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ENGLISH READERS

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FOR

MEXICAN SCHOOLS.

BOOK IV.

COMPILED BY R. J. FENN, KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON  
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH  
IN THE NORMAL SCHOOL FOR PROFESSORS  
MEXICO.

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## PREFACE

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This is one of a series of four "Readers;" and I have written it with the object of furnishing a book that I hope will be interesting to Mexican students of English.

All the English readers in use in our schools, both public and private, are either English or American publications; and, good as they are, the subject-matter is not always of such a nature as to interest the Mexican student. The Ascent of Popocatepetl should be more interesting to him than the Ascent of Mont Blanc; the Battle of Otumba than the Battle of Waterloo, or of Bunker's Hill, and a walk through the City of Mexico than a walk through New York. From this point of view I have endeavoured to make the reader as "Mexican" as possible, in character.

The book contains five distinct parts.

The first part is entirely Mexican, consisting of extracts from the works of eminent writers on Mexico, and of visitors to the country.



The second part contains dialogues, chiefly on Mexican subjects. In writing the dialogues, I have put into the mouths of the speakers the colloquial language of everyday life, a knowledge of which is of paramount importance. This section of the book, I am inclined to think, will be the most popular, both with pupil and teacher.

The third part is composed of extracts from English and American authors, -humorous, serious, and otherwise.

The fourth is a poetical section.

The fifth contains specimens of various kinds of letters, -Business, Social, Official &c.

I would suggest that lessons should be selected from the first, second, and third parts in rotation. This will give variety, and will be more interesting than reading the book through from beginning to end.

Many of the pieces of poetry are well adapted for committing to memory; and much attention should be given to this important matter.

I am indebted to that ably-edited newspaper, the Mexican Herald, and to "Modern Mexico" for many valuable and interesting extracts from their columns.

My best thanks are also due to Señor A. Groso for many useful hints and suggestions in the early stages of the manuscript: to Dr. F. S.

Borton of Puebla for permission to print his two beautiful poems: and to Señor E. C. Rébsamen Director of the Normal School, for his kind support and encouragement in the undertaking.

I shall esteem it a favour to receive any hints or suggestions from teachers or others, with a view to further improvement of the book.

I must apologise for a few typographical errors, (a list of which will be found at the end of the book), reminding my readers that the whole of the type was set up by Mexican printers who did not understand a word of English.

*R. J. Fenn.*

Normal School for Professors.

Mexico.

October, 1903.



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## IN PREPARATION

*A book of Dialogues, a supplement  
to Book IV. containing the following:*

AT THE FABRICA DE HILADOS.  
THE MOTHER AND THE CHILDREN.  
IN THE LAWYER'S OFFICE.  
ON THINGS IN GENERAL.  
A DISAGREEABLE CASE.  
THE CHILDREN QUARREL.  
AT THE MAS BARATA.  
DON'T DAWDLE.  
A VISIT TO CHAPULTEPEC.  
TO THE MEXICAN CENTRAL.  
BACK AGAIN IN MEXICO.  
OUR HOUSE.  
AT THE RESTAURANT,  
THE TYPE-WRITER.  
THE SCHOOL.  
AT THE HOTEL.  
AT THE SHOEMAKER'S.  
A FRIENDLY MEETING.  
A SAN ANGEL FIESTA.  
AT THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S.  
*AND OTHERS.*

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### Mexico as first seen by the Spaniards.

---

The troops, refreshed by a night's rest, succeeded, early on the following day, in gaining the crest of the sierra of Ahualco, which stretches like a curtain between the two great mountains on the north and south. Their progress was now comparatively easy, and they marched with a buoyant step, as they felt they were treading the soil of Moctezuma.

They had not advanced far, when, turning an angle of the sierra, they suddenly came to a view which more than compensated the toils of the preceding day. It was that of the valley of Mexico (or Tenochtitlan as more commonly called by the natives), which, with its picturesque assemblage of water, woodland, and cultivated plains, was spread out like some gay and gorgeous panorama before them.

In the highly rarefied atmosphere of these upper regions, even remote objects have a brilliancy of coloring and distinctness of outline which seem to annihilate the distance. Stretching far



away at their feet were seen noble forests of oak, sycamore, and cedar; and, beyond, yellow fields of maize, and the towering maguey, intermingled with orchards and blooming gardens: for flowers, in such demand for their religious festivals, were even more abundant in this populous valley than in other parts of Anahuac.

In the centre of the great basin they beheld the lakes, occupying then a much larger portion of its surface than at present; their borders thickly studded with towns and hamlets; and, in the midst, like some Indian empress with her coronal of pearls, the fair city of Mexico, with her white towers and pyramidal temples, reposing, as it were, on the bosom of the waters—the far-famed “Venice of the Aztecs.”

