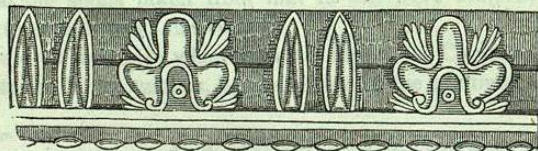
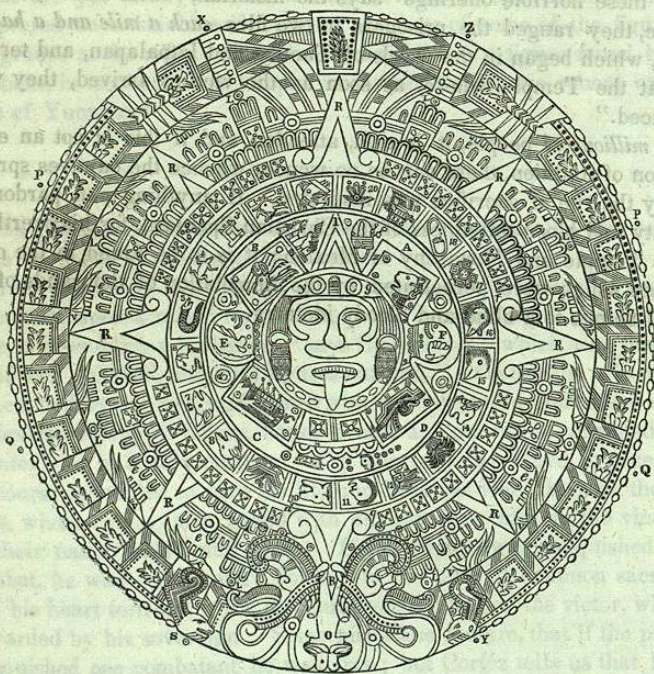


of the god who came to encounter him; and being this killed to his fortune and liberty, he was nevertheless slain by his enemies, who, to his fall, and to his death, had been waiting for him. His death was not a sacrifice, but a sacrifice to his death. The number of the victims, with whose blood the Tlacahualtepec was watered, is not known. It is said that 30,000 victims were offered to the god, but this is not known. The question may be asked, if the victims were offered to the god, why were they not offered to the god? The answer is, that the victims were offered to the god, and the god was the one who received them. The victims were offered to the god, and the god was the one who received them.

LETTER XIX.

THE MEXICAN CALENDAR. FIRE-WORSHIP, ETC.



The carved stone represented in the plate was found in the year 1790, about six feet below the surface of the Plaza, in the city of Mexico. The opinion of the best antiquarians is, that it was the *Tonalponalli*, or "solar reckoning" of the ancient Mexicans, derived by them probably from the Toltecs.

Before describing this relic, I will present a brief account of the division of time among these nations, illustrating in this manner and by the stone itself, one branch of the arts and sciences, at least, in which they had made a great and civilized progress.

The Mexicans had two Calendars by which they computed Time; the first being used for the "reckoning of the moon," and the regulation of their religious festivals, and the other for the "reckoning of the sun," or civil purposes.

Their civil year consisted of 18 months of 20 days each, by which division they gave the year 360 days; but the remaining five days were added to the last month, and bore the name of *nemontemi*, or "useless days."

The tropical year being six hours longer than 365 days, they lost a day every four years; but this fact appears to have been entirely disregarded by them in their calculations, until the expiration of their cycle of 52 years; when, having lost, in all, 13 days, they added that number to the period, before they commenced another cycle.

The 18 months had each a name derived from some festival, bird, plant, or fruit, occurring or appearing at that season, which name was designated by a peculiar *hieroglyphic*. The 20 days of the month had also each a name and mark, that was ever the same in all the eighteen. They reckoned by cycles of 52 years; and subdivided the months into four periods, or weeks of five days; each day of which commenced, as among the Romans and other nations, at sunrise, and was separated into eight portions.*

* McCulloh's Res: 201, et seq.

