

*The Students' Scrap Book,*

## A MEXICAN PRINCE.

Nearly four centuries ago the city of Mexico was busting with unusual excitement. The Aztec emperor was dead and the nobles had assembled to elect his successor from the Imperial family. Among the blood-royal, Montezuma stood preeminent; thoroughly educated in the University of the priests, a member of their highest order, in addition a warrior of great promise, and he was quickly chosen to fill the Imperial throne. And now his coronation day is at hand. The capital swarms with the subjects of the emperor-elect. Summoned from the dependant provinces by the swift footed couriers, the princes of the empire are thronging to render homage to their lord. The commoners are assembling to witness the rites of his coronation. Here and there the uniforms of the imperial police appear, and still more numerous, the black-robed priests flit like threatening shadows among the motly crowd. Wherever the eye may turn throughout the restless mass, the dejected faces of the war-captured slaves are seen, to-day toiling for their hard masters: to-morrow perhaps, to be sacrificed to their conqueror's gods. For hours before the time appointed for the coronation the throng surges through the city gazing at every notable object in impatient curiosity. At length, the hour has come. From the gates of the imperial palace a stately procession emerges and moves slowly towards the temple of the Mexican war-god. In the van wild-eyed priests chant a wierd melody. Then the tributary princes followed, gorgeous in their armors of gold and tropical feathers. Finally borne on a palanquin by captive princes the emperor appears in oriental splendor. In awe all bow before him. Now the procession is winding up the sides of the pyramidal temple. It has reached the top. There the nobles crown their monarch, and as high priest of the Empire, Montezuma prays for a prosperous reign. Attendant priests now bring forward a captive prince and before the hideous statue of the war-god they bind him to the sacrificial altar. The king takes up the knife and with its keen blade, cleaves the victim's breast; then plunging his hand within the wound he plucks out the beating heart and lays it still palpitating before the god of the Aztecs. When he has finished his propitiatory sacrifice the monarch strikes the sacred drum; as its mournful notes roll over the waters of Tezcuco, the whole valley of Anahuac becomes a charnel-house and before the sacrifice is completed, ten thousand human hearts are sending their grateful incense to Heaven and ten thousand warriors are following their prince to oblivion. Thus did Montezuma become priest and king of the Aztecs. In the midst of his exaltation one thought disturbed the emperor. Day and night his mind dwelt on the fair-haired god who, in the long ago, came to Anahuac and taught the people a religion of peace. Then he departed eastward over the great sea, promising to return to Mexico, and foretelling its destruction at that time. The oracles declared his coming in the reign of a Montezuma, and the Emperor has heard of a mysterious white man far to the east. He felt that the time of the god's return was at hand. However, resolutely putting aside his forebodings the emperor dis-

played his military powers in conquering the nations from sea to sea. Then the arrogance of a conqueror took possession of him. He forgot the fair-haired god, he forgot his forebodings; he almost defied himself. The greatest princes must crave audience on bended knee. He increased greatly the burden of taxation throughout the empire. The tributary provinces became restless; they longed for a deliverer. Only a storm was needed to shake down the props of personal might surrounding the emperor, and the quicksands of disaffection would engulf the whole empire. That storm was rising on the eastern horizon. In the 16th year of Montezuma's reign, couriers from the eastern coast reported that winged boats had come from over the Ocean and from them a band of white-faced men had disembarked, clothed in grey armor from which all weapons fell harmless, and wielding against their foes the death-dealing lightning. Some of the strangers rode on terrible beasts, whose awful appearance caused the stoutest warrior to fly in terror. Terrified by the seeming fulfillment of the oracle, the Emperor attempted by bribes, threats and snares to obtain the departure or destruction of the dreaded stranger. His efforts were worse than vain. The Spaniards had tasted Mexican gold by the emperor's own orders, and the plundering of the whole empire could scarcely alleviate the insatiate thirst thus produced. Cortez had learned of the disaffection of the subject tribes and from the coast the stranger advanced, persuading some nations, forcing others into rebellion. Montezuma from within the walls of mountains surrounding his capitol, heard in consternation that the white man had left the coast, and was conquering all before him. Nothing can withstand this small band of strangers; his empire is melting at their fiery touch. Now, his couriers tell him, Cortez has turned aside to subjugate Tlascala invincible to Mexican arms. Now the thunder of the evening's cannon have terrified her war-like sons into submission. Following close upon this news, comes the tidings that the Tlascalons have joined the strangers in their expedition against Mexico, and that the combined army was in the field. Panic stricken by the approach of the prophesied destruction, Montezuma weakly sent an embassy to invite the strangers to the capital. On to Mexico the invited guests proceeded; over snow capped mountains, through steep defiles, past awful chasms, till before them lay the valley of Anahuac in all its tropical glory. In the valley, Lake Tezcuco shone like a mirror; its borders seemed a Titan's necklace, gemmed with populous cities and pre-eminent among the jewels. Mexico, the Venice of the new world, dazzled the Spaniard's greedy eyes, with her wonderous gardens, lofty temples, and massive palaces. With superstitious dread, Montezuma beheld the strangers winding down the mountain pass within the valley. He had abandoned all hope; his superstition held him fast; yielding to his fate, he received into his city as guests, a band of invincible warriors accompanied by an army of his deadliest foes. The royal proclamation forbade any injury to the monarch's guests. His father's palace became the Spaniards' abode, and the delicacies of a tropical market ministered to their appetites. Soon after the arrival of the strangers, the Emperor met the Spanish leader in conference. As their conversation proceeded, Montezuma seized upon a new hope from the pacific expressions of Cortez. Perhaps the god had not sent these men as destroyers, but as ambassadors-