her maiden name; and though she adds to it that of her husband, she is more commonly known by her own.

From ignorance of another Mexican custom, I made rather an awkward blunder the other day; though I must observe, in my justification, that I had lately been in the agonies of searching for servants, and had just filled all the necessary departments pretty much to my satisfaction. Therefore, when the porter of the Señora de —— brought me the compliments of his mistress, and that she begged to inform me that she had another servant at my disposal (otra criada á mi disposicion), I returned for answer, that I was greatly obliged, but had just hired a recamérrera (chambermaid). At this the man, stupid as he was, opened his great eyes with a slight expression of wonder. Fortunately, as he was turning away, I be-thought me of inquiring of the señora’s health, and his reply, that “she and the baby were coming on very well,” brought the truth suddenly before me, that the message was merely the etiquette used on informing the friends of the family of the birth of a child—a conviction which induced me slightly to alter the style of my answer. Experientia docet!

LETTER THE ELEVENTH


The street in which we live forms part of the Calle de Tacuba, the ancient Tlacopan, one of the great causeways by which ancient Mexico communicated with the continent. The other two were Tepeyayac (now Guadalupe) and Iztapalapan, by which last the Mexican emperor and his nobles went out to receive Cortes on his entrance to Tenochtitlan. The ancient city was divided into four districts, and this division is still preserved, with a change from the Indian names to those of San Pablo, San Sebastian, San Juan, and Santa Maria. The streets run in the same direction as they did in former times. The same street frequently changes its name in each division, and this part of the Calle de Tacuba is occasionally called
the "Plazuela del Sopilote," "San Fernando," and the "Puente de Alvarado," which is the more classic of the three, as celebrating the valour of a hero; while a ditch, crossed by a small bridge near this, still retains the name of "el Salto de Alvarado," in memory of the famous leap given by the valiant Spaniard, Pedro de Alvarado, on the memorable night called the "noche triste," of the 1st of July, 1520, when the Spaniards were forced to retreat from Mexico to the mountains of Tepeyayac.

On that "sad night," the rain falling in torrents, the moon and the stars refusing their light, the sky covered with trick clouds, Cortes commanded the silent march of his troops. Sandoval, the unconquerable captain, led his vanguard; and the stern hero, Pedro de Alvarado, brought up the rear. A bridge of wood was carried by forty soldiers, to enable the troops to pass the ditches or canals, which must otherwise have impeded their retreat. It is said that in choosing the night for this march Cortes was guided by the counsels of an astrologer.

Be that as it may, the first canal was happily passed by means of the portable bridge. The sentinels who guarded that point were overcome; but the noise of the struggle attracted the attention of the vigilant priests, who in the silence of the night were keeping watch in the temple. They blew the holy trumpets, cried to arms, and awakened the startled inhabitants from their slumbers.

In a moment the Spaniards were surrounded by water and by land. At the second canal, which they had already reached, the combat was terrible. All was confusion, wounds, groans, and death; and the canal became so choked with dead bodies, that the rear-guard passed over them as over a bridge. We are told that Cortes himself swam more than once over the canal, regardless of danger, cheering on his men, giving out his orders, every blow aimed in the direction of his voice, yet cool and intrepid as ever, in the midst of all the clamour and confusion and darkness. But arrived at the third canal, Alvarado finding himself alone, and surrounded by furious enemies, against whom it was in vain for his single arm to contend, fixed his lance in the bottom of the canal, and leaning against it, gave one spring to the opposite shore.

An Aztec author, and contemporary of Cortes, says that when the Indians beheld this marvellous leap, and that their enemy was safe, they bit the dust (comieron tierra):
and that the children of Alvarado, who was ever after known as “Alvarado of the leap,” proved in the course of a lawsuit before the judges of Tezcucio, by competent witnesses, the truth of this prowess of their father.

In a hitherto unpublished manuscript which has come to light this year, in an annual called the “Mosaico Mexicano,” there are some curious particulars concerning the “noche triste.” It is said that the alarm was given by an old woman who kept a stall; and mention is made of the extraordinary valour of a lady called Maria de Estrada, who performed marvellous deeds with her sword, and who was afterwards married to Don Pedro Sanchez Farfan. It is also said that when the Indians beheld the leap they called out, “Truly this man is the offspring of the sun;” and that this manner of tearing up the ground, and eating earth by handfuls, was a common Indian mode of expressing admiration. However, Mexico is so rich in traditions, that when I particularize this one it is only because we live on the site where the event took place...

