

to the south; and a range of fine edifices, with a basement of lofty arcades, to the west. The removal of the circular balustrade, the amphitheatre, and the equestrian statue of Charles the Fourth, has left the range of the eye over the broad tessellated pavement of the spacious area, without obstruction.

At the close of the day in question, a portion of the area in front of the Portales or arcades, and before the Palace, appeared covered by slight erections of bamboo frame-work thatched by matting, and shut in by a profusion of green branches and palm-leaves. The more spacious were devoted to the sale of refreshments, and liquors of various kinds,—lemonade, pinade, a liquor called *chea*, and pulque; or for that of *dulces* for which the city is celebrated. They not unfrequently formed a booth of twelve or fourteen feet in length, with seats and tables for the use of the customers. The smaller served as temporary shops for the retail of trifles of every description,—confectionary and fruits, ornaments, or articles of apparel. The whole were most tastefully adorned with bouquets of flowers, and at night illuminated with lamps, tapers, and torches. The trade of the fair,—for fair it was, seemed to be chiefly in the hands of Indians, or those in whom the Indian blood predominated.

The crowd thickened, and the bustle in the Plaza increased every hour. The incessant sound of the innumerable bells, and the rolling of carriages, were really fatiguing to the ear. But, when the Cathedral

clock tolled the hour of ten, on Holy Thursday, a change came over the scene. The regular shops were shut, not a bell was to be heard. The carriages of every description disappeared from the streets; not a horse or mule was to be descried; but innumerable crowds of both sexes, and of all classes, rich and poor, were seen intermingling on the same level, and pouring, morning and evening, in one unbroken stream through the thoroughfares, and under the Portales. They clustered by hundreds about the doors of the churches; and by thousands,—yes, tens of thousands,—on the Plaza Mayor.

All the damas of the city, dressed in black, and shrouded in their *mantillas*, repaired on foot from church to church, according to the fashion which enjoins them to visit as many as possible, within the prescribed time of humiliation.

This state of things lasted for forty-eight hours. In the principal churches, the high-altars were despoiled of their rich load of ornaments, or completely veiled by dark coloured drapery; and the organs were as mute as the bells: while in all others, constant illumination, and the display of gold, silver, and tawdry ornaments, was fatiguingly splendid.

But do not deceive yourself: though there was an absence of many of the ordinary sounds, the city was not silent. The trample of thousands of feet,—the march of stately and interminable processions,—and the hum and clamour of innumerable voices filled the ear; both in the ordinary tones of conversation, and exerted to

their utmost pitch, as they energetically, yet lovingly called the attention of the passing to their commodities. '*Aquí hay juiles!*' 'Here's your sorts! white fish!' bellowed one. '*Pato grande, mi alma! pato grande, venga usted!*' 'A great duck! O my soul, a great duck—come and buy!'—responded another.

You may further understand, that the interior of the churches were no more the theatre of silence than the streets without, when I tell you that in addition to the incessant stream of worshippers which poured along their pavement from one door to another the live-long day,—in many of them, waltzes, boleros, and polonaises, from harpsichord or organ, were the accompaniment of the hasty devotion of the passing multitudes.

All these sounds you may conceive, for they were after all but ordinary; but it is a moral impossibility for you to imagine the extraordinary hubbub produced by the sound of thousands of rattles, which filled the air from morning to night. They were to be seen in the hands of every individual of the lower classes, and of many of the upper; of every form and material, bone, wood, and even silver; from the size of a child's plaything, to one which would out-grind half a dozen of our watchmen's rattles, and required both hands to wield. Many of the stalls in the Plaza Mayor were devoted to their sale alone; while others dealt in nothing but effigies of Judas Iscariot, varying in size and monstrosity, from a doll of a foot long, to the size of the human figure. Hundreds of them were seen

tied together by the neck, and dangling from long poles by twenty and thirty in a cluster, over the heads of the mob.

At the corner of the market, nearest the Plaza, where it happened that the principal rattle-venders had ensconced themselves, if you shut your eyes, you might imagine yourself after sunset in the depth of a forest in the Floridas, where a few million grasshoppers, cicada, and wood-bugs were at their serenade.

