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 Coyohuacan 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 aëronaut 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 toil. 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,
San Bartolo

that some penny-a-line rhymer had written an account of
it in verse beforehand, giving a most grandiloquent
account of the ascent of the balloon; and when we came
out, the plaza was full of men selling these verses, which
the people were all buying and reading with roars of
laughter.

The first of May being San Felipe, there will be a ball
at the French Minister’s, to which we shall probably go.

25th.—We have just returned from a ride to San Bar-
tolo, an Indian village, four leagues from this, where we
got with a large party, some on horses, some on asses,
others on mules, and one adventurous Jehu driving him-
self in a four-wheeled carriage, with a pair of horses, over
a road formed of ruts, stones, holes, and rocks, where,
I will venture to say, no carriage ever made its appearance
before. Even the horses and asses got along with diffi-
culty. In spite of large straw hats and green veils, we
were burnt the colour of red Indians. In the middle of
the day we find the sun intolerable at present, and, owing
to the badness of the roads, we did not reach our destina-
tion until twelve or one o’clock.

San Bartolo is a small, scattered Indian village, with a
church, and is remarkable for a beautiful spring of water,
that jets cold and clear from the hard rock, as if Moses
had but just smote it; for its superb tall pine-trees; for
the good looks and cleanness of the Indian women, who
are for ever washing their long hair in the innumerable
clear streamlets formed by the spring; and for a view of
Mexico, which is particularly favourable, owing to the
thick, dark screen of pine wood in the foreground, and
the distinct view of the Laguna. Our dinner was carried
by Indians, who had trotted off with it at day-dawn; but
who had taken the wrong road, and did not arrive till
long after us. We dined under the pine-trees by the side
of the stream, but surrounded by crowds of gaping
Indians, in too close vicinity to be agreeable. Some of
the young women were remarkably handsome, with the
most beautiful teeth imaginable, laughing and talking in
their native tongue at a great rate, as they were washing
in the brooks, some their hair and others their clothes.
The men looked as dirty as Indians generally do, and by
no means on a level with these handsome damsels, who
are so much superior to the common race of Indians near
Mexico, that one would think they had some intermixture
of Spanish blood in their veins. A sister of the woman who takes charge of the hacienda where we live, is one of the most beautiful creatures I ever beheld. Large eyes, with long dark lashes, black hair nearly touching the ground, teeth like snow, a dark but glowing complexion, a superb figure, with fine arms and hands, and small beautifully-formed feet. All that is best of Indian and Spanish, "of dark and bright," seems united in her. C—n says he has seen peasant women in Andalusia in the same style of beauty, and quite as handsome. She is only nineteen. Such beauties as these startle one every now and then in some remote village. She belongs, no doubt, to the mestizos—the descendants of whites and Indians, the handsomest race in Mexico.

You ask if the castes in Mexico are distinct. There are seven supposed to be so. 1st, the Gachupinos, or Spaniards born in Europe; 2nd, the Creoles, that is, whites of European family born in America; 3rd, the Mestizos; 4th, the Mulattoes, descendants of whites and negroes, of whom there are few; 5th, the Zambos, descendants of negroes and Indians, the ugliest race in Mexico; 6th, the Indians; and 7th, the remains of the African negroes.

Of pure Indians, Humboldt in his day calculated that there existed two millions and a half in New Spain (without counting mestizos), and they are, probably, very little altered from the inferior Indians, as Cortes found them. The principal families perished at the time of the conquest. The priests, sole depositaries of knowledge, were put to death; the manuscripts and hieroglyphical paintings were burnt, and the remaining Indians fell into that state of ignorance and degradation, from which they have never emerged. The rich Indian women preferred marrying their Spanish conquerors to allying themselves with the degraded remnant of their countrymen; poor artisans, workmen, porters, etc., of whom Cortes speaks as filling the streets of the great cities, and as being considered little better than beasts of burden; nearly naked in tierra caliente, dressed pretty much as they now are in the temperate parts of the country; and everywhere with nearly the same manners, and habits, and customs, as they now have, but especially in the more distant villages where they have little intercourse with the other classes. Even in their religion, Christianity, as I observed before, seems to be formed of the ruins of their mythology; and all these
festivities of the church, these fireworks, and images, and gay dresses, harmonize completely with their childish love of show, and are, in fact, their greatest source of delight. To buy these they save up all their money, and when you give a penny to an Indian child, it trots off to buy crackers, as another would to buy candy. Attempts have been made by their curates to persuade them to omit the celebration of certain days, and to expend less in the ceremonies of others, but the indignation and discontent which such proposals have caused, have induced them to desist in their endeavours.

