INTRODUCTION

El Periquillo Sarniento is Spanish America's first novel and the foundational literary work of Mexico, a self-portrait of the colony of *Nueva España* (New Spain) in its struggle to become an independent nation. The *Periquillo* is a book read as part of their national education by Mexican schoolchildren, who, much like young readers of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the United States, can appreciate this story of a son's disobedience, trials, and errors, for its slapstick humor. Adults who reread the novel as experienced readers find in it much more than a comic tale; behind the humor in the son's wayward growth into manhood, they read a thoughtful inquiry into American identity, from the time when their ancestors (and ours) were wresting the Americas from European control.[1]

José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi published the *Periquillo* in Mexico in 1816, a time when his country was in the midst of war. Battles for independence from Spain were raging all over the vast portion of the western hemisphere that Spain had colonized; in Mexico, the rebellion had begun in 1810 with Father Miguel Hidalgo's rallying of his Indian parishioners in the small town of Dolores to the cry of "Long live independence! Long live America! Death to bad government!" The Mexican countryside was torn by fighting; in Mexican cities, factional hatreds divided the population—and divided loyalties caused anguish in many individuals—until the final, disillusioned negotiations secured Mexico's independence in 1821.

The publication of the *Periquillo* in the midst of this political chaos and the ensuing economic stringency is surprising. Why would Mexicans have wanted to buy Lizardi's novel when food and other essentials were more pressing needs? Why would a novel, generally thought to be just entertainment, have appealed to them when real-life concerns seemed more deserving of attention? How could they even have found the private time to read? Answers to these questions help us to understand the role the novel played at the moment (and perhaps plays today) in Spanish America. Writing the novel required that Lizardi reexamine the colonizer's language; reading the novel was an act of liberation. Mexicans needed to disassociate from traditional literary forms, to question colonial paternalistic metaphors of governance, to see themselves in ways other than those their colonizers dictated. Reading this homegrown novel, Mexicans could now view the world around them honestly; if official literature had always depicted them before as obedient subjects, now they were disorderly and disreputable. In Lizardi's novel they did not speak proper Castilian. Many readers, shocked by the ugliness of Lizardi's representation of colonial Mexico, would have set the novel aside from time to time in order to consider whether his repellent worldview accurately reflected reality. They would have resumed reading

[1] For background and documentation for most of my assertions in this essay, see my *Lizardi and the Birth of the Novel in Spanish America* (2001).

only after reassuring themselves that they agreed with his judgment of Mexican society and appreciated that Mexico could only be improved through such honest confrontation of that reality. Lizardi's fresh and daring use of language forced his readers to break away from the kind of obedient reading they had learned from the catechism, to leave behind the stupefying, unquestioning attitude toward the printed word that admiration for Baroque poetry had induced in them. The frequent pauses that punctuated their reading afforded them the opportunity to think critically about their world and their habitual use of language. Thus, the novel taught them a whole new way of seeing and thinking.

In the first decades of the 19th century, Mexicans of the upper social strata spoke and wrote in Spanish (a few could also communicate in Latin) with a refined and Europeanized Spanish lexicon. Through the centuries of colonial rule, religious literature such as sermons, theological treatises, and devotional works were the prevalent forms of literature in Mexico; the most common secular literary form was poetry, including epics, adulatory paeans, and witty plays on language addressed to an inner circle of sophisticated readers. Although 16th-century Spain had given birth to the novel, the Spanish rulers of the empire tried to prohibit its exportation to the American colonies. Inquisition officials feared that the novel's imaginative leaps of fiction would affect colonists' weaker minds. Despite these strictures, many novels managed to slip through customs.[2] But if Spanish officials could not keep novels from reaching the Americas, they could at least quash the efforts of Spanish Americans to write novels for their own local readerships. The only home-produced narratives that Americans read during the three centuries of colonial rule were the officially permitted forms: histories, diaries with story threads, and essays with a progressive development. Still, another factor inhibited the production of novels in both Spain and the Americas in this time. In 1713, the French Bourbon line replaced the ruling Hapsburg dynasty of Spain, and with the new royal court came the French neoclassical preference for "true" stories over the novel, with its suspect inventions. Spanish writers of the 18th century left behind their country's healthy novelistic tradition and disguised their fictions by labeling them dreams, reveries, biographies, confessions, histories, letters, diaries, lives, and so on.[3]

Thus, the *Periquillo* was a breakthrough on at least two accounts. With it, Lizardi broke a long-standing prohibition imposed by Inquisition authorities on American authors; on top of this, his fiction flew in the face of 18th-century taste. He was quite aware that he was doing something entirely new. He once wrote that his novel had "an undeniable particularity, and it is that of being the only romance-type work proper to the country that has been written in its class by an

[2] See Irving Leonard's *Books of the Brave* (1949). Introduction by Rolena Adorno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[3] Much of this documentation is only available in Spanish. Excellent surveys, however, of literature of Spain in the 1700s are the volume on the 18th century by Nigel Glendinning in the series, *A Literary History of Spain* (London and New York: Benn and Barnes and Noble, 1972); Richard Herr's *The Eighteenth Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); and Jefferson Rea Spell's *Rousseau in the Spanish World Before 1833: A Study in Franco–Spanish Literary Relations* (New York: Octagon, 1938, 1969).

American in 300 years." Though he used the word "romance" to describe the *Periquillo* on this occasion, Lizardi usually insisted that it be read as a true history; he hesitated to refer to it as a novel because of the genre's forbidden, unreal character. He was clear about the date of the novel's writing—1813, in the midst of a bloody civil war. And, insisting on the novel's veracity, he repeated that there were many Periquillos in Mexico, whose fall from decency to degradation represented a common pattern in that social class of *criollos* (persons born in Mexico to Spanish parents, who were often denied access to privilege and thus lived with a Spanish name but little money). On the other hand, he compared it time and again to Miguel de Cervantes'[4] *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615), and even remarked that it was being called "el *Quijote* de la América." In this way he set his novel alongside that prestigious book, which by the early 1800s was well on its way to becoming Spain's national classic.

Critics have proposed many models for this first Mexican novel. Lizardi himself cited the *Quijote* as his source of inspiration. Other proposed sources include the Spanish picaresque novel;[5] the satiric tradition represented by Diego de Torres Villarroel (1693–1770), the author of the book's epigraph; and *Fray Gerundio* (1758), a fictionalized critique of poorly educated clergy by the Spanish Jesuit Francisco de la Isla (1703–1781). English, French, and underground Spanish novels were also reaching Mexico in the early 1800s, despite the efforts of the Inquisition, and were written about in publications that Lizardi is known to have read. New editions of Spanish American histories by Bernal Díaz del Castillo[6] and others were being published; excerpts of more recent histories were appearing in the periodical press; and Lizardi was familiar with Mexico's earlier belle-lettristic tradition, represented by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz[7] and her contemporary Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora.[8] All of these and more may have provided Lizardi with literary models. What matters most, however, is his originality. In writing the first Mexican novel, he drew together many written and oral varieties of language, creating a picture of contemporary Mexico that later critics called "realistic"; and he broadened the category of literature by addressing his work to readers of both sexes and of all social strata and levels of education. Mexican authors who were to follow Lizardi took full advantage of the new readership that he forged.

[4] Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) published his famous work in two parts—1605 and 1615.

[5] The picaresque, thought to have begun with the publication in 1554 of the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*, concentrated attention on the dirty world of the lower classes in contrast to the pretty, upper-class world that was portrayed in the romances. Spain's Golden Age (1550–1650) also produced two other important picaresque novels to which Lizardi's work was compared: Mateo' Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1559) and Francisco de Quevedo's *El buscón* (1626). For Lizardi's relation to the picaresque, see my introduction to Hackett Publishing's unabridged edition of David Frye's translation of the *Periquillo*.

[6] Díaz del Castillo, a soldier who accompanied Hernán Cortés on the military mission to conquer Mexico in 1519, wrote his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. It was published in Madrid in 1796.

[7] Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz (1651–1695), a nun, savant, and poet.

[8] Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645–1700), a scientist, collector of pre-Columbian documents, and writer.

The *Periquillo* was an immediate hit. The Mexico City printing house of Alejandro Valdés printed it at a rate of two chapters a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, beginning in February of 1816. Each volume of the three volumes published during Lizardi's lifetime cost subscribers four pesos; those persons living outside Mexico City paid four and a half pesos. It is estimated that 500 copies were printed in this first edition, but numbers do not tell the whole story. There is evidence from newspapers and pamphlets of the period that those copies circulated among many readers, and that learned persons (such as priests) read the story aloud to many others.

Because its paper fascicles came out in installments, it was strikingly different in appearance from the leather-bound books of the time. It was a new product, midway between highbrow literature and the proliferating ephemera of newspapers, pamphlets, handbills, fliers, and posters. Newspapers talked about Lizardi's protagonist as if he were real. Readers were amused by the book's humor; but the tale of a *criollo* youth, set against the backdrop of a Mexico whose ugliness they recognized as their own, also shocked some. One reader complained that no person of high rank appeared in the novel to relieve its portrayal of low life—Lizardi responded that Mexico had no kings, and that, logically, Periquillo would not have associated with them in any case. Others were most offended by Lizardi's deviations from literary norms and castigated him for validating as literary the languages whose sounds they associated with the flow of the gutter.

Lizardi did not start out as a novelist. Born in 1776 to *criollo* parents (his father was a doctor though the family seems to have been borderline-poor), he was fairly well educated according to the standards of the day. Like the hero of the *Periquillo*—whose education Lizardi mocks—he attended several private schools in Mexico City. He ended a two-year college program when his father died. He then disappeared from view for almost eight years, which leads his biographers to think that in those years he drifted and experienced the low life that he chronicles in his novels. When Lizardi's name does surface in the records of the period, it is as a poet; in 1808 one of his poems appeared in *Diario de México*. That newspaper continued to publish his poetry until 1813 when a more skilled poet severely criticized him. At that point, Lizardi turned increasingly to the political journalism that would occupy him until his death, of tuberculosis, in 1827.[9]

In his own name and under his pen name, "El Pensador Mexicano," he wrote almost 300 pamphlets and wrote and published almost a dozen newspapers (several of which had runs over two and three years). He also wrote plays, fables, and two other forms of literature that seem strange to us today—almanacs and a literary last will and testament. After the *Periquillo* was published, Lizardi wrote three other novels—*La Quijotita y su prima* (1818, 1819), *Noches tristes y día alegre* (1818, 1819), and *Don Catrín de la Fachenda* (written probably in 1819 but not published until 1831). It has been suggested that Lizardi adopted the novel form

[9] The best account of Lizardi's life is by Spell.

only because he wanted to disguise his political beliefs from Spanish censors; after all, the publication of political pamphlets was impossible during wartime conditions. Lizardi was eager to test out his ideas in a longer work and he was also frantic to earn a living. Economic need, however, does not completely explain the artistry and the ambition of the novels.

Throughout his life Lizardi questioned—and challenged—the standards of his day. When he was a boy, his father turned him in to the Inquisition for possession of a deck of cards that had lewd meanings. His education conformed to no recognized pattern for a decent young man; after he left college he apparently educated himself through his scattered reading. Later, on several occasions, he ran afoul of the Inquisition and the Holy Office's later incarnation as ecclesiastical authority. In 1822–1823 he was excommunicated for writing a pamphlet that was understood to defend Freemasonry.

Some accused him of deliberately flouting traditional values in order to shock his public; of dwelling on low life and sensationally incorporating vulgar language into his narrative so as to sell his work. Most of his readers in this period of political disorder and moral uncertainty, seem to have understood that Lizardi was trying to be helpful by dramatizing in his fiction what happened when persons flaunted traditional values. Spanish colonialism had taught religious faith, respect for authority, and obedience. By defying authority, then, the Mexican insurgents were criminals. To justify their disobedience and assuage their guilt Mexicans had to reconstruct the paternalistic myth that had kept them dependent for many years, rewrite that metaphor as an adolescent coming of age, and find a basis for unity in the new Mexican family. Revolution meant going against father figures (the Spanish monarch, the Pope and priestly counsels); republicanism meant accepting new French ideas that had led in France to the terror of Robespierre; new forms of commerce meant siding with Protestant England and accepting a capitalistic ethic that seemed selfish. This trial-and-error search, which the youth makes on the road to adulthood, seems to have been enacted in Lizardi's own life as he progressed from youthful abandon to a careful regard for the authoritarianism of paternalistic structures to a criticism of these structures and arguments for independence.

