waiting. As for him, he was as kind and agreeable as usual, and, after coffee, took his departure to the sound of music.

LETTER THE TWENTY-NINTH


21st.

We received a few days since an invitation to attend the sumptuous mass, annually given by the Asturian Brotherhood, in honour of the Virgin of Cavadonga, in the church of Santo Domingo. The invitation being printed on blue satin, with gold lace and tassels, seems worthy of a place in a box of wax figures, which will be sent by the next packet.

The church was superbly decorated, and only well-dressed people were admitted. C——n was carried off to a post of honour near the altar, and a padre gave me a velvet chair. The music was beautiful, but too gay for a church. There were violins and wind instruments, and several amateur players. Some pieces from the Cheval de Bronze were very well played. The sermon, preached by Guerrero, a chanoine who has some reputation as an orator, contained a prudent degree of praise of the Spaniards, and even of a king, could that king be a pelayo.

In the evening we dined at the Prussian minister’s—a pleasant party.

Yesterday we went to Chapultepec, C——n and I, M. de G——t, and M. de N——, to take views with the Daguerreotype, which C——n had the pleasure of receiving some time ago from Boston, from our friend, Mr. Prescott. While they were working in the sun, I, finding that the excessive heat had the effect of cooling my enthusiasm, established myself with a book under Montezuma’s cypress, which felt very romantic. The poetry of the scene, however, was greatly weakened by the arrival of
a party of *forcats* in chains, who are working in the castle, which I believe there is some intention of having transformed into a military college. They are so insolent, that forgetting they are guarded and chained in couples, I felt glad to see that the servants were within call.

Our weekly *soirées* have begun, and, so far, are very successful. There are now three tertulias in the week at the houses of the diplomats. We have generally music, cards, and plenty of dancing, and every one seems pleased, the best proof of which they give by generally staying till two or three in the morning.

28th.—You may imagine my joy at the arrival of K—and A—in health and safety at three o'clock to-day. They have had a good journey from Vera Cruz, suffering from nothing but the cold, which they felt especially at Perote. As they arrived on the day of a *soirée*, they did not make their appearance, being tired. I have now an excuse for revisiting all my old haunts, and the first week or two must pass in sight-seeing.

30th.—We dined yesterday at Tacubaya; where the C—a family, particularly the ladies of the family, are in a state of the greatest uneasiness.

I had just written these words, when I began, to my great astonishment, to rock up and down, chair, table, and myself. Suddenly, the room, the walls, all began to move, and the floor to heave like the waves of the sea! At first, I imagined that I was giddy, but almost immediately saw that it was an earthquake. We all ran, or rather staggered as well as we could, into the gallery, where the servants were already arranged on their knees, praying and crossing themselves with all their might. The shock lasted above a minute and a half, and I believe has done no injury, except in frightening the whole population, and cracking a few old walls. All Mexico was on its knees while it lasted, even the poor madmen in San Hepolito, which A—had gone to visit in company with Señor ——. I have had a feeling of sea-sickness ever since. They expect a return of the shock in twenty-four hours. How dreadful a severe earthquake must be! how terrible it is to feel this heaving of the solid earth, to lose our confidence in its security, and to be reminded that the elements of destruction which lurk beneath our feet, are yet swifter and more powerful to destroy, than those which are above us.
I cannot help laughing yet at the recollection of the face of a poor little clerk who had just entered the house with a packet of letters for C——n. He did not kneel, but sat down upon the steps as pale as death, looking as "creamed faced" as the messenger to Macbeth; and when the shock was over, he was so sick, that he ran out of the house without making any remarks. The scarlet hucanaya, with a loud shriek, flew from its perch, and performed a zig-zag flight through the air, down to the troubled fountain in the court.

Your friend, the Honourable Mr. ——, arrived the other day, looking very ill, having had the yellow fever at Havana very severely, a peculiar piece of bad fortune at this season.

All the furniture we ordered from the United States, arrived some time ago, a mass of legs and arms. Tables, wardrobes, etc., were, I believe, all sold for the mahogany at Vera Cruz. The mirrors also arrived in powder. This must be owing to bad packing, since our most delicate things from London, such as crystal, porcelain, etc., have arrived in excellent condition.

