

to leave the mules to their fate: and, sending them forward on the main road, under the conduct of Miguel, and a little valet of Espindola's, our small party turned aside, under the escort of the latter. We soon reached the town of Puebla Grande de Mittan, the situation of which, more to the east, had long been indicated by the huge church which rises over its motley collection of habitations. We allowed ourselves no breathing time here, further than a hasty glance at the church and a draught of pulque required; but continued our route over an elevated district of singular sterility, commanding however noble views of the surrounding chains. After two hour's ride, we descended into a valley with occasional haciendas, scattered over its surface, and shortly after found ourselves at the brink of the Barranca of Regla. A well constructed road, upon which we had been pacing for some time, conducted us by a rapid descent into the recesses of this celebrated ravine, when we suddenly came in sight of the immense pile of the Hacienda and its moorish church tower overtopped by the lofty colonades of columnas basalt which form the sides of the Barranca. In the abundant supply of water which rushes down it, you find the reason which has led to the choice of this singular locality for the erection of those colossal works for the smelting and amalgamation of the silver ores, which the enterprise and unlimited means of a former Count of Regla have constructed within this horrible gulf, at the cost of nine millions of dollars. At the present

time, this property, together with an almost boundless extent of country on the neighbouring Cordillera and in the plain, including the silver mines of Real del Monte, have been, since 1824, rented in perpetuity of the noble possessor, by a British Mining Company, for the paltry sum of sixteen thousand dollars per annum.

We were hospitably received and entertained for some hours by Mr. M., the Company's superintendant at the Hacienda; and through his kindness were furnished with every facility for a detailed inspection of the various works, which of course have been brought to far greater perfection by the present proprietors. Not the least remarkable feature of these immense works, are the ponderous bulwarks of hewn stone, built to protect the works from the impetuous torrents of *debris* brought down by the river in the rainy season. We did not of course fail to ascend the Barranca to the celebrated cascade, which you reach by tracing the course of the stream between two walls of basaltic columns, upwards of a hundred feet in height. It is to be found at some distance above the Hacienda, where a screen of the same singular geological structure, composed of perpendicular columns of twenty-five or thirty feet in elevation, stretches across the ravine, and bars the course of the river which pours over it from the upper part of the Barranca; disjointed sections of rock half covered with moss, and shaded by trees, lie at the foot of either precipice. In the rainy season, the whole scene must

be very grand. The colour and texture of the basalt differs in some respects from any I have seen in Europe, if I except that on Ben More, in the north of Ireland. The form of the columns, however, is very complete, and in most cases hexagonal or pentagonal. The Barranca of Regla lies about seven thousand feet above the Gulf.

The kindness of our entertainer made us prolong our stay far longer than prudence should have permitted, the more so, as a thunder-storm was evidently in preparation. We had four leagues of road before us; and the latter part of this, after entering the mountains, was acknowledged to be extremely perilous for a nocturnal ride. A melancholy proof had been given only a few evenings before, when one of the gentlemen connected with the Mines, descending from Real del Monte, with Mr. M. was precipitated in the darkness into a profound barranca, and was then lying at the point of death.

But whether in the shape of thunder-storm, darkness, barranca, or banditti, we seemed to have made up our minds to dare the danger, and to sleep at an elevation of two thousand feet higher up the country. In fine, just as the thunder began to echo among the mountains of the Rio del Chico, we might be seen issuing from the deep ravine, and urging our horses across the plain in the direction of the nearer chain, like men who knew that no time was to be lost.

Evening fell in early, under the lugubre and premature shade, cast over the brown plain and blue mountains

by the thunder-clouds; and by the time we reached a small village at the foot of the latter, night had fairly set in. The storm however seemed to spend itself more to the northward, as the glare of lightning became less frequent; and it was now that such a darkness fell upon us as baffles all description. I had been riding forty yards in advance as a kind of scout, feeling the way, but now I was compelled to come to a dead stop, and give up the task of leader to Espindola. A momentary flash from time to time showed us that we were at the entrance of a mountain-defile overhung with rocks, and at the brink of a dashing torrent, rolling down a barranca to the left;—but in our progress forward, our ears alone gave token of the character of the locality. The danger I have no scruple in saying was imminent, and increased in a terrific degree, as we crawled forward step by step, at the edge of a gulf, which increased momentarily in depth, upon a road of no great breadth, undefended on the side of the precipice, and conducted in several instances over the abyss, by bridges equally without parapet.

