

**MEMOIR OF AN EVENTFUL
EXPEDITION IN CENTRAL AMERICA;
RESULTING IN THE DISCOVERY OF
THE IDOLATROUS CITY OF IXIMAYA,
IN AN UNEXPLORED REGION**

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Memoir of an eventful expedition in Central America; resulting in the discovery of the idolatrous city of Iximaya, in an unexplored region by Pedro Velasquez

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PEDRO VELASQUEZ

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MEMOIR

OF AN

EVENTFUL EXPEDITION

IN

CENTRAL AMERICA;

RESULTING IN THE DISCOVERY OF THE IDOLATROUS CITY OF

TEOTIHUACAN.

AS AN UNDISCOVERED NATION: AND THE POSSESSION OF TWO

REMARKABLE AZTEC CHILDREN,

Descendants and Specimens of the Sacerdotal Caste, (now nearly extinct,) of the Ancient Aztecs Founders of the Ruined Temples of that Country.

DESCRIBED BY

JOHN L. STEVENS, ESQ.,

AND OTHER TRAVELLERS.

Selected from the Specimens

PEDRO VELASQUEZ,

OF SAN SALVADOR.

NEW YORK:

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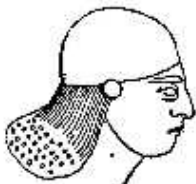
1850.

of *Mahaboons*, still existing in that city, and to which belonged *Vaalpeor*, the official guardian of those children, as mentioned in this memoir. Velasquez states that the likeness of *Vaalpeor* to the right hand figure in the frontispiece of Stevens' second volume, which is here also the one on the right hand, was as exact, in outline, as if the latter had been a daguerreotype miniature.

While writing his "Narrative" after his return to San Salvador, in the spring of the present year, (1850) Senor Velasquez was favored, by an American gentleman of that city, with a copy of "Layard's Nineveh," and was forcibly struck with the close characteristic resemblance of the faces in many of its engravings to those of the inhabitants in general, as a peculiar family of mankind, both of *Iximaya* and its surrounding region. The following are sketches (somewhat imperfect) of two of the male faces to which he refers:—



And the following profile, from the same work, is pronounced by Velasquez to be equally characteristic of the female faces of that region, making due allowance for the superb head dresses of tropical plumage, with which he describes the latter as being adorned, instead of the male galea, or close cap, retained in the engraving.



These illustrations, slight as they are, are deemed interesting, because the *Iximayans* assert their descent from a very ancient Assyrian colony nearly contemporary with *Nineveh* itself—a claim which receives strong confirmation, not only from the hieroglyphics and monuments of *Iximaya*, but from the engravings in Stevens' volumes of several remarkable objects, (the inverted winged globe especially,) at *Palenque*—once a kindred colony.

It should have been stated in the following Memoir, that Senor Velasquez, on his return to San Salvador, caused the two *Keana* children to be baptized into the Catholic Church, by the Bishop of the Diocese, under the names of *Maximo* and *Bartola Velasquez*.

MEMOIR
OF A RECENT
EVENTFUL EXPEDITION
IN
CENTRAL AMERICA.

In the second volume of his travels in Central America—than which no work ever published in this country, has created and maintained a higher degree of interest, both at home and abroad—Mr. Stevens speaks with enthusiasm of the conversations he had held with an intelligent and hospitable Padre, or Catholic priest, of Santa Cruz del Quiche, formerly of the village of Chajal; and of the exciting information he had received from him, concerning immense and marvellous antiquities in the surrounding country, which, to the present hour, remain entirely unknown to the world. The Padre told him of vast ruins, in a deserted and desolate region, but four leagues from Vera Paz, more extensive than Quiche itself; and of another ruined city, on the other side of the great traversing range of the Cordilleras, of which no account has been given. But the most stimulating story of all, was the existence of a *living* city, far on the other side of the great sierra, large and populous, occupied by Indians of the same character, and in precisely the same state, as those of the country in general, before the discovery of the continent and the desolating conquests of its invaders.

