

ment of a more unrestricted intercourse with Europe, "the second discovery of the New World;" and such it has indeed proved to us, for we have acquired more information respecting America, and a greater insight into the capabilities of the country, and the character of its inhabitants, in the last three years, than had been obtained during the three centuries which preceded them.

## SECTION II.

## RESIDENCE IN THE CAPITAL; AND RETURN TO THE COAST.

THE approach to Mexico did not give us a very favourable idea either of the Capital, or of the country about it. The valley on the Otumba side possesses none of the beautiful features which are so remarkable to the South and East; for, having more recently formed a part of the great lake of Tēzcūcō, which in the rainy season still extends as far as San Crīstōbāl, the waters in receding have left a barren tract, covered with a crust of Carbonate of Soda. Sterility prevails, with few interruptions, from the village of San Jūan dē Tēōtīhūacān to the Convent of Guādālūpē, in which the Virgin of Guādālūpē, the Patroness of Mexico, has taken up her abode. A drawing of this rich but singular building will be found in the first volume: it is difficult to say to what style of architecture it belongs, as all pretensions to uniformity are destroyed by the Capillas, (chapels,) erected in the vicinity of the principal



edifice by the more wealthy votaries of the Virgin, one of which is very remarkable, for, having been built in consequence of an escape from shipwreck, in order to commemorate the event, it has assumed as much as possible the form of the sails of a ship.

The avenue which extends from Guădălŭpě to the gates of the Capital is traced upon the line of one of the ancient Mexican causeways: it is broad and paved in the centre, with a row of trees on each side; but the suburb to which it leads by no means corresponds with this magnificence. It is dreary and desolate, the Indian population by which it was formerly tenanted having been destroyed by an epidemic disorder, while their houses, which are merely composed of mud-bricks baked in the sun, are entirely in ruins.

Such a scene agreed too ill with the picture which Humboldt has drawn of Mexico, not to occasion us considerable disappointment, nor were we satisfied with the assurances which we received, that we had not passed through any one of the principal streets of the town, on our way from the Gate, until a view of the splendid Calle de San Francisco, which enters the Alameda close to the house in which we were lodged, convinced us of the propriety of not forming too hasty an opinion. The second day made converts of us all: in the course of it we had occasion to visit most of the central parts of the town, and, after seeing the great Plaza, the Cathedral, the Palace, and the noble streets which communicate with them,

we were forced to confess not only that Humboldt's praises did not exceed the truth, but that amongst the various Capitals of Europe, there were few that could support with any advantage a comparison with Mexico.

In the general style of the architecture there is something very peculiar. The streets are broad, airy, and drawn at right angles, so that by looking down any two, at the point where they intersect each other, a view of nearly the whole extent of the town is commanded. The houses are spacious, but low, seldom exceeding one story; the roofs are flat, and as they sometimes communicate with each other for a considerable distance, when seen from an elevation, they look like immense terraces, the parapets by which they are separated being lost in the distance. Few of the public buildings attain the height to which an European eye is accustomed in such edifices. This is owing partly to the difficulty of laying a good foundation in the valley of Mexico, where water is uniformly found at a very few feet from the surface, and partly from the frequency of earthquakes. The first renders it necessary to raise all the larger buildings upon piles, while the second, although the shocks are seldom severe, would endanger the safety of very lofty edifices, which are the first to suffer.

Every one who has resided in a Southern climate, knows how much the purity of the atmosphere tends to diminish distances; but even at Madrid, where



the summer sky is beautifully clear, I never saw it produce this effect in so extraordinary a degree as at Mexico. The whole valley is surrounded with mountains, most of which are, at least, fifteen miles from the capital, yet on looking down any of the principal streets, (particularly in the direction of *San Ángel*, or *San Augustín*.) it appears to be terminated by a mass of rocks, which are seen so distinctly, that on a fine day, one can trace all the undulations of the surface, and almost count the trees, and little patches of vegetation, which are scattered over it.

