

## LETTER XXI.

JALAPA.—JILOTEPEC.—CUATEPEC.

*Jalapa, 20, 21st February, 1851.*

As the grey morning began to dawn upon us, the rain ceased, and at five we found ourselves in Jalapa at the great gate of the "Hotel de la Vera Cruzana" which Mr. J— had recommended to us as the best. The morning was desperately *cold!* and we were kept for some time shivering at the door, before we could gain admittance. At last the heavy bolts were drawn by the sleepy *portero*, and we walked into an immense *patio*, with a fountain in the centre, and small orange trees and shrubs, in large earthen vases, placed at intervals in a low surrounding balustrade. We felt almost frozen; and the great house looked bleak in the yet damp and early morning: but we ordered hot chocolate, got ourselves into bed-rooms, running off the corridor, and went to bed at six, now more

comfortable, but still very cold. At the Puente Nacional, the previous morning, so scorching were the rays of the sun, so oppressively hot the atmosphere, that H— could barely allow herself a hasty look at the surrounding scenery.

We rose, refreshed, at ten, and breakfasted in a *comedor*, or dining-room, about 40 feet in length and 28 to 30 feet in width, with a corresponding loftiness of roof. Such are the principal public rooms generally in Mexico. I had a letter of introduction for Mr. K— here, and was about to proceed to his house, after breakfast, when our host, Don Juan, informed me that he (Mr. K—) had just lost a favourite child, and, moreover, that he had a countryman of our own in his house suffering from a fractured limb, caused by the upsetting of the *diligencia*. I forebore therefore the pleasure I had anticipated in making Mr. K—'s acquaintance; but I must mention his name, in order to record the high respect he enjoys for his urbanity and hospitality to strangers, and for the general kindness of heart and benevolence which distinguish him. He is one of that rare class who do good by stealth, "blushing to find it fame;" and accordingly he is greatly beloved in Jalapa.



I had also a letter for my *banker*, Don Nicolas Pastoressa, a worthy and opulent merchant and shopkeeper, who was all kindness, and supplied all my wants.

Jalapa is a very curious, old-fashioned looking town, and what you rarely or never find in Spanish America, its streets are quite irregular and crooked. It is beautifully situated on undulating and hilly grounds, most of its thoroughfares very steep, many of the houses large and commodious, in the old, heavy, Spanish style, with windows almost flush with the pavement, and defended by iron gratings. "Behind these," says Mr. Ruxton in his very clever 'Adventures in Mexico and the rocky Mountains,' "sit the Jalapeñas, with their beautifully fair complexions and eyes of fire."—In the background of the city and its numerous hills and ravines is seen the great Cofré of Perote, with lesser mountains intervening. It is faithfully drawn by Mrs. Ward, and ornaments the second volume of Mr. W—'s work.

I had, like every one else, heard much of the scenery around Jalapa; and as far as I could perceive, on a first and general glance, its beauties had by no means been exaggerated. I determined,

therefore, to visit two places, to which my attention had been particularly called by Mr. J—, my time not permitting me to compass more.

The first is *Jilotepéc*, about two or three leagues on the high road to Puebla.

From the commencement of the road, the mountain scenery which lies before you, is diversified and extensive. The vegetation around, is, as ever, of the freshest, and of the most brilliant hues. Diverging from the highway at a right angle, and proceeding along a road, which appeared to me to be at the foot of mountains, rising from the table land, I felt invigorated by the freshness, quite amounting to coldness of the air.

Suddenly—as we journeyed along, we came to the valley of *Jilotepéc*; and no scenery I ever saw (I have seen much), ever struck me with so much wonder and admiration. There was such an extent of table land, that the idea of any deep valley thereabouts, was entirely banished from the mind—at least it was from mine.

