

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

would be very imposing, as the whole-length figures of the ladies are seen to much more advantage than in our own theatres, pressing over the high parapet of what we correctly call boxes. The pit has three divisions, to each of which the prices vary, and each seat is separated by arms, and numbered; which practice, however convenient, could hardly be established in our crowded houses.

The orchestra is indifferent; the scenery, dresses, and machinery, inferior to the theatrical exhibitions seen at Bartholomew fair, and the performers in general below mediocrity.

The house is lighted from above by sconces, each holding a number of glass lamps; and is more pleasing than might be expected. It is open every night, and twice on Sunday, on which day, and on holy-days, the price is double; but this esta-

blishment paid so ill, at the time of our visit, that its final close was announced from the stage while we were present—so that the capital of New Spain is now without any dramatic entertainment.

Of the audience I must say but little, in consequence of the woeful change which has taken place among the inhabitants of this once gay city. Not a tenth part of the house was occupied; and of those present but very few were females, and they not dressed for the occasion as in Europe,—wearing no ornaments, with the exception of one young lady of distinction, who had a plume of black feathers in her head. Two or three Canton crape shawls were the only coloured articles of dress to be seen. With very few exceptions, all present, of either sex, pursued their favorite habit of smoking; the ladies even in the boxes, with a fan in one hand and a cigar

in the other, enveloped in a smoke that rendered it difficult to see from one side of the house to the other.

The "Spectator" thinks that women may so manage the graceful use of the fan as to make it an engine capable of ensnaring the hearts of men. If this be possible, how are we to withstand a Mexican beauty thus doubly armed? how many a hero who has fearlessly stood fire at Trafalgar or Waterloo, how many men who have dared all the artillery of the quadrille at Almack's, would fly from the fair one with smoke issuing from her lips and nostrils, and enveloped in the fragrant incense of "real Havannah."

The last time I visited the theatre was in company of M. Lewis Sultzer, agent of the Rhenish Company of Merchants. He had been in Mexico 40 years before, during the viceroyalty of the celebrated

Galvez; and was strongly impressed with the miserably altered appearance of this once splendid place of amusement, which he had before seen crowded to excess by brilliant audiences. In the presence of the Viceroy smoking was prohibited, but between the acts a curtain was let down before his box, that the people might not be altogether debarred this luxury.

The alameda, or public promenade, situated on the north side of the city, is not worthy, in my opinion, of the other establishments. It is laid out in paved walks, with fountains and statues in very bad taste and worse execution. Neither are the company who frequent it for the purpose of walking of the best description, and those who use the drive in their close coaches are scarcely seen. In these kinds of enjoyments the Mexicans certainly do not excel.

The following is the account given of the alameda by Friar Thomas Gage. It is the description of the same place two hundred years before, and, that it may lose none of its interest, I have inserted it in his own words.

“The gallants of this city shew themselves daily, some on horseback, and most in coaches, about four of the clock in the afternoon, in a pleasant shady field, called the Alameda, full of trees and walkes, somewhat like unto our Moor-fields, where doe meet, as constantly as the merchants upon our Exchange, about two thousand coaches full of gallants, ladies, and citizens, to see and to be seen, to court and to be courted,—the gentlemen having their train of blackmoor slaves, some a dozen, some half a dozen, waiting on them in brave and gallant liveries heavy with gold and silver lace, with silk stockings on their

black legs, and roses on their feet, and swords by their sides; the ladies also carry their train of slaves by their coaches' side, of such jet-like damesells, as have before been mentioned for their light apparell, who, with their bravery and white mantell over them, seem to be, as the Spaniard saith, ‘mosca in leche,’ a flie in milk.”

Another drive and ride, called the Paseo, is about two miles long, planted with double rows of trees, and mostly frequented on Sundays and Holydays. Many handsome well-mounted and well-dressed young men, ambling on their pretty little horses, here display their persons and equestrian skill to advantage. A number of elegant carriages and equipages are sported on these occasions; but I observed only one chariot and two single-horse chaises in the city. The road terminates suddenly near a bridge and gate, through which the canal of

