(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 flattering, 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 Yturbiendo 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 Agustin I., 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
people cannot have personal sympathies." Ambition led him to desert the royal cause which he had served for nine years; and vanity blinded him to the dangers that surrounded him in the midst of his triumphs, even when proclaimed emperor by the united voice of the garrison and city of Mexico—when his horses were taken from his carriage, and when, amidst the shouts of the multitude, his coach was dragged in triumph to the palace. His great error, according to those who talk of him impartially, was indecision in the most critical emergencies, and his permitting himself to be governed by circumstances, instead of directing these circumstances as they occurred.

I could not help thinking, as the general stood there looking at the waxen image of his friend, what a stormy life he himself has passed; how little real tranquillity he can ever have enjoyed, and wondering whether he will be permitted to finish his presidential days in peace, which, according to rumour, is doubtful.

Sth.—I had the honour of a long visit this morning from his grace the archbishop. He came about eleven o'clock, after mass, and remained till dinner-time, sitting out all our Sunday visitors, who are generally numerous, as it is the only day of rest for employés, and especially for the cabinet. Amongst our visitors were Señor Canedo, who is extremely agreeable in conversation, and as an orator famed for his sarcasm and cutting wit. He has been particularly kind and friendly to us ever since our arrival—General Almonte, Minister of War, a handsome man and pleasant, and an officer of great bravery—very unpopular with one party and especially disliked by the English, but also a great friend of ours. Señor Cuevas, Minister of the Interior, married to a daughter of the Marquesa de Vivanco, an amiable and excellent man, who seems generally liked, and is also most friendly to us. All these gentlemen are praised or abused according to the party of the person who speaks of them; but I not interfering in Mexican politics, find them amongst the most pleasant of our acquaintances.

However, were I to choose a situation here, it would undoubtedly be that of Archbishop of Mexico, the most enviable in the world to those who would enjoy a life of tranquillity, ease, and universal adoration. He is a pope without the trouble, or a tenth part of the responsibility. He is venerated more than the Holy Father is in enlight-
ened Rome, and, like kings in the good old times, can do no wrong. His salary amounts to about one hundred thousand dollars, and a revenue might be made by the sweetmeats alone which are sent him from all the nuns in the republic. His palace in town, his well-cushioned carriage, well-conditioned horses, and sleek mules, seem the very perfection of comfort. In fact, comfort, which is unknown amongst the profane of Mexico, has taken refuge with the archbishop; and though many drops of it are shed on the shaven heads of all bishops, curates, confessors, and friars, still in his illustrious person it concentrates as in a focus. He himself is a benevolent, good-hearted, good-natured, portly, and jovial personage, with the most laissez-aller air and expression conceivable. He looks like one on whom the good things of this world have fallen in a constant and benignant shower, which shower hath fallen on a rich and fertile soil. He is generally to be seen leaning back in his carriage, dressed in purple, with amethyst cross, and giving his benediction to the people as he passes. He seems engaged in a pleasant reverie, and his countenance wears an air of the most placid and insouciant content. He enjoys a good dinner, good wine, and ladies’ society, but just sufficiently to make his leisure hours pass pleasantly, without indigestion from the first, headaches from the second, or heartaches from the third. So does his life seem to pass on like a deep untroubled stream, on whose margin grow sweet flowers, on whose clear waters the bending trees are reflected, but on whose placid face no lasting impression is made.

I have no doubt that his charities are in proportion to his large fortune; and when I say that I have no doubt of this, it is because I firmly believe there exists no country in the world where charities, both public and private, are practised on so noble a scale, especially by the women under the direction of the priests. I am inclined to believe that, generally speaking, charity is a distinguishing attribute of a Catholic country.

The archbishop is said to be a man of good information, and was at one time a senator. In 1833, being comprehended in the law of banishment, caused by the political disturbances which have never ceased to afflict this country since the independence, he passed some time in the United States, chiefly in New Orleans; but this, I believe, is the
only cloud that has darkened his horizon, or disturbed the tranquil current of his life. His consecration, with its attendant fatigues, must have been to him a wearisome overture to a pleasant drama, a hard stepping-stone to glory. As to the rest, he is very unostentatious, and his conversation is far from austere. On the contrary, he is one of the best-tempered and most cheerful old men in society that it is possible to meet with.

I send you, by the Mexican commissioners, who are kind enough to take charge of a box for me, the figure of a Mexican tortillera, by which you may judge a little of the perfection in which the commonest lepero here works in wax. The incredible patience which enabled the ancient Mexicans to work their statues in wood or stone with the rudest instruments, has descended to their posterity, as well as their extraordinary and truly Chinese talent for imitation. With a common knife and a piece of hard wood, an uneducated man will produce a fine piece of sculpture. There is no imagination. They do not leave the beaten track, but continue on the models which the Spanish conquerors brought out with them, some of which, however, were very beautiful.

