

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Second Visit to Themascaltepec.—Ceremony of taking Possession of a Silver Mine.

MY first visit to this romantic country was merely a journey of pleasure; but while detained by the necessary business of Mr. Wilcox, I was shown the shaft of a valuable silver mine, which had been deserted several years on account of the proprietor's not being able with the machinery of the country (worked by mules) to keep it clear of the water which overflowed it and expelled the workmen. On examining its situation, close to the precipitous stream of the river Bada, which is at this season considerable, it struck me that its waters, with the adoption of proper machinery, were admirably calculated to drain the mine;

and on consulting Mr. Goulde, the American engineer at the mine of Mr. Wilcox, he fully confirmed my conjecture, and offered to construct the required mill-work at a moderate expense, as the necessary iron-work for the machinery and pumps had been brought by him from New York. An inquiry into the former products of the mine, among several of the people who had worked in it, confirmed me in the determination if possible to possess it; and on my return to Mexico I consulted Don Lucas Alaman, Minister of State, on the propriety of doing so, and was advised to apply to Government for a letter of naturalization, to enable me to denounce it according to law; by his interest an act of congress was passed in a few days for the purpose, and now, accompanied by my friends, Mr. W. M. Bates and Mr. Snyders, I went to take formal possession of the silver mine of Milan

or Del Bada, sleeping the first night at Lerma, where we were joined by Mr. Goulde and his servant. On the second we reached St. Miguel de las Ranchos, drenched with heavy rain, but my Indian friends supplied us with every comfort in their power. The next morning brought us to Themascaltepec, where the judge, or governor, received me with the greatest politeness, assured me he rejoiced in the prospect of foreigners, and particularly of English, settling among them, as he was convinced that, by means of their capital and improved machinery, the mineral wealth of the country would be again brought into circulation, and the people be fully employed. We spent the evening with him, in the course of which he intimated that, understanding I had paid much attention to the flowers and fruits of the country, he would show me some of the latter from

an estate of his own in the neighbourhood, held in much estimation here. We were introduced into a small room, the floor piled with large bars of silver, the whole of which had been produced by his mine in a few weeks. The second day after my arrival I was formally installed in the seigniory of the mine and adjacent lands, in the presence of some of the principal inhabitants and the Padre of the town, who attended for the purpose of witnessing the ceremony, which consisted of the proper officer taking me by the hand, at the mouth of the mine, and declaring me, in the name of the government, its right and lawful owner; then, congratulating me on the possession of such a valuable property, he requested me to take three stones and cast them in different directions, and afterwards to pluck up some weeds and throw them away, to show that the land and whatever it produced was

at my disposal.* We now returned, followed by the whole company and a crowd of Indians, to a house in the neighbourhood, where an entertainment was provided, consisting of wines, Spanish brandy, a variety of cakes, sweetmeats, and dulces, which, after a few appropriate toasts and a blessing from the Padre, were quickly dispatched, and the ceremony concluded with the greatest good humour.

The situations of mines, in general, are in sterile and barren districts, but those of Themascaltepec are an exception. It would be difficult for the traveller to point out a more lovely or romantic situation than the little town in which this mine is situated. The plentifully supplied market exhibits a profusion of every variety of vegetable and

* This is precisely similar to the ceremony of infestment, agreeably to the old feudal system still practised in Scotland.

animal production that can be met with in Europe and America. In the same field may be seen the finest European wheat, plantations of sugar-cane, and fences of the *Agava Americana*. The culinary vegetables are equally fine and cheap; the market well supplied with beef, mutton, pork, and poultry, at a reasonable rate. The climate is still finer than at Mexico; it is seldom warmer and never so cold; there is scarcely a change except during the wet season, when rain may be expected every afternoon. At this time the vegetation is surprisingly luxuriant. The variety of flowers and ornamental plants yet unknown to European botanists exceeds all enumeration. The roads in the neighbourhood are almost impassable, from the festoons and arches formed by the variety of creepers which choke the way; wild vines, convol-

vuli, and passifloras form thickets that are penetrated with difficulty.

One undescribed tree, twenty feet high, with its bright green foliage, and flowers like clusters of roses,* is seen at every step as you traverse the banks of the three streams that surround the town, and whose waters flow through every part, brought by means of aqueducts. Themascaltepec is the capital of one of the smallest mining districts in New Spain; yet its average annual produce, during the time the mines were at work, was 260,000 marks of silver. The town is situated in a small valley surrounded by mountains, containing silver, copper, and lead, and whose surfaces are mostly covered with wood, among which the Indian cottages and plantations produce

* Now growing in the botanic garden at Chelsea.

a very pleasing effect. The houses are mostly of one story, and covered with a large projecting roof of wooden shingles, admirably adapted to the climate; they have but few glass windows and no chimnies, as the temperature is such as to render fire at all times unnecessary, except for culinary purposes, when charcoal only is used in simple brick stoves. I have often been surprised at the great facility and ease with which as good a dinner is provided as by the elaborate and expensive apparatus used in our kitchens; the whole place of which is supplied by a few earthen vessels, of their own manufacture: grates, ranges, stoves, ovens, jacks, and all the et-ceteras of pots, kettles, stewpans, saucepans, steam and frying pans, and a hundred others, are unknown even by their names; the value of a few shillings in earthenware supplies the whole, and will furnish a greater

variety of dishes than are in general to be met with at English tables. The town has a well supplied weekly market on Sundays, when the assemblage of Indians is very numerous, and their conduct religious, decent, and becoming: here they are very unlike those of Mexico. I would as soon trust myself alone in their cottages for the night, and could repose in as much security, as in those of an English peasant. The respectand civility with which they treat strangers border almost on servility. On going to and returning from Themascaltepec, I have passed four nights in the Indian town of St. Miguel de las Ranchos, in which is not a white inhabitant, and never met with more kindness, honesty, and hospitality in any country. I have spent some delightful hours in this little hamlet, which is about eighteen miles from Themascaltepec, and situated in one of the most enchanting

