

CHAPTER XXXII.

Journey from Xalappa to Vera Cruz.—Road to Mexico.—
Duties and Expenses on Merchandise.—Contraband Trade
—Mines.

HAVING received advice of the arrival of the Phaeton, I left Xalappa with Dr. Mackie on the morning of the 22d of August, in a litter carried between two mules, something in the manner of a sedan-chair: they are of sufficient length to lie down in, and when two persons travel together, they are placed opposite each other. The litter has a roof and curtains of strong canvas to exclude the sun or rain: we had two sets of mules, which relieved each other, and baggage-mules for our servants and luggage, besides three drivers, and

a person who superintended the whole. We had therefore nine mules and four persons employed for the transport of what, in England, would easily have been accomplished with a chaise and pair.

We reached Puente del Rey the first evening, having performed great part of the journey on the noble causeway made about twenty years since, most of which is still in good repair; and the whole way to the Puente might be made a fine road, by connecting the unfinished parts on the M'Adamizing principle, as plenty of good materials are found near it. The road now presented a very different appearance from what it did when we passed up from the coast, owing to the rains, which had covered the places, then parched and burnt up, with the finest verdure, and profusion of elegant plants, among which a great variety of mimosas seemed to predominate. I pro-

cured seeds of some of them, and during this day's journey saw the only dangerous serpent I had met with in the country: it was of a small size, and brilliantly coloured with alternate rings of black and scarlet. Our guides and several Indians declared it to be extremely venomous, but the appearance of its teeth did not prove it; it is called the coral snake both in the country and by naturalists.

We took supper, and rested our mules till two o'clock, when travelling over a tolerable road till near daylight, we came to several bad swampy places, where the mules had considerable difficulty in making their way through the water and mud: one of them fell, and it required some trouble to raise it and proceed. In another place the litter had to be raised higher on the backs of the mules, to prevent the water from entering; this part of the road,

lying through a low flat morass, will with difficulty be made good for carriages in the wet season, as there are no materials near to raise it above the surrounding swamp. After getting through, the road became better, and the mosquitoes which had annoyed us disappeared. We halted at Santa Fe to breakfast, and a short ride brought us to a sudden opening of the road, and gave us a view of the sea, Vera Cruz, and the castle of St. Juan de Ulua, with his Majesty's frigate Phaeton lying between them. My Indian servant was surprised at the appearance of the calm unruffled surface of the ocean, and eagerly inquired if that was the blue water, and exclaimed "What a beautiful country!" comparing the frigate, to which his whole attention was directed, to a palace. We reached the city gates about one o'clock, an hour at which they are

closed; after a little difficulty we obtained admission, and arrived at the house of Mr. Stuart, where Dr. Mackie was to remain. I was recommended to the good fathers of the Franciscan convent, near the gate leading to the pier, and took up my quarters with them, and lived as comfortably for the time I remained as the excessive heat of the climate would permit.

I found, on my return, that several respectable English mercantile houses had been established during my short absence, and that others were preparing; strong hopes were entertained that the heavy import duties would shortly be lessened, and the facilities for transporting goods into the interior be increased. A plan for the establishing of waggons on the great road to the capital had been partially acted on by some gentlemen from the United States, and promised to be successful, especially if

the road were put into a state of repair, and a few of the unfinished points of connexion completed, which would not be attended with very considerable expense, with the exception of one place, as it lies principally through a populous country, abounding with good stone for the purpose. If the persons who now crowd the prisons of the large towns, mostly for robberies, could be employed, it might be advantageous to the people, and would effect the requisite repairs in a few months. Or if once the independence of this valuable country is acknowledged by England, a company might be formed for effecting this very desirable work, which would amply repay the expenditure. Without it, the conveyance of the heavy cast iron machinery of the steam-engines, with the necessary iron tools, &c. for the mines now about to be opened, will be a labour of great difficulty.

The duties and other expenses on the landing of goods at Vera Cruz are enormously high, and tend much to discourage the mercantile speculator; eight and a half per cent. ad valorem is paid on all cargoes from Europe at the Spanish castle of St. Juan de Ulua, and twenty-seven and a half to the town. This too is on their own arbitrary valuation, and is often three times the original cost. One dollar each package is charged for the hospital, and four and a half dollars per ton on the ship, according to her register; three rials per ton for water; eight dollars for the captain of the port; and thirty-two dollars each trip for the use of large boats for landing the cargo: to these may be added the expense of portage to the custom-house, and afterwards to the stores of the merchants; even this is expensive, as labour of all kinds is here excessively high-priced, and the insolence

of the negro porters is intolerable. The above are the principal charges at the port, to which the removal of goods to Mexico adds much, as they pay an additional duty of about twelve per cent. on their arrival, and the carriage of every horse or mule-load, from two to three hundred weight, is from eighteen to twenty-two dollars. The goods sold in Mexico pay again another duty, on being removed to the provinces; but if they are intended, when landed, to be removed direct to the cities beyond Mexico, an arrangement can be made at the port custom-house which will save some of the expenses.

