

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ancient Mexico.

It was my intention to have mentioned nothing in this little work that had not come under my own observation; but as it is necessary in a description of Mexico to say something of its ancient state, concerning which, from the various contradictory accounts, so little can be depended on, I have been induced to alter my resolution to a certain extent. Therefore, after examining the few remaining monuments of ancient art which still exist in the capital, as well as those of more importance in Tezcucó and its neighbourhood, and also the collection of drawings, in the Minería, (made by order of the Spanish govern-

ment,) of most of the like subjects which are still to be found in the provinces, and having consulted the various authors whose works appear worthy of notice;—I have selected the following passages from the labours of the Abbe Clavigero, of whose account, as well as that of Bernal Dias, I have not the smallest reason to doubt the authenticity, as the remains at Tezcucó and other places in the vicinity confirm all they have said of the magnificence of the ancient capital. The mutilated map of the original city, in the state in which it was found by Cortez on his first arrival, is believed to be the only authentic document at present existing that can convey any idea of the size and regularity of its plan. This map is now unfortunately only a fragment, but still sufficient to prove the superiority of the ancient capital to the modern city raised by the Spaniards

on its ruins. It stood, at that time, like Venice, on a number of small islands in the lake, from which it is now, owing to the receding of the waters, distant about two miles. Bernal Dias, when looking down on the city from the top of the great Teocalli or Temple, compares it, from its regular division into squares, to an immense chess-board. This division appears to have been copied in the present city, which does not, however, contain one half so many squares as are depicted on the fragment of the ancient map. These squares seem to have been surrounded either by paved roads, or canals which could be passed by canoes, the former being marked by footsteps, and the latter by curled waves. In each of the squares or divisions was a temple, the name of which, in the Aztec character, was placed over it, and this has also been translated into

the Spanish language, and is probably in the hand-writing of Boturini, in whose collection this valuable document formed a prominent feature, and was even then mutilated and torn in the middle, as described in his catalogue of the valuable antiquities he possessed. In the copy of the map given in this work, the dotted lines are the supposed continuation of the squares; but somewhere near the centre was the site of the great temple, which has probably occasioned some devotee long since to destroy that part. On the border on one side of the map is represented a line of ancient kings and caziques, with some of the Spaniards; and on the opposite side, the remains of figures on horseback are strong proofs of its having been made after the conquest, which is confirmed by the first Christian church of St. Maria being also represented on it, as well as several

temples. The history of the conquest of this extensive empire is too well known to be repeated in a work of this kind, but it is probably requisite, previous to describing its existing antiquities, to give some idea of the state of the ancient capital and the magnificence of the monarch who then governed it, which the following selections will, it is hoped, in some measure convey.

“ALL the servants of his palace consisted of persons of rank. Besides those who constantly lived in it, every morning six hundred feudatory lords and nobles came to pay court to him. They passed the whole day in the antechamber, where none of their servants were permitted to enter, conversing in a low voice, and waiting the orders of their sovereign. The servants who accompanied those lords were so numerous as to occupy three small

courts of the palace, and many waited in the streets. The women about the court were not less in number, including those of rank, servants, and slaves. All this numerous female tribe lived shut up in a kind of seraglio, under the care of some noble matrons, who watched over their conduct; as these kings were extremely jealous, and every piece of misconduct which happened in the palace, however slight, was severely punished. Of these women the king retained those who pleased him, the others he gave away, as a recompence for the services of his vassals. All the feudatories of the crown were obliged to reside for some months of the year at the court; and, at their return to their states, to leave their sons or brothers behind them, as hostages, which the king demanded as a security for their fidelity; on which account

they were required to keep houses in Mexico.

"The forms and ceremonials introduced at court were another effect of the despotism of Montezuma. No one would enter the palace, either to serve the king, or to confer with him on any business, without pulling off his shoes and stockings at the gate. No person was allowed to appear before the king in any pompous dress, as it was deemed a want of respect to majesty; consequently the greatest lords, excepting the nearest relations of the king, stripped themselves of the rich dress which they wore, or at least covered it with one more ordinary, to show their humility before him. All persons, on entering the hall of audience, and before speaking to the king, made three bows, saying at the first, lord; at the second, my lord; and at the

third, great lord. They spoke low, and with the head inclined, and received the answer which the king gave them, by means of his secretaries, as attentively and humbly as if it had been the voice of an oracle. In taking leave, no person ever turned his back upon the throne.

The audience-hall served also for his dining room. The table was a large pillow, and his seat a low chair. The tablecloth, napkins, and towels were of cotton, but very fine, white, and always perfectly clean. The kitchen-utensils were of the earthenware of Chollula; but none of these things ever served him more than once, as immediately after he gave them to one of his nobles. The cups in which they prepared his chocolate, and other drinks of the cocoa, were of gold, or some beautiful sea shell, or naturally formed vessels curiously varnished, of which we shall

speak hereafter. He had gold plate, but it was used only on certain festivals, in the temple. The number and variety of dishes at his table amazed the Spaniards who saw them. The conqueror Cortez says that they covered the floor of a great hall, and that there were dishes of every kind of game, fish, fruit, and herbs of that country. Three or four hundred noble youths carried this dinner in form; presented it as soon as the king sat down to table, and immediately retired; and, that it might not grow cold, every dish was accompanied with its chafing-dish. The king marked, with a rod which he had in his hand, the meats which he chose, and the rest were distributed among the nobles who were in the antechamber. Before he sat down, four of the most beautiful women of his seraglio presented water to him to wash his hands, and continued standing all

the time of his dinner, together with six of his principal ministers, and his carver.

