

CHAPTER V.

AN INDIAN FUNERAL—COPAN RIVER—WOMAN'S KINDNESS—HACIENDA OF SAN ANTONIO—
 STRANGE CUSTOMS—A MOUNTAIN OF ALOES—THE STATE OF HONDURAS—VILLAGE OF COPAN—
 —AN UNGRACIOUS HOST—WALL OF COPAN—HISTORY OF COPAN—FIRST VIEW OF THE RUINS—
 VAIN SPECULATIONS—APPLICATIONS FOR MEDICINE—SEARCH FOR AN ABODE—A SICK
 WOMAN—PLAGUES OF A MULETEER—AN UNPLEASANT SITUATION—A THUNDER STORM—
 THOUGHTS OF BUYING COPAN.

TURNING away from the church, we passed the brow of a hill, behind which was a collection of huts almost concealed from sight, and occupied by our friends of the night before. Very soon we commenced ascending a mountain. At a short distance we met a corpse borne on a rude bier of sticks, upon the shoulders of Indians, naked except a piece of cotton cloth over the loins, and shaking awfully under the movements of its carriers. Soon after we met another, borne in the same way, but wrapped in matting, and accompanied by three or four men and a young woman. Both were on their way to the graveyard of the village church. Ascending, we reached the top of a mountain, and saw behind us a beautiful valley extending toward Jocotan, but all waste, and suggesting a feeling of regret that so beautiful a country should be in such miserable hands.

At half-past twelve we descended to the banks of the Copan River. It was broad and rapid, and in the middle was a large sandbar. We had difficulty in fording it; and some of the baggage, particularly the beds and bedding, got wet. From the opposite side we again commenced ascending another ridge, and from the top saw the river winding through the valley. As we crossed, by a sudden turn it flowed along the base, and we looked directly down upon it. Descending this mountain, we came to a beautiful stream, where a grey-haired Indian woman and a pretty little girl, pictures of youth and old age, were washing clothes. We dismounted, and sat down on the bank to wait for the muleteer. I forgot to mention that he had with him a boy about thirteen or fourteen years old, a fine little fellow, upon whom he imposed the worst part of the burden, that of chasing the mules, and who really seemed, like Baron Munchausen's dog, in danger of running his legs off.

Our breach with the muleteer had not been healed, and at first we ascribed to him some agency in our troubles at Comotan. At all events, if it had not been for him, we should not have stopped there. All day he had been particularly furious with the mules, and they had

been particularly perverse, and now they had gone astray; and it was an hour before we heard his spiteful voice, loading them with curses. We mounted again, and at four o'clock saw at a distance a hacienda, on the opposite side of a valley. It stood alone, and promised a quiet resting-place for the night. We turned off from the camino real into a wild path, stony, and overgrown with bushes, and so steep that we were obliged to dismount, let the mules go ahead, and hold on ourselves by the bushes to descend. At the foot of the hill we mounted, and crossed a stream, where a little boy, playing in the water, saluted me by crossing his arms upon his breast, and then passed on to Mr. Catherwood. This was a favourable omen; and, as we climbed up a steep hill, I felt that here, in this lonely spot, away from the gathering-places of men, we must meet kindness. On the top of the hill a woman, with a naked child in her arms and a smile on her face, stood watching our toilsome ascent; and when we asked her if we could make *posada* or lodge there, she answered in the kindest phrase of the country, with a face that spoke even a warmer welcome than her words, "como no?" "why not?" and when she saw that our servant had pineapples in his alforjas, she asked why he brought them, and if he did not know that she had plenty.

The situation of the hacienda of San Antonio was wildly beautiful. It had a clearing for a cowyard, a plantation of corn, tobacco, and plantains, and the opening gave a view of the high mountains by which it was surrounded. The house was built of poles plastered with mud, and against the wall in front of the door was a figure of the Saviour on the cross, on a white cotton cloth hung round with votive offerings. The naked child which the mother carried in her arms was called Maria de los Angeles. While supper was in preparation the master of the house arrived, a swarthy, grim-looking fellow, with a broad-brimmed sombrero, and huge whiskers, and mounted on a powerful young horse, which he was just breaking to the mountain-roads: when he knew that we were strangers asking hospitality, his harsh features relaxed, and he repeated the welcome the woman had given us.

