

CHAPTER V.

Former Volcanic Eruptions.—Los Vegas.—Perote.—Agava Americana.—Pulque.—Mirage.—Ocho d'Agua.

March 20.—LEFT Xalapa and travelled along a pleasant road to San Raphael, passing a fine Hacienda or farm. The whole way abounded with lovely and romantic scenery; the trees constantly varying, and differing from any we had ever seen. The Nopal, or prickly pear, grows here to the height of twenty-four feet, and as many in diameter. I observed many fine birds, amongst which were a few species of pheasants, numerous hawks, and vultures. The road was steep but good, and continually presenting a change of scene.

Mountains similar to those of Cumberland and Westmoreland, covered with tro-

pical vegetation and magnificent trees, produced such an enchanting effect, that no words can convey an adequate idea of it. About seven or eight leagues from Xalapa we entered the region of Pines, and travelled through a volcanic crater; the whole country for leagues was an entire mass of cinder, scoria, lava, and pumice, piled up in every form that can be conceived, and still remaining in the same state, as when first left by some dreadful explosion of an unknown volcano: in some places huge pinnacles threatening to fall and crush the passing traveller; in others, the liquid lava seems to have burst like an immense bubble, leaving arches of solid crust, from sixty to eighty feet high, and three or four thick, all hollow underneath, and spread at the bottom with loose cinders. This valley is bounded on the left by a ridge or wall of immense height, as if the great flood of

melted matter had been chilled and stopped in its course. In some parts it seemed as if the lava and scoria had been in part decomposed; and in these, several species of aloes, yucca, dracinae, and other strange and picturesque plants, were thriving luxuriantly. In other places, thousands of trunks of huge trees dead and crumbling into dust, added wildness to the scene of desolation.

Still farther on the left, the mountain of Pines, of extraordinary size, and others covered with stunted oaks, served by contrast to exhibit the picture of this tremendous looking and savage region with greater force.

After travelling about four miles over this bed of eruptive matter, which was constantly varying in its features, we came suddenly upon a clay and sandy soil, and soon after, to the Indian village of Los Vegas,

built with planks and logs of wood, and covered with shingles, in the same manner as the mountain-villages of Norway and the Alps. As we passed from hence, vegetation once more seemed to decline;—the fine prospect was lost; till we ultimately reached the elevation of the Table-land, and found ourselves in a different climate. A large sandy plain, after passing a hacienda, brought us to the town of Perote, which is of considerable extent, having a strong fort on the right.

Perote is a substantial place, built of stone; but from the mode in which it is constructed, has more the appearance of a prison than the usual abode of men, there being scarcely a window or chimney to be seen. The law term used in England, that "a man's house is his castle," is here literally true, as from the state of society and the local situation, security from an attack

is, in erecting a house, the first consideration.

Perote is 12,000 toises above the level of the sea, and just under the mountains. We were driven into the court-yard of an extensive Posada or inn, but very different from houses of accomodation known by that name on the roads of England, though a large square, surrounded by a colonnade, seemed to bespeak a place of some comfort. We arrived shivering in our great coats, but no landlord nor waiter greeted our arrival; we were shown several appartments, and had, indeed, our choice; but not an article of furniture was visible, except benches to sleep on, and a huge table, that seemed coeval with the building. We procured a candle, but the luxury of a candlestick was out of the question: a hole in the table, round which grease had accumulated, pointed out to us, however, the

means of remedying the deficiency. But though, probably, many a hungry appetite had been appeased off this table, yet I doubt whether it had ever received a table-cloth, or undergone the purification of washing, since its construction. But we were fortunately in some degree independent of our situation, as we had brought provisions with us; and after our meal, our mattresses being spread on the benches, the night was heaven compared to what we had experienced on the other side of Xalapa.

