

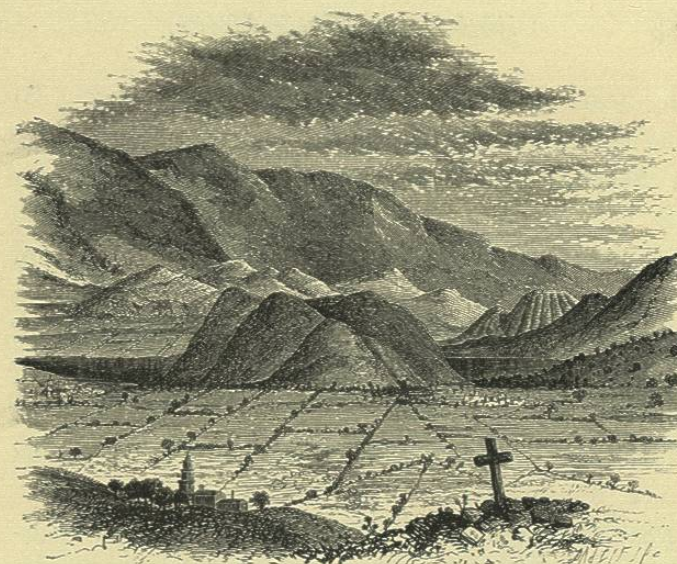
army governing the Valley of the Lakes. I fancy not.

27 de
abril
de 1866.
From Rio Frio we descended into the Valley of Mexico, and the third day, the 27th of April, following the road between the two great lakes of Chalco and Tezcoco, we arrived at the Garita of the capital.



AUSTRIAN HULAN.

MEXICAN LEVY.



VALLEY OF MEXICO: DESCENT FROM RIO FRIO.

CHAPTER III.

MEXICO.

THE Calzada is the name of the long straight road passing between Chalco and Tezcoco; it is constructed upon a large embankment, in existence as far back as the days of the Spanish invasion, and although the face of the scene has been vastly changed by the receding of the waters, nevertheless when you first discover Mexico, stretching, one might almost fancy, far along the surface of the lakes, possibly you may be on the very spot from which Ferdinand Cortés gazed with an exult-

ing heart on the wonders of the ancient city. To the right, a curiously-shaped rock, surmounted by a church, attracts your attention immediately, from its very prominent position. This is the famous shrine of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe—the patron of the country,—and the little scattered town lying at its foot is the Villa de Guadalupe, the resort of the thousands of pilgrims who, from all parts of the empire, arrive annually to pay their devotions to the miraculous picture of the Virgin, suspended over the principal altar, and the object of the greatest veneration to all Mexicans. In the background, behind the lofty public buildings and cathedral of Mexico, rise a fine chain of mountains, the Sierra de Tacubaya, and on the left, numerous clumps of trees only half conceal the pretty neighbouring towns and villages that lie thickly scattered all around the suburbs,—the hill and palace of Chapultepec, towering over the scene, alone interrupting the level and fertile plains that gradually rise and form the slopes of the far-off blue hills bordering the valley.

Arriving, as we did, by the Peñon Viejo, the many towers and domes of the innumerable religious edifices, the large extent of the city, the wide-spreading waters of the lakes, the pure clear air and delightful temperature of the climate, above all, perhaps, the association of ideas,—produce a series of impressions decidedly in favour of Mexico.

“ We think how great had been our bliss
If Heaven had but assigned us
To live and die in scenes like this
With friends we’ve left behind us !”

Nor are you deceived, when, having passed the Garita and riding down the long avenue of trees approaching the suburbs, you find yourself—after traversing a few streets—fairly landed on the grand plaza and under the shadow of the imposing cathedral, occupying the ancient site of the great Aztec Teocalli.

The scene is busy and gay: men, women, and children of all shades, from the pure-blooded Indian to the pale-faced Mexican beauty, hurry and throng under the arcades selling and buying fruit, vegetables, trinkets, and “Palais-Royal” jewellery, keeping up the whole time a most incessant clatter of tongues. The colour is very effective; the Indian women in bright dresses and still more dazzling zarapes* contrast strikingly with the sombre attire of the Mexican ladies, who with black mantillas gracefully thrown over their masses of dark hair, and cunningly closed over the lower part of the face, disclose just enough beauty to make one wish that a passing gust of wind might disarrange those careless and enticing folds, and reveal a little

* A ‘zarape’ is a finely-woven blanket of variegated colours, worn by the Mexicans somewhat after the fashion of a Scotch plaid.

more of their pretty faces and neat figures to the passers-by.

Without an exception the fair sex walk magnificently, and have that thorough-bred air which so generally characterizes women of Spanish race; they dress, besides, with exquisite taste, and their black eyes and long eyelashes go far to compensate for the slovenliness and dirt of the Indian maidens, who appear to be born with a natural antipathy to water and cleanliness.

