

LETTER XXXIV.

MEXICAN GOSSIP.

Mexico, July 15th, 1849.

My time and attention have been so completely engrossed with the affairs of my mission since the beginning of June, that I have not been able to go on with my journal satisfactorily. I propose, therefore, giving you two or three letters towards the close of my residence here, to embrace, generally, what I have yet to say on Mexico, its people, institutions, and various other matters. To the great object which brought me here, my mission on account of the foreign bondholders of this state, I shall dedicate one letter; and I hope to illustrate the leading branch of industry of Mexico mining—by the details of a visit which I propose making next month to Real del Monte—an establishment so celebrated in former years in England, and once more one of great public interest here.

In the meantime, I shall continue to re-produce H—'s notes of what she has seen and is still seeing of Mexican life, going on from the *fête* of San Agustin:—

“4th June.—My father offered to ride out with me next morning. Having had a horse for some time, and beginning to despair of the arrival of the ‘Dean,’* I had got a habit made here—very inferior, in make and texture, to my own, but yet much dearer. So before seven o’clock in the morning I was actually on horseback. You can conceive nothing more delightful than these morning rides, with the beauty of the climate, freshness of the air, diversity of roads, and never-ending change of the finest scenery. We were joined, before we got out of the town, by the Marquis de R—, Mr. B—, Mr. T—, and Mr. H—. The exercise was exhilarating, and I enjoyed myself accordingly. We met many *cavalleros*, but no *ladies*.

“This was the day of the third of Madame

* A merchant vessel, by which I had shipped a piano, saddles, H—'s riding-habit, and sundry other things, and which, by a “singular coincidence,” was *wrecked*, as well as our unfortunate “Forth”; and our goods and chattels went to the bottom of the sea.—W. P. R.

Levasseur's monthly balls, but which, from the indisposition both of Mrs. M— and my father, I did not attend. These balls are conducted with so much *savoir faire* and spirit, that they are forming an epoch in the fashionable records of Las Señoras Mexicanas.

"9th.—We have spent our time during the week in our usual way: many visits from our kind friends, and among them Mr. Piña y Cuevas, the ex-Minister of Finance, as well as one of the most agreeable of our acquaintances, a Mr. W—, Secretary of Legation (as I think I have mentioned) to the United States Legation. He has been Chargé d'Affaires here, and I don't know that they could have a better. He is intimately acquainted with everything Mexican, and his talent is accompanied by a wit and drollery which make him a favourite wherever he goes. I have been with Mr. and Mrs. M— to the Theatre, no longer the Opera; and I found that the drama here depended, as in England, a good deal on the French school. The comedy was a translation of one which I had myself seen in Paris.

"On the 6th we had accounts from England, by way of the United States, to the 5th of May, just

thirty days. We ought to have our letters of May by the packet on the 8th.

"We had an excellent sight of the Corpus Christi procession on the 7th; and that being a great holiday given up after the imposing ceremony to paying visits: we had our share of these, and passed the day pleasantly.

"9th.—We rode to Chapultepec, which I admired more than ever. It is the finest embodiment, if I may so speak, of the grandeur of Mexico, which I have anywhere seen.

"12th.—Our packet letters arrived this afternoon, when we had begun to despair of them. Mr. T—, on his grey, dashed in with ours, and at all times a welcome and agreeable visitor, you may guess he was not in an inferior degree, when he so kindly and considerately came to relieve our anxiety.

"15th.—Thanks for your feelingly expressed sympathy in our late perilous situation. I need scarcely say that I knew you would sympathise with us in so momentous an affair.

"I am getting quite accustomed to Mexican life, and I now like it a great deal better than I

did at first. I then felt the want of my accustomed exercise, the 'Kensington Gardens' of this place not only being at some distance from where we live, but inaccessible to a lady, except at early morn (for so fashion rules it), and then of course not as an *unprotected*, but as a protected female. Now, however, I go out on horseback every morning early. To-day I had a very pleasant ride to Tacubaya; and, although you could hardly call it the country, seeing it is not so far from Mexico as Bayswater is from the City, yet the road is somewhat different, as you may imagine, when I tell you that we were rather alarmed on discovering that the gentlemen had forgotten their pistols, several robberies having lately been committed on this very road.

