

aristocratic luxury which the great banking-houses display. Again we descend a step, and come to *pesetas* and *reales*—silver still; but now somewhat rough in the appointments. At length we come down to *medios*, the lowest silver coin, and *clacos* (penny-pieces): these may be called the banks of the tatteredmalions. They were held in booths in the square.

I visited these booths next day, when they were in full play, as being certainly the most entertaining, and to a stranger the most original part of the *fiestas*. I found that the heaps of copper on the table were great, and so were the heaps of rags on the backs of the players. The torn blanket prevailed; and among the females (for there was a good sprinkling of them) the costume, in many instances, was at once scanty and dirty. But it was a curious *melée*—various grades of the lowest ranks, various dresses, a truly motley crew, and requiring much time and space to individualise.

The morning, and indeed the whole of the day, of the 27th, the commencement of the *fêtes*, was indeed a busy one in San Agustin; and I can best give you, in a few words, an idea of the

scene, that it was a "Derby day" on a smaller scale than our own; the road and the arrivals being very much of the same kind. Towards the afternoon, San Agustin was crammed. It was a great fair, "a great gambling *fête champêtre*," as Madame C— de la B— calls it, where every one seemed bent on one purpose—that of thorough enjoyment and recreation.

I visited all the banks and gaming-booths; and one thing remarked by every one, and not unworthy of remark again, could not fail to strike the stranger—that, from the highest to the lowest of the gaming establishments, all was order, quiet, and perfect *sang froid*; whether losing a thousand ounces on a turn-up card, or backing with a handful of *clacos* the favoured suit, you could never tell, by the looks of the players, whether they were winning or losing.

I must here state to you, that Mr. Escandon entertained his party (a dozen in number) in first-rate style. Nothing could exceed his hospitality, nothing the very handsome manner in which it was carried out. Then his large and really beautiful country-house, which stands in the midst of a garden filled with the finest of roses,

and of every other sort of flowers, of shrubs and of trees, afforded more than ample room for all his *recherché* and perfect arrangements.

There was something so truly characteristic and original in these San Agustin *fêtes*, that I felt quite sorry H— had not witnessed their commencement. I resolved, therefore, that she should be out the second day, instead of only the last; and I shall give you her impressions and observations on what she saw and did. On the evening of the first day, continuous torrents of rain fell, which interrupted some of the diversions; but the rainy night was succeeded by one of the most lovely of Mexico's lovely mornings. The beauty and fragrance of the roses glittering in the early dew, were enchanting. I culled *one* rose to show to H— as a specimen—one than which even our own England could produce nothing more exquisitely beautiful.

At six o'clock, A.M., all was bustle—servants hurrying about with chocolate and brushed coats, shining boots and jugs of hot water. Grooms were saddling for the *cavalleros*, and harnessing for the carriage-drivers. Guests were calling for Juan! Geronimo! Ventura! and the various sounds within

were mixed with the neighing of the impatient steeds without. At half-past six, A.M., we started for Mexico; and thus H— relates the second part of the *Fiesta de San Agustin*:—

“On the evening of the 26th, Mr. E—'s party for the occasion began to find their way out; and he himself drove Mr. M—, Mr. F—, and my father to the place of rendezvous in one of his *caratelas*. Some very amusing accounts of the '*fiesta*' are given by Madame C. de la B—, who, by the way, passed part of one in Mr. Escandon's house. All Mexico goes out of Mexico for the time being, leaving the city under the dismal appearance of a total desertion. I began almost to repent that I had not accompanied my father; for after passing one day in total seclusion, I had the prospect of another.

