

We dined at half-past three. In the evening the ladies went to the Paseo; Mrs. J—'s turn-out being one of the best. Altogether, we passed a delightful evening, and got home just in time to go over the same pleasant ground with our own party; which, at half-past nine had adjourned to coffee in the drawing room.

LETTER XXVIII.

DIARY OF A MONTH CONCLUDED.

Mexico, 10th April, 1851.

SATURDAY, the 31st, was a day of diplomatic courtesies. Our *Chargé d'affaires* accompanied us to the French Legation, there to be introduced to the Minister and his lady. Our party was made up of Mr. and Mrs. M—, H—, Messrs. F— and B—, and myself, led by Mr. Doyle. The Legation occupies one of the handsomest houses in Mexico, in a fashionable street, with the odd name of "Calle de Don Juan Manuel."

M. Levasseur speaks little Spanish as yet; but he is refined and piquant in his own language. Madame is a German lady; lively, clever, intellectual, and accomplished, speaks five or six languages fluently, and has some knowledge of

Greek and Latin. She was *tres aimable* with us; and we all received invitations to the first of her soirées, for Monday the 9th of April.

I am writing a second letter on the politics of Mexico by the packet; so on that point I will only say that my respected friend and coadjutor, Don Manuel Piña y Cuevas, Minister of Finance when I arrived, having resigned, he determined to give a soirée, dedicated "a la Niña Henriqueta," not only as a proof of his personal regard, but as a demonstration of his sympathies with me in my public capacity. He invited us by a very kind note, and we went accordingly on Saturday, the 31st (March). Messrs. M—, F—, and B— were dining with Sir J. L—; but they joined us later in the evening.

Mr. Piña y Cuevas may not be called of the highest grade of the *haut ton*; but I can only say, we found at his party a great many agreeable people, including his relative, Cuevas, Prime Minister, many senators, members of the *Camara de Diputados*, and others. The most marked attention was paid to H— all night, and the utmost solicitude was shewn to amuse us both. We had

an excellent concert, one of the principal performers being la Señorita Cossio, *prima donna* at the Grand Theatre. After her first song, she was led to a seat next to my own. I did not then know who she was, for she had not performed in either of the two operas I had seen, and I had not heard her name in the salon. I turned round to her, and making a bow, said, "I perceive, Señorita, that better music is to be heard in the drawing-rooms of Mexico than in the Grand Theatre."

"*Es favor que V. me hace.*"—"You are complimentary," answered the young lady, smiling.

"My dear sir," said a gentleman who stood by, "you are addressing la Señorita Cossio, of whose name you surely cannot be ignorant."

I explained how it was, and during the evening I enjoyed a good deal of the sprightly conversation of the amiable *prima donna*. Let me state, to her great honour, the origin of her singing in public. Her father was a highly respectable gentleman, moving in the best circles. By some misfortune he lost his property, died, and left his widow and family unprovided for. Miss Cossio hesitated not to avail herself of her great musical talents. She

made a successful *debut*, maintains her mother, with whom she lives, and herself comfortably, and is universally respected. I talked also to Madame Cossio, who doats on her daughter, and listens to her praise with an honest maternal pride.

After the concert, refreshments of every kind were served; dancing and conversation ensued, and highly pleased with our entertainment, we retired at a very late hour. I must not omit to mention, that the finest girl present was the young and elegant Miss Cortina, daughter of the Conde and Madame Cortina, so often mentioned by their friend, Madame C— de la B—.

On the 1st of April, I went with a party to visit the little town of Guadalupe, chiefly celebrated for its church, the sanctuary of "Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe," the patroness saint of Mexico.

The road to Guadalupe, after you emerge from the dirty suburbs, goes along a fine causeway, lined with trees, and is about three miles from the centre of the City of Mexico. The church was not built to meet the wants "of a town population;" but the town has grown out of the celebrity of our Lady's church. It is built at the foot of a hill called Tepayac, on the summit of which

once stood the temple of Tonantzin. How this Indian place of worship fell into decay I need not particularise; but how the Virgin's sanctuary arose and flourished close by, must claim our passing notice, for it sprang from a miracle.

Madame C— de la B— had the celebrated tradition related to her by the old bishop at Guadalupe, and he seems to have taken the merit of the account to himself; but the rogue had stolen it from a printed sermon of the Cardinal di Lorenzano, Archbishop of Mexico, preached in 1760. The curtailed particulars are these.