In wax, especially, their figures have been brought to great perfection. Everything that surrounds them they can imitate, and their wax portraits are sometimes little gems of art; but in this last branch, which belongs to a higher order of art, there are no good workmen at present.

A propos to which, a poor artist brought some tolerable wax portraits here for sale the other day, and, amongst others, that of a celebrated general. C——n remarked that it was fairer than the original, as far as he recollected. “Ah!” said the man, “but when his excellency washes his face, nothing can be more exact.” A valuable present was sent lately by a gentleman here, to the Count de —— in Spain; twelve cases, each case containing twelve wax figures; each figure representing some Mexican trade, or profession or employment. There were men drawing the pulque from the maguey, Indian women selling vegetables, tortilleras, vendors of ducks, fruitmen, lard-sellers, the postman of Guachinango, loaded with parrots, monkeys, etc., more of everything than of letters—the Poblana peasant, the rancherita on horseback before her farm-servant, the gaily-dressed ranchero, in short, a little history of Mexico in wax.
You ask me how Mexican women are educated. In answering you, I must put aside a few brilliant exceptions, and speak en masse, the most difficult thing in the world, for these exceptions are always rising up before me like accusing angels, and I begin to think of individuals, when I should keep to generalities. Generally speaking, then, the Mexican Señoras and Señoritas write, read, and play a little, sew, and take care of their houses and children. When I say they read, I mean they know how to read; when I say they write, I do not mean that they can always spell; and when I say they play, I do not assert that they have generally a knowledge of music. If we compare their education with that of girls in England, or in the United States, it is not a comparison, but a contrast. Compare it with that of Spanish women, and we shall be less severe upon their far niente descendants. In the first place, the climate inclines every one to indolence, both physically and morally. One cannot pore over a book when the blue sky is constantly smiling in at the open windows; then, out of doors after ten o'clock, the sun gives us due warning of our tropical latitude, and even though the breeze is so fresh and pleasant, one has no inclination to walk or ride far. Whatever be the cause, I am convinced that it is impossible to take the same exercise with the mind or with the body in this country, as in Europe or in the northern states. Then as to schools, there are none that can deserve the name, and no governesses. Young girls can have no emulation, for they never meet. They have no public diversion, and no private amusement. There are a few good foreign masters, most of whom have come to Mexico for the purpose of making their fortune, by teaching, or marriage, or both, and whose object, naturally, is to make the most money in the shortest possible time, that they may return home and enjoy it. The children generally appear to have an extraordinary disposition for music and drawing, yet there are few girls who are proficient in either.

When very young, they occasionally attend the schools, where boys and girls learn to read in common, or any other accomplishment that the old women can teach them; but at twelve they are already considered too old to attend these promiscuous assemblages, and masters are got for drawing and music to finish their education. I asked a lady the other day if her daughter went to school. "Good
heavens!" said she, quite shocked, "she is past eleven years old!" It frequently happens that the least well-informed girls are the children of the cleverest men, who, keeping to the customs of their forefathers, are content if they confess regularly, attend church constantly, and can embroider and sing a little. Where there are more extended ideas, it is chiefly amongst families who have travelled in Europe, and have seen the different education of women in foreign countries. Of these the fathers occasionally devote a short portion of their time to the instruction of their daughters, perhaps during their leisure evening moments, but it may easily be supposed that this desultory system has little real influence on the minds of the children. I do not think there are above half-a-dozen married women, or as many girls above fourteen, who, with the exception of the mass-book, read any one book through in the whole course of the year. They thus greatly simplify the system of education in the United States, where parties are frequently divided between the advocates for solid learning and those for superficial accomplishments; and according to whom it is difficult to amalgamate the solid beef of science with the sweet sauce of les beaux arts.

But if a Mexican girl is ignorant, she rarely shows it. They have generally the greatest possible tact; never by any chance wandering out of their depth, or betraying by word or sign that they are not well informed of the subject under discussion. Though seldom graceful, they are never awkward, and always self-possessed. They have plenty of natural talent, and where it has been thoroughly cultivated, no women can surpass them. Of what is called literary society, there is of course none—

"No bustling Botherbys have they to show 'em
That charming passage in the last new poem."

There is a little annual lying beside me called "Calendario de las Señoritas Mexicanas," of which the preface, by Galvan, the editor, is very amusing.

"To none," he says, "better than to Mexican ladies, can I dedicate this mark of attention—(obsequio). Their graceful attractions well deserve any trouble that may have been taken to please them. Their bodies are graceful as the palms of the desert; their hair black as ebony, or golden as the rays of the sun, gracefully waves over their
Families of the Old School

delicate shoulders; their glances are like the peaceful light of the moon. The Mexican ladies are not so white as the Europeans, but their whiteness is more agreeable to our eyes. Their words are soft, leading our hearts by gentleness, in the same manner as in their moments of just indignation they appal and confound us. Who can resist the magic of their song, always sweet, always gentle, and always natural? Let us leave to foreign ladies (las ultramarinas) these affected and scientific manners of singing; here nature surpasses art, as happens in everything, notwithstanding the cavillings of the learned.

