LETTER THE SIXTH


MEXICO, 26th December.

We left Puebla between four and five in the morning, as we purposely made some delay, not wishing to reach Mexico too early; and in so doing, acted contrary to the advice of Don Miguel, who was generally right in these matters. The day was very fine when we set off, though rain was predicted. Some of the gentlemen had gone to the theatre the night before, to see the Nacimiento, and the audience had been composed entirely of Gentusa, the common people, who were drinking brandy and smoking; so it was fortunate that we had not shown our faces there.

The country was now flat but fertile, and had on the whole more of a European look than any we had yet passed through.

At Rio Prieto, a small village, where we changed horses, I found that I had been sitting very comfortably with my feet in a basket of chirimoyas, and that my bordequins, white gown, and cloak, had been all drenched with the milky juice, and then made black by the floor of the diligence.

With no small difficulty a trunk was brought down, and another dress procured, to the great amusement of the Indian women, who begged to know if my gown was the last fashion, and said it was “muy guapa,” very pretty. Here we found good hot coffee, and it being Christmas-day, every one was cleaned and dressed for mass.

At Rio Frio, which is about thirteen leagues from Mexico, and where there is a pretty good posada in a valley surrounded by woods, we stopped to dine. The inn was kept by a Bordelaise and her husband, who wish themselves in Bordeaux twenty times a day. In front of the house some Indians were playing at a curious and very ancient game—a sort of swing, resembling “El Juego de
los Voladores," "The game of the flyers," much in vogue amongst the ancient Mexicans. Our French hostess gave us a good dinner, especially excellent potatoes, and jelly of various sorts, regaling us with plenty of stories of robbers and robberies and horrid murders all the while. On leaving Rio Frio, the road became more hilly and covered with woods, and we shortly entered the tract known by the name of the Black Forest, a great haunt for banditti, and a beautiful specimen of forest scenery, a succession of lofty oaks, pines, and cedars, with wild flowers lighting up their gloomy green. But I confess that the impatience which I felt to see Mexico, the idea that in a few hours we should actually be there, prevented me from enjoying the beauty of the scenery, and made the road appear interminable.

But at length we arrived at the heights looking down upon the great valley, celebrated in all parts of the world, with its framework of everlasting mountains, its snow-crowned volcanoes, great lakes, and fertile plains, all surrounding the favoured city of Montezuma, the proudest boast of his conqueror, once of Spain's many diadems the brightest. But the day had overcast, nor is this the most favourable road for entering Mexico. The innumerable spires of the distant city were faintly seen. The volcanoes were enveloped in clouds, all but their snowy summits, which seemed like marble domes towering into the sky. But as we strained our eyes to look into the valley, it all appeared to me rather like a vision of the Past than the actual breathing Present. The curtain of Time seemed to roll back, and to discover to us the great panorama that burst upon the eye of Cortes when he first looked down upon the table-land; the king-loving, God-fearing conqueror, his loyalty and religion so blended after the fashion of ancient Spain, that it were hard to say which sentiment exercised over him the greater sway. The city of Tenochtitlan, standing in the midst of the five great lakes, upon verdant and flower-covered islands, a western Venice, with thousands of boats gliding swiftly along its streets, long lines of low houses, diversified by the multitudes of pyramidal temples, the Teocalli, or houses of God—canoes covering the mirrored lakes—the lofty trees, the flowers, and the profusion of water now wanting to the landscape—the whole fertile valley enclosed by its eternal hills and snow-crowned volcanoes—what scenes of wonder and of
beauty to burst upon the eyes of these wayfaring men!

Then the beautiful gardens surrounding the city, the profusion of flowers, and fruit, and birds—the mild bronze-coloured Emperor himself advancing in the midst of his Indian nobility, with rich dress and unshod feet, to receive his unbidden and unwelcome guest—the slaves and the gold and the rich plumes, all to be laid at the feet of “His most sacred Majesty”—what pictures are called up by the recollection of the simple narrative of Cortes, and how forcibly they return to the mind now, when, after a lapse of three centuries, we behold for the first time the city of palaces raised upon the ruins of the Indian capital. It seemed scarcely possible that we were indeed so near the conclusion of our journey, and in the midst of so different a scene, only two months minus two days since leaving New York and stepping aboard the Norma. How much land and sea we had passed over since then! How much we had seen! How many different climates, even in the space of the last four days!

