

The most important of all the tribes, the Mexicans or Aztecs, although the last to choose a permanent resting-place, had been as long in the valley as any of the sister nations. They proceeded from Aztlan, an unknown region of the north, and reached Anahuac about 1195, having made three stations, at which the ruins of *casas grandes* are still to be seen. Their first halting-place was on the shores of the lake of Teguyo or Teguayo, probably identical with the lake of Timpanogos, or Great Salt Lake, in Utah; the second was on the river Gila; and the third not far from Presidio de los Llanos. After reaching the plain of the lakes, the Mexicans led a nomadic existence for one hundred and thirty years. After a series of unsuccessful encounters, in which their numbers were greatly diminished, they laid, on the islands of the lake, the foundations of their city of Tenochtitlan, in 1325. Reduced to extreme poverty and hated by surrounding nations, they resolutely strove against ill fortune until they became numerous and powerful enough to take the offensive. They then spread desolation and slavery through many of the tribes who, in former days, had shown them little mercy. Their capital was extended and beautified to an extraordinary degree; they soon became the equals of the Tezcucans in the cultivation of the arts and sciences; their institutions, customs, religion, and



SEÑOR GENERAL DON MARIANO ESCOBEDO.

even their language, were propagated wherever their power reached. The adjacent territories were invaded and occupied by Aztec garrisons. The Tezcucans were perhaps more advanced in knowledge and refinement than the Mexicans, but the latter were certainly far more powerful, and they gave their name to the whole country and to the civilization of their day.

The boundaries of the Aztec realm have never been precisely defined, but they extended northward to the country of the Huastecas, whom the Mexicans never subdued; to the northwest the empire did not reach beyond the province of Tulba, the vast tract of land beyond which was occupied by the Otomies and some Chichimec tribes; to the west it terminated at the frontier of Michoacan; on the southwest it was in general limited only by the Pacific; and the greatest length on that coast was from Soconusco to Coliman. On the Atlantic side the Mexicans possessed all that lay west of the Coatzacoalcos. The Acolhuan dominions did not form one-eighth of the Aztec kingdom. It should be observed that Ahuizotl, whose reign immediately preceded the Spanish conquest, carried his arms successfully into Guatemala, subduing that country and a portion of Nicaragua. The Tepanecs, in 141 seized the Acolhuan capital, assassinated the king, and placed their own prince, Tegozmoc, upon the throne, which was transmitted to his son, Moxtla. But Nezahualcoyotl, the rightful heir, succeeded, with the aid of the Mexicans, not only in driving out the Tepanecs, but in conquering their country, which they gave to their allies, the Mexicans. A league of mutual

support and defence was then entered into by the princes of Mexico, Tezcuco, and Tlacopan, the conquered countries to be divided between the confederates, and the largest share to be awarded to Mexico. During a century of constant warfare this compact was adhered to with strictest fidelity. The Mexican monarch had the predominance in matters of war; the authority of the three was equal in all other concerns, and no one ever meddled with the government of the others. Toward the middle of the fifteenth century, when the Acolhuan power began to decline, the Mexican king plundered a portion of his neighbor's territory, and arrogated to himself the title of emperor, though the Tezcucan sovereigns continued to reign until the time of the conquest. These last had the prerogative of crowning those of Mexico. For the first twenty-seven years after the foundation of Tenochtitlan, the government was in the hands of a body of twenty nobles; but in 1352 it was transformed into an elective monarchy, Acamapitzin or Acamapichtle being the first king. In the beginning the power of the sovereigns was limited, and their prerogatives were very moderate; but with territorial extension and increased wealth came the introduction of court pomp and pageantry, and such despotism as characterized the reign of Montezuma I.

