

## CHAPTER XXVIII

Coaching—The old *diligencia*—The road to Chapala—Sunset on the lake—Some superb colourings—Seismic disturbances—Colima and its eruptions—Popocateptl—Climbing the volcano—Commercial possibilities—Architecture—Some notable buildings—Churches and the French war—Vandalism *in excelsis*—Pottery—Crockery from abroad—Ancient ruins—Palenque—Mitla—Cuernavaca.

I ARRIVED in Mexico too late to see the *diligencia* in the heyday of its glory and importance, when, ere the railroads came to dispossess it, it was the veritable "King of the Road," and its driver and conductor veritable princes. Whereas, in some parts of Mexico, the *diligencia* still maintains its precarious existence—as for instance as Chapala, whence a railway will ere long have dispossessed it—at one time, not so very long ago, every trip from one city to another had to be taken by this means. What these vehicles were like can be accurately gauged from the specimen in use at Chapala, a huge, lumbering, unwieldy vehicle, reminiscent of Colonel Cody's "Deadwood" coach, which at one time played so prominent a part in that splendid "show" of Buffalo Bill's at Earl's Court Exhibition.

I have ridden over many of the roads to the Colonial gold-fields in such coaches, actually from Kimberley to Bloemfontein, from Southern Cross to Coolgardie, and from Thames to Napier; I have enjoyed the rough but novel experiences and the jovial company of the drivers and the passengers, and no less did I enjoy the rolling, swaying, jolting old *diligencia* at Chapala, starting from the railroad station at Ocatlán. To my mind it was by far the most interesting part of the journey, in spite of the awful state of the road and the imminent peril in which all the passengers stood of breaking their necks at almost every turn of the cumbrous machine.

The expedition, indeed, was full of incidents, and sometimes realistically reminiscent of the bad old bandit days when the coach and its passengers made a sort of purgatorial journey from Scylla to Charybdis—if they escaped the bandits of the mountains they fell into the hands of those distinguished cut-throats, the "Platerados," who afterwards became "respectable"—comparatively speaking—and took service under the Government as the Rurales.

The coach running on the Chapala road has been doing service ever since the year 1876. How many times it has been robbed, upset and been relegated to the repair-shop, I should very much have liked to find out. It bore the marks of considerable wear and ill-usage upon every part of it; but still it held together with altogether wonderful pertinacity *malgré* the bumps, wrenches and the contortions of its wheels to which it was subjected during the several hours' exacting journey to Chapala.

In many ways the journey reminded me of my long-passed experiences while coaching in Zululand, in the Transvaal and in the Orange Free State. There was the hallooing, hoarse-voiced driver's deputy in place of the yelling Zulu or Kaffir *voerlooper*. There was the same 16-foot whip, called in South Africa the "sjambok," and wielded with much about the same deadly effect. There were the galloping team of mules once again, cunning beasts, ever on the alert for any temporary abstraction upon the part of the driver to drop into an aimless shuffle, and only again spurred to action by the combined volley of stones—kept under the driver's seat for just such an emergency—the swish of the terrible whip and the application of some awful Mexican swear-words, of which, it may be hoped, they did not know the meaning.

There was no slackness about that journey. It was hurry, bustle, noise and confusion—all delightfully interesting after the prosaic railway journey from Guadalajara—all the time. It passed much too quickly, and many of the passengers would like to have had it all over again. But it was not to be. Here we were at Chapala, and both man and beast—especially the beast—must partake of refreshment and rest while they can get them. Undoubtedly it is a long and trying pull for the team, which, all things considered, brings the coach between



the two points, and over a vile piece of road, in admirable time.

It scarcely needs the advantages of comparison to appreciate the beauties of a sunrise or a sunset in any part of the world. The Northerner who has seen the exquisite colouring of the aurora borealis is just as much impressed as he who has witnessed the tropical and semi-tropical skies of the South; and even he who has fortunately seen both would, in his remembrance, scarcely attempt to pit one scheme of colour-beauty against another.

