

at which the seat of this tremendous power must be situated.

There is however a caprice in the effects produced which it is difficult to explain. The same earthquake which I have thus noticed as so sensibly felt at Mexico, was not observable at Guadalupe, within a mile of the city; while at Tacuba it was yet more severe. It was felt neither at Real del Monte, nor at Regla, while an hacienda situated between those two places was shaken to its foundation. It was rumoured that the hot baths situated on the Peñon, an isolated mass of lava between the city and the lake, had increased in heat since the commencement of the shocks; and further, that Popocatepetl had shown slight signs of combustion; but the most careful observation and attention could detect nothing of the kind from the terraces of the city. Morning after morning I directed my glass to him, but no perceptible vapour dimmed the clear silver outline of his snowy summit. He was at rest, and he may perhaps sleep for ages.

LETTER VI.

WE had not been many days in the city of Mexico, when we made the discovery, that notwithstanding the excellent letters of introduction with which we had been furnished in Europe and the United States—as far as the *natives* of the country were concerned, we should have to be the contrivers of our own amusements.

It is true, our calls were returned and our cards acknowledged. We exchanged compliments; bartered bows, polite speeches, and grateful acknowledgments, for the boiling-hot, rapturous expressions of ecstasy of our Mexican acquaintances, at the unlooked-for happiness of seeing us in this world. We smiled in delight, in the very extremity of gratitude, at the devotion with which the palaces, the houses, the very lives of our noble male friends, were seemingly placed at our command, without any reserve.

It might have appeared that every other duty or pleasure was to be relinquished for the felicity of cultivating our friendship. We received a thousand compliments, which the gayest of our European admirers had never had the wit to conceive, nor the effrontery to utter. On one or two occasions, we

had the ecstasy of presenting a comely black-eyed Dama or Signorita, with a balmy *cigarita*; and of receiving it again from her delicate hand, after it had been consecrated by a preliminary whiff.

And how then?—why, after the first interview some of the most impassioned of our acquaintances were never again heard of. Others evidently kept out of our way. Two or three who had travelled in Europe were again met with in society, at the houses of the European residents, where, of course, they behaved with the proper reserve, staid decorum, and the cool nonchalance of civilized and well-bred men: and the greatest attention which we met with during our stay, from any individual,—with the exception of one single family connected by marriage with Europeans,—was an occasional impromptu invitation to come and sit for an hour in an evening, ‘quite in a family way.’ This was laughable; and the more so, as we found that it was the general experience among foreigners of all grades.

There were those among the diplomatic corps, whose object it has been from the commencement of their residence in the city, to cultivate a friendly and social spirit with the families of natives of so-called education, attached to whatever party they might be;—but a series of the most ludicrous vexations and disappointments showed them the total impossibility,—the chimerical nature of the scheme; and we found the society at their houses literally reduced to the superior class of Europeans, and half a dozen Mexicans, whose visits to Europe had rendered a little more susceptible

of the advantages of a different state of society, than that afforded by their own country.

The European merchants were equally unfortunate, and found in the constant display of jealousy, and in the low intrigues of their rivals among the natives, no opening for a more liberal state of feeling and conversation. Consequently, they kept aloof from each other.

Then came the lower orders of foreign speculators. All found themselves the subject of jealous hatred in Mexico. ‘*How does Monsieur like Mexico?*’ said a garrulous French barber to me, the very morning of my arrival,—‘*Fine streets, fine houses, fine churches, fine clothes!*—but the people,—they are all, all, all, from the President to the leper, what we in France call *canaille, Monsieur.*’ ‘*Ma foi, qu’ils sont bêtes ces Mexiciens,*’ said the Belgian host of a *meson* at Tacubaya: ‘*all from the highest to the lowest are as ignorant as that bottle!*’—and he pointed to an empty one. ‘*You ask a question,*’ ‘*Quien sabe!*’¹ is all you get for answer. *You show them something they never saw before—‘Santa Maria, que bonito!’ is their only exclamation.*’

But the most eloquent was a little German sadler, who wound up a long high-Dutch tirade against the miserable inhabitants of the country, their mode of living, their ignorance, dishonesty, and the hard lot which compelled him to cast his life away among

¹ Who knows?

such wretches, by saying, '*There is not von man here, so honest as my tog Spitz :—Carampa !*

But in our case, besides this known feeling of jealousy of the Mexicans towards the foreigner, something was to be laid to the charge of the season of Lent, during which it seemed that there were neither bull-fights nor tertullia.

