

be traced down the successive steps of the table-land to the very shore of the Pacific.

In process of time we reached the Cruz del Marques,¹ a solid stone cross erected by Cortez, to indicate the bounds of the territory assigned to him by Montezuma.

The shade of the pine-forest which still clothes a great part of the upper region of the mountain, was grateful to us; at the same time that it was the most perilous part of our voyage, so far as the probability of being robbed went. We passed, however, without molestation, retaining possession of our watches and purses, and the cherished opinion of our being invincible.

If in quitting the Valley of Mexico at day-break, we had to complain of the cold, noon brought with it a degree of heat for which we were quite unprepared, and it grew in intensity as we descended the steep face of the mountain to the southward. The western slopes of the Cordillera of Mexico are far more sudden and inclined than those on the side of the Gulf, and the consequence is, that by the route we were now following, after a journey of a few hours' travel, you descend to a level, to reach which on the opposite side, you must travel for several days.

We had not descended far upon the south-western

¹ About 9500 feet above the sea.

slope, before we descried the sea of broad and yellow plain, which here formed the second step of the Table-land, stretching into the bright haze as far as the eye could penetrate.

As we proceeded, the heat increased; and, as we wound along the edge of the ravines, the road became almost impassable for the horses, from the quantity of rock and stone with which they were strewed: and right glad were we, after passing through a picturesque village, at the foot of the mountain, to find ourselves and our train, housed in a comfortable *posada*, in the town of Cuernavaca, after an uninterrupted ride of sixteen leagues, without halt or refreshment.

I think we treated both ourselves and our quadrupeds with unusual severity on the occasion. But there seemed to be no alternative.

In resolving to take the circuitous route upon which we had now set out, we had a further end in view than that of merely extending our observations a little, by seeing a part of the country which was less known and less hacknied, than the direct and ordinary one from the capital to Puebla. Ever since we had entered New Spain, it had been a pet scheme to visit certain remarkable remains, existing in the vicinity of Cuernavaca. I refer to the fortified hill and palace of Xochicalco, or the 'House of Flowers,' of which little was known, but what was to be culled from a small pamphlet in Spanish, written many years ago, from which Humboldt probably gives the few facts

mentioned in his Researches. He was unable to visit Xochicalco himself.

Our inquiries in Mexico with regard to the precise position and character of these ruins, were productive of no kind of certain information. Among all our acquaintances, European and native, we could not find more than two or three who had ever heard of their existence; and farther, '*Quien sabe*' was the answer to every thing.

However, hurried as we found we should be, if we intended to leave Vera Cruz on the first of May, we kept steadily to our purpose; and, no sooner had we refreshed ourselves by ablutions and a hearty meal, followed by a basin of excellent lemon ice; and had seen the termination of a savage affray in the opposite house, in which braining with clubs and stones was the fashion, than we set about our inquiries in considerable confidence, as there could be no question, but the ruins, after all, were to be found in this neighbourhood. Our host and his neighbours were first applied to.—*Quien sabe! Quien sabe!* was all we got for our pains. We went to a young merchant, the only European resident of any standing here:—he had never heard of the existence of such a place. At length we determined to make use of a note of introduction to the principal Cura of the town; and here we were more successful. He knew that Xochicalco existed, but he had never visited it. According to him, it lay among a group of hills which he pointed out to us from his window, across the great

plain, called the Cerro de Xochicalco; and he promised to furnish us with a guide for the following day, and perhaps to accompany us himself. He stated the distance was perhaps three, or at most, four leagues.

Jaded as we were, we set about our preparations with alacrity. As our speedy advance to the coast was now a matter of absolute necessity, we determined to spare our horses as far as practicable: and with infinite pains, borrowed two others, in order to leave them to their repose, for the time of our absence. We decided to set off at day-break, leaving Garcia and the arriero to proceed with the mules to the town of Yautepec, six leagues distant: with the intention on our parts, after our anticipated return from our excursion in the course of the afternoon, to take our fresh horses and follow them thither. Wise and good projects, but like many human ones, vain nevertheless!

That a restless night should follow a day of excitement and exposure like the last, was not to be wondered at. The doubt which hung over our whole projects of advance to Vera Cruz, and our fate there, did not perhaps mend the matter; and for my part I own, that at dawn, I arose from the floor of the chamber where we were all stowed together with bags and baggage, feverish and unrefreshed.

Just as we rode out of the gateway of our posada, the first sun-beams were shining upon the white summit

of Popocatepetl, which now appeared exactly in the east.

