LETTER THE THIRTY-SEVENTH


27th.

H.—in his last letter asks what distinguished men we have in Mexico? and with a tone of doubt as to their being very numerous. Distinguished in what way? As generals, as statesmen, as men of literature? It seems to me that a country where we have known Bustamante, Santa Anna, General Victoria, Posada, Gomez Pedraza, Gutierrez Estrada, Count Cortina, Gorostiza, Don Carlos Bustamante, Quintana Roo, General Moran, Don Lucas Alaman, General Almonte, Señor Canedo, Don Francisco Tagle, Señor Neri del Barrio, Señor Fagoaga, Don Jose Valentin, the Count de Casaflores, etc., etc., is not so destitute of distinguished men as he supposes. The preceding are, I confess, strung together as they occur to me, without order or regularity; soldiers, statesmen, and literary men, some on one side of politics, some on another, but all men of note, and men who have acted, or suffered, or been distinguished in one way or another in the revolutions of the last thirty-two years. And there is not one amongst those I have mentioned, who, if he were to write merely his personal history, would not by so doing write the history of these civil wars. The three first, as principal figures in every revolution, are already historical; Bustamante as an honest man and a brave soldier; Santa Anna as an acute general, active and aspiring, whose name has a prestige, whether for good or for evil, that no other possesses; General Victoria, a plain, uneducated, well-intentioned man, brave and enduring. A passage in his life is well known, which ought to be mentioned as an offset to the doubtful anecdote of the two-headed eagle. When Yturbiode, alone, fallen and a prisoner, was banished from Mexico, and when General Bravo, who had the charge of conducting him to Vera Cruz, treated him with every species of indignity, Victoria,
the sworn foe of the emperor during his prosperity, now, when orders were given him to see Yturbié embarked, surrounded him with attentions, and loaded him with respectful distinctions; so that Yturbié himself, moved with gratitude, after expressing his warm esteem for the General's consistent conduct, presented him with his watch as a memorial of his grateful admiration.

As for Don Manuel Gomez Pedraza, he has occupied too distinguished a place in the political occurrences of this country, not to be generally known. An officer in the time of the Spanish government, he was distinguished for his severe discipline and strict moral conduct. In the time of Yturbié he was military commandant of Huasteca, and supported the emperor, who afterwards made him commander-general of Mexico. In 1827 he was minister of war, during the presidency of Victoria, and was distinguished for his extraordinary activity, which quality was greatly wanting in that general. In 1828 he and Guerrero were announced as candidates for the presidency, and after a terrible political tempest, Gomez Pedraza was elected. The fermentation that succeeded, the fury of the two parties, the Guerreristas and Pedra- zistas, which were mingled with Yturbidistas, was increased by the arrival of Santa Anna at Perote with eight hundred men, who, having shut himself up in the fortress, declared for Guerrero, and published a manifesto, which set forth that general as a hero, and his rival as a hypocrite. Then came the famous revolution of the Acordada, and both Pedraza and Guerrero disappeared. Pedraza left the Republic, and after another revolution, hearing that "the constitution and laws were re-established," returned to Vera Cruz; but was met by an order which prohibited him from disembarking. He then set sail for New Orleans. Another change brought him back; and at this present juncture he lives in tranquillity, together with his lady, a person of extraordinary talent and learning, daughter of the Lizenciado (jurisconsult) Señor Azcárate. Such are the disturbed lives passed by the "children of the soil."

Of Gutierrez Estrada, now far from his household gods, and languishing under unjust persecution, I have already spoken. Count Cortina is a gentleman and a scholar, a man of vast information, and a protector of the fine arts. His conversation is a series of electric sparks; brilliant as
an ignis fatuus, and bewildering as a will-o’-the-wisp. I have seldom heard such eloquence even in trilbies; and he writes with as much ease as he speaks. We have seen three clever pieces of his lately, showing his versatile genius; one upon earthquakes, one upon the devil, and one upon the holy fathers of the church!—the first in the form of a pamphlet, addressed to a lady, giving a scientific explanation of the causes of these phenomena, interspersed with compliments to her beaux yeux: the second is a burlesque poem; and the third a grave and learned dissertation.

