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## MEXICO

## AS IT WAS AND AS IT IS.

## LETTER I.

## VOYAGE TO VERA CRUZ.

I LEFT New-York on the 27th of October, 1841, with a fair wind, and on the twelfth day after, at sunrise, saw the lofty peak of Orizaba, towering above the distant line of the western horizon.

I have rarely beheld a more beautiful sight than this was. The maritime Alps, as seen from the Gulf of Lyons, present a spectacle of great majesty and beauty. But this grand and solitary peak, lifting its head more than 17,000 feet above the ocean, the sentinel, as it were, of a land toward which you may still sail for days before you arrive, has struck every traveller with wonder since the days when Cortez first hailed it on his adventurous voyage for the conquest of Mexico.

\* \* \* \* \*

Our vessel has been quite full of passengers in cabin and steerage; merchants, going out to gather in their fortunes in this country; manufacturers, keen and thrifty, with their machinery, ready to take advantage of the ample profits to be reaped in the "cotton line" from the protection of national industry in Mexico; a German student, fresh from his *alma mater*, adventuring for fortune in Vera Cruz, in spite of all competition and the vomito; a gentle maiden, sighing for *somebody* at the end of the voyage; a staunch Scotch operative, with a wife and two children, the latter of whom made up in their little private volunteer squalls for the sea squalls we missed; and last of all, a worthy old Italian fighter, who



had gone with Napoleon through all his campaigns, and, at length, determining that war was not a thriving occupation, had pitched upon a way of making his fortune by taking a dapper little Mexican body, for his wife, and the "hatting business," as a trade.

In fact, we had on board specimens of all that active industry and fearless enterprise, which push the fortunes of our native and adopted citizens all over the world, and make our country known as much by the resistless energy of her children, as by the political liberty they enjoy at home, or which is extended to them by the protection of her flag abroad.

I commenced this voyage in low spirits, and with but a slight desire to partake of the pleasures of the cabin; but, what with charming weather and good companionship, I was soon drawn forth from my state-room, to the social table; and rarely have I passed a more agreeable time in a voyage at sea. The variety of character thus blended together, was both amusing and instructive. There were tempers to suit the grave and the gay; and when the hour came for separation, we met for the last time around the board with saddened hearts, at the contemplation of the certainty that by far the larger portion of us would meet no more, and that all were about to encounter the uncertainties of fortune in a strange country, amid prejudices, disease, and revolutions.



## LETTER II.

### VERA CRUZ.

You left me in sight of land—on soundings—with the Peak of Orizaba in full view; and although we presumed it highly probable that we would make our harbor before evening, yet were we disappointed. The wind became baffling toward noon, and notwithstanding our captain was a brave man and stanch seaman, he determined, at nightfall, to avoid running close in with the shore, and therefore "lay to" until daylight. Nothing could be more provoking; the city was not more than ten miles distant, and the lights in the houses were distinctly visible over the level sea.

With the first streak of dawn, however, all was bustle on deck, and the topsails spread to the morning breeze. Day broke gloriously over the sea; our colors were run up; the ship headed for the harbor; and when within a mile or two of the castle, a pilot came on board. Our first inquiry was as to the yellow fever—our next, as to the revolution. Of the first disease there were no remains, and the latter had terminated in the political death of Bustamante.

At eight o'clock we moored under the walls of the Castle of St. Juan de Ulloa; and in an hour afterward, with umbrellas spread to protect us from the scorching November sun, we landed on the quay which has for so many years poured out the wealth of Mexico.

Vera Cruz lies on a low, sandy shore, extending for miles along the coast. I will not trouble you with the details of this city's history, famous as the spot where thousands have come to die of the vomito—or, to make their fortunes (if they survive the certain attack of that disease,) and return with shattered constitutions to colder climates, to ache in memory of the heat they endured in Mammon's service.

Landing at the Moletta, the first thing that struck me was a gang of more than a hundred galley-slaves, chained, and at work in the broiling sun, cutting and carrying stone to repair the broken pier. The second was the roofs of the churches, which seemed to be covered with mourning, as I supposed for some deceased prelate. The mourning turned out, however, to be nothing more than thousands of zopilotes or turkey-buzzards, the chief of whom is usually perched on the peak of the cross of the loftiest church—a sentinel for prey! These two classes of folks, to wit: the galley-slaves and zopilotes, constitute a large part



of the most useful population of Vera Cruz—the former being the city authorities' laborers, the latter the city authorities' scavengers. It is a high crime to kill a zopilote. He is under the protection of the laws, and walks the streets with as much nonchalance and as "devil-may-care" a look as other "gentlemen in black," who pick the sins from our souls as these creatures pick impurities from the streets.

