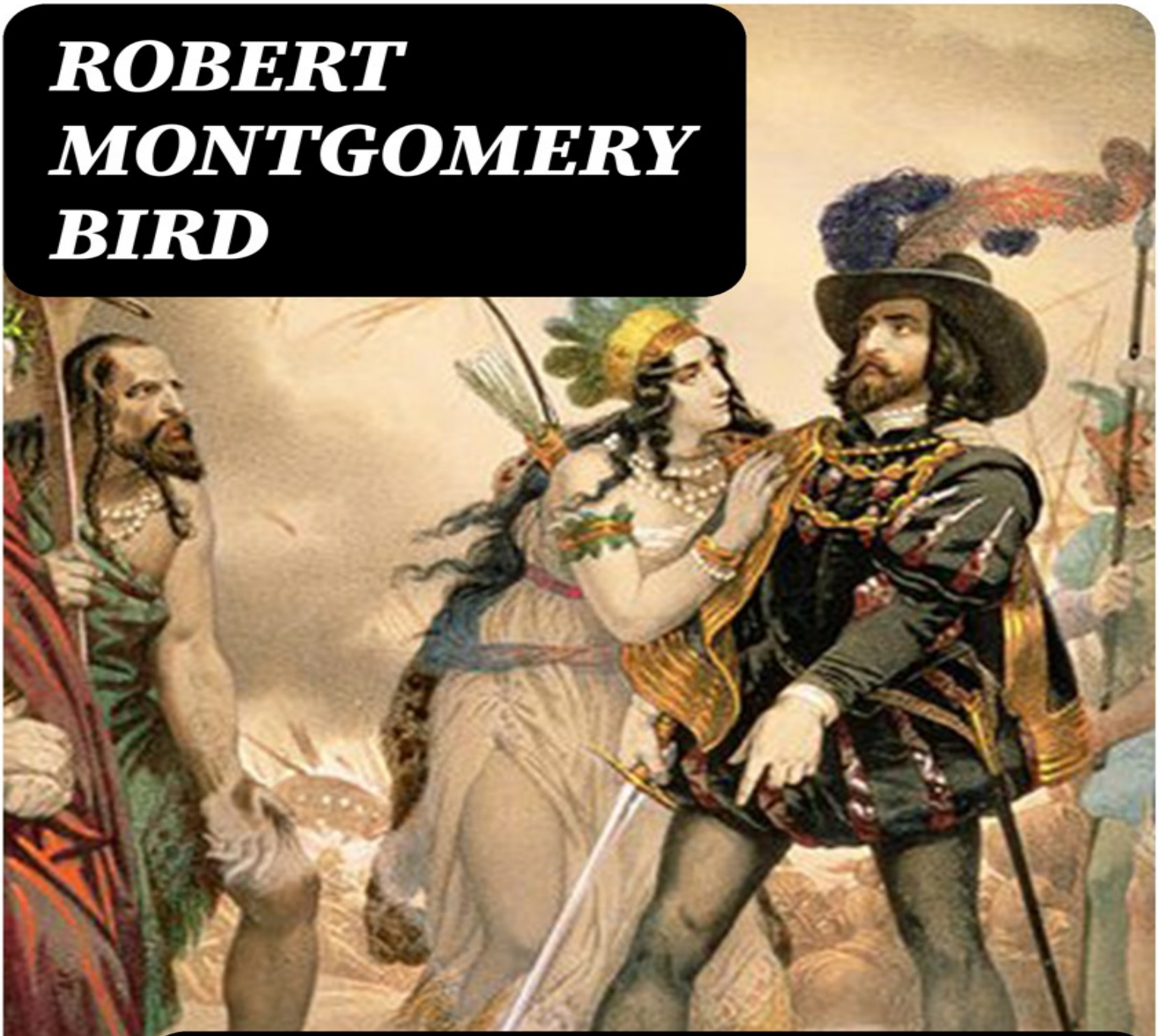
ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD



