One thing is certain: the whole affair had a brilliant appearance; and the handsome carriages, fine horses, gaily-dressed officers and soldiers, together with the military music and the crowds of people collected, produced an imposing effect.

LETTER THE FORTY-SECOND


13th July.

We little expected to be still here at the opening of the new Italian opera, and had consequently given up our box. Señor Roca, who went to Italy to bring out the requisites, has arrived at the end of a wonderfully short period, with the singers, male and female, the new dresses, decorations, etc.; and the first opera, Lucia de Lammermoor, was given last week. The theatre is the former Teatro des Gallos, an octagonal circus, which has been fitted up as elegantly as circumstances would permit, and as the transition from the crowing of cocks to the soft notes of Giulietta rendered necessary. The prima donna assoluta is the Signora Anaide Castellan de Giampietro, born in Paris, bred in Milan. The prima donna soprano is the Signora de Ricci; and the second donna is called Branzanti. The first tenor is Signor Giampietro, husband to the prima donna; and the second tenor is the Signor Alberti Bozetti. The first bass is Signor Tomassi, and the buffo bass Signor Spontini. They have been so much proné, and public expectation has been so much excited, that we supposed it probable that the first evening at least would be a failure to a certain extent. Besides, the Mexican audience, if not very experienced, is decidedly musical; and they have already had a pretty good opera here, have heard Madame Albini, la Cesari, Garcia (the father of Malibran) and the beaux restes of Galli; therefore can compare.

The first evening, the Castellan made her appearance
as Lucia. She is about twenty; slight and fair, with black hair, graceful, and with a very sweet, clear, and pure young voice, also very correct. The tenor rests upon his wife’s laurels. He looks well, but little more can be said in his praise. Tomassi has some good notes, and a fine figure. Of the others who sang that evening there is little to be said. The theatre is extremely well got up, the dresses are new and rich, and the decorations and scenery remarkably good. The public, however, were disappointed. They had prepared for wonders, and were not satisfied with a fair performance. The applauses were few and far between. The Castellan was not called for, and the following day a certain degree of discontent pervaded the aristocracy of the capital.

At the second representation of the same opera things mended. The voice of La Castellan was appreciated. Applauses were loud and long, and at the end of the opera she and the director were called for and received with enthusiasm. She seems likely to become a favourite.

Last evening we had Romeo and Giulietta, in which La Ricci and La Cesari made their appearance, the former as Giulietta, the latter as Romeo. The Ricci is a thin young woman, with a long, pale face, black eyes and hair, long neck and arms, and large hands; extremely pretty, it is said, off the stage, but very ineffective on it; but both on and off with a very distinguished air. Her voice is extensive, but wanting cultivation, and decidedly peacockish; besides that, she is apt to go out of tune. Her style of dress was excessively unbecoming to her style of beauty. She wore a tight white gown, a tight blue satin-peaked body, with long tight blue sleeves. The public were indulgent, but it was evident that they were disappointed.

La Cesari, highly married, and who for the last three years has not appeared upon the stage, came out as Romeo, with tunic and mantle, white silk stockings, hat, and feathers, etc. She was very much frightened and ill at ease, and it required all the applause with which the public greeted the entrée of their former favourite to restore her to self-possession. She looked remarkably well—tall, handsome, beautifully formed, rather pale, with fine dark eyes, dark hair, and moustaches. Her acting was greatly superior, as much so as was her beauty to any of the others. She has more knowledge of the
theatre, more science, taste, and energy, than any of them; but her voice, a soft contralto, is out of use and feeble. The theatre, besides, is ill-constructed for the voice, and must have a bad effect upon the fulness and tone. On the whole, it seems doubtful whether the opera will endure long. Were we going to remain here, I should trust that it might be supported, for, with all its faults and drawbacks, it is decidedly the best public exhibition in Mexico. The coup d'oeil was exceedingly pretty, as all the boxes were crowded, and the ladies were in full dress.

