

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

of the city. He was of course followed by the valorous little Raphael. Our horses, and a fat saddle-mule pertaining to our stud, were safely housed at a livery stable in the vicinity, yclept the 'Washington;' where a tall, raw-boned Kentuckian, from the backwoods, presided, under the dignified and dulcet title of, Don Floresco !

Garcia, a new equerry and valet, knowing in the streets and resources of the capital, and in the most approved ways of emptying the purses of *los señores estrangeros*, had been hired to be our attendant.

Against honest Miguel we had no other complaint to make, except that he was ill-looking, and a *borrachio*, a title which may be applied without offence to many respectable gentlemen in the western hemisphere, as well as to a poor Mexican Meztizo. He had now exacted from us a precise document, bearing witness to his qualifications and character, and mounting his active pad, had turned his face towards the coast.

A fresh skin, the brush, and an English tailor, had done something towards making us presentable—in our own opinion. Letters of credence and introduction had been delivered; the proper visits made; and we were now at liberty, each to follow his own devices.

De Pourtales being somewhat indisposed, took it into his head to consult Dr. C——, to take exceeding care of his health, and to remain a great deal within doors, philosophizing and discussing unknown fruits.—the *Sapote prieto*, the *Sapote chico*, the *Sapote borrachio* and the *Sapote blanco*,—the luscious *Avocate*

and *Mamei*, the vaunted *Chirimoya* and the sweet *Grandita*. He took siestas both before and after dinner, and received visits. M'Euen also got a most unaccountable fit of the fine gentleman; reclined a great deal, and read considerably; and, for some days, except on extraordinary occasions,—a lounge on the Alameda, or under the Portales de las Flores,—was very hard to put into motion.

As for your humble servant, he was never in better health and spirits in his life; and knowing that the time was circumscribed, thought to make the best use of the opportunity. Being in a great degree left to chalk out and follow my own devices, I was abroad early and late. Thanks to active habits, the disregard of heat and dust, the occasional assistance of my steed Pinto, and a philosophic contempt of the chances of being lassoed and robbed,—before half the period of our halt was at an end, I had contrived to see a great deal both within and without the city, and to learn something, in spite of our disadvantages,—and such there were. So far I am satisfied; at the same time that I have continually to keep in mind the latter, and the brevity of our visit, when I recollect how many and how interesting are the subjects and objects to which I paid little or no attention.

But my preface is finished; and now, that I have actually glanced at Mexico, what kind of dish must I cook and serve up to you? Must I give you the literal and homely hodge-podge of my own hasty

diary; daily notices of personal occurrences, personal observations, and personal reflections; with cuttings from the conversation and information of those with whom we came in contact?—or shall I dress you a dish of historical and statistical information, served up with a garnish of apt quotations from Bullock and Poinsett, or still better, from Humboldt,—the first, the best, and the only really philosophic modern traveller who ever visited New Spain, whose researches, written thirty years ago, form still the text-book of every succeeding visitor!

Will you have a *trifle*, half-undigestible solid, and half evanescent froth, prepared from the shadowy history and traditions of the aboriginal people; shrouded in the mist of hieroglyphic, emblematical, and enigmatical devices, rendered yet more dim from the misconception, the misinterpretation, and the bigotry of the conquerors; and still more by the stupidity of modern conjurors and expounders of enigmas: or a sober, well-seasoned regale from the tale of the Conquest, marvellous, even when those large deductions which must be demanded, both by unimaginative common sense and evident truth, have been made? The choice is an embarrassing one, and allowing you to take full time for decision, I invite you to partake in the mean time of the *pot pourri* which I forthwith serve up to you.

The general position and remarkable features of the valley and capital of New Spain, have been too often described not to have become familiar to you.

You have seen, how, in our ascent from the coast, after we had passed through the teeming and fertile uplands of the torrid region at the base of the mountains, we had mounted from one broad and varied step of this gigantic mountain mass to another, till we had gained the interior plateau, where at the height of 7470 feet, girdled by the severed chain of the southern Cordillera, the valley of Mexico, with its lakes, marshes, towns, villages, and noble city opened upon our view.

