

A SHORT HISTORY OF MEXICO

CHAPTER I.

ABORIGINAL MEXICO. — THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
TENOCHTITLAN AND THE AZTEC CONFEDERACY.

The earliest authentic date in Mexican history. — Traditions of the Nahuatl families. — Their wanderings, and reception in the Valley of Mexico. — Founding of Tenochtitlan in 1325. — True reason for selection of the site. — Earlier occupants of Mexican table-lands. — The Toltecs. — Discovery of Pulque. — The Chichimecas. — The Tecpanecas. — The Culhuas. — Exaggerations by Spanish historians. — Tlatelolco. — Treaty between the Aztecs and Tecpanecas. — The Otomites, Tarascos, and Zapotecas, and the survival of their languages. — The government of Tenochtitlan. — The Tlaca-tecuhtli and his office. — Acamapichtli. — Huitzilihuitl. — Chimalpopoca. — Izcohuatl. — Overthrow of the Tecpanecas. — Formation of a Military Confederacy. — Moteczuma I. — Axayacatl the Terrible. — Overthrow of Tlatelolco. — Tizoc. — Ahuizotl, the Cruel. — Moteczuma II. — The Tlaxcalans. — Advent of Europeans. — Description of Tenochtitlan in 1519. — The Four Wards. — The insulation of the Pueblo. — The Causeways, Teocallis, Tecpanes, and other buildings. — Aztec civilization.

THE earliest authentic date in the history of Mexico is 1325, — generally accepted as the year in which the Mexicans, or Aztecs, ended their wanderings about the shores of Lake Texcoco, and settled upon the site of what was afterwards Tenochtitlan, and is now

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the City of Mexico. Traditions and myths are sadly mixed up with the realities of these events, as we shall hereafter see; but the best authorities agree in accepting that year as the beginning of Mexican history, and relegating all accounts of the previous occupants of the Mexican Valley to the realm of archæology. Such accounts can therefore claim no serious attention from the present writer, whose purpose it is to relate only what is actually known of the history of Mexico. Archæology is no proper pursuit for the hurrying traveller in Mexico. Reserving that for leisure hours at home, he will find plenty of books from which to gather the conflicting theories held by different men as to who were and whence came the Mayas, the Qquiches, the Toltecs, and the Chichimecas; who built the cities whose ruins are the occasion of so much wonder to the travellers in Yucatan, — cities said to have been overgrown with dense forests before the Spanish conquest, — or who built Mitla, the ruined city in the State of Oaxaca; and by whom and for what purpose the so-called "pyramids" of San Juan Teotihuacan were erected, or the similar mound in Cholula.

The seven families of Nahuatlacas who

arrived in the lake region of the Mexican Valley in the beginning of the fourteenth century, whom we call Aztecs, or Mexicans, and of whose subsequent movements we have to some extent, authentic records, brought with them certain traditions which are partially corroborated by the researches of archæologists. From these traditions it would appear that they had originated in a country unknown save by the name Aztlan (and that merely means "the place of the Aztecs"), and indefinitely located "somewhere north of the Gulf of California," perhaps in the locality where are found the remarkable Cliff houses of Colorado and New Mexico. They began their southerly march about the middle of the twelfth century, and stopped for a time in what is now Arizona of the United States, leaving there certain monuments. The ruins of Casas Grandes attest that they made that a stopping-place also. Again they settled in a country known as Culhuacan, and it is there that they appear to have formulated their religion, adopting as their god of war Huitzilopochtli. That being the name of one of the Chichimecan rulers of that century suggests the possibility of their having made a tribal hero do duty as a tribal deity. Huitzilopo-

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chtli furnished the nucleus for the subsequent development of the Aztec mythology.

