

Havana, bringing English dates to the 22nd of March; and yesterday, via New Orleans, we had all European news up to the 7th of April, yet we have not our own packet letters of the 1st; and before we can answer them the packet may have taken her departure. As for any one who has studied the routes, thinking of going to England by a Royal Mail Steam Company's Packet, the case every day becomes rarer; almost all go by way of the United States. Let the Directors of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company remedy this evil if they would have the Mexican line be of any use to the public, or of any profit, through passengers, to themselves.

LETTER XXXII.

LIFE IN THE CITY OF MEXICO.

Mexico, 11th June, 1852.

My own time and attention are now so completely devoted to the advancement of my mission, that I shall here avail myself once more of some passing observations on our "visit," contained in extracts from H—'s journal, commencing 18th April. I omit such topics as I have already taken up myself.

"We had visits from Mr. Thornton and Mr. H—. The former and one or two other English gentlemen have lately got an *English* boat to row on the canal here; and as we rather quizzed the experiment, Mr. T. invited us to go next day to have a row, to which we agreed. But, being now in the rainy season, just as I prepared to set off, the water began to pour from above, preventing our excursion on the water

below. We have heavy rain almost every afternoon.

“In the evening there was a concert in the theatre, given by the *Deutsche Verein* here, for the benefit of the Foundling Hospital of this city. The lady singers were professional; the gentlemen, amateurs. It was very creditable on the whole; and although there were no solo performances, there were some good choruses and part-singing. The theatre was really worth seeing. It was well lighted, and decorated with flowers. Then all the ladies were *en grande toilette*, which has a beautiful effect when the house is well filled (as it always is on these grand occasions), the fronts of the boxes being so low, that nearly the whole figure is seen, and that to the greatest advantage. In one box there were four girls in a row, three of whom are acknowledged beauties, all dressed alike in simple white and chaplets; and the frame of the picture (*i. e.* the box) being, as it were, a wreath of flowers, you can imagine that the effect was most pleasing. In our box we had many visitors during the evening, which I spent very agreeably.

“29th.—On the 22d we had a drive in the

Paseo de las Vigas, which is always amusing; and I am sorry the season for it is drawing to a close. Yesterday Mr. Falconnet and my father accompanied me to the Paseo Nuevo, to which I generally go alone. What amuses me most there, is, to see the original manner of *greeting* which the fashionables here adopt. There is no such thing as gentlemen bowing; but, instead, an odd sort of movement of the hand, a gentle wave of the four fingers; whilst the ladies either do the same, or wave their handkerchiefs or fans.

“Mr. P—, one of the United States Consuls, whom my father had known in England, dined here yesterday, just arrived from California. He gave us many amusing and curious incidents of his travel. For instance, he told us that, on his arrival, seeing a man who stood idle, he asked him to carry his portmanteau to the inn, for which he offered him five dollars (a sovereign); ‘And I’ll give you *ten* if you’ll do as much for me,’ said the man.

“On the 30th we had all a pleasant drive to the Rancho de los Remedios, Tacubaya, and thence we went to a very large building, the palace of former archbishops, but now used as a sort of barrack.

It is consequently in disorder and dilapidation; but situated towards the top of the Barranca, or hilly ground, it commands a splendid view of the valley of Mexico and surrounding mountains. A Mexican party, friends of Mr. and Mrs. Mackintosh, joined us at the palace; and two very good-natured and pleasant girls, gave themselves up for the time, to my advancement in Spanish. Every one is extremely kind with me in this respect.

“On the 6th May, Madame Levasseur gave her second ball, which went off with great spirit. There was plenty of dancing, and some very excellent amateur singing; and Miss A— particularly distinguished herself, having a beautiful voice. Madame Levasseur, as the presiding genius of the night, carried everything with éclat.

“9th May.—Yesterday we went at last to see the English boat, Mrs. Mackintosh, Mr. T. M—, Mr. F—, and I drove down to the canal. Mr. M—, Mr. B—, and my father went on horseback, and rode along the canal bank, whilst we got in and were rowed by four of the gentlemen owners. Mr. M— and my father ere long turned back, the road being very bad, with every now and then deep ditches. Over the first they coaxed their horses,

but at the second they failed. Mr. B—, however, being of a somewhat impetuous character, got over it, and reached the third, through which he plunged, and had just reached the top of the opposite side, when the horse stumbled and floundered, and Mr. B— was left in the ditch, not without danger. Luckily he was not hurt; so, although wet and covered with mud, he got into the boat—one of our gentlemen, Mr. T. M— volunteering to ride the horse home.

