near San Lazaro especially, in their arid whiteness, seem characteristic of the unfortunate victims of leprosy enclosed in the walls of that hospital.

We rode out the other day by the barrio, or ward of Santiago, which occupies part of the ancient Tlatelolco, which once constituted a separate state, had kings of its own, and was conquered by a Mexican monarch, who made a communication by bridges between it and Mexico. The great market mentioned by Cortes was held here, and its boundaries are still pointed out, whilst the convent chapel stands on the height where Cortes erected a battering engine, when he was besieging the Indian Venice.

LETTER THE THIRTEENTH


Early this morning we rode to the convent of San Joaquin, belonging to friars of the Carmelite order, passing through Tacuba, the ancient Tlacopan, once the capital of a small kingdom, and whose monarch, Tete-panquetzaltzin (short and convenient name), Cortes caused to be hung on a tree for a supposed or real conspiracy. The number of carts, the innumerable Indians loaded like beasts of burden, their women with baskets of vegetables in their hands and children on their backs, the long strings of arrieros with their loaded mules, the droves of cattle, the flocks of sheep, the herds of pigs, render it a work of some difficulty to make one’s way on horseback out of the gates of Mexico at an early hour of the morning, but it must be confessed, that the whole scene is lively and cheerful enough to make one forget that there is such a thing as care in the world. There is an indiffer-ent, placid smile on every face, and the bright blue sky smiling over them all; dogs bark, and asses bray, and the Indian, with near a mule’s load on his back, drags his hat off to salute a bevy of his bronze-coloured countrymen, nearly equally laden with himself, and they all show their teeth and talk their liquid Indian and pass on.
Convent Garden

These plains of Tacuba, once the theatre of fierce and bloody conflicts, and where, during the siege of Mexico, Alvarado of the Leap fixed his camp, now present a very tranquil scene. Tacuba itself is now a small village of mud huts, with some fine old trees, a few very old ruined houses, a ruined church, and some traces of a building which — assured us had been the palace of their last monarch; whilst others declare it to have been the site of the Spanish encampment.

San Joaquin, also a poor village, contains the fine convent and immense walled garden and orchard belonging to the rich monks of the Carmelite order. As C—n knows the prior, he sent in our names, and I was admitted as far as the sacristy of the convent church. The prior received us with the utmost kindness; he is a good-looking man, extremely amiable and well-informed, and still young. The gentlemen were admitted into the interior of the convent, which they describe as being a very large handsome building, clean and airy, with a fine old library, chiefly composed of theological works; to the garden, which is immensely large, and though not much cultivated, full of flowers; and to the great orchard, celebrated for the profusion and excellence of its fruit. There is a mirador in the garden which can be seen from the road, and from which there is a very extensive view. I was very anxious for admission only to the garden, and pleaded the manly appearance of my riding-hat, which would prevent all scandal were I seen from a distance; but the complaisance of the good prior would not go quite so far as that, so I sat in the sacristy and conversed with a good-natured old monk with a double chin, whilst the others wandered through the grounds. They afterwards gave us a very nice breakfast, simple but good; fish from the lake, different preparations of eggs, riz-ou-lait, coffee, and fruit. The monks did not sit down with us, nor would they partake of anything themselves.

We went in the evening to see a pretty hacienda called Los Morales (the mulberry-tree) belonging to a Spaniard, which has a nice garden with a bath in it, and where they bestowed a quantity of beautiful flowers on us.

The other day we set off early, together with the Belgian and French ministers and their families, in carriages, to visit a beautiful deserted hacienda, called el Olivar, belonging to the Marquis of Santiago. The
house is perfectly bare, with nothing but the walls; but the grounds are a wilderness of tangled flowers and blossoming trees, rose-bushes, sweet-peas, and all manner of fragrant flowers. We passed an agreeable day, wandering about, breakfasting on the provisions brought with us, arranging large bouquets of flowers, and firing at a mark, which must have startled the birds in this solitary and uncultivated retreat. We had a pleasant family dinner at the E—'s, and passed the evening at the Baron de ——'s. The gentlemen returned late, it being the day of a diplomatic dinner at the English minister's.

