



## Chiapa Chocolate

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GAGE, THE DOMINICAN, A GREAT ADMIRER OF Chocolate, a man who combated with all his energy the objections which medical men of the seventeenth century made to its use, derived its name from *atte*, the Mexican word for “water,” and the sound it makes when poured out—*choco*, *choco*, *choco*, *choco*!

Oh, Professor Max Müller! what do you say to this? Whatever the derivation of the name may be, the composition of the beverage is well known. Cacao, sugar, long-pepper, vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, almonds, mace, anise-seed, are the main constituents, and the cake-chocolate used in Britain is believed to be made of about one-half genuine cacao, the remainder of flour or Castile soap.

We are not going any further into the mysteries of its composition, which may be ascertained from any encyclopedia, for our business is with a circumstance in connection with its history, probably known to few.

And first for our authority—the aforementioned Dominican. Thomas Gage was born of a good family in England; his elder brother was Governor of Oxford in 1645, when King Charles retreated thither during the Great Rebellion. Whilst still young, Thomas had been sent to Spain for education, and had entered the Dominican order, and having been, like so many Spanish ecclesiastics, fired with missionary zeal, he embarked at Cadiz for Vera Cruz, whence he betook himself to Mexico, near

which town he made a retreat, previous to devoting himself to a life of toil in the Philippines.

However, the accounts he received of these islands were so discouraging, and the monastic life in Mexico was so inviting, that he postponed his expedition indefinitely. But Gage had no intention of spending his life in ease: he hurried over the different districts of Mexico and Guatemala, making himself acquainted with the languages spoken wherever he went, and he labored indefatigably as priest to several parishes of great extent.

Gage’s account of the cultivation of the cacao and the manufacture of chocolate is interesting, his treatise on its medical properties—conceived in the taste and spirit of his day—curious, and his personal narrative, lively and amusing.

One little statement must not be passed over. Chocolate, it seems, is useful as a cosmetic; Creole ladies eat it to deepen their skin tint, just on the same principle, observes Gage, as English ladies devour whitewash from the walls, to clarify their complexion.

Chiapa was a central point for Gage’s labors during a considerable period. At that time it was a small cathedral town, containing 400 Spanish families, and 100 Mexican houses in a faubourg by itself.

The cathedral served as parish church to the inhabitants: one Dominican and one Franciscan monastery, besides a poverty-stricken nunnery, supplied the religious requirements of the

diocesan city. No Jesuits there! quoth Gage, with a little rancor. Those good men seldom leave rich and opulent towns; and when you learn the fact that there are no Jesuits at Chiapa, you may draw the immediate inference that the town is poor, and the inhabitants not liberally disposed.

Liberally disposed! The high and stately creole Doms, who claimed descent from half the noble families of Spain; the grand representatives of the De Solis, Cortez, De Velasco, De Toledo, De Zerna, De Mendoza, who lived by cattle-jobbing and by pasturing droves of mules on their farms, and who gave themselves the airs of dukes, and were as ignorant and not so well-behaved as the donkeys they reared; who ate a dinner of salt and kidney-beans in five minutes, and spent an hour at their doors picking their teeth, wiping their mustaches, and boasting of the fricasees and fricandoes they had been tasting—these men liberally disposed!

They contributed nothing to the treasury of the Church, but gave the clergy considerable trouble. These Creoles particularly disliked and resented any allusion to their duty of almsgiving, and a request for charity was by them regarded as a personal affront.

Gage was soon intimate with the Bishop, Dom Bernard de Salazar, a very worthy prelate, perhaps a little wee bit too fond of the good things of this present life, but otherwise most exemplary, very energetic, and as bold as a saint in reforming abuses which had crept into the Church.

Talk of abuses, and you may be sure that woman is at the bottom of them! A certain Czar, whenever he heard of a misfortune, at once asked, “Who was she?” knowing that some woman had originated it. The same view may perhaps be taken of abuses and corruptions in the Church.

Dom Bernard de Salazar had the misfortune to live in a perpetual state of contest with the ladies of his flock, and the subject of dispute was chocolate. It was a brave struggle—bravely fought on both sides.

The prelate fulminated all the censures at his disposal in his ecclesiastical armory; the ladies, on their side, made use of all the devices and intrigues stored in their little heads, and gained the day—of course.