I must confess that I differ very materially with Cortés on the question of Aztec beauty; either the race has wonderfully degenerated since the days of the conquest, or he possibly may have been influenced by the charms of Malinche, when he praised the good looks of the Indian women. At the present time there is little in their favour; they have coarse hair, large, heavy features, and short, clumsy figures,—in fact, none of the refined traits you naturally look for in the fair sex. Their dress, certainly, is not wanting in originality, and they evince considerable taste in the bright combinations of colour they appear to delight in, and the long plaits of black hair they invariably wear; but still they are far from prepossessing in general appearance.

There is one feature of dress purely Mexican, and worn by all classes—the *rebozo*. There is no portion of ladies' apparel in Europe, as far as I

know, answering to this. It is neither a shawl nor a cache-nez, but perhaps something between the two; a long piece of heavily-woven silk or cotton, generally of a dark colour, and about a yard wide and from four to five in length, worn thrown over the head and shoulders, with the ends hanging down the back,—it produces rather a novel and original effect. Mexicans consider it extremely becoming, but I cannot say that I agree with them on this particular point, although their taste upon such matters is generally unimpeachable.

Let me, though, do justice to the national costume of the sterner sex. Fortunately, that abomination of the old world, the inevitable chimney-pot hat, does not threaten to supersede the broad-brimmed sombrero with its heavy "torsada"* of gold or silver lace, neither do mathematically-cut frock-coats interfere with the short jackets and loose flowing trousers, covered with silver coins or studs, the Mexican exquisite delights to wear. Decidedly it is refreshing to find originality even in dress; and the cavalier "got up" for his ride in the "paseo," mounted on an active, well-bred little horse of about fourteen hands, his saddle massively mounted in silver, with leopard-skin "chivaras"† attached to

* The 'torsada' is simply a cord covered with gold or silver lace, and worn round the sombrero, after the fashion of a hatband.

† The 'chivaras' are spatterdashes, worn over the trousers when

the cantle, and a zarape of brilliant colours hanging in long folds over the pommel, riding with the greatest ease and perfection, would, I am certain, meet with approbation were he suddenly dropped in Rotten Row.

The Indian wears the same costume as the Mexican, the only difference being that his sombrero is made of straw, very battered and rather dirty, and his jacket, when he has one, is generally of leather, as are his overalls, left unbuttoned at the side, in order to show the white cotton trouser invariably worn beneath them.

But I linger too long under these arcades forming the two sides of the plaza. Thanks to the Imperial *régime*, the centre of this great square is now charmingly laid out with broad, well-kept paths, a profusion of flowers, and several fountains, in good taste and keeping, although not pretentious, and here hundreds of people stroll every evening to listen to the Austrian band. The palace forms the third side, and the cathedral the fourth.

The former building has nothing to recommend it beyond its size, and bears the most commonplace whitewashed appearance possible. Not so the cathedral, which is sufficiently imposing to attract one's attention, although it is neither so well-built

riding in dirty weather, made of deer-skins, goat-skins, etc., with the hair turned on the outside.

nor so well-situated as that of Puebla. On one of the terraces, and resting against the wall, is the famous "Aztec Calendar-stone," one of the few relics of the ancient country that has escaped the fanaticism of the Spanish priests, who appear to have considered themselves engaged upon a holy work whenever they could destroy any object, however precious, connected with the former religion of the great city.

Leaving the Plaza by the Calle de Plateros, and following the Calle San Francisco—the continuation of the Plateros—you find yourself in the Old Bond Street of the city, and I can assure you the shops would pass a very good muster against many in the Old World. In the Calle San Francisco is the principal hotel—the Hotel Iturbide,—formerly the residence of the unlucky emperor of that name, who was shot by his countrymen at Victoria, in the State of Tamaulipas; for the Mexicans have an expeditious and time-honoured habit of cutting short the career of any obnoxious public character, either by the bullet or the rope, that has not at all lost favour in their eyes of late years; neither does any abatement of the custom appear probable at the present time.

As far as accommodation goes, this hotel is tolerably comfortable, but the noise is insupportable, and continues night and day, for it is the headquarters of the diligences which rattle in and out of the patio incessantly. There is another and less

pretentious hotel, the Bazar, quieter and far better kept; but as you value your constitution, let me counsel you that there is only one restaurant in Mexico where you can be sure of a good dinner; that kept by Fulcheri, in the Calle de Refugio. All the others are a snare and delusion, and to be studiously avoided. However, if behindhand in their *cuisine*, the Mexicans are in advance of many European cities with regard to their baths, for in every small town you will find at least one Casa de Baños, and in Puebla and Mexico their number is legion, all of them being clean and neatly kept, and the tariff exceedingly low.