December 3rd.—Have had many visits to-day, this being my dia de fiesta. Amongst others the president was here. This custom of keeping people's dias gives one a great deal of trouble, but the omission is considered rather a breach of politeness.

12th.—This being the anniversary of the day of the miraculous apparition of our Lady of Guadalupe, the cathedral and village will be crowded with Indians from all parts of the country. A—— and Mr. B—— have driven over there; but, from all accounts, the crowd will be so great, that we are not tempted to accompany them. We have a soirée this evening, and have had two pleasant parties this week at the other houses. To-morrow we intend going with a large party to the Desierto, where some gentlemen are to give a breakfast. I understand that there are to be twenty-three people on horseback, and eighteen in carriages, and our trysting-place is by the great fountain with the gilt statue, in the Paseo de Buccarelli; the hour, half-past seven. They say the Desierto is a beautiful place, but being seven leagues from Mexico, we shall probably all return as tired as possible.

15th.—The morning of our party to the Desierto was beautiful. Here one need not fear those contretemps in
regard to the weather, which in England so often render a party of pleasure painful; unless, indeed, one chooses to select an evening in the rainy season for an expedition. We met by the fountain at the hour appointed, some in carriages, and some on horseback. Of the latter I formed part. The road leads along the aqueduct by Chapultepec, and through Tacubaya, and is the high-road that goes to Toluca. The first part, after passing Tacubaya, is steep, bleak, and uninteresting. Plantations of maguey and occasional clumps of Peruvian trees are the only vegetation, and Indian huts the only traces of human life. But after a tedious ascent, the view looking back upon Mexico, with all her churches, lakes, and mountains is truly magnificent. The road also begins to wind through a fertile and wooded country. About noon we reached an inn, where travellers stop who are going to Toluca, and where we halted to collect our scattered forces. Hanging up by a hook in the entry, along with various other dead animals, polecats, weasels, etc., was the ugliest creature I ever beheld. It seemed a species of dog, with a hunch back, a head like a wolf, and no neck, a perfect monster. As far as I can make out it must be the *itzquintepotezotl*, mentioned by some old Mexican writers. The people had brought it up in the house, and killed it on account of its fierceness. This inn stands in the valley of Guajimalco, and is about a league from the Desierto.

There is no longer any road there, but a steep and winding path through the beautiful woods. Therefore those who had come in coaches were now obliged to proceed on donkeys, with Indian guides. The beauty of the scenery is indescribable. The path winds, ascending through a wilderness of trees and flowering shrubs, bathed by a clear and rapid rivulet; and every now and then, through the arched forest-trees, are glimpses of the snowy volcanoes and of the distant domes and lakes of Mexico.

The ruins of the old Carmelite convent, standing on the slope of a hill, are surrounded by noble forests of pine, and oak, and cedar; long and lofty forest-aisles, where the monks of former days wandered in peaceful meditation. But they removed from this beautiful site to another, said to be equally beautiful and wilder, also called the Desierto, but much farther from Mexico; and this fertile region (which the knowing eye of a Yankee would instantly discover to be full of capabilities in the way of machinery),
belongs to no one, and lies here deserted, in solitary beauty. Some poor Indians live amongst the ruins of the old cloisters, and the wild deer possess the undisputed sovereignty of the woods.

It is said that a benighted traveller, who had lost his way in these solitudes, and was miraculously saved from dying of cold, founded this rich convent of Carmelite monks, in gratitude to Heaven for his deliverance, bequeathing his desire, that all travellers who passed that way should receive hospitality from the convent. Certainly no place more fitted for devotion could have been selected than this mountain retreat; and when the convent bell tolled at evening, calling the monks to prayer, and waking the echoes of the silent hills, its deep notes must have been all in unison with the solemn scene.

But the sight of a very magnificent déjeûne à la fourchette, spread under the pine-trees, the uncorking of champagne bottles and Scotch ale, the savoury odour of soups and fricandeaus, the bustling attendance of English waiters, put to flight all romantic fancies. We remembered that we were hungry, that we had ridden seven miles and had not breakfasted; and no order of friars could have done more justice to the repast than we did. . . . But the component parts of a party of pleasure must be very curiously selected, the mosaic of the society very nicely fitted, or it will inevitably terminate unpleasantly; and the elements of discord are more dangerous, their effects more lasting, than even the coughs and colds and rheumatisms produced by those watery elements, sworn foes to all picnics and gipsy parties in our foggy island.