A few miles before we reached Perote we had come to large plantations of the great American aloe (*Agava Americana*.) It is grown in considerable quantities, and this was the first plantation of it which we had met with. From it is made the favourite liquor of the Mexicans called Pulque. Intending to examine it more at leisure, we rose before the sun the next morning, and

found it growing in the streets and round the town. It attains a size which surprises those who have only seen it in European hot-houses. We measured some of the leaves and found them ten feet long, fifteen inches wide, and eight thick: many of them were just open; their flower-stalk twenty feet high, and expanding, like rich candelabras, their arms clustered with yellow flowers. As this is an article of great importance, and forms the principal beverage of the people, I determined to obtain all the information I could concerning it, and shall give an account of it hereafter. Mr. Vanderies and myself left our inn on foot before sun-rise, and were amply repaid by a most pleasant morning's ramble. The rest of the party had another proof that gaming is a prevalent vice of the common people in Mexico: for when they were about to leave the town, they were informed, that

they must delay their departure, till the cattle had been fed, as the drivers had gambled away all the money which had before been given them to purchase provender.

Near the inn is a fine fountain of very excellent water protected by a statue of the angel Gabriel; and not far from it grew some of the largest Nopal I had yet seen: they were trees twenty-four feet in diameter, with leaves perfectly smooth and round, eighteen inches across, the fruit and blossom made a very singular appearance. The environs of Perote, with its castle and Indian suburbs, having the mountains of Orizaba and Perote for their back ground, are very picturesque, and would be a very desirable subject for a painter.

Before us lay the parched and volcanic mountain of Pizara. It reminded me of

St. Michael's mount, in the bay of Penzance; and a thick fog, resting on its base, looked at a distance like the ocean. We walked through cultivated fields of poor sandy land to a Hacienda, a rich farm; but though a fair building with a church,* we could not procure any milk. Our carriage overtook us at this place, and we entered a desert of arid sand, bounded on the right by high rocks, or broken volcanic mountains, similar to those we had seen the day before. We observed thousands of dead and decaying trees of considerable dimensions; so as to give the idea, that this dreary tract had not long since been covered with large timber. We continued our road for five leagues, and came to a house, where

* By the laws, whoever builds a farm-house is compelled to erect a church. But these Haciendas are of great extent; we saw a drove of pigs, consisting of (we were told) 4000, and all belonging to one of them.

we intended to breakfast, but could procure no provisions of any kind, and were obliged to proceed for three leagues further, when we found good bread and pulque, or fermented juice of the aloe. This drink is not pleasant to those unaccustomed to it, as the smell is disagreeable; but it is generally considered to be very wholesome, and accordingly has a great consumption.

Our route proceeded through desolate and parched plains, and we were often deluded by what appeared to be water; the deception being so great, that images of the objects around, were reflected in a very extraordinary manner.* We observed in this

* This remarkable optical deception occurs under particular states of the atmosphere, on the verge of the horizon, and particularly in warm climates, on extensive plains, &c. Objects seen often appear with extraordinary elevation, double or inverted. This singular phenomenon is obviously caused by refraction of the rays of light passing through the atmosphere, the lower strata of which

day's journey, several whirlwinds passing in different directions, and carrying along the sand and gravel to an astonishing height. They looked like smoke in the air, and some of them were near and rather alarmed us: a gentleman informed us that they often overtook the traveller unacquainted with the effect, whose hat is frequently lifted from his head and borne away for miles.

At one period we noticed two or three following each other like columns of smoke, and losing themselves in the clouds. As we came to the close of our day's travel, the road approached near to the volcanic

have different densities. When this effect is confined to the elevation of an object, our seamen call it looming. This play of vision has received the appellation of *Mirage* from the French, and by the Italians it is called *Fata Morgana*: for further information on this subject, see the Supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, under the head *Meteorology*; and in the *Philosophical Transactions* of 1800, are some pleasing experiments on the subject, by Dr. Wollaston.

rocks, vegetation began to appear, and we observed a number of the trees that produce the gum dragon, and various aloes: we also saw several specimens of eagles, hawks, and other birds of prey, some of which came so near our carriage as to be easily shot without our getting out. Towards the end of the desert, and while occasional verdure was to be seen, we noticed a house, with a row of cypress trees; and found a rivulet of water, of which all our party drank freely. Mr. Hall informed us that near this spot was a lake, much frequented by aquatic birds, and he and my son went off to shoot some. They had not left us many minutes, when we observed two armed men galloping across the plain, and making for our vehicle; they were in appearance military, and as the present disturbed state of the country rendered travelling very unsafe, we pre-

pared to defend ourselves and our property in the best manner we could. After they had reconnoitered, they retired however, perhaps upon observing that our companions were armed at a small distance.