The general appearance of the town at the period of our arrival was dull; except at an early hour of the morning, when the great streets presented a very lively scene, particularly those near the Cathedral, and the Plaza Mayor, where the *Părăn*, and the principal shops are situated. In these we found many articles of domestic manufacture; hats, with cotton and woollen cloths, from La Puebla and *Quērētārō*;—a great variety of coloured blankets, called *Mangas*, used as a cloak when riding by most people, and as a substitute for every other kind of clothing by the lower orders;—leather, curiously wrought, from Guadalajara;—with saddles, spurs, lassos, and all the trappings with which the Mexican horses are usually disfigured. All these were concentrated upon one point; near which, in the *Calle de Plateros*, there was a whole nest of silversmiths. In the other parts of the town, some cumbrous furniture was occasionally to be met with, as bedsteads,

presses, and tables, painted, varnished, and inlaid at a vast expence, but of a most uncouth shape, and generally as little calculated for comfort, as for ornament. All the other contents of the shops appeared to be European, but the supply was scanty, and the price enormous. Nature, on the other hand, as if to compensate the want of the luxuries of the Old World, appeared to have been most munificent in her gifts. For many days after my arrival, I could never pass a common fruit-stall, without stopping to admire the variety of fruits and flowers with which it was adorned. Pine-apples, Oranges, Bananas, Chirimoyas, Melons, Grenaditos de China, and a thousand other delicious fruits, are found in abundance during the greatest part of the year, together with Pears, Apples, and all the productions of more Northern climates. Many of these fruits do not, it is true, thrive on the Table-land; but it must always be borne in mind that Mexico, from the peculiarity of its geological structure, and the manner in which heat is modified by height in every part of its territory, combines, sometimes within a very few leagues, the greatest possible variety of climates. On the road to Acapulco, for instance, a descent, as rapid as that from Las Vigas to Jalapa, commences within a few miles of the Capital, so that on reaching the plains of *Cuernāvaca*, you find a *Tierra Caliente*, with all its various productions, from which Mexico derives a constant and most abundant supply. On the Table-land, flowers are to be found at



all seasons, but particularly from March to June, when roses spring up in such profusion, that, on the *dias de fiesta*, hundreds of men and women, of the very lowest classes, are seen returning covered with garlands from the Chīnāmpās. The trees, too, preserve their foliage during ten months of the year.

With such advantages as these, the valley about the Capital might be made a paradise; yet there is hardly a single country-house to be seen, except in the Pueblos of Sān Angēl, and San Āgüstīn, which have been almost abandoned since the commencement of the Revolution. The principal feature in the smaller villages is a little white chapel, which produces a beautiful effect when seen through the trees at a distance; but, as you approach, the charm is broken, for it is usually surrounded by nothing but wretched hovels, which afford shelter to a few Indian families, with all their live stock, compressed into the smallest possible compass. Yet there are very pretty rides in many directions: Chāpūltēpēc and Tācūbāyā, (of which I shall have occasion to speak later,) are within a moderate distance; and, by taking the direction of the Pāsēō dē lās Vīgās, you see the remains of the Chīnāmpās, or floating gardens, which are to be found at a little distance from the canal of Chalco. It seems to me questionable whether they ever did float, but it is certain that they are now all fixtures: they are surrounded, however, by a broad ditch full of water, over which a little drawbridge is thrown, to keep

up the communication with terra firma. Of the correctness of the description which Humboldt gives of their beauties, it was impossible for us to judge, as, in January, we naturally looked in vain for the hedges of flowers, with which he states them to be adorned: to us they appeared mere kitchen-gardens, and it is, in fact, from thence that the Capital is principally supplied with vegetables. The hut of the Indian proprietor, far from adding to the attractions of the scene, is generally a miserable hovel, but too well suited, in point of appearance, to the squalid looks and tattered garments of its inhabitants.

