

## II.

## FROM THE CHURCH TOP.

First Attempt and Failure.—At it again.—The Southern Outlook.—Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl.—Cherubusco.—Chapultepec.—Guadalupe.—The patron Saint of the Country.—Round the Circle.

THIS is the highest of all the man-built places from whence I have ever tried to talk. I am sitting on the top of the finest church in this city, except the cathedral—that of the Profesa. It adjoins my hotel, and is easily accessible from the azatea, or flat roof, of that building. The sun is burning his way down the western sky, setting masses of clouds on fire with his effulgence.

Two little girls, children of my landlady, have led me hither, and they are woefully frightened at a man in the belfry fixing the bells. In broken English, the older of the two makes known her fears, "Will he make nothing of me?" she cries. I relieve her, and soon she says her little sister calls her a "false fool" for being so alarmed.

Though the place is excellent for composition, the children keep me so intent upon their perilous pranks that I have no leisure for sketching. And so I sit and see the sun roll down behind Ajusca, the highest of the western hills, and behold the reflex glory on the white brows of the two south-eastern volcanoes, with their terrible names, flushed with the opposing sun, as the brow of death glows with the light from the sun beyond the veil.

The sun gone, the glory is gone; no twilight lingers here, as winsome as a morning nap. Abrupt beginnings and abrupt endings are characteristics of clime and people, with very gay and gracious interludes. The air grows chill as the sky grows dark, and the children and I climb the chancel roof, peep into the dome, and down into the church; that is, I do; they are too timid or too well

trained. All is dark and silent save the ghastly pictures on the roof of the dome, which are silent but not dark. We slide down the smooth sides of that chancel roof, scampër along on the broad-backed ridge of the nave; that is, they do, not I; alas! for this proof of a vanished childhood, and get ourselves upon our own roof, which is attached to that of the hotel, and into our own rooms. Our bird's-eye view, though viewed like all such views of real birds, stays, like theirs, undescribed.

The easel is set up again at the same spot. It is morning now. The sun is up these two hours, and pours a strong flood of warmth and light on this page. The noise of the street carts comes muffled up to this house-top. The morning trumpet-clang and drum-beat of the soldiers mingle with them, and rise above them, clear and steady, a sign that this government is more military yet than civil. Frequent bells put in their heavy musical notes, sometimes rapid; there is one now striking the half-seconds, sometimes slower, but all alike calling a heedless city to an almost voiceless service.

The birds send up their pretty chatterings among the bells, the trumpets, and the rattling carts, those true babes in the wood, and babes in nature, whose very songs are the laugh of childhood threading the graver tones of maturer nature. How deliciously their treble laugh breaks on the ear! Do you not wish you could hear them, poor ice-bound citizens of the Arctic North?

This is a royal place to see this royal city. Never had a town such grand environment. Athens has mountains and sea, but scanty plains. Rome, plains, but no water, and low-browed hills. Jerusalem, mountains, but no plains nor sea. Modern cities are without the least trace of scenic loveliness. London, Paris, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans, and Berlin, how cheap their panorama! It is a map and not a picture that one draws when he paints these capitals: Boston and Baltimore make a slight approach to hill effects, but only a hundred feet high are their mountains, and no plains to set off even these.