The Padre averred that, in younger days, he had climbed to the topmost ridge of the sierra, a height of 10 or 12,000 feet, and from its naked summit, looking over an immense plain, extending to Yucatan and the Gulf of Mexico, had seen, with his own eyes, in the remote distance, “a large city, spread over a great space, with turrets white and glittering in the sun.” His

account of the prevalent Indian report concerning it was, that no white man had ever reached this city; that the inhabitants, who speak the Maya language, are aware that a race of white strangers has conquered the whole country around them, and have hence murdered every white man that has since attempted to penetrate their territory. He added, that they have no coin or other circulating medium; no horses, mules, or other domestic animals, except fowls, "and keep the cocks under ground, to prevent their crowing being heard." This report of their slender resources for animal food, and of their perpetual apprehension of discovery, as indicated in this inadequate and childish expedient to prevent it, is, in most respects, contradicted by that of the adventurous expedition about to be described, and which, having passed the walls of their city, obtained better information of their internal economy and condition than could have been acquired by any Indians at all likely to hold communication with places so very remote from the territory as Quiche or Chajul.

The effect of these extraordinary averments and recitals of the Padre, upon the mind of Mr. Stevens, together with the deliberate conclusions which he finally drew from them, is best expressed in his own language.

"The interest awakened in us, was the most thrilling I ever experienced. * One look at that city, was worth ten years of an every day life. * If he is right, a place is left where Indians and a city exist, as Cortez and Alvarado found them; there are living men who can solve the mystery that hangs over the ruined cities of America; who can, perhaps, go to Copan and read the inscriptions on its monuments. No subject more exciting and attractive presents itself to any mind, and the deep impression in my mind, will never be effaced.

"Can it be true? Being now in my sober senses, I do verily believe there is much ground to suppose that what the Padre told us is authentic. That the region referred to does not acknowledge the government of Guatamala, and has never been explored, and that no white man has ever pretended to have entered it, I am satisfied. From other sources we heard that a large ruined city was visible; and we were told of another person who had climbed to the top of the sierra, but, on account of the dense clouds resting upon it, he had not been able to see anything. At all events, the belief at the village of Chajul is general, and a curiosity is aroused that burns to be satisfied. We had a craving desire to reach the mysterious city. No man if ever so willing to peril his life, could undertake the enterprise, with any hope of success, without hovering for one or two years on the borders of the country,

studying the language and character of the adjoining Indians, and making acquaintance with some of the natives. Five hundred men could probably march directly to the city, and the invasion would be more justifiable than any made by Spaniards; but the government is too much occupied with its own wars, and the knowledge could not be procured except at the price of blood.— Two young men of good constitution, and who could afford to spend five years, might succeed. If the object of search prove a phantom, in the wild scenes of a new and unexplored country, there are other objects of interest; but, if real, besides the glorious excitement of such a novelty, they will have something to look back upon through life. As to the dangers, they are always magnified, and, in general, peril is discovered soon enough for escape. But, in all probability, if any discovery is made, it will be made by the Padres. As for ourselves, to attempt it alone, ignorant of the language and with the *mozos* who were a constant annoyance to us, was out of the question. The most we thought of was a climb to the top of the sierra, thence to look down upon the mysterious city; but we had difficulties enough in the road before us; it would add ten days to a journey already almost appalling in the perspective; for days the sierra might be covered with clouds; in attempting too much we might lose all; Palenque was our great point, and we determined not to be diverted from the Course we had marked out." Vol. II, p. 193-196.

It is now known that two intrepid young men, incited probably by this identical passage in Mr. Stevens's popular work—one a Mr. Huertis of Baltimore, an American of Spanish parents, from Cuba, possessing an ample fortune, and who had travelled much in Egypt, Persia, and Syria, for the personal inspection of ancient monuments; and the other, a Mr. Hammond, a civil-engineer from Canada, who had been engaged for some years on surveys in the United States, agreed to undertake the perilous and romantic enterprise thus cautiously suggested and chivalrously portrayed.

