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MYTHOLOGY OF THE AZTECS OF SALVADOR

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MYTHOLOGY OF THE AZTECS OF SALVADOR.

SINCE half a century ago the mythological treasures of the "Popol Vuh" were given to the world at large, Central America has contributed very little to the literature of aboriginal folk-lore. Lately Professor H. Pittier de Fabrega has published in the Journal of American Folk-Lore some legends collected by him during his long sojourn and travels in Costa Rica. He has, however, made the same complaint to the writer as others in the Central American field, that the time for collecting similar material in most parts of these regions seems almost to have passed, and that apparently little is yet to be gathered without laborious effort and patient researches. Other Central American investigators in the later decades, who have included similar investigations in their ethnological researches, are Dr. W. J. Gabb, who worked in Costa Rica, and Dr. Carl Sapper and Dr. Alfred M. Tozzer, both of whom worked in Guatemala. Many interesting and curious data regarding general folk-lore and usages are found scattered in the etymological studies of several native Central American scholars, as in "Barbarismos de Costa Rica" by Carlos Gagini, in "Nahuatlismos de Costa Rica" by Juan F. Ferraz, in "Hondurenismos" by A. Membrena, in "Provincialismos de Guatemala" by Batres Jaurégui, and in "Quichéismos" by Santiago Barberena of Salvador. The pages of the journal "Repertorio Salvadoreño" ought also to be remembered.

In Salvador, as well as in most other parts of Central America, the missionary work of the Spaniards early exerted a powerful and dominating influence, and even up to this date the civil powers often have joined in discouraging and suppressing the ancient religious ceremonies and usages, which kept the old myths and conceptions in life. Important material may, however, still possibly be preserved amongst the little known vanishing tribes, inhabiting the unhealthy, tropical forest lands on the Atlantic watershed of Honduras and Nicaragua. The most efficient way to save from destruction the vestiges of this kind still surviving amongst the numerous tribes of the Central American states would undoubtedly be to discover some opportunity for making an effective appeal to the educated Central Americans themselves. All over these small republics, not only in the larger centres, but even in many isolated mountain villages in the Indian districts, there are domiciled native government officials, lawyers, physicians, teachers, etc., who have graduated from their own higher institutions of learning as well as from European and North American schools. Very many of these have decided literary inclination and tastes — some are well-known writers of international fame wherever the Spanish tongue is esteemed. Through education, familiarity with the people

and the language, etc., they are exceptionally well adapted for undertaking this patriotic and important work before it is irrevocably too late.

During my own ethnological investigations of more than a year amongst the Aztecs, or Pipiles, of Salvador, I continuously searched for mythological material but with very meagre results. The few legends obtained amongst this people I herewith submit to the Journal of American Folk-Lore for publication.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE CALABASH-TREE AND THE TOBACCO PLANT.¹

The wizards come into the houses by night in the shapes of dogs, hogs, cats, or owls, and entice the women away with them. The women are acquainted with a number of tricks and dodges of which the men have no knowledge. The men are asleep, unaware of everything. Sesimite, or the Giant, was in the habit of coming to a house in the pueblo of Ahuachapan and carrying off the wife of one of the men to enjoy her. The neighbor, the husband's friend, observed it and gave him warning. "Do you not know," said he, "that your wife is a witch, who steals away at night in a disguise to meet her lover? Take care of yourself!" The husband kept watch over his wife, and observed her get up in the middle of the night and place a log of wood in his arms instead of herself. Then she swung herself up to the beams of the ceiling, falling straightway to the floor, where she lay headless, her head having vanished through the door.

The husband narrated to his neighbor what had happened. "What am I to do?" he said. "Let us think out something to do!" said his neighbor. "Let the body lie where it is, but put a heap of hot ashes on the spot where the head belongs. That is the best method of curing women who give themselves up to witchcraft."

The man did as he was told. Later, during the night, the head returned, but could not succeed in attaching itself to the trunk. "Where are you, you cruel husband, who have done this thing?" the head exclaimed. The husband, however, who had gone up to the loft, made no reply, but sat crouched up in a corner perfectly still. Thereupon the head flew up to the loft. When it saw the husband, it settled on his shoulder and stuck fast there. The man being aware of the fact with regard to witches, that you never get rid of them, if once they settle on your body in that manner, was grievously distressed at his woeful fate and went to the priest to inquire what he ought to do. "Take mat-

