

So much for the arming of our escort. Now as to their valour.

For what purpose were they hired—at the cost of eighteen dollars, to ride by the side of the coach, from La Puebla to Perote?—To scare away thieves, and robbers. But if the thieves would not be frightened? To fight? No! such an idea never came into their heads. To fight?—he, he,—ha, ha,—ho, ho!—to get perhaps a shot from a real carbine, or a slash across the nose;—or at least to be lassoed, half strangled, dragged from horseback, and ground to powder, by being hurried along the road for a few hundred yards,—and all that for only eighteen dollars! and for the pleasure of their valours, the three heretic Dons?—No, the idea ridiculous! Does it not appear almost such to you? Seriously speaking, I believe an escort in Mexico is never expected to fight, not only because I never heard of a well-accredited case of their doing so, but from the peculiar style and character of the arms wherewith they are furnished. This strange circumstance apart, I must give our dragoons a good character. They gave us no trouble, always stuck to the carriage, spoke not an unnecessary word, and were dismissed at Perote, where all danger from banditti was supposed to be at an end.

To resume the notice of our journey. Six leagues of road over the wide undulating surface of the sandy plains, brought us towards evening at our halting place, Ojo de Agua; a posada built at a spot where a

clear and abundant stream issues forth from the foot of a mass of volcanic matter, and forms a green oasis in the middle of the desert. Till the afternoon of this day, we had been unable to catch a glimpse of the great cone of Orizava, towards the northern extremity of whose chain we were gradually approaching. The weather had been dull and hazy ever since we reached Cholula, whence we should otherwise have been able to descry it. Now, as we trotted slowly over the plains, our eyes were busily engaged in searching among the shifting layers of light cloud which rose above the distant horizon, for some indication of his presence. One bright spot after another was the production of much speculation and ultimate disappointment; at length, about two hours before we reached our resting place, we became unanimous in believing, that a certain indistinct whitish mass, high up in the smoky atmosphere, formless and vague as it was, could be no other than the object of which we were in search; and true enough, as the sun went down behind us, and the air cleared, we saw it become brighter and brighter; and, in fine, shaking aside its veil, the colossal cone stood before us in majesty, at the limit of the Table-land over which it soared to the perpendicular height of ten thousand feet.

As we proceeded over the almost interminable plains the following day to Perote, it stood revealed in all its sublimity, as well as the whole of the chain with which it is connected. This range is terminated to the north by the extinct volcano called the Coffre de Perote.

A sudden change in the air about noon, which we were all sensible of, was immediately recognised, as indicating a Norte on the coast. At Perote we arrived towards evening, after halting for two hours in the vicinity of an isolated volcanic mass, called the Cerro de Pizarro.

Perote is a small decayed town, with a Fort, or rather a depot, in the vicinity, situated at the height of 7691 feet above the Gulf, near the eastern limit of the Table land. An early march of a few hours the following morning, brought us to the crest of the Pass, to the north of the Coffre de Perote; and to the commencement of the great descent to the coast.

Our journey thus far from Perote, had been rather barren of interest, but upon gaining the elevated alpine village of Las Vigas, it was far otherwise. The sandy route now gave place to a steep Calzada, over which the unwieldy coach came lumbering down, with many a jog and many a jolt, to the great discomfort of the occupant, and the apparent peril of the train of mules. The upper part of the road crosses the flanks of the Coffre de Perote, a mountain so called, from a square, chest-shaped eminence, which crowns its long ridge, and contains the crater of a volcano, which, however long dormant, must once have been the vent of tremendous eruptions, judging by the signs scattered over the neighbouring country. Las Vigas lies at the height of 7820 feet above the gulf, and consequently within the limit of the *Tierras frias*. The forests in the vicinity are chiefly pine. At this elevation we

were enveloped in cold driving mist, worthy of the Alps; and though its partial clearance before we descended to Jalapa, three thousand five hundred feet lower, gave us many a glimpse of the magnificent scenery around; yet it must be conceded, that we lost much, by not having a brighter and less clouded view. Some distance below Las Vigas, we entered upon a *pedregal* covered with scanty vegetation; and we continued for many miles, to descend over slopes covered to a great depth by volcanic deposits; here thick beds of black cinders and scoria, coating the rock with a thick stratum, and lying just as they had rained from the heavens;—there floods of black lava, hard as adamant, and yet bearing upon their unequal surface, abundant signs of the liquid state in which they had poured down from the mountains above. As usual the surface of the lava was never smooth, even in places where it had met with the least obstruction, but displayed an infinity of sharp wrinkles overlapping each other, or, rather I should say, shooting from under the other. In parts of the country where rocks, or inequalities of the original surface had interposed impediments to the gentle flow of the volcanic matter, the scene of confusion was truly terrific. Here, the surface would be heaped with huge blocks of solid rock, hundreds of tons in weight, masses which had evidently once floated like corks upon the irresistible flood; and there black rifts and yawning caverns would mark the struggles of the fluid, as it pitched down some mountain steep to a lower level.

