

Vogue

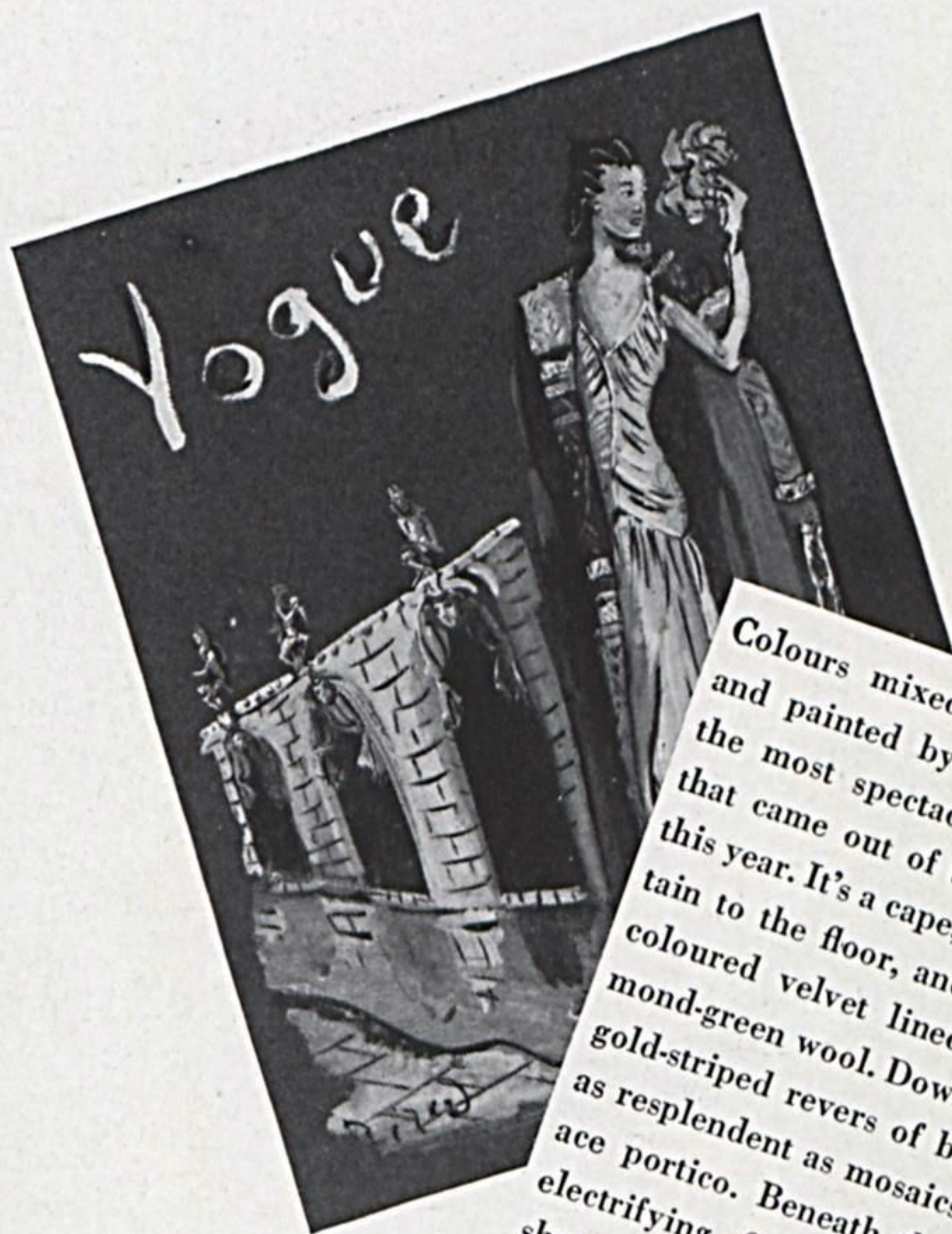
Incorporating Vanity Fair



**ADVANCE
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EDITION**

See section opposite page 176

October 1, 1937 • Brides • New York Fashions • Price 35 Cents



Colours mixed by Madame Lanvin and painted by Bérard—for one of the most spectacular evening wraps that came out of the Paris Openings this year. It's a cape, falling like a curtain to the floor, and made of brick-coloured velvet lined with pale almond-green wool. Down each side are gold-striped revers of brocaded lamé as resplendent as mosaics from a palace portico. Beneath the cape is an electrifying Scheherazade dress of sheer gold lamé, its corselet bodice closed with a zipper and shirred into ripples at the side and front seams

