amusing, and as all ranks and conditions are mingled, one sees much more variety than at a ball in the city.

On their way home, C——n and Señor —— discussed the effects likely to be produced on the morals of the people by this fête. Señor ——, like nearly all the wisest men here, persists in considering gambling an innocent amusement, and declares, that at all events, this fête ought never to be done away with. In his opinion, it conduces to the happiness of the people, gives them an annual pleasure to look forward to, and by the mingling of all ranks which then takes place, keeps up a good feeling between the higher and lower orders. C——n asked him why, if such was the case, the government did not at least endeavour to draw some advantage from it, after the manner of the Count de Revillagigedo—why, as the bank, by the nature of the game, has, besides a great capital, which swallows up all the smaller ones, an immense profit, amounting to twenty-five per cent., they do not make the bankers pay four or five per cent., and charge half a dollar or more to each individual who enters to gamble; with which money they might beautify the village, make a public pasoe, a good road, a canal to Mexico, etc.

I thought that whatever the government might feel on this subject, neither the bankers nor the gamblers would relish the insinuation. I shall write in a few days by the Baron de ——, minister from ——, who leaves Mexico in a fortnight.

LETTER THE TWENTY-SECOND


17th June.

As we dine nearly every Sunday with the Countess de la C——a at Tacubay, where she keeps open house to all her friends, we have had the pleasure of becoming intimately acquainted with her son-in-law, Señor Gutierrez Estrada, who, with his amiable wife, has lately returned from Europe.
A great dinner was given us the other day by General Moran and his lady the Marquesa de Vivanco, at San Agustin. We went early that we might have time to walk about the garden, which is beautiful, and to visit an artificial cave there, which we found lighted up with coloured lamps, and where a most fascinating species of cold milk punch, with cakes, was served to the company. The dinner would certainly have been superb in any country; the family have travelled a great deal in Europe, (per force, the general having been exiled for several years,) and are amongst the oldest and richest in Mexico. The dowager marquesa has a most patriarchal family of daughters and grand-daughters, and of the large party assembled at table, nearly all were composed of its different members. In the evening we had a pleasant dance under the trees.

20th.—Being invited yesterday to a fete at San Antonio, we left Mexico about eight o'clock, by the great causeway leading to San Agustin. The day was peculiarly brilliant, but the rainy season is now announcing its approach by frequent showers towards evening. We found a large party assembled, and about twelve o'clock sat down to a most magnificent breakfast of about sixty persons. Everything was solid silver; even the plates. A vast capital is sunk in diamonds and plate in this country, no good sign of the state of commerce. The ladies in general were dressed in white embroidered muslins, over white or coloured satin, and one or two Paris dresses shone conspicuous. There was one specimen of real Mexican beauty; the Señora —, a face perhaps more Indian than Spanish, very dark, with fine eyes, beautiful teeth, very long dark hair, and full of expression. The house, which is immensely large, is furnished, or rather unfurnished, in the style of all Mexican haciendas. After breakfast, we had music, dancing, walking, and billiard-playing. Some boleros were very gracefully danced by a daughter of the marquesa’s, and they also showed us some dances of the country. The fete terminated with the most beautiful supper I almost ever saw. A great hall was lighted with coloured lamps, the walls entirely lined with green branches, and hung with fresh garlands of flowers most tastefully arranged. There was a great deal of gaiety and cordiality, of magnificence without ceremony, and riches without pretension.
Although warned by various showers that a bad night would probably set in, and although it was too likely that the hospitality within the house would be extended to our coachmen, and even though the whole party were strongly pressed by the marquesa to pass the night there, so that it was with difficulty we resisted her entreaties to remain, we did, in the face of all this, set off at twelve o'clock at night to return to Mexico; about seven carriages together, with various gentlemen riding. Though very dark there was no rain, and we flattered ourselves it would keep fair till we reached the city. The minister of the interior, who is married to a daughter of the marquesa, C—— n and I, and La Güera Rodriguez, set off in one carriage. Some carriages had lamps, others had none. Some had six horses; we had six mules, and an escort of dragoons. We had not gone two miles before a thunderstorm came on; and the black clouds which had been gathering above our heads burst forth in torrents of rain. The wind was tremendous. All the lamps were extinguished. The horses waded up to their knees in mud and water. Suddenly there was a crash, followed by loud cries. A carriage was overturned, in which were the Señora L—— and a party of gentlemen. In the midst of this awful storm, and perhaps still more bewildered by generous liquor, their coachman had lost his way, and lodged them all in a ditch. The poor Señora was dreadfully bruised, her head cut, and her wrist dislocated. In the darkness and confusion she was extricated with difficulty, and placed in another carriage.

