Before entering on my more serious labors, I recall an amusing incident in which Pomposo figures as principal. Like all the other hotels at the capital, the San Carlos is kept on the European plan, which made it necessary for guests to pass through an open *patio* to the restaurant. On one occasion, when going down to dinner, I encountered Pomposo at the head of the stairway. He came rapidly toward me, flourishing his arms, as if the house were on fire or Popocatapetl had made a fresh outbreak, and almost out of breath, exclaimed: "Porfirio! Porfirio! Porfirio!"

"Who is Porfirio? and what is the matter?" I asked. Completely overcome, he sat down, and, not comprehending my lack of understanding, continued breathlessly: "In the grand dining-room down stairs, Porfirio has sixteen friends; they are eating; hush! Do you not hear the music?" I still asked to be enlightened as to the august Porfirio, whose name had cast a spell on Pomposo.

"WE NEVER FURNISH SOAP AND MATCHES IN THIS HOTEL."

"Do you not know General Porfirio Diaz, our President?" And without waiting for an answer, added, "Don't go down till later, *por Dios Santo!*"

CHAPTER VI.

TENOCHTITLAN—THE AZTEC CAPITAL.

AMONG the many northern tribes which invaded the lovely valley of Anahuac in the twelfth century were the Aztecs or Mexicans. After leading a nomadic life for more than a century—weary from their wanderings—they rested on the borders of Lake Tezcuco. The remarkable revelation of an eagle with outspread wings, standing upon a *tunal* that grew from a fissure in a rock on the water's edge, holding in his talons a serpent, impressed them as a favorable omen of future sovereignty, and indicated this spot as a permanent abiding place. At once they began preparations for building their city. Upon a slender foundation of reeds, rushes, and piles in the spongy marshes of Tezcuco the Aztecs built their huts, to be replaced in time by the solid structures which adorned the city at the coming of the Spaniards. This was the beginning of *Tenochtitlan* ("cactus on a stone"), named in honor of its supernatural origin—the capital of the most powerful empire of the Western world. To-day the hoary superstition is sacredly embodied as the national emblem on the escutcheon of Mexico.

From these humble beginnings, by subjugations of the weak and alliances with the strong, this Indian empire extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from unknown limits on the north to the Gulf.

This city was the great center of government, law, and religion to

this vast sovereignty, and had a population about the same as to-day. The wondrous tale of its wealth and grandeur and imposing magnificence has been often told; also how it was razed to the ground by the conquerors, and its canals filled with the débris of temple and palace. It was then rebuilt, and rose from its ashes exceeding its original splendor; and to-day—having withstood sieges, and witnessed the rise and fall of rulers, from the Spanish viceroys to the Habsburg—it stands in unrivaled beauty, the capital of the Mexican Republic.

Wonderful impressions present themselves to a thoughtful mind on entering for the first time this great metropolis, where every foot of ground is historic—the Rome of America, once the Venice. At the time of the conquest, in 1519, every street was a canal, thronged with Indians, peculiarly attired, paddling along in their canoes, conducting the entire commercial and agricultural business of the valley of Anahuac! "How gay and picturesque must have been the aspect of the lake in those days," says Prescott, "with its shining cities and flowering islets rocking, as it were at anchor, on the fair bosom of its waters!"

The ancient city had then three distinct avenues or causeways which connected it with the mainland, and to which is attached much historic interest.

The Spaniards first entered the city at its southern extremity by the causeway of Iztapalapan. The Tepeyac is on the northern boundary, and is connected with the first-mentioned causeway by a long street. It was on the hill Tepeyac that the Virgin Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego. Owing to this, Tepeyac is also known as Guadalupe. It is three miles from the city. The third causeway, Tlacopan, is quite as memorably historic. The Calle de Tacuba is the ancient causeway of Tlacopan. It was here that the Spaniards were defeated by the Aztecs, and, as is related by all historians, here also Pedro Alvarado made his famous leap, on the terrible night of July 1, 1520—the *Noche Triste*. It must have been indeed a night of sorrow for the conquerors. A pitiless rain poured down upon the invaders. Neither starlight nor moonlight lent their gentle radiance to a scene

so terrible. But to remain at that point was not possible; accordingly one of Cortez's most faithful soldiers, Sandoval, led the now dismayed Spaniards. Forty men carried a wooden bridge, by which the troops might cross the ditches and canals, otherwise impassable.

