

cestors!" and I was informed that chaplets of flowers had been placed on the figure by natives who had stolen thither, unseen, in the evening for that purpose; a proof that, notwithstanding the extreme diligence of the Spanish clergy for three hundred years, there still remains some taint of heathen superstition among the descendents of the original inhabitants. In a week the cast was finished, and the goddess again committed to her place of interment, hid from the profane gaze of the vulgar.

CHAPTER XXVI.

First Visit to the Silver Mine at Themascaltepec.

HAVING received an invitation from Mr. Smith Wilcox, the American Consul-General, to visit the silver mine about thirty leagues from Mexico, on which he was then, at considerable expense, erecting a steam-engine, for the purpose of clearing it of the water which had prevented it from being worked for several years;—on the 24th of April I accompanied that gentleman, his nephew, and the proprietor of the mine. We left the city after breakfast, in a carriage drawn by seven mules, and travelled by the side of the great aqueduct which bounds the road on one side, whilst the other is separated from the swampy

meadows reclaimed from the lake by a deep ditch, the bank of which is planted with large trees somewhat resembling our poplars. At a league's distance we passed the fine palace or castle of Chapultepec, built by the Viceroy Galvez at an immense expense, and lately occupied by the Ex-Emperor: it stands on a remarkable hill, or rather rock, and commands a most beautiful view of the city and surrounding country. About two miles farther lies the village of Tacubaya, finely situated on the first rising ground, principally composed of the beautiful houses, villas, and superb gardens, of the nobility and rich citizens of the capital. A little above this place, not far from the Bishop's Palace, is the noblest view of the city, but even from hence no idea of its extent could be formed by a stranger, as the site is so flat that little more than its profile can be seen. It

is from the top of its cathedral, or from its grand streets, crossing each other at right angles, that an estimate of the size and splendour of Mexico can be made. We now ascended by a tolerable road for nearly ten miles to an hacienda, where we stopped to dine, the road to it affording nothing very interesting, and in some places appearing barren and burnt up. At this spot rises the fine stream of water which forms the principal supply for the capital, to which it is carried, at great cost, by means of the aqueduct. We continued to ascend till within a short distance of Lerma, when, (having crossed the mountains that surround the valley of Mexico,) we descended into the plain or valley in which that place and the city of Toluca stand. On reaching the town we found the entrance closed for the night, but after some detention procured admission from the

Governor, and reached the Posada about eight in the evening.

Lerma is a regularly built town, but consists principally of small houses: it appears never to have been finished.

We left it soon after daylight, and, passing the end of a lake which looks as if it had formerly been much larger, crossed the fine plain, covered by rich meadows and considerable farms, in high cultivation. In two hours we reached Toluca, a distance of twelve miles, to breakfast.

This, like most of the Mexican cities, is handsome, and regularly built. Its exterior presents an appearance of prosperity I had not observed in other places: the houses had a new and fresh appearance, and, what I had not seen before, several new buildings were constructing. It has considerable manufactories of soap and candles; the best hams and sausages in New Spain are

said to be cured here; we observed several manufactories of them, and admired again their fine breed of hogs.

We left Toluca in the coach, and proceeded about two leagues farther, where the road for wheel-carriages ceases. Here having procured horses and mules for the whole party, which had been augmented by the addition of several persons going to the mine, (among them a Yorkshire blacksmith,) we ascended about a league, and then entered an extensive wood, which crowned the Cordillera, on the west side of the Table-land of Mexico. This was by much the most beautiful scene I had witnessed in America;—abounding with trees of the noblest form and loftiest height, most of them entirely new to me, but among them oaks and pines, whose size and luxuriance eclipsed any thing seen in the Alps or in Norway! We

still continued to rise, and in one elevated open place caught the last view of the mountains that surround the vale of Mexico: on our left lay the volcano of Toluca, covered with perpetual snow; and shortly after we reached a defile in the mountain, and began to descend towards the Pacific ocean.

The scenery was now inexpressibly grand. The ground, being broken into abrupt hills, afforded many openings, through which the tops of the immense forests below were seen to the greatest advantage. In many places, for a considerable distance, our path was shaded by trees of an amazing height, so close as almost to exclude the light,—on emerging suddenly from which the most enchanting prospects were spread beneath our feet; the summits of gigantic volcanos, receding like steps beneath us, seemed to lead the eye to the

waters of the Pacific, to which the mountain-torrents we passed were hastening. The descent now became very steep, so that in many places we were obliged to alight from our mules, and proceed, with cautious steps, over broken masses of basalt and other volcanic substances, where not a trace of the labour of man was visible, or any circumstances that could remind us of being in an inhabited country; except occasionally meeting small groups of Indians, carrying the productions of their little farms to the market of Toluca, or even as far as Mexico. From these simple people the unprotected traveller has nothing to fear; they are the most courteous, gentle, and unoffending creatures in existence, and never pass, without saluting, a stranger. Their burthens consisted generally of fruit, fowls, turkeys, mats, shingles of wood for roofs of houses, and sometimes of charcoal.

