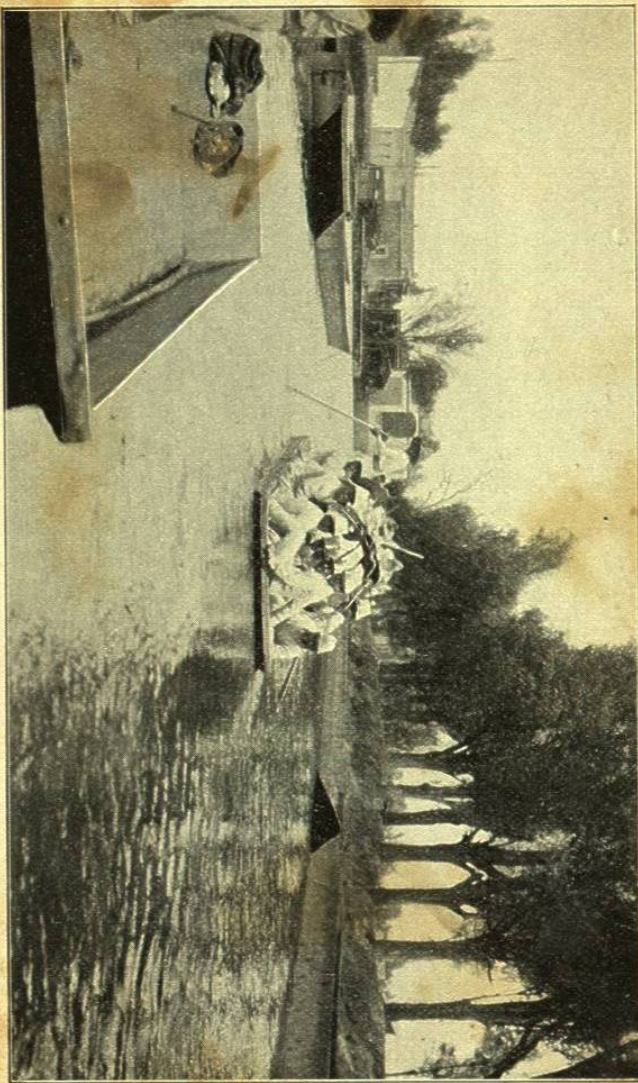


## CHAPTER XII.

When the Spaniards first entered the City of Mexico one of the wonderful sights that met their astonished eyes was "those fairy islands of flowers, overshadowed by trees of considerable size, rising and falling with the gentle undulation of the billows." The *chinampas*, or floating gardens, thus described by Prescott, were originally formed of frames of osiers filled with the soil from the bottom of the lake, upon the surface of which they floated. Although still beautiful with their wealth of bloom and verdure, the chinampas no longer float, but are anchored along the shores of the canal, and make no pretense to be anything but irrigated fruit and vegetable gardens. From the irrigating ditches barges laden with garden produce are floated into the Viga canal, and thence to the market places of the city.

It was a hot morning when first we strolled slowly through the poorer districts of the Capital, toward the Viga canal. The filth, misery and drunkenness were depressing, but not worse than in many



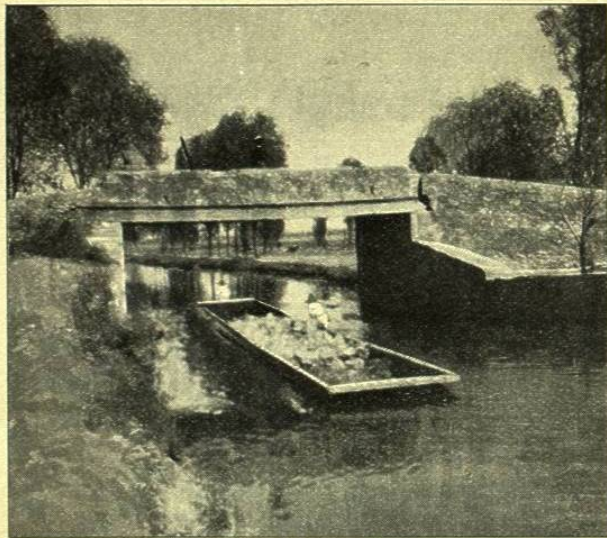
CANAL DE LA VIGA—page 118

cities of the old world. "This," said a man in clerical garb, addressing us in a ministerial tone, "is the fruit of Romanism." I did not care to remind him that in the Protestant city of Glasgow the scene might be duplicated, and that the Cowgate of that great Presbyterian stronghold, Edinburgh, is infinitely worse. Although I dread, as every friend of the country must, the influence of the Church upon her political conditions, still I have little sympathy for the contempt so freely manifested by some Protestants for the Catholic Church in Mexico. I never see a peasant or a peon kneeling before an altar without feeling glad that he has this staff of comfort to help him on his weary way. Better, a thousand times, is even the grossest superstition, than no belief at all.

