

#### LETTER IV.

It is an advantage to have a mind disposed to enjoyment, and to feel yourself participating in that temper, which extracts pleasing sensations out of every situation. I may without arrogance say, that in different degrees perhaps, and from very different impulses, such was the character of each individual of the trio whose footsteps you have good-humouredly, I doubt not, followed thus far.

We had all, while in the *Tierras calientes*, been struck with the peculiar beauties of that region and its wonderful productions; and revelled, with all due temperance I hope, in the many sources of rational enjoyment there laid before us; philosophically enduring, if not scorning those annoyances, to which the climate, country, and the rude state of society, unavoidably exposed the traveller.

The suffocating heat, the insect plagues, the unwonted food—what in fact had they been to us, compared to the sum of our enjoyments? We almost felt regret, while mounting the lofty mountain-ladder which was to raise us to another and more temperate

zone, that we were turning our backs upon such unparalleled beauty.

Nevertheless, if I would signalize one evening and one scene, during our ramble in New Spain which touched our hearts more than another, I should name the Monte Penulco and the setting sun which we witnessed there.

A desolate looking stone-building, in the vicinity of a poor Rancho, divided by party walls into a number of comfortless lodgings, here furnished us with accommodation, and after seeing that all our retinue had followed us without accident, we left our horses to their repose, and sallied forth for a stroll.

The swelling crest of the Monte Penulco is said to have been at the time of the Spanish conquest, the site of a large town containing many thousand inhabitants. You look now in vain for the traces, either in the remnants of buildings, or inequalities of surface. A solitary stone ruin, of considerable strength, standing in the middle of the wide pastures, is the only vestige of old times; and that, I have no doubt, like many ruins in this part of the country, which are shown as Indian antiquities, is of Spanish origin. It may either have been a chapel erected for the edification of the new converts, on a fort constructed to overawe the Indian inhabitants.

In other respects, nature has reclaimed her own, and resumed her quiet sway over the Monte Penulco and its brethren, which exhibit throughout all their varied

undulations of surface, an unbroken carpet of delicious verdure nurtured by the moist mists of the mountains, and beds of gentle flowers, fanned by the pure and elastic air of an eternal spring.

How sweet we felt the repose of that long still evening upon those green alpine pastures! Well might we, as we lay at ease upon the fresh sod, and watched the sun sink among the mountains girdling the horizon, while his slanting beams glistened upon the pretty white *cenothera* which spotted the turf,—congratulate each another upon our escape from the persecutions of *garrapatos* and their insect allies.

The view on all sides was fine, but chiefly so towards the deep defiles of the Cañada at our feet. The Monte Penulco occupies the angle between the forks. Across the opening which marked the great defile above Tlacolula, an even line of blue, melting into the mist of the utmost visible horizon, marked the open country of the Huastec, through which we had passed many days previous. Many little solitary Indian huts, and patches of sugar cane, and numerous herds of cattle, were scattered over the precipitous slopes far and wide, and altogether, we agreed, that, no where in America had we seen mountain scenery whose general features and colouring bore so great a resemblance to the lower green Alps of Switzerland, with their wide pastures, transparent atmosphere, and glistening chalets.

The Monte Penulco lies probably at the height of between four and five thousand feet above the Gulf. The limit at which the sugar-cane and banana come to

perfection, has been given as the boundary between *Tierras calientes* and *Tierras templadas*; but I am doubtful whether that is a just criterion, as so much depends upon the geological formation of a locality, and its position with regard to the surrounding country, and in some parts of Mexico, sugar is cultivated at a much greater height than that which otherwise would exhibit the phenomena of the *Tierras templadas*.

We supped in our den, during the brief twilight of the tropics, and welcomed the temperate zone of New Spain in a horn of its own vintage, which I here introduce to your notice under the name of *pulque*—a liquor drawn from the great Mexican aloe, or Maguey.