Yet all at once—without any warning—I stood on the edge of a precipice, and looked down with amazement on the peaceful valley of *Jilotepéc*, lying at a great and almost perpendicular depth below. And



glancing around, my wonder increased as I observed that the valley was encircled by a ring, if I may so speak, of symmetrical mountains, and like the particular cone on which I stood. In the centre of the valley lay Jilotepec, whence rose the village church, prettily designed, with a handsome spire; while its clear and marble-like (although only whitewashed) walls still glittered in the softened rays of the descending sun. The valley was a gem in itself; and the whole, by reason of the grandeur of the surrounding mountains, presented a noble blending of the sublime and beautiful.

After gazing in silence for some minutes on the scene which lay above me—around me, and below me, we began to wind down to Jilotepec, and I assure you, it would have appeared to you a somewhat perilous descent. I had, however, been accustomed to yet more formidable ones in the Cordillera of Chili and Peru. Still, all the way, although the road was zig-zig, it was sometimes so steep as to threaten a somersault, if we did not keep ourselves well back on our saddles. But the sure-footed animal on which I was mounted, descended in safety by the paved way (for such it was)—a road cut out through the otherwise

impervious woods, which teemed with a mixture of fine large timber trees, flower-covered shrubs, underwood and wild flowers innumerable; the luxuriance with which they all clustered together, on either side, lending to every turn of the precipitous way, a new and increasing interest.

Jilotepec is an Indian village; one of a vast group in that mountainous vicinity, all of the same character, composed of a better sort of cottages, and of inferior huts. Through the centre of the village, runs one principal line of road, scarcely to be called a street, and in which was situated the public house, into which I entered, to give my guide some refreshment. It was served by a remarkably handsome young female, apparently married; and as fair as any Englishwoman could desire to be.

I ought to observe, that another remarkable object in this beautiful valley, is the ruin of a church, placed on a small conical hill, close to the village, and to ascend to which, I was extremely sorry time did not permit. In fact, I had lingered so long, viewing the grandeur of nature above me, as I had done before, in contemplating its beauties beneath me, that I was warned by an Indian not



to tarry; for if darkness overtook us in our ascent, I might very easily be falling over a precipice, no unusual event; and having no wish so to end my agreeable trip, I made haste home, and got there (without meeting robbers) somewhere after nightfall.

I was very sorry H— could not accompany me on this trip to Jilotepec, though I should have felt really nervous, had I seen her descending to the valley, and ascending from it. Cuatepec was an easier affair, and certainly, as I was told, "*muy divertido*," livelier. So, next morning, providing a *litera* for H— (who did not like to venture on the peaked Mexican saddle, used indifferently here by men and women), and a horse for myself, off we went, on a lovely morning, for Cuatepec.

We passed through a succession of varied scenery, as fine as any on which the eye could dwell. The distance of the village or town is about three leagues from Jalapa, or eight miles, not more; but in some panoramic views which we obtained, these eight miles presented to us every element of the finest scenery. Sombre dells and gurgling rivulets, deep ravines and mountain streams; hills, undulating grounds, plains;

cultivated fields; fruit trees, wild flowers; dense forests and coppice; cottages, sugar plantations; mountains in the distance, seen under a sky, the blue of which was only interrupted here and there by a fleecy cloud, lying in mid-air or hanging about the higher mountains. The foliage and the verdure were freshened by the early dews, and glistened in the morning sun. I wish I could lead you to Cuatepec—truly a paradise realised—nature exhibiting her beauties with the skill of an artist; showing in the foreground the nicer shades of her pencil, and happy grouping of her more minute materials, supporting these by a massive background, best calculated to give completeness to the picture.

You enter Cuatepec by a long approach, lined by trees and cottages. Fruit and flowers (in particular the *Floripondus*) depend in graceful clusters from the trees; which are, moreover, so frondiferous, that each whitewashed cottage is only distinct when you come up to it, while those in the line before you merely peep forth from the intervening trees. From this avenue you enter on the principal street of the town itself, wide, and with many very good houses.