This story, then, is at the heart of the *Periquillo*. Pedro Sarmiento, born to honorable parents who, however, are poor, receives a basic education. When his father dies, Pedro is forced into the world to seek his own fortune. Now called Periquillo Sarniento (a name with which his classmates baptized him, distorting his real name and making fun of his dress and mangy appearance), he begins another life.[10] Because his colonial education has not prepared him to earn a living and he has squandered the little money his father did leave the family, he turns to deceit and crime. He abuses friends' generosity; he gambles; he fakes competence as a doctor and a judge, injuring innocent people; he ends up in jail

[10] "Periquillo" ridicules "Pedro" and is a diminutive of perico (a small parrot, or parakeet). Inquisition records where the bird is mentioned reveal that the perico was often associated with free speech, blasphemy, and lasciviousness (in English, "A little bird told me"). "Sarniento," based on sarna (mange or bodily filth), defiles his surname "Sarmiento."

and is banished to Manila. Although he seems to have been rehabilitated there, on his return to Mexico he continues his erring ways. He joins a band of highwaymen and, with them, almost commits murder. At that moment, he repents. In a quick wrap-up of the novel, readers see him restored to respectability as a *paterfamilias* who recounts his youthful mistakes to his children (his readers) and counsels that they learn from his missteps and misfortunes so as to avoid making the same mistakes. The *Periquillo* teaches a new kind of education—one based not on blind acceptance of European wisdom but instead on the lessons of American experience.

The novel takes place mainly in Mexico City and nearby towns. The text's streets and place names are ones Mexican readers would have recognized. When, in the last part of the novel, Periquillo goes to the Philippines, his travel there may or may not have been imagined; one scholar believes that the author himself may have traveled to that distant part of the Spanish empire.[11] However, the description of life on a Pacific island, where Periquillo is shipwrecked on his way home, is clearly fictitious. The portrayal of Utopian life there was meant to be an ironic satire of conditions in Mexico; the island's civil order according to a system of law mocked the disorder rampant then in Mexico.

The book's language reproduces the unique turns-of-phrase that Mexicans used at that moment. The collage includes substandard forms that the poetry and theater of the period had never used and may have seemed like a foreign language to respectable readers: Indian speech, gambling slang, criminal lingo used to dupe innocent people and conceal the identities of the perpetrators and their actions. Lizardi also introduced the discourses newly arrived in Mexico, which amateurs were trying to learn and sometimes imitated badly: scientific and legal terminology, the didacticism of the new secular histories, French forms of courtesy, etc. And, in an age that was leaving Latin behind as a learned language, he mocked the pretensions of partially educated persons to a higher status in their use of broken Latin (in the novel his targets are physicians, but Lizardi's readers also would have understood members of the clergy who mouthed Latin without knowing what they were saying).

The *Periquillo* was wildly popular throughout the 19th century. After the initial publication in 1816, editions appeared in 1825, 1830–1831, 1842 (two printings), 1865, 1884 (two printings), 1896, 1897, 1903, 1908, and 1909. That record attests to the extensive circulation of the novel. Additionally, the fact that cheap almanacs printed extracts of Lizardi's novels, that later novelists mentioned him, that newspapers were titled with Lizardi's name, and that the printmaker, José Guadalupe Posada, quoted him and illustrated some of his characters shows that Lizardi lived on in the Mexican imagination. The populace (many of whom were illiterate and only heard of him through oral sources) appreciated that Lizardi told

[11] Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr., "China and the Philippines in *El Periquillo Sarmiento*," *Hispanic Review* 31 (1963): 336–347.

their truths and wrote in the same language they spoke; some sector of the elite class (which proclaimed a popular ideology, in some cases in opposition to the party in power) valued his satire.[12]

Beginning in 1910, however, Mexico's literati and intellectuals began to diminish the importance of Lizardi's work. They substituted the novels of the Revolution of 1910, in which heroes such as Pancho Villa figured, for what they called the crudeness of Lizardi's earlier work. Nevertheless, beginning in 1940, Agustín Yáñez began its rehabilitation when he argued that the *Periquillo* expressed something of the Mexican character in the same way that the *gaucho* poem, *Martín Fierro*, revealed the Argentine national character. Following the lead of social psychologists like Samuel Ramos who had attempted to define a national ethos, Yáñez saw the novel's main character as *pelado*, a word that means "peeled" or "plucked." Yáñez thought that larger social forces acted upon the Mexican, regardless of social class. The Mexican personality, then, was only reactive: individuals did not control their own lives or initiate plans of action. *The Periquillo* symbolized Mexico's history of victimization; when one class imposed its will on another and when the whole country was controlled by other, more powerful countries.[13]

The *Periquillo*'s life in the English speaking world has been full of ups and downs. The first translation appeared in 1942 when a vogue for all things Mexican was sweeping through the United States.[14] Katherine Anne Porter took the translation of her then husband, Eugene Pressly, and edited it for publication by Doubleday Doran as *The Itching Parrot*. Correspondence with her publisher and others reveals that economics forced her to drastically cut the text.[15] In 1952, an abbreviated student edition in Spanish, edited by Erwin K. Mapes and Frances M. Lopez-Morillas, was published by Appleton, Century, Crofts.

This translation, wonderfully done by David Frye and entitled *The Mangy Parrot*, promises a new life for the classic work. The Mexican story of adolescence and rebellion from parental control will benefit several groups of readers: the young who will laugh at the funny episodes and identify with Periquillo's confusion as to how to start out on a new life; parents who will see in the story their own mistakes; literary critics who will appreciate that the novel's track in a neighboring country reveals again the genre's associations with history and politics; and scholars of American history who will understand Lizardi's attempt to novelize the uncertainties that confronted a generation of revolutionaries throughout

[12] For a fuller discussion, see my discussion of satire in the introduction to the complete Hackett Publishing edition of *The Mangy Parrot*.

[13] Agustín Yáñez (1904–1980), who was minister of education, was a prolific essayist and novelist. His thesis is developed in his collection of Lizardi's writings, called *El Pensador Mexicano* (Mexico: UNAM, 1962, 3rd ed.). Samuel Ramos (1897–1959) exerted considerable influence on Mexican analysts with his *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, translated by Peter G. Earle with an introduction by Thomas B. Irving (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975). Octavio Paz's study of the Mexican character in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) owes much to Ramos.

[14] James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914–1947* (Washington, London: Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

[15] Her papers are held at the University of Maryland.

the Americas. In the last part of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th, both Anglo America and Spanish America faced similar problems of decolonization. Independence pleased many, but others, as the new nations advanced into a postcolonial future, were dismayed that it apparently required rejection of colonialism's good and useful lessons. Lizardi shows that independence brought confusion as it forced Mexico to acknowledge its crime against the father; it separated Mexico from its parent, Europe. It plunged devout Mexicans, whose faith was connected to belief in a king's supremacy, into a spiritual dilemma where the new humanism did not seem to be of much comfort. Thus, behind what seems to be only a rogue's story is a valuable dramatization for U.S. readers of complexities relative to our own nation's entry into modernity and experience with self-government.

List of Recommended Readings in English

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CHAPTER 1

PERIQUILLO BEGINS BY WRITING WHY HE HAS LEFT THESE NOTEBOOKS TO HIS CHILDREN; HE DESCRIBES HIS PARENTS, HIS COUNTRY, HIS BIRTH, AND OTHER CHILDHOOD INCIDENTS

Flat on my back for many months now, struggling against both illness and doctors, and waiting with resignation for the day when, in accordance with the plans of Divine Providence, you will have to close my eyes, dear children, I have thought to write down the not uncommon events of my life, so that you will beware of and guard against the many perils that may befall and even harm a man in the course of his days.

It is my hope that, by reading this, you will learn to avoid many of the mistakes you will find admitted here by myself and others, and, forewarned by my example, that you will escape the suffering I have endured through my own fault. Be satisfied that it is better to learn from another's disappointments than to feel them falling on your own head.

[. . .]

My children, after my death, you will read these scribblings for the first time. Direct then your prayers for me to the throne of all mercy; let my mad acts be a lesson to you; never let yourselves be seduced by the falsity of men; learn the maxims I am teaching you, remembering that I learned them myself at the cost of hard experience; never praise my work, for I have undertaken most of it with the aim of improving you; and, when you have absorbed these warnings, begin to read.

My Country, Parents, Birth, and Early Education

I was born in the city of Mexico, the capital of North America, in New Spain.[1] Never could my mouth sing sufficient praise in honor of my dear country; but since it is mine, such praise would be ever suspect. Those who live there, and the foreigners who have seen it, can give more believable panegyrics, for they are not constrained by partiality, whose magnifying lens can at times hide defects while enlarging the advantages of a country, even to those born there. Leaving, therefore, the description of Mexico to impartial observers, I will say: I was born in this rich and prosperous city between 1771 and 1773, to parents who were neither wealthy nor mired in poverty; who were pure of blood, a purity that gleamed and was better known for their virtuous behavior.[2] Oh, if only children would always follow their parents' good examples!

[1] ["Mexico" always refers here to Mexico City. What we now call the country of Mexico was still the Spanish colony of New Spain; it gained independence five years after the novel was written. –Tr.]

[2] [Pure of blood (*de limpia sangre*): this phrase was applied in colonial Spanish law to "Old Christian" families—that is, to those with no Jewish, Arabic, or African ancestry. –Tr.]

After I was born, following the baths and other necessities of the hour, my aunts and grandmothers and other old-fashioned ladies wanted to bind my hands and wrap me up as tight as a bottle-rocket. They argued that if they were to leave my hands unbound, I would likely frighten myself; they said I would grow up to be free with my fists; and finally—this was their weightiest, most incontrovertible argument—they said that this was how they had been raised, and was therefore the best and the safest way to follow, and that no one should think of arguing against them, because old folks are wiser than the people of today, and since they had bound their own children's hands, their example had to be followed blindly.

They then drew from a basket a length of ribbon that they called an *amulet sash*, adorned with *deer's-eye seeds, hand charms made of jet, crocodile teeth*, and other such trinkets, so as to dress me up with these relics of superstitious paganism on the same day that had been set aside for my godparents to profess, on my behalf, my faith in the holy religion of Christ.

Lord help me, how my father had to fight against the old ladies' prejudices! He wasted so much saliva convincing them that it was a pernicious and absurd flight of fancy to bind and tie the hands of babies! And he had to work so hard to persuade these sweet foolish women that jet, bone, stone, and other suchlike and unlike amulets have no power whatsoever against wind-sickness, anger, evil eye, and similar claptrap!

His Honor told me this story many times, along with how he eventually triumphed over them all, so that, like it or not, they refrained from imprisoning me, and merely decked me out with a rosary, a holy cross, a reliquary, and the four Gospels; and then, he tried to baptize me.

My parents had already found me godparents who were far from poor, and were naively convinced that this couple would take care of me in case I were orphaned.

My poor old folks had less knowledge of the world than I have acquired myself, for in my long experience, the majority of godparents know nothing of the obligations they are taking on toward their godchildren, so that they think themselves grand to give them half a *real* when they see them; and if the children's parents die, they think of them as seldom as if they had never met. True enough, there are godparents who fulfill their obligations to the letter, and even surpass their godchildren's parents in giving them shelter and education. Praised be such godparents!

As it happened, my own godparents, rich as they were, did me as much good as if I had never seen them; as good a reason as any for me never to think of them again. Indeed, they were so miserly, indolent, and stupid that, given how little I ever owed them from infancy onward, you might have thought my parents had picked them from the most wretched poorhouse in town. I abhor such godparents; even more, I abhor those parents who "do business with the sacrament of baptism" by not searching out virtuous and honorable godparents, going rather after the rich or well connected, whether in the crude hope that they will get some trifle from them, or because they are foolishly convinced that perhaps, due to some unforeseen contingency in the public order or disorder, they will be useful to their children after their deaths. Pardon me, dear offspring, for these digressions, which spill naturally from my pen and will do so more often than you might like in the course of this work.

They did baptize me in the end, giving me the name of Pedro, followed (as is the custom) by my father's surname, which was Sarmiento.

My mother was beautiful, and my father loved her to distraction; because of this, together with the arguments of my discreet aunts, it was unanimously decided that I be given a wet nurse, or *chichigua* as we say here.

Dear children! If you ever get married and have children of your own, never leave them to the mercenary care of that class of people. In the first place, they are slovenly as a rule, and the moment their attention wanders, they are likely to cause the children to get sick; since they don't love them but only feed them out of monetary interest, they take no care to avoid getting angry or eating a thousand things that damage their health, and consequently that of the infants who are put in their care; and they commit other harmful excesses, which I refrain from recounting in respect of your modesty. Second, it is a scandal against nature for a rational mother to do what no ass, no cat, no dog, nor any female animal devoid of reason would do.

