

CHAPTER XXVII.

Excursion from Mexico to Tezcuco, Otumba, and the Pyramids of St. Juan de Teotihuacan, and round the Lake of Tezcuco.

ON Whit-Sunday, 1823, I left Mexico, in company with Mr. Gillow and my son, attended by an Indian guide, furnished us by the politeness of Donna Roderigez, mother of the Countess of Regla, to whom also we were indebted for letters of introduction to some of the principal inhabitants of Tezcuco.

We were early on horseback, and in passing the great square of the city, witnessed a sight not often seen by Europeans, though no rarity here:—nearly a thousand horses and mules, loaded with silver, were

just preparing to start for Vera Cruz, to ship the latter on board an English frigate. Such a scene, when the mining operations are in activity, is a very common occurrence; and even now, when the mines were nearly all filled with water, and ruined, it seemed scarcely to attract the notice of the people.

We proceeded several miles on the original causeway leading to Vera Cruz, which passes over what was formerly the Lake of Tezcuco, but is now dry. When we arrived at Mexico, only seven weeks before, the ditches were filled with water, and covered by myriads of shoveller ducks and other aquatic birds, and Indians were employed in fishing; but, owing to the unusually dry season, the whole had become an arid desert, and sent forth such effluvia, as, in a less elevated country, would have been productive of the worst

consequences. The usual road lay round the borders of the lake, but our guide took us across its dry bed, which shortened the journey above a league. This passage brought forcibly to my recollection the accounts of journeying over Arabian deserts, except that on one side our prospect terminated in vegetation, and on all sides in mountains. It was a level sand, without a blade of grass, or any other vegetable matter, so burnt up and yielding, that our horses could only walk, and that with difficulty; and there was not a living object near us, except that now and then a group of Indians chanced to cross our path, which still kept up the resemblance to Arabia, as they were not unlike the petty caravans. When we arrived at a village, we observed the first commencement of verdure, and a few miles more, through sandy, parched fields, brought us

again into a good road; and, after a pleasant ride over a country not very fertile, we reached the gates of Tezcucó. For some time before you approach the immediate vicinity of this city, you are apprised that you are near a place of great antiquity. You pass by the large aqueduct for the supply of the town, still in use, and the ruins of several stone buildings of great strength. A bridge, over which the road passes (Puente des Brigantinas), points out the place where Cortez built and launched his brigantines on the lakes, when he returned to conquer the capital. But such is the change in the face of the country, that it is now a league and a half from the water. A little further on we came to the foundations of ancient buildings of great magnitude.

Near the gates, we observed the modern ditches dug for the defence of the city

during the revolution: these had brought to light several ancient structures, all of great strength and many of considerable size. On entering the gates, to the right are seen those artificial tumuli, the teocalli of unburnt brick so common in most Indian towns, supposed to be temples, tombs, or places of defence, or perhaps serving for all these purposes.

The town was crowded with country people; and our English dresses and small saddles excited their surprise and merriment. We were conducted to the house of Don Pedro Poso, the chief magistrate, an old Spaniard, and a most hospitable and worthy man, by whose family we were received and treated with the greatest politeness. His brother, with whom I had formed some acquaintance in Mexico, and who was well acquainted with the antiquities of the place, fortunately happened to be

travelling through the town at the time, and very kindly undertook, whilst dinner was preparing, to conduct us to some of the many interesting objects with which Tezucuo abounds.

The foundations and ruins of temples, fortresses, palaces, and other extensive buildings, are alone sufficient to attest its former consequence and splendour; but it is likewise well known to have been in old times the seat of Mexican literature and arts. It was the Athens of America, and the residence of historians, orators, poets, artists, and the great men of every department of the sciences who existed in those days. It was on the return of Cortez to the attack of Mexico, after a series of misfortunes succeeding the night of desolation, with his army recruited by the Spaniards from Cuba and reinforced and assisted by the Tlascallans, that, advancing

to this city, he was invited by the caique to enter and take up his quarters for the night; but the wary general, suspecting treachery, deferred his entry till the morning, when he found the town deserted, and that preparations had been made to destroy his army had he accepted the invitation on the evening before. Upon this, Cortez deposed the reigning caique, and placed in his stead a young man who was in great favour with him, and who ever after continued firmly attached to his interest. He built a strong fortress or barracks for the safety and convenience of Cortez's troops; and the town remained the head-quarters of the Spaniards till the final reduction of Mexico.

