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The influences of some Mexican folklore and beliefs on Mexican life

Leona Lillian Lampi

The University of Montana

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THE INFLUENCES
of
SOME MEXICAN FOLKLORE AND BELIEFS
on
MEXICAN LIFE

by

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B. A., Montana State University, 1946

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CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF FOLKLORE

Man has always been confronted with the unknown, surrounded by superior forces against which he has had to defend himself. These forces have not always presented themselves as physical challenges but as mental ones also, arousing in man an insatiable desire to explain and conquer them. As civilizations advanced, attempts by all races to answer the eternal question "why?" caused many phases of culture to develop, such as music, art, literature, scientific beliefs, and countless others. Of these expressions folklore and beliefs are two interesting ways in which man has preserved his observations and explanations. These have given to each respective culture a rich heritage—not a static one but a living heritage—one which grows and changes and also influences the lives of those who are in contact with it.

Folklore is rapidly taking its place among the sciences of anthropology. Viewed in this scientific light folklore is able to solve many of the obscure problems of history and clarify the many profound problems which have been encountered in trying to trace the growth of the various races, physically and spiritually.

Story telling is one of the oldest arts of mankind,
and the role of the story teller has always been an honored and enviable one. As a rule a good story teller is proud of his ability to relate tales to his listeners in the same manner and taste as the original teller. However, one does find that legends and historical events, especially, undergo changes with the telling and are often associated with the culture and locality of the listener. Thomas Allibone Janvier, who is noted for his work with Mexican folklore and has compiled many of the legends of the City of Mexico, once stated that "... many of them simply are historical traditions gone wrong: the substantial facts at the roots of them—always of a romantic or of an odd sort—having been obscured or distorted by imaginative additions or perversions contributed by successive generations of narrators through the passing centuries."¹

Folklore usually falls into several categories: legends or myths which have as an objective to keep alive ancient happenings and traditions; fanciful tales told for amusement; and those stories which are supposed to be true and are used for moralizing influence.

Upon further investigation one finds that many stories are based on beliefs of the time, beliefs derived from the people's delving into the unknown. This was

especially true of the ancient races which had a high level of culture and civilization, such as the Chinese, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and in the New World the Mayas, Toltecs, Incas, and other Indian tribes.

Great similarity in the content of stories is found in all parts of the world, a fact which is most puzzling since geographically many nations were remote and had no possible contact with one another. One theory about this similarity has been that all people go through the same growth processes and are thus confronted with essentially the same questions, therefore, the resulting explanations have resembled one another in many respects. In opposition to this theory is the stand which rejects any parallelism between remote nations stating that these nations have their own individual cultures which are influenced by individual external and internal forces, consequently, any similarity between such different cultures is merely hypothetical.

Be that as it may, it is most interesting to note the striking similarity in the people's lore regarding the creation of the world and man. Throughout the world's lore is found the belief that the gods made several attempts to create the earth and life before the present world came into existence. Since Mexico will be the field of this study, let us consider the Mexican legends and beliefs regarding this creation.
According to Mexican legends there were in all five suns. Quetzalcoatl, God of Wind, destroyed the first sun and became the second sun. He ruled until one day an enemy pulled him to earth, causing a great hurricane in doing so, which uprooted all things and destroyed man. The remaining inhabitants became monkeys. The Procreators made a new sun, but Quetzalcoatl, not satisfied with the new creation, caused a fire to devastate the earth; those who didn't perish became birds. The fourth sun was destroyed by a deluge, the survivors becoming fish. The fifth sun was destined to be destroyed by earthquakes and at the end of every fifty-two year cycle or with every eclipse the people expected the earth to be destroyed again. However, this last creation remained and during its reign, the superior human beings were situated in the center of the country, these being the Aztecs, according to Aztec records, and those tribes living to the four cardinal points were inferior, speaking different languages and having different customs. With the end of these disasters on earth, Quetzalcoatl took a permanent place in the sky on the throne of Venus, the morning star.²

Since similar beliefs to the above can be found in the lore of all races, it seems plausible that there should be some explanation for these stories. Eric Larrabee, an

editor of Harper's Magazine, has outlined in the January 1950 issue, Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky's theory, \(^3\) which is presented in his book, Worlds in Collision. Dr. Velikovsky states that several great catastrophes have almost destroyed the earth in the past. A comet, which later became the planet Venus, passed close to the earth causing violent changes. The shifting of the atmosphere produced hurricanes of tremendous proportions. The whole face of the earth changed, volcanoes burst forth, new mountains came into being, old ones collapsed. Later, this comet again made contact with the earth after an interval of fifty-two years and caused further disturbances. Dr. Velikovsky further proposes that all races were simultaneously affected by these world-shaking events, thus explaining the analogy between the lore and beliefs of the races. Whether or not Dr. Velikovsky's theory can be accepted is a subject receiving considerable attention at the present time, but since no theories have yet been advanced which satisfactorily explain similarities in the cultures of various races, one might, at least, consider Dr. Velikovsky's theory as a possible explanation.

Another instance of parallelism is found in the primitive concept of the creation of man. This belief found its roots in the primitive religion of man. The gods were con-

sidered all powerful, and it was they who created man. Since nature played such an important role in man's life, plants were many times designated as the gods' clay for molding man. In the Mayan and Aztec beliefs corn is the flesh and blood of man.  

As cultures developed, some folklore and beliefs sank into oblivion while others were perpetuated by being absorbed into daily living. As an integral part of the culture they began to have a growing influence on the people. It is the influence of some lore and beliefs as they apply to the Mexican people that will be the main concern of this thesis.

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4 Toor, op. cit., pp. 460-66
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF MEXICO

The present day Indians of Mexico, although usually considered as of the low-caste, actually are descendents of many noble races; and although most of them know little or nothing of the greatness of Mexico's past civilizations, they still preserve some of the traditions, customs, and beliefs of their ancestors.

Many in Mexico are would-be archeologists and have their own ideas about the origin of the Mexican race. Since the legend of a universal flood is a widely accepted one, there are those who trace the Mexicans to those inhabitants of Atlantis who sought refuge in Mexico. They will cite, of course, the Aztec word for water, "atl", relating naturally to the flooded continent, Atlantis. One is then assured by another Mexican that there is no doubt that tribes came from China via boats blown over to this continent. Yet another will produce ancient tablets covered with hieroglyphics which, when translated, prove that the first Mexicans are the lost tribes of Israel. Then there are still those who maintain that in Mexico began the growth of all races.5

Despite varying proofs for each of these theories, the ranking anthropologists of our day generally agree that the Indians inhabiting the North American continent came by way of the Bering Straits and the Aleutian chain in a migration that lasted many centuries. It is estimated that this migration took place about the end of the Old Stone Age of the beginning of the New, since if it had been much later, the tribes would have brought with them some domesticated animals and plants, of which they knew nothing until the arrival of the Spaniards.

These Indians spread out over the continent in groups of families and slowly worked down toward the south, becoming more individual in their customs, speech, and facial characteristics. When they finally found places to their liking, they settled down and after a period of time, trading back and forth, the various groups began to combine and communities developed.

Between the third and tenth centuries a great civilization came into being—that of the Mayas. In its wanderings the Maya tribe had made great progress in the fields of art and science so that by the time it finally established itself in the north of what is today known as Guatemala, it had developed an astoundingly high civilization. It constructed magnificent cities, progressed in art, invented an advanced system of hieroglyphics and a year count as perfect as ours.
today. An amazing civilization! Then suddenly, in the tenth century, for no discoverable reason, the Maya empire moved on, en masse, to Yucatan, a considerably less desirable spot, quite unsuited for agriculture; and yet again the Mayas flourished, building up another empire, almost comparable to their first.

While the Maya civilization advanced, so did the civilizations of many other Mexican tribes. The Teotihuacan civilization flourished in the Valley of Mexico and then came to an end in the ninth century when the Toltecs rose in power; the Zapotecas of Oaxaca too had a period of high culture; and the Totonacs had their great ceremonial center in Vera Cruz. The civilizations of these tribes and others were influenced by many external conditions, one of which was war by which they either lost their culture or gained new cultures to add to their own. It was through war that the last of the great Pre-Columbian civilizations came into power.

The Aztecs were by nature a warlike and nomadic people, assimilating the cultures of the tribes they conquered, so that by the time they came into full power they had acquired quite a mosaic-like culture pattern. This tribe eventually settled on one of the islands of Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico in the fourteenth century. According to legend this particular spot was divinely designated as the seat of the Aztec Empire, and upon this spot the tribe began the building of that empire which was still in power when the Spaniards came.
Much has been written about the Spanish conquest. Perhaps it might be sufficient merely to point out that the Spaniard did not, in his coming, improve the status of the Indian. On the contrary, the Indian became, for the most part, a virtual slave of the conquering people. Even after the Independence the situation remained almost the same, the controlling power merely shifting hands. Since the Social Revolution of 1910-20, which was fought to free the downtrodden classes, much has been done to improve their lot, but much still remains to be done.

It is hoped that this fleeting glance into the past may serve to illuminate somewhat the background of the Mexican people for a better understanding of their beliefs and folklore.

Folklore in Mexico has its roots in a chaotic state and has thrived in such confusion. Man has never been static in this country from the time of the primitive age to the present day, and much of the unraveling of history and culture is preserved in the country's folk literature. The Mexican has not only inherited the impassive, reflective mood of the Indian but also the exploring quality of the Spanish Conquistador—a combination which plays an important part in the molding of his customs, folklore and habits. Mexico is still primitive in many ways, and today, as in the past, much of the folklore arises from the people's attempts
to understand their surroundings; it is the Indian's way of delving into the unknown. The Mexico of today has inherited a rich, artistic past—a creative, and deeply rooted culture. Ancient beliefs and lore have continued to be a constant challenge to those of our modern world who find in these beliefs a further insight into the civilizations of the past and a means to a better understanding of the modern Mexican.

Mexican lore might easily fall into the three categories outlined in the previous chapter: the historia or leyenda, a story which usually records events in history, miracles of saints, wars or local events, and has as an objective the keeping alive of the Mexican ancient happenings and traditions; the cuento, the story told for amusement; and the ejemplo, the story, supposedly true, used for moralizing influence. Of these three the cuento and the leyenda, equally popular, have better survived the ages. Ejemplos are considered old-fashioned since their influence, which before sanctioned moral conduct, has become increasingly impotent with the rapid spread of education and Christian religion and the closer contact with the city.⁶

The telling of cuentos and leyendas in some sections is also becoming more infrequent because of the breakdown

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of the well-organized family groups where young people were strictly controlled. The influx of newspapers, trains, tourists, and radios have all had a stifling effect on the age-old tradition of story telling. Nevertheless, these stories continue to be loved and remembered everywhere, and in the more remote corners of the country, folktales still serve to bring something of the aesthetic into the lives of the people and will undoubtedly long continue to be a medium by which the unlettered men and women received education and entertainment.  

Folklore and folkways spring from folk people, and it is this particular group which is especially affected by these traditions. As the population becomes more modern and sophisticated, there is a natural tendency for it to drop many of the interests and ideas which it possessed before modern civilization presented its complexities. Mexico still has, however, many people who love their lore and folkways. These people live intense lives, appreciating all phases of their lives to the fullest, be they political, social, or religious; and because of this intensity the lore and beliefs have become more significant—just how significant will be elaborated upon in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCES OF RELIGIOUS LEGENDS

The Mexican has never been divorced from religion, and because of this, religion has added much to the culture of the nation. The Mexican Indian has always believed that nothing could exist without the help of the gods, and so one cannot separate his religion from the other aspects of his life. The economic, social, political, and religious work hand in hand and the guiding element, according to the Mexican folk, is religion.