“We now proceeded to the celebrated *Chinampas*, or floating gardens (which, in our school days, astonished our weak minds); but they are now decided *fixtures*, although still pretty and novel in their appearance. Altogether our excursion was a most pleasant one, notwithstanding heavy rain in the course of it.

“Five P.M. 11th—I was sitting this morning, quietly copying a letter for ‘the Mexican commissioner,’ and trying not to think of the packet, when, hearing the sound of a horse briskly entering the *patio*, I rushed to the window, and saw Mr. T— on his ‘Frison,’ giving a large packet into my father’s hands. ‘Beraza has arrived—there are your letters’—said this kind friend—and

having soon after received *my* share of the spoil, I have been busy with it ever since.

“On the 15th, we called on our friends the Robles. Poor old Mr. R. died about a week ago, and the custom here being for all friends and acquaintances to call during the first nine days after a death, the family is occupied in receiving visitors during that period. When we entered the room there were several visitors, all in mourning, and as silent as possible. A slight remark, now and then, in a low tone of voice, was alone to be heard. But Miss Robles detained us till the other visitors had retired, and then in a pleasing, subdued manner, entered into conversation with us.

“On the 16th, we went to see the Tobacco Establishment, which is very interesting; but the account of which I leave to my father.

“Thursday, the 17th, being the last day of the Paseo de las Vigas—it is called the ‘*Combate de las Vigas*’—the last struggle, as it were, of this popular amusement. So we made up our little party for it. Mr. F— went with me, *en coche*; and Mr. B—, Mr. T—, and my father accompanied us, *à Cavallo*. The scene was animated and exhilarating, for the *paseo* was crowded in every part—

the canal, the footpath, and the carriage-way; and I enjoyed it much.

“On the 21st, we went to the palace, to see the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, as ‘Parliament’ was to be prorogued that day by the President. His principal aid-de-camp received us, and showed us all over the state apartments, some of which are really handsome. He told us that the senators and deputies were likely to sit longer than had been expected, and meantime he offered to show us the garden, called the *Botanical Garden*. It is pretty enough; but the one remarkable thing in it is the *Arbol de la Manito*, or hand-tree, of which it is said there are only three in the republic. It bears a flower exactly the shape of a hand, and hence its name. The old gardener, who was delighted with the interest we took in his various flowers and plants, promised to let me know when the *Manito* was in flower, which I told him I was very curious to see. Mr. S—, the President’s aid-de-camp, gathered a beautiful *bouquet* for me, and then we returned to the palace, to await the ‘closing of Parliament.’ While we were again poking into the different *salons*, we somewhat suddenly came upon an elderly gentleman, dressed in

a grand military uniform, whom the aid-de-camp introduced as His Excellency the President! We bowed, and General Herrera begged us to take a seat in his *salon*. The ceremony of the closing was to have taken place at one, and it was now half-past two. So my father remarked that at that hour he thought it would have been at an end. 'So did I,' said the President, with the greatest good-nature; 'but no doubt those gentlemen (the legislators) have a good deal of business to get through with, and I am waiting here till they send for me.' While we were exchanging compliments, and about to retire, the message that 'All was ready,' came, and so we dispersed. Of the chambers you will probably have another account; they are plain, but handsome. What amused me most, when we visited them *before* the prorogation, was to see the *leperos* in the gallery appointed for the public, listening to the debates with the most profound attention, and apparently deepest interest! But where can you go in Mexico without falling in with some of these worthies?

"On the 22nd, Mr. Buchan, the manager of the New Real del Monte Mining Company, dined here, a very clever and agreeable person, who kindly

invited us to go and see the mines, and to pay a visit to his wife and himself, which we readily promised to do.

"The 24th being the Queen's birthday, the gentlemen dined at the British Embassy.

"I must now tell you that at Whitsuntide every year there are three days' fête at a handsome and picturesque village called *San Agustin de las Cuevas*, about ten miles from the city, and where several of the good families here have handsome country houses. Among the rest our kind friend, Mr. Escandon, who invited us, with Mr. and Mrs. Mackintosh, to spend *the* three days at his house. Mrs. M., being unwell, could not go; and as there were no ladies in the house, I proposed only going on the last and principal of the three days."