The Countess del V——e has just sent me a beautiful bird with the most gorgeous plumage of the brightest scarlet and blue. It is called a *huacamaya*, and is of the parrot species, but three times as large, being about two feet from the beak to the tip of the tail. It is a superb creature but very wicked, gnawing not only its own pole, but all the doors, and committing great havoc amongst the plants, besides trying to bite every one who approaches it. It pronounces a few words very hoarsely and indistinctly, and has a most harsh, disagreeable cry. In fact it presumes upon its beauty to be as unamiable as possible.

I prefer some beautiful little humming-birds (*chupamirtos* as they are called here) which have been sent me, and which I am trying to preserve alive, but I fear the cold will kill them, for though we see them occasionally here, hanging by their beaks upon the branches of the flowers, like large butterflies, and shaking their brilliant little wings so rapidly that they seem to emit sparkles of coloured light; still this is not their home; properly speaking, they belong to the *tierra caliente*. These little birds are of a golden green and purple, and are so tame, that whilst I am writing I have two on my shoulder and one perched on the edge of a glass, diving out its long tongue for sugar and water. Our live stock is considerable: we have Guinea fowls, who always remind me of old maiden ladies in half-mourning, and whose screaming notes match those of the *huacamaya*; various little green parrots; a scarlet cardinal, one hundred and sixty pigeons in the pigeon-house, and three fierce dogs in conspicuous situations.

I received a very polite letter to-day from the Señora de Santa Anna, and as it was enclosed in a few lines from
Santa Anna himself, I send you his autograph, for I doubt much whether we have seen the last of that illustrious personage, or whether his philosophic retirement will endure for ever.

I have been endeavouring lately to procure permission from Señor Posada, who is shortly to be consecrated archbishop, to visit the convents of nuns in Mexico. Señor C—o, secretary of state, our particular friend, has been kind enough to interest himself in the matter, though with indifferent hopes of success. A few days ago he sent me his correspondence with Señor Posada, who observes that the vice-queens alone had the privilege of the entrée, and seems to hesitate a good deal as to the advisableness of granting a permission which might be considered a precedent for others. However, I think he is too amiable to resist our united entreaties. I hold out as an argument, that C—n, being the duplicado of the queen herself, my visit is equal to that of the vice-queen, which argument has at least amused him. His consecration is fixed for the 31st of May.

Don Pedro Fonti, the last archbishop named in the time of the Spanish dominion, having renounced the mitre, three illustrious churchmen were proposed to fill the vacant place: this Don Manuel Posada, Don Antonio Campos, and Dr. Don José Maria de Santiago. The first was chosen by the Mexican government, and was afterwards proclaimed in the Roman Consistory last December, with the approbation of Gregory XVI. They are now only waiting for the pontifical bulls, which are daily expected from Rome; and it is said that the ceremony, which will take place in the cathedral, will be very magnificent.

April 3rd.—Accompanied by the — minister, we spent yesterday in visiting the Minería, the Botanic Garden, the Museum, etc., all which leave a certain disagreeable impression on the mind, since, without having the dignity of ruins, they are fine buildings neglected. The Minería, or School of Mines, the work of the famous architect and sculptor Tolsa, is a magnificent building, a palace whose fine proportions would render it remarkable amongst the finest edifices of any European country. All is on a great scale, its noble rows of pillars, great staircases, large apartments and lofty roofs, but it reminds one of a golden aviary, containing a few common sparrows.
Several rich Spaniards contributed more than six hundred thousand dollars to its construction. We were shown through the whole of this admirable building by the director, who occupies a very handsome house attached to it. But however learned the professors may be,—and amongst them is the scientific Señor del Río, now very old, but a man of great learning and research,—the collection of minerals, the instruments and models, are all miserable and ill kept.

The Botanic Garden, within the palace, is a small ill-kept enclosure, where there still remain some rare plants of the immense collection made in the time of the Spanish government, when great progress was made in all the natural sciences, four hundred thousand dollars having been expended in botanical expeditions alone. Courses of botanical lectures were then given annually by the most learned professors, and the taste for natural history was universal.