VOGUE

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VANITY FAIR

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is Published Twice a Month

October 1, 1937

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Elizabeth Penrose—Editor of British Vogue

Michel de Brunhoff—Editor of French Vogue

Edna Woolman Chase—Editor-in-Chief of the three Vogues



SEÑORA DIEGO RIVERA, WIFE OF THE FAMOUS MEXICAN ARTIST

TONI FRISSELL

Señoras of Mexico

by Alice-Leone Moato

NOT all Mexicans are picturesque Indians in big straw hats. There is actually a group of what, for want of a more pleasing term, must be called "society." This always seems to come as news to the average American traveller who, on entering a drawing-room in Mexico City and finding it full of smartly dressed people talking much as people talk in all the drawing-rooms of the world, is invariably overcome with astonishment. "But how sophisticated!" he is sure to cry out in amazement.

As a matter of fact, it would probably be necessary to go to Vienna to find another group resembling what is left of the old régime in Mexico. There are innumerable analogies to be drawn between the two: most marked is the fact that, in Mexico City as in Vienna, the society is a small, tightly closed corporation with every one related to every one else. It is strongly Catholic and does not countenance divorce, so that any woman who leaves one husband to marry another is in for a bad time of it, unless, of course, she is a foreigner. Most of the people have known each other since childhood and, in any event, follow the Spanish custom of addressing social equals by Christian name and the familiar "tu."

At one time, the Mexicans were as fabulously wealthy as Austrians; and they, too, have seen their fortunes wiped out by a revolution. Since they have difficulty in making ends meet, their life is scarcely what could be called one mad round of gaiety. If people didn't get married or die once in a while, things would be pretty slow, as weddings and funerals are the only two big social functions left.

In the days when they had money, everything was done on such a lavish scale that none of them have been able to adjust themselves to any simple form of entertaining. During the Centennial, for instance, Don Pablo Escandón thought nothing of building another room onto his house for one night, in order to seat fifty extra guests at dinner, and, quite as a matter of course, he bought a gold service for fifty to