So far H—; and as she did not go to St. Agustin till the 28th, I must give you some account of the two previous days.

Which may be the strongest passion of man's heart I will not pretend to say, but I am sure the passion for *play* is very deeply rooted in our evil nature; and I think that, *par excellence*, the Spaniard is, of all European people, the most generally addicted, if not the most passionately devoted to, play.

The seed has lost nothing by being transplanted to the Americas.

The fêtes of San Agustin in Mexico are, beyond any others I have heard of or witnessed, the most celebrated for gambling. All the world is occupied in the city a considerable time before the fêtes commence in making up their book—in *their* fashion—that is, in acquiring, by hook or by crook, by the needy, and in shadowing forth, more or less, by the well-to-do and the rich, the share they are to stake respectively in the three days sober madness of San Agustin. As I was busy putting up some correspondence for the Vera Cruz post, H— dashed into my room to say that Mr. Escandon was waiting to whirl me off to San Agustin. At the door stood the *caratela* or phaeton, a very elegant and light one. It was drawn by two superb “frisons”—very large, fine North American carriage-horses. Mr. E. had the “ribbons” in front, with Mr. F—by his side; Mr. Mackintosh and I occupied the body of the carriage; and away we drove in first-rate style. Three mounted servants accompanied us, and they had under their charge our saddle-horses. The drive along the level road, from Mexico to San Agustin, five

leagues distance, is not only, in general, beautiful, but, in one particular part, remarkable and unique. As you advance, your eye dwells on a succession of the best farms in the valley; extensive meadows, divided into sections by splendid rows of the universal *fresno* (ash-tree), and covered with cattle; well-cultivated fields, principally of wheat, and extensive plantations of the Mexican aloe, or algave; and, every here and there dotted with farm-houses and villas, the whole road is diversified and agreeable.

At about four leagues from the city, we passed the splendid *Hacienda de San Antonio*, and close by is the toll, where a heavy tax is levied on all vehicles, with the romantic view of some day or other repairing the roads with the proceeds.

Another very curious object pointed out to me was, from one great trunk two different trees, with wide-spreading, strong, and perfectly developed branches, quite beyond any other graft I ever saw.

The *remarkable* part, of which I have spoken, is a long volcanic track on one side of the road called the *Pedregal*, or stony place, presenting an irregular stony surface, mixed with lava, in naked sterility, and which continues on from San Agustin

over a succession of volcanic hills and elevations, reaching the celebrated mountain of Ajusco, which lies on the road to Cuernavaca. But this track—this strange interloper in the beauties of the valley between Mexico and San Agustin—has a very striking and novel effect.

We drove into and through the very pretty village of San Agustin towards sunset, and found quite splendid arrangements made for the three days' fête by Mr. Escandon at his beautiful country house, just on the outskirts of the village.

We sallied forth, about nine o'clock, to view the preparations made for the morrow, when Mexico was to pour her thousands into the great emporium of play, the Conclave—not of cardinals, but of card-players—the field of battle, where ounces of gold, not ounces of vulgar lead, were to determine who were the victors, who the vanquished.

The great banks were all in order, and twenty to thirty thousand doubloons, as the van force of the bankers were ready, with a reserve, to meet the attack of any amount of (gold) metal of all the great guns from the city, brought up to engage in the mighty battle of "*Monté*." The bankers are "all, all honourable men;" and nobody thinks, for

a moment, that there is the slightest impropriety in capitalists opening a gaming-house for three days every year in San Agustin.

Some may think it an improvement on former times, others *did* consider it a most unnecessary innovation, that the executive government—president, ministers, staff and functionaries—were not this year transferred, bodily, from the palace in the city, to the mansions of *monte* in San Agustin. General Herrera and his ministers set their faces against government-gambling, *ex officio*.

The "banks" are established in the best houses. I was told that on one occasion, one house had been let for the *monte* week for 1,500 dollars, or £300. At each of these great banking-houses, "all the delicacies of the season" were, throughout each day, *á la disposicion* of the gentlemen players.

Having inspected, then, these great "banks," we descended gradually in the scale. I was conducted to a bank where *silver* (that is, *dollars*) was allowed to be placed on the table. This might be said to represent the "middle class," substantial and comfortable, without that air of