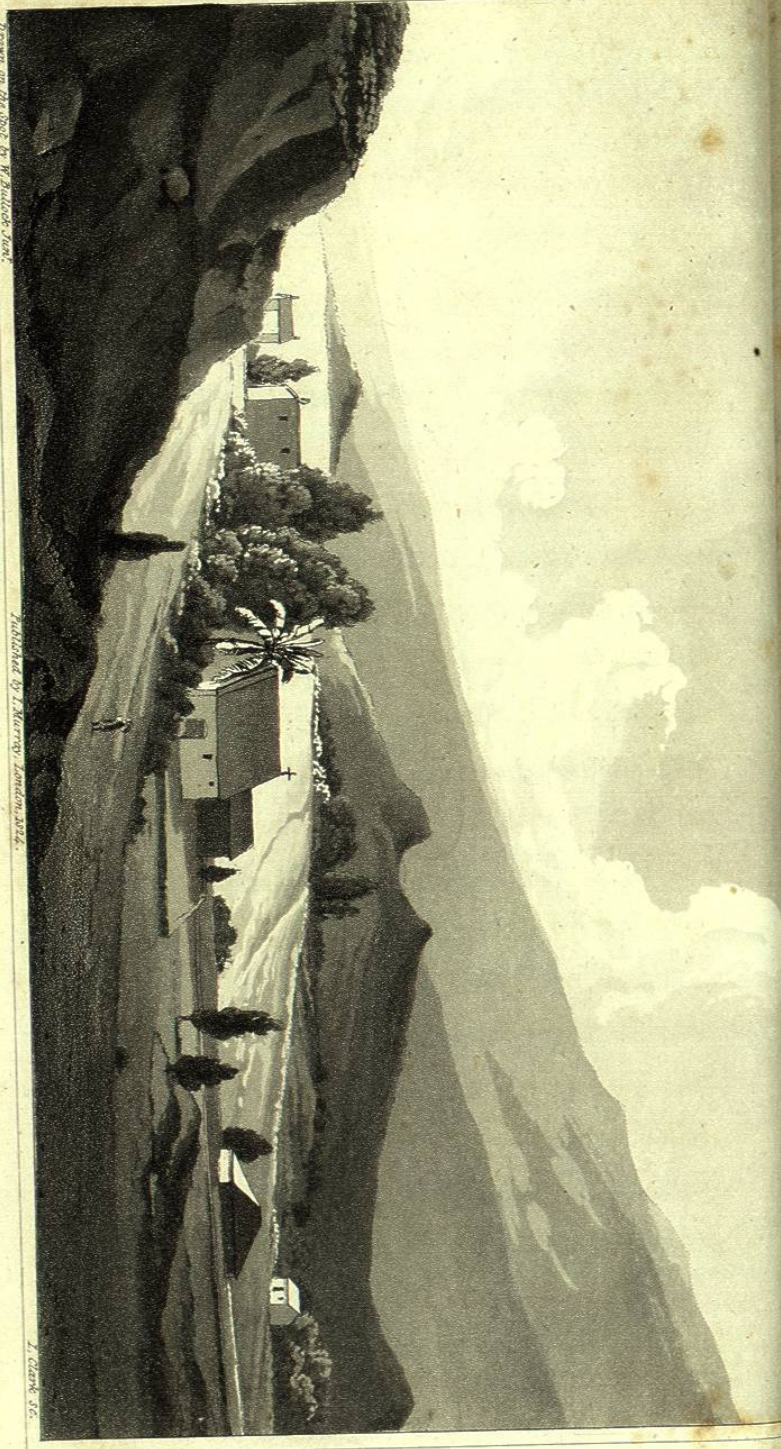


CHAPTER IV.

Xalapa, formerly the Mart of New Spain.—High Mass.—
Religious Procession.—Washing.

WE were driven to the principal inn, and, as usual, found only empty rooms for our accommodation; a table was, however, supplied, and benches for our beds. We were served with a good Spanish dinner, and felt as much at home as our situation would permit.

Mr. Vanderies having brought a letter of introduction to a widow lady here, she consented to receive us into her family, which, preferring to a posada, we took advantage of the opportunity, and experienced the greatest civility and attention. Our apartments were airy and pleasant, on the ground floor, looking into the square court



Drawn on the spot by W. Bullock's son.