The religion of the Pre-Columbian Indian was polytheistic in nature and was all powerful. The priests had invented as complicated and thorough a ceremonia as that of any other nation, and they had thrown a veil of allegory over early traditions.

The arrival of the Spaniards with their new religion contributed considerably to the molding of Mexican folk literature. The teaching of the new worship was well received by the deeply religious nature of the Indian. However, this new element had to fight many aspects of an already deeply entrenched faith. Despite many handicaps it set to work and in fifty years reports had it that all the natives had been converted to the Catholic religion. In the first two years of Spanish rule 10,000 churches were
set up, many from the very stones that once were parts of temples and altars to pagan gods. During this transition many miracles were said to have taken place which served to further influence the impressionable Indian. Nevertheless, even with the old places of worship destroyed, the old religion did not die and the missionaries found that they had to accept some of the old beliefs and mythology into the new. Out of this combination has emerged a faith somewhat grotesque in its joining of pagan and Christian characteristics.

From the time of the aborigines, religious lore has been outstanding in its influence on the people. Typically influential is the legend of

"The Eagle, The Serpent, and the Cactus"

Long, long ago the Aztecs lived in a country which they called Aztlan. The chief god of the Aztec tribe was Mexitla, and it was he who started the Aztec people on their long trip which finally ended in the country which we today call Mexico—named after this particular god.

Mexitla was also called Hummingbird-on-the-Left, because he wore the feathers of that bird on his left foot and many times he would turn himself into a hummingbird to lead his people on the long journey.

One day when one of the high priests in the land of Aztlan was sitting under a large tree, he heard a hummingbird
singing on a branch overhead.

"Come, let us go," the bird sang. Over and over it sang its little song. The priest ran to get another priest to hear this little bird's unusual message, and the bird sang again, "Come, let us go."

So it was that the Aztecs followed the command of this bird and began to follow it southward, always moving, never stopping very long in one spot. How long should they travel? Where should they stop? Their god, Mexitla, or Hummingbird-on-the-Left, answered, "Never fear. When you come to the most beautiful spot in the world, where it is never too hot and never too cold, where there are sun and blue sky and lakes and rivers and forests, where there are riches in metal and riches in land—there shall you stop. Never fear. I shall give you a sign, and it shall be an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a serpent. There shall your journey end."

On and on the Aztecs moved. Many times they found a beautiful spot and wished to stop, but the sign did not appear. Sometimes when they would stay too long in one place, Mexitla would get very angry and in order to quiet him, the Aztecs offered him their most handsome sons and daughters as sacrifices. Then they would start on their journey again.

Finally they reached the land of the Toltecs who, with all the other tribes, tried to drive out the newcomers, but the Aztecs were too warlike and smart. Although they
were forced to live on two small reed-covered mud banks or islands, they managed to grow their food and flowers on floating gardens which they made by heaping soft mud from the lake onto rafts which they made from weeds and wattlework. Little by little the race became stronger and soon the other tribes realized that they would not be able to drive them out.

One day two priests were wading along the shore of the lake looking for a better place to settle when suddenly they saw the promised sign. A great eagle swooped out of the sky, picked up a snake from the marshes and then alighted on a cactus plant which was growing out of a rock in the water. The eagle devoured the snake.

Then Mexitla appeared and spoke, "Here my people, the Aztecs, shall dwell and build a great city and become the greatest nation in the land!"

This legend was more significant to the Pre-Columbian Mexican than to the present day Mexican, for the actual prophecy and its fulfillment affected the lives, not only of the Aztecs, but those of other tribes as well. The Aztec tribe became the most powerful in the land and remained so until the arrival of the Spaniard. As a result of Mexitla's prophecy, this god became even more powerful and influenced the religion adopted by his people. He was not a gentle god; in fact he was a god of war and exacted belligerent actions.
from his people in the way of wars, bloody sacrifices and brutality.

When the Spaniards arrived, they found a wonderful city erected on the islands of Lake Texcoco, and in due time this city became to be known as Mexico City. Actually this spot was a terrible place to locate a city. It was situated in a basin with no natural drainage, meager soil, and always in danger of floods and disease, but despite these disadvantages, because of the power of the divine sign, Mexico City remained in such a location. The Aztec symbol which had designated this as the site of the Aztec Empire was later chosen as the national coat-of-arms. And so this ancient legend lives on in the lives of every Mexican, for this symbol of the Eagle, Serpent and Cactus can be found on the Mexican flags, banners, money, and countless other things.

The Mexican coat-of-arms is customarily placed above the entrances of all churches. However, the most imposing replica of this emblem can be found in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. This emblem, fashioned from copper, is a vivid reminder of the Indian symbol which was chosen by the Mexican people as being most emblematic of their love for freedom.

Another legend stemming from religious beliefs which has shaped the lives of the Mexicans is that of Quetzalcoatl.
This legend has lived on to the present time mostly because of the controversies arising as to its authenticity and also because of artistic contributions attributed to Quetzalcoatl's influence. The lives of many of the aboriginal Indians were built around

"Quetzalcoatl, The Fair God"

The Toltec Indians of Ancient Mexico worshiped a god so good, powerful, and loving that many other nations of Indians took him as their god, paying homage to him. In English his name means Plumed Serpent or Feathered Serpent, and strangely enough the stone images which we see today of this kind, intelligent god are quite frightening in appearance—feathered bodies with serpent heads and staring eyes. Perhaps this name of Quetzalcoatl might mean more than Plumed Serpent, however, for some have said that the first part of the word "Quetzal" which name was given to certain birds in Mexico, also means perfection of beauty and the last part "coatl" could mean wisdom—so Quetzalcoatl, the god of beauty and wisdom.  

When Quetzalcoatl was a man and king of the Toltecs,

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8 Abel Gamiz, "Quetzalcoatl," Anuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico, Vol. II (Mexico: Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico, 1941), pp. 94-95.
before he became a god, he was a tall fair person with a blond beard and he wore a beautiful white robe with red crosses on it.

Quetzalcoatl, the king, was very gentle and wise and he wanted his people to live in peace and harmony. He was a man full of ideas and was continually showing his people new things. From him they learned to weave cloth, to smelt metal, and to farm well. It is said that in his reign the Toltec people grew such crops that a man was able to carry only one ear of corn at a time, and pumpkins sometimes grew as large as a man, and cotton grew in many beautiful colors. As time went on, he taught his people to measure time, to read the stars, and soon they developed a calendar more perfect than those of other races throughout the world.

The Toltec empire flourished. Quetzalcoatl became an old man. Then one day, one of the gods, who practiced black magic and vile deeds, because of Quetzalcoatl's popularity and position, became very jealous and tricked him into drinking of the juice of the cactus, a drink which we today call pulque. Then Quetzalcoatl performed deeds that did not please his people, and they decided to send him away.

Before he left his country, Quetzalcoatl prophesied that some day he would again return to the people of Mexico. In his wanderings he stopped with many tribes teaching them
the arts and crafts. Finally he arrived at the mountain Orizaba, a beautiful volcanic peak which is always covered with snow. At sunset or sunrise this mountain reflects soft shades of pink and gold and lavender. Where could Quetzalcoatl have found a more lovely place to spend his last mortal days!

So he climbed to the top and descended into the crater of the volcano. Then he threw himself into the flames from which he emerged as the God Quetzalcoatl, who rose into the heavens to become the Morning Star.

Whether or not there was a white man in Mexico before the Spaniard has been a debatable subject for centuries. There is a story that in 1121 a Bishop Eric left Iceland for America and was never heard of since. Conjecture has it that he ended in Mexico and finding the people receptive began teaching them the doctrines of his religion. One myth tells of a hooded white man who urged the Indians to perform penance and confess. He taught them art, gem cutting, weaving, metal work and also condemned bloody sacrifices. 9

There have been many indications that perhaps the Christian faith was taught to these people long before the advent of the Spaniard. However, even if Eric had arrived in Mexico with his teachings, the arts and beliefs would

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naturally have changed considerably before Cortez arrived several hundred years later so that they would not be directly traceable to a Christian teacher.

A historical Quetzalcoatl or not, the influence of this god permeated the cultures of almost every tribe in Mexico, artistically, intellectually, and emotionally.

Some tribes attribute the final creation of man to Quetzalcoatl who, according to myth, descended into the lower regions and secured bones of the dead from the gods. He then took them to the Goddess of Birth who ground them on stone. The powder was sprinkled with blood of the gods and it then became man.\(^\text{10}\)

Quetzalcoatl also discovered corn which the gods had not been able to find. The ants knew where it was, therefore, Quetzalcoatl changed into a black ant and followed the other ants to the mountain of Tonacetépetl where he found the corn.\(^\text{11}\)

The High Priests of the Zapotec tribes were called Quetzalcoatl in memory of the Toltec god, and they were considered living images and incarnations of Quetzalcoatl.\(^\text{12}\)

Sahagún in his history of the ancient Indians commented on the Quetzalcoatl influence over the Toltecs:

\(^{10}\) Toor, op. cit., pp. 459-60.
\(^{11}\) Ibid, p. 461
"...since they (the Toltecs) were lively and clever in transactions, they succeeded in a short time in acquiring riches, and they said their god Quetzalcoatl gave them these, and so it was said among them of one who became rich in a short time that he was a son of Quetzalcoatl."

Temples were built to him, and according to Aztec historians the Cholula pyramid was constructed by Quetzalcoatl as a refuge from his enemies. Much of the painting of these Indians concerned the legend of Quetzalcoatl. In the temple at Mitla were found astounding paintings depicting the religion and legends of the Indian, and one of the central figures in these friezes was Quetzalcoatl who apparently guided and advised the Indians in all phases of their lives.

Just before the Spanish Conquest the Aztecs had begun to dispense with the gentler teachings of Quetzalcoatl and had reverted to the human sacrifices and captive killings. The people were becoming uneasy and, remembering Quetzalcoatl's promise to return to Mexico to rule again, feared his anger at

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13 Bernardino de Sahagún, Historia General de las Cosas de Nuevo España (Mexico: Editorial Pedro Rondez) Book III, Chap. 29, Sec. 1., p. 115.

such serious infractions of his teachings. However, under the reign of Montezuma the brutality continued. At the beginning of the 16th century strange occurrences took place. The lake rose and flooded Mexico City drowning many people—and there had been no rainfall or earthquakes. Comets were seen. A royal princess professed the ruin of the race and then died. Finally rumors of white men arriving on the east coast reached the ears of Montezuma. Could it be that the Fair God had returned? At first Montezuma accepted Cortez as such; how could he dare to do otherwise? And although Cortez did not realize what a golden opportunity he had in his grasp, the mere fact that the legend of Quetzalcoatl existed considerably aided the Spaniards in their primary penetration into Mexico. Later, when he realized the possibilities of such a situation, Cortez naturally took advantage of it to subdue many of the tribes.