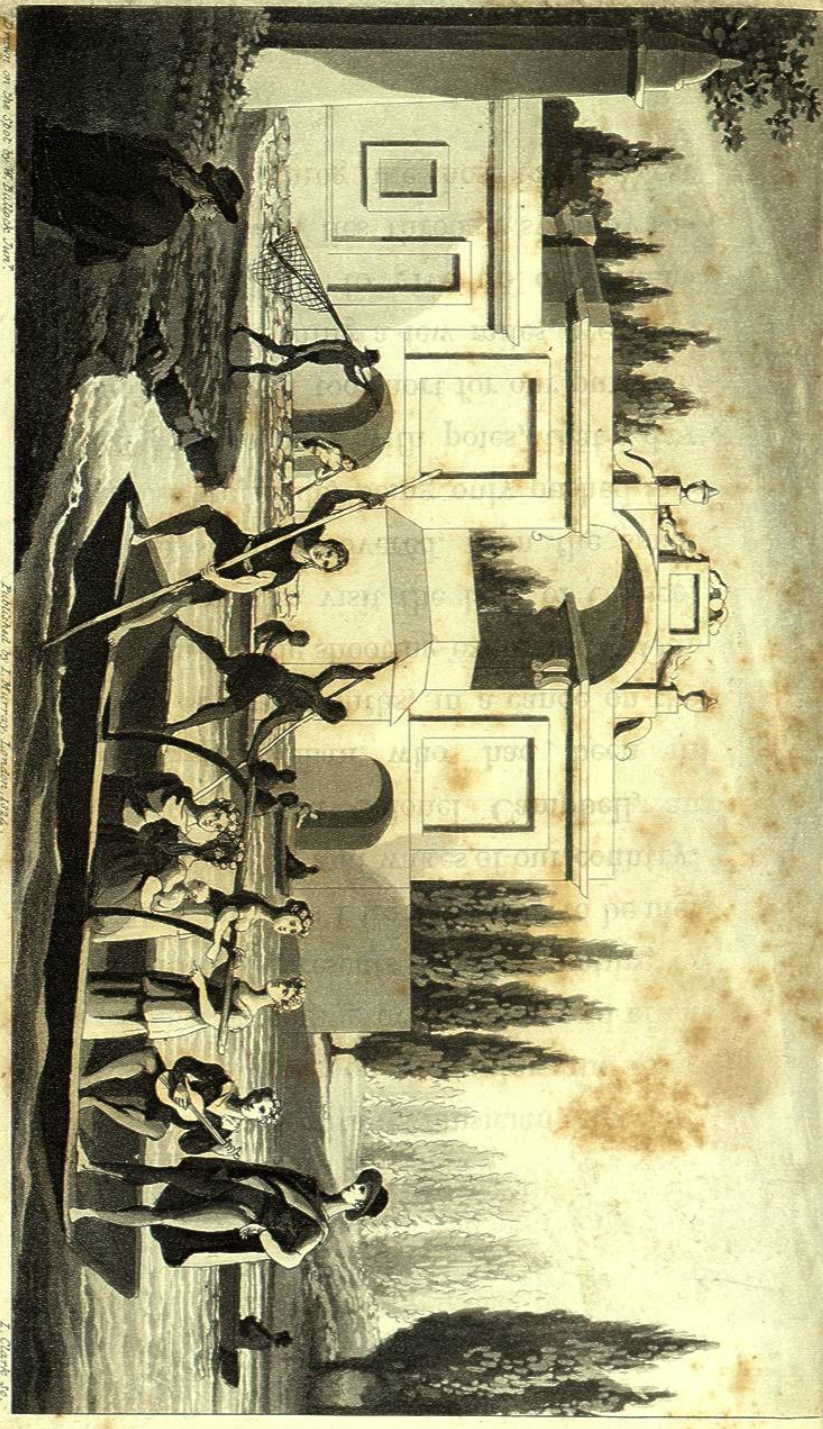
Chalco passes. Here most of the carriages draw up close on the side of each other, in such a way as to prevent the company from seeing farther than the window of the carriage next them. These coaches generally contain ladies, who, by this ridiculous custom, have no opportunity of displaying their fine figures and beauties for admiration.

From the account I had received of the Paseo, I was a little disappointed; but the sight of the Indians returning home from their little Sunday excursions in their canoes, on the canal of Chalco, which is close to the ride, made ample amends. In the fine evenings, during the dry season, the environs of the city present a scene of bustle, gaiety, and pleasure, scarcely to be paralleled; hundreds of canoes, of various sizes, mostly with awnings, crowded with native Indians, neatly dressed, and their

heads crowned with the most gaudy flowers, are seen passing in every direction: each boat, with its musician seated on the stern, playing on the guitar, and some of the party singing or dancing, and often both united, presents such a picture of harmless mirth as I fear is rarely to be met with at the fairs and wakes of our country.