We kept, as well as the ear and touch would permit, one exactly behind the other, momentarily passing the word to halt, or advance, rapidly from one to another. Now and then we came to a full halt, from the utter doubt whether the next step would not be over the precipice. The passage of each bridge in turn, was a moment of great interest, yet through God's mercy, we met with no accident, but gradually ascended, till the freshening air and the expansion of the

valley, as we might see by an occasional flash, indicated our approach to the town. In fine, there we arrived, and after some little search, found our valets, and a room prepared for our reception in a *Meson* or Inn.

The mules and their cargoes had fortunately escaped pillage: some thought from the fact, that there were no robbers to attack them, and others, from the intimidation produced by the formidable and suspicious appearance of the leather case of my gun, which, in its empty state, was always carried in advance upon the leading mule, in the hands of little Raphael. Pointed forward between the ears of the animal, it certainly might pass for a bow-gun of extraordinary construction.

We made a halt of two days at Real del Monte, which we found to be a singularly picturesque town, containing among others, one large decorated church, and many substantial buildings. It is surrounded by forests of oak and pine, and mountain slopes carpeted by white, red, and yellow flowering shrubs. It is situated at the height of upwards of nine thousand feet above the sea. We found our time fully taken up by the overground and underground excursions which we were enabled to make with much interest to ourselves, through the polite attention of the gentlemen connected with the Mining Company. Among the former I distinguished a climb to the summit of a singular rock rising at the distance of some miles, about one thousand feet higher than the town, and commanding a view of

extraordinary interest and extent on both sides of the great chain in which the mines are situated. This you will easily conceive, when I enumerate among the points visible within the vast horizon, the plains and lakes of the great valley of Mexico, about twenty leagues distant; the volcanoes of Mexico and Puebla on one hand, and the vale of Regla, and even the great cone of Orizava itself, on the other.

I feel that my description of the Mines must of necessity, be very brief and insufficient, and that for many details you must be referred to the writings of more sober and laborious writers.

A portion of the first day was devoted to a survey of the superficial operations and works; and on the morning of the second, M'Euen and myself spent six hours underground, while Pourtales, eschewing fatigue, luxuriated in his grass-hammock, smoked five dozen cigaritas, and sipped pulque.

A brief account, you have, however, the right to demand.

The great vein of silver-ore called the Biscaina, lying in the porphyric rock of this chain, was one of the earliest and most productive of those opened by the Spaniards. It was worked by them with great advantage nearly two hundred years, but circumstances at the beginning of the last century, gave rise to its temporary abandonment. It was however re-opened, and other shafts commenced towards the close of the same century by the Count of Regla, who, in the excavation

of an adit or subterraneous canal, to carry off the waters from the Mines, is said to have realized eleven millions of dollars; such being the richness of ore with which he accidentally came in contact. Subsequently difficulties have constrained his descendant to cede his right, as before mentioned; and the Real del Monte Company, after the complete repair of the old works, and the construction of new—the cost and labour of which have been enormous,—have at length so far attained its object, that at present the actual proceeds of the Mines exceed the expenditure, which here and at Regla, is estimated at thirty thousand dollars monthly. The energy and skill of our countrymen in the construction of new shafts, and the substitution of steam for animal power—the great roads constructed to Regla and to Vera Cruz, whence all their heavy machinery has been transported on its arrival from England; and the order and wisdom evident in all the operations, are not unworthy of the British name.

At the same time, there is something about mining speculations in any country, and more than all in a country like New Spain, where justice and reason have so little sway, which would make me advise any friend of mind to take a slower but surer mode of seeking his fortune.

In consequence of the number of artificers and miners transported hither, an English colony has sprung up in Real del Monte, and it was moving for me to see the flaxen hair and blue eyes, and hear the prattle of many English children, gambolling in close vicinity

to the swarthy offspring of the mixed races of the country.

From the eminence to the south of Real del Monte, an excellent bird's eye view is attained of the general disposition of the works.

The great vein runs through this elevated mountain mass, nearly in a direction of E. and W. underlaying South, with a variation of 24 degrees. All the works are to the south of the town, and are seen disposed up the slope of the main ridge.

The lowest shaft is the Dolores, 330 varas¹ deep. Then follows San Cyetano, 347 varas; Santa Teresa, 335; Terrero, 370; Guadeloupe, 210. Santa Agatha and San Francisco, are the highest shafts in the series. The great adit, to the level of which the water is brought up by powerful steam engines from the bottom of the Mines, lies 242 varas below the mouth of the Terrero shaft. It is throughout 2½ varas high, and 1½ wide, and runs for two miles and a half with a very gentle fall, to its opening in the vale of Moran below. Hitherto, steam-power has only been applied to the purpose here stated, the ore and rubbish being raised to the surface by horse power applied to a windlass.

