

Near the village, are to be seen the ruins of a noble aqueduct of fifty arches, built by the Spaniards.

Two other shorter excursions than the Remedios are among the pleasant rides from Mexico. One, the *Olivas*, or plantation of Olives, an "hacienda," now deserted, but the grounds of which were beautiful in their day. The other, *Los Morales*, "mulberries," is very prettily situated, and the gardens and grounds are in nice order.

LETTER XLIX.

DE OMNIBUS REBUS.

MEXICO, 30th September, 1849.

THERE is much which is amusing in the streets and out-door population of Mexico. The total absence, however, of well-dressed women, is a great draw-back to the fashionable streets, such as the *Calle de los Plateros* (the Bond Street of Mexico); and while lounging in them, all you are permitted to see of the "*Señoras de tono*," is their shopping. They come in their carriages, stop at the shop doors, proceed from one to another, and in this way carry forward the momentous business of a lady's life. The early morning walk to the *Alameda* is their only indulgence in peripatetics.

The great plaza is the most curious part of the city; the most bustling (except in the vicinity of

the markets); and the most picturesque and various in the shops and in the shoppers. All classes are here mixed up,—minus the “*Señoras de tono*” aforesaid—from the poor Indian upwards. During the day, a constant stream of people move round the plaza, and give great animation to it. The whole side of the square fronting the Palace, and half of the next, forms an arcade, filled with shops and other establishments of the most diversified and heterogeneous kind; toy shops, book stalls, cafés, silversmiths, with curious specimens of Mexican wares, silver-work of every kind, clothes and Mexican costume shops, everything Mexican, and all ostentatiously displayed with great abundance. Then follows, ending at the south-west corner, from which you cross over to the palace, the “*Parian*,” a great bazaar, where the lower and common classes are fitted out with every possible article of dress and ornament, both of foreign and national texture and make; but still, on the whole, presenting a truly Mexican appearance. Near one corner of the plaza, sit the “*Evangelistas*,” letter writers employed by those deficient in calligraphy;—lovers’ letters—business—family—any sort of letter you

like to dictate. In the centre of the square are the municipality, a dirty-looking place, and the “*Lonja*,” the exchange of the city, open to native and foreign subscribers; offering every facility both for business and pleasure. The great salon is a large and handsome one, properly fitted up, and well supplied with foreign and domestic papers and periodicals. Beyond, is an excellent billiard room; and refreshments are always to be had. The *Lonja* is managed by a joint committee; and here, subscription balls and concerts (for the *élite*), are sometimes given. We attended some of both, and found them extremely well conducted. At Herz’s concert, I had the honour of an introduction to general Herrera, and his daughter; and I found him, as I have found almost every man in power I have known in Spanish America, unostentatious, and indulging in that sort of happy familiarity, characteristic of the Spaniard, which never descends below the mark of good breeding.

From a street running parallel with the palace, and into which you turn from the “*Parian*,” you enter on the great market of Mexico; and as far as the fruits and the vegetables go, it is a very

wonderful display. Such an abundance and such a variety of the vegetable productions of nature can nowhere else be seen. The climate of Mexico allows of every production both of tropical and cold climates ; and its very numerous indigenous plants and fruits being added to those of almost all other countries, the result is quite striking. The markets are principally supplied by the Indians, who bring their stuffs by the canal from Chalco. Mr. Bullock was quite in raptures with the market ; and he tells us it was his constant morning's excursion. "I was never tired of examining their fruits and vegetables," he says ; and I say the same myself. I do not think you have any European fruit which you may not find here ; and if you add "various kinds of bananas, plantains, pawpaws, custard-apples, soursop, citrons, shaddock, ackee, sapotes" (three or four quite distinct kinds), "abocatas, tunnals, pitalli, ciayotte, chennini, genianil, pomegranates, dates, annonas, mangoes, star-apples," etc. —not forgetting, as Mr. Bullock does, the finest of all fruits, the chirimoya, the Aguacáté (which is the Peruvian Palta, a delicious fruit), and many others—you may conceive the variety which the market offers to the eye, and ministers to the

taste. With animal food, Mexico is also well supplied ; but they have only one kind of good fish, something like a whiting (not so fine), caught in fresh water. Wild-duck from the lakes is so superabundant, that they are brought down by a cannonade, rather than by shooting. Frogs are eaten, though rarely ; and the most curious of their delicacies are mosquito's eggs, taken in myriads by lines laid across the marshy grounds about the lakes.