But my thoughts which had wandered three centuries into the past, were soon recalled to the present by the arrival of an officer in full uniform at the head of his troop, who came out by order of the government to welcome the bearer of the olive-branch from ancient Spain, and had been on horseback since the day before, expecting our arrival. As it had begun to rain, the officer, Colonel Miguel Andrade, accepted our offer of taking shelter in the diligence. We had now a great troop galloping along with us, and had not gone far before we perceived that in spite of the rain, and that it already began to grow dusk, there were innumerable carriages and horsemen forming an immense crowd, all coming out to welcome us. Shortly after the diligence was stopped, and we were requested to get into a very splendid carriage, all crimson and gold, with the arms of the republic, the eagle and nopal, embroidered in gold on the roof inside, and drawn by four handsome white horses. In the midst of this immense procession of troops, carriages, and horsemen, we made our entry into the city of Montezuma.

The scenery on this side of Mexico is arid and flat, and where the waters of the Lagunas, covered with their gay canoes, once surrounded the city, forming canals through its streets, we now see melancholy marshy lands, little
enlivened by great flights of wild duck and waterfowl. But the bleakness of the natural scenery was concealed by the gay appearance of the procession—the scarlet and gold uniforms; the bright-coloured sarapes, the dresses of the gentlemen (most, I believe, Spaniards), with their handsome horses, high Mexican saddles, gold-embroidered anqueras generally of black fur, their Mexican hats ornamented with gold, richly-furred jackets, pantaloons with hanging silver buttons, stamped-leather boots, silver stirrups, and graceful mangas with black or coloured velvet capes.

At the gates of Mexico the troops halted, and three enthusiastic cheers were given as the carriage entered. It was now nearly dusk, and the rain was falling in torrents, yet we met more carriages full of ladies and gentlemen, which joined the others. We found that a house, in the suburbs at Buenavista, had been taken for us provisoirement by the kindness of the Spaniards, especially of a rich merchant who accompanied us in the carriage, Don M——l M——z del C——o; consequently we passed all through Mexico before reaching our destination, always in the midst of the crowd, on account of which and of the ill-paved streets we went very slowly. Through the rain and the darkness we got an occasional faint lamp-light glimpse of high buildings, churches, and convents. Arrived at length in the midst of torrents of rain, C——n got out of the carriage and returned thanks for his reception, giving some ounces to the sergeant for the soldiers. We then entered the house, accompanied by the Mexican officer, and by a large party of Spaniards.

We found the house very good, especially considering that it had been furnished for us in eight-and-forty hours, and we also found an excellent supper smoking on the table; after doing justice to which we took leave of our friends, and, very tired, prepared for sleep.

The servants and luggage arrived late. They had been left with the diligence, under the guardianship of Don Miguel, and it appeared that the robbers had mingled with the crowd, and followed in hopes of plunder; insomuch that he had been obliged to procure two carriages, one for the servants, while into another he put the luggage, mounting in front himself to look out. Tired enough the poor man was and drenched with rain; and we found that much of this confusion and difficulty, which was chiefly
caused by the storm and darkness, would have been avoided had we left Puebla some hours sooner.

However, "All's well that ends well." I thought of Christmas in "Merrie England," and of our family gatherings in the olden time, and as if one had not travelled enough in the body, began travelling in the mind, away to far different, and distant, and long gone-by scenes, fell asleep at length with my thoughts in Scotland, and wakened in Mexico!

By daylight we find our house very pretty, with a large garden adjoining, full of flowers, and rosebushes in the courtyard, but being all on the ground-floor, it is somewhat damp, and the weather, though beautiful, is so cool in the morning, that carpets, and I sometimes think even a soupçon of fire, would not be amiss. The former we shall soon procure, but there are neither chimneys nor grates, and I have no doubt a fire would be disagreeable for more than an hour or so in the morning. The house stands alone, with a large court before it, and opposite to it passes the great stone aqueduct, a magnificent work of the Spaniards, though not more so, probably, than those which supplied the ancient Tenochtitlan with water. Behind it we see nothing but several old houses, with trees, so that we seem almost in the country. To the right is one large building, with garden and olive-ground, where the English legation formerly lived, a palace in size, since occupied by Santa Anna, and which now belongs to Señor Perez Galvez; a house which we shall be glad to have, if the proprietor will consent to let it.

