

proceeded over what was formerly a causeway across the lake, but still this ancient and imperial city offers no ostentatious appearance—all is dismal and solitary. We had passed but one miserable hut in several miles, and the country in its immediate vicinity resembles the worst parts of Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER VIII.

City of Mexico.—Surrounding Country.—Its Streets.—Houses.—Plaza Major Government House.—The Account of the City by the Writers of the Seventeenth Century.

NOTHING around gives any idea of the magnificent city to which you are approaching; all is dreary silence and miserable solitude. And can this, I thought to myself, be Mexico?—have I then for such a place left my home and all that is dear to me, whilst “half the world intervenes between me” and the comforts of England? what have I gained in exchange! We arrived at the barriers, and, passing through a part of the shabby-looking troops that surrounded the city, entered the suburbs, which were mean and dirty, the

people inhabiting them covered with rags, or only wrapped in a blanket. So great was my disappointment, that I could scarcely bring myself to believe that I was in the capital of New Spain, the great mart of the precious metals, whence they flow to all parts of the habitable world:—a few minutes more, however, brought us into the city, and whatever I had seen of regularity and largeness of streets, size and grandeur of churches and houses, was here surpassed, and I felt repaid for all the dangers and troubles I had undergone. Many of the streets are nearly two miles in length, perfectly level and straight, and with the ends terminating in the view of the mountains that surround the valley. Most of the houses are of the same height, generally three stories, highly decorated, and ornamented with two rows of balconies of wrought iron, painted or

gilt, and some of bronze. The stories are very lofty, the apartments being from fifteen to twenty feet high. The first or ground-floor is entered by a pair of large folding gates, ornamented with bronze, often thirty feet in height. These lead into the courtyard, surrounded by the house, filled with trees and flowers, producing a very pretty effect, and having a gallery to each floor, offering so many separate promenades under shelter from the sun and rain. The lower apartments are generally occupied by the porter and other servants; the floor above is often let off; but the highest, which is the principal, is occupied by the family themselves, having a separate stone staircase of great magnificence leading to it. Nothing can be better calculated than these residences for the delightful climate, in a country where change of temperature is scarcely known, where perennial spring reigns,

where fire-places are never seen, and where it is scarcely necessary to have glass windows to exclude the night air from the bedrooms. All that is requisite is a strong roof against the heavy rains that occur at certain seasons, and lofty rooms to afford a free circulation of the air; and nothing can be better adapted for this purpose than the style of architecture introduced by the Spaniards into Mexico.

The fronts of the houses are in general white, crimson, brown, or light green, painted in distemper, and having a pleasing appearance; and the dryness of the atmosphere is such, that they retain their beauty unimpaired many years. Many of these fronts have inscriptions upon them taken from Scripture, or stanzas addressed to the Saviour or his divine Mother.

Numbers too are entirely covered with glazed porcelain, in a variety of elegant de-

signs and patterns, often with subjects from scriptural history, giving the whole a rich and mosaic appearance, quite different from any thing of the kind in Europe. The walls of their great staircases are frequently covered in the same manner, and mixed with a profusion of gilding, which, in contrast with the blue and white porcelain, has a really splendid effect. I am inclined to think that this mode of ornament was borrowed from the Moorish palaces and mosques existing in Spain at the time of the discovery of Mexico, and introduced into this city and Puebla de los Angeles, when the wealth of the mines of the New World was such as to render it impracticable for the proprietors to spend their immense revenues in household expenses, equipages, or servants.

The porcelain was probably the manufacture of Holland and the Netherlands,

then under the Spanish yoke. The walls of several of the churches are finished in the same manner. The roofs are all nearly flat, and bricked, and many of them are covered with flowers, affording a pleasant place of resort in a fine evening, as the prospect is delightful, and the air refreshing and uncontaminated by smoke. Owing to this species of ornament, the city, seen from an elevation, presents a far more beautiful appearance than those of Europe, where the red-tiled and deformed roofs, and shapeless stacks of chimnies, are the principal features in the prospect. Indeed, no place I ever saw affords so many interesting points for a panoramic view, independently of its own intrinsic beauty, its interesting architecture, its houses with their light balconies, covered parterres of shrubs and flowers,—its situation in the grand valley of Mexico, with its sea-like lakes, sur-

rounded by snow-capped volcanic mountains, the highest in New Spain. But the furniture and internal decorations of most of the houses ill accord with their external appearances. The closing of the mines, the expulsion of the rich Spanish families, and sixteen years of revolutionary warfare, with all the concomitant miseries, have wrought a melancholy alteration in the fortunes of individuals, and in the general state of the country: and in this the capital bears no inconsiderable share. The superb tables, chandeliers, and other articles of furniture, of solid silver, the magnificent mirrors and pictures, framed in the same precious metal, have now passed through the mint, and in the shape of dollars are circulating over Europe and Asia; and families whose incomes have exceeded half a million per annum can

now scarcely procure the means of a scanty existence.