[. . .]

Not only did my parents manage to make me ill tempered by their neglect, they also made me sickly by their care. My wet nurses began to weaken my health, and to make me proud, pretentious, and impertinent with their carelessness and untidiness; my parents finished off the job with their excessive and misdirected care and tenderness. For as soon as they had gotten me off the breast—which cost more than a little trouble—they set about raising me to be pampered, delicate, and lacking all direction or moderation.

It is essential that you know, my children (in case I have not told you so before) that my father was a man of good judgment and not the least bit vulgar, and as such, he always opposed my mother's silly notions. But sometimes (not to say most of the time) he would relent when he saw that she was growing distressed or upset, and this is why my rearing swung between good and bad, to the detriment not only of my moral education, but of my physical constitution as well.

All I had to do was show a desire for something, and my mother would put herself out to get it into my hands, justly or unjustly. Let's say I wanted her rosary, her sewing thimble, a piece of candy that some other child in the house was holding, or anything of the sort; I had to get it that very instant, or else; for otherwise I would deafen the whole neighborhood with my screams. And since they taught me that they would give me anything I wanted to keep me from crying, I would cry for whatever caught my eye, just to get it right away.

If some maidservant bothered me, my mother would have her punished in order to satisfy me; and this did nothing but teach me to be proud and vengeful.

They fed me whatever and whenever I wanted to eat, no matter the hour, without any rule or order in the quality or quantity of my food; and with this pretty method, within a few months they managed to make me diarrhetic, potbellied, and pasty-faced.

Apart from this, I slept until ungodly hours; and when they got me out of bed, they would dress me from head to foot, wrapping me up like a tamale, so that (I am told) I never got out of bed without my shoes on, and never left my musty

little corner without my head bound up. And more: although my parents were poor, they were not so poor that they could not afford little glass windows in their house; and since they had windows, I was never allowed to go out onto the balcony or the passageway, except by some rare accident, and that only late in the day. They skimped terribly on my baths, and when they did bathe me once in a blue moon, it was in a tightly closed room, and with steaming hot water.

Such was my early physical education. What could possibly result from worrying about so many things at the same time, other than raising me to be weak and sickly? Since they almost never offered me clean air, my body never grew accustomed to receiving its healthy impressions, so I would succumb to it at the slightest lapse, and at the age of two or three I was constantly coming down with colds and catarrhs, stunting my growth. Oh, mothers have no idea how much harm they do their children by following these methods. They should accustom their children to eating as little as possible, and give them foods that are easy to digest, in line with the tender resilience of their stomachs. They should familiarize them with fresh air and the outdoors; make them rise at a regular hour; have them go barefoot and without scarves or wraps on their heads; dress them without binding them up, so that their fluids can flow unhindered; allow them to play whenever they want, and in the fresh air whenever possible, so that their little muscles can grow stronger and more agile; and finally, bathe them often, and in cold water if possible, or lukewarm at most. It is incredible how much children would benefit from this plan of living. All the knowledgeable doctors recommend it; and in Mexico, we can now see it being practiced by many wealthy and broad-minded gentlemen; and in the streets, we now see crowds of children of both sexes dressed quite simply, with their heads exposed and no more wrappings on their legs than their little skirts or loose trousers. May God grant that this method become widespread, so that all young children might grow into robust adults who are therefore useful to society!

My poor, dear mother had one other silly notion: to fill my imagination with monsters and bogeymen, which she used to intimidate me whenever she was angry and I refused to keep quiet, go to sleep, or something of the sort. This corrupt practice gave me a cowardly and effeminate spirit, so that even at the age of eight or ten, I couldn't hear any little noise at night without being frightened, nor see any shadow, nor attend a funeral, nor enter a dark room, because everything filled me with terror. Even though I no longer believed in the bogeyman, I was still convinced that the dead appeared to the living all the time, that demons jumped out to scratch us and squeeze our necks with their tails whenever they felt like it, that there were shades that attacked us, that souls in torment wandered around begging us to pray for them; and I believed in other absurdities of the sort more than in the articles of the faith. All thanks to a gaggle of old women who, either as maidservants or as visitors, endeavored to entertain the little boy with their tales of ghosts, visions, and intolerable apparitions! Oh, how those old women damaged me! What a harmful concept I formed of the divine, and what an advantageous and respectable attitude toward the demons and the dead! If you should marry, my children never let your own children become familiar with these superstitious old women (may I see them burnt with all their frauds

and fairy tales in my lifetime). And do not permit them to share the society and conversation of stupid people, who, far from teaching them anything useful, will imbue them with a thousand errors and idiocies, which stick more tightly to our imaginations than ticks; for children pick up ideas of good and bad with great tenacity at their age, while, once they are adults, not even sage books and teachers suffice to erase the impressions made by the first errors that nurtured their spirits.

This is the reason why we see men, every day, whom we respect for their authority or character, and in whom we recognize a fair amount of talent and education, who we nevertheless find capriciously faithful to some ridiculous superstition; and worse, they clutch it more tightly than covetous Croesus did his treasure. They tend thus to die embracing their antiquated ignorance; this being rather natural, as Horace said: "The jar long retains the smell of the first fragrance that imbued it when it was new."

My father was, as I have said, a very judicious and very prudent man; he was always disturbed by these foolish stories; he was absolutely opposed to them; but he loved my mother to distraction, and his excessive love was why, not to cause her grief, he suffered and tolerated, despite himself, almost all her extravagant ideas and, without any bad intentions, allowed my mother and my aunts to conspire to harm me. And, God help me, how coddled and spoiled they made me! What, deny me anything I wanted, even if it was illicit for my age or harmful to my health? Impossible. Scold me for my childish rudeness? Not a chance. Restrain the first impulses of my passions? Never. Just the opposite: my vengeful acts, my gluttony, my stubbornness, and all my foolishness were passed off as amusing actions proper to my age, as if early childhood were not the best age for imprinting us with ideas of virtue and honor.

Everyone forgave my waywardness and sanctioned my crude errors with that ancient and too often–repeated chorus: "Leave him be; he's just a boy; it is natural at his age; he doesn't know what he is doing; how can he start where we finished?" and so on. With this indulgence, my mother perverted me even more and my father had to yield to her inappropriate tenderness. How wrong men are to let their wives overrule them, especially regarding the rearing and education of their children!

Finally, this was how I lived in my home for my first six years in this world. That is, I lived like a mere animal, not knowing what I should know, while learning too much of what I was better off not learning.

The time then came for me to leave the house for a short while; I mean, they sent me to school, and there I again managed not to learn what I needed to know, while learning, as always, what I should never have known, and all because of my mother's unthinking disposition; but the events of this era I will leave to the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

In which Periquillo writes of his entrance into school, the progress he made there, and other matters that will be learned by those who read these words, hear them read, or ask about them

My father sulked a bit, my mother pouted, and I ranted and raved, cried and screamed; but nothing could make my father revoke his decree. They marched me off to school, whether I liked it or not.

The teacher was quite the upright man, but he lacked the sufficient prerequisites for the job. In the first place, he was poor, and had undertaken this profession merely out of necessity, without regard to his abilities or inclination; little wonder he was so upset and even ashamed of his fate. *[. . .]* Once I heard him say in conversation, "Only my blasted poverty could have made me a schoolmaster. I have no life with all these damnable boys—they're so mischievous, and so stupid! No matter how hard I look, I can't find one good worker among them. Oh, drat this blasted job! On top of that, being a schoolteacher is the ultimate trick the Devil can play on us!" So argued my good teacher, and by his words you will recognize the innocence of his heart, his lack of talent, and the low opinion he had formed of an occupation that is so noble and laudable in itself; for teaching and giving direction to youth is a calling of the highest dignity, which is why kings and governments have showered wise instructors with honors and privileges. But as my poor teacher was unaware of all this, little wonder he should form such a low opinion of such an honorable profession.

In the second place, as I have said, he did not have the right disposition or temper for teaching. His heart was too sensitive; he loathed causing anyone pain; and this soft temperament caused him to be too indulgent with his students. It was rare for him to scold them harshly, and even rarer for him to punish them. His decrees left the rod and the ruler with little work to do; so the boys were in their glory, and I among them, for we could do whatever we pleased with impunity.

You see, my children, although this man was good in himself, he was awful as a teacher and head of household; for just as you should not hover over young children all day with whip in hand like a prison warden, neither should you ease up on them completely. It is fine if punishment is only employed every once in a while, if it is moderate, if it does not look like vengeance, if it is proportionate to the crime, and if it is only resorted to after every sweet and kind means of seeking reform has been tried; but if such means do not work, it is perfectly fine to use harsher methods, depending on the child's age, evil intent, and condition. I do not mean that parents and teachers should be tyrants, but neither should they pamper and indulge their children or pupils. As Plato said, "children's passions should not always be restrained with severity, nor should they be habitually petted and caressed."[1] Wisdom consists in finding the medium between these extremes.

[1] Plato, *On Laws*, book VII.

Then again, my teacher lacked any of the talent needed for his job. At most he could read and write well enough to understand and be understood, but not well enough to teach. *[. . . .]* He adorned his writing with periods, commas, question marks and other punctuation signs, but without any order, method, or knowledge; so some of his things came out so ridiculous that he would have been better off not writing a single comma. *[. . . .]* He had a lovely image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, and at its foot he placed a quatrain that should have read thus:

> For of our heavenly Father
> Was Mary the favored daughter:
> Only she could be conceived
> Without original sin.

But the wretched man muddled his placement of punctuation marks from one end to the other, as was his custom, and made a devil of a mess, for which he would have deserved to be gagged if he had understood what he was doing, because he wrote:

> For of our heavenly Father,
> Was Mary the favored daughter?
> Only she? Could be, conceived
> Without: original sin.

You can see, children, how likely someone is to write a thousand foolish things if he lacks training in orthography, and how important it is for you not to neglect this point with your own children.

It is a pity how little effort is put into this branch of learning in our kingdom. A thousand gross barbarisms are written publicly every day, in the candle shops, chocolate stands, kiosks, the bills posted on street corners, and even in the posters at the Coliseo.[2] It is common to see a letter capitalized in the middle of a noun or verb, one letter switched for another, and so on. Such as: *Famous ChocoLates, Royel Sigars, The Barber of Cevvill, Proude Bakkery*, and similar infelicities, which display not only the ignorance of the writers from a mile away, but the neglect of the authorities in this area.

What a miserable impression the foreign visitor must form of our state of enlightenment, when he sees that such shabbiness is permitted to appear in writing, not just in some village, but in no less than Mexico, the capital of the Northern Indies, in full view and with the forbearance of so many respectable authorities and of such a large number of educated men from every field! What could he say? What idea could he form, other than that the common people (and this, only if he is being equitable) are terribly vulgar and ignorant, and that their enlightenment is being utterly neglected by those who should be educating them?

[2] [Coliseo: the main theater in Mexico City at the time. –Tr.]

It is to be wished that writing these public barbarisms, which contribute more than a little to damaging our reputation, should be outlawed.[3]

As you might imagine, what could I have learned under such a talented teacher? Nothing, of course. I spent one year in his company, and in that year I learned to read "fluently," as my simpleminded tutor liked to say, though I was really reading at full gallop; because, as he never paused for any such childishness as teaching us to read with punctuation, we jumped right over the periods, parentheses, exclamation points, and other such details as lightly as cats; and for this my teacher and his fellows congratulated us.

I also forgot, in just a few days the few scattered maxims of good breeding that my father had taught me while I was in the midst of being spoiled by my mother; but in exchange for the little that I forgot, I learned other little pleasantries, such as how to be shameless, bad-mannered, argumentative, sly, loudmouthed, and mischievous.

This school was not only poor, but poorly run, so that only very common boys attended it. In their company and with their examples, helped along by my teacher's neglect and my good disposition toward being bad, I turned out very well educated in all the arts I have mentioned. One of them was the custom of giving nicknames not only to my schoolmates, but to everyone I knew in my neighborhood, even the most respectable old people. A bad habit, unworthy of anyone of good birth! But this vice has been introduced into almost every school, college, barracks, and other public institution; and it is so common in the villages that no one there could escape having a nickname behind their back. At my school, we forgot our own given names because we only called ourselves by the insulting ones that we made up for each other. One boy was known as Squinty, another was Hunchback; this one was Sleepy, the other was Wasted. There was one who happily answered to Crazy, another to Donkey, a third to Turkey, and so on down the line.