The Viga canal, which drains the waters of Lake Xochimilco into the lower level of Lake Texcoco, is no longer the limpid stream that Cortés' army saw. It is now the sewage conduit for the city, and the whole stagnant mass suggests cholera, typhus, and other diseases incident to filth. In these vile waters women were washing their hair and bathing their babies, men were wading, children were paddling, and the whole community seemed to regard the yellow flood as a great advantage. Barges laden with fruits and vegetables were poling down the canal, and great loads of dead pigs—

which, upon investigation, proved to be only pigskins filled with pulque—passed by us on their fragrant way. We knew it was our duty as conscientious tourists also to launch our bark upon the stream, but as we did not care to stir up the sleeping nastiness with a boat we took the horse cars instead. The line passes along one of the three ancient causeways, the one by which the army of Cortés first entered the city. As we go south the track bends beside the stream, the tall trees meet overhead, the crowd lessens, the water clears, and the Viga canal really becomes a thing of beauty. The first town south of Mexico is Santa Anita, the Mexican Coney Island. It is a popular resort on holidays and offers unlimited advantages to gamblers.

There are several ancient and shabby towns with dilapidated churches along the route. The market women, with their scant stores spread around them, sit listlessly under the shade of the trees, and comfortless barges loaded with passengers pass by on their way to Lake Xochimilco and the towns along its shores. At Mexicalcingo the car-line branches, one line continuing south to Xochimilco, the other going east to Ixtapalapan. At Mexicalcingo there is a picturesque old church, smelling of dead and gone saints, and a quaint wayside shrine over which the wild vines climb. We walked



CORTÉS' BRIDGE.

over to a romantic stone bridge—the same, tradition has it, to which Montezuma came with his escort to meet the treacherous Cortés and to bid him welcome to the city. It was doubtless on just such a sunny morning as this that the feather-crowned Aztecs welcomed their stern and visored guests, and thus set the seal to their own destruction.

Across this old bridge must have come, too, General Scott with his army. He crossed the mountains where Cortés crossed before him, through the pass between the white volcanoes, marched down

the road to the battlefields of Churubusco and Molino del Rey, which we see yonder, and thence swept on to Chapultepec and the City of Mexico. Independent of its historical associations the old bridge is a pleasant resting place, and we loitered in the sunshine, watching a graceful woman washing clothes in the stream. Fortunately for the welfare of the household linen the water was clearer than nearer the city. Troops of velvet-coated donkeys, almost hidden under their loads of verdant forage, ambled by, and a woman and three children, bearing upon their backs great bundles of cane, passed us with a courteous "Buenos días, señor; Buenos días, señora." It seems impossible that a human back—much less the back of a woman or a child—can support such a weight as these people habitually carry. Two hundred and fifty pounds is the average load for the Mexican porter.

If we cross the bridge and continue east along the ancient causeway, we shall come to the old City of Ixtapalapan, the former residence of the brother of Montezumã. In this town Cortés was hospitably received by the prince, Cuitlahua, who accompanied the Spaniards on their way to the Capital. Like Mexico, Ixtapalapan was built upon piles above the water, and was a city of fine architecture and magnificent gardens, all of which excited the too ready cupidity of the Spaniards. The

hospitality of Cuitlahua Cortés afterward requited with the blackest ingratitude. When the Spaniards, some months after their expulsion from the City of Mexico, returned again to besiege the Capital, remembering the "noche triste," and burning with a desire to avenge their comrades, they attacked Ixtapalapan. As the battle went against them, the brave inhabitants of the doomed city, seeing that all was lost, cut down the dykes and allowed the waters of the lake to overflow the town. A horrible conflict ensued in which the warriors fought waist-deep in the flood, but the usual good fortune attended the Spaniards, and the massacre that followed the victory is a foul blot on the record of Cortés.