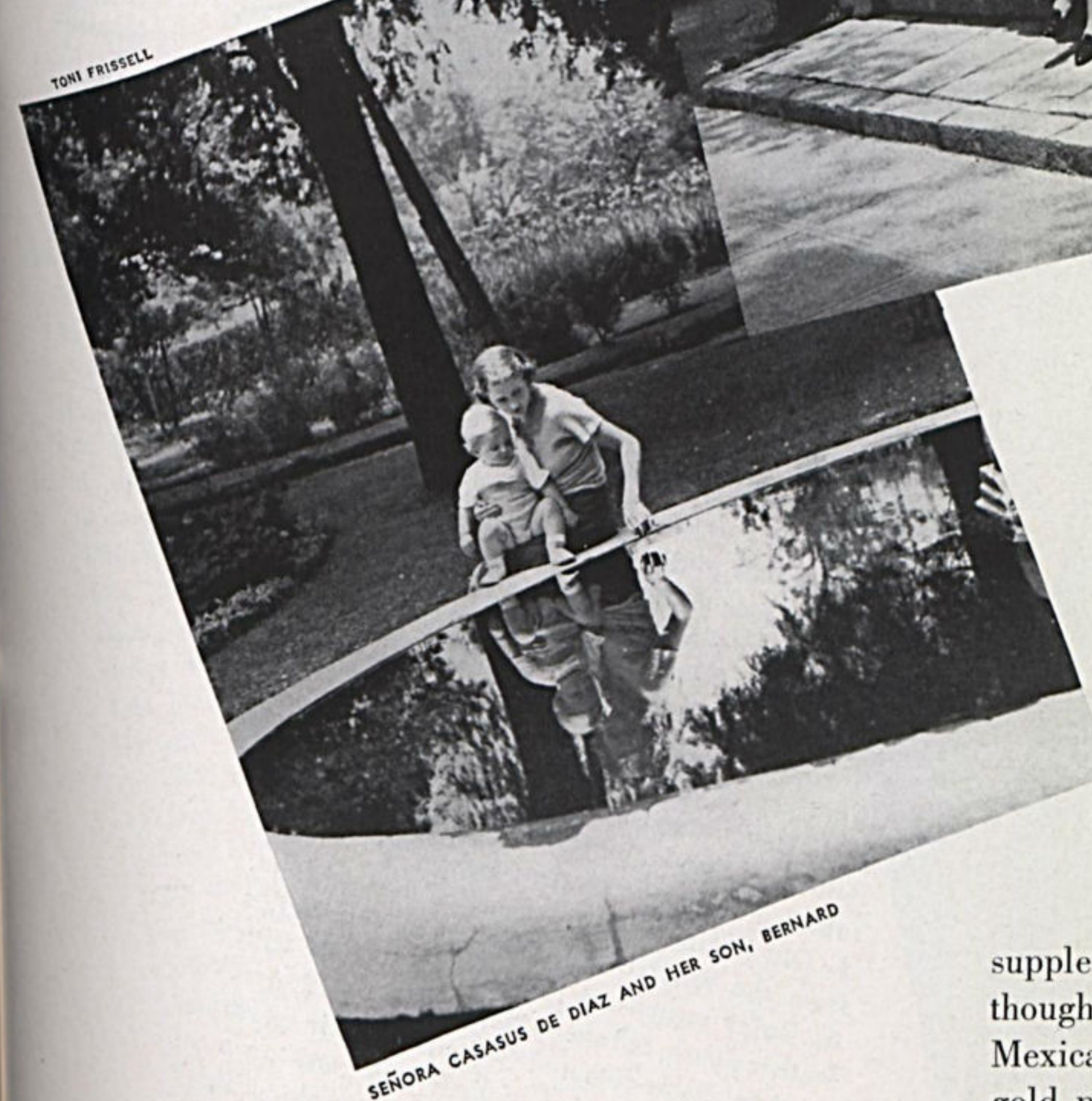
SEÑORA MIGUEL DE COVARRUBIAS



SEÑORA ESTRELLA CARROLL DE ELIZAGA



TONY FRISSELL



SEÑORA CASASUS DE DIAZ AND HER SON, BERNARD

SEÑORA ELENA PUGA DE RINCÓN GALLARDO AND HER DAUGHTER, ELENA



SEÑORITA MERCEDES MARTINEZ DEL CAMPÓ, SEÑORITA DIANA SUBERVIELLE

supplement the one for a hundred that he already had. Having once thought in those terms, there is no way of convincing the average Mexican that it is possible to give a dinner for twelve people with no gold plate, only three or four courses, and less than six footmen. So they just don't entertain.

They do give teas. Affairs that begin at seven or eight and last far into the night. The table is set in the dining-room with every variety of sandwich conceivable and all sorts of delicious Mexican dishes—*toasted tortillas* spread with alligator-pear, *enchiladas*, little cakes—which one usually eats while standing up in front of the table. Sometimes there is bridge of a very indifferent variety, and, at other times, the guests merely sit around talking or, on some special occasion, there may be a couple of guitarists brought in to play and sing.