Cuernavaca is most nobly situated, on a tongue of land, girdled on three sides by tremendous barrancas; in which, matchless sterility, and the exuberant and broad-leaved vegetation of the tropics, are blended together in an extraordinary manner. It possesses a large church and prison, and many other buildings, the architectural details of which are uncommonly picturesque. I never saw a country where there were richer subjects for the artist, than that in which our rambles were placed for some days to come.

The mule-path which we followed, led us for some time along the edge of the great barranca to the west of the town, in a direction nearly due south. But after traversing it by a long descent, and longer ascent; and gaining a village where we took a second guide,—the first furnished by the Cura not being acquainted with the road,—we crossed a band of sugar and cotton plantations; and, entering upon the uncultivated stony plains, bent our course a little more to the westward, towards the Cerro in advance. Our borrowed horses were wretched animals; and I well remember the hard trot of the emaciated beast which I had the misfortune to bestride; and the galling position in which I was pinioned by a badly-constructed Mexican saddle.

By some arrangement of the Cura's, which we did not then comprehend, our party had been increased as

we left Cuernavaca, by a fine, hardy, bold-looking, armed horseman, who kept us company the whole day, whether as guide or as companion we scarcely knew; though on our return we had a hint given us to pay him a few dollars in quality of the first. He was not talkative; at the same time that there was nothing uncourteous in his reserve or general bearing, which I can best liken to that of a stalwart and stark moss-trooper. We had our suspicions at the time that he was a known bandit, whose fidelity and safe-guard the good Cura had thus thought proper to secure; and we have since had them verified and found that this was really the case.

The plains over which we now moved, were more barren and inhospitable in their character than I can describe. The surface, strewed with loose scoria and rock, and brown as the sands of Arabia, produced not a blade of grass; but refracted the hot rays of the sun with a glare which blistered and excoriated the face and hands. And the fervid, glowing, furnace-like heat of that sun I shall never forget! There it hung in the heavens like a blazing ball of copper, shedding its beams through a yellow haze, which, at an early hour of the day, spread a thin transparent veil over the vast plains and their towering mountain boundary; and as it rose to the zenith, throwing our shadows under our feet, it scorched the skin like fire. In vain the eye was cast abroad in search of relief; every object far and near glared with the reflected brilliance—not a tree, not a

rock, not an overhanging bank in the shadowless and thirsty land! The yawning barranca, deep as it might be, formed but a focus, where the sun's rays were concentrated. The very hills in advance seemed to cast no shade. Opinions as to our distance from them, were hazarded and recanted again and again. They loomed in thin haze, till they appeared near at hand, while their lowest swell lay at the distance of many miles. And then the barrancas! Though our previous travelling in this singular country had prepared us for this feature of the plains as well as of the mountain slopes, we had no where seen them upon the same scale. One of those which we traversed this morning, of which no indication had been observed till we arrived at the very brink, took us an entire hour to traverse. Though water has undoubtedly been an agent in their formation, the origin of the greater number of those tremendous furrows in the surface of the Table-land is to be traced to the earthquake, and the sudden disruption of the strata by volcanic agency. You see many, in which the two sides, though furlongs apart, exhibit uncontested signs, that their jagged perpendicular walls were once in junction. Every Mexican traveller must have remarked the insidious manner in which many of these gulfs commence. In riding along the plains, you perhaps find yourself separated from the companion with whom you are conversing, by a crack or fissure of a few inches in breadth: you proceed carelessly; the rent gapes imperceptibly wider and wider; and increases in depth, till it imperatively demands

your attention. Perhaps a very natural dislike to retrace your steps, and ignorance of the real nature and extent of the obstacle, induces you to keep your direction in search of its termination; when, before you are aware, you find a hideous and impassable gulf yawning between you, delving deep for many miles into the face of the landscape, and no alternative left you but to return to its very source. I sketch from experience. Some of the larger of the barrancas I have described, form beds for the scanty streams descending from the forested slopes of the neighbouring Cordillera, and at one of these, about ten in the morning, we quenched for a moment the burning thirst of our party, men and horses.

An hour after, we reached the base of the hills which apparently form a detached group in the Table-land. For many miles previously we had observed and repeatedly crossed an ancient paved causeway, about eight feet in breadth, composed of large stones tightly wedged together, and running directly over plain and barranca, towards the hill of Xochicalco.

The strange mould of the summit of the steep hill on our left, as we entered the group by a small valley, had long drawn our attention, as it appeared to be surrounded by a regular rampart; but I incline to think that it may be the natural formation.

At the termination of the little valley above-mentioned, we arrived at length at the foot of the emi-

nence which was the principal object of our excursion.

