

that so enormous a fragment of porphyry could be thus safely carried for leagues, in the face of such obstacles, and without the aid of cattle, — for the Aztecs, as already mentioned, had no animals of draught, — suggests to us no mean ideas of their mechanical skill, and of their machinery; and implies a degree of cultivation, little inferior to that demanded for the geometrical and astronomical science displayed in the inscriptions on this very stone.²²

The ancient Mexicans made utensils of earthen ware for the ordinary purposes of domestic life, numerous specimens of which still exist.²³ They made cups and vases of a lackered or painted wood, impervious to wet and gaudily colored. Their dyes were obtained from both mineral and vegetable substances. Among them was the rich crimson of the cochineal, the modern rival of the famed Tyrian purple. It was introduced into Europe from Mexico, where the curious little insect was nourished

²² Gama, *Descripcion*, Parte 1, pp. 110–114. — Humboldt, *Essai Politique*, tom. II. p. 40.

Ten thousand men were employed in the transportation of this enormous mass, according to Tezozomoc, whose narrative, with all the accompanying prodigies, is minutely transcribed by Bustamante. The Licentiate shows an appetite for the marvellous, which might excite the envy of a monk of the Middle Ages. (See *Descripcion*, nota, loc. cit.) The English traveller, Latrobe, accommodates the wonders of nature and art very

well to each other, by suggesting that these great masses of stone were transported by means of the mastodon, whose remains are occasionally disinterred in the Mexican Valley. *Rambler in Mexico*, p. 145.

²³ A great collection of ancient pottery, with various other specimens of Aztec art, the gift of Messrs. Poinsett and Keating, is deposited in the Cabinet of the American Philosophical Society, at Philadelphia. See the Catalogue, ap. *Transactions*, vol. III. p. 510.

with great care on plantations of cactus, since fallen into neglect.²⁴ The natives were thus enabled to give a brilliant coloring to the webs, which were manufactured of every degree of fineness, from the cotton raised in abundance throughout the warmer regions of the country. They had the art, also, of interweaving with these the delicate hair of rabbits and other animals, which made a cloth of great warmth as well as beauty, of a kind altogether original; and on this they often laid a rich embroidery, of birds, flowers, or some other fanciful device.²⁵

But the art in which they most delighted was their *plumaje*, or feather-work. With this they could produce all the effect of a beautiful mosaic. The gorgeous plumage of the tropical birds, especially of the parrot tribe, afforded every variety of color; and the fine down of the humming-bird, which revelled in swarms among the honeysuckle bowers of Mexico, supplied them with soft aerial tints that gave an exquisite finish to the picture. The feathers, pasted on a fine cotton web, were wrought into dresses for

²⁴ Hernandez, Hist. Plantarum, lib. 6, cap. 116.

²⁵ Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS. — Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 7, cap. 15. — Boturini, Idea, p. 77.

It is doubtful how far they were acquainted with the manufacture of silk. Carli supposes that what Cortés calls silk was only the fine texture of hair, or down, mentioned in the text. (Lettres Améric., tom. I. let. 21.) But it is certain they had a species of caterpillar,

unlike our silkworm, indeed, which spun a thread that was sold in the markets of ancient Mexico. See the Essai Politique, (tom. III. pp. 66–69,) where M. de Humboldt has collected some interesting facts in regard to the culture of silk by the Aztecs. Still, that the fabric should be a matter of uncertainty at all shows that it could not have reached any great excellence or extent.

the wealthy, hangings for apartments, and ornaments for the temples. No one of the American fabrics excited such admiration in Europe, whither numerous specimens were sent by the Conquerors. It is to be regretted, that so graceful an art should have been suffered to fall into decay.²⁶

There were no shops in Mexico, but the various manufactures and agricultural products were brought together for sale in the great market-places of the principal cities. Fairs were held there every fifth day, and were thronged by a numerous concourse of persons, who came to buy or sell from all the neighbouring country. A particular quarter was allotted to each kind of article. The numerous transactions were conducted without confusion, and with entire regard to justice, under the inspection of magistrates appointed for the purpose. The traffic was carried on partly by barter, and partly by means of a regulated currency, of different values. This consisted of transparent quills of gold dust; of bits of tin, cut in the form of a **T**; and of bags of cacao, con-

²⁶ Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS. — Acosta, lib. 4, cap. 37. — Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 9, cap. 18-21. — Toribio, Hist. de los Indios, MS., Parte 1, cap. 15. — Rel. d' un gent., ap. Ramusio, tom. III. fol. 306.

Count Carli is in raptures with a specimen of feather-painting which he saw in Strasbourg. "Never did I behold any thing so exquisite," he says, "for brilliancy and

nice gradation of color, and for beauty of design. No European artist could have made such a thing." (Lettres Améric., let. 21, note.) There is still one place, Patzquaro, where, according to Bustamante, they preserve some knowledge of this interesting art, though it is practised on a very limited scale, and at great cost. Sahagun, ubi supra, nota.

taining a specified number of grains. "Blessed money," exclaims Peter Martyr, "which exempts its possessors from avarice, since it cannot be long hoarded, nor hidden under ground!"²⁷

There did not exist in Mexico that distinction of castes found among the Egyptian and Asiatic nations. It was usual, however, for the son to follow the occupation of his father. The different trades were arranged into something like guilds; having, each, a particular district of the city appropriated to it, with its own chief, its own tutelar deity, its peculiar festivals, and the like. Trade was held in avowed estimation by the Aztecs. "Apply thyself, my son," was the advice of an aged chief, "to agriculture, or to feather-work, or some other honorable calling. Thus did your ancestors before you. Else, how would they have provided for themselves and their families? Never was it heard, that nobility alone was able to maintain its possessor."²⁸

²⁷ "O felicem monetam, quæ suavem utilemque præbet humano generi potum, et a tartareâ peste avaritiæ suos immunes servat possessores, quod suffodi aut diu servari nequeat!" De Orbe Novo, dec. 5, cap. 4. — (See, also, Carta de Cortés, ap. Lorenzana, p. 100 et seq. — Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 8, cap. 36. — Toribio, Hist. de los Indios, MS., Parte 3, cap. 8. — Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS.) The substitute for money throughout the Chinese empire was equally simple in Marco Polo's

time, consisting of bits of stamped paper, made from the inner bark of the mulberry-tree. See Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo, gentil' huomo Venetiano, lib. 2, cap. 18, ap. Ramusio, tom. II.