The stone (of which I have presented an extremely accurate drawing from one made with the greatest care by De Gama,) is now walled against the base of one of the towers of the Cathedral, where it passes by the name of *el Relox de Montezuma*, or "Montezuma's watch." It is a vast mass of basalt, eleven feet eight inches in diameter, and the circular portion is raised by a rim of about $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the broken square of basalt, out of which the whole was originally carved. This rim is adorned with the sculpture represented in the second figure.

De Gama, in his "*Discripcion Historica*," has prepared a long and very learned account of the various figures and symbols with which this Calendar is covered, and from his observations, and those of Nebel, I have

* McCulloh's Res: 201, et seq.

digested the following description. Involved as almost all antiquarian researches are in obscurity, and free as those who engage in them are to mix up their fancies and theories with the slightest facts upon which they can found a hypothesis, I confess that I do not rely entirely upon the surmises of the writers I have cited. Yet they are the only persons who have hitherto attempted to unravel the mystery, and I am therefore obliged either to present their conjectures or none.

The large head in the centre, with a protruding tongue, is said to represent the sun; while the triangular figures marked with the letter R, and the other figures marked with the letter L, denote the larger and lesser rays with which the Indians surrounded that luminary.

Around this central sun are four squares, denoted by A, B, C, D, which, together with the circular figures E F at the sides of the triangle, I, at the top, and the character H at the bottom, combined, (according to De Gama,) to form the symbol of the sun's movement—or perhaps the symbols of the four weeks into which the month was divided.

The hieroglyphs denoted by the numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, &c. up to 20, are the days of the month, and the rest of the figures around the zone are somewhat fancifully said to represent the milky way known to the ancients by the name of *Cillalincue*. By an equal stretch of the imagination, the waving lines, marked V, are supposed to indicate the clouds, which were venerated as gods called *Almaque*, the inseparable companions of TLALOC. De Gama thinks that the small squares at *e* are symbols of the mountains where the clouds are formed. Such are the satisfactory conjectures of antiquarians!

Gnomons were placed in the holes at X, Z, PP, QQ, and YY; the stone was then set up vertically due east and west, with its carved face to the south; and by means of threads stretched from the tops of the gnomons and the shadows they cast on the surface of the stone, the seasons of the year, and the periods of the day, were determined with astronomical accuracy.

* * * * *

Various other carved stones intended for astronomical purposes, have been discovered at different times throughout the Valley of Mexico and its neighborhood. De Gama relates, that "in the year 1775, while laborers were excavating at the hill of Chalpultepec, they laid bare a cluster of curiously sculptured rocks, which, after a careful examination, he believed had once formed a portion of the system by which the Mexicans determined the exact periods of sunrise and sunset at the equinoxes, and regulated the time during the remainder of the year." But when he returned to the hill for the purpose of further investigation, he found these rocks and all their carving had been *destroyed by the ignorant excavators*,

through the utter carelessness and neglect of the authorities of the place. The same fate was shared by another astronomical erection, which was found on the hill of Tezcocingo, on the eastern side of the lake of Tezcoco, to which I shall have occasion to allude in an account of a visit I paid to the pyramids of St. Juan Teotihuacan.

These are the few hasty and very imperfect sketches I have collected, to illustrate one branch of the art and science of these people; and I will conclude them by an account of a singular superstition which is related by the Baron Humboldt to have existed, in regard to the *termination of their cycle of 52 years*. They firmly believed that the sun would return no more on his diurnal course, and that evil spirits would descend to destroy mankind!

"On the last day of the great cycle the sacred fires were extinguished in all their temples and dwellings, and the people devoted themselves to prayer. At the approach of night no one dared to kindle a flame—their vessels of clay were broken, their garments rent, and whatever was precious destroyed as useless in the approaching ruin. In this mad superstition, pregnant women became the objects of peculiar horror to men; they covered their faces with paper masks, they imprisoned them in their granaries; and believed that when the final catastrophe occurred, these unfortunate females, transformed into tigers, would join with the demons and avenge themselves for the injustice and cruelty of men.