Ample equipped with every desirable appointment, including daguerreotype apparatuses, mathematical instruments, and withal fifty repeating rifles, lest it should become necessary to resort to an armed expedition, these gentlemen sailed from New-Orleans and arrived at Balize, in the fall of 1848. Here they procured horses, mules, and a party of ten experienced Indians and *Mestitzos*; and after pursuing a route, through a wild, broken, and heavily wooded region, for about 150 miles, on the Gulf of Amatique, they struck off more to the south-west, for Coban, where they arrived on the morning of Christmas day, in time to

partake of the substantial enjoyments, as well as to observe the peculiar religious ceremonies, of the great Catholic festival, in that intensely interior city.

At this place, while loitering to procure information and guides for their further journey to Santa Cruz del Quioche, they got acquainted with Sr. Pedro Velasquez, of San Salvador, who describes himself as a man of family and education, although a trader in indigo; and his intermediate destination, prior to his return to the capital, happening also to be the same city, he kindly proffered to the two Americans his superior knowledge of the country, or any other useful service he could render them; and he was accordingly very gladly received as their friend and companion on the way. It is from a copy of a manuscript journal of this gentleman, that the translator has obtained the only information as yet brought to the United States concerning the remarkable results of the exploring expedition which he will proceed to describe, or of the fate of Messrs. Huertis and Hammond, its unfortunate originators and conductors, or of those extraordinary living specimens of a *sui generis* race of beings, hitherto supposed to be either fabulous or extinct, which are at once its melancholy trophies and its physiological attestors. And it is from Senor Velasquez alone that the public can receive any further intelligence upon this ardently interesting subject, beyond that which his manuscript imperfectly affords.

In order, however, to avoid an anticipatory trespass upon the natural sequence of the narrative, it may be proper to state, that prior to his departure in their company from Coban, Senor Velasquez had received from his fellow travellers no intimation whatever concerning the ulterior object of their journey, and had neither seen nor heard of those volumes describing the stupendous vestiges of ancient empire, in his native land, which had so strongly excited the emulous passion of discovery in their minds.

Frequently called by his mercantile speculations, which he seems to have conducted upon an extensive scale, to perform long journeys from San Salvador, on the Pacific side of the Cordilleras, to Comyagua in the mid-interior, and thence to Truxillo, Omoa, and Ysabal, on the Bay and Gulf of Honduras, he had traversed a large portion of the country, and had often been surprised with sudden views of mouldering temples, pyramids and

cities, of vast magnitude and marvellous mythology. And being, as it evidently appears, a man of unusual intelligence and scholastic acquirements, he had doubtless felt, as he states, a profound but hopeless curiosity concerning their origin and history. He had even seen and consecutively examined the numerous and ornate monuments of Copan ; but it was not until he had proceeded to the second stage of the journey from Coban to Quiche, that he was shown the engravings in the first volume of Stevens' Central America, in which they are so faithfully depicted. He recognized many of them as old acquaintances, and still more as new ones, which had escaped his more cursory inspection ; and in all he could trace curious details which, on the spot, he regretted the want of time to examine. He, moreover, knew the surly Don Gregorio, by whom Mr. Stevens had been treated so inhospitably, and several other persons in the vicinity of the ruins whom he had named, and was delighted with the *vraisemblance* of his descriptions. The Senor confesses that these circumstances inspired him with unlimited confidence in that traveller's statements upon other subjects ; and when Mr. Huertis read to him the further account of the information given to Mr. Stevens by the jolly and merry, but intelligent old Padre of Quiche, respecting other ruined cities beyond the Sierra Madre, and especially of the living city of independant Candones, or unchristianized Indians, supposed to have been seen from the lofty summit of that mountain range, and was told by Messrs. Huertis and Hammond that the exploration of this city was the chief object of their perilous expedition, the Senor adds, that his enthusiasm became enkindled to at least as high a fervor as theirs, and that, " with more precipitancy than prudence, in a man of his maturer years and important business pursuits, he resolved to unite in the enterprise, to aid the heroic young men with his experience in travel and knowledge of the wild Indians of the region referred to, and to see the end of the adventure, result as it may."

He was confirmed in this resolution by several concurring facts of which his companions were now told for the first time. He intimately knew and had several times been the guest of the worthy Cura of Quiche, from whom Mr. Stevens received assurances of the existence of the ruined city of the ancient Astecs,