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-
servants, were our escort, together with our Mexican boy; and we had mules to carry our luggage, which was compressed into the smallest possible compass. The morning was perfectly enchanting, and the air like balm, when we set off by this uncertain light; not on roads (much to our satisfaction), but through fields, and over streams, up hills and down into valleys, climbing among stones, the horses picking their way like goats. I certainly never felt or imagined such an atmosphere. The mere inhaling it was sufficient pleasure.

When the light gradually began to dawn, so that we could discern each other’s faces, and made sure that we were not a party of shadows, for besides the obscurity, a mixture of sleepiness and placid delight had hitherto kept us all silent, we looked round on the landscape, as little by little it assumed form and consistency. The fires from the hacienda were still visible, but growing pale in the beams of morning, vanishing like false visions from before the holy light of truth. As we rode along, we found that the scenery on the hilly parts was generally bleak and sterile, the grass dried up, and very little vegetation; but wherever we arrived at a valley sheltered from the sun’s rays, there we found a little rivulet trickling through it, with water like liquid diamonds, bathing the trees and the flowers—the loveliest blossoming trees, mingled with bananas, oranges, and lemons, and interspersed with bright flowers, forming a natural garden and orchard.

One tree, with no leaves on it, is covered with white starry flowers, and looks at a distance as if it had been covered with snow, which had melted off the branches, leaving only occasional white tufts. Another is bending with lilac blossoms, which hang in graceful clusters—another with flowers like yellow balls. Then there are scarlet wild flowers, that seem as if they were made of wax or shining coral, and quantities of white jasmine, trailing on the grass, and throwing itself over the branches of the trees. There is one beautiful tree, with flowers like immense white lilies, and buds that look like shut lily blossoms in white wax.

Leaving these beautiful and fertile lands that adorn the slopes and bases of the hills, you mount again up the steep paths, and again you find the grass dried up, and no vegetation but stunted nopals or miserable-looking blue-green magueys. Yet sometimes in the most desert spot,
a little sheltered by a projecting hill, you come upon the most beautiful tree, bending with rich blossoms, standing all alone, as if through ambition it had deserted its lowly sisters in the valley, and stood, in its exalted station, solitary and companionless.

As for the names of these tropical trees, they are almost all Indian, and it is only botanically that they can be properly distinguished. There is the *floripundio*, with white odoriferous flowers hanging like bells from its branches, with large pointed pale-green leaves—the *yollojochitl*, signifying flower of the heart, like white stars with yellow hearts, which when shut have the form of one, and the fragrance of which is delicious—the *izgujochitl*, whose flowers look like small white musk-roses—another with a long Indian name, and which means the flower of the raven, and is white, red, and yellow. The Indians use it to adorn their altars, and it is very fragrant as well as beautiful.

After six hours' good riding, our guides pointed out to us the formidable barrancas at some distance, and expressed their opinion, that, with great caution, our horses being very sure-footed, we might venture to pass them, by which means we should save three leagues, and be enabled to reach an hacienda within six leagues of the cave that night; and after some deliberation, it was agreed that the attempt should be made. These barrancas (the word literally means a ravine or mountain gully) are two mountains, one behind the other, which it is necessary to cross by a narrow path, that looks like a road for goats. We began the ascent in silence, and some fear, one by one till the horses were nearly perpendicular. It lasted about twenty minutes; and we then began to descend slowly, certainly not without some danger of being thrown over our horses' heads. However, we arrived in safety at the end of the first mountain, and this being accomplished, drew up to rest our horses and mules beside a beautiful clear stream, bordered by flowering trees. Here some clear-headed individual of the party proposed that we should open our hamper, containing cold chicken, hard eggs, sherry, etc.; observing, that it was time to be hungry. His suggestion was agreed to without a dissenting voice, and a napkin being spread under a shady tree, no time was lost in proving the truth of his observation. A very ingenious contrivance for making a wine-glass, by
washing an egg-shell in the stream, is worthy of record. When we had demolished the cold chicken, the *mozos* surrounded the cold meat, and after gathering branches covered with beautiful flowers, with which we ornamented our horses' heads and our own hats, we prepared to ascend the second mountain. This is as steep, or nearly as steep as the first; but we were already confident in the sure-footedness of our horses, and even able to admire the view as we ascended single file. After much rain, this path must of course be completely impassable. The day had now become oppressively warm, though it was not later than eleven o'clock; and having passed the hills, we came to a dusty high-road, which, about twelve, brought us to the hacienda of Meacatlan, belonging to the family of Perez Palacio. We were overtaken on the road by the eldest son of the proprietor, who cordially invited us in, and introduced us to the ladies of his family, and to his father, a fine, noble-looking old gentleman. As we were excessively tired, hot, and dusty, we were very glad to spend a few hours here during the heat of the sun; and after joining the family at breakfast, consisting of the most extraordinary variety of excellent dishes, with a profusion of fine fruits and curious sweetmeats (amongst which was that ethereal-looking production, called *angel's hair, cabella de angel*), we were glad to lie down and rest till four o'clock.

This hacienda is very productive and valuable, and has a silver mine on it.

There is also every variety of fine fruit, especially the largest *cedrats* I ever saw; which, although they have not a great deal of flavour, are very refreshing. With all their beauty and fertility, there is something very lonely in a residence on these estates, which are so entirely shut out of the world; not so much for the proprietors themselves, who are occupied in the care of their interests, but for the female part of the family.

