

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Introduction — Mexico, its Physical Geography — Aboriginal Peoples — The Nahua Race — Their Language — Original Home.

THE study of the civilisations of ancient Mexico and Central America is fraught with much more importance than would at first sight appear, as from the consideration of the histories of these communities we are enabled to trace the almost complete evolution of a race, absolutely isolated from the rest of mankind, through the various stages of savagery and barbarism to one of comparative advancement in the scale of human existence. Apart from its merely historical importance the subject must ever possess a deeply romantic interest from the very circumstances under which the race, whose antiquities we are about to examine, was isolated by the lapse of ages from the rest of the human family. The origin of these civilised peoples, their possible affinities with the various European and Asiatic

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racess, and the method by which they succeeded in reaching the new-found continent, were questions which agitated the scholars of Europe for many generations subsequent to the discovery of America, and if these problems do not appear so obscure as they once did, because of the labours recently lavished upon them by a band of able though widely dispersed scholars, they have at least lost none of the intense interest which must ever attach to them.

The area covered by the ancient Nahuatl or Mexican race, both in its fluctuant and settled conditions, extended in its utmost limits from British Columbia in the north to Costa Rica in the south, the principal theatre of the race being confined, however, to the Mexican plateau proper and its immediate vicinity, that is from the boundaries of Texas and New Mexico on the north to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec on the south. This plateau, which was known to them as Anahuac¹, is 69,000 square miles in extent, and from 6,000 to 8,500 feet above sea-level, including in its gradual elevation from the sea-coast all varieties of temperature, from the torrid heat of the tropics to a genial climate analogous to that of Italy. This elevation is formed by the mountain range of the Mexican Cordilleras which, near their highest point, the peak of Orizaba, divide

¹ "Near the water." The original allusion was to the vicinity of the lakes.

The races which inhabited Mexico before the coming of the Nahuatl were many and diverse. Commencing at the southern extremity of the country we find the Huasteca, a Maya-speaking people, who had long been settled about Tampico on the Mexican Gulf. The Mexicans named their territory Huastlan, or land of the tamarind, which grew there abundantly. To the northward of Vera Cruz on the Mexican Gulf dwelt the Totonacs, and at the estuary of the Tabasco river the Chontals. On the Pacific shore southward of Mexico the Mixtecâ and the Zapotecâ adjoined each other, while a tract of considerable dimensions was inhabited by the Tarascâ, who occupied a part of the modern province of Michoacan. The Coahuilcans also dwelt on the Pacific side. But the most

important aboriginal population of Mexico was that of the Otomi, who still occupy the plateau of the Guanajuato and Queretaro, and who, before the advent of the Nahua races, probably peopled the entire Mexican plateau. Their language is of the type known as "incorporative," that is, one word embraces several, and appears to have some affinity to the Athapascan dialect of British North America¹. It is probable, however, that these several peoples were themselves newcomers in the land. The Totonacs and Chontals were in all likelihood allied to tribes dwelling to the south-east of the Yucatan peninsula who spoke a similar language, and their migration to the lands they occupied was possibly effected from south to north by way of the Mexican Gulf. The Tarascâ claimed to be of the same stock as the Nahua, but their language and characteristics render this extremely doubtful. Here and there among the more secluded valleys are still found communities which probably represent a yet more archaic people. These are the Popolcan, Mixe, Chinantec, Zoque, Mazatec, Cuicatec, Chocho, and Mazahua, the latter allied to the Otomi.

The Ulmecs "People of the Rubber Land," and Xicalancans "People of the Land of Pumpkins," were also early settlers, and probably came from the Tierra Caliente or hot country near the eastern coasts of

¹ D. G. Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 38.

The Nahua peoples included all those tribes and confederacies speaking the Mexican language or Nahuatl¹tolli, and designated themselves "Nahuatlacâ," a term signifying "those who live in accordance with a settled rule of life." They appear to have extended in their geographical distribution, at various periods, from British Columbia on the north to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec on the south.

The Nahuatl tongue, or Nahuatl, was the language of a barbarism little removed from savagery, representing a low state of mental culture. It must be borne in mind that the Aztecs, from whom we get our ideas of the Nahuatl tongue, on their entrance to Anahuac (as they designated the Mexican plateau), were in a condition akin to mere savagery, and that they were simply the heirs of an older civilisation. The people who possessed this older culture were much more polished, and probably spoke a more cultivated dialect of the same tongue. If they did so, it is for ever lost to us. Like most other American languages Mexican belongs to the incorporative type. In all languages, every grammatical sentence conveys one leading idea, and "incorporative" language "seeks to unite in the most intimate manner all relations and modifications with the leading idea, to merge one in the other by altering

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the forms of the words themselves, and, welding them together to express the whole in one word, and to banish any conception except as it arises in relation to others¹."

Much difference of opinion exists as to the locality where the Nahua People originated or gained those characteristics and formed that language which entitles them to be regarded as a separate branch of the American Race. Those theories which would seek for them a southern origin may be summarily dismissed, as linguistic and ethnological research has discovered affinities between the Nahuatl and the tongues of existing northern peoples, notably to the Tsimshian Nootka-Columbian group, including the Wakash, Ahts, Haidah, and Quaquitl, all inhabiting British Columbia. This resemblance, however, is most marked as regards religious conceptions and artistic efforts. The early beliefs of the Nahua peoples centred round the worship of Quetzalcoatl, the Man of the Sun (see p. 58), who descended from the sun in the form of a bird, and resumed his human shape in order to instruct mankind in the arts of civilisation. This deity the Thlingit recognise as "Yetl," the Quaquitl as "Kanikilak," the Salish of the coast as "Kumsnöotl," "Quäaqa," or "Släalekam²."

