

## LETTER XXII.\*

ROBBERS! ROBBERS!! ROBBERS!!!

The cry is still they come! Let 'em come!  
Our castle's strength will laugh a siege to scorn.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE universal theme of conversation between Vera Cruz and the city of Mexico is that of "The Robbers!" We began, in fact, to hear of them in London, for there, by our Mexican friends, we were told that, "*of course*," we must prepare to be robbed on the road to Mexico. Nobody escaped; we must take no valuables with us; only forty or fifty dollars, as a peace-offering to inevitable robbers. So, to be tempest-tost first; shipwrecked next; driven incontinently on desert islands; and finally, to be assaulted, and forthwith, *boca abajo*, licking the dust, to be stopped and plundered; seemed to be the unmistakable price which we

\* Written after our arrival at Mexico.

were to pay for our transfer from the Modern Babylon to the much celebrated seat of the ancient Aztecs.

I have tarried so long over the first part of our journey from Vera Cruz to Mexico, that I must now endeavour to be brief with the remainder. At Vera Cruz we had learned that the banditti never attacked *literas*, as by them they could never get plunder to speak of; it was from Jalapa, where we were to join the *diligencia*, that we were to look out for the civil gentlemen of the road. I was not to take any arms; I was to offer no resistance; we were to embrace mother earth when ordered to do so; to lose good-naturedly whatever we had with us; and to fear nothing more.

On the evening of our return from Cuatepec (Wednesday 21st), I went from the Vera Cruzana to the Hotel de Diligencias, and there met Monsieur Thullier, a gentlemanlike and pleasant Frenchman, whose acquaintance I had made at Vera Cruz, the place of his business as a merchant. He and his friend M. Pommier had come up by the *diligencia* just arrived, and they were to be our *compagnons de voyage* as far as Puebla. He told us that he had left Mr. J— and our other

friends in much alarm about our safety, the driver of the upset *diligencia* (which we had met on our way) having reported that his accident had arisen from his horses having taken fright at a quantity of linen and clothes strewed on the road, and supposed to be from a *litera* from Vera Cruz, which had been robbed! It was a mere invention of the driver to cover his own negligence.

We started from Jalapa at half-past nine, A.M., Thursday, the 22nd. The *diligencia*, drawn sometimes by horses, sometimes by mules, according to the nature of the road, but always by six or seven in number, carries, in three seats, nine inside passengers in the *one* body of the carriage—not being divided into *coupé*, etc., as in France. We started with more than our complement, for in the hind seat (instead of three, the regulation number) was an entire family, consisting of *six* individuals, namely, a Mexican general of division, and on his lap a child; his young wife next to him, and on *her* lap a child; lastly, a grown-up daughter of the general by his first marriage, and on *her* lap a child! The extraordinary-looking general! You would, indeed, have required to be credibly assured, as we were, that he was *really* a general,

ere you could either have guessed at or believed such a fact. He was frightened out of his wits about the robbers; so were his females; but as far as Puebla there was nothing to fear. Outside we had the administrador of the Puebla diligence office, accompanied by two well-armed and sturdy soldiers of the corps of the *Fieles* (faithful) *de Puebla*; and, for my own part, I felt there was very little danger indeed of our being waylaid or robbed.

Smack went the *cochero's* whip, then, and away went the *diligencia*! Rising from the centre of the town, we soon had, all around, the magnificent scenery, which, with so much pleasure, I had witnessed on my way to Jilotepec. The road, in some parts, was terrific, for though paved, the large blocks of stone were every where loosened, and lying about; while great holes and ruts sent us jumping, every now and then, towards the roof of the coach, "To make, but never to mend," certainly seems to be the motto in Mexico.

The luxuriant vegetation, and variety of woodland scenery, do not extend beyond three leagues from Jalapa; where, as you go on rapidly rising, the country gradually takes a different aspect. Jalapa, as you have seen, stands about 4,300 feet

above the level of the sea; and commencing a rise on that elevation, we soon exchange the tropical productions for the hardy plant and the pine forest. The prickly pear, however, the *nopal*, as called here, is seen every where, and, in some parts, it strengthens into a somewhat uncouth and fantastic-looking tree; while the great member of the Cactus family, called "*el organo*," from its resemblance to that instrument, rises in close contact one with another, and presents the same appearance as the front of a large church organ.