July 20th.—As we are living in the mint, the directors have called on us; and this morning they came to invite us to descend into the lower regions to see the silver coined. We went all over this immense establishment, a fine picture of decayed magnificence, built about one hundred and ten years ago by the Spaniards. Dirty, ill-kept, the machinery rude, the workmen discontented; its fine vaulted roofs, that look like the interior of a cathedral, together with that grandiose style which distinguished the buildings of the Spaniards in Mexico, form a strong contrast with the occupants.

We saw the silver bars stretched out, the dollars cut and whitened and stamped; and in one place we saw the machines for coining false money, which have been collected in such numbers that there is hardly room for them! We saw the place where the silver and gold is tested; and the room with the medals, amongst which are some ancient Roman, Persian, and English, but especially Spanish, and many of the time of Charles III.; when we were looking at which, an old gentleman exclaimed, "Would to Heaven those days would return!" without doubt the general feeling. This old man had been forty-four years in the Casa de Moneda, and had lived under several viceroys. He could remember, when a boy, being sent with a commission to the Viceroy Revillagigedo, and being very much frightened, but soon reassured by the kind reception of the representative of majesty. He spoke of the flourishing condition of the mint in those days, which coined twenty-seven millions annually, and was a royal house. He said that the viceroys used to praise them and thank them for their exertions; that the house was then kept in the most perfect order, the principal officers wearing a uniform, etc.
Hereupon another old gentleman took up the theme, and improved upon it; and told us, that, on one occasion, they had one million three hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold in the house; and described the visit of the vice-queen Yturriaguay, who came to see it, and sat down and looked round her in amazement at the quantity of gold she saw accumulated. This old gentleman had been thirty years in the mint, and seemed as though he had never been anywhere else; as if he were part and parcel in it, and had been coined, and beat out, and clipped there.

Hearing him, another fat man, rather unclipt-looking than otherwise, began to bewail the state of the times, till it was a chorus universal, where all sang in one key. One had a very large, underhanging lip, with a kind of tragi-comic countenance, and was constantly making lugubrious puns. Another, who seemed bred to the mint, (though by his account the mint was not bread to him,) was insatiably curious, as a man born in a mint might be. We passed about three hours in a mixture of admiration of the past and sorrow for the present, and were reconducted to our domicile by the poor employés, who seemed to think that a Spanish minister was the next best to a Spanish viceroy, or of anything they had seen for some time.

"The Past is nothing; and at last,
The Future will but be the Past."

says Lord Byron. Here the past is everything; and the future?—Answer it who can.

We were assured, while wondering at the number of machines for false coining which had been collected, that there are twice that number now in full force in Mexico; but that they belong to such distinguished personages, the government is afraid to interfere with them. Besides this, there is now no sufficient punishment for this crime, a capital offence in the days of the Spanish government. A lady here is said to have exclaimed with much simplicity on hearing her husband accused of false coining: "I really wonder why they make so much noise about it. It seems to me that my husband's copper is as good as any other!"

24th.—We went last evening to the opera, which was a repetition of Lucia, as it appears they cannot venture, in the face of public disapprobation, to repeat Romeo and
Giulietta at present. As we were passing through the square, the carriage suddenly drew up, the coachman and footman uncovered their heads, and an immense procession came passing along the cathedral, with lights and military music. There were officers in full uniform, with their heads uncovered, a long file of monks and priests, and a carriage carrying the host, surrounded by hundreds of people on foot, all bearing lighted torches. A band of military music accompanied the procession, all which astonished us, as it was no fête-day. When, at length, being able to pass along, we arrived at the opera, we were informed that they were carrying the viaticum to a rich acquaintance of ours, a general, who has been indisposed for some time, and whose illness has now exhibited fatal symptoms.

For him, then, these great cathedral bells are tolling heavily; for him, the torches and the pompous procession—the sandalled monks, and the officers in military array; while two bands of music are playing at his door and another in front of the cathedral, and in the midst of these sounds of monkish hymn and military music, the soul is preparing to wing its flight alone and unattended.

But the sweet notes of Lucia drown all other from our ears, if not from our thoughts. In a house not many hundred yards off, they minister the host to the dying man, while here, La Castellan, with her pretty French graces and Italian singing, is drawing tears from our eyes for fictitious sorrows.