We went a few days ago to see some effects which are for sale, belonging to a cura who died lately, having heard that he has left some good paintings amongst them. We went in the evening, and found no one but the agent (an individual in the Daniel Lambert style), an old woman or two, and the Padre Leon, a Jesuit, capellan of the Capuchin nuns, and whose face, besides being handsome, looks the very personification of all that is good, and mild, and holy. What a fine study for a painter his head would be! The old priest who died, and who had brought over various valuables from Spain, had a sister who was a leper, and who died in the hospital of San Lazaro. This dreadful scourge is by no means wholly unknown here; and though it is ordained that all who are afflicted by it shall be shut up in this hospital, I have met two persons, and one of these in society, who have the disease.

For this house, which is very large, the executors ask a preposterous rent. The goods of the defunct, which were for sale, were ranged on long tables in a very large apartment. There were virgins and saints, surplices, candlesticks, and snuffer-trays; boxes of all sorts and sizes; an ill-set parure of emeralds and diamonds; several good paintings, especially one of the Annunciation. There was the death of San José, various saints, etc., all religious subjects, as may be supposed. Two C— n
bought; one I greatly coveted. There were also two large pieces of embroidered velvet, on which were the arms of Castile, said to have been hung on a portrait of Queen Cristina when she entered Madrid. The agent begged C——n to buy them, asking at the same time an impossible price therefor.

There was moreover a large box full of relics from Jerusalem, which the padre told me could not be sold, but that I might choose whatever I liked; so that I returned home with various Agnus Deis, crucifixes, and rosaries. The next day a messenger from Padre Leon brought me the painting of the Annunciation, which I had admired so much, and which is a sketch of Bayeu, a Valencian painter, from his own painting of the Annunciation in the royal chapel of Aranjuez; also the embroidered velvet, begging my acceptance of both. We have since wished to show our sense of the padre's politeness, but he will neither accept presents, nor will he visit any one but such as in the hour of need require his spiritual services. In the house of sickness and by the bed of death he is ever to be found, but chiefly if it is also the abode of poverty. In the house of the rich man he rarely visits, and then only when his presence has been requested—when he has been called in to administer spiritual consolation to the sick or the dying. But in the dwelling of the lowly, in the meanest and most wretched hovels, he has never to be sought. The guardian and friend of the poor, his charities are equally extensive and judicious.

Yesterday being a fête-day, the Paséo was very full of carriages, and consequently more brilliant and amusing than usual. This Paséo is the Mexican Prado or Hyde Park, while the Viga may be reckoned the Kensington Gardens of the metropolis, only however as succeeding to the other, for there is no walking, which in Mexico is considered wholly unfashionable; and though a few ladies in black gowns and mantillas do occasionally venture forth on foot very early to shop or to attend mass, the streets are so ill kept, the pavements so narrow, the crowd so great, and the multitude of leperos in rags and blankets so annoying, that all these inconveniences, added to the heat of the sun in the middle of the day, form a perfect excuse for their non-appearance in the streets of Mexico.

In the Alameda, however, which is so pretty and shady, it is very agreeable to walk; but though I have gone there
frequently in the morning, I have met but three ladies on foot, and of these two were foreigners. After all, every one has feet, but ladies alone have carriages, and it may be a mixture of aristocracy and indolence which prevents the Mexican Doñas from profaning the soles of their feet by a contact with their mother earth.

The Paséo called de Bucarelli, after a viceroy of that name, is a long and broad avenue bounded by the trees which he planted, and where there is a large stone fountain, whose sparkling waters look cool and pleasant, ornamented by a gilded statue of Victory. Here, every evening, but more especially on Sundays and fêté-days, which last are nearly innumerable, may be seen two long rows of carriages filled with ladies, crowds of gentlemen on horseback riding down the middle between these carriages, soldiers at intervals attending to the preservation of public order, and multitudes of common people and lêperos, mingled with some well-dressed gentlemen on foot. The carriages are for the most part extremely handsome—European coaches with fine horses and odd liveries, mingled with carriages made in the country, some in the old Mexican fashion, heavy and covered with gilding, or a modern imitation of an English carriage, strong, but somewhat clumsy and ill-finished. Various hackney-coaches, drawn by mules, are seen among the finerequipages, some very tolerable, and others of extraordinary form and dimensions, which bear tokens of having belonged in former days to some noble Don.

