

in later times by the name of Tezcucans, from their capital, Tezeuco, on the eastern border of the Mexican lake, were peculiarly fitted, by their comparatively mild religion and manners, for receiving the tincture of civilisation which could be derived from the few Toltecs that still remained in the country. This, in their turn, they communicated to the barbarous Chichimecs, a large portion of whom became amalgamated with the new settlers as one nation.

Availing themselves of the strength derived, not only from the increase of numbers, but from their own superior refinement, the Acolhuans gradually stretched their empire over the ruder tribes in the north; while their capital was filled with a numerous population, busily employed in many of the more useful and even elegant arts of a civilised community. In this palmy state, they were suddenly assaulted by a warlike neighbour, the Tepanecs, their own kindred, and inhabitants of the same valley as themselves. Their provinces were overrun, their armies beaten, their king assassinated, and the flourishing city of Tezeuco became the prize of the victor. From this abject condition the uncommon abilities of the young prince Nezahualcoyotl, the rightful heir to the crown, backed by the efficient aid of his Mexican allies, at length redeemed the state, and opened to it a new career of prosperity, even more brilliant than the former.

The Mexicans, with whom our history is principally concerned, came also, as we have seen, from the remote regions of the north, the populous hive of nations in the New World, as it has been in the Old. They arrived on the borders of Anahuac towards the beginning of the thirteenth century, some time after the occupation of the land by the kindred races. For a long time they did not establish themselves in any permanent residence; but continued shifting their quarters to different parts of the Mexican Valley, enduring all the casualties and hardships of a migratory life. On one occasion, they were enslaved by a more powerful tribe; but their ferocity soon made them formidable to their masters. After a series of wanderings and adventures, which need not shrink from comparison with the most extravagant legends of the heroic ages of antiquity, they at length halted on the south-western borders of the principal lake, in the year 1325. They there beheld, perched on the stem of a prickly pear, which shot out from the crevice of a rock that was washed by the waves, a royal eagle of extraordinary size and beauty, with a serpent in his talons, and his broad wings open to the rising sun. They hailed the auspicious omen, announced by an oracle as indicating the site of their future city, and laid its foundations by sinking piles into the shallows; for the low marshes were half buried under water. On these they erected their light fabrics of reeds and rushes; and sought a precarious subsistence from fishing, and from the wild fowl which frequented the waters, as well as from the cultivation of such simple vegetables as they could raise on their floating gardens. The place was called Tenochtitlan, in token of its miraculous origin, though only known to Europeans by its other name of Mexico, derived from their war-god, Mexitli. The legend of its foundation is still further commemorated by the device of the eagle and the cactus, which form the arms of the modern Mexican republic. Such were the humble beginnings of the Venice of the Western World.

The forlorn condition of the new settlers was made still worse by