valleys in the world, and they seem the most contented of mankind. I wished much to have brought one of them to England, but nothing could induce them to leave the lovely spot on which they are placed. The inhabitants of Themascaltepec are courteous and civil to strangers, particularly when known to them; they are very religious, and constant in their devotions at church;—most of the ladies attend divine service morning and evening every day, and their exterior behaviour is as modest and becoming as I ever witnessed. The three clergymen of the place did me the honour of calling upon me the day after my arrival; they are intelligent men, well disposed to the foreigners whom Mr. Wilcox has brought among them, but regretted they were not Christians, a name given in this country only to members of the Church of Rome. The introduction of the steam-

engine has excited the greatest curiosity among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, the major part of whom do not believe half the extraordinary tales related by the workmen of the uses for which steam is employed. When told that the cotton of which their clothes are made, the hardware on the table, and most of the luxuries in Europe, are produced by its application, they look at you with astonishment; and when assured that, by the same agency, we travel at the rate of nearly 200 miles a day, with certainty and safety, without more inconvenience than remaining in our own houses, they shake their heads and say, "When you have by means of hot water drawn all the cold from our mines, then we can believe you; but as what you tell us is not an article of faith, you must excuse us till then." I hope and trust their doubts will be dispelled in a few months, as Mr. Wilcox

has nearly surmounted the difficulties he had to encounter in bringing the large pieces of his steam-engine from Vera Cruz to this place; much of it has arrived, and I saw the remainder within a few leagues. One waggon with the beam had nineteen mules to draw it. Most sincerely do I hope, and firmly believe, that the spirited undertaking of this gentleman will fully answer his purpose, and that his example will be followed by hundreds of others, to the advantage of themselves and of the country in general.

On the 4th of July I left Themascaltepec, on my return to Mexico and England, after an absence of little more than seven months, during the greater part of which I had been busily engaged in Mexico, collecting every thing requisite to form the Exhibitions now open in the Egyptian Hall, in the hope of showing the public whatever was most

interesting in this extraordinary and almost unknown country. A few hours brought us to my favorite Indian village of St. Miguel. We were instantly surrounded by the Alcalde and our friends, who began to prepare dinner for us; and whilst Mr. Goulde was employed in engaging forty of the people, and fourteen oxen, to proceed to meet the machinery of the engine, and assist in removing it through the woods to the village, I strolled with my gun over the plain to the neighbouring woods, and procured some of the birds which now form a part of the Exhibition. In this ramble I was followed by numbers of young men and boys: their delight and astonishment at seeing a bird killed whilst flying was so great, that it was a long time before they could be quieted. Each bird was brought home for me by a separate bearer; and, on our arrival at the village, the detail of the wonderful man-

ner in which it was killed was recounted with great animation to their friends. The Indians remained with us till after supper, when as usual we received their "*Buenos Noche*," and retired to rest; but many of them were in attendance before day to see us on the road; when we took a hearty breakfast, and left these good people—I hope not for the last time. Nothing can exceed the beauty of the road from hence to the city of Toluca; the woods are the most elevated as well as the grandest in Mexico; and the number and beauty of the flowers that appeared in much novelty at almost every quarter of a mile excited the greatest admiration. A botanist might add several hundreds, of considerable beauty, to our gardens in this morning's ride. The temperature here being full as cold as in England, they would, I have little doubt, be a permanent advantage: how much did

I regret that circumstances prevented my doing this! I have however brought some, and still hope to be the means of obtaining the whole. Near the village I found two kinds of potatoes, but without bulbous roots, growing wild, and in the woods strawberries of fine flavour, as well as gooseberries, currants, and abundance of grapes, and the scarlet kidney-bean, with its bright red blossom, in every hedge. Passing through Toluca, we reached Lerma early, and got a comfortable supper; but the next morning being Sunday, our landlady as usual refused us our breakfast till we had been to church. We arrived at the hacienda within fifteen miles of Mexico, and dined on very fine frogs from the lake. I thought them superior to those in Europe; to my friends they were new, but they seemed to make their acquaintance with much satisfaction. We now descended the mountains

that bound the valley, with the rich prospect of the lakes and city before us; and in the afternoon we observed a most curious and beautiful phenomenon. In the sky, on the opposite side of the lake, apparently near Tezcuco, the clouds had assumed a remarkable density of appearance, and the usual distant thunder announced the approach of rain; the lightning showed itself in broad sheets, quivering between the moving clouds, which, suddenly opening, discovered a large mass of the most vivid and strongly contrasted colours, greatly resembling the rainbow, but of ten times the size and brilliancy. It continued about ten minutes and then suddenly disappeared. I observed a similar effect afterwards, on the day I left Mexico for Vera Cruz. On reaching the city, we learnt that his Majesty's ship Phaeton was on the coast, and would take a convoy of

silver, then preparing to leave Mexico. As my friend was going to Vera Cruz, we immediately determined to proceed together, and engaged a carriage to depart on the 19th instant.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Return from Mexico to Xalappa.

On the 19th July, accompanied by Messrs. Bates and Snyders, I left Mexico in a carriage drawn by eight mules, by the high road for Vera Cruz. We halted for a short time at Ayotla, close to the lake of Chalco, when, parting with my son and Mr. Gillow, who had accompanied us thus far on horseback, we proceeded a few miles farther to a large hacienda, where we proposed to pass the night. On approaching it we were struck with the sound of a large bell, which continued to be rung with great force. Having unloaded our carriage and entered the house, we inquired of the ringer the cause of his continual exertion, when