In my own mind I do not know, and never shall know, where I have seen the most beautiful sunsets—in South Africa across the wide and open stretches of veldt and out beyond the majestic Limpopo mountains; in Egypt on the incomparable Nile; or in Jerusalem, where the glow of colour, spread across the sky to the hilltops of Bethlehem, produces a feast of beauty impossible of description; in the Himalayas, where the mystic loveliness of Indian atmosphere lends a distinctive charm all its own and unmatched anywhere else in the world; in dear old England, where, on a summer's evening, Milton's "Twilight Grey" plays so prominent and so sweet a part; or in Mexico, where the curiously subtle charm of surroundings makes itself manifest at no hour of the day more deeply than at sunset, when a stillness comes over all Nature which can be felt and almost touched. Nowhere can this insidious, indefinable charm be found more pronounced than on Lake Chapala.

Here in the months of June to October—the rainy season—are to be witnessed some gorgeous and unforgettable splendours, no two settings being the same, the golden glory of the sun receiving each evening a new and still more beautiful framing. Now it is a yellow and rose field with glintings of purple fire and mother-of-pearl interstices; again, a sky of emerald and topaz, with the fringes of a deeper sapphire and outrunners of vivid scarlet fading away on the mountain tops into a paler pink; or, yet again, following upon the almost daily thunderstorm, the sky is piled up high with huge banks of purple-coloured clouds, weird monsters assuming more fantastic shapes than human mind could conceive, golden-edged against the turrets and peaks and

battlements, moving and changing with such rapidity that no sooner has the eye grasped the beauty of one scene than it has changed with the marvellous precision of the kaleidoscope into another.

Flaming clouds are now rent asunder, and superb Sol himself flashes forth his parting rays upon the green and grateful earth, the flying segments orange-tipped and crimson-dyed, scudding quickly from before the dazzling splendour of the dying King of Day, and becoming but colourless vapour immediately his life-giving rays are withdrawn.

Down into a sea of seething crimson sinks the sun, and as his golden rim disappears the life and light of the world seem to go out with him. Of twilight there is none, and here no prismatic light holds long carnival in the air; a slight pause, almost imperceptible, and the but now furnace-glowing sky has become translucent and shimmering, ethereally beautiful with its grays and mauves and lace-like fleecy clouds, soon to reflect the pallid beauty of the rising moon, seen as a shadowy lamp poised well above the distant mountains. The black, velvety darkness of night is at hand, "the stars of the twilight" gleam faintly at first and then like lamps of purest silver,—and another day has gone.

The seismic disturbances in Mexico during the month of April last called the attention of the whole world to the only active volcano in the Republic—Colima. As a matter of fact, the volcano does not stand in Colima territory, but is located in the southern portion of the State of Jalisco, approximately about 75 miles from the nearest point on the Pacific coast, and in about the same latitude as the City of Mexico. By the time that the Mexican Central Railway Co's. extension work is completed it will be quite possible for tourists and travellers to visit this famous volcano, which affords one of the most beautiful spectacular shows in this part of the world. A portion of the extension between Tuxpan and Colima will pass within a short distance of the base of the volcano. The amount of attention paid to the mountain by the scientists and geologists from all parts of the world, who assembled in Mexico towards the beginning of last year, has caused it to become far better known than before.

Its activity dates back far into the past, long before the



Spaniards landed in Mexico, according to Indian traditions. It is a matter of history that the volcano has been more or less active since 1611. The mountain consists of practically two twin volcanoes, one active and the other extinct, the first known as Colima and the second as Nevada de Colima. The extinct cone stands 14,350 feet high, and the active one 12,728 feet. The existing terminus of the Zapotlán branch of the Mexican Central—Tuxpan—is only 10 miles from the base of the mountain, while the city of Colima is 27 miles to the south. Tonila, an Indian *puébla*, is immediately in the shadow of the mountain, and has been destroyed more than once during violent activity.

The Zapotlán earthquake of 1742 cannot be traced to any activity on the part of the Colima volcano, nor can that of March 25th, 1806, when hundreds of deaths took place from the earthquake, more than a thousand persons being crushed to death in one church alone, and at a moment when the sacred edifice was thronged with worshippers listening to the last of a series of missionary sermons preached by a priest of the Franciscan Order. Two years later the volcano manifested signs of renewed activity, but for the following ten years, viz., until February 15th, 1818, nothing unusual occurred. But on that date a violent eruption took place, the volcano throwing out thousands of tons of sand, which fell around for hours, ruining fields of sugar-cane and other products in the north and west of the volcano. Three months and sixteen days later, on May 31st, when the volcano was again comparatively quiet, the City of Guadalajara was shaken by an earthquake, and one of the great spires of the cathedral was thrown to the ground.