²⁸ "Procurad de saber algun oficio honroso, como es el hacer obras de pluma y otros oficios mecánicos. Mirad que tengais cuidado de lo tocante á la agricultura. En ninguna parte he visto que alguno se mantenga por su nobleza." Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 6, cap. 17.

Shrewd maxims, that must have sounded somewhat strange in the ear of a Spanish *hidalgo*!²⁹

But the occupation peculiarly respected was that of the merchant. It formed so important and singular a feature of their social economy, as to merit a much more particular notice than it has received from historians. The Aztec merchant was a sort of itinerant trader, who made his journeys to the remotest borders of Anahuac, and to the countries beyond, carrying with him merchandise of rich stuffs, jewelry, slaves, and other valuable commodities. The slaves were obtained at the great market of Azcapozalco, not many leagues from the capital, where fairs were regularly held for the sale of these unfortunate beings. They were brought thither by their masters, dressed in their gayest apparel, and instructed to sing, dance, and display their little stock of personal accomplishments, so as to recommend themselves to the purchaser. Slave-dealing was an honorable calling among the Aztecs.³⁰

With this rich freight, the merchant visited the different provinces, always bearing some present of value from his own sovereign to their chiefs, and usually receiving others in return, with a permission to trade. Should this be denied him, or should he meet with indignity or violence, he had the means of resistance in his power. He performed

²⁹ Col. de Mendoza, ap. Antiq. of Mexico, vol. I. Pl. 71; vol. VI. p. 86. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 2, cap. 41.

³⁰ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 9, cap. 4, 10-14.

his journeys with a number of companions of his own rank, and a large body of inferior attendants who were employed to transport the goods. Fifty or sixty pounds were the usual load for a man. The whole caravan went armed, and so well provided against sudden hostilities, that they could make good their defence, if necessary, till reinforced from home. In one instance, a body of these militant traders stood a siege of four years in the town of Ayotlan, which they finally took from the enemy.³¹ Their own government, however, was always prompt to embark in a war on this ground, finding it a very convenient pretext for extending the Mexican empire. It was not unusual to allow the merchants to raise levies themselves, which were placed under their command. It was, moreover, very common for the prince to employ the merchants as a sort of spies, to furnish him information of the state of the countries through which they passed, and the dispositions of the inhabitants towards himself.³²

Thus their sphere of action was much enlarged beyond that of a humble trader, and they acquired a high consideration in the body politic. They were allowed to assume insignia and devices of their own. Some of their number composed what is called by the Spanish writers a council of finance ;

³¹ Ibid., lib. 9, cap. 2.

³² Ibid., lib. 9, cap. 2, 4.

In the Mendoza Codex is a painting, representing the execution of a cacique and his family, with the

destruction of his city, for maltreating the persons of some Aztec merchants. *Antiq. of Mexico*, vol. I. Pl. 67.

at least, this was the case in Tezcucó.³³ They were much consulted by the monarch, who had some of them constantly near his person; addressing them by the title of "uncle," which may remind one of that of *primo*, or "cousin," by which a grandee of Spain is saluted by his sovereign. They were allowed to have their own courts, in which civil and criminal cases, not excepting capital, were determined; so that they formed an independent community, as it were, of themselves. And, as their various traffic supplied them with abundant stores of wealth, they enjoyed many of the most essential advantages of an hereditary aristocracy.³⁴

That trade should prove the path to eminent political preferment in a nation but partially civilized, where the names of soldier and priest are usually the only titles to respect, is certainly an anomaly in history. It forms some contrast to the standard of the more polished monarchies of the

³³ Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 2, cap. 41.

Ixtlilxochitl gives a curious story of one of the royal family of Tezcucó, who offered, with two *other* merchants, *otros mercaderes*, to visit the court of a hostile cacique, and bring him dead or alive to the capital. They availed themselves of a drunken revel, at which they were to have been sacrificed, to effect their object. *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 62.

³⁴ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva España*, lib. 9, cap. 2, 5.

The ninth book is taken up with an account of the merchants, their pilgrimages, the religious rites on their departure, and the sumptuous way of living on their return. The whole presents a very remarkable picture, showing they enjoyed a consideration, among the half-civilized nations of Anahuac, to which there is no parallel, unless it be that possessed by the merchant-princes of an Italian republic, or the princely merchants of our own.

Old World, in which rank is supposed to be less dishonored by a life of idle ease or frivolous pleasure, than by those active pursuits which promote equally the prosperity of the state and of the individual. If civilization corrects many prejudices, it must be allowed that it creates others.

We shall be able to form a better idea of the actual refinement of the natives, by penetrating into their domestic life and observing the intercourse between the sexes. We have fortunately the means of doing this. We shall there find the ferocious Aztec frequently displaying all the sensibility of a cultivated nature; consoling his friends under affliction, or congratulating them on their good fortune, as on occasion of a marriage, or of the birth or the baptism of a child, when he was punctilious in his visits, bringing presents of costly dresses and ornaments, or the more simple offering of flowers, equally indicative of his sympathy. The visits, at these times, though regulated with all the precision of Oriental courtesy, were accompanied by expressions of the most cordial and affectionate regard.³⁵

The discipline of children, especially at the public schools, as stated in a previous chapter, was exceed-

³⁵ Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva España*, lib. 6, cap. 23-37. — Caramo, *Hist. de Tlascala*, MS.