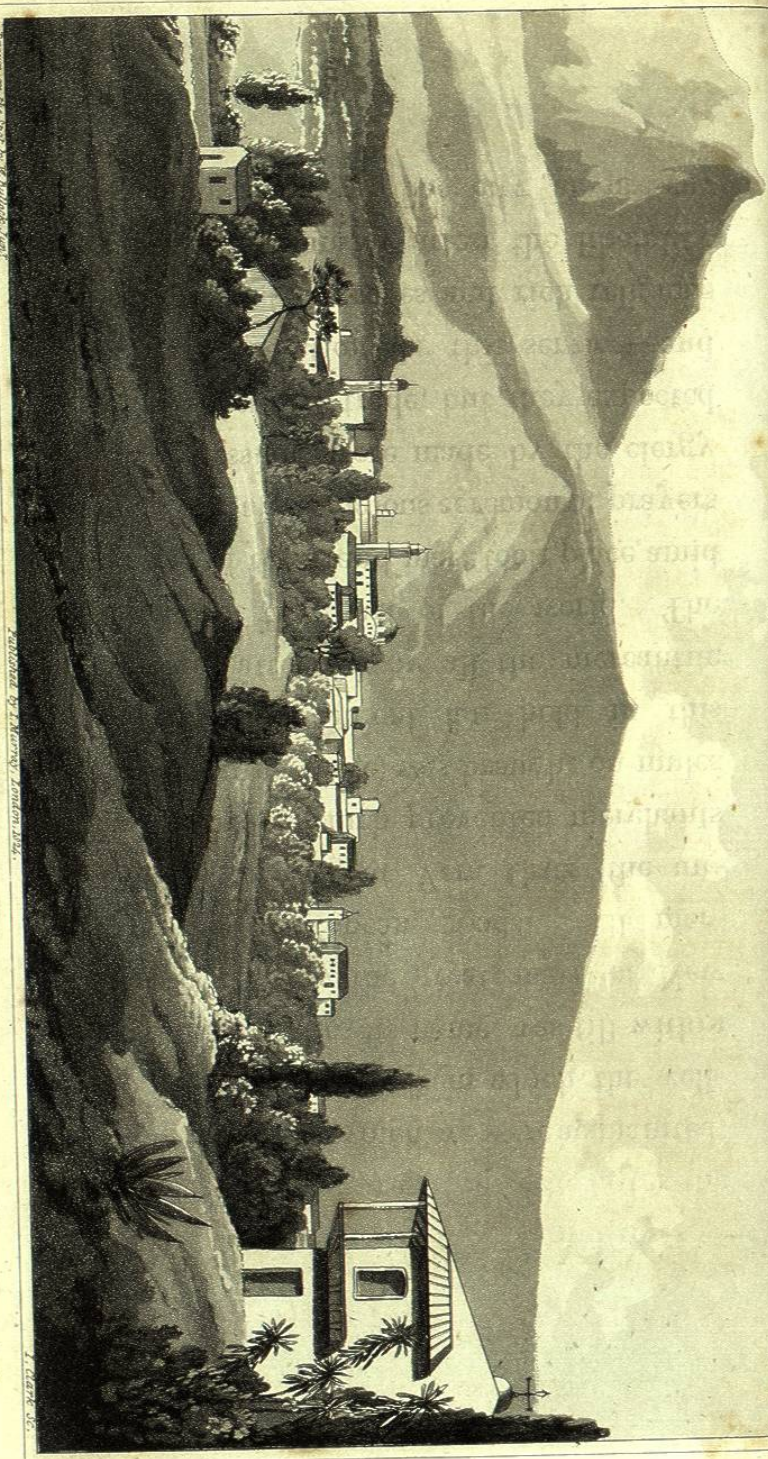
Published by J. Murray, London, 1824.

J. Clark Sc.

EAST SIDE OF XALAPA.

stocked with blooming flowers and roses as fine as those of Europe, and the latter the only plants with which we were acquainted.

Xalapa or Jalapa, from which the well-known drug takes its name, was till within the last century the great mart of New Spain for European goods. All merchandise arriving at Vera Cruz (the unhealthiness of which prevented merchants from stopping there) was brought on mules to the great annual fair held in this city, and attended by all the mercantile interests of this part of the world. The opening of the grand mart took place amid much form and religious ceremony; prayers and processions were made by the clergy for the success of trade, but they expected some remuneration for this service—and the numerous churches and rich religious establishments amply attest the liberality of the merchants. The city at present



WEST SIDE OF XALAPA, WITH THE MOUNTAIN FEROTTE.