But I hope that these times are nearly at an end, and that the period is arriving when Mexico will again exalt her head among the greatest cities of the world, a rank to which she is entitled from her own intrinsic beauty, and as the capital of one of the finest portions of the globe. The liberality and wisdom of her counsellors, under the new order of things, will enable her to break the trammels in which she has so long been confined, that intelligent strangers may be induced to visit her, and bring with them the arts and manufactures, the improved machinery and great chymical knowledge of Europe; and in return she can amply repay them by again diffusing through the world her immense mineral wealth.

The Plaza Major, or grand square of Mexico, is one of the finest that exists. The east side is occupied by the grand cathedral, and segrario, or parish church; the north by the splendid palace of the Viceroy; the south by a fine row of houses, the centre of which is the palace built by Cortez, and now called the Casa de Stada; the west has a range of buildings with a piazza in front, consisting of many good shops, some public offices, granaries, &c.

About the centre of the square is a fine equestrian statue of Charles V., erected by a Spanish artist, Sig. Tolsa, in Mexico, about twenty years since, and highly creditable to his talents. It is doubtless the finest specimen of casting in the New World, and would not disgrace the labour of Michael Angelo, Cellini, or John of Bologna. On my arrival the Ex-Emperor

had erected a temporary amphitheatre of great size for the purpose of giving bull-fights; and this statue, which formed the centre of the arena, was enclosed in a large globe of paper surmounted by a figure of fame.

The pleasing effect of the grand square is much injured by the admission of a trumpery building called the Parian, a kind of market or bazaar, held principally I believe by the Spanish shopkeepers. This erection is a disgrace to the taste of the government which permitted it to spoil one of the noblest squares they have, but the revenues it brings to the city are at present so necessary that its speedy removal is hopeless.

The palace, or government-house, is a truly magnificent building. It is nearly square, its front measuring several hundred feet. In its interior are four large

square courts, over which most of the public offices are distributed, as well as the prison, the mint, barracks, botanic garden, &c.

The existing state of this city exhibits only a shadow of the grandeur it had once attained. The period of its greatest splendour, wealth, and luxury, may be placed within one century from its conquest by Cortez. The present internal decorations but ill accord with the magnificent houses and palaces on which thousands have been lavished, and prove at once the poverty of the present Mexicans and the wealth of their ancestors. The massive silver tables, staircases, and chandeliers, &c. &c. have all disappeared. The profusion of jewels and the extravagant equipages are no longer to be seen in the streets, and the *ensemble* even of people of the highest rank of the present day reminds us in no-

thing of the authenticated descriptions of the inhabitants of the same place by writers two centuries ago. In the year 1625 an English Dominican friar, called Thomas Gage, found means to get himself conveyed from Spain (with a number of Religious who were going to the Philippine Islands,) to the capital of Mexico, and thence to several of the provinces. After a stay of nearly twelve years he returned to his native country, became a puritanical preacher, and chaplain to Sir Thomas Fairfax, and gave such an account of the country he had visited as induced the Protector Cromwell to attempt to add New Spain to the British dominions; and an expedition under the command of Penn and Venables sailed for that purpose, which, though unsuccessful in its principal object, captured the valuable island of Jamaica on its return. Gage

is the only native of this country who has published an account of what he has seen in New Spain, and his work is now very scarce. It is called the "English American, his Travels by Sea and Land; or a New Survey of the West Indies, printed in London 1648;" and contains much curious information in page 56. He describes, in his quaint and humorous manner, Mexico as it then was, which will corroborate my own remarks, and, as it may amuse the reader, I have inserted it.

"The streets are very broad, in the narrowest three coaches may goe, and in the broader six may goe in the breadth of them, which makes the city seeme a great deal bigger than it is; in my time it was thought to bee of between 30 and 40,000 inhabitants, Spaniards, who are so proud and rich, that half the city was judged to keepe coaches, for it was a most credible

report that in Mexico in my time there were above fifteen thousand coaches. It is a by-word, that in Mexico there are foure things faire, that is to say, the women, the apparel, the horses, and the streets. But to this I may adde the beauty of some of the coaches of the gentry, which doe exceed in cost the best of the court of Madrid and other parts of Christendome, for there they spare no silver, nor gold, nor pretious stones, nor cloath of gold, nor the best silkes of China to enrich them. And to the gallantry of their horses, the pride of some adde the cost of bridles and shooes of silver:—the streets of Christendome must not compare with those in breadth and cleannesse, but especially in the riches of the shops which doe adorn them. Above all, the goldsmiths' shops and workes are to be admired. The Indians, and the people of China that have