The general figure of the valley is a broken oval of about sixty miles in length, by thirty-five in breadth. At the present day, even when divested of much that must have added to its beauty in the eyes of the Great Captain, and his eager followers, when, descending from the mountains in the direction of Vera Cruz, after overcoming so many difficulties, the view of the ancient city and its valley at length burst upon them like a beautiful dream,—I never saw, and I think I never shall see on earth, a scene comparable to it. I often made this reflection, whenever my excursions over the neighbouring mountains led me to a point which commanded a general view.

I could not look upon it as did the Spanish invaders, as the term of indescribable fatigues, and of dangers, known and unknown;—the rich mine which should repay them for their nights of alarm and their days of toil, and compensate for their seemingly utter abandonment of home;—the prize that should satisfy the cravings of the most inordinate, and fill their laps with that dear

gold for which they had ventured all! I could not enter into the ecstasy of the moment, when, after pursuing their blind way to this paradise from the plains of Tlascala and Cholula, into the recesses of pine-clad and barren rocks, higher and higher towards the cold sky, till untrodden snow-covered peaks arose on either hand, and they marched within sight and hearing of the Great Volcano which menaced their path,—they gained, in fine, the western slope, and saw the green and cultivated fields and gardens spreading like a carpet at their feet, round the bright and inland sea which then encircled the ‘VENICE of the AZTECS!’ With what ravishment must they have marked the thousand specks which moved upon the waters round that broad city spread below, with its white roofs, streets, temples, and edifices?—what must have been their amazement at descrying the long and solid causeways dividing the waters;—the innumerable towns and villages scattered over the surface of the fertile plain; and the huge circle of mountains which appeared to form like a bulwark on every side? No! I could not realise all they felt,—but, amidst the desolation of most of the ancient fields and gardens; the aridity and utter barrenness of much of the broad plain which now girdles the city in every direction; the diminished extent of the lake; the solitude reigning on its waters; the destruction of the forests on the mountain-slopes;—I still felt that the round world can hardly match the beauty and interest of that landscape. Even if man had destroyed, without in

some degree repairing the wrongs he had committed to that lovely scene by the fruits of his industry and genius, there is that about the whole scenery which is above him, and beyond being affected by him. But let us do the stern old conquerors justice. Their minds would appear to have been imbued with the pervading spirit of the land which they conquered. All around them was strange, and wonderful, and colossal,—and their conceptions and their labours took the same stamp. Look at their works: the moles, aqueducts, churches, roads,—and the luxurious City of Palaces which has risen from the clay-built ruins of Tenochtitlan, at a height above the ocean, at which, in the Old World, the monk of St. Bernard alone, drags through a shivering and joyless existence!

If the general features of the valley of Mexico are thus striking, those presented by the capital are not less so. In both its general plan and position, and the solidity and grandeur of its details, it has impressed me with a greater idea of splendour than any city I have seen in either hemisphere.

It covers with its suburbs an area of probably upwards of three miles square, occupying the central portion of that extended oval which was covered by Tenochtitlan at the time of the conquest.

The Plaza Major, or principal square of the new city, corresponds with that of the old. The cathedral is based on the ruins of the great temple or *Teocallis*;—the palace of Cortez, the Casa del Estado, rises on

the very spot on which Montezuma held his court ; and many of the principal streets at the present day, are conducted precisely over the same ground as the more noted of the ancient thoroughfares.

You see the broad and well-paved way sweep through the long vista of palaces and public and private edifices, from one end of the city to the other ; and the contrast between the bright blue sky above, and the screen of mountains which forms the background far in the distance, enveloped in the clear aerial tints of this transparent atmosphere ;—combined with the variety of colouring and graceful proportions of the architecture, is more magnificent and beautiful than I can describe.

At the time of our visit, the city may be said to have exhibited an aspect of extraordinary splendour, from the circumstance, that in consequence of the ravages of the cholera the preceding year, the inhabitants throughout its limits, had been compelled by public ordinance, to paint and clean their houses.

