

## LETTER XLVII.

## THE PASEOS AND ENVIRONS OF MEXICO.

I HAVE insensibly gone on occupying so much space with my foregoing letters, that I must greatly curtail what I had yet to say on a variety of topics—omit many altogether—and take you very rapidly indeed through the United States; which I regret.

Leaving the heart of the city, its public buildings and institutions, I shall in this letter take a somewhat wider range.

As stated in our letters, there are three public drives and promenades—*paseos*, as they are shortly and appropriately called in Spanish—the *Viga*, the Paseo Nuevo, and the Alameda.

Las Vigas is the *paseo* of the city of Mexico at large; the Paseo Nuevo is the drive and the ride

of the aristocracy: and the Alameda was once fashionable, but is so no longer.

A peculiarity affecting Las Vigas is, that the promenades only commence with Lent, and continue daily through that season (as it ought to be at least) of religious preparation. From Easter they are held on a few holidays and Sundays: then comes the *combate* or conclusion, and the meetings are forgotten till Lent comes round once more.

The Paseo de la Viga\* is the most completely national gathering I have ever witnessed; and I defy any country to shew a more characteristic or more amusing show of the manners, customs, and æsthetics of its people, than the Viga shews of those of the Mexicans.

The paseo lies on the south-east side of the *plaza* of Mexico, and before getting to it, you pass through large and desolate-looking places, very partially built upon. The ruinous bull-ring lies on one side; and clearing the whole at the boundary line, you enter on the *paseo*. On your left hand is the canal, with double rows of trees on its banks, and

\* *Viga* means the beam of a house, or large log, but why the *paseo* is called "*de la Viga*," I do not know.



plenty of space; in the centre is a wide line of road for carriages and equestrians; and on the right hand are again two rows of trees to form the double avenue.

As you approach, you find yourself in a stream of human beings, all moving to the *paseo*—on foot, on horseback, and in carriages, mixed up in one heterogeneous mass—*leperos*—*Indios*—secondary and inferior classes of Mexican men and women, vendors of fruits, sweetmeats, and other things, are the pedestrians; and as they arrive at the *paseo*, they disperse among the trees, or keep to the foot-way, or loiter on the banks of the canal. Scarcely any respectable-looking or well-dressed person, however, is to be seen in the motley groups. But on horseback, what an extraordinary variety of classes! Mexicans of every grade—from the Europe-travelled scions of the highest houses, and the *cavalleros* proper, boasting of their Spanish lineage and unadulterated native grace and greatness, down to the very lowest who can contrive to sport a nag, however ill-fitted both man and beast may be for such a *concurso*: and the splendid looking-intermediate classes The *rancheros*—the gay citizens—the fancy men of

every kind—many of them mounted on fiery steeds, and decked out in splendid Mexican costume—the horses covered with rich trappings, here in silver, there in fine stamped leather—what a mixture! Then foreigners of every nation—particularly the French, English and German—our own countrymen, generally, keeping to their own equestrian propinities, and, as I believe, superiority. The whole equestrian turn-out forms a rare sight.

But no less heterogeneous is the concourse of carriages and vehicles of every kind. You have them from the value of five or six hundred guineas, down to twenty pounds. The equipages of the first families are really fine, well appointed, and with splendid *frisons*—the large American coach-horses. Some of them cost two thousand dollars (£400) a pair.

Then come others, somewhat less dashing, with fine mules; and from this point down they go by degrees, till you get to such a family carriage as I have described at page 63 of this volume.

The concourse is immense. The carriages go up and down the principal drive, of about a



mile and a quarter in length, forming complete and compact moving lines; and at two or three different points they draw up, in standing lines, to observe, in silence, the passing to and fro of the moving panorama. The horsemen draw up, ever and anon, in the same way; while in the wide and commodious centre, are parties—some moving in slow masses; others trotting along, in familiar chit-chat; and here and there, more lively spirits galloping, three or four abreast, in gallant style. Throughout, order is maintained, when necessary (although that is seldom) by a detachment of cavalry, stationed at different parts of the *paseo*.

While all this is going on by land, the canal running parallel with the *Viga* is nearly covered with canoes, filled with Indians, who ascend and descend, partly on pleasure, partly on business. The canal springs from the lake of Chalco, passing by the *Chinampas*; once floating islands, now low lying garden grounds, separated by deep and wide ditches (little canals, in fact); and then goes on (I speak of the canal) to form a junction with the lake of Tezcucó.