About four o'clock we remounted our horses, and retraced our path through the woods; and who could ruminate on petty disputes, or complain of trilling accidents, or not forget any disagreeable individuals who might have been found among our numerous party, when the splendid panorama of Mexico burst upon us, with all its mountains, lakes, and plains, its churches, and towers, and gardens, bathed in a flood of golden light, the rich crimson clouds of sunset resting upon the snow of the volcanoes, while the woods through which our horses picked their steps, over stones and streamlets, were fragrant with blossoming shrubs and wild roses?

When we reached the inn where the carriages had been left, we remounted our horses, and as it was growing
dusk, and the whole party had not yet collected together, we thought it advisable for the equestrian part of the expedition to ride forward; so leaving the carriages with their escort, we set off for Mexico; C—n, I, A—-, and a servant, at full gallop, and hardly drew our bridles till we reached the city; tired, as you may suppose, after our fourteen leagues' ride.

20th.—Our yesterday evening's tertulia was very crowded; and there was a great deal of music and dancing. These weekly soirées are decidedly successful, and the best families in Mexico unite there without etiquette, which we were told it was impossible to bring about.

Perhaps it is that I am getting accustomed to the Mexican style of face, but it appeared to me that there was a great deal of beauty assembled; and as for fine voices, they are as common in Mexico as they are rare in England.

A rich senator, Don B—- G—-, made a vow to the Virgin some years ago, that he would cause a splendid mass to be performed annually in the cathedral, at his own expense, in honour of our Saviour's birth, on the morning of Christmas-eve. This mass is performed entirely by amateurs, most of the young ladies in Mexico, who have fine voices, taking a part in it. I was drawn in, very unwillingly, to promise to take a trifling part on the harp, the accompaniment to the Incarnatus.

Preparations have long been going on for this solemnization, and various rehearsals have taken place amongst the amateur singers, in the evening, before large audiences in the Minería. The whole thing promises well.

24th.—C—n has gone with Señor Zurutuza (a Spanish gentleman), to Cuernavaca, in tierra caliente, to spend a few days at his estate in the neighbourhood; which at this season will be delightful.

This morning we rode to San Joaquin, where we met the prior on horseback, on his way to Mexico to confess the old prioress of the convent of Santa Teresa. He turned back, and accompanied us during the rest of our ride. He rode with us to Tacuba, round the traces of the ruins, and to the fine old church and dismantled convent, where we dismounted, and having taken off our riding-hats, accompanied the prior through the deserted cloisters into the old church; and I imagine we must have looked
very picturesque; I in my riding-habit, and the sandalled friar in his white robes, kneeling side by side, on the broken steps of the altar. He is so pleasant and well-informed, that he is a particularly agreeable companion.

LETTER THE THIRTIETH

Christmas-day—Kalends and Mass—Amateur Performances—Solo—

25th.

Christmas-day! One year this evening since we made our entry into Mexico. What a different aspect everything has assumed to us in one year! Then every object was new, every face that of a stranger. Now we are surrounded by familiar sights and sounds, and above all by friendly faces. But though novelty, which has its charms and its désagrément, has gone, nothing in Mexico even appears commonplace. Everything is on so large a scale, and everything so picturesque. Then there is so much interest attached to its old buildings, so much to see, even though there are no sights and no show-places, unless we are to put in that class the Minera, Museum, Cathedral, University, and Botanic Garden, usually visited by travellers, that at whatever period we may leave it, I feel convinced we shall regret some point of interest, that we have left unvisited. . . .

Some days ago coloured cards, printed in gilt letters, were sent round, inviting all the senator's friends to the mass, in this form:

"J—é B—o G— requests that you will honour him with your presence and that of your family, in the solemn function of Kalends and Mass, with which he annually makes an humble remembrance of the Birth of the Saviour, which festivity will take place on the morning of the 24th of this month, at nine o'clock in the Parish Church of the Sagrario of the Holy Cathedral.

"Mexico, December, 1840."

By nine we were all assembled in the choir; Don B—o