The *Mole*, or quay, is of good masonry and furnished with stairs and cranes for the landing of goods, though from the great violence of the ocean during the *Northers*, and the great neglect of proper repairs, it is likely to be entirely ruined. In heavy weather the sea makes a clear breach over it; yet this, and the Castle of San Juan on a land-spit near a mile off, are the only protections for the shipping of all nations and the commerce of more than half the Republic!

Passing from the *Mole* you enter the city by an unfinished gateway, near which Santa Anna lost his leg during the attack of the French in 1838. Beyond this portal is a large square, which will be surrounded with custom-house buildings—though there is now scarce a symptom of them except in the granite stones, most of which have been imported from the United States. From this spot, a short walk to the left leads you to the arcade of a street, and you soon find yourself in the public square of the city, which, though small in its dimensions, is neat and substantial. On the east, north, and west, it is bounded by noble ranges of edifices, built over light arches—the one to the eastward, with its back to the sea, being the former Governor's residence, and still appropriated to the civil and military purposes of the State. On the south of the square is the parish church, with its walls blackened with sea-damps and zopilotes.

The streets of Vera Cruz, crossing each other at right angles, are well paved with smooth pebbles, and the side-walks are covered with a cement resembling *brescia*. The houses, in general, are exceedingly well constructed to suit the climate, and though not of very imposing architecture, yet with their flat roofs, parti-colored awnings, and display of women and flowers from their balconied windows, make the city both cool and picturesque. Upon the whole, I must confess that I have seen worse looking cities than Vera Cruz, even in the "picture-land" of Italy; and when, from the roofs of the dwellings, I look at the open sea in front, the exceedingly clean streets, and the desolate coast of sand and stunted shrubbery, which extends north and south as far as the eye can reach, I am at a loss to know why it is so cursed with disease. St. Augustine, St. Mary's, and a hundred places along our southern sea-coast, have infinitely more the appearance of nests for malaria.

It is said, that in the early period of the history of this country, Vera Cruz was not so sickly as of late years, and that, although there were occasional attacks of violent fever, it was not until 1699 that the Black Vomit made its appearance. In that year an English vessel arrived in the port with a cargo of slaves, and with them came this fatal disease. The Spanish chronicles of the town, of that date, give the most fright-

ful pictures of its outbreak, and of the heroism with which the priests (especially the Jesuits,) devoted themselves to the ill and dying; and the father Francisco Xavier Alegre dwells with pleasure on the self-sacrifice with which his holy brethren met the fell monster and ministered to the wants of the sufferers.

It was entirely too warm, even in this middle of November, to stir out of the house with satisfaction. We therefore dressed ourselves in summer apparel, and took an excellent dinner very quietly, resolved not to expose our persons unnecessarily, as we understood there had been recent cases of vomito. A number of gentlemen called to see us, and I found the Governor and other officers exceedingly anxious to afford us all the protection in their power on the road to Mexico. They say that the country has been lately scoured by troops of dragoons, but that it is still infested with robbers; and, although we are to have a military escort, our friends appear to intimate that Colt's revolving pistols, double-barrelled guns, and a stock of resolution and coolness, will be our best safeguards. We have, therefore, taken the stage which will depart four days hence; and as we are amply prepared with arms and ammunition, and a number of determined passengers, I trust we shall reach the capital without having our noses stamped in the ground after the most approved fashion of the *Ladrones*.

At sunset, a countryman was so good as to call for us to walk with him to the *Alameda*. We sallied from the south gate, and took our way into a desolate and melancholy country. On every side were marks of solitude and misery. The ruins of houses and churches, filled with weeds and creepers; neglected fields, overgrown with aloes and made still more sad by the long pensile branches of the solitary palm; and, over all lay the dark shadows of evening, as the last rays of the sun fell aslant on the stagnant pools. A sergeant was drilling a few recruits to the tap of the drum. The music seemed to be a dead march, and the step of the soldiers was slow and solemn. Nothing could be more dreary—more heart-sickening. We loitered on, like the rest of folks, but there was no liveliness—no spirit. The people were not cheerful and joyous as when abroad with us for an evening's promenade, but strolled along in silent pairs, as if oppressed by the sadness of the melancholy wastes on the one side, and the cold, dreary, illimitable sea on the other.

