IX.

A DAY AND NIGHT AT EL DESIERTO.

A Point of View.—The Woods: their Peril and Preservation.—How we got here.—Chapultepec.—Tacubaya.—Santa Fé.—Contadera.—Guajimalpa.—The Forest.—The Shot.—Solitude.—The Ruin.—Its Inquisition.—A Bowl of Song.—Moonlight Pleasure and all-night Horror.—Morning Glories.—Its History.—A more excellent Way.—Home again.

LET me have Turner's pencil for a moment. How your black and white would burn! On this rock, high and lifted up, come and sit. You are panting from the long pull and the steep pull up the gorge; but you forget it all in the landscape, near and remote, that lies under your eye. It is torrid and temperate at a glance. Could we see round that lofty point, we could add and frigid also; for there sit the snow peaks that bring the north pole to the equator. But these apart, the scene is one of exquisite beauty and grandeur. The gorge beneath us is lined on both sides with munificent pines, firs, and hemlocks; not stinted and spindled, as they are on our northern hills, nor clipped and shaven, but in all their original, untrimmed, uncut magnificence. In the midst of them sits a castle-like ruin, such as the Rhine seldom affords, England seldomer, and other lands never. Its gray walls, thick and high, its several domes and turrets, its archways and entrances are of the best Rhine quality. It is on a cleared point that is well above the bottom of the valley and yet well below our towering observatory. It is a reminiscence of feudal times in looks and situation, and one could easily transfer himself almost three hundred years backward, when its foundations were laid.

It is not a castle, though very like a castle; but a convent, built in 1606, the year before the first permanent English colony was planted on this continent, and quite a while before *the* English colony was planted on a rock—the colony that has colonized the whole continent down to Mexico, and will yet colonize that and all south of it.

This elaborate building was then erected in a country that for eighty-five years, nearly a century, had been under European sway, culture, and religion. So the Pilgrim Rock must abase its head before the rock-built walls of El Desierto. I would like to see it lowering its crest before any thing.

Beyond this grand forest and its romantic ruin lie the plains of Mexico. The sun blazes over them, making it all a lake of golden mist, out of which rises many a bold and brown sierra, that at our height and in this radiance looks neither bold nor brown. For forty or sixty miles this open landscape stretches. A matter of twenty miles is of no consequence in this country, so clear is the atmosphere. Emerson's "Brahma" is here fulfilled in one of its lines,

> "Far and remote to me are near."

The basin is of treeless land, salt-marsh, irrigated meadow, and shallow lake, with knobs of hills embossed upon it. Just round the corner of that neighboring point of pines, to our right, lies the central spot of the park—not a rude upheaval of mountains, but a fair city, with its towers and domes and roofs flashing in the setting sun. We saw it often in our ascent hither. It is a city that perhaps best of all on earth fulfills Tennyson's description,

> "Sown in the centre of a monstrous plain,
> The city glitters like a grain of salt."

The monstrous plain and the dazzling sunshine envelop this town, and make it blaze like a diamond amidst diamonds.

This writing, begun at sunset on the mountain-top, is being continued before the convent walls, not long after sunrise. The rest of the party, gentlemen and gentlewomen, are practicing their pistols on the walls. Small success have most; but one, the guide and guardian of the band, puts his bullet through the mark every time. I content myself with telling Lessing's fable of the Jupiter

and Apollo who went out on a shooting-match. Apollo put his arrow through the centre of the bull's-eye. "I could beat that if I had a mind to try," says Jupiter, and stalks haughtily home. Many a critic of shooting guns and ideas is equally contemptuous, critical, and careful, and so maintains a reputation that one shot or one book of his own would utterly destroy. "Critics are men that have failed," says the sarcastic Disraeli, in "Lothair." They would fail if they tried. This Jupiter critic of sharp shots did try, foolishly, and landed his ball way up the side of the wall. Content, he retreats to his mossy seat by the side of the fountain, and resumes his pen and his true vocation.

