

CHAPTER XLII

TABASCO

TABASCO lies north of Chiapas and stretches along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, covering an area of twelve thousand seven hundred and sixteen square miles. It lies also between Campeche on the east and Vera Cruz on the west. The population is largely Indian, of a peaceful disposition, although Tabasco, like all the other Mexican states, is fast being developed by white men from various northern points. There are many lagoons and inlets along the coast, with the islands of Laguna Carmen

and Puerto Real. The surface is flat and marshy, except in the southern portion, where it rises toward the mountains of Chiapas and becomes more healthy.

The Usumasinta and Tabasco Rivers are the most important streams: these are navigable, carrying a large amount of freight, and being the principal thoroughfares of the state. Oak, cedar, ironwood, and mahogany abound. Coffee, cacao, sugar-cane, pepper, palmetto, tobacco, and rice are extensively cultivated, offering magnificent opportunities for further development. Corn yields three and often four crops a year in this land without a winter. Wild bees furnish large amounts of wax and honey, and indigo grows spontaneously.

The capital and largest city is San Juan Bautista. Cortez and the Spanish army discovered Tabasco and made a landing there before they went on to Mexico. Bernal Diaz speaks of the town of Tabasco, with its wooden walls. It was then a very populous place, with the better houses built of stone and lime, and the others of mud or adobe. The inhabitants, the Tabascan

Indians, gave proof of superior refinement as well as unusual valor. Their stout resistance, however, did not prevent Cortez and his soldiers from finally gaining possession and capturing it "in the name of the Crown." This he did with three sword-cuts on a large ceiba-tree,



GENERAL ABRAHAM BANDALA,
GOVERNOR OF TABASCO.

proclaiming aloud that he took possession of Tabasco in behalf of his Catholic sovereigns, and would defend and maintain it with sword and buckler. He did not find this so easy as he had hoped, for soon the whole adjacent country was ready for battle, and on the 25th of March

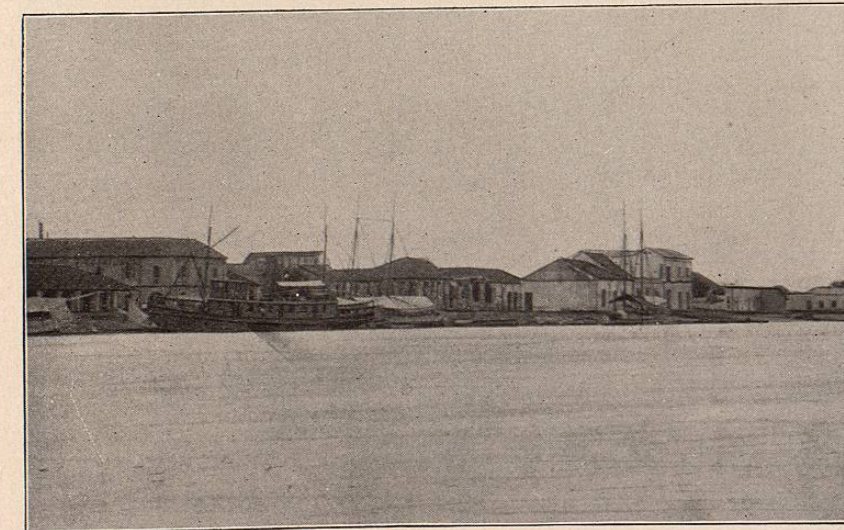
(Lady Day), 1519, a fierce contest was waged on the plains of Ceutla, a few miles from Tabasco. Even then this country was well irrigated with numerous ditches crossing off the land like a checker-board. Maize and cacao were growing in great abundance, and great plantations of them were fed by numerous canals and reservoirs of water, with only a narrow roadway between. Cortez's troops triumphed, however, after a fierce battle lasting some hours, and in the interchange of slaves following the great Spanish conqueror came into possession of the beautiful slave Doña Marina, who had so much influence in Mexican matters afterward.

Her father was a rich and powerful cacique, but died young, and her mother married again. In order to secure the estates for the son of this second marriage her mother sold Doña Marina into slavery; and after one or two changes she fell into the hands of Cortez, who first made her his interpreter, then his secretary, and finally his mistress. Afterward she had it in her power

to have her mother properly punished, but refused to do so. Her son, Don Martin Cortez, was Comendador of the Military Order of St. James. She always felt sympathy for the conquered race, and her name of Malinche (the Aztec word for Marina) was always remembered with kindness in Mexico. Many an Indian ballad commemorates her good qualities, and it is said that her gentle spirit even now watches over Mexico, and that oftentimes the spirit of an Indian princess is seen at



FARM-HOUSE, TABASCO.



