

A VOYAGE to CALIFORNIA, to observe the TRANSIT OF VENUS. By Monsieur CHAPPE D'AUTEROCHE. With an Historical Description of the Author's Route through MEXICO, and the natural History of that Province. Also a VOYAGE to NEWFOUNDLAND and SALEE, by Mons. de CASSINI.



D'Auteroche gives the following description of the city of Mexico:

"WE arrived at Mexico on Easter Day, March 26, at noon. Before we entered the city, we met the marquis de la Torre, Inspector of infantry. The moment he saw us, he went and gave notice of our arrival to the viceroy, who sent orders that we should be suffered to enter the city without any search, and conducted to the house of the Jesuits, where a lodging was prepared for us. We had no sooner alighted there, but four gentlemen came to conduct us to the palace. I am at a loss for words to express the friendship and politeness shewn us by the marquis de Croix, viceroy of Mexico, and by his whole court. He left nothing undone to procure us whatever we wished for, and to make our stay at Mexico agreeable to us. We had no table but his own for the four days we continued in town, and he was so obliging as to send a cook to dress victuals for our attendants after the French fashion. The next day after our arrival, he lent us one of the coaches to go about the town.

Mexico, the capital of the province which bears that name, is situated on the banks of a lake, and built upon a fen, crossed by a multitude of canals, consequently the houses are all built upon piles. The ground gives way in many places, and many buildings are observed to have sunk upwards of six feet, without any visible alteration in the body of the building: one of these is the cathedral, which I shall speak of hereafter.

The streets of Mexico are very wide, perfectly straight, and almost all intersect each other at right angles. The houses are tolerably built, but not much ornamented either within or without; their make is the same as in Spain.

There is no very remarkable edifice at Mexico. The viceroy's palace is in a spacious and pretty regular square, with a fountain in the middle. The only merit of this palace is, that it is built very solid. No decorations are to be found there. Within its circumference are three handsome court-yards, with each a fountain in the middle. The mint stands behind this palace, and is a noble building. Upwards of 100 workmen are constantly employed there in coining piastres for the king of Spain, out of the enormous masses of silver brought thither by the owners of the mines, who exchange them for coin. It is said, about 14 millions of piastres are struck yearly in this mint.

The most sumptuous buildings are the churches, chapels, and convents. There are a great many in this city, which are very richly ornamented, and among others the cathedral. The rail round the high altar is solid silver; and what is still more costly, there is a silver lamp, so capacious that three men get in to clean it: this lamp is enriched with figures of lions' heads,

and other ornaments of pure gold. The inside pillars are hung with rich crimson velvet, enriched with a broad gold fringe. This profusion of riches in the churches at Mexico is not very surprising to whoever has seen the cathedral of Cadiz, and the immense treasures contained in it. Gold and precious stones are there lavished upon the sacred vessels and ornaments; and the images of the holy Virgin and other saints are either solid silver, or clad in the richest garments.

The outside of the cathedral of Mexico is unfinished, and likely to continue so; they are afraid of increasing the weight of the building, which already begins to sink, as before noticed. I shall say nothing of the other churches, I believe there are as many as there are saints in the calendar.

The city of Mexico contains three squares; the first is the *Maior* or great square fronting the palace, the cathedral, and the market-place, which is a double square surrounded with buildings: this square is in the center of the city. The second, adjoining to this, is the square called del Volador, where the bull-feasts are held. The third, is that of Santo Domingo. These squares are tolerably regular, and each has a fountain in the middle. To the north of the town, near the suburbs, is the public walk, or Alameda. A rivulet runs all round it, and forms a pretty large square, with a basin and *jet d'eau* in the middle. Eight walks, with each two rows of trees, terminate at this basin like a star; but as the soil of Mexico is unfit for trees, they are not in a very thriving condition. This is the only walk in or near to Mexico; all the country about it is swampy ground, and full of canals. A few paces off, and facing the Alameda, is the *Quemadero*; this is the place where they burn the Jews, and other unhappy victims of the awful tribunal of inquisition. This *Quemadero* is an enclosure between four walls, and filled with ovens, into which are thrown, over the walls, the poor wretches who are condemned to be burnt alive; condemned, by judges professing a religion whose first precept is charity.

