XII.

LAST WALK IN MEXICO.

The Market-place.—The Murder-place.—Mexic Art and Music.—Aquarius.—Ruins, and how they were made.—A Funeral.—San Fernando Cemetery.—The English and American also.—Vaminos.

THE time draws near to leave this pleasant seat. The object of coming is so nearly completed that it can be safely intrusted to other hands. The beautiful cloisters of San Francisco, for which negotiations have been going forward for two months, are so nearly ours that the risks of losing them are reduced to a minimum. The four parties holding claims upon them are all disposed of but one, the lessee, and the church has to take the risk of him, and for two months holds the titles of a theatre. But the wet season exhausts his vitality, and he follows his fellows, and leaves the property for its proper occupants. Dr. Butler, the superintendent, arrives, and the route homeward begins to open.

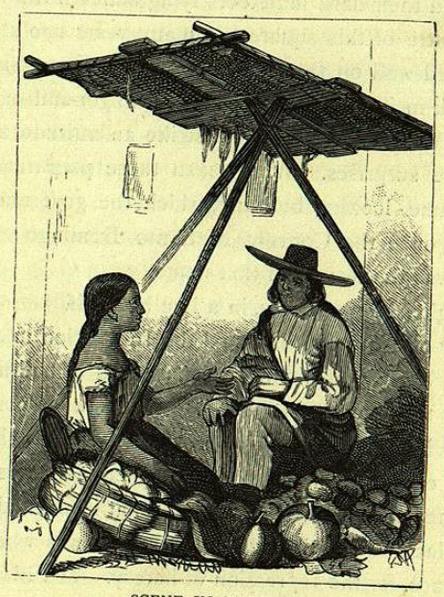
Walks must be frequent now, if we would see all the town, and even then, as in all towns, much will be left unseen.

Let us go to the market-place.* This is usually the heart of the town. Here it is no exception. It comes close up to the palace and the plaza, being at the south-west end of the latter. It is made by the ending of the canal system in the very heart of the city. The canal makes the vegetable market, and *that* makes all the rest. It is the busiest hive of a market-place I ever saw. No European plaza, except on fair-days, no Baltimore street centre of a morning, or Cincinnati of a night, equals the crowd and chatter and push of this lively spot at almost every hour of the day. The boats' prows stuck in among the shops and stalls add to the excitement. Sunday morning is their fair, and such a crush and hubbub

* See illustration, p. 112.

are then encountered here as would forever cure the most radical anti-Sabbatarian of his desire to show his independence of the Scriptures by a desecration of the sacred day.

As one has to go through it on his way to one of our churches, he gets a glimpse of its desecration in spite of himself. Each vocation has its allotted place. One narrow avenue is filled with coffin-makers, driving a brisk trade with their black boards, for black is the color of your "wooden jacket" in Mexico. A dozen shops and several dozen workmen make this dismal trade hilarious.



SCENE IN MARKET.

Another long alley is appropriated to the eating business, and great stew-pans over handfuls of coals keep hot the flesh-soups and bones; while on the ground around sit groups of eaters, dipping their bread in the sop or sipping chocolate or coffee, each of which beverages they know how to compound excellently well.

Across the town we find another plaza, less noisy daily, but which has seen greater crowds and heard greater noises than even

this noisiest and densest of markets. Pass down the Street of the Silversmiths to the Church of the Profesa, from whose top and whose street-corner we first contemplated the city. It is a majestic, cooling edifice. Its high roof and darkened light makes it one of the pleasantest of temples. Leave that and go straight across to the eastern side of the town. Behind the cathedral, half a mile away, you will see a long narrow square. On one side now is the custom-house; at its lower end is a church, with its high fence. Before it are big wagons, with their triple set of mules resting by their side, and their dark muleteers lying beneath the wagons.

In the centre of this square not many years ago stood an iron post. A dead wall on the side opposite the custom-house shows many a break in its surface, the size of a finger-end or larger. If, now, I were Victor Hugo, I should strike an attitude, and begin to make up the surprises. What mean these preparatory strokes? That now tame-looking building, which the government officials occupy, was once the Convent of Santo Domingo: that church fronting us was the temple of that name.

