

## LETTER XLV.

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTICES AND REMARKS.

*Mexico, Sept., 1852.*

I HAVE stated, in one of my former letters, that I should reserve for my concluding pages some miscellaneous observations on a few of the more remarkable points (not yet mentioned) which Mexico presents to the view of the traveller. My matter, meantime, has swelled into a bulk so much greater than I anticipated, that I can only glance at some further particulars which I think may prove interesting. You will readily perceive, at the same time, that the scope of this slight work could never, in its very nature, include more than mere sketches of Mexico and its people; for anything beyond that, required in the first place, a more lengthened residence, a closer examination than mine; and, in the second, that coming after other, and recent publications, of a more elaborate nature, I should run the risk of

tiring, rather than ensure a certainty of instructing my readers.

This premised, I shall now, in a cursory way, proceed to fulfil my allotted task.

Of the churches of Mexico, I have not much to add to what I have already said. The principal of them having been mentioned in my account of the Semana Santa, viz: the cathedral, San Francisco, San Augustin, Santo Domingo, La Profesa, Santa Teresa, and Santa Teresa la Nueva; to which may be added a long list of secondary temples, which it would be tiresome to detail.

All the churches in Mexico, great and small, are in their interior fitted up always with a showy, sometimes with a gorgeous, but often with a gaudy magnificence. The total amount of money laid out in gildings, carvings, plate, dresses, and jewellery, could it be calculated, would be something incredible, and only to be accounted for by the fact that all this exterior show of religion ministers to the strongest passion, perhaps, which the Mexicans, as devout Catholics, entertain.

With respect to the nunneries (the two finest of which, are "La Encarnacion" and "La Con-

ception"), of course, I can say very little; for to me, as to the great generality of persons, they are a sealed letter; and with regard to the friars, as far as I could observe, they are pretty much the same here, as in Spain, and its other transatlantic ex-colonies. The clergy enjoy a very fair reputation among the Mexicans themselves; but justice compels me to say, that, as the prime movers of the highly intolerant religious spirit which pervades Mexico from one end to the other, I look upon the clerical body at large, as forming the chief barrier against the advancement of Mexico in the scale of nations.

Although I have just stated that the nunneries are a sealed letter to all comers, I must make, as regards myself, one exception to this general statement; for you will be rather surprised to hear that I breakfasted one morning in a nunnery, and a very remarkable one too, being that of *Las Monjas Indias*, or the Indian nuns. I must give you some short account of our visit.

Some particular occasion arose, I think an annual one, when the bishop had to make a visitation of the nunnery, at which time, the abbess

generally invites him and some of his friends to a morning repast. Mrs. Mackintosh very kindly got H— and myself included in this year's invitation.

The nunnery is situated in a distant and poor quarter of the city, and is not to be spoken of as a public building. Within, all is plain and homely, but clean; and indicative in its details of the class to which the asylum is appropriated.

The door was opened by a "sister," and by her we were conducted to the Lady Abbess. Many other nuns were about, and they proceeded to show us over the convent. They were all habited in a coarse black dress, with a wholly impervious veil thrown over the head and face; and how they contrived to see through it, I cannot comprehend. We observed, however, when they had any particular object to search out or look at, they contrived so to adjust the veil as to attain their object, without those around being able to see them any the better. They seemed to be all kind, simple creatures; talkative, communicative, and full of every-day gossip. Most of them appeared to me to have passed the prime of life; and indeed many of them talked to me of the great

number of years they had been in the convent. Some of them were quite affectionate in their manner with both H— and myself, calling her “Hermanita,” and me “Padrecito” at every turn. They showed us all over the establishment, the chapel, the gardens, and various offices. The endowment is very poor, but the *Monjas Indias* seem to be quite content with their lot. The abbess, as might be expected, was of a superior character to the others.

About twelve o'clock we sat down in the Refectory, to a “*dejeuner à la fourchette*,” composed of dishes purely and exclusively Mexican; indeed I have seen nowhere so curious and so characteristic an exhibition of the *cuisine* of the country, as on this occasion. The *chef d'œuvre* was, the *Mólé de Guajalote*, which was pronounced to be quite faultless. This, as well as the other dishes, most of them redolent of garlic, would have made many a Londoner stare. We all, notwithstanding, made a most excellent breakfast.