All crossed safely; the sentinels on duty were easily silenced, but the ever-wakeful priests in the temple, also on watch, were attracted by the unusual noise.

Instantly the cry "To arms!" was raised, the trumpets were sounded, and the inhabitants aroused from their peaceful slumbers. By the time the Spaniards had reached the second canal, they were entirely surrounded by water, and the groans of the dead and dying mingled strangely with the beating of the rain and the fury of the wind. The third canal was reached, but in attempting to cross, the few remaining soldiers were killed, and Alvarado the fearless was left alone.

Resting his lance in the bottom of the canal, he gave a spring and was landed safely on the opposite bank.

When the Indians beheld this feat, they ate handful after handful of dirt, and exclaimed: "Truly this man is the offspring of the sun!" Since that time the place has borne the name of "*El Salto de Alvarado*."*

At Popotla, somewhat over two miles from the capital, still stands in reasonable preservation the celebrated "*Arbol de la Noche Triste*" ("Tree of the Sad Night"), against which Cortez leant and wept on the night of his defeat by the Aztecs.

Only a short distance beyond Popotla is Atzcapotzalco. In Aztec days this town was their great slave market, and on each recurring sale-day the Indian maidens were decked out in all their bewitching adornments to dance and sing, in order to please those who might become purchasers.

The city of Mexico, which stands on the site of the ancient city, is one of the finest and best built cities on the continent. The architecture

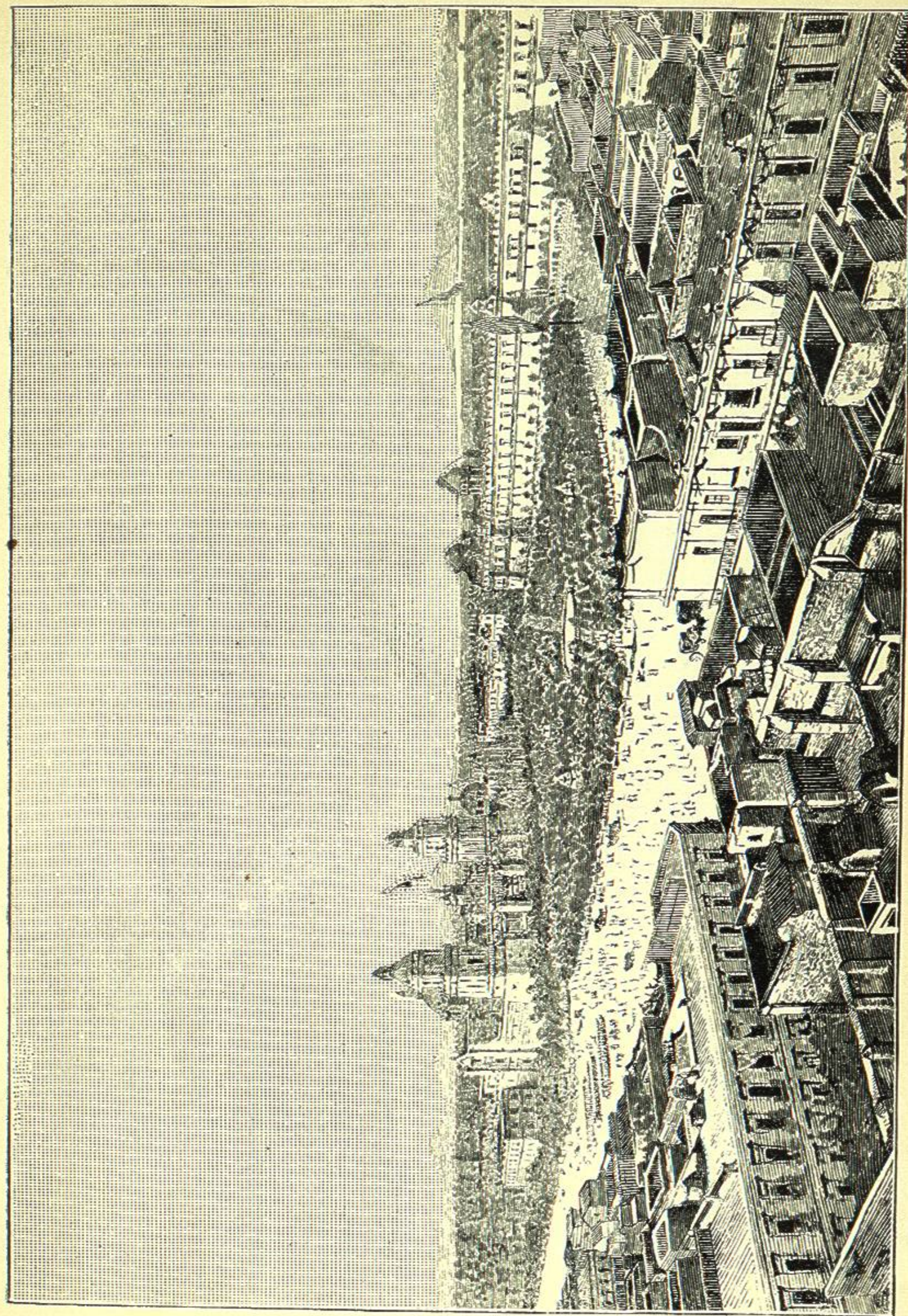
* Bernal Diaz discredits as impossible this exploit.

