

CHAPTER XXIII

COAHUILA

COAHUILA lies just west of Nuevo León and east of the state of Chihuahua, having an area of fifty-eight thousand nine hundred and twenty square miles. It is the third largest state in the Mexican republic. The main line of the Mexican International Railway traverses the entire state. The population of this state is about one million and a quarter, and its resources are unbounded. Some of the richest mines in the republic are found within its limits; the Sierra Mojada mines, for instance, having an output of over twenty thousand tons a month, while in the Mula range there are mines yielding thousands of tons per month. The location of smelters within the republic has given an impetus to the mining of lower grades of ore, and thousands of tons are shipped monthly to the San Luis Potosí and Monterey plants. The location of large smelters on the line of the Mexican International Railroad and the opening of the Durango extension have opened mines of fabulous wealth. Sixty miles from Torreon is the famous Cuencame mining range.

A Belgian syndicate, under the name of the Compañía Carbón de Piedras Negras, is working the Fuente coal-mines. It has one hundred and thirty thousand acres of coal land, and has a tap line of two miles connecting the mines with the Mexican International Railroad.

Along the line of the Mexican International Railroad are some of the finest health and pleasure resorts in the world. Health-seekers should try Mexico's famous hot springs at Hermanas. The town nestles among the hills, and the location of the springs—some two hundred yards from the railroad track—is ideal. They are the largest springs of hot mineral water on the continent, and, flowing out of the hill-side, form a river of hot, clear water, which passes through the finest grove of guisache-trees in Northern Mexico. The natural temperature of the water is 110° F. Physicians recommend these waters in preference to those of the Arkansas springs. They "cure all," affording relief to all those who are afflicted by blood-poisoning, scrofula, rheumatism, etc. San Antonio's leading physicians recommend the water for cancer, as well as for the diseases just mentioned. Hermanas has other attractions. With unexcelled scenery, the climate is invigorating; there are no dews at night, and the dry but not hot atmosphere renders the place a consumptive's elysium. The mountains rising to the east and west, with their deep ravines, have plenty of game, and the pellucid waters of the Rio Salado repay the angler his casting there.

The surface of Coahuila is rough, several ranges of mountains crossing it from northwest to southeast. The only plain of any extent is on the western side, and is called the Bolsón de Mapimi, from its peculiar formation, having no opening except on the north. Several tribes of savage Indians live in this vicinity, and formerly interfered seriously with farming and mining interests. A large part of the state consists of rough, mountainous country, with much good grazing land.

In the Bolsón de Mapimi are the lakes Caiman and Parras. The river Mapimi flows into Caiman, and the Rio Grande del Parras into Parras. Other rivers tributary to the Rio Grande are the Salado, Sabinas, Toya, and Meteros; none of them are large. Silver-mines exist in the mountains, and offer great opportunities for development. The tillage lands yield abundantly of wheat, maize, and barley. In the southern part of the state are large maguey plantations, and the vicinity of Parras is famous for its vineyards and the excellent quality of their wine. Brandy of remarkably good quality is made there also. These, with coarse cloths and potteries, are as yet the principal products of Coahuila.

Saltillo, the capital of Coahuila, is reached by the Mexican National Railroad. It is a well-built city on the Rio Tigre, four hundred and thirty-five miles from the city of Mexico. The town, which now numbers some twenty thousand inhabitants, was founded in 1586, and incorporated as a city by Leon Vicario in 1827. The government house and the parish church are the chief edifices of interest. The annual fair held in Saltillo, lasting eight days, is largely attended from all parts of the state, and makes a general *fiesta* most popular with all. Saltillo is celebrated for its good wine and the many and brightly colored serapes, the pride of the Mexican's wardrobe, prized more highly than the overcoat of the American or the top-coat of the Englishman. To own a serape of Saltillo is to possess the best and most artistically woven in intricate colors that can be produced, with all the factories of Mexico striving to imitate those hand-woven in Saltillo. The climate of Saltillo is fine. The town is at its best in summer, and has claims as a resort at all seasons. There are an especially fine plaza and a cathedral. These and the long stone aqueduct which brings the city's water-supply from the mountains, the old French fort, the gardens, and the orchard, are objects of interest to the tourist.