Horses, as being more showy, are more fashionable in these public promenades than mules; but the latter animal requires less care, and is capable of undergoing more fatigue than the horse. Most families have both mules and horses in their stable, and for those who visit much this is necessary. The carriages, of which the most fashionable seems to be the carratela, open at the sides, with glass windows, or filled with ladies in full toilet, without mantillas, their heads uncovered, and, generally, coiffées with flowers or jewels; but the generality being close coaches, afford but an indistinct view of the inmates, as they pass along saluting each other with their fingers or fan. The whole scene, on the evening of a fête, is exceedingly brilliant, but very monotonous. The equestrians, with their fine horses and handsome Mexican dresses, apparently take no notice of the ladies as they
pass, rarely salute them, and never venture to enter into conversation with them. But they are well aware to whom each carriage belongs, and consequently when it behaves them to make their horses curvet, and otherwise show off their horsemanship to advantage. Black eyes are upon them, and they know it. When the carriages have made two or three turns, they draw up at different stations in a semicircle a little off the road, and there the inmates sit and view the passers by. Occasional streams of smoke may be seen issuing from the carriages, but chiefly, it must be confessed, from the most old-fashioned equipages, and from the hackney-coaches. Smoking amongst ladies in the higher classes is going very much out of fashion, and is rarely practised openly except by elderly, or at least by married ladies. In a secondary class, indeed, young and old inhale the smoke of their cigaritos without hesitation, but when a custom begins to be considered vulgar, it will hardly subsist another generation. Unfeminine as it is, I do not think it looks ungraceful to see a pretty woman smoke.

This Paso commands a fine view of the mountains, but I greatly prefer the Viga, which now begins to be the fashionable promenade. It is bordered by a canal shaded by trees, which leads to the Chinampas, and is constantly covered with Indians in their canoes bringing in fruit and flowers and vegetables to the Mexican market. Early in the morning it is a pretty sight to see them in these canoes gliding along in a perfect bower of green branches and flowers.

Yesterday, on returning from an evening drive there, having left C——n and several gentlemen who had dined with us, taking coffee and smoking upon the balcony, I found that by good fortune I had escaped being witness of a murder which took place before our door. These gentlemen had observed, for some time, a group of persons, male and female, of the lower class, talking and apparently amusing themselves; sometimes laughing, and at other times disputing and giving each other blows. Suddenly, one of the number, a man, darted out from amongst the others, and tried to escape by clambering over the low wall which supports the arches of the aqueduct. Instantly, and quite coolly, another man followed him, drew his knife, and stabbed him in the back. The man fell backwards with a groan, upon which a woman
of the party, probably the murderer’s wife, drew out her knife, and stabbed the man several times to the heart, the others, meanwhile, neither speaking nor interfering, but looking on with folded arms, and their usual placid smile of indifference.

At the same time, some soldiers appeared in the distance, riding down the street; seeing which, the man and woman who had committed the murder, endeavoured to take shelter in our house. The porter had, fortunately, barred the doors, and the soldiers riding up, took them both into custody. No sensation was excited by this, which is an everyday occurrence. Yesterday I saw a dead man lying near the Longa (the Exchange) and nobody took any notice of him. “You have been engaged in a disagreeable business,” said I to Colonel ——, who had come to pay us a visit, and was still en grande tenue, having just returned from the execution of one of his own soldiers, who had stabbed a comrade. “Yes,” said he, with an air of peculiar gaiety; “we have just been shooting a little tambour.” . . . We were invited, lately, to a “día de campo” (a day in the country), a very common amusement here, in which, without any peculiar arrangement or etiquette, a number of people go out to some country place in the environs, and spend the day in dancing, breakfasting, walking about, etc. This was given at Tacubaya by Don B—o G—a, a senator, and was amusing enough. The music consisted of a band of guitars, from which the performers, common men, and probably self-taught, contrived to draw wonderfully good music, and, in the intervals of dancing, played airs from the Straniera and Puritani. The taste for music is certainly universal, the facilities wonderful, the science nearly at zero.

The ladies in general wore neither diamonds nor pearls, but a sort of demi-toil t, which would have been pretty if their dresses had been longer and their shoes not so tight. Some wore bonnets, which are considered full dress. The E—— family, and the young Señora de C——, were beautifully dressed. Mexican women, when they sit, have an air of great dignity, and the most perfect repose of feature. They are always to be seen to most advantage on their sofas, in their carriages, or in their boxes at the theatre.

There were immensely long tables, covered with
Visit to the Colegio Vizcaino

Mexican cookery, which I begin to get accustomed to; and a great many toasts were given and a great quantity of champagne drank. We danced a great deal, quadrilles, waltzes and Spanish country-dances, walked about in the garden and orchard in the evening, and returned to dance again to the music of the indefatigable guitars, so that it was dusk when all the carriages set off, much about the same time, to bear each other company.