After the election of a king, four princes or lords were chosen from among his nearest of kin, whose voice was indispensable in all state affairs. They acted as senators, were presidents of the royal council, and one of their number was in due time elected successor to the crown, with sole reference to fitness for the office. In later times it was customary to appoint the four candidates to the government of minor states; the one elected must have been general in the army, and not under thirty years of age. When the successor was under age, the government, during his minority, was committed to the senior of the royal family most fitted for the charge, whose election was confirmed by the kings of Tezcuco and Tlacopan. Three councils or cabinets assisted the king in the administration: one for the revenue, another for war, and a third for the government of the provinces. The councillors or ministers, though necessarily of the nobility, owed their eligibility to long military service and a profound knowledge of state matters. The nobles and priests were the main supporters of the national interests; but the influence of the latter in public affairs was more limited than in some of the earlier monarchies. They had no seat in the privy council, and their functions were chiefly restricted to superstitious exercises and foretelling the issue of campaigns. But they were intrusted with the education of children, were consulted on all grave family concerns, and their social influence was almost unbounded. Profound respect for the main principles of morality was evinced by the ancient Mexicans, with whom the security rather of person than of property was largely provided for. In the uninhabited districts public inns were placed at intervals for the gratuitous accommodation of wayfarers, and boats or bridges for their convenience in crossing rivers; and when the roads were damaged by floods, they were repaired at the public expense. A complete system of supreme and subordinate tribunals existed in all the towns, and a still more perfect judicial organization in the neighboring kingdom of Acolhuacan, where a council of all the judges throughout the realm was held once in eighty days at the capital, the monarch in person presiding, for the adjudication of causes left undetermined by the lower courts.

The Aztecs were as remarkable for the moderation of their civil as for the severity of their penal code; but their laws seem to have been administered less impartially than in Tezcuco, and to have been somewhat flexible for the nobles and priests. Creditors could imprison their debtors, and had a claim upon their inheritance, but could not enslave the widows or orphans; and slaves about to be sold might free themselves by taking refuge in the royal palace. Adultery was punished with death, however noble the offender might be. For treason or any



crime against the person of the monarch, embezzlement of the taxes, etc., the offender was put to death with all his kindred to the fourth degree. Murder of even a slave was always a capital crime. Drunkenness in youth was a capital offence; in persons of maturer years, though not capital, it was punished with severity; but men of seventy years, and all persons on festive occasions, were permitted the use of wine. He who lied to the prejudice of another had a portion of his lips cut off, and sometimes his ears. Finally, he who robbed in the market, altered the lawful measures, or removed the legal boundaries in the fields, was immediately put to death; and conspirators against the prince, and those who committed adultery with the prince's wife, were torn to pieces, limb from limb. The murder of a merchant or an ambassador, or any injury or insult to the latter, was sufficient cause of war. During a series of very cruel wars all prisoners were devoured or enslaved. At one time the laws were so few that the people knew them all by heart. They were represented by paintings; and the judges were attended by clever clerks, or painters, who by means of figures described the suits and the parties concerned therein.

The Mexicans had two kinds of prisons,—one for debtors and persons not guilty of capital crimes, the other a species of cage in which were confined condemned criminals and prisoners taken in war, both of whom were closely guarded; those doomed to capital punishment being sparingly fed, and the others abundantly nourished, that they might be in good flesh when led to sacrifice. For the same reason the Mexicans in battle preferred to capture their enemies alive. Polygamy was permitted, but seldom practised save by the princes and nobles.

Marriage generally required the consent of the parents of both parties, and there was a special court for divorces, in which a wife might sue. Filial affection was a characteristic virtue of the Aztecs. Except in the royal family, sons succeeded to all the rights of their fathers; if these died without male issue, their rights reverted to their brothers, and in the absence of the latter, to their nephews. Daughters could not inherit.

The government revenues were derived from crown lands set apart in the various provinces, from a tax on the agricultural products, and chiefly from a tribute consisting of provisions and manufactured articles; besides which a contribution was received from the merchants and craftsmen every twenty or eighty days. The profession of arms was one of the most esteemed, and those who died in defence of their country were regarded as the happiest.

There were four distinct grades of generals, and next below them were captains. The main bodies or regiments consisted of eight thousand men, and seem to have been divided into battalions of four hundred men each, and these into squads of twenty. They marched in admirable order; the priests were always in front, and the signal for combat was given by kindling a fire and sounding a trumpet. Their tactics were unfavorable to hostilities by night; but "force and stratagem, courage and deceit," says Prescott, "were equally admissible in war."

The first European to visit the shores of Mexico was Francisco Fernandez de Cordova, in 1517; but he discovered only the coast of Yucatan. The discovery was continued in the following year by Juan de Grijalva, in command of a squadron sent from Cuba by Velasquez, who sailed round the north coast as far as the mouth of the river Panuco, and landed on the islet on which now stands the castle of San Juan de Ulua. After his return, his brilliant account of his discovery excited the desire of conquest.