The circuit of the hill of Xochicalco, or the House of Flowers, may perhaps measure three miles, and its perpendicular height about three hundred feet. The opinion has been hazarded, that the whole mass is artificial; but it is one I cannot entertain for a moment, as its whole position and general configuration shows it to be one of the group; though there is no doubt but its entire surface, great as it is, has been subjected to a general design, and cased from its summit to its base with artificial work. The decay of centuries, at the same time that it has injured many of the details, yet allows the general plan to be detected. Even the broad moat, which encircled the whole, remains perfectly distinct.

Alighting from our horses at the foot of the hill, which is partially covered with dry brushwood and leafless trees; we scrambled upwards from one stage to another, over the crumbling stone-work, which, from its steepness occasionally, rendered advance difficult. Four terraces apparently, make the entire circuit at regular intervals of elevation, though occasionally they were not easy to detect, from the accumulation of rubbish.

The intermediate slopes are covered with platforms, bastions, pyramidal and rectangular elevations and stages, one above the other, and other erections of which I can neither describe the exact forms nor guess their appropriation. It is evident that all were faced with

the same uncemented stone-work, and were accommodated to the natural moulding of the hill, which, however far from regular, was conical in its general outlines. Upon a platform in connection with the highest terrace, we were obliged to leave our horses, before we climbed up a steep, stone-faced declivity, evidently pyramidal in its structure, to the summit.

Thence we commanded a wide view over the neighbouring hills and plains,—a scene of matchless sterility, glaring in the noon-day sun; and we now saw, that in addition to the paved-road from the north which I have mentioned, there were others of precisely the same construction, running towards the 'House of Flowers' as to a common centre, from other points of the compass.

From the summit we proceeded to the northward into a hollow square, situated at a somewhat lower elevation, in the centre of which we found the ruins of the remarkable Altar, or Teocalli, which has been the principal object of speculation or attention.

Though evidently formed upon the same general principles with the other ancient pyramidal structures of New Spain, it differs from every other erection of the class hitherto discovered in Mexico,—the pyramid of Papantla excepted,—by being wholly constructed of large regularly-hewn and symmetrically laid masses of hard and richly-sculptured rock, instead of layers of unburnt bricks, or piles of earth and stone.

In its perfect state, which it preserved till a comparatively recent date, it is said to have consisted of

seven distinct stories, diminishing of course in size, but of precisely similar construction. Of these we now only found the lower story, and portions of the second, remaining in their original position; the hewn stones composing the remainder having been wantonly moved and carried off, little more than a century ago, by the proprietors of the sugar-plantations in the neighbourhood, for the foundation of their haciendas.

The base lines of the lowest square, which correspond to the cardinal points, may be fifty feet in length; and the height of the first story from the present level of the hollow square in which it stands, eight or nine feet.

One remarkable fact is, that instead of the wall rising at right angles from the base, it inclines inward, to the height of six feet, with a variation of perhaps fifteen degrees from the perpendicular, when the completion of the story is effected by perpendicular masses, sculptured in like manner, being placed so as to project out several inches from the line of those immediately below;—a rude analogy of outline with the Egyptian architecture, that must immediately strike you. It is to be supposed that every story was constructed in a similar manner.

The chief characteristics of the sculpture, are its decision of outline and boldness of relief. The hardness of the dark basaltic stone in which they are cut, has preserved its freshness without the slightest appearance of decay.

To describe the character of the isolated figures, is

out of my power. The majority of the hieroglyphic signs,—for such they doubtless are,—resembled nothing in heaven or earth; but in many parts I detected the clothed human figures, seemingly reposing in the Asiatic manner.

Whether each face of the structure bore throughout similar devices, placed in exactly similar positions, I do not recollect positively: I think not: at the same time it was certainly the case at the angles, where some of the richest and most singular figures were to be found. The ornament which has been described as ‘a crocodile spouting water,’ is of very large size, and must have been repeated eight times in each story, by being symmetrically placed at either extremity of the inclined basement of the structure.

As to its bearing resemblance to ‘a crocodile spouting water,’ that is mere fancy; it may as well portray the head of a griffin, or of any other fanciful monster; and what the ancient observer interpreted as a jet of water, was, in my eyes, intended to represent a double tongue.

We were now nearly blinded by the heat and glare; and after half an hour’s survey, and reiterated but abortive attempts at a detailed sketch, I was glad to join my companions in beating a retreat; for the vertical sun’s rays left no side of the building in shade, and the trees and shrubs which grew on the borders of the inclosure, and upon the ruins, were leafless and desolate.

