

## LETTER XLIV.

## CITY SIGHTS AND COUNTRY QUARTERS.

ON Friday we were a good deal taken up preparing for our departure, as the *arrieros*, who take our principal luggage are twenty days on the road from this to Vera Cruz. On Saturday night we went to Herz's VERY last concert, his *real* last one; for we have had three *sham* "last" ones; and it was moreover called a monster concert. We had some good playing, and bad singing, and at the end they gave us the new national hymn composed by Herz; performed by two orchestras, seven pianos, played by thirteen professors, a chorus, and Mr. Herz with variations. Great was the noise, great the applause, and great my pleasure when we got home.

Yesterday, Mr. L— gave a grand morning

party, as a leave-taking to H—and myself. I have spoken of him before, and his pretty residence at Tisapan, five leagues from this. He made up a gay party of sixteen (including the Misses A—, one a celebrated and *good* musician) to meet us; and after all I was taken ill. So I sent H— under the protection of Mr. G—, who spent a very pleasant day.

To comprehend better the modes, habits, and customs of the people here, I have, among other things, witnessed some of their religious ceremonies. Plenty there are of them; for each church, on the anniversary of its saint's-day, has its *great* go, with a vast variety of *little* intermediate goes.

Monday was the fête-day of Nuestra Señora de las Mercédes; and her church is one of the most noted in the city; while the "*Mercedario*" friars are among the most celebrated of the monkish orders here.

I mentioned to you, that Mrs. Mackintosh, H—and I went, on Sunday evening, 23rd, to see the *Mercedario* fireworks; for the operations commence on the eve of the great day itself. The coach could not advance for the dense crowd in the streets immediately surrounding the great pile of

the *Merced* church and convent. So I got out, determined to penetrate the throng. What an assemblage! Two-thirds were *leperos*—the remaining third a mixture of all the other classes, saving the very highest. I rubbed against rags and tatters and half-naked bodies all the way. Men, women, and children were huddled together, and pushing to and fro. The houses were illuminated generally with lanterns, placed in the windows; and on either side of the streets were ranged men and women, with heaps of every kind of comestible—fruits, and many horrible-looking things in the sweet line, for sale. They plied an active trade; but I could no more understand their incomprehensible cries, than how they contrived to keep the populace off their street-strewed stands.

I got to the church, and entered with the incoming stream, buffeting with the outgoing. It was grandly lit up, particularly the great altar. The images, of which there were many, large and small, were all decked out in their most splendid habiliments; the priests were in their gorgeous appointments; their assistants in all their characteristic dresses; and prayers were going on, accompanied

by a fine organ, a band of music, and a full choir.

I found the church full of *leperos*, and women of different classes; some in the aisles, many squatted in the body of the church, either talking to one another, or attending to the priests.

With great difficulty I fought my way out on leaving the church, through the crowd which surrounded it; particularly at two intersecting streets, where stages were erected in the centre, for bands of music; to listen to which the people were packed together in almost impenetrable masses. I got back to the carriage which was waiting for me outside the crowd, and we saw not the fireworks.

Next morning was the grand procession; which I went to see. The crowd was still greater than overnight, and all the windows and balconies were filled with spectators. What I could not comprehend well, was to see a great number of boys and men on the *tops* of the houses, waving pocket-handkerchiefs tied as bundles, and containing (to me) unknown substances. A line was kept open for the procession; and an immensely long string of ragged, dirty boys walked along each side of

the line with candles. In the centre were men, with coarse church ornamental coverings, who carried banners, crosses, and so forth. Then came music, next padres or friars; and last the virgin, elevated on a large and profusely decorated platform. Her dress was a blaze of silver and gold; and her stand moved on, supported on the shoulders of twenty strong men. As it neared me, the object of the pocket-handkerchiefs became apparent; for at each house which the virgin passed the bundles were swung round, three of the corners were let go, and out flew thousands of pieces of coloured paper, round and oval, of the size of this page, with dried flower leaves; all which being let loose, filled the air, and then descended in showers on the virgin's moving altar. At one place a rope extended from two opposite *azoteas*; and as soon as the image approached, off flew a boy from one side, dressed as an angel, with a glittering helmet; then gliding along the rope to the centre of the street, and there hanging over the virgin as she passed, he let go an enormous bundle of papers and flowers. The band played, the bells rung, rockets went up, and all was a scene of hubbub the most complete.