With so many godparents around, I could not escape my christening. When I went off to school, I wore a green waistcoat and yellow pants. These colors, and the fact that my teacher sometimes affectionately called me not Pedro but Pedrillo, furnished my friends with my nickname: *Periquillo*, or Little Parrot. But I still needed some kind of adjective to distinguish me from another Parrot we already had. This adjective or surname was not long in coming: I came down with a case of *sarna*, or mange, and the boys had no sooner noticed it than they remembered my true surname, Sarmiento, and turned it into the resounding title of *Sarniento*, Mangy. So here you have me, known not just at school and as a child, but full-grown and far and wide, as Periquillo Sarniento, the Mangy Parrot.

[Periquillo comments at length on the evils of nicknames, citing classical Latin authors and the Bible.]

Returning to my progress at school, I must say there was none; and things would have remained that way if an unforeseen accident had not freed me from my teacher. As it happened, one day a priest entered with a child he was entrust-

[3] [In a footnote, Lizardi cites Spanish writer Antonio Ponz on the need for enlightenment in the spelling of public signs. –Tr.]

ing to my teacher's care. After they had chatted, the priest was leaving when his eyes fell on the quatrain I mentioned earlier. He looked at it closely; took out his spectacles and read it again; tried to clean off the question marks and commas, thinking they must be flyspecks; and when he was satisfied that they were firmly painted characters, asked, "Who wrote this?"

To which my teacher responded that he had written it himself in his own handwriting. The ecclesiastic grew indignant, asking him, "And just what, sir, did you mean by what you have written here?"

"Father, I, well," my teacher stuttered in reply, "I meant to say this: that the most holy Virgin Mary was conceived in original grace, for she was the favored daughter of God the Father."

"Well, my friend," the cleric responded, "maybe that is what you meant to say, but the way it reads here it is a scandalous blunder. However, since it is just a consequence of your bad orthography, take the pen from the inkwell, and all the cotton you have, and erase this perversely written poem right now before I go. And if you do not know how to use punctuation marks, you should never draw them; better off trusting your letters and everything else you write to the discretion of your readers, without a drop of punctuation in them, than to write blasphemies like this because you do not know what you are doing."

My poor teacher, all embarrassed and filled with shame, erased the fatal verse in front of the priest and all of us. After he had concluded his tacit retraction, the ecclesiastic continued, "I am taking my nephew with me, for he is blind because of his age; and you are just as blind because of your ignorance; and as you have heard, when the blind leads the blind, they both end up falling over the precipice. You have a good heart and good manners, sir, but these qualities are not sufficient in themselves to make men good fathers, good tutors, or good teachers of the young. The necessary requirements for these occupations are *knowledge*, *judgment*, *virtue*, and *aptitude*. All you have is virtue, and that by itself will make you a good errand boy for nuns, or a good sexton, but not an educator of boys. Therefore, you will have to seek some other position, for if I see this school open again, I will let the teaching inspector know, so that he will confiscate your license, if indeed you have one. Goodbye."

Just imagine how this panegyric left my teacher feeling. As soon as the priest left, he sat down and lay his head on his arms, full of confusion and profoundly quiet.

That day we had no writing exercises, no lessons, no prayers, no catechism, not a bit of work. We shared in his grief and mourned his sadness as best we could, for we set aside our exercises and books and did not dare raise our voices at all. Of course, just to keep in shape, we played and talked in whispers until the stroke of noon; and as that hour began to ring, my teacher came to. He prayed with us, and after giving us his blessing, said in a very tender voice, "My children, I will not attempt to carry on in a position that not only keeps me poorly fed but takes away my appetite. You have just seen my run-in with the priest. God forgive him for the hard time he gave me; but I will not leave myself open to a second round, so do not come back this afternoon. Tell your parents that I am sick and have closed down the school. So, my children, good luck to you all, and pray for me."

We continued to grieve for a while, and our eyes continued to show our sorrow, for we indeed felt sorry for our teacher—since, fools though we might be, we knew we could not find a softer teacher if we had one made to order of butter or marzipan. But, in the end, we left.

When each boy got home, he must have done what I did, which was to tell the whole story from start to finish, down to my teacher's resolution to close down the school.

Upon hearing this news, my father had to seek a new teacher for me. After five days, he found one, brought me to his school, and handed me over to his terrible rule.

How unstable is fortune in this life! Scarcely does she smile at us for one day, when she frowns upon us for months on end. Lord help me, but did I ever learn this truth when I changed schools! In an instant I went from a paradise to a hell, from the care of an angel to that of a tormenting devil. My world turned upside down.

This new teacher of mine was tall, gaunt, gray-haired, rather bilious, and melancholy; a full-fledged, upright man, proud of his reading, famous for his penmanship, skillful at arithmetic, and quite a fair student. But all his good qualities were tarnished by his temperament, which was gloomy and harsh.

He was all too efficient and exacting. He had very few students, and he considered each one of them the sole object of his institute. A beautiful sentiment, had he known how to carry it out judiciously! But where good judgment is lacking, some sin to one extreme and others to the other. My first teacher was excessively compassionate and obliging; my second was excessively severe and exacting. The first spoiled us; the second did not let us get away with anything. The former pampered us without reserve; the latter tortured us without pity. *[. . .]*

It is a gross error to think that fear can make us advance in childhood, if it is excessive. Pliny rightly stated that "fear is a very unfaithful teacher." When someone undertakes something under threat of fear or terror, it is a miracle if he succeeds; the troubled spirit, as Cicero said, is unsuited to fulfilling its functions. So it was with me. When I went or was taken to school, I arrived already filled with an imponderable fear; my trembling hand and stammering tongue could neither write a well-formed line nor articulate a word in its place. I mixed up everything, not for lack of will and work, but for an excess of fear. My errors were followed by whippings, the whippings by more fear, and more fear made my hand and tongue more clumsy, which only yielded me more punishment.

I lived in this horrific circle of errors and punishment for two months, under the domination of that infernal satrap. Throughout this time, my mother, urged on by my complaints, implored my father to change schools for me. What grief she suffered! How many tears she shed! But my father was unyielding, convinced that it was all because of her pampering; and in this he did not want to acquiesce to her, until by fortune a friar came visiting one day who already knew of my new teacher's fine stew, and volunteered to speak of his cruelties. My mother gave such an earnest speech, and the friar testified so solidly in my favor, that my father was won over and resolved to place me elsewhere, as will be seen in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

In which Periquillo describes his third school, and how his parents argued over finding him a trade

[Periquillo expects yet another cruel schoolmaster, but his third teacher is a wise man who runs "a tidy, spacious classroom, full of light and ventilation" and speaks gently to the boy, letting him know that the lash is not meant to be used on "the decent child with a sense of shame." Periquillo cheerfully obeys him; his character is utterly transformed while he is under the good teacher's influence. He remarks to his children (the supposed audience of his memoirs) that children are natural mimics, and that they should therefore be careful to set good examples when they have children of their own. After two years he graduates; his father tries to talk him into finding a trade.]

My father, who, as I have told you, was a prudent man and always looked beyond the surfaces of things, took into consideration the fact that he was already old and poor, and determined to find me a trade, for he said that, no matter what, it was better for me to be a bad workman than a good vagabond. But scarcely had he communicated his intention to my mother when—Lord of my soul! What a fuss and hullabaloo the sweet lady raised! She loved me dearly, true enough, but her love was disorderly. She was good and sensible, but full of common notions. She told my father, "My son, a trade? God forbid! What would the people say if they were to see the son of Don Manuel Sarmiento apprenticed to be a tailor, a painter, a silversmith, or whatever?"

[They argue back and forth until Periquillo's mother repeats the question.]

"Nothing. What should they say?" my father replied. "The most they could say is: my cousin the tailor, my nephew the silversmith, or whatever; or perhaps they will say: we don't have any relatives who are tailors, and so on; and maybe they will never speak to him again; but now, you tell me: what will his relatives give him, the day they see him jobless, tattered, and dying of hunger? Come on, I told you what they would say in one case, now you tell me what they would say in the other."

"Could be," my good mother said, "could be they'd help him out, if only so that he won't tarnish their golden reputations."

"You can laugh at that, dear," my father replied. "So long as they can keep his hands off their gold, they won't care much about what he does to their golden reputations. Most rich relatives have a well-rehearsed routine for avoiding the hint of shame their poor relations' rags might cause them: they roundly deny the relationship. Stop fooling yourself; if Pedro has any good luck or gains any standing in the world, not only will his true relatives recognize him, he will discover a thousand new ones, though they're no more closely related to him than the Grand Turk, and he will have such a swarm of friends continually at his side that he won't be able to move; but if he is poor, as will be likely, he will have nothing but the peso he earns. This is a truth, and an ancient and well-established one in this world; that is why our elders wisely said, 'There is no better friend than God,

and no closer kinsman than a peso.' *[. . .]* I would like for my son Pedro to learn a trade, since he is poor, so that he won't depend on family nor strangers after my days are done. I warn you, men often find more comfort among strangers than kin; but be that as it may, it is best for each to rely on his own work and his own business and not be a burden to anyone else."

"You've almost stunned me with all these things," my mother said; "but what I see is that an hidalgo without a trade is better accepted, and treated as more distinguished in any decent place, than any hidalgo who is a tailor, tinker, painter, or so on."

"There's your coarse and unfounded fear," my father replied. "He doesn't have to have a trade; but he must have some honest business. An office employee, a military officer, or some such, will be treated better than a tailor or any manual tradesman, and rightly so; it is right and just for people to make distinctions; but the tailor, even the shoemaker, will be held in higher esteem anywhere than any hidalgo who is a lazy, ragged, swindling rogue, which is what I do not want my son to become. All this aside, whoever told you that having a trade is debasing? What's debasing is bad actions, bad behavior, and bad education. Is there any baser job than herding pigs? Well, that did not stop a Sixtus V from becoming the pontiff of the Catholic Church. . . . "

But you will discover the outcome of this argument in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER 4

In which Periquillo tells us of the outcome of the conversation between his parents, and its result, which was that they set him to study, and of the progress he made

My mother, despite all that had been said, was obstinately opposed to teaching me a trade, insisting that my father send me on to higher education. His Worship told her, "Don't be foolish; what if Pedro is disinclined toward his studies, or has no aptitude for them—wouldn't it be outrageous to send him in a direction he does not want to follow? The silliest thing some parents do is to make their son become a lawyer or a priest by brute force, even when he has no vocation for such a career, nor any talent for letters: a baneful process, whose pernicious effects are daily bemoaned when we see all these paper-pushing lawyers, murderous doctors, and ignorant, dissolute priests."

[Periquillo's father argues that each person should nurture his or her unique aptitudes, denounces parents "who foolishly and madly push their boys into college, without taking the least effort to investigate whether they have any aptitude for letters," and adds that he is poor and cannot provide for his family after he dies. He fears that college will make Periquillo too proud and lazy to work for a living in an honest trade.]

"So just think what a state your Pedro will be in, if we send him to college and I die, leaving him (as is likely) halfway through his studies; for he will be up in the air, unable to go forward nor back. And when you see that rather than hav-

ing a staff you can count on to support you in your old age, you will have by your side a lazy good-for-nothing who won't do a thing to help you (for stores don't give credit for syllogisms or Latin phrases), then you will curse all your son's studies and degrees. Therefore, my dear, let's do now what you will wish you had done after I am gone. Let's have Pedro learn a trade. What do you say?"

"What can I say?" my mother replied, "except that you are doing everything in your power to mortify me and turn my poor baby into an unhappy wretch, trying to make him common by making him a craftsman, and that is why you have spent so much time talking and pontificating. So, what, do you already know that he is stupid? Do you already know that you are going to die when he is halfway through his studies? And do you already know, finally, that when you die, every other resource is going to be cut off? God does not die; the boy has relatives and godparents who can help him; there are plenty of devout rich men in Mexico who can protect him; and I who am his mother will beg for alms to sustain him until he makes it. No, but you don't love the poor boy; nor me either, and that is why you are trying to saddle me with this affliction. What am I to do? I'm as wretched as my son. . . ."

Here, my dear mother, bless her soul, began to cry, and with a couple of tears she brought all my good father's firmness and solid reasoning crashing down; for as soon as he saw her crying, he hugged her, for he loved her tenderly, and told her, "Don't cry, my dearest, it isn't so bad as all that. What I have told you is what reason and experience have taught me; but if what you want is for Pedro to study, then let him study and good luck to him; I won't stop it; perhaps God will let me live to see him through it, and if not, His Majesty will open a path for you, since He knows your good intentions."