The canal of Chalco presents a much more lively prospect. Both evening and morning it is covered with canoes, in which the natives convey the produce of their gardens, fruit, flowers, and vegetables, to the Mexican market. Chalco is a large town, situated upon a lake of the same name, about twenty miles to the South-east of the Capital; the canal which leads to it is very narrow. The canoes mostly used are of two kinds: one, a punt, which is pushed along by men, and contains sometimes the joint stock of two or three families; the other, a very light narrow canoe, about twelve feet in length, and just broad enough to contain one person sitting down, at each end, with their little provision for the market piled up between them. The canoes are chiefly worked by women, with single paddles, with which, however, they are made to skim over the water with great velocity. The



gesticulations of these ladies, when animated by a little Pulque on their return home, their extreme volubility, and the energy which they display in their quarrels with the tribes of children which they carry about with them, form a curious contrast to their melancholy looks, and extreme taciturnity at all other times. They are, however, a very hardy race, and capable of supporting great fatigue. I have often met, when returning from my rides, whole files of men and women, all loaded, the men with baskets, the women with a couple of children each, setting out from Mexico at five in the evening, to return to their villages, which I usually found, upon inquiry, to be seven or eight miles off; and this they accomplish in an hour and a half, by continuing steadily at a long Indian trot, which many of them are able to keep up for a surprising distance. If a question be asked of the leader, the whole party stops, and when it is answered, they proceed again together at the same uniform pace.

Amongst the many curious scenes that Mexico presented at the end of 1823, I know none with which we were more struck than the Alameda. As compared with the Prado of Madrid, it was, indeed, deprived of its brightest ornament, the women; for few or none of the ladies of Mexico ever appear in public on foot; but to compensate this, it had the merit of being totally unlike any thing that we had ever seen before. On a Sunday, or *Dia de Fiesta*, the avenues were crowded with enormous coaches,

mostly without springs, but very highly varnished, and bedizened with extraordinary paintings in lieu of arms, in each of which were seated two or more ladies, dressed in full evening costume, and whiling away the time with a *segar en attendant* the approach of some of the numerous gentlemen walking or riding near. Nor were the equestrians less remarkable; for most of them were equipped in the full riding-dress of the country, differing only from that worn by the lower orders in the richness of the materials. When made up for display in the Capital, it is enormously expensive. In the first place, the hind-quarters of the horse are covered with a coating of leather, (called the *anquera*,) sometimes stamped and gilt, and sometimes curiously wrought, but always terminating in a fringe or border of little tags of brass, iron, or silver, which make a prodigious jingling at every step. The saddle, which is of a piece with the *anquera*, and is adorned in a similar manner, rises before into an inlaid pommel, to which, in the country, the lasso is attached; while the plated headstall of the bridle is connected by large silver ornaments with the powerful Arabic bit. Fur is sometimes used for the *anquera*; and this, when of an expensive kind, (as black bear-skin, or otter-skin,) and embroidered, as it generally is, with broad stripes of gold and silver, makes the value of the whole apparatus amount to four or five hundred dollars, (about 100%.) A common leather saddle costs from fifty to eighty dollars. The rider wears a



Mexican hat, with a brim six inches wide, a broad edging of gold or silver lace, and a very low crown: he has a jacket, likewise embroidered in gold, or trimmed with rich fur, and a pair of breeches open at the knee, and terminating in two points considerably below it, of some extraordinary colour, (pea-green or *bleu celeste*;) and thickly studded down the sides with large silver buttons. The lower part of the leg is protected by a pair of Guadalajara stamped-leather boots, curiously wrapped around it, and attached to the knee with embroidered garters; these descend as far as the ankle, where they are met by shoes of a most peculiar shape, with a sort of wing projecting on the saddle side;\* and the whole is terminated by spurs, (made at Lerma or Toluca,) of so preposterous a size, that many of them weigh a pound and a half, while the rowels of all trail upon the ground, if, by any chance, the wearer is forced to dismount. A cloth manga, or riding-cloak, is often thrown over the front of the saddle, and crossed behind the rider in such a manner as to display the circular piece of green or blue velvet in the centre, through which the head is passed when the manga is worn, and which is generally very beautifully embroidered. The cost of the whole dress, when the saddle is of fur, with *armas de agua* of the same materials, it is not easy to calculate, as