“To my no small surprise, however, I was awakened next morning by my father, who had come in with Mr. Landa, in his *caratela*, accompanied by Don Antonio Escandon on horseback, to take me out in the afternoon, an arrangement to which I very readily agreed. After a beautiful drive, we arrived at San Agustin at four P.M. Rain kept us to the house during the

afternoon, and at seven a splendid dinner was served up to a large company. After dinner all the gentlemen went to join the 'Monte' table, saving Mr. L—, Mr. F—, and my father who remained with me. So we had first music (a piano had been sent out for the occasion), and then a moonlight walk in the garden, which was a wilderness of sweets. None of the family having been in the house since the Americans had possession of the country, the garden had been neglected, although now overgrown with roses and lovely flowers of every sort; I never saw anything to compare to it. A fine clear stream of water, too, runs rapidly through the garden and grounds, and, now increased by the daily rains, its gurgling noise broke pleasingly in upon the stillness and silence of the moonlight night.

"Next day, being *the* day, we had several new arrivals to breakfast. Mr. R. G—, the Marquess de Raddepont (a most agreeable Frenchman), Mr. W—, Secretary to the American Legation, and Mr. G. M—.

"After another walk all over the charming grounds, a carriage driven by Mr. L— came round; a party of four of us, including, 'the

commissioner' and myself, got into it. We went through the village, and stopped at one of the gambling-houses, to see the wonderful game of 'Monte.' It was a pretty house, with a nice garden, and there sat rows of men with rows of doubloons before them, silent and orderly—no confusion or quarrelling, but the most profound attention to what was going on, was observed by every one present. Heaps of the gold ounces were now scraped into the 'bank,' now deliberately appropriated by winning players, and new heaps were transferred by losers from their stock on hand to the centre of the table, for the next venture, all with imperturbable gravity and *sang froid*. It is indeed most extraordinary to see the wonderful calmness with which the Spanish race win or lose large sums of money in this way.

"From the Monte Bank, we went to view the two most celebrated gardens belonging to the country-houses of this fashionable place. One was that of, I believe, the late General Moran, the most extensive and best kept. It was very fine and very large, laid out more in the French than in the English style.

"On our return, I retired to read in a pretty little summer-house in the garden, whence I was called by Mr. Escandon to meet some ladies who had come to lunch. These were the Misses L—, and a Miss E—, Mr. L—, the Spanish Chargé d'Affaires, with one or two other additions to our party, which had now swelled to a large one. Miss L—, who is considered one of the most musical young ladies in Mexico, sang very nicely to us. After their departure, I spent two hours quite alone in the house, seeing I was not to be tempted into the 'Plaza de Gallos,' either by the promise of a most splendid cock-fight, or of a most brilliant 'Concurrencia'; for although the ladies here will not now patronise a bull-fight, yet at San Agustin, once a year, all the élite and beauty of Mexico honour with their presence and gayest toilettes—a cock-fight.\*

\* Note by W. P. R.—Although I have not the slightest *penchant* for cock-fighting, and had never been but in one cock-pit in my life, on the principle of seeing every trait, if possible, of the customs and habits of a new people, I went to the cock-pit at San Agustin. I witnessed two fights out of the great number of the day; and these two were quite enough for my not over-strong nerves, where deliberate cruelty is the basis of amusement. Otherwise the cock-pit presented a curious and animated scene. It is a fine commodious circus, with rows of boxes rising from the ground circle, in which the operations are carried forward. To complete

"At five o'clock, with prognostications of rain, I went in a carriage with Messrs. E—, M—, F—, and B—, to the hill called 'Calvario,' whither at that hour of this particular day, all the world—at

H—'s account of the San Agustin amusements, I shall here quote what Madame C. de la B— says of the cock-pit in 1840, when she visited it. With one or two slight differences, her observations were very much my own.

"We went to the *Gallos* about three o'clock. The plaza (or circus) was very much crowded, and the ladies in their boxes looked like a *parterre* of various-coloured flowers. But while the señoras in their boxes did honour to the fête by their brilliant toilette, the gentlemen promenaded round the circle in jackets, high and low being on the same *curtailed* footing, and certainly in a style of dress more befitting the exhibition. The President and his suite were already there, also several of the foreign ministers.

