this place, three very magnificent aides-de-camp brought us an invitation from General Valencia, to attend a ball to be given by him and other officers, in the theatre, to the president, on the occasion of his excellency’s being declared “benemerito de la patria.” We did not go, as we were setting off for the country, but C—n being requested, as were the other ministers, to send the colours of his nation, did so, and to-day there is much talk in Mexico, besides a paragraph in the newspapers, connected with these matters. It appears that the drapeaux whether by accident or design, were improperly placed, and these faults in etiquette are not uncommon here. The English minister having observed that his drapeau was placed in a subordinate rank, and finding that his warnings beforehand on the subject, and his representations on seeing it were neglected, cut it down and left the ballroom, followed by all the English who were there.

LETTER THE THIRTY-NINTH


On Holy Thursday we went early in the morning to Coyohuacan (now pronounced Cuyacan), which is almost a continuation of the village of San Angel; but there are more trees in it, and every house has its garden, or at least its inner court, filled with orange-trees. Here, after the total destruction of the ancient Tenochtitlan, Cortes took up his residence for several months. Here he founded a convent of nuns, and in his testament he desired to be buried in this convent, “in whatever part of the world I may finish my days.” The conqueror’s last wishes in this respect were not held sacred. At the time of the conquest, Coyohuacan, together with Tacubaya, etc., stood upon the margin of the Lake of Tezcucio; most of the houses built within the water upon stakes, so that the canoes entered by a low door. This was un-
doubtedly the favourite retreat of Cortes, and it is now one of the prettiest villages near Mexico. Its church is wonderfully handsome; one of the finest village churches we have yet seen.

One of the prettiest places in the village belongs to an order of monks called the Padres Camilios. It consists of a house and garden, where the monks go by turns to enjoy the country air. Comfortable padres! There is one room looking into the garden, and opening into a walk bordered by rose-bushes, which is such a place for a siesta; cool, retired, fragrant. A hammock with a mattress on it is slung across the room, and here the good padre may lie, with one eye opened to the roses, and the other closed in inward meditation. However, its whole merit consists in being cleanly and neatly kept, for it is a large, empty house, and the garden, so called, is little more than a pasture-field, with nice gravel-walks cut through it, bordered with fine rose-bushes, and beautified by a clear fountain.

We went to the A——’s house, which is halfway between San Angel and Coyohuacan; the Señora A—— driving me herself in an open carratella with white frisones (northern horses), which, compared with the spirited little Mexican steeds, look gigantic. We went first to see the church, which was brilliantly illuminated, and ornamented with loads of flowers and fruit (especially oranges), and thronged with ragged lepéros and blanketeted Indians. We then set off, to endeavour, if possible, to find a place in the crowd, who had hurried off to see el prendimiento (the taking of Christ), and to hear the Curate preach an appropriate sermon in a portable pulpit, amongst the trees.

We made our way through the patient, bronzed and blanketeted crowd, not without sundry misgivings as to the effects of evil communication; and at length reached the procession, all ranged on the grass under the trees, in a pretty and secluded little grove; in two long rows fronting each other; each person carrying a lamp surmounted by a plume of coloured feathers, very ingeniously made of coloured spun glass. They were all dressed in the costume of Pharisees, Jews, Romans, etc. The image of the Saviour was shortly after carried through on a platform, to the sound of music, followed by the eleven disciples, and was placed in a kind of bower amongst the trees, supposed to give a representation of the garden of
Gethsemane. A portable pulpit, covered with shining stuff, was carried in, and placed beneath a tree just outside of this enclosure, and soon after, the curate arrived, and mounted into his place. A number of little ragged boys, who had climbed up on the very topmost branches of the trees, to have a good view, were piked down with lances by the Jews, notwithstanding their seemingly just remonstrances that they were doing no harm; but when the Jews observed in answer to their “Que hacemos?” “What are we doing?”—“The Señor Curá will be angry;”—they tumbled down one on the top of the other like ripe apples, and then stood watching for the first convenient opportunity of slipping up again.