I forgot to mention, that on arrival here, we yielded to the desire of Espindola, that we should dispense with his services for the night and following morning, and allow him to go forward to his home in the town of Zacualtipan, between three and four leagues distant, to prepare his wife for the reception of our party: and I have now further to narrate the defection of our scape-grace Julian, who after going about his work in the evening like a man in a maze, was reported early the next morning by his comrade, to be dead—or dying—or drunk; at all events incapable, or unwilling to move another step. We therefore visited him, and inquired into the particulars of his case. We examined his tongue—well-coloured and healthy: felt at his pulse—free and regular; and

punched him affectionately in the stomach, that being, according to the mute indication of the sufferer, the main seat of the unknown disease. He bore this professional treatment with great meekness. We ascertained that he had in conformity to his invariable habits made a very hearty supper,—to wit, a dozen and a half of *tortillas*, smeared with *chile*; a dish of rice; a dish of *frijoles*, forbye an egg or two; a huge pot of pulque, and a couple of yards of sugar cane; and we had great suspicion from what we learned, that he intended as soon as the coast was clear, to make an equally hearty breakfast. But what were we, poor, innocent, helpless travellers to do? There he lay under a group of Palma Christi, on his *armas d'agua*, or goat-skin knee-wrappers, like a man who has completely lost his hold upon the world,—made his last testament,—left to others the consolations to be derived from the possession of his goods and chattels—his battered green velvet pantaloons, and short jacket; his mighty sword, and mightier carbine;—and was only waiting for the priest to give him his viaticum.

It is true, we had all good reasons to believe him 'playing possum,' as the Anglo Americans express it, otherwise shamming; indeed, we had proof positive for knowing this to be the case, and that moreover he had excellent reasons for doing it, and for quitting us here. He was deeply in our debt. He was tired of his masters, as he found that his villainies, small and great, were detected. He knew that from this day henceforward, the gallant bearing of a warrior which he had assumed

was no longer to be a sinecure, but that there was a possibility of his having actually to fight—all urgent reasons for breaking his chain. And break it he did—no doubt finding his health wonderfully restored, as soon as our diminished train disappeared; and I could almost sympathise with the laugh which he must have indulged in, as he saw the three Dons in the distance, reduced to the necessity of turning muleteers—the more so, as our hyper-charity had left him a bonus for his ill conduct.

Abobo and his fellows were all mad that morning,—whether from the intoxicating effects of mountain air, or from their feeling that Espindola was absent, and that we were in a dilemma, I know not. However you might be tempted, *you* cannot follow Julianio's example and go back; but nolens volens must keep us company over one swelling height after another, up and down—but always attaining a greater and greater altitude, till after about three hours march through an elevated line of country, partly under cultivation, the view suddenly opened to the south, and we saw the main chain of the Sierra Madre, heaped over the horizon in that direction, the wide stretch of varied table-land at its feet, and the pretty town of Zacualtipan before us.

It was certainly a pity that Julianio did not keep up his courage so far as to advance to Zacualtipan, for he would have gloried in the eclat with which our party entered it; wheeling round by the great church, and across the Plaza, with ringing spurs and jingling

arms, at a hard trot after our intoxicated mules, who, led by old Abobo, as soon as they recollected the locality and the near proximity of their own stable, set off at a canter, to the great risk of the various piles of which their lading was composed. Great was the astonishment of the peaceful inhabitants; and even a sleepy *corps de garde* of half clad soldiery, lounging under the piazza of the municipal palace in the square, were evidently taken by surprise. However, they had no time to collect their forces; for following hard in the wake of our baggage, we descended a narrow street, on the opposite side of the space, and rushed pell mell into the hospitable court-yard, much to the delight of our honest *arriero*, who, with his young wife and two children, were upon look out for us. He gave us a hearty welcome to his home, where, both for his sake and our own, we had determined to take an entire day's rest.

A salvo of hearty kicks was meantime fired by old Bamanos upon every set of ribs and haunches within reach, either as a salutary correction for their general want of discipline, or a publication of his resumption of authority as '*lord of the walk,*' now that they were at home.

