

and bad. It was once nearly completed, at the expense of the Veracruz Consulado, in the same magnificent style as the rest of the causeway; but not a vestige now remains of their labours. During the Civil War, the ground between Jälāpā and Pērōtē was obstinately disputed by the Insurgents, who, in their attempts to cut off the communication between the Capital and the Coast, destroyed every part of the road that was not actually in the possession of the Royalist forces, which were stationed in considerable numbers at Jälāpā. Hence the marks of devastation, which commence at an equal distance above and below the town. We were four hours in reaching Pērōtē on horseback, although the distance is not above four leagues; and as to the carriages, we left them, as usual, far behind. The road winds almost continually through a pine forest, with occasional clearings, the fences round which serve to show the little value that timber possesses in these districts, as they are constructed with whole trunks of trees piled lengthways, one upon another, in wasteful profusion. These symptoms of the presence of man increased as we approached Pērōtē. After passing the village of Crūz Blāncā, we passed two large Haciendas, or Farms, surrounded by extensive fields of wheat, barley, and Indian corn, which, when the crop is on the ground, may, I dare say, justify Humboldt's description of their beauty. When we saw them, they had assumed the monotonous colouring peculiar to the Table-land during

the dry months; and there was, consequently, but little to attract the attention or gratify the sight.

Pērōtē, San Juan de Uloa, Acapulco, and San Blas, being the only fortresses which the Viceroyalty of Mexico contained, we were curious to see a place to which the Natives appeared to attach no little importance, and naturally conceived that it would be so situated as to command some one of the principal mountain-passes, through which an invading army would endeavour to penetrate into the Interior. We were disappointed, therefore, at finding the Castle placed beyond the last ridge of the mountains, upon the borders of one of those immense plains, which extend, almost without interruption, for fifty miles in the direction of the Capital. It is, in fact, a mere depôt for arms and bullion; for, although regularly fortified with four bastions and abundance of heavy artillery, it is too small to be of importance, and would probably not be taken into account at all by an enemy's force on its march towards the Central Provinces. The town, which lies about half a mile from the fortress, consists of one long street, with flat-roofed houses, seldom rising above the ground-floor, low windows, mostly without glass, and whitewashed walls. It affords, altogether, a fair specimen of the style of architecture which the Spaniards have introduced into all their American Colonies, where, with the exception of the Capitals, houses of two stories are seldom seen. We were received with great hospi-

tality by the Governor and Officers of the garrison, but proceeded almost immediately to the village of Těpěyāgūalcō, (about seven leagues farther on,) which we reached a little before dusk.

Pěrōtě may be regarded as the Eastern extremity of the Table-land: it is situated 7,692 feet above the level of the sea, and as it is but little protected from the North-west winds, its climate is at times exceedingly severe. In the immediate vicinity of the town, the ground is fertile, and the Cerealia succeed remarkably well; but as you advance into the Interior, the sterility of the soil increases at every step. The pine-forests are confined entirely to the mountains; they cease to thrive upon the tracts of flat country by which the ridges which intersect them at intervals are separated from each other. These form a succession of basins, which evidently must have been, at some former period, extensive lakes. The action of the water upon the foot of the mountains, by which these basins are environed, is distinctly visible, and you can even trace the line to which it appears to have risen. It seems to have partaken of the nature of that of the Lake of Mexico, for, in receding, it has left the ground covered with a thick coat of Tequesquite, or Carbonate of Soda, which is gradually destroying every trace of vegetation. The whole plain already produces only a scanty supply of food for the flocks of sheep which are occasionally seen wandering over it; and as the water that still remains is brackish, and grows every

year more scarce, it is probable that the district will ultimately become a desert.