Unfortunately, the boy of the muleteer was taken very ill; his master paid no attention to him, and, while the poor little fellow was groaning under a violent fever, ate on with perfect indifference. We made him a comfortable bed on the piazza, and Mr. Catherwood gave him a dose of medicine. Our evening passed very differently from the last. Our host and hostess were a kind-hearted and simple couple. It was the first time they had ever met with men from another country, and they asked many questions, and examined our little

travelling apparatus, particularly our plated cups, knives, forks, and spoons; we showed them our watches, compass, sextant, chronometer, thermometer, telescope, &c., and the woman, with great discernment, said that we must be very rich, and had "muchos ideas," "many ideas." They asked us about our wives, and we learned that our simple-minded host had two, one of whom lived at Hocotan, and that he passed a week alternately with each. We told him that in England he would be transported, and in the North imprisoned for life for such indulgences, to which he responded that they were barbarous countries; and the woman, although she thought a man ought to be content with one, said that it was no *pecado* or crime to have two; but I heard them say, *sotto voce*, that we were "mas Christianos," or better Christians than they. He assisted us in swinging our hammocks, and about nine o'clock we drove out the dogs and pigs, lighted cigars, and went to bed. Including servants, women, and children, we numbered eleven in the room. All around were little balls of fire, shining and disappearing with the puffs of the cigars. One by one these went out, and we fell asleep.

In the morning we all rose together. The boy was much better, but we did not think him in a condition to travel. His brutal master, however, insisted upon his going. For all that our kind friends had done for us, they would have charged us nothing; but, besides compensating them in money, we distributed among them various trifles, and, when bidding them farewell, I saw with regret a ring which I had given her sparkling on his finger. After we had mounted, the little boy whom we had met at the stream came staggering under a load of six freshly-cut pineapples; and even when we had started, the woman ran after me with a piece of fresh sugar-cane.

All parted at the hacienda of San Antonio with kind feelings except our surly muleteer, who was indignant, as he said, that we made presents to everybody except to him. The poor boy was most grateful, but, unfortunately for him, we had given him a knife, which made the muleteer jealous.

Almost immediately from the hacienda we entered a thick wood, dense as that of the Mico Mountain, and almost as muddy. The ascent was toilsome, but the top was open, and so covered with that beautiful plant that we called it the Mountain of Aloes. Some were just peeping out of the ground, others were twenty or thirty feet high, and some gigantic stalks were dead; flowers which would have kindled rapture in the breast of beauty, had bloomed and died on this desolate mountain, unseen except by a passing Indian.

In descending we lost the path, and wandered for some time before we recovered it. Almost immediately we commenced ascending another

mountain, and from its top looked completely over a third, and, at a great distance, saw a large hacienda. Our road lay directly along the edge of a precipice, from which we looked down upon the tops of gigantic pines at a great distance beneath us. Very soon the path became so broken, and ran so near the edge of a precipice, that I called to Mr. Catherwood to dismount. The precipice was on the left side, and I had advanced so far that, on the back of a perverse mule, I did not venture to make any irregular movement, and rode for some moments in great anxiety. Somewhere on this road, but unmarked by any visible sign, we crossed the boundary-line of the state of Guatemala and entered Honduras.

At two o'clock we reached the village of Copan, which consisted of half-a-dozen miserable huts thatched with corn. Our appearance created a great sensation. All the men and women gathered around us to gaze. We inquired immediately for the ruins, but none of the villagers could direct us to them, and all advised us to go to the hacienda of Don Gregorio. We had no wish to stop at a village, and told the muleteer to go on, but he refused, and said that his engagement was to conduct us to Copan. After a long wrangle we prevailed, and, riding through a coppice, forded once more the Copan River, and came out upon a clearing, on one side of which was a hacienda, with a tile roof, and having *cocina* and other outbuildings, evidently the residence of a rich proprietor. We were greeted by a pack of barking dogs, and all the doorways were filled with women and children, who seemed in no small degree surprised at our appearance. There was not a man in sight; but the women received us kindly, and told us that Don Gregorio would return soon, and would conduct us to the ruins. Immediately the fire was rekindled in the *cocina*, the sound of the patting of hands gave notice of the making of tortillas, and in half an hour dinner was ready. It was served up on a massive silver plate, with water in a silver tankard, but without knife, fork, or spoon; soup or *caldo* was served in cups to be drunk. Nevertheless, we congratulated ourselves upon having fallen into such good quarters.