In addition, the veteran Galli, the faded Pelligrini, in short, the whole *corps d'Opera Italienne* was out of humour. And they might well be. They had been invited to charm the eyes and ears of the Mexicans for the season, under certain conditions. The government had bound itself to insure them a certain amount of remuneration; that is, whatever sum their professional receipts might fall short of it, it had pledged itself to make good. Now as it happened, the people were in poor spirits, and had neither time or ears for them. Their receipts fell far short of their hopes, and in utter distress they applied to the liberal government. Government responded to their application in rather a cavalier manner; for instead of hard dollars,—it sent a file of passports regularly made out, from the prima donna, to the scene-shifter and candle-snuffer, and the advice, to take their departure forthwith. This was poor satisfaction; but singers are proverbially unfortunate in Mexico. There was, for example, Garcia, who, travelling, was set upon by banditti and pillaged, even to his snuff-box, diamond-ring, and pantaloons: after which, the robbers insisted that he should sing for

them. He did so—and was hissed most obstreperously by his lawless auditory! It is said that he had borne the pillaging with becoming temper, but the hissing he never forgot or forgave.

Thus situated, we made the best of our position, and determined to enjoy ourselves in our own way: riding out every morning, frequently dining and spending the afternoon at the house of one or other of our European acquaintances, and passing the evening at the Paseo, or on the elevated Azotea of one of the fine palaces, which, now half-warehouse and half dwelling-house, are many of them in the occupation of foreigners. The scale of the interior arrangement of these princely structures, corresponds with the stately exterior. They contain suits of elevated apartments, now despoiled of their rich furniture, and melancholy from their vast extent and want of inhabitants; but evincing in their fresh gay gilding, carved work, panelling, and painted ceilings, both the past glories of which they had been the scene, and the extreme purity of the atmosphere which circulates within their lofty walls. The views from the more elevated, over the flat roofs and the numerous domes of the city, and the complete panorama of mountains, were of a beauty which is indescribable.

There are certain thoroughfares and places of resort, in Mexico, which seem to pour one incessant stream of human beings, from sun-rise to sun-set. Such are

the main streets leading to the causeways; The vicinity of the Parian and Plaza Major, where the bulk of the business of the capital is concentrated; the various markets; and the quarters where the canals from the lakes terminate.

Numberless light canoes laden with fruits, flowers, vegetables, maize and straw, meat, wild ducks, and game of various description, approach the centre of the city by the latter channels; frequently accompanied by the Indian speculators and their families, young and old. Thence the cargoes are transported on the back, through the press of rival mules, trooping in from the *calzadas*; and are deposited in the spacious market-place near the University.

The spectacle afforded by this crowded area, was a never-failing source of interest—whether our observation was directed to the habits of the Indian, the varied picturesque costumes, the nature of the commodities exposed for sale, or the peculiarities of individual character.

The Mexican and Ottoman Indian possesses very distinct features from his North American brethren. He has a shorter face and thicker lips, and the cheek bone is much more protuberant.

During the early hours, good humour evidently pervaded the press; and the public spirit seemed to harmonize with the freshness of the flowers,—of which, as in the days of Cortez, there was here always an inexhaustible profusion;—with the bright colours of the fresh-culled fruits and vegetables,—and the orderly

arrangement of the various piles of calico, hides, earthen-ware, baskets, ropes, and matting. The toil of their journey, and that of subsequent arrangement being over, the Indian and his family might be seen seated at their morning meal of *tortillas* and *chile*, in peace; and in satisfied expectation of the approach of a customer.