I hardly know any thing more gloomy than the ride from Pěrōtě to Těpěyāgūalcō; the uniformity of the scene is only broken by little hills which start up abruptly every here and there, covered with the Aloe, the Cactus, and a few dwarf palms, which almost conceal the masses of lava of which they are composed. Upon the whole, we were none of us inclined to dispute the justice of the appellation by which this tract of country is distinguished, "*el Mal Pais*," although there are some redeeming points to which the European traveller may look back with interest, and even with pleasure. The first of these is the view of Ōřizāvā, which is seen from this dreary plain to greater advantage than even from Jālāpā; and the second, the frequency with which specimens of "mirage" occur, in a degree of perfection which the great Sahara itself can hardly surpass. Prepared as we were for this optical illusion, we were more than once completely deceived by it, and fancied that we really saw before us a vast expanse of water, with trees, houses, and every surrounding object, beautifully reflected in it. The whirlwinds of sand too, which occasionally rise in majestic columns from the centre of the plain, were to me a novel sight; and we were all much struck with an insulated conical mountain, called El Cerro de Pizarro,\* which had

\* The outline of this mountain is given in the drawing of the Maguey, vol. I. Sect. III.

attracted our attention almost immediately after leaving Pěřōtě, and which, on a nearer approach, we found to be composed entirely of masses of lava, so black and gloomy, as to give to the whole the appearance of having very recently emerged from the bowels of the earth.

The house in which we were lodged at Těpěy-āguālcō, contained one large Sala, which served us for bed-room, dining-room, and every other purpose; in this, however, the whole extent of the accommodations consisted, for no provisions of any kind were to be procured, and the servants having neglected to lay in a stock at Pěřōtě, we were reduced to very short allowance. Fortunately, we had a couple of cases of preserved meat with us, which we converted into soup, and this, with a few crusts of bread which were discovered in one of the carriages, saved us from a course of Tortillas and Chile, upon which the servants were dieted, *ad libitum*, as a proper recompense for not having been better purveyors.

Few people like this dish at first, although it constitutes the food of two-thirds of the population of Mexico. There is an unpleasant taste in the maize, to which, as well as to the extreme pungency of the Chile, it requires some time to get reconciled. I never learnt to eat it with pleasure, though I have sometimes had recourse to it in the absence of more palatable food.

After a most detestable breakfast, we set off, at an early hour on the 26th, for Nōpālūcā, (a town about

twelve leagues from Těpěyāguālcō,) having taken the precaution of sending one of the soldiers of our escort in advance, in order to avoid, if possible, a second scarcity. Our road lay through a continuation of the plains which I have already described, where, with the exception of a few hawks and vultures, a wolf or two, and some Cōyōtēs, (a large kind of jackall,) which are always found prowling in the vicinity of a flock of sheep, not a living creature was to be seen. It was with considerable satisfaction that, about one o'clock, we crossed a little ridge of hills that forms the North-western boundary of the Mal Pais, and found that we were about to enter upon a less dreary scene. From this ridge, to El Ojo de Agua, a solitary inn, which takes its name from a fine spring of water that rises near the house, a sensible improvement took place. A few trees and Haciendas, with little patches of cultivation around them, broke, at intervals, the monotony of the view: we saw some large flocks of sheep, a cow or two, with some horses, and as we approached the stream to which these indications of fertility were due, we found ducks and other water-fowl in great abundance.

There is a singular view of Ōřizāvā from the inn-yard at Ojo de Agua. The mountain stands exactly opposite the gateway, from which a long vaulted passage leads to the Patio, or court. This passage has the effect of confining the view in such a manner that the eye rests exclusively upon the

Peak, which appears, when thus seen, to stand alone, detached from the chain of inferior hills by which it is connected with the Coffre. In a clear day, the effect is very striking, as, from the purity of the atmosphere, the outline of this enormous mass is distinctly and sharply defined; but I should think it very difficult to transfer this effect to paper, so as to give any idea of the magnificence of the object. It is a natural picture as it now stands, and I should much doubt the power of art to do justice to it.

The boundary line between the States of Veracruz and La Puebla runs close to Ōjō dē Āguā, in consequence of which the guard which had accompanied us from the Coast, was replaced by an escort of Lancers, which had been stationed there by the Authorities of Lă Pūēblă, to await our arrival. The men were remarkably well mounted and equipped, and in the officer, Don Juan Gōmēz, we found a young Creole of gentlemanlike manners, and agreeable conversation, with whose society, during the rest of our journey, we were all much pleased. After passing an hour at the inn, where there were provisions in abundance to make amends for the scantiness of our morning fare, we proceeded towards Nōpālūcā, observing with pleasure, as we advanced, that a number of little farms gave the surest possible indication of a more fertile soil. At Santa Ana, a village about two leagues from Ojo de Agua, we were received with great politeness by the Cura, an old man who came out to meet us

