advantage over churches and theatres, only proves that ladies know how to manage these matters better than gentlemen, so that one is inclined to wish à la Martineau, that the Mexican police were entirely composed of old women.

12th.—I have formed an acquaintance with a very amiable and agreeable nun in the convent of Santa Teresa, one of the strictest orders. I have only seen her twice, through a grating. She is a handsome woman of good family, and it is said of a remarkably joyous disposition; fond of music and dancing, and gay society, yet at the age of eighteen, contrary to the wishes of all her family, she took the veil, and declares she has never repented of it. Although I cannot see her, I can hear her voice, and talk to her through a turning wooden screen, which has a very mysterious effect. She gives me an account of her occupations and of the little events that take place in her small world within; whilst I bring her news from the world without. The common people have the greatest veneration for the holy sisterhood, and I generally find there a number of women with baskets, and men carrying parcels or letters; some asking their advice or assistance, others executing their commissions, bringing them vegetables or bread, and listening to the sound of their voice with the most eager attention. My friend, the Madre ——, has promised to dress a number of wax figures for me, in the exact costume of all the different nuns in Mexico, beginning with that of her own convent.

I have now seen three nuns take the veil; and, next to a death, consider it the saddest event that can occur in this nether sphere; yet the frequency of these human sacrifices here is not so strange as might at first appear. A young girl, who knows nothing of the world, who, as it too frequently happens, has at home neither amusement nor instruction, and no society abroad, who from childhood is under the dominion of her confessor, and who firmly believes that by entering a convent she becomes sure of heaven; who moreover finds there a number of companions of her own age, and of older women who load:
her with praises and caresses—it is not, after all, astonishing that she should consent to insure her salvation on such easy terms.

Add to this the splendour of the ceremony, of which she is the sole object; the cynosure of all approving eyes. A girl of sixteen finds it hard to resist all this. I am told that more girls are smitten by the ceremony, than by anything else, and am inclined to believe it, from the remarks I have heard made on these occasions by young girls in my vicinity. What does she lose? A husband and children? Probably she has seen no one who has touched her heart. Most probably she has hitherto seen no men, or at least conversed with none but her brothers, her uncles, or her confessor. She has perhaps also felt the troubles of a Mexican ménage. The society of men! She will still see her confessor, and she will have occasional visits from reverend padres and right reverend bishops.

Some of these convents are not entirely free from scandal. Amongst the monks, there are many who are openly a disgrace to their calling, though I firmly believe that by far the greater number lead a life of privation and virtue. Their conduct can, to a certain extent, be judged of by the world; but the pale nuns, devout and pure, immersed in the cloister for life, kneeling before the shrine, or chanting hymns in the silence of the night, a veil both truly and allegorically must shade their virtues or their failings. The nuns of the Santa Teresa and of other strict orders, who live sparingly, profess the most severe rules, and have no servants or boarders, enjoy a universal reputation for virtue and sanctity. They consider the other convents worldly, and their motto is, "All or nothing; the world or the cloister." Each abbess adds a stricter rule, a severer penance than her predecessor, and in this they glory. My friend the Madre —— frequently says—"Were I to be born again, I should choose, above every lot in life, to be a nun of the Santa Teresa, but of no other convent."...

It is strange how, all the world over, mankind seems to expect from those who assume religion as a profession a degree of superhuman perfection. Their failings are insisted upon. Every eye is upon them to mark whatsoever may be amiss in their conduct. Their virtues, their learning, their holy lives—nothing will avail them, if one
A Chair in Church

blot can be discovered in their character. There must be no moral blemish in the priesthood. In the Catholic religion, where more is professed, still more is demanded, and the errors of one padre or one ecclesiastic seem to throw a shade over the whole community to which they belong.

LETTER THE TWENTIETH


4th June.

Some days ago, having received a message from my nun that a girl was about to take the veil in her convent, I went there about six o'clock, and knowing that the church on these occasions is apt to be crowded to suffocation, I proceeded to the reja, and speaking to an invisible within, requested to know in what part of the church I could have a place. Upon which a voice replied—

"Hermanita (my sister), I am rejoiced to see you. You shall have a place beside the godmother."

"Many thanks, Hermanita. Which way shall I go?"

Voice.—"You shall go through the sacristy. José Maria!"

José Maria, a thin, pale, lank individual, with hollow cheeks, who was standing near like a page in waiting, sprang forward—"Madrecita, I am here!"

Voice.—"José Maria—That lady is the Señora de C—n. You will conduct her excellency to the front of the grating, and give her a chair."

After I had thanked the voice for her kindness in attending to me on a day when she was so much occupied with other affairs, the obsequious José Maria led the way, and I followed him through the sacristy into the church, where there were already a few kneeling figures; and thence into the railed-off enclosure destined for the relatives of the future nun, where I was permitted to sit down in a comfortable velvet chair. I had been there but a little while