How would I love to sit for hours and days on the stone fountain where this is being written, and under the grand cypresses that tower above me with less spreading branches than their twin hemlock of New England, or on the broad parapet that makes a low wall for the front of the cloister. "The sound of the going in the tops" of the pines and hemlocks, which David heard in the tops of the mulberry-trees, comes solemnly on the ear, the same sad wail that they have given forth to the like mortal ear since first these forests were pierced and these walls arose.

How sad are the voices of Nature. The moan of the forest and of the ocean have often been noticed. Was that part of the note of lamentation sent forth from Nature when man fell—that groaning after restoration which she and all that her inhabits still unutterably utter? Why should they not be pleasant sounds, full of music and mirth too? Why should they not laugh for joy? The hills skipped for gladness when their Lord came. So may the whispering of forests be yet full of joyousness. When the earth is redeemed, and man is all holy and all happy within and without, the trees shall clap their hands, and every flower smile audibly its fragrant bliss. Could you mix senses better than in that sentence, Mr. Critic? Mrs. Browning is an authority for part of it; for does not she say of the angels,

"I ween their blessed smile is heard?"

These woods, I fear, will never see the leaf-clapping day; for the Yankee is around, and a forest of primeval grandeur affects him precisely as a company of first-class negroes used to affect "a good old Southern gentleman, all of the olden time." Mr. John M. Mason, Buchanan's minister to France, met the Haytien minister at an imperial levee. As he carelessly contemplated his ebon equal, in all the pomp and circumstance of ambassadorial dignity, he was asked what he thought of his sable associate. "I think he would be worth eighteen hundred dollars in Richmond," was his prompt reply. So the American of to-day says, when he sees these magnificent trees, "I think they would cut into so many thousand feet, and be worth so many petty dollars." Let us enjoy them while we may, for they are soon to vanish.

Has not General Palmer and his troupe of engineers been up this very pass exploring for a route from Mexico to Toluca, and so to the Pacific? The railroad is coming, and these trees must prepare to go. Only one thing can save them — a camp-meeting. Maximilian tried to buy them, and could not, though he offered eighty thousand dollars for the place. The Methodists may get a few hundred of the acres by the grace of General Rosecrans, including, I trust, the old convent, and so preserve a bit of this grand picture for future generations. They are about the only conservators of our forests. Their presence is timely here. With the railroad that comes to level these original woods let the Church come to save a portion thereof from devastation.

It is well located, too, for such a service. Less than twenty miles from the capital, easily accessible by the multitudes, we may yet hear the voice of prayer and praise ascending in its newer and better forms from these most venerable cloisters and forests.

Let me tell you a little more fully our visit to each of these choicenesses. Taking to horse, we cantered merrily through the silent streets of the city at six o'clock of the morning of Tuesday, the 11th of February. No shawl or overcoat burdened our shoulders or stifled the breathing. A summer morning, soft as July, it was. Just as we were pacing through the Alameda, and had en-

tered the paseo, or fashionable drive, the sun met us, and smiled responsive to our smile. The road ran along the arches of the aqueduct, looking very Roman, and hiding under them robbers, who not unfrequently here waylay coach and horseman, which is very Roman also.

A half-hour, and we pace along the base of Chapultepec, standing high above the aboriginal pines and cypresses that skirt its base and climb its steep sides. Tacubaya is next passed, a pretty suburb, with superb parks and grounds of Mexican millionaires. Here, a few Saturday nights ago, one of these chiefs, Señor Escandron, gave a *fête champetre* to nine hundred persons, at an expense, it was said, of forty thousand dollars. Dancing and drinking were the chief amusements of the Sabbath-breaking hour and its preliminary preparation; gambling and gorging were the interludes. These grand pavilions and gardens are so infested with robbers that none of these gentry dare spend a night here except they are strongly guarded. So safe is this country in a large village not four miles from the palace of the President!

