CHAPTER XV.

Monterey—Its situation—Character of its buildings—Incident in its history—Entrance to the city—The main plaza—Its Cathedral—Halls of Justice—Trophies of war—East end of the city—West end of the city—Arista's palace—Hospital—Cemetery.

Monterey (literally the *King's Woods*) is the principal city of the department of New Leon, and contains in ordinary times fifteen thousand inhabitants. It was commenced in the 16th century, and is situated so as to command the pass of the mountains that separate the plains, that border on the gulf of Mexico, from the mountainous region. The mountains are unlike those of the more northern parts of our continent. Their bases are not surrounded by broken land or gradual ascents; on the contrary, they rise suddenly from the plain, and seem, although in stupendous groups, each isolated and distinct. Their aspect is singularly dreary, their steep sides have no attractive spots, while the tops mingle in the thin clouds above, looking at all times cold and desolate.

The city of Monterey is at the foot of a hill running from the east to the west. Between it and the hill winds the San Juan, until it reaches the east end of the town, when it turns suddenly northward, bounding Monterey on the south and east. The country approaching it from Camargo is level; beyond, nothing is met but interminable hills.

The greater part of the city is built in the old Spanish style, with houses of one story, the walls of which vary from eighteen to thirty inches in thickness. The window-shutters and doors are double, the windows protected by heavy iron bars in the place of sashes, the mildness of the climate making glass unnecessary. The interior of these buildings is often ornamented; the walls of some delicate color, festooned with roses, and garnished by pictures of saints. The floors are of cement or brick made perfectly smooth and well painted.

To the American there are many things to call forth his admiration, besides the events connected with its capture by our arms. In 1816, General Mina, a partisan officer of the frontiers of Mexico, called about him a number of gallant and daring spirits, who conceived the idea of conquering New Leon and the surrounding country. The assistance they had a right to expect from certain disaffected inhabitants of the department was not given. Mina and his party were betrayed and taken prisoners by a superior force under Arredorido, and carried to Monterey, and employed for a long time in placing the pavements that now adorn its streets. In time all, save a few who escaped, were taken out and basely shot by order of the government.*

Approaching the city from Mérine, but little is seen of its buildings; the citadel in front, and the towers of the cathedral are the principal objects that attract the eye. But continuing on, you descend into the "bottom," in which the city stands. You pass through a few lanes, forming the suburbs of the city, when you unexpectedly find yourself at the entrance of a beautiful bridge that spans a quick running stream. On examination you discover that the water rises from a rocky bed, under which are some of the finest living springs in the world. The bridge, you learn by inscription, is nearly a century old, and the long time passed since its erection has only tended to harden into one solid mass the stone and mortar of which it is constructed. Upon the column that bears the inscription stands a statue of the Virgin, of the size of life. The drapery being in colors, attracts the unaccustomed eye from its novelty, and takes away from the sacred character abstractly peculiar to pure white marble, and doubly impressive when exhibiting some hero, or sacred personage.

The guardian sainte of Monterey, by her blue mantle and golden crown, was socialized to suit the ideas of the citizens who adored and worshipped at her shrine. It was around her sacred form that, in the assault, the Mexicans seemed most to concentrate, and ne

* The senior editor of the St. Louis Reveille (1847) is the only survivor of this expedition.

doubt as her mild calm face was seen amidst the smoke of the battle, it gave courage and inspired hope.

As in all Mexican cities, the principal streets tend towards *the* plaza. There may be a dozen, but in one only is every thing attractive concentrated. A few squares passed, brings you to this important place. You find one side of the great plaza occupied as usual by the cathedral, and Monterey boasts of one that would ornament any city on our continent. The architecture is peculiar, a curious mixture of the Grecian and Moorish; the effect as a whole is decidedly pleasing. The roof is formed by a magnificent dome, in the front of which, springing from the corners of the buildings, rise two towers. In one is the town clock and barometer, in the other a chime of Spanish bells. The building is surrounded by a heavy stone wall, which, besides its handsome gateway, is elaborately ornamented with figures in stucco, mostly in basso-relievo, illustrating legends of the Spanish church.