Thus, by degrees, the Mexican oak, and many other hardy trees, came up to replace the more tender tribes; and these were succeeded by pines, at first here and there, but gradually dilating into large and dark forests, which clothed the mountains to their very tops. At the same time, and also by degrees, we came to a soil showing a highly ferruginous character; and displaying on the surface, lumps of scoria and other volcanic substances, which ended in a continuous lava spread over the ground. It stood, sometimes, in gigantic pinnacles; sometimes it formed arches on the face of the heights through which our road was cut: it lay now in concrete masses, now in

black and crumbling cinders; and many large trees having been felled, and unremoved, the effect produced altogether was strange and desolate. Here, too, the clay-built and thatched cottages of the low countries, had given way to wooden houses; straight trunks of trees built up longitudinally, forming the walls, and shingles, the roofs. Another curious trait of these gloomy woods, at this time, consisted in the remains of field fortifications, composed of scoria and trunks of trees, erected at intervals, to assail the American army on its march to the interior.

The origin of all the volcanic matter lying here in such immense quantities, and for leagues in extent, is unknown. Of the internal convulsions and heavings of the earth, which have ended in such explosions, and scattered such overwhelming torrents of burning lava over the surface, we absolutely know nothing. The antiquarian may stand and contemplate the certain proofs of the direful workings of his mother earth; of her throes and convulsions when pouring forth from the mighty crater the tormenting fire which preyed upon her vitals. The proofs of these volcanic wonders he may look curiously upon, but he must

rest content in utter ignorance of how and when the *cause* produced these grand effects. His imagination may carry him back to chaos; he may fancy that these are vestiges of the workings of our planet long before what geologists call "the first formation:" but all must be guess-work—no guide through such utter darkness. The liquid lava," says Mr. Bullock, "seems to have burst like an immense bubble, leaving arches of solid crust from sixty to eighty feet high, and three or four thick; all hollow underneath, and spread at the bottom with loose cinders. This valley is bounded on the left by a ridge or wall of immense height; as if the great flood of melted matter had been chilled and stopped in its course. In some parts, it seemed as if the lava and scoria had been in part decomposed; and in these, several species of aloes, yucca, dracinae, and other strange and picturesque plants, were thriving luxuriantly. In other places, thousands of trunks of huge trees, crumbling into dust, added wildness to the scene of desolation."

As we travelled along, in these high regions, we had constant views of the two high mountains—Cofré de Perote, or "*Nauh Campátepetl*," and the

peak of Orizava, or "*Citláltepetl*." The latter is 17,375 the former about 13,475 feet above the level of the sea. They are connected by a ridge of lower mountains; and the giant termini, with their snow-capped summits glittering in the rays of the sun, have an appearance surprisingly grand and imposing.

Emerging at length from the pines and the scoria, we arrived at Las Vigas; an Indian village, the houses constructed of wood. We had changed horses several times before, breakfasting towards noon at an intermediate hamlet. From Las Vigas we continued to ascend till we reached Cruz Blanca, another Indian village, said to be the highest point of carriage road in Mexico. It is about 8,000 feet above the level of the sea. Thence we wound round the pine mountains to Perote, where we arrived at about half-past five, P.M., not to start again till three A.M., for Puebla.

Jalapa lies on the eastern side of the Cofré, and Perote, closer to it, on the western side. We had come winding round in a north-westerly direction; and from Perote to Puebla, our route lay along the south-western side of the Cofré, the connecting chain, and the peak of Orizáva.

Perote, situated on a deep sandy soil, with uninteresting scenery, is a miserable-looking town. At some distance, is a large fortification; only useful as a sort of political bastille. The inn where we stopped was spacious and ghostly, and one large bed-room was assigned to H— and myself. We had a tolerably good dinner; after which, I walked out in the evening to see what I could of Perote.

At the door, a tall, dark, dirty, assassin-looking fellow accosted us. "Do you want an escort?" he enquired.

"Why," said M. Thullier, "I think not. We have two of the '*fieles*' with us, and we are all well armed within."

"Look ye," replied the *guard*, for such he said he was, "the roads are very bad, very dangerous *hereabouts* — many *ladrones* are prowling about; I advise you to take an escort the first stage."

"Well, well," said T—, "two or three of you may go with us, just to keep a look out a-head. *We* will fight."

The soldier said he could not undertake the escort with fewer than four men; so a bargain

was struck, and each passenger was to pay a dollar to the escort.