"As soon as it became dark on that awful evening, a grand and solemn procession of the "NEW FIRE" was commenced. The priests put on the garments of the various idols, and followed by the sad and bewildered people, ascended a hill about six miles from the city.

"This mournful march was called the "procession of the gods," and was supposed to be their final departure from their temples and altars.

"When the solemn train had reached the top of the hill, it rested until the *plerades* ascended to the zenith, and then commenced the sacrifice of a human victim, stretched on the stone of sacrifice, and covered on the breast with a wooden shield which the chief priest *inflamed by friction*.

"The victim received the fatal blow or wound from the usual obsidian knife of sacrifice, and as soon as life was extinct, the machine to create fire was put in motion on the board over his bosom. When the blaze had kindled, the body was thrown on an immense pile, the flames of which instantly ascended into the air, and denoted the promise of the sun's return! All who had been unable to join in the sacred procession of the departing gods, had climbed to the terraces of houses and the tops of Teocallis, whence they strained their eyes toward the spot where the hoped-for flame was to appear; and as soon as it burst upon their sight, hailed it with joyful shouts and acclamations, as a token of the benevolence of the gods and the preservation of their race for another cycle.

"Runners, placed at regular distances from each other, held aloft torches of resinous pine, by which they transferred the new fire to each other, and carried it from village to village, throughout the Empire, de-

positing it anew in every temple, whence it was again distributed to the dwellings of the people.

"When the sun arose above the horizon on the succeeding day, the shouting and joy were renewed by the people in the city, toward which at that moment the priests and crowd took up the line of returning march. It was the restoration of their gods to their deserted shrines!

"The imprisoned women were immediately released; the whole population clad themselves in new garments; the temples were purified and whitened, and everything that was requisite for domestic comfort, splendor or necessity, was renewed under the promise of renewed life and protection from the gods."

There is scarcely a country of the world, in which there are not or have not been traces of this adoration of the sun, the great source of life, light, fruition, and beauty; and, among the brutal rites of the Mexican priesthood, it is gratifying to observe a festival like this which has in itself something natural and dramatic.

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THE CITY OF MEXICO AS IT WAS AT THE CONQUEST.

LETTER XX.

THE CITY OF MEXICO AS IT WAS AT THE CONQUEST.

AFTER having given an account of the antiquities which survived the ravages of the conquerors, (who, with a blind zeal to establish their power and religion, overthrew temple, tower, and almost every record of the Indians,) it has struck me that a notice or sketch of the city of Montezuma, its sovereign and people, would not be uninteresting to even the most careless reader. I have, therefore, gathered from the letters of Cortéz to the Emperor Charles the V., and the history of Bernal Diaz del Castillo, such accounts as appear to be most authentic, not only because they impress us with the grandeur and advanced civilization of the Indians, but because they may probably serve to establish a connection between the inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico and the people who, dwelling farther south, were the builders and occupants of the temples and palaces which have lately been revealed to us in the picturesque pages of Stephens and Catherwood.

"The province which constitutes the principal territory of Montezuma," (says Cortéz in his letter to Charles the V.,) "is circular, and entirely surrounded by lofty and rugged mountains, and the circumference of it is full seventy leagues. In this plain there are two lakes which nearly occupy the whole of it, as the people use canoes for more than fifty leagues round. One of these lakes is of fresh water, and the other, which is larger, is of salt water. They are divided, on one side, by a small collection of high hills, which stand in the centre of the plain, and they unite in a level strait formed between these hills and the high mountains, which strait is a gun-shot wide, and the people of the cities and other settlements which are in these lakes, communicate together in their canoes by water, without the necessity of going by land. And as this great salt lake ebbs and flows with the tide, as the sea does, in every flood the water flows from it into the other fresh lake as impetuously as if it were a large river, and consequently at the ebb, the fresh lake flows into the salt.

"This great city of Temixtitlan, (meaning Tenochtitlan, Mexico,) is founded in this salt lake; and from terra firma to the body of the city, the distance is two leagues on which ever side they please to enter it.

"It has four entrances, or causeways, made by the hand of man, as wide as two horsemen's lances.