Don José Eduardo Gorostiza, though a native of Vera Cruz, is the son of a Spanish officer, and when very young went to Spain, where he was known politically as a liberal. He was distinguished as a writer of theatrical pieces, which have been and still are very popular; and those which he merely translated, he had the merit of adapting to the Spanish stage, and Castilianizing in grace and wit. One of his pieces, which we saw the other evening at the theatre—"Con tigo, pan y cebolla," (With thee, bread and onions,) is delightful. Besides occupying a place in the Cabinet of Mexico, he has been Chargé d’Affaires in Holland, and Minister at the Court of St. James. In conversation he is extremely witty and agreeable, and he has collected some good paintings and valuable books in the course of his European travels.

The reputation of Don Carlos Bustamante, deputy from Oaxaca, is altogether literary. He has made many researches in Mexican antiquities; and has published a history of the "Discovery of America," written by Padre Vega, which was unknown before; also the "Gallery of Mexican Princes;" "Tezcoco in the last Days of its last Kings," etc. He lately sent me his "Mornings in the Alameda," a book intended to teach Mexican young ladies the history of their own country. I have read but a few pages of it, but was struck with the liberality of his remarks in regard to the Spaniards, which, coming from such a source, are so much more valuable and worthy of credit than any that can be made by a foreigner, that I am tempted to translate the passage to which I allude. "The Spanish government founded colleges and academies in the reign of the wise Charles the Third; it established that of fine arts, which it enriched with the most beautiful statues, which you can still see when you visit it. ("Their
transportation," he says in a note, "cost seventy thousand dollars.") He sent excellent workmen, and imitated his predecessor Philip the Second, who sent to Mexico whatever could not find a place in the works of the Escorial. Of his wisdom, we have proofs in those magnificent temples which attract the attention of travellers, such as the Cathedral of Mexico, San Agustin, Santo Domingo of Oaxaca, and others. Spain did no more, because she could do no more, and Spain gave to this America a constitution, which the Mexicans themselves, who pride themselves most on their learning, are unacquainted with; and whose analysis was formed by the learned Padre Mier, in the History of the Revolution, which he printed in London; a constitution, in which are made manifest the good intentions of the Austrian monarchs; and their earnest desire to render the Indians happy; especially in the case of the great Philip the Fourth, whose autograph law is preserved; and which I have read with respect and emotion, prohibiting the bad treatment of the Indians. In short, this America, if it were considered in a state of slavery under the Spanish dominion, was at least on a level with the peninsula itself. Read over the frightful list of taxes which oppressed the Spaniards, and compare it with those that were imposed upon us, and you will find that theirs is infinitely greater than ours. These truths being granted, remark the progress which the colonies had made in sciences and arts, and this truth which escaped from the light pen of the censor Beristain, will be confirmed. Mexico, he says, was the sunflower of Spain. When in her principal universities there were no learned men to fill the mathematical chairs, Mexico could boast of Don Carlos de Siguenza y Gongora: when in Madrid there was no one who had written a good epic poem, in Mexico the Bernardo was composed; " etc., etc.

The next on my list is Don Andrés Quintana Roo, the best modern poet of Mexico, a native of Yucatan, and who came to the capital when very young, to study law. He is said to possess immense learning, and was enthusiastic to fanaticism in the cause of independence; insomuch that he and his wife, Doña Leona Vicario, who shared in his ardent love of liberty, braved every danger in its cause, suffered imprisonment, escaped from the Inquisition, from the hands of robbers, endured every
privation, so that their history would form a romance. He is now devoted to literature, and though he occasionally launches forth some political pamphlet, he is probably wearied of revolutions, and possesses all the calmness of a man whose first years have been spent in excitement and troubles, and who at length finds consolation in study alone; the well of science proving to him the waters of Lethe, in which he drinks the oblivion of all his past sorrows. And it is very much the case in Mexico at present, that the most distinguished men are those who live most retired; those who have played their part on the arena of public life, have seen the inutility of their efforts in favour of their country, and have now retreated into the bosom of their families, where they endeavour to forget public evils in domestic retirement and literary occupation.

Amongst these may be reckoned Don Lucas Alaman, who passed many years in Europe, and in 1820 was deputy to the Spanish Cortes. Shortly after his return he became minister of foreign relations, which high office he has filled during various seasons of difficulty. He is a man of learning, and has always been a protector of art and science. In conversation he is more reserved, less brilliant, and more minute than Count Cortina, always expressing his opinion with caution, but very ready and able to give information on anything in this country, unconnected with politics. General Moran, now infirm, and long since retired from public service, is universally respected, both as a military man and a gentleman. He is married to a daughter of the late Marquis de Vivanco, general of division, who long held out against the independence, and when the colonial system was dissolved, would never go further than to desire a prince of royal birth in Mexico. General Moran has been exiled several times, and his health has not held out against bodily and mental suffering; but he is ending his days in a tranquil retirement in the midst of his family. Of General Almonte and of Señor Canedo, who are figuring in public life in our own day, I have frequently written.