I never failed to remark, however, an exception to this tranquillity, in the person and demeanour of an old, grotesque Alguazil, who appeared to have the duty of maintaining order,—or rather, of stirring up disorder, in that part of the market which lay opposite to the University. He usually lost his temper at sun-rise; and, as far as I could discover, never found it till after sunset;—swearing most grievously the live-long day;—thumping the cruppers of the mules, and the heads and shoulders of the Indians,—overturning hampers, kicking over the baskets,—knocking down the piles of merchandize; and putting every thing in confusion, in dogged determination to see all go according to rule and square. He seemed perfectly careless of consequences: and he met the objurgation and vociferous upbraidings of the dark-eyed and dark-haired female whose arrangements he had invaded, with the same recklessness, with which he braved the sullen scowl of hatred from her swarthy mate.

The heat of noon brought comparative silence. Multitudes had departed; and those who maintained their stand were dozing; but a little later, the old Alguazil with uplifted staff and voice might be seen

at his unwelcome labours;—goaded bipeds and quadrupeds; twitching the hair of the one, and the tails of the other; and dispensing execrations upon both. Unfortunately, I must allow, that at this hour, there was some reason for his interference; as the numberless *pulquerias* in the vicinity of the market, to which many of the males had retired in the morning, while their wives carried on the business,—now vomited forth their inebriated occupants; and many a family group which had entered the city in harmony, was seen retiring to their canoe amid violence and lamentations.

The shops in Mexico do not make any great figure; they are in general open; and of small dimensions. Certain quarters are devoted to distinct lines of business. Thus the jewellers have their street; the seller of *mangas* theirs,—and so forth. Coach-making is among the most important mechanical trades of the capital; and, perhaps, the most lucrative after that of the gold and silver-smiths;—but no trade can be very bad, if we consider the price asked for almost every article. Saddlery, confectionary, millinery, and tailoring, flourish. The vender of medicines seems to have a stirring business. The Parian, which I have before named, forms a depository of a great proportion of the home-manufactured goods; and the hire of the stalls brings in a large revenue to Government. This alone can be pleaded in defence of its maintenance, to the destruction of the beauty of the Plaza Mayor. It is also the principal resort of the *Evangelistas*, writers

of letters, memorials, and billets-doux, for the unlearned of the city. Many foreign artisans have of late years settled in Mexico, but are always regarded with jealous dislike by the natives.

The works in wax are celebrated; and there is an artist, Hidalgo by name, whose models of national character and costumes are of a rare beauty and fidelity. There is evidently much native talent of an imitative kind; but the disadvantages under which the country labours, are sufficient to crush and extinguish it.

Owing to the causes before alluded to, I am totally unable to give you the smallest insight into the manner in which the best classes of the natives employ themselves, during the early part of the day. Soon after sun-rise, the churches held their proportions of worshippers of all ranks. The hour of prayer over and gone; while we suppose that the males repaired to their ordinary occupations, private or official,—the higher class of females disappeared altogether. Among the crowds in the great thoroughfares, at the market, under the great arcades, or on the promenades—it was a rare occurrence to descry the *mantilla* of a lady of condition.

Now and then, it is true, a solitary maiden, followed by her watchful duenna, might cross your path, saluting your nostrils by a gentle whiff from the lighted cigarita, which, like the glance of her black eye, was but half shrouded by the ample *mantilla*; but this was not a usual apparition.

It was evident that they neither went out shopping, nor visiting, nor gallivanting, but staid within doors—which, on the charitable supposition that they were properly employed, was well enough; but hereof deponent saith not.

It was far otherwise in the evening. Then all, young and old, came out of their hiding places, and the Alameda and Paséos before sun-set, and the Portales after dark, swarmed with the damas and signoritas of the city.