We halted for breakfast at a hamlet situated in the very centre of this volcanic matter, and afterwards resumed the sharp descent. Below the lavas, the forests became more luxuriant, teeming with curious trees, and shrubs; and the views far more open. Judging from what we saw, they must be of a most splendid description, and that epithet may be worthily bestowed upon the situation of the city of Jalapa, where we arrived at two o'clock in the afternoon, having left Perote at four A. M. The change from the sterility of the Table-land above, to the luxuriant and teeming vegetation of this lovely region, was the more striking, than the contrast between the characteristic features of the great level plains with their barren volcanic cones, to the varied and beautiful wooded hills, vales, and mountains, which characterise this most lovely region of New Spain.

You, and others have asked me, what comparison can be drawn between the Alps of Europe, and the Cordillera? I was going to say none, but the traveller must learn not to be rash. The lines of just comparison are very faint. The highest summits are covered with snow; the green swelling mountain and pastures of the middle region have a general resemblance with the lower alps of Switzerland, in their outlines and colouring,—though hardly in their climate; and there is something in the general features of the upland vales of the Cordillera, where they break down towards the coast, which puts you in mind of the scenery of those magnificent vallies, where the icy

streams of the great southern chain of the Alps, precipitate themselves towards the sunny plains of Italy, and carry far down into the clime of the vine and chesnut, the *debris* of the inhospitable regions of bare rock and snow.

But as to those details, which you would take as chiefly characteristic of either chain, no similarity can be established whatever.

In the limestone, slate, and granitic ranges of the Alps, beauty of outline is far from being confined to any single ridge. It is an attribute of the secondary, as well as the most elevated;—of the parallel chains, as well as of the diverging mountains, which, like ribs, start out from the great back-bone of the continent, and sink gradually to the level of the plains on either hand. Piled, range behind range, with deep vales between,—with numerous lakes;—and clothed up to the very limit of eternal snow, with green or forested slopes,—they are eminently picturesque; and the gentle luxuriance of the lower vallies, contrasts felicitously with the precipitous rocks and masses of snow, which occupy the higher regions. The scale and the structure of the Alps, permit the eye to command in almost every situation, the whole of their varied detail. The enormous extent of the glaciers on the upper plains and acclivities, and the peculiar manner in which they descend towards the vallies, are mainly characteristic of these mountains.

Now as to general outline, both from what I have seen, and have heard with regard to other parts of the

Andes, that of the great porphyritic chains of the Cordillera, can hardly be said to be generally picturesque. It is scarcely broken enough; its details are too vast. One enormous wall of mountains rises behind another, each buttressing a broad step of table-land, but in general the interval between them is far too great for the eye to command more than one at a time. Here and there, from the general level of the undulating mountain ridge, rises a tremendous cone, with a breadth of base, and an even smoothness of outline, which, at the same time that they proclaim its origin, and add to its sublimity, take from its picturesque beauty. The summit bears its mantle of snow; but compared with the mass, it is but a cap,—not a flowing mantle, with its silver and purple folds and its fringe of ice.

There are again, for the reason stated, few positions in which your eye will command at the same time, the rich and gorgeous vegetation of the lower slopes of the Mexican Cordillera, and the sublimity of the superior ranges. The vast sheets of the barren Table-land are interposed, the *tierras templadas* separate the *calientes* from the *frias*. Each have their peculiar characteristics, but they can seldom, if ever, be comprised in one and the same picture.

You look in vain among all the exuberant forest-growth and the giant flora of Mexico, for the sweet cheering freshness of Alpine vegetation;—that luxuriance without rankness, which clothes the lower vallies.

From this you will see, that where the two chains

might be supposed to have points of resemblance, they have little or none.

Besides that, in the style of its vegetation, both in the torrid and temperate regions,—the plains and their peculiar characteristics,—the prodigious barrancas,—the whole series of volcanic phenomena, which pervade the country, from the sands of the coast, to the craters of the highest volcanoes; as well as in the colouring,—the more prominent features of Mexico are so marked and so utterly different, that they extinguish the idea of comparison.

Suppose us now at Jalapa, a picturesque town situated high upon the broken sides of the huge mountain-rampart which serves as a base for the great chain of the eastern branch of the Cordilleras. A lovelier sight, and more beautiful scenery, you need not seek in the torrid zone! Below you, a steep descent leads rapidly down the verdant and fresh slopes, towards the shore of the Gulf, which is just visible from the highest parts of the town, at the distance of twenty leagues and upwards. Above you rises ridge above ridge, crowned by the *Cofre de Perote*; and yet farther to the southward, by the magnificent snow-covered summit of *Orizava*,¹ in comparison to whose sublime and majestic stature, the elevated mountains which cluster round its feet, appear but as pigmies. To the right and left extending along the mountains' sides, at the height of

¹ Height of *Orizava*, 17,375 feet.

between four and five thousand feet above the sea, lies a delicious and salubrious region, covered with magnificent forests, and diversified with some of the most beautiful towns in New Spain; a country, smiling with an eternal spring, under the kindly influence of the heavy mists and dews, which, rising thus midway up the steep Cordillera from the bosom of the Gulf, pause here in mid-air, and promote that rich verdure, which is equally grateful to the inhabitants of the arid and sterile table-land, or of fervid sands of the sea-board.

