

The Coming Age  
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A GARDEN SPOT OF NATURE AND A TREASURE HOUSE OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATION  
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The ordinary tourist who takes a regulation trip to the City of Mexico, never leaving the plateau, gets no more conception of the real attractiveness of the country—of the charms it has for the archaeologist, the artist, and for him who travels for pleasure—than a tourist from Europe would get of the United States by traversing Cape Cod. It has been known to travelers and explorers, and to those who have read their reports, that, for example, the valley of Oaxaca, lying in south-western Mexico, offers an extremely interesting country to visit; but until recent years the fact of its being reached only after several days' journeying over dusty plains and difficult mountain passes has kept away all tourists except the few who were determined to see the ruins of Mitla, the giant tree of Tule, or a market day in the City of Oaxaca, whatever the cost might be in money, time, or personal inconvenience. But this most interesting part of Mexico is now connected with the capital by rail, and our journey was accomplished with ease.

After leaving San Lazaro station our train went spinning along for many miles between rows of shade-trees, and parallel to an ancient highway upon which were journeying various picturesque individuals and parties on their way to market. To the right extended the glassy level of shallow Lake Chalco, from the marshes of which our locomotive startled great flocks of ducks. Looking back on the other side over Lake Texcoco, we could see large flat-bottomed boats loaded with merchandise, each of them being propelled by a dozen or more Indians, who pushed with poles along one side and then ran nimbly around on the other side to commence at the bow again,—these endless chains of animated figures presenting a fantastic picture in the morning sunlight.

After a little while the road curved most conveniently, bringing into view those stately sentinels of the valley, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, the two snow-crested volcanoes. We may possibly climb Popocatepetl, procuring guides, horses, and mozos at Ameca-meca, and at an altitude of seventeen thousand eight hundred feet above sea-level enjoy the grandest bird's-eye view on the continent. It was from the

ever-steaming crater of this mountain that intrepid Cortez secured sulphur for replenishing his supply of gunpowder. But the more precipitous slopes of its mate, "the sleeping woman," are quite forbidding.

After passing the "castle" of the late ex-President Gonzales, our train stopped at the first important place, Texcoco. The country hereabouts is full of historic interest, and sooner or later every one in the City of Mexico comes here to see "Molina del Flores," an hacienda containing one of the world's most charming gardens, a beautiful spot on the hill-side divided by a rushing mountain stream, favored alike by nature and a lavish expenditure of silver dollars.

At noon we reached Puebla, the "City of Angels," the most conspicuous object on the landscape as we approached being the pyramid of Cholula. After lunch at one of the several good hotels, we went by street-cars to visit the most mysterious and interesting monument of prehistoric man, and, climbing up its dilapidated sides to realize its height, enjoyed a rare panoramic view of mountains, valley, and the dome-studded city. As a matter of course, we exchanged a few centavos with various urchins for stone hatchets or small carved figures of ancient mold which are found imbedded in the walls of the pyramid and in the earth round about it,

Next day we visited the cathedral, in contrast to which that in the City of Mexico seemed a poverty-stricken affair. Here all was found to be as grand, as beautiful, and as finished as money could make it. Puebla is the Rome of Mexico, and we were fortunate in finding that an *espei* daily holy day was being celebrated. Gorgeous vestments were brought into use, while organ, choir, orchestra, and the reverent multitude, of every degree and picturesquely attired, combined to make the occasion impressive.

While it was yet morning we sought the plaza, where a large variety of pottery, baskets, and other peculiar products of the district were being sold by the natives, and where opportunity was enjoyed of observing the characteristics of the local Indian population, which are markedly different in every Mexican town. We were tempted to remain in Puebla several days, its good hotels, clean streets, and pure, bracing atmosphere being a welcome contrast to their opposites in the capital; but we contented ourselves with a day and a half, and left the next morning for Oaxaca.