The bishop sat at the head of the table, and did the honours of it most gracefully. He was bland in his manners, full of *savoir faire*, and through

his kindly nature there ran a vein of wit and humour, which rendered his conversation irresistibly attractive. Near to him sat the Abbess, and around several important personages of the City. The nuns waited with assiduity and apparent pleasure upon the company, although they were not destined themselves to partake of any of the good things which were going. They exhibited to us, before we went, specimens of their own dietary, a purely vegetable one, and of the coarsest products, most plainly prepared, of the kitchen garden. Such was the *Convento de las Monjas Indias*; and I saw nothing in Mexico which pleased me more.

Mexico boasts of a number of very fine public edifices and buildings; and I am sorry I can do little more than enumerate most of them. Of the Cathedral and the Casa de Minería I have already spoken, and of both as of the highest order of merit. Of the Palace also, I need say no more than I have already done; and the principal theatre, not remarkable as a building, has heretofore come under review. The bull-ring has fallen into desuetude, and now has only the appearance of a great heap of ruinous wooden buildings.

One of the most prominent, and, at the same time, most interesting of the public establishments of the capital of Mexico, is the university or *museum*. It is a fine old solid piece of architecture, with much of monastic gloominess, but very imposing. It forms, like all the other buildings, a great quadrangle; and its various and lofty apartments are rich in monuments of the Astec dynasty, and antiquities of every kind; many of them unique, all interesting. Mr. Branz Mayer devotes a space equal to fifty or sixty of these pages, to the Museum and its contents, and to him I must refer the antiquarian reader.

In the centre of the great *patio* of the museum, stands the Colossal equestrian figure of Charles IV., cast by the celebrated Tolsa, the architect of the Casa de Minería. The statue is a noble work of art, equalled by few of its kind; and it is a thousand pities it has been removed from the Great Plaza which it formerly adorned; and where all its fine proportions and grand outline were seen to the greatest advantage.

In the museum is now also deposited the famous *sacrificial stone*, on which the human victims of the Aztecs were immolated by their priests. I may

here also observe, that the *gladiatorial stone*, used for the sacrifice of warriors taken in battle, still lies buried in the great square, although Mr. Mayer gives a plate of it in his work: and, finally, I have to notice, that the ancient Mexican calendar—also a round carved stone, and which, in the opinion of the best antiquarians, was the *tonalponalli*, or “solar reckoning of the ancient Mexicans”—was found in the year 1790, about six feet below the surface of the Plaza in Mexico, is now walled against the base of one of the towers of the cathedral, and passes by the name of “*el reloj de Montezuma*,” or “Montezuma’s watch.”

The *mint* forms part of the great palace buildings; and it is a large establishment. The machinery is old and rough; and one is surprised to consider, that from it so many millions of well-coined dollars issue yearly. But new machinery from England is about to replace the old and in a year or two the establishment will probably equal any other of the same kind, even in Europe.

But one of the most splendid public establishments which I have ever inspected, is certainly the *Casa del Apartado*, where all silver, holding

gold, is sent for separation by chemical process, the one metal from the other; that is, for the extraction of the gold mixed up with the bars of silver, sent to Mexico for the purpose of being coined. This great and truly national establishment is only now in process of completion; and in no part of the world could it be excelled, either materially, mechanically, or scientifically. I believe the Casa del Apartado, when finished, will cost two or three hundred thousand dollars. Its details are most interesting, and it seems to be worked in a perfectly able, judicious, and scientific manner.

*El Estanco del Tabaco* is another establishment of an extraordinary and highly interesting nature. In Mexico, tobacco is a government monopoly; but so badly did it succeed when in the hands of the government itself, that they wisely farmed out the revenue, and Messrs. Escandon, Mackintosh and Bringas took the contract for a given number of years, on advantageous terms for the government. No longer sinking revenue in the management of the monopoly, the state at once began to receive monthly payments in hard cash.