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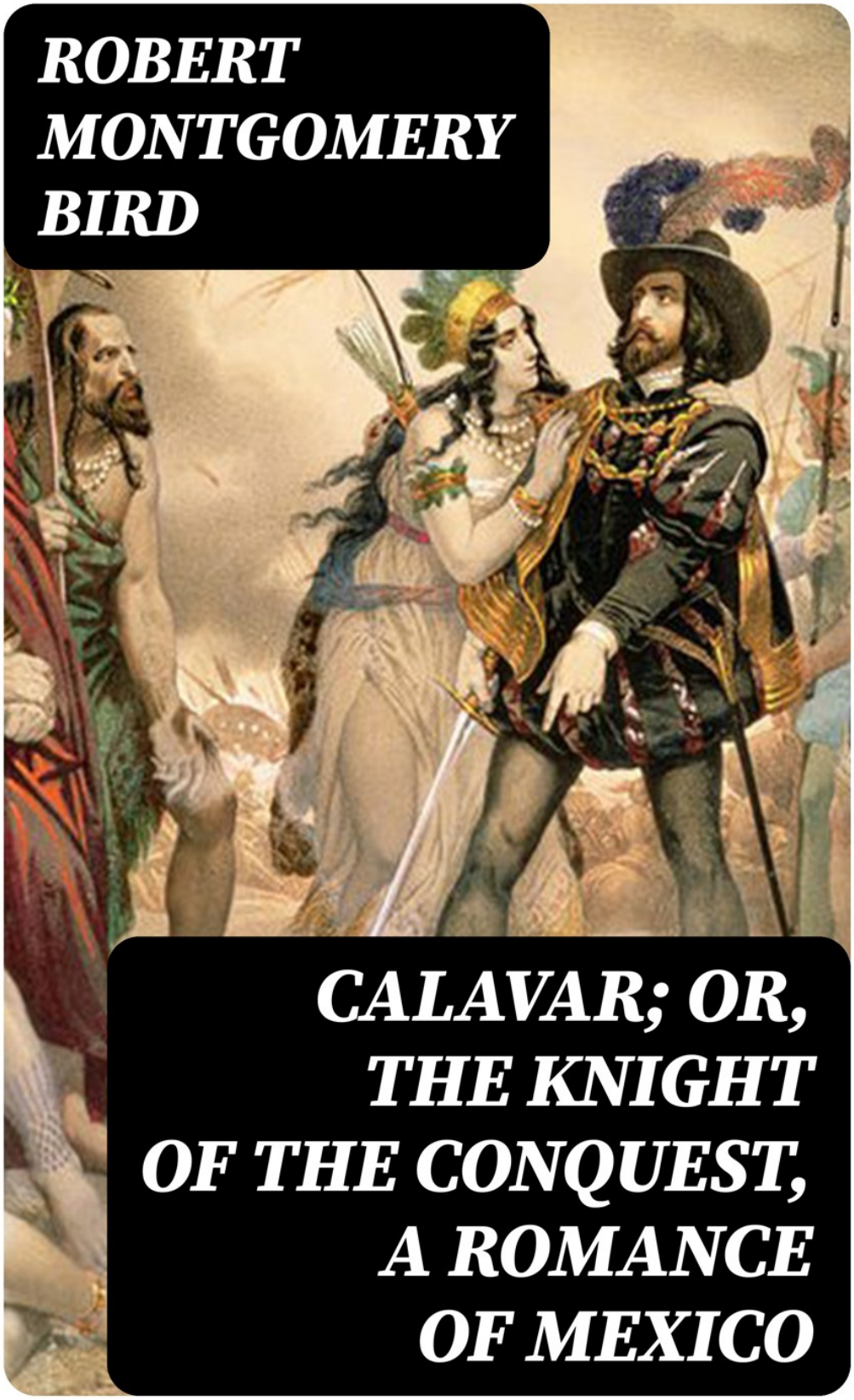

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INTRODUCTION.

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Nature, and the memory of strange deeds of renown have flung over the valley of Mexico a charm more romantic than is attached to many of the vales of the olden world for though historic association and the spell of poetry have consecrated the borders of Leman and the laurel groves of Tempe, and Providence has touched both with the finger of beauty, yet does our fancy, in either, dwell upon objects which are not so much the adjuvants of romance as of sentiment; in both, we gather food rather for feeling than imagination,—we live over thoughts which are generated by memory, and our conceptions are the reproductions of experience. But poetry has added no plenary charm, history has cast no over-sufficient light on the haunts of Montezuma; on the Valley of Lakes, though filled with the hum of life, the mysteries of backward years are yet brooding; and the marvels of human destiny are whispered to our ears, in the sigh of every breeze,—in the rustling of every tree which it stirs on the shore, and in the sound of every ripple it curls up on the lake. One chapter only of its history (and that how full of marvels!) has been written, or preserved; the rest is a blank: a single chain of vicissitudes, —a few consecutive links in the concatenation of events,— have escaped; the rest is a secret, strange, captivating, and pregnant of possibilities. This is the proper field for romantic musings.

So, at least, thought a traveller,—or, to speak more strictly, a rambler, whose idle wanderings from place to

place, directed by ennui or whim, did not deserve the name of travels,—who sat, one pleasant evening of October, 183-, on the hill of Chapoltepec, regarding the spectacle which is disclosed from the summit of that fair promontory.

The hum of the city came faintly to his ear; the church-towers flung their long shadows over the gardened roofs; the wildfowl flapped the white wing over the distant sheets of water, which stretched, in a chain, from Chalco to San Cristobal; the shouts of Indian boatmen were heard, at a distance, on the canal of La Viga, and the dark forms of others, trotting along the causeway that borders it, were seen returning to their huts among the *Chinampas*. Quiet stole over the valley; the lizard crept to his hole; the bat woke up in the ruined chambers of the viceroy's palace, that crowns the hill of Chapoltepec, or started away from his den among the leaves of those mossy, majestic, and indeed colossal, cypresses, which, at its base, overshadow the graves of Aztec kings and sultanas. At last, the vesper-bells sounded in the city, and the sun stooped under the western hills, leaving his rays still glittering, with such hues as are only seen in a land of mountains, on the grand peaks of Popocatepetl and the White Woman, the farthest but yet the noblest summits of all in that girdle of mountain magnificence, which seems to shut out Mexico from the rest of the world.