Still no light? he would say, in a line by itself.

The order of Saint Dominic had the Inquisition in charge. Ah yes! now it begins to glimmer. That mass of buildings was the dungeon of the church. There its victims were confined, tried, racked, and killed, save such as were reserved for the extremest punishment of fire. That church was where its priests and prelates performed their stately services. That iron pillar in the centre of the place, where the mule-wagons are, was where the burnings took place, for the repression of heresy. Mr. Black, long consul-general, a venerable gentleman of seventy, told me he saw the pillar when he first came here some fifty years ago, and its use for such purpose was never then denied. The Inquisition was then in full power, and had its authority been questioned, or that of the Church, its fires would have been relighted in this place.

A few years since, in digging away some of these buildings to open and widen the streets, a prison was discovered in which four skeletons were found as they had been left to starve by their sacred superiors of the convent and the true faith. Before they fell into dust their photograph was taken. It is a dreadful grave-stone of a dead system—dead, not because of its own desire to die, not because its managers had outgrown it, and voluntarily abandoned it, but because a power had grown up around and above it that compelled its abolition. It would break forth to-day had its Church her former power. It only awaits growth and opportunity to reproduce the starved inmates of an inwalled cell and the stake of fire. Such opportunity only Christianity can prevent.*

The fagot and the dungeon are gone, but the purpose remains. The power alone is wanting. No one would sooner light these fires over all the earth than the Infallible God now mumbling in the Vatican, or his chief-priests in Mexico. The murder of Stevens, the name and fate of the protomartyr, was caused and is approved by the Church. A priest demanded it. No bishop or archbishop has disapproved it. No government, city, state, or national, dares punish the murderers. They are as safe as were those of the first Stephen from the Caiaphas and Herod of that day. Truly can we say of Christianity what Madame Roland said of liberty, "Oh, Christianity! what crimes are committed in thy name!"

But what are those spots on the wall?

They are where the balls, fired at criminals and revolutionists who were done to the death on this square, missed the victims and struck the wall behind them. It is the government place of execution to this day. The shrive is short between conviction and death. A few hours and the criminal or innocent one, if condemned, is marched hither, set up against the wall, and shot out of the body. All crimes have one punishment. Murder, robbery, kidnaping, horse-stealing, treason, revolution, almost petty larceny, receives swift verdict and execution. The place is ghostly in the bustle of midday. Let us away to more cheerful sights.

One thing surprised me above all others in Mexico: its attainment and progress in art.

Come down below the plaza, by the eastern side of the palace

* See illustrations, pages 186, 188.

and the post-office, and you see a large building devoted to art. The galleries are longer and fuller than any others on this continent. New York, Philadelphia, and Boston are far below Mexico in these treasures. They occupy some eight or ten long rooms, and are of every age from the time of the conquest until now. Not a few of them are of much merit. They even claim Murillos among the spoils of the convents that have been transferred hither.

Modern art is not wanting, nor inferior. Seldom can you see on European walls more vigorous paintings than those of Noah and his family receiving the dove. It is a remarkable set of figures, every one a study, every one a life. Columbus contemplating the sea is a superb piece of work. Dante and Virgil looking into hell is awfully vivid. Mr. Seward expressed a desire for a copy of this masterly work. Several Ishmaels and Hagars are on the walls. It seems a favorite theme. Best of all, for drawing and effective handling of colors, is the Dead Monk. Rembrandt rarely exceeded it. A group of monks hang over a dead brother. Their gray cowls and robes, their scared and skeleton faces, their lights dimly glowing from the tapers in their hands, which are the only illumination of the room, and the dead prone in the midst the only calm one; these make a ghastly picture of great power and tenderness.

The galleries of sculpture are less advanced. Most of the groups are in plaster, money being wanted to put them into stone.