Look here; turn your eye (and body too, or you will leave your

*No se ve  
fracta V-2  
habla de  
otro punto,  
no del suyo*



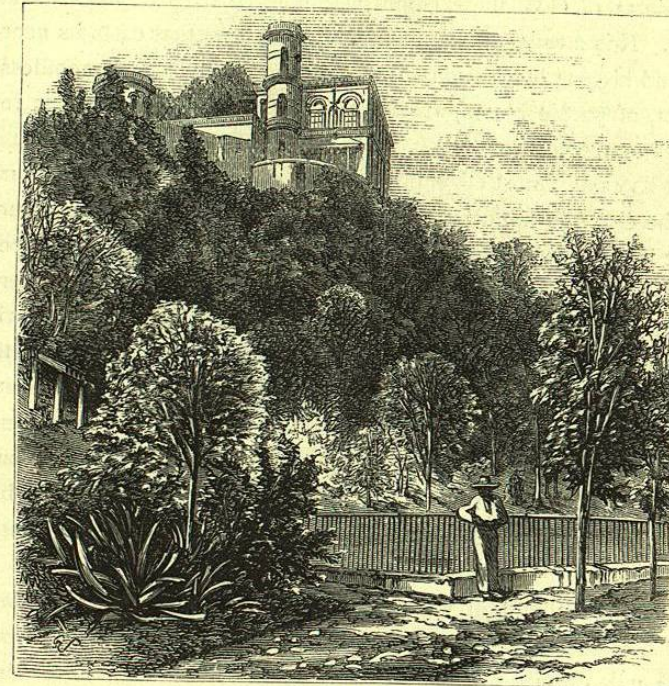
head on this slippery roof-side), and take in this scene. Everywhere a green valley, everywhere dahlia hills—the true dahlia—that deep purple sliding into black, and yet never losing its royal bloom, the finest color of all for the garments of men and women, as well as for Greek and Aztec mountains.

I am now looking southward; so may you. The city lies all about us, its limits being equidistant in all directions. Its flat roofs extend for a mile, domed twice or thrice with spacious churches. Then comes a flat gray field for several miles: it is probably more than ten miles, but distances are as deceitful as is every thing else in this clime. It is sprinkled with trees, especially to the west, and at its farther termination. To its right, or westward, the trees grow denser, and evidently line thoroughfares and fill gardens. A village glistens under the hills in which it is ending. Then comes a mass of dark and rugged peaks, soft in their ruggedness, and light in their darkness, the fields creeping well up their sides, and sometimes, but rarely, climbing on and over their heads.

This southern route was the one chosen by Cortez and Scott for entering the town. Between the two snow volcanoes they came over a lofty pass, around the western edge of that broad, flashing lake, by the side of the canal that you see stretching out, lined with trees and floating gardens. Along well-built causeways, amidst a frightened mass of living people, the invaders marched. Cortez had more than one bloody fight on that passway; and Scott made a rough lava height and Cherubusco, a not wide plain, famous with his victories. There, too, you note a purple hill, two hundred feet high, where the Aztec priests kindled the sacred fire at the close of each half century. They thought the world had come to an end. Light was never to come again; everywhere it was extinguished. The people march in solemn procession from the city to this hill; the priests take the chosen human victim to its summit. His heart is extracted. A new flame is kindled upon it. It is transmitted to waiting torches, and sent through the whole nation, re-illuminating the face of society, and keeping fresh the hope and heart of man. One can hardly fancy that low and silent and

shrubless peak to have been so long the scene of such a sad and memorable festival.

Keep your eye and head moving westward, and you see the same city, landscape beyond, and tall hills in the rear. Almost due west lies Chapultepec, the favorite haunt of the rulers of this people from



CHAPULTEPEC.

Montezuma to Juarez, a superb park, palace, and picture. It is a fortress and a garden, a sort of Windsor Castle set down with its hill-top, forests, and views, three miles from London town. It deserves a visit and a page of its own, and so we now swing round the circle, leaving its yellow walls, a little haughty in their frowning at our presumption to come and go without more obeisance.

On getting round toward the north, the girdle of nearer hills dips down, giving glimpses of mountains beyond. The level lands stretch out farther, fifteen and twenty miles, before the passes are



touched. The country is full of trees, which are also full of greenness. Church towers peer above their tops, and white and drab specks appear among the interstices, the proofs that this wide area has villages amidst its verdure.

