

LETTER XXXV.

REAL DEL MONTE.

Real del Monte, 18th August, 1851.

At noon of Monday last (13th), I finished my correspondence for the packet, and walking over to Beraza's house, found him packing his mails, and about to take his departure for Vera Cruz.

On Tuesday, I was busy preparing for our trip to Real del Monte, writing about my mission, and taking leave for a week of my political antagonists, through the medium of the newspapers; and with other matters. We were obliged to be stirring—with a lady in the case, no small affair—at five A.M. the next morning. At the coach-office, we found Mr. Escandon and Mr. G—, our fellow-visitors to Mr. Buchan; and at five minutes past six, we were all in the *diligencia*, rattling over the stones of Mexico, *en route* for Real del Monte.

The morning broke beautifully clear and warm, and away we sped, all in good spirits. Don Manuel Escandon, I consider one of the most agreeable men in Mexico. I never knew any one so completely *desprendido*, "unassuming," although having indubitable claims to pretensions of a high order. Amiable and kind-hearted; talented, travelled, a man of the world; in short, a first-rate travelling companion, Mr. G— is a congenial spirit, and high in the general esteem.

We had scarcely got to the end of our first stage, when an alarm was given that robbers were on the road! And we were all unarmed! Mr. G—, thought he had a pocket pistol; but, on drawing it out, it proved to be a flask of Cognac! The fact is, that Wednesday was the feast-day of *Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion* (Assumption), which is always kept as a high day and holiday at Pachuca, a little town at the base of the mountainous ridge on which Real del Monte lies; and on all such occasions gamblers go from Mexico, carrying with them a plentiful supply of doubloons for their banks at *Monte*. So the robbers, it was said, were on the road, looking out for the

jugadores (gamblers) bound for Pachuca by the *diligencia*.

Now three out of four of these gentlemen had taken places by the *diligencia* by which we came; but not arriving at the booking-office in Mexico at the precise moment, Don Manuel, knowing their vocation, and not liking their company, insisted on the coach starting to the hour, so that two of the speculators in cards were left behind. Meantime, the peril seemed imminent, that Messrs. Escandon and G—, with myself, would be mistaken for the Monte bankers, and maltreated for not giving up doubloons, which we had *not* in our possession.

Under these circumstances, we held a council of war at the first post-house. We there found a loaded pistol, and an unloaded rusty carbine—no powder or shot being at hand. So Mr. Escandon had a tall, stout, young fellow, belonging to the post-house, mounted on a fiery steed; the unloaded carbine was slung conspicuously across his saddle-bow, and from his girdle projected the butt-end of his horse-pistol. We then set off, our man-at-arms, thus accoutred, careering and caracoling in front. I put my watch and chain in my

boot; H— hid her's; and Don Manuel, and the one *jugador*, who was with us and not a little uneasy, stuffed their gold and silver into the linings of the *diligencia*.

We looked for the attack in traversing a long, deep wood, through which we had to pass. But whether the robbers, like the gamblers, missed the *diligencia*, or whether, hearing there were *Ingleses* as passengers (a class they are not fond of attacking), or whether it was altogether a false alarm,—the fact is, we passed through the wood, and the robbers did not appear.

The road to Pachuca stretches through the plain of Mexico, now made specially verdant by the periodical rains. The splendid mountains which rise in every variety of shape beyond the verges of the valley, and form a noble amphitheatre of nature, lent much grandeur to our drive; whilst lights and shadows cast upon them by the sun, crossed every now and then by a fleecy cloud, heightened the charm, by giving a constant variety to the view.

We breakfasted, *à la Mexicaine*, at a little village (I forget its name), and the dishes provided—*guisados*, *frijoles prietos*, *chile relenos*,

huevos revueltos, *sopas*, and other delicacies, were done justice to by all, save by H—, who pronounced against the grease and the garlick, and confined herself therefore to tea (brought by Don Manuel), and *tortillas*.

Towards the afternoon, we were overtaken by two or three of those sudden and heavy showers which fall at this season, and which diversify the appearance of the landscape not a little. We arrived at half-past three at Pachuca, the resting place of the *diligencia*.

Pachuca lies at the very foot, almost in the *faldas* or lap of the mountains, which are here well wooded; while the trees in the valley display a rich foliage, amidst a vegetation everywhere luxuriant. Here, however, as almost everywhere in Mexico, the want, to complete the scenic effect, is that of water. Pachuca is picturesquely situated, as you may imagine; but it looks best at a little distance, many of the small towns of Mexico, as far as I have seen, being somewhat mean in their architecture, often dirty, and as often with a look of decay.

When we alighted from the *diligencia*, we found an open carriage, a very well-constructed one,

belonging to Mr. Buchan, with four jet black, large, handsome, and sleek mules, waiting to take us to Real del Monte. It was a double phaeton, called here a *caratela*. A sumpter mule took our luggage. H— and Mr. Escandon occupied the body of the carriage; Mr. G— and I took the front seat or dickey, and the postillion mounting the near wheeler, we set off, commencing from the very door to mount the acclivities.