Now comes a long pull of a dozen miles up a broad and dusty road, amidst mules and men equally heavy-laden and equally sad-faced—mules often diminishing into donkeys, and men into boys. The human beasts of burden carry on their backs huge crates filled with earthenware and other commodities, weighing, one would guess, several hundred pounds. These are held to their backs by a broad strap going over the forehead, and the hair is left thick, and made to grow thicker over the eyes, in order to make a matting for this strap. I have seen stones and bricks so carried that weighed, I was told, four hundred pounds. Their heads bow to the burden, and they trot along under their huge loads as fast as a horse can walk.

The road ascends the spurs of the Toluca range; through Santa Fé, a string of adobe huts; through Contadera, where a body of troops are stationed that eye us soldierly, that is, quietly and searchingly; and at last leaves us at the venta of Guajimalpa, a wayside station for changing mules on the stage to Toluca.

Here we turn off the dusty highway and climb a smooth, open, steep hill. The water rattles gayly down a brisk stream, which a mile or two back we had turned aside into a pasture path to enjoy. The smooth upland soon becomes rougher and more wooded, and after a mile or more we enter a cleft in a smooth-faced wall of a venerable look, and are in the grounds of the Convent of El Desierto.

The woods grow thicker in numbers and in size. No needy knife-cutter has been allowed to ply his trade in this sacred inclosure. For two hundred and sixty-nine years they have been let alone. Only the path, of a single horseback width, has been cut through them. This path winds along the sides of lofty hills and deep ravines, densely shaded, now climbing, now declining, for a mile and a half; then, winding up a steep acclivity, it emerges upon the open space on which the convent stands.

One notices in this location the same taste that governed the abbots of England and Europe. They always chose the most beautiful spots for their retreats. They had an eye to the beauty of nature, all the keener, perhaps, because they were forbidden to look upon all other beauty. They knew how to make a wilderness blossom like the rose, but they selected the wilderness most susceptible of such blossoming. This rare combination is one of the best. Few ever equaled; none, we believe, surpassed it. Their whole area was nine leagues square—three miles in each direction; and all encompassed with a choice brick wall, that still survives in large part and perfect form.

The clearing is narrow, woods hugging the buildings closely on either side, removed not a hundred feet in the rear, but opening on the front to the breadth of a single pasture lot, a slope of five or ten acres.

Was ever solitude more solitary? In this bright, warm morning not a creature is stirring except the visitors and visited. Not a bird or insect, or man or beast. In fact, I only saw one insect in all the woods and walks, and that was a wasp, that had fallen on the ground, and fluttered and fainted from sheer loneliness. The

birds were alike absent. A black hawk sailing over the black wasp was the only representative of that tribe, except the cock and hens of the court-yard.

How near akin seem our very dogs and horses in the dense loneliness. One easily detects in these favorites of man a yet closer affinity, and wonders why, when horses are admitted to the revelator's heaven, dogs are excluded. They must be the ugly dogs of Eastern countries, and not their developed associates of Christian men. No animal seems to have acquired so much from the Gospel as the dog. Every other creature seems unchanged in nature in every estate of man. The ancient horse was as proud and petted a beast as the modern. The cat, as my Spanish phrase-book teaches, is false to-day, and has never improved in heart or head; but this companion of man in his degradation, which always clings to him how low soever he plunges, seems also to arise with him, and in its sagacity, fidelity, and courage almost gives warrant of its possible immortality. Since Mr. Emerson allows that only about one man is born in five hundred years who is worthy of immortality, perhaps that rare example of the possibilities of our race may find as his chosen companion the alike fortunate representative of the canine race, and of that dog and that man the distich may prove true:

> "Admitted to that equal sky,
> His faithful dog will bear him company."

