

LETTER XI.

YUCATAN.

Campeachy, 30th January, 1851.

UNDER a great variety of aspects, the world may be, and has been, classified under distinct and contrasting heads: as male and female, subdividing into young and old, rich and poor; as genteel and vulgar, idle and busy, educated and ignorant; as mercantile and agricultural, town and country; in short, opposites, without end. I remember an amusing paper in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, which turned on the great division of mankind into umbrella purchasers and umbrella borrowers, the latter being a convertible term for "thieves." And among these various classes, some seem to be tied to one side, some to the other; tied to one acquired set of habits by an inevitable destiny, which fits them for one character, and renders them unfit for its opposite.

Well, among these classes, there is one not yet

specified—the moveable and immoveable, the go-abroad and the stay-at-home, the restless, and the quiet class of mankind.

The sober, settled, quiet, respectable, stay-at-home section—undoubtedly the most enviable of the two—is apt to look, sometimes in pity, sometimes in sorrow, almost always with a mixture of contempt, on the less happy opposite class—the wanderers on the face of the earth; not considering that man's nature in this, as in everything else, is regulated by a Higher Destiny than his own absolute will; that there *must* be such a class, as one of the great and indispensable elements of the social system which the Creator of the world has established; and that to fill up such a class, as to fill up all others, individuals must be predisposed by some hidden mental and physical organisation, fitting them for their vocation. Such individuals can no more resist the instinctive love of change, than can the others resist those of fixedness and repose. Phrenologists resolve all this into a bump of locality; but that is a meagre and unsatisfactory solution of the problem. It is no solution at all: it is at best an index to a book, not the book itself. At the same time, nothing here said, as every

reflecting mind will perceive, involves anything like a doctrine of Fatalism.

So much premised, I proceed to admit that I recognise in myself one of the wandering class. I made a vast, and, as I thought, an effectual attempt to change sides, seeking additional respectability, through stability; for I remained during eleven years in one place—London. But it has proved after all in vain. In the middle of 1848, I had no idea of being anywhere, during the rest of my life, but in London; at the beginning of 1849, lo, I am in Yucatan!

These remarks have been elicited by some latent misgivings that there will be, among our friends, many grave shakings of the head, when you tell them we have landed in Yucatan. I have thence been led to consider how many *travellers* there are, *bon gré, mal gré*, and so include myself in a general apology for a class.

Two days before we were wrecked, or had any fear of such a catastrophe, I said to you that our present voyage exhibited a pretty accurate illustration, in a small way, of the mutabilities of life; and I added, "This will be best seen, when we come to sum up our passage." There was something

here like an instinctive prospect of farther traits of resemblance; but I could scarcely anticipate that the picture was to come out at last, so complete in all its parts. Some deductions (if you will allow me another moment) may be drawn from this little apologetic disquisition:—First, that, as the proverb truly says, “Man proposes, and God disposes;” next, that the most remarkable quality in man is his short-sightedness, in spite of his unwearied pretensions to the contrary; and lastly, that he is ever compelled to feel, in his individual capacity, as well as to exhibit for the warning and benefit of mankind at large, the inevitable vicissitudes and mutabilities of life to which he is subject. These, you will say, are truisms (“*verdades de Pero Grullo*,” as the Spaniards phrase them); but, nevertheless, they cannot be too steadily kept in view by every rational being.

It is not my intention to enter here into any lengthened account of Yucatan and its people; for I know too little of either to impart a sufficient amount of interest to my subject, or to satisfy myself of the entire accuracy of my facts. But it is a country so little known in England—popularly, indeed, scarcely known till within the last few

years, when Mr. Stephens’s work, entitled “Incidents of Travel in Yucatan,” has been published; while, latterly, there has attached to the Peninsula of Yucatan so painful an interest, arising out of the terrible servile war which has raged there, and which has nearly cost the country its very existence as a civilized state; that I must give you some such slight account of it, as one, having only visited a single city in the territory, may be supposed to have gleaned in so circumscribed a circle, and during a residence of little more than a fortnight.