It was under the leadership of their war god that the Aztecs proceeded on their way from Culhuacan, leaving signs of another resting-place in what is known as the "Quemada," about twenty miles south of Zacatecas. At the end of nine years they left the Quemada, and by a very circuitous journey reached the mountain regions of Toluca, and finally arrived in Tula in 1196. Twenty years later they arrived at Zumpango, thirty miles north of the site of their future capital. They were well received by the chief of Zumpango (called by Spanish writers, in their fondness for conferring high-sounding titles upon the chiefs of these early tribes, "the Lord of Zumpango"), and a marriage was arranged between his son and a daughter of one of the Mexican families to whom the Spanish writers (conceiving that the Mexicans had already attained to the dignity of an hereditary government, instead of being a mere roving band) give the dignified title of "Aztec princess." It was from this marriage that the military chiefs of the Mexicans in the succeeding century were descended.

The wanderings of the Mexicans were re-

newed, and seven years later they passed by way of Tezoyocan and Tolpetas to Tepeyacac (Guadalupe-Hidalgo), then on the north-western shores of Lake Texcoco. After twenty-nine years of occupancy of this locality they were driven out by the Chichimecas, — a powerful tribe already established in the Valley of Mexico, speaking a language differing dialectically only from that spoken by the Mexicans. They fled to the rocky promontory of Chapultepec looking down upon the waters of Texcoco. Sixteen years later they sought refuge in a group of islands in the western extremity of Lake Acocolco (Aculco), where they eked out a miserable existence for fifty-two years. The Culhuacas made them slaves; but because of assistance rendered to their masters in the wars between the Culhuacas and the Xochimilcas, they were enabled to regain their liberty, and collected themselves together at Huitzilopochco (Churubusco), and went to Mexicalzingo and Ixtacalco. It was after two years that they proceeded to the selection of a permanent home and the foundation of a city which was to be the scene of their subsequent development.

In the marshy islands near the western



borders of Lake Texcoco, representatives of the poor tribe of Mexicans, wandering about in search of a place of rest, saw an eagle standing upon a *nopal* (prickly-pear cactus) strangling a serpent.<sup>1</sup> This was received as a sign that the gods had selected that spot for their future home. Accordingly there was established upon that spot, in the year 1325, the nucleus of the city of Tenochtitlan; that is, "the place of the *Tenuch*," or *nopal*. The name by which their city was subsequently called, and by which its successor is now known, was derived from Mextli, which either means the moon, or was another name given to Huitzilopochtli.

Although this legend of the foundation of Tenochtitlan has been so generally accepted as to give to Mexico a design for its escutcheon, — representing the eagle, the serpent, and the *nopal*, — yet there is a far more plausible explanation given for the selection by the Mexicans of such an unpromising site for their local habitation as the marshy islands of the lake borders. Upon entering

<sup>1</sup> It is said that the fountain bearing this device in bronze standing in the Plaza de Santo Domingo marks the exact spot of this apparition. But why was not this spot marked by the great *teocalli* of Tenochtitlan?

the lake region of the Valley of Mexico, they found four tribes already settled there, — the Aculhuas or Texcocans, the Tecpanecas, the Xochimilcas, and the Chalcas. The present towns of Texcoco, Xochimilco, and Chalco mark the sites occupied by three of these tribes. The site occupied by the Tecpanecas was on the western borders of Lake Texcoco, where now stands Atzacapotzalco. These tribes all spoke the Nahuatl language, — the language of the Mexicans, — with only dialectic differences. It became necessary for the newcomers — the Aztecs — to select a place for their home, not only offering them at least a scanty means of subsistence, but also capable of ready defence from the inroads of their neighbors, under their system of warfare. This was afterwards demonstrated as their city grew and causeways were constructed, — at first glance intended only to afford them a ready means of reaching the mainland, but upon closer study really designed to place their city at a greater distance from the mainland. For these causeways acted as dams, and deepened the waters of the lake west of the city, — more especially in the direction of their nearest neighbors, the Tecpanecas of Atzacapotzalco.



