

CHAPTER XXVI

SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

EAST of Zacatecas and Aguas Calientes is San Luis Potosí, one of the most important states in the republic. It has an area of twenty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-nine square miles, and a population at the last census of about five hundred and forty thousand.

This state, lying in the most central position in the country and crossed from north to south and from east to west by important railways, is mostly free from mountains, lying principally in the temperate district. Coahuila and Nuevo León join it on the north; Tamaulipas and Vera Cruz on the east; Querétaro, Guanajuato, and Jalisco are its southern neighbors; and Zacatecas bounds it on the west. It is within touch by railway of all the trade-centres: Tampico and Vera Cruz give it ports through which to reach all Atlantic points, while the railways from Laredo, El Paso, and Eagle Pass make the United States a very near neighbor. Salado, Parida, Matehuala, Catorce, San Venado, Moctezuma, El Maiz, Salinas, Valles, and Rio Verde are among its jewels.

If there is any one country which is beautiful in its picturesque vegetation and useful for the products of that kingdom, it is the Huasteca of San Luis Potosí. There the highest trees give support to a multitude of creeping vines and to a swarm of vegetable parasites, which create an agreeable confusion and form obscure thickets where the foot of man has never yet penetrated. The multitudes of shades of color of the green leaves and the divers hues of the flowers, with the half-light produced in many places by the shade of the trees, allowing an occasional vista of purest blue sky; the silence of the bosks at certain hours of the day; the harmonious songs of the birds at the rising and the setting of the sun, are all poetical, and invite to meditation and the adoration of the Author and Source of so many marvels. The entire state is a gem of varied beauty, worth travelling thousands of miles to see.

In the towns to the southeast and east of the capital there are lands well adapted for agriculture. The enterprise which is directed to this class of work will find there every kind of products which temperate and torrid climates know, not only in cereals and fibre-bearing plants, but also in fruits and hard woods. In all portions of the state Indian corn is cultivated, as well as wheat and beans, all most useful as food for the inhabitants; but the branches of agriculture which have been most developed are the cultivation of coffee and that of tobacco. The coffee-plants number about four million, with a mean yield of forty thousand quintals. Sugar-cane is another of the products which are most abundant. In fine, having, as this state has, lands in all three climates,—cold, temperate, and torrid,—it can produce all the fruits of every zone.

In the rural districts, to the north and northwest, there is an abundance of cattle and sheep, yielding hides and wool. *Palmito*, the central tender part of a palm-tree grown in the

Huasteca, when cooked in any one of several manners, is an agreeable and nourishing food. The *hualpoy* is a species of bean having the flavor of peas. The *pimienta* of Tabasco is a stout and aromatic tree, the odor of which may be noted in various parts of San Luis. Its spherical fruit is like that of the ordinary pimienta; its leaves make an agreeable beverage like tea. The *mora*, which is exported in great quantities, is a stout tree, the wood of which yields a yellow dye; the *mohuite*, a dark velvet; the *ixquilt*, a blue. Among textile plants, besides the varieties of magueys and pitas, there is *jonote*.

In the different rivers fish are found in great abundance and large variety. They are not only handsome in appearance, but are declared by epicures to be of a very fine flavor, being fed by the many natural undergrowths.

Nature has been most prodigal in trees suitable for construction, as well as for cabinet-making. Some of these are peculiar to this district. Among them may be found the *chicol*, with dark brown wood, which when dry is like iron, and which petrifies when buried in a moist place.

In some of the mountainous parts there is no necessity for oxen or ploughing, a hoe being sufficient to enable the planter to raise a good crop,—corn, for instance. In the level country ploughs are used with oxen.

In the coffee district they use plants which have come up of themselves. The plant at the age of two years is in the best condition for replanting. In the moist months of winter it is transplanted where it will be shaded in the summer while growing. After it has a fair start, the overshadowing trees are pulled up in order to give the more important plants light and air. This and fencing with wood are the only labors necessary. A coffee plantation lasts many years when once started. I have seen plants thirty years old still bearing.

Rice is cultivated in some parts with the plough; no more care is required than to cut the plant. In Xilitla, Huehuetlan, Coscatlan, and Aquisman there is an abundance of this crop, which brings good prices. When it is ripe it is cut as wheat is, dried, threshed, and winnowed in the wind, a picturesque process that has died out in our country. Sugar-cane grows in abundance. It is crushed with rude wooden rollers, and the sugar and molasses are made in a primitive manner. Tobacco is exported from the state, but not in nearly as large quantities as it should be. Vanilla is very easily grown, and yields a large profit.