As these bright tints faded into a mellow and harmonious lustre, casting a sort of radiant obscurity over vale and mountain, lake and steeple, the thoughts of the wanderer (for the romance of the spectacle and the hour had pervaded his imagination,) crept back to the ages of

antiquity and to those mystic races of men, the earliest of the land, who had built their cities and dug their graves in this Alpine paradise, now possessed by a race of whom their world had not dreamed. He gazed and mused, until fancy peopled the scene around him with spectral life, and his spirit's eye was opened on spectacles never more to be revealed to the corporeal organ. It opened on the day when the land was a wilderness, shaking for the first time under the foot of a stranger; and he beheld, as in a vision, the various emigrations and irruptions into the vale, of men born in other climates. They came like the tides of ocean, and, as such, passed away,—like shadows, and so departed; the history of ages was compressed into the representation of a moment, and an hundred generations, assembled together as one people, rushed by in successive apparitions.

First, over the distant ridges of Nochistongo, there stole, or seemed to steal, a multitude of men, worn with travel, yet bearing idols on their backs, in whose honour, for now they had reached their land of promise, they built huge pyramids, to outlive their gods and themselves; and, scattering over the whole plain, covered it at once with cornfields and cities. The historian (for this unknown race brought with it science as well as religion,) sat him in the grove, to trace the pictured annals of his age; the astronomer ascended to the tower, to observe the heavens, and calculate the seasons, of the new land; while the multitude, forgetting the austere climes of their nativity, sat down in peace and joy, under the vines and fruit-trees that made their place of habitation so beautiful. Thus they rested and multiplied, until the barbarians of the hills,—the earlier

races, and perhaps the aborigines of the land,—descended to take counsel of their wisdom, and follow in the ways of civilization. Then came a cloud, bringing a pestilence, in whose hot breath the rivers vanished, the lakes turned to dust and the mountains to volcanoes, the trees crackled and fell as before a conflagration, and men lay scorched with the leaves, as thick and as dead, on the plain; and the few who had strength to fly, betook themselves to the hills and the seaside, to forget their miseries and their arts, and become barbarians.—Thus began, and thus ended, in Mexico, the race of *Toltecs*, the first and the most civilized of which Mexican hieroglyphics,—the legacy of this buried people to their successors,—have preserved the memory.

But the rains fell at last, the lakes filled, the forests grew; and other tribes,—the *Chechemecs* and *Acolhuacans*, with others, many in number and strangers to each other,—coming from the same distant North, but bringing not the civilization of the first pilgrims, sat in their seats, and mingling together into one people, began, at last, after long seasons of barbarism, to emerge from the gloom of ignorance, and acquire the arts, and understand the destinies of man.

To these came, by the same trodden path, a herd of men, ruder than any who had yet visited the southern valleys,—*Aztecs* in family, but called by their neighbours and foes, *Nahuatlacas*, or People of the Lakes,—consisting of many tribes, the chief of which was that which bore upon a throne of bulrushes an image of the god Mexitli, the Destroyer, from whom, in its days of grandeur, it took its name. From this crew of savages, the most benighted and blood-thirsty,

and, at first, the feeblest of all,—so base that history presents them as the only nation of bondmen known to the region of Anahuac, and so sordid that, in the festivals of religion, they could provide for their deity only the poor offering of a knife and flower,—fated now to fight the battles of their task-masters, and now condemned to knead the bread of independence from the fetid plants and foul reptiles of the lake;—from this herd of barbarians, grew, as it seemed, in a moment's space, the vast, the powerful, and, in many respects, the magnificent empire of the Montezumas. In his mind's eye, the stranger could perceive the salt Tezcuco, restored to its ancient limits, beating again upon the porphyry hill on which he sat, and the City of the Island, with her hundred temples and her thousand towers, rising from the shadows, and heaving again with the impulses of nascent civilization. It was at this moment, when the travail of centuries was about to be recompensed, when the carved statue, the work of many successive Pygmalions, was beginning to breathe the breath, and feel the instincts of moral animation, that a mysterious destiny trampled upon the little spark, and crushed to atoms the body it was warming. From the eastern hills came the voice of the Old World—the sound of the battle-trumpet; the smoke of artillery rolled over the lake; and, in a moment more, the shout of conquest and glory was answered by the groan of a dying nation.

