

CHAPTER XII.

The Minería.—Academy of Fine Arts.

THE Minería, or School of Mines, has been erected but a few years. It is, perhaps, not equalled in point of extent, or beauty of architecture, by any thing similar in Europe: it has been constructed at an immense expense liberally furnished by the mine-holders, and other wealthy inhabitants. But alas! this noble structure is doomed never to be finished: its foundation, placed on the swampy bottom of the lake, has given way: its elegant columns are inclining from the perpendicular, and its architraves separating and cracking in every direction. Part has already been taken down, and I fear the

whole must shortly follow. The situation on which Mexico stood, till lately the centre of a lake, must originally have been chosen as a place of security by a few Indians, incapable of defending themselves against their more numerous and powerful neighbours. What a pity it is that it should have been made the site of such a noble city as the present capital!

The Academy of Fine Arts has been extinguished by the revolution: it has neither student nor director. The building and plaster casts, &c. remain, but its revenues are lost.

Baron Humboldt has given us rather a flattering picture on this subject, at the time he visited the country: if his account be correct, as indeed I have every reason to believe it to be, twenty years of internal war and insurrection have produced a deplorable change in the state of the arts.

There is not now a single pupil in the Academy; and though the venerable President still lives, he is in a state of indigence, and nearly blind. Not one landscape nor architectural painter remains in this great city; and the only few artists are those who copy religious subjects for the churches, and some who attempt portraits, but they are deplorably bad. The principal employment for the pencil seems to be in the decorations of coach-bodies and the heads of the wooden bedsteads; and in the metropolis, a few pictures of the Infant Saviour, the Virgin, Magdalen, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, or St. Cuthbert, are the only productions of modern painters which are to be met with. Of the myriads of pictures with which the churches, convents, cloisters, &c. &c. are crowded, I saw few worth the expense of removing. The churches and cathedrals may, amongst the great num-

bers with which they are encumbered, have some good, and I am inclined to think they have; but the quantity of light admitted into these superb temples is too little, even in the brightest day, to render it practicable to discover their merits: they are lost to the world in the sacred gloom that pervades the place. The public, too, are prevented from a near approach by clumsy railings; but, from what information I was enabled to obtain by peeping through, it appeared to me that some of the finest productions of the Italian and Spanish schools may be here buried in oblivion.

I visited the houses of many of the nobility, but found little worthy of notice. The Count of Valenciana's drawing-room has a set of prints from Claude, which, with the exception of a few fine things in the palace of the Bishop of Pue-

bla, are the only works worth mentioning connected with the old masters, that came under my inspection.

In the many rambles I made through the city, I often examined the brokers' and furniture shops; as, amongst the countless number of statues and pictures of saints and martyrs, I expected to have found something worth bringing home: but all my researches in this way only produced me two small pictures; one on copper, (the Adoration of the Shepherds,) an early picture, or a copy, of Corregio; the other a Holy Family, somewhat in the style of Carlo Maratti.

I had imagined that the amazing and rapid accumulation of wealth which had accrued to several individuals from the working of the silver mines would have caused some of the productions of European arts, either through devotion or taste, to have

made the voyage across the Atlantic; but this does not appear to have been the case, or, if it was, they have accompanied the Spaniards in their retreat to their mother-country.

I saw no traces of the occupation of the sculptor in marble: this may be accounted for by the customs of the country forbidding the use of monuments—nor are there any fire-places which could admit of such ornaments. Of carvers in wood there are many, as every house has a statue of a saint or madonna painted and generally superbly dressed. The art of engraving on stone is unknown in Mexico; but the Indians greatly excel in the modelling and working in wax. The specimens of different tribes with their costumes, with the habiliments of the gentry of the country, which I have brought over, will amply testify their merits in this depart-

ment. They also model fruit and vegetables in a beautiful manner. A lady at Puebla de los Angeles executes, in a singular style, from pieces of old linen cloth, groups of comic figures, some of which I have also brought to England. Such was her skill, that, from having only seen me for a short time, on my first passing through the city, I was surprised to find, on my return, that she had executed a portrait of me in this style, which was immediately recognised by my friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

Theatre.—Alameda.—Pasea.—Chinampas, &c.

MEXICO has but one place of dramatic exhibition; it is a good building, and of considerable size. Its internal form is that of a lengthened horse-shoe, narrowing considerably towards the stage, the proscenium of which is too much contracted to admit of showy exhibitions, or many actors at the same time. The amphitheatre, or audience part, consists of a pit and four tiers of boxes, which are let off by the month or season:—the front of these is scarcely raised a foot from the floor. They are furnished with chairs, &c. according to the taste or opulence of the owners; and, if occupied by a full-dressed audience, the effect