Under an appearance of stupid apathy they veil a great depth of cunning. They are grave and gentle and rather sad in their appearance, when not under the influence of pulque; but when they return to their villages in the evening, and have taken a drop of comfort, their white teeth light up their bronze countenances like lamps, and the girls especially make the air ring with their laughter, which is very musical. I think it is Humboldt who says that their smile is extremely gentle, and the expression of their eyes very severe. As they have no beard, if it were not for a little moustache, which they frequently wear on the upper lip, there would be scarcely any difference between the faces of men and women.

The Indians in and near the capital are, according to Humboldt, either the descendants of the former labourers, or are remains of noble Indian families, who, disdaining to intermarry with their Spanish conquerors, preferred themselves to till the ground which their vassals formerly cultivated for them. It is said that these Indians of noble race, though to the vulgar eye undistinguishable from their fellows, are held in great respect by their inferior countrymen. In Cholula, particularly, there are still caciques with long Indian names; also in Tlascala—and though barefoot and ragged, they are said to possess great hidden wealth. But it is neither in or near the capital that we can see the Indians to perfection in their original state. It is only by travelling through the provinces that we can accomplish this; and should the lateness of the season oblige us to remain here any time after another minister arrives, we may probably take a longer journey in some different direction from tierra caliente, where we may see some tribes of the indigenous Mexicans. Certainly no visible improvement has taken place in their
condition since the independence. They are quite as poor and quite as ignorant, and quite as degraded as they were in 1808, and if they do raise a little grain of their own, they are so hardly taxed that the privilege is as nought.

May 2nd.—We returned from Mexico this morning, having gone in to attend the ball given at the French Minister’s, on the day of Louis Philippe. It was very pretty, and we stayed till it was very late. We met with such a cordial reception from all our friends, whom we have not seen for a month, that we are tempted to believe ourselves as much missed in Mexico as they say we are. The Señora L.—— and the E——s were amongst the best dressed Mexican ladies last night; the latter in white crêpe and diamonds, and the other in black blonde over rose-colour, also with diamonds. The Señora A——, who went with us, looked very pretty in a white blonde dress, with a small black velvet turban rolled round with large diamonds and pearls. There were a great number of small crimson velvet turbans, and an amazing number of black blonde dresses. There were certainly some very pretty women. The corps diplomatique went in uniform.

7th.—Abecilta, a favourite Spanish actor, died a few days ago, and, as C——n took several boxes on the night of a play given for the benefit of his widow, we went in to the theatre on Saturday last. We are now looking out for another house in Mexico, for when the rainy season begins we shall find this too far from the city for C——n, who is obliged to be there constantly.

We ventured to take a walk alone yesterday morning through the lanes, down to San Angel and Coyohuacan, for which piece of imprudence we were severely reprimanded, and to-day it appears that two women had been robbed and ill-treated on the road near here; so we are too ready to subscribe to the renewal of our sentence of imprisonment in the house and orchard, when we have no gentlemen with us; but it must be confessed that it takes greatly from the charms of a country life, not to be able to walk out fearlessly. . . .

The quietness and stillness of this place is incredible. There is actually not a sound in the air; not a sight but a ragged Indian. The garden is in great beauty. The apricots are ripe and abundant. The roses are in full blow; and there is a large pomegranate-tree at the gate of the orchard, which is one mass of ponceau blossom.
Shooting Party

It is much warmer in the middle of the day this summer than it was last.

We spent a pleasant day lately at a great hacienda a few leagues from this, belonging to a Spanish millionaire, on occasion of a shooting party. We went there to breakfast, and afterwards set off on horseback, sitting sideways on men's saddles, to see the sport. It would have been very agreeable but for the heat. The sportsmen were not very successful;—saw a flight of rose-coloured flamingoes, who sailed high over their heads, unhurt; killed some very handsome birds called trigueros, with beautiful yellow plumage, and some ducks. The trigueros are considered a delicacy. We rode with the administrador all round the estate, which is very productive and profitable. He told us that they sell in Mexico, annually, fifteen thousand dollars' worth of corn, and ten thousand dollars' worth of milk, sending in this produce in canoes, by the canal which passes this way. We dismounted from our horses in a green meadow covered with daisies and buttercups, which, from association, I prefer to the tuberoses and pomegranate blossom, which now adorn the gardens. The Señor gave us an excellent dinner à l'Espagnole; after which I made an attempt to fire at some birds which shook their tails, and flew away in the most contemptuous manner.