The convent gate stands open, and we gladly enter the deserted Desierto. A stream of coldest water leaps out of the face of the high terrace before the entrance, and gives us that best of drinks, which man's perverted appetite is so constantly rejecting for muddy and heavy beers and ales, and sour, sharp wines, and hot brandies and whiskies. It is one of the greatest proofs of his depravity, this plunging into false and fatal beverages. How great the work to be done in this country in rescuing poor and rich from these drunken abominations! And not this country only.

The buildings covered not less than ten acres. There were three large open courts, or cloisters, surrounded with arcades, a

half-dozen long aisles, narrow and low-arched, out of which the cells of the monks open, and other apartments. Each cell had a private court of its own, open to the sky, but closed by high walls from all outward observation.

There were a multitude of smaller courts, three or four chapels or oratories, besides the church, and two large inclosures of several acres, which were possibly its gardens and possibly a portion of its approaches. The chief church was used for several years as a glass factory, and a huge furnace built under the dome and blackened walls still attest its change of use. It reminded one of the hero of "Put Yourself in his Place," who used an abandoned church as his furnace for the making of his tools, and thus made the ghosts useful in protecting his rights against opposing trades-unions and his high Tory uncle. So even the fertile genius of Charles Reade finds his fiction lagging behind this fact; and thus there is nothing new, not only under the sun, but even in the realm of the imagination. It did seem a little out of place, this glass-furnace where the altar stood; but the idolatry of the mass deserved perhaps this desecration, as Palestine had to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles because its chosen people had themselves trodden under foot the Son of God, an identity of words which the Holy Spirit expressly uses, with that verbal exactness which He always employs, in order to set forth the righteousness of that banishment and punishment which has continued now over eighteen centuries.

The mass is still an idolatry, worse than any the Jews fell into; and this desecration is but a type of many that have preceded it, and more that shall follow, until the true worship shall not be a repetition of an accomplished and, therefore, now idolatrous sacrifice, but a setting home of this sacrifice divine, with faith and prayer and earnest exhortation and conclusive reasoning, to the hearts and lives of the hearer and believer.

Outside this church is a spacious *patio*, or court, once surrounded by broad arches and shaded walks, only an arch or two of which remain. Go to the outer edge of it and wind down a narrow stairway, and you enter an under-ground series of cloisters, the size

of the arched wall above—a dark, low, fearful range of dungeons, which not a ray could penetrate. Out of it opens at one corner a chapel of flagellation, perhaps of inquisitorial judgment, for tradition hath it that this convent was for many years the seat of the Inquisition, and that it was removed hence to the Dominican convent in the city. But this is denied by others, who declare that the Carmelites, by whom it was built, never had charge of the Inquisition; and that this, therefore, could not have had any thing to do with those persecutions. It is replied, on the other hand, that when the Carmelites abandoned this spot for one more retired, at a greater distance from the city, the Dominicans occupied it, and perverted it to their cruel purpose. I hope not, for I should hate to think so fair and so secluded a retreat could have been made hideous with that horror. Yet these doleful arches look as if made for such purposes, and one shudders as he creeps through them, and fancies he sees his Christian brethren, two hundred years ago, chained to these walls and sitting in thick darkness, on their way to the rack and the fagot and glory.

We emerge gladly, and take to the outer garden, where an oratory, inclosed on three sides and open to the western sun, gives a charming view of the grand mountains and grander forests. It has such echoing qualities that one whispering in a corner, with his face close to the wall, is distinctly and loudly heard by one in the diagonal corner, though no others in the room can hear even the sound of the whisper. Thus two gentlemen at opposite corners and two ladies talked each to each, and no one heard a sound except that whispered by their own opposite. It has singing qualities as well, and as the quartette of voices joined in national and religious melodies, one could but exclaim, with a slight variation,

"O listen! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound!"