These complimentary attentions were paid at stated seasons, even during pregnancy. The details are given with abundant gravity and minuteness by Sahagun, who de-

scends to particulars, which his Mexican editor, Bustamante, has excluded, as somewhat too unreserved for the public eye. If they were more so than some of the editor's own notes, they must have been very communicative indeed.

ingly severe.³⁶ But after she had come to a mature age, the Aztec maiden was treated by her parents with a tenderness, from which all reserve seemed banished. In the counsels to a daughter about to enter into life, they conjured her to preserve simplicity in her manners and conversation, uniform neatness in her attire, with strict attention to personal cleanliness. They inculcated modesty, as the great ornament of a woman, and implicit reverence for her husband; softening their admonitions by such endearing epithets, as showed the fulness of a parent's love.³⁷

Polygamy was permitted among the Mexicans, though chiefly confined, probably, to the wealthiest classes.³⁸ And the obligations of the marriage vow,

³⁶ Zurita, Rapport, pp. 112-134.

The Third Part of the Col. de Mendoza (Antiq. of Mexico, vol. I.) exhibits the various ingenious punishments devised for the refractory child. The flowery path of knowledge was well strewed with thorns for the Mexican tyro.

³⁷ Zurita, Rapport, pp. 151-160.

Sahagun has given us the admonitions of both father and mother to the Aztec maiden, on her coming to years of discretion. What can be more tender than the beginning of the mother's exhortation? "Hija mia muy amada, muy querida palomita: ya has oido y notado las palabras que tu señor padre te ha dicho; ellas son palabras preciosas, y que raramente se dicen

ni se oyen, las quales han procedido de las entrañas y corazon en que estaban atesoradas; y tu muy amado padre bien sabe que eres su hija, engendrada de él, eres su sangre y su carne, y sabe Dios nuestro señor que es así; aunque eres muger, é imágen de tu padre; ¿que mas te puedo decir, hija mia, de lo que ya esta dicho?" (Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 6, cap. 19.) The reader will find this interesting document, which enjoins so much of what is deemed most essential among civilized nations, translated entire in the *Appendix, Part 2, No. 1.*

³⁸ Yet we find the remarkable declaration, in the counsels of a father to his son, that, for the multiplication of the species, God or-

which was made with all the formality of a religious ceremony, were fully recognised, and impressed on both parties. The women are described by the Spaniards as pretty, unlike their unfortunate descendants, of the present day, though with the same serious and rather melancholy cast of countenance. Their long black hair, covered, in some parts of the country, by a veil made of the fine web of the *pita*, might generally be seen wreathed with flowers, or, among the richer people, with strings of precious stones, and pearls from the Gulf of California. They appear to have been treated with much consideration by their husbands; and passed their time in indolent tranquillity, or in such feminine occupations as spinning, embroidery, and the like; while their maidens beguiled the hours by the rehearsal of traditionary tales and ballads.³⁹

The women partook equally with the men of social festivities and entertainments. These were often conducted on a large scale, both as regards the number of guests and the costliness of the preparations. Numerous attendants, of both sexes, waited at the banquet. The halls were scented with perfumes, and the courts strewed with odoriferous herbs and flowers, which were distributed in profusion among.

dained one man only for one woman. "Nota, hijo mio, lo que te digo, mira que el mundo ya tiene este estilo de engendrar y multiplicar, y para esta generacion y multiplicacion; ordenó Dios que una muger usase de un varon, y un va-

ron de una muger." Ibid. lib. 6, cap. 21.

³⁹ Ibid., lib. 6, cap. 21-23; lib 8, cap. 23. — Rel. d' un gent., ap Ramusio, tom. III. fol. 305. — Carta del Lic. Zuazo, MS.

the guests, as they arrived. Cotton napkins and ewers of water were placed before them, as they took their seats at the board; for the venerable ceremony of ablution,⁴⁰ before and after eating, was punctiliously observed by the Aztecs.⁴¹ Tobacco was then offered to the company, in pipes, mixed up with aromatic substances, or in the form of cigars, inserted in tubes of tortoise-shell or silver. They compressed the nostrils with the fingers, while they inhaled the smoke, which they frequently swallowed. Whether the women, who sat apart from the men at table, were allowed the indulgence of the fragrant weed, as in the most polished circles

⁴⁰ As old as the heroic age of Greece, at least. We may fancy ourselves at the table of Penelope, where water in golden ewers was poured into silver basins for the accommodation of her guests, before beginning the repast.

“Χίρνιβα δ’ ἀμφίπολος προχόω ἐπέχρει
φίρουσα
Καλῆ, χρυσίη, ὑπὲρ ἀργυρέοιο λίβητος,
Νίψασθαι· παρὰ δὲ ζιστὴν ἰτάουσαι
τράπιζαν.”

ΟΔΥΣΣ. Α.

The feast affords many other points of analogy to the Aztec, inferring a similar stage of civilization in the two nations. One may be surprised, however, to find a greater profusion of the precious metals in the barren isle of Ithaca, than in Mexico. But the poet's fancy was a richer mine than either.

⁴¹ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 6, cap. 22.

Amidst some excellent advice of a parent to his son, on his general deportment, we find the latter punctiliously enjoined not to take his seat at the board till he has washed his face and hands, and not to leave it till he has repeated the same thing, and *cleansed his teeth*. The directions are given with a precision worthy of an Asiatic. “Al principio de la comida labarte has las manos y la boca, y donde te juntares con otros á comer, no te sientes luego; mas antes tomarás el agua y la jícara para que se laben los otros, y echarles has agua á los manos, y despues de esto, cojerás lo que se ha caido por el suelo y barrerás el lugar de la comida, y tambien despues de comer lavarás te las manos y la boca, y limpiarás los dientes.” Ibid., loc. cit.

of modern Mexico, is not told us. It is a curious fact, that the Aztecs also took the dried leaf in the pulverized form of snuff.⁴²

The table was well provided with substantial meats, especially game; among which the most conspicuous was the turkey, erroneously supposed, as its name imports, to have come originally from the East.⁴³ These more solid dishes were flanked by

⁴² Rel. d' un gent., ap. Ramusio, tom. III. fol. 306. — Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 4, cap. 37. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 13, cap. 23. — Clavigero, Stor. del Messico, tom. II. p. 227.