On Good Friday, April 22, 1519, Hernan Cortez landed at that part of the coast where Vera Cruz was afterward built, and founded a town to which he gave the name of Villarica de

Vera Cruz. On the very day of his landing occurred the first of a series of battles, which terminated only with the taking of the city of Tenochtitlan, August 13, 1521, and the capture of the young and valorous Guatemozin, the last of the Aztec monarchs. The other smaller states were subdued after a short resistance.

A military government was immediately established, Cortez taking the supreme command; but *ayuntamientos* (municipalities) had already been formed, the first at Villarica, and these continued independently of the new military power. Many of the laws emanating from the *ayuntamientos* still exist in full force in the Mexican republic. By a decree of Charles the Fifth, Cortez was constituted governor of the new territory, which had been named New Spain, October 15, 1522. The Indians, though converted, were distributed among the *conquistadores* and other Spanish officials and immigrants, and compelled as slaves to till the ground and labor in the mines. This system of *repartimientos*, or distributions, had already been applied and found fatal to the aboriginal inhabitants of the island of Hayti, but the Mexicans, a hardier people, did not so readily succumb.

In 1528 was inaugurated the first *audiencia*, with Nuño de Guzman as president, and four auditors. The arbitrary and oppressive measures of this body caused considerable discontent in the colony, which, coming to the ears of the emperor, led to the suppression of the *audiencias*, and the establishment of a vice-regal government in New Spain. The first viceroy, Don Antonio de Mendoza, ruled the country from 1535 to 1550.

During his administration discoveries were actively prosecuted in the north; the first money was coined in Mexico; the printing-press, the first in the New World, was introduced; the University of Mexico and several colleges were founded, and numerous important reforms were effected. Of the sixty-four viceroys who successively governed the country till 1821, only one was of American birth, Don Juan de Acuña, a native of Lima (1722-34), and the most celebrated after Mendoza was Don Juan Vicente Guemes Pacheco, the second count of Revillagigedo (1789-94). In his time were accomplished many important improvements: the streets of the principal cities were drained, paved, and lighted, and provided with a tolerably efficient police; persons of known probity were placed in the public offices; and municipal revenues were introduced.

At the beginning of the present century, society in New Spain consisted of four classes of opposite tendencies and interests,—the pure-blooded Indians, the creoles, or pure-blooded descendants of the early Spanish settlers, the *mestizos*, or half-breeds, from the union of whites and Indians, and the Spaniards of European birth. The condition of the Indians had but little



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changed under the viceroys. They were compelled to pay tribute, and were held in a sort of tutelage, which ended only in the tomb. The Indian nobles, or *caciques*, were exempted from the degrading restrictions which weighed upon the others. As for the creoles, whose numbers were continually increasing, a policy due to ignorance of their real position in the community excluded them from all places of trust in the government, and even from the higher grades in the regular army. Upon such as had amassed great wealth titles of nobility were conferred, while conciliatory crosses were distributed to those of smaller fortunes; but the home government considered it imprudent to allow them to take part in the public administration, and placed it exclusively in the hands of the Spaniards.

This, with other grievances, caused profound discontent among the creoles, who would probably have resented it by open rebellion, had they not been restrained by the apprehension that the Indians, aided by the mestizos, might avail themselves of that event for the destruction of all the whites. An ineradicable antipathy had already sprung up between the creoles and the Spaniards, whom they distinguished by the sobriquet of *Gachupines*; yet probably no outbreak would have immediately ensued but for the events of 1818 in the peninsula. The usurpation of Ferdinand's throne by a Bonaparte was unanimously protested against by both Spaniards and creoles in Mexico; but the public mind was agitated by intemperate discussions concerning the provisional government, which the state of things made it necessary to organize; and the excitement was not a little enhanced by the imprisonment of the viceroy, Don José de Iturrigaray, suspected of a design to seize the crown of Mexico, on September 16, 1808.

After his arrest, the prestige of Spanish authority sensibly declined among the Mexicans, who began to long for independence. A conspiracy was formed, and on September 15, 1810, a revolt broke out in the province of Guanajuato, headed by a priest, Don Miguel Hidalgo, a man of great talent and considerable influence among the Indians, and a man who thus became "the Father of his Country."

