

A QOHELETH OF OLD MEXICO.

FRAGMENTS OF A POEM ON "THE TRANSITORINESS OF HUMAN AFFAIRS."

BY JOHN W. GOETZ.

[Buddhism has taught us the truths of transitoriness and of suffering. The same ideas are repeated in Ecclesiastes, chapter i, 4, where we read: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." And it is interesting to discover the same thoughts expressed in old Mexican poetry as composed by one of their kings.

Nezahualcoyotl—that was the sovereign's name—was born on February 4, 1402, in Tezcoco. His parents were King Ixtlixochitl and Queen Matlahuatzin, a sister of the Nahua king, Huitzilihuitl. In the year 1431 he was ceremoniously crowned as king of Texcoco and of the whole Chichimeco-Tecpanic kingdom.

The chronicles have handed down to us interesting accounts of his courage, his talents, his hardships, and romantic events of his life. One might really fancy to read an American tradition of the history of David.

Only two of his poems have come down to posterity, one of which is without a title, while the other bears the title "The Transitoriness of Human Affairs." Here follows a literal translation of it from the Nahuatl language.
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The transitory pomps of this world are like the green willows, for howsoever much the latter may strive for permanence, a sudden fire will nevertheless consume them, a sharp ax will destroy them, the north wind will pluck them out, and old age and decrepitude bend them and make them down-hearted.

The characteristics of the royal purple coincide with those of roses, on account of their color as well as on account of their fate.

The beauty of the roses lasts only as long as their chaste buds catch and keep avariciously those particles which the Dawn melts into precious pearls and economically dissolves into liquid dew;

But no sooner does the Father of the Winds send the smallest ray of light to them, then he deprives them of their beauty and

bloom, making them wither and lose their bright purple color with which they had been agreeably and gaily clad.

During a short period only the proud and flourishing nations enjoy their leadership ;

For those that in the morning prove themselves great and haughty, weep in the evening over the sad loss of their throne and over the repeated catastrophes which bring them nearer to dismay, drought, death, and the grave.

All earthly things come to an end ; for even the most festive, joyful and splendid career will come to a standstill, and completely vanish away.

The whole earth is a grave ; nothing exists that she does not pitifully hide and bury.

Rivers, brooks and springs flow, and none of them returns to its source.

They eagerly hasten towards the vast region of Tloluca (the sea) and the nearer they come to its extensive coast, the deeper they dig their sad beds in which to bury themselves.

What was yesterday is not to-day, and one does not know what to-day's things will be to-morrow.

The tombs are filled with ashes of evil smell, which were formerly bones, corpses and living bodies of people who sat on thrones, presided over councils, led armies, conquered countries, owned treasures, founded religions, and enjoyed pomp, authority, good fortune and power.

These glories disappeared like the terrible smoke vomited by the infernal fire of the Popocatepetl, with no other monuments but the rough hides on which they are recorded.

And if I led you into the dark holes of the grave-yards, and asked you about the bones of the mighty Chalchiuhtlanetzin, the first chief of the ancient Toltecs, and about those of the venerable worshiper Necaxeomil ;

If I were to ask you what became of the incomparable beauty of Empress Xiuhztal, and about the remnants of the peaceful Topiltzin, the last sovereign of the unfortunate Toltec kingdom ;

If I inquired for the ashes of our ancestor Xolotl, or the still warm dust of my famous, immortal, though most unfortunate father Ixtlixochitl ;

If I were to question you as to all your august fore-fathers ; what would you reply ?

The same as I also should answer: *Indipohdi, indipohdi* (I know nothing); for the first and the last are mingled with the earth.

Their fate will be ours and that of our successors.

Let us therefore, O invincible princes, brave commanders, true friends and loyal liegemen, try to attain heaven; for there everything is eternal and nothing decays.

The horror of the grave is a flattering cradle for the sun, and the miserable shadows bright lights for the stars.

Nobody is able to change those celestial bodies; for as they serve directly the magnificence of our creator, they let our eyes see the same things to-day that our ancestors beheld and that our offspring too will behold.