The *East* coast of Yucatan was first seen in 1506, by Juan Diaz de Solis, and Vicente Muñoz Penzou, who had accompanied Columbus in his last voyage; but the country, properly speaking, was *discovered* by Francisco Hernandez de Cordova, who landed in 1517 from the Havana, at Cape Catoche, the extreme north-east point of the country. He went on to Campeachy, distant between two and three hundred miles, and thence to Champoton, opposed throughout by the Indians, who at last succeeded in beating him and his small force off, as they also did, next year, the expedition of Don Juan de Grájalon.

This captain had sailed along the coast of

Yucatan, till he reached the Mexican province of Tabasco. Here the report of the riches of Mexico first met the greedy ears of the Spaniards; and the eventual result was the conquest of Mexico by Hernan Cortes.

One of his chief captains, Don Francisco de Montejo, in 1526, under competent authority, undertook the conquest of Yucatan; and he obtained, moreover, from Charles V., a commission, or royal grant (*real merced*), appointing him adelantado, or governor, in perpetuity, for himself and his descendants, with various other privileges and immunities, accorded to him and his followers.

After going through incredible hardships, which were met with unflinching fortitude, and overcome by the prowess which was in these conquests everywhere displayed, the Montejos—first the father, and then the gallant son—succeeded in conquering the indigenous possessors of Yucatan, so that, in 1542, it was raised to a Captain-Generalship of Spain, independent of Mexico, as well as of Guatemala.

Yucatan is a peninsula, terminating on the east side with the British Settlement of Belize, and contiguous on the west with the Mexican province or state of Tabasco. It lies between 18° and

22° north latitude, and 80° and 86° west longitude. The Gulf of Mexico stretches along the west, and the Gulf of Honduras along the east side of the peninsula.

Yucatan has five districts, viz.:—

	SOULS.
1st. Merida, with a population of . . .	118,839
2nd. Yzmal " " . . .	72,096
3rd. Valladolid " " . . .	97,468
4th. Tekaz " " . . .	134,000
5th. Campeachy " " . . .	82,232
Total inhabitants . . .	504,635

Which includes the Indian population, in a proportion, I believe, of four to one.

The cities called after the above districts, have respectively—

	INHABITANTS.
1st. The Capital, Merida	24,090
2nd. Yzmal	5,335
3rd. Valladolid	11,457
4th. Tekaz	4,000
5th. Campeachy	15,357

There are of secondary towns and villages, 253, with populations ranging from 7,551 down to 924 inhabitants. The townspeople of Campeachy

claim a much higher population than here stated, some calling it 30,000; but I think that from 15,000 to 18,000 is the outside number.

Yucatan is a poor country. To Europe it only sends dye woods (Palo de Campéché);* but it supplies Mexico, New Orleans, Belize, and the Havana with a great variety of minor articles—as salt, hemp, hides, bags, cordage, cocoa-nuts, fruits, and other things; while, for the consumption of the country, the Yucatecos seem to have all the necessaries, and some of the luxuries of life. The fisheries are very extensive, and the poorer classes, Creole and Indian, on the coast, chiefly subsist by barter or consumption of the produce of the sea, the fish being at once good and abundant. They have all the tropical fruits, and many peculiar to the Spanish American colonies, as the *chirimoya*, *palta*, and others; while they also produce Indian corn, rice, coffee, sugar, rum, tobacco, etc. Horses, horned cattle, and sheep they possess in moderate abundance; they reckon up 1,388 *haciendas*, something between a farm and an estate, now the one, now the other; and 2,040 *ranchos* and *sitios*, which may be likened to the huts and hovels of

* Pronounced "Campaychay."

the Irish peasantry (*without the starvation*), or to the holdings of the Highland cotters in Scotland.

In 1821 or 1822, Mexico achieved its independence of Spain, and Yucatan followed. But the Yucatecos had scarcely emancipated themselves from the mother country, when they voluntarily sunk their newly-acquired nationality in a fusion with Mexico, as a federal state of that nation.

This measure being distasteful to a large proportion of the Yucatecos, particularly to the uneasy, and not generally well-to-do party—the ultra-patriots; the result was, that they rose up against the Mexican Union; asserted their own independence as a free republic; and a war with Mexico ensued.