The Aztecs used to smoke after dinner, to prepare for the *siesta*, in which they indulged themselves as regularly as an old Castilian. — Tobacco, in Mexican *yetl*, is derived from a Haytian word, *tabaco*. The natives of Hispaniola, being the first with whom the Spaniards had much intercourse, have supplied Europe with the names of several important plants. — Tobacco, in some form or other, was used by almost all the tribes of the American continent, from the North-west Coast to Patagonia. (See McCulloh, Researches, pp. 91–94.) Its manifold virtues, both social and medicinal, are profusely panegyricized by Hernandez, in his Hist. Plantarum, lib. 2, cap. 109.

⁴³ This noble bird was introduced into Europe from Mexico. The Spaniards called it *gallopavo*, from its resemblance to the peacock. See Rel. d' un gent., ap. Ramusio,

(tom. III. fol. 306); also Oviedo, (Rel. Sumaria, cap. 38,) the earliest naturalist who gives an account of the bird, which he saw soon after the Conquest, in the West Indies, whither it had been brought, as he says, from New Spain. The Europeans, however, soon lost sight of its origin, and the name "turkey" intimated the popular belief of its Eastern origin. Several eminent writers have maintained its Asiatic or African descent; but they could not impose on the sagacious and better instructed Buffon. (See Histoire Naturelle, Art. *Dindon*.) The Spaniards saw immense numbers of turkeys in the domesticated state, on their arrival in Mexico, where they were more common than any other poultry. They were found wild, not only in New Spain, but all along the continent, in the less frequented places, from the North-western territory of the United States to Panamá. The wild turkey is larger, more beautiful, and every way an incomparably finer bird, than the tame. Franklin, with some point, as well as pleasantry,

others of vegetables and fruits, of every delicious variety found on the North American continent. The different viands were prepared in various ways, with delicate sauces and seasoning, of which the Mexicans were very fond. Their palate was still further regaled by confections and pastry, for which their maize-flour and sugar supplied ample materials. One other dish, of a disgusting nature, was sometimes added to the feast, especially when the celebration partook of a religious character. On such occasions a slave was sacrificed, and his flesh, elaborately dressed, formed one of the chief ornaments of the banquet. Cannibalism, in the guise of an Epicurean science, becomes even the more revolting.⁴⁴

The meats were kept warm by chafing-dishes. The table was ornamented with vases of silver, and sometimes gold, of delicate workmanship. The drinking cups and spoons were of the same costly materials, and likewise of tortoise shell. The favorite beverage was the *chocolatl*, flavored with va-

insists on its preference to the bald eagle, as the national emblem. (See his Works, vol. X. p. 63, in Sparks's excellent edition.) Interesting notices of the history and habits of the wild turkey may be found in the Ornithology both of Buonaparte and of that enthusiastic lover of nature, Audubon, *vox Meleagris, Gallopavo*.

⁴⁴ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 4, cap. 37; lib. 8, cap.

13; lib. 9, cap. 10-14. — Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 13, cap. 23. — Rel. d' un gent.; ap. Ramusio, tom. III. fol. 306.

Father Sahagun has gone into many particulars of the Aztec *cuisine*, and the mode of preparing sundry savory messes, making, all together, no despicable contribution to the noble science of gastronomy.

nilla and different spices. They had a way of preparing the froth of it, so as to make it almost solid enough to be eaten, and took it cold.⁴⁵ The fermented juice of the maguey, with a mixture of sweets and acids, supplied, also, various agreeable drinks, of different degrees of strength, and formed the chief beverage of the elder part of the company.⁴⁶

As soon as they had finished their repast, the young people rose from the table, to close the festivities of the day with dancing. They danced gracefully, to the sound of various instruments, accompanying their movements with chants, of a pleasing, though somewhat plaintive character.⁴⁷ The older

⁴⁵ The froth, delicately flavored with spices and some other ingredients, was taken cold by itself. It had the consistency almost of a solid; and the "Anonymous Conqueror" is very careful to inculcate the importance of "opening the mouth wide, in order to facilitate deglutition, that the foam may dissolve gradually, and descend imperceptibly, as it were, into the stomach." It was so nutritious that a single cup of it was enough to sustain a man through the longest day's march. (Fol. 306.) The old soldier discusses the beverage *con amore*.

⁴⁶ Sahagun, Hist. de Nueva España, lib. 4, cap. 37; lib. 8, cap. 13.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 13, cap. 23.—Rel. d' un gent., ap. Ramusio, tom. III. fol. 306.

⁴⁷ Herrera, Hist. General, dec. 2, lib. 7, cap. 8.—Torquemada, Monarch. Ind., lib. 14, cap. 11.

The Mexican nobles entertained minstrels in their houses, who composed ballads suited to the times, or the achievements of their lord, which they chanted, to the accompaniment of instruments, at the festivals and dances. Indeed, there was more or less dancing at most of the festivals, and it was performed in the court-yards of the houses, or in the open squares of the city. (Ibid., ubi supra.) The principal men had, also, buffoons and jugglers in their service, who amused them, and astonished the Spaniards by their feats of dexterity and strength; (Acosta, lib. 6, cap. 28;) also Clavigero, (Stor. del Messico, tom. II. pp. 179-186,)

guests continued at table, sipping *pulque*, and gossiping about other times, till the virtues of the exhilarating beverage put them in good-humor with their own. Intoxication was not rare in this part of the company, and, what is singular, was excused in them, though severely punished in the younger. The entertainment was concluded by a liberal distribution of rich dresses and ornaments among the guests, when they withdrew, after midnight, "some commending the feast, and others condemning the bad taste or extravagance of their host; in the same manner," says an old Spanish writer, "as with us."⁴⁸ Human nature is, indeed, much the same all the world over.