We arrived at Ocho d'Agua, the inn tolerable, and the town pleasantly situated; here a fine warm spring rises in front of the house, and forms a river. The abundance of birds in this part was prodigious; consisting principally of the black and red Oriole, on their northern migration; their number was such at sun-set as almost to obscure the light. Here we also observed large assemblages of horses, mules, and sheep; and, at the house, many hundreds of pigs, that were shut up in an enclosure for the night and turned out at day-break, when men, with sacks of barley, commenced feeding them, by scattering it along the banks of the warm stream, fol-

lowed by the hungry herd, and by many thousands of the Orioles. Had these birds been in such numbers in Italy, there would not only have been sufficient taken for present use, but a supply for some months; but here, though they consume large quantities of grain, they are suffered to depart in safety unmolested. At half a league distance, the river spreads itself into a marsh, and is covered by flocks of aquatic birds, ducks, herons, and snipes, which are seldom disturbed by the inhabitants.

The next morning we set off early, and breakfasted at Napaluca, where there is a pretty church, built in a good style, and where we found the best pictures we had yet seen in Mexico. Here it was thought requisite to procure an escort to Puebla, and our guard consisted of the mayor, or chief officer of the place, and five others, who stipulated to attend us completely

equipped with fire arms, but on their arrival we found that they had but one old musket for the whole party. When we complained of this, his worship informed us that arms were unnecessary, as the robbers knew him well, and would be very careful to keep out of his way. Most of this day's journey we passed over bad roads, such as no English carriage would have ventured on, yet we reached Puebla in the evening, having performed a distance of nearly fifty miles, without our mules having once tasted food or water on the way. As we approached Puebla, we met several groups of Indians, making a much more respectable appearance than any we had before seen; they were provided with candles, fire-works, artificial flowers, shrubs, &c., it being the eve of Palm Sunday: these were the preparations for the approaching festival of Easter.



Published by L. Murray, London, 1824.

L. Clark sculp.

SUPERIOR INDIANS in their HOLIDAY DRESS.

