

A VISIT TO MEXICO.

LETTER XXIV.

THE CITY OF MEXICO.

Mexico, 8th March, 1849.

THAT happiness and misery, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, are equally divided—equally mixed up for all men, is a theory which few are inclined to dispute. But I recollect my worthy and philosophical friend, Dr. F—, amused us one day on board ship, by treating the question under the less popular principle of moral compensation. In an ingenious dissertation which he gave us, he



he finds himself disappointed, or discovers that he has something else in view, vastly more important, the accomplishment of which he eagerly anticipates. So he takes a new start, once more to hope—and once more to be undeceived; once more to agree with the poet, that “man never is, but always to be blest.” He has but one sure refuge. “Blessed is the man that expecteth nothing, for verily he shall not be disappointed.”

All this, you may say peevishly, is very trite; not a doubt of it, my dear Sir; but then it suited my purpose to bore you with these truisms, because they were my stepping-stones to what I have to wind up with, viz., that having for years looked forward to the *pleasure* of visiting the city of Mexico, I am so far disappointed with it; and that accordingly I am now anxiously looking forward to the pleasure of returning to England.*

The *diligencia* carried us through a gateway into the great entrance to a large hotel; where in a moment, all was bustle and confusion. I was about to let Mr. Mackintosh know of our arrival,

* A travelled soldier once told me that only two things he had seen, exceeded his expectations, to wit: St. Peter's at Rome, and the Simplon line of road."

when he himself entered the *patio*, and we were introduced to him by Mr. Zurutuza, the great *Empresario* or proprietor of the *diligencias*, who had received us on our arrival. Mr. M— had been long looking out for H— and myself, and had no difficulty in recognising us. So, after shaking hands, he handed us into his carriage, in waiting, and the lively mules moved off at a brisk trot.

We drove into the *patio* of a handsome house, over the grand entrance of which were Her Majesty's arms; Mr. Mackintosh being British Consul. Mrs. M—, who is a Mexican lady, kindly welcomed us, and then left us to rest ourselves till the dinner hour.

Thus on Saturday afternoon, the 24th of February, we concluded our erratic journey from London to Mexico: wrecked, as we did *not* expect to be, at sea; not waylaid and robbed, as we *did* expect to be, by land; but happily reaching our destination at last, in safety, for which, God be praised! H— underwent the voyage uncommonly well, thereby diminishing the regret I could not help sometimes feeling, that I had acquiesced at all in her desire to accompany me. I little thought when I did give way, that she was to resume her

character as a traveller, under such buffetings as she received.

Next morning (Sunday), we rose late, but much refreshed. I found that we had arrived at an inopportune juncture, owing to the dangerous illness of the sister of Mrs. Mackintosh; but both she and Mr. Mackintosh said all they could to remove our uneasiness in thus unwittingly breaking in upon a domestic affliction.

In the afternoon, the carriage was ordered, and Mrs. Mackintosh begged us to take a drive, which we did, to the Paseo de las Vigas, of which I shall speak by and by.

To day I was introduced by Mr. Mackintosh to Mr. Doyle, Her Majesty's *Chargé d'Affairs*, who told me he would arrange for my being received *at court* on the Tuesday; very kindly assuring me, he would take care that the loss of my credentials should not debar me from at once commencing negociations. My first act on landing at Campechy, had been to write to the Committee of Spanish American bondholders to lose no time in replacing their part of the papers I had lost at the shipwreck.

On Monday, the 26th, Mrs. Mackintosh's sister

died; an occasion on which, according to the usages of the country, a house remains "*en duelo*" in mourning, for nine days; and during which, the lady of the house is bound by the same usages to stay at home, to receive "*visitas de pesame*"—condolence visits—from her friends.