PORT OF SAN JUAN BAUTISTA.

evening flitting among the grottos and groves around Chapultepec.

Many of the Spanish conquerors settled in Tabasco, others in the cordillera toward the rich slopes and valleys of Oaxaca. When Cortez endeavored to discover a strait in Central

America which should connect the great oceans, he again marched through Tabasco. He halted in Coatzacoalcos and hunted up a map of Tabasco. From there on to Honduras the Spanish army had a most discouraging time in the marshes and overflowed watercourses. They were obliged to build fifty bridges within a hundred miles, and one of them was more than nine hundred paces across. They found Iztapán, which was then a considerable village. They passed near the famous ruins of Palenque, and the village of Las Tres Cruces still has a trace of their visit in the three crosses which they left there. And yet, with all this, no description of the ancient capital is found in Bernal Diaz's or Cortez's accounts. Was it even then a heap of



STREET IN SAN JUAN BAUTISTA.

ruins mouldering in a mass of vegetation and hidden from the knowledge of the surrounding country?

Farther on, in the province of Aculán, was for many years the famous "Bridge of Cortez," which contained one thousand pieces of timber sixty feet long and the thickness of a man's body, and yet was built in four days. Until the present century this bridge stood as a monument of Cortez's commanding bravery and energy. It was in Aculán, too, that Cortez was informed that Guatemozin, the last of the Aztec chiefs, who had accompanied him from Mexico, had formed a conspiracy against the Spaniards. And in spite of his protestations, Cortez ordered his execution. He, with the chief of Tacuba and one or more inferior princes, was executed by being hung from a ceiba-tree beside the road. They had been "converted to Christianity," but died by the hands of those who converted them, and thus perished the last Aztec emperor.

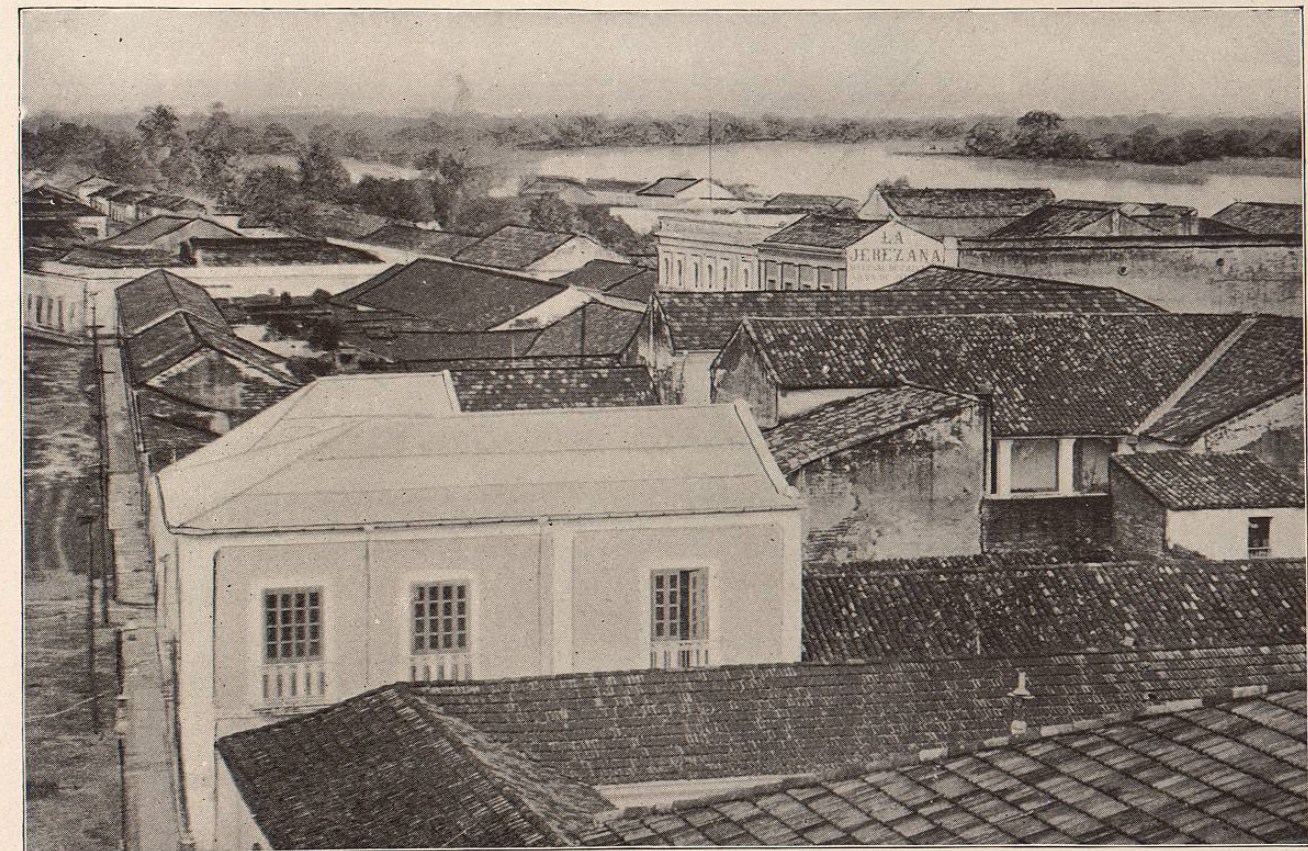
A good deal of the country is sloping and very much broken, but at least four-fifths could