The religious influence of Quetzalcoatl has long since disappeared, but this does not mean that Quetzalcoatl has been forgotten. One is surrounded by reminders of this god at his every turn in Mexico. When visiting the pyramids one is invariably greeted by little native children who sell clay images of the Plumed Serpent. The artistic nature of the Indian has found this god an excellent subject for his painting, silver work, sculpture, and weaving. Indeed, the spirit of Quetzalcoatl lives on in Mexico.
Both of the preceding stories date back to Pre-Columbian days and had their greatest influence at that particular time. Despite the change from pagan religion to Christian, religion itself did not diminish its hold on the people, because in the process of Christianizing it was a frequent event for the Mexicans themselves to experience religious visions of Christian saints, all of which served to strengthen the newly-imposed faith. These religious apparitions soon became part of the Mexican folklore, and among them the most famous probably is the legend of

"Our Lady of Guadalupe"

One Saturday morning in December in the year 1531, an Indian named Juan Diego was on his way down the hill of Tepeyac to the City of Mexico to attend Mass. He hurried past the ruins of the ancient shrine which stood on that hill, for the Franciscan Fathers had taught the Indians that no longer should they worship the ancient gods.

The shrine on the hill of Tepeyac had been built in honor of the Aztec Goddess Tonantzin, who was the goddess of Earth and Corn, and all the people had loved her very deeply. When the Franciscan Fathers had forbidden them to pray to her, the Indians felt very sad for the goddess had been so kind and gentle to them and to their crops.

This morning as Juan was crossing the hill, he
stopped suddenly for he thought he heard beautiful music and could smell a strange yet heavenly fragrance. Then, before him appeared the Blessed Mother Mary, dark of face, however, and dressed in the colorful garments of the Indians, standing on the stones which gleamed like precious stones beneath her feet. Juan Diego was startled at first and began to run away, but the gentle voice of the Virgin stopped him: "Do not run away, my son. Come near to me."

The Indian ascended the slope and knelt before her listening to her words. "Go to the Bishop, Juan Diego, and tell him that I want a church on this spot, here where I may give my blessings to the Indians just as another used to give them blessings, for I love your people and wish to be near them and protect them."

Juan promised to obey her command and hurried to the palace of the Spanish Bishop to tell him the Virgin’s request. But the Bishop, unable to believe that the Virgin would appear to such a humble and poor Indian, doubted Juan’s story, "Why did not the Holy Lady give you something to bring to me? How else can I believe such a strange tale?"

Juan was very unhappy and because the Bishop doubted his version, he too began to doubt that he had seen the apparition. Therefore, instead of returning to the hill as he had promised, he went to the home of an uncle in the city.
Much to his sorrow he found that his poor uncle was very ill and about to die, so he stayed to take care of him.

The following Tuesday he decided to return to the country to get some medicine. When he came to the hill of Tepeyac, he didn't go by the path where he had seen the Holy Mother but instead circled by another way that led by a spring of water. There the Virgin appeared to him again, and told him not to worry that his uncle was well again.

"Now," she said, after hearing of the Bishop's reply, "Go to the place where you first saw me. Pick the flowers you see there and take them to the Bishop as a token from me."

Juan did as he was told, and in a place where before only cactus had grown were blooming some beautiful roses. These he gathered and put in his tilma or cape and took them to the Bishop.

In the Bishop's presence he said that the Virgin had sent him a token of roses and saying this he opened his tilma. No one was more surprised than Juan himself, for instead of the roses there was painted on the cape from the colors of the roses a beautiful image of the Virgin.

The Bishop begged forgiveness for not having believed Juan Diego's story. Taking the Tilma he reverently placed it over the altar in his chapel and then asked Juan to point out the place that was designated by the Virgin for her church.
uncle he found out that at the exact moment when the Virgin appeared to him by the spring of water, his uncle had miraculously recovered.

A chapel was constructed on the spot where Juan had seen the Virgin. The news of the miracle spread rapidly and converts were made by the thousands. In fact, this appearance had such a stimulating effect that miracles happened in swift succession all over Mexico and soon there was scarcely a church which did not have a divine patroness, who probably is still worshipped today.

The Dark Madonna, who appeared to Juan Diego, became steadily more outstanding in her influence as time went on. In 1544 a terrible epidemic broke out in the City of Mexico. The Virgin was brought to the city and her presence abated the pestilence. In 1629 her presence caused the flood waters in Mexico City to subside. In 1754 a Papal Bull declared the Virgin of Guadalupe Patroness and Protectress of New Spain.

During the conquest and long afterwards the Virgins took part in the battles. When the Mexican patriot Father Hidalgo y Costillo started the Revolution for Mexican Independence, he began it with the cry, "¡Viva La Virgin

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15 Toor, op. cit., p. 175.
de Guadalupe y muera al mal gobierno!" "Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe and death to bad government!" During these ten years of revolution her image was on all the banners of the Insurgents. The Virgin of Remedies was the Protectoress of the Royalists. The Virgins were actually personified by the people and if either side captured a banner with the "enemy" Virgin on it, she was shot as a traitor. Also when the images produced miracles, they would receive military degrees according to the merit of the act. Some had ranks as high as generals. After the Victory of the Insurgents, the Virgin of Guadalupe was more powerful than ever. After the War for Independence the congress of the New Republic decreed December 12th, the anniversary of her last appearance to Juan Diego, a national holiday.

During Iturbide's reign in 1822, he created the Order of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The first president of the Republic, Félix Fernández, changed his name to Guadalupe Victoria. Today the name Guadalupe is on the lips and in the thoughts of countless Mexicans. Her image rides in taxis, she is stamped in cloth and paper, she greets you from the walls of taverns and from liquor bottles, her ballads are sung in every part of Mexico and composed by Mexicans of all

17 Toor, op. cit., p. 175-76.
18 Terry, op. cit., p. 397
classes. There is a saying that a pistol and a medallion of Guadalupe are any Mexican youth's birthright.

The Basilica of Guadalupe is situated at the foot of the Tepayac hill; above it on the hill is the chapel marking the spot where Juan found the flowers and about a block away is the chapel of the Well, the spot where Juan saw her for the second time. Inside the latter is the Well of the Virgin which is said to have effected many miraculous cures, and thousands still come to drink of its somewhat brackish waters, seeking relief from pain and illness. Pilgrims carry this water to their far-off communities and sell it to their neighbors. Tradition says that whosoever drinks of the waters of Guadalupe will return to Mexico.

On December 12th of each year there is a big fiesta to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Pilgrims come from all over Mexico, walking, dancing, crawling on their knees, to worship and enjoy the celebration. On December 12, 1931, the 400th anniversary, the celebration of the apparition of the Virgin was tremendous and church dignitaries from many foreign countries visited Mexico. On October 12, 1945, in a great fiesta the Virgin was crowned as The Queen of Wisdom and of the Americas. These services, lasting a week, were attended by high church officials from every land. 19

19 Terry, op. cit., p. 397
An aura of paganism still surrounds the religion of Mexico and today in villages where the wise women still practice, it is not uncommon to find them mixing witchcraft with Christian religious beliefs. A usual cure is a strange potion for the ailing person with instructions to drink it slowly and commend himself to the Virgin of Guadalupe who will cure him. Instances of such cures combined with Christian worship are found all over Mexico.

Although the Virgin of Guadalupe is surrounded by riches no matter where she is found, she is still a saint of the poor and humble more than of the elite. The Basilica is always full of the devout and suffering poor with their small gifts of flowers, incense, centavos, and whatever else they have they consider of worth. For centuries they have been praying to the Virgin with an undying faith despite the fact that every little ever comes to change their conditions.

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20 Toor, op. cit., p. 146
CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCES OF ANCIENT BELIEFS

Because religion has been such an essential part of Mexican life, it is not unusual to discover that religion itself was influenced by various aspects of Mexican life. The beliefs of the Pre-Columbian Indian, whether or not they originated from the religion of the period, many times were included in the religious rites of the tribes. So it was that the Calendar Stone, which actually was a scientific endeavor, the 52 year cycle, and the Four Cardinal Directions had multiple effects on the Mexican life.

The last of these, the Four Cardinal Directions, was quite a widespread and influential belief. The Universe was viewed with a religious sense rather than a geographic one in Pre-Columbian times, and it was divided into four religious areas plus the center. In the Aztec mythology the Fire God controlled the center; Tlaloc, the rain god, and Mixcoatl, the Cloud God, controlled the east, an area considered very productive—geographically this area covered the fertile Vera Cruz coastal plain. The land in the South was assigned to Gods of Spring and Flowers—Xipe and Macuilzochitl; Quetzalcoatl ruled the West, home of the evening
star Venus; and the North was associated with Mictlante-cuhtli, Lord of the Dead.²¹

In other records of Aztec mythology one finds the four directions associated with colors—red, east; black, north; blue, south; and white, west. When a divine couple had children the first four symbolized the four directions. These colors were considered sacred and were used in head-dresses, costumes and in art.²² Even today in the paintings of Orosco, Rivera and others one will notice the tendency to use these colors predominately when depicting ancient scenes or the Indians descended from the ancient tribes.

The veneration of the Cardinal Points is found among many primitive natives of the past and present, and it has been preserved in many instances in the lives of the modern Mexican. One interesting theory about the influence of the four directions is that it may have accounted for the ready acceptance of the cross. In any religious functions in ancient times, when offerings were made, it was the custom to present the offerings to the four directions or four cardinal points.

The records of the monks show that the dances among the Aztecs and other tribes were usually considered official.

²¹ George C. Vaillant, Aztecs of Mexico, (Garden City, New York: Double Day & Co., Inc., 1948), p. 171-72
²² Toor, op. cit., p. 329
Institutions, essentially religious and staged in honor of the deities. In present day Mexico a traditional group of dancers still remains called the Concheros. These men, of whom there are about 50,000 in the states of Guanajuato, Gueretaro, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, and the Federal District, dance regularly at numerous fiestas. Since the worship of the four winds or four directions has continued to be a part of the ritual of these groups, their most important dances are those performed at the sanctuaries situated at the four directions in relation to Mexico City—La Villa de Guadalupe, Chalma, Los Remedios, and Amecameca. In the Dance of the Concheros they make invocation to the spirits of the Four Winds before and after the dance, and during the dance gay colored banners are carried about to invoke the permission of the four winds or the four cardinal points to perform the dance.

In some parts of Oaxaca and Guerrero it is still the custom during the celebration of the Day of the Dead, November 2, to make offerings in the four corners of the pantheon and also in the center to the deities of the Four Cardinal Points.

The Mayan calendar consisted to two counts running together concurrently. The first, adopted by the Aztecs.

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23 Toor, op. cit., p. 328.
some time later, had 13 months with 20 days each, making up the sacred year of 260 days. The sacred year was further divided into 20 weeks with 13 days each, and each of these twenty "weeks" was presided over by a god or goddess.

The second count was 365 days, 18 months with 20 days each plus five additional days at the end of the year. This count was based on the seasons.

As these two counts ran concurrently, the beginning of the 260 day year and that of the 365 day year would coincide every 52 years.