From the moment you commence ascending, you behold the wonders and beauties of Real del Monte,—I mean the wonders of English enterprise, and the beauties of nature. The Spanish-Americans are proverbial for their bad roads, and their *no roads*; and, in this respect, Mexico is no better than her sister ex-colonies. The road between Vera Cruz and Mexico has perhaps had most pains bestowed on it; but you have heard how we were jolted there.* And in mountain districts, thinly inhabited, almost all the tracks and by-ways are dangerous, many of them all but impassable for a mule, and not a few only fit for laborious foot transit.

* Let honourable exception always be made of the road between Santiago de Chili and Valparaiso, constructed by O'Higgins, the Macadam of that country.

Judge, then, of your surprise, on leaving Pachuca, to enter on a beautifully Macadamised carriage road, winding or zig-zagging among what would be termed in England, mountains. In point of fact, we rise two thousand feet from Pachuca to Real del Monte; and this road, from the one place to the other, you find parapeted at the innumerable, small, intersecting ravines, by solid and handsome mason work, rendering the whole line an uninterrupted carriage way, with an almost imperceptible gradient, so that the mules cantered along as if they were travelling from London to Brighton, before the days of the rail! You have constantly the deep ravines on one side, and the peaks of the mountains on the other. The levelling of the surveyor has been so carefully and so skilfully done—the road winds from mountain to mountain, rounding the ends of the ravines so ingeniously, if I may so speak,—that, as you advance, you look east, west, north, and south alternately.

And what scenery! The mountains, from their tops to their bases, clothed with timber trees, shrubs, and brushwood, everywhere intermingling as usual with the wild flowers! Then, as you

gradually rise, and survey the scenes at foot, you have views of the valleys, luxuriant in their herbage and their crops, with here an *hacienda*, there some cottages, — Pachuca being the only town; and you see in the distance mountain overtopping mountain, the intervening ones, here and there, opening up views of plains, which stretch far and wide, till the whole component parts of the interminable vista are blended into one dark and undefinable mass!

Such is the character of the scenery till you approach Real del Monte, about ten miles from Pachuca. As you ascend the last eminence to enter it, an uncommonly beautiful conic hill rises before you, covered with larger and finer trees than the others, of a deeper green and thicker foliage. Around the base of the cone are large openings or swards, equalling in beauty the finest lawns in England.

Descending, we found ourselves at the back of the town of Real del Monte. The objects which first struck our eye were shingle-covered cottages, scattered on the side of the ravine, opposite to that which we descended, and three or four tall brick chimneys, rising above the mass of buildings which sur-

rounded them. As we advanced, the irregularities of the town became more distinctly visible, the houses being clustered on different hill sides, which formed, however, a continuous ravine, and showing, from the bottom to a variety of eminences, buildings jumbled about, here isolated, and there forming two irregular and curious-looking lines, the principal, I may say the only, street, which, from one end to the other, twisted itself through the town. At length, after much ascending and descending, we came to the parish church, when, turning sharply round, we presently found ourselves in Mr. Buchan's *patio*, just as the sun went down.

Our host received us most kindly; and, indeed, I myself having seen him three or four times in Mexico, and met him at Mr. Mackintosh's table, we were old acquaintances. In the drawing-room we found Mrs. Buchan—young, handsome, and of particularly prepossessing manners; and she was equally cordial with her husband in welcoming us to Real del Monte. With Mrs. B— we found Miss C—, who had preceded us on a visit to her friends at the "Real."

Towards seven we were all drawn round a cheerful blaze (within the tropics and in the

middle of summer!) in the drawing-room, whence we adjourned to the dining-room, also well heated by a good fire; there, seated round the hospitable board, we did ample justice to a capital dinner, and afterwards spent the evening in great hilarity.

Mr. Buchan is of a good Scotch family, but an Englishman by birth and education. He is full of vivacity, good-nature, and talent,—a most agreeable as well as instructive companion. He was educated at the Royal Military Academy of Woolwich, along with other cadets intended for the Artillery and Engineers. Had he, indeed, continued in the army, he would by this time have attained the rank of field-officer. But coming out here in 1825, he gave his valuable services to the Real del Monte Company; and he has since continued to devote his energies, which are untiring, and his great capacities, to mining pursuits. Mr. Buchan's large household is admirably arranged, and his kindness and hospitality are quite proverbial. As director of this great mining concern, he receives a thousand a year, with five hundred a year more as table allowance. His management, in every particular, may emphatically be pronounced *first-rate*.

Mrs. Buchan is a lady whom to know, is at once to esteem and admire. The beauty and animation of her countenance are a happy index of her lively disposition, her warm heart, her good sense, and her cultivated mind. Mrs. B. was also born of Scotch parents in London, her father, Mr. Auld, having long held the Secretaryship of the Scottish Hospital, and some other appointment, from both which he retired a few years ago, respected by all who knew him, to the honourable enjoyment of a "green old age."