In 1841-42, a great expedition was fitted out at Vera Cruz, for the purpose of subjugating Yucatan. Campeachy, their great and principal port, was invested by sea and land, and, I am told here, that the siege was undertaken with 13,000 men. Probably we must make some allowance for patriotic exaggeration. But, be that as it may, all the exertions to reduce the doughty Campechanos by the Mexicans were of no avail. These

bombarded the city from a neighbouring height they levelled many houses with the ground; they made some impression on the walls; yet, at the end of nine or ten months, Campeachy remained in the hands of its gallant defenders; the Mexican force dwindled away from thirteen to one thousand men (so I am told); and then Mexico, withdrawing the remnant of her invading force, formally relinquished all pretensions to coerce Yucatan into a federal union.

This success of the Yucatecos was, perhaps, the leading cause of the most terrible of all evils under which a nation of *races* can groan—a social war, a war of castes, which overtook Yucatan in a frightful form, towards the close of 1846. But to make an account of the rising of the Indians intelligible, I must revert to the establishment of Independence here in 1822.

That change brought into play in Yucatan, as a similar change has done in every other ex-colony of Spain, without exception, two violently antagonistic parties—those who *had* property, and those who had *not*. The higher classes; the merchants, the great landowners, the substantial retail traders; the prudent, the wary, the aged, the sedate; were

all either moderates in their politics, or, here secretly, there openly, opposed to the cause of independence. They alleged, with too much truth, that the Spanish colonies were not ripe for self-government. Among the Patriots, a party which greatly outnumbered the opposite one, you counted the young, the ardent, the needy, the military, the unscrupulous, with here and there an honest, but, probably, not a wise lover of his country. On the one side were ranged all those who were content with what they had, looking only to enjoy it in security; on the other, the great mass of those who had little to lose, or who had much ambition to gratify, and who saw in the popular cause a tempting chance of bettering their circumstances, or of rising into pre-eminence. The fear of loss withheld the one, the hope of gain impelled the other.

Over and above the opposing Creole parties in politics, Yucatan held within its territory, in the aborigines, another germ of strife. The dominating *white* population was scanty—the subjugated Indian race numerous; perhaps, four or five to one. Although bent beneath the Spanish yoke, the aborigines never ceased to hate their

that the provinces of Merida and Campeachy came to blows. In the meantime, the Indians were preparing to rise. The people of Merida sent forces to overawe them, and demanded a contingent from Campeachy. "It is a political juggle," said the Campechanos; "there is no rise of the Indians: Merida wishes to get us into her power." So they refused to assist. But, by and by, the tables were turned: the province of Campeachy was threatened, and appealed to Merida; but Merida replied to Campeachy, as Campeachy had answered Merida.

So, the Indians, emboldened by these divisions, fell upon the provinces of Tekaz and Valladolid on the eastern side of Yucatan, took the towns, and, with fire and sword, devastated the country; and then, too late, the Yucatecos saw, with fear and trembling, the result of a supine conduct following upon the track of broken promises. They saw that they were now about to engage in a life and death struggle for the possession of a soil, of which their forefathers had held peaceable possession for three hundred years.

The Yucatecos were taken quite by surprise by the vigorous outbreak of the despised and hitherto

humble Indians. But ages, apparently, had been insufficient to uproot the deep hatred with which the great body of the aborigines had always viewed their European spoilers—a hatred which had been so recently sharpened by unwarrantable bad faith, and by a return to ill usage on the part of the whites. Thus the war, which they began to wage, was one, not only of extermination, but of pitiless cruelty, of savage and ferocious revenge. Men, women, and children were massacred with every variety of ingenious torture. Villages, towns, and cities were burnt or demolished; and the whole north-eastern division of the republic presented one vast scene of devastation or ruin.

The troops of the government became panic-stricken, and everywhere dispersed. Terror extended itself on all sides: the people abandoning their homes and their strongholds, sought for safety in a flight to the sea-coast. Valladolid, a city of 12,000 inhabitants, and Tekaz, of 5,000 more, were abandoned; and gradually the whole interior seemed to be returning to its original owners. The individual instances of horrors committed during the progress of the Indians, have

been related to me by many, but are too sickening to be repeated here.

