routine of riding on horseback, visiting in carriage, walking very rarely in the Alameda, driving in the Paséo, dining at Tacubaya, the three weekly soirées, varied by a diplomatic dinner in the house of the — minister, and by the dinner of the English club who met here yesterday —by a sale of books after dinner, in which the president of the society fined me five dollars for keeping a stupid old poem past the time, upon which I moved that the poem should be presented to me, which was carried nem. con.

We have been strongly advised not to attempt this journey, and the stories of robbers and robberies, related by credible persons, are not encouraging. Robbers, bad roads, horrible heat, poisonous animals; many are the difficulties prognosticated to us. The season is already rather advanced, but it has been impossible for us to set off sooner. Our next letters will be written either during our journey, should we find the opportunity, or after our return.

LETTER THE THIRTY-FIRST


ATLACAMULCO, February 2nd.

A quiet day in a hospitable country-house, too sunny to go out, and nothing else to do, are temptations sufficient to induce me to sit down and give you an account of our proceedings during these last two days. Yesterday, the first of February, at four in the morning, very sleepy, we set off in the diligence which we had taken for ourselves; our sole luggage, two portmanteaus and a carpet bag; our dresses, dark strong calico gowns, large Panama hats, rebozos tied on like scarfs, and thick green barègé veils. A government escort of four soldiers with a corporal, renewed four times, accompanied us as far as Cuernavaca, which is about eighteen leagues from Mexico, and the entrance as it were to tierra caliente. These are supposed sufficient to frighten away three times the number of robbers, whose daring, however, has got to such a height, that no diligence now arrives from Puebla without being robbed. Six robberies have happened there in the last
fortnight, and the road to Cuernavaca is said to be still more dangerous. We took chocolate before starting, and carried with us a basket of cold meat and wine, as there is nothing on the road that can be called an inn. When we set off it was cool, almost cold; the astral lamps were out, and the great solar lamp was not yet lighted.

"But soon, like lobster boiled, the morn,
From black to red began to turn."

By the time we had reached San Agustin, where we changed horses, the sun had risen, enabling us to see all the horrors of the road, which, after leaving that beautiful village with its trees and gardens, winds over the mountain, amongst great volcanic rocks, a toilsome ascent; and passes by the village of Ajusco, a miserable robber’s nest. Yet the view, as we looked back from this barren tract, while the sun was breaking over the summits of the mountains, was very grand in its mixture of fertility and wildness, in its vast extent of plains and villages with their groves and gardens, and in its fine view of Mexico itself, white and glittering in the distance. The mountain of Ajusco, clothed with dark forests of pine, frowned on our right, and looked worthy of its brigand haunted reputation. At La Guarda, a collection of miserable huts, we changed horses, and declined some suspicious-looking frijoles in dirty saucers, which were offered to us; a proof both that we were young travellers in this country, and that we had not exhausted our basket of civilized provender.

The road wound round through a succession of rocks and woods till we reached Cruz del Marques—the Marquis being of course Cortes, while the cross, it is said, was planted there by him to mark the limits of his territory, or rather of that which the Indian Emperor had assigned him. About two o’clock the heat became intense, and we began to see and to feel symptoms of our approach to tierra caliente.

We arrived at the Indian village of Huichilaque, which is rather pretty, with cane cottages and a good many flowering trees; and from the eminence on which it is situated, the hot land is visible.

The diligence now began galloping down the rocky and stony descent. The country looked even more arid than before; the vegetation more dried up. Not a tree—but here and there, at long intervals, a feathery cocoa or a
palm, and occasionally some beautiful, unknown wild flowers. But the heat, the dust, the jolting! When at length we rattled through Cuernavaca, and stopped before the quiet-looking inn, it was with joy that we bade adieu, for some time at least, to all diligences, coaches, and carriages; having to trust for the future to four-legged conveyances, which we can guide as we please.

Cuernavaca (cow's horn), the ancient Quauhnahuac, was one of the thirty cities which Charles the Fifth gave to Cortes, and afterwards formed part of the estates of the Duke of Monteleone, representative of the family of Cortes, as Marquis of the Valley of Oajaca. It was celebrated by the ancient writers for its beauty, its delightful climate, and the strength of its situation; defended on one side by steep mountains, and on the other by a precipitous ravine, through which ran a stream which the Spaniards crossed by means of two great trees that had thrown their branches across the barranca, and formed a natural bridge. It was the capital of the Tlahuica nation, and, after the conquest, Cortes built here a splendid palace, a church, and a convent of Franciscans, believing that he had laid the foundation of a great city. And in fact, its delicious climate, the abundance of the water, the minerals said to exist in the neighbourhood, its fine trees, delicious fruits, and vicinity to the capital, all combined to render it a flourishing city. It is, however, a place of little importance, though so favoured by nature; and the conqueror's palace is a half-ruined barrack, though a most picturesque object, standing on a hill, behind which starts up the great white volcano. There are some good houses, and the remains of the church which Cortes built, celebrated for its bold arch; but we were too tired to walk about much, and waited most anxiously for the arrival of horses and men from the sugar estate of Don Anselmo Zurutuza, at Atlacaculco, where we were to pass the night. The house where the diligence stopped was formerly remarkable for the fine garden attached to it, and belonged to a wealthy proprietor. We sat down amongst the fruit trees, by the side of a clear tank, and waited there till the arrival of our horses and guides. It was nearly dusk when they came—the sun had gone down, the evening was cool and agreeable, and after much kicking and spurring and loading of mules and barking of dogs, we set off over hill and dale, through pretty wild scenery, as far as we could
distinguish by the faint light, climbing hills and crossing streams for two leagues; till at length the fierce fires, pouring from the sugar oven chimneys of Atlacamuco, gave us notice that we were near our haven for the night. We galloped into the courtyard, amongst dogs and negros and Indians, and were hospitably received by the administrador (the agent). Greatly were we divided between sleep and hunger; but hunger gained the victory, and an immense smoking supper received our most distinguished attention.