Between 1818 and 1869, a period of nearly 50 years, the mountain continued to smoke anew, but from a fresh opening some distance below the crest. From that time on until the latter part of 1871 the manifestations of activity were confined to the new crater, and in 1872 took the form of violent eruptions. In 1873 the old crater again commenced to discharge smoke and ashes, emissions from the new crater ceasing entirely, and two years later there was another period of extreme violence. There are also records of violent eruptions of the Colima volcano in the years 1877, 1885, 1889, 1891, and 1892.

In 1877 Chilpancingo, capital of the State of Guerrero, which was also seriously affected in the month of April last, was partially destroyed by earthquake, and a number of lives were lost. The City of Colima was severely shaken in January 1900, but without loss of life. Two years later, however, subterranean forces again attempted the destruction of Chilpancingo, several hundreds of people being killed and thousands made homeless. The most violent activity of Colima in recent years occurred in February and March 1903. A terrible state of affairs prevailed for several days, ashes from the volcano falling along the whole of the Pacific coast and ocean vessels many miles away from the shore and at points north, south and east of the volcano as far distant as 300 miles. Since March 1903 until April of this year the volcano has been smoking continuously, but no violent eruptions have taken place. The future history of the mountain cannot of course be predicted, but the record of the past few years leaves little doubt that there will continue to occur both eruptions and seismic disturbances.

Several attempts have been made within the past few years to deal with Popocatepetl as a commercial enterprise. In the month of November 1904, an American, Mr. A. H. Smith, was the main factor in an effort to secure Popocatepetl for an American Syndicate which was to be formed with a capital of \$5,000,000 (£1,000,000). The Company was to be organised under the laws of the State of New York, and the undertaking went so far that a General Manager was appointed in Mexico City, the idea being to work the rich sulphur deposits which are there located. Again in 1906 a small syndicate was formed in Mexico City for the purpose of authorising a thorough examination of Popocatepetl's sulphur deposits. The celebrated engineer, Mr. Harvey, an Englishman, was called upon to report, and although his verdict was of an encouraging nature, I understand that nothing has been definitely arranged in regard to the working of the deposits. At the foot of the mountain is an estate known as Popo Park containing a comfortable hotel managed by Captain Holt. It is practically a tourist rendezvous, as from here the ascent of Popocatepetl is begun. The ascent, though frequently made by tourists, including many ladies, is a very difficult and trying one, and no



one should attempt it without a guide. The scenery passed *en route* is exceedingly fine, the road leading through pine forests and across ranches with magnificent views of the snow-capped mountains, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl being almost continually in view. On the road up it is necessary to pass a night at the ranch house, the visitors sleeping on straw mats spread with their blankets, the pillows consisting of blocks of wood. Owing to the coldness of the atmosphere large fires are kept burning all night. Unfortunately, there being no chimneys, clouds of smoke pour into the room, causing considerable inconvenience and discomfort in spite of the cheerfulness which the fire affords. The journey to the summit commences at 4 o'clock in the morning in the summer and about 5 in the winter; a couple of hours later Cruces is reached, and here dismounting from the animals is necessary. The road leads through beds of gravel and ashes, and progress is slow on account of one's feet continually slipping backwards in this loose sand. Here a great many of the visitors become discouraged, and turn backwards without completing the ascent. Climbing is anything but attractive in the early part of the day on account of the coldness of the atmosphere and the bitter winds, and on the higher grade there is a danger of missing one's footing and losing one's balance; there is no place where one can sit down because of the deep snow, and the climbing must continue from hour to hour, the continual cry of "Vamaños" (Let us go) from the guides having to be attended to. At 200 feet from the summit the climber has usually had enough of it, but it is compulsory to go on. Then the rim of the crater is reached some six hours after the start. The crater is an enormous pit less than a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile in diameter, and visitors are taken down into it for quite a considerable distance. At the bottom is a pool of greenish water, while from numerous directions come jets of steam which rise to a considerable height. For 5 or 6 feet within the rim of the crater's mouth is usually a bed of rough ice, after which comes a bed of cool volcanic ashes several feet in depth. Descent into the crater can be made for a distance of 50 feet, but the further one goes down the more stifling become the sulphur fumes, which fill the crater with a nauseating gas.

