

When they go abroad the reboso is generally worn either over the head, concealing the greater portion of the face, or over the shoulders, like a shawl. It is worn by all Mexican women; its quality depending on the condition of the wearer. To their ordinary domestic duties they add the weaving of rebosos and blankets; the latter are worn by the men as an outer covering, and is literally "a bed by night, a garment all the day." Many of them are of fine texture, and of great beauty of figure and color. Their prices vary from \$3 to \$75, and even to \$100. Many of the better class of females are well-educated and accomplished ladies, who would grace the saloons of the most polished capitals. The town of Mier is celebrated all over the republic for the beauty of its blankets.

Mexican cookery is, to my taste, *detestable*; but many Americans, less fastidious perhaps, affect to like it. Everything is rendered as hot as fire by *red pepper*, which enters in enormous quantities into each dish as an essential ingredient. The favorite dish in Mexico is the frijoles (friholes,) which is universally brought on the table as a *bonne bouche*. It consists of small, brown, black-eyed beans, boiled for six or eight hours in soft water, and then mixed with melted lard and salt. It is, when thus cooked, a very agreeable vegetable. Another article of food, and almost as great a favorite, is the tortilla. It is prepared by boiling maize in a pretty strong ley (of ashes,) which separates the husk. It is afterwards washed in clean cold water till all the impurities are removed, and it is then mashed (for I know not how better to express it) on a short stone table, placed in an inclined position, with a stone *rolling-pin*, till it is ground into a soft, plastic paste. A woman then, wetting her hands, (it is to be hoped that they have been previously well washed,) takes up a small portion of the dough, and by dexterously shifting it from one hand to the other, patting it at the same time, (and producing a loud noise,) soon brings it to the required consistency, shape, and size. It is then baked on a griddle, and taken hot to the table, where it serves the triple purposes of bread, forks, and spoons. With butter, it would no doubt make a palatable bread; but in Mexico no butter can be found, except in the houses of foreigners. It is even extremely difficult to procure *cow's* milk, notwithstanding their numerous herds, and goat's milk is generally used; but that cannot be always obtained, and is not fit for use till it has been boiled. We succeeded occasionally in obtaining *curds* at some of the haciendas. In no portion of the world have I seen better wheat bread, cakes, or confectionary. The Mexicans are peculiarly skilful in the preparation of fruits and confectionary.

The wealthier classes live in a style of great luxury, and I have seldom partaken of more elegant and sumptuous entertainments than at their hospitable boards. The services of china and silver are beautiful and rich, while the courses follow each other in rapid succession; and the tables groan with a profusion of meats, fruits, confectionary, and wines, piled upon them. A gentleman, whose curiosity once induced him to count the courses at a dinner, assured me that they exceeded twenty in number.

During my short stay at Saltillo, I had an opportunity of witnessing their burial rites. A young lady of great beauty, whose loss was deeply deplored, had recently died, and an immense concourse of people attended the funeral solemnities. The deceased was dressed in white, with white satin slippers on her feet, her head decked with garlands, her raven locks gracefully disposed over her shoulders, her hands crossed in front, and

holding a large bouquet of flowers: thus adorned, "like a bride awaiting her bridegroom," she was placed on a white couch, also trimmed with flowers, and surmounted with a canopy of satin, roses, and feathers. On this bier the mortal remains of the poor young girl, beautiful even in death, were paraded, feet foremost, through the principal streets of the city, and around the main plaza, exposed to the wandering stare of curious strangers. The procession was headed by three priests, dressed in the rich vestments of their order, chanting prayers for the deceased, the chanting being accompanied by three violins; others carried banners and crosses; incense was burnt; four men in clerical costume bore the bier on their shoulders, and then followed the mourners, friends, and relations of the deceased; the whole being preceded by a band of music, while the bells of the Cathedral tolled mournfully. The ceremonies within the church were not different from those of the Roman Catholic religion in other countries.

The Mexicans have been often represented as a subtle, treacherous, and cruel race, in whom no reliance can be placed with safety. This may be so; but if I should speak of them from personal observation alone, I should say that they are naturally hospitable, kind-hearted, and amiable. In their manners they are extremely courteous, and the most civil people I have ever known. My duties generally carried me in advance of the army—sometimes several days ahead, and often to considerable distances with small escorts. On one occasion, being unwell, I remained over night in a town of 1,400 inhabitants, without a soldier within eight miles of me; and another time, I was fifty miles distant from the camp, with only three dragoons as a guard; and yet at no time did I feel the slightest apprehension for my safety, nor have I any reason to suspect that my confidence was misplaced. Wherever I went, whether to the princely hacienda or the humble rancho, I was treated with kindness and hospitality; and I must confess that the impression made upon me was greatly in their favor. With a better and wiser form of government—one able and willing to destroy their miserable system of *peonage*, to insure the liberty of the press, educate and liberalize the people, and develop the resources of the country—I cannot doubt that they would rise high in the scale of civilization. It is true, that while they possess many of the virtues, they exhibit also many of the vices of an ignorant and half-barbarous people. We have recently often heard of deeds of extreme cruelty perpetrated by them on the Rio Grande; but it remains to be seen how far they were acts of retaliation, provoked (but not justified) by the outrages they have endured. From Saltillo to Mier, with the exception of the large towns, all is a desert, and there is scarcely a solitary house (if there be one) inhabited. The smiling villages which welcomed our troops on their upward march are now black and smouldering ruins, the gardens and orange groves destroyed, and the inhabitants, who administered to their necessities, have sought refuge in the mountains. The march of Attila was not more withering and destructive. It is but an act of justice to General Taylor to say that he did everything in his power to prevent these excesses, and that they were principally committed by some of the quartermaster's men, who, until they were taught to the contrary by the strong arm of power, did not consider themselves as being amenable to martial or any other law; and by desperate adventurers, called by the army "outsiders," who followed the army for plunder, and frequently

organized themselves into bands to carry on their depredations, not being very particular as to whether they robbed Mexicans or their own countrymen. They emphatically "made war on their own hook." Many of these miscreants were sent home by General Taylor, and every possible precaution was taken to prevent their entrance into Mexico. Many of their misdeeds came under my personal observation, but the difficulty was to identify the individual. In general, the troops behaved with great forbearance and humanity.

