

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



forgot all about the necessity of having it in my pocket. The drowsy guard, however, took my word for the fact that I had one, and permitted us to pass on.

A warm, drizzling rain was pattering down, driven in by the Norther which was still raging and dashing the sea in long surges on the sandy beach along which our road lay for several miles. We could see nothing; the way soon became almost impassable through the deep sand, though our heavy coach was drawn by eight horses; and proposing that the curtains should be let down, at least on my side, I was soon in a profound sleep, nor did I awake until near sunrise, as we were passing the estate of Santa Anna, at Manga de Clavo. His *hacienda* was in the distance, to the right of the road, and appeared to be a long, low edifice, buried among forests, but without those signs of improvement and cultivation which make the property of our great landholders so picturesque. He owns an immense body of land in this neighborhood, lying for *leagues* along the road, but all seemed as barren and unattractive as the wildernesses of our far west.

During the night, an escort of three troopers had joined us at Boccherone. At daylight I caught sight of them, for the first time, in their long yellow cloaks, trotting along behind us on their small, but tough and trusty horses. They were three as poor looking wretches as I ever saw: one of them appeared to be just out of a fit of fever; the other a little the worse for an extra cup of *aguardiente*; and the third, as though he had just recovered from a month's chattering of the ague.

The road thus far had been tolerably good, although much cut up by the recent passage of baggage-wagons and trains of artillery. About seven o'clock we halted at the village of Manantial for breakfast. It is the usual stopping-place for the diligence, and we were of course immediately supplied with chocolate and biscuit. Our servitor was the Padrone's wife; and I could not help remarking her extreme beauty, and the musical sweetness of her voice, as she attended at the counter of her hut. Her Spanish was almost as liquid as Italian, and as soft as her eyes.

The houses in this part of Mexico are mostly built of split bamboos, set upright in the ground, with a steep roof, thatched with palm-leaves, and prepared of course, to admit freely the sun, wind and rain, which, during the season, is sufficiently abundant. Upon the whole, they are very respectable and picturesque *chicken-coops*.

Here our guard quitted us. It seems, notwithstanding the written orders and promise I had from the commandant at Vera Cruz for an escort, that these fellows had received no directions to accompany us, and had only ridden thus far because they thought the new Minister of Finance, Señor Trigueros, was in the stage. But I can scarcely think they were a loss. While my companions were finishing their *lunch*, I took occasion to examine their arms, not looking, however, at more than one carbine, and that I found had lost the catch of its cock, which of course always lay against the covering of the pan, pressing it open. I

mentioned this to the trooper, and asked him where he put the powder? "There, to be sure," said he, pointing to the pan. "And how do you fire it?" "Pshaw," replied the fellow, staggering off—" 'tis better so." He was half drunk, and as ridiculous as his weapon. If these are the soldiers of Mexico, they hardly rise to the dignity of respectable scare-crows.

We were soon called to coach, and mounting our vehicle with better spirits for the refreshment and morning air, we shortly entered a rolling country, with an occasional ruinous hamlet and plantation. Although the scenery was in spots exceedingly romantic, interspersed with upland and valley, and covered with a profusion of tropical trees and flowers, there was over the whole that air of abandonment which could not fail to strike one painfully. In a new country, as a traveller passes, by a solitary bridle-path, over the plains and hills, hidden by the primeval forests fresh as they came from Nature's hand, there is matter for agreeable reflection, in fancying what the virgin soil will produce in a few years when visited by industry and taste. But here, Nature instead of being pruned of her luxuriance with judicious care, has been literally sapped and exhausted, and made old even in her youth, until she again begins to renew her empire among *ruins*. It is true, that traces of old cultivation are yet to be found, and also the remains of a former dense population. The sides of the hills, in many places, as in Chili and Peru, are cut into terraces; but over those plains and terraces is spread a wild growth of mimosas, cactus, and acacias, while a thousand flowering parasite-plants trail their gaudy blossoms among the aloes and shrubbery which fill up the rents of time and neglect in the dilapidated buildings. It is the picture of a beauty, prematurely old, tricked out in all the fanciful finery of youth!

We wound along among these silent hills until about ten o'clock, when a rapid descent brought us to the National Bridge, built by the old Spanish Government, and enjoying then the sounding title of *Puente del Rey*. Changed in name, it has not, however, changed in massive strength, or beauty of surrounding scenery. Indeed, the neglect of cultivation, has permitted Nature to regain her power; and the features of the scenery are therefore more like those of some of the romantic ravines of Italy, where the remains of architecture and the luxuriant products of the soil are blent in wild and romantic beauty.