“*Quiere su merced parar en una posada con cocina?*” said Romero; for we had the same Romero and his brother, and some of the same “shameless” mules which had brought us from Vera Cruz,—“Will you stop at an inn *with a kitchen?*”

“With a kitchen!” I asked, “What do you mean?”

“Oh!” replied Romero; “you know there are *posadas* where they cook for you, and *posadas* where they do not.”

“By all means, then,” I said, “let us go to the best *kitchen-posada*,—and see, my friend, that a good dinner be cooked for you, while we walk out to view the town.”

*Dicho y hecho*—no sooner said than done—our *litereros* stopped at a clean, comfortable-looking *posada*; they let H— down in the middle of the wide street, and forth she stepped, with a lace shawl over her head, like some Indian princess. Away then we strolled over Cuatepec, while Romero superintended the preparation for more substantial amusement than scenery or sunshine, for him and his two companions. One of them was a volunteer, a cousin of Romero, in his holiday

dress and accoutrements—a picture of the Mexican costume, now so well known. Our cousin was rigged out in his gayest, for though a brother *literero*, he was, on the present occasion, out on his own account—that is, for his own pleasure.

In the centre of the fine, broad, countrified street, stands a handsome church; and another, as a terminus of the same line. The latter, resembling some of our own village churches, was situated on a green knoll, where browsed the pastor’s horse, along with a couple of ewes; and while we yet stood looking around us, out dashed a levy of chubby children, from the parish school, into the green, where we left them gambolling in the sunshine.

As we now walked to the other extremity of the long street, on passing one of the houses of the better class, I looked into the Patio, and saw some fine roses. We walked in. There we saw a “Señora Madre” with two good-looking young ladies, and a youth, apparently her family. I told her I had taken the liberty to step in to look at her flowers, and to beg a rose for the “Inglesita” who accompanied me. “Con muchísimo gusto,” said madame; and in a moment, with pruning knife in hand, the young gentleman was on his



feet. A profusion of compliments were interchanged; and H— left with a choice bouquet in her hand.

We returned, after an hour's pleasant walk, to our inn; and a savoury smell attracted me to an indubitable "kitchen." A variety of messes were in process of cooking; and great seemed to be the preparations making for the family and the guests, of whom Romero was the chief, and there he was indeed playing Sir Oracle. The innkeeper sat in the back corridor with his legs crossed, his serape on his shoulder, a cigar in his mouth, and cards in his hands. He was deeply engaged in play with two friends. He scarcely deigned to notice me. The principal manager of the concern was evidently his wife, who on this occasion despatched the culinary part of her work, with the assistance of two female cooks (probably *pro tempore*); while her daughter, a rather pretty girl of sixteen, with a little brother in her arms, was kept running in and out to buy a medio's worth of this, and a real's worth of that; always, as she went out, putting the child down on the ground, and taking up her *rebozo*, the universal covering, as you know, throughout the ex-colonies of Spain, for female head and

shoulders. At last, a famous dinner was served up for Romero, his brother, and "our cousin"; to which they all did ample justice. I had my lemonade, qualified with a little cognac; and a lady living opposite, having seen H—, sent over to her by a little handmaid, and "con muchas expresiones á la niña," some fine oranges, and sweet lemons—a juicy but tasteless fruit, in much request, however, within the tropics, on account of its cooling qualities.

On leaving the beautiful Cuatepec, we deviated, by Romero's recommendation, from the high road, making a detour to the Hacienda of Don—I forget his name—in which he told us we should see a noted "*trapiche*," or sugar mill, with the process of sugar boiling, and of distillation going forward.

H— and I had now changed places. She had languished under the lazy, lolling movement of the "*litera*," going out; so on our return, I crept into the "*litera*," and she mounted my sprightly little charger; when being placed under the care and management of our gay "cousin" who rode by her side, we trotted off for the Hacienda.