In the northern provinces of Mexico there is a strong feeling in favor of a federal, and in decided opposition to a central form of government. This is the instinctive result of a sense of self-preservation, for these people are not prone to indulge in abstract speculations. As there may be said to be no government many miles beyond the city of Mexico, they feel that, while they bear more than a just proportion of the burdens of the state, they receive none of its fostering care or paternal protection. The Federalists are called the American, and the Centralists the Mexican party. The former have been in favor either of becoming an integral portion of our Union, or an independent republic, under our protection and guarantee. How far this would *now* be practicable or desirable, is a question for the politician to settle: the trade of which the joint right of navigating the Rio Grande would give us almost the exclusive advantage, and the introduction of American machinery, to be paid for in the precious metals, might be a matter of some consequence. With the slightest encouragement during the last summer, the whole State of Coahuila would have pronounced against the existing government of Mexico.

Very truly, your obedient servant,

GEO. W. HUGHES.

To Colonel J. J. ABERT,
Chief Topographical Engineers.

CAMP NEAR MONCLOVA,
Mexico, November 14, 1846.

SIR: Having completed the reconnaissance of the country from Monclova to Quatro Cienegas, (and its vicinity,) on the route to Chihuahua, I have now the honor to submit to the commanding general, in addition to my short communication of the 12th instant, the following descriptive memoir, and accompanying topographical map, of the country embraced in the general's instructions of the 6th instant.

Owing to circumstances not necessary to mention, our first day's march (the 7th of November) terminated at the hacienda of Pozuelos. We left the plaza of Monclova by the main road to Monterey and Saltillo, but soon after quitting the city turned suddenly to the right, skirting the base of a high mountain range to our south, and leaving a series of hills of variable heights to the north. Our course was nearly due west, over a wild and barren region, for several miles, when we entered upon a wide and pretty valley, which, at a distance of nine miles from the city, brought us to the hacienda de Pozuelos, or the *hot well*, an artificial excavation some forty feet deep, which discharges a large volume of hot water, very palatable when it has been allowed to cool. This well irrigates two large

plantations, which nearly exhaust the supply—the surplus being lost in the swamps near Nadadores.

A mule track to Saltillo diverges from this well, as is shown on the map. Our first encampment was at the base of a high chain of mountains, which apparently blocked our further progress in that direction; but by pursuing a circuitous course bearing from NW. to SW. through the highlands, we reached, at a distance of eleven miles by a good road, the San Pedro spring, the source of a large creek flowing in a northwesterly direction down the valley of the Sacramento, which we followed for about three miles to La Villa Nueva, a small and modern town of four hundred and fifty inhabitants. In this quiet and secluded valley we saw the first appearance of improvement since our entrance upon Mexican soil. Within a few miles of each other, two new and respectable looking towns have recently sprung into existence, and many acres of rich but waste lands have been brought into successful cultivation. Here there are no wealthy proprietors nor lordly haciendas to please the eye with their immense proportions, but, what was more gratifying to an American, small, neat tenements, occupied by the owners and tillers of the soil. This valley was covered for miles with fields of maize and cotton, but it is so difficult to obtain authentic statistical information, that I am unable to state the amount of their production.

From Villa Nueva, a course of N. 85 W. brought us, over a distance of eight miles across the valley, to a remarkable mountain pass called el Puerto del Sacramento. It is about three hundred yards wide, the mountain rising almost vertically to an altitude of nearly 2,000 feet, and a huge rock directly in the pass gives it the appearance of a gigantic propylon of some vast temple. The road follows up this gorge, (through which flows a large and rapid stream, called the San Juan, that rises west of Cienegas,) for about six miles, where the mountains widen out, leaving between them a broad and most lovely valley, at the lower end of which is built the hacienda of San Juan. There is not a mile of this pass that does not offer a strong position for defence; but the most formidable is at the upper outlet of the gorge, where it is scarcely two hundred and fifty yards wide, with huge and inaccessible mountains rising almost perpendicularly from its two extremities, while the ground slopes down the pass as evenly as a glacis. As far as I could ascertain, it would be difficult to turn this position if occupied by an enemy.

To the south of the hacienda there are extensive salt ponds, which render the running water rather brackish, and probably impregnate them with sulphate of magnesia.

From the hacienda, a ride along the mountain on the north of the valley for twelve miles in a direction a little south of west brought us to the town of Quatro Cienegas, situated in the midst of this upland valley. For about eight miles the land, though rich and easily irrigated, is left uncultivated, and produces only a luxuriant growth of tall, wild grass.

The town of Cienegas contains, according to the last census, 1,428 inhabitants, or, including its dependencies (of St. Catarina, Rosarios, and Villa del Sacramento) subject to the jurisdiction of the alcalde, 2,682. The people of this district are distinguished for their industry, sobriety, and attachment to their religion. In politics, unlike the citizens of Monclova, they are mostly federalists, and unfriendly to the ruling powers of Mexico. We found them, as they had been represented, favorably inclined