As this revery ended in the brain of the stranger, and the conqueror and the captive of the vision vanished away together, he began to contrast in his mind the past condition of the new world with the present, and particularly

of those two portions, which, at the time of their invasion, had outlived the barbarism of nature, and were teeming with the evidences of incipient greatness. As for this fair valley of Mexico, there was scarcely an object either of beauty or utility, the creation of Christian wants or Christian taste, to be seen, for which his memory could not trace a rival, or superior, which existed in the day of paganism. The maize fields, the maguey plantations, the orchards and flower-gardens, that beautify the plains and sweeping slopes,—these were here, long ages ago, with the many villages that glisten among them,—all indeed but the white church and steeple; the lakes which are now noisome pools, —were they not lovelier when they covered the pestilential fens, and when the rose-garden floated over their blue surface? The long rows of trees marking the line of the great *Calzadas*, or causeways, the approaches to Mezico, but poorly supply the place of aboriginal groves, the haunts of the doe and the centzontli, while the calzadas themselves, stretching along over bog and morass, have entirely lost the charm they possessed, when washed, on either side, by rolling surges; even the aqueducts, though they sprang not from arch to arch, over the valley, as at the present time, were not wanting; and where the church spires of the metropolis pierce the heaven, the sacred tabernacles of the gods rose from the summits of pyramids. The changes in the physical spectacle among the valleys of Peru were perhaps not much greater; but what happy mutations in the character and condition of man, what advance of knowledge and virtue, had repaid the havoc and horror which were let loose, three hundred years ago, on the lands of Montezuma

and the Incas? The question was one to which the rambler could not conceive an answer without pain.

'The ways of Providence,' he murmured, 'are indeed inscrutable; the designs of Him who layeth the corner-stone and buildeth up the fabric of destiny, unfathomable. Two mighty empires,—the only states which seemed to be leading the new world to civilization,—were broken, and at an expense of millions of lives, barbarously destroyed; and for what purpose? to what good end? How much better or happier are the present races of Peru and Mexico, than the past? Hope speaks in the breath of fancy—time may, perhaps, teach us the lesson of mystery; and these magnificent climates, now given up, a second time, to the sway of man in his darkest mood,—to civilized savages and Christian pagans,—may be made the seats of peace and wisdom; and perhaps, if mankind should again descend into the gloom of the middle ages, their inhabitants will preserve, as did the more barbarous nations in all previous retrogressions, the brands from which to rekindle the torches of knowledge, and thus be made the engines of the reclamation of a world.'

The traveller muttered the conclusion of his speculations aloud, and, insensibly to himself, in the Spanish tongue, totally unconscious of the presence of a second person, until made aware of it by a voice exclaiming suddenly, as if in answer, and in the same language—

"Right! very right! *pecador de mi!* sinner that I am, that *I* should not have thought it, for the honour of God and my country!"

The voice was sharp, abrupt, and eager, but very quavering. The stranger turned, and perceived that the words came from a man dressed in a long loose surtout or gown of black texture, none of the newest, with a hat of Manilla grass, umbrageous as an oak-top. He looked old and infirm; his person was very meager; his cheeks were of a mahogany hue, and hollow, and the little hair that stirred over them in the evening breeze, was of a sable silvered: his eyes were large, restless, exceedingly bright, and irascible. He carried swinging in his hand, without seeming to use it much, (for, in truth, his gait was too irregular and capricious to admit such support,) a staff, to the head of which was tied a bunch of flowers; and he bore under his arm, as they seemed to the unpractised eye of the observer, a bundle of books, a cluster of veritable quartos, so antique and worn, that the string knotted round each, seemed necessary to keep together its dilapidated pages. The whole air of the man was unique, but not mean; and the traveller did not doubt, at the first glance, that he belonged to some inferior order of ecclesiastics, and was perhaps the curate of a neighbouring village.

"Right! you have said the truth!" he continued, regarding the traveller eagerly, and, as the latter thought, with profound veneration; "I must speak with you, very learned stranger, for I perceive you are a philosopher. Very great thanks to you! may you live a thousand years! In a single word, you have revealed the secret that has been the enigma of a long life, made good the justice of heaven, and defended the fame of my country. God be thanked! I am

grateful to your wisdom: you speak like a saint: you are a philosopher!"

The traveller stared with surprise on the speaker; but though thus moved by the abruptness of the address, and somewhat inclined to doubt its seriousness, there was something so unusual in the mode and quality of the compliment as to mollify any indignation which he might have felt rising in his breast.

"Father," said he, "reverend father—for I perceive you are one of the clergy——"

"The poor licentiate, Cristobal Johualicahuatzin, curate of the parish of San Pablo de Chinchaluca," interrupted the ecclesiastic meekly, and in fact with the greatest humility.

"Then, indeed, very excellent and worthy father Cristobal," resumed the stranger, courteously, "though I do not pretend to understand you——"

The padre raised his head; his meekness vanished; he eyed the traveller with a sharp and indignant frown:

"*Gachupin!*" he cried; "you are a man with two souls: you are wise and you are foolish, and you speak bad Spanish!—Why do you insult me?"

The stranger stared at his new acquaintance with fresh amazement.

"Insult you, father!" he exclaimed. "I declare to you, I have, this moment, woke out of a revery; and I scarcely know what you have said or what I have answered, or what you are saying and what I am answering. If I have offended you, I ask your pardon."