The short stay we made at Mexico did not permit me to take a fuller survey of the place. I was told there was a Spanish playhouse, but I was not tempted to go. I had enough of one at Cadiz.

I found a Frenchman at Mexico who spoke the Spanish and Mexican languages tolerably well, and was perfectly acquainted with all this country, having lived in it many years. I took him for my interpreter, as I thought he would be very serviceable to me for the remainder of our journey, and especially in California. As we went further on, we were to meet with Indians more savage than before; the viceroy therefore thought proper to give us a guard of three soldiers, to defend us against the robbers who infest those parts. Troops of fierce and unconquered Indians, called by the Spaniards *Indios bravos*, attack travellers when they find themselves strongest, murder them, or at least, after stripping and tying them to the neighbouring trees, they carry off their mules and baggage to some byé places, known to none but themselves, where they share the money, and hide the rest of the booty. Our guides told us, that some of the forests and mountains we passed by, conceal immense treasures hoarded up by these banditti: they are easily known by a handkerchief which they hold between their teeth to hide their faces. When a traveller

sees an Indian thus masked, the safest way is to be beforehand with him, and to kill him if possible. We were so lucky as to meet with none. Having provided ourselves with necessaries for our journey, we set out from Mexico the 30th of March 1769. Mr. Doz and Mr. Medina had hired a wheel carriage, but for my part as I had been told we should meet with bad roads, I chose to go on horseback. 'Tis true I did not ride the easier for it, but I escaped a thousand mischances which befall our two Spanish officers, and which retarded us more than once.

From Mexico to San-Blas, where we were to embark to cross the Vermeille sea, they reckon about 190 leagues. The farther you go from Mexico, the fewer habitations you meet with, and the road is often very rough, dangerous, and full of precipices. In most places where we stopped, we hardly found bread, and every thing in that part of the country wears the face of the most pinching penury.

Forty leagues from Mexico we found the little town of Queretaro, remarkable for a very famous manufactory of cloth. This town is pretty well built; it stands against the slope of a mountain, which is joined to another, farther off and higher, by a noble aqueduct, which conveys the water from the upper to the lower one, from whence it flows to all parts of the town. This aqueduct is a very solid piece of workmanship. These kind of works are very common in Mexico, and are the only remarkable performances in the way of building.

It was near Queretaro that I had the satisfaction, repeatedly to see a phenomenon realized, which I had often suspected than seen in France; I mean the lightning rising from the earth instead of issuing from the cloud, as it is commonly thought to do.

On the 3d of April in the evening, being then near Molino, a little hamlet about thirty-six leagues from Mexico, I observed to the south a great black cloud, at a moderate height above the horizon: the whole hemisphere about us had a fiery aspect. This cloud was supported, as it were, with three columns at equal distances, and their basis almost met the horizon. All the while it remained in this state, frequent and smart flashes of lightning appeared in three places of the cloud over these columns; and at the same time streams of electrical light darted from the correspondent points of the horizon below, as in an aurora borealis. Soon after, the cloud came lower down, and then it was that we saw incessant lightnings rising like so many sky-rockets, and flashing at the top of the cloud. I was the more convinced that I was not mistaken, as in this observation, the first who took notice of the phenomenon were, all my attendants, the interpreter, the soldiers, none of whom could be under the influence of any systematic prejudice. Once only the lightning seemed to issue from the cloud. Two days after, we saw the same thing again, and plainly distinguished the lightning rising from the ground, nor was its motion so swift but what we could discern its origin and direction.

Eight days after we had left Mexico, we arrived at Guadalaxara. This is a considerable town, and a bishopric. We rested two days in this place; it was what I greatly wanted, after a journey of a hundred leagues, upon sorry mules, and in bad weather and detestable roads.