This morning, after a refreshing sleep, we rose and dressed at eight o'clock—late hours for tierra caliente—and then went out into the coffee plantation and orange walk. Anything so lovely! The orange-trees were covered with their golden fruit and fragrant blossom; the lemon-trees, bending over, formed a natural arch, which the sun could not pierce. We laid ourselves down on the soft grass, contrasting this day with the preceding. The air was soft and balmy, and actually heavy with the fragrance of the orange blossom and starry jasmine. All round the orchard ran streams of the most delicious clear water, trickling with sweet music, and now and then a little cardinal, like a bright red ruby, would perch on the trees. We pulled bouquets of orange blossom, jasmines, lilies, double red roses, and lemon leaves, and wished we could have transported them to you, to those lands where winter is now wrapping the world in his white winding-sheet.

The gardener, or coffee-planter—such a gardener!—Don Juan by name, with an immense black beard, Mexican hat, and military sash of crimson silk, came to offer us some orangeade; and having sent to the house for sugar and tumblers, pulled the oranges from the trees, and drew the water from a clear tank overshadowed by blossoming branches, and cold as though it had been iced. There certainly is no tree more beautiful than the orange, with its golden fruit, shining green leaves and lovely white blossom with so delicious a fragrance. We felt this morning as if Atlacamuco was an earthly paradise.

It belongs in fact to the Duke of Monteleone, and is let by his agent, Don Luis Alaman, to Señor Zurutuza. Its average annual produce of silver is about thirty thousand arrobas, (an arroba containing twenty-five pounds). The sugar-cane was unknown to the ancient Mexicans, who
made syrup of honey, and also from the maguey, and sugar from the stalk of maize. The sugar-cane was introduced by the Spaniards from the Canary Islands to Santo Domingo, from whence it passed to Cuba and Mexico. The first sugar-canes were planted in 1520, by Don Pedro de Atienza. The first cylinders were constructed by Gonzalo de Velosa, and the first sugar mills built by the Spaniards at that time were worked by hydraulic wheels and not by horses. M. de Humboldt, who examined the will of Cortes, informs us that the conqueror had left sugar plantations near Cuyoaçan, in the valley of Mexico, where now, owing, it is supposed, to the cutting down of the trees, the cold is too great for sugar-cane or any other tropical production to thrive. There are few negroes on these sugar plantations. Their numbers have not increased since their introduction. We observed but one old negro, said to be upwards of a hundred, who was working in the courtyard as we passed; the generality of the workmen are Indians.

As for the interior of these haciendas, they are all pretty much alike, so far as we have seen; a great stone building, which is neither farm nor country-house (according to our notions), but has a character peculiar to itself—solid enough to stand a siege, with floors of painted brick, large deal tables, wooden benches, painted chairs, and whitewashed walls; one or two painted or iron bedsteads, only put up when wanted; numberless empty rooms; kitchen and outhouses; the courtyard a great square, round which stand the house for boiling the sugar, whose furnaces blaze day and night; the house, with machinery for extracting the juice from the cane, the refining rooms, the places where it is dried, etc., all on a large scale. If the hacienda is, as here, a coffee plantation also, then there is the great mill for separating the beans from the chaff, and sometimes also there are buildings where they make brandy. Here there are four hundred men employed, exclusive of boys, one hundred horses, and a number of mules. The property is generally very extensive, containing the fields of sugar-cane, plains for cattle, and the pretty plantations of coffee, so green and spring-like, this one containing upwards of fifty thousand young plants, all fresh and vigorous, besides a great deal of uncultivated ground, abandoned to the deer and hares and quails, of which there are great abundance. For four
months in the year, *tierra caliente* must be a paradise, and it has the advantage over the coasts, in being quite free from yellow fever. But the heat in summer, and the number of poisonous insects, are great drawbacks. Of these, the *alucrans*, or scorpions, which haunt all the houses, are amongst the worst. Their bite is poisonous, and, to a child, deadly, which is one of the many reasons why these estates are left entirely to the charge of an agent, and though visited occasionally by the proprietor, rarely lived in by the family. The effects are more or less violent in different constitutions. Some persons will remain for eight days in convulsions, foaming at the mouth, and the stomach swelled, as if by dropsy; others, by immediate remedies, do not suffer much. The chief cures are brandy, taken in sufficient quantities to stupefy the patient, guyacum and boiled silk, which last is considered most efficacious. In Durango they are particularly numerous and venomous, so that a reward is given for so many head of scorpions to the boys there, to encourage them to destroy them. The Señora ——, who lives there, feels no inconvenience from their bite, but the scorpion who bites her immediately dies! It is pretended that they prefer dark people to fair, which is to suppose them very discriminating. Though as yet there have been few seen in the houses, I must confess that we feel rather uneasy at night, and scrupulously examine our beds and their environs before venturing to go to sleep. The walls being purposely whitewashed, it is not difficult to detect them; but where the roofs are formed of beams, they are very apt to drop through.

