

enthusiasm of the nation. Year after year saw them return, loaded with the spoils of conquered cities, and with throngs of devoted captives, to their capital. No state was able long to resist the accumulated strength of the confederates. At the beginning of the sixteenth century just before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Aztec dominion reached across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific; and under the bold and bloody Ahuitzotl, its arms had been carried far over the limits already noticed as defining its permanent territory, into the farthest corners of Guatemala and Nicaragua. This extent of empire, however limited in comparison with that of many other states, is truly wonderful, considering it as the acquisition of a people whose whole population and resources had so recently been comprised within the walls of their own petty city; and considering, moreover, that the conquered territory was thickly settled by various races, bred to arms like the Mexicans, and little inferior to them in social organisation. The history of the Aztecs suggests some strong points of resemblance to that of the ancient Romans, not only in their military successes, but in the policy which led to them.\*

## CHAPTER II.

SUCCESSION TO THE CROWN—AZTEC NOBILITY—JUDICIAL SYSTEM—LAWS AND REVENUES—MILITARY INSTITUTIONS.

THE form of government differed in the different states of Anahuac. With the Aztecs and Tezucans it was monarchical and nearly absolute. The two nations resembled each other so much, in their political institutions, that one of their historians has remarked, in too unqualified a manner indeed, that what is told of one may be always understood as applying to the other. I shall direct my inquiries to the Mexican polity, borrowing an illustration occasionally from that of the rival kingdom.

The government was an elective monarchy. Four of the principal nobles, who had been chosen by their own body in the preceding reign, filled the office of electors, to whom were added, with merely an honorary rank, however, the two royal allies of Tezcuco and Tlacopan. The sovereign was selected from the brothers of the deceased prince, or, in default of them, from his nephews. Thus the election was always restricted to the same family. The candidate preferred must have distinguished himself in war, though, as in the case of the last Montezuma, he were a member of the priesthood.† This singular mode of supplying the throne had some advantages. The candidates received an education which fitted them for the royal dignity, while the age at which they were chosen, not only secured the nation against the evils of minority, but afforded ample means for estimating their qualifications for the office. The result, at all events, was favourable; since the

\* Machiavelli has noticed it as one great cause of the military successes of the Romans, "that they associated themselves, in their wars, with other states, as the principal;" and expresses his astonishment that a similar policy should not have been adopted by ambitious republics in later times. This, as we have seen above, was the very course pursued by the Mexicans.

† This was an exception.—In Egypt, also, the king was frequently taken from the warrior caste, though obliged afterwards to be instructed in the mysteries of the priesthood.