In a short time a young man arrived on horseback, gaily dressed, with an embroidered shirt, and accompanied by several men driving a herd of cattle. An ox was selected, a rope thrown around its horns, and the animal was drawn up to the side of the house, and, by another rope round its legs, thrown down. Its feet were tied together, its head drawn back by a rope tied from its horns to its tail, and with one thrust of the machete the artery of life was severed. The pack of hungry dogs stood ready, and with a horrible clicking, lapped up the blood with their tongues. All the women were looking on, and a young

girl took a puppy dog and rubbed its nose in the crimson stream, to give it early a taste for blood. The ox was skinned, the meat separated from the bones, and, to the entire destruction of steaks, sirloins, and roasting-pieces, in an hour the whole animal was hanging in long strings on a line before the door.

During this operation Don Gregorio arrived. He was about fifty, had large black whiskers, and a beard of several days' growth; and, from the behaviour of all around, it was easy to see that he was a domestic tyrant. The glance which he threw at us before dismounting seemed to say, "Who are *you*?" but, without a word, he entered the house. We waited until he had finished his dinner, when, supposing that to be the favourable moment, I entered the house. In my intercourse with the world I have more than once found my overtures to an acquaintance received coldly, but I never experienced anything quite so cool as the don's reception of me. I told him that we had come into that neighbourhood to visit the ruins of Copan, and his manner said, What's that to me? but he answered that they were on the other side of the river. I asked him whether we could procure a guide, and again he said that the only man who knew anything about them lived on the other side of the river. As yet we did not make sufficient allowance for the distracted state of the country, nor the circumstance that a man might incur danger to himself by giving shelter to suspected persons; but, relying on the reputation of the country for hospitality, and the proof of it which we had already met with, I was rather slow in coming to the disagreeable conclusion that we were not welcome. This conclusion, however, was irresistible. The don was not pleased with our looks. I ordered the muleteer to saddle the mules; but the rascal enjoyed our confusion, and positively refused to saddle his beasts again that day. We applied to Don Gregorio himself, offering to pay him; and, as Augustin said, in the hope of getting rid of us, he lent us two, on which to ride back to the village. Unfortunately, the guide we sought was away; a brisk cock-fight was then pending, and we received no encouragement, either from the appearance of the people or from invitation, to bring back our luggage to that place. And we learned, what was very provoking, that Don Gregorio was the great man of Copan; the richest man, and the petty tyrant; and that it would be most unfortunate to have a rupture with him, or even to let it be known at the village that we were not well received at his house. Reluctantly, but in the hope of making a more favourable impression, we returned to the hacienda. Mr. C. dismounted on the steps, and took a seat on the piazza. I happened to dismount outside; and, before moving, took a survey of the party. The don sat on a chair, with our detestable mule-

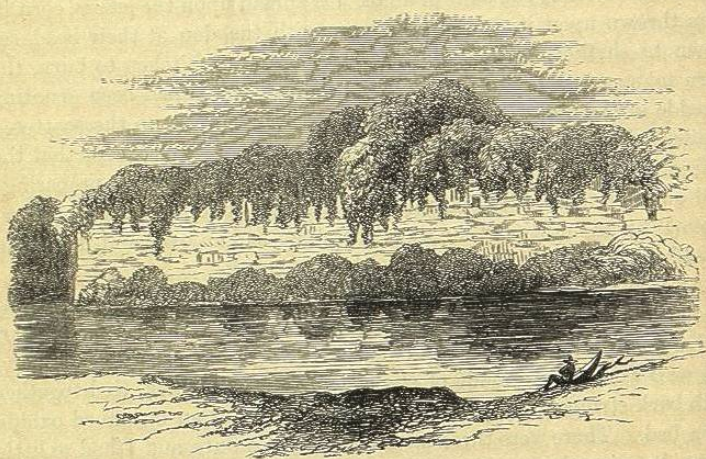
teer by his side, and a half-concealed smile of derision on his face, talking of "idols," and looking at me. By this time eight or ten men, sons, servants, and labourers, had come in from their day's work, but not one offered to take my mule, or made any of those demonstrations of civility which are always shown to a welcome guest. The women turned away their heads, as if they had been reproved for receiving us; and all the men, taking their cue from the don, looked so insulting, that I told Mr. Catherwood we would tumble our luggage into the road, and curse him for an inhospitable churl; but Mr. Catherwood warned me against it, urging that, if we had an open quarrel with him, after all our trouble we would be prevented seeing the ruins. The don probably suspected something of what passed; and, fearing that he might push things too far, and bring a stain upon his name, pointed to a chair, and asked me to take a seat. With a great effort, I resolved to smother my indignation until I could pour it out with safety. Augustin was very indignant at the treatment we received; on the road he had sometimes swelled his own importance by telling of the flags hoisted and cannon fired when we left Balize; and here he hoisted more flags and fired more guns than usual, beginning with forty guns, and afterwards going on to a cannonade; but it would not do. The don did not like us, and probably was willing to hoist flags, and fire cannons too, as at Balize, when we should go away.