The appropriate termination of this walk through the ruined *Alameda*, was the burying-ground. As we reached it, a funeral had just entered, and in the chapel they were saying some annual service for the dead! It may be wrong to indulge in such emotions, but here there really seems to be an utter *hopelessness in death*. We love to think, that when it falls



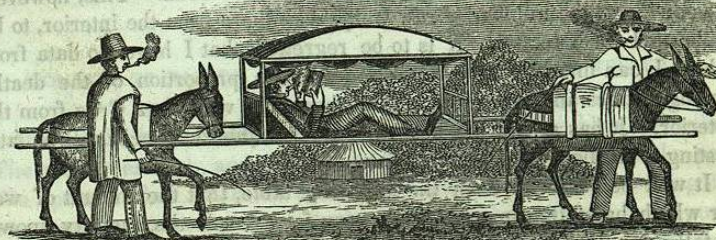
to our lot to share the common fate of humanity, we shall, at least, repose near our kindred and friends, in some beautiful spot, where those we have loved shall moulder beside us, until the dust we cherished in life shall be as blent as were the spirits that animated it. We love to think that our graves will not be solitary or unvisited. But, on this dismal shore, where the Shadow of Death for ever hangs over the prospect, the grave is not a resting-place, even for tired spirits, and the soul seems to perish as well as the body!

I came home with as capital a "fit of the blues" as ever was born in London of a gloomy November day and a melancholy temper; and I must confess that I passed the night somewhat nervously. What with the heat and exercise, our bodies were rather tired; but what with the vomito, the sad walk, and a little excitability, I do not remember to have slept a wink. In addition to these annoyances, there was a continual hubbub in the square under our windows all night long. First of all, the guard was to be set, and that produced drumming, fifeing, braying of trumpets, and bustle of troops; next, my bed was too short for me; then, just as I was coaxing myself into a doze, I discovered that the servant had neglected to put down the net, and consequently, came the onset of a colony of thirty mosquitos, ravenous for the fresh blood of a foreigner, after having dulled their beaks a whole season on Mexican skins; next, the clock on the opposite tower struck *every* quarter, and that was backed, with equal regularity, by the watchman under the *portales*, who prefaced his song with an "Ave Maria Purissima" that would have waked the dead. And thus from hour to hour I tossed and tumbled, while the clock struck, the watchmen howled, and the mosquitos sucked—occasionally *amusing myself* by *trying* to feel some of the symptoms of the vomito! But day at length broke, and a cold bath and a hearty breakfast perfectly reestablished me.

One of my fellow-travellers who was anxious to avoid the risk of waiting in Vera Cruz for the diligence, informed me about ten o'clock, that he had made arrangements for a "*litera*" to carry him to Xalapa, there to await the stage and rejoin our party. He was so good as to offer me a part of his couch, which I eagerly accepted, and immediately set to work packing my extra baggage for the Arrieros, as the diligence, and the muleteers who accompany *literas*, will carry but a limited burden. At four the *litera* arrived, but the muleteers would allow but one passenger! There was nothing but submission. Pancho had his bundles strapped on, stepped into his vehicle, or rather stretched, out on its bed, lighted his cigar, tied on a Guayaquil *sombrero*, and waved us farewell.

A *litera* is an article of rather curious conveyance. Here is a drawing of it. The pencil speaks better to the mind than any description I

can give you of it. It would create a sensation in Broadway, and is decidedly more picturesque and comfortable than a cab or an omnibus.



LITERA.

I send you some interesting tables as to the health and commerce of Vera Cruz, which I have compiled from accurate sources.

## ACCOUNT OF THE BAPTISMS AND BURIALS IN VERA CRUZ FOR 1841.

	Males.	Fem.	Tot.		Males.	Fem.	Tot.
Baptisms	214	240	454	Marriages	-	-	-
							37

	Males.	Fem.	Tot.		Males.	Fem.	Tot.
In the Parroquia	215	271	486	Hospital of Loreto	000	146	146
Hospital of St. Sebastian	254	000	254	Hosp. of S. Carlos	131	000	131
Total	-	-	-		600	417	1017

	Males.	Fem.	Tot.		Males.	Fem.	Tot.
From 1 to 7	94	135	229	From 26 to 50	249	132	381
" 8 to 15	32	36	68	" 51 to 75	35	23	58
" 16 to 25	188	85	273	" 76 to 100	2	6	8

