

SOME EARLY AMERICAN PIONEERS.

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The brief paper that I venture to offer aims not so much to present new facts as to emphasize some little known old ones. Interwoven amid these old facts can be clearly seen the red threads brought down from dim American pre-history through its history to the present day warfare in Mexico. These red threads and old facts, when rightly scanned, will tell far more clearly than mere words can do why certain areas of Mexico are ever under the thrall of blood lust and war violence, and why other areas are by nature law abiding and prosperous under difficulties.

In order to understand clearly these facts in their sequence, we must go back almost to the beginning of things on this continent. At a period when that which is now the United States of North America was probably a tenantless waste, a large portion of what is now the Republic of Mexico was peopled by a widespread race with many branches. So widespread was it that science has not yet been able to say the last word as to its general extension and much less fix its definite boundaries. It was a brown rather than a red-skinned race, although the red shows clearly through the brown. It was short of stature, but thick-set and sturdy, its religion was nature worship with the Sun and the Serpent as its deities. This was probably the primitive race of Middle America and Mexico and very possibly of a certain large area of North America as well.

When we speak of the ancient builders of America our thoughts almost instinctively revert to the Mound Builders or the Aztecs, but this is a mistake. The

Mound Builders are now known to have been merely Indian tribes, earlier perhaps than those found and fought by our forefathers, but like them in stage of culture and general characteristics. Some of these tribes may have been ancient, but they were not builders as science now interprets that word. The Aztecs were comparatively a modern people, hardly yet firmly settled in the land from which they had driven their predecessors, as they were in turn driven by the Spaniards. They were a building people and old but not ancient, as science uses the word.

Those of whom I am now going to speak, and into whose later works I have for years delved, belonged to the last of those early pioneer races of America, so old, so ancient even, that but few remaining traces, formless mounds, half effaced glyphs carved on stone, crumbling walls, only these remain to tell of what once has been. No one wise in the knowledge of these things even thinks to name, much less to fix by exact time, the passing of these most ancient and long forgotten building races of America.¹

The last of these earlier pioneer races, call them Toltec if you will, left clear traces of their passing over various portions of Middle America and of Mexico, but nowhere perhaps so clear and well defined as upon the peninsula of Yucatan. It was from the dying embers of this last civilized race that the Aztecs kindled the first fires of their own fierce civilization. In the chronicles of the Aztecs,² written half in glyphs and half in pictures, they tell the history of their race.

A thousand and more years ago, a band of fisherfolk lived upon an island in a lagoon on the west coast of Mexico, near the Gulf of Lower California. This lagoon was called by the people who lived on its borders Mexticacan, the place of the god Mexi, the god of the region. The people were called Mexicans

¹ P. Valentini, *The Olmecas and the Tultecas* in Proceedings of American Antiquarian Society for Oct. 1882.

² *Mexico, a través de los siglos*, vol. I, lib. iv.

or the Mexica, "the people of Mexi." The island upon which that particular group of fisher-folk lived was called Aztlan, the place of the white herons,³ and the people were called Aztecail or the Azteca, the people of Aztlan. There came a time when for some unknown reason there was a great outpouring of the people from this island to the mainland. Possibly it was by reason of quarrellings among themselves, for these fisherfolk of Aztlan were a turbulent, domineering people, but more probably it was because the adventurous ones among them had heard and listened to that eternal call of nature that ever bids man seek new homes in distant regions. Be that as it may, these Azteca of the Mexica crossed to the mainland and then commenced that famous migration of three hundred years during which they suffered all things that man may suffer and live, constantly fighting, sometimes conquering, sometimes conquered, until they reached Tenochtitlan and there these Azteca of the Mexica founded an empire that was to the New World what Rome was to the Old, until the Spaniards came.

These few brief sentences are at once the epitome, the epic and the epitaph of that wonderful people of a still more wonderful empire—an empire that, by reason of its complex code of laws carried out with inflexible justice, its disciplined army, widely extended and well protected commerce, and a certain refinement of art and action, made it compare well with that Spain whence its conquerors came.

The hands of time move around the dial of centuries. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain lie in their royal sepulchres. Columbus, the great Admiral, lies in a disputed tomb. Juana, the mad queen, at last rests quietly in her grave. Charles the Fifth, her son, is on the throne of Spain and in the distant new world, the brown-skinned Emperor of Anahuac, Moctezuma II, is frantically consulting the omens.

³ "Código Aubin."

While Herman Cortez with mailed fist is knocking at the gateway of his empire, and will not be denied.

And still the hands move round the dial. Moctezuma II, Emperor of the Aztecs, dies a prisoner. Cuittahuac, his successor, dies of the plague. Guah-temoctzin, the last Emperor of Anahuac, is tortured and hung. The feathered standard of the Moctezumas no longer is seen on Chepultepec, "the hill of the grasshoppers." The Royal standard of Charles the Fifth, on the roof of the Palace, proclaims New Spain. The Aztec Empire is ended.

Thus, in bold broad outline, with many breaks and dubious place, runs the history of America's earliest pioneers down to the coming of the Spaniards.

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