

MEXICO.

The general aspect of the Mexican plateau, as far south as the City of Mexico, has been previously alluded to in the account of my journey there in 1887-1888 (*antea*, pp. 9, 10). On each coast, between the mountain ranges and the sea, there is a comparatively narrow strip of low land, producing a tropical vegetation, which on the Atlantic extends a little to the north of Tampico, where the forests with epiphytical orchids suddenly disappear; while on the Pacific the low land terminates a little above Mazatlan, where the coco-palm ceases to grow, but the vegetation generally is less luxuriant on this coast than on the Atlantic. The plateau itself is arid in consequence of the rainfall being precipitated on the two coastal ranges, and produces but a scanty vegetation, consisting chiefly of Yuccas, Agaves and Cactaceæ, and Mesquite (*Prosopis*). The margins of the few existing streams or pools produce a few scattered willows and poplars, and the whole country presents a desolate appearance. The plateau is indeed a continuation of that of Arizona and New Mexico, and though it is depressed in the valley of the Rio Grande at El Paso, where the railway crosses, it is still at an altitude of 3700 feet above the sea. Southward it mounts considerably higher, and on reaching Zacatecas, the highest point on the railway leading to the Capital, there is an elevation of 8000 feet. The City of Mexico is situated in a valley surrounded by ranges of hills clothed towards their summits with pine trees, and reaching an elevation of about 10,000 feet, while to the south-east are the two lofty volcanoes of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, the tops of which reach above the snow limit. Numerous streams descend from the mountains and empty themselves into an alluvial valley with swampy meadows and form several large lakes, of which Texcoco, Chalco, and Xochimilco are the most important. It was on Texcoco that the old Aztec Capital was situated; the houses were built on piles, and the city, which was approached by a causeway, was destroyed by Cortes at the time of the Spanish conquest in 1519-1521. The modern town was placed by the conquerors on the swampy ground about two miles from the eastern margin of the lake, but notwithstanding the altitude it became one of the most unhealthy capitals in the world, for owing to the frequent rising of the level of the lake, the town was constantly inundated. Eventually a great drainage scheme was inaugurated, and for 150 years vast numbers of natives were employed in cutting a huge dyke for the purpose of draining the overflow of the lake; but the sodden ground had become so impregnated with sewage that the mortality was still extremely high, and it was not till 1900 that President Diaz finally completed the extensive drainage system which now renders the city a comparatively healthy resort. There can be but little doubt that in former times one large piece of water covered the whole area of the three lakes, and a map published about 1628 shows Chalco united with Texcoco, when the surface of the two lakes was far greater than it is at present. Owing to the drainage system so recently completed, there are