Under the guidance of Don Pedro Poso we commenced our rambles, and first inspected the Spanish palace built soon after the conquest. It is large and has been

handsome, but is now in as ruinous a state as the Indian palace which preceded it.

We were next shown an Indian idol, nearly perfect; the rattle-snake, of considerable size, lying neglected under a gateway. It had originally been painted of various colours, some of which were rendered perfectly distinct by merely throwing water upon it. From this we walked to the Spanish quarters or barracks, built by the young caique of Tezcucó for Cortez, still entire, surrounded by a wall twenty feet high, on the top of which the traces of the walks of the Spanish centinels are distinctly visible; and we were shown a recess in the wall built for the celebration of mass. After passing the fine aqueduct, and several tumuli, (pyramids of unburnt bricks,) our guide conducted us to the site of the palace of the ancient caiques, or tributary kings of Tezcucó. It must have been a

noble building, far surpassing any idea I had formed of the architectural abilities of the aboriginal Americans. It extended for three hundred feet, forming one side of the great square, and was placed on sloping terraces, raised one above the other by small steps: some of these terraces are still entire, and covered with cement, very hard and equal in beauty to that found in ancient Roman buildings. From what is known of the extensive foundations of this palace, it must have occupied some acres of ground. It was composed of huge blocks of basaltic stone, of about four or five feet long, and two and a half or three feet thick, cut and polished with the utmost exactness. The great church which stands close by is almost entirely built of the materials taken from the palace, many of the sculptured stones from which may be seen in the walls, though most of the ornaments are turned in-

wards. Indeed our guide informed us, that whoever built a house at Tezcucó made the ruins of the palace serve as his quarry. On visiting this city the antiquarian will find in it many things worthy of his notice. I suspect that most of the buildings are little altered from what they were before the arrival of the Spaniards, who must themselves have employed, at least for some time, the same workmen and materials as the original inhabitants. In many of the walls and pavements I discovered fragments of sculptured stones, and in a small house I found the ancient arms of Mexico, the Spread Eagle and Nopal, with hieroglyphic characters. At a well about half a mile from the town are two circular carved stones, that may have been used on the identical spot before the conquest.

On our return our host pressed us to wit-

ness a cock-fight (it was Whit-Sunday): to oblige him, I saw for the first time in my life that sanguinary sport, as it is called, in a building erected for the purpose. The place was crowded with persons of both sexes and all ages, and I was mortified to see several females, well dressed, but whose looks too evidently betrayed the pleasure they received from this inhuman pastime. I could not but consider it as a strong proof of the great distance at which these people are placed behind the inhabitants of Europe in refinement and intellectual enjoyment. I am no judge of such things myself, but the English friend who accompanied us, and who is from Lancashire, assured us that the animals were very fine ones, and one of the inhabitants, in speaking in praise of them, said they were of the true Derby breed!

Whilst at our dinner we were informed

that at a distance of only two leagues was a place called Baño de Montezuma, and that it had formerly been used as a bath by that monarch. A gentleman of the town, Don Trinidad Rosalia, offered to escort us, and in a few minutes we were on horseback: after a smart canter through cultivated grounds, and over a fine plain, bounded by the mountains of the Cordilleras, we approached an hacienda and church*, and here I expected to find the bath of which we were in search, in some subterraneous place, but learnt to my surprise that we had to mount a conical mountain called Tescosingo. We employed our horses as far as they could take us, but the unevenness of the ground at last obliged us to dismount, and having fastened them to a nopal tree, we scrambled with great

* Every person who builds an hacienda is by law compelled to erect a church also.

difficulty through bushes and over loose stones, which were in great quantities on all sides, and at last perceived that we were on the ruins of a very large building—the cemented stones remaining in some places covered with stucco, and forming walks and terraces, but much encumbered with earth fallen from above, and overgrown with a wood of nopal, which made it difficult to ascend. In some places the terraces were carried over chasms by solid pieces of masonry; in others cut through the living rock: but, as we endeavoured to proceed in a straight line, our labour was very great, being sometimes obliged to climb on our hands and knees. By the assistance of underwood, however, at length, after passing several buildings and terraces, the stucco of which appeared fresh and of a fine peach colour, we arrived at about two thirds of the height of the hill, almost ex-

