

plants, and flowers with much taste. Among their chief productions were maize, cotton, cacao, the maguey or aloe, chile, etc. The maguey alone furnished the poor with almost all the necessities of life: paper, thread, needles, cloth, shoes, stockings, and cordage from the leaves, the thickest part of these with the trunk furnishing besides a substantial dish, and pulque and mezcal from the fermented juice. From the juice of the maize-stalk they prepared sugar; from the cacao they made chocolate (Aztec, *chocolatl*), which they formed into tablets. In mining and metallurgy they were very expert. They exercised the arts of casting, engraving, chasing, and carving in metal with great skill; and in looms of simple construction they made manta (cotton cloth) and other tissues, some of which were of exquisite fineness, interwoven with rabbit-hair and feathers, their only substitutes for silk and wool, and painted or dyed in most gorgeous colors. With the feathers of birds tastefully disposed on fine cotton webs they made garments of the utmost magnificence. Buying and selling, there being no shops, were carried on in public squares or market-places. Earthenware of every description, and suited for every domestic use, was one of the chief Mexican industries; and many of the articles were painted in showy colors and designs. No beasts of burden were used, all carrying being done either by water, chiefly on the lakes, where a marvellous number of vessels were employed, or on men's backs. The maritime commerce was probably very trifling. For the rapid transmission of news towers were erected at intervals of six miles along the high-roads, where couriers were always in waiting for despatches, which were transferred from hand to hand at each stage. Despatches were thus carried three hundred miles in a day. The different trades were commonly grouped into a species of guild. The women shared equally with the men as well in social festivities as in labor. The Mexicans were simple in dress, but given to an inordinate display of ornaments. The people were courteous and polished, and strict observers of the proprieties of life.

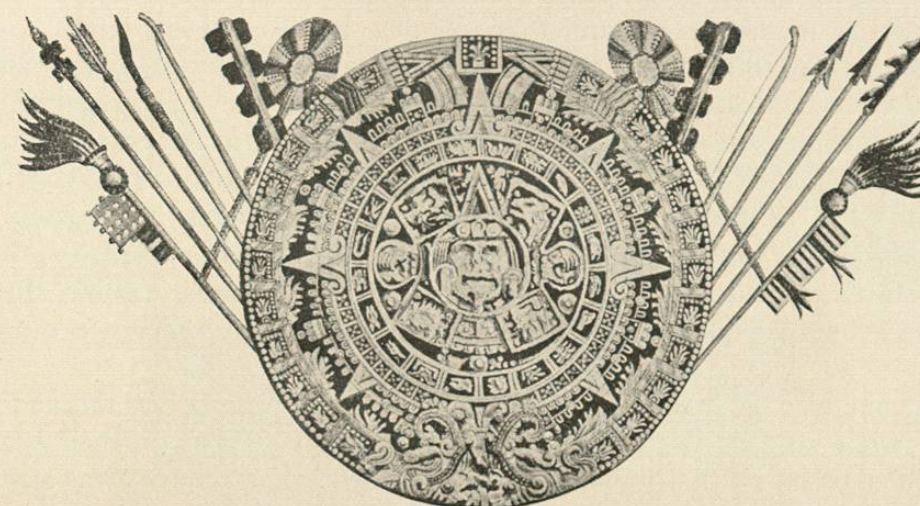
The ancient temple of the Aztecs in the city of Mexico occupied the site of the present cathedral. It was a pyramidal edifice, constructed by Ahuitzotli, accounts of which appear in all histories of the Spanish invasion. It occupied, with all its different edifices and sanctuaries, not only the ground the cathedral now stands on, but a part of the plaza and streets adjoining. We are told that within its enclosure were five hundred dwellings; that its hall was built of stone and lime, and ornamented with stone serpents. We hear of its four great gates, fronting the four cardinal points; of its stone-paved court, great stone stairs, and sanctuaries dedicated to the gods of war; of the square destined for religious dances, and the colleges for the priests and seminaries for the priestesses; of the horrible temple, whose door was an enormous serpent's mouth; of the temple of mirrors, and that of shells; of the house set apart for the emperor's prayers; of the consecrated fountains, the birds kept for sacrifice, the gardens for the holy flowers, and of the terrible towers composed of the skulls of the victims,—strange mixture of the beautiful and the horrible. We are told that five thousand priests chanted night and day in the great temple to the honor and in the service of the monstrous idols, who were anointed thrice a day with the most precious perfumes, and that of these priests the most austere were clothed in black, their long hair dyed with ink, and their bodies anointed with the ashes of burnt scorpions and spiders; their chiefs were the sons of kings.

It is remarkable, by the way, that their god of war, *Mejitli*, was said to have been born of a woman—a Holy Virgin—who was in the service of the temple, and that when the priests, having knowledge of her disgrace, would have stoned her, a voice was heard, saying, "Fear not, mother, for I shall save thy honor and my glory;" upon which the god was born, with a shield in his left hand and an arrow in his right, a plume of green feathers on his head, his face

painted blue, and his left leg adorned with feathers. Thus was his gigantic statue represented.

There were gods of the water, of the earth, of night, fire, hell; goddesses of flowers and of corn. There were oblations offered of bread and flowers and jewels, but we are assured that from twenty to fifty thousand human victims were sacrificed annually in Mexico alone. That these accounts are exaggerated, even though a bishop is among the narrators, we can scarcely doubt; but if the tenth part be the truth, let the memory of Cortez be sacred, who, with the Cross, stopped the shedding of innocent blood, founded the cathedral on the ruins of the temple, which had so often resounded with human groans, and, in the place of these blood-smearing idols, enshrined the mild form of the Virgin.