is grand and massive rather than diversified and ornate. The monotony of solid walls and high-arched portals at first strikes the stranger with a feeling akin to disappointment, but familiarity brings only a deeper consciousness of the grandeur of the whole. A singular and impressive feature is the fact that not only is the site that of the ancient Aztec capital, but the general style of the buildings remains the same. The flat roof, the *azotea*, the square surrounding the *patio*, all belong to the past as to the present.

The *Plaza Mayor*, or Zócalo, is said to be unequaled anywhere. One entire side is covered by the cathedral, which occupies the site of the temple of the Aztec war-god. The National Palace, formerly the residence of the viceroys, covers another side, and stands on the veritable site of the Halls of the Montezumas. The other two sides are occupied by the shady portals.

The great causeways are still in use as leading highways, and the streets are laid out in symmetrical lines, running at right angles—north and south, east and west. Each side of a block has its individual name, but often the same is applied to three or four squares consecutively—as the three San Franciscos, the two Calles Plateros, "streets of the silversmiths," and the first, second, third, and fourth Providencias. A narrow street is called a *callejon*. An effort has recently been made to change this puzzling method by giving the same name to a street throughout its entire length.

I was much interested in the tradition of the "*Calle del Indio Triste*" ("Street of the Sad Indian"). A wealthy Indian cacique established his home there, and then became a spy upon his own tribe, steadily informing the viceroy of all their plans and intentions. He failed from some cause to make known to the latter a mutiny which was in process of execution. This gave the viceroy a pretext for the confiscation of his property. Poor and despised by his own people and held in contempt by the Spaniards, he took his seat on the corner of the street, weeping and distressed, refusing food or comfort, and finally, in this melancholy attitude, he breathed his last. His property passed to the crown, and with a view to teaching



THE ZOCALO.

the Indians a lesson, the viceroy had erected the statue of an Indian weeping, in the same attitude as the real one, sitting with his back to the wall, which remained there until the house was demolished, when the statue was sent to the museum. But the street did not change its name.

The street-car system is admirable. First and second-class cars are yellow and green, and every ten, fifteen, thirty, or sixty minutes they leave the Zócalo all in a line, one after another, on their rounds, some of which include a radius of from ten to twenty miles.

Every moment in the day the ear is regaled with the unmelodious tooting of a cow's horn in the hands of the car driver. These men manage to extract more muscular exertion from their *mulas* than ever did a hard-hearted Sambo.

As the street-car lines have their second and third-class lines, with prices to correspond, so also is the cab system regulated.