In this remarkable picture of manners, which I have copied faithfully from the records of earliest date after the Conquest, we find no resemblance to the other races of North American Indians. Some resemblance we may trace to the general style of Asiatic pomp and luxury. But, in Asia, woman, far from being admitted to unreserved intercourse with the other sex, is too often jealously immured with-

who has designed several representations of their exploits, truly surprising. It is natural that a people of limited refinement should find their enjoyment in material, rather than intellectual pleasures, and, consequently, should excel in them. The Asiatic nations, as the Hindoos and Chinese, for example, surpass the more polished Europeans in displays of agility and legerdemain.

⁴⁸ "Y de esta manera pasaban gran rato de la noche, y se despedían, é iban á sus casas, unos alabando la fiesta, y otros murmurando de las demasías, y excesos; cosa mui ordinaria en los que á semejantes actos se juntan." Torquemada, *Monarch. Ind.*, lib. 13. cap. 23. — Sahagun, *Hist. de Nueva España*, lib. 9, cap. 10-14.

in the walls of the harem. European civilization, which accords to this loveliest portion of creation her proper rank in the social scale, is still more removed from some of the brutish usages of the Aztecs. That such usages should have existed with the degree of refinement they showed in other things is almost inconceivable. It can only be explained as the result of religious superstition; superstition which clouds the moral perception, and perverts even the natural senses, till man, civilized man, is reconciled to the very things which are most revolting to humanity. Habits and opinions founded on religion must not be taken as conclusive evidence of the actual refinement of a people.

The Aztec character was perfectly original and unique. It was made up of incongruities apparently irreconcilable. It blended into one the marked peculiarities of different nations, not only of the same phase of civilization, but as far removed from each other as the extremes of barbarism and refinement. It may find a fitting parallel in their own wonderful climate, capable of producing, on a few square leagues of surface, the boundless variety of vegetable forms, which belong to the frozen regions of the North, the temperate zone of Europe, and the burning skies of Arabia and Hindostan!

One of the works repeatedly consulted and referred to in this Introduction is Boturini's *Idea de una nueva Historia General de la América Septentrional*. The singular persecutions sustained by its author, even more than the merits of his book, have associated his name

inseparably with the literary history of Mexico. The Chevalier Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci was a Milanese by birth, of an ancient family, and possessed of much learning. From Madrid, where he was residing, he passed over to New Spain, in 1735, on some business of the countess of Santibañez, a lineal descendant of Montezuma. While employed on this, he visited the celebrated shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and, being a person of devout and enthusiastic temper, was filled with the desire of collecting testimony to establish the marvellous fact of her apparition. In the course of his excursions, made with this view, he fell in with many relics of Aztec antiquity, and conceived — what to a Protestant, at least, would seem much more rational — the idea of gathering together all the memorials he could meet with of the primitive civilization of the land.

In pursuit of this double object, he penetrated into the remotest parts of the country, living much with the natives, passing his nights sometimes in their huts, sometimes in caves, and the depths of the lonely forests. Frequently months would elapse, without his being able to add any thing to his collection; for the Indians had suffered too much, not to be very shy of Europeans. His long intercourse with them, however, gave him ample opportunity to learn their language and popular traditions, and, in the end, to amass a large stock of materials, consisting of hieroglyphical charts on cotton, skins, and the fibre of the maguey; besides a considerable body of Indian manuscripts, written after the Conquest. To all these must be added the precious documents for placing beyond controversy the miraculous apparition of the Virgin. With this treasure he returned, after a pilgrimage of eight years, to the capital.

His zeal, in the mean while, had induced him to procure from Rome a bull authorizing the coronation of the sacred image at Guadalupe. The bull, however, though sanctioned by the Audience of New Spain, had never been approved by the Council of the Indies. In consequence of this informality, Boturini was arrested in the midst of his proceedings, his papers were taken from him, and, as he declined to give an inventory of them, he was thrown into prison, and confined in the same apartment with two criminals! Not long afterward he was sent to Spain. He there presented a memorial to the Council of the Indies, setting forth his manifold grievances, and soliciting redress. At the same time, he drew up his "Idea," above noticed, in which he displayed the catalogue of his *museum* in New Spain, declaring, with affecting earnestness, that "he would not exchange these treasures for all the gold and silver, diamonds and pearls, in the New World."

After some delay, the Council gave an award in his favor; acquitting him of any intentional violation of the law, and pronouncing a high

encomium on his deserts. His papers, however, were not restored. But his Majesty was graciously pleased to appoint him Historiographer General of the Indies, with a salary of one thousand dollars *per annum*. The stipend was too small to allow him to return to Mexico. He remained in Madrid, and completed there the first volume of a "General History of North America," in 1749. Not long after this event, and before the publication of the work, he died. The same injustice was continued to his heirs; and, notwithstanding repeated applications in their behalf, they were neither put in possession of their unfortunate kinsman's collection, nor received a remuneration for it. What was worse, — as far as the public was concerned, — the collection itself was deposited in apartments of the Vice-regal palace at Mexico, so damp, that they gradually fell to pieces, and the few remaining were still further diminished by the pilfering of *the curious*. When Baron Humboldt visited Mexico, not one eighth of this inestimable treasure was in existence!

I have been thus particular in the account of the unfortunate Boturini, as affording, on the whole, the most remarkable example of the serious obstacles and persecutions, which literary enterprise, directed in the path of the national antiquities, has, from some cause or other, been exposed to in New Spain.