The Puente Nacional spans the river *Antigua*, which passes over a rocky bed in a deep dell of high and perpendicular rocks. The adjacent heights of this mountain pass have been strongly fortified during the wars; among their fastnesses and defiles the revolutionary generals lay concealed in Iturbide's time, and finally descended from them to conclude the fight in favor of independence.

At Puente, there is a village containing the usual number of comfortable cane huts, before which the neighboring Indians had spread out for sale their fruits and wares; while the Mexicans (as it was Sunday) were amusing themselves by gambling at *monté* for *clacos*. At the inn a break-



fast of eggs and frijoles was prepared for us. The eggs, the beans, the bread, and a bottle of tolerable claret went down famously, with the seasoning of our mountain appetites; but I cannot say as much for the stew of mutton and fish fresh from the river. What with onions, and lard, and garlic, and chilé peppers, I never tasted such a mess. We unanimously resolved to leave it as a precious *bonne bouche* for some Spanish successors, to whose bowels such a compound may be more savory than to North Americans.

Having dispatched this collation, we again mounted the diligence. I had seen an officer in command of some cavalry at the door of our inn, and recollecting that the succeeding post is represented to be one of the most dangerous on the route, I told our Yankee driver that I thought he might as well take my order for the escort, and a bundle of cigars, and try their effect upon the military. Whether it was the order or the Principés I am unable to say, but four dragoons were immediately mounted for our service. If the odor of that offspring of the "Vuelta de Abajo" still floats in the memory of the Lieutenant, and a well-supplied traveller happens hereafter to pass the Puente Nacional while he is in command, let me suggest that a similar gift may be received as thankfully and effectively. When our driver cracked his whip, and the horses sprang off from the *lassos* of the grooms at full gallop, the "bold dragoon" stood with cap in hand, and I could catch a glimpse of a head bowing most gracefully in the midst of a cloud of fragrant smoke.

Our route westward to *Plan del Rio* was through a mountainous country of short and gradual ascents, in most of its characteristics resembling the one we had passed over during our morning ride. At length, a steep descent over a road as smooth as a bowling-green brought us to the village of Plan. The guard trotted after us leisurely; the day had become cloudy and the scenery dreary, and the fear of robbers among these solitary wildernesses again came over us. We felt, indeed, more anxiety than since our departure.

My host at Plan del Rio received us warmly, though his house was as cold and uninviting as the day. He speedily produced a smoking dinner of fowls and rice, to which I found myself able to do but little justice. But the dinner had been served—we had tasted it—a bottle of claret had been drunk, and though our appetites had been frugal, the *nine* of us were obliged to pay two dollars each for the service! The two fowls which made the stew, cost, at the most, a *real* each; the rice as much, the salad grew for the planting, and the claret stood our host about seventy-five cents the bottle: so, for what, with service and cooking and original cost, taxed our Padrone not more than three dollars at the extreme, he had the modest assurance to charge our coach-load *eighteen*! If this statement will induce any of our enterprising Yankee boys, who are whittling sticks for want of knowing how to turn an honest penny, to come out to Plan del Rio and set up an "OPPOSITION STAGE-HOUSE," I wish them joy of their undertaking. It absolutely requires, as I have shown, no capital worth men-

tioning, besides a table, a dozen chairs, knives, plates and forks, a few strings of Weathersfield onions, and flexibility of limbs and countenance to grace the thousand shrugs, apologies, compliments, humbug and grimaces necessary to make a successful innkeeper in a Spanish country.

At Plan our guard left us—as the lieutenant's command extended no farther. Our host of the flexible face and productive cookery, insisted that there was not *much* danger, besides which there were no troops on the station; so he bowed us to the coach door, and declared for the fiftieth time that he had been delighted to see us, hoped we would not fail to call again if we returned, and assured us that he only kept a few *choice bottles of his claret* for such "caballeros" as we were!

