

## **EL CERRO DEL CARMEN**

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ON ONE of those warm summer afternoons, when we long for fresh air and peaceful rest, it is pleasant to go to spend the last moments of the day, on the hill that rises to the N.E. of this beautiful city.

A very ancient sanctuary, built by the poor inhabitants of the valley, long before it was thought to move the capital of the kingdom of Guatemala here, brings to mind historical episodes from distant times; while the captivating perspective of the population, which allows the last rumors of the day to be heard, and which appears lying between a blanket of greenery in a circus of mountains, veiled by volcanoes, under a cerulean pavilion of splendid clouds, crowds various ideas in the mind, which They exalt the fantasy, until soft breezes from the south cool our foreheads, and the light of the peaceful moon spills its faint rays, like a celestial balm, on the longing heart.

The humble temple imitates a feudal castle from the Middle Ages, with battlements and cannons in its towers, which give it a strange appearance, unbecoming of a hermitage. Let it be seen that time, that old destroyer of all that exists, has placed its chilled hand on the dirty and worm-eaten walls, respecting, with pious veneration, the portrait of one of the first benefactors of the church, which is discovered inside it, among other dusty and old paints. The good Mr. José Morales Rox y Alfarol represents about ninety years in that portrait, which is due to the brush of our famous painter Rosales, who to give the painting a more funerary appearance, placed a skull in the hands of the venerable rebuilder of the chapel the hill. That portrait is there, a testimony of the recognition of the devout people, and a symbol of the centuries that have passed on the ancient hill. I don't know what it feels like to contemplate all that, which seems like a silent protest the destructive action of the centuries.

Saturated with heroic mysticism, with romantic episodes and rare events, the story of that old hermitage runs. It is fame and is confirmed by the true chronicler Vásquez, that before the 17th century, a pilgrim named Juan Corz, originally from Genoa, of great virtue and refined faith, went to the Holy Land. He happened to pass through the town of Santa Teresa, in Spain, upon returning from Jerusalem, and as some nuns from Avilés knew about it, they called him to ask where he was heading on his long walk. Perhaps the Genoese did not find a place more remote and isolated than the kingdom of Guatemala, because of the Spanish conquest, he told the nuns that he would come here; And they then commissioned her to bring an image of the Virgin of Carmen, which the founder destined for such distant regions.

The penitent Corz was forty years old when he came to establish his lair among the bitter rocks of the place of Las Vacas, and on the banks of the stream that bears that name, in the most tangled of the bushes. While he lived a life of abstinence and contemplation, in hermitical isolation, there was no shortage of peasants who surprised him, during his fervent prayers, and who took the news to the nearby village, which had the ugly name of Rincón de la Leonera. The inhabitants of the place attributed miraculous events to the image in the cave, before which the Genoese prayed, it is not known whether to invoke the kindness of heaven over the inhabitants of the nearby farmhouse, or to demand forgiveness for personal and youthful faults. It is true that the Valeras, the Morales, the Hincapiés, the Justinianos, the Dardones, the Mayorga, and several other of the main families of the region, who were in the pleasant valley that was later called La Ermita, thought of build a temple to the Virgin of Carmen; but the monk fled from those who were looking for him to propose the erection of the church. Finally, they headed en masse to the mysterious grotto, and managed to convince Brother Corz of the need to consecrate an oratory to the portentous image.

In the place where the Old Parish is today, they built a poor chapel, in which the effigy of the virgin was placed; What more would be the astonishment and sorrow of those simple and credulous people when the next morning, when they went to worship Our Lady of Mount Carmel, it had disappeared from the place where it had been placed the day before. Ignorance of the times and the ideas of the time gave rise to conjectures that attributed the mysterious disappearance of said effigy, later found in the corner of the rock that it previously occupied, to a supernatural cause. It was then that Corz himself chose the nearby hill as the seat of the hermitage, next to which, and in a small tower that is still there, it was arranged that the penitent would live, as guardian of the image of the Queen of the Heavens. Isolated the Christian pilgrim, he used to shelter, on nights of rain and storms, whoever he happened to find in his house. Who would presume that for this reason gossip and slander, usually the offspring of envy, and which almost always hover over the golden ceilings of the powerful, would also poison the pure atmosphere of the solitary cenobite? A vague rumor arose against the hermit's proven virtue, and according to the chronicles, a great testimony was also raised against him, which mortally wounded his honor. Sometimes it is not enough to isolate oneself from the world and take refuge in the caves of the mountains, so that slander ceases to hurt the fame of men like lightning.

Be that as it may, the truth was that since then the unfortunate Juan Corz was no longer seen, and he disappeared forever from Cerro del Carmen. The following poorly written remembrance is still discovered on one of the stones of the old chapel:

"The founder of this was Juan Corz Religious of the Ceramic Natural Order of the Lordship of Gnoba-Year 1620."

How many years have passed since the hermit's strange disappearance! His name, sculpted on the tombstone, is also gradually erasing after two centuries; while

the traces of the slander that embittered the last years of his life would never be erased from the heart of the Genoese mystic.