The number of carriages which repair to the evening promenade is very great; and there is certainly considerable taste and luxury displayed among them.

They are in general capacious vehicles, with bodies well and substantially built, if not exactly after the present European taste;—gaily decorated and painted in the old sumptuous style in vogue two centuries ago; but the huge scaffolding on which they are pendant, defies description. This, from one extremity to another, cannot frequently be less than fourteen or sixteen feet—I like to keep within bounds. I should esteem it be morally impossible to overturn one of them by any lawful means. They are drawn by two or four steeds, or mules, heavily caparisoned; and, when once in motion, may be seen soberly trotting round the Alameda, or over the Paséo, for a brief space; when they draw up in solemn stateliness side by side, in one of the open spaces, to allow the occupants a full opportunity to see and to be seen. The gentlemen on horseback meanwhile, course up and down, with much the same objects in view; halting and chatting with

their acquaintances, or rapidly exchanging in passing, that friendly little gesture with the fingers, which passes current among familiars in this country. I will not deny that you see some fine horses, and some striking costumes; and further, some handsome faces; and that there is a kind of excitement produced by the bustle of these evening promenades, particularly when they take place on the Paséo de las Vigas;—but whether it was that I love not crowds, and am given to seek more quiet pleasures, and to prefer scenes of less glare and dust,—or was apt to be too strongly reminded by them of the vanity of the world,—or, lastly, that I was conscious that *Pinto* was one of the shabbiest steeds in the city to look at, in spite of the daily care of Don Floresco; and that my cutting a dash was out of the question—I soon grew tired of attending the Promenade, and used to gird on my weapon and slink off in another direction. Several times a week, about sun-set, the band of the artillery regiment quartered in the city, played for half an hour in the vicinity of their barracks; and many of the loungers, both mounted and on foot, were accustomed to repair thither: and, to do them justice, I have heard far worse military bands in Europe. It was whispered that the music was by far the best feature of the regiment, and I think with every probability of truth. Like all other portions of the Mexican army which came in our way, the officers were gaudily dressed in very bad taste, and the men looked more like foot-pads than soldiers.

And now the scene of the fashionable promenade changes to the Portales, where some hundreds of dames and gallants form into two dense lines, from which, when once entangled, you can hardly extricate yourself; and continue defiling up and down with monotonous regularity and at a funereal pace, for half an hour or more; while the dirty steps at the doorways of the shops opening under the arcades, upon which the beggars and lepers have been reclining during the day, are now, to your astonishment, crowded by luxuriously dressed females, chatting and smoking with their beaux. This is perfect Mexican,—just as an acquaintance described to me his morning visit to a noble lady to whom the preceding evening he had been presented at the Opera, where she shone in lace, and diamonds,—when he found her in the most complete dishabille; all her French finery thrown aside; without stockings, and eating *tortillas* and *chile*, out of the common earthenware plate of the country. I must do the Mexican gallants the credit to say that some time ago, a proposal was started to provide chairs. The offer, however was indignantly refused by the belles; and there they squat to this very day, according to the custom of their mothers and grandmothers.

At this hour the *mantilla* was almost universally laid aside. The females of this country cannot be said to be distinguished for personal beauty. They are short in person, and seldom the possessors of elegant form or features. The eyes are commonly fine, and the majesty of their gait, which is remarkable, is char-

acteristic of the admixture of Spanish and Indian blood. In their style of dress they have now adopted the French fashion; always preserving the *mantilla*, however, as before mentioned, in the earlier part of the day.

I regret to see national costumes on the wane, here and elsewhere; most following the vile fashions of France and England: and this fancy extends itself in many cases to the trappings of the horses, as well as to those of the rider; and not a few of the young Mexicans now use the English saddle, instead of the high *mameluke* saddle and furniture of their fathers.

