

with masses of the beautiful pale blue convolvulus called poetically by the Mexicans *la manta de Maria*. High above the abode walls rose the tall pink tower of the village church, with its green-tiled cupola and ponderous bells.

The Mexicans are the most devout and fervent Catholics it has been my lot to meet, and I looked forward to Christmas to see some quaint and interesting religious customs. Nor was I disappointed. On Christmas eve, then, having seen that the doors were securely barricaded, we set forth shortly before midnight for the church. Myriads of stars spangled the frosty sky, of great size and brilliancy, and low down on the horizon was shadowed the dark outline of the mountains of the San Pedro range. The streets, usually silent and deserted after dark, were thronged with people hurrying to the midnight Mass and when we reached the church it was already full. According to the Spanish and Mexican custom the main body of the building was in soft shadowy darkness, all the light being concentrated on the high altar, which was radiant with countless tapers. The light shone reflected on the throng of swarthy faces turned eagerly towards it, with a weird Rembrandtesque effect which would have fascinated Mr. Mortimer Menpes. It was a strange scene to our eyes.

From all parts of the lonely Sierras these pious peasants had flocked in to hear their Christmas Mass; wild looking herdsmen and shepherds, many of marked Indian type, wrapped about in many-colored zarapes, with dusty sandalled feet, and fringed leggings of dressed deer skins. All were kneeling on the bare stone floor, or on the broad brims of their highcrowned charros. Presently the sacristan came in bearing an image of the Divine Infant, which he laid on the altar before the tabernacle. Then, precisely at the stroke of midnight, the venerable parish priest appeared vested in white and gold, and Mass began. When it was concluded, the priest took the Infant in his arms and held it for a moment for the congregation to see.

He then descended the sanctuary steps and advanced down the centre of the church, the people falling back on each side to make way for him as he presented the Nino de Dios to each one in turn. All crowded round; young men and maidens; old men and children; grayhair-