hausted with our exertions; and great indeed was our disappointment when we found that our guide had mistaken the situation, and did not know exactly where we were. Greatly chagrined, we began to retrace our steps; and luckily in a few minutes perceived the object of our search. It was cut in the solid rock, and standing out like a martin's nest from the side of a house. It is not only an extraordinary bath, but still more extraordinarily placed. It is a beautiful basin about twelve feet long by eight wide, having a well about five feet by four deep in the centre, surrounded by a parapet or rim two feet six inches high, with a throne or chair, such as is represented in ancient pictures to have been used by the kings. There are steps to descend into the basin or bath; the whole cut out of the living porphyry rock with the most mathematical

precision, and polished in the most beautiful manner. This bath commands one of the finest prospects in the Mexican valley, including the greater part of the lake of Tezcuco, and the city of Mexico, from which it is distant about thirty miles.

Night was fast approaching, and the sky portending a thunder-storm, we were obliged to depart; and now I had occasion to regret the hours I had unprofitably lost at the cock-fight. I had just time to make a hurried sketch for a model, and my son to take a slight drawing, when we were reluctantly forced to quit a spot which had been the site of a most singular and ancient residence of the former monarchs of the country. As we descended, our guide showed us in the rock a large reservoir for supplying with water the palace, whose walls still remained eight feet high; and as we examined farther, we found

that the whole mountain had been covered with palaces, temples, baths, hanging gardens, &c. yet this place has never been noticed by any writer.

I am of opinion that these were antiquities prior to the discovery of America, and erected by a people whose history was lost even before the building of the city of Mexico. In our way down we collected specimens of the stucco which covered the terrace, still as hard and beautiful as any found at Portici or Herculaneum. Don T. Rosalia informed us that we had seen but the commencement of the wonders of the place;—that there were traces of buildings to the very top still discernible;—that the mountain was perforated by artificial excavations, and that a flight of steps led to one near the top, which he himself had entered, but which no one as yet had had courage to explore,

although it was believed that immense riches were buried in it.

We regained our horses, and an hour brought us back to Tezcuco, greatly fatigued indeed, but more lamenting the little time we had been able to give to the most interesting place we had visited; and which, it is not a little extraordinary, appears to have been unnoticed by the Spanish writers at the conquest, in whom it probably excited as little interest as it does in the present inhabitants of the city of Mexico, not one of whom could I find who had ever seen or even heard of it. What a subject for contemplation does this collection of ruins present to the reflecting mind! The seat of a powerful monarch, whose subjects (if we may judge from their works,) were probably an enlightened people, existing and flourishing long before the Continent of America was known to

Europe, and yet a people whose customs, costume, religion, and architecture, strongly resembled those of an enlightened nation of Africa, which may be said to have ceased to exist twenty centuries before this continent was discovered.—Who now can solve this difficulty?

Early the next morning we visited the Indian village of Huexotla, about two miles from Tezcuco. It was once a place of considerable importance, as its extensive and strong walls, and other ruins, still remaining, amply testify. On our approach we observed several of the small pyramidal teocallis or mounts, composed of alternate layers of clay and unburnt bricks; one of them had evidently an entrance to the centre, which was discovered by part of it having fallen in. I have since regretted that I did not cause it to be opened, as it might have thrown some light on the

obscure history of these common but extraordinary Aztec erections. Some of them, as a mere matter of speculation, might amply repay the trouble and expense, as Bernal Dias, and other writers, positively assert that many of them contained considerable treasure.

On entering the village we were met by some Indians, who, on being informed of the object of our visit, kindly undertook to show us the antiquities of the place. They first pointed out the foundation of a palace, in which two large reservoirs of water still remained, tolerably perfect; one of these, covered with rose-coloured cement, is entire: we were conducted through the town, mostly in ruins, and consisting of nearly demolished buildings, in which the Indian and Spanish architecture were so blended, as to be with difficulty traced apart. At the door of a cottage we noticed

a large idol of stone, similar to that we had seen at Tezcucó, but of better workmanship; and in the centre of the town a singular kind of column with a pointed top, of which we made a drawing. By this time our party had considerably increased, and I believe consisted of all the male population of the place, which never having been visited by strangers before, our appearance excited much amusement, but nothing could exceed their civility and kindness. They were delighted with the sketches we had made, and eagerly pointed out every object they thought worthy of our observation. The ancient wall, almost thirty feet high and very thick, extends to a considerable distance, and is of a very singular construction, being divided into five unequal parts. The broadest division is built of large oval stones, with the ends standing out so as to