"Enough! right!" said the curate, with an air of satisfaction; "you are a philosopher; you are right. You were

in a revery; you have done me no wrong. I have intruded upon your musings,—I beg your pardon. I thank you very heartily. You have instructed my ignorance, and appeased my repining; you have taught me the answer to a vast and painful riddle; and now I perceive why Providence hath given over my native land to seeming ruin, and permitted it to become a place of dust and sand, of dry-rot and death. The day of darkness shall come again,—it is coming; man merges again into gloom, and now we fall into the age of stone, when the hearts of men shall be as flint. This then shall be the valley of resuscitation, after it is first *plenus ossibus*, full of skeletons, an ossuary—a place of moral ossification. Here, then, shall the wind blow, the voice sound, the spirit move, the bone unite to his bone, the sinew come with the flesh, and light and knowledge, animating the mass into an army, send it forth to conquer the world;—not as an army of flesh, with drum and trump, sword and spear, banner and cannon, to kill and destroy, to ravage and depopulate; but as a phalanx of angels, with healing on their wings, to harmonize and enlighten, to pacify and adorn. Yes, you have taught me this, excellent sage! and you shall know my gratitude: for great joy is it to the child of Moteuczoma, to know there shall be an end to this desolation, this anarchy, this horror!

Vigilare metu exanimis, noctesque diesque
Formidare:——

Came I into the world to watch in sorrow and fear for ever? *Hijo mio!* give me thy hand; I love thee. The vale of

Anahuac is not deformed for nothing; Christian man has ruined it, but not for a long season!"

The Cura delivered this rhapsody with extreme animation; his eye kindled, he spoke with a rapid and confused vehemence; and the stranger began to doubt the stability of his understanding. He flung his bundle to the earth, and grasped the hand of the philosopher, who, until this moment, was ignorant of the depth of his own wisdom. While still in perplexity, unable to comprehend the strange character, or indeed the strange fancies to which he had given tongue, the padre looked around him with complacency on the scene, over which a tropical moon was rising to replace the luminary of day, and continued, with a gravity which puzzled as much as did his late vivacity,—

"It is very true; I regret it no longer, but it cannot be denied: The cutting through yonder hill of Nochistongo has given the last blow in a system of devastation; the canal of Huehuetoca has emptied the golden pitcher of Moteuczoma. It has converted the valley into a desert, and will depopulate it.—Men cannot live upon salt."

"A desert, father!"

"Hijo mio! do you pretend to deny it?" cried the Cura, picking up his bundle, and thumping it with energy. "I aver, and I will prove it to your satisfaction, out of these books, which—But hold! Are you a spy? will you betray me? No; you are not of Mexico: the cameo on your breast bears the device of stars, the symbol of intellectual as well as political independence. I reverence that flag; I saw it, when your envoy, attacked by an infuriated mob, in his house in yonder very city, (I stole there in spite of them!) sprang upon the

balcony, and waved it abroad in the street. Frenzy vanished at the sight: it was the banner of man's friend!—No! you are no fool with a free arm, a licentious tongue, and a soul in chains. Therefore, you shall look into these pages, concealed for years from the jealousy of misconstruction, and the penal fires of intolerance; and they shall convince you, that this hollow of the mountain, as it came from the hands of God, and as it was occupied by the children of nature, was the loveliest of all the vales of the earth; and that, since Christian man has laid upon it his innovating finger, its beauty has vanished, its charm decayed; and it has become a place fitting only for a den of thieves, a refuge for the snake and the water-newt, the wild-hog and the vulture!"

"To my mind, father," said the American, no longer amazed at the extravagant expressions of the ecclesiastic, for he was persuaded his wits were disordered, "to my mind, it is still the most charming of valleys; and were it not that the folly and madness of its inhabitants, the contemptible ambition of its rulers, and the servile supineness of its people,—in fine, the general disorganization of all its elements, both social and political, have made it a sort of Pandemonium,—a spot wherein splendour and grandeur (at least the possibilities and rudiments of grandeur,) are mixed with all the causes of decline and perdition, I should be fain to dream away my life on the borders of its blue lakes, and under the shadow of its volcanic barriers."

"True, true, true! you have said it!" replied the curate, eagerly; "the ambition of public men; the feverish servility of the people, forgetful of themselves, of their own rights

and interests, and ever anxious to yoke themselves to the cars of demagogues, to the wires wherewith they may be worked as puppets, and giving their blood to aggrandize these—the natural enemies of order and justice, of reason and tranquillity; is not this enough to demoralize and destroy? What people is like mine? Wo for us! The bondmen of the old world wake from sleep and live, while we, in the blessed light of sunshine, wrap the mantle round our eyes, sleep, and perish! Revolution after revolution, frenzy after frenzy! and what do we gain? By revolution, other nations are liberated, but we, by revolution, are enslaved. 'Nil medium est'—is there no happy mean?"

"It is true," said the American. "But let us not speak of this: it is galling to be able to inveigh against folly without possessing the medicament for its cure."