"I have engaged these men, you see, Mr. Robertson," said M. Thullier, as we walked away, "for although they take the title of National Guards, they are in reality gentlemen of the road; and I think, on the whole, it is best to pay them moderately in their former capacity."

Thus are matters managed with the *soi disant* guards, "on the road" in Mexico.

We soon returned from our stroll, over the dismal town of Perote, which presented little more to our view than a deep sandy way in every street, the houses enclosed by high walls; the front one having a great *porton* or gate, entering upon the dwelling. I certainly saw little, and that indistinctly; but that little gave me no desire whatever to see more.

On entering our large bed-room, I found H— in a great fright. "One of the robbers has already been here," she said; "and with the greatest difficulty I have got quit of him." On going into particulars, I found that our escort robber had with H— begun his canvass among the passengers for the poll tax we had agreed to pay. When, at last,

H— understood his object, she said to him, “Yes, yes, I will pay a dollar, but go away—go and arrange with the gentlemen.”

When we rose from our truckle beds (*catres*), ready dressed as usual, at two, A.M., the cold was intense; and outside indeed, we found the ground white with hoar frost, and the pools of water covered with ice. However, at three, A.M., we were all in our places in the *diligencia*, our robber escort looming in the dark around us. They went one stage, collected their dollars, asked if we wished them to go any farther, took off their hats to us, and returned.

We saw little of the country between Perote and Tepeyahualco, and lost little, as you may infer from the district being called “el mal pais” —the sorry country; barren and bleak. But from Tepeyahualco, it began greatly to improve, and the “Cofré” and “Orizava” being constantly in view, under different aspects, as we advanced, an ever varying grandeur pervaded the scene. Many *haciendas* lay scattered about, during this part of the way, and as each had invariably a large handsome chapel attached to it, the country looked as if it were dotted with parish churches. The exten-

sive fields were well cultivated; and here abounds the aloe, which in Mexico is called the *Maguey* (pronounced *Maguy*), and from which, the celebrated *Pulque* (*Poólkay*), a universal drink among the Mexicans, is made.

We were now, you understand, on the tablelands. From Tepeyahualco we went on to “*el ojo del agua*,” where there is a fine clear *tepid* piece of water. It rises from its spring, bubbling and smoking; but though coming up warm, it gets colder as it spreads into a tolerably-sized sheet of water. Close to the spring-head were three or four Indian women, using the ready-hot water for washing clothes.

At mid-day we entered the town of Nopalúca, where we had our dinner-breakfast; and travelling from three A.M. till noon (nine hours), on a cup of chocolate or coffee only, has the effect, I do assure you, of bestirring the gastronomic affections: so that, under such circumstances, the viands are not over nicely criticised.

The dust, which had begun to annoy us from Tepeyahualco, became insufferable from “*El ojo del Agua*” to Puebla. It went before us; it followed us; it kept us company on either side; it

drove into the *diligencia*, and made its exit with unceasing assiduity. The men outside appeared to be heaps of dust, with each a sort of human outline; inside, our lining of the subtle substance was *interior*; we gulped it down at every breath we drew, and were all but suffocated by its unceremonious and unwelcome occupation of our throats. It was, therefore, with a pleasure commensurate with our previous sufferings, that about five o'clock P.M., we found our driver cracking his whip, and the *diligencia* giving a jolt extraordinary, as we rattled over the rough large stones of the wide, paved streets of the famous city of Puebla. We drove into the ample *patio* of the great Diligencia Hotel; and there, as it is generally much crowded, our junior *administrador*, who had accompanied us from Jalapa, immediately secured one splendid bed-room for us (separate ones we had ceased to look for); and in it, after having dinner, we were to rest till three o'clock in the morning.

## LETTER XXIII.

PUEBLA TO MEXICO.

*Mexico, March, 1849.*

As we had got to Perote, so we got to Puebla—that is, without being attacked by highwaymen. We had passed through the Pinal, a splendid breadth of pine-tree mountain scenery; and as this was the favourite haunt—a convenient point of attack for the robbers; when we saw them not there, it was considered that we no longer stood “in the imminent breach,” that we had passed the main danger of the road.

I had a letter for Mr. T—, of Puebla, and I went to his house on my arrival. I had an opportunity, while out, of examining the streets as I sauntered leisurely along. The view showed me at once that I was in the best of Spanish American cities I had yet visited. The houses were massive and handsome, the rectilinear streets wide, well-