Priests observed the Planet Venus and set down the earth's revolution of this planet at 584 days. At the end of two cycles (104 years) there was a tremendous religious ceremony, because the beginning of a Venus count, the solar count, a 52 year cycle, and the sacred year count all coincide. In their reckonings both Aztec and Mayan tribes made use of a cycle of 144,000 days and even larger units which indicates that their grasp of duration was astounding and not equaled until modern times. The 52 year cycle deeply affected the Aztecs as they thought of the change of one cycle to another as the end of one life and the beginning of a new one. They had a New Fire Ceremony at which time they extinguished the old altar fire which had burned perpetually.

\[24\text{ Vaillant, op. cit., pp. 181-199.}\]
for fifty-two years and kindled a new one in honor of a new life. 25

As with so many ancient customs the original significance of their preservation has almost been forgotten by present day participants. In certain parts of Mexico the ancient Aztec game of Patolli (meaning beans) still is played but undoubtedly few realize that at one time this game had considerable astronomical and religious significance. It is played on a little board in the form of a cross, each of the arms is marked with a double row of little houses, and the players have to cover 52 houses from the starting point until returning to it. Dice are used, the dice in ancient times being beans. The numbers on the board, it is thought, may have been the image of the sun passing through the 52 houses of the cycle. 26

On Corpus Christi festivals the performance of the Voladores takes place, the best exhibition being at Papantla, Vera Cruz. This Flying Pole dance or game as it is sometimes called existed among various tribes. Today it is danced by the Huastecas, Otomis, Mexicans and Totonacs with only a few changes from the ancient dance. The ancient symbolism has been lost to most of the Flyers, but they still usually have

26 Toor, op. cit., pp. 274-75.
four Flyers plus one center performer, sometimes referred to as a musician. The four voladores, swinging on ropes, circle the pole thirteen times each. These four flyers originally represented the four cardinal points or the four birds who guarded the four cardinal points. The total revolutions made by the voladores amount to 52, the number of years in the cycle. This dance is so unusual inform that it would be unfortunate not to include a description of it.

On Corpus Christi day one sees in the middle of the plaza a tall straight trunk of a tree which is usually about 90 feet high. This tree trunk has been carefully selected by a group of Indians who have scoured the countryside for weeks looking for the most suitable choice. Even the selecting and cutting down of the tree requires certain rituals. The groups dances around it asking its pardon for daring to cut it down, and then during the cutting the Indians pour liquor on it to make it forget its pain, and they continue to sing and dance until it falls. Then they transport it to the village plaza where it is set up, but before this, the hole into which it is to be placed is well filled with offerings of food, drinks, and smokes so that the tree will be well fed and will be able to support the flyers.

After the pole is set up, something resembling a vine rope is spiraled up the tree trunk, serving as a ladder for three men who, carrying a section of a hollowed tree trunk,
climb the pole very carefully. They put this section in place at the top of the pole as if placing a thimble on a finger. These three Indians lash and coil four ropes beneath the "thimble". All these activities are watched in silence by the people gathered below. A few feet below the top of the pole four small boards are arranged in a square and are attached to the "thimble". These boards are to serve as resting places for the flyers. Then the three Indians come down the pole and disappear into the crowd.

After a time there appear five men, wearing some strange clothes symbolizing birds. They are the performers, the intrepid men who will relive the ancient native dance. One by one they scale the pole, four seating themselves on the constructed board square and the "musician" taking his place at the top of the "thimble".

On the pinnacle of the pole which is scarcely nine inches in diameter this "musician" begins his dance and with it his sad music played on the flute and the tambourine. He is the epitomy of harmony, equilibrium and valor. He dances and leaps on the small platform without losing his balance until his part of the dance is finished. Then he is followed by the "voladores" who take their turns in displaying equally graceful and daring dance steps. The danger of the performance is reflected in the deep long silence of the spectators who watch the spectacle with faces almost frozen with awe.
Then suddenly the four flyers leap out into space, head first. Around their feet are tied ropes which are attached to the "thimble. As the "thimble" rotates on its pole pivot, the ropes lengthen and the men swing out further and further, circling the pole thirteen times before finally reaching the ground. Their garb and their manner of descent certainly give the appearance of birds circling to the ground. The fifth man, the "musician", clambers down the ladder of vines. Nobody has uttered a cry; only when the last man reaches the ground is the atmosphere of tenseness and breathlessness lifted.

As has been mentioned before, the symbolism of this dance has been lost to many including the performers, but it is still a profession among the Indian tribes to be a Voldador, and it is almost considered a position which can only be inherited. Although it has preserved many of the ancient rites, the dance has generally become known as a secular performance. This dance or game has many times been compared to the Sun Dance of the Plains Indians in the United States.27 In some places the number of flyers or Voladores has been increased to make the dance more impressive not only for the natives but also for the tourists who are attracted to the Corpus Christi fiestas. It has also been rumored that because of

excessive drinking by the voladores to bolster their courage before attempting the dance, local authorities in some places have forbidden the presentation of the dance.

Not only have the various concepts of the Calendar Stone survived the ages, but the Calendar itself continues to maintain its importance throughout the years, perhaps not as a basis upon which to measure the days and the years, but at least as a cultural piece. However, undoubtedly there are still places in Mexico where natives follow this calendar in their religious activities and agricultural determinations. In other parts of the country it has provided the Mexican artist with workable material for all sorts of design. There are very few handbags and briefcases that boast of any sort of intricate leather work which do not include the Mexican Calendar Stone motif. In the silver line many bracelets, watch chains, buckles, and flat war remind one of the scientific genius of the great cultures that existed hundreds of years before a European set foot on this continent. This piece of culture from the past will no doubt continue to be a valuable key to many of the archeological mysteries that still surround the cultures of the Pre-Columbian Indian.
CHAPTER V

THE ROLE OF ROMANTIC LEGENDS

Mexico has many legends which cannot be classified as completely religious nor as springing from generally accepted beliefs. Some of the best loved stories are among this group which might be labeled romantic.

Superstition has kept alive many of these stories, such as those connected with Malinche, the Aztec girl who was Cortez' interpreter and mistress. Many stories exist about Malinche's power over men, and several sections outside of Mexico are said to be haunted by her spirit leading men astray. Malinche is characterized in many of Mexico's folk dances. In Pahuatlan six flyers are used in the Dance of the Voladores, and one of these is dressed as Malinche. Her dance is more intricate than the rest and the costume makes it even more dangerous. The Cora tribe also uses Malinche in their dances, dressing a young child as the young woman. Another dance performed by many tribes is that of La Conquista depicting the Conquest by Cortez. This dance utilizes historical characters including Malinche. Numerous other folk dances have Malinche as a central figure and in these she is treated in a variety of ways, both sympathetically

\[28\] Toor, op. cit., p. 347.
and harshly. Malinche is also preserved in the legends arising from the struggle for Independence. She is depicted riding on horseback casting thunderbolts at the Government.  

Mexico is a city full of superstitions, and many of the streets of the city have been named as a result of some specific happening there. These names have been accepted, and the people still associate certain deeds with certain streets and take many of the legends at face value.

There is a story about a merchant and his son who came to live in Mexico City. They set up a small shop on a street which since their time has been called the Alley of the Dead Man. The son became very ill one day, and his father vowed that if the Virgin made his son well, he, the father, would walk in his barefeet to the sanctuary and give thanks. His wish was granted, but the father did not fulfill the vow. He kept putting it off but still always thinking about it. Finally he talked to the Archbishop who said that undoubtedly the Blessed Virgin wouldn't want him to risk rheumatism for such a vow and he dispensed the merchant from it. However, the Archbishop, on his way from church, saw the merchant walking in his bare feet to the sanctuary. In reply to his questioning, the merchant answered that he must fulfill his

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vow or spend his days in Hell. Later the Archbishop went to
the home of the merchant and found him dead. It is said that
even now, 300 years later, the merchant in a white shroud,
carrying a yellow torch, still walks the Alley of the Dead
Man or the Callejon del Muerto. 30

Of the folktales which have arisen from the fruitful
imagination of the ancient Indian few can compare with the
legend of the two mountain peaks which became the final rest-
ing places for a Toltec Princess and a Chichimecan Prince.

There once was a Toltec King reigning in the Valley of
Teotihuacan who had a lovely daughter. This daughter was
eighteen years of age and had not yet seen anyone among the
Toltec nobles who caused even the slightest flutter of her
heart. According to Toltec law only a Toltec of noble birth
had any right to look upon the Toltec princess with any
thoughts of having her as his bride. But one day a handsome
young Chichimecan prince of the nearby mountains of the mighty
Ajusco happened to come to the Toltec capital to do some
trading. The Chichimeca tribe was not among the tribes which
the Toltecs accepted, least of all the royal Toltecs.

Nevertheless, this Chichimecan prince arrived in the
capital, carried upon a richly adorned litter. He was dressed
in the most elegant robes and was followed by quite an im-

30 Vicente Riva Palacio and Juan de Dios Peza, Tradiciones y Leyendas Mexicanas, (Mexico: Libreria General, 1922).
pressive retinue. It so happened that this morning the Tolte
c princess and her ladies-in-waiting were in the market
place looking for some fine embroideries, and there the two
met. The attraction between the young people was immediate,
and although neither said a word, the ladies-in-waiting were
aware of the admiration in the Chichimecan’s face and noticed
the sudden flush of excitement that lighted the face of their
dear princess. After whispering to each other, the ladies-
in-waiting rushed the royal one quickly back to the palace.

The prince reluctantly finished his transactions and
turned toward home, resolving to forget the lovely princess
whom he had seen in the market place, for he knew what diffi-
culties would be encountered if this sudden attraction were to
continue. But he was not able to forget the beautiful lady
of the market and after many restless days he again went to
the Toltec capital with the hope of seeing her again. This
time he had his slaves carry him past the palace of the Tol-
tec king. And there, in the low doorway leading into a
beautiful garden, he saw the princess. She was dressed in a
white robe of the finest linen. The bright colored embroidery
for which she was shopping the first time he saw her adorned
the neck and sleeves and a band of it bordered the hem of the
skirt. Her black braids hung gracefully on her shoulders. Her
beauty was almost breathtaking, but despite this beauty her
eyes were very sad.
But when she saw the prince a new and happy light came into her dark eyes and she smiled and beckoned the prince to come nearer. He alighted from the litter, and as he approached her, she realized that this tall, handsome Chichimecan prince was the man who she had always dreamed would some day come to her.

Upon his head he wore a headdress of green quetzal feathers. His features were strong and of classic lines. And his eyes were filled with a burning light of love. The clothes he wore were of the finest quality, and the skins that he had over his shoulder gave proof of his courage and great hunting ability. Everything about him was pleasing to the eye of this young maiden.

Realizing what a short time they had together, the prince quickly told her of his love, and the princess too confessed her love for him. Again the prince went away, this time pondering as to what course should be taken. Then he sent the Toltec king a message stating his love for the princess and requesting her hand in marriage.

The King was furious and rejected the offer. Unable to understand why a Toltec princess would become infatuated by an outsider, he confined his daughter to her room thinking that she would soon forget the prince. However, one of the ladies-in-waiting was very sympathetic to the lovers and sent a message to the Chichimecan offering to arrange a meeting.
between the two. The King believing that no daughter of his could possibly be seriously interested in a Chichimecan relaxed his vigilence, and as the months passed the two lovers met quite often in a nearby spot where the princess used to go to play when she was very young.

The two finally decided to brave the King's anger and one evening the Prince carried the Princess away. She was certain that her father's love would make him lenient and he would then permit the marriage. But she did not reckon with the ancient Toltec law. The father king refused to see his daughter to give her his blessing, and he issued an edict stating that noone was permitted to give food or shelter to the lovers. So they became outcasts, not only of the Toltecs, but also of the Chichimecas who also refused to accept them.

