

## CHAPTER XXX.

Xalappa.—General Victoria.—Rural Fete.—Religious Fete and Ceremony at Telotepec.—Visit to a Cavern, and Valley of Lava.—Departure for Vera Cruz.

ON arriving at Xalappa, we drove to the house of Donna Guadaloupe, the lady with whom we had formerly resided, who again received us into her house, in which we constantly received the most polite attention from herself and numerous family. We found several English on their road to the capital, and also Dr. Mackie, the British Envoy, whom I mentioned on my arrival at Vera Cruz. He was now executing the object of the mission with which he was entrusted by the British Government, having fortunately met here General

Victoria, the Chief of the Executive Government, with whom he usually spent the evenings, without the object of his voyage being even surmised in the city. I have reason to believe that the Doctor's exertions were attended with complete success, and that the commercial interests between England and Mexico will be mutually benefited by them; especially as he was received by General Victoria, in his official capacity, with the greatest pleasure, and his opinion of the advantages to be derived from a connexion with this country duly appreciated.

General Victoria is a native of Durango, in New Spain, and of a respectable family. On the breaking out of the revolution, in 1810, he had just finished his studies, and decided on taking an active part in favour of the liberation of his country from the Spanish yoke. No native has been so con-

spicuous in the long and arduous struggle, or has acquired the confidence of the people in a greater degree, than he has. A real well-wisher to the cause of rational liberty, coolness and determination in the hour of danger and an ardent desire to form a connexion with this country have ever been the leading features of his character. The moment he considered the views of the ex-Emperor injurious to the rights of the people, he publicly denounced him, on which he was arrested and confined; but his friends enabled him to escape from prison, and to proceed a second time for concealment to the woods between Xalappa and Vera Cruz, where he had formerly been for thirty months without having seen the face of a human being, when proscribed, and an immense price set on his head, by the Spanish Viceroy. His privations and sufferings during that period almost exceed

credibility. His precarious existence depended on vegetables and insects, procured in the forests where he resided, without the smallest communication with his fellow-creatures. At one time, in consequence of his mental and corporeal sufferings, he was attacked by fever, and remained eleven days at the entrance of a cavern, stretched on the ground without food, hourly expecting a termination of his wretched existence: so near death, that the vultures were constantly hovering over him in expectation of their prey. The first nourishment he received was the warm blood of one of these birds, which had approached to feast on his half-closed eyes, when he seized him by the neck, and was by this means enabled to crawl to the nearest water to slake his parching thirst. After the expulsion of the Spaniards an old and faithful Indian discovered his retreat, but with difficulty

could recognise his person, he being destitute of clothes, and so altered in appearance, that he had scarcely the semblance of a human form.

A few days after our arrival we were informed that a rural fete and bull-fight would be given on the following Sunday, in honour of the General, at a village about three leagues from hence, to which Messrs. Snyders and Bates offered to accompany me.

After a hearty breakfast on a broiled armadillo, I set off on horseback, with my friends, to Quatlepec. The morning was unclouded, and our road lay over the most lovely and variegated country in the world. All travellers speak of the neighbourhood of Xalappa with delight, and with great reason: an eternal, never-interrupted spring reigns here; the fields are always covered with verdure, and the

woods abound with flowers, blossoms, and fruits. The general aspect of the country, in this day's excursion, reminded me strongly of the finest parts of Devonshire; but the hills are smaller, more diversified, and clothed with trees, shrubs, and flowers, in such endless variety, that no part of Europe can vie with it. In our short ride we passed over fertile plains covered with fields of the finest maize (now nearly ripe), and studded with Indian cottages; through deep sombre woods, composed of the noblest and most picturesque trees—lofty pines and oaks, with the tree that produces the liquid amber, and the elegant fern tree, with its waving, light, feathery branches (nine or ten feet long), formed a conspicuous part. We crossed several streams of water, which, rushing over rocks far beneath us, added much to the beauty of the scene. The whole country

is of volcanic origin, and we passed several small craters, now covered with rich soil and the finest vegetation. We observed many new and showy birds, and the air absolutely swarmed with myriads of the most splendid butterflies. A gentle progress of two hours brought us to the village, situated in a plain; we had entered it some time without perceiving it, the houses were so enveloped in the gardens by which they are surrounded, and the luxuriance of the foliage is such as almost to exclude them from sight. Lemons, oranges, avocatas, and sapotas were the common fences of this village, which supplies a great portion of the markets of Xalappa. When we arrived in the principal street, which is of considerable length and leads to the square or plaza, and the houses not surrounded with trees like the others, we found the whole place alive and crowded with people,