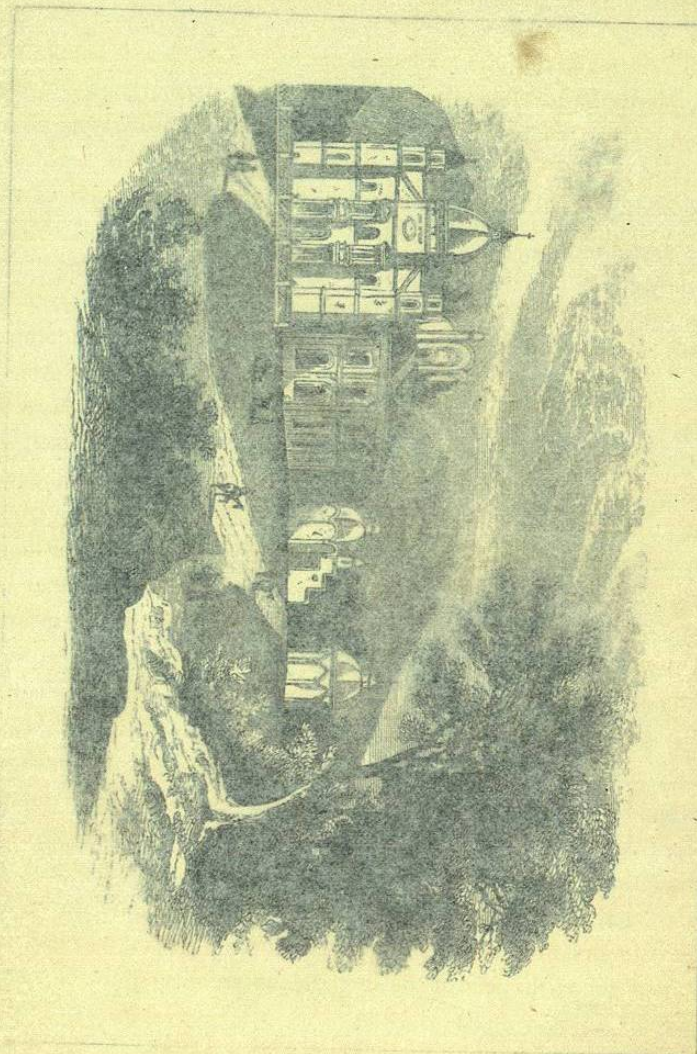
To the right still, the landscape narrows to its closest limits, and the sierra of Guadalupe comes within three or four miles of the town. It is a range fifteen or twenty miles long, that casts its nearest and highest battlements over against the city. It is woodless, bright, of purple bloom, without a shady retreat, save such as recesses may give.

At its easternmost edge, just where it drops into the plains nearest the city, you notice several domes and towers massed together. That is the group of temples dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the most famous, popular, and powerful of all the virgins of America, if not of the Church that worships her. That spot is a curious evidence of the manner in which Romanism adapts itself to the people it governs. The Indians were sullen and unsubdued after Cortez had conquered their nation. They were a dangerous element, being, like the subjects of the East India Company, a thousand to one more numerous than their rulers. How shall they be subdued? Their priests and worship were gone, but not their faith in both.

They had a seat of worship in this spot. An Indian coming over the mountains, seeking for a priest at a church built by Cortez, a mile or so from its base, is met by the Virgin, who tells him to build a church to her in that spot. He flees affrighted to the priest, and tells his tale. It is not idle words to not empty ears, though it is so assumed. He is repulsed by the priest, meets her twice again, asks a sign, has his soiled blanket filled by her hands with flowers from these barren and burning rocks, which when poured out at the feet of the incredulous archbishop are no more flowers, but

"A fair maiden clothed with celestial grace,"

even the maiden mother herself. Her flowers had changed to a flowery Madonna, with a bud of a boy in her arms, as on a branch.