Much trouble and vexatious delay may also be prevented, on the part of the owner of goods, by employing a respectable resident broker. Some newly arrived supercargoes, who chose to conduct their own business at the custom-house, assured me

they had lost much time and had saved nothing by it.

The contraband trade carried on by the Castle is a source of considerable loss and trouble to the fair trader, as it is notorious that, by intriguing with its officers of the customs, goods to a vast amount may be clandestinely conveyed into the country. They are generally landed at the Castle first, till an opportunity offers for their removal, when they are taken in the night to the beach above or below the town. I slept some nights after my arrival at Vera Cruz on board the vessel that took me out; she was moored under the walls of the Castle, and near us was a Spanish ship of war, which was employed in this way regularly in secretly discharging a cargo of brandies. It is principally the Spanish merchants who are thus enabled to avoid the heavy duties and charges demanded by the Mexi-

can government, and who by these means are competent to undersell the fair trader in the article of his own manufacture. This state of things cannot be of long continuance; half a dozen English frigates, properly applied, would afford relief in a few hours, and purge New Spain of the only place now held by her former masters. The state of trade has already undergone as great a change as the politics of Mexico, and the further alterations of fashions will introduce a more extensive demand for our manufactures. It would be difficult to point out such things as will be most proper for the trade, but persons embarking their property in American speculation should remember that the market may be overstocked, and likewise make themselves acquainted with such articles as are in general demand, and what are not in use. Grates, fire-irons, fenders,

and hearth-rugs, have been sent to people who never saw a fire-place or a chimney, and knives and forks to persons who never use them.

The prosperity of Mexico must always depend on the cultivation of her immense mineral wealth. The silver mines have already produced more riches than those of any other portion of the globe, and more rapid fortunes have been made by individuals than are possessed by any in Europe. The mine of Vallentiana, which may now be considered as British property, (being one of those engaged to be worked by our first mining company,) was discovered about sixty years ago by an enterprising young Spaniard, of the name of Obergon. He had no property, but was assisted by a Mr. Otterro, a shopkeeper in the neighbourhood; in a short time each partner annually shared profits to the amount of

two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. During the revolution the machinery was destroyed by fire, and the water accumulated to such a degree, that it could not be extracted by the slender means they possess; and the mine has remained unproductive ever since: but English mechanics and steam-engines are now on their way to it, and the most beneficial results may be expected, not from this alone, but from hundreds of other mines now lying dormant. Mining operations, it is believed, have never been well conducted here, notwithstanding which, more than one thousand six hundred millions sterling have been issued from the treasury.

Nothing is now wanting, in my opinion, to re-establish the prosperity of this fine country, but an acknowledgment of its independence by Great Britain. That it is forever severed from the mother-country I

have not the smallest doubt: but in its present state it may yet linger, from the debility to which it is reduced by the revolution, for years, unless cherished by our assistance, with which it would shortly rise and be again in opulence and productiveness—the result of which, to Great Britain, can scarcely be calculated. But I am getting into a subject beyond my depth;—to the wisdom and vigilance of his Majesty's ministers the world looks with confidence, and it will not be disappointed.

Some delay in receiving the cargo of dollars destined for England prevented the departure of the Phaeton for several days; and as it was now the sickly season, my residence here was not altogether pleasant; but although the weather was very hot, my health, by attending to the medical advice I received in England, was not at all affected. My leisure offered an opportunity

of seeing more of the city than I had done before, and my opinion of it improved on a further acquaintance. The public walk had now a better appearance; and the vegetation caused by rains had relieved it of its former aridity. I spent some pleasant hours at the houses of Mr. Stuart and my friend and travelling companion, Mr. Bates, who was now established at Vera Cruz.

To Mr. Joshua Smith, an American gentleman resident here, I am greatly indebted, for his politeness and assistance; his knowledge of every thing connected with this country is exceeded only by his attention to every stranger who visits it.

I had little opportunity of forming an opinion of the ladies, except from seeing them in their regular daily attendance at the church of the convent in which I lived. Among them are many fine women,

whose deportment was most strictly decorous.

Of the Spanish merchants I can say nothing: it is very natural that, situated as they are, the arrival of so many English, and the consequent injury to their trade, cannot be pleasant to them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Departure from Vera Cruz.—Number of Birds in the Bay of Campechy.—Havannah.—Azores or Western Isles.—Arrival at Portsmouth.—Medical Advice.

FOR several days after that fixed for our departure the wind had not been favorable for our leaving the anchorage, but on the morning of the 31st of August a gun announced the raising of the anchor, and the Phaeton was under sail before we were on board. What a change do ten minutes make in the situation of an Englishman, in a place like this, when he feels himself transported suddenly from the pestilential air of the most unhealthy place in the world, where he was surrounded by people by no means his friends, saw none but