The theatre was pretty well filled, though there were some empty boxes, sights more hideous in the eyes of actors than toothless mouths. We sat with Madame la Baronne de —, and nearly opposite was Madame —, related to the “Principe de la Paz,” a handsome woman, with a fine Bohemian cast of face, dark in complexion, with glittering teeth, brilliant eyes, and dark hair. La Castellan sang very well, with much clearness, precision, and facility. She is certainly graceful and pretty, but, except in her method, more French than Italian. Her style suits Lucia, but I doubt her having l’air noble sufficient for a Norma or a Semiramis. The bass improves upon acquaintance, but the handsome tenor is nought. The audience seemed to me both indulgent and discriminating. They applauded the pretty prima donna con furore; they praised the bass when he deserved it, the
Gold Embroidery

... when it was possible; but where he sang false, nothing could extort from them a solitary viva. This discrimination makes their applause worth having, and proceeds less from experience or cultivation, than from a musical instinct.

In a visit we made this morning, we were shown a piece of embroidery, which, from its splendour and good taste, is worthy of observation, though by no means uncommon here. We went to call on the wife of a judge, who showed us all through their beautiful house, which looks out on the Alameda. In one of the rooms, their daughter was engaged on a piece of embroidery for the altar of the chapel. The ground was the very richest and thickest white satin; the design was a garland of vine-leaves, with bunches of grapes. The vine-leaves were beautifully embroidered in fine gold, and the grapes were composed of amethysts. I can conceive nothing richer and more tasteful than the general effect. The gold embroidery done in Mexico is generally very beautiful, and there are many ladies who embroider in great perfection. There is an amazing quantity of it used in the churches, and in military uniforms. I have also seen beautiful gold-embroidered ball-dresses, but they are nearly out of fashion. ... We hear that General ..., though still ill, is likely to recover.

25th.—This being the day of Santiago, the patron saint of Spain, C—n was invited by the padres to San Francisco to attend mass in the church there. We were shown to the tribuna (gallery) of the Countess de Santiago, where they gave us chairs, and put down a piece of carpet. C—n and the rest of the legation were in the body of the church, in velvet chairs, with lighted tapers in their hands. The saint was carried in procession, going out by the principal door, making a tour of the streets, and returning by a side door. The music was pretty good, especially one soprano voice. Twelve little boys were placed on crimson velvet benches, on either side of the altar, representing pilgrims of Galicia (of which Santiago is the capital), handsome little fellows, belonging to respectable families, dressed in robes of dark green or crimson, or violet-coloured velvet, with falling lace collars, and the neck ornamented with gold and silver shells; a large pilgrim’s hat fastened on behind, and hanging down, and in their hands staffs with gold bells.
They were beautiful children, and all behaved with becoming gravity and decorum during the ceremony, walking with much dignity in the procession.

After the función, we went out to Santiago, an old church near Mexico, where the Indians annually come in procession on this day, and sell their fruit, flowers, pulque, etc. All the waste ground near the church was covered with green booths, and there was a great crowd of carriages and horsemen, and people on foot. The troops were drawn out, escorting the procession to the church. But though the scene was curious, as the remnant of an old-established ceremony, and the Indians, with their booths and flowers, and great show of fruit, were all very picturesque, the sun was so intense, that after walking about a little while, and buying tunas and nuts and peaches, we returned home, together with the Güera Rodriguez, who was in the carriage with us, and giving us a lively description of what this fête used to be in former days. Had a visit the same morning from the Señora M—, whom I think even handsomer by daylight, than she appeared to be at the opera; not always the case with dark beauties.

26th.—Another representation of Vaccaj’s Romeo and Giulietta, with the second appearance of La Ricci. Music and Ricci seem considered a failure. The Señora Cesari made the handsomest of Romeos, as usual, but was ill, and out of spirits. The opera as a whole was coldly received; the boxes and pit were nearly empty, and La Ricci seems unlikely to gain any favour with the public, though it must be confessed that she looked better, was more becomingly dressed, and both sang and acted better than the preceding night. Yesterday we went to a soirée at the — minister’s. Madame Castellan and her tenor were there, and had come from a dinner given by a rich curate to the whole corps opératique, from the prima donna down to the joueur du fagote, and even to the tailor who makes the opera dresses, and his wife. This rich padre, it is said, spends a great part of his fortune in entertaining actors and singers. La Castellan (permission to that effect having been obtained from the manager, for it is against their agreement to perform in private houses) sang several airs to the piano, with much expression, especially from Robert le Diable; and Nina Pazza per Amore; but I prefer her voice in the theatre.
Mexico by Moonlight

She is not at all beautiful, but has a charming face with a very musical expression.