The general style of building is regular and symmetrical in its outlines. The better houses are nearly of the same height ; strongly built of porphyry or porous amygdaloid ; rising to the third story, with flat roofs, and lofty apartments, disposed round an interior quadrangle. At the same time, in the ornaments and details of the façades, the style of the elaborate carving, the form of the windows and balconies, and the colouring, the eye recognises an endless variety at every turn. Whether the style of embellishment is

always in good taste or not, it is often very curious and always striking. Most of the façades are painted in distemper, white, orange, crimson, blue, and green or red ; and many are overlaid with glazed and stained porcelain tiles of extremely beautiful design.

Such is the number of the churches, convents, and public buildings in the central part of the city, that you can hardly move without commanding a view of one or more edifices of this character, rising above the general line, and rearing a pile of stately architecture, with painted dome and towers in brilliant relief against the sky.

For the accommodation of a population estimated at one hundred and sixty thousand, you enumerate fifty-six churches within the bounds of the city, in addition to the cathedral. The convents and monasteries are thirty-eight in number. Some of these are of very great extent. That of the San Francisco contains five churches within its walls.

Many of the ecclesiastical edifices are of very great size, and all more or less highly wrought and embellished interiorly, though the number of those which are distinguished for really good design and good taste, are comparatively few in number. Santa Teresa, the Antigua, the Professa, San Augustin, the Incarnacion, and one or two others, might be named as having some claim to be exempt from the general stricture of bad taste, false and gaudy ornament, tinsel and glitter, which applies to the majority, and which in many becomes absolutely offensive. Statu-

ary, painting, and carving, is lavished upon all, but rarely of a character above mediocrity. In actual riches, display of gold, silver, and embroidery, Mexico far surpasses every city in Europe; and the value of precious metals which you have sometimes before you, in the shape of candelabras, vases, balustrades, shrines, and consecrated vessels, is incalculable.

The signs of the domination of the papal religion are to be seen everywhere in the streets, where pictures, shrines, and processions abound. Few are the palaces, on one part or other of the façades of which you do not descry a patron saint, 'sanctified in stone;' and most of the houses which form the angle of the intersecting streets, are surmounted by a little arabesque shrines rising above the level of the *azotea* or terraced roof.

I have hastily penned these brief outlines of the interior aspect of the city, intending, as I may feel tempted, to relate the events of the Holy Week which we are approaching, and fill you up the outlines here or there, and to people it, which you see I have omitted to do. Meanwhile, I would lead you without the walls, if a breast-work of hardened mud, stretching across the entrance of the causeways, deserve the name.

Round that nucleus of splendid streets and buildings which I have alluded to, in traversing the outskirts of the city, you find a large space occupied by

buildings of a very inferior design, interspersed, however, by large and spacious churches. Beyond these, at least on the east and north sides, an exterior circle of scattered cabins is observable, constructed of the *adaubi*, or unburnt brick, prepared from the clay of the surface, inhabited by the very refuse of the populace. They are posted on the very limits of that plot of ground, which, by an elevation of two or three feet over the surface of the lake, had been dignified by the erection of this great city. The whole of this space was probably, thickly covered by the ancient capital.

Over these marshes in the times of Montezuma, covered as they then were by water, three causeways led to the firm land; namely that of Tacuba to the west, Tepeaca on the north-west, and Cuoyacan towards the south. It was upon the latter that Cortez made his first entry into the capital. At that time the majority of the streets were intersected by canals; and the city being surrounded by water on every side, the principal communication with the surrounding districts, and between the different quarters, was carried on by light canoes. These canals are now almost all filled up; and except that of Chalco, there is no considerable canal in the city. On the other hand, the causeways are now above double their original number. The three ancient *calzadas* are still maintained; the first being still that of Tacuba, the second of Guadaloupe, and the third of San Augustin. There is then in addition, the great *calzada* running to the south east over the flats, to the southern extremity of