And so it continued from sun-rise to sun-set. I believe myself within bounds when I assert that we saw fifty thousand people collected in the great square morning and evening. Sometimes the mass was so dense, that the booths were threatened with an overturn; and you were glad to gain the step of one of the palaces, from which you might look over the sea of heads, at your ease; and descry the bunches of Judases hideously besmeared with red and blue paint, bobbing about over the level of the multitude. Then would come a stir at the other end of the square; and, with a long-drawn train of crucifixes, decorated banners and tapers, the clergy of one of the great churches to the westward would defile into the crowded area; clearing their uninterrupted way, as though by magic, to the great entrance of the Cathedral, through a press, where, a moment before, a dog could hardly have wormed his way. Some of these processions on the afternoon of Good Friday were more gorgeous and splendid in their aspect, than any I had witnessed in Italy itself, and apparently interminable.

They were revolting from the hideous and disgusting representations which they comprized, of the sacred scenes of the Passion. During the passage, the whole mass of human beings collected on the Plaza Mayor, remained kneeling in silence. To what Divinity? My brain swims with the recollection of the press and glare, and the confused and intermingling pictures presented before us during these two days; and I am totally unable to disentangle from the mass, any connected event or spectacle worth detailing. The whole city seemed to reel under the influence of frenzy, and we were obliged to reel with it. To see as much as we could, and to give no offence, were, I own, our principal objects. I remember an old woman who happened to be my neighbour during the passage of one of the processions, who perhaps observed that I was not as ready with a genuflection as the bystanders, shaking a Judas, the size of a child of two years old, at me, by the scuff of the neck, and muttering to me with a scowl of hatred, 'See! here is a countryman of yours!'

It was a rebuke which I felt I merited, for what did I there?

During this season every church and monastery had its peculiar services from morning to night. In the Cathedral I heard several; and the music accompanied by a small orchestra, was good as to composition, though indifferently performed. Within that noble structure I remarked nothing in the general style of the rites and services of a particularly undignified

or revolting character: but to describe the orgies enacted in the generality of the other churches, could but be disgusting to you. The scenes of the Passion were played and turned into comedy; while waltzes and contredances were played over the bier, on which the effigy of our Saviour was laid out in state. On the evening of that day, after making the round of eighteen or twenty churches, we returned to our quarters, thoroughly fatigued and out of spirits.

At an early hour on the Saturday, preparations were made to terminate the season of humiliation. What humiliation! On going into the streets we saw the Judases,—which I omitted to tell you, were, in fact, fire works so disguised; hanging by thousands over the centre of the streets, and to the fronts of the houses. In the Plaza Mayor, the booths had entirely disappeared; troops were drawn up before the Palace, with the artillery in advance; and it was with the utmost difficulty I could make my way into the Cathedral. Every part of its pavement was crowded.

I had hardly made my way to the high altar, when the deep bell of the church tolled half past nine,—and the lofty roof and the impending dome resounded with the burst of sounds which instantly pervaded the great city from one end to another! Within,—the trumpet and full organ mingled their burst with the clang of the great bells;—the dark veil which had shrouded the high-altar parted and rolled back, displaying the gorgeous pile of ornament which it had concealed. Without,—the artillery thundered in the square—the

bells of every church and convent through the city clanged incessantly, and were answered by those in the towns and villages far and wide—the Judases exploded by thousands, and the multitude hailed the conclusion of the Holy Week!

Before an hour was at end, the streets resounded to the roll of the carriages, and the sounds of innumerable hoofs; the calzadas and canals were crowded with Indians returning to their homes; the buyer and the dealer repaired to their traffic; the idler to his vices, and the gambler to the monte-table. The robber, exulting under his lightened conscience, betook himself to his stand in the pine-forest, to commence a fresh career of rapine; and the assassin to the resumption of his cherished schemes of blood and vengeance. The re-opening of the Opera was publicly announced, and the citizens joyfully anticipated the recommencement of bullfights.