Upwards of three centuries ago, and ten years after the conquest, the Virgin Mary appeared to an Indian called Juan Diego, as he passed the mountain of Tepayac, desiring him to go to the bishop, and to order him to come and worship her on that spot. Diego, not being admitted to the bishop, returned and told the Virgin so. He was ordered to return with the message of "Mary, the Mother of God." So he did; saw the bishop, who refused any credence to the miracle, unless verified by a token. Whereupon Diego saw the Virgin for the third time, when she desired him to ascend the rugged mountain, and thence bring

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her roses. Desert as he knew the place to be, Juan Diego joyfully mounted the rocky eminence, found and cut the roses, and throwing them into his tilma, or apron, brought them to Mary. She sent him with them as "the token" to the bishop. The apron unfolded, and the roses drawn forth, "*lo! there appeared on the rude garment that blessed picture of the Virgin*, which now, after centuries, still exists, without having suffered the slightest injury!" Such is the miracle, as related by the archbishop; but we have not his authority for what is averred by others, namely, that not only the apron, but every leaf of every rose plucked by Juan Diego, bore the impress of the Virgin, now known as of Guadalupe.

Be that as it may, you will readily suppose that no time was lost in rearing a church to our Lady of Guadalupe on Tepeyac; and so successfully did the shrine bring wealth to the church, that a second and more magnificent one — that now standing — replaced the first: while "Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe" has, indeed, become a household word over the length and breadth of Mexico.

The church itself has nothing to boast of in its architectural claims, but its interior decorations

are sumptuous in the extreme. "The altar at the north end," says Mr. Brantz Mayer, "and the canopy and pillars around it, are of the finest marbles. Above it, in a frame of solid gold, covered with a crystal plate, is the figure of the Virgin, painted on the Indian's tilma, as represented in the preceding cut. On each side of the image, within the frame, and extending its whole length, are strips of gold literally crusted with emeralds, diamonds, and pearls. At the feet of the figure there are again large clusters of the same costly gems. From each side of the frame issues a circle of golden rays; while above it, as if floating in the air, hangs the figure of a dove, of solid silver, as large as a goose."

When we went into the church, I found that thorough repairs were going forward, painting and gilding the dome, roofs, walls and recesses, in the richest manner. Votaries and visitors were entering and leaving, while at a table sat a woman before a complete ribbon stall! All sorts of devices were stamped on these ribbons, illustrative of the history of the tutelary saint. Then in a corner was a male attendant with *medals* for sale. I bought one for four rials, with about one rial's

worth of silver in it, the rest copper. It is oblong, under an inch and a half in length; has on one side the Virgin of Guadalupe, with "N. S. D. Guadalupe de Mexico. A. 1805," as the surrounding inscription. On the obverse side is, "NON FECIT TALITER OMNI NATIONI." With this medal I received a small printed paper (in which I now keep the medal), which is worth transcribing and translating. It runs thus:—

"Nuestro Santisimo Padre, el Señor Pio VI., por su breve de 13 de Abril de 1785, concedio indulgencia plenaria para la hora de la muerte, á todas las personas que trajeren consigo una de las MEDALLAS DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE GUADALUPE, que se expenden, benditas en su santuario." Which being translated, says:—

"Our most Holy Father, the sovereign Pope Pius VI., by his brief of the 13th of April, 1785, has conceded plenary indulgence, in the hour of death, to all those who shall then have upon them, ONE OF THE MEDALS OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, which, ready blest, are sold in her sanctuary."

I must mention two or three other particulars about the village of Guadalupe, and then leave it.

A couple of hundred yards from our Lady's

church is a holy spring-well, the filthiest puddle imaginable, under a dome, or small chapel; and the Indians being persuaded that the water is blessed by the Guadalupe herself, they flock to it daily and hourly in hundreds often, and not unfrequently by thousands. They bless themselves in it—they duck themselves in it; the women, with their miserable little children buckled on their backs, bend over the sacred and very dirty fluid, and get at it in any way they can. Finally, hundreds come with cans and rude vessels, and carry the water away, not only from the fount, but from the gutters which run from it.

A strange, rough, broken, but wide flight of steps, cut out in the rock, leads you from the dome to the top of Tepeyac, where stands another chapel. Thence we had a splendid view of Mexico, the plain, and the mountains.

Then midway, on this ascent, stands a singular mass of brick-work, rising up in the form of a ship's sail, rudely shaped, the votive offering of a tempest-tossed Spanish skipper, who, in a violent storm, prayed to our Lady of Guadalupe, was heard, and saved. When he got safely to port, he hastened to prostrate himself at her shrine, and

raised, in the brick sail, the palpable manifestation of his faith and gratitude.