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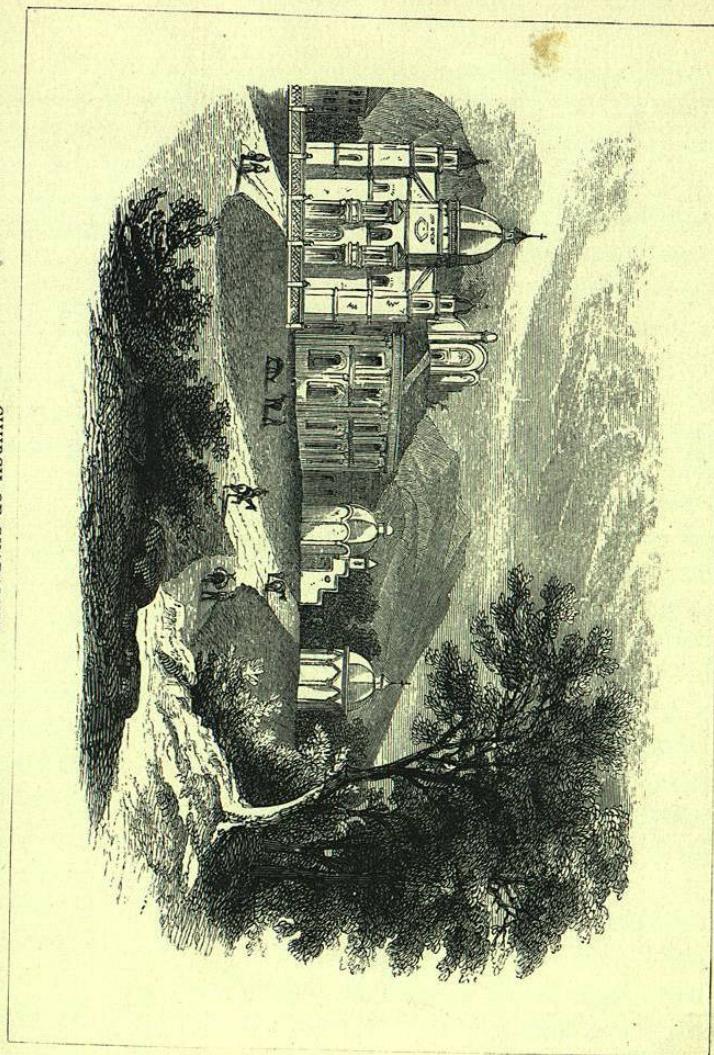
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CHURCH OF GUADALUPE.





If you doubt this they will show you the greasy blanket with her form upon it, over the high altar at Guadalupe, in a frame of solid silver, located just where she spread it, and she filled it with herself.

I agreed to accept the miracle if they would show the flowers as fresh to-day as when they were picked. This they could also do; for flowers abound in this latitude, and beautiful enough to turn any dirty blanket into a Madonna.

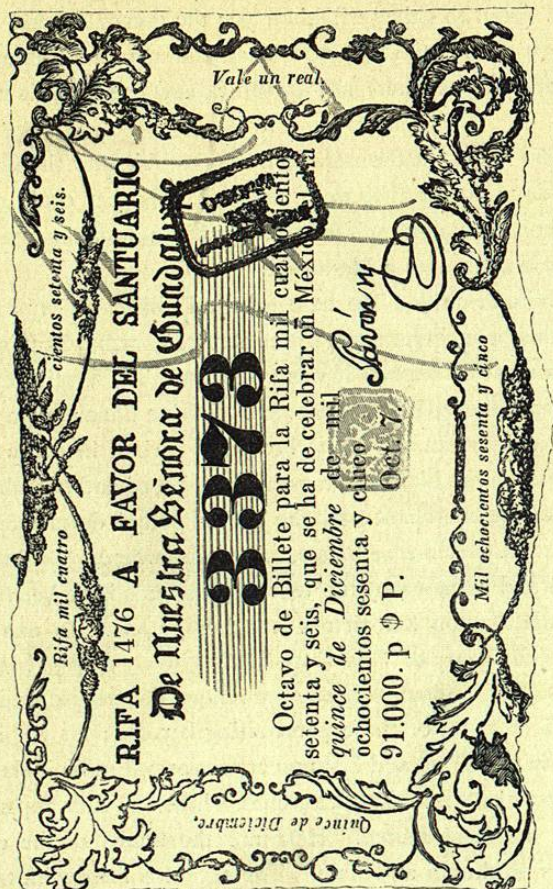
That miracle settled the case for the Indians. They had a *señora* of their own. Our Lady of the Remedies was a Spanish mother. This was an Indian. It was a success. The Virgin of Guadalupe became the goddess of Mexico. Divine honors were paid to her. Temples went up everywhere, and shrines in every temple. Her picture on its blanket hangs in every house and hut, above the counter of the merchant and the bar of pulqui dram-shops, over the forge and over the bed, here, there, everywhere. Books by the thousand and sermons by the tens of thousands have been written and preached upon her virtues and her powers. In one of the books in the library of Vera Cruz she is gravely said to have "got around God." Undoubtedly she got around this people, and effectually took them in, or those personating her did; for the blessed Virgin is in Paradise, and has no connection with this idolatry.