Having thus followed the Aztecs through their traditional wanderings, and arrived with them at the point marking the beginning of their history, there are certain attempts to account for the earlier occupants of the high tablelands of Mexico which cannot be wholly ignored, though none of them can with safety be set down as matters of sober history. That which treats of the Toltecs furnishes as a beginning-point the suspiciously early date of 720, and supplies us with the unpronounceable names of a succession of nine rulers, and an account of the destruction of the "monarchy" in 1103. A succession of nine rulers, occupying the throne on an average more than forty-two years each, and altogether nearly four hundred years, bears *prima facie* the impress of improbability. The site and ruins of the capital of this so-called "monarchy" still remain at Tula, or as it was anciently called, Tollan, fifty miles north of the city of Mexico, on the present line of the Mexican Central railway. The tribe had risen out of the densest obscurity one hundred and thirty years previously, and had spent that length of time in wanderings, — remaining long enough in one locality, fifty-nine miles northeast of the Mexican capital,

to bestow upon it the name of Tollantzingo (Tulancingo), the place of the Toltecs. The name Toltecs signifies, according to some, "the builders," and suggests that the title may have been conferred posthumously — so to speak — upon the race by their successors, when the latter came to see the remains of the buildings left by their antecedents.

One notable event in the history of the Toltecs seems well authenticated and is deserving of mention here. It is the discovery or invention of *pulque* in the "reign" of the eighth Toltec chief, Tepancaltzin, during the latter half of the eleventh century. Xochitl, the daughter of Papantzin, was the discoverer, and upon being presented by her father before the chief of her tribe, who was not more delighted with the beverage than with the beauty of the discoverer, she was elevated at once to a place in his household. To one who knows Mexico and what a hold this beverage (the juice of the *maguey*, Mexican aloe, or *agave Americana*, in a certain stage of fermentation) has had upon the affections of the people for eight centuries, it will occasion no surprise to learn that to this event is accorded a permanent place in history, while the details of the rebellion where-



in Tepancaltzin and his "queen" were killed, and the Toltec government was overthrown in 1103, have been allowed to sink into oblivion. From 1103, although Topiltzin, probably the leader of the rebellion, succeeded to the chieftaincy, anarchy seems to have prevailed in Tula, until the fair land of the Toltecs was nearly depopulated by famines, plagues, and wars, and the few survivors emigrated to Yucatan or Guatemala, leaving behind them in Tula monuments to mark them as a race well advanced in civilization.

The Chichimecas ("eagles," as their name signifies, according to one of many etymologies suggested), were the successors of the Toltecs. They were far less advanced in civilization, and came from Amaquemecan (Amecameca), at the foot of the two famous mountains Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. An effort has been made on the part of some historians to give to the Chichimecas the earliest place in history, and to establish them in the "kingdom of Huehuetlapallan" with a long line of "kings," the thirteenth of whom, Icoatzin, established the Toltec government by placing his second son, Chalchiuhtlanctzin, in the chieftaincy in the year 720, thus making the Toltec "dynasty" subservi-

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ent to that of the Chichimecas. But the location of the "kingdom of Huehuetlapallan" cannot be identified, and the events attributed to that "kingdom" would carry it back 1,796 years before the Christian era, and are not even to be regarded as traditions, but are reduced to the character of myths. No reliance is to be placed upon the accounts of the Chichimecas prior to their settling upon the lands left unoccupied by the departure of the Toltecs from Tula. From Tula they wandered off, first to Cempoalla and Tepepolco, and finally reached Tenayucan (Texcoco) on the east side of the lake Texcoco, where they established themselves and elected a ruler, Xolotl the Great (or, as his name signifies, "the sharp eyed or vigilant person"). He is said to have attained to the chieftaincy in 1120. A succession of four chiefs in Tenayucan carries the history of the Chichimecas down to the time of the settlement of the Aztecs at Tenochtitlan; but as one hundred and twelve years are given as the length of the reign of Xolotl the Great, faith in this history is greatly weakened.

It was by Xolotl the Great that the colony of Tecpanecas was established at Atzacapotzalco. It was composed of a tribe or family

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of Aculhuas, to the two principal "chiefs" of which he gave his two daughters in marriage. This colony was organized, according to the best accounts, in 1168, and either elected a chief or at least accepted one of Xolotl's appointment.