The descent of the mountain side is much more expeditiously accomplished than the ascent, and from two to three hours will see the climber at the base Amecameca, whence to Popo Park is a comparatively short distance. I would strongly advise anyone who contemplates climbing Popocatepetl not to undertake the task on his own account or even to select his own guides. Regarding these, as was the case at Vesuvius before Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son took over the complete arrangements for the tourists, it is possible to fall into the hands of some who can not only be offensive in manner, but prove themselves very untrustworthy. By making arrangements with the necessary authorities this kind of experience can be avoided, and it is very necessary that it should be.

While Mexican architecture must ever be of considerable interest to Europeans and Americans visiting the country, it cannot be regarded as typical of any particular country or time, being, as a matter of fact, a mixture of many people and many periods. The touch of the Spaniard is naturally found everywhere, and while he built strongly and built vigorously, he lacked the delicate ideas and the beautiful execution of the Italian, the simple but effective style of the Greek, or the more graceful design of the Moor. The Aztec style of building already existed in profusion upon the Spaniards' advent, and thus we find an incongruous assimilation of the several distinct styles, one crude, substantial and ugly, another with all the characteristics of the barbaric structures of old Spain—the domes, the arches and the towers. The famous *patio*, or courtyard, is, strictly speaking, neither Aztec nor Spanish, nor yet wholly Moorish. But it is a permanent feature of all Mexican buildings, and, indeed, is very essential to the climate. Some authorities declare that the *patio* is Aztec; but if this is so, assuredly the arches which one sees in so many structures, private houses as well as churches, are not? Nevertheless they form a very handsome and welcome addition to the general crudeness and monotony of the buildings. The various influences which have been at work on Mexican architecture can best be seen, for instance, in the Cathedral of Mexico City, which has passed through the hands of five centuries of architects, all of whom have had their own ideas and methods of carrying them out, and yet whose combined

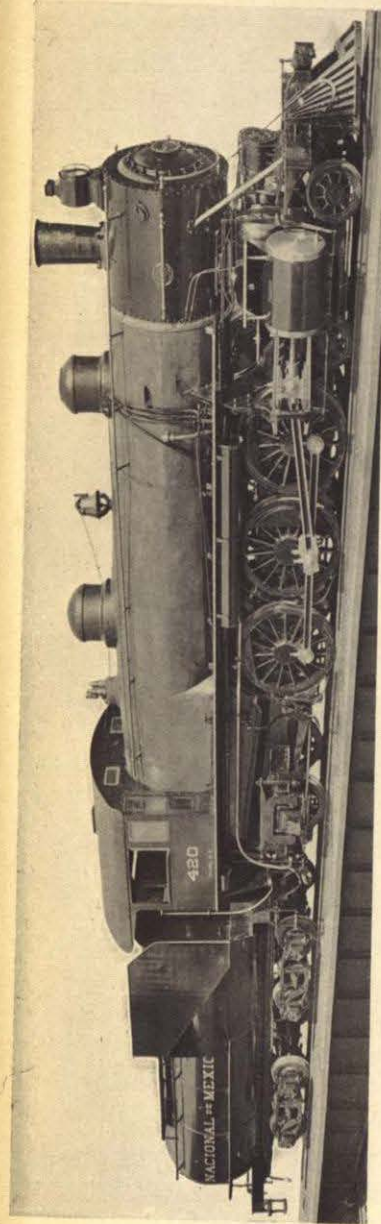


efforts are anything but inharmonious or disagreeable to the not too-critical eye.