El Arbol de las Manitas (the tree of the small hands) was the most curious which we saw in the garden. The flower is of a bright scarlet, in the form of a hand, with five fingers and a thumb; and it is said that there are only three of these trees in the republic. The gardener is an old Italian, who came over with one of the viceroys, and though now one hundred and ten years old, and nearly bent double, possesses all his faculties. The garden is pretty from the age of the trees, and luxuriance of the flowers, but melancholy as a proof of the decay of the science in Mexico. The palace itself, now occupied by the president, formerly belonged to Cortes, and was ceded by his descendants to the government. In exchange they received the ground formerly occupied by the palace of the Aztec kings, and built on it a very splendid edifice, where the state archives are kept, and where the Monte Pio (the office where money is lent on plate, jewels, etc.) now is, the director of which is Don Francisco Tagle, whose apartments within the building are very elegant and spacious.

The Museum within the University, and opposite the palace, in the plaza called del Volador, contains many rare and valuable works, many curious Indian antiquities, but they are ill arranged. On the walls are the portraits of the vice-kings, beginning with Hernan Cortes. We spent a long while here examining these antiquities; but
we have seen nothing in Mexico to equal the beauty of the colossal equestrian statue in bronze of Charles IV, placed on a pedestal of Mexican marble, which stands in the court of the University, but formerly adorned the middle of the square. It is a magnificent picture of sculpture, the masterpiece of Tolosa, remarkable for the noble simplicity and purity of its style, and was made at the expense of an ex-viceroy, the Marquis of Branciforte. We also saw the goddess of war lying in a corner of the court, beside the stone of sacrifices, which we had already been shown.

To-day we have been visiting the Academy of painting and sculpture, called the Academy of Fine Arts, of which I unfortunately recollected having read Humboldt's brilliant account, in my forcibly prolonged studies on board the Jason, and that he mentions its having had the most favourable influence in forming the national taste. He tells us that every night, in these spacious halls, well illumined by Argand lamps, hundreds of young men were assembled, some sketching from the plaster-casts, or from life, and others copying designs of furniture, candelebras and other bronze ornaments; and that here all classes, colours, and races, were mingled together; the Indian beside the white boy, and the son of the poorest mechanic beside that of the richest lord. Teaching was gratis, and not limited to landscape and figures, one of the principal objects being to propagate amongst the artists a general taste for elegance and beauty of form, and to enliven the national industry. Plaster-casts, to the amount of forty thousand dollars, were sent out by the King of Spain, and as they possess in the academy various colossal statues of basalt and porphyry, with Aztec hieroglyphics, it would have been curious, as the same learned traveller remarks, to have collected these monuments in the courtyard of the Academy, and compared the remains of Mexican sculpture, monuments of a semi-barbarous people, with the graceful creations of Greece and Rome.

Let no one visit the Academy with these recollections or anticipations in his mind. . . . That the simple and noble taste which distinguishes the Mexican buildings, their perfection in the cutting and working of their stones, the chaste ornaments of the capitals and relieves, are owing to the progress they made in this very Academy,
is no doubt the case. The remains of these beautiful but mutilated plaster-casts, the splendid engravings which still exist, would alone make it probable; but the present disorder; the abandoned state of the building, the non-existence of these excellent classes of sculpture and painting, and, above all, the low state of the fine arts in Mexico, at the present day, are amongst the sad proofs, if any were wanting, of the melancholy effects produced by years of civil war and unsettled government.

The Holy Week is now approaching, and already Indians are to be seen bringing in the palm-branches and the flowers for the altars, and they are beginning to erect booths and temporary shops, and to make every preparation for the concourse of people who will arrive next Sunday from all the different villages and ranchoes, far and near.

LETTER THE FOURTEENTH


21st April.

On the morning of Palm Sunday, I went to the Cathedral, accompanied by Mademoiselle de ——, daughter of the —— Minister. We found it no easy matter to make our way through the crowd; but at last, by dint of patience and perseverance, and changing our place very often, we contrived to arrive very near the great altar; and there we had just taken up our position, when a disinterested man gave us a friendly hint, that as the whole procession, with their branches, must inevitably squeeze past the spot where we were, we should probably be crushed or suffocated; consequently we followed him to a more convenient station, also close to the altar and defended by the railing, where we found ourselves tolerably well off. Two ladies, to whom he made the same proposition, and who