

LETTER XXXVI.

REAL DEL MONTE CONTINUED.

Real del Monte, August 1849.

HAVING written a good deal to you about what I have seen in Mexico at large, I propose here to give you, as well as I can, a sketch-history of this celebrated Real del Monte.

From the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards, upwards of three hundred years ago, this part of it was known as a mineral district, and thenceforward mining was, in the rudest manner, carried on by hundreds of small miners. They dug their holes, called mines, worked downwards till their progress was arrested by water, and then they abandoned such works, to open up and commence with others.

At last, in 1739, a Biscayan, named Don Pedro José Romero de Terreros, having, some time before, left Spain for the New World, established himself at Querétaro, capital of the adjoining

province to Mexico. Here he made some sixty thousand dollars, with which he determined to return to his native country; but passing through the district of Real del Monte, and struck with the appearance of its mineral riches, he felt an irresistible desire, by acquiring some of them, to add to his stores. He was associated with a friend, called Bustamante. They shortly, in their enterprise, exhausted their capital; but, nothing daunted, the latter went back to Querétaro, whilst the former proceeded to Mexico, to endeavour to raise new supplies. Bustamante was unsuccessful; but Terreros contrived, on the most ruinous terms, to raise funds in the capital. He returned accordingly, and at last fell upon some veins, which ended in producing for him eleven millions of dollars. Terreros then divided his property into several *mayorazgos* or entails, Regla being the principal; and he was hereupon ennobled, under the title of Conde de Santa Maria de Regla. The *hacienda* of that name being thus raised to a *mayorazgo*, the Conde, in 1760, commenced the huge pile of buildings which constitute the manor-house, chapel, and mining-works of the estate. The town of Real del Monte began to

rise, and cultivation to spread; and in the due course of nature, leaving his powerful name and influence thus established, he went the way of all living.

Of course, the Regla family had become one of the first in Mexico, and was speedily strengthened by high alliances. But the present Count, grandson of the founder, turned out a man of extravagant habits, another Duke of B—, and he may now be said to be all but ruined, unless the mines return to the magnificent *yields* of the time of the first Count, of which, appearances as yet give no indications.

In 1822-3, then, Don Ignacio Castelaso, the general agent of the Count de Regla, having drawn up a somewhat elaborate report of the mines of Real del Monte, his Italian friend, Rivafinoli, proceeded to London, with the view of making something of them, in conjunction with the Count; and, in point of fact, he brought about the formation of the celebrated company of Real del Monte, with which Mr. Kinder was so immediately concerned. England was, at the time, labouring under a plethora of riches, which was ere long lowered by the bleedings of foreign investments, led on, I may say, by Real del Monte.

The agreement was for a given number of years (I think, twenty-one); and the lease provided, that, after all capital laid out was reimbursed by the produce of the mines, then Count de Regla was to have half of the remaining proceeds yearly; while, meantime, he was to be allowed *alimentos*, or a yearly advance against his anticipated profits, of sixteen thousand dollars a year. Under no circumstances could these instalments, or, perhaps, more properly, this annual ground-rent be withheld; for, were that done, the right of actual and entire possession reverted, in the very act, to the proprietor. This mode of disposing of the Regla lands and tenements was, in point of fact, giving a lease of the whole estate, subject to a ground-rent of sixteen thousand dollars, and a royalty on the nett produce of the mines—not to commence, however, till after deduction of capital previously expended, and likewise of the aggregate *alimentos* theretofore paid.* The outlay of capital on the mines, together with the rent paid to the Count de Regla, now amount to some-

* This proves, that the *alimentos* are neither precisely, a rent, nor yet an advance against future royalties; not a rent, because it was to be deducted from future royalties; not a royalty, because, whether the mine produced anything or not, the tenure was subject to the payment of sixteen thousand dollars.

where about six or seven millions of dollars, so that he and his posterity are not likely to get much more out of this magnificent estate than the sixteen thousand dollars yearly. I must mention, too, that the Count's after-necessities having forced him frequently on the Company's purse, covenants in the original agreement were, from time to time, modified, until at length the lease was made perpetual, and the present Real del Monte Company have become the indefeasible proprietors, always subject, nevertheless, to the ground-rent of sixteen thousand dollars, a mere pepper-corn for such a truly princely possession.

The London Real del Monte Company commenced working on a magnificent scale; then, under the influence of panic, suddenly deserted, in the most critical time (as I shall explain by and by), their judicious, talented, and indefatigable agents, Captain Vetch and Captain (now Colonel) Colquhoun; and the result has been unmitigated ruin. The mania at the time was so strong and so general that no expenditure was for a moment grudged. People thought that they were laying out tens, to receive back thousands, so they "paid up" their tens with surprising alacrity. The management, in London,

of many of the new companies, under the reaction, was miserably bad; and, in the end, many shareholders were completely ruined, and retired to cottages, there to abandon for ever their "*châteaux en Espagne*."

