

rather large. No *Conducta* having come in from Guanajuato, none has gone down to Vera Cruz for the present packet. The Exchange value of a dollar here for bills on England is $44\frac{1}{8}d.$; but as a reduction of the export duty on silver is on the *tapis*, no considerable amount of bills on London can be negotiated, so that the rate is almost nominal.

As the February packet had not arrived, three days ago, at Vera Cruz, we are under the persuasion that the line has been deranged by the loss of the Forth, and that our Mexican correspondence has been forwarded from Havana by a sailing vessel. By way of the United States, we long ago received London dates to the 26th of January.

LETTER XXVI.

RETROSPECTIVE.

Mexico, 6th March, 1851.

“My last letters from Vera Cruz,* as well as those from my father, informed you that we should start two days afterwards, which we did. By *this* packet you will see such long details of our doings, from Vera Cruz to ‘the city,’ that I shall give you *my* account of them as shortly as I can.

“The ball, to which we went at Vera Cruz, was really very pleasant and amusing. There were some pretty girls, and almost all were nicely dressed. Part of the printed announcement of the ball was, that ‘quadrilles, waltzes, and country dances will be danced alternately; and those young ladies who may wish to dance the polka, shall be satisfied to their hearts’ desire.’ So, you may perceive,

* Not inserted here. [H— now writes].

they have only just got to the polka, and that as yet the *deux temps* is to them a mystery.

“ We left Vera Cruz, then, on the 18th and arrived here on the 24th. The first part of the road is so bad, that the breaking down of the *diligencia* is a common occurrence; and as for the bones of the unhappy passengers, they suffer, I hear, considerably. We avoided the possible fractures, by going as far as Jalapa in a *litera*, a slow-and-sure style of travelling, quite new to us.

“ We started in the evening, the heat being too great during the day to allow of travelling with ease, either to man or beast, and we arrived at our first stage at three A.M. next day, very tired and cramped, having had but little room for a change of position in the *litera*. These conveyances are something between a palanquin and a sedan-chair, just large enough to admit of two persons reclining (not at full length) *herring fashion*; so that it is very easy for the feet of the one traveller to come into disagreeable contact with the head of the other, and frequent collisions of this sort took place between us. There are pillows at each end, a canvass roof, and curtains of the same material all around.

“ Of Puente and its fine bridge, you will hear from the journalist. We started again in the afternoon, arriving at five next morning at Jalapa, a place of which we had heard much, being celebrated for its beautiful scenery and fine climate. Here we rested two days, enjoying ourselves much, and seeing something of the country. All sorts of lovely flowers and shrubs were blooming in the greatest profusion, yet the temperature was delightfully cool, and it rained a good deal. I thought the weather even *cold* in the evenings.

“ We proceeded on our journey in the *diligencia*. Some of the passengers were armed, and all seemed to think it next to impossible that we should reach the city without an encounter with the *ladrones*, who generally lighten the diligence of luggage, and passengers of dollars, once or twice a week!

“ We thought that we only required this to make our chapter of accidents complete; but although we were entertained all the way with anecdotes of these ‘*cavalleros*,’ we were not favoured with a visit from them, which, on the whole, most of us seemed not to regret.

“ Mr. M— received us in the *diligencia* office,

on our arrival here, and took us at once to his house. Both Mr. and Mrs. M— received us most kindly, although we could scarcely consider ourselves otherwise than as intruders, from the dangerous illness of Mrs. M—'s sister, who required at the time her exclusive attention.

“The houses here inhabited by the upper classes are very handsome, and for the most part magnificent in size. They are almost all alike, and in describing one, you may almost say I describe them all. This is one of the best—very nicely fitted up and very large. The suites of rooms are of fine dimensions, with lofty ceilings. The ground floor is devoted to business and offices, etc.; then you mount a very wide staircase, and enter a square, as it were, with a wide corridor running along two sides, from which, and from the windows on the other side, you look down upon the *patio* below. You enter the different rooms from the corridor, which is adorned with fine shrubs, plants, runners, and flowers. All the rooms are fitted up in the European style, and much more like what we see at home than I had expected.