And this is Christianity! and the worship of the only true God!—to introduce which, in place of existing superstitions, the blood of millions of the blind heathen of this vast region was shed by its Spanish conquerors! The plea for all the cruelties exercised against the Aborigines was their idolatry, and their inhuman sacrifices; and the most exaggerated statements, suited to excite the horror and extinguish the compassion of the bigoted Catholics of Europe, were found necessary, and were made, to palliate in some degree, the undeniable enormities perpetrated upon the Indians.

The detestable character of the ignorant idolatry in

exercise among the ancient race, needs no demonstration; yet, at the present day, with the exception of the single item of human sacrifice as a part of the religious system; it may well be asked, by what has it been supplanted—fewer and more dignified divinities? purer rites? a less degrading superstition? less disgusting ignorance? a better system of morality?—Who will dare to assert it?

As to the charge of the inhuman rites, and the bloody festivals of the later generations of the Aztecs,—the magnitude of which as asserted by the Roman Catholic historians is almost incredible,—no one offers to palliate them.

You are shewn with obsequious eagerness the huge round Stone of Sacrifices;—you are told to mark the hollow for the head of the victim, and the groove which carried off his blood;—your ears tingle when they are filled with the number of those who are supposed to have been immolated upon its carved surface. You turn and see the huge and detestable figure of the idol goddess Teoyamiqui, before whom, as Spanish historians relate, the hearts of the victims were torn out:—yes!—but no officious cicerone leads you to the court of the Dominican convent, and points the broad perforated stone, where the hundreds and thousands of poor benighted, ignorant heathen, expired at the stake amidst smoke and flame. No one reminds you that about the time the idolatrous worship of the Aztecs was extirpated in Mexico; the same Inquisition, then in its first flush of power, burnt eighteen thousand

victims at the stake, in the old world; and consigned two hundred and eight thousand to infamy and punishment, scarcely better than death itself. The simple fact is, that at the present day, dark as we consider it, the Roman Catholicism of Europe, is light, when compared to that established in this country, and practised by its inhabitants.

A change of names,—a change of form and garb for the idols,—new symbols—altered ceremonials—another race of priests,—so much and no more has been effected for the Indians.

The change was easily made. The ancient superstition abounded with fasts, feasts, and penances; so did the new. The whole system of the aboriginal religious hierarchy bears a singular resemblance to that which took its place under the domination of Spain. Even the monk found his vocation excited no surprise; the existence of regular orders of celibates of both sexes, whose lives were devoted to the service of certain amongst their gods, seems indisputable.

With the Indians, Teotl, the unknown God,—“*He by whom we live,*” as He was termed,—He whom they never represented in idol form,—is still the supreme Being under the name of Dios. They continue to adore the god Quetzalcoatl—the Feathered Serpent, under the name of San Thomas. It is indifferent to them, whether the evil Spirit is called Diablo, or Tlacatecolotl. They retain their superstition, their talismans, their charms; and as they were priest-led under the old system, so they are kept in adherence to the

church of Rome, by the continual bustle of the festivals and ceremonials, and processions of the church. But as to change of heart and purpose,—a knowledge of the true God as “a Spirit, who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth;”—a sense of their degraded and fallen state as men,—and an acquaintance with the truths of the true gospel;—its application to their individual state, and its influence upon their lives and characters, they are as blind and as ignorant as their forefathers.

I should not think I were hazarding much, were I to say that all classes, high and low, participate in this darkness, to a degree which is truly almost incredible; and the proofs are the countenance and support given to the degrading system; with its revolting, childish, and superstitious ceremonies; the low state of public and private morals; and the supine and contented ignorance, which they cherish with a jealousy which would be ludicrous, were it not lamentable.

Among other signs of the weakness of the existing government, the neglect and the decay of many of the public institutions is not to be overlooked.