The curate began his sermon by an account of the sufferings and persecution of Christ; of the causes and effects of his death, of the sinfulness of the Jews, etc. He talked for about half an hour, and his sermon was simple enough and adapted to his audience. He described the agony of Christ when in the garden to which he often resorted with his disciples, and the treachery of Judas who knew the place, and who “having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and pharisees, came thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.” As he went on describing the circumstances minutely, one who represented the spy, with a horrible mask like a pig’s face, was seen looking through the trees where the Saviour was concealed; and shortly after, Judas, his face covered with a black crape, and followed by a band of soldiers, glided through stealthily. “Now,” said the curate, “observe what the traitor does. He hath given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he—hold him fast.’ He goes—he approaches the sacred person of the Lord.” Here Judas went forward and embraced the Saviour. “It is done!” cried the preacher. “The horrible act of treachery is completed. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master, and kissed him. But now, Jesus knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he.” As the curate said these words, they all fell prostrate on the ground. “Mark,” cried he, “the power of the Word! They came out to take him with swords and with staves, but at the sound of the Divine Word, they acknowledge the power of God,
and fall at his feet. But it is only for a moment. Behold, now they bind him, they buffet him, they smite him with the palms of their hands, they lead him away to the high priest."

All this was enacted in succession, though sometimes the curate was obliged to repeat the same things several times before they recollected what to do. "And already, in anticipation of the iniquitous sentence, behold what is written." This alluded to a paper fastened upon a pole, which a man held above the heads of the crowd, and on which was written, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, President of Upper Galilee."

And now, escorted by Judas and the multitude, the Saviour was borne through the crowd, in conclusion of the prendimiento. The curate wound up his discourse by an exhortation to abstain from sin, which had been the cause of this awful event. I regret to state that at this very moment, a man poked his hand into A——'s pocket, who turned very sharply round, and asked him what he wanted; "Nada, Señorito," (Nothing, sir,) said he, with an innocent smile, showing two rows of teeth like an ivory railing, but at the same time disappearing pretty swiftly amongst the crowd, who now all began to move, and to follow the procession, the band striking up a galope. In the evening we returned to San Angel, and visited the lighted churches there. As it was late when we entered the parroquia (parish church), the lights were nearly all extinguished, and a few alone of the devout were still kneeling before a figure of our Saviour in chains. . . .

On Good Friday we set off early for Coyohuacán, though rather afraid of the sun, which at present, in the middle of the day, is insupportable, and even by ten o'clock disagreeable. The whole enclosure round the church, and to a great distance beyond it, was covered with people, and there were even a few carriages full of well-dressed persons, who had come from the different neighbouring haciendas; amongst others, the family of the Marquesa de Vivanco. The padre Yturalde, who has some reputation for eloquence, was expected to preach three sermons at Coyohuacán that day, besides one, in the village of Mizqueaque. We found that one sermon was just concluded. By the time we arrived the sun was pouring
down his beams like molten lead. Our carriage was open, and under every tree was a crowd, so there were small hopes of finding shade. Women were selling fruit; and booths with ices and chia were erected all down the lane leading from the church. At last, however, a little room was made, and seats were placed for us close to the pulpit, and under a tree.

The image of the Saviour was now carried forwards on a platform, with the heavy cross appearing to weigh him down; and on the same platform was Simon, the Cyrenian, assisting him to bear the weight. The Cyrenian was represented by an old man, with hair white as snow, dressed in scarlet cloth; who, in a stooping posture, and without once moving his body, was carried about for hours in the whole force of the sun, the rays pouring down upon his uncovered head. For a long while we had believed him to be a wooden figure dressed up, and when he came near he greatly excited our surprise and compassion. If he survives this day’s work it will be a miracle. I can now almost give faith to ——’s assertion, that in some of the villages the man who represents Judas actually hangs himself, or is hanged upon a tree! The Saviour was dressed in crimson velvet, with the crown of thorns; and a figure of the Virgin, in deep mourning, was carried after him by Indian women.

