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# CONQUEST OF MEXICO.

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## BOOK I.

### INTRODUCTION—VIEW OF THE AZTEC CIVILISATION.

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### ANCIENT MEXICO—CLIMATE AND PRODUCTS—PRIMITIVE RACES—AZTEC EMPIRE.

OF all that extensive empire which once acknowledged the authority of Spain in the New World, no portion, for interest and importance, can be compared with Mexico;—and this equally, whether we consider the variety of its soil and climate; the inexhaustible stores of its mineral wealth; its scenery, grand and picturesque beyond example; the character of its ancient inhabitants, not only far surpassing in intelligence that of the other North American races, but reminding us, by their monuments, of the primitive civilisation of Egypt and Hindostan; and lastly, the peculiar circumstances of its Conquest, adventurous and romantic as any legend devised by Norman or Italian bard of chivalry. It is the purpose of the present narrative to exhibit the history of this Conquest, and that of the remarkable man by whom it was achieved.

But, in order that the reader may have a better understanding of the subject, it will be well, before entering on it, to take a general survey of the political and social institutions of the races who occupied the land at the time of its discovery.

The country of the ancient Mexicans, or Aztecs as they were called, formed but a very small part of the extensive territories comprehended in the modern republic of Mexico. Its boundaries cannot be defined with certainty. They were much enlarged in the latter days of the empire, when they may be considered as reaching from about the eighteenth degree north, to the twenty-first on the Atlantic; and from the fourteenth to the nineteenth, including a very narrow strip, on the Pacific. In its greatest breadth, it could not exceed five degrees and a half, dwindling, as it approached its south-eastern limits, to less than two. It covered, probably, less than sixteen thousand square leagues. Yet, such is the remarkable formation of this country, that though not more than twice as large as New England, it presented every variety of

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