Boturini's manuscript volume was never printed, and probably never will be; if, indeed, it is in existence. This will scarcely prove a great detriment to science, or to his own reputation. He was a man of a zealous temper, strongly inclined to the marvellous, with little of that acuteness requisite for penetrating the tangled mazes of antiquity, or of the philosophic spirit fitted for calmly weighing its doubts and difficulties. His "Idea" affords a sample of his peculiar mind. With abundant learning, ill-assorted and ill-digested, it is a jumble of fact and puerile fiction, interesting details, crazy dreams, and fantastic theories. But it is hardly fair to judge by the strict rules of criticism a work, which, put together hastily, as a catalogue of literary treasures, was designed by the author rather to show what might be done, than that he could do it himself. — It is rare that talents for action and contemplation are united in the same individual. Boturini was eminently qualified, by his enthusiasm and perseverance, for collecting the materials necessary to illustrate the antiquities of the country. It requires a more highly gifted mind to avail itself of them.

CHAPTER VI.

TEZCUCANS. — THEIR GOLDEN AGE. — ACCOMPLISHED PRINCES. —
DECLINE OF THEIR MONARCHY.

THE reader would gather but an imperfect notion of the civilization of Anahuac, without some account of the Acolhuans, or Tezcucans, as they are usually called; a nation of the same great family with the Aztecs, whom they rivalled in power, and surpassed in intellectual culture and the arts of social refinement. Fortunately, we have ample materials for this in the records left by Ixtlilxochitl, a lineal descendant of the royal line of Tezcuco, who flourished in the century of the Conquest. With every opportunity for information he combined much industry and talent, and, if his narrative bears the high coloring of one who would revive the faded glories of an ancient, but dilapidated house, he has been uniformly commended for his fairness and integrity, and has been followed without misgiving by such Spanish writers as could have access to his manuscripts.¹ I shall confine myself to the prominent features of the two reigns which may be said to embrace the golden age of Tezcuco; without attempting to weigh the probability of the details,

¹ For a criticism on this writer, see the Postscript to this Chapter.

which I will leave to be settled by the reader, according to the measure of his faith.

The Acolhuans came into the Valley, as we have seen, about the close of the twelfth century, and built their capital of Tezcucó on the eastern borders of the lake, opposite to Mexico. From this point they gradually spread themselves over the northern portion of Anahuac, when their career was checked by an invasion of a kindred race, the Tepanecs, who, after a desperate struggle, succeeded in taking their city, slaying their monarch, and entirely subjugating his kingdom.² This event took place about 1418; and the young prince, Nezahualcoyotl, the heir to the crown, then fifteen years old, saw his father butchered before his eyes, while he himself lay concealed among the friendly branches of a tree, which overshadowed the spot.³ His subsequent history is as full of romantic daring, and perilous escapes, as that of the renowned Scanderbeg, or of the "young Chevalier."⁴

Not long after his flight from the field of his father's blood, the Tezcucan prince fell into the hands of his enemy, was borne off in triumph to his city, and was thrown into a dungeon. He effected

² See Chapter First of this Introduction, p. 15.

³ Ixtlilxochitl, Relaciones, MS., No. 9. — Idem, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 19.

⁴ The adventures of the former hero are told with his usual spirit by Sismondi (Républiques Ital-

iennes, chap. 79). It is hardly necessary, for the latter, to refer the English reader to Chambers's "History of the Rebellion of 1745"; a work which proves how thin is the partition in human life, which divides romance from reality.

his escape, however, through the connivance of the governor of the fortress, an old servant of his family, who took the place of the royal fugitive, and paid for his loyalty with his life. He was at length permitted, through the intercession of the reigning family in Mexico, which was allied to him, to retire to that capital, and subsequently to his own, where he found a shelter in his ancestral palace. Here he remained unmolested for eight years, pursuing his studies under an old preceptor, who had had the care of his early youth, and who instructed him in the various duties befitting his princely station.⁵

At the end of this period the Tepanec usurper died, bequeathing his empire to his son, Maxtla, a man of fierce and suspicious temper. Nezahualcoyotl hastened to pay his obeisance to him, on his accession. But the tyrant refused to receive the little present of flowers which he laid at his feet, and turned his back on him in presence of his chieftains. One of his attendants, friendly to the young prince, admonished him to provide for his own safety, by withdrawing, as speedily as possible, from the palace, where his life was in danger. He lost no time, consequently, in retreating from the inhospitable court, and returned to Tezcucó. Maxtla, however, was bent on his destruction. He saw with jealous eye the opening talents and popular manners of his rival, and the favor he was daily winning from his ancient subjects.⁶

⁵ Ixtlilxochitl, Relaciones, MS., No. 10. — Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 20-24.

⁶ Idem, Relaciones, MS., No.

He accordingly laid a plan for making way with him at an evening entertainment. It was defeated by the vigilance of the prince's tutor, who contrived to mislead the assassins, and to substitute another victim in the place of his pupil.⁷ The baffled tyrant now threw off all disguise, and sent a strong party of soldiers to Tezcucó, with orders to enter the palace, seize the person of Nezahualcoyótl, and slay him on the spot. The prince, who became acquainted with the plot through the watchfulness of his preceptor, instead of flying, as he was counselled, resolved to await his enemy. They found him playing at ball, when they arrived, in the court of his palace. He received them courteously, and invited them in, to take some refreshments after their journey. While they were occupied in this way, he passed into an adjoining saloon, which excited no suspicion, as he was still visible through the open doors by which the apartments communicated with each other. A burning censer stood in the passage, and, as it was fed by the attendants, threw up such clouds of incense as obscured his movements from the soldiers. Under this friendly veil he succeeded in making his escape by a secret passage, which communicated with a large earthen pipe formerly used to bring water to the palace.⁸ Here he

⁷ Idem, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 25. The contrivance was effected by means of an extraordinary personal resemblance of the parties; a fruitful source of comic,—as every reader of the drama

knows,—though rarely of tragic interest.

