

DON PORFIRIO DIAZ

One nice thing about these walks was that several times we saw Don Porfirio Diaz, also riding. He had a white horse and was followed by a footman only.

Once we had an opportunity to see him at very close quarters. On one of our trips to England we came back on the same boat with Sir Reginald Tower, the British Ambassador to Mexico, who was bringing the Order of the Bath to Don Porfirio from King Edward VII. Sir Reginald had a fairly short speech <sup>off</sup> by heart, but was worried about the pronunciation of his Spanish. He said he found it easier to learn this from children, so he would take us every day to his cabin where for half an hour or so he would repeat <sup>5</sup> after us until we were all satisfied. Then he would give us a lemonade and chase us around the decks. My brother Wilfred was his favourite, but we all loved him by the time we reached Veracruz.

To our intense delight he invited Mother and Father to the presentation, and there were four personal invitations for us children as well. Of course, we had to have new dresses and suits for the occasion, and were nearly bursting with excitement.

The presentation took place in the long front room of the Palacio, with its beautiful chandeliers. Don Porfirio sat in the Chair of State under the canopy, looking splendid with the great dignity with which he always carried himself. Sir Reginald walked up the long room and delivered his speech faultlessly. We were very proud indeed of him, and of our President. ~~B~~ <sup>But</sup> when Sir

Reginald walked backwards out of the long room we were even more impressed than we had been by the speech.

The Sixteenth of September is the anniversary of the Mexican Independence from Spain and on this day there was always a big parade from Chapultepec to the Palacio. Don Porfirio would lead it with his guard, the Chapultepec Cadets, wearing white breeches, high black boots, dark tunics with blue ribbons across their breasts, white gloves and helmets with white plumes. After this what we like most was the "Rurales" - one of Mexico's finest regiments. Their dress was that of the "charro", with the fine big hats, embroidered with gold or silver. The saddles were splendid. Some of them had long <sup>under</sup> ~~saddle~~-saddles of sheep-skin, reaching almost to the ground, while the most beautiful ones were inlaid heavily with gold and silver. The "Rurales" were splendid riders and their horses were spirited animals. The yells and cheers from the crowd as they passed sometimes frightened the animals but only once did I see a rider thrown.

We would go to the British Club or be invited by friends living in Madero to watch the parade from the balconies. Huge baskets of flowers would be placed behind us to throw. Most of mine went to Don Porfirio, but I always kept some for the "Rurales".

The last year before the Revolution, when Mexico had been independent for one hundred years, the celebrations reached their highest peak. Every country was asked to send a company to take part in the parade. Much to our disappointment King Edward had just died, and Britain, being in mourning, was only represented by a small company of Marines. The Austrian officers were very grand in their long blue capes and shining helmets. I threw a bunch of violets at one of them. It fell in front of his saddle and he turned and saluted in my direction. The day was made for me.

This was the last time I saw Don Porfirio. ~~All~~ one could see of him in his open carriage as he drew near the end of Madero was his white head and his hand holding his hat. The rest of him was covered in flowers.

Bellas Artes - the Palace of Fine Arts - was to have been finished for the celebrations, but even though it was not quite completed an opera company from Italy came to give performances. And for the first time my sister and I attended the opera.

My Father always said it was the oil that precipitated the Revolution and that the reforms would have come about in any case, more gradually. He went to see Don Porfirio off when he left on the "Ypiranga" for Europe. <sup>The old president</sup> He made a short speech from the platform of the observation car, saying he was leaving Mexico for its own good.

His last years were spent in Paris and Spain, where he died. His wife, Doña Carmen Rubio de Diaz, an elegant lady, lived very frugally in Paris after his death. My Uncle sometimes went to see her there. She still had numerous friends and relations here in Mexico and years after she returned.