The upper of these three churches, where she first appeared, is reckoned the most sacred. Here are the tombs of the chiefest dignitaries of church and state. The ascent is lined with trophies of her ability to save; one a solid mast and sail of stone, erected by a worshiper whose life was saved from shipwreck, as he believed, through her interposition.

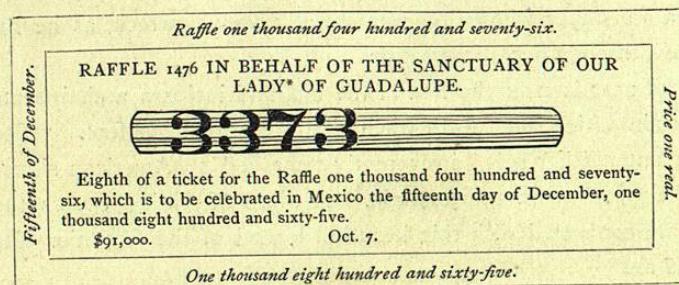
The next is near the foot of the hill, and incloses a chalybeate fountain, which burst forth when she lit there on her foot. "The iron entered her sole," irreverently remarked an American sinner as he gazed upon the fountain. A blaze of gilding covers the chapel connected with this beautiful legend of the fountain. Its walls are

"Thick inlaid with patines of bright gold."





THE LOTTERY TICKET.



\* "The Sanctuary of our Lady" would be better translated freely "The Church of the Blessed Virgin."

The largest church, where her blanket portrait hangs, is a few rods farther out on the plain. There is the chief outlay of gold and silver and precious stones. Two solid silver railings with silver banisters lead from the altar to the choir, a hundred feet at least. On its wall is an inscription to her as the Mother of God, Foundress and Savior of the Mexican People.

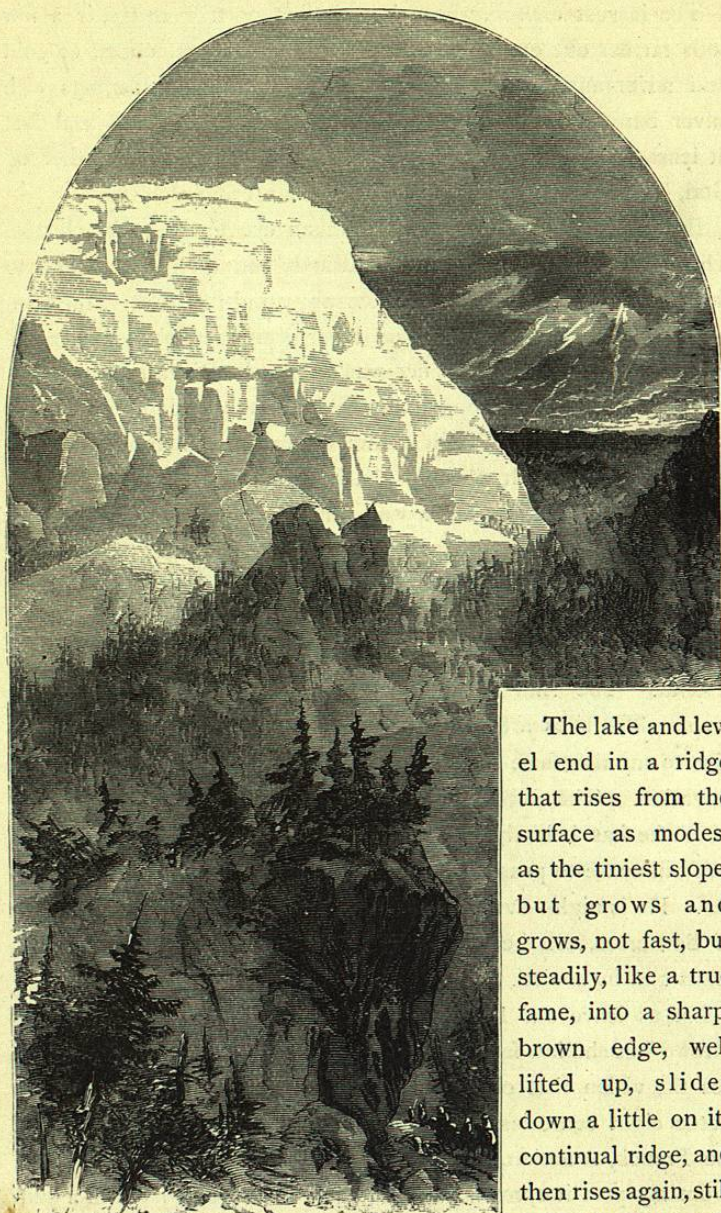
But the priests of the Virgin have an eye to the main chance. They turn her into lottery speculations, and make her useful to their often infirmities. At the door-way an old servant of the temple sold her pictures, beads, and other ecclesiastical knickknacks. A picture that I bought of her was wrapped up in a lottery ticket like that shown on the opposite page, with its translation.