contains 13000 inhabitants; but at the time of the fair it was crowded to excess. It is probably decreasing in population, though still a very handsome place. It has many two-storied houses, built after the old Spanish manner, forming a square, and enclosing a court planted with trees and flowers, and having a well or fountain. The roofs are tiled, and not flat as in Vera Cruz, yet projecting from the sides, sheltering the house from the sun in hot weather, and keeping it dry in the rainy season. Many are furnished with glass windows, and most have an ornamental grating in front of those on the ground floor, which admits a free circulation of air—for the climate is so delightful as seldom to require their being closed. There are still eight churches of a mixed style of architecture; they are kept clean—and the interiors highly decorated with carving, gild-

ing, and painting. The high altar of the Cathedral is of silver, and the walls are covered with gilt ornaments. There are eleven other altars; and the service is performed in an orderly and impressive manner. I attended high mass on Sunday, which was very splendid: all the females above the very lowest class wear black, and are dressed alike, with a handsome lace veil over the head, but which is seldom worn over the face; in this respect retaining less of the manner of the mother country than is still to be found in Antwerp and in the Netherlands, although so long a period has elapsed since these countries were subject to Spain. A great proportion of the congregation were Indians, who had come to market, and it was really a pleasing sight to observe with what attention and devotion this simple and innocent people,

the descendants of cannibal ancestors, performed their acknowledgements to their Creator. All the convents and religious houses, except one, are now closed, and will probably remain so. We met yesterday, it being Lent, a religious procession, carrying a figure of Christ bearing his cross. The streets through which it passed had been swept, watered, and strewed with orange leaves and flowers; and many of the houses had small crosses, decorated with flowers and drapery, placed over the doors.

The shops and warehouses do not make a showy appearance, as nothing is exposed in the windows. The barbers' shops, however, form an exception: they are very numerous, and have a very respectable exterior. Mambrino's helmet is sported as a sign over their doors. All articles of European manufactory are dear, being

three or four hundred per cent. above the cost price, and generally of the worst kind. This is probably owing to the policy of Old Spain in compelling the province to receive all supplies from the mother country.

Xalapa is justly celebrated for the excellency of its washing: I never saw linen look so well; many of the inhabitants of Vera Cruz send hither to have their washing done. Near one of the entrances is a fountain of the purest water supplying a public washhouse, called Techacupa, in which 144 persons can be employed at the same time. Each washerwoman is supplied with a constant stream, conveyed by pipes to a stone vessel in which the linen is soaked. Added to this is a flat stone on which they wash, and this constitutes the whole apparatus. The operation is performed with cold water and

soap, and the linen is rubbed by the hand as in England. I observed that the women had a cut lemon with which they sometimes rubbed the clothes.

Of the people I can give no very satisfactory account. They are patterns of politeness, full of compliments, and profess that their houses are at your service, but seldom ask you in. Of the ladies strangers see but little: they seldom appear in the streets, and there they are in the same habits as at church; but in their houses they are gay, sprightly, and affable. They have a character for intrigue; I can only say, if it be deserved, that it never came under my observation. Those whom I met seemed to maintain a cheerful unembarrassed demeanour, and I never noticed the least approach to impropriety.

Both men and women in general are very ill-informed with respect to the state

of Europe. They believe the continent to be under the dominion of Spain; that England, France, Italy, Holland, Germany, &c. are only so many paltry states or provinces to which the king of Spain appoints governors, who superintend the manufactories, &c. for the benefit of that country. I found it dangerous to contradict this flatly. One lady asked me where a muslin dress had been made? "in England," "and how came it here?" "probably through Spain," I replied; "well then, what is England but the workshop of Spain?" Many think that the riches of Spain enable the others, and as they call them, the poorer parts of Europe, to live.

Of the wars in Europe they know as little as of its general state; and even the name of Wellington seemed scarcely known in Xalapa, though they had heard indeed, of the buccaneers, and spoke of our illus-

trious Drake, and Sir Walter Raleigh, as pirates. In this comfortable degree of ignorance, it is not strange that they viewed with surprise my walking-stick gun, my portable chair and table, my camera lucida, and other little specimens of English ingenuity. Nothing gave them more pleasure than a volume of the plates of Ackerman's Fashions, which I had carried out; it was in prodigious request, and they looked with astonishment at some prints of the public buildings of London. But their wonder was greatly augmented when they were informed of the purposes for which they had been built: we heard them exclaim in amazement to each other, "and yet these people are not Christians," "what a pity they are not Christians!" But the day, I hope, has arrived, when Spanish policy can no longer keep its American subjects in such darkness, and when the

obscuration of the Mexicans will vanish. On the other hand, Europe has much to learn respecting America. Even the very names of some of the finest cities of the Mexicans are almost unknown to her; and therefore we ought to pause before we laugh at the ignorance of the American Spaniard. How very few of the inhabitants of Great Britain have heard of Puebla or Guatamala, yet they are superb, populous, and wealthy cities; and it is from New Spain that Europeans principally draw the coin which hourly passes through their hands, and so much contributes to the ease and elegance of life.

We were introduced to several respectable families in Xalapa, and spent many pleasant evenings with them: lively chat, music, and dancing, filled up a few hours, that might otherwise have passed heavily. On

the first evening of my being in their society, I observed a smoke rising above the head of a lady who was playing on the piano; and on going round to ascertain the cause, I found that, notwithstanding her engagement at the instrument, she did not forego her segar, but was puffing the fumes away in volumes from mouth and nostrils. I never saw females of any country on such good terms with each other; expressing the greatest delight in meeting, and embracing most affectionately at parting. The lady and gentleman of the mansion are always reminding you that the house and all that it contains are at your disposal, and if you express your admiration of any thing that belongs to them, they immediately assure you it is at your service. These are, it need hardly be repeated, mere words

of course, hyperbolical compliments, which almost go beyond the old Spanish salutation: "May you live a thousand years."