How true it is that where there is a man, there passions arise; and where there is a community, crimes arise there. The name of Cain reverberates, through the centuries, like an eternal curse.

When it was believed that all the related events took place, wrapped in the shadow of credulous mysticism, in the fertile valley, which is called Las Vacas, in memory of the first conqueror who brought cattle to the ancient kingdom of Guatemala; In these regions there were nothing but extensive meadows, which could be seen full of foliage, and illuminated at night by thousands of fireflies.

Antigua Guatemala then competed in opulence with the superb capital of Mexico, without even realizing that volcanic shocks would throw its inhabitants towards the valley of "La Erita".

When in 1773 it was a question of moving the capital to the place where it is today, there were riots and brawls, caused by opposing interests between the Terronists, which is what they called those who clung to their old homes, and the transferists who yearned for leave the pleasant slopes of the upright volcanoes. How could the founder of the Cerro del Carmen church, who by instinct distanced himself from men, presume that from that hill he would be able to contemplate, through the centuries, a beautiful city, whose houses can be seen today among the branches of the gardens, like white doves among nests of vegetables?...

The slander made the penitent emigrate from the hill.

The earthquake made our grandparents leave the ancient capital of Central America, to found it at the foot of that historic hill.

Then, ah, idolized Guatemala! The political upheavals, the horrendous crimes that have been perpetrated on your soil, will have gone to remove the ashes of the founder of the oldest church that remains on the top of the mountain.

A thousand times the righteous would have fled again from that minaret, which seems to testify day by day to all the facts of our sad history!

From remote regions came the poor pilgrim, in search of a nest and a temple: the human storms destroyed the nest, while the temple has remained, like a mystical ark that keeps the remains of dead generations, there on the mountain, after the flood of our tears.

In the year 1620, when the Cerro church was inaugurated, the thirteenth of its bishops had come to govern the diocese, D. Fr. Juan Zapata, a model of charity and Christian meekness who was the prelate who authorized the erection of said temple.

The chroniclers report that, in the month of December of that year, an immense ball of fire was seen that, crossing the space, with a terrifying roar, fell near the newly built hermitage. That aerolite, which we all know today is a physical phenomenon without any significance, greatly alarmed the few residents of the Las Vacas valley and Rincón de la Leonera. There were prayers and they did penance.

In the month of June of the year 1751, the surveyor D. Juan del Bosque measured four caballerias and fifty-seven and a half acres of land around the hill that were awarded to the Brotherhood of Nuestra Señora del Carmen; land that cost nothing at that time, since when this city was founded, and the M.N. and L. City Hall, the area in which it is located today, and the lands for those elected, cost from ten to twenty pesos each caballeria, as can be seen from a list that we have of the titles and owners of the works and estates that were expropriated. These lands belonged to Contreras, Bosques, Montenegros, Arrivillagas, Solares, Muñoz and del Cid.

Today there are places in the city where the square vara costs from ten to one hundred pesos.

Time sometimes values some things and nullifies others. Everything changes under the sky; in such a way that, in that human wave, the generations that die leave the field free for the generations that come, just as in that hurricane of thought, the ideas that succumb leave the field free to the ideas that are born. Everything transforms and develops, while history takes note of what happens. Everything lives from death.

In the past there was more simplicity of customs, more expansion in the soul, more beliefs in the mind: it is true that error, an ailment of the finite, infiltrated everywhere. Today, positivism will rise erect, which is nothing more than the denial of all idealities, of all supreme aspiration, and which leads, after the carnival of life, to the enduring silence of the terrifying of nothingness. From there is born the realistic idea, which finds human destiny in enjoyment, science in denial, love in interest, and the end of being in stinking worm pasture. Humanity seems desperate, wanting to tear the perfume from the flower, the murmur from the fountain, the spirit from man, and God from nature. The aspiration to the beautiful was art; the aspiration to the infinite was religion; the aspiration for happiness was love; Today love, religion and art are sacrificed to the realism that invades everything, to drag the fantasy through the mud, the heart through rot, and the spirit through the abysses of nothingness.

The mind wanders from time to time and from generation to generation, and when it goes back to the time in which that mystical chapel of Cerro del Carmen was founded, by the piety of one of those who, like the penitents of the Force of Fate, he wore a rough sackcloth, to come and hide in a retreat; It goes through the changes of ideas, the changes of things and the transformation of everything that exists. If the hermit arose from his bone, and were like another Oedipus, from house to house, asking each one for the treasure of traditions, or like Hamlet, from tomb to tomb, demanding of those who sleep the sleep of death, so that they could say what good

things they left behind in this land of love; How few there would be those who did not intone the miserere of their guilt. How few there would be who, looking back, would not remain, like the precious ones in the Bible, converted into pillars of salt!

Nor does that mean that the spirit of the century has not spread around that semi-hermitage, semi-castle monument, through whose barbicans the telegraph wire and the echoes of the roar of the locomotive pass today.

Without blaspheming our parents, without cursing the past, as an isolated entity that did not have the roots of the present; Let us walk forward, with light in our understanding, love in our hearts and faith in our conscience.