There are other venomous reptiles, for whose sting there is no remedy, and if you would like to have a list of these interesting creatures, according to the names by which they are known in these parts, I can furnish you with one from the best authority. These, however, are generally to be found about outhouses, and only occasionally visit your apartments. There is the *chicaclina*, a striped viper, of beautiful colours—the *coralillo*, a viper of a coral colour, with a black head—the *vinagrillo*, an animal like a large cricket. You can discover it, when in the room, by its strong smell of vinegar. It is orange-coloured, and taps upon the person whom it crawls over, without giving any pain, but leaving a long train of deadly poison—I have fancied that I smelt vinegar in every room since hearing this—the *salamanquesa*, whose bite is fatal: it is shaped
like a lizard—the eslaboncillo, which throws itself upon you, and if prevented from biting you, dies of spite—the cencoatl, which has five feet, and shines in the dark; so that fortunately a warning is given of the vicinity of these animals in different ways, in some by the odour they exhale, in some by the light they emit, and in others, like the rattlesnake, by the sound they give out.

Then there is a beautiful black and red spider, called the chinclaquili, whose sting sends a pain through all your bones; the only cure for which is to be shut up for several days in a room thick with smoke. There are also the tarantula and casampulga spiders. Of the first, which is a shocking-looking soft fat creature, covered with dark hair, it is said that the horse which treads on it instantly loses its hoof—but this wants confirmation. Of the scorpions, the small yellowish coloured ones are the most dangerous, and it is pretended that their bite is most to be apprehended at midday. The workmen occasionally eat them, after pulling out the sting. The flesh of the viper is also eaten roasted, as a remedy against eruptions of the skin. Methinks the remedy is worse than the disease. . . .

But to banish this creeping subject, which seems not at all in unison with the lovely scenes that surround us—an Eden where no serpent should enter—we have been riding this evening to a beautiful little Indian village called Acapansingo, than which I never beheld anything prettier in its way. Some few houses there are of stone, but the generality are of cane, and each cottage is surrounded by its fruit-trees, and by others covered with lilac or white blossoms, and twined with creepers. The lanes or streets of the village are cleanly swept, and shaded by the blossoming branches that overhang them; while every now and then they are crossed by little streams of the purest water. I think I never knew what really delicious water was till I came here. The Indians, both men and women, looked clean, and altogether this is the prettiest Indian village we have yet seen.

As we are very anxious to visit the celebrated cave of Cacauamilpa, near the city of Cautlamilpa, and also to see as much of tierra caliente as possible, we have determined, though with regret, to leave our present quarters at Atlacamulto to-morrow morning, at two o'clock A.M. As there are no inns, we are furnished with letters of recom-
mendation to the proprietors of the chief haciendas in these parts. Formerly there was so much hospitality here, that an annual sum (three thousand dollars it is said) was assigned by the proprietors to their agents, for the reception of travellers, whether rich or poor, and whether recommended or not.

Our plan of visiting the cave has been nearly frustrated by the arrival of General C——s, a neighbouring proprietor, who assured us that we were going to undertake an impossibility; that the barrancas, by which we must pass to arrive at the cave, were impassable for women, the mountain paths being so steep and perpendicular, that men and horses had frequently fallen backwards in the ascent, or been plunged forward over the precipices, in attempting to descend. We were in despair, when it was suggested that there was another, though much longer road to the cave, by which we might ride; and though our time is at present very precious, we were too glad to agree to this compromise.

C——n and A—— have returned from a shooting expedition, in which they have not been very successful; and though I have only recounted to you the beginning of our adventures, I must stop here, and take a few hours' rest before we set off on our matinal expedition.

LETTER THE THIRTY-SECOND


COCOYOTLA, 5th.

On the morning of the third of February we rose about half-past two, and a little after three, by the light of the stars and the blaze of the sugar fires, our whole party were assembled on horseback in the courtyard. We were about twelve in number. Don Juan, the coffee-planter, and Don Pedro, a friend of his, were deputed by the agent to act as our guides. Four or five well-armed mozos, farm-