The following day, the Countess C—a having been kind enough to procure an order for permission to visit the Colegio Vizcaino, which I was anxious to see, we went there with a large party. This college, founded by the gratuitous charities of Spaniards, chiefly from the province of Biscay, is a truly splendid institution. It is an immense building of stone, in the form of a square, on the model, they say, of the palace of Madrid, and possesses in the highest degree that air of solidity and magnificence which distinguishes the Mexican edifices, and which, together with the width and regularity of the streets, the vastness of the public squares, the total absence of all paltry ornament, the balconies with their balustrades and window-gratings of solid iron and bronze, render Mexico, in spite of its insufficient police, one of the noblest-looking cities in the world. The object of this college is to provide for the education of the children of Spaniards, especially for the descendants of Biscayans, in Mexico; a certain number being admitted upon application to the directors. There are female teachers in all the necessary branches, such as reading, writing, sewing, arithmetic, etc.; but besides this, there is a part of the building with a separate entrance, where the children of the poor, of whatever country, are educated gratis. These spend the day there, and go home in the evening. The others are kept upon the plan of a convent, and never leave the institution while they belong to it; but the building is so spacious and airy, with its great galleries, and vast court and fine fountains, garden and spacious azotea, that the children are perfectly well off. There are portières and sisters, pretty much as in a convent; together with an old respectable Rector; and the most perfect order and cleanliness prevails through the whole establishment.

We first visited the poor scholars, passing through the large halls where they sat with their teachers, divided into classes, sewing, writing, reading, embroidering, or
casting up accounts, which last accomplishment must, I think, be sorely against the Mexican genius. One of the teachers made a little girl present me with a hair chain which she had just completed. Great order and decorum prevailed. Amongst the permanent scholars in the upper part of the institution, there are some who embroider astonishingly well—surplices, altar-hangings, in short, all the church vestments in gold or silk. In the room where these are kept are the confessionals for the pupils. The priests are in a separate room, and the penitents kneel before the grating which separates the two apartments. All the sleeping-rooms are scrupulously neat and clean, with two green painted beds in each, and a small parlour off it, and frequently ornamented with flowers and birds. The girls are taught to cook and iron, and make themselves generally useful, thus being fitted to become excellent wives to respectable men in their own rank of life.

We visited the chapel, which is extremely rich and handsome, incrusted with gilding, and very large. The pupils and their teachers attend mass in the gallery above, which looks down upon the chapel and has a grating before it. Here they have the organ, and various shrines, saints, nacimientos, etc. We were afterwards shown into a great hall devoted to a different purpose, containing at one end a small theatre for the pupils to act plays in. All the walls of the long galleries are covered with old paintings on holy subjects, but many of them falling to pieces from damp or want of care. The building seems interminable, and after wandering all through it for several hours, and visiting everything—from the garden below where they gave me a large bunch of roses and carnations, to the azotea above, which looks down upon every street and church and convent in Mexico—we were not sorry to rest on the antique, high-backed chairs of a handsome apartment, of which the walls were hung with the portraits of the different Spanish directors of the college in an ancient court costume. Here we found that the directors had prepared a beautiful collation for us—fruit, ices, cakes, custards, jellies, wines, etc., in great profusion.

Rested and refreshed, we proceeded to visit the pupils at their different classes. At the writing-class various specimens of that polite art were presented to us. That of the elder girls was generally bad, probably from their
having entered the college late in life. That of the younger ones was much more tolerable. We saw some really beautiful specimens of embroidery. Having returned to the hall where there was a piano, some of our party began to sing and play. The Señora G—sang an Italian air beautifully. She is evidently a scientific musician. The Señorita H—s played one of Herz’s most difficult combinations with great execution, and a pretty girl, who is living in a convent, having been placed there by her novio, to keep her out of harm’s way till he is prepared to give her his hand, sang a duet with another young lady, which I accompanied. Both had fine voices, but no notion of what they were singing. My friend the Señora C—delighted us with some of the innumerable and amusing verses of the Jota Arragonesa, which seem to have neither end nor beginning, all gay and all untranslatable, or at least losing their point and wit when put into an English dress. Such as

A poor man met with a sixpence,
And for joy he gave up the ghost,
And in the troubles of death,
Even his sixpence was lost.

The woman who loves two at once,
Knows what is discreet and right,
Since if one of her candles goes out,
Still the other remains alight, etc. . .

It is impossible to see any building of this size kept more perfectly clean and neat; generally the case here in all establishments which are under petticoat government. These old Spanish institutions are certainly on a magnificent scale, though now for the most part neglected and falling to ruin; nor has any work of great consequence been attempted since the independence. . .

After various alarms and rumour of our house concerning robbers, some true, some exaggerated, and some wholly false, we have at length procured two old Spanish soldiers of the Invalidos, who have taken up their quarters downstairs, and spend their time in cleaning their guns, making shoes, eating and sleeping, but as yet have had no occasion to prove their valour. Perhaps the fact of there being soldiers in the house will be sufficient to keep off the more ordinary robbers.