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## MEXICO IN 1827.

### BOOK THE FIRST.

MEXICO IN 1827.

BOOK I.

SECTION I.

BOUNDARIES.—GEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE.

CLIMATE.

THE Republic of Mexico, which comprises the whole of the vast territory formerly subject to the Vice-royalty of New Spain, is bounded to the East and South-east by the Gulph of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea; to the West by the Pacific; to the South by Guätēmälā, which occupies a part of the Isthmus of Darien; and to the North by the United States.

The exact line which separates the provinces of Las Chiāpās and Tābāscō from the territory of Guätēmälā, has not yet been fixed, but is at present the subject of amicable discussion between the two governments. To the North, the frontier is defined, with sufficient exactness, by the treaty of Washing-

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ton,\* the validity of which, since the declaration of Independence, has been tacitly acknowledged both by Mexico, and the United States.

According to the third article of this treaty, the boundary line between Mexico and Louisiana (then ceded by Spain to the United States) commences with the River Sábina, which runs into the Gulph of Mexico, about lat. 29, West long. 94, and follows its course as far as its junction with the Red River of Natchitoches, which then serves to mark the frontier up to the 100th degree of West longitude, where the line runs directly North to the River Arkansas, which it follows to its source, in the 42d degree of North latitude, from whence another direct line is drawn (immediately upon the forty-second parallel) to the coast of the Pacific; thus dividing between the two rival republics the whole Northern continent of America, with the exception of the British Colonies.

A reference to the accompanying map will explain this seemingly complicated arrangement, which at present is of but little importance, except with regard to the Eastern coast; as between the frontier established, and the last settlements of the Americans and Mexicans to the North and West, a vast space intervenes, tenanted only by Indian tribes, who have never yet been subdued, and over whom

\* This treaty was signed on the 22d February, 1819, by Mr. Adams and the Chevalier Onis, then Spanish Minister at Washington.

neither of the two governments possesses the slightest authority. With the exception of a narrow belt of missions in New California, on the Western coast, which terminates with the port of San Francisco in lat. 36, and the isolated province of New Mexico, the capital of which (Santa Fé) is situated in the same parallel as San Francisco, the whole country contained between 28° and 42° of North latitude, is unappropriated by any white population, and almost unknown; and centuries must elapse before the civilization of America can increase sufficiently to give it any value. It will, probably, be one of the last strong holds of man in a semibarbarous state; for it is in this direction that the Indians, who have been driven from the valley of the Mississippi by the rapid emigrations, which have taken place, during the last twenty years, from the old Atlantic Anglo-American states, are now retiring.\*

On the North-eastern frontier the case is different, for there the rich and beautiful province of Texas might prove a source of contention, did not the two governments wisely determine to remove all motives of difference, by abiding by that arrange-

\* Should any of my readers wish for information respecting the mode in which these Western settlements have been conducted, and the extraordinary manner in which they have thriven, I can refer them to Flint's "Journal of a Ten Years' Residence in the Valley of the Mississippi;" which, although written in a most uncouth style, is both an interesting and instructive work.

ment, to which (directly or indirectly) each has already given its consent.

It will be perceived, by this sketch of the Mexican territory, that, at the two most distant points of S.S.E. and N.N.W. (the southern extremity of Yücātan, and the boundary line, where it runs into the Pacific,) it extends over twenty-seven degrees of latitude, or  $1876\frac{1}{2}$  English statute miles. Its greatest breadth is in the parallel of 30 N. lat. where, from the Red River (Rio Colorado) of Texas, to the coast of Sōnōrā, Humboldt gives the distance at 364 leagues, of twenty-five to the degree.

Nothing can be more imperfect as yet, than our acquaintance with this vast country. Few even of the principal towns and rivers are correctly laid down, and consequently not even the elements of a good map exist. Humboldt has done much towards correcting the errors which prevailed before his time, but his personal observations were confined to a comparatively small circle, and upon those of others he could not rely. A little time, however, will now add considerably to our stock of information; for amongst the foreigners who are at present exploring the Mexican territory, there are some scientific men, who employ their leisure hours in taking observations, and tracing their route through the various parts of the country, which their avocations oblige them to visit.\*

\* I allude particularly to Captain Vetch, Director of the Real del Monte Company, and Mr. Glennie, one of the Commissioners

The result of their inquiries, when combined with the statistical information which the governments of the different States are labouring to collect, and the military surveys of the *Estado Mayor*, will be extremely valuable; and many years will, probably, not elapse, before the interior of Mexico will be as well known as that of most countries in the Old World.