But what most attracts our attention are the curious and picturesque groups of figures which we see from the windows—men bronze-colour, with nothing but a piece of blanket thrown round them, carrying lightly on their heads earthen basins, precisely the colour of their own skin, so that they look altogether like figures of terra cotta: these basins filled with sweetmeats or white pyramids of grease (mantequilla); women with rebosos, short petticoats of two colours, generally all in rags, yet with a lace border appearing on their under garment: no stockings, and dirty white satin shoes, rather shorter than their small brown feet; gentlemen on horseback with their Mexican saddles and sarapes; lounging leperos, moving bundles of rags, coming to the windows and begging with a most piteous but false sounding whine, or lying under the arches and
lazily inhaling the air and the sunshine, or sitting at the
door for hours basking in the sun or under the shadow
of the wall: Indian women, with their tight petticoat
of dark stuff and tangled hair, plaited with red ribbon,
laying down their baskets to rest, and meanwhile
deliberately examining the hair of their copper-coloured
offspring. We have enough to engage our attention for
the present.

Several visitors came early—gentlemen, both Spaniards
and Mexicans. Señor A——z, decidedly the ugliest man
I ever beheld, with a hum on his back, and a smile of
most portentous hideosity, yet celebrated for his bonnes
fortunes; Señor de G——a, Ex-Minister of the Treasury,
extremely witty and agreeable, and with some celebrity as
a dramatic writer; Count C——a, formerly attached to
the bedchamber in Spain, married to a pretty Andalusian,
and entirely Mexicanized, his heart where his interests
are. He is very gentlemanlike and distinguished-looking,
with good manners, and extremely eloquent in conversa-
tion. I hear him called “inconsecuente,” and capricious,
but he has welcomed C——n, who knew him intimately
in Madrid, with all the warmth of ancient friendship.

We are told that a great serenade has been for some
time in contemplation, to be given to C——n, the
words, music, and performance by the young Spaniards
here.

27th.—A day or two must elapse before I can satisfy
my curiosity by going out, while the necessary arrange-
ments are making concerning carriage and horses, or mules,
 servants, etc.; our vehicles from the United States not
having yet arrived,—nor is it difficult to foresee, even from
once passing through the streets, that only the more solid-
built English carriages will stand the wear and tear of a
Mexican life, and that the comparatively flimsy coaches
which roll over the well-paved streets of New York, will
not endure for any length of time.

Meanwhile we have constant visits, but chiefly from
gentlemen and from Spaniards, for there is one piece of
etiquette, entirely Mexican, nor can I imagine from whence
derived, by which it is ordained that all new arrivals,
whatever be their rank, foreign ministers not excepted,
must in solemn print give notice to every family of any
consideration in the capital, that they have arrived, and
offer themselves and their house to their “disposicion;”
failing in which etiquette, the newly-arrived family will remain unnoticed and unknown. Our cards to this effect are consequently being printed under the auspices of Count C—a. I have, however, received the visits of some ladies who have kindly waived this ceremony in my favour; and amongst others, from the Dowager and the young Countess of C—a; the eldest a very distinguished woman, of great natural talent, one of the true ladies of the old school, of whom not many specimens now remain in Mexico; the other extremely pretty, lively, and amiable, a true Andalusian both in beauty and wit. The old Countess was dressed in black velvet, black blonde mantilla, diamond earrings and brooch—her daughter-in-law also in black, with a mantilla, and she had a pretty little daughter with her, whose eyes will certainly produce a kindling effect on the next generation.

They were both extremely kind and cordial; if there are many such persons in Mexico, we shall have no reason to complain. I hope I am not seeing the cream before the milk!

Some Mexican visits appear to me to surpass in duration all that one can imagine of a visit, rarely lasting less than one hour, and sometimes extending over a greater part of the day. And gentlemen, at least, arrive at no particular time. If you are going to breakfast, they go also—if to dinner, the same—if you are asleep, they wait till you awaken—if out, they call again. An indifferent sort of man, whose name I did not even hear, arrived yesterday, a little after breakfast, sat still, and walked in to a late dinner with us! These should not be called visits, but visitations,—though I trust they do not often occur to that extent. An open house and an open table for your friends, which includes every passing acquaintance; these are merely Spanish habits of hospitality transplanted.

Had a visit from Señor —— and his wife, very civil and obliging people, always agreeing with each other, and with you, and with all the world, almost to the extent of Polonius to Hamlet. Our conversation reminded me of that the whole time they were here.

I have just brought from the garden a lapful of pink roses, clove-carnations, and sweet-peas. Rosetta could not sing here—

“For June and December will never agree.”
The weather is lovely, the air fresh and clear, the sky one vast expanse of bright blue, without a single cloud. Early this morning it was cool, but now, by ten o'clock, the air is as soft and balmy as on a summer-day with us.