I accepted an invitation from Mr. Hall, an English resident of Vera Cruz, to see a new establishment for the distillation of brandy. It was nearly five miles in the country, and we found a party of about twenty persons invited to a rural dinner and a day's amusement. We were shown the process of distillation, which was very simple, and promised amply to repay the proprietor. The juice of the sugar-cane, fermented in large open bags made of skins of oxen, was distilled in a slight copper alembic covered with wood, and a plentiful supply of spirit obtained, which much resembled Irish potsheen whiskey. The visitors consisted of nearly an equal number of ladies and gentlemen, mostly young persons, and several of them offi-

cers in the army. A plentiful repast was served up in the Spanish style, in a house built of sticks. Of the greater portion of the dishes, I could not learn the component parts; but one striking feature was a pig three months old roasted whole, and stuffed with walnuts, which I thought an excellent dish, and well cooked. There was a great want of knives, as only one was allowed to each table; and I was told this was common in Spanish America. Before dinner was over a species of fun, something like what is practised during the carnival at Rome, commenced. A gentleman, rolling a piece of bread between his fingers to the size of a pea, would, with great dexterity and privacy, fling it in the face of some one employed in eating; the party struck generally had his suspicions of the quarter from whence it came, and would watch his opportunity of returning

the compliment. The more surprize was excited the more this sort of hostility was practised, till the battle became general, and at last whole cakes were expended in this species of sport. The fair part of our company retired to a plain before the house, and were followed by the gentlemen, the game still continuing. Other missiles were then sought for, and when every thing else had been exhausted, what had been left by a number of mules, that had been feeding by, was sent about in all directions by the combatants.

To this succeeded dancing to a guitar, strummed by a pretty little girl about twelve years old, and some of the ladies accompanied with their voices the movements of their feet. Whilst this amusement was going on, a fine young bull was brought and tied by a long cord to the stump of a tree: the beautiful little ani-

mal seemed for a while to enjoy the noisy sport as much as any of the company, till he had received several very marked insults, when he lost his temper, and with considerable violence ran at an Indian, against whom he had already shown marks of hostility. Several persons now joined in the attempt to work him up to the highest point of irritation; the young men advanced in front of him, with only a pocket handkerchief, and when they had provoked him to attack them, would merely step aside, and leave the handkerchief covering his face. The contest had continued without any one being endangered, till in a furious charge at his Indian *friend*, the bull broke the rope; but the sable adversary very dexterously turned short and seized him by the tail, and contrived so to hold him, till another rope was passed round his body, and he was again secured.

A soldier next leapt on his back, but after a few efforts, the animal threw him to a considerable distance, and he fell with violence. It now became quite furious, when an Indian sprang upon its back, clasping its sides with his legs, and resisting every effort of the bellowing brute to dislodge him; and then finally galloped off into a wood.

It was the first time I had ever witnessed any thing like a bull-fight, even of this mimic kind; and as the parties did not seem to apprehend any peril, the laughter, in which the females had no inconsiderable share, was occasionally very boisterous and long continued. Leap-frog and some other rustic sports followed, till some of the ladies remarked that the sun was low, when a general retreat was made to the house. I concluded all was over, but a

long old table was brought out, and the friend by whom I had been introduced, whispered to me, that I was now to witness the conclusion of all Spanish parties.

Cards were produced, the table was immediately spread with doubloons and dollars, and considerable sums were won and lost in a few minutes. I was shocked to observe the change which took place, and in so short a time, from boisterous but innocent mirth, to a display of passions of the worst kind, and in which the ladies acted a still more unpleasant part than in the former sports. Those beautiful beaming black eyes which, but a few minutes before, had sparkled with life and joy, were now overcast and louring with expressions of avarice and discord: not one smile nor jest occurred during the whole of this short scene; for it only continued whilst the

horses were getting ready, when our cavalcade, consisting of twenty-two animals,* took a narrow path through the woods. It was some time before hilarity resumed its sway, when some curvetting and racing took place among the sprightly little chargers. We entered the city of Xalapa after sun-set in a body, and I was much pleased with what I had seen;—the entertainment, in its leading features, carried my ideas back to the days of good Queen Bess.

* The ladies in Mexico ride on the same horse with the gentlemen or servants; but reverse our obsolete English style of riding double. The lady in Mexico rides in front, sitting on the contrary side to that used in England, and supported by the arm of the male companion.