"Thou art an American of the North," said the Cura; "thy people are wise, thy rulers are servants, and you are happy! Why, then, art thou here? I thought thee a sage, but, I perceive, thou hast the rashness of youth. Art thou here to learn to despise thine own institutions? Why dost thou remain? the death-wind comes from the southern lakes"—(in fact, at this moment, the breeze from the south, rising with the moon, brought with it a mephitic odour, the effluvium of a bog, famous, even in Aztec days, as the breath of pestilence;) "the death-wind breathes on thee: even as this will infect thy blood, when it has entered into thy nostrils, disordering thy body, until thou learnest to loathe all that seems to thee now, in this scenery, to be so goodly and fair; so will the gusts of anarchy, rising from a distempered republic, disease thy imagination, until thou comest to be

disgusted with the yet untainted excellence of thine own institutions, because thou perceivest the evils of their perversion. Arise, and begone; remain no longer with us; leave this land, and bear with thee to thine own, these volumes,—the poor remnants of another Sibylline library,—which will teach thee to appreciate and preserve, even as thy soul's ransom, the pure and admirable frame of government, which a beneficent power has suffered you to enjoy."

"And what, then, are these?" demanded the traveller, curiously, laying his hand on the bundle, "which can teach Americans to admire the beauty of a republic, and yet are not given to thine own countrymen?"

"They are," said the curate, "the fruits of years of reflection and toil, of deep research and profound speculation. They contain a history of Mexico, which, when they were perfect, that is, before my countrymen," (and here the Cura began to whisper, and look about him in alarm, as if dreading the approach of listeners,)—"before my countrymen were taught to fear them and to destroy, contained the chronicles of the land, from the time that the Toltecas were exiled from *Huehuetapallan*, more than twelve hundred years ago, down to the moment when Augustin climbed up to the throne, which Hidalgo tore from the Cachupins. A history wherein," continued the padre, with great complacency, "I flatter myself, though Mexicans have found much to detest, Americans will discover somewhat to approve."

"What is it," said the rambler, "which your people have found so objectionable?"

"Listen," said the padre, "and you shall be informed. In me,"—here he paused, and surveyed his acquaintance with as much majesty as he could infuse into his wasted figure and hollow countenance,—"in me you behold a descendant of Moteuczoma Xocojotzin."

"Moteuczoma what?" exclaimed the traveller.

"Are you so ignorant, then?" demanded the padre, in a heat, "that you must be told who was Moteuczoma Xocojotzin, that is, *the younger*,—the second of that name who reigned over Mexico?—the very magnificent and unfortunate emperor so basely decoyed into captivity, so ruthlessly oppressed and, as I may say, by a figure of speech, (for, literally, it is not true) so truculently slain, by the illustrious Don Hernan Cortes, the conqueror of Mexico? Perhaps you are also ignorant of the great names of Tizoc, of Xocotzin, and of Ixtlilxochitl?"

"I have no doubt," replied the American, with courteous humility, "that in the histories of Mexico, which I have ever delighted to read,—in the books of De Solis, of Clavigero, of Bernal Diaz del Castillo, and especially in that of Dr. Robertson,—I have met these illustrious names; but you must allow, that, to one ignorant of the language, and of the mode of pronouncing such conglomerated grunts, it must be extremely difficult, if not wholly impossible, to rivet them in the memory."

The curate snatched up his bundle, and surveyed the stranger with a look in which it was hard to tell whether anger or contempt bore the greater sway.

"De Solis! Diaz! Clavigero! Robertson!" he at last exclaimed, irefully. "*Basta! demasiado?* What a *niño*, a little

child, a *pobre Yankee*, have I fallen upon! That I should waste my words on a man who studies Mexican history out of the books of these jolterheads!"

The padre was about to depart, without bestowing another word on the offender. The American was amused at the ready transition of the curate from deep reverence to the most unbounded contempt. He was persuaded the wits of the poor father were unsettled, and felt there was the greater need to humour and appease him: and, besides, he was curious to discover what would be the end of the adventure.

"Father," said he, with composure, "before you condemn me for acquiring my little knowledge from these books, you should put it in my power to read better."—The padre looked back.—"What information should be expected from incompetent writers? from jolterheads? When I have perused the histories of father Cristobal, it will then be *my* fault, if I am found ignorant of the names of his imperial ancestors."

"*Ay de mi!*" said the curate, striking his forehead; "why did I not think of that before? *Santos santísimos!* I am not so quick-witted as I was before. I could forgive you more readily, had you not named to me that infidel Scotchman, who calls the superb Moteuczoma a savage, and all the Tlatoani, the great princes, and princesses, the people and all, barbarians! But what more could you expect of a heretic? I forgive you, my son—*you* are a Christian?"

"A Christian, father; but not of the Catholic faith."

"You will be damned!" said the curate, hastily.

"A point of mere creed, perhaps I should say, mere form —"

"Say nothing about it; form or creed, ceremony or canon, you are in the way to be lost. Open your ears, unbind your eyes—hear, see, and believe!—Poor, miserable darkened creature! how can your heretical understanding be made to conceive and profit by the great principles of philosophy, when it is blind to the truths of religion?"

"Reverend padre," said the traveller, drily, "my people are a people of heretics, and yours of Catholic believers. Which has better understood, or better practised, the principles of the philosophy you affect to admire?"

