Captain G. F. Lyon, R.N., F.R.S.,* who published, in 1828, a journal of a residence and tour in the Republic of Mexico, in the year 1826. He entered the capital by a very fine approach from Tolúca. "From an eminence," he says, "we came suddenly in sight of the great valley of Mexico, with its beautiful city appearing in the centre, surrounded by diverging shady paséos, bright fields, and picturesque haciendas. The great lake of Tezcuco lay immediately beyond it, shaded by a low floating cloud of exhalations from its surface, which hid from our view the bases of the volcanoes of Popocatepétl and Iztaccihuatl; while their snowy summits, brightly glowing beneath the direct rays of the sun which but partially illumined the plains, gave a delightfully novel appearance to the whole scene before me."

"The arid, glazed and silent surface of those interminable levels," says Mr. Charles Joseph Latrobe, "over which the whirling column of sand is seen stalking with its stately motion in the midst of a hot and stagnant atmosphere, and upon whose surface he continually sees painted the magic and illusory pictures of the *mirage*, with their transparent waters and reflected scenes; the

huge dark piles of distant mountains, range behind range; the strange colouring of the landscape, far and near; the isolated volcanic cones springing up from the dead flats, and the lofty peaks of the great volcanoes far in the distance, gleaming in the blue sky with their snowy summits; the numerous churches, each with its dome and towers, mocking the deserted waste around, and the wretched groups of mud cottages in its vicinity, by its stately architecture. All this, seen through an atmosphere of such transcendant purity, that vast as the expanded lanscape seems, no just idea of its immensity can be formed from the calculations of the eye, embodies forth, not perhaps the picturesque, nor perhaps the beautiful, but most assuredly the sublime.

"And when approaching the main valley, the villages thicken around him, with their streets cheered and beautified, amid the general sterility, by groups of the graceful Peruvian pepper-tree; and the roads are seen crowded by long strings of laden mules and gay cavaliers; and the stupendous works of human design harmonise with those of nature, and prepare him for the sight of the most

extraordinary scenes in the world, whether we regard the works of men or those of God—the Artificer of all. And such is the valley and city of Mexico." Mr. Latrobe came in by the same approach as Mr. Ward.

Madame C— de la B— entered the capital, as we did, from Vera Cruz. She was also disappointed of the "*grand view;*" but, being of a lively temperament, she thus adroitly turns her disappointment into an advantage. "At length we arrived," says our charming authoress, "at the heights looking down on the great valley, celebrated in all parts of the world, with its framework of everlasting mountains, its snow-crowned volcanoes, great lakes and fertile plains, all surrounding the favoured city of Montezuma, the proudest boast of his conqueror—once, of Spain's many diadems, the brightest. *But the day had overcast;* nor is this the most favourable road for entering Mexico. The innumerable spires of the distant city *were faintly seen.* The volcanoes *were enveloped in clouds.*" . . . So Madame C— de la B—, like ourselves, saw little or nothing. But the shade of Montezuma had arisen; the imaginative powers

had been called up; and with the *calamo currente* of a ready writer, Madame C— de la B— draws aside the curtain of Time, takes a vision of the Past, instead of the breathing Present, and dashes off a splendid picture of the great panorama which must have burst on the eyes of Cortes, when he first looked down upon the table land. But when the vision is exchanged again for reality, "the scenery on this side of Mexico," our fair authoress states, "is arid and flat; and where the waters of the lagunes, covered with their gay canoes, once surrounded the city, forming canals through its streets, we now see melancholy marshy lands, little enlivened by the great flights of wild ducks and other waterfowl."

All that I have as yet said and quoted cannot have prepared you for Brantz Mayer's first view of the valley of Mexico. I wish I could give you all he says; but that I could not conscientiously do; it is too diffuse for mere transfer, although, where it stands, it is not a bit too long. Mr. Mayer's honest enthusiasm is, as an acute mercantile friend of mine used to say of everything that pleased him, "very much to the point."

"A sudden clearing in the forest," says Mr. Brantz Mayer, "disclosed the magnificent VALLEY OF MEXICO.

"The sight of land to the sea-worn sailor—the sight of home to the wanderer, who has not beheld for years the scene of his boyhood—are not hailed with more thrilling delight, than was the exclamation from one of our passengers, as he announced the prospect."

Mr. Mayer, disliking to deal in hyperboles, is afraid to describe the valley. He has, however, seen the Simplon, the Splûgen, the view from Rhigi, the Rhine, the prospect from Vesuvius, "over the lovely bay of Naples, its indolent waves sleeping in the warm sunshine on their purple bed;" "but none of these scenes compare with the valley of Mexico."

Neither pen nor pencil, Mr. Mayer affirms, can do justice to the valley; and, therefore, he contents himself with attempting a catalogue of the valley's features, though, even so, he says, "I am confident I must fail to describe or paint them."

Mr. Mayer's picture is highly coloured; "but nature here reigns paramount; nothing to interfere

with her in her vast domain." "Yet, one thing," says Mr. Mayer, "was wanting. Over the immense expanse there seemed scarce an evidence of life. There were no figures in the picture. It lay torpid in the sunlight—vast, solitary, and melancholy . . The silence was almost super-natural . . . It was a picture of still life, inanimated in every feature."

Lieutenant Ruxton had the advantage, like Mr. Mayer, of opening up his view of the valley, "bathed by the soft flooding light of the setting sun."

"The first impression," Mr. Ruxton says, "which struck me on seeing the valley of Mexico, was the perfect, almost unnatural tranquillity of the scene. The valley, which is about sixty miles long, by forty in breadth, is, on all sides, enclosed by mountains, the most elevated of which are on the southern side; in the distance are the volcanoes of Popocatepétl and Iztaccihuatl, and numerous peaks of different elevation. The lakes of Tezcuco and Chalco glitter in the sun like burnished silver, or, shaded by the vapours which often rise from them, lie cold and tranquil on the plain. The distant view of the city, with its white buildings

and numerous churches, its regular streets, and shaded *paséos*, greatly augments the beauty of the scene, over which floats a solemn, delightful tranquillity."

Such are the impressions, compressed and inadequately conveyed, of the pleasant writers who have preceded me, on first viewing the plain on which the capital of Mexico lies.

I have only to add, or to repeat, that nothing can be conceived more *triste* and uninviting than the approach to Mexico, on the Vera Cruz route, on such a sort of day as we had. The land is not only bare, parched, and monotonous, almost without a single tree, but the immense extent of white and saliferous fields on the right adds greatly to the dreary aspect of the scene.

At length we found ourselves fast approaching the precincts of the city. On either side of the raised and paved road, poplars began to show themselves, and seemed at last to pretend to something of the character of an avenue: huts, houses, and other large buildings, all equally ruinous, disfigured the road side; dirty Indians, lazily lying about, were their possessors. We found

the suburbs equally mean and filthy. We were petrified! But in a very few minutes these features suddenly disappeared; and all at once, without previous warning, as it were, we found ourselves in handsome streets of something like palaces. We were in the centre of Mexico, the most splendid city on the continent of America.

END OF VOL. I.

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