My mother consoled herself with this prescription, and from that moment she tried to get me to study; and I was fitted out with black clothes, a Latin grammar book, and all the other odds and ends I needed.

It seems that my father had spoken prophetically, for everything turned out just as he had said. Indeed, he was knowledgeable about the ways of the world and shrewd in his judgment; but most of the time, he lost these virtues, for he yielded so willingly to my mother's whims.

[. . .]

At last the day arrived when they sent me to study; the school was that of Don Manuel Enríquez,[1] a figure well known in Mexico, as much for his good manners as for his pleasant disposition and established ability to teach Latin grammar, for in his time, none of the many private tutors in this city could challenge his primacy; yet due to the common and tenacious prejudice that still reigns here, he taught us much grammar and little Latin. *[. . .]*

Despite this, in three years I finished my elementary education satisfactorily; they assured me that I was a fine grammarian, and I believed it better than if I had seen it for myself. God bless you, self-love! How easy it is for you to fool us, even

[1] [Lizardi went to the school of Manuel Enríquez de Agredo in the 1790s. See Jefferson Rea Spell, *Bridging the Gap: Articles on Mexican Literature* (Mexico: Editorial de Libros, 1971), p. 173. –Tr.]

when we have our eyes wide open! The fact is, I took my public examination in all the parts of grammar and came out on top; my teacher and friends were all happy, and my beloved parents more puffed with pride than if I had passed the Mexico bar examination.

This performance was followed by gifts, embraces, thank-yous to my teacher, and the end of my primary studies; though I shouldn't end before telling you some of the other things I learned in those three years. Here, there were many more than the few children at my good school: an endless number of boys, between boarders and day students, all of them sons of their own mothers, all so different in character and education; and since I was a first-class troublemaker, I had the cursed luck of being able to pick all my friends from among the worst boys, and they quickly and faithfully returned my attention; as you can see, and as everyone knows, birds of a feather flock together; the donkey does not lie down with the wolf, nor does the dove nest with the crow; like loves like. Thus I did not associate with sensible, honorable, reasonable boys, but with naughty and mischievous ones, in whose friendship and company I did myself in a little more each day—as will happen to you and to your children, if you ignore my lessons and fail to insure that they make only good friends, or no friends at all; for it never fails that, as the divine axiom tells us, "with a saint, you will become a saint, and the corrupt will corrupt you." That is precisely what happened to me; to be sure, I was already corrupt, but in the company of these bad students, I became utterly lost.

[. . .]

Without a doubt, I was the wickedest boy among the most boisterous students, for I was the *ne plus ultra* of the clowns and jokesters. This quality alone proves that mine was not the best of characters, for in the wise opinion of Pascal: "Joking man, poor character."[2] In the colleges, as you know, phrases like *pull a trick, play a prank, do a practical joke*, and so on, really mean *mock, insult, provoke, mortify, offend, bother*, and *injure* some other poor boy by every possible means; and what is most unjust and opposed to all the laws of virtue, good breeding, and hospitality, is that the comedians who play these jokes show off their odious talents on the poor new boys just entering college. It would be altogether appropriate if these dimwitted buffoons were tied to a column in the college yard and given a hundred lashes for each of their "pranks"; but how regrettable it is that the professors, tutors, administrators, and other persons of authority in their communities should wash their hands of all responsibility for these crimes—which is what they are, and serious ones too, though they are passed off as "boys' play" even when their victims complain—ignoring the fact that their acquiescence legitimizes these abuses and allows for the solid formation of cruel spirits in the abusers, such as I was, who could watch one of these hapless boys crying after I had utterly afflicted him with insults and taunts; and his tears, which, springing from the wounded feelings of an innocent child, should have moved me to pity and stayed me, served me instead as an appetizer and a motive for laughing and for redoubling my taunts with greater determination.

[2] [*Diseur de bons mots, mauvais caractère*, Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 46. –Tr.]

Just consider, then, how lovely a character I had, for I was held to be the best prankster in college, and my companions said I could play practical jokes with the best, which was as much as to say that I was the most contemptible of the lot, and that no one, good or bad, could help feeling put out if they heard my wicked tongue speak against them. Do you find anything favorable about this situation, my children? Doesn't this alone tell you how depraved my spirit and condition were? For a man who takes pleasure in afflicting his neighbor can but have a mean soul and perverse heart. Nor does it help to say that lots of boys play pranks; for all that shows is that, if they are bad as boys, they will be worse when they grow up, if God and reason don't moderate them, which is not what commonly happens. I had a crowd of classmates, and by observation I have seen that scarcely a one of these jeering geniuses has turned out good; and the worst of it is how many of them there are in our colleges.

From the way I began, you will see that I was completely depraved. And so I went on to study philosophy.

CHAPTER 5

Periquillo writes of his matriculation into the school of arts; what he learned; his general exams, his degree, and other curious events that will be learned by those who wish to know

I finished grammar school, as I have said, and entered the grand old College of San Ildefonso to study philosophy under the direction of Doctor Don Manuel Sánchez y Gómez, who lives today, an example to his pupils.[1] It was not yet common, in that illustrious college, that seminary of the learned, that ornament of knowledge for the metropolis—it was not yet common, I was saying, to teach modern philosophy there in all its aspects; its lecture halls still resonated with the ergos of Aristotle. There you could still hear debates over the Rational Being, the Hidden Properties, and the Prime Matter, which was defined in relation to Nothingness, *nec est quid*, and so on. Experimental physics had never been mentioned on that campus, and the great names of Descartes, Newton, Musschenbroek, and others are scarcely known within the walls that had nurtured Portillo[2] and other celebrated geniuses. In short, the Aristotelian system that dominated the loftiest intellects of Europe for so many centuries had not yet been entirely abandoned, when my wise teacher first dared to show us the path of truth, while trying not to stick out too much, for he selected the best in Aristotle's logic

[1] [Lizardi enrolled in 1797 in the College of San Ildefonso, located two blocks north of the Cathedral. After 1910, the building housed the National Preparatory School and was painted with murals by José Clemente Orozco; today it is a museum. –Tr.]

[2] [Antonio Lorenzo López Portillo (1730–1780), Mexican writer, philosopher, and mathematician. –Tr.]

and what he felt was most probable in the modern authors, through whom he taught us the rudiments of physics; and in this way we became true eclectics, who would not stick capriciously to any one opinion nor defer to any system simply because we were well-disposed toward its author.

In spite of this prudent method, we still learned plenty of the sort of nonsense that has been taught out of habit and that should have been gotten rid of, as is shown both by reason and by the proofs of the illustrious Feijóo, in Discourses X, XI, and XII of the seventh volume of his *Teatro crítico*.[3]

[Periquillo learns enough Aristotelian logic to call himself a logician, though he learns no common sense.]

I had no better luck with physics. I spent little time trying to distinguish the particular from the universal, or learning whether a given factor applied to the properties of all bodies, or whether another factor was limited to certain specific types. Nor did I find out what experimental or theoretical physics were; nor try to distinguish between a repeatable experiment and a rare phenomenon of unknown cause; nor did I stop to learn what mechanics means; what the laws of movement and inertia are; what the terms *force* and *power* mean, and what they are composed of; even less did I discover the meanings of *centripetal force, centrifugal force, tangent, attraction, gravity, weight, potential, resistance,* and other trifles of the same sort; and you can imagine that if I was unaware of these things, I was even more ignorant of the meanings of *static, hydrostatic, hydraulic, barometric, optical,* and 300 such tongue twisters; but on the other hand, I fervently debated whether the essence of matter was knowable or not; whether a given ternary dimension was the essence of matter or of water; whether or not Nature abhors a vacuum; whether infinite division was possible; and other similar hullabaloos that it made blasted little difference whether we knew or not, for all the good they could do us. *[. . .]*

In the same way and no better, I said that I understood metaphysics and ethics, and all but claimed to be a second Solomon after I finished the course in Arts, or rather it finished with me.

Meanwhile, two and a half years went by, a length of time that might have been better employed with fewer scholastic rules, an exercise or two in useful problems of logic, teaching the most basic principles of metaphysics, and as much theoretical and experimental physics as possible.

My teacher, I think, would have done exactly that if he hadn't feared being singled out and perhaps becoming the target of a few carping critics by departing entirely from the ancient routine.

It is true—and I will always concede this in honor of my teacher—as I was saying, it is true that we no longer debated the nature of the Rational Being, Hidden Properties, Formalities, Quiddities, Intentions, and the whole swarm of meaningless terms with which the Aristotelians endeavored to explain everything that

[3] [Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro (key Spanish Enlightenment thinker, 1676–1764), *Teatro crítico universal, o discursos varios en todo género de materias para desengaño de errores comunes* (13 volumes, 1727–1760). –Tr.]

escaped their understanding. It is true (we say with Johan Burkhard Mencke) that "these questions are not heard as often now in our schools as in past years; but have they been entirely abolished? Are our universities entirely free of the dregs of barbarity? I am afraid that in some of them the old ways still hold sway; if not throughout, then perhaps rooted in enough subjects to hold back the progress of true wisdom."[4] This critic's declarations are certainly quite appropriate in our Mexico.

At last, the day arrived for me to receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts. I passed my exams with satisfaction, and came out grandly, just as I had in my grammar school examination; for as the respondents were not trying to show off themselves, but rather to show off their boys, they did not get wrapped up in their questioning, but at once pronounced themselves satisfied with the least vigorous answer, and we were left feeling as smug as could be, thinking that they had no questions on which they could press us. How blind is self-love!

So the upshot of it all was that I came off perfectly well, or at least so I persuaded myself, and they gave me the great, the resonant, the resounding degree of Bachelor, and I was approved *ad omnia*.[5] Dear God, what a laudable day that was for me, and how happy the hour of the graduation ceremony! When I took the college oath; when, standing at the front of the hall between two college officials shouldering maces, I heard myself called a Bachelor in the midst of that general pomp, and by no less than a Doctor who wore a shiny tasseled cap of pure silk on his head, I thought I would die, or at least go mad, with joy. By then I had formed such a high opinion of the Bachelor's degree that, I assure you all, at that moment I wouldn't have traded my title for that of a Brigadier or Field Marshal. *[. . .]*

We arrived at my house, which was filled with old ladies and young women—relatives and servants of the guests—who, as soon as I entered, bowed and curtsied a thousand times for me. I reciprocated, more puffed up than a turkey-cock; you can tell how vain I was. My poor, foolish mother was exceedingly hospitable; her elation gleamed in her eyes.

I shed my graduation gown and we entered the wide drawing room where we were to be served lunch, the center toward which the bows and curtsies of all these gallant gluttons were aimed. Believe me, my children, whenever you see great crowds drawn to a fiesta, whether a wedding, a baptism, or any other ceremony, what attracts most people is the *chow*. Yes, *free grub, free grub* is the bell that calls the crowds to visit, and the flag that recruits so many friends of the moment. If these were mere ungarnished fiestas, you wouldn't find them quite so frequented. *[. . .]*

We sat down at the table and began to eat gaily, and as I was the reason for the fiesta, everyone directed their conversation toward me. All they talked about was the boy with the Bachelor's degree; and knowing how happy my parents were, and

[4] [*Declamaciones contra la charlatanería de los eruditos* (Madrid, 1787 [1715]), p. 131. See Spell, p. 150. –Tr.]

[5] For everything; this phrase was used to designate the titles of those approved to continue studying any of the major fields, as opposed to those who are not generally approved but who can only continue in the fields designated in their titles. –E.

how conceited I was about my title, they all poked us not where it hurt, but where it felt good. Thus all I heard was: "Have some more, Bachelor"; "Do drink up, Bachelor"; "Please see here, Bachelor"; and *Bachelor* this and *Bachelor* that, at every turn.

Lunch ended; dinner then followed, and at night came the dance; and the whole time was a continuous Bachelorization. God help me, how they Bachelored me that day! Even the old wives and the housemaids gave me my Bachelorizings from time to time. Finally, God Almighty willed the bash to come to an end, and with it ended all the Bachelory. Everyone went home. My father was left sixty or seventy pesos the poorer, for that is what the celebration had cost him; I was left with one more cause for pretentiousness; and we went to sleep, which was what we most needed.

The next day, we woke up at a fine hour; and I, who shortly before had been so vain of my title, and so satisfied to hear how everyone feasted my ears by repeating it, had already lost all taste for it. How true it is that man's heart is endless in its desires, and that only solid virtue can fill it!