The only other popular form of social gathering is the luncheon party, which begins any time between two and three o'clock and lasts until five, with the men of the household present. (A "hen" luncheon is unheard of.) The meal consists of at least six courses, some of which will be French, but there is always sure to be one dish of rice and eggs; a Mexican *pièce de résistance* such as *mole*, beans and cheese, with fruit pastes. But dinners are left for foreigners and diplomats to give. We can't remember ever having been to a Mexican dinner-party. Like the Spanish, Mexicans have never liked (Continued on page 166)

Opposite page: Drifting on the floating gardens of Xochimilco: Señorita Sofia Vereá, Señorita Mercedes Fernandez Castelló, Señorita Tana Corcuera

SEÑORAS OF MEXICO

(Continued from page 109) foreigners—that is to say any outsider not a Latin—and it is seldom that they open their doors to one. If you are instantly received with open arms by Mexicans, you may be sure those arms don't belong to the right people. It would not be exaggerating to say that, in the last thirty years, no more than five American women have been taken into the inner group. Even the diplomats have to make good on their own merits. An official position is no open sesame.

Somehow, Mexicans always feel constrained with an English or American person. It may be partly the language; most of the men speak perfect English, because they have gone to one of the great English Catholic public schools, such as Stonyhurst or Beaumont, but the women, although they do speak English, are not at home in that language and prefer to stick to Spanish or French. Any Mexican gathering is sure to be bilingual, especially nowadays when there are a great many people who have spent all their lives in France and just recently returned to Mexico because of financial difficulties.

They are also a little frightened by our free-and-easy ways and find it difficult to reconcile this easy manner with our passion for punctuality and social reliability. They are completely undependable socially, accepting invitations with no idea of turning up, and it bores them to be expected to give a definite answer. Since the families are so large, most households never sit down to a meal less than ten or twelve, and it doesn't make much difference whether or not one person more or less turns up. They just can't see why we take that sort of thing seriously.

The average Mexican woman of society divides her time between home and church. Her one great amusement is the bullfight, and, during the season, she will never miss a Sunday. The same boxes and seats are subscribed for year after year just as they are at the Metropolitan in New York. Mexican women go to a polo game once in a while, and a few play tennis.

The younger element has taken up golf with fervor. Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, the golf club is crowded with all the young girls and men chasing a ball madly around the course. Several of them have turned out to be top-notch players, but even the dubs love the game and never miss an opportunity to play. This enthusiasm may be due partly to the fact that it is the only chance that girls have of going out unchaperoned. For some reason, a golf course is considered a safe place for a girl to be alone with a man.

There is no other time, however, when a girl is not carefully chaperoned. Mamas still arrive at a party with their daughters and sit around the room keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings, as well as putting a crimp in them. (The mother still remains the most powerful force in most families. We have heard old boys of sixty say they couldn't go to such and such a place or



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SEÑORAS OF MEXICO

see such and such a person because "mi mamá" would not like it!) Recently, things have become so "modern" that, at small parties in private houses, the mother will disappear after having greeted the guests, but only if there are chaperons present in the form of a married or engaged couple or a brother and sister. Such a thing as a twosome anywhere but on the golf links is completely unheard of.

It is only lately that it has been considered proper for a young girl of good family to go out on the street alone. Now, she may drive her own car, or, if she hasn't one, take taxis or buses and go along without a duenna. Even married women seldom go to night-clubs, and this last winter was the first time we ever saw a single girl in one. Of course, it was in a large party with plenty of uncles and aunts present, but nevertheless, it seemed very daring. Only five or six girls of what might be termed the "reigning families" have ventured to do this, and that is only because two years ago, Carmen Corcuera, back in Mexico from Paris where she has spent most of her life, announced that she went to night-clubs abroad and saw no reason why she should not do so in Mexico. There were many horrified gasps, much ohing and ahing, but she got away with it, and her lead is now being timidly followed by her friends.

Most of the girls get engaged when they are quite young, but that doesn't mean that they get married right away. Engagements go on for years. Being engaged in no way curtails a man's freedom; he sees his fiancée at her parents' house or at young people's parties, but he goes out on the town on his own. When he grows tired of sowing wild oats or has none left to sow, things begin to grow serious, and the wedding-day is set. Everybody turns out for the big event—old folk who probably haven't seen the light of day since the last wedding or funeral come out of their houses, the women splendid in purple velvet and aigrettes, the men buttoned into ancient Prince Alberts. Every last cousin, uncle, aunt, and great-grandmother is present, and most of them go up the aisle with the bride and groom in French fashion.