But now, if you choose, you may accompany us to the mouth of the Dolores shaft, when, having garbed in miners' dresses, with heads well defended with a kind of felt helmet, we began our descent by ladders,

¹ Vara, or Mexican yard, is 2 feet 9 inches English.

accompanied by two of the English captains or overseers, and went down, down, down into the bowels of the earth. We passed the mouth of the adit; and, reaching the bottom of the mine, in our progress from one shaft to another, visited every part of the 'workings.' To gain and examine some of these required a certain degree of strength and resolution, from the defective and dangerous means of descent and exit. They were various in appearance, sometimes a shapeless excavation, and at other times wrought into a form of a gallery, according as the rock had been rich or poor in the ore, which is found in a quartz matrix, embodied in the porphyry rock of which the whole chain consists.

The system of mining struck me as peculiar. The common miners are, for the most part, of the Indian race. A few of them band together, to work in company, and take their equal shares of the proceeds. They are paid four rials a day by the Company, and take as their further perquisite, one-eighth of the ore extracted.

On issuing from the mouth of the mine, the confederates themselves divide the lumps of ore, rich and poor, into eight heaps in the presence of one of the overseers, and that overseer determines which of the eight shall be given up to them. There are subterranean offices where the tools and candles are kept, and regularly served out and reclaimed, by an officer charged with that particular duty. Blasting and other operations are carried on as in other mines.

There are upon an average about three hundred

Indians, constantly thus engaged in the different parts of the mine; and the scenes presented in those gloomy caves, where they work by the red light of their tapers, with scarcely any covering, are far beyond my describing.

The ascent of the great shaft of the Terreros, from the depth of nearly a thousand feet below the surface, by means of a series of perpendicular ladders, thirty-two in number, was one of the most fatiguing exploits which I ever undertook. We were, nevertheless, highly gratified by our adventure. It may yet be mentioned that the ore is transported to Regla, where it goes through the necessary processes for being converted into bullion, after which it is carried to the city of Mexico, and coined into dollars at the Government Mint. In this form it is exported.

The lust for gold which possessed the souls of the conquerors, condemned the Aborigines of these central portions of America, to a system of oppression and tyranny in times past, which is almost inconceivable. As there was no personal danger to which the quest after the precious metals might expose the Spaniard, that he would not dare; so there was no depth of cruelty to which he would not descend to further his debasing passion. Of this the traditions of the Indian preserve many striking illustrations.

I give you one anecdote,—whether told before or not, I do not know,—which was related to me, with others of the kind, in the mining district where such tales abound.

In an Indian village further to the north, say the Indians, there lived in the old Spanish times, a Padre: a man of simple and retired habits, who laboured to convert and maintain the inhabitants in the Catholic faith.

He was beloved by the simple tribe among whom he was domesticated, and they did not fail to prove their good will by frequent presents of such trifles as they found were agreeable to him. They say that he was a great writer; and occasionally received from the Indians of his parish, a small quantity of finely coloured dust, which he made use of to dry his sermons and letters. Knowing how much the Padre loved writing, they seldom returned from the mountains without bringing him some. It happened that once upon a time, he had occasion to write to a friend of his, living in the capital, who was a jeweller, and did not fail to use his pounce box. In returning an answer, his knowing friend, to his great surprise, bantered him with his great riches, seeing that he dried the very ink on his paper with gold dust! This opened the simple Padre's eyes. He sent for his Indian friends, and without divulging his newly acquired knowledge, begged them to get him more of the fine bright sand. They, nothing doubting, did so. The demon of avarice began to whisper into the old man's ear, and warm the blood of his heart. He begged for more, and received it—and then more—till they had furnished him with several pounds weight. All intreaty that they would show him the locality where this bright dust was gathered, was resisted with

calmness and steadiness for a long time. Alternate cajoling and menace were employed with equally bad success. At length wearied out, they told him that as they loved him, and saw he was disturbed in his mind, they would yield to his desire and show him the spot, on the condition that he would submit to be led to and from the place blindfold. To this he greedily consented, and was in course of time taken upon their shoulders and carried whither he knew not, by many devious ways, up and down mountain and baranca, for many hours, into the recesses of the Cordillera, and there, in a cave through which a stream issued from the breast of the mountain, they set him down and unbound him. They there showed him quantities of the gold dust intermingled with large lumps of virgin ore, while their spokesman addressed him saying:—'Father, we have brought you here at your urgent request, because you so much desired it, and because we loved you; take now what you want to carry away with you,—let it be as much as you can carry, for here you must never hope to come again; you will never persuade us more!' The Padre seemingly acquiesced, and after disposing as much of the precious metal about his person as he could contrive to carry, he submitted to be blindfolded, and was again taken in the arms of the Indians to be transported home. The tradition goes on to relate how the good Curé, upon whom the cursed lust of gold had now seized, thought to outwit his conductors by untying his rosary, and occasionally dropping a

bead on the earth. If he flattered himself that any hope existed of his being thus able to thread the blind maze through which he passed, and find the locality, one may imagine his chagrin, when once more arrived and set down at his own door, the first sight which met his uncovered eyes was the contented face of one of his Indian guides, and an out-stretched hand, containing in its hollow the greater part of the grains of his rosary; while the guileless tongue of the finder expressed his simple joy at having been enabled to restore such a sacred treasure to the discomfited Padre.