Decidedly you can amuse yourself in this capital, and although the resources are not so numerous as in the cities of the Old World, nevertheless there are several boasting at least of the charm of novelty. The Alameda, a beautifully laid-out public garden, shaded by magnificent trees, is crowded with the *beau monde* in the morning from eight to nine; and two or three times a week the Austrian bands play round the large fountain in the centre of the enclosure. The Paseo de Bucarelli, extending from the Plaza de Toros for at least three miles, to the church of the Piedad, is a famous carriage-drive. On either side of this road is a ride for equestrians, and you may canter till your horse has had enough, shadowed from the sun by the fine trees which line

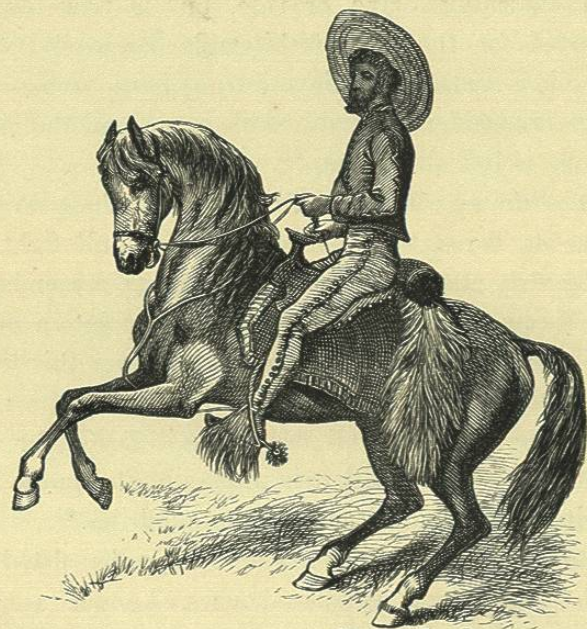
the avenue. Every evening this is crowded with rich equipages, and the horsemen are so numerous that you frequently find it a difficulty to get along; but Sunday is *par excellence* the day; then everybody in Mexico consider themselves bound to appear, and the crush is positively alarming. Again, there is the Paseo Viejo, on the opposite side of the city, following the banks of the canal leading into the Lake of Chalco, by which the Indians bring fruit and vegetables from the direction of Cuernavaca, for the consumption of the capital. This is a charming drive or ride, but is now almost deserted for the more fashionable Bucarelli; still there is a season—I believe during Lent—when the Viejo is considered a fashionable paseo, and the rival avenue is left almost empty and deserted.

On Sunday afternoon all the world flock to the Plaza de Toros, the Spanish taste for bull fighting being very strongly developed in their descendants the Mexicans, who work themselves up into a curious state of excitement once a week over this their national amusement. I confess my sympathies go with the bull, and all my commiseration for the wretched horses; still it is impossible to ignore the merits and the adroitness of the *quadrilla*.*

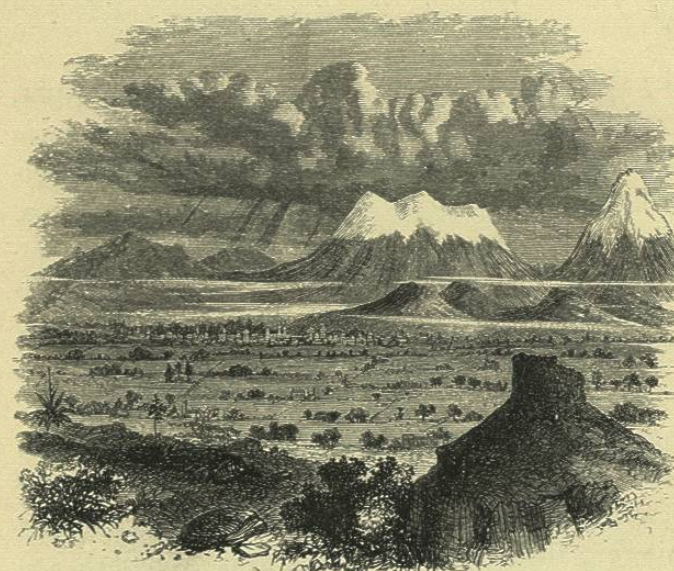
Beyond the bull-ring lies a large garden fitted up with kiosks and summer-houses, known as the

* *Quadrilla*.—This term comprises all the men who assist at a bull-fight, *matadores*, *chulos*, *picadores*, *lazos*, etc. etc.

Tivoli del Eliseo, and here it is the delight of the sterner sex to breakfast or dine, away from the heat and dust of the city. This and another establishment of the same kind, the Tivoli de San Cosmé, are in fact the Richmond and Greenwich of Mexico. You can get a capital dinner, and the wines are excellent, but the prices are fabulous; from £3 to £4 a head, without any wine, is by no means their highest charge; and a good deal of money can be consumed at either of these two resorts in an incredibly short space of time.



EL CABALLERO.



VALLEY OF MEXICO, FROM ABOVE CHAPULTEPEC.

CHAPTER IV.

"LES ENVIRONS."

THERE is one great advantage with regard to Mexico—all the places of interest around it lie within the distance of an easy ride; and provided you "turn out" early enough in the morning, you can "do"—I believe that is the orthodox expression—the environs and be back in time for a late breakfast, before there is too much sun or dust to make it unpleasant. Suppose we try the experiment!

Following the Calle San Francisco, and leaving

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