From Monday the 2nd, to Saturday the 7th, I was entirely occupied with official duties and correspondence. Many a hot walk had I across the great Plaza, to the palace; and I do believe I shall at last go away with a more accurate recollection of the façade of the Cathedral, the Portales and the bazaars of the Plaza, the courts of the palace, and its wide but tiresome staircases, than any traveller who has visited the city of Mexico.

For Sunday the 8th, we had accepted of an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. J—, to spend the day at Tacubaya, and afterwards to dine with them in town.

Having by this time, with the assistance of Mr. T. M—, bought myself a handsome and fiery little Mexican steed, for which I paid sixty dollars, or £12, I set off on him with Messrs. J— and C—, at eight o'clock A.M., leaving H— to come out with Mrs. J— in the carriage, Miss C— being also one of the party. They took the usual road, whereas we went round by the *Garita*, one of the great outlets of Mexico, and which leads on to

one of the finest of the avenues,* because the longest, which give so much beauty to the outskirts of the city. Turning off to the right from this splendid ride and drive, about half way, we entered on an Hacienda, which led us across to Tacubaya, whence we obtained a beautiful view of the village reposing in the lap of the hills, which gradually rise amphitheatrically behind.

Mr. J—, having purchased a piece of land, lying at the entrance of the village, and which he had bought very cheap, determined to convert it into an English villa and pleasure grounds; and, as often happens, the size of the house, as originally planned, increased under the improvements which architects generally suggest, *after* the plan and estimate are agreed upon. Be that as it may, Mr. J— has displayed indisputably good taste in the formation of his fine residence. The house is quadrangular, each side presenting a handsome front; it has two floors, the rooms on which are all large and lofty; the staircases, rooms, and balconies are spacious and elegant; and the architecture of the whole is good. The pleasure-grounds,

* The commencement of it, however, is most noisomely trying to the olfactory nerves.

to the extent of four or five acres, prettily laid out, *à la Inglesa*, are as yet rather bare, from the want of full-grown trees; but every year lessens this defect. The rapidly-growing ash, and other trees, are fast producing shady walks.

One of the prettiest things belonging to this handsome country-house, is the porter's lodge, in which we spent the day. The mansion itself not being yet furnished, Mrs. J— has had the lodge fitted up for temporary use; and it forms a pretty specimen of an English cottage transplanted to the valley of Mexico.

Tacubaya has been called the Richmond of Mexico; and if a river like the Thames flowed past the former, the comparison might hold good, physically and fashionably. As it is, Tacubaya does appear to be to Mexico what Richmond is to London—the resort of rich families to their handsome villas, during the “season.” And from the higher parts of Tacubaya, as from Richmond Hill, the view obtained might vie for beauty with that of the finest summer retreat possessed by any capital in the world.

We returned in the cool of the evening; dined, according to promise, with Mr. and Mrs. J—, and,

being joined by Dr. M—, we spent the remainder of the evening agreeably. The doctor is certainly an estimable member of the English society here; and when perfectly at his ease with associates whom he values—for in him the spark which lies in the flint requires to be struck out by the steel—he is amusing, intellectual, and humorous.

Monday, the 9th (Easter Monday), was a day so important to the Mexican ladies, that we heard of it four and twenty hours after we landed at Vera Cruz, just two months before. “You will have an opportunity,” said Mr. D— to H—, “of seeing all the beauty of Mexico at the ball of the French embassy; it is to be given on Easter Monday.” In point of fact, if I were to transfer to my paper all that has, during these two months, been said, in the higher circles, of Madame de Levasseur's coming ball, I should have to give you three-fourths of the fashionable conversation of that momentous interval.

“How are we to dress?” that was the puzzling point. Madame had begged all her friends to go “plainly attired.”

“Will Mrs. A—,” said Mrs. B—, “obey the

mandate? And if she does not, won't it be because she desires to outshine me?"

Now it was rumoured that all were to go in court dresses, resplendent with diamonds, pearls, and other precious stones: anon, it was reported that all those who went so, would be ridiculed, pooh-poohed, and laughed at.

After all, as if by common consent, the Mexican *belles* hit on the *juste milieu*; they were all elegantly, and not over dressed. Madame collected an assemblage overflowing with the *élite* of the Mexican metropolis. The only plainly, perhaps quaintly dressed lady in the splendid saloon of the French Minister, was our clever and accomplished hostess herself.