The insurrection soon assumed formidable proportions, Hidalgo having at one time one hundred thousand men under arms. He finally suffered several defeats, was betrayed to his enemies (March 21, 1811), and four months later was shot in company with his companions in arms, Allende, Aldama, and Jimenez. The contest was continued by Morelos, also a priest, who called a national congress, which met at Chilpanzingo in September, 1813, and in November declared Mexico independent. On October 22, 1814, it promulgated at Apatzingan the first Mexican constitution, which is known by the name of that place.

After several defeats, Morelos was captured, carried to the city of Mexico, and executed as a rebel, December 22, 1815. For several years the contest waged among the patriots, of whom the principal chiefs were Victoria, Guerrero, Bravo, Rayon, and Teran. These were gradually driven from the field and were killed, imprisoned, or obliged to hide in the mountains, so that long before 1820 the authority of Spain appeared to be fully re-established in Mexico.

But in the course of that year the news of the revolution in Spain, and of the proclamation of the constitution which Ferdinand VII. had been compelled to adopt, renewed the agitation among the Mexicans in favor of a liberal government.

Don Agustin Iturbide, a native Mexican and a colonel in the Mexican army, who during the recent civil war had distinguished himself on the royalist side, now threw off his allegiance and began the second revolution by proclaiming Mexico independent, February 24, 1821. The revolt of Iturbide was eminently successful. In the course of a few months the whole country recognized his authority except the capital, and by a treaty signed at Cordova, August 24, 1821,

with the viceroy, Don Juan O'Donoju, he obtained possession of Mexico on September 27, and instituted a regency, of which he was the head, and O'Donoju one of the members.

Eight months later, with the support of the army and the mob of the city of Mexico, Iturbide was proclaimed emperor on the night of May 19, 1822, under the title of Agustin I. His reign was short. On December 2, Santa Anna, seconded by Bravo, Guerrero, and other chiefs, proclaimed the republic of Vera Cruz; and Iturbide abdicated on March 19, 1823, rather than see the country again plunged into civil war.

The congress which had been dissolved by Iturbide, but reconvened by him shortly before his abdication, appointed a new governor, called *poder ejecutivo* (executive power), composed of Generals Bravo, Victoria, Negrete, and Guerrero. Iturbide was condemned to exile, and embarked at Vera Cruz for London in May of the same year, just twelve months after his exaltation to the throne.

On October 4, 1824, the congress promulgated a constitution closely resembling that of the United States, by virtue of which Mexico was formed into a republic with nineteen states and five territories. General Don Felix Fernando Victoria, better known as Guadalupe Victoria, one of the most intrepid heroes of the war of independence, was the first president, and General Bravo the first vice-president. Iturbide, who had the temerity to venture back to Mexico in this year, was arrested and shot at Padilla on July 19. In 1828 the candidates for the presidency were Generals Gomez Pedraza and Guerrero; on the election of the former the opposite party took up arms, and a bloody contest ensued, which terminated in the downfall of Pedraza's government and his flight from the country, January 4, 1829. Guerrero assumed the executive functions on April 1.

The year 1829 witnessed the recognition of the Mexican republic by the United States, and an attempt made by Spain to regain possession of her lost colony. In July, Brigadier-General Barradas, with four thousand Spanish troops, disembarked at Cabo Rojo, near Tampico, but he was compelled to capitulate on September 11, his troops being disarmed and sent to Havana.

The vice-president, General Anastasio Bustamante, who was commanding a reserve corps at Jalapa for the purpose of repelling the invaders, pronounced against Guerrero, and, having succeeded in deposing him, was himself elected president in his stead, January 11, 1830. Revolutionary disturbances continued till February 14, 1831, when Guerrero, one of the principal leaders, was treacherously delivered up to his enemies and executed. His name is perpetuated in that of one of the present states of the republic.

Bustamante was succeeded by Pedraza, who in turn was deposed by Santa Anna, the latter entering office on April 1, 1833, little more than three months after the inauguration of Pedraza. Bustamante was compelled to go into exile, and with him several other personages of political notoriety.

Congress now passed laws suppressing the convents and abolishing the compulsory payment of tithes. It also proposed to appropriate the property of the church to the payment of the national debt, but this measure led to insurrections and to further complications, which ended in 1835 in the abrogation of the constitution of 1824 and the conversion of the confederation of states into a consolidated republic, of which Santa Anna was nominally constitutional president, and practically dictator.

This revolution was acquiesced in by all parts of the country except Texas, where several thousand American colonists had settled. The refusal of the Texans to submit to the centralized government, which they pronounced a usurpation, induced Santa Anna to march against