Don't imagine that I am just pretending now to be all holy and that I am writing down these things to make you think I have been a good person. No, I am far from a vile hypocrite. I have always been depraved, as I have told you, and even now, as I lie prostrate in this bed I am not what I ought to be; but this confession should assure you of my truth, for it does not come from any virtue that can be found in me, but from the knowledge that I have of virtue, a knowledge that vice itself cannot obscure, so that, should I rise again from this illness and return to my erring ways of old (may God forbid), I will not retract what I am writing to you now; rather, I will confess that I act badly though I know what is good, as Ovid put it.

Coming back to myself, I was saying, two or three days after my graduation, my parents decided to send me to amuse myself at a cow branding that was to take place on a friend's hacienda near this city. And, indeed, I went. . . .

CHAPTER 6

In which our Bachelor reports what happened on the hacienda, which is curious and entertaining to hear

I reached the hacienda accompanied by my father's friend, who was no less than the owner of the estate. We dismounted and everyone there greeted me favorably.

On the occasion of the amusement provided by the branding, the house was filled with brilliant people, both from Mexico and from the other towns all about.

We entered the house; I picked out a good seat by the sitting room,[1] for I never liked leaving the company of skirts for long; and after they had spoken of

[1] [Spell (p. 175) describes the 18th-century sitting room (*estrado*) as a "slightly elevated and railing-enclosed platform in the drawing-room, on which the ladies, seated on cushions scattered about, entertained their gentlemen friends, who sat nearby on chairs or stools." –Tr.]

various country matters that I did not understand, the great lady, who was the wife of the hacienda owner, entered into conversation with me, saying, "So tell me, young sir, what did you think of the countryside you have passed through? It must have caused you to take notice, for they say it is the first time you have left Mexico."

"So it is, ma'am," I told her, "and I truly love the countryside."

"But not as much as the city, isn't it true?" she said.

Out of politeness, I replied, "Yes, ma'am, I like it here, although, to be sure, I do not dislike the city. It all seems fine to me in its own fashion; and so, in the countryside I am happy in a country way, and in the city I am entertained in a city way."

They celebrated my answer as if it were a pronouncement worthy of Cato, and the lady continued the praise, saying, "Yes, indeed, the college boy is talented, though it would be more seemly if he weren't so mischievous, from what Januario has told us."

Januario was a young man of eighteen or nineteen years—the lady's nephew, my own classmate, and a great friend. I turned out as I did because he was such a joker and a tremendous rogue, and I never fell out of step with him, nor did I neglect to learn from his every lesson. He had been my closest friend since my first school, and he was my constant *ahuizote*[2] and my inseparable shadow everywhere I went, for he attended the second and third schools where my parents sent me; he left these schools with me, and with me he entered grammar study in the house of my teacher Enríquez; when I left there, he left; I entered San Ildefonso, he entered as well; I graduated, and he graduated on the same day.

He was graceful, tall, and elegant of body; but as it was a law in my above-mentioned school that no one could escape without a nickname, we would stick one on anybody, even a Narcissus or an Adonis; and following this rule, we gave Don Januario the nickname *Juan Largo*, Long John, in this way combining the sound of his name with the most distinctive perfection of his body. But after all, he was my teacher and my most constant friend; and in carrying out these sacred duties, he did not neglect two things that concerned me deeply and that stood me in good stead throughout my life, and these were: to inspire me with his bad habits; and to divulge my gifts and my sobriquet, *Periquillo Sarmiento*, the Mangy Parrot, everywhere; so that, thanks to his loving and active diligence, I have kept it through grammar school, through my study of philosophy, and into public life whenever possible. Tell me, my children, if it would not be ungrateful for me, in my life story, to neglect to name and profusely thank such a useful friend, such an effective teacher, the public crier of my glorious deeds; for all these titles were faithfully fulfilled by the great and meritorious *Juan Largo*.

I did not know, however, whether these ladies had been fully informed about me, nor whether they knew my resonant byname. I was smugly horsing around in the sitting room, as they say, with the lady and a group of girls, not the least lively and talkative of whom was the daughter of the lady who had flattered me, and she struck me as no bale of hay herself, for on top of the fact that there is no such

[2] [*Ahuizote*: curse, nemesis. The editor of the 4th edition explains this usage by reference to the Mexican emperor Ahuizotl (1482–1502), feared for his executions of thousands of captives. –Tr.]

thing as an ugly fifteen-year-old (and she was fifteen), she was altogether beautiful and her figure quite attractive: a powerful motive for me to try to behave as affably and circumspectly as I could, in order to please her; and I had noticed that whenever I made some tasteless collegiate joke, she was the first to laugh, and she readily applauded my wit.

So I was coming off well and feeling at home, when I heard the sound of horses arriving in the patio of the hacienda, and before there was time to ask who it was, there appeared in the middle of the room, wearing a fine rain cloak, sun scarf, field boots, and the full get-up of a respectable country squire. . . . Who do you think it could be? Who else but Juan Largo, that devil, repaying me for my dark sins, my dear friend and flatterer! He saw me the second he entered, and, greeting everyone else all at once and in a rush, he ran up to me with his arms held wide and gladdened my ears as follows: "Hey there, my dear Mangy Parrot! Great to see you round here! How's it going, brother? What're you up to? Have a seat. . . . "

You cannot imagine how angry I was to see how the villain had, in one instant, exposed my mangy parrotry in front of all those respectable gentlemen—and what hurt me more, in front of so many mocking girls and women, for as soon as they heard my honorable titles, they set to guffawing as impudently as they could, without the least consideration for my little self. I don't know if I turned yellow, green, blue, or red; what I do remember is that, in my anger, the room grew dark around me and my cheeks and ears burned hotter than if I had rubbed them with chili. I looked at the accursed Juan Largo and tossed him some reply filled with scorn and solemnity, thinking I could correct the girls' mocking and my friend's insolence by acting haughty; but I achieved just the opposite, for the more serious I grew, the more fervently the girls laughed, so much so that it seemed somebody must be tickling the little piggies, and that rascal Juan Largo added yet more tasteless jokes to the mix until they redoubled their cackling. Seeing the fix I was in, all I could do was to give in to my embarrassing bad luck and conceal the pique I felt, laughing along with everyone; though if I were to tell the truth, my laughter was not very natural, but somewhat more than forced.

In the end, after they were done parroting my nickname and had dissected the rotting carcass of its mangy etymology, since they had no more spleen for laughing, and that rogue had run out of repartee for insulting me, the scene came to a close and, thanks be to God, the storm passed. *[. . .]*

Dinnertime came, they set the table, and we all sat according to our class and character. I was seated across from a young curate from Tlalnepantla, who sat next to the parish priest of Cuautitlán (a town seven leagues from Mexico), a fat and grave old man.[3]

[3] [A curate (*vicario*) and a parish priest (*cura*) are both ordained priests, but the former has a lower rank, being a mere hired assistant of the tenured *cura* of his parish. Tlalnepantla and Cuautitlán lie north of Mexico City (and today form rather industrial suburbs of the capital), near the town of Tepotzotlán, where Lizardi lived as a child. –Tr.]

Everyone ate gaily, and I along with them; being a lad, after all, I was not resentful, especially when they endeavored to please me with the abundance of exquisite dishes and tasty sweets; for Don Martín (that was the hacienda owner's name) was fairly liberal and rich.

During the meal, they spoke of many things that I did not understand; but after they had removed the tablecloths, a lady asked if we had seen the *commit*.

"The *comet*, you mean, ma'am," said the curate.

"That's it," replied the matron.

"Yes, we've been seeing it for the past few nights from the terrace of the rectory, and have been greatly entertained by the sight."

"Ay, what an ugly sort of entertainment!" said the matron.

"Why, ma'am?"

"Why? Because that comet is an omen of some great harm that wants to befall us."

[The curate invites Januario to explain what comets are; Januario excuses himself from the table and leaves the job to Periquillo, who simply repeats the matron's superstitions. The curate interrupts and gives the correct astronomical explanation.]

"That is what has been established as most probable by physicists in this matter; all the rest is nonsense, to which no one pays attention anymore. If you would like to study these things more deeply, you should read Father Almeida, Brisson, and other authors who have been translated into Spanish. *[. . . .]* I recognize that I have broken the rules of good breeding; but these gentlefolk in their wisdom will forgive me, and you will either thank me or not, for my good intentions, which amount to making you realize that you should not open your mouth to talk about things you don't understand."

Just imagine how I felt after such a liturgy. I instantly recognized that the father was right, hurt as I was by his sharp reproach, for though I was ignorant, I was never stupid, nor was my head made of *tepeguaje*;[4] I was easily tamed by reason, for in reality the truth is sometimes so penetrating and well demonstrated that it gets into our heads despite our self-love. What poor wretches are those whose minds are so obtuse that they cannot grasp the most obvious truths! And even more wretched, those who are so obstinate that they close their eyes to keep from seeing the light! How little hope either type has of ever being tamed by reason! I felt embarrassed, as I was saying, and I think my shame was written all over me, for I dared not utter a single word, nor did any words come to me. The ladies, the priests, and the other fellows at the table only stared at each other and at me, making me blush more and more.

But the curate himself, a very prudent man, got me out of the spot I was in quite cunningly, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have talked long enough; I am going now to say vespers, and the young ladies will want to rest a bit before our evening entertainment at the bull ring."

[4] [*Tepeguaje*: the hard, dense wood of a tree native to tropical Mexico. –Tr.]

He got right up from the table, and everyone else did the same. The ladies retired to the inner rooms, and as for the men, some lay down on sofas, others picked up books, others sat down to cards, and yet others picked up their shotguns and went out to pass the time in the orchard.

[Periquillo broods about his folly, but realizes that his public shaming was his own fault. He confesses his ignorance to the curate, who tells him that a willingness to admit he was wrong is a hopeful sign.]

"But where did you learn the heap of superstitions that you told us about comets? Surely they did not teach you that at college."

"Not in the least, as you can see," I replied. "The cornucopia of erudition that I spouted forth can be attributed to the old ladies and cooks at home."

"Nor are you the first," the father said, "to suck up such absurdities with your first milk. The truth is that these are all lies and old wives' tales. As for you, what you should do is study hard, for you are still young and can improve yourself. I'll give you the list you asked for, of authors in whose works you can easily read about these matters, and I will also give you a few lessons while we are here."

I thanked him, captivated by his fine character; I was about to ask him a boyish favor, when we were called to the entertainment in the horse-shoeing corral.

CHAPTER 7

Our author continues the story of what happened to him on the hacienda

[The curate tells Periquillo which books he should read to study physics and goes on to describe the delights of studying the natural world, which leads to an appreciation of the divine. Eventually they are called outside to see the cowboys perform; everyone is amazed to see how well Periquillo and the curate get along.]

At last we arrived at the place where the circus had been set up for our entertainment, a great corral where comfortable benches had been arranged. The curate and I sat together, and we passed the afternoon watching them brand the yearling bulls and the horses and mules that they had. But I noticed that the spectators showed less pleasure when they were marking the animals with hot irons than when they were fighting the yearlings or breaking the colts, especially whenever a young bull threw one of the boys or a young mule shook off a rider; because then their laughter was boundless, no matter how much compassion the affliction displayed on the face of the injured rider might inspire. Since I had never before observed such a scene, I couldn't help feeling moved when I saw a poor fellow limp away from under a mule's hooves or a steer's horns. *[Periquillo voices his distaste to the curate, who says that the bullfights in Mexico City are worse, often leading to serious injuries and death.]*

"Father," I said to him, "is that how rational beings act, exposing their lives to be sacrificed by an enraged beast? And do so many people troop in to enjoy the blood of the brutes spilled, and perhaps even that of their fellow men?"

"That is precisely what happens," the curate answered me, "and it will keep happening in the realms of Spain until at last we forget this custom, as repugnant to Nature as it is to the enlightenment of the century in which we live."

[Periquillo goes on to ask the curate to help him get even with Januario by posing a problem in physics to him that he would not be able to answer because Januario understands no more about physics than Periquillo does. The curate replies revenge is "a vile passion" and that pardoning affronts is noble; but when Periquillo enthusiastically declares that he will never seek revenge against anyone in the future, the curate cautions him against making rash and arrogant resolutions.]

Our conversation continued a bit, until the evening ended and, with it, the entertainment, entailing our return to the salon of the hacienda.