Our mules stood still. As far as the noise of the storm would allow us to hear, we made out that our coachman also had lost the road. Two dragoons rode up to direct him. One fell, horse and all, into a deep ditch, where he remained till the next morning. Another carriage came ploughing its way behind us. Another exclamation in the darkness! A mule had fallen and broken his traces, and plunged into the water. The poor animal could not be found. Never was there such a chapter of accidents. We were the only carriage-load which escaped entirely, owing chiefly to the sobriety of the coachman. Very slowly and after sundry detentions, we arrived in Mexico towards morning, very tired, but with neither broken bones nor bruises.

18th.—Day of the Corpus Christi, in which the host is
carried through the city in great procession at which the president, in full uniform, the archbishop, and all the ministers, etc., assist. In former days this ceremony took place on Holy Thursday; but finding that, on account of the various ceremonies of the holy week, it could not be kept with due solemnity, another day was set apart for its celebration. We went to a window in the square, to see the procession, which was very brilliant; all the troops out, and the streets crowded. Certainly, a stranger entering Mexico on one of these days would be struck with surprise at its apparent wealth. Everything connected with the church is magnificent.

This evening the Señora A—came after it was dark, in a Poblana dress, which she had just bought to wear at a Jamaica, which they are going to have in the country—a sort of fair, where all the girls disguise themselves in peasants' dresses, and go about selling fruit, lemonade, vegetables, etc., to each other—a very ancient Mexican amusement. This dress cost her some hundred dollars. The top of the petticoat is yellow satin; the rest, which is of scarlet cashmere, is embroidered in gold and silver. Her hair was fastened back with a thick silver comb, and her ornaments were very handsome, coral set in gold. Her shoes white satin, embroidered in gold; the sleeves and body of the chemise, which is of the finest cambric, trimmed with rich lace; and the petticoat, which comes below the dress, shows two flounces of Valenciennes. She looks beautiful in this dress, which will not be objected to in the country, though it might not suit a fancy ball in Mexico.

June 27th.—I was awakened this morning by hearing that two boxes had arrived from New York, containing books, letters, etc.; all very acceptable. We also received a number of old newspapers by post, for which we had to pay eighteen dollars! Each sheet costs a real and a half—a mistaken source of profit in a republic, where the general diffusion of knowledge is of so much importance, for this not only applies to the introduction of French and English, but also of Spanish newspapers. Señors Gutierrez Estrada and Canedo used every effort to reduce this duty on newspapers, but in vain. The post-office opposes its reduction, fearing to be deprived of an imaginary rent—imaginary, because so few persons, comparatively, think it worth their while to go to this expense.
Life in Mexico

There is but one daily newspaper in Mexico, "La Gazeta del Gobierno" (the government paper), and it is filled with orders and decrees. An opposition paper, the "Cosmopolita," is published twice a week; also a Spanish paper, the "Hesperia;" both (especially the last) are well written. There is also the "Mosquito," so called from its stinging sarcasms. Now and then another with a new title appears, like a shooting star, but, from want of support, or from some other motive, is suddenly extinguished.

Enlightened individuals like Don Lucas Alaman and Count Cortina have published newspapers, but not for any length of time. Count Cortina, especially, edited a very witty and brilliant paper called the "Zurriago," the "Scourge," and another called the "Mono," the "Ape;" and in many of his articles he was tolerably severe upon the incorrect Spanish of his brother editors, of which no one can be a better judge, he having been a member of the "Academia de la Lengua," in Spain.

The only kind of monthly review in Mexico is the "Mosaico Mexicano," whose editor has made his fortune by his own activity and exertions. Frequently it contains more translations than original matter; but from time to time it publishes scientific articles, said to be written by Don J. M. Bustamante, which are very valuable, and occasionally a brilliant article from the pen of Count Cortina. General Orbegoso, who is of Spanish origin, is also a contributor. Sometimes, though rarely, it publishes "documentos ineditos" (unedited documents), connected with Mexican antiquities, and Mexican natural history and biography, which are very important; and now and then it contains a little poetical gem, I know not whether original or not, but exceedingly beautiful. So far as it goes, this review is one great means of spreading knowledge, at least amongst the better classes; but I understand that the editor, Don Ygnacio Cumplido, a very courteous, intelligent man, complains that it does not pay.