¹ Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 19.

² *Brit. Assoc. 5th Rep. of the Committee on the N.W. Tribes of the Dominion of Canada*, 1889, pp. 29-51.

The resemblance between British Columbian art-forms and those of the Nahua is too striking to be accounted for in any other way than by a common origin¹. This applies especially to the art of sculpture, in which these northern tribes have acquired an unique and curious style. Marchand in his *Voyages* (Tom. II. p. 282) is so struck with this resemblance that he argues that the Haidah Indians must have arrived at their present seat from Mexico or Central America, and the substantial identity of the idol forms of Mexico with those still found in the Haidah lodges it is not possible to doubt, according to Payne (*op. cit.* Vol. II. p. 377). Nor is the advancement of these northern tribes of recent origin. Every circumstance indicates its remote antiquity, and a trustworthy investigator has remarked upon the prolonged isolation necessary for its development². The traditions of the Nahua as to the place of their origin would also appear to strongly fortify the theory that they first became a homogeneous racial family in the district of British Columbia. They universally described their ancestors as immigrants from the north, who had reached the Mexican plateau in successive swarms, by way of Xalisco, or the "Land of Sand." The name "Aztlán," so often met with in the writings of the Spanish historians of ancient

¹ Payne, *Hist. of the New World called America*, Vol. II. pp. 376-7.

² Boas, *Bull. Amer. Geo. Soc.*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 229.

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Mexico as the place of origin of the Aztecâ, is of doubtful value as a genuine remnant of ancient tradition, but "Tlapallan" and "Chicomoztoc" or "the Seven Caves," may represent Arizona or New Mexico. It is wholly unlikely that the Nahua swarmed into Mexico directly from British Columbia, and their traditions describe many stopping-places on the way where their forefathers sojourned for periods of longer or shorter duration¹.

CHAPTER II

THE MEXICAN PEOPLES

Probable Route of the Nahua Migration—The Toltec Question—
 The Chichimecâ—The Aculhuaque—The Tecpanecs—The
 Aztecâ—Other Races of the Mexican Plateau.

NAHUA legend which deals with the migrations of the race states that they had long dwelt in "Tlapallan," or "the Place of Bright Colours," described as a maritime country, which they reached by sea, coasting southwards along the shore of California. There is every reason to believe that their migrations took place by land, following the valleys and plains of the Rocky Mountains; yet there is a possibility that bodies

¹ *Vide* Chap. II.

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of the Nahua reached Mexico by canoe. There is no reason to doubt that the British Columbian tribes were early maritime adventurers; and the native god Quetzalcoatl is represented as being a skilful manager of the canoe, and as riding on a sea-monster¹.

The Toltecs, the first Nahuatl immigrants, says Ixtlilxochitl², the Texcucan chronicler, after their arrival from Chicomoztoc in the maritime country of Tlapallan or Huehuetlapallan, passed the country of Xalisco, and landed at the port of Huatulco, travelled by land until they reached Tochtepec or Tototepec on the Pacific coast, and from that spot worked their way inland to Tollantzinco. This migration, states the legend, occupied 104 years. "This account," says Payne, "undoubtedly exhibits a remarkable coincidence with the ethno-geographical facts distinguishing the coast alleged to have been passed along"; but he proceeds to state that in his opinion it was invented to account for the distribution of the language, or at least adapted to it, as "it seems incredible that an ethno-geographical distribution should to this day exist substantially unaltered which was effected by a migration alleged to have taken place before the foundation of Tollan³." Another legend of the Toltec migration agrees with the first in stating that Tlapallan, the northernmost station of

¹ Dresden Codex, pp. 25-45.² *Hist. Chichimeca*.³ *Hist. of the New World called America*, Vol. II. p. 420.

the immigrants, had been reached by coasting along the Californian shore, but differs as to the halting-places mentioned on the route. The most probable route taken by an immigrant tribe would appear to be directly south-eastwards over the plains of Chihuahua, Durango, and Zacatecas, until the plateau of Anahuac was reached, when they would descend to the Mexican Gulf in the east, and the Pacific shore in the west.

The question relative to the origin and identity of the Toltec race who are supposed at some distant period to have inhabited the plateau of Anahuac bristles with difficulties. Some authorities allow to them a merely legendary status; others insist that they were a semi-legendary race analogous to the Picts of Scottish history; whilst still others claim for them the full acknowledgment of a people with an undoubted historical position. These rival hypotheses we will briefly describe and sift:—(1) the legendary evidence as to their origin and history; (2) the theory of modern authorities that they existed solely as a figment of Nahua mythology; and (3) hypotheses regarding their historicity and authentic existence.

(1) Legends relating to the Toltec migrations have already been described and examined. In the Nahua mind the Toltecs were a people of cognate race to the Nahua themselves, and speaking the same language, who had either perished or been