This lottery of the Virgin is one of the most flourishing. The monthly drawings draw daily pennies to their purse. It makes the priestly pot boil. Time was when luxuries were theirs; but these are hard times now for priests, and so they have to thus turn an honest penny to a dishonest use.

But these popular orgies are fading out. True, each December witnesses multitudes from over all the land attending her annual festival. The Indian honors it with the dances of the ancient times. The rites are more Aztec than papal. Yet the Jesuit begins to say that faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe is not essential to salvation. The Bible will replace the Jesuit, and the trick by which he has held their souls captive these three centuries and a half will cease to possess them more. Christ the Liberator is coming. He is nigh—even at their doors. This old blanket, like that of Bartimeus, will be thrown away, and the people will come to Jesus and be healed.

Let us leave our Lady of Guadalupe, if you can, with all this shrewd but shallow faith and policy, and look more easterly. Here lies the vision that charmed the Toltec twelve centuries ago, the Aztec eight centuries ago, the Spaniard three centuries ago, and the French, Austrian, and American conquerors of our own day. From my post it spreads out into a plain that loses itself in a sun-mist forty miles away. Across the plain threads of water stretch themselves, sometimes spreading into bayous, or lakes.





IZTACCIHUATL.

The lake and level end in a ridge that rises from the surface as modest as the tiniest slope, but grows and grows, not fast, but steadily, like a true fame, into a sharp, brown edge, well lifted up, slides down a little on its continual ridge, and then rises again, still not sharp nor sud-

den, nor seemingly very high, but into a ragged rim covered with snow. You are surprised to find so low a horizon covered with perpetual ice. Yet there it lies, not so low after all. It is ten thousand feet above this seat, and nearly eighteen thousand above the gulf, that reclining Lady of the Skies, who rejoices in the unpronounceable name of Iztaccihuatl. I have heard all sorts of people seek to speak this word, and never heard two agree. So call it as it looks, or call it Big I, which it undoubtedly is. You see her head, neck, chest, robes, and feet, white-slippered, "with the toes turned up at the daisies" of the stars, with a long trail sweeping beyond, as becomes this White Woman, which that hard name means.