Still another tribe was settled in the lake region, and is accounted for as follows: It was composed of survivors of the Toltecs upon the overthrow of Tula in 1103, who received the name of Culhuas. The place of their settlement still bears the name of Culhuacan. This tribe was destined to play a prominent part in the history of the Aztecs. The first in its line of ten chiefs dated his "reign" from 1109.

In the most reckless manner the Spanish writers have employed such terms as "empire," "kingdom," "king," "queen," "lord," and "prince," in their attempts to write the history of ancient Mexico. When any one comes to identify the sites of these "empires" and "kingdoms," and finds them not only completely surrounded by the mountains which enclose the valley of Mexico, but all bordering upon the marshy shores of a lake scarcely more than fifteen miles in diameter, he sees how little reliance is to be

1 descomposicion  
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2 descendido-  
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3 rodeados  
to surround

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to border =

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placed upon the many accounts given of the occupants of the Mexican Valley, prior to the fourteenth century, — accounts which have been partially harmonized above. Destructive as such a course must be of much of the romantic interest attaching to the early history of Mexico, it is much safer to regard the occupants of the Mexican Valley as petty tribes, probably all of Nahuatl stock, settled in *pueblos* or villages so disposed as to afford means of pursuing horticulture, as well as to protect the inhabitants from the incursions of their neighbors. Their political rulers were doubtless no more than *caciques*, more probably the heads of families. As the house of lumber built by the Toltecs at Tollantzingo was "large enough to accommodate the entire nation," it is not likely that the entire nation at Tollantzingo included more than a few families. So it was, probably, with the Aztecs and their neighbors, and setting out with this in our minds we shall more clearly comprehend what follows in the history of the Aztecs.

It was about thirteen years after the settlement of Tenochtitlan by the seven Nahuatl families that a petty quarrel that had broken out during the previous wanderings of those

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7 porsequin

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families bore fruit in a schism, and one of the families established itself at Tlatelolco, while another faction removed to Chapultepec. We find Spanish authors treating these factions as separate and hostile "kingdoms." But Tlatelolco was separated from Tenochtitlan by a narrow canal only, and enjoyed, in common with Tenochtitlan, isolation from the mainland; and Chapultepec was distant only a league from either pueblo, so that there was scant room for hostilities between rival "kingdoms;" and we must reserve for some time our judgment regarding the power or government of any of these families or tribes until the Aztecs, first by confederation and afterwards by victorious arms, gained an actual ascendancy in the Mexican Valley.

For a long time the Mexicans of Tenochtitlan subsisted on fish, birds, and such wild vegetables as the marshy borders of the lake afforded. But with the increase of population a need of other commodities grew up. To supply this demand they approached the Tecpanecas for the purpose of securing commercial relations with them, and also to secure the use of one of the springs on the mainland. The desired concessions were made by the Tecpanecas, but on the condi-

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tion that the Mexicans should pay tribute to them. An inscription upon the aqueduct that now brings the waters from the great spring at Chapultepec to the fountain known as *Salto del Agua* in the southwestern part of the present city of Mexico, refers to this peculiar relation of the Aztecs and the Tecpanecas, though in language far from accurate. It states that —

*conta que*

"The course of this aqueduct is that of the aqueduct made by the Aztecs in the reign of Chimalpopoca, who was granted the right to the water of Chapultepec by the King of Atzacapotzalco, to whom the Aztecs were tributary until the reign of Izcohuatl (1422-33, A. D.), when they secured their independence." X

*exacto*

*conceder*

Besides the tribes which have been mentioned there were others scattered throughout the lands beyond the mountains, shutting in the Mexican Valley. As to the origin of these it would be useless so much as to hazard a guess. The Otomites, "distinguished for their barbarity," occupied the mountains of Ixmiquilpan. The Tarascos, or Michoacans, occupied a locality distinctly marked by a State name still preserved, their capital being Tzintzuntzan, on the shores of Lake

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Patzcuaro. The Zapotecas still occupy their ancient seat in the mountains of Oaxaca, and have furnished in the present century one of the greatest characters in Mexican history.

