

CHAPTER IV

OBSERVATIONS OF THE INDIANS OF THE SAN MARTIN PAJAPAN REGION

The San Martín Pajápan area between Lake Catemaco and the coast is occupied almost exclusively by Indians speaking Nahuatl and Popoluca. The country is mountainous, rainy, and extremely fertile. The lower parts are covered with thick jungle; the higher, whether from clearing or through a change in soil, are open grass and oak country; while the slopes of the San Martín Volcano itself are covered with jungle and thick woods. This growth of jungle, a quantity of steep ridges and deep stream beds, and the mountainous quality of the interior have made it difficult of access and a natural refuge, for which reason, probably, it has been so well preserved to its original inhabitants.

At the time of the Conquest, Montezuma had Aztec garrisons at several points in this region. The Spaniards regarded it as part of the province of Coatzacoácos, and some of the Conquerors held land-grants in the area. Early descriptions of the area are meagre, and not until 1746 do we get much information about the towns and inhabitants. In that year, Villa-Señor y Sanchez published his book, "Theatro Americano . . ." and though he deals only with part of the towns, he gives us some idea of the fertility and general state of the district, for which reason we quote him here at some length.*

"CONCERNING THE JURISDICTION OF ACAYUCA AND ITS TOWNS†

The town of Acayuca (Acayucan) is the capital of the province of Guzacualco (Coatzacoácos) at a distance of 100 leagues from the city of Mexico. It is situated on the northern coast, but the district starts to the southeast. Its temperature is warm and humid, and the land so fertile that it gives four crops of corn a year; and, as this has no outlet to other jurisdictions, this same abundance of crop is the cause of the Indians being very little energetic in working, because to make their fields, they only have to cut the bush and make holes in the ground with pointed sticks, and they do the same with beans, without using plow or any other implement of cultivation. Here the Alcalde Mayor lives, together with the Governor and Officials of the Indian republic. Its population consists of 13 families of Spaniards, 296 Indians, and 70 of Mestizos and Mulatos. It has a district church with a priest and a vicar who speaks the Mexican language. This is a

*Villa-Señor y Sanchez, 1746. Chap. XXVIII., Page 366.

†Modern names are given in parentheses.