Six o'clock is early for a start; but we were glad that the trip was to be made by daylight, a trip which provides the unique experience of going from a temperate climate down nearly six thousand feet to the dinner station, Tomellin, in the tierra caliente, and of rising again at night to a level of five thousand feet above the sea. Leaving Puebla, the huge coneshaped, snow-clad mountains, Orizaba and Malinche, made the prominent element of grandeur in the landscape for a long time. For several hours there was little of novelty to attract attention except the agricultural peculiarities of the district, an occasional fortress-like hacienda, now and then some extended view of a wide valley sloping down ahead of us, or may be a cluster of habitations upon some mountain side, always graced by the dome of its little church. Our locomotive seemed to avoid the straight and narrow way, choosing always a serpentine path, until we were forced to conclude that the engineers who planned the road either were actuated by a desire to provide the traveler with opportunity for viewing every bit of scenery, or else that they acted in obedience to orders which provided a maximum milage with its corresponding emolument to concessionaires. But, however that may have been, we adopted the hypothesis, that the scenery, the railroad, and the comfortable coaches in which we rode were prepared for our special benefit, and we enjoyed it all accordingly.

As the sun got higher we got lower, and before noon were despising our overcoats and thinking that a plunge into the running water with which our train was racing would be decidedly refreshing. The little river grew larger, while we crossed it dozens of times, and the palisade-like formations on either side suggested at once opportunities for the artist and a story for the geologist. At a dinner, served by the ubiquitous celestial, we left the stream that had become so familiar, and, pursuing the upward track of another one like it, entered a canon sixty miles long and rich in variety of grand views. The rushing water was nearly always heard above the puffing of our sturdy locomotive, and, as our path bended and turned, now winding through tunnels, crossing and recrossing the stream, now taking a narrow shelf that was made by blasting away hundreds of tons of solid rock, rows of heads protruding from car windows all along gave evidence of general interest in the scenery. It was just dusk as we gained the highest point, and, as if to reserve the famous valley of Oaxaca for another day, the veil of night was dropped with tropical suddenness, and we rolled from the crest down to our destination below.

Oaxaca is dissimilar in many respects to all other Mexican cities. It has, of course, the

regulation zocalo, alameda, and plazas, but the Indian population is distinctively different from that of either the plateau or gulf states; and the city, with clear water from the mountain rushing along the middle of its principal slanting streets, its balmy atmosphere, and semi-tropical vegetation, has a charm peculiarly its own. Cortez soon heard of the fertile valley of Oaxaca, and he was eventually appointed lord over this domain by the King of Spain. But the indomitable spirit of at least one tribe of this country successfully resisted all attempts of the conquerors, and down to the present time these people have been left in sovereign and undisputed possession of their native hills, the Mexican Government wisely refraining- from sending any soldiers or tax-gatherers to molest them. Some of this proud race, the "Mixtecs," come to market in Oaxaca, and it is noticeable, and generally commented upon, that their dialect bears a strange similarity in sound to the English language. It was in the mountains of Oaxaca that Mexico's great patriots, Juarez and Diaz, imbibed that love for their country and zeal for its welfare that have made them such factors for their country's good.

Market day comes on Saturday, and this is one of the most interesting sights to be seen in the republic. Long before daylight the commercial pilgrims begin to arrive in the city, some on foot with staff in hand and merchandise held on their backs by a strap over the forehead, some driving trains of burros, and some, of more important character, driving pairs of oxen whose heads are firmly bound together by yokes which draw the cumbersome, primitive wooden cart. The streets become filled with these motley caravans, and, as if the market square with its modern equipment of masonry and roofing were not ample for their accommodation, the overflow takes possession of all neighboring thoroughfares; sombrero dealers in one direction, sellers of rebozos, zarapes, sandals, pottery, baskets, etc., assorting themselves in classified order. Here we were at last a part of the crowding, bargaining, gesticulating, picturesque gathering that makes an Oaxaca market day the most unique in all Mexico, already congratulating ourselves for having come.

We noticed many peculiarities of the people, and were impressed over and over again with the bright, fearless glances, the clear complexions, the fine features, the graceful movements, the pleasant laughter, and the happy manners of these Indian women. Some of them, if regulated by an artist of fashion, might have graced any drawing-room in the world, and one in particular had that fine type of Italian beauty seldom seen except in the upper classes. What did it mean, this evidence of culture

where none exists? Possibly these people are degenerate survivors of a much higher civilization.