The territory of Mexico presents, according to Humboldt, a surface of 118,478 square leagues, of twenty-five to the degree; but this estimate does not include the space between the Northern extremity of New Mexico and Sōnōrā, and the boundary line, as fixed more recently by the treaty of Washington, the extent of which is not yet well ascertained. Thirty-six thousand five hundred square leagues, comprising the states of Zācātēcās, Guādālajārā, Guānājūātō, Vāllādōlid, Mēxīcō, La Pūēblā, Vērācrūz, Ōāxācā, and Mēridā, are within the Tropics, or, what is usually denominated, the torrid zone; while New Mexico, Dūrāngō, New and Old California, Sōnōrā, and a great part of the old Intendancy of San Luis Pōtōsī, containing, in all,

of the United Mexican Association, both of whom have been indefatigable in their researches. Captain Vetch has nearly completed a very valuable map of the interior of the country; and Mr. Glennie possesses a series of observations, taken by himself, which extend from Ōāxācā, (100 leagues to the S.W. of Mexico,) to Chīhūahuā, and Gūāymās, a port on the northern extremity of the Gulph of California.

82,000 square leagues, are without the Tropics, or under the temperate zone. The whole extent of the Republic is equal to one-fourth of Europe, or to France, Austria, Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain, put together; and the difference of latitude alone, on so enormous a surface, would naturally have the effect of causing considerable changes in the temperature of the more distant points.

It is not, however, to this circumstance, so much as to the peculiarity of its geological structure, that Mexico owes that singular variety of climate, by which it is distinguished from most other countries of the world.

To this I must call the particular attention of my readers, as, without a right understanding of its causes, a great part of the present sketch would prove unintelligible.

The Cordillera of the Andes, after traversing the whole of South America and the Isthmus of Pānāmā, separates into two branches on entering the Northern continent, which, diverging to the East and West, but still preserving their direction towards the North, leave in the centre an immense platform, or Table-land, intersected by the higher points and ridges of the great mountain chain by which it is supported, but raised, in the more central parts, to the enormous height of seven thousand feet above the level of the sea.

This elevation it loses, in part, on its approach

to the North, by the gradual disappearance of the Eastern branch of the Andes, which sinks nearly to a level with the ocean, about the 26th parallel of North latitude, as if to make way for those mighty rivers by which Tēxās, Louisiana, and the Flōrīdās are watered: but to the West, the Cordillera continues in an almost uninterrupted line, through Dūrāngō and Sōnōrā, towards the frontiers of the United States, where it splits into various ramifications, until its course is lost in the unknown regions of the North.

Upon the whole of this Table-land, the effect of geographical position is neutralized by the extreme rarification of the air; while upon the Eastern and Western declivities it resumes its natural influence as it approaches the level of the sea, until the strip or belt of flat country which extends from the base of the Cordillera to the ocean, is subject to the same degree of heat as that which prevails in the East or West Indies, or any other country similarly exposed to the rays of a tropical sun.

Thus Mēxīcō, Guānājuātō, Zácātēcās, and the other great towns upon the central plateau, enjoy a temperature entirely different from that of Vērācrūz, Tāmpīcō, Ācāpūlcō, and Sān Blās, which are situated nearly in the same parallels on the Eastern and Western coasts; while the intervening space is filled up with almost every possible modification of heat.

On the ascent from Vērācrūz, climates (to use

Humboldt's expression) succeed each other in layers, (*se suivent par couches*;) and the traveller passes in review, in the course of two days, the whole scale of vegetation.