It seemed as if this bowl of stone bowled out the melody (do not read that bawled), and echoed in every rocky fibre to the exultant harmony. With what gusto did it sing the John Brown song (it

seemed as though that had never been sung before), and "The Star-spangled Banner," and "Blow ye the Trumpet, blow!" and tenderer airs, such as "Tenting on the Old Camp-ground," and "A Charge to keep I have." They all melted together, and we agreed that when the coming camp-meeting is held in these old woods, this chapel in the garden will be a choice resort for the happy minstrels of those happy convocations.

The choicest walk, after all, is by moonlight. It is familiar to say,

"If you would see Melrose aright,
Go visit it by pale moonlight."

This far larger and costlier abbey, and situated more romantically, deserves like visitation. The flood of silver raining from that mine in the sky—an appropriate figure for this silver country—poured over all the *patios* and *azateas*, or flat roofs, on the porcelain-tiled domes, into the gardens, everywhere but into the still roofed corridors and shut cells. They looked all the blacker and more fearful for the contrast. We climb to the belfry, and let the sound of our own music creep into our ears, while we also send out over the valleys and woodlands a cheerful summons to the robber serenaders, that may make us sing another song before morning. We sit on the flat roofs, with their slightly raised battlements, and continue our talk and song till the hour grows late, and the air slightly chill, for this is nine thousand feet above New York, and the midnight February air is not quite as warm as her midnight air of August.

All this vivacity was assumed. We may as well own it: we were really scared. The gentleman who conducted us, of undoubted personal courage, felt some fears for the ladies in his care. Of the two men with him, one made no pretense as a marksman, and had not even put a revolver in his belt. We prepare for the night by barring heavily the outer door of the ruin and inner doors of our apartments, as well as the shutters to their glassless windows. A fire is burning on the unused hearth, whose light is companionable and comforting. The ladies lie undressed on a couch before

the fire, and the gentlemen occasionally on mattresses; for the chieftain is out most of the night patroling the walks, and his associates frequently creep around behind him. Every sound is caught by exceedingly erect ears, and many never made are distinctly heard, the spirit within hearing in the outward ear:

"The airy tongues that syllable men's names,
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses."

This desert wilderness is profuse in such vocalizations. A couple of charcoal-burners, perhaps from the mountains, grazed our gate, and came near being grazed by our balls. A whispering breeze in the tree-tops seemed to be the low orders of the assailing forces. A horse, if such there be, wandering loose on these hillsides, if not a ghostly horse, sounded like the tramp of steeds rushing down upon us. The very breathing of the dog, who murmured in his sleep, was taken as an omen of alarm. So, with fits of feeble slumber and interludes of long waking, with wanderings about the ruins by moonlight, stealthily seeking a stealthy foe, we managed to get through the night; and the morning finds us, oh, so courageous! Who's afraid? Who cares for the beggars of Santa Rosa, or Guajimalpa, and other unpronounceable towns about us? Let them come by the legion. Our four revolvers and one carbine are equal to them all.

Yet we had reason to fear, for the master of the first village below had warned us of the danger, and the *administrador* of the place declared it not improbable that we should be visited. These villages harbor hordes of robbers, and we were well studied by their sidewalk committees as we passed through them. The two men who passed our gate at ten of the night, and even tried it, were perhaps a part of a gang, rather than charcoal-burners, who, seeing through two eyelet-holes one of the party with his carbine, gave such a report as dissuaded others from returning with them to receive our hospitality. Others reported, after we got back, that the country round considered the deed most perilous, and wondered at our escape. Perhaps our audacity or indifference was,

after all, our safety. Undoubtedly, we did risk something in coming hither, and once and again half regretted our temerity. But it paid.

We take another climb in the morning to another summit—a two-hours-and-thirty-minutes' tramp, very different from the two-thirty of the racer. But the result was different; for we gained health and appetite, and a glorious prospect in our two-thirty toil up the face of the mountain. Before us and far beneath lay the high, uplifted plains of Anahuac, with the city on its breast, a dazzling diamond. The two snow-peaks blazed more brightly than the city they inclose; and all the valley, its lakes, meadows, and mountains, cities and hamlets, burned in the torrid flame. A slight smoke, the first I have seen, left some of the remoter ranges less distinct. Yet the Sierra of Real del Monte, eighty miles away, was not afar off, and more distant ranges girt the horizon. Below us the cleared knolls were patched off into pastures by hedges of maguey, whose dark, broad leaves, even at this height, were visibly glossy and green.