Entreaties and threats were now employed in vain. Gentle as the Indians were, they were not to be bended. Government were apprized of the circumstances, and commissioners were sent down to investigate the affair. The principal inhabitants were seized, and menace being powerless,—torture, that last argument of the tyrant was resorted to—all in vain, not a word could be wrung from them! Many were put to death,—still their brethren remained mute; and the village became deserted under the systematic persecution of the oppressors. The most careful researches, repeatedly made from time to time by adventurers in search of the rich deposit, have all resulted in disappointment; and, to this day all that is known is, that somewhere in the recesses of those mountains lies the gold mine of La Navidad.

The following day, despite the temptation we felt to make various excursions in this interesting neighbourhood, we found ourselves necessitated to resume

our route to the capital, twenty-three leagues distant. From the summit of the Sierra, above the town of Real del Monte, a steep and rugged descent brings you to the level of the great plains which form the central land of Mexico; and over these we now proceeded slowly, in a suffocating heat. The first evening we reached a collection of mud huts and of plantations of nopal and maguey, disposed around a fine large picturesque church, called the San Matteo Grande.

The second day's ride of seven leagues, over a hilly country, increasing in interest at every step, brought us over the great dike of San Cristobal, to a village within three leagues of Mexico: and, at last, on the morning of the 18th, passing by the celebrated collegiate church of Guadalupe, we quitted terra firma by the causeway from the north, and half an hour afterwards, entered the gate of Mexico.

I would not here anticipate many observations upon the features and phenomena of the district now traversed, which may find a more suitable place in a future letter, but I cannot avoid observing, how, from the very moment of his descent from the mountains, the unusual scenes which open themselves before the traveller, prepare him as it were for that extraordinary and fascinating picture, which is presented to him on attaining the object of his toils.

The arid, glazed, and silent surface of those interminable levels, over which the whirling column of

sand is seen stalking with its stately motion in the midst of a hot and stagnant atmosphere; and upon whose surface he continually sees painted the magic and illusory pictures of the mirage, with their transparent waters and reflected scenes:—the huge dark piles of distant mountains, range behind range;—the strange character of the colouring of the landscape far and near;—the isolated volcanic cones, springing up suddenly from the dead flats, and the lofty peaks of the great volcanoes far in the distance, gleaming in the blue sky with their snowy summits; the numerous churches, each with its dome and towers, mocking the deserted waste around, and the wretched groups of mud cottages in its vicinity, by its stately architecture:—all this—seen through an atmosphere of such transcendent purity, that vast as the expanded landscape seems, no just idea of its immensity can be formed from the calculations of the eye—embodies forth not perhaps the picturesque, nor perhaps the beautiful, but most assuredly the sublime.

And, when approaching the main valley, the villages thicken around him, with their streets, cheered and beautified amid the general sterility, by groups of the graceful peruvian pepper-tree; and the roads are seen crowded by long strings of laden mules, and gay cavaliers,—and the stupendous works of human design, harmonize with those of nature, and prepare him for the sight of one of the most extraordinary scenes in the world, whether we regard the works of men, or those of God, the Artificer of all. And such is the Valley and City of Mexico.

LETTER V.

MY last letter closed with the entry of our travel-soiled and battered train into the city of Mexico. Such epithets may be well applied to us, for we were covered with white dust from head to foot; our faces were excoriated by the refraction of the sun's rays on the heated plains; and, contrasted with the splendour around us, it was impossible not to feel that there was something humiliating in our undisguisable shabbiness.

All things considered, we were not sorry to find ourselves speedily in possession of quarters in a species of lodging, gaming, eating, and club-house, called the *Gran Sociedad*, at the corner of the two great streets, Espiritu Santo and del Refugio, and near the centre of the city. Here we hired badly-furnished apartments, and eventually settled down for a month's residence.

A few days, and you may imagine us fairly inured to our new position.

Espindola having loyally performed his contract, and given up his charge, had clattered out of the gateway with his mules and bag of dollars; and, in high good humour with his late employers and himself, had set off to seek another engagement among the merchants