We left this hospitable mansion about four o'clock, rested and refreshed, the proprietor giving K—— a horse of his, instead of her own, which was tired. The sun was still powerful, when we and our train remounted, but the evening had become delightfully cool, by the time that we had reached the beautiful village of San Francisco de Tetecala, lying amongst wooded hills, its white houses gleaming out from amidst the orange-trees, with a small
Ride by Moonlight

river crossed by bridges running through it. Many of the houses were tolerably large and well built. It was a fête-day, and the musical bells ringing merrily; the people were clean and well dressed, and were assembled in crowds in an enclosure, looking at a bull-fight, which must be hot work in this climate, both for man and beast.

But when the moon rose serenely, and without a cloud, and a soft breeze, fragrant with orange blossom, blew gently over the trees, I felt as if we might have rode on for ever, without fatigue, and in a state of the most perfect enjoyment. It were hard to say whether the first soft breath of morning, or the languishing and yet more fragrant airs of evening were most enchanting. Sometimes we passed through a village of scattered Indian huts, with little fires of sticks lighted in their courts, glowing on the bronze faces of the women and children; and at the sound of our horses' hoofs, a chorus of dogs, yelping with most discordant fury, would give us loud notice of their total disapprobation of all night travellers. Sometimes a decided smell of boiled sugar was mingled with the fragrance of the orange blossom and jasmine; reminding us of those happy days of yore, when the housekeeper in all her glory, was engaged in making her annual stock of jellies and jams.

Once we were obliged to dismount, that our horses might make an ugly leap over a great ditch guarded by thorny bushes, and amongst trees where the moon gave us no light.

About ten o'clock symptoms of weariness began to break out amongst us, spite of moonbeams and orange-buds; when down in a valley we saw the sugar fires of Cocoyotla, the hacienda to which we trusted for our next place of shelter, darting out their fierce red tongues amongst the trees. We knocked for admittance at the great gate, and it was some time before the people within would undo the fastenings, which they did with great caution, and after carefully reconnoitring us; afterwards giving for excuse, that a party of thirty robbers had passed by the night before, and that they thought we might have been some of these night-errants. We sent in our credentials to the proprietor, an old gentleman married to a young wife, who, living on the road to the cave, is by no means pleased at his house being turned into a posada for all and sundry, and complained bitterly of a party of
Englishmen who had passed by some time before, "and the only Spanish word they could say, was Vater, by which they meant Agua, Caramba!" However, he was very hospitable to us, and pressed us to remain there the following day, and rest ourselves and our horses after our fourteen leagues march, previous to going on to the cave.

A very good supper and a very sound sleep were refreshing, and the whole of the next day we spent in wandering about or sitting lazily amongst the magnificent orangetrees and cocos of this fine hacienda. Here the orangetrees are the loftiest we had yet seen; long ranges of noble trees, loaded with fruit and flowers. At the back of the house is a small grove of cocos, and a clear running stream passing through beautiful flowers, and refreshing everything in its course. Indeed all through tierra caliente, except on the barren hills, there is a profusion of the most delicious water, here at once a necessity and a luxury.

These sugar estates are under high cultivation, the crops abundant, the water always more than sufficient both for the purposes of irrigation and for machinery, which A—— considers equal to anything he has seen in Jamaica. They produce annually from thirty to fifty thousand arrobas of sugar. The labourers are free Indians, and are paid from two and a half to six and a half reals per day. I believe that about one hundred and fifty are sufficient for working on a large estate. Bountiful nature, walking on the traces of civil war, fills up the ravages caused by sanguinary revolutions, and these estates in the valley of Cuernavaca, which have so frequently been theatres of bloodshed, and have so often changed proprietors, remain in themselves as fertile and productive as ever.

In the evening we visited the trapiche, as they call the sugar-works, the sugar-boilers, warehouses, store-rooms, and engines. The heat is so intense among these great boilers, that we could not endure it for more than a few minutes, and pitied the men who have to spend their lives in this work. They make panoja on this estate, cakes of coarse sugar, which the common people prefer to the refined sugar.

Just as we were preparing to retire for the night, an animal on the wall attracted our attention, close by K——'s bed—and, gentle reader! it was a scorpion!
We gave a simultaneous cry, which brought Señor — into the room, who laughed at our fears, and killed our foe; when lo! just as our fright had passed away, another, a yellowish-coloured, venomous-looking creature, appeared stealing along the wall. The lady of the house came this time, and ordered the room and the beds to be searched. No more could be discovered, but it was difficult to sleep in peace after such an apparition.

At three the next morning we rose, and set off by moon and starlight for the cave. The morning was lovely as usual, and quite cool. We passed a great deal of barren and hilly road, till we reached some plains, where we had a delightful gallop, and arrived early at a small rancho, or farmhouse, where we were to procure guides for the cave. Here we added four Indians, and the master of the house, Benito, to our party, which was afterwards increased by numbers of men and boys, till we formed a perfect regiment. This little rancho, with its small garden, was very clean and neat. The woman of the house told us she had seen no ladies since an English Ministra had slept there two nights. We concluded that this must have been Mrs. Ashburnham, who spent two days in exploring the cave. We continued our ride over loose stones, and dry, rocky hills, where, were the horses not sure-footed, and used to climb, the riders' necks would no doubt suffer. Within about a quarter of a mile of the cave, after leaving on our right the pretty village of Cautlamilpas, we found ourselves in a place which I consider much more dangerous than even the barrancas near Meacalcan; a narrow path, overhanging a steep precipice, and bordering a perpendicular hill, with just room for the horses' feet, affording the comfortable assurance that one false step would precipitate you to the bottom. I confess to having held my breath, as one by one, and step by step, no one looking to the right or the left, our gowns occasionally catching on a bush, with our whole train we wound slowly down this narrow descent. Arrived near the mouth of the cave, we dismounted, and climbed our way among stones and gravel to the great mountain opening. But an account of the cave itself must be reserved till our return to Atlacamulco.