Señor Neri del Barrio and the Count de Casaflores, married to sisters, ladies of high birth, the eldest a countess in her own right, are, as well as their families, all that is most distinguished in Mexico. Señor Fagoaga,

1 He is now, September, 1842, once more filling the same situation under General Santa Anna.
who is now in bad health, I know only by reputation. He is brother of the Marquis of Apartado, and of the celebrated Don José María Fagoaga, with whose family we have the pleasure of being very intimate. C—n says that he is a man of great taste and a thorough gentleman, and that his house, which is one of the handsomest in Mexico, possesses that ornament so rare in this country—well-chosen paintings. Don José Valentin, who has figured in the political world, and who was curate of Huamantla, is one of the kindest and best old men I have ever met with; so severe to himself, so indulgent to others—so simple in worldly matters, so learned in everything else—so sincere, good, and charitable. He is a universal favourite with young and old, being cheerful, fond of music, and of gay conversation, in proportion as he is wise and learned in his observations, and serious in his conversation when the occasion requires it. Doctor Valentin as an ecclesiastic, and Padre Leon as a monk, are models.

As for Don Francisco Tagle, he is a gentleman of the old school, and his name figures in all the political events which have taken place since the independence, of which he was one of the signers. He is very rich, possessing, besides a profitable maguey estate near Mexico, enormous property bounding Texas, and being also the keeper of the Monte Pio, formerly the house of Cortes, a palace, in which he and his family live. He is a man of great learning and information, and too distinguished not to have suffered personally in political convulsions. Whether he would choose the same path, with his present experience of a Mexican republic, he is too wise to mention. He and his family are amongst our most intimate friends, and with a few exceptions all those whom I have mentioned have been here since our return, which is one of the reasons why their names occurred first to my memory; for there are still many distinguished persons remaining.

Nearly all these, at least all who are married, have had the good fortune to unite themselves with women who are either their equals or superiors, if not in education,—in goodness, elevation of sentiment, and natural talent. They, as well as every Mexican, whether man or woman, not under forty, have lived under the Spanish government; have seen the revolution of Dolores of 1810, with continuations and variations by Morelos, and paralyzation
in 1819; the revolution of Yturbi de in 1821; the cry of Liberty (grito de Libertad) given by those generals “bene-
meritos de la patria,” Santa Anna and Victoria, in 1822;
the establishment of the federal system in 1824; the horrible
revolution of the Acordada, in which Mexico was pillaged,
in 1828; the adoption of the central system in 1836; and
the last revolution of the federalists in 1840. Another is
predicted for next month, as if it were an eclipse of the
sun. In nineteen years three forms of government have
been tried, and two constitutions, the reform of one of
which is still pending in the Chambers. “Dere is not
like trying!” (as the old perruquier observed, when he
set out in a little boat to catch the royal yacht, still in
sight of Scottish shores, with a new wig of his own
invention, which he had trusted to have been permitted
to present to his most gracious majesty George the
Fourth!).

LETTER THE THIRTY-EIGHTH

New Minister—San Angel—Profitable Pulque Estate—The Village—
Surrounding Scenery—The Indians—The Padre—The Climate—
Holy Week in the Country—Dramatic Representations—Coyo-
huacan—The Pharisiers—Image of the Saviour—Music and
Dresses—Procession—Catholicism amongst the Indians—Strange
Tradition—Paul the Fifth—Contrast between a Mexican and a
New England Village—Love of Fireworks—Ferdinand the Seventh
—Military Ball Drapeaux.

San Angel, March 30th.

It is a long while since I last wrote, but this week has
been employed in moving into the country, and making
arrangements for the sale of our furniture, in consequence
of our having received official news from Spain of the
nomination of a new envoy extraordinary and minister
plenipotentiary to the republic of Mexico. As, on account
of the yellow fever at Vera Cruz, we shall not wish to pass
through that city later than May, it is necessary to be in
readiness to start when the new minister arrives. On
Thursday last we came out to this place, within three
leagues of Mexico, where Don Francisco Tagle has kindly
lent us his unoccupied country house. As we had an
infinity of arrangements to make, much to bring out, and
much to leave, and all Mexico to see, you will excuse this