It was in the midst of this that my watch, which was in my waistcoat pocket, secured by a gold chain round my neck as usual, was neatly cut away, without the slightest perception of the *coup de main* on my part; and one for which I was all the less prepared, as to avoid pocket-handkerchief robbery (never dreaming of my watch-chain being cut), I had taken my place in the centre of a knot of monks, who walked with the procession.\* Certain it is, however, that I returned from the procession *with* my chain and (thanks to the dexterity of the *lepero* pickpockets) *without* my poor old watch, which I had worn for twenty-five years.

On Thursday, the 27th, we had the anniversary of the real independence of Mexico, which was effected by Yturbide, first the patriot, afterwards the emperor, next the proscribed, and then the martyr on his return from England. He is *now* deified as the hero of the revolution.† Great doings again in

\* I was afterwards assured, that it was no uncommon case for *leperos*, in such processions, to assume the garb of the friar, and so to facilitate their operations.

† His body was removed from the place where he was shot, to the cathedral of Mexico, with a pomp vying with that which accompanied the remains of the Emperor Napoleon when brought to France. (See Frontispiece, Vol. I.)

the way of processions, public harangues, music, promenading and illuminations. In the evening, H— and I went to a farewell party, given to us by Mr. G—; a most pleasant affair, with some capital singing by Miss A—, known among her intimates as “Natcha,” and without dispute one of the most charming belles of Mexico. She sang some of the little national, as well as Spanish airs—comic—with inimitable grace and fun. We had a splendid supper—many toasts and speeches—and we separated at half-past one.

According to previous engagement, we set off, on Saturday at 3 P.M., for San Mateo, one of the estates (*haciendas*) and principal seat of Don Joaquin Escandon. We went in a diligence, drawn by four large, black, and beautiful North American horses (*frisonés*). Our party consisted of the three brothers Escandon, Mr. Doyle, our *Chargé d’Affaires*, Mr. T—, *Attaché of the Legation*, Mr. W—, American *Chargé d’Affaires*, Mr. Bringas, H— and myself. The drive was pretty as far as Tanepantla, a small town four leagues from Mexico; and from that to the hacienda, two leagues farther, it was beautiful. We found ourselves in one of the finest parts of this splendid valley.

Many of the houses of the haciendas here are rough and dilapidated: Don Joaquin’s is exactly the reverse—a beautiful country seat, kept in the finest order. Passing through an avenue of well-grown trees, you enter the *patio*, and ascend by a handsome flight of steps, adorned on either side by trees and shrubs, to the principal corridor, one hundred feet in length, and sixteen feet in width.

The parterre is redolent of flowers in pots and vases. The *patio* is immensely spacious; the rooms all very fine, as you may suppose, the house having a frontage of one hundred feet; while the views on every side are magnificent.

At seven, we sat down to a capital dinner and excellent wines; and all retired early, to be ready for an excursion on horseback early next morning. All our horses, saddled, had been led out from town by Mr. Escandon’s grooms.

We were mounted by half-past seven, and proceeded through scenery, now wild, now cultivated, always romantic, to Don Joaquin’s *adjacent* estate, called the *Lecheria*, or dairy estate. The family never resides there, but the house and buildings

are of enormous extent. It has a pretty chapel, where mass is regularly said.\*

We returned by a different and still more beautiful road (always in Don Joaquin's grounds) to San Mateo, and after a fruit and iced champagne lunch, we had an afternoon ride through new scenery. Towards sun-set we walked in the gardens, very extensive and prettily laid out. At half-past seven dinner — at ten a display of fireworks — and, returning this morning all on horseback, for the weather was enchanting, by quite another road, Mr. T—, an old hand, declared he had seen nothing to surpass the beauty of the scenery, even in the beautiful valley of Mexico. It is indeed most surprising—most incomprehensible to know that this Mexico is *going to decay*, when one sees such proofs on every hand of its natural and acquired riches. Let me mention, as one instance of the latter, that on our way home this morning, we visited a flour-mill, the property of a rich Mexican family, and to give you at once an idea of its enormous extent and importance, I have

\* On the grounds is a grand *represa de agua*—a reservoir—solidly built with stone, at a very large cost of money.

only to say that it yields its proprietors a hundred thousand dollars — twenty thousand pounds of annual income! They have just erected *additional* buildings fitted up with English machinery, at a cost of seventy thousand dollars, yet it is not *one sixth part* of the entire buildings; including mills, warehouses, granaries, flour stores, dwelling-houses, stabling, and I know not what other out-houses.

We arrived in the city at nine this morning, delighted with our trip, and more and more gratefully alive to all the disinterested kindnesses which we had received, and were receiving at the hands of Don Manuel Escandon, and the various members of his family.