Weeks and months passed, and they became more weary and hungry. Their only food was the berries which they found and the roots which they were able to dig up. At last they knew that they must die, and one night as they lay themselves down in the shelter of an immense maguey in the valley over which towered two very high mountain peaks, the Chichimecan told his Toltec princess that on the morrow they would have to part. The cold winter would soon begin, and they could not survive the hardships much longer.

"Tonight will be our last night together on earth."
But soon we shall be united in the spirit world, and we shall be happy for there will be no Toltec nor Chichimecan laws to punish us or separate us. The priests of our fathers' people have called upon the disapproval of the love god, and we must pay for our deed with our lives. At sunrise we will say farewell, and then you will ascend the lower mountain there, and when you reach its peak, there you will find your eternal resting place. I shall ascend the higher mountain and soon we shall be united again."

In the morning the Chichimecan prince tenderly bid his lovely princess farewell. Then they both turned away and began their long ascent to their respective mountain peaks. A Toltec legend has it that snows fell and covered both mountains. Iztacihuatl, as the Toltecs named the mountain where their princess lay, has been covered with snow since that day, a shroud of white which protects and shields their sleeping lady from the wintery blasts, while about once a year in December, Popocatépetl, as the Chichimecans called the mountain to which their prince went to keep his watch, rumbles and sends forth smoke, a symbol of the prince mourning for his dead love.

This legend cannot be cited as one which actually has considerable effect on the Mexican people of today, but one must not minimize its importance in the Mexican folklore.
Perhaps it might be considered under a "squaring the circle" aspect. The mountains evoked the growth of this legend, the legend serves to call attention to the mountains, and then when one views the mountains, he is immediately reminded of the legend again. Surely in years past the existence of the legend tended to decrease the frightening aspect of Popocatépetl's rumblings and gave to them instead a romantic aura evoked by the legend. It is quite likely that this attitude has remained through the ages, and so today when Popocatépetl mutters, it is not unusual to hear an explanation based on the old Tolteco legend.

As these mountains inspired the ancient Indian imagination, so they have in modern times continued to contribute to Mexican artistry. The two mountain peak motif is a usual sight on Mexican tapistries, paintings, pottery, and jewelry. Perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of its use is on the world-famous stage curtain made by Tiffany for the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Such technical skills have been employed that it is possible to view this curtain mountain scene under every imaginable atmospheric condition—in rain, sunshine, at sunset or sunrise. It is said that the idea for this outstanding work of art came from the Mexican painter, Atl, who has captured Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl on canvas in every change devised by nature; these
changes the Palacio de Bellas Artes has attempted to portray mechanically.

In almost every tour which one might take in the vicinity of Mexico City, it would be unusual not to have the guide make special mention of Popo and Izzi, as they are popularly called. In such a tour attention would probably be directed to the appearance of Izzi to a sleeping woman, and with that introduction one would be told the legend of the two lovers. The romantic element in the Mexican personality will not let this legend die, and also the superstitious fear which many Mexicans still possess finds in this story an assuring and interesting explanation for Popo's periodic rumblings.

Another of the popular legends told in Mexico is that of the Chinese girl who has become, strangely enough, a symbol of Mexican womanhood. This Chinese girl is known as

"La China Poblana"

Long long ago in a country in eastern India was born a little girl whom her parents called Mirrha, meaning Bitterness. Mirrha's father was a magician who performed wonderful miracles and healed the sick. After Mirrha was born, the Virgin Mary appeared and took the young mother to a near-by hill and there uncovered a hidden treasure of gold and jewels.
"Take these," she said, "and bring up your daughter with much care."

Astrologers who cast the horoscope of the young girl predicted that her wheel of destiny would bring her strange fortunes. One day she suddenly disappeared and after five long days of frantic searching her parents found her unharmed on a raft of driftwood which had been swept by the rushing waters of the river into a calm bay. It was then predicted that she would be swept by the forces of destiny across the seas to strange lands where she would find happiness and an eternal resting place.

When she was nine years old, her parents, escaping from an invasion, stopped at a seaport which was frequented by Portuguese merchants and sailors, who actually were pirates and slave traders. One day as she was playing on the shore, she was kidnapped by these pirates and placed on a ship bound for Manila.

At Manila she was sold by the pirates to be sent to the Marquez de Galvez, then the Viceroy of Mexico. From Manila the Galleon spread its sails, and after a long lonesome voyage across the Pacific docked at the port of Acapulco. The city was bustling with merchants from all parts of Mexico who had come to bid on the perfumes, spices, silks, laces, etc., which had come from the Philippines and China. The
little Chinese girl sat on one of the bales, frightened and lonely.

The Viceroy of Mexico had been recalled from his post so that now Mirrha had no master. The Captain was talking to a merchant from Puebla.

The captain explained, "I bought her in Manila from some Portuguese pirates for the Viceroy, who, of course, is not here to claim her. She says she was baptized in China and her Christian name is Catarina de San Juan."

"She is a beautiful child," the merchant said, "My wife and I would love her."

"Then take her with you," the captain answered. "My ship is no place for a child and I couldn't leave her in Manila to be sold. She is more a princess than a slave."

"Yes, indeed, a little princess, and my wife and I will treat her like one."

On her way to Puebla Mirrha soon lost her fear and in no time at all she was able to converse in broken Spanish with the merchant. She told him all about her life before coming to Mexico.

In Puebla the little Chinese girl lived very happily with the merchant and his wife. And as she grew older she spent much of her time helping the poor and the sick. Soon her name was beloved by all.
The children loved her dearly and often she would sit in the garden of the nuns' convent and tell stories to the boys and girls clustered about her. Sometimes she became homesick for her native land, and one afternoon in the spring she told the children she was too sad to play with them. They left her one by one until she was all alone in the garden. Then suddenly they all rushed back, laughing and carrying a bouquet of flowers for their lovely Chinese lady. Hearing the merry laughter the nuns hurried to the windows just in time to see a lovely miracle take place. As the children gave her the flowers, lovely blossoms appeared on the Chinese lady's plain blouse and skirt, and Catarina was no longer sad. After that she always wore soft blouses and full skirts that were embroidered with flowers.

Catarina died in 1688 and to honor her the women of Puebla made themselves dresses like hers, except their skirts were more gaudy because they added spangles and sequins. Usually they wore them to fiestas, and now the custom has spread all over Mexico. Catarina de San Juan was named La China Poblana—the Chinese girl of Puebla—and the costume she made famous also carries the same name.

How much of this story is legend and how much is truth, no one knows, but in the State Museum of Puebla is a collection of the clothes owned by the Oriental girl who won for
herself a place in the hearts--and also in the wardrobes--of all the women of Mexico.

It is interesting to note that one present day aspect of China Poblana is far removed from her predecessor of the saintly characteristics and deeds. In fact this present day China has come to exemplify someone far from saintly, someone flirtatious; and her gestures and character are usually considered frivolous. Her costume itself is an indication of this frivolity. The bright colors attract all eyes—the dark red and green skirt sparkling with spangles and heavily embroidered with yellow, black and white flowers. Her white or cream colored blouse, also embroidered, leaves arms and throat bare. A blouse such as this is used today in the hot southern part of the country. On her bare arms are many bracelets; around her waist is a rebozo which is sometimes used to cover La China’s head when she goes to Mass. She wears green tafetta slippers and her hair, usually parted in the middle and plaited in two thick braids is tied with red and green ribbons.

This imitation of the original China Poblana costume has given romantic inspiration to many Mexican writers such as Fidel, Juvenal and Facundo and such authors have used these frivolous characteristics, portrayed by the present day Chinas, as definite charges against China Poblana. The role that the China Poblana plays in much literature is that
of a flirt and trouble-maker among the young men, and more than once has she herself jealously drawn a dagger on a rival or has had the blood of an unfortunate lover spilled on her account. It is rather curious that such a person should spring from the saintly Catarina de San Juan.31

The China Poblana is a familiar sight at any festivity in Mexico. On the last Friday during Lent a traditional fiesta used to take place on the Viga canal, outside of Mexico City. This was attended by all classes, including the Spanish nobility. However, after 1920 it became mostly a fiesta of the masses,32 but since it was also a day of the Charros, the Chinas and Charros continued to turn out for the festivities in large numbers. Charros may be classified as gentlemen cowboys noted for their dexterity in handling horses and are readily recognized by their special costumes—sombreros with high crowns and wide brims, tight pants and short vests, scarves, boots, and whips—all of one color and heavily decorated with ornaments of silver and gold. Occasionally the young lady with the Charro will wear a Charra costume which actually is a modified China Poblana costume, a long full green flannel skirt with red yoke, trimmed with sequins, a white embroidered shirt tucked into the skirt and


32 Terry, op. cit., p. 350.
a folded rebozo over the shoulders crossed in front. The Charras usually wear a sombrero and sometimes a sarape over their shoulders. The Chinas, Charras, and Charros almost always participate in any outstanding activity of the year such as the opening of the bullfighting season and the opening of the Hipódromo, the race track of Mexico City.

In the folk dances of Mexico one will see the China Poblana costume time and time again. The government since 1921 has become interested in the importance of native folk art and craft and has made the folkdance a required physical education course in all schools. The Jarabe Tapatío was chosen as the national folkdance, and the official costumes are those of the China Poblana and the Charro. The Federal Department of Education sends dance instructions and general arrangements to all the teachers of the country. 33

Images of La China Poblana can be found on postcards and calendars everywhere in Mexico, and in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco, exquisite miniatures are made of the little Chinese girl of Puebla.

Truly, although Catarina de San Juan—La China Poblana—has been dead over three centuries, she still lives in the hearts of many Mexicans.

CHAPTER VI

RECAPITULATION

Folklore and folkways constitute an important part of the real Mexico, and they have a meaning not to be overlooked when considering the country, a meaning which they lack in connection with a country like ours. Our adult world is quite an unimaginative one. Perhaps the Mexican outlook on life could be compared to those few precious years of our childhood when lore and legend seemed so vitally important to us. This is not to imply that the Mexican lives in a state of fancy but only to suggest that his life is tempered and colored by the Mexican tradition of folklore. This tradition has been an essential part of the Mexican life since before the Conquest, and the people and the nation have continued to grow in that pattern of tradition.

We can scarcely boast of having many truly American traditions. Probably the only one which come readily to mind is the observance of Thanksgiving. American folk literature usually is viewed from the literary standpoint rather than from tradition. Therefore, most people are unaware of the definite influence which folklore and beliefs have on the lives of many peoples of the world, and it is probable that even those who are most strongly affected by them do not consciously realize their importance.
Whether or not Mexico is aware of the control which folkways exercise, it is one of the few countries which continues to find enjoyment in retaining old folklore and giving birth to new. The Mexican has always found lore to be a good medium for expressing ideas, explaining happenings and exploring the unknown. His background in this field has been especially rich, and this field continues to be vibrantly alive. Actually beliefs and legends, being such an essential part of Mexican life, have proved themselves indispensable to the growth of this nation.

In the preceding chapters several types of lore have been presented to illustrate their influence on various phases of Mexican life. The legends stemming from religion undoubtedly have been more influential than any others. It might be said that without the use of miracle legends, conversion to Christianity would have been a much more difficult and slower process. Catholicism has been able to use various legends to convince the Mexican of the desirability of its religion, whereas in other countries such obvious measures would not have been useable.