There were a great many fine women, and some very beautiful girls present. The lady did the honours with grace, kindness, and intelligence, talking alternately with all in their own language—Spanish, French, German, Italian, and English. The thing "went" *à merveille*, with one most extraordinary exception, and that was the music. If I indulge in a little raillery on this score, Madame cannot take it amiss, for it was certainly no fault of hers. She laughed at it very much herself. She

could not *make* a band—she must take what was made to her hand in Mexico. And what a band! With a recollection of Strauss's, of Weippert's, and of Jullien's, the Mexican band was something to tickle the fancy of the humourist.

Figure to yourself, in the recess of one of the windows, level with the floor, and in no way separated from the company, eight or ten "unshaven, unshorn," half lame, blind tatter-demalion music-scrapers, pouring forth tinklings and sounds which would have driven Jullien stark staring mad in two minutes! And then calling themselves the fashionable quadrille band of the court of Mexico! Instead of grand piano, a sort of hurdy-gurdy! instead of violin and violoncello, thumb-thrummed old guitars! a shrieking fife, for the melodious flute! and Heaven knows what other sorts of incongruous instruments of Mexican origin, to make up for the want of flageolet, oboe and bassoon!

Every thing else was perfect: so think to European eyes and ears how singular the effect of these musicians, and of their music must have been. The *charivari* of a rustic wedding in England, transferred to Almacks'!

But so it is in Mexico; you have often to remark one incongruity or another; there is a want of right keeping in *all* its parts; and in some cases there is such a jumble of grandeur and meanness, of luxury and discomfort, of exterior show defective in its detail, of an attempt often at everything, and of an incompleteness in such attempts, that an Englishman is first struck with a grand idea of the *tout ensemble*, and then amused when he begins to examine the details. In England, the head of a family advancing in wealth and station, begins by "making things comfortable at home"; gets a better house, better furnished; puts smarter furniture into it; increases the number of his servants; improves his *cuisine*; indulges in better wines, and more of them; sees his friends oftener; and *at last*, sets up his carriage. Here, by high and low, the one thing considered indispensable is—the carriage. The higher and richer classes, in virtue of their rank and means have their splendid equipages, a large proportion got up in first-rate style: but many families, far removed from the upper and even middle circles; living in mean and dirty houses; unheeding of domestic comforts; scarcely (sometimes) a whole chair to sit

upon; pinched for a coarse and scrimp dinner; put in short to their daily shifts to live—such a family must nevertheless keep their carriage. It may be an old-fashioned, dirty, broken-down, rumbling concern, built in the year one; it may be dragged by two wretched mules in tattered harness; it may boast for coachman of a half-clad Mexican, in his shirt sleeves, and broad-brimmed glazed hat; but still it is the *coche*; and moreover, another Mexican, a grade or two beyond the *lepero* may hang on behind, and pass as the lacquey of the family carriage.

Perhaps I ought to suppress some of these unpalatable particulars of unwholesome habits in Mexico; but I have Shakespeare's authority for what I do; "nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice."

We had an opportunity, as I have said, of seeing at Madame de Levasseur's all the beauty of the highest class here; and certainly, if not general, there were at any rate, very many specimens of fine and pretty women in the room. I incline to think, at the same time, that the middle class, being much more numerous, boasts in its ranks of a greater aggregate of female beauty, than we find among the exclusives.

But like Spanish and Spanish-American women generally, they are here, in all ranks, kind in their feelings, unaffected and prepossessing in their manners; and in their dress and deportment in public, almost invariably shewing good taste, and native grace.

Let me here remark, that while many foreigners, particularly Englishmen, agree in praising *women* in Spanish-America, they are inclined to speak in a disparaging tone of the men. I think it unfair and unjust; and I think I could shew that personal vanity has too much to do with the relative estimate made. You must know a people thoroughly, and judge *impartially*, if you would avoid pronouncing a rash opinion emanating probably, from self-sufficiency; and a long experience has led me to the belief that the Spanish-Americans of the higher classes, are of an unaffected and affable nature, of much good breeding and urbanity, and of a great kindness of feeling in their social intercourse, as well among themselves as with foreigners.

The ball was kept up with much spirit till two in the morning. I very much enjoyed the scene; for I there met and conversed with most of the

leading public men; and both pleasing and amusing I found them. I got into one little *coterie*, in the course of the evening, the members of which, made me laugh heartily with their witty sallies; and while thus engaged, another friend came up to me, and said aloud, "Do you know, Mr. Robertson, that you have got around you four ex-ministers, and a grave senator?" They all gave a droll look at each other, and became more jocose than ever.

Madame de L— announced, to the satisfaction of the assembled guests, her succeeding soirées for the first Saturday of every month, inviting all then present to favour her with their "*concur-rencia*."