The interior is strikingly imposing, a dim light only struggles through the high narrow windows, the greatest flood playing upon the altar. Paintings, many of seeming merit, the best of the Murillo school, and perhaps by that master's own hand, hang from the walls, beside execrable pictures of native origin of almost hieroglyphical simplicity. The altar was deprived of its rich ornaments. In that sacred place, as well as in the body of the building, Ampudia had piled his immense stores of ammunition, as regardless of the sanctity of the church as he would have been of a jacal. His profanation seemed to carry its punishment, for when he discovered that our shells struck against the walls of the building, he found that, in its explosion, not only his enemies, but himself would be destroyed.

Opposite the cathedral are the halls of justice and the prisons. They have a dreadful appearance; the heavy massive walls and crowded grated windows give fearful evidence of the narrow cells within, and the hopelessness of escape, except in death. High above, on the wide parapet, walked day and night the lone Mexican sentinel, giving additional repulsiveness to the building. To an American, a Mexican prison, be it where it may, at Monterey, or

Perote, at Matamoros or Mier, is a place of fearful interest, and one in which hundreds of his fellow-countrymen have lingered out a painful and degraded existence. In the centre of the plaza, after the surrender of the city, the captured cannon was arranged, and made an imposing appearance. The pieces in many instances bore the familiar inscriptions of our own manufactories, but there were others of foreign origin, with quaint mottoes, and singular names. The vicissitudes of artillery in the fortunes of war are among the most curious and romantic of its incidents.

The faces of the plaza, at right angles with the cathedral and halls of justice, were occupied by the fashion stores and offices of various kinds, and must, in the "piping time of peace," have presented a gay appearance, when filled with costly goods, blazing with light, and thronged with *signoras* and gay *cavalleros*.

East of the plaza, the city is crowded with buildings, so that every square is literally a perfect fortification. The fronts of many of these dwellings showed the indentation of the cannon ball, and the heavy window bars were bent in the terrible concussion. In these places were the groceries and retail shops; the latter kept principally by Englishmen and Scotchmen, who had in many instances adopted Mexican clothes and moustache and Mexican complexions and habits, but their hearts still throbbed at hearing their native language, and their eyes betrayed that they acknowledged our troops as brothers, as men of their own family.

In the upper part of the city was concentration of wealth. The private residence sits lordly in the centre of a square, hid from view by heavy stone walls, over which peep, in luxuriant profusion, the orange and lime tree, which mingle the sweets of their snowy blossoms with the mild fragrance of those of the apple tree that blushes by their side. What a climate is possessed by Monterey, where the fruits of the tropics vie in perfection while growing beside those of the temperate zone—where birds of the gayest plumage, such as only are gilded and bronzed by the fiercest heats, sit and shine, beside the humbly decorated songster that seems peculiar to snowy climes!

At the foot of the Palace hill is "Arista's palace." It is a fairy

land, and its former possessor had rare taste, and knew that the wide-spread lawn, and the shade tree, cheap as they are, gave more beauty and more aristocracy of appearance, than abortive attempts in stone and mortar. It is the ornamented grounds that appeared so beautiful, for the house is small; its piazza, however, is liberal, and is extended entirely around it. Upon terraces of stone, hundreds of earthen jars were ranged, in which flowering bulbs opened their limpid-looking petals, beside the double-leafed rose, and the whole were reflected into a small stream that stole along in its artificial canal, until it noisily poured into a magnificent bath.

Here was the hospital of the First Division; here was repairing the injury given to poor humanity, in the conflict of arms. Here, among the severely wounded, were Capt. Gatlin and Lieut. Potter, of the Seventh, and Lieutenant Wainwright of the Eighth. Here were prostrate our countrymen, fevered with pain, from every variety of wounds. The damp sweat of death trickled down the foreheads of some, while the healthful glow of convalescence beamed upon the wan cheeks of others. An army hospital in time of war is a place of curious reflection, and most solemn thought. A chill of dread passes over the mind on entering the pestilential buildings usually occupied for such an office, and the feeling was but little modified, in viewing the wrecks of the hostile field, although surrounded by the choicest bounties of nature; an elysium created by taste in the rare climate of New Leon.

