

CHAPTER XV.

Markets.

ONE of the most interesting sights to an inquisitive stranger in Mexico is a ramble early in the morning to the canal which leads to the Lake of Chalco. There, hundreds of Indian canoes, of different forms and sizes, freighted with the greatest variety of the animal and vegetable productions of the neighbourhood, are constantly arriving: they are frequently navigated by native women, accompanied by their families. The finest cultivated vegetables which are produced in European gardens, with the numberless fruits of the torrid zone, of many of which even the names are not known to us, are piled up in py-

ramids, and decorated with the most gaudy flowers. In the front of the canoes, the Indian women, very slightly clothed, with their long glossy tresses of jet black hair flowing luxuriously to the waist, and often with an infant fastened to their backs, push the canoes forward with long slender poles. In the centre, under cover, the remainder of the family are seated, mostly employed in spinning cotton, or weaving it, in their simple portable looms, into narrow webs of blue and white cloth, which forms their principal clothing. Other boats are loaded with meat, fowls, turkeys, and a profusion of wild ducks, which they pluck and prepare on their road to market; generally throwing the feathers, which they consider of no value, into the water. Others again are freighted with Indian corn in bulk or straw, the general food for horses, reared like floating pyramids. Milk, but-

ter, fruit, and young kids, are all in the greatest plenty, and, what adds to the picturesque appearance of the whole, is, that nearly every canoe has a quantity of red and white poppies spread on the top of the other commodities; and, if there be a man on board, he is usually employed in strumming on a simple guitar for the amusement of the rest. The whole of this busy scene is conducted with the greatest harmony and cordiality. These simple people seldom pass each other without saluting; "Buenos Dias Señor, or Señora," is in every mouth, and they embrace each other with all the appearance of sincerity.

They land their cargoes a little to the south of the palace, near the great market; and remove their various commodities on their backs to the place where they deposit them for sale. This market is well worth visiting at an early hour;—then

thousands of Indians assembled with their various commodities for sale, many of them from a considerable distance, form one of the most animated sights that can be witnessed. It was my constant morning's excursion; and by purchasing their curious birds, or other natural productions, at rather a higher price than usual, I became known to them, and had several of them in my pay, who brought to my house whatever they could find that would please the *Britannico*, a name by which I was known in the market. One old woman was very successful in taking the humming birds, and brought me alive many of the most beautiful species in my collection. But I had much difficulty in procuring specimens of ornithology in the market fit for my purpose; for, though hundreds of fine birds were almost daily brought, yet

most of them were partially plucked, and many were brought without their feet.

Among the great variety of aquatic birds thus imported from the borders of the lake are numbers of our waders, sandpipers, phalaropes, &c. all brought alive; and the quantity of ducks of various kinds is surprising;—25,000 have been sold in a year, and at a very low price. The most plentiful were the shoveller (*anas clypeata*,) and the teal, (*anas crecca*,) which are both sold at the same cost, and are principally eaten by the poor, though the latter is equally good as in England, where it is so much esteemed for the delicacy of its flesh.

Domestic water-fowl are almost unknown in this part of New Spain. I never saw a tame duck, and geese but twice in the whole country. Turkeys, fowls, pigeons,

hares, and rabbits, are in great plenty, and venison is occasionally met with at table. Fish is scarce and dear, the lakes producing but few species: the pesca blanca, or white fish, resembling in appearance and taste our smelts, is the best. Tortoises, frogs, and the axolote, a species of salamander, (an aquatic animal much resembling a water-newt or lizard,) are abundant in the market, and all good eating; the latter have been the subject of dispute among naturalists since the discovery of America, and we are still in obscurity with respect to their doubtful history. They were so plentiful in the time of Cortez that his army principally subsisted on them, and I have seen them by thousands in the markets of Toluca; yet they have never been discovered in a young state, nor has any sexual difference yet been noticed. I brought several home in spirits, which are now

under the inspection of Sir Everard Home, from whom the public may shortly expect much information respecting this obscure species.

The Indians also bring to market a considerable quantity of a small delicate fish, not more than two or three inches long, which they take in nets in the canals and ditches near the lakes. They are enclosed in the leaves or capsules which surround the head of the Indian corn, and then roasted. In this state they are exposed for sale, at a very reasonable rate: we thought them excellent, but they are seldom seen at the repasts of the rich. They have also a small crustaceous animal resembling our shrimp, but not so well tasted. The meat market is well supplied with beef, mutton, and pork, and in the spring kid is plentiful and cheap; veal is prohibited by law. The beef and mut-

ton are by no means equal to what we have in the markets of Europe; but, though these meats are not of the best quality, they are by no means bad. Perhaps the fault is in a great measure owing to the butcher, and we are always partial to our own method of preparing animal food. Of vegetables and fruits there are few places that can boast such variety as Mexico, and none where the consumption is greater in proportion to the inhabitants. The great market is larger than Covent Garden, but yet unequal to contain the quantity daily exposed for sale: the ground is entirely covered with every European kind, and, as I have already stated, with many the very names of which we have scarcely heard. I was never tired of examining these fruits and vegetables. I have taken casts and drawings of all I could procure of the former during my residence: they are very numerous and extraordinary,

and these copies are executed in a manner which will convey a better idea of a Mexican market, and the productions of a tropical region, than a volume of description. They must be seen to be understood: how few persons in Europe have any idea of the form or appearance, when in a state of life and vegetation, of the various kinds of bananas, plaintains, pawpaws, custard-apples, sour sop, citrons, shaddock, ackee, sopotas, avocata, tunnals, pitalli, ciayotte, chennini, genianil, granadilla, pomegranates, dates, annonas, mangoes, star-apples, melons, gouards, tomatas, &c. with which, and many others, this market abounds in succession at various seasons of the year; but by the casts I have taken of them they will be familiarised to the mind in a moment. In such a country and climate the finest productions of every part of the globe might be produced, but the whole is left to



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J. Clark sculp.

MEXICAN INDIANS returning from MARKET.

the care of untutored Indians, whose horticultural knowledge is very limited.

A few intelligent gardeners from the north of our island would soon acquire fortunes in the neighbourhood of Mexico, and be the means of increasing the blessings already enjoyed by the people in those delightful regions.

Besides the articles furnished for the table, numbers of Indians dispose of wool, cotton, coarse cotton cloth, manufactured skins, earthenware, baskets, &c. in the market, and it is an amusing scene to witness them collected in large parties with their children seated on the ground, enjoying their frugal meals of Tortilios and Chile. But, unfortunately, in the lanes near the market are found numbers of pulque shops, where the men are seen enjoying their favourite beverage, and indulging in their propensity to gaming; and I am sorry to

say that, in more than one instance, I have noticed these generally good-natured creatures, when heated by pulque or aqua ardenté, and soured by the ill fortune of the day, venting their disappointment, like mere Christians, on the persons of their innocent and unoffending wives.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Mint.

THIS establishment occupies one part of the palace of the Viceroy, and is of considerable extent: we visited it in company with several German and American gentlemen, and obtained admission, without difficulty, and a person to attend us, who explained every part of the process of preparing the silver, coining, &c. and on our leaving the place, refused any remuneration whatever for his trouble,—a thing very unusual in any part of the world. In no institution of the kind, that I am acquainted with, does a stranger receive so much attention, politeness, and information, gratis, as in this.

The silver is sent from the mines in bars,