The new Secretary of Legation, Señor T—, and the new attaché, Señor G—, have just arrived in Mexico.

10th.—The Baron and Madame de —, with their secretary, the Count de R—, came out yesterday morning unexpectedly to breakfast, and spent the day with us.

13th.—We went out with C— last evening, to take a walk; when a man rushed by us in a state of great agitation, and on going further we met some workmen, who told us that an Indian labourer had stabbed a man in the next field, and that he had died before a padre could be procured. We heard the cries of his wife and children, and A—, crossing the ditch that bordered the field, went to see the man. He was a master-workman, or director, and had found fault with one of the men for his idleness. High words ensued, and the labourer (probably the man who had passed us) drew his knife and stabbed him. He was lying stone dead, with his hand half cut through in his efforts to defend himself. A— asked an administrador, who was standing near, what would be
Life in Mexico

done to the guilty man. "Probably nothing," said he, shrugging his shoulders; "we have no judges to punish crime." This reencounter, as you may believe, took away from us all inclination to pursue our rambles.

There is a pretty farmhouse in the village, in which we took shelter the other day from a shower of rain. The farmers are civil and respectful, a superior kind of people, with good manners rather above their station. The daughters are good-looking, and the house clean and neat. One of the girls gave me an account of a nocturnal visit which the robbers paid them last winter. She showed me the little room where she was alone and asleep, when her mother and sister, who slept in the chamber adjoining, being wakened by the breaking in of their door, sprang out of the window to make their escape, and she was left in the house alone. She jumped out of bed and bolted the door (her room had no other egress), and there she held a parley with these night visitors, promising to unlock every drawer and closet, if they would wait till she put on her clothes, and would do her no personal injury. The agreement was made, and they kept their word. They cleared the house of every article it contained, leaving nothing but the blanket in which the girl had wrapped herself. All their clothes, household utensils, money, everything was carried off with astonishing precision; and having made her swear not to move till they had time to leave the village, they paid her no further attention. The other women, who had given the alarm, found no one inclined to move in the middle of the night against a party whose numbers their fears had probably magnified.

The administrador gave us an amusing account this evening of a visit which a band of no less than thirty robbers once ventured to pay this strong and well-defended hacienda. He was living there alone, that is, without the family, and had just barred and bolted everything for the night, but had not yet locked the outer gate, when looking out from his window into the courtyard by moonlight, he saw a band of robbers ride up to the door. He instantly took his measures, and seizing the great keys, ran up the little stair that leads to the azotea, locking the gate by which he passed, and, calling to the captain by name (for the robbers were headed by a noted chieftain), requested to know what he wanted at that hour of the night. The captain politely begged him to come downstairs and he
would tell him; but the agent, strong in the possession of his great keys, and well knowing the solidity of the iron-barred windows, continued his parley in a high tone. The captain rode round, examined everything with a practised eye, and found that it would require a regular siege to make good his entry. He threatened, entreated, observed that he would be content with a small sum of money, but all in vain. There stood the sturdy administrador on the housetop, and there sat the captain on his horse below, something like the fox and the crow; but the agent with the keys was wiser than the crow and her cheese, for no cajoling would induce him to let them out of his grasp; and worse than all, shooting him would have done them no good. At last the captain, finding himself entirely outwitted, took off his hat, politely wished the agent a very good night, drew off his men and departed.

Another time, being also alone, he was attacked in broad daylight by two men who came under pretence of buying pulque; but having time to get hold of a sword, he overpowered one, which frightened the other, upon which they both began to laugh, and assured him it was mere experiment to see what he would do—a perfect jest, which he pretended to believe, but advised them not to try it again, as it was too good a joke to be repeated. Señor — pointed out to us the other day a well-known robber captain, who was riding on the high road with a friend. He had the worst-looking, most vulgar, and most villainous face I ever saw; a low-lived and most unpoeitic-looking ruffian; fat and sallow.