in his sacerdotal dress. Such an instance of courtesy towards heretics, was too remarkable not to be most gratefully acknowledged, and we remained for some time receiving and returning compliments, to the great edification of a crowd of by-standers, who all regarded us with intense curiosity. We did not reach Nōpālūcā till dusk, when we found excellent quarters at the house of one of the Regidores of the town, Don Raymundo Gōnsālēz, whose wife and three daughters were all employed in preparing supper for us, with their own fair hands. We were much pleased with the appearance of the town, which is clean and pretty: the houses are indeed, only built of Tapia, or rammed earth; but as the walls are kept white-washed, and in good repair, there is nothing to denote the humble materials of which they are formed. The land about the town is subdivided into a multiplicity of small enclosures, which it was quite pleasing to see once more, after the deserts over which our eyes had been roaming for two whole days. They indicated habits of industry, of which we had seen but few traces; for in the *Tierra Caliente*, it was rather the bounty of Nature, than the exertions of the inhabitants, that we had found cause to admire: their indolence seemed to increase exactly in the same ratio, as the facility with which their wants were supplied. But on the Table-land, the necessaries of life are not to be obtained without some efforts: the fertility of the soil is great, but it requires the hand of the culti-

vator to call it forth; and to this the laborious habits of the agricultural population, in the Central Provinces of Mexico, are probably due.

On the evening of our arrival at Nöpälucă, a courier came in from the Capital with letters, which informed us that disturbances had taken place at La Puebla, the Capital of the Province, where it had been our intention to sleep on the following night, which, although not serious, induced the Supreme Government to wish that the Commission should take another route, which branching off to the North, across the Llănös de Apăn, (a district remarkable for its fertility,) enters the valley of Mexico by Ötumbă and San Crïstöväl, leaving Lă Pueblă far to the South and West. With this wish we of course complied, and two dragoons of the escort were dispatched, in order to prepare quarters for us at any Hacienda, in the direction of Otumbă, where they might be able and willing to afford us hospitality for the night. We ourselves did not set out till ten o'clock, when we took the road to Hűămăntlă, (a little town four leagues from Nöpälucă,) which led us through a succession of large fields of corn, barley, and maize, interspersed with plantations of the Aloe, (*Agare Americana*,) from which the wine of the natives, Pulque, is extracted. Having already given a detailed account of the process by which this liquor is prepared, (Book I. Section III.) it would be superfluous to repeat it here; I shall, therefore, merely state that Pulque is

nowhere found in greater perfection than in the district through which we were about to pass, where the Maguey plantations, from their vicinity to La Puebla and Mexico, constitute one great source of the prosperity of the inhabitants.

Although but very short notice had been given at Hűămăntlă of our intention to visit that place, we found a great part of the population waiting in the streets to receive us; nor was it possible to withstand the solicitations of the Cura, at whose house we were absolutely compelled to alight. We were immediately visited by the Ayuntamiento, with the Alcalde at its head, as well as by the officers of a regiment quartered in the town; after which we were conducted to a room, where a dinner for thirty people had been prepared, in a style of hospitality which would have done honour to any country in the world. The moment that we quitted the table, our kind hosts, who were determined not do things by halves, sent for all our servants, as well as the escort, who were regaled with the innumerable dishes which we had been compelled to leave untouched; while we, being very great people, were solicited to exhibit ourselves from the balcony to the crowd assembled below. I mention these circumstances, trifling as they may appear, because they serve to show the feelings with which the prospect of an intercourse with Great Britain was hailed by the Mexicans. Nothing could be more decisive in this respect than our reception, particularly in

the smaller towns, where, whatever was done, was done spontaneously by the inhabitants themselves, and not under the direction of the Government, as was the case at Jālāpā and Veracruz.

The population of Hūāmāntlā does not exceed three thousand souls. The town ranks as second in the district of Tlāscālā, to which it belongs; indeed, it is but little inferior in importance to the Capital itself, which has now "fallen from its high estate," and does not contain above four thousand inhabitants: a sad change from the days when it set at defiance the whole power of Montezuma, and baffled, for some time, the efforts of Cortes, to force a passage through its territory.

