

ceased to be a lacustrine city, and many of the surrounding swamps disappeared; but irregularities in the level of the lake, and the stagnation of sewage waters, made the town very unhealthy. A plan of drainage for remedying this state of affairs was begun in 1607 under the direction of Enrico Martinez, but for various reasons it was not carried out successfully, and in 1629 the city was overwhelmed by a disastrous flood. Of the 20,000 families who had their homes in the city, only 400 survived. For a time it was thought that Mexico should be abandoned, and that Puebla should be made the capital in its stead; but the plans of drainage were carried on for years without much method, and Mexico still held her position as capital of the country. The canals of drainage were not completed till towards the end of the nineteenth century, and were then not carried through the old cuttings, but were formed farther to the east. This *desague*, as the work is called, is the greatest drainage system and one of the most remarkable engineering enterprises in the world. It consists of a canal 43 miles in length, and a tunnel somewhat exceeding 6 miles, and it carries off the surplus waters of the whole Mexican basin into the River Tequizquiac, a tributary of the Tula, whence they flow by the Rio Panuco into the Gulf of Mexico. Partly as a result of this draining off of the waters of the lake, and partly as a result of a general desiccation of the surrounding regions, the lake has withdrawn, till now over two miles intervene between the lake-shores and the city.

The other inland drainage area lies north of the volcanic highland, and has been termed the Chihuahuan province of the great American desert, in contradistinction to the Soñora Nevada province to the west of the Western Sierra Madre. The lakes of this province are all of the ephemeral desert type. During the rainy season the waters which find no seaward outlet are collected in depressions on the plateaus, where extensive tracts, known as lagunas, remain flooded for several months at a time. But the waters are rapidly reduced in level by evaporation, and fluctuate greatly with the quantity of rainfall. At a very early period, when the rainfall of the country was greater, there was, according to Reclus,¹ an excess of water, which found its way to the course of the Rio Grande del Norte by valleys, where it is still possible to follow with the eye the old river-beds. Then, as precipitation became less, the outflow ceased, and the waters of the basins thus cut off gradually became salt. Many lakes have been entirely dried up, owing to the fact that the streams which fed them were lost through evaporation in the desert before reaching them. One reason given for this process of desiccation is the reckless destruction of the upland forests by

¹ *Le Mexique au début du xx^e siècle*, p. 55, Paris, N.D.