Toward evening the skin of an ox was spread upon the piazza, corn in ears thrown upon it, and all the men, with the don at their head, sat down to shell it. The cobs were carried to the kitchen to burn, the corn taken up in baskets, and three pet hogs, which had been grunting outside in expectation of the feast, were let in to pick up the scattered grains. During the evening no notice was taken of us, except that the wife of the don sent a message by Augustin that supper was preparing; and our wounded pride was relieved, and our discontent somewhat removed, by an additional message, that they had an oven and flour, and would bake us some bread if we wished to buy it.

After supper all prepared for sleep. The don's house had two sides, an inside and an out. The don and his family occupied the former, and we the latter; but we had not even this to ourselves. All along the wall were frames made of sticks about an inch thick, tied together with bark strings, over which the workmen spread an untanned oxhide for a bed. There were three hammocks besides ours, and I had so little room for mine that my body described an inverted parabola, with my heels as high as my head. It was vexatious and ridiculous; or, in the words of the English tourist in Fra Diavolo, it was "shocking! positively shocking!"

In the morning Don Gregorio was in the same humour. We took no notice of him, but made our toilet under the shed with as much respect as possible to the presence of the female members of the family, who were constantly passing and repassing. We had made up our minds to hold on and see the ruins; and, fortunately, early in the morning, one of the crusty don's sons, a civil young man, brought over from the village Jose, the guide of whom we stood in need.

By reason of many vexatious delays, growing out of difficulties between Jose and the muleteer, we did not get away until nine o'clock. Very soon we left the path or road, and entered a large field, partially cultivated with corn, belonging to Don Gregorio. Riding some distance through this, we reached a hut, thatched with corn-leaves, on the edge of the woods, at which some workmen were preparing their breakfast. Here we dismounted, and, tying our mules to trees near by, entered the woods, Jose clearing a path before us with a machete; soon we came to the bank of a river, and saw directly opposite a stone wall, perhaps sixty feet high, with trees growing out of the top, running north and south along the river, in some places fallen, but in others entire. It had more the character of a structure than any we had ever seen ascribed to the aborigines of America, and formed part of the wall of Copan, an ancient city, on whose history books throw but little light.



I am entering abruptly upon new ground. Volumes without number have been written to account for the first peopling of America. By some the inhabitants of this continent have been regarded as

a separate race, not descended from the same common father with the rest of mankind; others have ascribed their origin to some remnant of the antediluvian inhabitants of the earth, who survived the deluge which swept away the greatest part of the human species in the days of Noah, and hence have considered them the most ancient race of people on the earth. Under the broad range allowed by a descent from the sons of Noah, the Jews, the Canaanites, the Phœnicians, the Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Scythians in ancient times; the Chinese, the Swedes, the Norwegians, the Welsh, and the Spaniards in modern, have had ascribed to them the honour of peopling America. The two continents have been joined together and rent asunder by the shock of an earthquake; the fabled island of Atlantis has been lifted out of the ocean; and, not to be behindhand, an enterprising American has turned the tables on the Old World, and planted the ark itself within the State of New-York.

The monuments and architectural remains of the aborigines have heretofore formed but little part of the groundwork for these speculations. Dr. Robertson, in his History of America, lays it down as "a certain principle, that America was not peopled by any nation of the ancient continent which had made considerable progress in civilization." "The inhabitants of the New World," he says, "were in a state of society so extremely rude as to be unacquainted with those arts which are the first essays of human ingenuity in its advance toward improvement." Discrediting the glowing accounts of Cortez and his companions, of soldiers, priests, and civilians, all concurring in representations of the splendour exhibited in the buildings of Mexico, he says that the "houses of the people were mere huts, built with turf, or mud, or the branches of trees, like those of the rudest Indians." The temple of Cholula was nothing more than "a mound of earth, without any steps or any facing of stone, covered with grass and shrubs;" and, on the authority of persons long resident in New Spain, and who professed to have visited every part of it, he says that "there is not, in all the extent of that vast empire, a single monument or vestige of any building more ancient than the conquest." At that time, distrust was perhaps the safer side for the historian; but since Dr. Robertson wrote a new flood of light has poured upon the world, and the field of American antiquities has been opened.