High above all arose the royal hill of Chapultepec (the residence of the Mexican monarchs), crowned with the same grove of gigantic cypresses which at this day fling their broad shadows over the land. In the distance, beyond the blue waters of the lake, and nearly screened by the intervening foliage, was seen (a shining speck) the rival capital Tezcuco; and still further on, the dark belt of porphyry, girdling the valley around, like a rich setting which Nature had devised for the fairest of her jewels.

Such was the beautiful vision which broke on the eyes of the conquerors; and even now, when

so sad a change has come over the scene—when the stately forests have been laid low, and the soil, unsheltered from the fierce radiance of the tropical sun, is in many places abandoned to sterility—when the waters have retired, leaving a broad and ghastly margin, while the cities and hamlets on their borders have mouldered into ruins—even now that desolation broods over the landscape, so indestructible are the lines of beauty which Nature has traced on its features, that no traveller, however cold, can gaze on them with any other emotions than those of astonishment and rapture.

What, then, must have been the emotions of the Spaniards, when, after working their toilsome way into the upper air, the cloudy tabernacle parted before their eyes, and they beheld these fair scenes in all their pristine magnificence and beauty! It was like the spectacle which greeted the eyes of Moses from the summit of Pisgah; and, in the warm glow of their feelings, they cried out, “It is the Promised Land!”

PRESCOTT.

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#### Cortés visits the Great Aztec Temple in Mexico.

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The Teocalli (temple) was a solid pyramidal structure of earth and pebbles coated on the outside with stone, probably of the light, porous



kind employed in the building of the city. It was square, with its sides facing the four cardinal points; and was divided into five bodies or storeys, each one receding so as to be of smaller dimensions than that immediately below, the usual form of the Aztec teocallis, and bearing a resemblance to the pyramids of the Old World. The ascent was by a flight of steps on the outside, which reached to the narrow terrace or platform at the base of the second storey, passing quite round the building with a second stairway to a similar landing at the base of the third. The breadth of this walk was just so much space as was left by the retreating storey next above it. From this construction, the visitor was obliged to pass round the whole edifice four times in order to reach the top. This had a most imposing effect in the religious ceremonies, when the pompous procession of priests with their wild minstrelsy came sweeping round the huge sides of the pyramid, as they rose higher and higher toward the summit in the presence of the gazing multitudes.

The temple was about three hundred feet square at the base and less than one hundred feet in height.

When Cortés arrived before the teocalli, he found two priests and several caciques commissioned by Moctezuma to save him the fatigue of

the ascent by bearing him on their shoulders, in the same manner as had been done to the emperor. But the general declined the compliment, preferring to march up at the head of his men. On reaching the summit, they found a vast area paved with broad flat stones. The first object that met their view was a large block of jasper, the peculiar shape of which showed it was the stone on which the bodies of the unhappy victims were stretched for sacrifice. Its convex surface, by raising the breast, enabled the priest to perform more easily, his diabolical task of removing the heart. At the other end of the area were two towers or sanctuaries, consisting of three storeys, the lower one of stone or stucco, the two upper of wood elaborately carved. In the lower division stood the images of their gods; the apartments above were filled with utensils for their religious services, and with the ashes of their Aztec princes, who had fancied this airy sepulchre. Before each sanctuary stood an altar, with an undying fire upon it. Here also was the huge cylindrical drum made of serpents' skins, and struck only on extraordinary occasions, when it sent forth a melancholy sound that might be heard for miles, a sound of woe in after times to the Spaniards.

Moctezuma, attended by the high priest, came forward to receive Cortés as he mounted the



area. "You are weary," said he to him "with climbing up our great temple," But Cortés, with a polite vaunt, assured him, "the Spaniards were never weary." Then, taking him by the hand, the emperor pointed out the localities of the neighborhood. The temple upon which they stood, rising high above all other edifices in the capital, afforded the most elevated as well as the most central point of view. Below them, the city lay spread out like a map, with its streets and canals intersecting each other at right angles, its terraced roofs blooming like so many parterres of flowers. Every place seemed alive with business and bustle, canoes were glancing up and down the canals, the streets were crowded with people in their gay, picturesque costume, while from the market-place they had so lately left, a confused hum of many sounds and voices rose upon the air. They could distinctly see the symmetrical plan of the city, with its principal avenues issuing, as it were, from its four gates, and connecting themselves with the causeway which formed the grand entrance to the capital. They could see the insular position of the metropolis, bathed on all sides by the salt waters of Lake Texcoco, and in the distance the clear fresh waters of the Chalco; far beyond stretched a wide prospect of fields and waving woods, with the burnished walls of many a lofty temple rising

high above the trees and crowning the distant hill-tops. The view reached in an unbroken line to the very base of the circular range of mountains, whose frosty peaks glittered as if touched with fire in the morning ray; while long, dark wreaths of vapor, rolling up from the hoary head of Popocatepetl, told that the destroying element was indeed at work in the bosom of the beautiful valley.