The road was at first terrifically bad; but presently we got into a sort of parish road, running



through "Cañaverales," or sugar-cane plantations. The Hacienda stood on an eminence, to which we ascended by a causeway, and we found the buildings so extensive, that I should think they did not cover less than half-a-dozen acres of ground. The Hacienda was extremely rough in all its appointments; but in Mexico, where money is not to be had under eighteen per cent. per annum, everything *to pay*, must be got up at the cheapest rate, and under a system of stringent economy; for though more perfect machinery, better constructed buildings, attention to repairs, and a higher class of labour employed, would no doubt produce larger results, it is very questionable whether the additional gain could be brought to pay for the increase of capital employed.

The *trapiche* or mill for crushing the cane revolved around very large, solid brass cylinders; the vats for receiving the juice were ranged along a gallery of from 150 to 200 feet in length, the contents being constantly ladled out from one vat to another. The distillery had a slovenly look, but was working well, and produced a good flavoured spirit which I tasted. The stabling, granaries, and other appurtenances bore all the

same uncouth, untidy, and, here and there, dilapidated appearance; neatness, comfort, exact order, cleanness, as being all considered unnecessary towards beneficial results, were not only disregarded, but really sedulously shut out, apparently on the economical system already referred to.

Our inspection over, we proceeded on our way, and ere long fell into the main road. Here I perceived the real motive of honest Romero's recommendation to go round by the "Cañaverales;" he was carrying off, as heavy a bundle as he could lay on his mule's shoulder, of the canes which he had cut in passing through the field. "*Ola! Romero!*" I cried, "*qué es eso? robo?*" (what is that? a robbery?)—" *Qué robo, valgame Dios!*" answered he; "*si eso no quiere decir nada.*"—Robbery! it was nothing. I then thanked him for his kind and disinterested advice to visit the hacienda, particularly as he had so much trouble in getting through the Cañaveral. Romero laughed. "The fact is," said he, "I have two little ones at home, and whenever I go to Cuatepec, or on other excursions towards a Cañaveral, the mother and they always look for a *cañita* (a little cane), and so you see, *patron*, I never like to disappoint them."



Again on the high road, H— galloped off, and, with “our cousin,” went far ahead of the “shameless” mules who could scarcely manage a trot. While we were thus separated, a tremendous shower of rain began to fall. The cousin, seeing its approach, galloped still faster, till he screened H— from the storm under the porch of a roadside public-house; and there, as I jogged up in the swinging *litera*, I found her laughing at our forlorn appearance, all soaked as we were in the rain.

H— was, however, forced to take her place once more from this point in the *litera*. The rain continued to fall copiously, as we trotted off in our old way—heads and heels—and we were not long in reaching Jalapa, although the road is equally hilly and beautiful. As we drew near, the rain ceased. Every thing looked thankful for what had fallen: the flowers sent forth more than their usual fragrance; the leaves of the trees assumed a still fresher green; the birds, shaking their feathers, chirped forth their joy; and near Jalapa, from the low point, happily chosen by Mrs. Ward, we got a beautiful view of the ancient city and its gardens hanging on their declivities, with the hills and higher mountains, and of the great Cofré of Perote,

which stood out, in massive relief, as the culminating point of the scene.

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A POSTSCRIPT TO LETTER XXI.

On reading over what I have said of Jalapa and its scenery, I have thought you might fancy, I was “romancing” a little; and I shall therefore in self-defence give here some extracts from other travellers. You will find that among us all, I alone have the temerity even to attempt a task which, it is held, the pen is incapable of performing.

“Of the country about Jalapa,” says Mr. Ward, in 1827, “it is impossible that any words should convey an adequate idea. It stands in the centre of some of the finest mountain scenery which any country can boast of.”

Mr. Bullock, who preceded Mr. Ward by some five years, undertakes a long account of the city of Jalapa; but he only takes a passing notice of the surrounding scenery. As he approached Jalapa, “the country greatly improved in appearance, the air was perceptibly better, our spirits began to revive, and soon, to our very great satisfaction, we discovered woods of oak. The face of