“When the minerals want to be trees, the trees flowers, the flowers birds, the birds songs, the songs poetry, the type poetry, and the archetype type; when, from the wave of the Ocean, to the beat of the heart, from the bee buzzing over the chalice overflowing with honey, to the harp sending out the note launched to immortality, everything created seeks the origin of its creation, and with atoms, sparks, essences, aromas, chirping, wings, flights, inspirations, songs, prayers, incense, all creatures long to unite with eternal love;” Let us not deny our species, boasting of a positivism that makes man inferior to the level of the brute, and that would justify the envy that Calderón's hero had of the birds that flew like bouquets of feathers, and the fish that split the liquid element, like ship with scales; Let us not forget that everything on earth happens quickly, and then fades away:

*“¿Qué es la vida? una ilusión,  
Una sombra, una ficción,  
Y el mayor bien es pequeño;  
Que toda la vida es sueño  
Y los sueños, ¡sueños son!”*

The last shadows of the afternoon already cover the white towers of the buildings and the brown roofs of the houses; The evening star shines brighter on the horizon; the sentinel of the night, the singing sultan, bids farewell to the day, as he retires to his seraglio; The men, carrying some disappointments and others illusions, return to their homes; Light sources, which resemble stars fallen to the earth, stand out over the dead city in the midst of shadows. Progress, too, in its civilizing expansions, would have filled the 17th century monk with admiration, if instead of the cocuyos that he saw here among the cane fields, at sunset, he had seen the rays conducted docilely and without noise by a thin wire until they are light bulbs! One does not reach the height of culture without passing the via crucis of bitter tests, nor does the mischievous child run without having fallen many times in his first attempts. Pain precedes life; pain purifies what is stained; Pain is a part of humanity.

What is lost in purity of customs, in simplicity of habits, in patriarchal life; you gain in elements of civilization and development. Today we live fast, and the fever of

greed and intense enjoyment spreads, even if it does not last long. Ideals are sacrificed to material interest. THE law of conscience is obscured, and selfishness shows off its livid jaws. It is needed to talk, the telephone; to walk, steam; to see, the electric light; to be happy, gold... Gold, which is the god of the 19th century; gold, which is the metal from which the wire is forged that carries and brings through the world the current of desires and aspirations, galvanizing the heart and atrophying the conscience... The conscience, which denies itself; but that despite that it exists, as Galileo would have said, if instead of being about the movement of the earth on itself, it had been about the movement of our own acts about the mysterious center of our entire being, which is called the soul, or whatever those who do not aspire to deny even their own existence want to call it.

As we descended the hill, which a short time before had been illuminated by the afternoon twilight, we involuntarily looked back, and memories of better times, of happy times in life, came to mind. When we remember the happy and turbulent childhood, which without fear or foresight, peacefully enjoyed the first years of existence, it seems to us that just yesterday, in that same place, among the restless crowd of childish companions, we were running everywhere, in joyful games, like loose little birds: in the region of the wind flying kites soared amidst the garrulous hubbub of the little tyrants.

Just yesterday, teenagers, we were looking for a sweet look of love at that same Hill, which has impassively witnessed so many intimate confidences. Young people, we once again spread our imagination and cherished dreams on the country walk... and it seems like it was yesterday; That it was all a dream, a vain shadow, a moment of life. How many times have we sighed for that hill, in a foreign land, in the middle of splendid parks and orchards!

More than ten generations have seen the crenellated temple grow and die; now of conquerors who only equipped with a cloak and a sword came here with heroic courage; now of dignitaries who, favored by luck, were opulent owners of Indian regions; now of Creoles who longed for independence, as the sick long for a filter that would cure their illnesses, even if they ran the risk of containing a deadly cough, now of insubordinate people, who revolt and kill themselves in intestinal convulsions... We have been passing between bursts of shadows and light, between eclipses and solstices, in feverish activity.

We have not paid enough attention to the fact that the school education of the individual, the politics of the citizen and the democracy of the people are the basis of freedom.

“The engine of the administrative machine is the people. The suppression or omission of this driving force (says a wise American) by the rulers, who have only organized the government, is the cause of Caesarism in Europe and of leadership in America. In some of those called republics, there is nothing more than a fluid and

floating mass of social molecules without individuality or organic cohesion, fused in the personality of the strongest. Society is crystallized in the figure of a man's brain, until new volcanic eruptions found it under another name and another form, veiled with the shroud of its lava.

Ah, *Cerro del Carmen*! Tomorrow, in a few hours, the morning rays will come to once again gild the feudal towers of your temple, which from that mountain will see many more generations sink; You will see this beautiful city grow and develop, until it becomes an emporium of wealth and ostentatious luxury, protected by peace and under the aegis of work and order; He will see his children gathered in happy brotherhood, without their opinions being disputes, nor their aspirations being dalliances; You will see Guatemala, garden of Central America, displaying fragrant flowers and excellent fruits:

*“¡Salve cara parens,  
Dulcis Guathimala, salve!”*

ANTONIO BATRES JAUREGUI.