The whole business underwent a thorough

reform: order, activity and economy, took the place of wasteful expenditure by irresponsible agents, and unscrupulous jobbers. A guard was appointed; undoubtedly the finest body of men in the republic, and the contraband trade, the bane of every fiscal operation of Spain and her descendants, was altogether crushed in the tobacco revenue.

In this new and better state of affairs, we visited the Estanco del Tabaco, accompanied by the *Empresarios* above named; and, under the guidance of the chief administrator, we spent some hours in the great establishment.

The building stands on an open piece of ground, not far from the Paseo Nuevo, and scarcely within the precincts of the city. It is only one story high, but runs round large *patios*, and is of a size commensurate with the great manufactory carried on within the walls. About six or seven hundred people are employed in all, in the various processes of segar and snuff-making. Three-fourths or four-fifths of the operatives are women, married and single, middle-aged and young. The most perfect division of labour exists, and the work ascends from the lowest to the highest points by the nicest gradations. There is the receiving and

opening of the rough tobacco—the preparing it, through different operations, for segars; “*puros*,” or leaf segars, of various qualities—for paper segars—for snuff. Then there is the preparation and cutting of the paper into the tiny pieces destined to form one paper segar: then the making into packets, making boxes, packing, marking, sending away; all is done in parts, like the making of a pin. See one box of the paper segars ready to be sent off, and you see a *fac simile* of every one package of this manufacture which leaves the premises.

The female operatives work in suites of long rooms, ranged from one end to the other, with ample space and air, and a forewoman to look over each. The neatness and celerity with which all work is done, is surprising. There order, decency, and propriety preside over the whole establishment; and when you consider that all the females are from the lowest class of such a population as that of Mexico, you are surprised to see such a clean, neat, well-appointed set of factory girls. But there is a great *esprit de corps* in the operatives of the Fabrica de Tabaco, and they stand quite above the rest of the surrounding population as a class

of themselves. Their general morals are many grades higher; and after they have once joined or been admitted into the Fabrica as operatives, there is nothing that the women so much dread as losing caste, or being dismissed for bad conduct. They have all piece-work set them, and the most industrious and expert make excellent wages. They all assemble from seven to eight o'clock in the morning, take their dinner with them, and retire from work at sunset, six or seven.

One fact connected with the *Estanco* must not be omitted. There is a school attached to it for the younger children of the married workwomen; and *nurses* to take care of the infants of the same class, while the mothers are at work. The director, as may be supposed, from his general kindness—his care of his large flock—the firmness, yet amenity with which he keeps up the moral standing, as well as efficient working of the establishment—is not only respected, but what is better—beloved by all. And he accurately reflects the feelings and wishes of his employers.

The distribution of the tobacco and segars over such a wide surface as that of the Republic of

Mexico, is managed by depôts\* and sub-depôts throughout the country; and a perfect system of accounts is maintained throughout. One of the principal federal states has *pronounced* against the Tobacco monopoly by the Government—that is Puebla; and a more selfish, or anti-national piece of rebellion cannot be imagined. For it is not a question of monopoly or no monopoly throughout the land; it is simply one state exonerating itself from a tax which all the other states pay towards sustaining the central Government.

\* If you could fancy England supplied with malt liquor from one great brewery in London, through the medium of their vintners of the city and country at large, you would have an idea of how the Estanco goes to work. It would be in England, at every public-house, "England's Entire," as it is in Mexico, in every place you visit, "Estanco del Tabaco."

## LETTER XLVI.

## PUBLIC WORKS—COLEGIO DE LAS BISCAYNAS.

AMONG the most striking objects in the environs of Mexico, are the two grand aqueducts which supply the city with water. The greater of these, running from the vicinity of Chapultepec, divides the high road into two (with intermediate passages), and has its handsome terminus near to the extremity of the Paseo Nuevo. It is solidly built, although not in good repair; and consists of nine hundred arches. The other goes by the road of San Cosme; one of the most pleasant *paseos* out of the city. The water is soft, and comes from pure and abundant fountains.

The *Desague* of Huehuetoca, or great sewer, formed to relieve Mexico from an overflow of the surrounding lakes, was one of the greatest works of the old Spaniards. The lakes are Chalco and