"The cemetery," directly at the foot of the Palace hill, is a spot of interest to the American. That excellent taste, so observable in all Catholic countries, that prompts so much care of the abodes of the dead, displayed itself in all the grave-yards of Monterey, particularly in the "old one" of the cemetery. Here lay the ancient Spanish population. Two centuries had almost passed away since they had commenced their long sleep; their old tombs were but little impressed by time; the clear air and fine climate preserving rather than corroding the marble and stone. Near the entrance was situated the Monterey chapel. It consisted simply of a dome resting upon pillars, under which was an altar, and a table in front

of it, used to bear the dead, while the priest performed the last burial rites. The high strong walls of the cemetery had been mounted with cannon, and its sacred ground filled with troops. The rude tramp of soldiery had marked their footsteps upon the sod, and defaced the marble with their weapons, but they had not the courage to justify their profanation by a defence of the graves of their fathers, but fled the instant that our guns opened upon them.

CHAPTER XVI.

Monterey after the surrender—The cathedral—Gov. Morales and Gen. Taylor—Misunderstanding—Mexican insensibility to kind treatment—Letter from a citizen—Social life—Female character—Superiority of Mexican women—Society.

As soon as the troops of the enemy had left the city, it began to wear a more cheerful aspect than greeted the curious observer at the time of the capitulation. Many of the most public thoroughfares became animated with citizens, who opened their stores for traffic with "the invaders."

The Rev. Mr. Rey, the Catholic priest, distinguished himself for the zeal with which he had the cathedral cleared of its profanations and prepared for divine service. Capt. Ramsey, of the Ordnance department, found his "stores" tumbled about by the padre, in a most unmilitary manner, and in spite of protestations to the contrary, he was obliged to submit to the indignity; the church having an entire victory over the military department, so far as clearing out the munitions of war from the interior of the cathedral was concerned.

On the 4th day of October, the Rev. Mr. Rey preached to a large congregation, composed of soldiers of every grade, and a great number of the Mexican citizens. It was a curious spectacle to witness the sun-burnt veterans of our army so recently engaged in the strife of war, now kneeling beside their enemies, acknowledging the same Supreme power, and evincing that they were children of the same Father.

A mutual understanding was had between Gen. Taylor and Gov. Morales, in which it was agreed that the governor might pursue

his civil capacity unmolested, where it did not interfere with our military operations, and that the citizens were to bring in corn and other supplies at prices agreed upon; but a misunderstanding arising in the preliminaries, the governor complimented Gen. Taylor in one of his letters as follows:

With satisfaction it is known to the government of this state, that your excellency is perfectly versant with the French idiom. This government has a proficient interpreter in this language, and wishes (to be better understood) that all future communications from your excellency may be made in this idiom. With profound respect,

God and Liberty!

FRANCISCO DE P. MORALES.

MONTEREY, *Sept.* 29, 1846.

To Z. TAYLOR, commander-in-chief, Army of Occupation, U. S.

Gen. Taylor promptly informed "the functionary," that he had been misinformed in regard to his possessing a knowledge of the French idiom, and so ended the important matter.

The better class of citizens but slowly returned to their homes; all who could leave at the taking of the city, seemed to have done so, as they had no faith in our promises of protection. The spirit of exaggeration that seems peculiar to the people, appears unconsciously to affect their conduct, and they act as if they spoke the truth, even while most departing from it. The Mexicans have never given our government the least credit for its leniency after a battle; the wounded who were taken from the battle-fields of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and conveyed in our wagons to Point Isabel and Matamoros, and nursed often to the momentary exclusion of our own suffering troops, recovered from their wounds, and when they were able, entered the ranks of the enemy, and all spread the most revolting tales of our cruelty and disregard of the offices of humanity. Promptly paid for every service rendered or value received, the very recipients of this bounty are foremost to represent themselves as robbed of their goods and chattels. The following letter, written evidently by a respectable citizen, and

originally given to the world in a Vera Cruz paper, illustrates this singular feature of the Mexican character.

"MONTEREY, *September* 28, 1846.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—I reply to your short letter of the 28th, which reached me by the same hands through which this will be delivered. I can communicate nothing new which has transpired in the few days since the military occupation of this town by the vandalism of the Volunteers who serve under the banners of the United States. There is not a house in the interior of the town and centre of the city which is not occupied by force, without any agreement with the proprietors or their agents in regard to the payment of rent. Nothing has been respected, notwithstanding that Gen. Taylor and Gen. Worth are prodigal of assurances to those public functionaries, who have remained behind to be witnesses of the unnumbered outrages which are daily perpetrated upon unarmed citizens, that they have express orders from their government to respect the property, laws, prevailing religion, and even the prejudices of the people. They repeat this to such officers, public or private, as apply to them to know what guaranties families can have, while they make preparations for their departure from this unhappy capital; but the result is, that nothing is respected; that the utmost insecurity prevails; that no one is master of his own property, or even of his own existence, threatened with perfect impunity by the unbridled Volunteers, who, let loose upon the whole city, commit excesses which decency and shame prevent me from specifying. The force which has been introduced into the city, consists of between two and three thousand Regulars, well disciplined, subordinate, and under excellent officers. The remainder consists of a thousand or fifteen hundred unbridled Volunteers, much like the Camanches in their appearance, ferocity, and customs.