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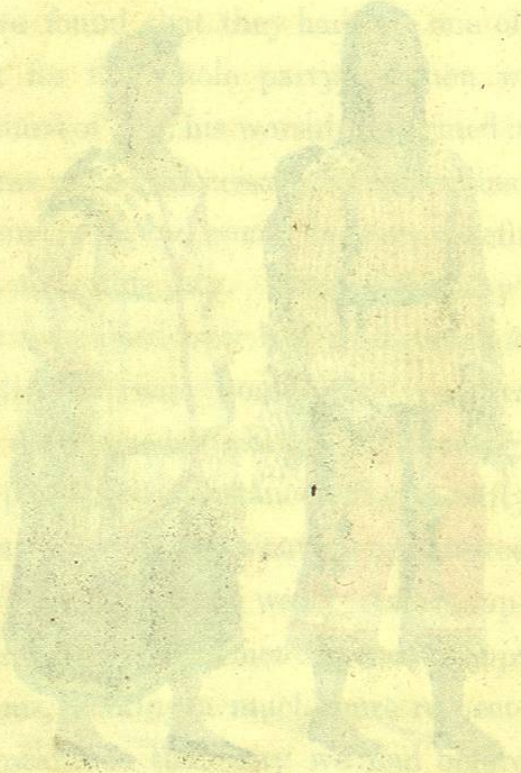
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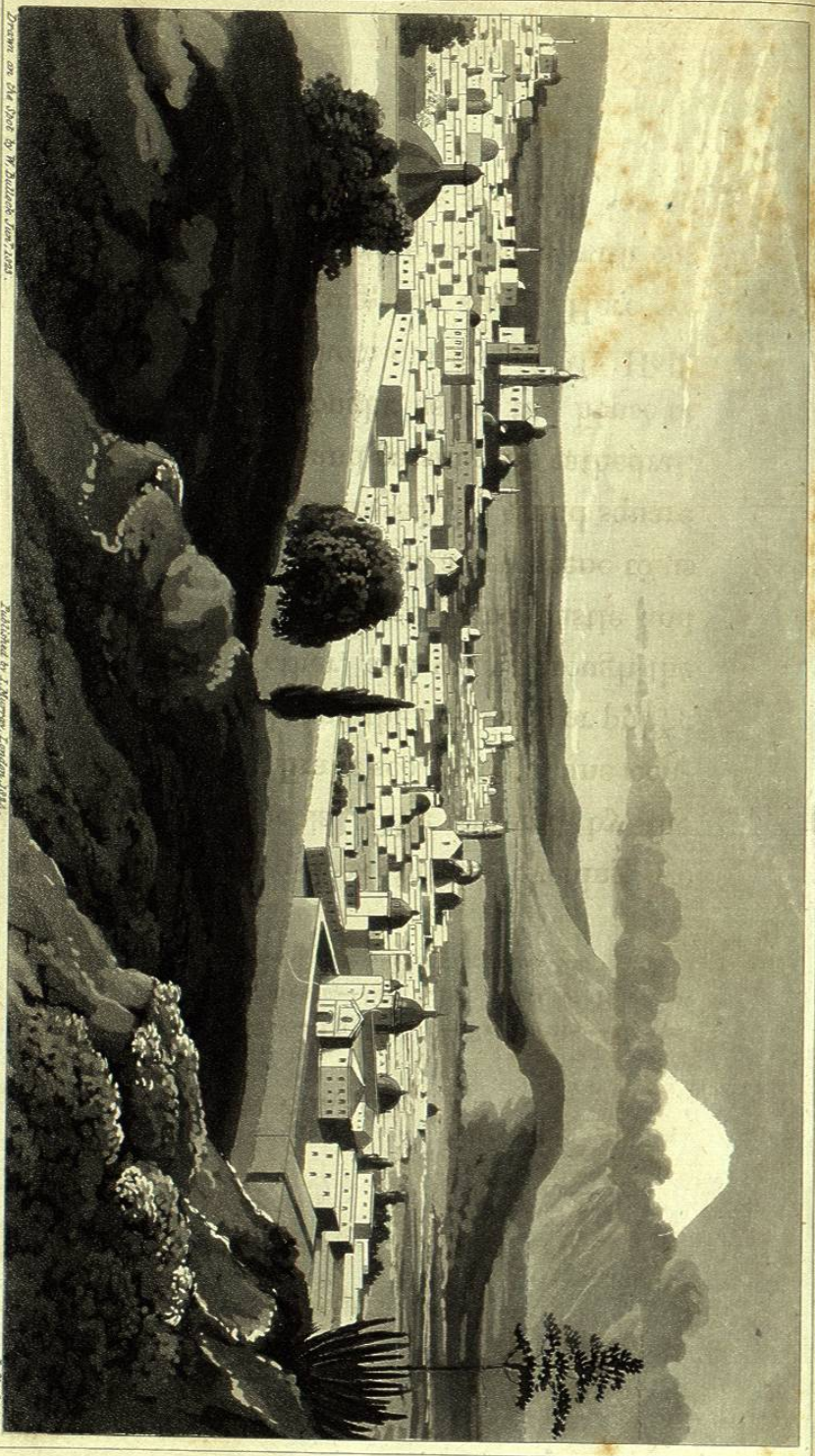
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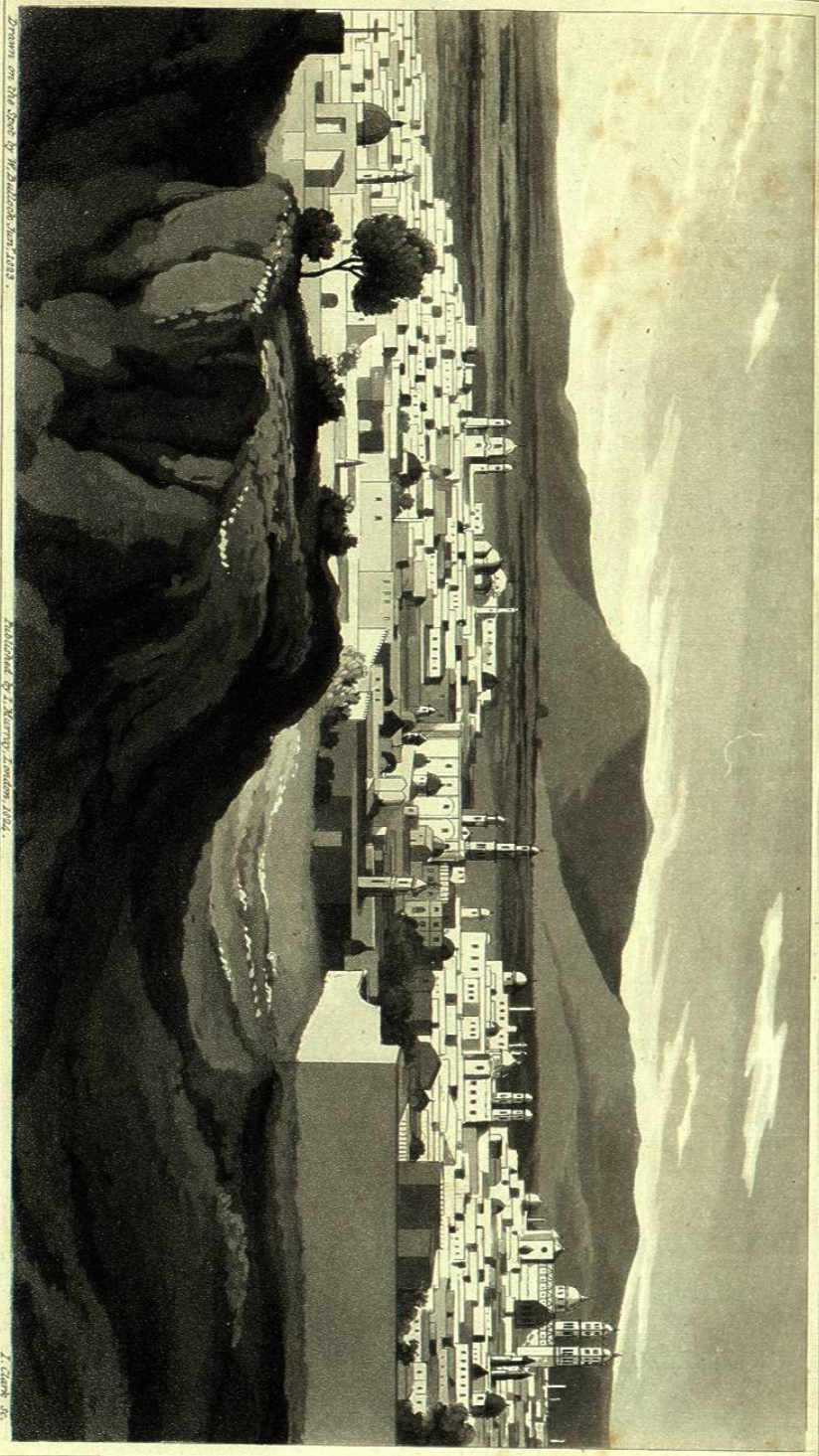
Drawn on the spot by Richard West, 1825.

Engraved by J. Murray, London, 1825.

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NORTHERN EXTREMITTY OF PUEBLA DE LOS ANGELOS.

SOUTHERN EXTREMITTY OF PUEBLA DE LOS ANGELES, FROM THE S. E.



CHAPTER VI.

Puebla de los Angeles.—Its Streets.—Pavements.—Houses.—Cathedral.—Churches.—San Filipe Neri, or House of Religious Retreat.—Police.—Manufactories, &c.

ABOUT eight o'clock in the evening we arrived at Puebla. We entered by the bridge of San Francisco, with a fine convent on one side and the Almeida, or public walk, on the other, and went through the crowded and busy streets, the bustle and hurry of which presented a new scene to us in America. We crossed the grand square or market-place, and passing the cathedral, a few minutes brought us to the house of a merchant, on whom our friend, Mr. Hall, quartered us during our stay. Here we had every reason to be satisfied with our entertainment: our table was well served