There are no circulating libraries in Mexico. Books are at least double the price that they are in Europe. There is no diffusion of useful knowledge amongst the people; neither cheap pamphlets nor cheap magazines written for their amusement or instruction; but this is less owing to want of attention to their interests on the part of many good and enlightened men, than to the unsettled state of
the country; for the blight of civil war prevents the best systems from ripening.

Fortunately, there is an English society here, a kind of book-club, who, with their minister, have united in a subscription to order from England all the new publications, and as C——n is a member of this society, we are not so arrière in regard to the literature of the day as might be supposed. Like all English societies, its basis is a good dinner, which each member gives in turn, once a month, after which there is a sale of the books that have been read, and propositions for new books are given in to the president. It is an excellent plan, and I believe is in part adopted by other foreigners here. But Germans of a certain class do not seem to be sufficiently numerous for such an undertaking, and the French in Mexico, barring some distinguished exceptions, are apt to be amongst the very worst specimens of that people which "le plaisant pays de France" can furnish forth.

We went lately to a ball given by a young Englishman, which was very pretty, and where nearly all the English were collected. Of families, there are not more than half a dozen resident here, the members of whom form a striking contrast in complexion to the Mexicanas. With very few exceptions (and these in the case of English women married to foreigners, they keep themselves entirely aloof from the Mexicans, live quietly in their own houses, into which they have transplanted as much English comfort as possible, rarely travel, and naturally find Mexico the dullest of cities. C——n has gone to dine with the English minister, and I am left alone in this large room, with nothing but a humming-bird to keep me company; the last of my half-dozen. It looks like a large blue fly, and is perfectly tame, but will not live many days.

I was startled by a solemn voice, saying, "Ave Maria Purissima!" And looking up there stood in the doorway a "friar of orders gray," bringing some message to C——n from the head of the convent of San Fernando, with which monks C——n has formed a great intimacy, chiefly in consequence of the interest which he has taken in the history of their missions to California.

In fact, when we hear the universal cry that is raised against these communities for the inutility of their lives, it is but just that exceptions should be made in favour of those orders, who, like the monks of San Fernando, have
dispersed their missionaries over some of the most miserable parts of the globe, and who, undeterred by danger, and by the prospect of death, have carried light to the most benighted savages. These institutions are of a very remote date. A learned Jesuit monk, Eusebio Kuhn, is said to have been the first who discovered that California was a peninsula. In 1683 the Jesuits had formed establishments in old California, and for the first time it was made known that the country which had until then been considered an El Dorado, rich in all precious metals and diamonds, was arid, stony, and without water or earth fit for vegetation; that where there is a spring of water it is to be found amongst the bare rocks, and where there is earth there is no water. A few spots were found by these industrious men, uniting these advantages, and there they founded their first missions.

But the general hatred with which the Jesuits were regarded, excited suspicion against them, and it was generally supposed that their accounts were false, and that they were privately becoming possessed of much treasure. A visitador (surveyor) was sent to examine into the truth, and though he could discover no traces of gold or silver, he was astonished by the industry and zeal with which they had cultivated the barren and treeless waste. In a few years they had built sixteen villages, and when they were expelled, in 1767, the Dominican friars of Mexico took their place.

Until these missions were established, and in every part of the peninsula which is not included in the territory of the missions, the savages were the most degraded specimens of humanity existing. More degraded than the beasts of the field, they lay all day upon their faces on the arid sand, basking in the heat; they abhorred all species of clothing, and their only religion was a secret horror that caused them to tremble at the idea of three divinities, belonging to three different tribes, and which divinities were themselves supposed to feel a mortal hatred, and to wage perpetual war against each other.

Undeterred by the miserable condition both of human and of vegetable nature, these missionaries cultivated the ground, established colonies, made important astronomical observations, and devoted themselves to science, to agriculture, and to the amelioration of the condition of these wretched savages.
In New California, the missions were under the charge of thirty-six Franciscan friars, under whom the most extraordinary progress in civilization took place; since in little more than thirty years, upwards of thirty-three thousand Indians were baptized, and eight thousand marriages had taken place. The soil being fertile and the climate more benign than in the other California, in eighteen missions established there, they cultivated corn, wheat, maize, etc., and introduced vegetables and fruit-trees from Spain; amongst these the vine and the olive, from which excellent wine and oil were made, all through that part of the country.