My introduction to the minister of foreign affairs having been deferred to Thursday, the 1st of March, Mr. Doyle then called at two o'clock, and drove me to "the palace." It is a quadrangular pile of building, occupying, with its spacious courts, a double block or square, equal I think, to six acres and a half of ground. Its principal front, which has a handsome and regular appearance, forms one side of the Plaza.

This once viceregal palace is so capacious, that it contains under its own roof, not simply a noble residence for the President, but nearly the whole of the public offices of the State; for here we have, in splendid suites of rooms, those of the Foreign, Home and Financial Ministries, and the Treasury; together with the Mint, Courts of Justice, Senate-house, Chambers of Deputies, and many others, even including a large barrack for the guards.

We drove in by the great gate of the principal court; and there leaving Mr. Doyle's carriage, we ascended an immensely wide staircase, leading by easy steps to the different *salons* of the Members of State. We were ushered into the suite composing the Foreign Office, where His Excellency Don Luis Gonzaga de Cuevas, and His Excellency (all the Mexican ministers have this title) Don Manuel Piña y Cuevas, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Finance, were ready to receive me, in the capacity of Commissioner of the Foreign Bondholders of the State.

Mr. Doyle introduced me in a suitable manner, by pointing out the importance of the business which had brought me to Mexico, and by kindly recommending me to the personal consideration of the Ministers. I then addressed them at some length, and each of them answered me in courteous terms. I replied in the same; and good faith, confidence and friendship, were mutually professed. Some general conversation ensued, principally about my unfortunate voyage, and the sufferings of the "*niña*." The Foreign Secretary, who, *ex officio*, is Prime Minister, went so far as to give me an invitation to visit him at his private

residence; while the Minister of Finance proposed of himself to open business with Mr. Mackintosh and me this week. In short, all is *couleur de rose* so far; and it is not for me to anticipate, at present, that the affairs of the bondholders may hereafter assume some hue not quite so bright.

Friday, the 2nd, we spent in looking into Mr. Mackintosh's well selected library, and particularly into works on Mexico, and many illustrations of it, of an interesting kind.

On Saturday, the 3rd, I had the pleasure of dining with Mr. Doyle, and of making the acquaintance of some of the principal English residents, as well as of Mr. Thornton, *Attaché* of the Legation. I much admired Mr. Doyle's house—a handsome and commodious building, fitted up with great taste; while the hospitality of Her Majesty's representative, was in excellent keeping with his residence.

On Sunday the 4th, we had a visit from one of our fellow-sufferers in the shipwreck, Mr. D—; and we readily agreed to make the acquaintance, by and by, of the relatives with whom he lived. During these days of mourning, it did not seem proper to be going about, although in this respect, our host and hostess were most kind; and accord-

ingly to day, they again insisted on our taking the carriage and having our drive to the Paseo de las Vigas; which, as one of the most remarkable features of this place, I must, as I have said, describe to you anon.

On Sunday morning, the archbishop of Mexico having died of dyspepsia, his interment, with due pomp, was announced to take place at the Cathedral the following day. We missed the procession from the archiepiscopal palace, close to the cathedral; but I had previously taken H— to see His Grace lying in state.

Now you must read Madame C— de la B—'s book in order to have before you a lively picture of the *leperos*, the *lazzaroni* of Mexico—a disgusting race! Yet in the cathedral, which was crowded to excess, we found that three-fourths of the people assembled were these very *leperos*. It was a feast for the eyes and the olfactory nerves after such a fashion, as to render a description, I can assure you, “more honoured in the breach than the observance”. So I hastened through the double *rank* and *de-file* of these worthies as fast as I could. The cathedral was hung with black; and in front of the great altar, placed on a *cata-*

falque, in form of a square *cenotaph*, lay the body of the prelate dressed in full pontificals, gloves and jewelled rings, yet withal, not to me, an agreeable, nor yet an edifying sight. The people about me seemed to think otherwise, and “*de gustibus*,” etc. The body was deposited in a vault, after the procession. So on Sunday the good old archbishop was alive; created a fuss and a bustle in Mexico on Monday morning by reason of his funeral; was buried at two, P.M., that day; and by four, P.M., he was as much forgotten as if he had never lived. The affairs of the world are proverbially transitory; but transcendantly so are the affairs of Mexico. Suppose an archbishop of Canterbury were taken ill, continued ill, died and was buried. The event would be, at any rate, a nine days' wonder. What newspaper paragraphs! What enquiries, bulletins, biographies, eulogiums and clerical speculations! Whereas, here the honest archbishop dies, *empachado*,* without previous notice on Sunday is buried on