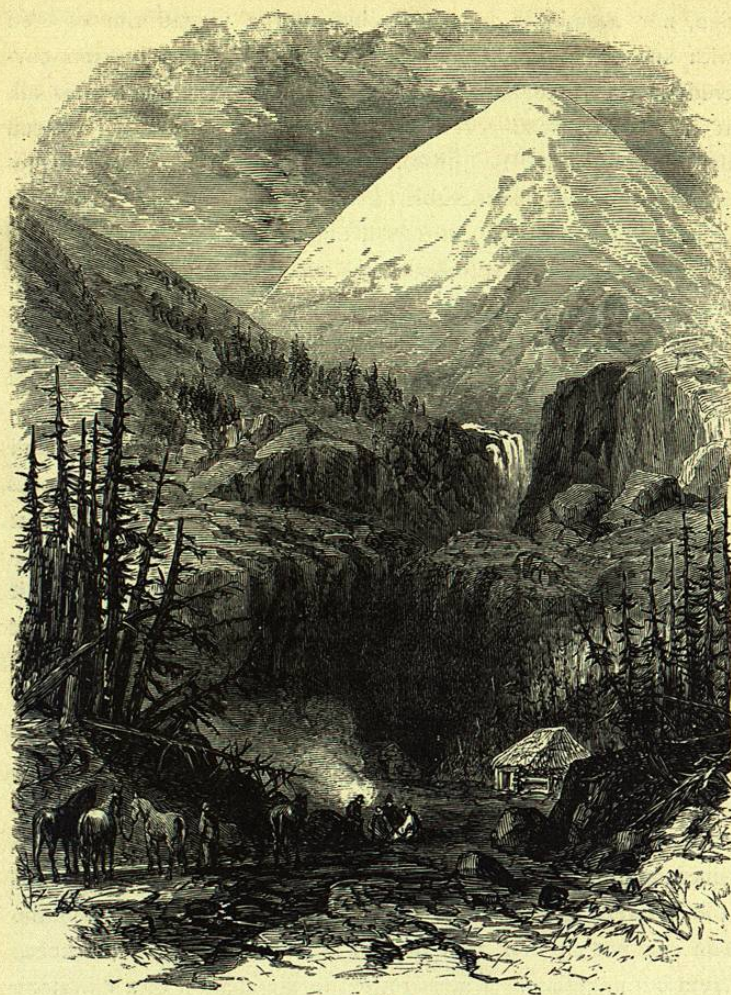
The southern side of this snow range drops off to a sharp and snowless ridge, where the pass lies over which Scott and Cortez marched. Narrow as it looks, it is probably several miles before that valley is crossed and the magnificent dome and peak of Popocatepetl rounds itself up into a superb cone of lustrous ice. Down it glides on the farther side into those brown rims on which we first gazed, and thus sails round the circle of this view. These snow-peaks are thus a not extravagant part of the landscape. They do not stretch suddenly and extraordinarily above their fellows. They are *primi inter pares*. A fall of rain here at this season will make all this high ridge snow. It was so last week, but the snow was gone ere noon, except from the two head centres. The king and queen reign (or snow) perpetually.

The torrid sun, it would seem, ought to burn off their mantle. You can not sit in it now half an hour. It burns on the knees like a burning-glass. I must retreat to the shadow of a tall stone bass-relief lifted up at the front of the roof, and at the foot of a headless statue, once a Magdalene, I judge, conclude this portrait.

It shows how high they are, and how distant also, not less than sixty miles away, if you notice that range of cliffs that lies between them and us. They, too, are well lifted up, and they crouch as lions at the base of these mighty powers.

See the volcanic origin also. The craters are visible of these





THE DOME.

lower hills. Some look just like a bowl upside down, with its bottom cut off—a round hollow.

You have seen the valley of Mexico. On that north-eastern edge of the snow range, a few feet above the lake, you remember, Cortez stood and viewed the landscape over, and said, "I must subdue this exquisite region for our Lady and her Christ." What

a job he undertook he hardly then dreamed. How much labor and loss of life, fightings without and fears within, before he rode a conqueror through these streets, which he had made without inhabitant, and almost without a dwelling-place. Inch by inch he leveled off the Aztec city. Two years and over he plotted and fought, and fought and plotted, ere the prize was his.

The bloodless battle now being fought for the recovery of this same land to Christ, how long will that take? How many will fall? Not so bloodless, perhaps, after all. A more cunning enemy than Montezuma, a more daring one than Guatemozin is to be subdued. He may kill many ere he himself is slain. But conquer Christ will. This earth in all its beauty is His. These people in all their lowliness are His. The Church He has saved with His most precious blood must come hither bearing the true cross of personal holiness, and by patient continuance in well-doing bring up this population to the level of Christian probity, piety, and peace.

It is a grander work than any ever before devised. It is worthy of the Church and its Divine Head. Let it be steadily prosecuted. Match Cortez in his patience, perseverance, persistence, and it will be done.

The sun grows hot and hotter. The shelter of the bass-relief is gone. A deep recess below gives a stone seat in the corner, just fitted for shade and air. The breezes of Popocatepetl glide coolingly over the leaf and the writer. You have seen Mexico from the house-top; let us take a new page, and show you Mexico from the sidewalk.

*! No where pretender!*