The importance of the Mint to the revenues of the country, renders its maintenance an object of state policy; but the University, the Museum, the public Library, the splendid Mineria or schools of the Mines; many of the noble hospitals of Spanish foundation, and the Academy of Arts, were, at the time of our visit, in a state of general neglect shameful to the govern-

ment and people. The botanic garden which occupies an interior court of the Palace, is also but indifferently maintained under the care of an old badger of a functionary, who will make you up a packet of the most vulgar and ordinary garden-seeds, and charge you fifty dollars for it, with the best assurance of conscience in the world.

But to go into the details of these matters, would be to write a book instead of a letter.

Though in the last degree of confusion, the Museum, which is to be found in the Palace, presents a scene of great interest; as, besides a multitude of rare and unique works illustrative of the history of the country, and a great quantity of the most curious antiquities, it contains many of the most remarkable records of the Conquest. But all are in the most appalling disorder—a disorder which has, by the by, favoured numerous thefts. The same observation applies to the state of the more massive antiquities which have been, from time to time, brought to light; such as the Stone of Sacrifice, the Feathered Serpent, the idol goddess of War, and many others, all of which have been described at large a hundred times. There they lie, half-covered with dust, dirt, and rubbish, in a corner of the court of the University; to whose area, the fine bronze equestrian statue of Charles the Fourth, has also been exiled, by the levelling, king-hating republicans.

The great Toltec Calendar is seen to more advantage, from its being inserted in a conspicuous position

into the wall of the Cathedral, which, I have elsewhere mentioned, is built on the site of the principal *teocalli* of the Mexicans, dedicated to the god Mexitli.¹

Wonder has often been expressed, why so few remnants of the ancient city are to be found, and how completely the vestiges of its existence have been swept from the large area which it once occupied. The site of a few of the principal buildings is known; and here and there, fragments have been unearthed, and this is all. That the greater proportion of the dwellings should have disappeared, no one need marvel, when it is recollected, that they were merely built of layers of unburnt clay; that the numerous canals were filled up with the ruins; and, moreover, that the mode resorted to by Cortez according to his own account, in gaining possession of the city, was literally to level every house and street as soon as it was won. But still I am satisfied that these causes, however plausible, are not sufficient to account for the fact altogether; but that a most sedulously jealous and concerted system of destruction and inhumation must have

¹ The first great temple named in the history of the Kings, is that in the reign of the sixth monarch, Axayacatl, in 1470, who erected a tower of nine floors in honour of *the Creator*. The seventh King, Tizoc, collected materials for a very great temple, which his son, the eighth monarch, finished; when, Clavigero states, 8,000,000 of people came to the dedication; and all the prisoners made during four years, in number 72,344, were ranged in two files, a mile and a half long, and were sacrificed. This was probably the great one which formed the main citadel of the Mexicans at the taking of the city.

been pursued by the conquerors with reference to all relics of the ancient race.

It may be supposed, that a people that proves itself so little disposed to appreciate treasures of this nature, would show but little ardour in their being brought to light and preserved; and whatever is discovered, is discovered by chance. Foreigners have occasionally instituted a search in suitable localities, and have made valuable discoveries; but the existing law, which prohibits the exportation of antiquities under any pretence, has put a stop even to their labours.

Indeed at all times the inhabitants of this city, even when most civilized, and numbering many men of education, have been singularly apathetic with regard to the vestiges of the ancient people upon whose seat of empire they had established themselves by the right of conquest. For two entire centuries the same insane and bigotted spirit of wanton destruction, which the Spanish historians show to have influenced the conquerors, and to have caused the annihilation of much that was curious and valuable, seems to have possessed their descendants to a very late epoch, if not to the present day.

There is ample proof of this, in a pamphlet¹ now becoming rare, published by de Gama, a Spanish savant, in 1792, to give a description of the two most

¹ Descripción y cronológica de los piedras con ocasion del nuevo empedrado que se esta formando en la plaza principal de Mejico se hallaron en ella. Año de 1790. &c.—por Don Antonio de Leon y Gama.

remarkable of the Toltec antiquities, the goddess of war, and the Sacrificial stone, both of which were discovered accidentally two years previous.