This is the one opportunity one has to see all of Mexican society out at once. But every year there are fewer people, and there never seem to be any new faces. The very smart group is closing in more and more and growing smaller and smaller. At present, it is headed by five women: Countess Luis de Subervielle, née Mier; Madame Carlos Vereia, née Corcuera; Madame Enrique Corcuera, née García Pimentel; Madame Pedro Corcuera, née Mier; Madame Rafael Bernal, née García Pimentel.

Thirty years ago, this same society was ruled with an iron hand by only three ladies: Doña Carmelita de Romero Rubio de Diaz, wife of the President (aunt of "Chato" Elizaga, who was a popular beau in Paris for years and made many American friends); Doña Catalina Cuevas de Escandón, wife of Don Pablo Escandón, at one time Ambassador to the Court of Saint James's, and the (Continued on page 168)

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SEÑORAS OF MEXICO

(Continued from page 167) head of a family which has always stood for the top in birth, wealth, and culture. And the Duchess of Regla. Though these three are still alive, naturally they are no longer active rulers in society, since they are all well advanced in years and remain at home.

The Duchess of Regla's son, Don Carlos Rincón Gallardo, Marqués de Guadalupe, Conde de Regla, Marqués de Villahermosa de Alfaro, stands out as the *grand seigneur* of Mexico. Over sixty, he is still an enthusiastic horseman and is the head of the Charro Association (once the President's guard), which once in a while gives *jaripeos* with Don Carlos leading in all the roping and tailing of bulls and other feats. When he rides out in the morning, he usually wears the Charro uniform of tight leather trousers, short jacket, and enormous hat and is such a handsome sight that he is invariably followed by a band of tourists snapping pictures.

Besides those already mentioned, the *crème de la crème* is made up of people bearing the following names: Garcia Pimentel, Riba y Cervantes, Romero de Terreros, who have the title of Marqués de San Francisco (these titles are all Spanish), Campero, with the title of Marqués del Apartado, the Duke of Villamil, Limantour, Serrano, Landa, Cuevas, Fernandez del Castillo, Martinez del Rio (Dolores del Rio's first husband was a member of this family), Redo, Fernandez del Valle, Alcázar, Elguero, Algara, Amor, de la Torre, Fernandez Castelló, Osio, Yturbe, Yturbide (the head of this family is not, as appeared in a recent article on Mexico, a descendant of the Emperor of that name. The Emperor had no children).

A great many Mexicans have married abroad. Ordinarily, they marry either in France or Spain, although Bichette Amor

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married Count Celani, while her sister is Princess Poniatowski. Pepe Landa is the husband of Virginia Willys, Luz Landa is Mrs. William Leslie, Piedita Yturbe married Prince Max Egon Hohenlohe-Langenbourg, and Rose Covarrubias, who will be remembered over here as the beautiful Madame Naño, is now Madame Mavrocordat.

In Spain, Don Pablo Escandón's sister married the Duke of Montellanos (his brother was the Marqués de Villa Vieja); Madame Vereá's eldest daughter is the wife of Count Teba, who is the son of the Duchess of Santoña and a nephew of the Duke of Alba; Maria Campero became the Duchess of Huete; and Francisco Yturbe married the niece of the Duchess of Durcal. In France, Mexicans have married into the Polignac family; and Guerrieff de Launay, Burin des Boziers, d'Erlanger, Subervielle, Villeneuve are a few of the other French families that have become related to Mexicans by marriage.

These connections probably account for the fact that, alone of all Central and South Americans, the Mexicans have been taken into French society. Instead of belonging to the café and night-club groups, they have actually become a part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and one meets Yturbes, Amors, Limantours, Corcueras, Landas, and Beisteguis in all the French homes.