We saw a horribly ugly man to-day, and were told he was a lobo, the name given here to the Zambos; who are the most frightful human beings that can be seen. La Güera Rodriguez told us that on an estate of hers, one woman of that race was in the habit of attending church, and that she was so fearfully hideous, the priest had been obliged to desire her to remain at home, because she distracted the attention of the congregation!

We spent yesterday at the house of the — minister at San Angel, where he gave us and the — minister and his family a beautiful breakfast. How consistent everything looks in a good English house! so handsome without being gaudy—the plate so well cleaned, the servants so well trained.

June 8th.—We were sitting under an apple-tree the
other day, trying to tame the fiercest little deer I ever saw, who was butting and kicking with all his might, when a large packet of letters was brought us, the reading of which insured us an agreeable afternoon. We continue to lead a very quiet life here, occasionally taking a short ride in the evening, and making acquaintance with the neighbouring villages, the prettiest of which is Tesapan, a most rural and leafy spot, where there are fine fruit trees, plenty of water, and good-looking peasant-girls. Sometimes we go to San Antonio to see the V-o family; occasionally to San Agustin, where they are preparing for the great fête. We are in treaty for a house in Mexico, having now given up all idea of passing through Vera Cruz this summer. We are in hopes of having that of the late Marquesa de San Roman, who died some time ago, but the delays that take place in any transaction connected with a house in Mexico, and the difficulty of obtaining a decisive answer, are hard trials of patience.

We generally have a number of visitors from Mexico on Sunday, and those who come in carriages may be considered as real friends, for they decidedly risk their necks, not to mention their carriage-springs at a bad hit on the road, which the owners, who are Indians, will not allow any one to mend for them, and will not mend themselves. When we reach it, we are obliged regularly to get out of the carriage, go about a hundred yards on foot, and then remain in much anxiety at the top of the hill, till we see whether or not the carriage arrives unbroken, which it rarely does. A few dollars would make it perfectly safe.

Our chief visitors during the week are from the Carmelite convent of San Angel. The old padre guardian is about eighty. Each convent has a prior, but the padre guardian exercises authority over all the convents of his order as well as over his own.

There are many excellent houses and fine gardens in San Angel, and a number of families from Mexico are now there for the season. Tacubaya and all the environs are beginning to be occupied, and Mexico looks warm and deserted. But there are so few incidents in our quiet life among the magueys, that I shall write no more till we return from San Agustin after the fête. If you wish to hear how we pass our time, you must know that we gener-
ally rise about six, and go out into the orchard and stroll about, or sit down with a book in a pleasant arbour at the end of one of the walks, which is surrounded by rose-bushes, and has a little stream of water running past it. Nor do we ever enter the orchard unarmed with a long pole, for its entrance is guarded by a flock of angry geese, hissing like the many-headed Hydra that watched over the golden apples of the Hesperides. At eight we breakfast, and by nine the sun is already powerful enough to prevent us from leaving the house. We therefore sit down to read or write, and do occasionally take a game at billiards. C—n generally rides to Mexico, but if not, goes up to the azotea with a book, or writes in his study until four o'clock, when we dine.

After dinner we walk into the village, if we have any attendant esquire; if not, we go to the azotea and see the sun set behind the volcanoes, or walk in the garden till it is dark, and then sit down in the front of the house, and look at the lights in Mexico. Then we have tea or chocolate—and the candles are lighted—and the last Indian workman has gone off to his village—and the house is barred in, and we sit down to read, or write or talk, or sometimes we play billiards by lamp-light. And then indeed the silence and the solitude make us feel as if the world were completely shut out. I never experienced such perfect stillness. Even the barking of a dog sounds like an event. Therefore, expect no amusing letters from this place; for though we are very comfortable, there are no incidents to relate. The Indians come in the morning to drink pulque, (which, by the way, I now think excellent, and shall find it very difficult to live without!) a little child from the village brings us some bouquets of flowers, which the Indians have a pretty way of arranging in a pineapple or pyramidal form; the Chinese cook, with his little slits of eyes, passes by with meat and fruit which he has been buying at the market of San Angel; the prior saunters in to see how we are—a chance visitor comes on horseback from Mexico, with a long sword by his side, as if he were going to fight the Saracens. And excepting that a padre came last Sunday and said mass to us in the pretty little chapel of the hacienda, which saved us the trouble of going down to the village, and, moreover, took chocolate with us afterwards, there has been nothing to vary the usual routine of our country life.