As mentioned before the religious element has reflected upon almost every aspect of Mexican life. It did so during the Pre-Columbian era, and it has continued to do so up to the present day. One need only to attend various religious
and social festivities to realize that neither the social nor the religious are satisfactorily complete without the presence of the other. Economically, religion has been utilized by many Mexicans to promote their well being. Politically, religion has many times been the deciding factor in controversies. The legends and lore connected with the religion of Mexico, pagan and Christian, have certainly helped to maintain its strength.

Although the status of the Mexican Indian, economically, socially, and politically, has never been an enviable one, still it is he who has contributed most to Mexican culture. He has not chosen to ignore outside influences, yet he has not allowed them to destroy his individualism—the result being a delightful blend of Spanish and Mexican qualities.

The artistic temperament of the Mexican has inspired many outstanding contributions to the culture. The old stories and beliefs, religious and non-religious, have become objects for imitation; and so not only are they preserved in the actual telling but also in paintings, pottery, weaving, jewelry and clothing. The ideas of this lore continue to live by the people's commemorating them in games, dances, songs, national emblems and standards.

Needless to say, not all Mexicans have direct contact with the actual folklore and folkways, but there are few who are not influenced by them, if not directly, at least indirect-
ly. It is heartening to note that even though Mexico is acquiring more sophistication as the years pass, a sophistication which naturally has a tendency to draw away from folkways, most Mexicans, proud as they are of their heritage, are consciously and unconsciously encouraging the perpetuation of the folk traditions which so vividly portray in many ways the fears and superstitions, the ideals, the habits, and the soul of the Mexican,
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APPENDIX

On the following pages will be presented English translations of several Mexican legends. Although modern contrivances of man make it difficult to imagine the ancient days and to retell the tales and legends which still cling to the country, although electric lights illumine the streets discouraging imaginary lovers, and although buses and automobiles rush past noisily driving the spectres from the streets, still somehow these legendary tales hang on and the Mexican keeps them alive by giving his version of them.

Most of the tales included here date back to the pre-Columbian or colonial period. The story about the woman Xtabay is an old Mayan legend, one which has been preserved by each succeeding generation and has become well known all over Mexico. The first part of this story is the seldom heard legend of the origin of this woman who drives men insane by giving them her love and then disappearing. The last part is a selection used in a modern play which has as its theme the mythical power of this woman.

The Wild Pigeon and the Animal Stories are a few of the delightful and enchanting tales of the ancient Indian tribes. To them the flowers, birds, animals, rocks, trees and clouds all had their legends, and they greatly enjoyed relating and believing them.
The story of the Weeping Woman and that of the Woman with the Iron Shoes originate in the city of Mexico. Almost every street and section of Mexico City is noted for one or more legends. Amidst the clamor of this modern metropolis these tales live on and grow, and new ones are born to be told and retold until they too will become a part of the Mexican folklore tradition.
"Virtue," says the Indian who possesses a natural gift of wisdom and a clear mind, "is in the heart and not in the actions of men. Fill your heart with virtue and when you die, you will go to the place where all is happiness, under the tall and leafy Cod-trees which await in heaven for those men who are good.

"A wise saying is that one must not only remember the things of life but also the things of death. Listen and you will see how this is so.

"Much has been said of the woman Xtabay and most of it with reference to the fact that she is a beautiful Indian woman who bewitches with her cunning arts those men who approach her when they encounter her at night on the road. It is said that she seduces them because she is very beautiful and that she also kills them because she is hard of heart. This is what is related, but her origin is not revealed, nor is it said who the woman Xtabay was before dedicating herself to such perverse deeds. Who was she as a human being? We shall see that she does not come out of the ceibas as it is the custom to narrate. The ceiba is a sacred and good tree, and from its bosom no malignant being can be born.

"No, the woman Xtabay is born of a bad plant, the
punzadora, and if one encounters her next to the ceiba, it is because she is able to hide herself behind its wide trunk in order to surprise her victims. She also knows that the ceibas are trees which the Indian loves most and there she can easily trap him. But in no way is she the daughter of the ceiba.

"Now listen to the story I have to tell you--

"Once long ago two women lived in a little town. One was known by the name of Xkeban, which, when translated into English, means 'prostitute'. The other was called Utz-colel, which means 'good woman'. In truth, Xkeban was very beautiful, but she was always involved in illicit love affairs. Because of this, she was not accepted by the honorable people of the community who excused themselves from her presence whenever possible, as if escaping from a repulsive thing. On more than one occasion they had planned to throw her out of town, although finally, for moral satisfaction, they had preferred to have her close at hand in order to scorn and ridicule her.

Utz-colel was extremely beautiful, righteous and austere, and none could match the virtue of that woman. She had never committed any frailty of love which would cause the chaste neighborhood to place her under surveillance.

But the bad woman, despite being who she was, did good deeds freely, whereever she could and whenever she could. She
was very sympathetic and helped the beggars who came to her for aid. She cured the sick forgotten poor. She sheltered useless animals. Never had she been heard to complain, and above all she was humble of heart and suffered silently all the abuses and insults of the townspeople.

"Utz-colel, on the other hand, although very virtuous of body, was inflexible and hard of character, and she had such egotistical sentiments that she treated with scorn the beggars who approached her, not giving them even a crust of bread, for she said that it would foment vagrancy. She had disdain for the humble, considering them inferior to her, and she did not cure the sick by her repugnance. Her virtue, which she did not ever expose to the temptations of love, was as rigid as an upright pole, and her heart was as cold as the skin of the serpent.

"One day the neighbors did not see Xkeban leave her house; another day passed and still another. They supposed that she was probably engrossed with some one of her many admirers and therefore they chose to ignore her absence. Soon they began to smell an overpowering perfume whose origin they could not find at first. Finally they investigated further, and much to their astonishment they found that the wind was carrying this scent from the house of Xkeban. And in the house of Xkeban was found her body. She had been abandoned by all the community, but her pets still were guarding her
body with care, licking her hands and chasing the flies away. But what astounded the neighbors most of all was the perfume which emanated from the dead body and spread over the entire town.

"The townspeople remained quite confused and unable to explain such a phenomenon. When news of this reached the ears of Utz-colel, she laughed scornfully in disbelief. 'It is impossible,' she exclaimed, 'that the cadaver of such a creature would be able to give off any perfume.'

"Nevertheless, she was curious and went to Xkeban's home and there she too smelled the fragrant perfume which came from the body. Not hiding either her wonderment or her spite, she said with contempt, 'It is only a trick of the devil to deceive man,' but then she added, 'However, if the body of this vile woman smells so fragrant, when I die, as I am so very virtuous, surely my body will give off an even better odor.

"Naturally, at the funeral of Xkeban were only the very poor, whom she had helped or cured of their infirmities, since the rest of the people said, as did the virtuous woman, that the whole thing was the work of the devil. But wherever the funeral procession passed, there remained the smell of a pleasant and mysterious perfume, and the following days her tomb was covered with forest flowers. But nobody knew who had placed them there.
"A short time later, Utz-colel died, and there was great mourning by the people who were impressed by her virtuous life. She had died a virgin and surely the doors of heaven would open wide for her soul. But to everybody's amazement, and contrary to that which everybody had expected and that she herself had predicted, her body gave off an unbearable stench, as of putrid meat. Notwithstanding this terrible thing, the greater part of the community went to her funeral carrying great wreaths of flowers to adorn her tomb. But it so happened that the following morning there no longer were any flowers on the grave, a fact which naturally was attributed to work of demons."

Now then, according to the opinion of many who find great wisdom in the folklore tradition, all this has an explanation. Xkeban who loved freely and indiscriminately, actually harming none, had been in reality a virtuous woman; while Utz-colel, although un tarnished in body, had been a sinful woman, because, as says the Indian, virtue is in the heart and not only in the actions of men.

The legend goes on to say that the dead Xkeban was converted into a little flower called Xtabentun which is sweet, simple and fragrant and so meek that it is found in hedges only, as if seeking protection because it feels defenseless, as no doubt Xkeban felt in her life. The juice
of this flower intoxicates, pleasantly however, as does love—as did the love of Xkeban.

Utz-colel, on the other hand, was converted after death into the flower Tzacam, which is an Indian spiny cactus that grows rigidly erect as it is said virtue must stand. So had stood Utz-colel, rigid and austere of body, and always cruel of heart. At the top of the Tzacam grows a flower which is beautiful, but without a pleasant fragrance, instead possessing a disagreeable odor. When one tries to pluck this flower, he usually pricks himself on the many cactus spines.

God converted Utz-colel into this flower because he felt that this most vividly portrayed her as she was in her life on earth.

The woman converted into the Tzacam began to reflect on the strange case of Xkeban and finally came to the conclusion that because Xkeban's sins had been of love only, she had received pleasant judgment after her death. Therefore, she planned to imitate Xkeban by surrendering herself also to love. However, she neglected to realize that if Xkeban surrendered herself to love, it was from the goodness of her heart and because it had been a natural impulse, while Utz-colel would submit to love in its most perverse forms, following thus her evil inclinations.

Utz-colel, calling on the evil spirits for assistance, obtained an ability to return to earth each time she wished, becoming a woman again, in order to satisfy her love in men.
The love that she would inspire in men would be an unlucky love, because her cruelty would not permit any other kind.

"Therefore," says the Indian, "know, those who wish to know it, that Utz-colel is the woman Xtabay, who comes forth from the Tzacam, the flower of the rigid and spiny cactus, and who when she sees a man comes back to life and follows him along the road or watches him from behind the ceiba, combing her long hair with a piece of the Tzacam bristling with spines, until she manages to attract attention to herself. Then she seduces him and finally kills him in the frenzy of an infernal love."¹

... 

"If you are young in years and of animated heart and happy face, if already you have known the sweetness of becoming enraptured by the scent of vanilla that there is in women's hair, and if you know how to press your lips to hers as one tastes of a ripe plum, if you do not know how to root yourself to one spot when a maiden passes in front of you and smiles at you, poor youth! poor you, when Xtabay knows the road you travel when you look for the one who dwells in your soul. Poor you! Xtabay is the woman that you desire in all women and that you have not found yet. Heaven help you if

¹ Translation of "El Origen de la Mujer de Xtabay" by Luis Rosada Vega, Leyendas Mayas (Mexico: Editorial Delfin)1945.
you see her appear before you one night.

"You will realize then that she is beautiful as you have not been able to imagine that a woman might be. You have been able to imagine that a woman is like a ray of the moon that passes through the leaves. But she is more than that.

"You have been able to think that she is like a flower that opens at dawn, wet with dew, and fragrant as a censer before God, but Xtabay is more than that.

"You have been able to dream that she has eyes filled with stars and that her face is radiant as a cloud that reflects the sun. But she is much more than that.

"O, unfortunate one! when you hear her call, you tremble and remember the power of the enchanting voice of your ideal lover, and you remember the softness of her mouth that is for you like a comb filled with honey; and then your thoughts begin to burn like a live coal and you say to yourself, 'It is she who has appeared to me on the road.' But accept your fate that she, whom you love and fear, has not appeared before your eyes nor will she ever appear, because the maiden that until now has consumed your love day and night, already has come to be less than a dry leaf which becomes dust in the wind of your memory and of her you will not wish to know anything more.
"This is so because when you have seen Xtabay, it will seem to you that you have met life for the first time.