Now the great subject of altercation was as follows. The ladies of Chiapa were so addicted

to the use of chocolate, that they would neither hear low mass, much less high mass, or a sermon, without drinking cups of steaming chocolate, and eating preserves, brought in on trays, by servants, during the performance of divine service; so that the voice of the preacher, or the chant of the priest, was drowned in the continual clatter of caps and clink of spoons; besides, the floor, after service, was strewn with bon-bon papers, and stained with splashes of the spilled beverage.

How could that be devotion which was broken in upon by the tray of delicacies! How could a preacher warm with his subject whilst his audience were passing to each other sponge-cake and cracknels!

Bishop Salazar’s predecessor had seen this abuse grow to a head without attempting to correct it, believing such a task to be hopeless. The new prelate was of better metal. He commenced by recommending his clergy, in their private ministrations, to urge its abandonment. The priests entreated in vain. “Very well,” said the Bishop, “then I shall preach about it.” And so he did. At first his discourse was tender and persuasive, but his voice was drowned in the clicker of cups and saucers. Then he waxed indignant. “What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you?” The ladies looked up at the pulpit with unimpassioned eyes, while sipping their chocolate, then wiped their lips, and put out their hands for some comfits.

The bishop’s voice thrilled shriller and louder—he looked like an Apostle in his godly indignation. Crash!—down went a tray at the cathedral door, and every one looked round to see whose cups were broken.

“What was the subject of the sermon?” asked masters of their apprentices every Sunday for the next month, and the ready answer came, “Oh! chocolate again!”

After a course on the guilt of church desecration, the Bishop found that the ladies were only confirmed in their evil habits.

Reluctantly, the Bishop had recourse to the only method open to him, an excommunication, which was accordingly affixed to the cathedral gates. By this he decreed that all persons showing willful disobedience to his injunctions, by drinking

or eating during the celebration of divine service, whether of mass (high or low), litanies, benediction, or vespers, should be ipso-facto excommunicate, be deprived of participation in the sacraments of the Church, and should be denied the rite of burial, if dying in a state of impenitence. This was felt to be a severe stroke, and the ladies sent a deputation to Gage and the Prior of the Dominican monastery of St. James, entreating them to use their utmost endeavors to bring about a reconciliation, and effect a compromise, a compromise which was to consist in Monsignor's revoking his interdict, and in their—continuing to drink chocolate.

Gage and the Prior undertook the delicate office, and sought the Bishop.

Salazar received them with dignity, and listened calmly to their entreaties. They urged that this was an established custom, that ladies required humoring, that they were obstinate—the prelate nodded his head—that their digestions were delicate, and required that they should continually be imbibing nourishment; that they had taken a violent prejudice against him, which could only be overcome by his yielding to their whims; that if he persisted, seditions would arise which would endanger the cause of true religion; and, finally, the prelate's life was menaced in a way rather hinted at than expressed.

"Enough, my sons!" said the Bishop, with composure; "the souls under my jurisdiction must be in a perilous condition when they have forgotten that there must be obedience in little matters as well as in great. Whether I am assaulting an established custom, or a new abuse, matters little. It is a bad habit; it is sapping the foundations of reverence and morality. God's house was built for worship, and for that alone. My children must come to His temple either to learn or to pray. Learn they will not, for they have forgotten how to pray: prayer they are unused to, for the highest act of adoration the Church can offer, is only regarded by them as an opportunity for the gratification of their appetites. You recommend me to yield to their vagaries. A strange shepherd would he be, who let his sheep lead him; a wondrous captain, who was dictated to by his soldiers! As for the cause of true religion being endangered, I judge differently. Religion is endangered; but it is by children's disobedience

to their spiritual legislators, and by their own perversity. I am sorry for you, my sons, that you should have undertaken a fruitless office; but you may believe me, that nothing shall induce me to swerve from the course which I deem advisable. My personal safety, you hint, is endangered: my life, I answer, is in my Master's hands, and I value it but as it may advance His glory."

When the ladies heard that their request had been refused, they treated the excommunication with the greatest contempt, scoffing at it publicly, and imbibing chocolate in church, "on principle," more than ever; "Just," says Gage, "drinking in church as a fish drinks in water."

Some of the canons and priests were then stationed at the cathedral doors to stop the ingress of the servants with cups and chocolate-pots. They had received injunctions to remove the drinking and eating vessels, and suffer the servants to come empty-handed to church. A violent struggle ensued in the porch, and all the ladies within rushed in a body to the doors, to assist their domestics. The poor clerks were utterly routed and thrown in confusion down the steps, whilst, with that odious well-known clink, clink, the trays came in as before.