I accompanied Colonel Campbell, an English gentleman who had been in Mexico several months, in a canoe on the canal, on a little shooting excursion. Our intention was to visit the lake of Chalco, but we soon discovered, from the small progress we made, being only pushed forward by two boys with poles, that a day would be much too short for our purpose. After accomplishing a few miles, we were therefore obliged to give up our intention:—the canal lies through swampy savannahs, something like those in the West

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GATE on the CANAL of CHALCO, MEXICO.

Engraved on the Stone by W. Hillcock, Junr.

Published by T. Agnew, London, 1822.

Z. Grant, Sc.

Indies, in which the vegetation is very luxuriant; several pretty villages are on its banks, and we saw Indians catching tortoises, from whom we procured specimens. We landed about a quarter of a mile from a church, to which was a raised path, and entered the Indian village by a bridge of unhewn timber, and were in the midst of the houses before we were seen. We were first observed by a group of nearly naked children, who instantly set up a cry of terror, and disappeared; a general alarm was now spread, and all the women were at the doors in an instant, and appeared terrified at the sight of strangers. A few inquiries, and a few medias given to the peeping young ones, however, soon dispelled their terrors, and one fine healthy young woman, to whose child we had given a little present, asked us into her house, and, seeing me observe her fur-

niture and domestic utensils, explained the use of every thing, and then brought her three children, who had hid themselves in a corner, to shake hands with us. The place was surrounded with chinampas, or what have improperly been called floating gardens; her husband was at work on one of them, and she called him to show it to us. They are artificial islands, about fifty or sixty yards long, and not more than four or five wide. They are separated by ditches of three or four yards, and are made by taking the soil from the intervening ditch, and throwing it on the chinampa, by which means the ground is raised generally about a yard, and thus forms a small fertile garden, covered with the finest culinary vegetables, fruits and flowers,—Mexico receives an ample supply from them. We shot here several pretty birds, some of which we killed on the wing, to the great surprise of

the natives, who had now gathered round us in considerable numbers. We returned to the village, looked at the church, and examined a curious circular ancient warm bath, in form of an oven, with a very low entrance; it was of unburnt brick, and the flue and fire-place still remained.

The village had one house of comfortable appearance; it was a shop, and, on passing it, the owner, the only white man in the place, invited us in to take refreshment. He brought us some excellent pulque, which, being quite fresh, was devoid of the smell so disagreeable to strangers. We were pressed to dine, accepted the invitation, and sent a man to bring our canoe, from which we made some addition to the repast. Our host liked our Madeira, and begged a small cup for his lady, who was just confined: we sent her the remainder of the bottle; and this little act of civility

soon brought us acquainted with the whole family, who treated us in the kindest manner;—we dined, and spent two hours with them, and parted, I believe, mutually pleased with each other. Our canoe had been steered through the chinampas to the door of our new friend, and most of the villagers came to see us off. On our way home we landed several times at the villages on the banks, and made some additions to our ornithological collection;—many of the birds were new, but not of very splendid plumage. The sides of the canal were covered with feathers of the ducks from the lake of Chalco, which had been plucked and thrown away by the market-people, to whom they are of no value. We admired the dexterity with which the numbers of canoes we met were navigated. Some were so small as scarcely to support the weight of the person con-

tained—these were impelled forwards by a small paddle. I fear the reader may think these accounts tedious, but on me the recollection of a day spent in this manner leaves a stronger impression than those passed in polished society, where all around is artificial.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Botanic Garden.

THIS beautiful establishment occupies one of the courts of the viceregal palace; and, though situated in the centre of a large and populous city, every vegetable production seems in perfect health and vigour. It affords to the stranger a most delightful retreat from the mid-day sun, and to the botanist, or admirer of the works of nature, a treat not to be met with elsewhere in New Spain, or perhaps in the world. It is handsomely laid out in the Spanish fashion, with flagged walks, bordered with elegant large pots of flowers. The walks are rendered cool by the creeping plants that are trained over them. They diverge from a