"As soon as the king sat down to table, the carver shut the door of the hall, that none of the other nobles might see him eat. The ministers stood at a distance, and kept a profound silence, unless when they made answer to what the king said. The carver and the four women served the dishes to him, besides two others who brought him bread made of maize baked with eggs. He frequently heard music during the time of his meal, and was entertained with the humorous sayings of some deformed men whom he kept out of mere state. He showed much satisfaction in hearing them, and observed that, amongst their jests, they frequently pronounced some important truth. When his dinner was over he took tobacco mixed with liquid amber, in a pipe or reed beautifully var-

nished, and with the smoke of it put himself to sleep.

“After having slept a little, upon the same low chair, he gave audience, and listened attentively to all that was communicated to him, and answered every one by his ministers or secretaries. After giving audience, he was entertained with music, being much delighted with hearing the glorious actions of his ancestors sung. At other times he amused himself with seeing various games played, of which we shall speak hereafter. When he went abroad, he was carried on the shoulders of the nobles in a litter covered with a rich canopy, attended by a numerous retinue of courtiers; and wherever he passed, every person stopped with their eyes shut, as if they feared to be dazzled with the splendour of majesty. When he alighted from the litter, to walk on foot, they spread carpets, that

he might not touch the earth with his feet.

“The grandeur and magnificence of his palaces, houses of pleasure, woods, and gardens, were correspondent to this majesty. The palace of his usual residence was a vast edifice of stone and lime, which had twenty doors to the public squares and streets; three great courts, in one of which was a beautiful fountain; several halls, and more than a hundred chambers. Some of the apartments had walls of marble and other valuable kinds of stone. The beams were of cedar, cypress, and other excellent woods, well finished and carved. Among the halls there was one so large that, according to the testimony of an eye-witness of veracity, it could contain three thousand people. Besides this palace he had others, both within and without the capital. In Mexico, besides the seraglio for his

wives, there was lodging for all his ministers and counsellors and all the officers of his household and court; and also accommodation for foreign lords who arrived there, and particularly for the two allied kings.

“Two houses in Mexico he appropriated to animals; the one for birds which did not live by prey; the other for those of prey, quadrupeds, and reptiles. There were several chambers belonging to the first, and galleries supported on pillars of marble all of one piece. These galleries looked towards a garden, where, in the midst of some shrubbery, ten fish-ponds were formed, some of them of fresh water for the aquatic birds of rivers, and others of salt water for those of the sea. In other parts of the house were all sorts of birds, in such number and variety as to strike the Spaniards with wonder, who could not believe there was any species in the world

wanting to the collection. They were supplied with the same food which they fed upon while they enjoyed their liberty, whether seeds, fruits, or insects. For those birds who lived on fish only, the daily consumption was ten Castilian *pesos* of fish, (according to the testimony of the conqueror Cortez, in his letters to Charles V.) which is more than three hundred Roman pounds. Three hundred men, says Cortez, were employed to take care of those birds, besides their physicians, who observed their distempers and applied timely remedies to them. Of those three hundred men, some procured them their food, others distributed it, others took care of their eggs at the time of their incubation, and others picked their plumage at certain seasons of the year; for, besides the pleasure which the king took in seeing so great a multitude of animals collected together, he was prin-

cipally careful of their feathers, not less for the sake of the famous Mosaic images, of which we shall speak hereafter, than of the other works which were made of them. The halls and chambers of those houses were so many in number, as the conqueror above mentioned attests, that they could have accommodated two great princes with all their retinue. This celebrated house was situated in the place where, at present, the great convent of St. Francis stands.

“The other house, appropriated to the wild animals, had a large and handsome court, with a chequered pavement, and was divided into various apartments. One of them contained all the birds of prey, from the royal eagle to the kestrel, and many individuals of every species. These birds were distributed, according to their species, in various subterraneous chambers, which were more than seven feet deep, and

upwards of seventeen in length and breadth. The half of every chamber was covered with flat stones: and stakes were fixed in the wall, on which they might sleep, and be defended from rain. The other half of the chamber was only covered with a lattice, through which they enjoyed the light of the sun. For the support of these birds, were killed, daily, near five hundred turkeys. In the same house were many low halls filled with a great number of strong wooden cages, in which lions, tigers, wolves, cayatoo, and wild cats were confined, and all other kinds of wild beasts; which were fed upon deer, rabbits, hares, techichis, and other animals, and the intestines of human sacrifices.