To judge by the small percentage of others besides themselves present, it would appear that these Indians gathered here from surrounding hills and valleys to trade among themselves, as their ancestors did before them, not requiring any middle-man to share their profits. At any rate, it was evident that the presence of a golden-haired American child of two summers, with bright blue eyes, red cheeks, and a little fat finger always pointing at something wanted, was a decided novelty; for as our party moved along, followed by a faithful muchaco with big basket on his head to collect purchases, we made a sensation. Bargaining was suspended, the chatter of gossip ceased as attention was directed to the fair little one from the far north. The more eager ones came forward, and seemed glad that their exclamations were understood and responded to; the language of kisses there was no doubt about.

Returning to the cool seclusion of our hotel rooms, we investigated the contents of our basket, spreading out the handwoven cloths of strange designs, the delicately carved colanders made of cocoanut shells, the little dinner-bells made of fine clay, the funny-looking shoes made of fibrous material for rainy weather, and the rain-coat that makes its wearer look like a porcupine when it is dry and like a big wet bird of some strange variety when in the rain.

Near the market place is the "Soledad" church, one of the oldest in use on the continent. On its walls hang portraits of the consecutive and unbroken line of bishops who have presided here since early in the seventeenth century down to the present time. We saw the usual small paintings that are brought to give graphic testimony of some miraculous visitation of mercy by the Virgin of Guadalupe, and an especially large one, a marine view of a storm-beaten ship, whose crew gave this painting as a thank-offering for having been saved in a "perilous passage from Cadiz to Vera Cruz in the year 1741." Another large picture that commanded attention represented a company of Indians who, while engaged in offering tribute to their heathen divinities, are surprised by a band of Spaniards, and, presumably by direction of two white-robed priests in the foreground, are being massacred for their paganish idolatry. As we turned to leave the sanctuary we almost stumbled over a poor Indian who had bared his shaggy head and was crouching before a very ghastly-looking, blood-bespattered wooden image of human shape, whose big toe he kissed.

It was just possible that his religion was, after all, scarcely an improvement over that of his ancestors.

It is pleasant to sit in the alameda or the zocalo and to watch the people enjoy themselves, seemingly thoroughly content. The music, usually of the military bands, is never failing; they have nothing to worry over. There is no silver, question to muddle their brains, the problem of protection or free trade doesn't concern them; for their home-market is sufficient, and the phenomenon of poverty with progress has not disturbed them, because they have experienced little commercial progress or relative poverty.

But, pleasant as it was for us to remain in the City of Oaxaca, our destination, the objective point of our trip, was Mitla, twenty miles beyond, where are situated ruins of what is called the "palace." So, after inquiries, we engaged a carriage, one of very few in the city, and at an early hour in the morning, after desayuno, our conveyance appeared, drawn by six mules. The driver had an assistant to handle the whip, and, owing to the roughness of the roads, which are rarely used by carriages, these two men were continually occupied in their respective duties.

The feature of this agricultural district is the independent farmer, with his small but sufficient acreage. We met him driving his ox team along the highway, and noted his self-reliant bearing. He is a contrast to the average rural peon in Mexico, who has no alternative but to accept the petty wages paid by the big

landlords. In Mexico the land question is only just beginning to assume its real importance, because the mass of the population has, after centuries of oppression, become accustomed to and apparently content with a very meager subsistence; but there is already an awakening, in sympathy with the rest of the world, which will before long result in a vast improvement of conditions.

The valley of Oaxaca is most beautiful during the rainy season, but it is well that we did not come at that time, for then the country roads are well-nigh impassable, except for burros and drivers who can pick their way in single file.

After about two hours of traveling we entered the shaded streets of the little pueblo of Tule, and turning up a narrow lane, approached the tree of enormous girth and

mammoth proportions described by Humboldt. We climbed out of our dusty ark, and surveyed the tree at leisure. Walking around it, close to the bark and stepping over huge roots, required seventy-two paces. To get the width of one side twelve paces must be taken, while seventeen are necessary to match the greatest width of this mass of living wood. On one side is imbedded a tablet commemorating Humboldt's visit, and carved initials and missing pieces of bark tell of other visitors, most of whom returned to the city without going further, But we were reminded of the aging day, and were soon rolling onward again. We had expected a hot, disagreeable journey, but our carriage bounded along on easy springs, was well shaded by an ample roof, and the air was cool and almost free from dust.