What with sour wine, sour spirits, and imposition, I doubt much if there was ever an angrier coach-load on any highway. We were effectually ill-tempered, and we looked to our primings with the full disposition to defend ourselves nobly. It would have fared ill with any one who had ventured to attack us during our first hour's ride. In addition to this, our road, as soon as it left the river, ascended rapidly and passed over a track which would in any other country be called the bed of a mountain stream, so rough and jagged was its surface. Although it is the duty of the Government to keep this highway in order, yet as the chief travelling is on horseback, and the principal part of merchandise is transported on mules, no one cares how these animals get along. Sure-footed and slow, they toil patiently among the rents and rocks, and their drivers are too well used to the inconveniences to complain. Besides this, in case of insurrections, it is better for the roads to be in bad condition, as it prevents easy communication between the several parts of Mexico, and the disjointed stones serve to form, as they have often done, breastworks and forts for the insurgents.

But over this mass of ruin we were obliged to jolt in the ascent of the mountain, during the whole afternoon, meeting in the course of it fifty wagons laden with heavy machinery for factories near Mexico.

I must not forget to mention one redeeming spot in the gloomy evening. On looking back as we were near the summit of the mountain, I caught a glimpse of the plains and hills over which we had been all day toiling. The view was uninterrupted. Before us lay valley upon valley, in one long graceful descending sweep of woodland and meadow, until they dwindled away in the sands to the east, and the whole was blent, near the horizon, with the blue waves of the Gulf of Mexico. Just then the sun broke out from the region of clouds which we were rapidly approaching in our ascent, and gilding, for a moment, the whole lowland prospect, I could almost fancy I saw the sparkle of the wave crests as they broke on the distant and barren shore.

At the village on the mountain we could get no guard. This is said to be a very dangerous pass; but the commanding officer told us he had been stationed here for two weeks, during which he had scoured the mountains in every direction, and believed his district to be free from robbers.



Cigars would not avail us this time! His men were tired and he could give no escort.

Night soon fell dark and coldly around us. In these elevated regions the air is cold and nipping; but we dared not put down our coach curtains for fear of an attack. We therefore donned our cloaks and overcoats, and laid our guns and pistols on the window-frames. John, the old gray hero, was on the look-out, with his blunderbuss, from the box, and the driver promised to have an eye to windward.

Thus we jolted on again, at times almost stalled, and, in sudden smooth descents, swinging along with a rapidity in the dark and moonless night, that seemed to threaten our destruction among the rocks. Six, seven, eight, and half-past eight o'clock passed, and no robbers appeared, though there had been several false alarms. The road became worse and worse, the coach heaving over the stones like a ship in a head sea, and the driver being obliged to descend from his seat and *feel* for the track. We saw lights passing over the heath in many places, and it was *surmised* they might be the signal lights of robbers. After due consultation, it was determined *that they were!* As we approached them they proved to be fire-flies! We felt for our percussion-caps and found them all right, and, at that moment, the coach was brought to a dead halt in the blackest looking ravine imaginable.

"A *mighty* bad road, sir," said John, from the box, cocking his blunderbuss. Its click was ominous, and we were at once on the alert. "There is *something black*—on horseback—just ahead of us," added he. A whistle among the bushes. Crack went the whip unmercifully over the mules, and at ten paces in advance, up rose "the *something black*," and away trotted *three cows!*