"Be careful when you go alone along the road by the light of the moon and under the stars. The east wind will sigh over you and make you feel that you are blossoming like a tree in the soft rain. Then you will be young as if you had three youths, and Xtabay, who has been watching you, will approach you.

"You will see her, all dressed in white, glittering. You will see her long black shining hair, and you will see her hands twisting it and combing it with a comb of twigs, and you will see her feet like two small birds hovering near the earth.

"Unfortunate one! you will feel her eyes pierce you like two arrows that you are not able to draw out. You are so unfortunate for you do not feel fear or pain but merely the madness of happiness, and you have seen the ideal and upon seeing it your heart has been opened.

"She appears to you in the air, scarcely perched on a large rock or gliding along an edge of a corn field. She moves before you always drawing you on.

"Ah, how light you feel when you run after her, who beckons to you and smiles and the sharpness of her eyes cuts you to your very soul. Such a murmuring of her lips that
one does not know if it is a sound or a kiss. Such a shining of her body that one does not know if it is a brightness or a sudden blaze,

"She escapes as a hummingbird, and you are going after like the point of an arrow. Where is she taking you? Where are you going?

"You will never tell about it, because you will not return. Nobody who has followed Xtabay has ever returned. Where are they who do not return? Nobody knows.

"She comes to the road of him who goes alone and is young and arrogant and thinks of love, because this one will follow her irrevocably. She does not call to him who knows he does not have to follow her. In the depths of the earth, where the enchanting ceibas take root, hundreds of thousands of youths are imprisoned by Xtabay. If they would remember that the world exists, perhaps they would return to tell us about that which nobody knows yet. But nobody will know for they never return.

"May you be free from the evil power of Xtabay, amorous and happy young man who is not able to resist her. If I were able to give you a charm, I would gladly give it to you.

"But meanwhile, unfortunate one, if on your way you must meet her, who will escape like the smoke and whom you
will follow like the wind, she, when she has taken you captive, will seem to you to come from the trunk of the ceiba and not from the depths of your own heart...  

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2 Translation of La Que Salió Al Camino by Leopoldo Peniche Wallado (Mérida, Yucatan: Talleres Gráficos y Editorial "Zamna"), 1949, pp. 83-86. This selection is an extract taken from "La Xtabay" a story included in La Tierra del Paján y del Venado, by A. Mediz Bolio.
Many years ago in the land of the Mayas there was a little village, one of the most flourishing of the countryside and therefore was inhabited by some of the most distinguished noble families. One of these had a warrior son (all the sons of nobility were warriors) who caused a furor among the young maidens of the region, but he did not pay any attention to them. In war he had accomplished so many victories that his fame had extended to the borders of the land. He had for a symbol of his bravery the head of a tiger embroidered on all of his clothing. The grandee of the region was very fond of this young man and put him in command of his army.

This youth frequently visited the woods surrounding the village to practice the handling of arms or to amuse himself hunting and killing beasts, a sport at which he was very skilled. One day he followed a beautiful deer into which he had shot three arrows and soon found that he was lost. At first he did not know what to do, but then examining the course of the sun he decided to follow one certain direction, believing that eventually he would arrive at his own village or at one or another of the surrounding villages. As he walked along, he suddenly realized that the sun was rapidly sinking and that he had not yet reached a familiar
spot. What should he do when the light of the day failed so that he wouldn't retrace his steps. Fortunately he noticed Xnuc-ek (Venus) and knowing that it followed in the course of the sun, found it a simple matter to continue his course with this star as his guide.

Suddenly he found himself at the bank of one of the many springs of this country which at this season were overflowing forming small and picturesque lakes. He leaned against the trunk of a large tree to rest and watched the large moon begin to rise, sending its silver rays across the rippling waters of the pond making fantastic reflections.

The magnificent sight held the warrior spellbound and then to his amazement he saw a canoe gliding on the surface of the lake. He was still more amazed when he saw, as the canoe approached him, that it held a young woman as beautiful as a houri. She wore on her head a crown of feathers of vivid colors. Her black hair lay softly on her shoulders; on her dress of embroidered cotton shone many ornaments of gold and on her neck and arms she had magnificent gold jewelry.

The delicate boat crossed rapidly in front of the young soldier as if propelled by the breath of invisible beings. Then reaching the center of the lake, it sank under the water and disappeared.

When the sun set the next day, the hunter again turned his steps to this same spot, hoping to see the mysterious
vision again. But he was disappointed. Nevertheless, he did not stop visiting the spot for fifteen consecutive days, but he did not see the vision again. Then he was overtaken by a great sadness. He avoided his friends and even his parents, spending entire days in the solitude of the forest where he felt his pain was not quite so intense.

This sudden change of habits and character affected the entire community whose well-being would be lost in case an early death might take one of their most valiant and illustrious citizens. What caused this terrible change, was it madness? That was what everybody asked, but nobody would have been able to ascertain the cause if the youth had not confided in one of his very close friends.

"Well, I advise you," the friend said, when he heard the story, "to take your complaints to an X-men that I know. She is very skilful and no doubt will be able to cure you. Already you know how much power the X-mens have since you have seen some results of their magic,"

"But," the soldier replied, "the only remedy for my grief is to see her again. I want to adore her, even if it be from a distance. I know well that she is an immortal being and that despite my noble birth I am unworthy of her. But if I might but look upon her again. She is so beautiful!"

Upon saying this, he sighed and sat down on a large log and tears began to flow down his cheeks. He who had
not humbled himself before a multitude of enemies was crying like a child. The mysterious power of love!

Becoming ashamed of such a show of weakness, he recovered, wiped his face of his tears and continued with the conversation. The two finally agreed that the soldier should consult the witch the next day. At the appointed hour the two went to the hut of the witch and informed her of what had happened. She exclaimed in a voice, cavernous from old age,

"You desire, o youth, a very difficult thing. But that does not matter. I shall know how to snatch you from the sad state in which you find yourself. The immortal spirits have appeared to men before you, but to irrational beings they are always visible. These spirits like the songs of birds best of all and listen to them with delight. Would you like to be turned into a pigeon?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the soldier.

"But never more will you become a man," replied the witch with a solemn and mysterious tone. "Your brilliant career as a soldier will be finished from the day you fly into the air. Do you accept?"

"I accept," he said resolutely.

The old woman went into a corner of her hut and in an instant returned muttering strange words. She carried in her bony fingers a green thorn, taken from a very common bush.
"Tomorrow," she said, "there ought to be a full moon, a time when all the deities come out to view the beauties of nature by the light of the great moon. If you wish to see then your beautiful maid, if you want to receive her love, speak now!"

"Oh, yes, I do," exclaimed the young man enthusiastically.

He approached the witch who thrust the thorn into his neck and instantly he turned into a beautiful pigeon, and he flew up into the air.

The following night was completely enchanting. The clear sky was glittering with stars. To the east and over the tops of the trees one could see the moon spreading its soft and mysterious light, shining on the waters of the small lake making it seem like a liquid mass of silver.

Suddenly from its depths rose a small boat, which began to move over the surface. It was the canoe of the water nymph who had risen from her mysterious mansion.

Upon facing the tree where the young soldier had been the night when he first had seen her, she heard the sweet and melodious cooing of a wild pigeon. Stopping the boat, the naiad listened with delight to those melodies so full of enchantment and sadness which penetrated into her very heart. Finally the cooing bird was silent, and the nymph continued her way to the center of the lake where her boat sank from view.
From then on every evening the same thing happened. One night when the pigeon sang so very sweetly and sentimentally, she extended her arms toward it. The bird flew down and perched itself in the bow of the little boat, bursting forth into its sentimental melodies. She caught it and held it to her heart, caressing it tenderly. She was passing her hand along its back when she encountered a hard object. Seizing it with her fingers she extracted a green thorn.

At that very instant the beautiful pigeon turned into a young man who collapsed to the bottom of the boat, pale and dying.

It was the young soldier.

The little boat was unable to support the extra weight and began to sink. The nymph at that crucial moment did a heroic thing. She thrust the green thorn into her own neck and as a pigeon flew into the air.

Hundreds of years have passed since these happenings took place, but nevertheless, when the moon shows its whole face, a canoe comes up from the bosom of this little spring lake carrying the body of the young soldier. It stops at the same place each time and then is heard the sad song of a wild pigeon who cries over its lost lover.
song is over the canoe continues its way and sinks slowly into the waters.\(^3\)

\(^3\) Translation of "La Paloma Torcaz" by Lulogio Palma y Palma, Leyendas Mayas (Mexico: Editorial Delfín) 1945.
THE WEEPING WOMAN

There once lived in the City of Mexico a very poor young girl by the name of Luisa. She lived on one of those little streets or alleys, crowded with poor, in a small, dark apartment. Luisa was lovely and enchanting and soon word of her beauty spread from the low class to the very highest. It was not long before would-be lovers and prospective husbands began to frequent the poor street where she lived. It was not rare to hear ballads sung by hopeful suitors nor to hear these ditties end in quarrels and more often than not in the clashing of swords. But the door of Luisa always seemed to be closed and never a wicked word could be spoken against her.

At the end of the street there was an image of a saint painted on the wall and over it hung a light, a gift of some devout soul. At night when the city had become quiet and the music and songs were no longer heard, when this street was deserted and the wind whistled and the stars were hidden, and in the belfry the owls were silent and the black walls were whipped by a monotonous rain, then could be heard stealthy steps of someone who came with a mysterious purpose. At the same time the door of Luisa would open little by little, and a woman wearing a cloak would go silently to the foot of the painting where under the small light stood a
a young man. The two would spend the hours before the dawn
together, planning their next meeting before they parted.

One day, the neighbors, awaking to the new day, noticed
to their astonishment that Luisa had disappeared and every-
body also saw with great interest that both doors of her
room were open and there were indications not of robbery or
of assault but of a planned flight and an agreed abduction.
News of this spread rapidly throughout the vicinity, every-
body's comment being slightly changed from the previous one.
All were anxious to find out who had been courting Luisa and
with whom she had disappeared. Every so often someone would
turn up with a new piece of news. Names of counts and titled
nobles were whispered, but only whispered, because no one
dared to place the blame on any specific person for fear of
receiving whip lashings for his imprudence. Finally time
restrained the evil tongues and little by little the people
forgot the beauty of Luisa, her rejected suitors, the court-
ings and serenades, the duels and quarrels. And the narrow
street again settled back to the dullness of former years
without any interesting happenings or scandals and without
any more light in the nights than the little light over the
saint.

How easy a life of love was under such protection!
How lightly the days passed! How rapidly went the years!
For him who lives on love there is no memory of the past,
nor are there any shadows in the future, not any misunderstandings in the present. Six years had passed since the beautiful Luisa one night disappeared from her rooms. Her abductor had been a very discreet young man of noble birth, whose name was Don Muñó de Montes-Claro. He was overjoyed at the acquisition of such a lovely creature and immediately hid his treasure in a nicely furnished little home on one of the better streets. There he built his pleasant nest which everybody looked for in vain.

Luisa had three children and these children were her constant joy. Luisa was very happy and tried to make the life of her lover as pleasant as possible. As the years passed he seemed perfectly content with the arrangement, and Luisa refused to realize her true position and that usually unions such as theirs last only a few years at the most. Theirs had been unusually successful and long.

