

CHAPTER XXXV

SONORA

NORTH of Sinaloa lies the state of Sonora, between the state of Chihuahua and the Gulf of California. Sonora has an area of eighty-one thousand and twenty-two square miles. All the eastern portion is extremely mountainous, and, as in Sinaloa, there are extensive western plains.

Sonora is noted for the longevity of its people. At the time of the discovery of America it was inhabited by the most vigorous and robust of all the Indians. The old Spanish explorers commented on the healthfulness of its climate, and in modern times there are few countries in the world where the death-rate is lower and the average age of the people is greater. These conditions extend even to the vegetable kingdom: diseases that trouble the fruit-growers so much in California and the north seem to lose their virulence under the bright sun and balmy sky of Sonora; and various orange scales, to which the Agricultural Department of the United States has devoted so much time and money in the vain effort to eradicate them, are unknown. There seems to be something in that dry but soft climate that conduces to universal health. The cattle industry is one of the most important in Sonora, and offers great opportunities to the farmer or other individuals who will go into stock-raising.

The Yaqui River is the largest stream in Northern Mexico, being four hundred and fifty miles long. It rises away up in the summits of the Sierra Madre, and its head-waters extend even into Arizona. The other principal rivers are the Mayo and the San José. All three empty into the Gulf of California, as, in fact, do all the waters of Sonora.

The water of the Yaqui has most wonderful fertilizing qualities. It is of about the color and consistency of chocolate. The material in suspension is so fine that it takes a long time to settle, and let the water stand as long as you will it never gets entirely clear. This silt or coloring matter thus carried in suspension is the richest kind of fertilizer. It is this that makes the valley of the Nile of an inexhaustible fertility; it is this that has enabled the Pima Indians to raise wheat in the valley of the Gila, in Arizona, for more than three hundred years on the same land without exhausting the soil and without supplying to it any other plant food than the water used for irrigation; and it is this that has made the Yaqui valley so rich and fertile.

There is no better land in the world. For fruits no lands can be better. Sonora already, notwithstanding the deficiency of its rainfall and the backwardness of its development, sends to Kansas City and Chicago the best oranges that are found in their markets, and all its fruits are celebrated wherever they are known. The banana, the cocoanut, the pineapple, and nearly all other tropical fruits reach a perfection here that they never have attained upon the Mediterranean, and the figs of Sonora are superior to those of Smyrna.

Sonora is, generally speaking, a mountainous state, but it is not by any means all mountain. The Yaqui and Mayo valleys bear a larger proportion to the whole state than does the Hudson

River valley to the Adirondack region of New York. All through, the percentage of mountains in Sonora is about double, and that of level land about half, what it is in New York State.

There is a difference, however, between our mountains and those of Sonora. Ours are for the most part barren of mineral wealth, but Sonora is the California of Mexico. Three hundred years ago the Jesuit Fathers, coming into this country to save the souls of the Indians, found its mountains full of silver and gold. Although concerned principally with the affairs of the world to come, they never entirely neglected the things of this world: so the priests became prospectors and their Indian neophytes were turned into miners. Laymen had to render an account and pay tribute to the crown on all their mines produced, but these pious explorers claimed exemption from all such burdens, and the world will never know how much gold and silver was shipped in those early days by the Jesuit Fathers to the Church of Rome.

There are traditions floating now all through the sierras and the Rockies of lost mines of fabulous wealth, and the credulous of both countries—and the Yankee can be quite as credulous as the Mexican—have been exploring these terrible cañons and hunting through these mountain fastnesses, chasing sunbeams everywhere, in the vain effort to find something that probably never existed.

But we can safely cast aside all these fancies. There is enough of actual riches easily to be found in these mountains to satisfy the wildest dreams of avarice, and Sonora has already shown that she is a state of great mineral resources.

There are numerous gold- and silver-mines in Sonora. All the products of the temperate zone flourish here, besides coffee and much fruit.

In a mining way Sonora offers a vast and virgin field to American capital. The great gold lode at Minas Prietas is but in the infancy of its development, and it has already produced many millions. Those who know assert that there are a number of such lodes in Sonora, which need only to be developed by the requisite capital to make them rivals of the Prietas lode, and nowhere in the world can mining operations be conducted more cheaply.

Gold-mines are found all over the state, especially in the Altar district, where so many well-known old gold-mines have been known to exist. With the certainty of saving nearly all the gold by using the by-products, as in South Africa and other parts of the world, many new efforts have been made. Las Prietas and La Dura are the most productive in Sonora now. Las Prietas group has a population of five thousand people, and La Dura and surrounding may have two-thirds as many. Lampasas, in Northeast Sonora, is a silver camp that promises to grow, with additional machinery contemplated by its owners.



BAY OF GUAYMAS.

Batuc, in Ures district, has two paying mines, newly discovered, which, with the employment of capital, will become very productive. These are of silver, with some gold.

Lead is being found in larger amounts than ever known before.

Copper is also a new product, notably the Nacozari discoveries.

Sonora, generally speaking, is well timbered and watered, and a very little coke added to the hard woods will furnish cheap fuel for lead smelting. In the great enterprises of irrigation, development, and cultivation of the natural resources in agriculture and horticulture there is a vast and virgin field to be occupied.

On the Yaqui River the Sonora and Sinaloa Irrigation Company, with Mr. Walter S. Logan, of New York, as president, has completed its canal, which will reclaim nearly four hundred



PRINCIPAL STREET IN THE CITY OF GUAYMAS.

thousand acres of land. But the great work of colonizing and bringing into productiveness all that vast tract of fertile soil remains to be done. Numerous similar projects of great magnitude and importance are capable of development in Sonora, none of which should be neglected or overlooked by American capital.

This early completion of the Yaqui Canal will produce a better state of things in that section, and safety to life and property. Most likely an extension of the railroad to that fertile section will follow.

The principal railway in the state runs from Guaymas northerly to Benson, Arizona, connecting with the Southern Pacific. This opens up one of the most fertile valleys of Sonora, together with some very picturesque scenery.

European banking-houses have long had their eyes fixed on the state of Sonora, which is

indeed, as a distinguished statesman has termed it, "the treasure-house of Mexico." President Diaz is lending his powerful influence to the construction of the railway which is projected from the main line of the Mexican Central at Chihuahua, and has undoubtedly had in view the realization of the predictions of eminent geological and mineral experts, who have pronounced Northwestern Mexico far richer in minerals than the older and better-known sections of the republic.

Sonora is divided into eight cantons,—Ures, Hermosillo, Guaymas, Alamos, Montezuma, Zagarita, Altar, and Magdalena. Nogales is the northern railroad terminus, and lies next to the United States.

Guaymas is surrounded by hills, and is a hot place. Before the railway reached it from Nogales the streets were dirty and narrow and the place was unhealthy, but it has much



GOVERNMENT PALACE, HERMOSILLO.

improved of late. The port is commodious, with excellent anchorage, and furnishes safe harbor for many vessels. It is the port of entry for Sonora and Chihuahua, and its foreign trade is very large. The Indians carry on a large fishery business, and the chief exports are wheat, flour, and hides.

Guaymas is one of the most important ports of Mexico. While there we had ample opportunity to see the beautiful girls for which the city is justly famous. They dress stylishly. Strange to say, light hair and blue eyes predominate, and there is many a fair head covered with Cleopatra-auburn hair. The water in the bay is beautiful, with more phosphorescence than I have ever seen elsewhere. Altogether, this was one of the loveliest ports we found in Mexico.

The most beautiful sight in all my travels was the view of the bay at night around Guaymas.