¹ In a recent paper of mine, "Die Baumkalabasse im Tropischen Amerika" (Boas Memorial Volume, New York, 1906), I have, on p. 200, referred to the sacred character of the calabash-tree; how, for example, amongst the Aztecs in Salvador, the saying holds "that when the lightning strikes a house and destroys everything in it, the calabash vessels are always left untouched," and how in the *Popol Vuh*, the holy book of the ancient Quiché Indians of Guatemala, one of the titles given one of their gods was *Ah-Raza-Tzel*, which means "The maker of calabash vessels," etc.

ters quietly and wait!" said the priest. The head, however, remained on the man's shoulder. The man wept at his misfortune, but that availed nothing. Not until after the lapse of a long time did the man succeed in enticing the head to leave his shoulder. That occurred on one occasion, when the man was out in the woods, and at a time of the year when the zapotes were just beginning to ripen. The man, as he was wandering about in the woods, caught sight of a gigantic zapote tree. "My daughter," said the man to the head, "there are some zapotes already ripe in that tree. Would it not be nice to have some zapotes to eat? I know you are fond of that kind of fruit! Get off my shoulder while I climb up the tree, and do you sit here meanwhile on my back-cloth," said the man. So saying he spread out his garment on the ground and the head settled itself down upon it. The man then climbed the tree and got hold of a few quite green zapotes, which he hurled with all his force at the head. It jumped and cried out and called upon the man for mercy. "Have pity, for mercy's sake, have pity upon me. Oh, cruel husband that you are! Do you want to kill me?" "Oh, no," said the man. "Why, I was choosing out the fruit that is ripest, those green zapotes fell off accidentally." Straightway he began anew to hurl down upon the head the hard green fruit, and the head yelled and uttered lamentations. At that moment a roe happened to be passing quite near to the spot. The head then sprang up into the air and settled on the back of the roe, who in terror made off into the woods. The plaits came undone and the hair was tossed about by the wind. At the first precipice she came to, the roe threw herself over, and nothing remained of them but "dust" and skulls (*pinole y calaveras*).

The husband then returned to the priest and reported what had happened. The priest replied: "You must now follow in the footsteps of the roe and collect all the hairs which aid you in finding the place where the head lies. Then you must bury the head with all the hair at the same spot, and you must carefully tend the mound over the grave. For from that head something will arise." The man obeyed the priest's injunctions. After burying the head he made a habit of going every fifteenth day to put the grave in order and to root up the weeds. He had been to the grave in this way many times, when one day he saw a sprout shooting up out of the mound. The young plant grew apace and soon became a tree, which one day brought forth a black flower, resembling the bowl of a pipe in shape. This flower gave place to a very large, round, green fruit. The tree was that which we now call "huachkal quahuitl" (the calabash-tree).

Once more the husband repaired to the priest and narrated what had taken place. "Be very careful of that fruit," said the priest. "Do not touch it until it is quite ripe." When the fruit had at length ripened and gone yellow, it fell to the ground. Then the priest lent the man

a saw, with which he very cautiously began to divide the shell. To his amazement he observed something moving inside the fruit. His surprise turned into alarm when he plainly heard infant voices from within the calabash. The shell of the fruit had now been cut open. Within there were four small children, three boys and a girl, who at once asked him: "Are you our father? Where then is our mother?" The mother being dead, the children were taken in hand by the husband's parents in-law, Sesimite the Giant and Tantèputz, the man-eating woman.

The virgin up in the sky, to-wit, the Moon, dispatched a messenger, carrying a bamboo joint filled with milk from her own breast to the motherless little children found in the calabash.¹ The messenger handed the joint to the alligator, who, however, drank up the milk himself. The rabbit, on hearing that, went to the alligator to ask him what he had done with the milk sent by the moon to the motherless children in the calabash. "Here it is," said the alligator, opening its mouth and stretching out its tongue. With a rapid slash the rabbit cut off the alligator's tongue, leaving only a short stump in its mouth. Thereupon the alligator dived down into a deep pool. Ever since he lost his tongue the alligator in shame frequents the deepest pools of the rivers to hide himself.

The girl in the calabash was named Xochit Sihuati, "the flower-girl." In course of time she became one of the most beautiful women that have ever lived. Her black hair was very long, and she was ever encompassed with that fresh scent that emanates from a woman on leaving the bath. "No man shall ever touch me," she said, "but after I am dead all the people in the world shall take delight in the glorious strength of which I am possessed." She died quite young, a virgin as she had vowed, and on her grave there sprang up a plant called *yel*, which has a finer aroma and is possessed of diviner qualities than any other plant in the world.²

For comparison I here quote a story about the origin of the Manioc plant or Yucca (*Manihot utilissima*, Pohl.), obtained by Count de Magelhaes amongst a certain tribe on the Amazon River, published in the "Revista Antropológica," Rio de Janeiro, 1882, translated into Spanish and inserted in the work "Quichéismos" by Dr. Santiago J. Barberena in San Salvador, 1894.