“We arrived, as I have said on the 24th, and

next day we took a drive to Las Vigas—during Lent, *the* fashionable drive and ride. It was very full, and amused us greatly, as it does every stranger on first seeing it. There were two rows of carriages, and many equestrians; and, indeed, we had to stop very often from the number of conveyances which obstructed our way. There were some few very handsome equipages; but speaking generally of Mexican carriages, they have something incongruous. Either the harness is bad, or the servants are queerly dressed, or the mules look small and miserable—for mules are much more used than horses—and this alone takes away much from the good effect. I have never seen an open carriage—at least for ladies. As the fair sex here consider it *not respectable* to walk in the streets or gardens (except very early in the morning), a carriage is indispensable to *respectability*; and many families, who have nothing else to correspond, drive about behind their *pair* of mules, for a one animal carriage is almost unknown.

“But to return to this drive, or Mexican Hyde Park. It certainly is most amusing, for the variety of costumes, especially of the equestrians,

and of odd figures, seemed to me to be endless. Then the ladies are in evening toilette, which looks strange in the daylight. Again, running parallel with the road, there is the canal which it would indeed require a stretch of imagination to fancy the Serpentine. You see it covered as you drive along, with canoes full of 'darkies,' who play a sort of banjo and lyre, or small harp, and sing their strange monotonous songs—and *foot it*—on any part of the foot but the 'light fantastic toe'—their grave and absurd-looking dances—whilst they are all evidently enjoying life, dressed out in their gayest, and crowned with wreaths of flowers of the brightest hue. I shall be quite sorry when Lent is over, for then 'el paseo de las Vigas' is no more resorted to, but is replaced by the Paseo Nuevo, which is just a straight road, lined by trees, its great beauty consisting in the view of the snowy mountains, of unpronounceable names.

"Ladies must not, as I say, walk out after early morning (which you may suppose does not suit me), when they may be supposed going to and returning from mass. During the day, however short the distance, or fine the weather, you must go in your carriage. I hear the rides are very

pretty, and I want exercise, for I only at present have a drive in the afternoon to the Paseo. So I have been longing for my *habit*, which has come up to-day with our heavy luggage.

"From what I have seen of Mexico, I think I shall enjoy my visit to the city very much, though I do not think I should like it as a residence. There is hardly any English society; and till I know Spanish better, of course I cannot enjoy the native. Several English ladies have left lately, and at present there are but three besides myself.

"From different causes, we have been living very quietly since our arrival here. In the first place, Mrs. M. lost her only sister the day after our arrival; in the second, we are in Lent; and in the third, we have had but scanty wardrobes till to-day.

"We have, however, been twice to the theatre, which is a very handsome one indeed. It has not been built many years, is in excellent taste, and the form of it very good. Mr. M.'s box is one of the best, close to the stage, large, with a retiring room. During Lent, dramatic performances are not allowed, so they have got up an operatic company (Mexican), which, although not such as we

should listen to in England, pleases me, as yet, more than the plays. The first night we went they gave the *Somnambula*, with the Italian text, of course. I certainly did not admire the *Elviro*, who could neither boast of voice nor good looks. The *Amina* was much better, although the 'Ah! non giunge' was too much for her. The orchestra was terrible; while the best part of the performance was the chorus, which was small, but the voices were fair, and they sang in good time and tune. The second night, we saw 'Lucia,' in which all got on better; and, altogether, it amuses me very much. But stay, I am omitting my principal point—the audience, or 'concur-rencia.' The ladies are, in general, nice-looking, and a good many very pretty; and almost all dressed in good taste."

LETTER XXVII.

DIARY OF A MONTH.

Mexico, 10th April, 1849.

FOLLOWING up my plan of giving you *something* by every packet, till I get to England once more, I resume the thread of my story from the departure of our last mails.

We have now resided here six weeks, and, as a natural consequence, I now know something more of the *City* of Mexico than I did at the close of my last letter; and I shall accordingly go on in my journalising way, and desultory mode of observation.

On the 9th of March we began to look for the packet—for its arrival is *the* event of the month—and we seemed to have been an age without letters from England. Ah! how few are there, man or woman, born on English ground, who do not, on quitting *home* for a foreign country, leave behind the greater part of his or her affections