28th.—Day of the memorable serenade. After dinner some ladies paid me a visit, amongst others the wife and daughter of the Spanish consul, Señor M——y, who were accompanied by the sister of Count A——a. They and a few gentlemen arrived about six o'clock, and it was said that the serenade would not begin till twelve. It may be supposed that our conversation, however agreeable it might be, would scarcely hold out that time. In fact, by nine o'clock, we were all nearly overcome by sleep, and by ten I believe we were already in a refreshing slumber, when we were awakened by the sound of crowds assembling before the door, and of carriages arriving and stopping. Not knowing who the occupants might be, we could not invite them in, which seemed very inhospitable, as the night, though fine, was cold and chilly. About eleven the Count and Countess C——a arrived, and the Señora de G——, a remarkably handsome woman, a Spaniard, looking nearly as young as her daughters; also the pretty daughters of the proprietress of this house, who was a beauty, and is married to her third husband; and a lively little talkative person, the Señora de L——n, all Spanish; and who, some on that account, and others from their husbands having been former friends of C——n’s have not waited for the ceremony of receiving cards. Gradually, however, several Mexican ladies, whom we had sent out to invite, came in. Others remained in their carriages, excusing themselves on the plea of their not being en toilette. We had men à discrétion, and the rooms were crowded.

About midnight arrived a troop of Mexican soldiers, carrying torches, and a multitude of musicians, both amateur and professional, chiefly the former, and men carrying music-stands, violins, violoncellos, French horns, etc., together with an immense crowd, mingled with numbers of léperos, so that the great space in front of the house as far as the aqueduct, and all beyond and along the street as far as we could see, was covered with people and carriages. We threw open the windows, which are on a level with the ground, with large balconies and wide
iron gratings, and the scene by the torch-light was very curious. The Mexican troops holding lights for the musicians, and they of various countries, Spanish, German; and Mexican; the leperos, with their ragged blankets and wild eyes, that gleamed in the light of the torches; the ladies within, and the crowd without, all formed a very amusing spectacle.

At length the musicians struck up in full chorus, accompanied by the whole orchestra. The voices were very fine, and the instrumental music so good, I could hardly believe that almost all were amateur performers.

A hymn, which had been composed for the occasion, and of which we had received an elegantly-bound copy in the morning, was particularly effective. The music was composed by Señor Retes, and the words by Señor Covo, both Spaniards. Various overtures from the last operas were played, and at the end of what seemed to be the first act, in the midst of deafening applause from the crowd, C——n made me return thanks from the window in beautiful impromptu Spanish! Then came shouts of “Viva la España!” “Viva Ysabel Segunda!” “Viva el Ministro de España!” Great and continued cheering. Then C——n gave in return, “Viva la Republica Mexicana!” “Viva Bustamente!” and the shouting was tremendous. At last an Andalusian in the crowd shouted out, “Viva todo el Mundo!” (Long live everybody), which piece of wit was followed by general laughter.

After hot punch and cigars had been handed about out of doors, a necessary refreshment in this cold night; the music recommenced, and the whole ended with the national hymn of Spain, with appropriate words. A young Spanish girl, whose voice is celebrated here, was then entreated by those within, and beseeched by those without, to sing alone the hymn composed in honour of C——n, which she naturally felt some hesitation in doing before such an immense audience. However, she consented at last, and in a voice like a clarion, accompanied by the orchestra, sung each verse alone, joined in the chorus by the whole crowd. I give you a copy:

Himno Patriótico que varios Españoles, Residentes en México, dedican al Esmo. Sr. Don A—— C—— de la B——, Ministro Plenipotenciario de S. M. C. en lá República, con Motivo de su Llegada á dicha Capital.

Musica del Sr. J. N. DE RETES; Palabras del Sr. D. JUAN COVO.
Life in Mexico

CORO.
Triunfamos, amigos,
Triunfamos en fin,
Y libre respir
La Patria del Cid.

La augusta Cristina,
De España embeleso,
El mas tierno beso
Imprime á Ysabel:
Y “Reina,” le dice,
“No ia sobre esclavos;
Sobre héroes bravos,
Sobre un pueblo fiel.”

Triunfamos, amigos, etc.

Donde está de Carlos
La perdida hueste?
Un rayo celeste
Polvo la tornó.
Rayo que al malvado
Hundió en el abismo—
Rayo que al Carlismo
Libertad lanzó.

Triunfamos, amigos, etc.

Al Bravo Caudillo,
Al bueno, al valiente,
Ciñamos la frente
De mirto y laurel.
Tu diestra animosa,
Heroico guerrero,
Tu diestra, Espartero,
Sojuzgó al infiel.

Triunfamos, amigos, etc.

