

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-



paved and clean; and the whole denoted the possession of quiet and comfort, with no small share of opulence. Puebla is, I believe, the second city in Mexico; the number of its inhabitants is variously calculated at from sixty to ninety thousand. It is favourably known for its manufactures, especially that of cotton calico, here called *mantas*. It is celebrated for its noble cathedral, with its gorgeous interior. And let me state, by the way, that the full or proper name of the city is Puebla de los Angeles; for it is a miracle well accredited and received by the truly devout Catholics of the place, and by the mass of the Indians, that during the erection of the cathedral, angels descended every night, and *doubled* the work which the human labourers had performed during the preceding day. As regards the edifice itself, I may say that I have not often seen a finer specimen of ecclesiastical architecture than that which distinguishes the cathedral of Puebla de los Angeles.

It stands, with its principal front, about two hundred feet in width, on the south side of the great Plaza, on the opposite of which is the governor's palace; the two other sides of the square being occupied by *portales*, or piazzas filled

with shops, with several open passages leading into the adjoining streets.

The cathedral is elevated on a stone platform of ten feet in height, so that it stands boldly out from the surrounding buildings. Over the front, or west end, are two lofty towers; and between them is the main entrance, a large and handsome portico, surmounted by stone sculpture and mouldings. The depth of the building is about five hundred feet; the whole constructed with much solidity, supported by massive buttresses; the material is a hard stone, resembling blue basalt, the stones chisel-squared, and the joints pointed.

The nave is lofty; but, as happens in many cathedrals, the effect is destroyed by a screen and buildings over the choir. The aisles are divided off by massive columns, and the floors and pillars of the "Tabernacle" are of Puebla marble, found in the quarries of Totamehuacan and Tecali, the first, two or three leagues, the other, seven from the city. Small side chapels, receding from pillars on either side, are enclosed by rails, fancifully and gaudily painted. A chandelier, weighing some tons, which depends from the dome, is said to have cost in the mere cleaning, some years ago, four



thousand dollars. "The great altar, imposing in its appearance, is composed of a great variety of Mexican marbles, including a very transparent white. The rail and steps," says Mr. Mayer, "which are of fine marble, lead to a circular platform, eight or ten feet above the floor, beneath which is the sepulchre of the bishops (constructed entirely of the most precious materials), divided into niches and panels, and covered with a depressed dome of marble, relieved by bronze and gold circles, from the centre of which depends a silver lamp, for ever burning on the habitation of the dead." It must be observed, that the great altar is so large and prominent, as to be very much disproportioned to the building in which it stands. It is altogether, however, so rich in marble and precious stones, lofty columns (with burnished gold plinths and capitals), in its magnificent altar of silver, crowded with statues, etc., that Mr. Bullock declares that, after having travelled over most of Europe, he knows nothing like it.

The images are on the same scale of elaborate, but often fantastical and gaudy adornment, with pearls and precious stones innumerable, and the church plate and jewels being rich and costly in the

extreme—the cathedral of Puebla stands, in this respect, pre-eminent over all the other churches in Mexico.

Notwithstanding a pressing invitation from Mr. T— to dine with *him*, we joined the *table d'hôte* of the great hotel, where our party was augmented by the arrival of the *diligencia* from Mexico to Vera Cruz.

And *apropos* of that simultaneous arrival. At Jalapa we had heard of a *pronunciamiento* (for who has ever been in Mexico for a month without hearing that a *pronunciamiento*—a ricketty essay at revolution—had taken place?) and now the passengers brought word that it had been put down. Both pieces of news, at Jalapa and at Puebla, were matters to think of for two minutes, no more; and then to be dismissed from the mind.

"Indeed!" says the recipient of the news at Jalapa, lighting his cigar, and puffing away; and when, at Puebla, he is told the *pronunciamiento* is put down. "*Vaya pues*," he adds, "very well!" and again he smokes his cigar, forgetting the matter altogether.

After dinner, our two French friends walked out with H— and myself, to show her what could be seen of Puebla by night. We went to the



Plaza Mayor, which is handsome; and the view of the cathedral, externally, was imposing. After rambling through two or three of the best streets, we returned; and next I went to visit Mr. T—. I found several agreeable foreigners with him, and time slipped past; and it was near ten before I got back to my hotel. There I found H— in tribulation, not only fearing another robber visit; but fast making up her mind that I had been waylaid, having been assured that one-half of the lower class of Pueblanos subsisted by street robbery and pillage.

At Puebla, we took leave of our friends Messrs. Thullier and Pommier, who had lightened the journey much by their pleasantries and anecdotes, as well as by their fund of general information, given in an easy way, touching the country which we had come to visit. Their places in the *diligencia* were supplied by two other Frenchmen from Oajaca, there established in business. The general, too, and his family (to our no small contentment) were transferred to the *daily diligencia* which runs between Puebla and Mexico.

In lieu of them, and of a young Santanderino (also transferred), we had an old gentleman, who never uttered a word during our journey; another,

scarcely less taciturn; a rich miller (as all millers are); and a principal baker of Mexico (poor, as all bakers are); who both spoke *ex cathedra* of the cereal products of Mexico, proving, to my satisfaction, the great amount of riches, which the country derived from this most important source of national wealth.