The procession consisted of the same men on horseback as we had seen on foot the preceding day; of the Spy, the Pharisees, the Jews, the Betrayer, and the mob. Some had helmets and feathers, and armour. Some wore wreaths of green and gold leaves. One very good-looking man, with long curls and a gold crown, and a splendid mantle of scarlet and gold, was intended for a Roman. By his crown he probably meant to personify the Roman Caesar. The sermon, or rather the discourse of the padre, was very good, and appeared to be extempore. He made an address to the Virgin, who was carried by and led up to the pulpit, and another to the Saviour, during which time the audience was breathlessly attentive, notwithstanding the crying of children and the barking of dogs. It was supposed that they were now leading Christ before the judgment-seat of Pilate, and the next scene was to be the delivery of the sentence.

When the curate’s discourse was finished, the procession went on; the Indian women began to sell their nuts
and oranges, and the band struck up an air in the distance, to which, when last I heard it, Ducrow's horses were dancing! We, in a fiery sun, which made its way through our mantillas, now proceeded to search for a convenient place from which to hear the padre's next sermon, and to see the next scene in the sacred drama. The padre, who was walking under the shade of a lime silk parasol, insisted upon resigning it to me. The Señora —— did not seem to feel the heat at all. At last, in order to avoid the crowd, we got up on the low azotea of a house, beside which the pulpit was placed; but here the sun was overwhelming.

The padre's sermon was really eloquent in some passages, but lasted nearly an hour, during which time we admired the fortitude of the unhappy Cyrenian, who was performing a penance of no ordinary kind. The sun darted down perpendicularly on the back of his exposed head, which he kept bent downwards, maintaining the same posture the whole time, without flinching or moving. Before the sermon was over we could stand the heat no longer, and went in under cover. I felt as if my brains were melted into a hot jelly. We emerged upon hearing that the procession was again moving towards the pulpit, where it shortly after formed itself into two lines. In a few moments a man with a plumed helmet, mounted on a fiery horse, galloped furiously through the ranks, holding a paper on the point of his lance, the sentence pronounced by Pontius Pilate.

Arrived at the pulpit, he handed it up to the priest, who received it with a look of horror, opened it, tried to read it, and threw it on the ground with an air of indignation. The messenger galloped back more furiously than he came, and his horse bolting at the end of the lines, occasioned a laugh amongst the spectators. Then followed the parting address to the Saviour, whose bearers now brought him up to the pulpit, followed by the mournful figure of the Virgin. Reflections on the event concluded this act.

We returned in the afternoon, to see the descent from the cross, which was to be performed within the church. The church was crowded, and a black curtain hung before the altar. The padre now recapitulated all that had taken place, and described the Saviour's parting with his mother at the foot of the cross, addressing the Virgin who stood
in her sable robes not far from the altar, and interrupting his sermon to pray for her intercession with her Divine Son. I observed all the women in tears as he described the Virgin’s grief, the torments of the crucifixion, the indignities that the Saviour had suffered. All at once he exclaimed in a loud voice, “Draw back the veil, and let us behold him!” The curtain was drawn, and the Saviour crucified appeared. Then the sobs of the women broke forth. They clasped their hands, beat their breasts and groaned, while the soldiers who stood below the cross clashed their swords, and one of them struck the body with a lance. At the same time the Virgin bowed her head, as if in grief. Unfortunately I was near enough to see how this was effected, which peep behind the scenes greatly diminished the effect.

Then the soldiers mounted a ladder near the crucifix, and took down the body, to bear it away. As it came by the pulpit, the priest seized the hands, and showed the marks of the nails, at the same time breaking out into exclamations of grief. The soldiers stood below, impatiently clashing their swords; the women sobbed violently; the procession passed on, and we returned to the A——’s house.

