

CHAPTER XVIII.

Manufactories—Customs.—Manners, &c. &c.

THE account of the manufactories of New Spain will occupy but a small space. The policy always pursued by the mother-country in keeping the colonies dependent on her as much as possible induced her to frame strong laws for this purpose. Silkworms were not allowed to be reared, nor flax to be cultivated; and the vine and olive were prohibited under severe penalties. A few coarse woollens and cottons, amounting in the whole country to scarcely a million and a half sterling, were, it appears, formerly made; but during the revolution even these have diminished.

The wretched system in which public manufactories are conducted is of itself sufficient to disgust even the most degraded and lowest of the human species. Instead of encouraging the love of labour and industry, as the means of obtaining comfort, wealth, and enjoyment, it is here accompanied by slavery, poverty, and misery.

Every manufactory that requires many hands is strictly a prison, from which the wretched inmates cannot remove, and are treated with the utmost rigour. Many of them are really confined for a number of years for crimes against the laws; and others, by borrowing a sum of money from the owners, pledge their persons and their labours till they redeem it, which it often happens is never done. The proprietor, instead of paying in money, supplies them with spirits, tobacco, &c. and by these

means they increase, rather than liquidate, the original debt.

My friend, Mr. Lewis Sultzer, a very intelligent German, with whom I went from England, and resided in Mexico, is at the head of an extensive mercantile establishment, called the Rhenish Company, and has been acquainted with the country for forty years. He dined and spent a Sunday at one of these places, near the city, where woollens are made; and on his return in the evening, his description corroborated the account I had previously heard. They have mass said for the wretched inmates on the premises; but high walls, double doors, barred windows, and severe corporeal punishments inflicted in these places of forced industry, make them as bad as the worst-conducted gaol in Europe. As the people receive their ideas of

manufactories from such places, can we wonder at the detestation in which they are held? What must their opinion of Europe be, which they are taught to consider as the place where all the manufactured articles imported are produced, and, as they suppose, carried on by the same system? But this state of things cannot long remain: a liberal Government like the present will surely devise a remedy for so great an evil, while the introduction of artisans from Europe, and the steam-engines which are now erecting at two of the mines, will give the natives an idea of our mechanical knowledge, and tend greatly to prepare them for improvement.

They make excellent beaver hats in the capital, as well as in some of the provinces; and those of wool, used by the paysanas, are well adapted to the country.

The mangas, or cloaks, of thick cotton,

made here, and worn by the country gentlemen, do credit to the taste of the country—the patterns of many are elegant, and the fabric strong and good.

Their tanned leather is very indifferent, though the country produces abundance of fine bark, and skins are cheap. Before I left Mexico two tan yards were preparing by young men from Europe, with every prospect of success.

Paper has never been made in New Spain, but always imported from Europe: it is of bad quality, and exorbitantly dear. Perhaps, from linen not being in use among the lower classes, it may be difficult to procure the material for the best paper, otherwise the manufacture of it here would be very advantageous.

The making of cutlery and hardware, of any kind, is scarcely attempted; what is done is wretchedly executed. They must

continue long to receive it from Europe; but our manufacturers should be cautioned as to what they are to send, for few table knives, and no steel forks, are used at the houses even of the wealthy. I have seen a good dinner for a large party, with only one knife in the room.

Watches have never been made in the country, nor perhaps will be for many years. The number of persons who wear them is small; and those hitherto used are mostly of French or Swiss manufacture, at low prices.

Messrs. Roskells, of Liverpool, are the first English who have established a house here in this line of business; and their watches are deservedly held in high estimation; but the people must recover from the effects of their struggles for independence before they can purchase expensive luxuries.

I have already mentioned the works of glass and earthenware of Puebla, the latter of which is also made generally over the country; but our blue and white earthenware is in great request. Many hundred crates were sold in a few weeks, at great prices.

Our manufacturers of soft goods, of almost every description except fine woollen cloths, will find a considerable market in New Spain. The production of the looms of Great Britain,—our muslins and calicoes, printed and plain, are greatly used and preferred; but the *Platillos*, or German linens, sell better than Irish. They are made up in a different form, and present a more pleasing exterior, which probably is the principal cause of the preference. Our shawls of every description, but principally those that are showy and cheap, are beginning to be generally worn.