Since the only point of being there was to pass the time, everyone entertained themselves doing whatever they enjoyed best, and thus they took up their cards and their mandolins and began to have fun amongst themselves. I did not yet know how to play cards (or more to the point, I had no funds to gamble), nor how to strum the mandolin; so I went to the far end of the sitting room to listen to the singing of the girls, who calmly raked my patience over the coals; for two or three of them would draw close to me, and one would say to another, "Tell me a story, girl—just not the one about the Mangy Parrot."

Another would ask me, "Sir, since you have studied, tell us: how can parrots talk like people?"

Another would say, "Oh, girl, my arm's so itchy! You think I've caught the mange?"

And so the ladies went on making fun of me all night, until it was suppertime.

The table was placed, we all sat down, and among us there was my very good friend Juan Largo, who up until then had been playing ombre or some such card game.

Many topics were discussed throughout supper. I horned in on a topic or two, but only after being provoked and always with the addition of: 'It seems to me . . . ,' 'I don't have the wits . . . ,' 'I have heard it said . . . ,' and so on; but I no longer spoke as arrogantly as I had at midday, so intimidated was I by the sermon that the curate had preached to my face. How useful a lesson can be when it comes at the right time!

The meal ended, and my good friend Juan Largo, directing himself toward me, began to pour out his clownish genius, just as I had expected he would.

"So, Periquillo," he said to me, "you're saying that comets are sort of like trumpets? You were brilliant in your midday act! Yes, I've heard all about your witticisms; what I didn't know was that I had so great a physicist as one of my classmates—not just a physicist, either, but an astronomer as well. No doubt but that in time you'll become the best almanacker in the kingdom. What celestial object would even try to hide from a man who knows so much about comets?"

The women, who almost always act on the first thing they notice, and who heard only a cheerful ribbing in his derision, began to laugh and to stare harder at me than I would have liked; but the father curate, who liked me and recognized the shame I felt, managed to extract me from that trap, saying to Don Martín (who, as I said, was the owner of the hacienda), "So, do you know that the day after tomorrow you'll be having a solar eclipse?"

"Yes, sir," said Don Martín, "and I'm all in a dither about it."

"Why?" asked the curate.

"What do you mean, why?" said the landowner. "Because *eclimpses* are the Devil, is why. Two years ago now, I'm remembering, my wheat was growing along just fine, and then because of a darn eclimpse, it got all sucked dry and turned out short as can be, and not just that, all the calves and baby animals that was born those days got sick and most of 'em died. So just you see if I don't have good reason to be afraid of them eclimpses."[1]

"Don Martín, my friend," said the curate, "I think the lion is not as fierce as it's made out to be; what I mean is, the poor eclipses aren't as devious as you imagine them to be."

"How could that be, father?" said Don Martín. "You know a lot of things, but I've got lots of 'sperience, and like everybody knows, 'sperience is the mother of know-how. No doubt about it, eclimpses do a lot of damage to the fields, to the cows, to people's healf, and to pregnant women, too. Five years ago now, I'm remembering, my wife was expecting, and you might not believe it but my son Polinario was born harelipped."[2]

"And what caused that misfortune?"

"What else could it be, sir?" said Don Martín. "It was because the eclimpse took a bite of him."

"Don't fool yourself," said the curate. "The eclipse is a very upright fellow, and neither bites nor bothers anyone; otherwise, let's hear from Don Januario. What does our Bachelor have to say?"

"There's nothing for it," he replied, full of satisfaction that his opinion had been sought. "No, there's nothing for it," he said; "the eclipse cannot eat the flesh of children still in their mothers' wombs; but it can hurt them through its malign influence, and make them be born harelipped or hunchbacked, and through the same malignancy, it is even more likely to kill young animals and suck the wheat dry, as my uncle has said, testifying to his experience; for as you see, Father, *quod ab experientia patet non indiget probatione*. That is to say: what has been shown by experience needs no other proof."

"I am not surprised," said the father, "that your uncle thinks in this manner, because he has no reason to think otherwise; but I am very shocked to hear a college man produce the same sort of thing. Along these lines, tell me, what are eclipses?"

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1 [*Eclimpses*: Lizardi represents the landowner's rustic speech with phonetic spellings throughout, emphasizing his deviations from standard Spanish. I have substituted equivalent English mispronunciations (as here, *eclimpses* for the typical Spanish mispronunciation *eclises*). –Tr.]

2 [The belief that solar eclipses cause ruined fields, miscarriages among people and cattle, harelips, and other calamities remains common in rural Mexico. –Tr.]

"I think," said Januario, "that they are run-ins between the sun and the moon, in which one or the other has to come out the loser, depending on the strength of the victor; if the sun wins, it is an eclipse of the moon, and if the latter wins, the sun is eclipsed. Up to this point, there can be no doubt; because if you watch the eclipse in a bowl of water, you can materially see how the sun and the moon are fighting; and you can observe what one or the other eats in the struggle; and if these two bodies have the ability to do so much damage to each other, rock-solid as they are, how could they help but damage the tender seedlings or delicate infants of this world?"

"That's what I say," responded good old Don Martín. "Look here, Father, tell me if I'm right or wrong. No two ways about it, my nephew's real edgicated; right now, he up and explained eclimpses just the way my late brother, who was a man of many letters, used to tell it; and up there in our homeland, the Huasteca, everybody said he was a fountain of know-how.[3] Ah, my brother! If he were alive, how happy would he be to see how far his boy Januario's come along!"

"Not very happy, if you'll pardon my saying so," said the vicar; "for this gentleman doesn't understand a word of anything he's said; rather, he's a philosophical blasphemer."

[The curate patiently explains how eclipses occur. Don Martín asks, "If that's all eclimpses are, then why are they so harmful that they make us lose our plants or our animals, and even make our children fall sick and come out with defects?" The curate attributes these calamities to natural causes and their connection with eclipses to chance.]

Everyone applauded the curate, and gave my friend Juan Largo a good case of sunburn, so that his ears were ringing when he got up. A short while later, we went to bed.

CHAPTER 8

In which Periquillo writes of some adventures that happened to him on the hacienda, and his return home

The following day, we arose quite contented; the priest called for his carriage, the curate ordered his horse saddled, and they left for their respective homes. The curate gave me a very fond farewell, and I replied in the same tenor, for he was a likeable and benevolent man, neither proud nor thick-headed.

They went away in the end, and I was left without their useful company. My brother Juan Largo, stupid and shameless as ever (for it is the property of a fool not to care a whit about anything in this life), at lunchtime began to mock me about the comet; but I parried him, defending myself with the nonsense he had

[3] [The Huasteca is the semi-tropical coastal region northeast of Mexico City. –Tr.]

said regarding the eclipse, and with that jab I left him blushing; and he must have noted how silly it is to throw stones at the roof of your neighbor when your own is made of glass.

[Periquillo proves popular with everyone, especially the girls; Januario is resentful and plays pranks on him, such as taking him horseriding and causing his horse to throw him day after day. On one occasion, he entices Periquillo to enter the bullring to face a young bullock. At a critical moment, Januario stands in the way and Periquillo is thrown; when Periquillo tries to get up and run away, his pants fall down and the bullock tosses him high in the air, knocking him unconscious. He spends the rest of the day recovering.]

My good friend Januario, during the first hours of my injury when everyone else feared it might be something serious, displayed his deep distress with all the hypocrisy he could muster; but the next day, when he saw I was out of danger, he took charge and began to rain down all his buffoonery upon me, turning me red over and over again in front of the girls by shamefully recalling my recent adventure, emphasizing my nakedness, the position of my shirt, and the indecency of my fall. Since he was able to provoke the girls' laughter with his foolery, and I could not deny it, I felt terribly ashamed, and could only resort to begging him not to make me blush in those terms; but my begging only served to spur on his blasted verbosity, which added to my shame and to my anger.

To calm me down, he said, "Don't be a fool, brother, I'm only kidding. This afternoon we're going on a ride to Cuamatla—just wait till you see what a nice hacienda it is. Which horse do you want them to saddle up for you, Little Almond or my aunt's Smokey?"

I answered him the first time he mentioned the idea, "Friend, I'm thankful for your kindness; but don't bother having them saddle up anything for me, because I never plan to mount another horse nor mare again in my life, nor stand in front of so much as a cow, much less a bull or even a bullock."

"Come on, man," he said, "don't be such a coward; you can't be a horseman without taking a few spills, and a good bullfighter dies on the horns of the bull."

"Well, then, why don't you go die, and good luck doing it," I replied to him, "and you can take as many spills as you'd like, because I'm not tired of living yet. Why do I need to go home with one rib fewer, or with a broken leg? No, Juan Largo, I wasn't born to break horses or herd cows."

In two words: I never again mounted a horse in his company, and never so much as watched another bullfight with him, and from that day forward, I began to mistrust my friend a little bit. Happy is he who learns his lesson when he first falls into danger! Even better: "happy is he who learns his lesson when others fall into danger," as the ancient saying went: *felix quem facient aliena pericula cautum*. You can call that: turning adversity itself to your advantage.

Three days after this conversation, the entertainments ended and each guest went home. The wicked Januario had noticed that I looked fondly at his cousin, and that she was not put off by this, and he endeavored to play another prank on me worse than the one with the bullock.

One day when Don Martín was not at home, because he had gone to visit a nearby hacienda, Januario told me, "I've noticed that you like Ponciana, and that she loves you. Come on, tell me the truth; you know that I'm your friend and that you've never kept a secret from me. She's pretty; you've got good taste, and I'm only asking you because I know that I can help you gain what you desire. The girl is my cousin and I can't marry her; so I'd be happy if her love went to such a good friend as you are to me."

Who would have thought that this was the net that this devil was spreading to catch me, so he could have a laugh at the expense of my honor? Well, that's what happened, because I, simple as ever, believed him, and said, "It is obvious that your cousin is worthy; I cannot deny that I love her; but I also cannot know whether she loves me or not, for I have no way to find out."

"Why not?" said Januario. "What, haven't you ever told her how you feel?"

"I've never spoken to her about that," I replied.

"And why not?" he insisted.

"What do you mean, why not?" I said. "Because I'm ashamed; she'll say that I'm being forward, or she'll go tell her mother, or she'll send me packing. Besides, your aunt is very suspicious; she never gives us a chance to talk or even leaves her alone for a second; so, how do expect me to have time to hold such a conversation with the girl?"

Januario laughed heartily, made fun of my fear and caution, and said, "You're such a prude; I never took you to be so dull and useless; just look at the enormous difficulties you'd have to surmount! Not a bit of it, you chicken. All women want to think that someone is in love with them, and even if they don't repay it, they are thankful to be told so. Now, haven't you heard it said that nobody can hear you unless you speak up? So go ahead and speak, you savage, and you'll see how you get what you want. If you're afraid of my old aunt, I'll team up with you and arrange things so you can speak with my cousin alone, for as long as you want. What do you say? You want to do it? Speak; you'll see that I'm simply your true friend."

With this sort of advice, and seeing how opportunity was handing me what I most desired, it was not long before I accepted his obliging proposal, and I thanked him more than if he had done me a true favor.

The rogue went away for a short time, at the end of which he returned quite content and told me, "It's all done. I gave Poncianita an emetic and made her spill her guts to me; she sang like a canary, confessed how much she loves you. I told her that you're dying for her and that you want to talk to her alone. That's what she wants, too, but she's got the problem of her mother, who's on top of her all day like a jail guard. It looks like a huge difficulty, but I've devised the best method for you two to get what you want, never fear, and this is it: my uncle shouldn't be back until tomorrow; you know where the bedroom is where she sleeps with her mother, and you know that her bed is the one on the right as soon as you go in; so this very night, between eleven and twelve, you can go talk to her as much as you'd like, knowing that at that hour the old lady will be in the deepest part of her sleep. Poncianita is in on it; she just told me that you should go in carefully, without making any noise, and that if she isn't awake, you should touch her pillow, because she sleeps very lightly. Just look at that, Mr. Periquillo: how quickly we've conquered

all the difficulties that had you cowering; so you have no excuse to be so dull, take the chance before it gets away, I've done everything for you that I can."

Again I thanked my great friend for his hard work, and I stayed there weighing the pros and cons, thinking of what I would say to that girl (for in truth my naughtiness went no further than wanting to talk), and wishing that the hours would speed by so that I could make my visit at the witching hour.