been made Christians, and every yeere come thither, have now perfected the Spaniards in those trades. The Viceroy who went thither in the yeere 1625 caused a popingay to be made of silver, gold, and pretious stone, with the perfect colour of the popingay's feathers (a bird bigger than a pheasant), with such exquisite art and perfection, to present unto the King of Spain, that it was prized to be in riches and workmanship halfe a million of duckats. There is in the cloyster of the Dominicans a lampe hanging in the church, with three hundred branches wrought in silver, to hold so many candles, besydes a hundred little lampes for oyle set in it, every one being made of severall workmanship, so exquisitely that it is valued to be worth 400,000 duckats; and with such-like curious workes are many streets made more rich and beautiful by the shops of gold-

smiths. To the by-word touching the beauty of the women, I must add the liberty they enjoy for gaming, which is such, that the day and night is too short for them to end a primera when once it is begun; nay, gaming is so common to them, that they invite gentlemen to their houses for no other end:—to myself it happened that, passing along the streets with a fryer that came with me the first yeere from Spain, a gentlewoman of great birth knowing us to be chapetans (so they call the first yeere those that come from Spain) from her window called unto us, and after two or three slight questions concerning Spain, asked us if wee would come in and play with her a game at primera. Both men and women are excessive in their apparell, using more silkes than stufes and cloth; pretious stones and pearles further much this their vaine ostentation; a hat-

band and rose made of diamonds, in a gentleman's hat, is common, and a hat-band of pearles is ordinary in a tradesman; nay, a blackmore or tauny young maide and slave will make hard shift but shee will bee in fashion with her neck-chaine and bracelets of pearles, and her eare-bobs of some considerable jewels. The attire of this baser sort of people, of blackmores and mulattas, (which are of a mixt nature of Spaniards and blackmores,) is so light, and their carriage so enticing, that many Spaniards, even of the better sort, (who are too prone to venery,) desdaine their wives for them. Their cloathing is a petticoate, of silke or cloth, with many silver or golden laces, with a very broad double ribband of some light colour, with long silver or golden tags hanging down before, the whole length of their petticoate to the ground, and the like behind; their

wascoats made like bodies, with skirts, laced likewise with gold or silver, without sleeves, and a girdle about their body of great price, stuck with pearles and knots of gold, (if they bee any waies well esteemed of,) their sleeves are broad and open at the end, of Holland or fine China linnen, wrought some with coloured silkes, some with silke and gold, some with silke and silver, hanging downe almost unto the ground; the locks of their heads are covered with some wrought quoife, and over it another of networke of silk bound with a fair silke, or silver or golden ribband, which crosseth the upper part of their forehead, and hath commonly worked out in letters some light and foolish love-posie; their bare, black and tauny breasts are covered with bobs hanging from their chaines of pearles. And when they goe abroad, they use a white mantle of lawne or cambricke,

rounded with a broad lace, which some put over their heads, the bredth reaching only to their middle behind, that their girdle and ribbands may be seen, and the two ends reaching to the ground almost; others cast their mantles only upon their shoulders, and, swaggerers like, cast the one end over the left shoulder, that they may the better jog the right arme, and shew their broad sleeve as they walke along; others, instead of this mantle, use some rich silke petticoat, to hang upon their left shoulders, while, with their right arme, they support the lower part of it, more like roaring boys than honest civil maids. Their shooes are high and of many soles, the outside whereof, of the prophaner sort, are plated with a list of silver, which is fastned with small nailes of broad silver heads. Most of them are or have been slaves, though love have set them

loose at liberty, to inslave souls to sinne and Satan. And there are so many of this kinde, both men and women, growne to a height of pride and vanity, that many times the Spaniards have feared they would rise up and mutiny against them. And for the loosnesse of their lives, and publicke scandals committed by them and the better sort of the Spaniards, I have heard them say often, who have professed more religion and feare of God, they really thought God would destroy that city, and give up the countrey into the power of some other nation."

CHAPTER IX.

Churches.—Convents.—Religious Processions.—Palaces.

THE places of divine worship, and other religious establishments, in this city, yield to none in point of number, extent, or the richness of their endowments; but as any minute account of them, after the description I have already given of the churches of Puebla de los Angeles, to which they bear a great resemblance, would be superfluous, I shall merely notice a few of the most remarkable.

The cathedral of Mexico is far famed for its splendour and riches, and deserves its high reputation. It is about 500 feet long, including a building behind the altar, and stands in the great square, occupying the