On leaving Hūāmāntlā, which we did not accomplish until a very late hour, it being three o'clock before dinner was concluded, we took the road to Ācōcōtlān, a large Hacienda about five leagues from the town, at which we found that we were to sleep. Our ride was a beautiful one, as our guide conducted us through a rich country, at the foot of the Mālīnchē, a mountain which forms the connecting link between the Volcanos of Mexico and that of Ōrīzāvā, and at the same time disseminates fertility throughout the surrounding district by the numberless streams which descend from its summit. From whichever side the Mālīnchē is seen, its figure is always a perfect cone: its slope produces some of the finest wheat known in Lā Pueblā; and lower down, wherever the mountain-torrents afford any

facility for irrigation, crops of maize are grown, which, in a good year, increase in the ratio of 400 fanegas for every one that is put into the ground.

The Hacienda of Ācōcōtlān has little to recommend it but its situation: nothing, however, can be finer than this. The balcony of the great Sala, or state-room, in which we were lodged, commands a view of five mountains, two of which are upwards of two thousand feet higher than the highest mountain in Europe. We saw Ōrīzāvā with its peak *couleur de rose*, reflecting the last rays of the setting sun;—the Coffre de Pērōtē already half sunk into obscurity;—the Mālīnchē quite in the shade before us; and the two great Volcanos which separate La Puebla from Mexico, (Pōpōcātēpētl and Īstāccīhuātl,) with an occasional ray of light playing upon their snowy summits. We were all admiring the magnificence of this scene, when the silence around us was broken in the most unexpected manner. A long file of Indians returning from the labours of the day, drew up in a line before the house, and began to chant the Ave Maria, or evening hymn. The music was very simple, and few of the voices good, yet the whole, like the *Ranz des vaches* of the Swiss, derived an interest from the splendid scenery around, and made an impression, which much sweeter strains, under other circumstances, might have failed to produce.

Our host at Ācōcōtlān was a most respectable man; one of the numerous class of minor proprie-

tors, who continue, all their lives, to cultivate the spot upon which they are born, and transmit from generation to generation an estate, which supports themselves and their children, in comfort, and comparative affluence. He received us with great hospitality, and gave us a most excellent supper, with some Pulque, which, unaccustomed as we were to the beverage, most of our party thought exceedingly agreeable. This was not the case with the Chile, a powerful species of Capsicum, both green and red, of which the Mexicans make an immoderate use in most of their dishes: the taste is not disagreeable, but the pungency is so great, that a stranger finds it difficult to taste it without inconvenience. Robinson states, in his account of Mina's expedition, that with many of the American officers, who were compelled to live for some days upon Tortillas and Chile, on their march towards the Interior, excoriation was the consequence.

Our next stage from Ācōcōtlān was Cuautmānzīngō, where we were advised to pass the night, although the distance was only seven leagues, on account of the difficulty of reaching any other resting-place calculated to receive so large a party. The road was mostly good, but as it continued to wind around the foot of the Mālīnchē, it was occasionally intersected by deep barrancas, (or ravines,) which although perfectly passable for horsemen, retarded the progress of the carriages considerably. In one place we came to a descent of about twelve feet per-

pendicular, which there was no possibility of avoiding, as the barranca, both above and below, was exceedingly deep and rugged. The carriages were before us when this obstacle to our farther progress was discovered, and a dragoon came galloping back to announce that it was impossible to proceed. Upon reaching the place, however, we discovered that there was such an abundance of loose stones in every part of the ravine, that it would not be difficult to construct an inclined plane by which the carriages might descend; and this our joint efforts soon accomplished, a part of the escort having assisted in the conveyance of materials, while the rest broke down with their lances the side of the barranca. In about half an hour a very tolerable bridge was manufactured, and we had the pleasure of seeing the carriages all reach the bottom in safety.

At Cuautmānzīngō, where we arrived at an early hour, we were welcomed with the same hospitality which had characterized our reception everywhere, during our progress through the country. The most valuable portion of the estate consisted in some extensive corn-lands watered by the Mālīnchē, and in the Maguey plantations more immediately about the house. These we were glad to have an opportunity of visiting; and a part of the afternoon was employed in inspecting the progress of Pulque-making in all its stages. There is nothing disagreeable either in the smell or appearance of the liquor on the spot where it is thus prepared. The greatest atten-