The distinction in prices is indicated by flags. Carriages bearing a blue flag are first class, and may be had for $1.00 an hour, while a red flag is second class and costs 75 cents; a white flag shows a third-class coach, price 50 cents an hour. No deviation from these rules is allowed save on feast-days. But as those who dance must pay the piper, so, also, he who rides in a Mexican cab must pay the driver his fee of a *medio* for his *pulque*.

One great convenience in these cabs is a cord which is worn on the arm of the driver, one end being in the carriage, so that the passenger may at any time call an instantaneous halt without exhausting his lungs.

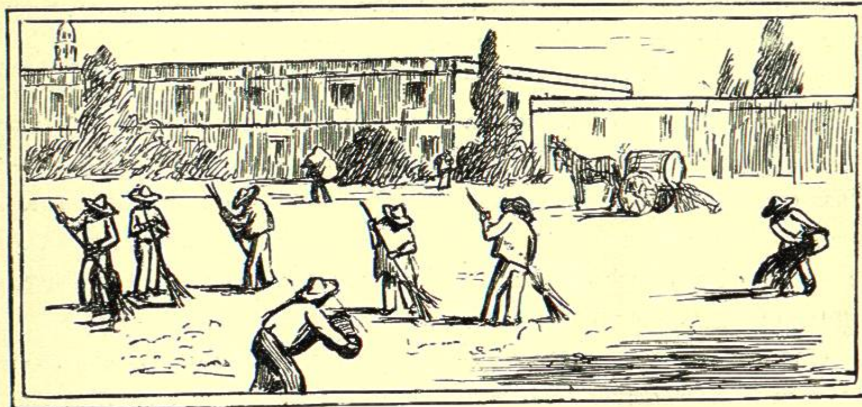
The iron-handed law at the Federal capital is unrelenting toward cabmen, and as the rates are posted in each vehicle and the drivers are all numbered, there is no necessity for an over-charge. Americans, with their profligacy in small change, are the most easily imposed upon, but if they make complaint the abuse is at once corrected, and the driver stands a chance of losing his position.

There is no fire department to speak of: as the buildings are either of stone or some other fire-proof substance, a conflagration is

of rare occurrence, and is a notable event of an ordinary life-time. There is but one fire-engine in the city, and perhaps in the republic, counting upon its venerable cogs and wheels at least forty summers.

Another machine, equally primitive, is the only water-sprinkler. Its operations are chiefly confined to the Paseo; but it has many sturdy competitors in the *mozos* in white who throw bucketful after bucketful of water before their masters' doors.

No city is more peaceful after night-fall. Pulque shops, by order of the government, close at six o'clock in the evening, and are opened



THE NEW AND THE OLD.

at the same hour in the morning. The city is so well patrolled that one may perambulate the streets at any hour of the night without fear of encountering rudeness. Little or no drunkenness is seen, though more than 250,000 pints of the beverage are daily consumed. The imbibers go at once to their homes, there to sleep off the effects of their indulgence.

The city lies in the lowest part of the valley of Mexico, like a deep-set jewel. From its location, and other unexplained causes, it

has several times been visited with frightful inundations, which have threatened to wash it from the earth. Of these the most wonderful was known as the "Fountain of Acucasexcatl," which sprang spontaneously from the ground during the reign of Ahuizotl. Another was the "Torrent," which, like the fountain, spread over the valley in the lowest places to the depth of about nine feet of water on the ordinary level. The death rate from drowning and disease, superinduced by the long-standing water, was terrible.

The chief cause of these inundations is believed to be the proximity of the lakes, which lie at unequal heights around the city. When the summer rains filled the highest, Lake Zumpango, it would overflow into the next, Lake of San Cristobal, and when that was full it in turn disgorged into a lower one, Texcoco, and so on until the waters overflowed into the plains of San Lazaro, and thence penetrated into the city. There is no danger from lakes Xochimilco and Chalco except in case of melting snows from Popocatapetl.

Seven times within the knowledge of man the city of Mexico has been inundated. Four times the calamitous visitation came in one century, twice in a brief interval of only three years; the latest occurred in 1629.

The finest engineering talent in the republic has been called into requisition to devise a system of drainage, but a wide difference of opinion as to the best means still prevails. Some favor a tunnel, but as the soil is spongy and treacherous, there could be no guarantee against its sinking. This, together with the prospect at any time of an earthquake, forbids the plan. Others recommend the extension of the Nochistongo, which is now utilized, and is partially effective.

