

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

Xochimilco on the south, their level being more than three feet above that of the great square of Mexico; north-westwardly the lake of Tezcuco; and more northerly, in a continuous range, are the lakes of San Christoval and Zumpango. This last is eighteen feet higher than the former, which again, is higher by twelve feet than Tezcuco, and this, three feet above the level of the great square. In 1629, the whole city of Mexico, with the exception of the square, was inundated; and up to 1634, some parts of the town were still traversed by canoes. From the inundation Mexico was relieved by an earthquake; and then the *Desague* was commenced, and finished in 1789. The length of the cut from the sluice of Vertideso to the *Salto*, or rapid of the river Tula, was 67,537 feet; made at a cost of eight millions of dollars. What would our Commissioners of Sewers say to a work of this kind?

Since the formation and conclusion of the *Desague*, all fears of inundation have ceased. In some of the still so called lakes, there is no doubt water; but where it exists, it rises little above a mud-puddle, except during the heavy, rainy season, and at all times it is quite superficial.

They are certainly the poorest *lakes*, properly speaking, I ever saw. On the other hand, from the drainage and cutting down of trees in many places, what was once water and verdure, is now an arid and salinitrous surface, as I have mentioned, on our entry into the city of Mexico. Nothing can be more dreary-looking, nothing so unlike a deluge. Even the famous Tezcuco, dried up during the heat of summer, sends forth so far and wide a fetid, sickening smell, that it often of a night reached us in the Capital, although distant many miles from the marsh.

The establishments in Mexico in connexion with public crime, indigence, mental and physical suffering, and general amelioration of the poorer classes are various. I shall first speak of the *Acordada*, or public prison.

The Spanish race has perhaps made less progress in the treatment of public crime, than any other nation. The terrible state of their prisons and dungeons is notorious; no means of moral correction has in them ever been attempted; the person only of the criminal is watched and guarded; and he is too often treated as a mere ferocious animal, rather than as a human being of

stamp Divine. I fear Mexico offers no exception to the general statement.

The *Acordada* is a very large building, situated at the extremity of a square beyond the Alameda, and on the way to the Paseo Nuevo. Here also is the *Morgue*, or dead house, a view of which, and of the bodies taken there day by day, is open to the public, through a low barred window in front of the prison. There are constantly grim instances of violent deaths, and here those who are missed from home or haunt are looked for.

As usual, the building runs round a quadrangular court; and here, well watched and guarded, the great body of the criminals are gathered together during the day*, except when

* "The whole of this area," says Mr. Branz Mayer, "is filled with human beings; the great congress of Mexican crime, mixed and mingling like a hill of busy ants, swarming from their sandy caverns. Some are stripped and bathing (in a fountain of troubled water in the centre)—some are fighting in a corner—some making baskets in another. In one place, a crowd is gathered around a witty story-teller relating the adventures of his rascally life. In another, a group is engaged in weaving with a handloom. Robbers, murderers, thieves, ravishers, felons of every description, and vagabonds of every aspect, are crammed within this court yard; and almost free from discipline or moral restraint, form perhaps the most splendid school of misdemeanour and villany on the American continent."

in gangs, they are driven by pairs chained together, into the streets, there to work as scavengers, and where nothing can be more disgusting than their appearance while, half naked and dirty, they are raking about in the ditches and open sewers of the suburbs of the town.

Apart from these criminals here spoken of, are a somewhat better class of prisoners, kept within the corridor; but on the whole, there is scarcely any distinction between the slightest and the greatest offenders against the laws; and one thing is certain, that *contamination* of the comparatively innocent, by juxta-position and intercourse with the very worst, is *inevitable*. The *Capilla*, in which condemned criminals pass the last three days of their life, is in a corner of the quadrangle, "and at a certain hour, it is usual for all the prisoners to gather together in front of the door, and chant a hymn for the victim of the laws. It is a solemn service of crime for crime."

The female prisoners and evil-doers occupy a separate part of the prison, and they are divided roughly into those who have occupied a comparatively reputable place in society, and those of the lowest grade. Of course the latter form the

great bulk of the prisoners. Both classes are superintended, more or less, by a society of ladies, who endeavour to instruct and do their best to reclaim these wretched criminals and minor offenders against the laws. Those who have been tried and sentenced are principally condemned to labour in the prison (not very hard), and this is carried out in a large vaulted gallery under their prison rooms. A less guilty set are, in a large hall, employed in menial offices; and in an adjoining court, on which the room opened, the still innocent children of some of the prisoners are to be seen disporting in the open air.

Although the prison, I believe, is under the jurisdiction of municipal directors, it is guarded within and without by a military force. The commanding officers and subalterns have a large and lofty apartment, for themselves, in the front or principal part of the prison, and in the guard-room, all the business connected with their charge is carried on—"Amid the hum of the crowd, the clank of chains, the shouts of prisoners, and the eternal din of an ill-regulated establishment."