We started, as usual, before daybreak, about four A.M., and this time without escort, or any other protection. The morning dawned upon us, ere long; and then we found we now had, on our left, the volcanoes of Popocatepétl, and of Iztaccihuatl, names which it cost me no small trouble to master. The latter is pronounced as if it were spelt Itstaseéwattle. The former was obviously rendered by Anglo-Mexican wit into "Pop-the-cat-in-the-kettle."

Both these mountains stand out in bold relief, crowned with eternal snows; and when these glitter under the first or the last rays of the sun, as he rises or sets, nothing can be more magnificent. The absolute height of Popocatepétl is 17,884, and Iztaccihuatl 15,704 feet. From their bases, whence they rise into their great cone, they may be 10,000 and 8,000 feet respectively.



The most splendid view we obtained was after leaving Rio Frio. This point, 8000 or 9,000 feet above the level of the sea, lies in  $19^{\circ} 25' N.$  and  $98^{\circ} 38' W.$ ; Popocatepétl in  $19^{\circ} N.$  and  $98^{\circ} 32' W.$ ; while Iztaccihuatl is in  $19^{\circ} 12' N.$  and  $98^{\circ} 36' W.$ ; so that you will observe we had the two mountains very nearly in a line due north of us at Rio Frio. That post (famous for the robbers, whom, notwithstanding all assurances and anticipations to the contrary, we did *not* see)—that post lies on the face of a ridge of mountains, which stretches immediately to the north from Iztaccihuatl, and which is covered with oaks and pines. We kept ascending the ridge from the Puebla side, and got to the highest part of the road some time before reaching Rio Frio. To this latter place, the rapidity of our flight down from the higher point was something amazing. We stopped at Rio Frio to breakfast; and a very good one we had, at the solitary inn, kept by a German widow, who was specially pleased when H— held converse with her in her native tongue, and who launched out, on this incontrovertible basis of intimacy, into strange accounts of “the robbers.”

After an hour's halt, we proceeded on our route

through the *Black forest*, the haunt, as far as we were concerned, of invisible banditti; and it was after emerging from the forest, that looking backward as we rapidly descended, we had the most imposing view of the mountains, with the dark, hanging forest stretching out between. It was a sight to strike the lover of Nature with wonder, if not to evoke feelings of reverence and awe.

In connection with these pine forests, I have not yet mentioned the *carboneros*, or charcoal-burners in the mountains. You see fires made, and blue smoke ascending from a great number of points, almost as if they were purposely clearing away the woods. But they are all the fires of the *carboneros*; a race of the most uncouth of all the barbarous classes to be found in this country. Deep, dark caves are the habitations of many of these Indians; who, both in appearance and habits, sink down to the lowest scale of humanity.

We were descending, then, to the plain of Mexico, so celebrated by those travellers who have, on their first arrival, had a bright sunny view of it, from this approach. Alas! to us it was a sealed book! A hazy atmosphere and volumes



of dust prevented us from seeing any thing beyond the brown arid ground about us; the uninteresting gloomy, stagnant-looking lake of Chalco, as we passed near it—a great saliferous bed of encrusted mud, where straggling Indians were preparing a sort of salt used by themselves; and dust—dust every where.

Well—as *we* saw nothing—I must let you know shortly what impressions were made on the minds of other travellers, on their approach to Mexico.

Mr. Ward came upon the city by a different route from the Vera Cruz highway. He was, like ourselves, disappointed. “The approach to Mexico,” he says, “did not give us a very favourable idea of the capital, or of the country about it. The valley on the Otumba side possesses none of the beautiful features which are so remarkable to the south and east; for, having more recently formed a part of the great lake of Tezeuco, which in the rainy season still extends as far as San Cristóval, the waters in receding have left a barren tract, covered with a crust of carbonate of soda. Sterility prevails, with few interruptions, from the village of San Juan Teotihuacán to the convent of Guadalupe.” The avenue, Mr. Ward tells us, ex-

tending from Guadalupe, is fine; but that the suburb to which it leads, by no means corresponds to it, being dreary and desolate; all the houses formerly occupied by an Indian population, composed of mud bricks, baked in the sun, being entirely in ruins. “Such a scene,” of course, “agreed too ill with the picture which Humboldt has drawn of Mexico, not to occasion us considerable disappointment.”—Ward’s Mexico in 1827, pp. 219, 220.

Mr. Bullock, F.L.S., celebrated for his museum, travelled in Mexico in 1823. He entered Mexico, as we did, from Vera Cruz; and I find, he was, like ourselves, wholly disappointed.

The late celebrated, but unfortunate traveller,

\* You will find a short, but interesting memoir of Captain Lyon, in one of Maunder’s admirable compilations—his “Universal Biography.” When I gave you *Excerpta* from various Mexican travellers, in my P.S. to Letter XXI, “Jalapa,” I made no mention of Captain Lyon. But the fact is, that in his account of that beautiful place, while it corroborates what I and others have said, he is far more full and interesting than any of us. Captain Lyon remained ten days at Jalapa, and he dedicates twenty pages to the city and its environs. To have quoted him to advantage, I must have become a plagiarist, and transferred “en cuerpo y alma,” as the Spanish phrase goes, his twenty pages to my own book; and that might have been a dangerous experiment, as well as a not very fair proceeding on my part.