* I give the word as generally applied to the archbishop's illness here. In English and Spanish dictionaries it is translated “timid, bashful, surfeited.” The bishop was neither *timid* (in the sense here meant), nor *bashful*. He died “*Atrito*”—labouring under an indigestion.

Monday, and forgotten on Tuesday. Surely we may, with our poet, here say, "Out! out! brief candle!"

From the cathedral, I drove H— to the "Casa de Minería;" considered the finest building in Mexico in point of size and architecture. It was designed by the celebrated Spanish architect and sculptor Tolsa. The nearest resemblance we have to it, in *style* of architecture, is the new façade to our public offices in Parliament Street. But the Casa de Minería forms a much nobler public building than any of our own; and perhaps it may vie with any other in Europe. It is vexatious, however, that from some defect in the foundation, the building has partially settled down, and thrown much of it out of the perpendicular. It not only mars the aspect of this palace, but endangers its duration. In 1827, Mr. Ward thought a few years would complete its destruction; but it still seems to remain firm, a species of leaning tower of Pisa.

From the Casa de Minería we took a leisurely survey of the finest surrounding streets. A massive, but rude grandeur is the distinctive character of the palace-like houses of this splendid city,

The architecture is plain; but where you find a reasonable number of these palaces in good repair, their very simplicity of design, combined with magnitude, is imposing. Of the best houses the ground floor, surrounding two or three spacious courts, is used for counting-houses, warehouses, or other business purposes (where the establishment is mercantile), as well as for domestic offices of every kind — kitchens, store-rooms, coach-houses, stabling, servants' rooms, etc.; and where no business is carried on, these domestic offices still take up the ground floor.

We next went to the Paseo nuevo, or the Paseo de Bucarelli, the celebrated viceroys of that name.* Double rows of trees form the avenue a mile in length, with fountains and statuary both of a secondary class, here and there. It is the evening resort of the fashionables in their carriages, and on horseback, with a sprinkling of pedestrians.

On the 5th, I addressed a note to the Minister of Finance, saying that I should now be happy if he would fix a day for our first interview. I im-

* If you look into our second volume of "Letters on Paraguay," you will find under the head of "Expulsion of the Jesuits," that this same Bucarelli carried the expulsion into effect, being then viceroy of Buenos Ayres.

mediately received a polite answer, fixing Thursday for a conference. On that day, accordingly, accompanied by Mr. Mackintosh, as agent of the English bondholders, I waited on Don Manuel Piña y Cuevas. The interview convinced me that the Minister really and truly felt anxious to be the medium of re-establishing the credit of Mexico in England; so that if he continue in office, I entertain good hopes of a pleasant termination to my mission. After a long sitting, we adjourned to Saturday the 10th.

LETTER XXV.*

PUBLIC AND POLITICAL.

Mexico, 15th, March, 1849.

DURING the stay which, for a few months, I propose making in this city, it is my intention to give you, from time to time, such information as I can obtain and depend upon, of the political affairs of the country, and which may appear to me to be useful towards enabling your readers to form some tolerably clear conception of the actual state of Mexico. I have been but a short time in the capital; but I have already had an opportunity of conversing with many individuals, on whose judgment I can rely, and of whose practical acquaintance with the material interests, and political bearings and tendencies, of the country I am well assured.

* This letter (here slightly altered) was published in *The Times*.