Finally, Luisa began to feel a change in the intense love which Don Muñó had had for her, and even his habit of seeing her every day was forgotten until he would stay away one whole week at a time occasionally. Luisa tried to hide her grief, but one day gave way to tears before her lover. Don Muñó, disliking such a scene, stormed out of the house.

Weeks passed and Luisa hoped that he would return. Finally she received news that on that very day he had been married in the big cathedral to the daughter of one of the
city's oldest families. That evening Luisa went to the home of the bride where the marriage feast was being held, and looking into the window, she saw her former lover, Don Muño, and his bride talking affectionately and holding hands just as Luisa and Don Muño had held hands in other years, making ardent vows in the quiet street without more light than that of the little lamp and with the saint as their only witness.

Broken-hearted she returned to her little house which had meant so much to her. Then suddenly her quiet despair gave way to a madness that prompted her to snatch up a dagger which Don Muño had left there at one time or another, and looking down at her sleeping children whom her lover had fathered, she plunged the dagger into the hearts of the young children. Then bespattered with the blood of her young ones, she ran out of the house into the street screaming and calling for her children with hideous cries.

Some time later there was a great trial in the City of Mexico and shortly afterwards great crowds gathered in the plaza of the city to watch the garroting of a woman who had killed her three little children.

In the evening of the same day, a great funeral procession carried the body of Don Muño de Montes-Claros to
its grave, since suicide seemed to be such a small price to pay for his injustice.

The Weeping Woman still walks the streets of Mexico. And she has been seen in all parts of the city as a mysterious woman, always dressed in white, with a rebozo over her head carefully drawn about the face so that it could not be seen. It has been said that this spectre sometimes gives a cry, such a terrible moan, that even the bravest of men cannot hear it without falling to the ground unconscious. There are those who swear they saw her on the street of Seo at the same time that another saw her on the street of San Pablo. Few people have actually seen her face and those who have have died. Those who have lost consciousness in her presence can only give very incoherent accounts of what occurred but they all agree that they were approached by the Weeping Woman.

Sometimes she merely walks quietly through the streets but at other times, when the rain beats down on the city and the winds blow fiercely, then she does not walk quietly but runs or flies through the air shrieking and moaning and calling for her children. Then the citizens close the shutters tightly, gather their children about them, and offer prayers to the Virgin to protect them from this terrible spectre. 4

4 Translation of "La Llorona", Tradiciones de y Leyendas Mexicanas, by Vicente Riva Palacio and Juan de Dios Peza, (Mexico: Librería General) 1922.
THE WOMAN WITH THE IRON SHOES

A good many years ago there lived in Mexico City two very good friends. One was a blacksmith and the other a clergyman. Despite the difference in character and their stations in life these two enjoyed their friendship and spent considerable time in each other's company.

Everybody considered this friendship very strange because the blacksmith was as good as his friend was bad. The priest, indifferent to all protests and denunciations, lived a fine and almost luxurious life and to everybody's horror kept a woman in his home. His friend, the blacksmith, tried to reason with the priest and to convince him to put the woman out of his house and change his too-earthly ways, but the priest refused to take his advice. And so the situation remained for many years.

One night very late the blacksmith was awakened by a pounding on his door. He went to the door very hesitantly and suspiciously thinking that the officers of the Inquisition might be there or perhaps some robbers who he had heard were in the neighborhood.

"Who is there?" he cried, terrified.

The only response was renewed poundings which threatened to break down the heavy door. He opened it finally, trembling violently, and came face to face with two Negroes,
dressed in strange costumes, suggestive of some devilish associations. They were leading a black mule, a very well-cared-for mule. They said that the she-mule belonged to his friend, the priest, and that he was making a journey on the morrow at dawn. They apologized for their late visit but said that it was necessary that the mule be shod so that there would be no delay in the morning.

Such a request at such a peculiar hour irritated the blacksmith so much that if it hadn't concerned his very good friend, he would not have granted it. But the bonds of friendship were strong.

He prepared his shop for the job, lighted his forge, and then proceeded to bring the mule to the narrow stall. This was not an easy task. The mule seemed to be terrified and fought and reared so viciously that it took the combined efforts of the three men to drag her into the stall. The blacksmith was quite startled at this incident, because he had never seen a mule act in such a manner. Usually mules were completely docile. After considerable hard work the blacksmith managed to fit the mule's feet with new shoes, and he felt that he had done a fine job for his friend.

The two Negroes thanked him for his service, again politely apologized for the late hour, and then dragged the protesting mule out into the night. Once outside they fell upon the animal with large clubs. The blacksmith objected
vigorously to their cruelty, but they merely laughed at him and continued beating the animal as they walked down the street.

The blacksmith closed his heavy door and returned to his bed, but he slept little for wondering about the strange occurrence.

The next morning early, almost before dawn, the blacksmith hurried to the home of the priest to talk to him before he started on his trip. He found the priest still sleeping soundly and with no apparent plans for a trip in mind. When the priest had awakened sufficiently, the blacksmith told him the story.

The priest found the story most amusing. He assured the blacksmith that he had not planned a journey, he didn't have a black she-mule, he did not have two Negroes to take care of a mule, nor did he inconvenience his friends in such a manner. Somebody surely had played a trick on the smith and thought that he would get his mule shod at the expense of the priest. The more he thought about the situation, the more amused he became and soon he was laughing uproariously. The smith tried to explain the situation in more detail, considering the incident quite serious, but the priest only laughed more. Finally he decided that he had to share this wonderful joke with Juana, his mistress.

They went to her room and found her asleep. The priest
loudly called to her but she did not respond. He went up to her and shook her but to no avail. He touched her forehead and found it rigid; her cheeks were chalk white; her face was like wax; her whole body was stiff. What a dreadful shock! Juana was dead!

Then to his horror the priest noticed that her hands were covered with blood and that there was nailed in each of them a horseshoe. Her feet too wore these iron shoes. The priest stared dumbly and unbelievingly. His friend then approached and felt his blood turn to ice when he realized that the iron shoes were the ones with which he had shod the black mule.

Horrorstricken, the two men rushed from the house and soon returned with three other priests who were to witness the terrible scene and who would also advise them. After considerable and serious consideration the three wise Fathers decided that such a situation was undoubtedly planned by the Divine Providence to serve as an example for sinners who needed guidance. Juana had undoubtedly been turned by God into a black she-mule and then had been entrusted to two evil spirits, condemning her to the pain of being shod in life and then rejected in death. A woman who died shod was similar to an animal and therefore she was denied sacred burial. Since this situation was so scandalous and strange and since none of the witnesses dared to explain it, it was
considered better to bury the body in the house of the priest so that everybody might not learn of the incident.

So it happened that the priest was so affected by this happening that he repented of his past life, entered a monastery and therelived a very priestly life.

The town soon heard of the incident, and from it they drew the moral that woman who accepts the love of a clergyman is turned into a mule either in this life or in the one that follows.  

5 Translation of "La Mujer Herrada" Tradiciones y Leyendas Mexicanas, by Vicente Riva Palacio and Juan de Dios Peza (Mexico: Librería General) 1922.
Xnuo Tamychi was a man of profound wisdom and was a great teacher of the animals. It is said that at times he would teach them tricks, cunning habits, and necessary practices, and on occasions he taught them malicious tricks, although not too often.

This great man taught the Kulub, a small wild animal, to steal corn, because the poor Kulub had been born destined to eat corn and without the knowledge of how to find any. With the permission of the teacher to steal corn, Kulub also gained the wisdom of how to find the grain.

So it happened that the Kulub had the habit of sneaking into the recently planted corn fields at night. Although the farmer had purposely erased all traces of furrows where his corn was planted, the Kulub had the ability to sense where the grain was buried. Then he would scratch at the ground, take out the corn, and devour it greedily.

But if Tamaychi taught the little animal the trick of finding corn, he also made an exception to it--Kulub could not scratch for or eat a seed which had already germinated under the penalty of grave punishment.

And it is true that the Kulub always remembers this.

The bird Chel also is a petty thief. He is of a servant type. He has a beautiful plumage of yellow and blue
and is about the size of a man's palm; he is very lively and has an amiable disposition.

Knuc Tamaychi enabled him to develop his abilities. This bird was many times found in a home, not as a captive but of his free will, hunting and eating little insects. And so he worked very hard like one of the servants but he never received a reward of any kind. It was because of that that Chel the bird became dissatisfied.

It is said that since he was very poor and was never paid for his services, he complained to Tamaychi, who sympathized with him and advised him to acquire for himself the wages which were denied him. And he suggested methods by which he could accomplish this.

And so it was that the bird Chel did amazing things, especially when he was in a home, since it presented so many opportunities for him to practice his thievery. Rosaries, rings, charms, and anything made of gold attracted him most of all. He took them when nobody was looking and carried them to his hiding place which he had arranged beforehand. It is only fair to warn the reader that whenever he encounters the bird Chel he should take extra care of any articles which might attract this little robber.

It was also Tamaychi who taught the serpent Ochcan to be a friend of man and to take care of his granaries. It is said that there was a time when it was impossible for the
Indian to keep his graneries free from insects and rats. In desperation Tamaychi was consulted and he said to the Indian, "What you need in your graneries is a good guard day and night. We will look among the animals for an intelligent, astute and also honorable animal to do this service for you."

And as the Ochcan was intelligent and astute and also was friendly to man, he was the chosen one. And from that day to this there has been no better guardian of the graneries than Ochcan.

Ochcan is long, quite ugly, and very peaceful. It never attacks men nor flees from him, and although it may crawl on him and wrap itself around the man's neck it will never harm him. The Ochcan is used on many haciendas to guard the corn and is found quite frequently in the ranch house itself. So tame is this serpent that it can be compared to the family dog. It slithers through the house, through the fields, always returning to guard that which has been entrusted to it. It spends most of its time curled up in the graneries, and no attacking animal dare approach it since it will devour the intruder immediately.

Tamaychi also taught the bird Xcolonte to pick at the trunks of trees in order to bore into them and to make its nest, because it is said that the branches and the thickets will damage the plumage of this bird. That is why this bird is called the carpinter bird.
He also taught the Xmaquech, or the Indian chameleon, to live without food or water, since he was so slow in his movements it was difficult for him to find any.

The Huech is an animal much pursued for his savory flesh, and it was Tamaychi who helped him defend himself. First he gave him a hard shell that looked like a medieval armor and then he filed the animal's claws to sharp points and taught him to dig into the ground making little tunnels where he could hide from his enemies.

It is also related that he gave the Bech the ability to run at the same moment that it leaves the eggshell, so that one may say that it is running before it breaks through the shell. So rapidly does a flock of Bech cross a road that it gives the impression of a ribbon unrolling.

The slyness of the fox is proverbial. A great robber of chickens, he was always being pursued for his nocturnal misdeeds. Finally he went to Tamaychi, complaining, "What shell I do? I can not avoid my natural fondness for the fowl." And Tamaychi taught him to defend himself with the only possible trick, that of pretending that he was dead when his attackers beat him, who would then leave him, enabling him to run away.

These are but a few of the things which the great Xnuc Tamaychi taught his friends, the animals.  

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Translation of "Cuentos de Animales" by Luis Rosado Vega, Leyendas Mayes (Mexico: Editorial Delfín) 1945.