It is evident that the lamentable effects of the political state of the country, and the constant struggle between parties for mastery, are felt throughout the whole structure of society. There is no frankness and no forgiveness between those who are for the moment in power, and those who have in any way shewn favour to another modification of the Constitution; or abetted other rulers. The instant that the struggle is at an end by the defeat of the one, the other takes advantage of its victory to crush their humbled adversary by confiscation, exile, and domestic oppression.

Unhappy Mexico! No sooner has a government seemed to be fairly seated, and felt itself called to exercise authority, and to enforce the laws; but some discontented partisan runs off to a distance from the Capital, gets a band of malcontents together, sets up a '*grito*' or bark,—to give warning that something is brewing;—follows it up in due time by a *pronun-*

ciamiento against the existing rulers;—proposes a modification of the Constitution; and, collecting an army, makes a dash at the metropolis. Perhaps, as was the fate of Canalizza's party, while we were in the country, he gets beaten on his way, and running abroad to escape the vengeance of his conqueror, leaves his adherents to make their peace as well as they may:—perhaps, like the hero of the day, Santa Anna, he succeeds, and gets possession of the presidential chair, to be kicked out in his turn, without a shadow of doubt, sooner or later. It would fill a volume, and be a perfect jest-book to give a history of all the changes experienced by this country since the expulsion of the Spaniards; and the real intentions, ends, and characters of those, by whom they have been brought about.

The most serious evil is, that in this state of affairs, nothing can be accounted stable. The sound principles of government, perchance professed by a party, most frequently perish with those who upheld them. You have read the wise intentions published to the world by this or that ephemeral President and his government, with regard to general tolerance, and the introduction of those principles of popular education and of internal policy, which can alone render the Mexicans capable of self-government. You have heard of the excellence of the police: the energy with which order was restored upon the public roads: of summary justice being inflicted upon those who transgressed the law. I should lay it down as a rule, that you never need believe

more than about a quarter of that which you might be lead to infer from the inflated style and mendacious language of whatever is published here;—but yet there may have been some foundation for what was asserted at such a date—at the same time that I would assure you, that the greatest probability exists of there not being a single word of truth in the statement, when applied to the real position of affairs, six months after. How was it when we were in Mexico? Santa Anna, a man of but little genius or talent, but cleverer than those about him in the low arts of intrigue, and into whose well-laid traps more than one old associate had fallen, was at the head of the *reform government* as President. The preceding year, General Duran had attempted to get up an unsuccessful revolution in favour of the so-called 'privileged classes.' This year Canalizza had run off to the eastward in the manner I have described; and, under what patriotic cry I forget, had issued a *Pronunciamiento*, proposing to set up a counter-government, according to the custom of the country. If I mistake not, General Bravo was down to the south-west, with the same intentions. The vice-president, Gomez Ferias, was at *couteau tiré* with the President; and the latter had, under the veil of leave of absence from the capital, for the restoration of his health, gone off in a very bad humour, to pout at his estate near Jalapa; where the general belief was, that he was brewing some mischief of his own, in favour of the army and the church, both of which were decidedly under a cloud in the actual state of

things. The latter especially began to tremble for its wealth, which the necessitous *Federacion* considered in the light of a lawful prize.

The surmise was right, as the event showed; for not long after, the wily President himself was pleased to set up his 'bark,' and abjuring the reform party, on whose shoulders he had climbed to power, made a run for the capital, beat his old friends, and throwing himself into the arms of the 'privileged classes,' was again elected President.

Since that time another '*grito*' has been given by the Zacatecanos, who revolted again, under favour of that pet cry of the giddy multitude in the age in which we live—reform!—and getting together six thousand *civicos* or militia, and thirty-two pieces of artillery, defended their city. Santa Anna's star again prevailed; and he beat them also. Durango then gave him a little more trouble; and now Texas, with its unruly colonists, has called him to the north. He may chance to hear some other dog 'barking' in the Capital before he gets back. Is not this laughable? But to return to the time of our visit.

