A Visit to Mexico.

BY PROFESSOR BARDWELL.

I have been asked to write a short account of my trip to Mexico, and to give my impressions of the country. It would have been pleasant to take the reader along with us on our journey as we left Laredo, Texas, crossed the Rio Grande and entered the Republic of Mexico, thus getting our first sight of Mexican life and the strange, dark people in tall hats and bright-colored blankets.

For more than eight hundred miles we traveled across a desert, dreary but interesting, because of the changing lights and shadows which relieved the monotony of a landscape on which the only growing things were cactus and sage-brush.

As we went farther south, low foot-hills of the mountain range loomed up in the distance, coming nearer and nearer as we proceeded. We stopped at stations which consisted of one-story, flat-roofed stone buildings, near which invariably grew a few scrub palms. Some traveler has aptly called them “feather-duster stations,” because of the resemblance of this tree to a familiar household implement. Although the immediate surroundings of these stations seemed so bare and desolate, there must be a considerable population not far away; for at all of them stood Indians wrapped in their blankets, ready to ride away on their waiting ponies or burros when the train had gone.

As we rode along we realized that our engine was having a hard struggle; for we were climbing up the slope to the great plateau. At one point, as we looked ahead we saw a small building with a signboard on its ridge-pole, bearing the legend “Tropic of Cancer.” On the side of this building as we approached it we read the words “Zona Templada”; and as we passed it, looking back we read “Zona Torrida.” We had passed from the Temperate to the Torrid Zone.

During the long climb up the desert slope the character of the country had changed. It was more mountainous, and a greater variety in the vegetation gave evidence of increased moisture in the soil. The sage-brush had disappeared, and the common cactus had given way to the maguey or pulque plant, which became so prevalent as we neared the city of Mexico that there seemed to be little else growing on the ranches.

The evening before we arrived at our destination we entered the cañon of San Miguel de Olinda. Never had our eyes beheld so grand a sight. It might be compared to a familiar bit of New England scenery, by saying that it is a hundred Deerfield Valleys combined. As we twisted and curved down through the gorge, the river below us, the gray cliff above us and the “blue sky over all,” with the setting sun gilding the whole, one could but regret his lack of the artist’s skill to place upon canvas the wondrous beauty of the scene.

Some time during the night we reached the highest altitude,—ten thousand feet,—and then gradually descended until in the morning we reached the capital city, which is situated on a mountain-girt tableland more than seven thousand feet above the level of the sea.

So much has been said and written about the City of Mexico and that part of the Republic which lies near it, that I will not attempt a description. The city itself, which is built on the site of the ancient Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, is a place of wonderful beauty, where modern enterprise and art are transforming the architecture of past centuries without destroying its characteristic features, and where business methods are being revolutionized by American push and thrift.

Nowhere are the contrasts between luxury and squalor more marked than in this great city, where evidences of wealth and culture abound and the poverty of the poor is almost beyond the pen’s descriptive power. The government of the city is administered efficiently in all its branches as it is in a Federal district, and governed by the Congress in a manner similar to our own Washington, in the District of Columbia.

As the object of our journey was to reach the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, comparatively little time was spent at the capital. Leaving the high altitude of the plateau, we went by way of the Mexican Railway, the oldest in the country, to Vera Cruz, Mexico’s principal seaport. In this short distance of about two hundred miles one passes from an elevation of 7,200 feet to the sea level, leaving the rare atmosphere and coolness of the mountains