anxiously waiting to catch a sight of their favorite and popular chief. The street had numerous rustic triumphal arches, formed of various-coloured draperies, entwined with branches of trees and the most showy flowers, and decorated with various mottos and inscriptions, indicating their attachment to the man who had suffered so much in the cause of liberty and the love of his country. There was scarcely a house which had not been whitewashed for the occasion, and which did not display some testimony of the joy of its inhabitants; and the crowds of Indians in their holyday dresses showed the interest felt by the whole of the neighbourhood. On reaching the Plaza, we found a space about the size of Covent Garden, enclosed with rails and palisadoes firmly bound together by a kind of vine or creeper. This was the intended scene of action for

the bull-fight : we passed through it, and, having procured a place of security and some provender for our horses, took a ramble through the village. In a short time the firing of rockets, sound of music, and shouts of the people, announced the approach of the General and his friends, preceded by an extensive band of native musicians, and a troop—not of soldiers, but of Indian girls, handsomely dressed, strewing flowers, waving banners, and shaking a sort of rattle, similar to those used by the Indians of St. Miguel de las Ranchos in their nocturnal dances. The General was hailed by the populace with marks of genuine love ; many to whom he was personally known shed tears. I had been introduced to him a few evenings before ; he recognised me, and a few minutes after sent for me to partake of the refreshment prepared for him. He seated me near him,

served me himself, and I never felt more honoured than on this occasion. Being the only Englishman present, I considered it a tribute paid to my country more than to myself. Whilst at table, dispatches arrived from Mexico for the General, and he retired to examine the contents ; and, shortly after, the amusement, (if bull-fighting can be so called,) commenced by one of the eight or ten unfortunate animals, selected for that purpose and confined in an enclosure, being turned into the large ring : they appeared of a light active breed, like our Scotch black cattle, and not at all vicious, till, tormented to madness by the injuries of the assailants, they attacked indiscriminately whatever came in their way. At its first entrance the affrighted animal galloped round the space, endeavoring to find a place to escape from the crowd of men on horseback who pursued it ; it then

endeavored to force its way to its companions, but being driven back with spears, sticks, and stones, it crossed the arena to some houses, whose fronts were included in the fence. The poor brute seemed at the door to request assistance, and tried to force an entrance, but in vain; he was caught by the lassos of the horsemen, entangled and thrown down: the points of his horns sawed off, and again turned loose, his torments were renewed by men with spears wounding him in various parts of his body. He at length became perfectly furious, tore the ground with his feet, bellowed hideously, and attacked every thing that approached him; but the number of his assailants was such, that his attention was drawn from one to the other; and I saw nothing to admire, either in the courage or agility of what appeared to me cowardly and barbarous pastime. One

gentleman should perhaps be excepted from the general censure. He waited on one side of the arena till the bull approached him with violence, when, taking off his mantle and holding it up, the animal leaped at him instantly, but, turning with a slight easy motion, he avoided the stroke of his horns, and laid the mantle on his head; this was repeated so often, that the bull refused to attack him longer, and was taken away by ropes, confined, and a girth put round him. A fellow then, with a large pair of spurs on, mounted the bull, which, set at liberty, renewed his efforts by endeavoring in vain to dismount his rider, at the same time dashing at every one who came near him; this was continued till the exertions of the animal had exhausted him to such a degree that he had scarcely sufficient strength to stand, and he was hauled back to his companions more

dead than alive, and another brought from the enclosure to undergo the same torment; but we had seen enough to satisfy our curiosity, and left them to finish their unmanly sport. The only thing in which it was to be preferred to the bull-fight in the Capital or in Old Spain, was that, though there was not that display of personal prowess and dexterity shown in those arenas, yet they were not guilty of the same horrible scenes of carnage; there was no tearing, mangling, or killing of bulls, no horses trailing their entrails after them, or wounded or dying matadores, which give such exquisite delight in Mexico or Madrid; but as far as their courage or intentions went, they were equally contemptible, and we left the valley with less pleasure than we entered it. But our ride back through this beautiful country restored us to good humour, and

I am convinced would, to nine-tenths of the inhabitants of our little isle, be far more gratifying than the sight of all the mangled carcasses of men, horses, and bulls, that have delighted the Spaniards since the time of the Moors.