Amongst the monks destined to these distant missions were those of San Fernando. There, banished from the world, deprived of all the advantages of civilization, they devoted themselves to the task of taming the wild Indians, introduced marriage amongst them, taught them to cultivate the ground, together with some of the most simple arts; assisted their wants, reproved their sins, and transplanted the beneficial doctrines of Christianity amongst them, using no arms but the influence which religion and kindness, united with extreme patience, had over their stubborn natures; and making what Humboldt, in speaking of the Jesuit missions, calls "a pacific conquest" of the country.

Many were the hardships which these poor men endured; changed from place to place; at one time ordered to some barren shore, where it was necessary to recommence their labours,—at another, recalled to the capital by orders of the prelate, in conjunction with the wishes of their brethren, among whom there was a species of congress, called by them a capitulo. No increase of rank, no reward, no praise, inspired their labours; their only recompense was their intimate conviction of doing good to their fellow-creatures.

In the archives of the convent there still exist papers, proving the hardships which these men underwent; the zeal with which they applied themselves to the study of the languages of the country; (and when we are informed that in the space of one hundred and eighty leagues, nineteen different languages are spoken, it was no such easy task;) and containing their descriptions of its physical and moral state, more or less well written, according to their different degrees of instruction or talent.
It frequently happened that marketable goods and even provisions had to be sent by sea to those missionaries who lived in the most savage and uncultivated parts of the peninsula; and a curious anecdote on this subject was related to C—n by one of these men, who is now a gardener by profession. It happened that some one sent to the monks, amongst other things, a case of fine Malaga raisins; and one of the monks, whose name I forget, sowed a number of the dried seeds. In process of time they sprouted up, became vines, and produced fine grapes, from which the best wine in California was made.

When the independence was declared, and that revolutionary fury which makes a merit of destroying every establishment, good or bad, which is the work of the opposite party, broke forth; the Mexicans, to prove their hatred to the mother-country, destroyed these beneficent institutions; thus committing an error as fatal in its results as when in 1828 they expelled so many rich proprietors, who were followed into exile by their numerous families and by their old servants, who gave them in these times of trouble proofs of attachment and fidelity belonging to a race now scarcely existing here, except amongst a few of the oldest families.

The result has been, that the frontiers, being now unprotected by the military garrisons or presidios, which were established there, and deserted by the missionaries, the Indians are no longer kept under subjection, either by the force of arms or by the good counsels and persuasive influence of their padres. The Mexican territory is, in consequence, perpetually exposed to their invasions—whole families are massacred by the savages, who exchange guns for rifles, which they already know how to use, and these evil consequences are occasionally and imperfectly averted at a great expense to the republic. Bustamante has indeed been making an investigation lately as to the funds and general condition of these establishments, with the intention of re-establishing some similar institutions; but as yet I believe that nothing decisive has been done in this respect. . . .

Near the convent there is a beautiful garden, where we sometimes walk in the morning, cultivated by an old monk, who, after spending a laborious life in these distant missions, is now enjoying a contented old age among his plants and flowers. Perhaps you are tired of my prosing
(caused by the apparition of the old lay-brother), and would prefer some account of him in verse.

- An aged monk in San Fernando dwells,
  An innocent and venerable man;
  His earlier days were spent within its cells,
  And end obscurely as they first began.
  Manhood’s career in savage climes he ran,
  On lonely California’s Indian shore—
  Dispelling superstition’s deadly ban,
  Or teaching (what could patriot do more?)
Those rudiments of peace, the gardener’s humble store.

Oft have I marked him, silent and apart,
  Loitering near the sunny convent-gate,
Rewarded by tranquillity of heart
  For toils so worthy of the truly great;
And in my soul admired, compared his state
  With that of some rude brawler, whose crude mind
Some wondrous change on earth would fain create;
  Who after flatter’ring, harassing mankind,
Gains titles, riches, pomp, with shame and scorn combined.

LETTER THE TWENTY-THIRD


5th July.

Yesterday morning we had a visit from the president, with two of his officers. He was riding one of the handsomest black horses I ever saw. On going out we stopped to look at a wax figure of Yturbi on horseback, which he considers a good resemblance, and which was sent me as a present some time ago. He ought to be a good judge, as he was a most devoted friend of the unfortunate Agustín L., who, whatever were his faults, seems to have inspired his friends with the most devoted and enthusiastic attachment. In the prime of life, brave and active, handsome and fond of show, he had all the qualities which render a chief popular with the multitude; “but popularity, when not based upon great benefits, is transient; it is founded upon a principle of egotism, because a whole