The canoe-passengers enjoy themselves quite as

much as their *Viga* rivals, if not more. The women's heads are profusely adorned with garlands, principally of double red poppies; and both sexes mix in their slow, listless dance, on the ample boards of their flat-bottomed vessels, aided and assisted by the old thrumming guitar. How much this adjunct to the *paseo de las Vigas* tends to add to its picturesque and varied aspect, you may easily imagine: it renders the amusement unique in its kind.

About sunset, when this great medley of human beings is at its height,—equipages, horsemen, and pedestrians begin to bend their various ways towards the city; and the *melée* of the departure is even more truly republican in its character than it is in the gathering of these heterogeneous masses as already described.

I have much less to say of the *Paseo Nuevo* than of the *Viga*. It is the stately promenade of the fashionables of Mexico, and has already been mentioned as the *Paseo de Bucarelli*. As a promenade, its principal if not only attraction is the view from it of the mountains of *Popocatepetl* and *Iztaccihuatl*—otherwise it is a long wide avenue (something more than half a mile)



with trees on either side. It leads out to the terminus of the great aqueduct, and to Chapultepec.

To this Paseo, then, all the fashionables of Mexico resort, in carriages and on horseback, and spend one or two hours in promenading up and down, and in occasionally taking up a stand at a side or opening, there to look at those who continue to move. A few gentlemen pedestrians are to be seen here and there, solitary sort of wanderers; and this, I believe, is all that is to be said of the Paseo Nuevo.

In going to it from the city, the carriages (and generally the gentlemen *à cheval*) pass through the Alameda; and this passage seems now to be the principal purpose for which the old-fashioned place—a mixture of gardens, walks, and drives—is kept up. In “the morning early,” a few, but very few, fashionable people, *walk* in the Alameda, (the only time that such an abomination as walking is permitted to Mexican ladies). Later in the day, seedy-looking citizens, or lazy *leperos*, are to be seen seated under the trees, on the outer part of the gardens—and in the afternoon the place assumes a lively appearance, from the throng of

carriages and horsemen hastening through it to and from the Paseo Nuevo.

As this may seem rather a disparaging account of the once fashionable Alameda of Mexico, I must, in justice to it, quote what an old Irish monk, Thomas Gage by name, who found his way to Mexico, nearly two hundred and fifty years ago, says of the promenade.

“The gallants of this city shew themselves daily; some on horseback, and most in coaches, about four of the clock in the afternoon, in a pleasant shady field called the Alameda, full of trees and walks, somewhat like unto our Moorfields; where do meet, as constantly as the merchants upon our Exchange, about two thousand coaches full of gallants, ladies, and citizens, to see and to be seen—to court and to be courted—the gentlemen having in their train blackamoor slaves, some a dozen, some half a dozen, waiting on them, in brave and gallant liveries, heavy with gold and silver lace, with silk stockings on their black legs, and roses (*roséttés*) on their feet, and swords by their sides. The ladies also carry their train of slaves by their coaches’ side, of such jet-like dame-



sells, as have before been mentioned for their light apparell; who, with their bravery, and white mantell over them, seem to be, as the Spaniard saith, '*Mosca en leche,*' a flie in milk.\* Since these grand old times of trains of slaves, with silk stockings on their black legs, what a falling off to be sure!

\* Gage went from Ireland to Spain, and then entered a convent of Dominican monks. He was sent to the Phillipines in 1625; made money, got back to England, abjured the Catholic faith, and obtained the living of Deal in Kent.

## LETTER XLVIII.

## CHAPULTEPEC—TISAPAN—MAGDALENA.

THE plain of Mexico, as often stated, is, for a great part of the year brown and arid, exposed, uninterruptedly, to the burning rays of a tropical sun. But almost all the rising ground on the opposite side of the city is full of interest and beauty, both from the diversity of fine scenery, its general cultivation, and the good account to which, in many ways and in many places, the natural riches and advantages of the country have been turned.

Several of these places have been particularly mentioned in our preceding pages. Tacubaya, San Augustin de la Cuevas, Guadalupe, the Haciendas de San Mateo and la Lecheria, Cuajamalpa, and the Desert. Some have been touched on incidentally, but one or two which we visited, have scarcely been spoken of at all.