Mr. Mayer gives the following criminal statistics for the year 1842:—

During the first six months, there

	Males.	Females.	Total.
were imprisoned in the City of Mexico	3197	1427	4624
During the second six months	2858	1379	4237
Total	6055	2806	8861

It was not possible for Mr. Mayer to gather from the returns, the number of finally *convicted* prisoners, but he shews the chief crimes for which the prisoners were incarcerated.

1. For adultery, and prostitution in its worst forms	312	179	491
2. Robbery	1500	470	1970
3. Quarrelling and wounding	2129	1104	3233
4. Quarrelling, bearing arms, etc.	612	444	1056
5. Homicide (murder) attempt at murder, and murder and robbery	70	17	87
6. Other crimes	75	22	97
Total	4698	2236	6934

During the same year 113 dead bodies were found—17 individuals were executed, and 894 sent to the hospital. This was in 1842; and it would

seem to argue a diminution of the higher crimes, that in this year (1849) I cannot call to mind one execution as having taken place; certainly not one of any public importance, as involving a more than ordinary atrocity.

In 1842, the cost of the *Acordada*, was £4121 in salaries of officers, and £30,232 for the support of the prisoners; together, at the rate of about £7000 per annum.

From the *Acordada*, it is pleasant to pass to the *Cuna*, from guilt to innocence, from every thing which most revolts, to all which most interests humanity. The *Cuna*—literally cradle—is the Foundling Hospital. No one who has visited our own in London, and looked carefully over its details, can have left it without profound impressions of the moral good which it accomplishes—of the incipient misery which it cuts short for thousands, substituting in its stead, health, happiness, and contentment, to those who are the objects of so pure and so heart-stirring a bounty.

The *Cuna* of Mexico, differs, in some particulars, from our Foundling Hospital in London. In the former the babes are not only put out to nurse, under the system of the nurse herself giving

security for good behaviour, but many infants are nursed in the establishment itself. They are divided from the children who have been weaned. All is cleanly and comfortable; and a junta of *ladies* of the first families take the utmost pains to see that the children are well cared for. Then the kindly and truly maternal nature of the higher orders of the female sex in Mexico, leads to a very wide system of *adoption*; and in such case the children are brought up as belonging to the family, with invariable care and affection. The acting directresses of the establishment are females of unimpeachable respectability; and thus the whole charity is carried out in an efficient, kindly, and Christian-like spirit. All honour to such an institution! and all praise to the high-minded individuals, male and female, who make the prosperity of this charity their daily care, as I am sure it must be their internal and most justifiable pride!

The great hospital for the insane, is that of San Hipolito—a large airy and most excellently conducted public establishment. The treatment of the patients is excellent, and indeed treads pretty closely on that adopted at the Hanwell

Asylum. It is true they have in San Hipolito dark rooms for the refractory, a *Quarto Negro*, or black hole for the furious, and strait waistcoats; but the general system pursued is that of mild and gentle treatment; and it has its reward. The great majority of the patients are quiet and well conducted—dine together in harmony; enjoy the fine grounds, and have a great respect for the director.

The Hospital *de Jesus de los Naturales*, is a large and handsome building, and is extremely well managed. It is for both sexes. It has every convenience for the patients, including hot and cold baths. Attached to it is a chapel, and on the *azotea* is a dissecting room. In the old church of San Hipolito, was deposited, by his own express desire, the body of Cortez, who founded and endowed the establishment; but his remains were removed during the revolutionary troubles, to avoid worse treatment.

There is also the Hospital *de San Juan de Dios*, and another, originally erected for lepers, called *San Lazaro*: and there may be others which did not come under my notice.

An admirably managed institution in Mexico,

is the *Monte Pio*, the same sort of thing which exists in France, under the name of *Mont de Piété*, a national establishment for advancing money on pledges, at a low rate of interest. The government undertakes to be pawnbroker.

The *Monte Pio* of Mexico is now established in that which was once the palace of Cortez, forming a corner of the great square. The amount of property pledged here by high and low is prodigious, and ranges over every article, from brilliants down to common wearing apparel. The interest charged is very moderate. The pledges, after a given time, if not redeemed, are offered for private sale, at the lowest price acceptable to the pledger: if no sale can thus be effected, then the pledges are, after a time, put up to public sale, sold to the highest bidder, and, after deduction of interest and charge of sale, the surplus is paid to the owner. All this is done with the most scrupulous justice towards the unfortunate pledger; and such a relief is a great boon, as I say, both to high and low.

Very many years ago, there were, in fine weather, to be seen almost daily in Mexico, three old gentlemen taking their evening walk together.