The goddess Teoyamiqui, or Cohuatlicue,¹ as de Gama calls her, is a colossal figure about nine feet high, hewn out of a solid block of basalt. The breadth is about five feet, and it is three feet in thickness. It is sculptured on all sides, and even underneath the feet, having evidently been suspended at a height from the ground, by two projections at the sides. The whole configuration is the most hideous and deformed that the fancy can paint, being a mass of serpents of all sizes, with claws and tusks of ravenous beasts, ornamented with human hearts and skulls.

The stone of Sacrifices, is a cylindrical mass of porphyry, of twenty-five feet in circumference, covered both on the surface and sides with sculptures in relief. It is strongly urged that this was not the Altar implied by the popular name, but one of the stones termed Temalacatl, on which gladiatorial combats between prisoners of rank and the Mexican warriors took place on solemn occasions. I have but little hesitation in asserting that the groove in the upper surface formed no part of the original design.

It has been surmised that this is the 'exceedingly great stone' which was discovered by the Mexicans as late as the reign of Montezuma, when it is

¹ Two different personages by the by. Teoyamiqui was the wife of Huitzipoctli, the god of war; while Cohuatlicue, was the goddess of flowers.—HUMBOLDT'S RESEARCHES. Vol. I. p. 266.

recorded that it was brought to the capital with great labour and pomp for the sacrifices: on which occasion 12,210 victims were immolated.

It may fairly be credited that many of these antiquities were the work of a people anterior to the Aztecs.

No doubt can be entertained but that their systems for the computation of time were transmitted to them from the Toltecs.

The great Calendar Stone is a vast mass of basaltic porphyry, twenty-four tons weight, covered with the most symmetrical and admirable hieroglyphics.

Two several calendars were in use among the Aborigines, namely the *Reckoning of the Sun*, used for civil purposes, and the *Calendar of the Moon*, employed to regulate their religious festivals.¹

²The Reckoning of the Sun was briefly as follows. The civil year consisted of three hundred and sixty-four days, divided into eighteen months, of twenty days each, with exception of the last, to which the five odd days were added. But evidently knowing that the tropical year exceeded their year by six hours, they, after the termination of each cycle of fifty-two years, added thirteen days before they recommenced the first month of the following cycle, and thus adjusted their time. Each of the eighteen months

¹ Their numerals were indicated as far as nineteen by round dots; the number twenty had a particular sign, as well as 400 and 8000, and this is all that is known of their system of notation.

² See Humboldt—M'Culloh, &c. &c.

has a certain name from some natural object characteristic of the particular season which it indicated, or from some particular festival or employment in which they were engaged at such times. The twenty days were also named, and like the months, had their hieroglyphic sign. Every fifth day throughout the month was a market day. In recording the events of their history, the precise cycle of fifty two years in which a given circumstance occurred, was first indicated, and not the century, as with us, and consequently the cycles were numbered from a certain epoch.

The year of the cycle in which an event happened was not indicated by its number, but by a more complex mode which I will briefly explain. The cycle of fifty-two years was subdivided into four equal parts of thirteen years each, called Tlalpilli; one of four hieroglyphic signs—*Tochli*, a rabbit—*Acatl*, a reed—*Tecpatl*, a flint—and *Calli*, a house, were applied to each year in succession, throughout the fifty-two; and thus in every cycle there would be thirteen years designated by each sign. The number of each of the thirteen years composing each of the four Tlalpilli was designated by dots; and the Mexican in pointing out the year of any event, would first name the number of the cycle, say *two*,—then the number of the Tlalpilli in such a cycle, say *four*,—then the number of the year in such a Tlalpilli, say *three*, and then the hieroglyphic sign of the year. So cycle • • •,—Tlalpilli • • • •,—year • • •,—and the Sign *Acatl*,—will indicate the forty-second year, in the

second cycle of their history. Each succeeding fourth year, coming under the sign of *the rabbit*, was called a 'divine year'; and, at the termination of the cycle of fifty-two years, a solemn astronomical festival was held.

The Reckoning of the Moon was yet more complex, and I will only allude to its main features. Their 'religious year' was composed of a series of periods of thirteen days, alternating with the hieroglyphics of the twenty days of the month in the civil year, by which a cycle of two hundred and sixty days is formed.