Veranse acatadas
Nuestras santas leyes;
Temblaran los Reyes
De España al poder.
Y el cetro de oprobrio,
Si empuña un tirano,
De su infame mano
Le harémos caer.

Triunfamos, amigos, etc.

Salud á Ysabela,
Salud á Cristina,
Quel el cielo destina
La patria á salvar.
Y el libre corone
La candida frente
De aquella inocente
Que juró amparar.

Triunfamos, amigos, etc.
Patriotic Hymn

Y tu, mensagero
De paz y ventura,
Oye la voz pura
De nuestra lealtad.
Oye los acentos
Que al cielo elevamos,
Oye cual gritamos,
Patria! Libertad!
Triunfamos, amigos, etc.

Tu el simbolo digno
Serás, C—n,
De grata reunion,
De eterna ar—tad,
Que ya, en ambos mundos,
La insana discordia
Trocóse en concordia
Y fraternidad.
Triunfamos, amigos, etc.

TRANSLATION.

Patriotic Hymn which various Spaniards, resident in Mexico, dedicate to his Excellency Señor Don A— C— de la B—, Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary from H. C. M. to the Republic, to celebrate his arrival in this Capital.

The music by Señor Don J. N. de Retes; the words by Señor Don Juan Covo.

CHORUS.
Let us triumph, my friends,
Let us triumph at length,
And let the country of the Cid
Breathe freely again.

The august Christina,
The ornament of Spain,
Imprinted the most tender kiss
On the cheek of Isabel.
And "Reign," she said to her,
"Not now over slaves,
But over brave Iberians,
Over a faithful people!"

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.

Where is the perfidious
Army of Carlos?
A celestial thunderbolt
Has turned it to dust—
A thunderbolt which plunged
The wicked one into the abyss—
A thunderbolt which Liberty
Launched against Carlist.

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.
Life in Mexico

Of the brave chief,
Of the good, the valiant,
Let us gird the forehead
With myrtle and laurel.
Thy brave right hand,
Heroic warrior,
Thy right hand, Espartero,
Subdued the disloyal one.

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.

Our holy laws
Will be acknowledged,
And kings will tremble
At the power of Spain;
And should a tyrant grasp
The sceptre of opprobrium,
From his infamous hand
We shall cause it to fall.

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.

Health to Isabella,
Health to Christina,
Whom Heaven has destined
To save the country;
And may he freely crown
The white forehead
Of the innocent princess
He swore to protect.

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.

And thou, messenger
Of peace and joy,
Hear the pure voice
Of our loyalty;
Hear the accents
Which we raise to Heaven;
Hear what we cry,
Country! Liberty!

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.

Thou, C——n, shalt be
The worthy symbol
Of grateful reunion,
Of eternal friendship,
Which already has changed,
In both worlds,
Insane discord
Into concord and fraternity.

Let us triumph, my friends, etc.

The air was rent with vivas! and bravos! as the Señorita de F—— concluded. Her voice was beautiful, and after the first moment of embarrassment, she sang
with much spirit and enthusiasm. This was the finale of the serenade, and then the serenaders were invited in, and were in such numbers that the room would scarcely hold them all. More cigars, more punch, more giving of thanks. About three o'clock the crowd began to disperse, and at length, after those Spanish leave-takings, which are really no joke, had ended, Captain E——, C——n, and I, all three excessively cold and shivering, having passed the night at the open windows, consoled ourselves with hot chocolate and punch, and went to dream of sweet-sounding harmonies. Altogether, it was a scene which I would not have missed for a great deal.

The enthusiasm caused by the arrival of the first minister from Spain seems gradually to increase. The actors are to give him a "funcion extraordinaria," in the theatre—the matadors a bull-fight extraordinary, with fireworks. . . . But in all this you must not suppose there is any personal compliment. It is merely intended as a mark of good will towards the first representative of the Spanish monarchy who brings from the mother-country the formal acknowledgment of Mexican independence.

LETTER THE SEVENTH


I made my début in Mexico by going to mass in the cathedral. We drove through the Alameda, near which we live, and admired its noble trees, flowers, and fountains, all sparkling in the sun. We met but few carriages there, an occasional gentleman on horseback, and a few solitary-looking people resting on the stone benches, also plenty of beggars, and the forçats in chains, watering the avenues. We passed through the Calle San Francisco, the handsomest street in Mexico, both as to shops and houses (containing, amongst others, the richly-carved but now half-ruined palace of Yturbide), and which terminates in the great square where stand the cathedral and the palace. The streets were crowded, it being a