## PART SECOND.

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Cortés was filled with admiration at this grand and glorious spectacle, and gave utterance to his feelings in animated language to the emperor, the lord of these flourishing domains.

Cortés then requested Moctezuma to allow him to enter the sanctuaries and behold the shrines of the gods. To this, Moctezuma, after a short conference with the priests, assented, and conducted the Spaniards into the building. They found themselves in a spacious apartment incrust-ed on the sides with stucco, on which figures were sculptured, representing the Mexican calendar, perhaps, or the priestly ritual. At one end of the saloon was a recess with a roof of timber richly carved and gilded. Before the altar in



this sanctuary stood the colossal image of Huitzilopochtli the war-god of the Aztecs. At the storming of this temple by the Spaniards in the following year, this uncouth monster was torn from his niche, and, in the presence of the awe-struck Aztecs was hurled down the steps; and the building was fired.

It is now in the Museum, having lain undiscovered in the great square close to the site of the teocalli, till the close of the eighteenth century. For some years after that it was kept buried, lest the sight of one of their old deities might be too exciting for the Indians, who had certainly not forgotten it, and secretly ornamented it with flowers as long as it remained above ground.

When Cortés saw this deity his countenance was distorted with lines to give him a hideous appearance: in his right hand he held a bow, and in his left a bunch of golden arrows. The huge folds of a serpent, consisting of pearls and precious stones, were coiled round his waist, and many pearls were sprinkled over his person. On his left foot were the delicate feathers of the humming-bird, and a chain of gold and silver hearts alternate, was suspended round his neck, emblematical of the sacrifice in which he most delighted. Three human hearts smoking and almost palpitating, as if recently torn from his victims, were now lying on the altar before him.

The adjoining sanctuary was dedicated to a milder deity, Tezcatlipoca, who created the world and watched over it with a providential care. Five bleeding hearts were seen in a golden plate on his altar. The walls of both these chapels were stained with human blood, and the stench was intolerable.

From this foul abode they gladly escaped into the open air; when Cortés, turning to Moctezuma, said, with a smile, "I do not understand how a great and wise prince like you, can put faith in such evil spirits as these idols, the representations of the devil. Moctezuma, greatly shocked at these remarks, answered, "these are the gods who have led the Aztecs on to victory since they were a nation, and who send the seed-time and the harvest in their season. Had I thought you would have offered this outrage I would not have admitted you into their presence."

Cortés, after some expressions of concern at having wounded the feelings of the emperor, took his leave.

One other structure may be noticed as characteristic of the brutish nature of their religion. This was a pyramidal mound or tumulus, having a complicated framework of timber on its broad summit. On this was strung an immense number of human skulls, which belonged to the victims,



mostly prisoners of war, who had perished on the accursed stone of sacrifice. They were said to number one hundred and thirty-six thousand. *Prescott's "Cortés and the Conquest of Mexico"*

### La Noche Triste

July 1st. 1520. The night was cloudy, and a drizzling rain, which fell without intermission, added to the obscurity. The great square before the palace was deserted, as, indeed, it had been since the fall of Moctezuma. Steadily, and as noiselessly as possible, the Spaniards held their way along the great street of Tacuba, which so lately had resounded with the tumult of battle. All was now hushed in silence; and they were only reminded of the past by the occasional presence of some solitary corpse, or a dark heap of the slain, which too plainly told where the strife had been hottest. As they pased along the lanes and alleys that opened into the great street, or looked down the canals, they fancied that they could see the shadowy forms of their foes lurking in ambush and ready to spring upon them. But it was only fancy; the city slept undisturbed. But the Mexicans were not all asleep.

As the Spaniards drew near the spot where the street opened on the causeway several Indian sentinels, who had been stationed at this, as at

other parts of the city, took the alarm, and fled, rousing their countrymen by their cries. The priests, keeping their night-watch on the summit of the temple, instantly caught the tidings and sounded their shells, while the huge drum in the desolate temple of the war-god sent forth those solemn tones, which, heard only in seasons of calamity, vibrated through every corner of the capital. The Spaniards saw there was no time to be lost. The bridge was brought forward and fitted with all possible expedition. But before they had time to defile across the narrow passage, a gathering sound was heard, like that of a mighty force agitated by the winds. It grew louder and louder, while on the dark waters of the lake was heard a loud noise like the plashing of oars. Then came a few stones and arrows striking at random among the hurrying troops. They fell every moment faster and faster, till they thickened into a terrible tempest, while the very heavens were rent with the yells and war-cries of myriads of combatants, who seemed all at once to be swarming over land and lake.

All means of retreat were cut off. Scarcely hope was left. The only hope was in such desperate exertions as each could make for himself. Order and subordination were at an end. Each thought only of his own life. Pressing forward, he trampled down the weak and the wounded, heedless whe-