

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## Climate.

THE climate of New Spain varies more in different parts than that of any other portion of the globe of equal extent. The low situations near the shore are the hottest and most unhealthy. The ports of Vera Cruz and Acapulco are deserted by foreigners during the rainy season, which lasts from April or May till October; and indeed the natives, during this period, shut themselves up in their houses, or only leave them on the greatest emergencies. It is then that the yellow fever and black vomit make their ravages among the human species. Strangers, particularly young men from Europe, cannot remain with safety even for a day.

During the short period that I was in Mexico many who had arrived in the vessels from Liverpool died. One young man, named Lunn, who had married but a few days before he embarked from England, anxious to place his wife in safety, immediately on his arrival pushed forward to Xalappa, where he left her and returned to Vera Cruz to arrange his affairs: in three days she was a widow, in a strange land, without a knowledge of the language, and without being known to a single person. Before the window of the apartment I occupied at Xalappa were exposed to the air the bedding and clothes of a young American, lately the occupant of the adjoining room. He had been taken ill at Vera Cruz, left it immediately in a litter, but arrived here only to die. Another youth from Europe, who had fled the miserable shore, died at Puebla just

before our entering it. As these occurrences are common, the impression is less forcible:—but even the hierreos, or muleteers, have a dread of Vera Cruz, for to those accustomed to the Table-land it is almost as fatal as to strangers.

The Baron Humboldt has given a melancholy but true account of the principal sea-ports of this empire, taken from authentic records. After what he has said, it might be imagined that even commercial speculation would set a higher value on human life than to risk it in the intercourse with Vera Cruz. But it is only on the coast and a few leagues from it, and there principally to the newly arrived, that the climate proves so destructive of the human constitution. As you rise to the Table-land, the air perceptibly begins to cool, the face of vegetation altogether changes, the tropical plants disappear, and

those belonging to temperate regions supply their places. On the contrary, in the journey from the capital to Vera Cruz, about four leagues beyond Xalappa the suffocating heat commences, the oak tree is no longer to be seen, and you enter the fever district; and the pestilence increases as you approach the shore. This, however, chiefly applies to the rainy season, as at other times it may be visited with little apprehension. But at all times I should advise foreigners to remain on board their vessels as much as possible; for in the harbour there is not so much danger, probably in consequence of the cleanliness and good ventilation of the ships. The *Rawlings*, in which I sailed, with eight passengers and a crew of twenty men, remained several months in the bad season without the loss of a man; and the *Phaeton* frigate, in which I returned, with

a complement of several hundred persons, passed three of the worst months on the coast with the loss of only one person, a midshipman, who died in Tampico. I should advise the stranger to have a carriage in readiness to transport him into the interior without loss of time, for exposure to the sun in the heated streets of Vera Cruz must always be attended with danger to the new comer. Another thing I should recommend is to avoid the great inn, or Posada, opposite the landing place; it may be as well regulated a house as most of the Spanish inns; but it is very objectionable from the continual crowd of people, the noise and confusion of its billiard-rooms, and the confined and otherwise bad accommodation of the sleeping apartments; but, above all, the stranger is here constantly reminded of the number of foreigners who have died in the house, and this so de-

presses the mind as to unfit the body to resist the contagion of disease.

On my return to Vera Cruz from Mexico I applied to the Franciscan convent, only a few doors to the north of the inn, and they received me into their large, airy and cool house—which faces the sea, is well ventilated, and has the best water of the city. The good fathers keep a plentiful table;—you have your choice of society, and can enjoy exercise in the sheltered cloisters of the establishment.

When the traveller who has been compelled to remain in Vera Cruz amidst contagion and death approaches the salubrious Xalappa, and is assured by the appearance of the green oaks that he has left behind him the districts of fever, with what pleasure does he inhale the temperate air, and view the verdant hills that surround this city,—a more healthy and delightful spot

than which does not exist. Here a perpetual spring reigns, verdure continues throughout the year, the woods are never unclothed, the vegetable productions always to be obtained in the markets, and fruits and blossoms to be seen at the same time. The cottage of the Indian is only intended as a shelter from the rain, for the extremes of heat and cold are alike unknown; and should the passing storm invade his cage-like house, a mat spread to the windward affords sufficient protection. Having reached the Table-land, the traveller has now nothing to fear from heat: indeed, at Perote and other places similarly situated, he may in the mornings and evenings experience the reverse, and, at this height, a few miles only make a great difference, accordingly as you rise or descend. But at Mexico itself the climate throughout the year equals

the best part of our month of May, the mean degree of heat on the Table-land being between sixty-five and seventy of Fahrenheit.

High winds are so little known here, that I never experienced any thing like a storm during my residence. Earthquakes, however, are not unusual, though they are seldom attended with danger. In the month of April I was awoken by a smart shock, followed by a tremulous motion, as if a person had been shaking the bedstead. The whole house was alarmed, but I heard of no damage in the city, though at Tlaxcala it had injured the church, and displaced some of the statues from the niches on the front.