They generally had their wives and daughters with them;—clean, modest-looking women, carrying heavy burthens exclusive of the children usually fastened on their backs. After a descent of several hours through this ever-varying and sublime scenery, to the effect of which a thunder-storm added much majesty, we arrived at a small plain, surrounded on all sides by pine-capped mountains. In the centre of this, in the midst of highly cultivated ground, rose the neat little Indian church and village of St. Miguel de los Ranchos, placed in one of the most delightful situations and lovely climates in the world. On the mountain we might almost have complained of cold, but the descent had brought us into a temperature resembling the finest parts of Europe, and our approach to the village just before sunset brought home strongly to our recollection.

Our path lay through corn fields, orchards, and gardens. Apples, pears, and peaches, almost obstructed our way; and fields of potatoes and beans in blossom might, but for the swarthy and thinly clothed inhabitants, who gazed with surprise at our advance, and the luxuriance of the Nopal or the great American Aloe, in full bloom, have made us fancy ourselves in England. We rode up to the church, and on dismounting presently found ourselves surrounded by numbers of men and boys, all eager to render us any assistance in their power. A small room adjoining this edifice, called the *comunidad*, provided by Government for the reception of strangers, was pointed out to us as our residence for the night; where having spread our mattresses on the floor, and given the Indians directions for the suppers of ourselves and horses, we walked out to examine the

church. It was the eve of the feast of St. Mark, or, as the Indians who accompanied us called him, Nostras Boueno Amigo (our good friend).

The church was gaudily ornamented with pictures and statues, and had that day been dressed with fruits, flowers, palm blossoms, &c., disposed in arches, chaplets, and a variety of other pretty devices, in honour of their patron.

Opposite the door, under a venerable cedar, of great size, was a small temple and altar, decorated in a similar manner, with the addition of several human skulls, quite clean, and as white as ivory. Round the great tree some men were employed in splitting pieces of candle-wood, a species of pine which contains a considerable quantity of resin, and which, being lighted, burns with a clear flame like a candle.

I rambled through the village and the surrounding plantations of the maguey or aloe: many of the plants were then producing the pulque. Night was approaching, and I hastened my pace, to reach our lodging, when the bell suddenly tolled in a quick manner, and in an instant the churchyard was brilliantly illuminated by the flame of eight piles of the candle-wood, prepared for that purpose; the effect was heightened, by its being quite unexpected. On my entering the churchyard four men discharged a flight of rockets, which was instantly answered by a similar salute from every house in the place: this was the commencement of the fete for the following day. In a quarter of an hour the bonfires were extinguished, and the church doors closed; and we retired to our place of rest to take the homely supper provided for us by our

new friends, which had been prepared in a house in the village. Our meal was not finished when a message requested our speedy attendance in the church: on entering we found it illuminated, and crowded by numbers of persons, of both sexes. Dancing, with singular Indian ceremonies, had commenced in front of the altar, which to my astonishment I immediately recognised to be of the same nature as those in use before the introduction of Christianity. The actors consisted of five men and three women, grotesquely but richly dressed, in the fashion of the time of Montezuma. One young man, meant to personate that monarch, wore a high crown, from which rose a plume of red feathers. The first part of the drama consisted of the representation of a warrior taking leave of his family preparatory to going to battle;—a man and

woman danced in front of the altar, and clearly expressed the parting scene, and knelt down and solemnly prayed for the success of his undertaking. The next act commenced with two warriors, superbly dressed; one, a Mexican, was distinguished by the superior height of his head-dress, and by a piece of crimson silk suspended from his shoulders: after dancing some time, a mock fight began, which, after various evolutions, terminated of course in the Mexican taking his enemy prisoner, and dragging him by his hair into the presence of his sovereign; when the dance was resumed, and the vanquished frequently implored mercy, both from his conqueror and the monarch. The various parts were admirably performed:—no pantomime could be better, and I almost expected to see the captive sacrificed to the gods. The audience seemed pleased with

our attendance, except one old man, who appeared to think we had seen too much; he was a little elevated with pulque, but some of the younger ones carried him out. In dancing, the women accompanied their motions and the music with a slight instrument in the right hand; it was a rattle, made of a small gourd ornamented with silver bells, and had a pleasing effect. I tried to buy one of these, but they refused to part with it. One old man seemed to act in a threefold capacity:—he was fiddler, or leader of the band; master of the ceremonies; and, if I mistake not, represented the high priest. He wore a white dress, over which were placed wreaths of small green leaves—and he apparently regulated the whole performance of the drama. On one occasion, when the royal Montezuma received the homage of his prisoner, the monarch remained standing, which being contrary to the etiquette

of his court, he was gently reminded of the error by getting a smart stroke on the cheek with the fiddlestick of the high priest; on which his majesty immediately squatted, and received with propriety the address of his general and the supplication of his prisoner.