The ignorance, carelessness, and indifference of the inhabitants of Spanish America on this subject are matters of wonder. In the United States, the opening of forests and the discovery of tumuli or mounds and fortifications, extending in ranges from the lakes through the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi, mummies in a cave in Kentucky,

the inscription on the rock at Dighton, and the ruins of walls and a great city in Arkansas and Wisconsin Territory, had suggested wild and wandering ideas in regard to the first peopling of this country, and the strong belief that powerful and populous nations had occupied it and had passed away, whose histories are entirely unknown. The same evidences continue in Texas, and in Mexico they assume a still more definite form.

The first new light thrown upon this subject as regards Mexico was by the great Humboldt, who visited that country at a time when, by the jealous policy of the government, it was almost as much closed against strangers as China is now. No man could have better deserved such fortune. At that time the monuments of the country were not a leading object of research; but Humboldt collected from various sources, information and drawings, particularly of Mitla, or the Vale of the Dead; Xoxichalco, a mountain hewed down and terraced, and called the Hill of Flowers; and the great pyramid or Temple of Cholula he visited himself, of all which his own eloquent account is within reach of the reader. Unfortunately, of the great cities beyond the Vale of Mexico, buried in forests, ruined, desolate, and without a name, Humboldt never heard, or, at least, he never visited them. It is but lately that accounts of their existence reached Europe and the United States. These accounts, however vague and unsatisfactory, had roused our curiosity, and were the object of our journey; though I ought perhaps to say that both Mr. C. and I were somewhat sceptical, and when we arrived at Copan, it was with the hope, rather than the expectation, of finding wonders.

Since the discovery of these ruined cities the prevailing theory has been, that they belonged to a race long anterior to that which inhabited the country at the time of the Spanish conquest. With regard to Copan, mention is made by the early Spanish historians of a place of that name, situated in the same region of country in which these ruins are found, which then existed as an inhabited city, and offered a formidable resistance to the Spanish arms, though there are circumstances which seem to indicate that the city referred to was inferior in strength and solidity of construction, and of more modern origin.

It stood in the old province of Chiquimula de la Sierra, which was conquered by the officers of Pedro de Alvarado, but not one of the Spanish historians has given any particulars of this conquest. In 1530 the Indians of the province revolted, and attempted to throw off the yoke of Spain. Hernandez de Chaves was sent to subdue them, and, after many sanguinary battles, he encamped before Esqui-

pulas, a place of arms belonging to a powerful cacique, which, on the fourth day, to use the words of the cacique himself, "more out of respect to the public tranquillity than from fear of the Spanish arms, determined to surrender," and, with the capital, the whole province submitted again to the Spanish dominion.

The cacique of Copan, whose name was Copán Calel, had been active in exciting the revolt and assisting the insurgents. Hernandez de Chaves determined to punish him, and marched against Copan, then one of the largest, most opulent, and most populous places of the kingdom. The camp of the cacique, with his auxiliaries, consisted of thirty thousand men, well disciplined, and veterans in war, armed with wooden swords having stone edges, arrows, and slings. On one side, says the historian, it was defended by the ranges of mountains of Chiquimula and Gracios a Dios, and on the opposite side by a deep fosse, and an intrenchment formed of strong beams of timber, having the interstices filled with earth, with embrasures, and loopholes for the discharge of arrows. Chaves, accompanied by some horsemen, well armed, rode to the fosse, and made sign that he wished to hold a conference. The cacique answered with an arrow. A shower of arrows, stones, and darts followed, which compelled the Spaniards to retreat. The next day Chaves made an attack upon the intrenchment. The infantry wore loose coats stuffed with cotton, swords and shields; the horsemen wore breastplates and helmets, and their horses were covered. The Copanes had each a shield covered with the skin of the danta on his arm, and his head guarded by bunches of feathers. The attack lasted the whole day. The Indians, with their arrows, javelins, and pikes, the heads of which were hardened by fire, maintained their ground. The Spaniards were obliged to retreat. Chaves, who had fought in the thickest of the battle, was alarmed at the difficulties of the enterprise and the danger to the credit of the Spanish arms, but received information that in one place the depth of the ditch which defended Copan was but trifling, and the next day he proceeded to the spot to make an attack there. The Copanes had watched his movements, and manned the intrenchment with their bravest soldiers. The infantry were unable to make a lodgment. The cavalry came to their assistance. The Indians brought up their whole force, and the Spaniards stood like rocks, impassable to pikes, arrows, and stones. Several times they attempted to scale the intrenchments, and were driven back into the fosse. Many were killed on both sides, but the battle continued without advantage to either, until a brave horseman leaped the ditch, and, his horse being carried violently with his breast against the barrier, the earth and palisades gave way, and the