	Males.	Fem.	Tot.		Males.	Fem.	Tot.
Vomito	120	35	155	Diabetis	1	0	1
Small Pox	64	78	142	Epilepsy	1	0	1
Fevers	98	44	142	Marasmus	0	1	1
Phthisis and Diarrhoea	151	61	212	Leprosy	0	1	1
Convulsions	39	11	50	Aneurism	0	2	2
Apoplexy	10	7	17	Abcess	3	1	4
Dysentery	7	22	29	Dropsy	10	9	19
Cholic	3	7	10	Ulcers	4	0	4
Pulmonia	3	5	8	Flow of Blood	0	2	2
Pleurisy	3	2	5	Child-birth	0	12	12
Asthma	0	4	4	Drowned	1	0	1
Causas	1	2	3	Contusions	0	1	1
Gangrene	7	5	12	Wounds	7	0	7
Inflammation	3	6	9	Diseases of children	63	99	162
Cholera (glacial)	1	0	1				
Total	-	-	-		600	417	1017



Thus, allowing the population of Vera Cruz to be about 6,500 (which I consider quite liberal,) you will perceive that one-sixth of the whole died in the course of the year; of this, one-sixth—about an equal proportion—perished from *vomito*. The excess of burials over baptisms is 563. Diarrhoea, dysentery and vomito are the most fatal maladies. In 1842, I am told that near 2000 died of vomito in Vera Cruz. This, however, was owing to the number of raw troops sent there from the interior, to be embarked for Yucatan. It is to be regretted, that I have no data from which I can inform you what is the relative proportion of the deaths among natives and foreigners, and of those who visit Vera Cruz from the interior. It has struck me, nevertheless, that this document will be interesting to medical readers.

It will be observed from the following table, that the amount of water which has fallen in each year, very far exceeds the quantity known to fall annually in any part of the United States. With us it scarcely exceeds four feet. It is not, however, difficult to account for the difference. Vera Cruz, situated at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, backed by a lofty range of mountains rising beyond the limits of perpetual congelation, must necessarily be the recipient of the immense body of water held in solution by the hot intertropical air, and which is constantly carried along by the trade-winds, to be condensed against the cold mountains. This will sufficiently account for the fact; although we were far from being prepared to expect its nature and extent to be such as is here stated.

	Feet. Inch.	
In the year 1822 there fell,	13, 1.5	in the 12 months.
1823	15, 8.9	"
1824	10, 8.1	"
1825	10, 7.1	"
1826*	5, 4.4	"
1827	21, 2.8	10
1828	12, 2.0	12
1829	23, 2.3	"
1830	18, 0.0	"

\* This year was remarkably dry; and was moreover characterized by universally severe weather upon the coast, and a great destruction of shipping property.

### LETTER III.

#### THE RIDE TO XALAPA, AND THE ROBBERS WE MET ON THE ROAD.

DURING the last two days of our stay at Vera Cruz, it blew a Norther. The wind was high, and made it impossible for ships to enter the port. We spent the last afternoon at the water-gate of the city, watching the waves as they spent their fury on the Mole, and the ships, anchored under the lee of the Castle, tugging at their cables like impatient coursers struggling to get loose. With these fine adjuncts of marine scenery, and the low brooding clouds of the stormy sky, I have never beheld a scene more worthy of the pencil of our countryman, Birch.

After supper we made our final preparations for departure. Trunks were strapped on the diligence, old and warmer clothing put on, and, at midnight, nine of us got into the American Coach for our journey to the Capital.

The stories of numerous robberies, and the general insecurity of the road, had been dinned into our ears ever since we arrived. Scarcely a diligence came in that did not bring accounts of the levying of contributions. Before we left the United States, many friends who had visited this country, warned me of my danger, and advising me to prepare myself with a couple of Colt's revolvers, hoped that I might reach the Capital in safety.

Now, for my own part, though not disposed to be rash on any occasion, I always received these tales "*cum grano*." But I nevertheless took the precaution to load my double-barrelled gun with large buckshot. S. prepared his double-barrelled rifle and a Colt's pistol with four discharges. J. took his Birmingham and horse-pistols. Another person had a pair of pocket-irons, and ground an old fashioned dress sword to a *very* sharp point. John, the servant, loaded a pistol and blunderbuss for the box; and thus, harnessed and equipped, we sallied at midnight from the court-yard, as resolved as any men who ever went on a feudal foray, to kill the first ill-looking miscreant who poked a hostile nose in our coach windows. By way, however, of making ourselves *perfectly* secure, and of passing the night with additional comfort, I took care, as soon as we were seated, to point my own weapon out of the window, and to see that my companions had their arms in such positions that if they did "go off," there would be no harm done, at least to the passengers.

It was very dark when we issued from the gates of the city, where our passports were demanded. Accustomed, of late years, to the unmolested travelling of our Union, I had put mine at the bottom of the trunk, and