

Vera Cruz will always be a port of consequence and a great gateway of commerce. It is the natural outlet of a fertile agricultural region, and must share in the prosperity of the export trade. The competition of Tampico is already felt in tonnage, and it is likely that the more northern port is already abreast in that particular of the City of the True Cross, for the growth of Tampico has been very rapid during the past few years. A friendly rivalry between the two ports, which are chief among the trading points of the Gulf coast, and between the railways using them as termini, will do no harm, for there is business enough in modern Mexico for both.

Physicians continue to send anæmic and debilitated patients to the coast, and for one who has too long lived in the dry and over-stimulating table-land climate a change to the sea-shore is most beneficial. There one breathes easily and the denser air is more heavily charged with oxygen. The change observable in a nervous invalid is immediate, for color comes back at once to the pale cheeks and whitened lips of the anæmic. The sea-breeze is nature's own tonic, never improved upon by the art of the drug compounder. There is so much to see and enjoy in Vera Cruz that for the table-land-dweller it is a complete novelty; and the invalid from the sea plateau finds in the sight of the sea and the ships a novel distraction, contributing to the restoration of nervous poise.

The state of Vera Cruz has an accomplished and popular executive head in Señor Don Teodoro A. Dehesa, to whose ability is owing much of the present progress of the place.



CHAPTER XXI

TAMAULIPAS

AT the extreme northeast of the state of Vera Cruz one crosses the Panuco River to Tampico, a rival port of Vera Cruz City. This is a convenient port for handling heavy tonnage, and, consequently, Tampico is fast becoming one of the most important towns in Mexico. It is in the state of Tamaulipas, and was originally named "Santa Ana de Tamaulipas." This state has several ports, but they are mostly encumbered with bars that hinder navigation.

Tamaulipas extends from Vera Cruz to the Rio Grande del Norte, which divides it from Texas. It has an area of twenty-eight thousand six hundred and fifty-nine square miles and a population considerably above one hundred thousand. The coast is low and sandy, and there are several lagoons along the shore, the largest of which—Laguna Madre—is over one hundred miles long, and in some parts over twenty miles wide.

The principal rivers of this state are the Fernando, or Tigre, Borbón, Santander, and Tampico. In the northern part the flat coastlands extend inward for many miles and then rise to elevated plains; in the south the country is diversified by many mountains and valleys, and the scenery is very picturesque. There are rich silver- and copper-mines, which promise great and undiscovered wealth, in these directions. Valuable timber abounds on the mountains, and, as the soil is very fertile, all the fruits, grains, and vegetables of the temperate and torrid zones are easily raised. This is also an excellent state for stock-raising of all kinds.

The chief towns are Ciudad Victoria, the capital of Tamaulipas, Matamoras, and Tampico. The latter town is built on rising ground, with wide streets crossing at right angles. The houses are mostly of stone. There are several churches, a custom-house, hospitals, a prison, good schools, and a number of monuments.



SEÑOR LIC. GUADALUPE MAINERO,
GOVERNOR OF TAMAULIPAS.

It was at Tampico that Americus Vesputius, the Italian navigator, first landed on this continent; and it was probably the harbor afforded by the mouth of the Rio Panuco that attracted the Spaniards who were cruising around the Gulf of Mexico in 1497, seeking for new worlds to conquer. Vesputius left a record of a famous game dinner which he enjoyed at Lariab, as the port was then called. This was four hundred years ago, and still the country around Tampico is a sportsman's paradise. When this queer ship landed and the first Europeans stood on American shores, the bold navigator at the head of the little group of men could hardly have expected that so great a country would commemorate his name.