What is better than the galleries is the school of art. You see in several rooms, as you pass through and along the corridors, quite a string of youths, bending over their drawing-books and canvas. They are fine-looking lads of all shades and blood: Spanish, Aztec, and all between. They have as instructors the best artists of the city, and they are worthy of the time and cost lavished upon them. When shall our America give her lads equal opportunity? The best artists of our chief cities would be glad to render such service, and many a noble youth would be glad to have it rendered. What school board will be the first to open a real school of art? When that is done, we shall find our starveling galleries

growing to fair and full proportions, and our larger and smaller cities alike enjoying real genius, expressed in real forms of art.

That there is a desire for this, the feeble attempts of girls' boarding-schools and the sometimes successful struggles of young men, bear abundant evidence. Could these girls have competent teachers, and these boys fair educational opportunities, there would be as grand an accession to our artistic force, as our musical conservatories, under the best professors of that art, have added to our musical culture. By as much as a permanent picture surpasses a burst of song, by so much will the school of painting excel that of music. Who will start a conservatory of art?

The Aztec does not neglect music. If you will come to the plaza on one of these superb moonlight nights, when it seems as if the purity of the atmosphere brought you nigh the silver orb (perhaps it is the silvery soil that does it), and the air is full of tremulous lustre. The brown Indian band take their stand on the raised round centre of the square. There is not a white, hardly a mixed blood among them. Pure Aztecs these. They begin. Did you ever hear more delicate notes, more softly rendered? The combinations are equally rich. They are not mere melody, but masterly intervolutions of harmony. Their touch is soft, and swift, and strong. They catch the soul of the music, and bring it palpitating before you. The moon seems to shed a directer ray. No Venetian night on the Plaza of San Marco ever excels these torrid-temperate perfections of moonlight and melody. The pieces are not familiar, and, I reckon, are original. If they are, then the two-fold gift of utterance and composition is theirs. The band would have won loudest applause if it had appeared at the Jubilee. Let Gilmore remember them in his Centennial Reunion, when all the world shall gather in Philadelphia, and he shall bring forth his bands and choruses for their delight. The Aztec band of Mexico will make French and German, English and Yankee, look to their laurels.

The schools of the city are in some respects superior to those of America. A large number of these are kept up by the Free-

masons. One of these I visited, in an old convent, which was granted it by the State. The scholars were taught French from cards hung round the room, and primers, and *petite* story-books. Our schools could and should make the youngest children conversant with this and the German language. It is far better to learn a language, which a child can easily learn to speak and read, than to study grammar, which an adult rarely knows, and which it is impossible for a child to understand.

Here, too, all the girls study book-keeping. Their penmanship is exquisite, and they will thus get openings to fields of labor hitherto denied them. They also are taught needle-work, and so made useful for the old as well as the new. Over three thousand pupils are studying English in the public and private schools. That is a sign of the influence of our language. The French has fallen out of favor since their invasion of the country. Our invasion seems to have made our tongue the more popular. It is probably because of the diffusion of this language, and the consciousness of its growing superiority as a world-tongue, and especially because of its utility as a neighbor-tongue, that it has such pre-eminence in these public schools.

The city has a school of mines, with abundant specimens of the wonderful treasures of the country. It has also marble works, where you see the rare marbles of the land, translucent, transparent almost, full of as rich variations as a polished mahogany knot; a future article of great commercial value.

As we are walking, you notice that man with a double burden, a strap going over his head in such a way that he carries a big jar before him and a bigger vase behind. He is the water-carrier—the institution of the city next to the lottery-ticket vender. The aqueducts flow into cisterns, like that of Vera Cruz, situated in the courts of houses; not every house, but as frequently as hydrants in our cities. These aquarii take the water from these reservoirs and carry it from door to door. A cuartillia a day, or a few tlaquas, will supply a family its daily need. His business is steady. Desierto comes thus to town, and its purveyors carry it to every door.

A WATER-CARRIER.

