

Aztec. The march of his veterans was not delayed that the arts of peace might induce submission ; nor was his ingenuity taxed as to the best methods of conferring the benefits of his social organizations. He fought for the extermination of his enemies ; and his bloody hand was stayed on the battle-field only that thousands of every conquered race should deck the altars of his gods, that slaves should not be wanting in his palaces, and that his foeman's flesh might be among the delicacies of his table at his triumphal orgies. To find the development of anything worthy the name of civilization among a people of such a nature is strange indeed, and his incongruity of character is explicable only by the fact that their military operations were carried on under a religious fanaticism, and hence cannot be fairly taken as a criterion of the national genius. With this consideration we may in some measure be able to sympathize with this rude people in their efforts for improvement, and regard with a degree of interest the struggle of the human mind to rise above its natural condition, as seen in the progress of the untutored subjects of the Aztec monarchy. We may observe characteristics the very opposite of those displayed in the reckless sacrifice of life that followed every victory, by glancing at the institution of slavery as regulated by the Mexicans. The duties and privileges of the slave were strictly defined by law, and severe penalties awaited all masters who assigned greater than legal tasks or administered other than prescribed punishments. The slave could have a family, hold property, and even own other slaves ; while, by a provision said to be unknown in any other nation, his children were born free. No master thought of selling his slaves unless for purposes of discipline, or obliged to do so by extreme poverty ; but, when the trembling hand of the old warrior could no longer draw the bow and he was awaiting his call to the mansions of the sun, his stern heart softened toward his faithful bondmen and with the last act of life he was wont to set them free.

In the starry canopy above him the Aztec priest read his people's destiny, and whether they were profited by his predictions or not, these observations resulted in a knowledge of many astronomical facts that were unknown to the great philosophers of antiquity. In the darkness of an eclipse the Aztecs saw neither famine nor pestilence, for they were not

ignorant of its cause. Their great festivals kept time with the movements of various constellations. Their calendar showed the periods of the solstices, and of the equinoxes, and that of the passage of the sun across their zenith ; and, its correspondence with the almanac of their conquerors, was sufficient to show for its calculators a skill in computation rivalling that of the enlightened nations of christendom. With this knowledge of mathematical science, we find a corresponding advancement in many of the arts. Agriculture, architecture, and sculpture were far in advance of the attainments of the savage, and the Mexican's skill in working the precious metals baffled the imitation of the Spanish goldsmith. The nearest approach to a literature, that was made by the American nations, was found among the Aztecs. Their contemporaries in Peru transmitted messages by means of an ingenious but cumbrous arrangement of variously colored threads ; but the native of Mexico had recourse to hieroglyphics, the highest style of writing attainable by a people ignorant of the alphabet. With his fanciful imitation of natural objects, and representing abstract ideas by the fantastic characters of his imagination, the Indian scribe recorded on the leaf of his native maguey the annals of his nation, and thus preserved for posterity the story of its ancestors.

The form of government in Mexico was an elective monarchy with all legislative function vested in the king ; but there was a constitutional protection against tyranny in the independence of the chief judges with whose decision the sovereign could not lawfully interfere. The dignity of the throne was upheld by the great nobles, most of whom lived in splendor but little inferior to that of the king himself, but their interests seem to have been so closely allied with their lords, that, unlike the feudal barons of Europe, they combined to sustain the central authority. The priests, too, of whom there was a great number, had no small part in the royal councils ; and by virtue of their pretended science of astrology and the power of superstition, they had an influence in the nation that made them the useful agents of the chief magistrate, and led him very frequently to entrust to their hands the supreme power. Cruel as this priestly domination may have been, and however wanton the destruction of life its ceremonial involved, it certainly was not severely rebuked by the boasted Christianity of its conquerors, propagated as that was