"It is said that the rest of these forces, amounting to nine thousand, are stationed in the woods, the Obispado, and other camps. In regard to what is said of that which is beyond the city, I am

not responsible, for they are very deceitful, and endeavor to exaggerate their forces.

"They have more than one thousand wounded, and about four hundred sick with fevers and dysentery. Many of their officers are dead, and I see that they are appalled by the abandonment of this city by the poor as well as rich. They ask every moment if Gen. Santa Anna is coming with troops; if there are, besides those who have left here, any troops at San Luis; and if the government, after the loss of this department, will not be inclined to enter into negotiations with the United States. Every thing indicates that in two days they will withdraw the Volunteers, in place of whom the population may return; but it is certain that no one will remain here, and they can only secure their conquest by the extermination of the Mexican race."

The social life of the Montereyans exhibits a higher order of refinement than had been witnessed by our troops, who had proceeded from Matamoros. It was evident that as "the interior" was approached, the people became more hardy and intelligent. No doubt the temperate climate caused exertions to be made incompatible with the heats of the lower lands. The rich mines, too, have their influence upon the inhabitants of Monterey; with the means there comes the desire for luxurious refinement.

Display is the ruling passion; a ride in the plaza, or a prominent place at church, seems to be among the highest ambitions. To an American, a Mexican gentleman appears incommoded with trappings, and absurd from his gaudy display. On horseback or on foot, there is a theatrical air that betrays the most superficial thinker and the most profound vanity. The character of the men of Mexico is familiar with our people, but the female population are of a higher order of beings, and most worthy of admiration; they are possessed of all the good qualities so wanting in the opposite sex.

The Mexican women of every class are brave and humane. They resented the surrender of Matamoros, and denounced the members of their own army to their faces. At Monterey, the women wrote

letters to different departments, charging their own troops with cowardice. They have always shown every disposition to make any sacrifices in the defence of their country; and there is an almost certainty that a woman commanded a body of Lancers at Monterey, and was distinguished for her bravery. In the principal grave-yard near the city of Mexico, there is to be seen the tomb of Donna Maria Vicario de Quitana, of whom it is stated, that "she preferred to leave her convent and join the standard of her country, under which she performed many feats of valor." Over the battle-field, on the suburbs of Monterey, they hovered, as ministering angels, and were seen to extend their kind services to our own wounded, who were afterwards lanced by the Mexican troops.

In the whole of Mexico, in fact in all the Spanish American countries, the women are superior to the men, both in body and mind. Comparatively uneducated, they perform their social duties with a higher regard to virtue than the moral standard of their nation demands. The higher classes are idle from habit, yet they make the hours agreeable by entwining their hair with blossoms, or making delicate embroideries. They while away the day in the hammock and in dressing for public display. In society, they converse pertly with their tongues and scandalize with the movement of their fans. They take an active part in the political strifes with which they are surrounded, and are justly credited with originating many of the revolutions that distract their country. With all their superior traits, they have weaknesses, as have all humanity.

A Mexican woman, high or low, rich or poor, bestows all of her choicest sympathy upon her feet. To be beautiful otherwise, and yet not have small feet, is but vanity and vexation of spirit; bright eyes, virtue, and mind, are all secondary; hence it is that Mexican women have an intellectuality about their extremities truly admirable to behold. In walking, sitting, or praying in the cathedral, the satin pointed slipper occupies the eye, and seems ever to be prominent and worthy of admiration.

Of the best society of Monterey, our troops have had few opportunities of judging. Society, in fact, is broken up by the miseries entailed by war, and the want of a community of languages, together. The peculiar relation of conqueror and conquered, makes, save in extraordinary cases, a proper appreciation of Mexican society impossible. It seems, however, to be in the order of Providence, that these women, so justly to be admired, are to become wives and mothers of a better race.