The more enlightened party, consisting of those who were averse to the ignorant bigotry of their fellow-citizens, and desirous of introducing the more enlightened policy of the United States or Europe, were quite in disgrace; their chiefs exiled, and themselves under the surveillance of the party in power. Their schemes had perished with them: education was dis-

couraged; jealousy and hatred of foreigners carried to a ridiculous pitch, and the administration of justice most infamously abused.

The popular party, having the upper hand, was, as elsewhere, tender of the lives of its near relatives and associates in prison. Seven hundred and thirty criminals crowded the *Acordari*, the principal goal of Mexico. There had not been an execution for three years. The promptitude with which eight out of ten miscreants, who had robbed the house of a European merchant in the city, were seized and executed some years before, owing to the firmness of one or two magistrates, and the authority of the English Consul-general, had neither been forgotten nor forgiven by the people and present government.

The transportation of criminals to the *Presidios* of Sonora and California, was known to be a perfect farce; as, however they might set out, they were never known to arrive there—unless they chose. Assassinations were frequent in the city; and to meet a bleeding body carried dangling from a litter, was no unusual event. A murder took place in the very house where we lodged. Thousands of drunken and gambling *leperos* lay about the churches and piazzas of the city.

Safety to person or property on the public roads, that was most doubtful. Many were robbed within a stone-cast of the gates; and the diligence from Vera Cruz, was, for a number of weeks successively, pillaged as a matter of course, in the *Piñal* between Puebla and Mexico, or near *Perote*.

After the defeat of Canalizza, the villages were hardly safe, such was the number of lawless ruffians dispersed about the country to the eastward: and all this was winked at by the government. What a blessing a Buonaparte would be for Mexico!

In matters of religion, nothing could be more bigoted and intolerant than the reform government of the country. The Roman Catholic religion in its blindest, most revolting form, was the only one tolerated by law; and whatever there may be in other Roman Catholic countries, here, there would seem to be no medium between the grossest and most debasing superstition and idolatry, and scepticism and infidelity.¹ The few Protestant residents are not permitted to have a place of worship; and were it not stipulated by the treaty with Great Britain, they would not be allowed a place of sepulture for their dead.

It was now the Holy Week. For several days previous to Palm Sunday, many preparations had been made for the coming solemnities.

The surface of the canals of Chalco and Iztacalco, which enter the city from the Paséo de las Vigas, was daily crowded with canoes, laden with the most beautiful flowers, the produce of the *chinampas*, or floating gardens of the Indians, on the border of the

¹ It is said that there are five hundred and fifty secular, and sixteen hundred and forty-six regular clergy in the capital; that in twenty-three monasteries there are twelve hundred individuals: and in fifteen convents, about two thousand souls, of which nine hundred are professed nuns.—See 'Notes on Mexico.'—

lakes. The great market was filled with palm-branches, and all the altars and shrines of the city, were perfumed with the sweet fragrance of the bouquets with which they were tastefully adorned.

The fruit-stalls under the arcades, and in the different Plazas, and the innumerable *pulquerias*, were decorated in the same manner. The love of flowers is as marked among the Indians at this day, as at the time of the conquest.

On the earlier days of the week, the interest of the scene thickened hour by hour. A large proportion of the population of the Valley repaired to the city; and the streets were crowded with all classes, from the poor half-naked Indian of the pure Ottoman or the Mexican race, whose sole covering was a dingy woollen or goat-skin blanket, and straw hat, jacket, and calico pantaloons reaching to the knee,—to the wealthy *paysano*, or country gentleman, whose costly apparel might be valued at upwards of five hundred dollars. About the evening of Wednesday, the scene on the Plaza Mayor, in front of the Cathedral, baffles all description. It forms at present one of the finest squares in the world; and were it not for the intrusion of the Parian, the large ungainly pile of building in one angle, it would be perhaps without rival.

The Cathedral, a noble and stately structure with two ornamented towers, rises to the east; the splendid palace of the Viceroy on the north; the House of Cortez, and a number of equally palatial buildings