⁸ It was customary, on entering the presence of a great lord, to throw aromatics into the censer. "Hecho en el brasero incienso, y

remained till night-fall, when, taking advantage of the obscurity, he found his way into the suburbs, and sought a shelter in the cottage of one of his father's vassals.

The Tepanec monarch, enraged at this repeated disappointment, ordered instant pursuit. A price was set on the head of the royal fugitive. Whoever should take him, dead or alive, was promised, however humble his degree, the hand of a noble lady, and an ample domain along with it. Troops of armed men were ordered to scour the country in every direction. In the course of the search, the cottage, in which the prince had taken refuge, was entered. But he fortunately escaped detection by being hid under a heap of maguey fibres used for manufacturing cloth. As this was no longer a proper place of concealment, he sought a retreat in the mountainous and woody district lying between the borders of his own state and Tlascala.⁹

Here he led a wretched, wandering life, exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather, hiding himself in deep thickets and caverns, and stealing out, at night, to satisfy the cravings of appetite; while he was kept in constant alarm by the activity of his pursuers, always hovering on his track. On one occasion he sought refuge from them among a small party of soldiers, who proved friendly to him,

copal, que era uso y costumbre donde estaban los Reyes y Señores, cada vez que los criados entraban con mucha reverencia y acamamiento echaban sahumero en el brasero; y así con este perfume se obscure-

cia algo la sala." Ixtlilxochitl, Relaciones, MS., No. 11.

⁹ Idem, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 26. — Relaciones, MS., No. 11. — Veytia, Hist. Antig., lib. 2, cap. 47

and concealed him in a large drum around which they were dancing. At another time, he was just able to turn the crest of a hill, as his enemies were climbing it on the other side, when he fell in with a girl who was reaping *chian*, — a Mexican plant, the seed of which was much used in the drinks of the country. He persuaded her to cover him up with the stalks she had been cutting. When his pursuers came up, and inquired if she had seen the fugitive, the girl coolly answered that she had, and pointed out a path as the one he had taken. Notwithstanding the high rewards offered, Nezahualcoyotl seems to have incurred no danger from treachery, such was the general attachment felt to himself and his house. “Would you not deliver up the prince, if he came in your way?” he inquired of a young peasant who was unacquainted with his person. “Not I,” replied the other. “What, not for a fair lady’s hand, and a rich dowry beside?” rejoined the prince. At which the other only shook his head and laughed.¹⁰ On more than one occasion, his faithful people submitted to torture, and even to lose their lives, rather than disclose the place of his retreat.¹¹

However gratifying such proofs of loyalty might be to his feelings, the situation of the prince in

¹⁰ “Nezahualcoyotzin le dixo, que si viese á quien buscaban, si lo iría á denunciar? respondió, que no; tornándole á replicar diciéndole, que haría mui mal en perder una muger hermosa, y lo demas, que el rey Maxtla prometia, el

mancebo se rió de todo, no haciendo caso ni de lo uno, ni de lo otro.” Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 27.

¹¹ Ibid., MS., cap. 26, 27. — Relaciones, MS., No. 11. — Veytia, Hist. Antig., lib. 2, cap. 47, 48.

these mountain solitudes became every day more distressing. It gave a still keener edge to his own sufferings to witness those of the faithful followers who chose to accompany him in his wanderings. "Leave me," he would say to them, "to my fate! Why should you throw away your own lives for one whom fortune is never weary of persecuting?" Most of the great Tezcucan chiefs had consulted their interests by a timely adhesion to the usurper. But some still clung to their prince, preferring proscription, and death itself, rather than desert him in his extremity.¹²

In the mean time, his friends at a distance were active in measures for his relief. The oppressions of Maxtla, and his growing empire, had caused general alarm in the surrounding states, who recalled the mild rule of the Tezcucan princes. A coalition was formed, a plan of operations concerted, and, on the day appointed for a general rising, Nezahualcoyotl found himself at the head of a force sufficiently strong to face his Tepanec adversaries. An engagement came on, in which the latter were totally discomfited; and the victorious prince, receiving everywhere on his route the homage of his joyful subjects, entered his capital, not like a proscribed outcast, but as the rightful heir, and saw himself once more enthroned in the halls of his fathers.

Soon after, he united his forces with the Mexicans, long disgusted with the arbitrary conduct of

¹² Ixtlilxochitl, MSS., ubi supra. — Veytia, ubi supra.

Maxtla. The allied powers, after a series of bloody engagements with the usurper, routed him under the walls of his own capital. He fled to the baths, whence he was dragged out, and sacrificed with the usual cruel ceremonies of the Aztecs; the royal city of Azcapozalco was razed to the ground, and the wasted territory was henceforth reserved as the great slave-market for the nations of Anahuac.¹³

These events were succeeded by the remarkable league among the three powers of Tezcuco, Mexico, and Tlacopan, of which some account has been given in a previous chapter.¹⁴ Historians are not agreed as to the precise terms of it; the writers of the two former nations, each, insisting on the paramount authority of his own in the coalition. All agree in the subordinate position of Tlacopan, a state, like the others, bordering on the lake. It is certain, that in their subsequent operations, whether of peace or war, the three states shared in each other's councils, embarked in each other's enterprises, and moved in perfect concert together, till just before the coming of the Spaniards.

The first measure of Nezahualcoyotl, on returning to his dominions, was a general amnesty. It was his maxim, "that a monarch might punish, but revenge was unworthy of him."¹⁵ In the present in-

¹³ Ixtlilxochitl, Hist. Chich., MS., cap. 28-31. — Relaciones, MS., No. 11. — Veytia, Hist. Antig., lib. 2, cap. 51-54.