The *leperos* have often been incidentally mentioned in these pages, without being exactly defined. Many others *have* defined them ; but none, I confess, to my own satisfaction. They are not professional beggars, although their rags, tattered garments, torn blankets, filth, and apparent poverty would entitle them to rank as such. All *leperos*, they say, are thieves. I will not back this assertion ; but I do think that almost all thieves and pickpockets in Mexico are *leperos*. In picking pockets they are particularly expert. They will work merely to live ; but assuredly they do not live to work. Idleness is their supreme delight. The *pulqueria*, or a sunny corner, is their choice retreat ; yet processions, the churches,

promenades, swarm with *leperos*. They will do all sorts of odd jobs to gain a few *clacos*, or pence. When the streets are flooded and totally impassable during the heavy rains, the *leperos* ply as ferrymen—whip you up in their arms, or take you on their backs, at all the worst crossings. Of course they are fond of gambling; but they are also great politicians, and listen in the “strangers’ gallery,” with serious interest, to the debates in the chambers. Their modes of employment are numerous; for work they must sometimes, although many of them, no doubt, prefer to thieve. Yet among them are some of the most ingenious workmen in wax and other materials. In short, they are ready for anything and everything, to supply their few wants beyond *pulque*. To a foreigner they are a riddle, to the city of Mexico they are undeniably a disgrace.

The beggars of Mexico are very numerous, and many are very disgusting; while no sort of police whatever seems to be exercised over them.

From *leperos* and beggars, one naturally goes to *pulque*, the nectar of such classes. It is obtained from the aloe, or *Agave Americanus*, called in Mexico the *maguey*. When it attains its height,

the great stalk and flower are cut down, and the trunk is so scooped out as to leave a hollow recess, whence the fluid, which is rapidly and abundantly distilled by the plant, is sucked off through a tube, and conveyed to a leather bag, or *bota*, by the Indian labourer who has charge of the plant. Then the juice is left to ferment, and is of a considerably intoxicating nature. I only tasted it once, and never had the slightest desire to repeat the trial. Each full-grown plant is estimated at eight dollars; so that, as it comes to maturity in eight years, it increases in value one dollar per annum. It is cultivated in fields with as much care as we cultivate wheat, giving profitable returns to the *hacendado*. The *maguey* is chiefly, if not only, grown as a farming product in the state of Mexico Proper; and the extent and importance of the trade may be inferred from the fact, that the carriage alone of the article to the city, the centre of consumption, costs three hundred thousand dollars annually.

Throughout Mexico, according to its varied latitudes, you have in active cultivation almost every production of nature—wheat, barley, oats—all our own cereal and green crops—the sugar-cane,

coffee, tobacco, cotton, rice, and minor products of warm climates. For cochineal the country is celebrated; and of timber and wood of every kind they have inexhaustible stores. Silver and gold I have only to mention, to make their importance understood by all. Quicksilver they also have; and iron-mines are in operation. In short, a country more abundant in every species of mineral and other riches than Mexico (even after her loss of New-Mexico and California, having still Sonóra and other parts), I do believe exists not on the face of the earth—excepting, perhaps, the United States, since their people have possessed themselves (after their own fashion) of such splendid territorial enlargements to their democratic empire as Texas, California, and New-Mexico.

The climate of Mexico, like its productions, is various; but throughout, I should say, salubrious. On some of its coasts, and particularly in the Gulf, it is held to be quite otherwise; but on this point, as I think I have shown in the earlier of these letters, there is much misapprehension. With proper care and precaution (which means, by omitting, and not committing, excesses), the climate, generally speaking, on the coast, I believe to be innocuous.

In the interior the climate, so far as I experienced it, is beautiful—here warm, there cold; but always healthy. But even in the city of Mexico you will do well to study the climate: you must not forget that you are near to the line, and you must live accordingly.

