

“WHY?”

By Robert Libott

They were met together at last – the men who had played God. There were two on either side of the table. The place at the head, however, was covered with mist so deep that no mortal eye will ever penetrate its veil.

The first of them spoke, and the fire on the hearth burned low and blood red.

“I am Alexander the Great. As a boy, I vowed that I would become the greatest king in my house. I razed Thebes, subdued Greece, captured Asia Minor, swept over Egypt, and went on eastward to India. I did all this and passed on my way before I had reached the thirty-fifth year of my life.”

Up spoke a Voice from the head of the table, and the flame leaped high and bright:

“On the nineteenth of March the swallows return to San Juan Capistrano.”

Then rose the second man, and the fire burned low and red.

“Once I ruled the earth. I am Gaius Julius Caesar. Those Romans thought they could be rid of me by sending me to Gaul, but I crushed Gaul beneath my heel. I defied the weak Senate, made myself dictator and imperator, and crushed the army of Pompey. I came, I saw, I conquered – and yet they killed me. Why?”

Spoke the Voice from the head of the table, and the fire leaped high and bright: “On the twenty-third day of October the swallows leave San Juan Capistrano.”

Then rose from the table a third man. When he spoke, the fire burned low and red.

“I am Genghis Khan. After my father died, I found a friend who later subdued all of Russia, and from this beginning I welded together an army. China fell before my onslaught, and I turned westward. There is nothing in the history of all mankind as great as the Empire of Khan.”

Again spoke the Voice from the head of the table, and the fire once more leaped higher and brighter: “On the nineteenth of March the swallows return to San Juan Capistrano.”

Finally spoke the fourth man, and the fire burned very low indeed, and was the color of blood.

“You conquered what? Barren waste and barbarian tribes. But I, Napoleon Bonaparte, conquered the most civilized continent in the world. Look at the Eagles of France which I planted throughout Europe, and see that I covered my name with eternal glory. True, I left nothing of my France, but I ask you, is there anything in the world half so glorious as the reign of Napoleon?”

Blut once again came the Voice from the head of the table, and the fire leaped higher than ever before, and burned brighter: “On the twenty-third of October, the swallows leave San Juan Capistrano.”

Ladies and gentlemen, today the war mongers are making the same old mistakes. They’re trying to play God --- and they don’t know how!

In this modern age, we are told that the faith of our fathers is but silly superstition – that everything has a scientific explanation. All right, scoffer and skeptic, tell my why, on the nineteenth of March, the swallows return to San Juan Capistrano.

Go down to San Juan. Stand before the nests of the little birds in the eaves of the old Mission and you’ll feel one with the whole universe. Then come back, if you dare, and say that the God of our fathers is no more.

Tell, then, the stories of your generals. Sing, then, the songs of your heroes. Lead, then, if you must, generation after generation into fruitless slaughter, for you know not why. But, remember! -- **On the nineteenth of March the swallows return to San Juan Capistrano. WHY????**