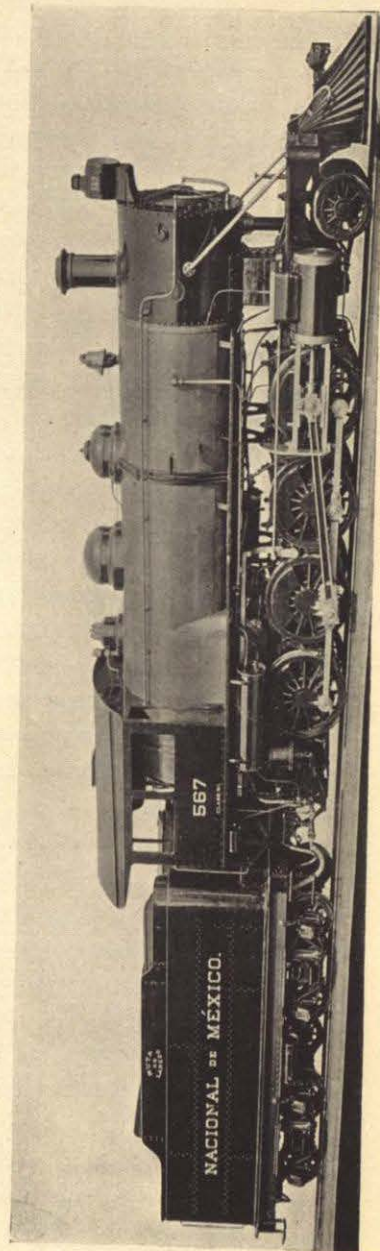
A specimen of many styles blended into one somewhat incongruous but interesting whole is to be found in the National Palace, on the east side of the Zocola, the public square, and containing the official cabinets of the Minister of Finance and Governor of the Federal District. The exterior is unattractive on account of its monotonous design and uncompromising lines; but here are to be seen the enormous *patios* or courtyards, many handsome staircases, some lofty and even noble apartments and several exceptional doors. The interior is not improved by some very prosaic mural paintings, while most of the ceilings are in very poor taste. The site was formerly occupied by the luckless Moctezuma's palace, so it is said, and which could scarcely have been less prepossessing in exterior, much though it excited the admiration and envy of the Spanish Conquerors. All of Cortes' soldiers are believed to have found shelter within its capacious walls.

The most elaborate of architecture seems to have been lavished upon the many cathedrals and churches which abound in Mexico, as in all Roman Catholic countries. The finest examples are found at Puebla, Querétaro, Oaxaca and Guadalajara. Silver altars, bronze-figures, tortoise-shell pulpits and marble pavements existed in countless number before the French invasion, many of the sacred edifices being ruthlessly stripped of their riches by the hands of vandals brought into the country by Bazaine, and who did more harm to the Republic's religious buildings than to the Republic itself. It has always been the Frenchman's pet method to revenge himself upon historic edifices—*vide* his foolish and purposeless attacks upon his own interesting Bastille and his beautiful Tuileries.

The student of ceramics would doubtless find much to interest him in the ancient pottery of Mexico, of which a great many genuine specimens—and more fraudulent ones—exist. In both design and execution Aztec potteries remind one of the ancient Egyptian to a remarkable degree, the colourings especially bearing a striking resemblance in their curious powers of endurance. The old Talavera ware is now becoming



NATIONAL LINES OF MEXICO. PASSENGER LOCOMOTIVE, BALANCE COMPOUND PACIFIC TYPE (1906).



NATIONAL LINES OF MEXICO. CONSOLIDATION LOCOMOTIVE TYPE, 1904. MANUFACTURED BY THE AMERICAN LOCOMOTIVE COMPANY, NEW YORK.—*see p. 281.*



very scarce, but antique jars, plaques and plaster figures are still common enough. Old Puebla ware also can be picked up occasionally. Every little market stall sells base imitations, for the Mexican is a close copier, but an indifferent originator. Pottery is made in many parts of the Republic, but most of the cheaper kinds of crockery come from Holland and Germany, the best being imported from England (Hanley and Stoke) and France.

In Mexico may be seen, scattered over the face of the vast territory—which covers some 1,987,201 sq. kilometres of superficial area—ruins older by many centuries than those of Chaldæa and Syria, of Karnac and Memphis, and more beautiful than those of the Temple of Ephesus—ruins which for antiquity defy the knowledge of the most able and experienced archæologists and which will continue to mystify the learned until the end of time. Neither a Fergusson nor a Choisy, neither a Perrot nor a Chipiez can tell us the history of the strange but evidently cultured races who built the marvellous great city of Palenque. The nearest approach to these ruins are the equally unknown and mysterious Anuradhapura ruins in Ceylon. So far as my limited knowledge extends, I should say that the Palenque remains are Mayan, there being an almost entire absence of the Grecque work found in the more recent Toltec architecture at Mitla.