The padre smote his forehead a second time: "The sneer is, in this case, just! The sin of the enlightened is greater than the crime of the ignorant, and so is the punishment: the chosen people of God were chastised with frequent bondage, and finally with expatriation and entire dispersion, for crimes, which, in heathen nations, were punished only with wars and famine. But let us not waste time in argument: as babes may be made the organs of wisdom, so may heretics be suffered as the instruments of worldly benefaction. What thou sayest, is true; unbelievers as ye are, ye will comprehend and be instructed by truths, which, in this land, would be misconceived and opposed; and from you may the knowledge you gain, be reflected back on my own people. In these books, which I commit to you for a great purpose, you will learn who were those worthies of whom I spoke. You will perceive how Ixtlilxochitl, the king of Tezcuco, was descended from the house that gave birth to Moteuczoma. This illustrious name inherit I from my mother.

With its glory, it has conferred the penalty to be suspected, opposed, and trampled. Three historians of the name, my ancestors, have already written in vain; jealousy has locked up their works in darkness, in the veil of manuscript; the privilege of chronicling and perverting the history of the land is permitted only to Spaniards, to strangers, to Gachupins. Twenty years since, and more, the books I composed, wherein the truth was told, and the injustice of Spanish writers made manifest, were condemned by ignorance and bigotry to such flames as consumed, at Tezcuco, all the native chronicles of Anahuac. But what was written in my books, was also recorded in the brain; fire could not be put to my memory. Twenty years of secret labour have repaired the loss. Behold! here is my history; I give it to you.—My enemies must be content with the ashes!"

The padre rubbed his hands with exultation, as the traveller surveyed the bundle.

"Why should you fear a similar fate for these volumes, now?" said the latter. "Times are changed."

"The times, but not the people. Hide them, let no man see them; or the pile will be kindled again; all will be lost—I cannot repair the loss a second time, for now I am old! Five years have I borne them with me, night and day, seeking for some one cunning and faithful, wise like thyself, to whom to commit them. I have found thee; thou art the man; I am satisfied: *buen provecho*, much good may they do you,—not you only, but your people,—not your people alone, but the world! Affection for country is love of mankind; true

patriotism is philanthropy.—Five years have I borne them with me, by night and by day."

"Really, I think that this betokened no great fear for their safety."

The padre laughed. "Though the Gachupin and the bigot would rob me of a Spanish dissertation, yet neither would envy me the possession of a few rolls of hieroglyphics."

As he spoke, he knelt upon the ground, untied the string that secured one of the apparent volumes, and, beginning to unfold the MS., as one would a very nicely secured traveller's map, displayed, in the moonlight, a huge sheet of maguey paper, emblazoned in gaudy colours with all kinds of inexplicable devices. As he exhibited his treasure, he looked up for approbation to the American. The '*pobre Yankee*' surveyed him with a humorous look:

"Father," said he, "you have succeeded to admiration, under this goodly disguise, not only in concealing your wisdom from the penetration of your countrymen, but, as I think, the whole world."

The padre raised his finger to his nose very significantly, saying, with a chuckle of delight,—the delight of a diseased brain in the success of its cunning,—

"This time, I knew I should throw dust in their eyes, even though they might demand, for their satisfaction, to look into my work. You perceive, that this volume, done up after the true manner of ancient Mexican books, unrolls from either end. The first pages, and the last, of each volume, contain duplicates of the first and the last chapters, done in Mexican characters: the rest is in Spanish, and, I flatter myself, in very choice Spanish. *Hoc ego rectè*—I knew what I

was about.—One does not smuggle diamonds in sausages, without stuffing in some of the minced meat.—Here is the jewel!"

So saying, and spreading the sheet at its full length, so as to discover his hidden records, the padre rose to his feet, and began to dance about with exultation.

"And what am *I* to do with these volumes?" said the traveller, after pondering awhile over the manuscripts.

"What are you to do with them? Dios mio! are you so stupid? Take them, hide them in your bosom, as you would the soul of some friend you were smuggling into paradise. Leave this land forthwith, on any pretence; bear them with you; translate them into your own tongue, and let them be given to the world. If they do not, after they have received the seal of your approbation, make their way back to this land, they will, at least, serve some few of the many objects, for which they were written: they will set the character of my great ancestors in its true light, and teach the world to think justly of the unfortunate people from whom I have the honour to be descended; and, in addition, they will open the eyes of men to some of the specks of barbarism which yet sully their own foreheads. As for my countrymen, were it even possible they could be persuaded to spare these pages, and to read them, they would read them in vain. They are a thousand years removed from civilization, and the wisdom of this book would be to them as folly. The barbaric romance which loiters about the brains even of European nations, is the pith and medulla of a Mexican head. The poetry of bloodshed, the sentiment of renown,—the first and last passion, and the true test, of the savage

state,—are not yet removed from us. We are not yet civilized up to the point of seeing that reason reprobates, human happiness denounces, and God abhors, the splendour of contention. Your own people—the happiest and most favoured of modern days,—are, perhaps, not so backward."

The heretic sighed.—The padre went on, and with the smile of generosity,—tying, at the same time, the string that secured the volume, and knotting it again into the bundle.