¹⁴ See page 18 of this volume.

¹⁵ "Que venganza no es justo la procuren los Reyes, sino castigar al que lo mereciere." MS. de Ixtlilxochitl.

stance, he was averse even to punish, and not only freely pardoned his rebel nobles, but conferred on some, who had most deeply offended, posts of honor and confidence. Such conduct was doubtless politic, especially as their alienation was owing, probably, much more to fear of the usurper, than to any disaffection towards himself. But there are some acts of policy which a magnanimous spirit only can execute.

The restored monarch next set about repairing the damages sustained under the late misrule, and reviving, or rather remodelling, the various departments of government. He framed a concise, but comprehensive, code of laws, so well suited, it was thought, to the exigencies of the times, that it was adopted as their own by the two other members of the triple alliance. It was written in blood, and entitled the author to be called the Draco, rather than "the Solon of Anahuac," as he is fondly styled by his admirers.¹⁶ Humanity is one of the best fruits of refinement. It is only with increasing civilization, that the legislator studies to economize human suffering, even for the guilty; to devise penalties, not so much by way of punishment for the past, as of reformation for the future.¹⁷

¹⁶ See Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. I. p. 247.

Nezahualcoyotl's code consisted of eighty laws, of which thirty-four only have come down to us, according to Veytia. (*Hist. Antig.*, tom. III. p. 224, nota.)

tlixochitl enumerates several of them. *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 38, and *Relaciones*, MS., *Ordenanzas*

¹⁷ Nowhere are these principles kept more steadily in view than in the various writings of our adopted countryman, Dr. Lieber, having

He divided the burden of government among a number of departments, as the council of war, the council of finance, the council of justice. This last was a court of supreme authority, both in civil and criminal matters, receiving appeals from the lower tribunals of the provinces, which were obliged to make a full report, every four months, or eighty days, of their own proceedings to this higher judicature. In all these bodies, a certain number of citizens were allowed to have seats with the nobles and professional dignitaries. There was, however, another body, a council of state, for aiding the king in the despatch of business, and advising him in matters of importance, which was drawn altogether from the highest order of chiefs. It consisted of fourteen members; and they had seats provided for them at the royal table.¹⁸

Lastly, there was an extraordinary tribunal, called the council of music, but which, differing from the import of its name, was devoted to the encouragement of science and art. Works on astronomy, chronology, history, or any other science, were required to be submitted to its judgment, before they could be made public. This censorial power was of some moment, at least with regard to the

more or less to do with the theory of legislation. Such works could not have been produced before the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 36. — Veytia, *Hist. Antig.*, lib. 3, cap. 7.

According to Zurita, the principal judges, at their general meetings every four months, constituted also a sort of parliament or *córtes*, for advising the king on matters of state. See his *Rapport*, p. 106; also *Ante*, p. 30.

historical department, where the wilful perversion of truth was made a capital offence by the bloody code of Nezahualcoyotl. Yet a Tezcucan author must have been a bungler, who could not elude a conviction under the cloudy veil of hieroglyphics. This body, which was drawn from the best instructed persons in the kingdom, with little regard to rank, had supervision of all the productions of art, and of the nicer fabrics. It decided on the qualifications of the professors in the various branches of science, on the fidelity of their instructions to their pupils, the deficiency of which was severely punished, and it instituted examinations of these latter. In short, it was a general board of education for the country. On stated days, historical compositions, and poems treating of moral or traditional topics, were recited before it by their authors. Seats were provided for the three crowned heads of the empire, who deliberated with the other members on the respective merits of the pieces, and distributed prizes of value to the successful competitors.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ixtlilxochitl, *Hist. Chich.*, MS., cap. 36. — Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. II. p. 137. — Veytia, *Hist. Antig.*, lib. 3, cap. 7.

“Concurrían á este consejo las tres cabezas del imperio, en ciertos dias, á oír cantar las poesías históricas antiguas y modernas, para instruirse de toda su historia, y también cuando había algún nuevo invento en cualquiera facultad, para examinarlo, aprobarlo, ó reprobar-

lo. Delante de las sillas de los reyes había una gran mesa cargada de joyas de oro y plata, pedrería, plumas, y otras cosas estimables, y en los rincones de la sala muchas de mantas de todas calidades, para premios de las habilidades y estímulo de los profesores, las cuales alhajas repartían los reyes, en los dias que concurrían, á los que se aventajaban en el ejercicio de sus facultades.” *Ibid.*

Such are the marvellous accounts transmitted to us of this institution; an institution certainly not to have been expected among the Aborigines of America. It is calculated to give us a higher idea of the refinement of the people, than even the noble architectural remains, which still cover some parts of the continent. Architecture is, to a certain extent, a sensual gratification. It addresses itself to the eye, and affords the best scope for the parade of barbaric pomp and splendor. It is the form in which the revenues of a semi-civilized people are most likely to be lavished. The most gaudy and ostentatious specimens of it, and sometimes the most stupendous, have been reared by such hands. It is one of the first steps in the great march of civilization. But the institution in question was evidence of still higher refinement. It was a literary luxury; and argued the existence of a taste in the nation, which relied for its gratification on pleasures of a purely intellectual character.

The influence of this academy must have been most propitious to the capital, which became the nursery, not only of such sciences as could be compassed by the scholarship of the period, but of various useful and ornamental arts. Its historians, orators, and poets were celebrated throughout the country.²⁰ Its archives, for which accommodations

²⁰ Veytia, *Hist. Antig.*, lib. 3, cap. 7.—Clavigero, *Stor. del Messico*, tom. I. p. 247.

The latter author enumerates four historians, some of much re-

pute, of the royal house of Tezcucoco, descendants of the great Nezahualcoyotl. See his *Account of Writers*, tom. I. pp. 6-21