be well cultivated. Coffee always requires a slope. The present population, which is sparse, consists principally of Indians. These people work faithfully and cheerfully at light work, such as coffee-gathering.

There is no finer country in the world awaiting development than this general slope. The rainfall is abundant. The climate is very healthy. Any observant man who will look at the Caucasian type of Mexicans among the scattered ranches of people born and raised there will find that they will compare favorably for bone, muscle, color, and physical strength with the best Mexican type. The water is plentiful, pure, and nearly always soft.

There is a good quantity of water-power available all through this state: the supply of it toward the wilder end of the slope is practically unlimited.

There is plenty of building-stone in the country. Part of the slope has an unlimited



SAN JUAN BAUTISTA.

quantity of marble of all colors. The state is especially attractive on account of the harmless, gentle, industrious nature of the few Indians that occupy it.

The trade of the state is controlled by Spaniards, who also own nearly all the steamers sailing under the Mexican flag in the Gulf of Mexico. They are all hard workers, and most of them fine fellows. They send home to Spain about a million dollars annually. A good many marry in the country, and their children are among the best types in the state.

This country unites all the conditions necessary for happy, reasonable living. The climate is temperate, the water excellent and abundant; there is plenty of timber and plenty of building-stone; it is a fine coffee, corn, cane, and cotton country.

The capital, San Juan Bautista, is on an island of volcanic origin thrown up in the midst of

the alluvial plain of the Grijalva, about sixty-five miles from the sea. It has a population of twelve thousand, and is provided with two street railroads and a first-class electric-light plant, comprising one hundred arc lamps and one thousand incandescents. The latter are extensively used in private houses. More than a million dollars have been put into new buildings since 1887, about half of that amount having been invested by foreigners, who would not be likely to place their money in turbulent communities. There has been only one burglary in San Juan Bautista for the last eight years, and that was committed by people from the interior.



GOVERNMENT PALACE, SAN JUAN BAUTISTA.

San Juan Bautista is almost a Yankee town in point of progress. All through that country we were impressed with what we have noted elsewhere, and that is the devotion of Mexicans to their dead heroes. The Mexicans have fine feelings, and perhaps nowhere is this better illustrated than in the regard thus shown for those whose gallant endeavor formed the cornerstone of their country's unparalleled prosperity.

The governor of Tabasco, General Abraham Bandala, is a hard-working and able functionary, to whose heart the interests of the people under his care are ever the first consideration.

CHAPTER XLIII

YUCATÁN

DOWN in the little strip of country between North and South America once flourished a rich and powerful empire. It marked a prehistoric millennium, for at the height of its development the empire had grown beyond warfare and capital punishment. There was no shedding of blood. The relics of its inhabitants, sculpture, and architecture challenge comparison with those of Greece. The

laws seem to have been far better than those of to-day. Its people had a literature from which other ancient nations seem to have borrowed copiously, if not always accurately. They were a physically perfect race, and theirs was the day of Methuselahs. Their religion forms the basis of the more modern religions. They worshipped one God, the creator of all things, and believed in the immortality of the soul. Their women were equal with the men, fighting with them side by side in battle, as well as sharing in all social, civil, and religious honors. It will thus be seen that the new woman is not so very new after all; she is something over ten thousand years old. The seat of this ancient empire, which included all the land of Tehuantepec to the Isthmus of Darien, was known as Mayax. Uxmal was the seat of government, while the centre of learning, the metropolis of the empire, was Chichen-Itza. To it came pilgrims from the adjacent country to see its glories and taste of its wonderful knowledge or to sacrifice in its grand temples.



LIC. CARLOS PEÓN,
GOVERNOR OF YUCATÁN.

Knowledge, as in all the old civilizations, was a matter of caste. The masses were taught in figurative language. The Mayan scholars had an excellent knowledge of geography, with primitive maps. It is not likely that the maps would be of much practical value to modern geographers, as the different countries were represented under the forms of certain animals or