Tampico is built upon a rocky bluff forty feet high, surrounded by lagoons of salt water. The town has about six thousand inhabitants, and connects with the various boat-landings by means of stone steps, in true Venetian style. The architecture of Tampico is more American than most Mexican towns display, owing, doubtless, to its ready communication with New Orleans and other northern ports. The houses are built of both wood and stone, with sloping roofs and outer verandas. Color prevails everywhere, the houses being painted in blues and yellows, each street looking fresh, bright, and clean, and especially so the brilliant façades clustering about the plaza. The latter is a densely shaded park paved with granite and provided with seats free to rich and poor, traveller and home-keeper alike. No flowers grow in this plaza, but the householders around it seem to vie with one another in window and veranda gardening. One house will have balconies on the street front with rows of blossoming orchids and amaryllis along the walls; another house will be covered with vines; and so on around the brilliant façade. Just out of Tampico may be found thousands of orchids growing wild, hanging thick on the seaward side of the rocks, where the tropical sun and perpetual moisture give them a most luxurious growth.

The market-place forms one of the most interesting features of Tampico. The pavement of the square is provided with holes, into which are thrust the long handles of the odd-looking umbrellas made by the natives. Under their shadows on market-days may be seen men, women, and children squatting beside plaited palm mats, upon which their wares are spread. These include, besides chile, the universal Mexican condiment, tiny earthenware jugs of honey neatly covered with a bit of corn-husk tied with maguey fibre, fans and beads, birds and onions, artistically carved wooden implements for household purposes, and everywhere bunches and heaps of marigolds.

Then there is a wonderful old church, with ancient wood-carving and frescoes by Spanish artists. It is a strange mixture of old and new that the traveller meets at every turn in Tampico; but the wonderful jetties built out from the mouth of the Panuco seven thousand feet into the Gulf are perhaps the most interesting of all. These jetties have great banks of stone with easy slopes and rounded tops, like those at the mouth of the Maas in Holland. The sand-bar which once obstructed this harbor has entirely disappeared, and now the inland harbor of Tampico is one of the most important on the American continent. The cost of these improvements was over three millions of dollars, borne largely by the federal government and the Mexican Central Railway.

Thus there has been opened to Mexican shipping an inland harbor on the eastern coast, free from the storms which make the roadstead of Vera Cruz sometimes inconvenient and dangerous. And the new port of Tampico has already regular lines of steamers connecting it with New York, Mobile, Havana, and European ports. While this is the first inland port that has been opened on the eastern coast of Mexico, the western shore has good harbors; and by the Mexican Gulf Railway running northwestward to Monterey, and the branch of the Mexican

Central which runs through San Luis Potosí, the port of Tampico is brought into immediate communication with the great internal system of Mexican railways.

Tampico is the strong rival of Vera Cruz, which long had a practical monopoly of Mexico's external trade toward the east. The New York and Cuba Mail Steamship Company's line of steamers make direct weekly sailings between New York and Tampico.

The lands in the neighborhood of Tampico for a distance of several hundred miles are unsurpassed in fertility. A few hours' ride from the city brings the traveller into a great plain covered with a dense wood. All over this plain are scattered hundreds of flat-topped mounds, some moated and some with sides of stone slabs. It is supposed that these mounds were once



MARKET AT TAMPICO.

the foundations of houses of reeds or bark, of which all traces have utterly disappeared. Small vestiges of pottery and a few pieces of stone carving have been found in this wilderness, leading archaeologists to locate here a prehistoric race allied to the Mayas.

Aside from the commercial importance of Tampico, it is a popular beach-resort. The Gulf beach, several miles in extent, affords an opportunity for surf-bathing second to none on the Atlantic coast, and this, too, for every day in the year. As a resort this place offers special inducement for the erection of a modern American sea-side hotel, with the particular advantage that such a hotel would be remunerative all the year round.

Aside from the surf-bathing, Tampico is an ideal hunting and fishing resort. This is the home of the tarpon, as well as of almost all varieties of salt- and fresh-water fish. Seven miles out on the Gulf are the banks of the red snapper. The lakes and rivers in the vicinity are, during the winter months, literally covered with ducks, geese, swans, flamingoes, etc. In the