Soon after this we left the church and retired to rest, but were shortly afterwards serenaded at our residence; the party wished for admission, but Mr. Wilcox being indisposed, we refused to open our door. About midnight we heard them again at their revels, when a flight of rockets concluded their devotions till morning.

We were still eighteen miles from the mine, at which it was desirable we should arrive early; we therefore left the village before day, some of the people having remained all night with our horses. They wished much to detain us, to see their fete,

and I felt regret at not staying. Our road lay through the numerous little farms belonging to the town, which extends a considerable distance. All was as silent as death, except the stream that runs through this peaceful vale; and the moon shone without a cloud as we passed through the plantations and gardens of these happy children of nature, who here cultivate their native soil without the interruption of a single white face, and seem scarcely to feel or even know their humiliating situation. Half an hour's easy ride brought us again to the woods, and to a repetition of the same magnificent scenery as that of the day before. In some places, the height of the trees and closeness of the foliage over our heads were such as to make it absolutely dark, although the moon still shone with the greatest splendour. Our path was in some places dif-

cult, and we had again to ascend towards the mountain-regions. About sunrise we reached a more open and cultivated country, and travelled near a rapid river, whose banks were covered with fields of wheat and maize—the prospect from hence is as rich as any part of Devonshire. Our narrow path, in many places, was so overgrown with vegetation as to be almost impassable. Among the fruits that presented themselves was our common blackberry, in greater perfection than in Europe; and once or twice we gathered very good strawberries. We now reached a sterile sandy district, and passed a few barren hills, which had, in some places, been worn by torrents into a variety of the most extraordinary forms: leaving these, we descended into a fine country, and entered the mining district of Themascaltepec, which a few years since produced a

considerable portion of the precious metal exported to Europe. A mile of steep and difficult descent brought us to the town from which the district is named, most romantically situated in a deep valley, near the junction of three rapid mountain-streams, on the only spot sufficiently level for the purpose.

Themascaltepec contains about one thousand inhabitants. It is now in a state of decay; most of the haciendas for preparing the silver ore are in ruins, and the expensive water-courses, which formerly turned the ponderous machinery for pounding the ore, are now neglected, and concealed by the thick vegetation with which they are overgrown.

The appearance of so many strangers in this retired little town excited some surprise among its inhabitants. I was the first Englishman that ever visited it. We were

hospitably received at the house of Don Jose Benitas, where Mr. Wilcox was met by Mr. Goulde, his American engineer, and many of the people whom he had brought from the United States for the purpose of erecting the steam-engine then putting up at his mine, distant within a mile of the town.

After partaking of a good Spanish breakfast, for which our long ride gave us an excellent appetite, we remounted our horses and rode thither. The road or path had been improved at much expense by Mr. Wilcox, but still it is such as few persons accustomed to English turnpikes would choose to venture upon on horseback: but surely nothing can exceed it in point of romantic scenery, or in the luxuriance and variety of the vegetation, which in some places renders it difficult of passage. The mine is situated in a

valley, through which a small stream winds, till it falls into the river at the bottom of the town.

We found the works in considerable forwardness, and part of the machinery for the steam-engine, which had been brought from Vera Cruz to Toluca on waggons, and afterwards through the woods by means of rude wooden carriages built on the spot, assisted by Indians and oxen, lying near it.

A shed of great magnitude, in the form of a cross, and as large as a cathedral, had been very ably constructed, and roofed with shingles, under the direction of Don Jose Benitas, with the aid of Indians only, and without the use of iron, being lashed firmly together with thongs of raw hides. It is intended to cover the engine, and the various work-shops, as well as the mouth of the mine; and to protect the

workmen from the sun and rain. The erection of roofs of this magnitude in England would have been an enormous expense, and exercised the talents of an able architect.

The Indian workmen, like all uninformed people, are strongly prejudiced in favour of their own customs; and the Europeans who have taken mines in Mexico will have much to contend with before they can bring them to work under their directions. They are indeed particularly averse to innovation. A common wheelbarrow is much too complex a machine to be used in removing the rubbish from the mine; and Mr. Wilcox was obliged to submit to two men dragging about half as much earth on a raw hide as one could have removed with ease on a barrow. A saw for cutting planks they had never seen till we arrived. Its operation astonished them. They thought it impossi-