In 1825, the late Mr. Kinder, the enthusiastic leader of the Real del Monte Company, was offered sixteen hundred pounds for each of his thirty shares of one hundred pounds paid up in that concern: he refused to sell; that is, he would not take forty-eight thousand pounds for what had cost him three thousand. The reaction set in, and down went all shares. In 1845-6, those of the Real del Monte were to be had at two pounds ten shillings each; that is, Mr. K—'s thirty shares, which, in 1825, were worth forty-eight thousand pounds, had gradually dwindled down to seventy-five pounds! The company was all but bankrupt: no more "calls" were listened to; and the debts could not be paid with unsaleable engines, though they kept up the steam—nor yet with stones, although silver was in them. The shares have since gone to *nil*; no one will have them, fenced in as they are with unknown responsibilities and debts. In vain did their new, active, intelligent, and enterprising, though prudent,

manager and agent, Mr. Buchan, write to the shareholders to take heart, and not to throw away their property. They had been panic-stricken in the first instance; they had got sick of the business in the second; and in this last and most hopeless fit they entered into negociations for the sale of the property to a Mexican company. A bargain was struck, and the perpetual lease of Real del Monte, with everything on it, passed from the hands of the Real del Monte bondholders for an old song. The entire sum paid was one hundred and thirty thousand dollars, for a business on which seven millions of dollars had, first and last, been expended; and, even of the mite to be received, three-fourths were not to go into the hands of the bondholders at all, but to be appropriated in Real del Monte itself in the liquidation of sums still due to the servants of the old company. What a winding up! Shares once worth sixteen hundred pounds sterling each, now not worth sixteen pence! And the actual moveable property on the estate, in houses, workshops, machinery, mining establishments, timber, wood, iron, implements, utensils, steam-engines, horses, horned cattle, mules, and many valuable miscellaneous materials, must be worth altogether some millions

of dollars. The house at Regla *alone* cost a million and a half, and *now* is valued at a million of dollars! All gone for twenty-five thousand pounds!

Thus did Real del Monte pass from the Condes de Regla in Mexico, and thus has it passed from the luckless shareholders in London; the first paying the penalty of personal extravagance, the other an equally severe one of wild speculation and injudicious disbursement. It is now in wiser hands than theirs; and prosperity dawns on this almost national establishment or colony, as you will gather from what I have yet to say.

The house which Mr. Buchan inhabits in Real del Monte is designated by all the neighbours *la casa grande* (the large house), from being by far the most conspicuous and best in the little town. It belonged to the Conde de Regla, and he made it his occasional residence. It is, as I have said, situated close to the Church, and (as in all Spanish-American houses) you enter by a large gateway, which opens into the *patio*, a square surrounded by the buildings and corridors. Behind is an unpaved yard, round which again are all the offices. The ground-floor of the principal building is chiefly devoted to business purposes; a double

flight of steps leads up to the corridor, which extends along the front and two sides of the *patio*, adorned, as is the general custom, with a profusion of flowers, creepers, and flowering shrubs in vases, at least two hundred in number. All are ever-greens, and two or three of the creepers, which gracefully festoon the rails of the corridor, being now covered with delicate and brilliant flowers, look extremely pretty.

On the first-floor are all the public rooms, and most of the bed-rooms of the house, the former large and lofty. The roof is of shingle, high and pointed, on account of the heavy rains. I occupy the library, converted into a temporary bed-room, whence I have a good view of the hill. It is, indeed, a pleasant room. The shelves are filled with books, principally scientific works, although general literature, including the chief periodicals of the day, is by no means excluded. Here I spend the little time I can spare in reading or writing.

The cold was unexpectedly severe the night we got here, and this, too, within the tropics, in the middle of summer! In fact, there has been frost since we arrived, for there is no great difference of temperature between summer and winter; it is

always very warm in the sunshine, and cold in the shade, and in the mornings and evenings either approaching to frost or freezing.

My room is the nicest, but the coldest in the house. When I got up at six on Thursday morning, I shivered at my toilette. A cup of hot coffee came opportunely and pleasantly; and at seven (without H—, who after the previous day's exertion was in no mood for early rising), we walked out with Mr. Buchan to see the working of the greatest of their mines hard by. I had been out myself half an hour before, wandering about this curious, straggling old place, where cottages cover the face of the hills to their tops, rising abruptly to the height of two or three hundred feet.

At the "Boca Mina," or mouth of the mine, is the great steam-engine, of four hundred horse-power, there placed to work a huge draining pump. The machinery is beautiful, and kept in shining order. The whole operation of pumping is interesting in the extreme. The fuel which feeds the furnaces is drawn from inexhaustible supplies of the surrounding plantations on the estate of the company.

At eight o'clock precisely the miners began to descend, by a difficult spiral stair, to their daily

tasks in the bowels of the earth, some hundreds of feet below the surface. Mr. Buchan invited us to accompany the miners, but we all declined the subterraneous visit, my own reason for doing so being, that I had, in former years, groped my way through the dark recesses of coal pits in England, and silver mines in South America.