The low-priced French woollen cloths seem to be preferred to our fine ones. It is but lately that coats of this material have come into general use. The glory of a Mexican dandy at present is to appear in a new coat of cloth as glossy as possible; the fineness of the fabric seems to be an inferior consideration to the shining surface.

Cotton stockings are now in demand; till lately, those of the finest French silk, with ornamented clocks, were principally worn by ladies; but, in a short time, I have no doubt that little else will be seen in Mexico but English manufactured goods and English fashions. It would be a good speculation for our merchants to forward a few handsome and well-dressed specimens of our countrywomen as pattern cards: our muslins and printed goods would be in greater request, and Manchester and Glas-

gow double their exportations in a few months. A few numbers of Ackermann's Fashions would probably assist in producing the same effect.

Carpets are very little used. I saw but two or three in the country. The floors of the fine apartments in which the Congress hold their meetings were covered with several of different patterns; and a few private houses of the nobility display small ones, or pieces.

But hearth-rugs (though fire-places are unknown) are in more general request, being used as saddle-cloths; whilst the huge lackered curtain-pins manufactured in Birmingham are seen decorating the high fronts of the saddles.

There are no optical instruments made in Mexico, nor an artist who can repair even a common barometer; for the slightest accident it must be sent to Europe.

Cast iron, so generally useful and necessary to us, is almost unknown in New Spain; its use for culinary purposes being supplied by the excellence of their common earthenware. Of its powers, when connected with steam, they have received such exaggerated accounts, that they in general disbelieve the whole. One person asked if it was true that, by means of a boiling teakettle, a thousand persons could be moved in safety one hundred miles a day. And the French story, of the inhabitants of Birmingham making their clergy of cast iron, and causing them to preach by steam, had been recently imported in an American bottom. But the Conde de Reglia having lately discovered both coal and iron on his estates, we may hope in a short time to convince the Mexicans of the great advantage to be derived from these materials.

The manufactory of shot is wretchedly bad, being of all shapes, and selling for one shilling and six-pence per lb. Gunpowder is cheap but coarse.

English beer and porter are in great request, and often sold at enormous rates; sometimes four or five dollars the bottle. The bottle itself is sold in Mexico at half a dollar, and in the provinces at a whole one.

Breweries were about to be established:— as fine barley as in Europe is produced in most parts of the country; and hops, till they can be cultivated, may be imported from England or the United States; but I scarcely think that, for a general beverage, beer will supplant their favourite pulque.

Spanish wine, not of the best quality, but high in price, is sparingly used. The brandies of the mother-country, and that made here from the sugar-cane, are in too much request; the latter strongly resembles

Irish whiskey, and is considered a wholesome spirit.

The literary establishments at present in Mexico are very few, and no libraries of any extent are open to the public. The productions of the press are not numerous, nor is there any thing that supplies the place of our magazines, or other periodical publications. There are now, however, three or four daily papers, but they contain very little information; they are only just beginning to insert advertisements, which are received gratis, in the same manner as they were in England at the commencement of our newspapers.

Lancastrian schools were established in the capital by the Emperor Augustine I., who is now in London: he informed me that it was his intention to have extended them throughout all the provinces. Something

of the same nature is in contemplation by the present Government.

The children of the nobility and wealthy inhabitants, are principally taught at home. The places of public instruction in greatest repute are the Seminario and San Idelfonza.

In the great square, near the market, are the public letter-writers, who, in the open air, like those of Naples, follow their daily labours; their occupation seems to be chiefly the production of ornamental love-letters, like our valentines; but, judging from their appearance, it does not seem a profitable calling. They are also dealers in ink, which by the way is of a bad quality.

Medical and surgical knowledge is less cultivated here than in Europe. Dissections are not allowed by law. Several young physicians, from the United States,

had arrived, and were getting practice, although labouring under the great disadvantage of not knowing the Spanish language.

An able oculist would be a valuable acquisition and blessing to Mexico, where diseases of the eye are so prevalent, and in which there are more blind persons than in any country in which I have ever been. There is not a native who can perform an operation. The Count of Vallentiana is at present in a state of total darkness, from cataract; it appeared to me that in England or France the cause could be removed in a few days.