We returned home by moonlight, the most flattering medium through which Mexico can be viewed; with its broad and silent streets, and splendid old buildings, whose decay and abandonment are softened by the silvery light; its ancient churches, from which the notes of the organ occasionally come pealing forth, mingled with faint blasts of music borne on the night wind from some distant procession; or with the soft music of a hymn from some neighbouring convent. The white-robed monk—the veiled female—even the ragged beggar, add to the picture; by daylight his rags are too visible. Frequently, as the carriages roll along to the opera, or as, at a late hour, they return from it, they are suddenly stopped by the appearance of the mysterious coach, with its piebald mules, and the Eye surrounded by rays of light on its panels; a melancholy apparition, for it has come from the house of mourning, probably from the bed of death. Then, by the moonlight, the kneeling figures on the pavement seemed as if carved in stone. The city of Mexico by moonlight—the environs of Mexico at daybreak—these are the hours for viewing both to advantage, and for making us feel how

"All but the spirit of man is divine."

In front of our house, I should say of the Mint, is the archbishop’s palace, and in front of this palace an object which has greatly excited our curiosity. It is an old man, who, whether as a penance, or from some motive which we do not know, kneels, wrapt in his serape, beside the wall of the Arzobispado from sunset till midnight, or later—for we have frequently gone out at nine in the evening, and left him kneeling there; and on our return at one in the morning have found him in the same position. He asks no alms, but kneels there silent and motionless, hour after hour, as if in the performance of some vow.

We made a call this evening on the archbishop in his own palace, an enormously large building; a sort of street, like this Casa de Moneda. He received us very cordially, and looked very comfortable without his robes of state, in a fine cloth dressing-gown, lined with violet-coloured silk.
August 1st.—We had a visit last evening from one of the directors of the mint, a curious and most original genius, a Mexican, who has served nearly thirty years in that and other capacities, and who, after speaking of the different viceroys he had seen, proceeded to give us various anecdotes of the Viceroy Revillagigedo, the most honoured for his justice, renowned for his energy, and feared for his severity, of the whole dynasty. Our friend was moved to enthusiasm by the sight of an old-fashioned but very handsome musical clock, which stands on a table in the drawing-room, and which he says was brought over by this viceroy, and was no doubt considered a miracle of art in those days.

Some of the anecdotes he told us are already generally known here, but his manner of telling them was very interesting, and he added various particulars which we had not heard before. Besides, the stories themselves seem to me so curious and characteristic, that however much they lose by being tamely written instead of dramatized as they are by him, I am tempted to give you one or two specimens. But my letter is getting beyond all ordinary limits, and your curiosity will no doubt keep cool till the arrival of another packet.

LETTER THE FORTY-THIRD

Revillagigedo—The False Merchant and the Lady—The Viceroy, the Unjust Spaniard, the Indian, and the Golden Ounces—Horrible Murder—Details—Oath—Country Family—The Spot of Blood—The Mother unknowingly denounces her Son—Arrest of the Three—Confession—Execution—The Viceroy fulfils his Pledge—Paving of the Streets—Severity to the Monks—Solitary Damsee—Box on the Ear—Pension—Morning Concert—New Minister—“Street of the Sad Indian”—Traditions—A Farewell Audience—Inscription on a Tomb.

August 3rd.

A lady of fortune, owing to some combination of circumstances, found herself in difficulties, and in immediate want of a small sum of money. Don — being her compadre, and a respectable merchant, she went to him to state her necessities, and offered him a case of valuable jewels as security for repayment, provided he would advance her eight hundred dollars. He agreed, and the bargain was concluded without any written document, the