It was less *recherche* than the one the night previous. The convent was not the centre of the scene, nor the woods the circumference. They were put one side, as the city had been in that picture. I prefer the seclusiveness of the first; and, if I were rich, would give an order quickly to some of these deft artists, of whom Mexico has many, to put that beauty on the canvas. The Falls of Atoyac, on the mountain rim of the Sierra Caliente, and the Convent of El Desierto are the true perfections of loveliness so far beheld in this country; and it is hard to say which of the two is chief. This has the superiority in the mingling with its woods and ravines, man and history and the Mexic plain; that, in its dancing water-fall, plunging into a green basin, whose walls of tropical luxuriance rise two thousand feet above the white-sprayed bottom. Who will give me both? The greedy spirit cries, who? And echo

"The green silence doth displace"

with a mocking "who?"

Desierto has never had its desert in fame, though not without it.

It was a great resort in the middle of the seventeenth century, within fifty years after the first stone was laid. One Thomas Page, an English ecclesiastic, visiting it then, says: "The orchards and gardens were full of fruits and flowers, which may take two miles to compass; and here among the rocks are many springs of water which, with the shade of the plantain (or banana) and other trees, are most cool and pleasant to the hermits. They have also the sweet smell of the rose and the jasmine, which is a little flower, but the sweetest of all others; and there is not any flower to be found that is rare and exquisite in that country which is not in that wilderness, to delight the senses of those mortified hermits."

The rose-bush and the jasmine remain yet, the path through the garden being lined with the former, growing as tall as your head, and the latter clinging to the crevices of the walls and along the ruined battlements, as fragrant and as pretty in its pink and checkered blossoms as it was more than two hundred years ago. The garden is now neglected, but could easily yield all tropical luxuries in this frostless air. No wonder the place became a great attraction, and Desierto was the fashion for Mexics. "It is wonderful," says Priest Thomas, "to see the strange devices of fountains of water which are about the gardens; but much more wonderful to see the resort thither of coaches, and gallants and ladies, and citizens from Mexico, to walk and make merry in those desert pleasures, and to see those hypocrites, whom they look upon as living saints, and so think nothing too good for them to cherish them in their desert conflicts with Satan." Even so early had the fruit of sainthood begun to ripe and rot. Like Martha's Vineyard, it had ceased to be so much a spiritual as a luxurious resort. Will the camp-meeting to come here fall into like condemnation?

He says these visitors brought presents, and the image of our Lady of Carmel had treasures of diamonds, pearls, golden chains, and crowns, and gowns of cloth of gold and silver. "Before this picture did hang in my time twenty lamps of silver, the poorest of them being worth a hundred pounds." Quaintly and profitably he

adds, "Truly, Satan hath given them what he offered unto Christ in the desert. All the dainties and all the riches of America hath he given unto them in that desert because they daily fall down and worship him." Is it so yet? Doth wilderness temptation supplant wilderness faith? Then will like desolations follow that have followed here, and in all the famous abbeys of the world, even the wasting of their treasures and the ruin of their palaces. Those twenty lamps, of ten thousand dollars' value and upward, where now? And the treasures, and gifts, and luxuries, and soliciting of prayers and masses, where are they?

The monks became aware of the perils this popularity was bringing, and withdrew to a remoter seclusion, farther up the mountain. Even there their mission failed, and the head of this convent was one of the first of those who rejected Romanism; though he has since returned to his old vows, not, I trust, to abide therein.