“The king of Mexico not only kept all the species of animals which other princes do for state, but likewise such as by nature seemed exempted from slavery—namely,

crocodiles and serpents. The serpents were kept in large casks or vessels; the crocodiles in ponds, which were walled round. There were also various ponds for fish, two of which, that are remaining and still beautiful, we have seen in the palace of Chapoltepec, two miles from Mexico.

Montezuma, who was not satisfied with having every sort of animal in his palace, also collected there all irregularly formed men, who, either from the colour of their hair or of their skin, or some other deformity in their persons, were oddities of their species. A humour this, however, not unattended with beneficial consequences, as it gave maintenance to a number of miserable objects, and delivered them from the inhuman insults of their other fellow-creatures.

All his palaces were surrounded with beautiful gardens, where there was every

kind of beautiful flower, odoriferous herb, and medicinal plant. He had likewise woods, enclosed with walls and furnished with variety of game, in which he frequently sported. One of these woods was upon an island in the lake, known at present, among the Spaniards, by the name of Piñon.

Of all these palaces, gardens, and woods, there is now remaining the wood of Chapoltepec only, which the Spanish Viceroys have preserved for their pleasure. All the others were destroyed by the conquerors. They laid in ruins the most magnificent buildings of antiquity, sometimes from an indiscreet zeal for religion, sometimes in revenge, or to make use of their materials. They neglected the cultivation of the royal gardens, cut down the woods, and reduced the country to such a state, that the magnificence of its former kings could not now find

belief, were it not confirmed by the testimony of those who were the causes of its annihilation.

“Not only the palaces, but all the other places of pleasure, were kept in exquisite order and neatness, even those which were seldom or never visited; as there was nothing in which he took more pride than the cleanliness of his own person, and of every thing else which was his. He bathed regularly every day, and had baths, therefore, in all his palaces. Every day he wore four dresses; and that which he once put off he never after used again: these were reserved as largesses for the nobles who served him and the soldiers who behaved gallantly in war. Every morning, according to the accounts given by some historians, upwards of a thousand men were employed by him in sweeping and watering the streets of the city.

“In one of the royal buildings was an armoury filled with all kinds of offensive and defensive arms which were made use of by those nations, with military ornaments and ensigns. He kept a surprising number of artificers at work, in manufacturing these and other things. He had numerous artists constantly busied likewise, namely, goldsmiths, mosaic workmen, sculptors, painters, and others. One whole district consisted solely of dancing masters, who were trained up to entertain him.

“The number of the images by which their false gods were represented and worshipped, in the temples, the houses, the streets, and the woods, was infinite. Zumarraga affirms that the Franciscans had, in the course of eight years, broken more than twenty thousand idols; but that number is trifling compared to those of the ca-

pital only. They were generally made of clay and certain kinds of stone and wood; but sometimes, too, of gold and other metals; and there were some of gems. In a high mountain of Achiauhtla, in Mizteca, Benedict Fernandez, a celebrated Dominican missionary, found a little idol called by the Miztecas *The Heart of the People*. It was a very precious emerald, four inches long and two inches broad, upon which was engraved the figure of a bird, and round it that of a little snake. The Spaniards offered fifteen hundred sequins for it; but the zealous missionary, before all the people, and with great solemnity, reduced it to powder. The most extraordinary idol of the Mexicans was that of Huitzilopochtli, which was made of certain seeds pasted together with human blood. Almost all their idols were coarse and hideous, from the

fantastical parts of which they were composed, in order to represent their attributes and employments."

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"This great temple occupied the centre of the city; and, together with the other temples and buildings annexed to it, comprehended all that space upon which the great cathedral church now stands, part of the greater market-place, and part likewise of the streets and buildings around. Within the enclosure of the wall which encompassed it in a square form, the conqueror Cortez affirms that a town of five hundred houses might have stood. The wall, built of stone and lime, was very thick, eight feet high, crowned with battlements, in the form of niches, and ornamented with many stone figures in the shape of serpents, whence it obtained the name of *coatepantli*, or the wall of serpents.

It had four gates to the four cardinal points: the eastern gate looked to a broad street which led to the lake of Tezcuco: the rest corresponded to the three principal streets of the city, the broadest and the straightest, which formed a continuation with those built upon the lake that led to Iztapalapan, to Tacuba, and to Tepejacaë."

"Zumarraga, the first bishop of Mexico, says, in a letter of the 12th of June, 1531, addressed to the general chapter of his order, that in that capital alone twenty thousand human victims were annually sacrificed. Some authors, quoted by Gomara, affirm that the number of the sacrificed amounted to fifty thousand. Acosta writes, that there was a certain day of the year on which five thousand were sacrificed in different places of the empire; and another

day on which they sacrificed twenty thousand. Some authors believe that, on the mountain Tepejacaë, alone, twenty thousand were sacrificed to the goddess Tonantzin."

"The most frequent oblation, however, was that of Copal. All daily burned incense to their idols; no house was without censers. The priests in the temple, fathers of families in their houses, and judges in their tribunals, whenever they pronounced sentence in an important cause, whether civil or criminal, offered incense to the four principal winds. But incense-offering among the Mexicans, and other nations of Anahuac, was not only an act of religion towards their gods, but also a piece of civil courtesey to lords and ambassadors."