"Meanwhile the cocks crowed valiantly, bets were adjusted, and even women entered into the spirit of the scene, taking bets with the gentlemen, *sotta voce*, in their boxes, upon such and such favourite animal. As a small knife (it is scimitar-shaped) is fastened to the leg of each cock, the battle seldom lasted long, one or other falling every minute in a pool of blood. Then there was a clapping of hands, mingled with the loud crowing of some unfortunate cock, giving himself airs previous to a combat where he was probably destined to crow his last. It has a curious effect to European eyes, to see young ladies of good family, looking peculiarly feminine and gentle, sanctioning by their presence this savage diversion. It is no doubt the effect of early habit . . . . unlike cock-pits in other countries (v. g. England) attended by black-legs and pick-pockets and gentlemanly *roués*, by far the largest portion of the assembly was of the first young

least that portion of it which can tear themselves from the fascinating 'Monte,' adjourn. There we found a very curious and motley assemblage of all ranks. We walked about a little—saw 'thimble rig,' or I suppose something very like it, and all sorts of race-ground tricks going forward. We admired the view from the top of the hill, and then returned to the carriage, whence I sat watching the arrivals, which was amusing enough, especially as the Señoras Mexicanas came out, 'positively on this occasion only,' in bonnets which were in great variety, and of course in French fashion. At six o'clock the dancing on the sward began; but whether it is going out of fashion, or whether the cloudy sky alarmed the

men in Mexico, and for that part of it, of the first old ones also. There was neither confusion nor noise, nor even loud talking, far less swearing among the lowest of those assembled in the ring."

When I attended the "ring," there were neither President nor minister present, a breach of custom which I very much applaud. What amused me more than anything were the *brokers*, who at once made and legalised, as it were, the bets. Many of them were of what we should call the "unwashed," but they did their business quite honestly, and brought lords and *leperos* into competition. "No offers refused," and "No questions asked," where the money was forthcoming, were the understood principles of the betting.

Señoritas, none of the higher classes ventured to 'trip it on the light,' etc. Be that as it may, I think, during the time I was there, I saw and spoke to *every one* of my Mexican acquaintances.

"We were a party of sixteen to dinner, which was more sumptuous than yesterday; and after a little music, and some first-rate Spanish comic songs from Mr. L—, we walked to the *Plaza de Gallos*, where the concluding amusement of the fête—the ball, was to be given. My father accompanied me, as did Mr. Escandon, and Mr. M—. We went to a box in order to look on, which is what the 'gente de tono' (fashionable folks) do. We had visits from all our friends; and at last, Mr. G. M—, having introduced me to Mr. H—, a young Englishman, I was persuaded to go down and have a closer inspection of the motley throng, which, indeed, was truly republican. But dancing, and 'hail, fellow, well met,' were the order of the evening — so well attended, too, that we could not find room in the quadrille about to commence; and so we looked on. The company was very gay—dresses and classes of every kind—a *pot pourri*; but all the elements of which it was composed mixed up in the most kindly fusion;

all classes present, mingling for a moment into one. I danced a polka, returned to our box, and soon afterwards we left, thus concluding the varied and novel entertainments of the day.

“Next morning we all breakfasted early, and by and by, the whole party, some in carriages, some on horseback, quite a picturesque cavalcade, started for the city. The fiesta in San Agustin being over for this year, fortunes having been lost and won in these three exciting days—the people having all come to their senses, quietly returned to their every-day pursuits, as if these had suffered no sort of interruption. Fancy *my* seeing a man who had lost nearly £20,000, and this seemed to be thought nothing of!

“We had a delightful drive home, without fear of robbers, who generally swarm on this road, and once more quietly in Mexico, San Agustin seemed to fade from every one’s thoughts, and looked to me like a dream.”

## LETTER XXXIII.

## POLITICS.

*Mexico, 11th June, 1849.*

THE politics of Mexico, as now in the course of development, merit the attentive observation of the English nation and government. We approach gradually to the alternative of Mexican Independence, or American annexation; and a large portion of this people contemplate no distant day when they must gird up their loins to struggle for their national existence.

In looking at parties here somewhat closely of late, I have been endeavouring to ascertain the real value of the public press, and to what extent it either leads, or is entitled to lead, what little public opinion exists in the country. Seeing, therefore, how much England is interested in the impending struggle, I have thought it might