As we wander about these vacant cells and close-walled paths we fall into sympathy with their vanished life, and repeat with too much inward approval Southey's lines:

> "I envy them, those monks of old,
> The books they read, the beads they told,
> To earthly feelings dead and cold,
> And all humanity."

Yet there was not much of mortification or of reading, as we have seen. Little as there was, however, it probably surpassed that of the surrounding people. They kept alive what little literature did exist, and performed most of the penances that were inflicted. So we come back to this present, and say:

> "Yet still, for all their faith could see,
> I would not these cowled churchmen be."

Or, with piety and poetry surpassing Emerson, should we say, with Wesley:

> "Not in the tombs we pine to dwell,
> Not in the dark monastic cell,

By vows and grates confined;
Freely to all ourselves we give,
Constrained by Jesus's love to live
The servants of mankind."

It is not in this hidden and idle manner that one must serve his generation; but in earnest efforts to bring all souls out of sin, ignorance, evil habit, and all degradation. These monks of Mount Carmel fared sumptuously or sparingly; but the peon still bowed his head to his burden, and the Spaniard still robbed and murdered. Better far less introspection and more outward action. Thus only will the world come nearer Christ and heaven.

We left regretfully the ancient pile and its more ancient surroundings. At half-past three that torrid winter afternoon our last picnic meal was shared by no less than four dogs, who ate the crumbs under the table, and even the meats off of it. They were worth eating, as I can testify. An English gentleman purveyed and a good English cook prepared the store which thus evanished at last from under the table.

We rode through the cool, rich forest, and out into the blaze, which burned our backs and necks as if it came through a burning-glass. There were the same burdened mules and men, donkeys and boys, the same lounging soldiers, the same sad-eyed women; one group alone merry with laughter, as they chased a rat among their ragged huts. The sun drove the long shadows over the plains, disappeared in a crater of fire, that shot up flames from its black bowl, while Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl glowed rosily long after valley and hill-top were in shadow and slumber. The moon arose, and our spirits with her, for it grew perilous even on the highway as it grew dark, and we paced chattingly along the Empress Road from Chapultepec, taking a moonlight ride, that rarest and riskiest of pleasure jaunts in Mexico. It is too bad that to the very centre of the city there is no protection against robbery. We escaped, and entered our courts in four hours after we left that of the convent, tired and delighted with the ride, the fright, the tramp, the ruin, the whole of El Desierto.

X.

A RIDE ABOUT TOWN.

The Horse and its Rider.—Paseos.—Empress's Drive.—A Relic of Waterloo.—The Tree of Montezuma.—The Woods.—View of Chapultepec.—Baths of Montezuma.—Tacubaya Gardens.—The Penyan.—Canal.—Floating Gardens.—Gautemozin.—The Café.

This country is made for the horse, and the horse for the country. He paces and canters deliciously, and the air and the clime fit perfectly to his gait. Horseback in England and the States is a luxury pursued under difficulties. The first difficulty is in the horse, which is seldom trained to such service; and the second and worse one is in the weather, which is not sufficiently uniform to make the luxury a permanency. Here every morning is perfect, and about every horse. The saddle, too, is made for riding; far superior to the English saddle, it holds you on, and does not make you hold yourself on. So if you come to Mexico, take to the horse. Only gentlemen, however, indulge in this pastime, and very handsomely they ride: straight legs, laced with silver buttons, broad hat of white felt, with a wide silver band expanded into a huge snake-like swell and fold; their horses often gayly caparisoned, and delighting evidently in their lordly service. There is no more characteristic or agreeable sight in Mexico than these riders; far more agreeable than it is when witnessed a few miles out of town, more or less, and the graceful horseman politely requests of you the loan of your watch, wallet, horse—if you have one—and sometimes all your outer apparel. That is a sight not unfrequently seen, all but the last, close to the city gates. Two of these city riders were relieved by others of these city riders of horses and purses, our last Sabbath night, on the crowded and fashionable drive of the town, not a mile from the Alameda.