"The mornings are so lovely here—the air so cool and clear, and the views of the mountains so fine—that I enjoy these rides above everything else. We go generally from seven to half-past eight, for then the heat (in the sun) begins to set in. I may mention here, that the coolness of the air, when not exposed to the vertical sun, enables the Mexicans (that is, in the city) to wear their clothes like other Christians; but in all the parts called

'*Tierra Caliente*,' they dress in *la Campechana*. I got a dress of that country, and will shew you, when we meet, that their contradiction of the received rules of dress has not a bad effect. I have not given up my bonnet, as I never walk, and in a carriage it is not much observed. The Mexican ladies who *only* walk to early mass, then sometimes wear a mantilla, or, as is more common, they put their shawls over their heads, this indeed being the almost universal costume. When driving they wear nothing on their heads. The lower orders wear the *rebózo*, a curious sort of scarf (made with the hand), dark brown or blue. This is put over the head, and the right end is thrown over the left shoulder, and thus forms anything but an ungraceful piece of dress. It is wide enough to reach to the waist, and is a sad excuse for laziness, as it completely envelops the upper part of the figure. The lower outward garment consists of a petticoat, which is generally white, from the waist to the depth of a quarter of a yard, the rest being of some colour. On Sundays the petticoat (or dress) is of beautiful white or coloured muslin. How artists must delight in this country, and how often I long for A—to be with me. There is hardly a

figure or object that would not do for a study. The miserable, sad-looking, toiling Indians,—their huts with the rose hedges,—the *lepero* with his indolent air,—the lower classes of men and women,—the *ranchero* (or farmer) with his wife clasped round the waist, as she sits before him on horse-back,—the large canoes with their dusky passengers, singing, playing, and dancing lazily in the cool of the evening, all dressed in their best, and bedecked with the very gayest flowers (the roses being more common, they are neglected for the gayer poppy);—in fact, I must wait till I can explain to you by word of mouth, how the picturesque predominates here over the useful and common-place.

“The female part of the upper classes of Mexico, although not enjoying as yet a very liberal education, seem anxious to improve (many, for instance, cultivate the *English*, and most of them the French language), and they are very ready to see their own faults. They have a *savoir faire*, which conceals any deficiencies they may have, and a sense of dignity which makes their manners fit for any society; and, accordingly, they are perfectly lady-like, and very agreeable. Like most

of the daughters of Eve, as I suppose I must admit, they are fond of dress. In the morning, mass—in the forenoon, visits, chatting, music, standing in the balcony, or any other *pasatiempo* which offers; then dinner; after which they dress and go to the *Paseo*, where they drive up and down, bow to their acquaintances (and, of course, like all other ladies, criticise their *toilettes*); all are in *full* dress, *i. e.* bare arms and necks, flowers in their hair, and a scarf or shawl, such as we use in going to a ball, thrown over them. Of course, the fine warm climate has much to do with this dissimilarity from our own afternoon dresses. The ladies return from their drive at half-past six to seven—have their chocolate, and dress for the theatre or evening party (the former being the rule and the latter the exception), and in their boxes they receive visitors during the evening. On all occasions, the pleasing manners of the Mexicanas, their complete tact, and their conversational powers, naturally produce very great effect. Another of their customs, I may add, is that they always embrace each other when they meet, instead of shaking hands.

“I have omitted as yet to tell you that on the

13th of last month, we went to the Señora de A—'s ball. It was the prettiest one I have seen here. The *patio* and the stone staircase were nicely carpeted; the rooms, which are very handsome, were beautifully lighted; and the ladies were more richly dressed than I have yet seen them. The show of diamonds was splendid. White is the favourite dress for such occasions; but there is every variety of material, from satins, brocades, and blondes, down to the simple *tarletan*; and flowers are very much worn. All the fashionables of Mexico were present, and the whole thing was conducted in a way to impress one with a very high opinion of the good taste, as well as of the riches of the leading society of Mexico.