Several engineering companies from our northern States have attempted to investigate the gigantic and dangerous task of draining the city, and if the problem be finally solved it will probably be by means of Yankee ingenuity and machinery.

When the great earthquake of 1882 visited the capital, it is claimed that the nearness of the water to the surface of the earth saved it from destruction. The opinion prevails amongst intelligent

people that a thorough drainage of the city would increase the danger from this source.

The foundations of a large proportion of the houses are laid either in water or in marshy flats; and I have often seen a loaded wagon, carriage, or cart perceptibly shake a two-story house. The School of Mines, a massive and immense structure, has sunk more than six feet in the earth within forty years, so I was informed by Professor Costillo, of that institution.

Mexico has been termed the Rome of America, not only because of its temples and palaces, but also on account of its churches and other ecclesiastical buildings; but many of the latter are alienated from their original use, while of the one hundred church buildings, only half this number are now devoted to religious services. The grand Gothic cathedral rises majestically above all surrounding objects, the most conspicuous feature in the architecture of the metropolis. It is built of unhewn stone, and is five hundred feet in length by four hundred and twenty in width. The walls are several feet in thickness. This great building was completed in 1667, nearly one hundred years after its foundation, at a cost of two million dollars. Its exterior is majestic and imposing, and the interior gorgeously painted and decorated, its altars enriched with gold, silver, and jewels.

But with all its grandeur the cathedral is anything but a choice place for devotional exercises. True democracy is the rule, and the most degraded, unclean *lepero* has as much space allotted to him as the grandest lady or gentleman. This is undoubtedly the true spirit and intent of Christianity, but one cannot help being a little fastidious. I have seen men most earnestly engaged in their devotions, with dozens of chickens, and as many turkeys as they could carry, suspended from their persons; women with burro loads of vegetables on their shoulders, others with one or two pappooses screaming and wiggling in their mothers' *rebozos*, all in such numbers as to forbid pious meditations.

Skirting the west side of the cathedral is a shady garden with fountains and seats, terminating in a most unique and choice flower market. At the corner, facing the Zócalo, there is a heap of curiously

carved stones and broken columns, and, pushing aside the gorgeous screen of flowers and vines, the inscription may be read: "Stones from the bloody sacrificial altar of Huitzilopotztli, used afterward in the first temple that the Spaniards erected to the Christian faith."

The church of Santa Brigida (St. Bridget's) is the most modern in its interior arrangements, having comfortable pews and carpeted aisles. But Santa Teresa, with its exquisitely painted interior; San Hipolito, with the exterior of its dome of glittering porcelain mosaic; and grand old San Fernando, with illustrious memories and associations, whose time-worn floors have echoed the footsteps of generations — these speak volumes in their silence and mellow gloom.

Of public monuments and statues there are five—the most noteworthy that of Carlos IV. at the head of the Paseo, which, with the exception of that of Marcus Aurelius at Rome, is perhaps the largest in the world. It was cast in Mexico, the first in the Western hemisphere. The statues of Christopher Columbus, President Juarez, and Cuatimotzin, the last of the Aztec kings, are all marvels of beauty and finish, and adorn the Paseo de la Reforma—the grand avenue or boulevard of the capital. This noble drive extends about three miles from the Alameda to Chapultepec, and is broad enough for six carriages to drive abreast. But usually they are driven in line, while the gayly equipped *caballeros* curvet in the opposite direction. Policemen are stationed every few yards. On either side the sidewalks are lined with pedestrians, in their "Sunday best"—groups of beautifully dressed children indulge in childish sports, the band plays, and all Mexico is jubilant.

There are five public markets. The principal one covers an entire block, but, despite its wealth of fruits, vegetables, game, fish and meat, is a wretchedly forlorn place, having no building, but merely a collection of huts, booths, and tents, which are most uninviting to the stranger.

The public gardens number twelve, the chief of which is the Alameda, and are all laid out in truly Parisian style.

Excellent educational facilities are afforded at the capital. Among them are the School of Arts and Professions for Women, Industrial