The mineral deposits throughout the state are already known, and there is considerable national and foreign capital invested in working the mines, and each year more American capital becomes interested. There are in the state seventy-two mines, of which forty-three are



SEÑOR GENERAL DON CARLOS DIEZ GUTIERREZ,
GOVERNOR OF SAN LUIS POTOSÍ.

in Catorce, twenty-five in Guadalcázar, and four in the capital. Of these, forty-eight produce silver, eleven lead, two copper, one sulphur, and ten mercury. The mines of San Pedro in this state were discovered in the middle of the sixteenth century, and it is they that have made the reputation of the state. There are here no regular veins, but metalliferous masses produce lead, oxide of iron, native silver, and sulphur, and almost all contain a trace of gold. The mining industry is notably progressive, and the "plants" for carrying it on are of the most modern type. The installations of the Concepción and Santa Nuna are most complete and costly. There is an immense metallurgical establishment at Morales, with five buildings and eleven furnaces. The state of San Luis produces over three million dollars of silver per year. Silver comes in considerable quantities from San Antonio de Guascama.

In the northern part of the state is Catorce, "The Silver City." Catorce means in Spanish fourteen, and these mines were discovered by a group of fourteen banditti. These are of the



PALACE OF THE GOVERNOR, SAN LUIS POTOSÍ.

most celebrated mines in Mexico. The great mining city is eight miles from the station of the same name, and since the discovery of queen silver, about 1780, the town has grown into a population of about twenty thousand. The plaza occupies the only level spot in the place. The mines are particularly interesting, with miles and miles of shafting and tunnelling. Enormous quantities of ore have been taken out, and still there is an annual output of several million dollars.

When we visited these mines we went on horseback, attended by one of the officials and a boy. The path is rugged and steep, but not dangerous, and gives a magnificent view of the town, stream, and cañon hundreds of feet below. Conducted by the proprietor of the mine

(which, by the way, in its first year produced one million six hundred thousand dollars), we inspected it thoroughly, and found it very interesting. We were conducted through a large iron gate across the patio into the warehouse, where we were struck by the extreme neatness of the place. With lights and guides we passed through the tunnel, which was at first like a cold-air passage, but afterward grew uncomfortably warm. As we proceeded we had to dodge the little cars that flew by with the rapidity of lightning, to dispose of their rich burdens. Once in the mines, every man was at his place, watching his part of the machinery with the utmost care.

Then we went down the shaft. It was like going down an elevator through the darkness of the Inferno into the very bowels of the earth. Once at the bottom and standing again on *terra firma*, we found another scene of strange and busy activity. But, alas, the activity grew less as the miners discovered our presence. Probably they had never seen two women down there before, and they feared terrible consequences, as there is a common superstition among the miners that a serious accident will surely follow a woman's visit to the mines. Indeed, while we were in Mexico City a band of thirty Indian miners walked all the way from the sulphur-mines of Popocatepetl, where they were working, because a woman had set foot in the place.

We could see no trace of silver on the sides of the gloomy black walls until small, greenish-mouldy spots were pointed out to us as indicating veins of silver. When we finally landed at the mouth of the shaft we felt that we had had an experience not to be missed for worlds, but not to be repeated if possible to avoid it.

Other important mines besides San Pedro (discovered about the middle of the sixteenth century) are Guadalcázar, Matehuala, Durazno, Cedral, and Salinas. The Concepción is worked by a powerful company, of which Governor Gutierrez is president. This is perhaps the most important and wealthiest in the state, seeming to be inexhaustible, although worked on an enormous scale, with a subterranean railway of its own. The mines of Charcas contain many minerals, and the salt-works of Peñon Blanco have made the fortune of their owners.

There is a large metal foundry, the most extensive on this continent, near the border of the state, which is proving valuable as an inducement to enlarge the workings in all these mines.

There are many manufactories in this state, especially in the capital, where are made soap, candles, varnishes, sombreros, tobacco, pottery, and wine. In the eastern towns are many small aguardiente stills and a few sugar-houses. The principal manufactures are cotton goods in Venado, wool in Santa Maria del Rio, linen in San Luis, and gilt and silvered articles.

The Mexican National Railway traverses the state from south to north, from the capital of the republic to Laredo, Texas, a distance of thirteen hundred and fifty kilometres. The trip from San Luis Potosí to Tampico affords one of the most delightful and interesting trips on the American continent. The views afforded passengers on this line are justly styled the "Swiss scenes of Mexico."