Zacualtipan was the largest town we had hitherto seen in Mexico, though far overrated, in being reported to contain ten thousand inhabitants. Its situation at the broken ground towards the head of a vast rocky ravine of great depth, descending for several leagues towards the valley of Rio Oquicalco, is very pictu-

resque. Many of the houses are constructed of limestone, with balconies and galleries somewhat in the Spanish taste. The principal church is more curious in parts, than beautiful in proportion: and it is singular to trace here and there, many of the Moorish and Arabesque details which are to be found in the splendid churches of the mother country, transplanted hither on the soil of the New World. The church is furnished with its quota of bells, priests, and tinsel; as we had an opportunity of discovering an hour after our arrival, when a large, but dirty and tawdry funeral procession, with hymns and crucifix, perambulated most of the narrow streets of the place, of which the deceased seemed to have been a wealthy inhabitant. There is little or no trade or manufacture here, as far as we could learn.

The house of our *arriero* was comfortably, but simply furnished, with settees round the walls, and was by far the most pleasant lodging we had occupied since our arrival in the country; and though far from wealthy, it was easy to see that the master was respected by his townsmen. He devoted the following morning to a ramble with us in the adjacent country, in which he pointed out various remnants of old times. We remarked the site of more than one Indian town, now only indicated by swelling heaps of rubbish or sunken wells, and some singularly-shaped rocks, which tradition points out as objects of idolatrous worship in ancient times.

What we were most eager to visit, were certain

Indian temples, of which we had heard much, and we were accordingly conducted to a massive ruined church of moderate size, situated a little below Zacualtipan, just at the commencement of the great defile. Its erection is referred to times prior to the conquest, but I have no hesitation in saying, falsely so, like others which we inspected in this valley, in continuing our route. It is strongly built of hewn stone, cemented by lime, and adorned with a species of carved frieze, the very form and drawing of which convinced me that *that* at least was of Spanish workmanship. And a little further inspection and acquaintance with undoubted erections of the Aztec and Toltec nations, certified me that the whole structure was of the same origin, though probably built upon the site of a temple or *teocallis* of the Aborigines. In the course of the same evening, we inspected another of similar form and character, strikingly situated on a knoll below the elevated village of San Bernardo, two leagues below Zacualtipan, and overlooking the great defile; and to this the same observation applies.

I had an awkward kind of adventure just before our departure of the town. While all unarmed, peaceably sketching alone, in a secluded spot in the vicinity of the church, I was attacked at disadvantage by a savage patriot, either mad or drunk, or both, who from the circumstance of my having been seen more than once in that precise position, in purlieus of his solitary dwelling, with paper and pencil, was pleased to consider me as a spy, and accordingly followed and

accosted me with his naked sabre at my throat. That the fellow was capable of doing me some grievous bodily injury, all for the love of *Mejico y libertad*, if nor for plunder, in spite of my honest face and intentions, I am convinced; and that I felt very foolish, at being thus taken unawares, without the means of self-defence, you will believe. As it was, I had to put on all my address, and more bold effrontery than I generally affect, to decoy him to accompany me towards a more public thoroughfare, where he was pleased to leave me; and to tell the truth, I was pleased to leave him. This was the second warning I had had, what kind of trouble I was likely to get into from doing that which in this land even honest people could not comprehend, besides throwing myself in the way of danger from the vicious; and as I could not resolve to give up my pursuits, I, from this time henceforward, never stirred abroad without being well armed.

In the vicinity of San Bernardo, we met with the first regular plantations of the *Agave Americana*, or *Maguey*, which I have alluded to as the source from which the present inhabitants of the Tableland of New Spain, as well as the Aztec aborigines draw their ordinary beverage. It is a noble plant, and I will not forget some future day to give you a more detailed account of its appearances, culture, and uses.

The *ninth of March* is noted on my memoranda,

as having afforded us a singularly amusing day's travel.

The whole tract of country over which it lay, was perfectly distinct in its features from any we had yet seen. The swelling forms, thick rank luxuriance of the lower country; and the sweet pastures and evergreen oaks of the first and lower steps of the *Tierras templadas* had alike disappeared; and, as we held our course over the elevated hills west of the great defile, we saw around us tracks of most astonishing extent, partly level table-land, and partly hill country, with rocky and precipitous sides, and furrowed with barrancas and ravines of astounding depth. The whole landscape, up to the foot of the distant Sierra Madre, appeared garbed in the most uninviting russet hue—the scanty grass covering the plain, being now of a uniform brown, and in perfect harmony with the burnt, arid soil, or bare rock. Fertile spots there were, but they were hidden in the deep vallies. The scene was not lovely, but it was sublime. Its details were highly curious. This region, barren as it was, had its vegetable, as well as its geological wonders, and they were such as to strike us with astonishment. The whole of the stony surface of the mountains on both sides of the valley of the Rio Oquilcalco, into which we descended, is covered with a profusion of magney, mimosa, cactus, and gigantic nopal or prickly pear, many of the segments of whose curious lobe-formed growth, were from three to four feet in circumference, and the oldest near the ground,