"And what shall I say of their souls? I shall say that in Europe the minds are more cultivated, but in Mexico the hearts are more amiable. Here they are not only sentimental, but tender; not only soft, but virtuous; the body of a child is not more sensitive, (no es mas sensible el cuerpo de un niño), nor a rose-bud softer. I have seen souls as beautiful as the borders of the rainbow, and purer than the drops of dew. Their passions are seldom tempestuous, and even then they are kindled and extinguished easily; but generally they emit a peaceful light, like the morning star, Venus. Modesty is painted in their eyes, and modesty is the greatest and most irresistible fascination of their souls. In short, the Mexican ladies, by their manifold virtues, are destined to serve as our support whilst we travel through the sad desert of life.

"Well do these attractions merit that we should try to please them; and in effect a new form, new lustre, and new graces have been given to the 'Almanac of the Mexican Ladies,' whom the editor submissively entreats to receive with benevolence this small tribute due to their enchantments and their virtues!"

There are in Mexico a few families of the old school, people of high rank, but who mingle very little in society; who are little known to the generality of foreigners, and who keep their daughters entirely at home, that they may not be contaminated by bad example. These select few, rich without ostentation, are certainly doing everything that is in their power to remedy the evils occasioned by the want of proper schools, or of competent instructresses for their daughters. Being nearly all allied by birth, or connected by marriage, they form a sort of clan; and it is sufficient to belong to one or other of these families, to be hospitably received by all. They meet together frequently,
without ceremony, and whatever elements of good exist in Mexico, are to be found amongst them. The fathers are generally men of talent and learning, and the mothers, women of the highest respectability, to whose name no suspicion can be attached.

But, indeed, it is long before a stranger even suspects the state of morals in this country, for whatever be the private conduct of individuals, the most perfect decorum prevails in outward behaviour. But indolence is the mother of vice, and not only to little children might Doctor Watts have asserted that

"Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do."

They are besides extremely leal to each other, and with proper esprit de corps, rarely gossip to strangers concerning the errors of their neighbours’ ways;—indeed, if such a thing is hinted at, deny all knowledge of the fact. So long as outward decency is preserved, habit has rendered them entirely indifferent as to the liaisons subsisting amongst their particular friends; and as long as a woman attends church regularly, is a patroness of charitable institutions, and gives no scandal by her outward behaviour, she may do pretty much as she pleases. As for flirtations in public, they are unknown.

I must, however, confess that this indulgence on the part of women of unimpeachable reputation is sometimes carried too far. We went lately to a breakfast, at which was a young and beautiful countess, lately married, and of very low birth. She looked very splendid, with all the—— diamonds, and a dress of rose-coloured satin. After breakfast we adjourned to another room, where I admired the beauty of a little child who was playing about on the floor, when this lady said, “Yes, she is very pretty——very like my little girl, who is just the same age.” I was rather surprised, but concluded she had been a widow, and made the inquiry of an old French lady who was sitting near me. “Oh, no!” said she——“she was never married before; she alludes to the children she had before the count became acquainted with her!” And yet the Señora de——, the strictest woman in Mexico, was loading her with attentions and caresses. I must say, however, that this was a singular instance...

There are no women more affectionate in their manners
than those of Mexico. In fact, a foreigner, especially if he be an Englishman, and a shy man, and accustomed to the coolness of his fair countrywomen, need only live a few years here, and understand the language, and become accustomed to the peculiar style of beauty, to find the Mexican Señoritas perfectly irresistible.

And that this is so, may be judged of by the many instances of Englishmen married to the women of this country, who invariably make them excellent wives. But when an Englishman marries here, he ought to settle here, for it is very rare that a Mexicana can live out of her own country. They miss the climate—they miss that warmth of manner, that universal cordiality by which they are surrounded here. They miss the laissez-aller and absence of all etiquette in habits, toilet, etc. They find themselves surrounded by women so differently educated, as to be doubly strangers to them, strangers in feeling as well as in country. A very few instances there are of girls, married very young, taken to Europe, and introduced into good society, who have acquired European ways of thinking, and even prefer other countries to their own; but this is so rare, as scarcely to form an exception. They are true patriots, and the visible horizon bounds their wishes. In England especially, they are completely out of their element. A language nearly impossible for them to acquire, a religion which they consider heretical, outward coldness covering inward warmth, a perpetual war between sun and fog, etiquette carried to excess, an insupportable stiffness and order in the article of the toilet; rebosos unknown, cigaritos considered barbarous. . . . They feel like exiles from paradise, and live but in hopes of a speedy return.

As to the colleges for young men, although various projects of reform have been made by enlightened men in regard to them, especially by Don Lucas Alaman, and afterwards by Señor Gutierrez Estrada, and though to a certain extent many of the plans were carried into effect, it is a universal source of complaint among the most distinguished persons in Mexico, that in order to give their sons a thorough education, it is necessary to send them abroad.