¹ Until quite recently it was the custom amongst the Indians in Nahuizalco, and perhaps still is in some cases, that when an infant died the mother deposited with it in the grave a bamboo joint with milk from her own breast.

² *Yel* is the Aztec name for the tobacco plant; in the Pipil or Aztec dialect of Salvador *yel*.

The Origin of the Manioc Plant.

One day long ago the daughter of an Indian chief, who lived in the regions where to-day the city of Santarem is situated, became with child. The girl's father swore vengeance on the man who had dishonored his house. He made inquiries of his daughter. But neither appeals, nor threats, nor punishments could cause her to name any man. She insisted that she never had had any relations with any man. The father had made up his mind to kill the girl. One day a white man appeared. He told the Indian that he ought not to kill the girl, because she was innocent and had known no man. The father listened to the man and believed him. At the end of nine months the young girl gave birth to a beautiful daughter, white as a lily. All the Indians of the neighborhood were highly astonished. Even from far they came for to look at the wonderful newborn white child. She was given the name *Mani*. She walked around and talked on the day of her birth. For all she had a sorrowing smile. At the end of a year she died without any disease or any sufferings. She was buried in the garden near the house. According to the custom of the ancestors the grave was kept clean and watered every day. One day the surface of the grave was found to be disturbed by the small sprout of an unknown plant, which no one dared to pull up. This plant grew and produced flowers and fruits. The birds which ate of the fruits got intoxicated. Later on the ground burst open and a fine-looking root showed itself. This root resembled the beautiful little body of Mani, the white girl. To the same was given the name *Mani-oc*.

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THE STORY OF THE CALABASH-TREE IN THE "POPOL VUH."¹

THE two brother wizards Hun-hun-ahpu and Vucub-hun-ahpu were condemned to death by the rulers of the nether world, Hun-came and Vucub-came, on their visiting them, inasmuch as they did not succeed in passing through the ordeals to which they were subjected. . . . "That is sufficient," said Hun-came and Vucub-came, "now your days are accomplished! Ye shall die the death! Ye shall cease to exist! Ye shall be rent in pieces and your countenances shall be hid here in this place!" They were, therefore, hewn in pieces and buried on the spot whereupon the ashes were wont to be cast. But ere that took place, the head of Hun-hun-ahpu was severed from his body and placed, by order of Hun-came and Vucub-came, between the two main branches of a dry tree by the wayside. Thereupon the tree began to blossom and bear fruit, and the fruit thereof is what we now call "jicarás." Hun-came and Vucub-came were mightily astonished at the wonder that had taken place. Round fruits were to be seen all along the branches, and shortly it was impossible to distinguish Hun-hun-ahpu's head from the other fruits on the tree. It took the shape of a calabash. All those who dwelt in the nether regions went out to behold the marvel. The tree was very highly esteemed and prized, for in a moment of time, on their depositing the head of Hun-hun-ahpu in the fork of the tree, it had received life, and they said among themselves: "Do not pluck the fruit of the tree! Do not walk beneath this tree!" Such was the determination of all those who dwell in the nether regions. Now a young girl heard the story of the miracle that had happened. We are now about to narrate how it was that she went to the spot where the tree stood.

Herein is narrated an account of a young virgin, the daughter of a great lord of the name of Cuchumaquic.

A young girl, the daughter of a great lord, Cuchumaquic by name, and of a woman of the name of Xequic (blood), heard, her father speak about the marvellous tree. Astonished at what she had heard she exclaimed: "Why should I not go down to see the tree they are talking about; for, in truth, what they relate is very strange and delightful." She went there straightway alone and went up to the foot of the tree, which was just opposite the place where the ash-heap lay. On seeing it she exclaimed in astonishment: "What beautiful fruits, and how very fruitful the tree is! I surely shall not die, shall not perish, if I take one of these fruits." Then the skull fixed between the branches spoke

¹ Translated by C. V. Hartman from *Las Historias del Origen de los Indios de Guatemala*, por el R. P. F. Francisco Ximenes, publ. 1856 by Dr. C. Scherzer, in Vienna.