It must not be supposed that all lingual traces of the occupants of Mexico in the fourteenth century have disappeared. Even in the streets of the capital some of the languages then spoken may now be heard. There are nearly two millions of people in the country who speak the Aztec or Mexican language proper; there are two thirds of a million who speak the Othomi. The Maya-Qquiche is spoken in Yucatan and parts adjacent by about four hundred thousand persons, the Zapoteca in Oaxaca by half a million, and the Tarascan by a quarter of a million in the State of Michoacan. Other languages and dialects are in use, and the whole number of Mexicans speaking native languages (some of them speaking the Spanish also) is very nearly four millions. To the Aztec language the more accurate term "*Nahuatl*" is sometimes applied. Geographical names derived from these ancient languages are aids in establishing some of the facts in the obscure periods of Mexican history. "Cingo" and "an" or "lan" are

characteristic terminations in the Nahuatl language, signifying "place." It is generally safe to refer localities bearing names with either of those terminations to the period of the Nahuatl occupancy.

The seven Nahuatl families who composed the settlement at Tenochtitlan were reduced, as we have seen, to five, by the defection of the colonists of Tlatelolco and Chapultepec.<sup>1</sup> Although the names of two "kings of Azteca" have been furnished us by Spanish writers, prior to the year 1375, it is by no means likely that these so-called "kings" were more than great warriors, if indeed they were more than heads of families, or caciques. And it was in the year above-named that the first approach to a governmental organization was effected in Tenochtitlan, and that was by means of the election, by popular vote, of a tlaca-tecuhtli, which means, literally, "chief-of-men." Acamapichtli ("Handful-of-reeds"), the person selected for this important office, so far from being a king or an emperor, as he is distinctly named in some

<sup>1</sup> They were further reduced to four by some means not wholly known, — possibly by the withdrawal of the Chinampancas, the occupants of the Chinampas, or floating gardens.



histories, or an autocrat or despot, as he has been generally represented to us, was simply the head war-chief of the Mexican tribe settled in Tenochtitlan, holding his office for life or good behavior. Upon his successors in office, a little over a century later, when Mexico, at the head of a military confederacy composed of all the tribes of the Valley, was accustomed to levy tribute upon weaker tribes beyond the mountain wall, the further duty was imposed of collecting this tribute. But from the earliest times any tendency on the part of the Tlaca-tecuhtli towards assuming a political dictatorship was held in check by a civil coadjutor, his equal in rank, and whose office was also elective. The principal occupation of the Mexicans was war, and their government may be best described as a military democracy. There was no office or dignity connected with its internal polity that was hereditary. Every office was dependent upon popular vote, and that was influenced by the merit of the candidate on the field of battle. And even the Tlaca-tecuhtli and his civil coadjutor were subject to a still higher authority, — a “council-of-chiefs,” of which they were, *ex-officio*, members, and which was the actual governing body of the Mexicans.

During the twenty-eight years in which Acamapichtli held the office of “chief-of-men” the population of Tenochtitlan increased and the condition of the pueblo was materially improved. Canals took the place of the irregular water-courses hitherto separating the several islands selected as the site of Tenochtitlan, and the erection of stone buildings is said to have begun. Acamapichtli was the descendant of the Aztec who married in Zumpango. He had two wives, to whom were born the next two “chiefs-of-men” elected by the people of Tenochtitlan. The first of these was Huitzilihuitl (“Hummingbird”), elected in 1403, — four months after the death of his father. His marriage with the daughter of the chief of the Tecpanecas of Atzacapotzalco served to strengthen the commercial alliance between the Mexicans and the Tecpanecas. He also married a daughter of a family of Quauhnuhuac (Cuernavaca). It has been stated that a system of jurisprudence grew up during the time of Huitzilihuitl. Upon his death, in 1414, he was buried at Chapultepec (“the hill of the grasshoppers,” as its name signifies), — probably the first warrior chief to find a resting-place in that historic ground, and to give to