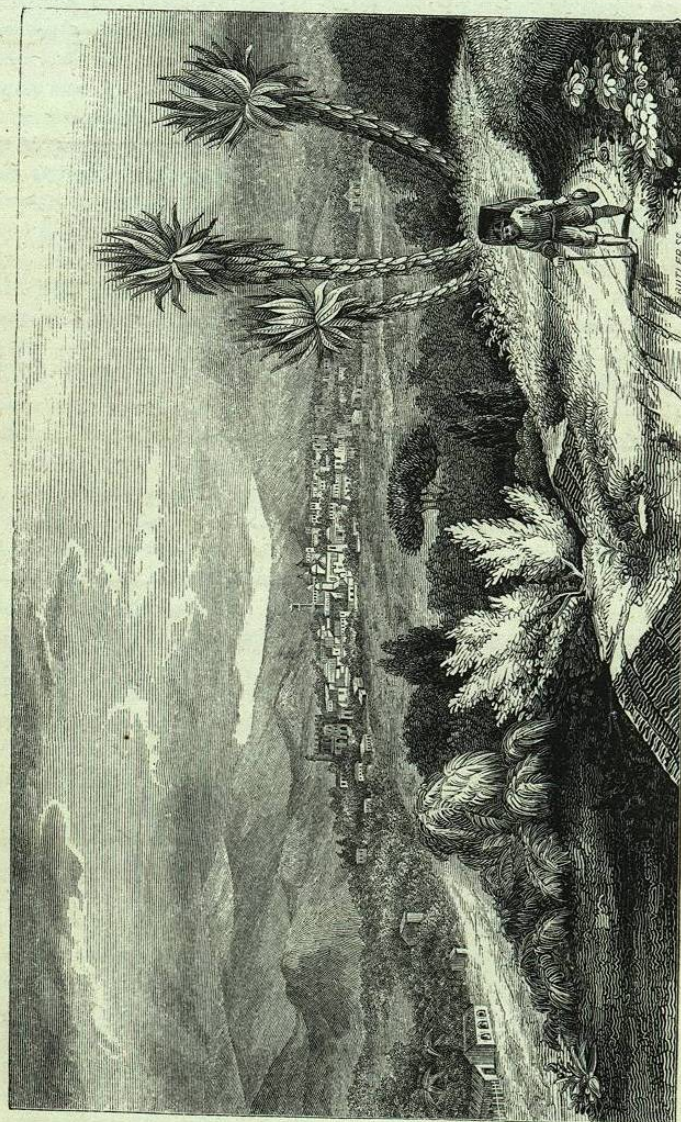
I confess to a little anxiety as I cocked my gun after John spoke of the "*something black*." It is enough to make one a little nervous, boxed up with nine in a coach, on a dark night, on a bad road, to be shot at by "*something black*." But when the danger turns out to be a peaceful cow, one feels quite as ridiculous as he had before felt nervous. As we had indulged in enough of that sort of excitement, I uncocked my gun, put the muzzle out of the window, and, keeping a finger on the trigger, resigned myself to a nap in the corner.

Jolts, pitches, tosses, nothing, woke me, until a rough voice bellowed in my ear: "There they are!" I was aroused in a moment, and moving my thumb to cock my gun, I found myself disarmed. The coach was at a halt, and strange voices and lights were around it.

It was a minute before I could shake off the oppression of my deep slumber and found that my neighbor had quietly pilfered my gun during my sleep, and that we were waiting while the guard at the *garita* of Xalapa examined our way-bill!

In a few moments we were again *en route*, and at half-past nine rolled into the court-yard of an excellent inn at Xalapa, where a good meal that served both for dinner and supper, seasoned the joke of my dextrous robbery.





CITY OF XALAPA.

#### LETTER IV.

##### XALAPA AND PEROTE.

WHEN the Neapolitans speak to you of their beautiful city, they call it, "a piece of heaven fallen to earth;"\* and tell you to "see Naples and die!"

It is only because so few travellers extend their journey to Xalapa and describe its scenery, that it has not received something of the same extravagant eulogium. I regret exceedingly that my stay was so limited as not to allow an opportunity of beholding the beautiful views around the city, under the influence of a serene sky and brilliant sun.

The town has about ten thousand inhabitants, and is, in every respect, the reverse of Vera Cruz; high, healthy, and built on almost precipitous streets, winding, with curious crookedness, up the steep hill-sides. This perching and bird-like architecture makes a city picturesque—although its highways may be toilsome to those who are not always in search of the romantic.

The houses of Xalapa are not so lofty as those of Vera Cruz, and their exteriors are much plainer; but the inside of the dwellings, I am told, is furnished and decorated in the most tasteful manner. The hotel in which we lodged was an evidence of this; its walls and ceilings were papered and painted in a style of splendor rarely seen out of Paris.

Before breakfast we strolled to the Convent of St. Francisco, an immense pile of buildings of massive masonry, and apparently bomb-proof. The church is exceedingly plain, but there is a neat and tasteful garden with a lofty wall. This convent also possesses a court-yard of about one hundred feet square, with an arcade of two stories, the upper part of which contains a series of spacious cells; but the whole edifice has a ruined appearance, having once been converted into a cavalry barrack, where the bugle as often sounded the morning call as the bell summoned to matins.

From the top of this conventual edifice there is a fine view of Xalapa and its vicinity. We could see the town straggling up its steep and irregular streets; but much of the adjacent scenery, and especially those two grand objects in the descriptions of all travellers, the PEAK OF ORIZABA and the COFFRE OF PEROTE, were entirely obscured by a cloud of mist which hung around the valley in a silvery ring, inclosing the ver-

\* "Un pezzo de cielo caduto in terra."