

## THE CITY OF MEXICO.

The following graphic description is taken from Waddy Thompson's *Recollections of Mexico*, a work of peculiar interest at this juncture:—

The city of Mexico is said to be the finest built city on the American continent. In some respects it certainly is so. In the principal streets the houses are all constructed according to the strictest architectural rules. The foundations of the city were laid, and the first buildings were erected by Cortez, who did every thing well which he attempted—from building a house or writing a couplet to conquering an empire. Many of the finest buildings in Mexico are still owned by his descendants. The public square is said to be unsurpassed by any in the world; it contains some twelve or fifteen acres paved with stone. The cathedral covers one entire side, the palace another; the western side is occupied by a row of very high and substantial houses, the second stories of which project into the street, the width of the pavement; the lower stories are occupied by the principal retail merchants of the city. The most of these houses were built by Cortez, who with his characteristic sagacity and an avarice which equally characterized him in the latter part of his life, selected the best portion of the city for himself.

The President's Palace, formerly the palace of the viceroys, is an immense building of three stories high, about five hundred feet in length, and three hundred and fifty wide; it stands on the site of the palace of Montezuma. It is difficult to conceive of so much stone and mortar being put together in a less tasteful and imposing shape; it has much more the appearance of a cotton factory or a penitentiary, than what it really is; the windows are small and a parapet wall runs the whole length of the building, with nothing to relieve the monotony of its appearance except some very indifferent ornamental work in the centre; there are no doors in the front either of the second or third stories—nothing but disproportionately small windows, and too many of them; the three doors, and there are only three in the lower story, are destitute of all architectural beauty or ornament. Only a very small part of this palace is appropriated to the residence of the President; and the public offices are here, including those of the heads of the different departments; ministers of war, foreign relations, finance and justice, the public treasury, &c. &c.

The streets of Mexico are uncommonly wide, much more so than is necessary, considering that they are not obstructed, as in our cities, by drays and wagons. The side walks are uncommonly narrow. The streets are all paved with round stone; the side-walks with very rough flat ones. The houses on the principal streets are all two and three stories high. The elevation of the rooms, from the floor to the ceiling, eighteen and twenty feet, gives to a house of two stories a greater height than we are accustomed to see in houses of three.

The roofs are all terraced, and have parapet walls of three or four feet high, answering all the purposes of a breastwork, a use too commonly made of them in the frequent revolutions to which that unfortunate country seems to be for ever destined. The walls are built of rough stones of all shapes and sizes, and large quantities of lime mortar. They are very thick, in ordinary buildings from two to three feet, and in the larger edifices of much greater massiveness. The foundations of most of the largest buildings are made with piles. Even these foundations are very insecure, and it is surprising that they are not more so, with such an immense weight of stone upon such an unsteady foundation. The streets cross each other at right angles, dividing the whole city into squares. Each one of these squares is called a street, and has a separate name; a serious inconvenience to a stranger, in the city. Instead of designating the street in its whole extent, by one name, and numbering the houses, each side of every square has a different name, and names which sound to Protestant ears, very much like a violation of the Third Article of the Decalogue; such as the street of Jesus, and the street of the Holy Ghost. A gentleman will tell you that he lives in the Holy Ghost, or that he lives in Jesus; certainly not always true, if taken in the sense in which our preachers use the words. In most of these streets there is a church, which gives name to the street in which it stands. In many instances these churches and convents (that of San Augustine) for example, cover the whole square, not with separate buildings, but one single edifice, with the usual patio or court, an open space in the centre.

The Cathedral occupies the site of the great idol temple of Montezuma. It is five hundred feet long by four hundred and twenty wide. It would be superfluous to add another to the many descriptions of this famous building which have already been published. Like all the other churches in Mexico, it is built in the Gothic style. The walls, of several feet thickness, are made of unhewn stone and lime. Upon entering it, one is apt to recall the wild fictions of the Arabian Nights; it seems as if the wealth of empires was collected there. The clergy in Mexico do not, for obvious reasons, desire that their wealth should be made known to its full extent; they are, therefore, not disposed to give very full information upon the subject, or to exhibit the gold and silver vessels, vases, precious stones, and other forms of wealth; but quite enough is exhibited to strike the beholder with wonder. The first object that presents itself on entering the cathedral is the altar, near the centre of the building; it is made of highly wrought and highly polished silver, and covered with a profusion of ornaments of pure gold. On each side of the altar runs a balustrade, enclosing a space about eight feet wide and eighty or a hundred feet long. The balusters are about four feet high, and four inches thick in the largest part; the handrail from six to eight inches wide. Upon the top of his handrail, at the distance of six or eight feet apart, are human images, beautifully wrought, and about two feet high. All these, the balustrade, handrail, and images, are made of a compound of gold, silver, and copper—more valuable than silver. I was told that an offer had been made to take this balustrade, and replace it with another of exactly the same size and workmanship of pure silver, and to give half a million of dollars besides. There is much more of the same balustrade in other parts of the church; I should think in all of it not less than three hundred feet.

As you walk, through the building, on either side, there are different apartments, all filled, from the floor to the ceiling, with paintings, statues, vases, huge candlesticks, vases, and a thousand other articles, made of gold or silver. This, too, is only the every day display of articles of least value; the more costly are stored away in chests and closets. What must it be when all these are brought out, with the immense quantities of precious stones which the church is known to possess? And this is only one of the churches of the city of Mexico, where there are between sixty and eighty others, and some of them possessing little less wealth than the cathedral; and it must also be remembered, that all the other large cities, such as Puebla, Guadalajara, Guanajuato, Zacateras, Durango, San Louis, Potosi, have each a proportionate number of equally gorgeous establishments. It would be the wildest and most random conjecture, to attempt an estimate of the amount of the precious metals thus withdrawn from the useful purposes of the currency of the world, and wasted in these barbaric ornaments, as incompatible with good taste, as they are with the humility, which was the most striking feature in the character of the founder of our religion, whose chosen instruments were the lowly and humble, and who himself regarded as the highest evidence of his divine mission, the fact that "to the poor the gospel was preached." I do not doubt but there is enough of the precious metals in the different churches of Mexico to relieve sensibly the pressure upon the currency of the world, which has resulted from the diminished production of the mines, and the increased quantity which has been appropriated to purposes of luxury, and to pay the cost of much more tasteful decorations in architecture and statuary, made of mahogany and marble.

But the immense wealth which is thus collected in the churches, is not by any means all, or even the largest portion, of the wealth of the Mexican church and clergy. They own very many of the finest houses in Mexico and other cities (the rents of which must be enormous,) besides valuable real estates all over the Republic. Almost every person leaves a bequest in his will for masses for his soul, which constitutes an incumbrance upon the estate, and thus nearly all the estates of the small proprietors are mortgaged to the church. The property held in the church in mortmain is estimated at fifty millions.

BIRTHS AND DEATHS.—The births in the United States, yearly, are from 400,000 to 500,000. Of this number of children, one in fifteen or more than 25,000 are still born; more than 30,000 inherit from their parents a diseased constitution, and a majority die young.