The inference is that these massive remains were once a huge city, inhabited by a warlike race, some 6,000 or 7,000 years ago, contemporaries of Cheops and Cheffran in Egypt. These ruins are in the State of Chiapas, and very difficult of access. They are greatly overgrown, and no excavation of any kind has been attempted. The many subterranean galleries are alive with the deadly tarantulas (spiders of enormous size), bats, vampires and snakes. Temples and palaces, all built upon pyramids, each beautifully carved and sculptured, abound; flights of steps lead to once great halls and apartments, now roofless, each surrounded by suites of smaller but still spacious rooms; patios with huge monoliths and vast dungeons where the light of day could never in their pristine massiveness and solidity have penetrated. Now, huge rents and cracks let in an abundance of daylight, and show up in relief the thoroughness of the construction of



those remote and ghostly times. Weeks might be profitably and pleasurable spent in exploring Palenque, but few visitors to Mexico can afford the time or the expense of travelling so far away from the beaten track.

The ruins of Chichen-Ytza in Yucatán are no less fascinating, and are equally unknown as to origin. Undoubtedly they form part of what was once a great stronghold, the main ruins being, as in the case of Palenque, built upon lofty pyramids, the walls of which are from 60 to 70 feet high. The buildings are terraced, and contain innumerable apartments, halls and galleries, although the carvings and inscriptions are totally dissimilar to either those of Palenque or Mitla. There is, for instance, a still magnificent ruin of a stairway, 56 feet wide, and rising from floor to floor until the top of the pyramid is attained.

Some of the stone carvings, especially four corner stones elegantly carved, are like those found at the ruins of Uxmal. There is one small and isolated castle-building upon a pyramid, the latter measuring at the base, north and south sides, 196 feet 10 inches, and on the east and west sides 202 feet. It does not face the cardinal points, although no doubt intended to do so. On the ground, at the foot of a wide stairway, are two colossal serpent heads, measuring 10 feet long, with mouths distended and tongues protruding. Nearly all the structures are lavishly carved or painted in weird designs, in still brilliant colours—vivid red, yellow, blue and reddish-brown. There is a ruin of parallel rows of short stone columns, all of solid pieces, enclosing a space 400 feet square. The columns are too short to have supported a roof. What, then, *did* they support? If only we knew! But not an atom of information, not a shred of evidence exists to afford us even a slight inkling upon which to build a surmise or a theory. Completely have the ancients preserved their secrets, and never to us nor to any later generation will they be revealed.

The ruins of Mitla in Oaxaca, more recent as they are believed to be, are no less wonderful in their enormous extent and splendid preservation. The mosaics are in themselves worth taking such a journey to see. Here the Mexican Government have authorized further excavations to be under-

taken, and the fresh researches are not unlikely to bring some important facts to light. The ruins of Monte Alban, also in Oaxaca, are not dissimilar to those of Palestine. Here are to be seen the same style of workmanship in the construction of the monuments, the same object in view—namely defence—the same mounds and the same quantity of broken pottery scattered about.

Recently some further ancient Mayan ruins have been discovered at the village of Acanceh, close to the city of Merida, in Yucatán, which are being explored; while last May, Count Maurice de Périgny, the well-known French explorer, came across an entirely new find of Mayan ruins at Rio-Beque, in the Territory of Quintana Roo. Close to Aticomulco, near Cuernavaca (Morélos) are some vast ruins which were known to but little understood by the Spaniards upon their arrival, for near at hand Hernan Cortés built his palace and put up his first sugar-mill. About fifteen miles away are the ruins of the temple of Zochicalco, which Humboldt believed to be an Aztec fortress. Perhaps he was right; but it is mere conjecture. A great number of granite blocks are covered with closely-engraved hieroglyphics, but no one knows what they signify. The pyramids of Cholula and of the sun and the moon, as well as numerous other ruins in various parts of the Republic, exclusive altogether of the numerous splendid relics of the early Spaniards' days, would in themselves form the subject of a huge and fascinating volume. It is with keen regret that my limited amount of space, prescribed to mathematical limits by a hard-hearted and unsympathetic publisher, precludes me from doing other than merely mentioning them.