As journeying peons passed, we were again impressed with their contrast to the population of the plateau. The tourist is there wearied by the array of wailing cripples who at each station gather about the Pullman cars, pleading for centavos: and even the best of peons to be seen there seem a hopeless, stupid, and inferior lot when compared with the natives of Oaxaca. We met a number of women riding on burros, talking and laughing together, their pretty rebozos artistically bunched on their heads to shade them from the midday sun, and ornamented ends falling down their backs. The men in attendance walked along beside their better halves. At one place a number of young men were actively engaged in an interesting game of ball.

At noon we reached Tlacolula, where the market day of the week, Sunday, was in full blast. Fronting the plaza we found an excellent fonda where man and beast were entertained. While awaiting the preparation of our midday meal we strolled about the market place, and again became objects of curiosity and exclamation to a multitude who had probably never before seen an American child. They pressed about us, talking in their outlandish dialect, and propounding questions to one of their number, who spoke Spanish, and so acted as interpreter. "What was our native language if not Castilian or Latin?" They had never heard of any other. "Where did we come from?" "Los Estados Unidos, where was that?" "Was it very far away from Tlacolula?" "Did we have silver there,— surely not refined silver?" etc.

Rolling out of town through a dusty lane, with funny little dwellings on either side, and barking dogs everywhere, we soon emerged into the wild, mountainous country that leads to Mitla. Arriving, we found a most hospitable host, whose hotel, with its three large patios, the first one a garden about eighty feet square, made the place

seem more like a delightful quintada than a public tavern, especially as we were the only guests.

We hastened to see the ruins before sunset. On all sides except the valley whence we came are high, frowning hills. It was an appropriate site for the king's residence; for the buildings whose ruins we saw are supposed to have been used by the king and his court, and as temples and adobes of the priests. We felt ourselves to be very far away from the rest of the world, and the air of dying day was still to oppression. With the grim mountain behind us and the slanting valley in front of us, we left the mysterious ruins, passed down to the inn, and were conscious of a new experience.

In the early morning, before leaving, we took another good look at the ruins of Mitla. The remnants of four large buildings face a square which, it has been demonstrated, was accessible only by means of an underground passage-way, the entrance to which was before us. There were several sets of these large buildings, and we noticed various patterns of design in their ornamentation. In some places the solid rock was chiseled out, and in others small geometrically-shaped stones had been nicely inserted, and now remained immovable after exposure to the weather of unknown centuries. The walls of the interior and underground passages are glazed with a cement, highly polished and of a dark red color, a lighter shade appearing in places worn or scratched away. Some of the huge blocks of solid stone measure nearly fifteen feet long by four and a half wide and three and a half thick. One was said to weigh not less than forty tons. How were they lifted into place? Certainly not without considerable mechanical skill. From the dilapidated remnants of some of the walls enough stone was taken to build a goodsized church, and there is used by the padre as a stable-yard for his horse an inclosure of ancient construction, ornamented all around at about twelve feet from the cemented floor with a frieze of hieroglyphics painted in scarlet characters on a terra-cotta colored background. Recently discovered tombs, ornamented with the same heavy stone work, were shown to us. The bodies that were found there crumbled to dust when exposed to the air, but some relics were secured. The government now has an agent here to take care of the ruins, and it is intended to inaugurate extensive excavations under direction of scientific men from the City of Mexico. Before leaving we secured stone implements, little stone heads, and other Egyptian-like ornaments, from the pretty Indian girls who had been waiting for us, bashful, pouting, and laughing among themselves.

On our return trip to the City of Mexico, we took the Vera Cruz Railroad from Puebla, and stopped off at San Juan Teotihuacan to see the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon. The symmetry of these artificial hills is well preserved, their juxtaposition is exactly that of the Egyptian pyramids, and the intervening quarter of a mile between them gives prolific evidence of a prehistoric city of large population. In some places excavations have revealed the frescoed walls and cemented floors of substantial dwellings, and the strangest part of it all is that, according to expert testimony, these streets and houses must have been buried by human agency and not by any force of nature. The fields around are strewn with fragments of ancient pottery, and one may pick up for himself quantities of little broken stone images.