Another move was requisite, and, on the following Sunday, when the ladies came to church, they found a band of soldiers drawn up outside, ready to barricade the way against any inroad of chocolate; a stern determination was depicted on the faces of the military—that if cups and saucers did enter the sacred edifice, it should be over their corpses.

The foremost damsels halted, the matrons stood still, the crowd thickened, but not one of the pretty angels would set foot within the cathedral precincts: a busy whisper circulated, then a hush ensued, and with one accord the ladies trooped off to the monastery churches, and there was no congregation that day at the Minster.

The brethren of S. Dominic and of S. Francis were nothing loath to see their chapels crowded with all the rank and fashion of Chiapa; for, with the ladies came money-offerings, and they blinked at the chocolate cups for—a consideration. This was allowed to continue a few Sundays only:—our friend the bishop was not going to be shelved thus,

and a new manifesto appeared, inhibiting the friars from admitting parishioners to their chapels, and ordering the latter to frequent their cathedral.

The regulars were forced to obey; not so the ladies—they would go when they pleased, quotha! and for a month and more, not one of them went to church at all. The prelate was in sore trouble: he hoped that his froward charge would eventually return to the path of duty, but he hoped on from Sunday to Sunday in vain.

Would that the story ended, as stories of strife and bitterness always should end; so that we might tell how the ladies yielded at length, how that rejoicings were held and a general reconciliation effected:—but the historian may not pervert facts, to suit his or his readers' gratification.

On Saturday evening the old bishop was more than usually anxious; he paced up and down his library, meditating on the sermon he purposed preaching on the following morning—a fruitless task, for he knew that no one would be there but a few poor Mexicans. Sick at heart, he all but wished that he had yielded for peace-sake, but conscience told him that such a course would have been wrong; and the great feature in Salazar's character was his rigid sense of duty. He leaned on his elbows and looked out of a window which opened on a lane between the palace and the cathedral.

"Silly boy!" muttered the prelate. "Luis is always prattling with that girl. I thought better of the fair sex till of late." He spoke these words as his eyes caught his page, chattering at the door, with a dark-eyed Creole servant-maid of the De Solis family. Presently the bishop clapped his hands, and a domestic entered. "Send Luis to me."

When the page came up, the old man greeted him with a half-smile.

"Well, my son, I wish my chocolate to be brought me; I could not think of breaking off that long tête-à-tête with Dolores, but this is past the proper time."

"Your Holiness will pardon me," said the lad; "Dolores brought you a present from the Donna de Solis; the lady sends her humble respects to your Holiness, and requests your acceptance of a large packet of very beautiful chocolate."

"I am much obliged to her," said the bishop; "did you express to the maiden my thanks?" Luis bowed.

"Then, child, you may prepare me a cup of this chocolate, and bring it me at once."

"The Donna de Solis' chocolate?"

"Yes, my son, yes!"

When the boy had left the room, the old man clasped his hands with an expression of thankfulness.

"They are going to yield! This is a sign that they are desiring reconciliation."

Next day the cathedral was thronged with ladies. The service proceeded as usual, but the bishop was not present.

"How is the Bishop?" was whispered from one lady to another, with conscious glances; till the query reached the ears of one of the canons who was at the door.

"His Holiness is very ill," he answered. "He has retired to the monastery of S. James."

"What is the matter with him?"

"He is suffering from severe pains, internally."

"Has he seen a doctor?"

"Physicians have been sent for."

For eight days the good old prelate lingered in great suffering.

"Tell me," he asked very feebly; "tell me truly, what is my complaint?"

"Your Holiness has been poisoned," replied the physician.

The Bishop turned his face to the wall. Some one whispered that he was dead, when he had been thus for some while. The dying man turned his face round, and said:

"Hush! I am praying for my poor sheep! May God pardon them." Then, after a pause: "I forgive them for having caused my death, most heartily. Poor sheep!"

And he died.

Since then there has been a proverb prevalent in Mexico: "Beware of tasting Chiapa chocolate."

Gage, the Dominican, did not remain long in Chiapa after the death of his patron: he seldom touched chocolate in that town unless quite certain of the friendship of those who offered it to him; and when he did leave, it was from fear of a fate like the Bishop's—he having incurred the anger of some of the ladies.

The cathedral presented the same scene as before; the prelate had labored in vain, and chocolate was copiously drunk at his funeral. ☼