Seventy three cycles of two hundred and sixty days amounted exactly to fifty-two years, so that their great religious cycle terminated and began with the civil cycle described above. A larger cycle of 2340 days was further produced by the introduction of a series of hieroglyphics, nine in number, and called the Lords of the Night; eight of which, with the addition of one of the smaller cycles of two-hundred and sixty, would amount to the civil cycle of fifty-two years.

From whatever source the ancient people of these countries derived their correct knowledge of the revolutions of the sun and moon, and their peculiar astronomical system, the analogies which have been detected between them and with those of Asia are most conclusive as to the fact of their having had one common origin.

The week of five days, the subdivision of the larger cycles, the nomenclature of the years, the regulation

of festivals according to half lunations, the method of intercalation, the proportion between the number of years of the cycle and the intercalary period,—all lead one to believe that the Mexican astronomical system, as well as those of the Chaldeans, Persians, and Hindoos, was based upon the principles of antediluvian science, the knowledge of which was common to the descendants of Noah, in the centuries preceding the confusion of tongues and general dispersion of the human race.

But to return for an instant to de Gama. We learn from him that the monstrous goddess was discovered in consequence of an excavation made in the Plaza Mayor, on the 13th of August, 1790, exactly, to a day, two hundred and sixty-nine years after the capture of the city by Cortes. The head lay at the depth of only one vara and a third below the surface, and the foot but one single vara or less. It was the 25th of September before it was finally extricated. On the 17th of December following, the Sacrificial Stone was found, at the depth of but a foot and a half below the pavement. Other relics were discovered subsequently. Some of the largest were instantly buried again, and among the number, those named. Others were destroyed; and no doubt seems to exist, but that at this very hour, at a very small depth in this central part of the city, a vast quantity of these colossal and curious remains of a forgotten people lie hidden from the day.

So little was de Gama's admirable treatise upon

these monuments understood or appreciated, that he had but one hundred and seventy-two subscribers for his pamphlet of one hundred and sixteen pages; and it is doubtful whether he found sufficient encouragement to publish a second treatise upon the Calendar and other monuments subsequently found, as he hints his intention of doing, in case that the sale of his first adventure, covered the expense of the impression and the plates.

He gives (*page 110*) a description of a cluster of most curiously sculptured rocks, discovered in the Cerro of Chapultepec, in the year 1775, while labourers were carrying on certain excavations. After a most careful examination, he conceived them to form part of an astronomical contrivance, by which the ancient Mexicans were enabled to determine the meridian, the exact time of sun-rise and sun-set at the equinoxes, and thus the true time throughout the year. In recording on his next return to Chapultepec, the utter annihilation of these valuable relics of an extraordinary people, he feelingly exclaims 'how many precious monuments of antiquity have thus perished through ignorance!' ¹

¹ Quantos preciosos monumentos de la antigüedad per falta de inteligencia, habran parecido an esta manera!

LETTER VII.

OUR allotted period of sojourn in the country, which we now felt to be lamentably brief, passed swiftly away amidst the excitement of our position; and, urged by the feeling that necessity would compel us to leave Mexico at the commencement of May, we prepared, early in April, to make an excursion of a few days in the environs of the capital.

Accordingly, on the 8th of that month, for the especial solace and service of the invalid of the party, a huge unwieldy Mexican state-carriage, swinging to and fro upon its scaffolding, drove majestically up to the door of the Gran Sociedad, at the heels of ten mules, furnished with faded trappings and harness, and with tail-pieces of brass-studded leather, shaped exactly like a beaver's trowel. M^r Euen and myself on horse-back, backed by our two equerries Garcias and Mariano, the (latter a new acquisition) acted as escort. All were, of course, armed to the teeth, and felt very valiant. Two *mozos* presided over the mules.

The coach was, by the by, not so much amiss; for it was of a strength of construction, which might have made it available as a temporary citadel, on a pinch—and once put in motion, it went lumbering over the pavement, and out of the gate of San Lazaro, to the