It was encompassed by a stone wall about eight feet high, ornamented on the outer side by figures of serpents in basso-relievo, and pierced on the four sides by gate-ways opening on the four principal streets. Over each gate was an arsenal, and barracks near the temple were garrisoned by ten thousand soldiers. The temple itself was a solid, pyramidal structure of



CALENDAR STONE.

earth and pebbles, coated externally with hewn stones. It was square, its sides facing the cardinal points, and was divided into five stories, each of which receded, so as to be smaller than that below it. The ascent was by a flight of one hundred and fourteen steps on the outside, so contrived that to reach the top it was necessary to pass four times round the whole edifice; and the base of the temple is supposed to have been three hundred feet square. The summit was a large area, paved with broad, flat stones. On it were two towers or sanctuaries, and before each was an altar, on which a fire was kept continually burning. The top of this remarkable structure commanded a superb view of the city, lake, valley, and surrounding mountains.

Inside the museum, to-day, one may see the old Aztec calendar, a round stone covered with hieroglyphics, undecipherable to us, but full of meaning to countless thousands of ages ago. It is a mass of porphyritic stone of ten feet diameter and circular shape. In the centre is a human head with the tongue hanging out, cut in relief. Around this head are five circles of hieroglyphic figures, intended for the computation of the different divisions of time in the calendar of the ancient Mexicans. The civil year was divided into eighteen months of twenty days each. The five intercalary days were added to the last month, and the fractions of hours



were computed at the end of a cycle of fifty-two years. Thirteen years constituted a *tlalpilli*; four of these a cycle of fifty-two years, which were represented by bundles of reeds bound together with a string; two of these cycles of fifty-two years constituted another division of a hundred and four years, which was called an old age,—I do not remember the Mexican term. I copy the following extract of a very interesting letter upon the subject from the Abbé Hervás to Clavigero:

"The Mexican year began on the 26th of February, a day celebrated in the era of Nabonassar, which was fixed by the Egyptians, seven hundred and forty-seven years before the Christian era, for the beginning of their month Toth, corresponding with the meridian of the same day. If these priests fixed upon this day as an epoch because it was celebrated in Egypt, we have here the Mexican calendar corresponding greatly with the Egyptian.

"On the 26th of February of the above-mentioned year, according to the meridian of Alexandria, which was built three centuries after, the year properly began. The year and century have from time immemorial been regarded by the Mexicans with a degree of intelligence which does not at all correspond with their arts and sciences. In them they were certainly very inferior to the Greeks and Romans, but the discernment which appears in their calendar equals them to the most enlightened nations. Hence we may imagine that this calendar has not been the discovery of the Mexicans, but that they have received it from some more enlightened people, and as the last are not to be found in America, we must seek for them elsewhere, in Asia or in Egypt. This circumstance is confirmed by your affirmation that the Mexicans had their calendar from the Toltecas (originating from Asia), whose year, according to Boturini, was exactly adjusted by the course of the sun more than a hundred years before the Christian era, and also from observing that other nations, namely, the Chiapanese, made use of the same calendar with the Mexicans, without any difference but that of their symbols."

In the museum, also, is their "Stone of Sacrifice," with a hollow in the middle where the victim was laid, while six priests, dressed in red, with green plumes on their heads, held him down and the chief priest cut him open, took out his heart, and offered it as a sacrifice to the idol of the Aztecs. Thank Heaven! Mexico of to-day has outgrown such practices.

When the flag of the republic was unfurled in 1821, the symbol upon it was that of the old native race,—the eagle and the cactus, the emblems of the Aztecs. They were a people without means of intercommunication, of different languages, in whom was mingled the poetry of paganism with the common principles of Christianity. Their intellectual classes were selfish and inert, their subdued classes indifferent; their wants were simple and easily supplied, and therefore there was no incentive to manufactures, commerce, or education; they knew little of arms and possessed none. All this made up a reason why these people did not sooner seize their chances for building up a representative government on the ruins of hereditary despotism.

Clinging yet with the Indian pertinacity to ancient customs in dress, in traditions, and in manners, many of the common people seem to a stranger as far removed from the progress of events to-day as the fossil remains of a past age. They apply themselves to any work which interests them, but as soon as that is over they relapse again into indifference. Good or bad, the gentle, trusting, superstitious, easily yielding nature of their ancestors is repeated and continued in the descendants. Ages of misrule and oppression did not break their sweet kindliness of soul nor dull the instinctive courtesy of loyal elevation natural to the Aztec citizen.

Patriotic they are, too. In spite of their seeming indifference, a strong vein of national spirit runs through the people. Hidalgo, Morelos, Guerrero, Juarez, Diaz, are to them living embodiments of vital truths, brave lights of patriotism that no reign of terror can obliterate. They have kept alive the spirit of liberty. The eagerness with which, in the plazas of many towns, are pointed out monuments, "*Chihuahua á Hidalgo*" and "*Tacubaya á sus Mártiros*," proves all this.

There is everything to hope for a country whose people have this principle so strongly intrenched. Once let them be aroused to a proper understanding of their own importance, and the threads of their advance will be quickly woven into the strong fabric of progress.

