

TENTH INTERNATIONAL GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS

MEXICO, 1906.*

By WILLET G. MILLER.

The Tenth International Geological Congress is not wholly unknown even to people in this country who take little or no interest in geology or mining.

The audience may recall the attention which the Canadian newspapers gave to certain features of the Mexican Congress. One morning, for instance, it was announced with startling headlines that a distinguished congressman from Montreal had been overwhelmed by a volcanic outburst on Mount Colima. Another day telegraphic despatches told in no less terror-inspiring language of a snowslide on Mount Orizaba that carried with it a Toronto congressman three thousand feet to the depths below. Happily these despatches, copies of which with brief, but appreciative obituary notices I found in my scrapbook the other day, proved to be but fabrications of press agents, and all the members of the Canadian contingent returned to their native land, a little the worse for wear, perhaps, but still in a satisfactory state of convalescence.

In describing the Mexican Congress it will be well to note briefly various features of the work of organization, the excursions, the sessions, entertainments and finally the achievements or beneficial and lasting results of the congress. A knowledge of these features should be of value in making arrangements for the Canadian Congress, and in carrying out the work. Incidentally I shall refer to the natural attractions that Mexico had in 1906 for entertaining a large body of people. If it is decided that our country, compared with Mexico, is lacking in natural attractions or in facilities for entertaining, then we should attempt to make up for these in other ways. Personally I believe that Canada, while offering a great contrast to Mexico, will prove no less attractive to our visitors, and that the achievement of the Twelfth Congress will be of much importance to science and to their country.

The following passage from Prescott, describing the march of Cortez' conquering army nearly 400 years ago, from the sea to the valley of Mexico, shows the character of the scenery:

"Nothing could be more grand than the view which met the eye from the area on the truncated summit of the pyramid. Toward the north stretched that bold barrier of porphyritic rock which nature has reared round the Valley of Mexico with the huge Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl standing like two colossal sentinels to guard the entrance to the enchanted region. Far away to the south was seen the conical head of Orizaba soaring high into the clouds, and nearer the barren, though beautifully shaped Sierra de Malinché, throwing its broad shadows over the plains of Tlascala. Three of these are volcanoes, higher than the highest mountain peak in Europe, and shrouded in snows that never melt under the fierce sun of the tropics. At the foot of the spectator lay the sacred city of Cholula, with its bright towers and pinnacles sparkling in the sun, reposing amidst gardens and verdant groves, which then thickly studded

the cultivated environs of the capital. Such was the magnificent prospect which met the gaze of the conquerors, and may still, with slight change, meet that of the modern traveller as from the platform of the great pyramid his eye wanders over the fairest portion of the beautiful plateau of Puebla."

For some years many geologists had expressed the hope that a meeting of the Congress would be held in Mexico at a time convenient for the government of the country and the Mexican geologists. The publications of the Geological Institute of Mexico had shown that the country offered a vast field for geological studies of all kinds. Moreover, being such a beautiful land and so interesting from other points of view, its natural features having been so well described by Humbolt and its early history in the fascinating pages of Prescott, and possessing great mineral wealth and historic mines, offers unexcelled attractions to visitors, especially to those from more northern regions.

At the Ninth Congress, held in Vienna in 1903, the hope of having a meeting in Mexico was realized, it being decided to hold the tenth meeting in that delightful country. Canada had also sent an invitation to Vienna, but the attractions of Mexico and the hearty invitation extended by the Government and the Geological Institute won the day for the southern country.

The invitation having been definitely accepted, a Committee of Organization was formed. This committee solicited the co-operation of all geologists residing in Mexico, and of a certain number of mining and other industrial companies and finally that of the governors and high officials of various states of the Republic whose assistance would be valuable in the conduct of the excursions.

The Executive Committee was composed for the most part of members of the National Geological Institute (or Geological Survey), the president being the director of the Institute. The committee was charged with all the preparations for the Congress, both of a scientific and of a purely administrative character.

The organization committee had over ninety members among whom were the foreign directors of several companies, e.g., Sir Weetman D. Pearson and Mr. John Hayes Hammond. The executive committee consisted of twelve members.

Local committees were organized in various states of the Republic to assist with the work of the Congress and to arrange for receptions and other entertainments. In most cases, during the excursions the Governors of the states acted as chief hosts.

Financial Assistance.

In addition to other assistance, the Mexican Government made a grant of \$164,000, or \$82,000 in gold, for the expenses of organization, the arranging of excursions, the publishing of the guide book and for other purposes.

All the railways in Mexico gave important reductions, at least fifty per cent., in the price of transportation. Half fare rates from all points east of Buffalo, Pittsburg and Atlanta to Mexico and return were

*An abstract of this paper was read at the meeting of the Organization Committee of the 12th Congress in Ottawa in March. About six-sevenths of the time devoted to the 12th Congress will be occupied with excursions, which will be of as much interest and value to mining engineers or to geologists, hence the Congress might properly be called a "Mining and Geological Congress."