The rainy season, in the city of Mexico, is not unhealthy; but the rains themselves deserve some special notice. During the four months which, more or less, they last, they are marked by an almost methodical regularity—a fine morning and forenoon; torrents of rain from three P.M. till late in the night. The streets are so inundated on some occasions, that they are not only impassable, but appear exactly like canals. I have looked out on the Calle de Capuchinas, when in this state, after the lamps were lit (particularly during a crescent moon), with interest and pleasure. The light played and sparkled on the accumulated waters, and gave a truly picturesque effect to the canal-street, with its palaces on either side.

We have earthquakes in Mexico; and during our stay we experienced three or four smart shocks. The houses are admirably adapted to resist their effect. Notwithstanding, an earthquake is always

an awkward thing; and to find your chair moving, and all the crystal drops of the chandelier jingling, and to listen to a low, hollow, murmuring noise, with an odd coolness in the air, and to hear the people hastening into the street—all this is not pleasant, although it was the utmost extent to which our alarms were allowed to proceed. Of the great volcanic mountain, Popocatepetl, so close, comparatively, to Mexico, I have already spoken; and you must use your own discretion in estimating how far its fiery eruptions have connection with the labourings of mother earth under the capital.

Of the foreign commerce, internal trade, imports and exports of Mexico, I do not, in this slight work, pretend to treat. On these points I must refer to others, particularly to Mr. Ward and Mr. Brantz Mayer, who have elaborated these important features of the republic. I will only give one statistical fact, of a suggestive kind, which may not be inopportune.

The great export of Mexico is silver. Last year it is understood that twenty millions of dollars were coined; and assuming the amount of silver produced, but not sent to the mint, as 20 per

cent. of the coinage, we should have four millions of dollars more. Let us add, hypothetically, for gold, cochineal, vanilla, and minor articles of export, one million of dollars more—in all, twenty-five millions. We have here twenty-five millions of dollars, or five millions sterling, of exportable produce from Mexico per annum.

Supposing, therefore, the imports and exports to be balanced, Mexico now consumes, in one shape or other, five millions, *nett value in the republic*, of foreign produce and manufactures. The Custom-House revenue is levied on gross value of imports; and taking that at thirty-five millions of dollars, and the average duties on imports at 30 per cent., we should have an income from the Customs on imports of . . . \$10,500,000

And take the Custom-House duties
on exports at only 1,500,000

We should have a total Customs in-
come of \$12,000,000

Properly recovered, perhaps three millions of dollars from internal resources of revenue might be calculated upon—giving ways and means per annum of \$15,000,000.

This would be a very flourishing, although a very natural, state of affairs; but, unfortunately, it is one which we know does *not* exist. What the Government actually receives, I believe, *nobody* knows. That a large proportion of what ought to be public revenue, is turned into the current of *contraband*, I believe *every one* knows; but how much goes to the Government, and how much to the *contrabandista*, is a problem which I cannot pretend to solve. One thing, however, will be clear to every reasoning and reasonable man—that if Mexico would adopt a more liberal commercial policy than that which now cripples her revenue, and encourages the baneful system of smuggling, the country would reap an enormous harvest by the change, and lay the foundation of a prosperity which, as yet, the country has never enjoyed.

A remarkable feature in Mexican history now, is the utter discredit into which the military profession has fallen. There is no regular *army* worth mentioning—the National Guard supplies its place. I much applaud the change. There are still many generals, colonels, and officers of lower grade; but by one and all the uniform in public is eschewed. You never see

one in good society, or at the theatre, or other places of amusement. The uniform only appears on those public occasions or processions on which duty requires its use. The occasion over, the uniform is doffed. In former years, the *fiestas de San Agustin* were crowded with the most brilliant military dresses; this year, not one.

In speaking, by the bye, of religious processions, I have omitted to mention the grandest of all in Mexico, as in other places—that of *Corpus Christi*, which we saw to great advantage. On this solemn occasion the Host is carried through the city to the cathedral; and the whole of the public functionaries, including the president and his ministers and staff, the archbishop and all the dignitaries of the Church, the judges, etc., attend. This was the greatest display, in a *military* point of view, which we saw. The whole length of procession was lined by National Guards; and several regiments of these, with one or two regiments of the line (all that could be called into requisition), some squadrons of cavalry, and a good train of artillery, brought up the rear of the grand display. On *this* occasion the uniforms and dresses of the old generals and other field officers were quite