"The profits which may accrue from the publication, I freely make over to you, as some recompense for the trouble of translation, and the danger you run in assuming the custody. Danger, I say,—heaven forbid I should not acquaint you, that the discovery of these volumes on your person, besides insuring their speedy and irretrievable destruction, will expose you to punishment, perhaps to the flames which will be kindled for them; and this the more readily, that you are an unbeliever.—Pray, my son, listen to me; suffer me to convert you. Alas! you shake your head!—What a pity, I am compelled to entrust this great commission to a man who refuses to be a Christian!"

"Buen padre, let us say nothing about that: judge me not by the creed I profess, but by the acts I perform. Let us despatch this business: the moon is bright, but the air is raw and unwholesome. I would willingly do your bidding, not doubting that the world will be greatly advantaged thereby. But, father, here is the difficulty:—To do justice to your composition, I should, myself, possess the skill of an author; but, really, I feel my incompetency—I am no bookmaker."

"And am I?" said the descendant of Moteuczoma, indignantly; "I am an historian!"

"I crave your pardon;—but *I* am not."

"And who said you were?" demanded the historian, with contempt. "Do I expect of you the qualifications or the labours of an historian? Do I ask you to write a book? to rake for records in dusty closets and wormy shelves? to decypher crabbed hands and mouldered prints? to wade through the fathers of stupidity, until your brain turns to dough, and your eyes to pots of glue? to gather materials with the labour of a pearl-diver, and then to digest and arrange, to methodise and elucidate, with the patient martyrdom of an almanac-maker? Who asks you this? Do I look for a long head, an inspired brain? a wit, a genius? *Ni por sueño*,—by no means. I ask you to read and render,—to translate;—to do the tailor's office, and make my work a new coat! Any one can do this!"

"Father," said the traveller, "your arguments are unanswerable; do me the favour to send, or to bring, your production to the city, to the Calle——"

"Send! bring! *Se burla vm.?*" cried the padre, looking aghast. "Do you want to ruin me? Know, that by the sentence of the archbishop and the command of the viceroy, I am interdicted from the city: and know that I would sooner put my soul into the keeping of a parrot, than my books into the hands of a messenger!"

"A viceroy, did you say, father? It has been many long years since a king's ape has played his delegated antics in Mexico. To please you, however, I will bear the sacred treasure in my own hands; earnestly desiring you,

notwithstanding your fears, which are now groundless, and the prohibition, which must be at this period invalid, to do me the favour of a visit, in person, as soon as may suit your conveniency; inasmuch as there are many things I esteem needful to be——"

The padre had seized on the hands of the speaker, in testimony of his delight; but before the latter had concluded his discourse, he was interrupted by a voice at a distance, calling, as it seemed, on the Cura; for this worthy, starting with fear, and listening a moment, suddenly took to his heels, and before the traveller could give vent to his surprise, was hidden among the shadows of the cypress trees.

"May I die," said the philosopher, in no little embarrassment, "but this lunatic Cura has left me to lug away his lucubrations,—his hieroglyphical infants, for which I am to make new coats,—on my own shoulders! Well! I can but carry them to the city, and seek some means of restoring them to his friends, or commit them to a more fitting depository. Pray heaven I meet no drunken Indian, or debauched soldado on my way."

By great good fortune, he was able, in a few days, with the assistance of a friendly Mexican, to solve the secret of the padre's confidence.

"You have seen him then?" said the excellent Señor Don Andres Santa-Maria de Arcaboba, laughing heartily at the grave earnestness with which his heretical friend inquired after the eccentric padre. "He offered you his hieroglyphics? Ah, I perceive! No man passes scot-free the crazy Cura. Ever

his books in his hand, much praise with the offer, and seven times seven maledictions when you refuse his bantlings."

"He *is* crazy, then?"

"*Demonios!* were you long finding it out? Ever since the old archbishop burned his first heathenish volumes, he has done naught but——"

"I beg your pardon.—Burn his books?—the old archbishop?—Pray enlighten me a little on the subject of the good father's history.

"'Tis done in a moment," said Don Andres; "the only wonder is that he did not himself give you the story; that being, commonly, the prelude to his petition. The mother of Don Cristobal was an Indian *damisela*, delighting in the euphonical cognomen of Ixtlilxochitl; a name, which, I am told, belonged to some old pagan king or other, the Lord knows who—as for myself, I know nothing about it. But this set the padre mad, or, what's the same thing, it made him an historian.—'Tis a silly thing to trouble one's noddle about the concerns of our granddads: let them sleep! rest to their bones—*Asi sea!*—They made him a licenciado, and then Cura of some hacienda or other, out among the hills—I know nothing about it. He wrote a book, in which he proved that the old heathen Montezuma, the great Cacique, was a saint, and Hernan Cortes, who conquered the land, a sinner. It may be so—*Quien sabe?* who knows? who cares? This was before the revolution—that is, before the first: (we have had five hundred since;—I never counted them.) Somehow, the viceroy Vanegas took a dislike to the book, and so did the archbishop. They set their heads together, got the good old fathers of the Brotherhood—(We have no Brotherhood now,