Nothing is left of the stately Aztec city except a little hamlet with a decaying church, and some miraculous volcanic springs. Above the town rises the Mexican Mount of the Holy Cross—the Hill of the Star—whose summit bears an immense cross. This Hill of the Star was formerly a holy hill to the Aztecs. The nation counted time by cycles of fifty-two years. Every time the cycle came to a close the people confidently expected the end of all things, and the last five days of each cycle were spent in wailing and gloom; the sacred fires went out on all the altars, and everything was ready for the coming of the final hour. On the last night of

the fifty-second year the priests accompanied by the people repaired to the Hill of the Star, bearing with them the flower of all their captives. At midnight, when the Pleiades reached the zenith, the hapless victim was sacrificed, and upon his body the new fire was kindled. As the flames streamed up into the heavens they were seen by all the watching towns and villages, who immediately broke out into songs of thanksgiving. The rekindling of the sacred fire was regarded by the Aztecs as a prophecy and a pledge that the nation would live and prosper for another cycle.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The patron saint of the City of Mexico is Nuestra Señora de los Remedios—Our Lady of Succor. Our Lady of Los Remedios is made of wood, and is only about ten inches long. She has lost one eye and the larger part of her nose, and, as one who is aware of the vicissitudes through which she has passed would expect, is a very shabby and pitiful little saint. She was brought to America by one of Cortés' soldiers, and during the time the Spaniards were entertained by the kindly Montezuma in the Capital, the wooden saint was placed upon a tiny shrine erected upon one of the teocallis. The "noche triste" so fatal to the Spaniards was also an unfortunate night for Our Lady of Los Remedios, for although she was carried by her friends out of the city, she was mislaid in the confusion, and nothing was heard of her for twenty years. At the end of that time Our Lady appeared to a Christian Aztec, who was sleeping on the spot where the Spaniards had camped the night after their expul-

sion from the Capital, and bade him look under a maguey bush near by, for her lost image. The Indian searched, found the lost saint, and taking it to his home tried to feed it, but it refused to eat, and during the night it fled once more to the shelter of the maguey bush. The Indian brought it back, locked it up in a strong box, and sat on the lid, but the saint returned to her old place, and the Church, seeing that she wished to remain there, built a temple and a shrine on the spot for her; and there she is to-day, a poor, blackened, mutilated little image, holding in her arms a tiny figure of the Christ. Once her altars were decked with silver, gold, and jewels; but all that is gone now, and even the lamps upon the shrine of this impecunious, one-eyed, little saint are of tin. The gourd from which the Indian who found her endeavored to induce her to eat is religiously preserved as a voucher for the authenticity of the story.

It is to Our Lady of Los Remedios that the people appeal in times of drought—albeit the most earnest efforts to provide her own shrine with water have failed. She is also called upon in times of special need, and at the festival of September first she is carried in procession through the city. At the time of the last severe visitation of cholera Our Lady was brought in solemn state to the Cathedral, followed by the Archbishop and all the

church dignitaries, and deposited upon the grand altar. But she refused to remain and was found the next day on her own shrine near the maguey bush, her soiled and mud-stained garments showing that she had made the return trip on foot.

Like some others of her sex, the Lady of Los Remedios has greatly impaired her usefulness by entering into politics. During the fight for Mexico's independence, she unfortunately chose the wrong side, and gained the contumely and contempt of the patriots. She held a General's commission in the Spanish army, and with others of her political faith was exiled from the city, but the sentence was never carried out. On account of her political record, however, the Lady of Los Remedios is not a popular saint to-day in Mexico. In order to see her chapel and shrine one must go by the N. R. R. to Naucalpan and climb the hill of Totoltepec on burros.

Fortunately the Mexicans have another saint; one that has no admixture of Spanish blood, no affiliation with the Conquerors—a saint that is all their own. It is not strange that, after the Conquest, even those Aztecs who accepted the faith of the invaders should feel a sullen resentment against the Spanish saints, who from the first had so successfully outgeneraled their gods. The powers which had so loyally aided the Conquerors, could,

they thought, be no friends of theirs. It was therefore peculiarly fortunate that the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared at the moment she did.