The parasitic plants of the Tropics are exchanged at a very early period for the evergreen oak, and the deadly atmosphere of Vērăcrúz, for the sweet, mild air of Jălăpă: a little farther, the oak gives place to the fir; the air becomes more piercing; the sun, though it scorches, has no longer the same deleterious effect upon the human frame; and nature assumes a new and peculiar aspect. With a cloudless sky, and a brilliantly pure atmosphere, there is a great want of moisture, and little luxuriance of vegetation: vast plains follow each other in endless succession, each separated from the rest by a little ridge of hills, which intersect the country at regular intervals, and appear to have formed, at some distant period, the basins of an immense chain of lakes. Such, with some slight variations, is the character of the Table-land from Mexico to Chĭhŭahuă. Wherever there is water, there is fertility; but the rivers are few, and insignificant, in comparison with the majestic streams of the United States; and, in the intervals, the sun parches, in lieu of enriching the soil. High and barren plains occupy but too large a portion of the centre of the country, between Zăcătēcăs, Dŭrăngŭ, and Săltĭllŭ; nor does nature recover her wonted vigour, until the streams, which gradually filter from the Cordillera,

are sufficiently formed to dispense moisture on their passage to the ocean. As the Eastern branch of the Cordillera disappears, or rather recedes towards the West, the space fertilized by these streams becomes more extensive; until in Texas, a country low, but well wooded, and rich in beautiful rivers, takes the place of the dreary *Steppes* of the interior.

The Rio Grande de Săntiăgŭ, which traverses the Băxĭŭ, and empties itself into the Pacific, near San Blas, and the Rio Bravo del Norte, which enters the Gulph of Mexico in 26 North lat., are the two principal rivers of the Table-land: the last, indeed, hardly merits that title, as it pursues its course over a part of the country where the Eastern Cordillera is lost;\* but the first rises in the very centre of Mexico, and the district through which it passes is amongst the richest of the known world.

Humboldt gives 25 degrees of the centigrade thermometer (or 76 of Farenheit) as the mean heat of the coast, and 17° centigrade (64 Farenheit) as that of the Table-land. But, in a country so extensive as Mexico, any general theory upon this subject must be liable to great exceptions. A situation, so sheltered as to give additional force to the reflected rays of the sun, or too much exposed to the winds of the North-west, which sweep the country, at times, with incredible violence; a

\* It rises at the foot of the mountains of Sierra Verde, and traverses a space of 512 leagues before it reaches the Gulph.

nearer approach to the Pacific side, (where the air is perceptibly milder;) the want, or abundance, of water; all these are circumstances which affect the temperature in the most opposite manner, even at the same height, and in the same parallel; and thus render it impossible, by the standard of elevation alone, to form any exact idea of the climate of the Table-land. Humboldt mentions the valley of Rio Verde, where sugar is raised with success at near four thousand feet above the degree of elevation which previous experiments had induced him to fix, as productive of the *minimum* of heat requisite for its cultivation; and I have myself seen a little spot, in the vicinity of Guădălăjără, which presents a similar phenomenon.\* In addition to these local peculiarities, which occur without there being any sensible difference in point of elevation to occasion them, every little break or descent in the surface of the Table-land, leads as naturally to an increase of heat, as the ascent from the coast does to a diminution of it. The transition is sometimes extremely sudden, for a deep ravine, or *căñădă*, is sufficient to occasion it. Thus, in the *Căñădă* of Qŭerětărŭ, and in the famous *Baranca* of Rēglă, at Real del Monte, both of which are situated in the centre of the Table-land, and nearly upon the same level as the Capital, a few hundred yards change the face of nature entirely.

\* The village of Zăpŭtlănējŭ; for an account of which, *vide* Personal Narrative, Book 5.

The luxuriance of Tropical vegetation replaces the stunted growth peculiar to the central plateau; the birds assume a more variegated plumage; the inhabitants a more relaxed and indolent expression; and the whole scene the characteristics of another world.

The same effects are produced wherever the same causes occur; and as, on a mountain chain, the inequalities of the surface are naturally very great, it is hardly possible to proceed to any distance, either to the East, or to the West of the Capital, without experiencing these transitions, which sometimes are met with repeatedly in the course of a single day. The natives, without inquiring into their origin, express the fact, by designating these hot, low ravines, as *Tierra Caliente*; a term which always implies a portion of the country, in which (from whatever causes) there is a sufficiency of heat to produce the fruits, and with the fruits, the diseases of the Tropics. *Tierra fria* (the cold country) is applied to the mountainous districts which rise above the level of the Capital, up to the limits of eternal snow; while *Tierra templada* (the temperate region) embraces, in its most general acceptation, all that is not included under one of the other two divisions. By many, however, it is thought to apply more particularly to a climate such as that of Jălăpă and Chilpănzîngŭ, (on the Eastern and Western ascent from the coast,) both of which are very much below the level of the Table-land: and I have myself found,