There was a time when most Mexicans of wealth lived in Paris, but lately they have had to return to Mexico to salvage what was left of their fortunes. The big ranches where they used to give week-end parties of thirty and forty guests have, with one or two exceptions, been confiscated by the government, and, with these sources of revenue gone, life abroad has become financially impossible. Under the circumstances, it isn't surprising that there is no love lost between members (Continued on page 170)

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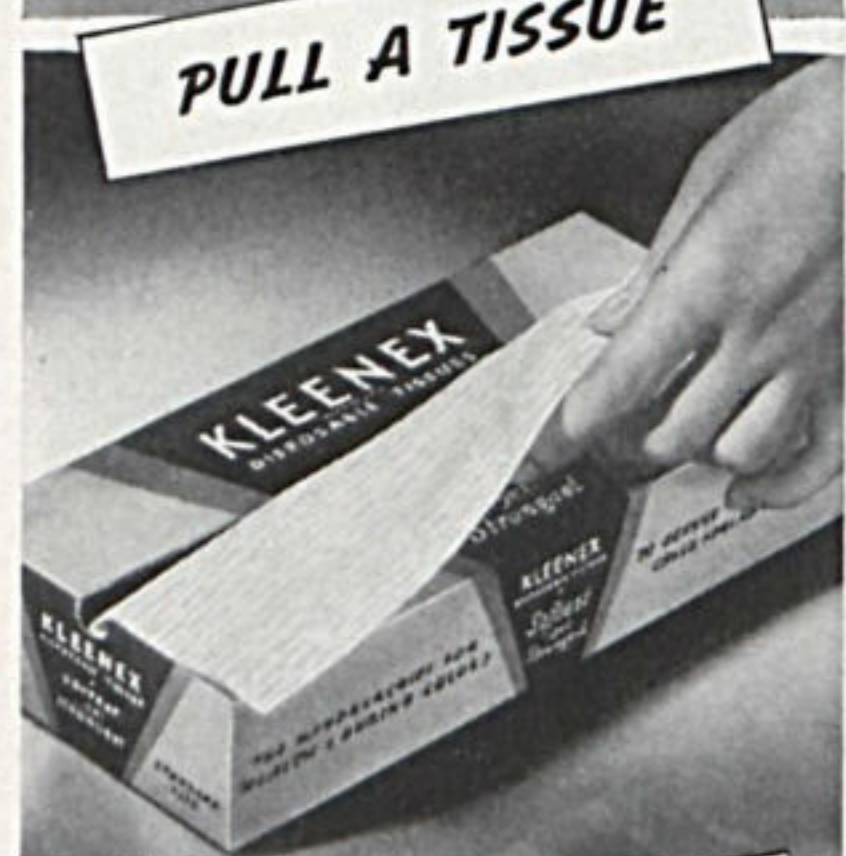
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SEÑORAS OF MEXICO

(Continued from page 169) of the old régime and those of the new. One of our ambassadors did have the bright idea of inviting political notables and members of society to the same dinner-party. No one spoke to any one else, and all the social guests departed immediately after dinner, never to set foot in the embassy again as long as that ambassador was there.

By the same token, there isn't much of what one might call cosy companionship between society and the artistic element headed by the Riveras and the Covarrubias. Their studios, however, are the Mecca of foreign visitors, who all want to meet the great mural painter and see his beautiful wife, Frieda, in the native costumes she affects. (She can be seen wearing Indian dress in the photograph on page 106.) Miguel Covarrubias, Vogue's distinguished Mexican artist, and his wife spend only a few months of the year in Mexico, where Señora Covarrubias also takes to native dress for wear at home. (She is shown on page 107 in the garden of her house in an adaptation of the Tehuantepec costume.)

But the day may yet come when these various factions will become just one great, happy family. Economic necessity has already brought about a great many changes in the Mexican May-fair. The men have had to go to work and, since many of them were not trained to any job, have taken what they could. In the old days, it would have been unheard of for a lady to be seen speaking to a bull-fighter, yet, to-day, Chucho Solorzano, one of Mexico's most popular matadors, is a cousin of the Yturbides, and one of the Cervantes is a professional pelota player. It is now probably only a question of time until the whole society becomes modernized or ceases to exist, but, at the moment, it is still something belonging to another age. A 1910 conversation-piece.

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