Upon the hill of Guadalupe was an ancient Aztec temple for the worship of Tonantzin, the mother of all the gods. The Spaniards, according to their wont, destroyed the temple and established near by a mission for the conversion of the Indians. One morning, as a pious Indian convert, Juan-Diego by name—or, in our vernacular, John-James—was returning from mass, he was accosted by a veiled figure which instructed him to go to the Bishop and command him to build a church on the spot where the figure was standing. But the unbelieving Bishop refused to listen to the mandate, and although the veiled figure appeared to the Indian again, and once again, the Bishop still refused to believe the story unless the poor fellow brought some undeniable token that the tale was true. The persevering vision came to Juan-Diego for the fifth time, and when he begged for a sign, it directed him to pick the flowers at his feet. To his surprise he saw the ground beneath him suddenly covered with beautiful blossoms which he proceeded to pluck, and with which he filled his *tilma* or mantle. The Indian carried the blossoms joyfully to the good Bishop, and when he opened his *tilma* to show the token, behold on the *tilma* was imprinted the figure

of the Virgin. On the spot where the vision had stood when it first accosted Juan-Diego, a spring of water gushed forth. Over this spring, as well as over the other places where the Virgin had appeared, chapels were built, the shrine of Guadalupe became the haunt of pilgrims and penitents, and in every Mexican church was erected an altar to the new saint.

In spite of the obvious authenticity of the story the Spanish church dignitaries were at first disposed to look rather coldly on this Indian virgin, whom they evidently considered as a "second-rate" saint. Canonization was most grudgingly bestowed upon her, and it was understood among the elect that she was to be considered as a strictly Mexican saint. The great festivals in honor of her first appearance were counted as especially Indian festivals, and the Indians came long distances to lay their gifts on the altar of their own particular Virgin. Some of the scoffing ecclesiastics even went so far as to accuse the poor Mexicans of worshiping, not at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but at the altar of their old deity, Tonantzin, the mother of the gods. However, the protection which the Virgin of Guadalupe extended over the Capital during the plague of 1736 disposed the Church to look less coldly upon this unorthodox saint; and the ecclesiastics even began to hold some perfunc-

tory ceremonies in her honor. Indeed, Maximilian, in his desire to conciliate the Mexicans, walked barefooted along the dusty road from the Capital to the shrine of Guadalupe, a distance of two miles and a half. In the imperial hands were lighted candles, and the imperial knees touched the ground before every wayside shrine along the route.

The Virgin of Guadalupe, like the Virgin of Los Remedios, is in politics. When the soldier-priest, Hidalgo, struck the first blow for Mexican independence he snatched from the altar of a neighboring church the banner of Guadalupe and unfurled it as the standard of Mexico. "Guadalupe, Guadalupe," was the war-cry of the Indians as they hurled themselves against the power of Spain, and it is small wonder that the name Guadalupe has hardly a saintly sound to churchly ears; nor need we marvel that the answering cry, "Remedios, Remedios," did not commend the Spanish saint to the Mexican patriot.

The standard of Mexico bears upon one side the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe clothed in a long blue mantle. The halo encircles not merely the head, but the whole figure, giving it a resemblance to the Virgin of the Shell. On the reverse side of the standard is the eagle with the serpent in its claws. It is a curious fact that the three great republics of the world—France, Mexico

and the United States—have, or at some time have had, the eagle for a national emblem. The remembrance of this fact may well warm the heart of that proud bird.

The road to Guadalupe lies along the great northern causeway from the Capital. The route is



HOLY STAIRWAY, GUADALUPE.

bordered with shrines which have been erected by the pilgrims, and has quite the air of a Mexican Appian Way. We descended from the street car in the market place of the village, and were immediately captured by beggars. Mexican beggars, as



a rule, are not persistent, but these boys yelled and hooted, and stood in our way, insisting upon leading us in every direction we did not wish to go and showing us all the sights we did not care to see, all the time demanding in terrific voices, "Centavos, centavos!" Finding we could not shake them off, we went our leisurely way pretending to be unconscious of their presence.

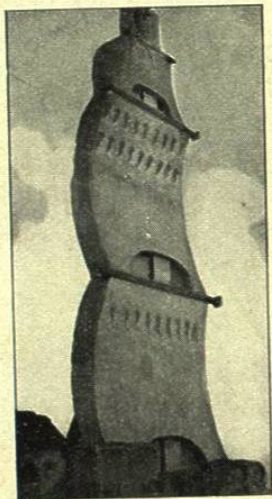
There is a little chapel built over a spring which gushed from the print of the Virgin's foot, where it is proper to drink from the mug which is offered irrespectively to all comers. It is a chalybeate spring, which may account for the doubtful odor of the water, which is hardly the odor of sanctity. Nevertheless, I believe some remarkable cures have been wrought by it.