While the Indians were thus gradually, yet surely, overpowering the white or Creole population of Yucatan, the people sought for aid from their surrounding neighbours. But both the United States and Mexico were too busy with their own war, to embarrass themselves with the troubles of Yucatan. The sovereignty of the country, as I have been assured, was proffered to the British authorities at Jamaica, and to the Spanish at Cuba, a donation which, I suppose, neither of the governors found himself in a position to accept. But although the Spanish authorities refused, on the part of Spain, to take back the allegiance which the Yucatecos had foresworn, the Governor of the Havana, from motives of humanity, sent succours in the shape of arms and ammunition, which were sorely wanted. And Mexico, having at length made peace with the United States, admitted the offer of the commissioners sent to propose the re-incorporation of Yucatan with the Mexican nation. Arms and war-munitions, as well as money, were sent, and at last the Yucatecos began to take heart. It was now the time to try whether the Indians or

the whites were to have the absolute possession of the soil. There was no medium—Yucatan must belong entirely to the one, or entirely to the other; and if to the Indian, the white man's life and property became equally worthless.

The whole white population, therefore, rose up and armed. They attacked the Indians, routed them in successive engagements, and retrieved their ground. At one time, the Indians were in some force, three miles from Campeachy, but they were quickly driven back. The towns and cities taken by them were recaptured, and they were gradually, although with much difficulty, dislodged from their principal points of advance, and driven towards their fastnesses in the East, bordering on the British settlement of Belize.

But the war is by no means ended as yet. An obstinate struggle, on the part of the Aborigines, still goes forward; they yet hold some important towns and places, from which the whites have not been able to expel them. Notwithstanding, the country begins to breathe; all the western peninsula is in repose; and although there is still much to do before an entire pacification can be effected,

the servile war, it is to be hoped, draws gradually to a close. Meantime, with public opinion still divided, Yucatan is once more an integral part of the Mexican federation.

The contributions, at one time, to carry forward the war with the Indians, amounted to *two per cent. per month* on all real property and capital; that is, a fourth part of every taxable man's whole substance was, in a year, given up to the State—something worse than our three per cent. Income Tax!

I have visited two of the *haciendas*, already mentioned, and a variety of the *ranchos*. In the former, there is the rough substantiality of a well-stocked farm, adapted, in its buildings and steadings, to a tropical climate, to the nature of the work to be done, and to the produce to be grown or reared. The *corrales* for cattle, and enclosure walls, as well as the principal dwelling, are of stone—the latter, spacious, airy, and dirty. In the country, wherever you go, you find hammocks—strong, open, hempen netting—slung; the nicest sort of bed for a hot climate, when the the mosquitoes have learned, as they do in time, to leave you alone.

The *ranchos* in the towns and environs have stone walls, and a rough, thatched roof, with a few trees and shrubs; barking dogs, two or three Indians, and little dark, copper-coloured children, naked or half-naked, round and about the place. No gardens, and ground very sparingly cultivated, till you get in among the *quintas*, or country houses.

The *quintas*, or villas, are also rough in their general keeping; but some of them boast of very spacious houses, showing symptoms of decaying, old-fashioned grandeur. The grounds are laid out in flower and kitchen gardens and orchards. The flowers are varied and beautiful; the orchards extensive; and the trees, which are all evergreen, being high, present a cool retreat in summer, under their wide-spreading branches, and the ample foliage with which they are covered and adorned.

On all sides of Campeachy—on the surrounding hills, and on the low grounds of the coast, the eye rests upon nothing but green trees, even through the winter season. Yet there are cultivated patches everywhere, although screened from the view by interposing masses.

My cursory account of Yucatan, and its chief port, Campeachy, concluded, I will proceed to give you some jottings of our perambulations and investigations here, commencing with extracts from H—'s letters; after which, I hope my next accounts will be of Vera Cruz and Mexico.

LETTER XII.

CAMPEACHY.

*Don Pedro's Hotel.**Campeachy, 3rd February, 1849.*

From the jetty of the Campeachy harbour, we proceeded immediately to the house of Mr. Gutierrez who received us very kindly; and while he got all the accounts of our disaster, etc. from the gentlemen, I was left to talk (?), as best I might, with his handsome wife, whom I like much.

When the gentlemen had concluded their business with Mr. G—, I accompanied them to the only hotel in Campeachy; and leaving others to arrange about beds, I proceeded with Mr. Molesworth to the kitchen, where we found some Creole mulatto as well as Indian women making chocolate. By means of signs and dumb shew, as we sat down among these "yellow gals," we soon got some of the delicious beverage in the highest perfection.