Masses of hewn stone were strewed about the base, and lay in disorder on the building itself. In the

centre of the Teocalli was an excavation, but evidently made in modern times, probably in a search after hidden treasure ; and yet, that the second story of the Pyramid at least, had contained a chamber, I satisfied myself, by discovering on one of the western faces, among the base stones of that story, which had not been moved from their original position,—one mass, which both by its situation and the fact of its being sculptured on two of its adjoining faces, plainly indicated its having served as a door-post. Its fellow was not in its place, but I have not the slightest doubt of the fact.

After leaving this interesting locality, we made a wide circuit of the mount to visit certain subterraneous excavations, entering deep into a shoulder of the hill, which, to judge by appearances, has been almost entirely cased over by the hand of man.

How far these caverns run under-ground, none can pretend to say ; our circumstances compelled us to rest satisfied with ascertaining the fact of their existence, and that there was every sign of their being wholly artificial.

The hill of Xochicalco may still be considered unbroken ground for the antiquarian ; and there is every probability of its rewarding a really careful and attentive survey. The details of the group of hills and the surrounding country should not be neglected. Our experience may be so far useful to our successors, whoever they may be, as to show, that here, plenty of time,

and the means of shelter and refreshment are absolutely requisite for the excursion. Situated as we were, and little as we positively effected, I wonder that we did so much. By the route we had come, we agreed that it must be seven leagues from Cuernavaca.

I need not tell you that there is neither the shadow of a tradition as to the people whose hands reared this singular monument, nor of the purposes to which it was devoted. I hazard no opinion either as to the one or the other.

The general traveller will of course point to the Toltecs ;—the more learned or pedantic may suggest that it is referable to the Zapotecs, and the probability is, that they are the work of neither one, nor the other.

Whether the ' House of Flowers ' was made subservient to self-defence, and formed a strong hold ;—or was a hill of delight set apart for the habitation of a monarch ;—or a high-place, where the religious mysteries of a people were performed,—or a spot chosen for a union of all these objects, it is still one of the most extraordinary localities in New Spain, and deserves much more attention than it has hitherto received.

Not a drop of water was to be found on the hill, or in the vicinity ; and when we mounted our horses in the ditch, and began our retreat across the plain, we were all panting with thirst and fatigue—none more than myself, whose feverish night had badly fitted for

the fatigue of a day like that I am describing. The nearest Indian village lay at a considerable distance out of the direct road, but we were all decided to repair thither. As to our going forward that evening to Yautepec from Cuernavaca, that was at once acknowledged to be impracticable. How shall I paint that arid stony plain, or that blazing sun—the blood seemed to boil in my veins.

The moment we reached the village, we threw ourselves off our horses, and rushed with one accord into the first palmetto-thatched hut, much to the terror of the female occupants, who had hardly time to hide their bag of maize, and get assurance to tell the customary lies.—‘Water—water, give us some water!’ *No hai!* ‘Is there none in the village?’ *No hai!* ‘Any pulque?’ *No hai!* ‘Any fruit?’ *No hai!*—*no hai!*—*no hai!*—*nada!* *nada!* *signores!*—None of us asked for chile pepper! We were almost in despair.

But shade was a luxury, even though it brought no coolness; and we lay down upon the floor. Good words and cigaritas, however, soon had their effect; and water was found,—first in thimbles-full, then in sufficient quantity to bring some degree of comfort both to ourselves and our horses; and at last we got some frijoles, tortillas, lemons, and a small lump of sugar. The poor beasts, who, bad as they were, had suffered with much patience, equally with ourselves, were invigorated by a few bundles of maize stalks.

We staid here three hours, and then resumed our return. In the neighbourhood of the village there was

some slight cultivation, and the direction which we took over the plains in returning, at the same time that we avoided two of the most extensive barrancas, brought us to more than one small stream, where the scattered trees afforded some solace to the eye, and a moment's shelter from the sun. On the banks of one of them, we saw with indignation a number of the sculptured blocks, from the Teocalli of Xochicalco, lying half buried in the soil.

The haze which I had remarked in the earlier hours of the day, continued to clothe all objects, without absolutely hiding them; but the outlines of the more distant ranges were so indistinct, that we could scarcely trace them. Such was the difficult character of the surface, and the continual checks we met with from barrancas, that the day was far spent before we arrived at the brink of the magnificent gorge which forms the entrenchment of Cuernavaca on the west. In the morning, we had crossed it many miles further down. It is splendidly varied in its character, and in the light of the sun, setting in gold and purple over the plain behind us, formed a magnificent picture.

The twilight fell upon us before we had extricated ourselves from the depth of the abyss, and when we did so by gaining the further edge, the moon was shining without rival in the heaven.

I cannot describe to you the delicious feelings which came over us, as we felt the cooling night air fanning our temples, while riding through the rich and luxuriant