In the evening the “Procession of the Angels” took place. Figures dressed in silk and gold, with silver wings, were carried by on platforms to the sound of music. The body of the Saviour lay in a sort of glass hearse, carried by men chanting a dirge, and followed by the Virgin. This procession was really pretty, but had an odd, unnatural effect amongst the fresh green trees, the smell of incense mingling with the fragrance of the flowers, and the gaudy silk and gold and plumes of feathers gilded by the soft setting sun, as they flashed along. I climbed up an old stone cross near the church, and had a good view. Everything looked gaudy when near; but as the procession wound along under the broken arches and through the green lanes, and the music came fainter upon the ear, and the beating of drums and the tolling of bells and the mournful chant were all blended into one faint and distant harmony, the effect was beautiful. I thought of the simple service of the Scottish kirk, and of the country-people coming out after the sermon, with their best Sunday gowns on, and their serious, intelligent faces, discussing the merits of their
Music in Mexico

minister's discourse; and wondered at the contrasts in the same religion.

As the evening was cool and pleasant we walked through the fields to the church of La Concepcion, where the procession was to pass, and sat down on the grass till we heard it coming. As the body was carried by, all went on their knees. At night commenced the peregrina, or condolence to the Virgin, in the church. She stood on her shrine, with her head bowed down; and the hymns and prayers were all addressed to her, while the sermon, preached by another cura, was also in her honour. I pleaded guilty to having been too sleepy to take in more than the general tenour of the discourse. The musicians seemed to be playing "Sweet Kitty Clover," with variations. If Sweet Kitty Clover is genuine Irish, as who can doubt, how did these Indians get hold of it? Did Saint Patrick go round from the Emerald Isle by way of Tipperary? But, if he had, would he not have killed the alacrans, and chicacinos, and corralillos, and vinagrillos? This requires consideration.

In the Ora pro nobis, we were struck with the fineness of the rustic voices. But music in this country is a sixth sense. It was but a few days before leaving Mexico, that, sitting alone at the open window, enjoying the short twilight, I heard a sound of distant music; many voices singing in parts, and coming gradually nearer. It sounded beautiful, and exactly in unison with the hour and the scene. At first I concluded it to be a religious procession; but it was not a hymn—the air was gayer. When the voices came under the window, and rose in full cadence, I went out on the balcony to see to whom they belonged. It was the forcats, returning from their work to the Acorada! guarded by soldiers, their chains clanking in measure to the melody, and accompanied by some miserable-looking women.

We left the church feeling very tired and sleepy, and walked towards the booths, where, in the midst of flowers and evergreens, they were still selling ices, and lemonade and chia. We sat down to rest in the cleanest of these leafy bowers, and then returned to Coyohuanecan. There was no drunkenness, or quarrelling, or confusion of any sort. An occasional hymn, rising in the silence of the air, or the distant flashing of a hundred lights, alone gave notice that the funeral procession of the Saviour had not
yet halted for the night; but there was no noise, not even mirth. Everything was conducted with a sobriety befitting the event that was celebrated. That some of the curate's horses were stolen that night, is only a proof that bad men were out, and took the opportunity of his absence from home to plunder his stables. We were told an anecdote concerning Simon the Cyrenian, which is not bad. A man was taken up in one of the villages as a vagrant, and desired by the justice to give an account of himself— to explain why he was always wandering about, and had no employment. The man, with the greatest indignation, replied, "No employment! I am substitute Cyrenian at Coyoacan in the Holy Week!". That is to say, he was to be substituted in the Cyrenian's place, should anything occur to prevent that individual from representing the character.

LETTER THE FORTIETH


23rd April.

We went to Mexico yesterday to see a balloon ascend from the Plaza de Toros, with an aéronaut and his daughter; French people, I believe. The scene was really beautiful. The plaza was filled with well-dressed people, and all the boxes crowded with ladies in full toilt. The president was there with his staff, and there were two bands of music. The day was perfectly brilliant, and the streets crowded with handsome carriages, many of them open. The balloon swayed itself up and down in the midst of the plaza like a living thing. Everything seemed ready for the ascent, when it was announced that there was a hole in the balloon, and that, consequently, there could be no ascent that day. The people bore their disappointment very good-humouredly, although it was conjectured that the air traveller had merely proposed to himself to get their money, without the slightest intention of performing his voyage. One amusing circumstance was,