



Memoirs of Pancho Villa (Texas Pan American)

Martín Luis Guzmán

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This is a tale that might be told around a campfire, night after night in the midst of a military campaign. The kinetic and garrulous Pancho Villa talking on and on about battles and men; bursting out with hearty, masculine laughter; weeping unashamed for fallen comrades; casually mentioning his hotheadedness—"one of my violent outbursts"—which sent one, two, or a dozen men before the firing squad; recounting amours; and always, always protesting dedication to the Revolutionary cause and the interests of "the people."

Villa saw himself as the champion, eventually almost the sole champion, of the Mexican people. He fought for them, he said, and opponents who called him bandit and murderer were hypocrites.

This is his story, his account of how it all began when as a peasant boy of sixteen he shot a rich landowner threatening the honor of his sister. This lone, starved refugee hiding out in the mountains became the scourge of the Mexican Revolution, the leader of thousands of men, and the hero of the masses of the poor.

Great battles of the Revolution are described, sometimes as broad sweeps of strategy, sometimes as they developed half hour by half hour. Long, dusty horseback forays and cold nights spent pinned down under enemy fire on a mountainside are made vivid and gripping. The assault on Ciudad Juárez in 1911, the battles of Tierra Blanca, of Torreón, of Zacatecas, of Celaya, all are here, told with a feeling of great immediacy. This volume ends as Villa and Obregón prepare to engage each other in the war between victorious generals into which the Revolution degenerated before it finally ended.

Martín Luis Guzmán, eminent historian of Mexico, knew and traveled with Pancho Villa at various times during the Revolution. General Villa offered young Martín Luis a position as his secretary, but he declined. When many years later some of Villa's private papers, records, and what was apparently the beginning of an autobiography came into Guzmán's hands, he was ideally suited to blend all these into an authentic account of the Revolution as Pancho Villa saw it, and of the General's life as known only to Villa himself.

The Memoirs were first published in Mexico in 1951, where they were extremely popular; this volume was the first English publication. Virginia H. Taylor, translator in the Spanish Archives of the State of Texas Land Office, has accurately captured in English the flavor of the narrative.

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