One thing strikes us in all this walk over the city—the multiplicity of ruins. It is as full of ruins as Rome or Jerusalem. Great dust-heaps of vanished populations are on the northern borders. Cleft walls high and thick are all through the main thoroughfares. This is a feature of Mexico which did not exist twenty years ago. Then there were no ruins, except those of liberty and religion. The fall of the Church as a political governing power cut open the streets and laid low the convents. Comonfort initiated this work. The American war had left the Bible and the light of Protestant Christianity to leaven the hard lump of antique superstition. It showed its leavening influence first in the opening of streets. At that time a large number of monasteries existed in the city. They covered from five to twenty acres. Of course they crossed the main thoroughfares everywhere, and interfered badly with the city's progress. They possessed gardens, parks, deep arcades around marble-pillared patios, dormitories, libraries, chapels, and magnificent churches. Their very halls of flagellation were richly bedight.

The convents St. Augustine, St. Dominic, and many others, were first emptied of their occupants. Friars and nuns were objects of ridicule. And then, if new streets were needed, the buildings were cut in twain. The chief of these was the Convent of San Francisco. It was the oldest and richest. None covered so large a space, or was so variedly and richly endowed. It was founded by a natural

son of Charles V., and held for centuries the chief place in the regards of the citizens. It crossed the street parallel with the main thoroughfare. Comonfort desired to cut his way through it. The archbishop refused. It was sacred soil. We all know how tenacious some in our own land have been of sacred soil. That was sacredly sacred. The State demanded passage. The Church refused. The State prepared to force it. The Church prepared to poison or stiletto the State. Each chief chose his appropriate weapons. But one day, before the Church had arranged to stop the State by stopping the breath of its chief, Comonfort cut his way through, and called the street "Calle de Independenzia" (the Street of Independence).

The convent was cut in twain, like the vail of the Temple, from the top to the bottom. The old dispensation closed, the new began. Ten years passed, and all convents, and even churches, passed into the power of the State, and the city was full of ruins of a system and of its dwelling-places.

Part of this convent is occupied by the Church of Jesus, the first Protestant chapel in Mexico. The church is to be occupied by the same society. The cloisters have come into possession of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and have been fitted up for a chapel. The deep arcades are shut out by hangings, and the area alone is appropriated to church uses. The exquisite pillars of polished stone are more beautiful than the spiral columns of the cloisters of San Juan de Lateran at Rome. It is said to be a remnant of Montezuma's palace. Its delicacy and richness seem more European than Aztec. It is a worthy temple for the better faith.

Our long and varied walk must come to an end. Where can it end more appropriately than where all walks end—at the grave? Do you see that procession? Strangely enough, the hearse follows the coffin. The body is borne on the shoulders of men. Why is this? It is a "*custom de la pais*," as they say here, a custom of the country. To show their regard for the departed, they take the body on their own shoulders forth to burial. It is a very plaintive and pretty custom.

One death I witnessed. Mr. Heaven, an Englishman long in the country, with a native wife, was gasping his last as I called with Dr. Cooper to see him. He remembered then his home faith. Asking him if his feet were on the Rock of Ages, he replied, "Yes! Not on the rock of Peter."

The next day we took him to the English cemetery. The sun shone bright and warm; the fields looked green and glad; geraniums in abundance reddened the parks with their blossoms. The trees were leafy as in June; every thing was alive but this man, who is of the head of every thing.

No female member of the family appeared at the house or the grave. Four servants of the undertaker carried out his body, followed by three ministers and one Methodist layman. Carriages took the gentlemen friends to the cemetery, and there a large crowd listened to the impressive service, most of whom probably had never before heard Scriptures read or prayers offered in their own language. May the seed sown at that grave's mouth bring forth abundantly for the regeneration of this land!

Among those present was the first man who ever read the Protestant burial-service over a dead body in this land: Mr. Black, the venerable ex-consul. He said that in 1824 an American, a shoemaker, was sitting in his shop-door on the plaza before the Cathedral. The procession of the Host passed by: the carrying of the altar, crucifix, and holy water to a dying man. He arose and knelt in his chair. A Mexican, passing by, knelt in his door-way, and ordered the American to get down on the floor on his knees. This was curtly refused. The Mexican instantly drew his sword and thrust it through the heart of the American.