To this 'city of refuge' flies the unacclimated European from the port below, as soon as that dreaded sickness, the *vomito prieto* makes its annual appearance within the narrow walls,—forgetting the thirst of gain, in sudden solicitude to preserve dear life. To this point, the moment he lands, the panting traveller presses up the steep mountains with might and main; and blesses God when he feels the fresh air of the mountains, and sees the white walls of the convent of San Francisco crowning the steep: and here the inhabitant of the table-land, or the departing stranger, pauses and lingers, ere he descend into the infected Tierra Caliente, and ventures to inhale the hot and subtle breath of fever and disease.

Our view of Jalapa was but a glance, but it was one which has left on my mind a delightful impression of beauty; and I often linger in fancy among its low, red-tiled, broad-eaved habitations, or exuberant gar-

dens, and muse upon the marvellous beauty of its convent-crowned hill, and the freshness of its gushing waters, lakes and shady woods.

In architecture, the town affords a delightful example of the old Spanish style, and many of the country-seats in the vicinity are delicious retreats.

The population amounts to thirteen thousand. We here met with the majority of the gentlemen who were to be our fellow-voyagers in the packet; and, as the exact hour of sailing was now known, and our departure from Jalapa in company fixed for the evening of the following day, our short stay was fully occupied. In fact far from being a day of repose, as was advisable, it was one of unremitting alacrity of body and mind.

To dismiss our retainers, to sell our horses and furniture, to make all the dispositions for final departure from the country, entailed upon us more fatigue than you can perhaps imagine.

But about noon, somehow or other, all was arranged! The arriero was on his way back to Perote, with the baggage of a party ascending to the Capital. Garcia and Jose Maria,—neither of whom had the slightest wish to risk their precious lives, by advancing a step further,—were remunerated for their services; if not to their heart's content, far beyond their deservings: and, masters of two of the horses of the train, were at liberty to seek other, and equally gullible, masters. Poor Pinto had to partake the fate of his comrades, and learn to obey another bridle and another spur,—and those perhaps none of the mildest,—being sold for less

than the cost of his shoes. When I think that he may have found a hard master, I have sometimes regretted that I did not shoot him with my own hand; for he had been a noble and fleet horse when young, and one of some renown; and was still active and generous, notwithstanding his rough coat and wisp of a tail; and I had insensibly become attached to him. We had travelled three months cheerily together, and gone through many strange scenes; and when I passed my hand over his neck for the last time, I own that I felt a very disagreeable tightness about the lower end of the gullet. I love poor dumb beasts.

Since our first landing in America, Pourtales and myself had made trial of almost every imaginable mode of travel and locomotion,—carriage, coach, gig, sulky, carry-all, and carry-nothing,—mud-waggon, dearborn, horse, mule, steam-boat, steam-carriage, goelette, shallop, skiff, wooden-canoe, bark-canoe, raft, rail, tree-stump, the back of an Indian, and what not. We were now to adventure our persons in yet another manner. The Mexican *littera* is a kind of oblong box, about a foot deep, three feet wide, and six feet long,—unfortunately more frequently shorter than longer. Two long poles passing down and fastened to the sides, project fore and aft, and serve as shafts for two mules, to whose pack-saddle the ends are attached by straps. In short,—a long box instead of an upright one,—a recumbent and supine position, instead of a sitting one, and two four-footed porters instead of two biped ones—are the main points of difference between

the littera and the sedan chair. It is furnished with a leather awning and cotton curtains, and ordinarily with a well-worn mattress, through which you may feel the rough boards upon which you recline.

We had heard the litter described as the most luxurious mode of travelling, and accordingly, each slipped into his independent vehicle, with a feeling of great satisfaction.

We formed a train of ten, with a horde of sumpter mules. Each litter besides its two mules, was furnished with a mounted leader, a driver, and three spare animals, to serve as relays. The price of each to the coast, was forty dollars.

So down the deep paved street we clattered, amidst the plaudits of the *poblanitas* from window and balcony; and were soon beyond the town, and travelled forward for hours through the forests, which gradually changed their character,—the oak and his congeners disappearing, and the mimosa taking their place.

Night soon closed in; and when we halted, we found it was four o'clock in the morning, and that we had reached the celebrated bridge, called by the builders, Puente del Rey;—still later, Puente Imperial,—and now Puente Nacional, where we were to lie quiet for twelve hours, the heat being such as to forbid advance. We had passed, between waking and sleeping, the villages of Encero, and Plan del Rio.

I was now in some degree authorized to judge of