which served for stem, as many feet in girth, rising one above another, till they formed a curious but ungraceful tree of fifteen or eighteen feet in height.

Among the cacti, of which I counted eight distinct species, from the little prickly ball no larger than a walnut, to the great white multangular column which rose gracefully in a single shaft, to the height of fifteen feet, two of the larger species might also arrogate the name of trees, and were extremely curious in appearance.

A rough and tortuous track led us into the arid and stony bed of the Rio Oquilcalco, where, sending the mules forward, we made a diversion to the left, to visit another so-called Indian temple, of much the same character as those I have already mentioned. A rugged passage of a mountain four leagues across, exhibiting the same phenomena, brought us to our mid-day halting place, at the pretty Hacienda Guadalupe, situated in the middle of shady trees, and smiling fields of maize, sugar-cane, beans, and so forth, on a clear mountain stream called Rio Grande, which in the rainy season forms a considerable river. The system of irrigation carried on in this vale, is productive of great fertility, and many of the fruits and productions of the *Tierras calientes*, are brought to perfection. After an hour's halt, we began the long and rocky ascent of the broad mountain of San Ammonica, by which you finally attain the level of the expanse of Table-land which forms the pedestal of the Sierra

Madre. Near the summit the traveller passes the crater of an extinguished volcano, having long perceived throughout the whole district, the marks of volcanic eruption, and after a difficult climb of the extreme and precipitous ridge, gains the level of the plain above mentioned. Though partly under careful cultivation, its surface also bears many signs of the volcanic origin of the country, in the beds of scoria, the deep and perpendicular rifts and barrancas which mark the path of the earthquake, or the combined effects of alternate heat and torrents, and the fearful looking pits, half full of black water which are dispersed over it. There was much to remind me of the country about Civita Castellana.

The day came to an end by our arrival at the great Hacienda Zoquital, where we took possession of one of a great range of unfurnished rooms, which, according to the custom of the country, are let at a fixed price for the occupation of travellers, while stabling is furnished for their horses and mules. It is seldom that these night-quarters are furnished with windows.

This was one of the most considerable haciendas we had seen; and in truth, its massive walls might have almost stood a siege, and maintained a considerable garrison within their circuit.

Many parties of *arrieros* were here passing to and fro from the capital. The attention of all seemed to be a little excited by the fact, that a troop of banditti had been plundering a party that very day on the road between the Hacienda and Real del Monte; and it

was quite amusing to see the determination with which loading and priming was carried on the next morning at day-break in our party in particular, as we were destined to be the first to advance in the direction of the supposed danger. What with guns, horse pistols, and pocket pistols, we calculated the three Dons could fire ten shots without reloading for their own share, which was not so much amiss, supposing every shot told. We could not count upon Miguel's blunderbuss, which was quite as likely to hit one of the party, as an enemy. As to Espindola, he was perfectly unarmed, and made no secret of his quaker principles and steady determination not to fight; as he said very coolly, 'Why should I, even if I had any thing to lose, for if I defended myself, and even beat off or killed my assailants, I am known to every robber in the country, and I should be stabbed secretly, if not shot openly! It is different with *los señores extranjeros*, if they choose to run the chance; but *los señores ladrones mejicanos* seldom attack when they are not sure to overpower.'

During the morning's ride over the wide plains, in the bright and cloudless sunshine towards Real del Monte, we were led to reconsider our plans for the day, on finding, that, as we were desirous of seeing the Hacienda and Barranca of Regla, we might attain that object in the course of the day, by going a few leagues out of the direct road to the silver Mines, without falling short of our arrangement to arrive that night at Real del Monte. Accordingly we resolved