There was intense excitement. Mr. Black, then a young traveler visiting the land, determined he should have a Christian burial. He got a Prayer-book, and accompanied the body to the grave, which was allowed to be dug in the gardens of Chapultepec. Stones were hurled at the procession, and one grazed across his chest as he was reading the service. They dug up his body and rifled it, and left it stripped on the ground. It was reburied, and

remained so, perhaps because the ritual was not read over it a second time. That was the first time the Protestant service was ever employed in this city at a burial; this morning was the latest.

Great have been the changes in this country since that hour. The uplifted hats of all that stood in the street or passed by when the body was being brought out, and of many whom the procession passed, showed how great the change of feeling toward their brethren of other communions. May each land and all churches of Jesus Christ more and more fulfill the Divine pleasure, so that of all people it may be truly said, "Whether living or dying, we are the Lord's!"

The chief national grave-yard is in the grounds of the San Fernando Church. This church is on the Street of San Cosme, not far from the Alameda. The tombs of dead presidents, many, are here. Quite stately affairs some of them, standing in the open space, while the walls about the inclosure are filled with cells that are occupied only five short years by the dead inhabitant. Unless "*Propriedad*" is written over it, the slumberer is disturbed, if not awakened, at the end of that little time, taken out, turned to dustier dust by the sexton in a neighboring court, or patio, and either thrust (what is left of him) into a grave at last, or laid up on a shelf. Sometimes his skull and other bones are set off with flowers and other ghastly adornings.

It is money that makes this dire necessity. The Church gets fifty dollars for a five years' lease, and several hundreds for a permanent location. Next to the utter absence of all Christian faith on these square slabs, is this horrid unchristian unburial. In a country where acres unbounded are fit only for the sexton's spade, and where churches and ceremonies abound, such parsimony and infidelity are inexcusable. Among the permanently buried of the patio are some half-dozen presidents, and generals, and cabinet officers, and grandees many.

Guerrero — Guerro is here, the first revolutionist, who, failing to get votes enough, took to arms, and was shot, as he deserved. A brave, liberal, progressive man, who failed to see that submitting to a wrong ruler was the best way to get a right one.

Miramon is here, who was shot with Maximilian, and whom the emperor compelled to take the post of honor, the centre of the group, on that sad day. Juarez, who shot him, lies not far away, each as quiet now, as fierce and hostile then. Saragossa, the popular general who drove the French from Puebla, is here, only a year elapsing after that victory before death conquered him. Comonfort, who began the revolution against the Church, is in the centre, one of the ablest presidents the country has ever had. The brother of the present President, a powerful leader himself of the State, is here. My Old Mortality guide through this realm was the American minister, who had known many of them, as almost all had been placed here in the last few years. Most of these leaders died in their boots, died with their feet warm, as the witty Isaac O. Barnes said John Rogers did. It matters not how. Enough that they died. Finis is finis.

How mocking is life in such a place! How easy, it would seem, it must be to have all ambition and life-greed of every sort

"Cooled, like lust, in the chill of the grave."

Yet we walk out from this dusty assemblage of the leaders of this nation, and in an instant are among the hot and hasting crowds of the public thoroughfare; horse rail-cars are flying by; they fly, and do not creep here, as in all the United States; the only thing that does creep there, except snakes and babies. Coaches and horsemen, and water-carriers and other carters, whose shoulders and foreheads are loaded with huge weights, every body and thing, seems as if it would never die. Both are right. Live while you live, and yet live so as to be ready for this sure summons.

If we still walk on up the San Cosme road, we shall come, after a mile or more, to where the aqueduct suddenly wheels westward, and turns its face toward Chapultepec. Opposite this turn you see the shaded gate-way of the English cemetery. The American adjoins. Each is neatly kept; but the English had a prettier ar-