Meanwhile, that traitor Juan Largo, who hadn't mentioned a word to his cousin about my flirtations, went to see his aunt and told her to keep an eye out for her daughter, because I was an utter cad; that he had already noticed that I was sending her thousands of signals at the dinner table, and that she was responding; that sometimes he had looked for me in my bed at night, and that I was missing; so she should move Poncianita to a different bedroom with a serving girl, and that she herself should take her daughter's bed that night, and should lie there quietly to see if he wasn't wrong. All this struck the lady as a good idea; she believed it as if she had witnessed it, thanked Januario for the zeal he showed for the honor of his house, promised to take his advice, and, without any further investigations, she closed herself in a room with the innocent girl and gave her the tanning of her life, according to what one of her serving girls told me when she came to work at my house two months later, for she had heard the gossip that the rogue had spread, and had witnessed the unjust punishment of Poncianita.

There are two lessons you should learn from this event, my dear children, which you should apply throughout your lives. The first is: do not be quick to reveal your secrets to everyone who tries to sell himself as your friend; for one thing, he might not be a friend at all, but a traitor, like Januario, trying to take advantage of your simplicity to ruin you; for another, even if he is a friend, the time might come when you fall out with each other, and then if he is as base as so many are, he will take his revenge by revealing any defects you made known to him in secret. In any case, it is better not to express your secrets than to risk doing so: "If you want your secret to remain hidden," said Seneca, "do not tell anyone, for if you cannot remain quiet yourself, how do you expect others to keep it in silence?"

The other lesson that this story offers is that you should not get carried away by the first idea that anybody offers you. Believing the first thing we are told, without investigating how likely it is, or how truthful the messenger is who gives us the news, implies an unforgivable frivolity, which should be classified as foolishness; and such foolishness can be and often has been the cause of irreparable harm. Because of wicked Haman's gossiping, all the Jews almost perished at the hands of the deceived Ahasuerus;[1] and because of the gossiping and calumnies of that damnable Juan Largo, his young cousin suffered an unjust punishment and loss of repute.

Throughout that day, the lady frowned and acted rudely toward me; but being a boy, I never imagined that I was the cause of her displeasure, attributing it to some illness or some disagreement with the serving family. I was surprised that the girl was not at dinner, but all I did was miss her.

[1] [In the book of Esther. –Tr.]

Night came, we had supper, and I went to bed and fell asleep without recalling the date we had made; but Januario, the dog, lay awake waiting for my ruin, and when the hour came and he saw me happily snoring away, he got up to waken me, saying, "What do think you're doing, you blasted lazybones? Come on, it's eleven at night, you're keeping Poncianita waiting."

I was feeling more sleepy than naughty, so it was more by force than by free will that I climbed from bed in my underclothes; barefoot and trembling from cold and fear, I went to my beloved's bedroom, unaware of the scheme that my great and generous friend had contrived for me. I tiptoed in quietly, approached the bed where I thought the innocent girl was sleeping, and touched the pillow; then, when I least expected it, her old mother walloped me full in the face, so soundly that I saw the sun at midnight. The shock of not knowing who had hit me counseled me to hold my tongue; but the pain of the blow forced a shout from me that was louder than the wallop itself. Then the fine old lady grabbed me by the shirt and, sitting me down next to her, said, "Shut your mouth, you impudent brat. Who were you looking for here? I know all about your games. Is that how you honor your parents? Is that how you repay the favors we've shown you? Is that how a well-born and well-raised child behaves? How are you any different from the plain, uneducated country bumpkins? Rogue! Rapscallion! Cad! How dare you hurl yourself onto the bed of a young maiden, the daughter of a lady and a gentleman who have treated you so well? You should be thankful that, out of respect for your good parents, I don't order my servants to beat you to a pulp; but tomorrow my husband returns, and I'll have him take you back to Mexico the same day, because I don't want rogues like you around my house."

Full of fear and confusion, I kneeled down to her, and cried and pleaded that she not tell Don Martín, until at last she gave me her promise. I went back to bed and noticed how hard the contemptible Januario was laughing under his covers; but I pretended not to see.

The next day, Don Martín came back, and the lady had the coach made ready under the pretext of some urgent business or other in the capital; and without seeing the poor girl again, I was taken to my parents' house; but as she had promised, the lady did not let her husband in on what had happened.

CHAPTER 9

Periquillo goes home and has a long conversation with his father about matters both curious and interesting

We arrived at my house, where I was very well received by my parents, especially by my mother, who could not get her fill of hugging me, as if I had just returned from some dangerous expedition to faraway lands. Don Martín stayed at our house for two or three days while he wrapped up his business, and then he retired to his hacienda, leaving me quite content because my misdeeds had been passed over in silence.

One day my good father called me in alone and said, "Pedro, you have become a youth without knowing when you left childhood, and any day now you will enter the fullness of manhood without knowing where your youth has gone. What I mean is: today you are a lad, tomorrow you will be a man; you have a father who can give you direction, give you advice, and support you; but tomorrow, when I die, you will have to find your own direction and earn your own way at the cost of your sweat or your endeavors, or else perish if you cannot; for as you see, I am a poor man, and have no inheritance to leave you other than the good education I've given you, although you have not taken as much advantage of it as I had hoped."

[Periquillo's father describes the relative merits of letters, law, and medicine, dwelling on the poverty of poets and the fact that "in America . . . there are no opportunities, rewards, or incentives for dedicating one's life to the sciences." He gives Periquillo a week to decide on a career, and says that, if he does not want to pursue a profession in letters, he can take up a manual trade. Periquillo, however, must discover which career suits him and follow it.]

My father left, and I stood there like a fool on the eve of the storm, for I still did not perceive how sound his teachings were. Nevertheless, I realized that His Grace meant for me to select a trade or profession that would put food on my table for the rest of my life; but I made no use of this realization.

For seven of the eight days he had given me to make my decision, I thought only of going to visit my friends and of loafing around, as was my habit, backed by the acquiescence of my ingenuous mother; but on the eighth day, my father nudged my memory, saying: "Pedrillo, you know what you have to tell me tonight, regarding what I asked you eight days ago." I instantly remembered the deadline, and went to find a friend with whom I could discuss the matter.

I found one, indeed; but what a friend! Just like all the other friends I had then: the sort of friend that disorderly boys, such as I was, normally have. His name was Martín Pelayo, and he was scarcely less annoying a pest than Juan Largo. He was about nineteen or twenty years old; a bigger card sharp than Birján;[1] more amorous than Cupid; a more fervent dancer than Bathylo; stupider than me; and lazier than the biggest drone in the best beehive. Despite these nullities, he was studying to be a father, so he claimed, though he had as much of a vocation for the priesthood at the time as I did to become a hangman. Nonetheless, he had already tonsured his hair and he wore clerical habits, because his parents had forced him into the clergy, in the same way you might force a nail into a wall: by hammering at it; and they had done this so as not to lose the income from a couple of juicy chaplaincies that they had inherited.[2] How sick I am and will always be of entailed estates and inherited chaplaincies!

[1] [Birján (or Vilhán) was the legendary inventor of the Spanish card deck. –Tr.]

[2] [A chaplaincy (*capellanía*) was an endowed position for a priest, who would say a specified number of masses per year in honor of the founders of the endowment. Much of the wealth of the Mexican church was locked into chaplaincies endowed by wealthy families and used to support a priest who usually came from those same families. Together with *mayorazgos*, or entailed estates, endowed chaplaincies were one of the main methods used by wealthy families to circumvent Spain's strict inheritance laws and keep their estates intact. –Tr.]

But be that as it may, this was the distinguished professor, the dignified elder, the virtuous sage whom I selected to ask for advice, and you can all imagine how well he might have fulfilled my father's good intentions. And so it was.

As soon as I informed him of my doubts and told him a little of what my father had preached to me, he laughed out loud and said, "Why even ask? Study to be a cleric, like I did—it's the best career, trust me. Look here: everybody will look up to a cleric; everyone will admire and respect him, even if he's a dolt, and will cover up his defects; nobody will dare stick a nickname on him or contradict him; there's always room for him at the best dance, at the best gaming table, and he isn't ignored even in the ladies' sitting rooms; and on top of it all, he will never be short a peso, even if he gets it from a Mass that he says poorly and on the run. So don't be a fool, study for the priesthood. Look here: the other day I was at this gaming house and I didn't feel like losing the hand, even though the fellow across the table had played an ace against my first card; so I grabbed the whole pot—that is, my own money and the other fellow's, too. The owner complained and swore, rightly, that it was his; but I shouted, raged, cursed, took the money and left the house, and nobody dared make so much as a peep, because they all figured me to be a deacon at the least; and you know that if I had been a doctor or a lawyer and had done the same thing, either I would have left without a penny, or they would have mounted such a battle that I might not have even gotten my ribs out of there intact. Therefore, once again I tell you, study to be a cleric and forget about anything else."

I replied, "I like everything you've said, and you've got me convinced; but my father told me that I have to study either theology, canon law, civil law, or medicine; and to tell the truth, I don't think I have enough talent for any of them."

"Don't be an idiot, " Pelayo replied. "You don't need to study so much or work so hard to be a cleric. Do you have a chaplaincy?"

"No, I don't," I replied.

"Well, don't worry about it," he continued; "get yourself ordained as a language specialist;[3] that is bad, because the poor curates are like servants to the parish priests, and some will even force you to make their beds for them; but that isn't much compared to the advantages you gain; and as for what your father says about having to study theology or canon law to become a cleric, don't you believe it. Just study a few definitions in Ferrer or Lárraga, and that'll be more than enough; and if you dip into Cliquet or the Salamanca course, well![4] Then you'll be the consummate moral theologian, a Seneca in the confessional, a Cicero in the pulpit; you'll be able to decide the toughest case of conscience that ever was, and your preaching will win you more devotees than all the Massillons and Bourdaloues—who were a couple of great orators, from what my professor tells me, because I've never cracked open their books."[5]

[3] [Language specialist: an assistant priest licensed to work in an Indian language. –Tr.]

[4] [The books mentioned are the common Spanish theology textbooks of the era. –Tr.]

[5] [Jean-Baptiste Massillon (1663–1742) and Louis Bourdaloue (1632–1704) were the most famous French preachers of their time. –Tr.]

"But, man, the truth is," I said, "I don't think I'd make a good priest, because I like women too much, so I think I'd be better off married."

"Perico, you're such a fool!" Pelayo answered. "Can't you see, that's just the Devil tempting you to keep you away from the holiest of professions? Do you think that being a priest is the only way you can sin along those lines? No, friend; laymen and even married men commit the same kind of sins. And that's aside from the fact that—who cares? . . . But I don't want to open your eyes to such things. Just get yourself ordained, man; do it and stop making so much noise about it, and later you'll thank me for my good advice."

I said goodbye to my friend and went home, resolving to become a cleric come what may, because I so enjoyed the flattering picture of the profession that Martín had painted for me.

Night fell, and my good father, never negligent about my welfare, called me into his study and said, "Today is the deadline I gave you, dear son, for seeking advice and deciding on the career that best suits you in the sciences or arts, because I don't want you to be wasting so much time. Tell me, then, what have you thought, and what have you decided?"

"I have decided, sir," I replied, "to be a cleric."

"I think that is very good," my father said, "but you don't have a chaplaincy, and in that case you will have to study some Indian language, such as Mexicano,[6] Otomí, Tarascan, Mazahua, and so on, so that you can find an appointment as a curate administering the sacraments to those poor people in their villages. You do understand that?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, because it did not cost me anything to say yes, not because I understood any of the obligations of a curate.

"Well, then, you must also know now," my father went on, "that you will have to go without grumbling wherever your prelate sends you, even if it is to the poorest village in the Hot Country,[7] even if you dislike it or find it damaging to your health, for the harder you work in your career as a curate, the more merits you will acquire toward being made a parish priest some day. These villages that I've mentioned are very hot and you will find little or no company there, except that of coarse Indians. There you will suffer from riding on horseback at all hours to take confessions, being burnt by the sun, lashed by fierce thunderstorms, and being kept up many late nights working. You will constantly battle the scorpions, ticks, chiggers, mites, nits, midges, mosquitoes, and other poisonous insects of the same sort that will quickly drink up your blood. It will be a miracle if you don't have to suffer through the tertian fever that they call 'the chills,' which is normally followed by consumptive jaundice; and in the midst of these travails, if you come up against a parish priest who is sullen, surly, and thick-headed, that will give you a tremendous opportunity for practicing patience; and if you fall in with one who is lazy and pampered, he'll pile all the work on your shoulders

[6] [Mexicano: that is, Nahuatl or "Aztec," the main Indian language of Mexico City. The four languages mentioned are the principal indigenous languages (in decreasing order) of central Mexico. –Tr.]

[7] [Hot Country (*Tierra Caliente*): the tropical lowlands of Mexico, breeding grounds of many tropical diseases in the colonial era. –Tr.]