As soon as the miners begin to descend in a long string, one by one, each with a candle stuck in front of his helmet-shaped felt cap, they commence the morning hymn, and sing it in chorus, as they wind their way down to the dark caverns of mother earth. This appeal to God, as these poor creatures are losing the sight of heaven, has an affecting sound to the ear, more particularly as it dies gradually away in the descent. They remain working till eight at night, and they are replaced by a fresh gang, who work till eight next morning. The works are suspended on the Sundays, and on some of the many holidays of Catholic countries. While the miners are below, they take no food, but have their dinner and supper in one when they come up. What a life! And to us, who too often neglect the obligation of thanking God, daily and nightly, for all the blessings which surround us,—what an example is the contentment

of these our poor fellow beings, who are shut out from almost all such blessings!

The working miners are chiefly Indians, who compose about three-fourths of the population of the town. The mining officers, captains of gangs, etc., are Creoles, with English superintendents of the whole work.

Adjoining the engine-house are the smithy, the turning-room, the place for metal casting, and the carpenters' department, all of which we inspected. Everything is admirably conducted; and these parts of the establishment are under the superintendence of Mr. Arthur, the chief engineer, a good-natured, merry fellow, whose size and scientific abilities are equally great. He is assisted, I think, by Captain (such is the title of head miners) Daw, one of the superintendents. All the artisans are English or Creole, and among the latter we found one or two very clever workmen.

After viewing all the scientific and mechanical elements which Mr. Buchan had at his command, at this his principal station, we walked about the town, observing its oddities and its sinuosities, with its *pulquerias*, and its houses and cottages, scattered about in "most admired disorder." The

pulqueria signs were, for the most part, drawn on the walls—rude paintings of many colours, representing trees, animals, men and women, and gods, according to the name of the *pulqueria*,—as the *pulqueria* of the Sun—of *Colossus*,—of the Good Friends,—of Apollo, and so forth. One had a group something like that which you see in ginger-beer shops at home, thus:—

On the left-hand side sat some ladies and gentlemen drinking wine, and opposite, on the right, the couplet—

“*Los Monarquistas en Roma*
Beben vino de ley;”

Then, another company drinking *pulque*, opposite which is the completion of the verse—

“*Pero nosotros los Indios*
Bebemos pulque fino de Maguey.”

To be translated thus:—

“All the Monarchists in Rome
Drink the very best of wine;”

“But we Indians like to quaff
Pulque of Maguey divine.”

Of the *pulque* made from the *maguey*—a plant so important in Mexico—I shall give you a succinct account by-and-by.

We returned to the “Casa Grande” at nine,

and at ten we had a famous Mexican breakfast, to which we all did ample justice.

At two P.M., the *caratela*, or phaeton, to which four horses were harnessed, with the old trusty driver, drew up to the door, and Mrs. Buchan, Miss C—, Mrs. Chenowith (denizen of the “Real”), and H—, took their seats. Four of us mounted on horseback, having Mexican saddles and *serapes*, and off we all set—a grand cavalcade—to make our first inspection of some of the many beauties of Real del Monte. Mr. Buchan chose for our ride and drive a place called Guajaloté (the Indian name for a *turkey*), but familiarly designated now as “the Farm.” We went by a fine road, which skirted a romantic valley, our view enlivened by the opposite hills, wooded, as usual, from base to top. Presently we came in front of the famous *Peñas Cargadas*, literally, “loaded rocks.” They are immensely large, rugged, and bare, boldly depending in imposing grandeur from almost the top of the mountain. There are two of them, both partially hidden by the rich foliage of surrounding trees, so that with the verdant carpet spread over the valley beneath, the whole effect produced is extremely fine. One of the bare rocks is said to vibrate when the wind blows very strong.

We got to the head of the valley, and entered on the romantic woodlands. On each side of the road, we had a great variety of well-grown trees (some very large), shrubs, underwood, and wild flowers. A conical hill was covered entirely with pine, fir, and spruce of every kind, which had a good effect among the other diversified woods. Winding through these, with an occasional peep of the more open scenery, we emerged from them to look down on Guajaloté, the loveliest of plains, or rather the finest of parks, adorned with trees clumped on a fine sward. This was "the farm," where the cattle, horses, and sheep were pastured. After gazing for a while at the scene which thus lay at our feet, we returned to Real del Monte, admiring once more the beauties which nature, with so lavish a hand, had scattered among the surrounding boundaries of the mining district.

Our dinner-party was increased by Mr. Brenchley, a gentleman who had been long in the employment of the old Real del Monte Company, and now about to proceed to England. The social enjoyments of the evening formed a pleasant sequel to the out-door amusements of the day.

LETTER XXXVII.

MINING STATISTICS.

Real del Monte, August, 1851.

It is not at all my intention (seeing it is not within the scope of my actual capabilities), to enter into any historical account of the mines of this country, nor yet to give purely scientific details of the various processes of mining at large, as practised in Mexico; but as the mineral riches of the country constitute its most important feature, I cannot entirely pass over the subject without notice. In what I have to say, I shall borrow from Mr. Ward, to some extent; for his elaborate and interesting account of "the mines of Mexico," is the best, if not the only one I have read; while his book is not now generally accessible to the reading community. I shall keep principally to leading statistics, except in the case of Real del Monte.

Mr. Ward gives a table, by which it appears that the registered coinage of the Mint of Mexico,