\* The use of these is more general amongst the middling and lower classes.

it depends entirely upon the degree of expence to which a person chooses to go in the embroidery. A very handsome saddle may be bought for three hundred dollars. I have known two hundred dollars given for a pair of Guadalajara boots, (worked with silver,) but eighty may be taken as a very liberal price. A jacket, not at all particularly fine, would cost as much more. The hat is worth twenty dollars; the breeches, if at all rich, fifty or sixty; the spurs, with embroidered stirrup-leathers, twenty; the plated bridle thirty-two; while a manga of the most ordinary kind is not to be procured under one hundred dollars, and, if at all remarkable, could not be purchased for less than three. The horse usually mounted on these occasions must be a Brazeador,\* fat, sleek, and slow, but with remarkably high action before; which, it is thought, tends to show off both the animal and the rider to the greatest advantage. The *tout ensemble* is exceedingly picturesque; and the public walks of Mexico will lose much in point of effect, when the riding-dress of England, or France, is substituted, as it probably will be, for a national costume of so very peculiar a character.

The *Ālāmēdā*, which is situated nearly at one extremity of the town, communicates with the Paseo Nuevo, a broad avenue of trees, from the extremity of which the road to Chāpūltēpēc, and Tācūbāyā,

\* The name is taken from the peculiar action of the *brazos*, or fore-legs, which are doubled up at every step, while the whole weight of the horse is thrown upon the hind-quarter.



branches off. The first is a summer palace, built by the celebrated Count Galvez during his Viceroyalty, upon a rock, to the foot of which the waters of the lake of Tēzcūcō formerly extended. Nothing can be more beautiful than its situation, or more striking than the view of the valley of Mexico which it commands. The road to Chāpūltēpēc is divided by an aqueduct, which separates the portion of it destined for carts and mules, from that intended for carriages and equestrians. The structure of this aqueduct is solid; it consists of nine hundred arches, and the fountain, from which it is supplied, produces the clearest and most pellucid water I almost ever saw. On entering the gardens of Chāpūltēpēc, the first object that strikes the eye is the magnificent Cypress, (*Sabino*, *Āhūahuētē*, or *Cupressus disticha*), called the Cypress of Montezuma. It had attained its full growth when that monarch was on the throne, (1520,) so that it must now be, at least, four hundred years old, yet it still retains all the vigour of youthful vegetation. The trunk is forty-one feet in circumference, yet the height is so majestic, as to make even this enormous mass appear slender. On a close inspection, it appears to be composed of three trees, the trunks of which unite towards the root so closely, as to blend into one; this circumstance, however, led us to give the preference to a second Cypress, not quite equal to the first in circumference, (it is thirty-eight feet in girth,) but as old, as lofty, and distinguished by a slight

curve towards the middle of the stem, which gives it a particularly graceful appearance. Both trees are covered, in part, with a parasitic plant, (*Tillandsia usneoides*), resembling long grey moss, which sets off their dark foliage amazingly. They were formerly surrounded by a whole wood of *Sabinos* as venerable as themselves; but the Revolution, which spared nothing, did not respect them. A detachment of troops was quartered at Chāpūltēpēc, which, from its commanding height, is a strong military position; and although it was never attacked, more damage was done by these barbarians, than the place would have sustained had it been taken by storm. They cut down a number of the finest old trees for fire-wood, and as no notice was taken of such slight excesses, at a time when licence was the order of the day, it is wonderful that any should have escaped. The view from the Azōtēā of Chapultepec, embraces the whole extent of the valley of Tēnōchtītlān, with its lakes and villages, and highly cultivated fields, intersected, every here and there, by rocks of the most uncouth shape, which stand sometimes isolated, and sometimes in groups so very singularly put together, as to give quite a novel character to the scene. Beyond these again, the eye rests upon the two splendid mountains, which form the boundary of the valley to the South-east. The most distant of these, Pōpōcātēpēlt is higher than any mountain in the Northern division of America, except Mount St. Elias. Īztāccīhuātl, which is