From San Luis Potosí, at an altitude of six thousand one hundred and eighteen feet above sea-level, the plain gradually slopes downward, by a series of terraces, cut through here and there by cañons giving passage for the watercourses descending from the table-land to the sea. Through one of these openings the train descends into and through the wild San Isidro valley, the mountain-sides of which are densely wooded. Soon after leaving Cardenas the road descends abruptly into the pleasant valley of Canoas, and thence enters the great cañon of Tamasopo. Winding along the shelf hewn in the sides of the almost perpendicular cliffs, around curves, and through a succession of tunnels, the train finally reaches the mouth of the cañon, where a magnificent view suddenly presents itself. Before and beneath spreads out a beautiful valley

encircled by mountains. Twelve hundred feet below is seen the dense, luxuriant tropical forest, interspersed with fields of growing cane and tropical fruits. Running along the almost perpendicular mountain-side, with grand cliffs towering above, there can be seen beneath, at three different places, the line of track over which the train is to pass before reaching the valley below. Here a new surprise awaits the traveller. He is passing through a coffee plantation. Under the giant trees, literally covered with an infinite variety of orchids, grows the coffee, with its



CHURCH AND FOUNTAIN AT GUADALUPE.

glossy evergreen leaves and bright red berries. Shortly after leaving Rascón the cañon called "Abra de Caballeros" is entered, at the mouth of which the river tumbles down a series of cascades over three hundred feet. These falls are called "El Salto del Abra." The water in the pools is of a lovely green color, which as it rushes over the falls appears turned into a snowy foam, presenting an effect long to be remembered. Just beyond the "Boca del Abra" the train passes, on an iron bridge, directly over an opening in the top of "Choy Cave," from which rushes, more than two hundred feet below, a beautiful stream of water, which winds its way through the valley toward the Gulf.

The Mexican Central system has another line from San Luis to the port of Tampico, four hundred and forty-six kilometres, said to be the finest piece of engineering in the republic. Both systems of railways have their stations respectively in the east and in the north of the Alameda, a few metres from the principal plaza, these being elegant edi-

fices, especially that of the National Mexican, without doubt the best in the country.

The railway from Vanegas to Rio Verde, a local enterprise, is in operation between Vanegas and Matehuala. Of similar origin is a line from Cedral to Potrero, the lines together amounting to seventy-two kilometres. This railway runs with great regularity, contributing principally to mercantile progress, and above all to the local improvement of mines.

Primary instruction is given in about nine hundred schools, of which seven hundred and eleven are public, ninety-one private, and nine sustained by religious associations. There is in the capital a college for secondary instruction, called "Scientific and Literary Institute," in which are followed the studies preparatory to the professions and the regular courses in medicine and law, and in topographical, geographical, hydrographical, mining, and mechanical engineering. In this institute there are thirty-one resident students and two hundred from outside. A normal school for male and one for female teachers have in the first thirty-nine students, all resident, and in the second sixty-eight, all non-resident.

An industrial military school, designed for the poorer class, has two or three hundred pupils, all receiving in the establishment primary instruction and devoting themselves to various trades,

which they are there taught. The printing and lithographic establishments of this school are the best in the city. The presses are steam-driven, and the director in each shop is most capable.

These pupils, as well as those in the normal schools, receive instruction in military tactics, in which they have shown great aptitude and proficiency. The students in each school receive board, clothing, and books free. In the industrial school there is a military band for young men and boys, conducted by a competent leader, who says that it is one of the best in the country.

In the school of arts and trades for girls are taught English and French and occupations adapted to the gentler sex, as millinery, flower-making, printing, lithography, and telegraphy. In this school there is a loom which is turning out satisfactory products, and some of the students have formed an orchestra, which is heard with great pleasure. All these establishments are supported by the government.

There are one civil, one military, and one children's hospital, the first supported by the state, the second by the general government, and the third by private means.

The capital of the state is San Luis Potosí. Other important towns are Valles, Matehuala, Venado, Guadalcázar, Rio Verde, Tamazunchale, Tancanhuitz, Santa Maria del Rio, Cerritos, Salinas, and Alaquinas, capitals of *partidos* or counties.

San Luis Potosí has a population of seventy-five thousand people, and is one of the most important business centres in the republic of Mexico. It is situated in a fertile valley surrounded by mountains rich in mineral wealth, and is the principal distributing point for a large section of Northern Mexico. The successful opening of the port of Tampico gives San Luis Potosí commercial advantages equal, if not superior, to those of any other city in the republic of Mexico. There is located at this point the smelting plant of the Compañía Metalúrgica Mexicana, the most extensive silver-lead reduction works on the North American continent.

This city may justly lay claim to a first rank among the cities of the Mexican republic. This is true whether she be considered from an historical, a political, or a commercial point of view. Founded in the days of the Spanish conquest, the geographical position of San Luis (almost in the centre of the great Northern Mexican plateau, some six thousand feet above the level of the sea) secured for her pre-eminence from the earliest times. She stands prominent in the country's history, colonial, imperial, and republican. The military commander, the political leader, the railroad or mining engineer, the commercial agent and capitalist, each in turn has made her the centre of his operations. The history of the city may to a great extent be read in its outward appearance. Grand old Spanish



CASCADE DEL SALTO, SAN LUIS POTOSÍ.