“On the 17th, having been invited by Mr. L—, we rode out to his house at Tisapan to breakfast—accompanied by four or five of our English friends. We had a charming ride, the scenery, most of the way, being diversified and picturesque, passing through San Angel at a distance of between two and three leagues from the city, and arriving about nine o'clock at the pretty village of Tisapan, about a league farther on. Mr. L— received us

very kindly, and presently took us through his garden, then by the banks of the stream, and at last to his *azotea*, whence the view is very fine; all to divert certain ravenous appetites from thoughts of breakfast, as he was still waiting the arrival of other guests. Towards eleven, Mr. L— began to entertain serious fears of a *pronunciamiento* by our now rebellious party, when happily two carriages drove up with the expected arrivals; and that most abundant and varied of all meals, a Mexican breakfast, was served up, to the contentment of our mal-contents.

“The walks about the sequestered village were truly delightful. In the course of them we sat down under a large mulberry tree, and there conversed with ‘the oldest inhabitant of the place’—the owner of the tree and the adjoining cottage, an amusing old man, and although of a very advanced age, both hale and hearty.

“After our rambles, we returned to Mr. L—'s very pretty country house—had music (for bachelor as he is, we found a piano in the drawing-room)—farther refreshments, in the shape of a late lunch; and, in the cool of the afternoon, we enjoyed a pleasant ride home, after a delightful day.

"I must just tell you, *en passant*, that on the 20th we all went to a concert at the theatre, to hear the principal performer—a *black artiste*—on the violin, and which, considering he has been almost self-taught, he played very well indeed.

"Again, on the 23rd, we went to see a German conjuror, yclept Herr Alexander, who performed some very clever tricks; among others, Houdin's celebrated one of the boy suspended in the air.

"We have now got into the rainy season, which is so far unpleasant, that we fear we may not be able to get out much. It is curious to see the regularity with which the rains fall. They commence about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, and last for two, three, or four hours; and it rains so heavily that many of the streets become impassable, and one cannot ride out on account of the muddy roads. Yesterday we had such a storm!—thunder and lightning, with rain, which fell in torrents, the like of which I never saw before. Our rides, however, are always in the morning, when, although the roads are often bad, there is no rain. There is nothing here from which I derive so much pleasure as from these rides, notwithstanding the early rising; but six o'clock

in the morning here is quite a different thing from the same hour in London.

"The town is on the *qui vive*, on account of the arrival of Madame Bishop and Bochsa, who are about to enliven the fashionables with a series of concerts.

"5th July.—We dined with Dr. and Mrs. Martinez del Rio, who had a very pleasant party, all acquaintances of our own, including Don José Martinez del Rio (our host's brother), whom we had the pleasure of knowing in England. We spent a delightful evening. Both Dr. and Mrs. M— are very musical, and they played duets on piano and violin, in a manner far superior to the general performances of amateurs; while the fair Señora sang charmingly many pretty Spanish songs, as well as Italian and others. She is a most pleasing person—young, pretty, and accomplished—of Spanish and Italian descent; yet more French than either. Reconcile this, if you can! Mrs. M—'s father was Italian, her mother was a Spanish lady, and she herself was educated and lived (till she was married) in Paris.

"7th.—We all went to the monthly ball at the French Embassy, which went off with the usual

éclat, and which I enjoyed accordingly. Indeed, the *réunion* was so agreeable—all so nicely managed both by Monsieur le Ministre and Madame—that we did not leave till two in the morning. So, instead of being up at six, as usual, my father had actually to awake me at ten, by throwing my packet letters into the room! No event brings such interest with it as the packet! I could do nothing till I had read all my letters; and then, having made my *toilette*, I joined Mr. F—, Mr. B—, and my father, who, in the library, were deep in the European news; and so much had we to talk about, that, to my surprise, three o'clock struck when our friends retired. So quickly had the hours flown past!

“On the 9th, Mr. M— gave a farewell dinner, on the occasion of Mr. Falconnet and the Marquis de Raddepont leaving Mexico. It was a most agreeable party; it included Mr. T—, of our legation; Mr. W—, of that of the United States; Sir J. L—, and Mr. Beraza. I need hardly tell you that we spent a pleasant evening.”

PART IV.

REAL DEL MONTE.