The Story of the Calabash-Tree.

and said: "What do you want? These round things are only bones of the dead, but perchance you desire them nevertheless." "Yes," answered the girl, "I should like to have one of those fruits." "Stretch out your right hand," said the skull. "Gladly," said the girl, stretching up her right hand towards the skull. The skull thereupon spat right in the middle of her hand. The girl immediately drew back her hand and looked into it, without, however, observing a single trace of the spittle of the skull. "I have given you a sign," said the skull, "in my spittle and slaver; this head of mine will never speak any more, for it is only bone, there is no flesh left here. The same shall be the fate of all mighty men whoever they may be. . . . They are only honored for the sake of their flesh, and when they die human beings are terrified at the skull, and its progeny is as spittle and slaver. But if they be children of a wise and clever man, the being of the wise man is not terminated but passes to the sons and daughters he has engendered. My being has now passed into you. Rise from the realms of the dead to the earth, in order that you may not die."

So spoke the head of Hun-hun-ahpu. That was the word of wisdom and the message of Huracan, of Chipacaculha and Raxacaculha, and in accordance with their orders it was done. Then the young girl returned to her home, after hearing many words of counsel and messages. In a short time she was conscious of being with child as a result of what was only spittle.¹ The children who were born were Hun-hun-ahpu and Xbalanque. Six months afterwards the girl's father became aware of her being with child, and she was severely reprimanded by him.

¹ The idea of spittle being endowed with generative power occurs extensively even amongst the North American Indians. Remembering having observed this idea mentioned in one of the legends published by Dr. G. A. Dorsey, I communicated with him, and he very kindly furnished me with the following instances, which I here quote:—

Saliva drops into girl's mouth and she becomes pregnant. (Hoffman, *Flathead Indians*, p. 27.)

Baby comes from spittle. (Curtin, *Creation Myths*, p. 348.)

Man spat upon girl's stomach and she became pregnant. (Farrand, *Quinault Traditions*, p. 124.)

Flynx spits on girl and so she becomes pregnant. (Leit, *Thompson River Indians*, p. 37.)

From Dr. A. B. Lewis of Columbia University I have obtained another quotation from Curtin's *Creation Myths*, p. 300:—

"My grandmother," said he in the night, "I may not come back to-morrow. If anything happens, the bow and the quiver and all that are with them will fall on the bed. You will know then that some one has killed me. But a child will rise from the spittle which I have left near the head of the bed; a little boy will come up from the ground." . . .

"In the middle of the fourth night she heard crying on the ground near Tsawandi Kamsu's sleeping place. A little baby was crying, rolling, struggling, wailing. . . . The old woman went to the spot where the crying was, looked, found a baby covered with dirt, mud, and ashes. . . . 'I don't think anyone brought that baby into this house,' said the old woman to herself. 'Tsawandi Kamsu said that a baby would come from the ground, would rise from his spittle. Maybe this is his spirit that has come back and is a baby again.'"

Then assembled in the council chamber Hun-came, Vucub-came, and Cuchumaquic. The last named said: "My daughter is with child by reason of her dishonorable ways of life." So spoke Cuchumaquic, when he stepped forward before his masters. "That is sufficient," they replied; "subject her to cross-examination, that she may confess and we may hear what she has to say in her defence." "Good, noble lords," he replied, and thereupon at once asked his daughter: "Whose is the child thou hast in thy womb?" She replied: "I am not with child, O my father! No man hath ever approached unto me." "Thou hast brought dishonor upon thyself," was the father's answer. "Come hither now and carry her away to be sacrificed, and then bring me her heart in a calabash." This command was given to the owls, who were four in number. They went straightway and brought a calabash, carried away the girl, taking with them a sharp knife to cut her asunder with. The girl then said to those who had been sent: "Kill me not, for I have not done any wrong, for the fetus I have in my womb came there of itself; what happened was this: I went out to divert myself by beholding the marvel that had taken place with regard to Hun-hun-aphu's head on the ash-heap; do not therefore put me to death!" The messengers replied: "Well, then, what are we to take with us in the calabash instead of your heart? Did not our masters order that it was to be placed in this calabash? We would gladly set you at liberty." "Good," said she. "This heart does not belong to them, . . . it shall not be burnt in their sight; put in the calabash the fruit of this tree," said the girl, and the sap of the tree was red. The sap was tapped into the calabash, and at once it coagulated and formed a round ball. And the hardened sap was placed in the calabash instead of the heart, and in color it was red as blood . . . and this tree is called "granapalo colorado" or the blood tree.