We climbed the long flight of stairs to the chapel on the hill, the scene, according to tradition, of the Virgin's first appearance, passing on the way the curious Stone Sails of Guadalupe. No one knows the true story of these, but they are doubtless the thank-offering of some pious sailor. The chapel on the hill is the entrance to a pretty, carefully tended cemetery. Half way down the hill is the pathetic little grotto of the Virgin, which has been decorated by the Indian women of the village with bits of colored glass, silvered paper and pebbles. The fourth and largest church, at the foot of the

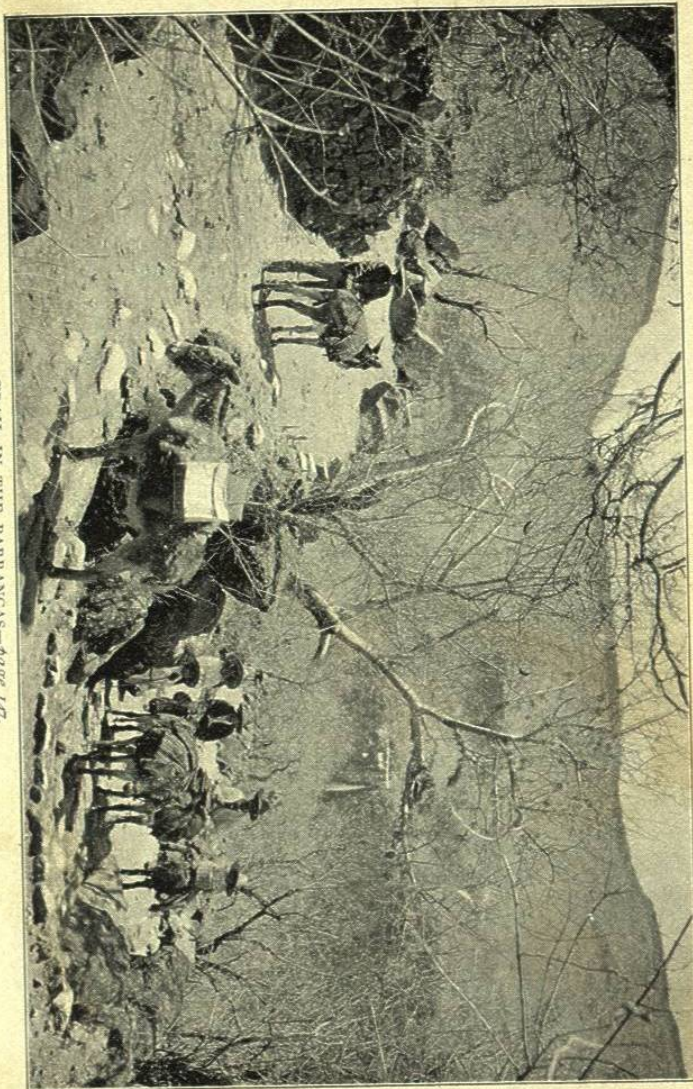
hill, formerly contained the sacred tilma of Juan-Diego, but we learned on inquiry that the relic had been removed to the grand new Cathedral near by, where we found it serving as an altar-piece. The tilma, which still retains the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is of coarse fabric, but the color is bright and fresh and the figure of the Virgin as distinct as when new. It is said that many "distinguished scientists" have examined the tilma and are unable to explain the phenomenon. At all events Mexican theologians are doubly blessed, for they have the liberty of choosing between the wooden Virgin of Los Remedios and the cloth Virgin of Guadalupe.

The new Cathedral of Guadalupe, built specially for the preservation of the tilma, has already cost more than \$2,000,000. It is decorated with huge paintings, the offerings of the different cities of Mexico. The interior of the church, which is not so overloaded with gilding as most of the other Mexican churches, is really beautiful; some of the stained glass is fine, and there is in front of the altar a good statue in marble of one of the former bishops. In the market place outside the church there are numberless booths for the sale of immensely long candles, and although the people look too poor to buy bread there are always plenty of purchasers. As we sat in the church a number of

penitents, carrying lighted candles several feet long in each hand, crawled from the entrance door to the high altar, upon their knees. There was about these poor souls an air of proud proprietorship in their favorite saint, and I could not find it in my heart to criticise their mental or spiritual attitude. Doubtless superstition is as great an inspiration to them as enlightened religion is to us, and no one who knows how utterly empty these patient lives are would wish to deprive them of any hope for the present or the future.



STONE SAILS.



TRAIL IN THE BARRANCAS—page 147.