A few miles south of Saltillo is the battle-field of Buena Vista. Still on the up-grade, the railway train reaches the summit at Carneros, where the company has a coaling station. At Carneros the descent to the plain commences. Just before leaving the hills the village of Gomez Farias is pointed out on the right, once the home of a noted brigand, and now inhabited by his better-behaved descendants.

In quest of a quiet, recreative spot yielding health and pleasure, where the days are bright and warm without being oppressive and the nights delightfully cool, one may well try the Mexican Alpine city of Parras. Flanked on the southwest by the magnificent mass of the Sierra Mojada, five thousand feet from base to summit, and on the other sides by mountain-chains of lower elevation, the upland valley in which Parras, like a "sleeping beauty," lies is



SEÑOR LIC. MIGUEL CARDENAS,
GOVERNOR OF COAHUILA.

one of the most charming in all Mexico. Its height above sea-level is five thousand and thirty-three feet; its mountain air is dry and invigorating; its temperature during the hottest month of the year 1889 was at the highest 88 degrees, and at the lowest 55 degrees—the very atmosphere to breathe after the somewhat relaxing summer heat of Southwest Texas. Parras has many attractions. Shady lanes, with rose-clad hedges, by running streams afford pleasant drives and walks; *tajos*, long and deep, tap the inexhaustible reservoirs of water underneath the adjacent hills, and a net-work of ditches irrigates the entire valley below. Extensive bodegas may be visited, where about six hundred thousand gallons of Parras wine are annually sold;



CITY OF SALTILLO.

and pure, undoctored wine can be had in the city at five cents per tumbler. But it is in July, August, September, and October that Parras is most attractive, for then its vineyards are laden with ripening grapes.

Parras is not vainly called the "Garden of Coahuila." It is a picturesque little paradise, an oasis in the desert, a rose in the crown of Mexico.

From Tescalco there is a full view of the beautiful valley of Parras. In front is the road from Paila winding through the hills. To the right lies the Hacienda del Rosario, with its cotton-mill, one of the largest in the republic, its immense vineyards, and its extensive bodega, in which every year are stored from twenty thousand to thirty thousand gallons of excellent wine. To the left is a range of the Sierra Madre, the highest peak of which boasts an elevation of ten thousand feet. Below lies Parras, the quaint little old Mexican town; it has about ten thousand inhabitants, and looks rather queer to American eyes. Its better houses are all built in Moorish style, the court-yard generally a flower-garden in the middle of the house, the rooms built

around it, windows and doors opening into it, and very few out upon the street. This is very characteristic of Mexican life, where you seldom see the ladies outside of the house, and where it is very difficult for a stranger to gain admittance into the family circle. The flat roofs are made of hard, stamped soil, and give generally sufficient protection, as there is very little rain here. The rainy season is in July, August, and September, with a nice shower in the afternoon which makes the air delightfully cool and bracing. Soon after the rain is over one can go everywhere, as mud is almost unknown. There is a cave with a wooden cross on it, where on the 15th of August, 1594, the first mass in this region was celebrated. Inside the cave there was



PLAZA DE SAN FRANCISCO, SALTILLO.

only room for the priest, his dusky congregation, consisting of Indians of different tribes, kneeling or standing outside among the rocks, some looking at the image of the Christian God with loving devotion, others with ill-concealed mistrust, comparing it mentally with fierce Huitzilopochtli, their god of war, to whom, every spring, were sacrificed thousands of human beings.

Tescalco is situated on the south side of the Plaza de Armas, a pretty square with ever-green trees and a sparkling fountain in the middle. The flower-beds are surrounded by rose-hedges, the broad walks between them paved with slate, just as it is brought from the quarry, in all manner of shapes. Even the floors of the houses are mostly made in this fashion. Nearly every house has its vineyard, and these, the wealth of Parras, stretch far out to the foot-hills. Many of these vineyards are hedged in by centifolia roses and elderberry, forming the lovely little lanes in which we so delight to ramble. A little white chapel on the top of a hill is the first sign of Parras, in whatever direction you approach. To reach it one must ascend a steep, rocky path, and pass through the strangely-shaped rock that crowns the hill, by a flight of