ESSENTIAL AMERICAN HISTORY

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THE MYTHS OF THE NEW WORLD

The Myths Of The New World

A Treatise On The Symbolism And Mythology Of The Red Race Of America

Daniel G. Brinton

Contents:

The Myths Of The New World, Daniel G. Brinton
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Germany

ISBN: 9783849619923

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PREFACE.

I have written this work more for the thoughtful general reader than the antiquary. It is a study of an obscure portion of the intellectual history of our species as exemplified in one of its varieties.

What are man’s earliest ideas of a soul and a God, and of his own origin and destiny? Why do we find certain myths, such as of a creation, a flood, an after-world; certain symbols, as the bird, the serpent, the cross; certain numbers, as the three, the four, the seven—intimately associated with these ideas by every race? What are the laws of growth of natural religions? How do they acquire such an influence, and is this influence for good or evil? Such are some of the universally interesting questions which I attempt to solve by an analysis of the simple faiths of a savage race.

If in so doing I succeed in investing with a more general interest the fruitful theme of American ethnology, my objects will have been accomplished.

Philadelphia,
April, 1868.

CHAPTER I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RED RACE.

When Paul, at the request of the philosophers of Athens, explained to them his views on divine things, he asserted, among other startling novelties, that “God has made of one blood all nations of the earth, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from every one of us.”

Here was an orator advocating the unity of the human species, affirming that the chief end of man is to develop an innate idea of God, and that all religions, except the one he preached, were examples of more or less unsuccessful attempts to do so. No wonder the Athenians, who acknowledged no kinship to barbarians, who looked dubiously at the doctrine of innate ideas, and were divided in opinion as to whether their mythology was a shrewd device of legislators to keep the populace in subjection, a veiled natural philosophy, or the celestial reflex of their own history, mocked at such a babbler and went their ways. The generations of philosophers that followed them partook of their doubts and approved their opinions, quite down to our own times. But now, after weighing the question maturely, we are compelled to admit that the Apostle was not so wide of the mark after all—that, in fact, the latest and best authorities, with no bias in his favor, support his position and may almost be said to paraphrase his words. For according to a writer who ranks second to none in the science of ethnology, the severest and most recent investigations show that “not only do acknowledged facts permit the assumption of the unity of the human species, but this opinion is attended with fewer discrepancies, and has greater inner consistency than the opposite one of specific diversity.”2-1 And as to the religions of heathendom, the view of Saint Paul is but expressed with a

more poetic turn by a distinguished living author when he calls them “not fables, but truths, though clothed in a garb woven by fancy, wherein the web is the notion of God, the ideal of reason in the soul of man, the thought of the Infinite.”2-2

Inspiration and science unite therefore to bid us dismiss the effete prejudice that natural religions either arise as the ancient philosophies taught, or that they are, as the Dark Ages imagined, subtle nets of the devil spread to catch human souls. They are rather the unaided attempts of man to find out God; they are the efforts of the reason struggling to define the infinite; they are the expressions of that “yearning after the gods” which the earliest of poets discerned in the hearts of all men. Studied in this sense they are rich in teachings. Would we estimate the intellectual and æsthetic culture of a people, would we generalize the laws of progress, would we appreciate the sublimity of Christianity, and read the seals of its authenticity: the natural conceptions of divinity reveal them. No mythologies are so crude, therefore, none so barbarous, but deserve the attention of the philosophic mind, for they are never the empty fictions of an idle fancy, but rather the utterances, however inarticulate, of an immortal and ubiquitous intuition.

These considerations embolden me to approach with some confidence even the aboriginal religions of America, so often stigmatized as incoherent fetichisms, so barren, it has been said, in grand or beautiful creations. The task bristles with difficulties. Carelessness, prepossessions, and ignorance have disfigured them with false colors and foreign additions without number. The first maxim, therefore, must be to sift and scrutinize authorities, and to reject whatever betrays the plastic hand of the European. For the religions developed by the red race, not those

mixed creeds learned from foreign invaders, are to be the subjects of our study. Then will remain the formidable undertaking of reducing the authentic materials thus obtained to system and order, and this not by any preconceived theory of what they ought to conform to, but learning from them the very laws of religious growth they illustrate. The historian traces the birth of arts, science, and government to man's dependence on nature and his fellows for the means of self-preservation. Not that man receives these endowments from without, but that the stern step-mother, Nature, forces him by threats and stripes to develop his own inherent faculties. So with religion: The idea of God does not, and cannot, proceed from the external world, but, nevertheless, it finds its *historical* origin also in the desperate struggle for life, in the satisfaction of the animal wants and passions, in those vulgar aims and motives which possessed the mind of the primitive man to the exclusion of everything else.

There is an ever present embarrassment in such inquiries. In dealing with these matters beyond the cognizance of the senses, the mind is forced to express its meaning in terms transferred from sensuous perceptions, or under symbols borrowed from the material world. These transfers must be understood, these symbols explained, before the real meaning of a myth can be reached. He who fails to guess the riddle of the sphynx, need not hope to gain admittance to the shrine. With delicate ear the faint whispers of thought must be apprehended which prompt the intellect when it names the immaterial from the material; when it chooses from the infinity of visible forms those meet to shadow forth Divinity.

Two lights will guide us on this venturesome path. Mindful of the watchword of inductive science, to proceed from the known to the unknown, the inquiry will be put whether the

aboriginal languages of America employ the same tropes to express such ideas as deity, spirit, and soul, as our own and kindred tongues. If the answer prove affirmative, then not only have we gained a firm foothold whence to survey the whole edifice of their mythology; but from an unexpected quarter arises evidence of the unity of our species far weightier than any mere anatomy can furnish, evidence from the living soul, not from the dead body. True that the science of American linguistics is still in its infancy, and that a proper handling of the materials it even now offers involves a more critical acquaintance with its innumerable dialects than I possess; but though the gleaning be sparse, it is enough that I break the ground. Secondly, religious rites are living commentaries on religious beliefs. At first they are rude representations of the supposed doings of the gods. The Indian rain-maker mounts to the roof of his hut, and rattling vigorously a dry gourd containing pebbles, to represent the thunder, scatters water through a reed on the ground beneath, as he imagines up above in the clouds do the spirits of the storm. Every spring in ancient Delphi was repeated in scenic ceremony the combat of Apollo and the Dragon, the victory of the lord of bright summer over the demon of chilling winter. Thus do forms and ceremonies reveal the meaning of mythology, and the origin of its fables.

Let it not be objected that this proposed method of analysis assumes that religions begin and develop under the operation of inflexible laws. The soul is shackled by no fatalism. Formative influences there are, deep seated, far reaching, escaped by few, but like those which of yore astrologers imputed to the stars, they potently incline, they do not coerce. Language, pursuits, habits, geographical position, and those subtle mental traits which make up the characteristics of races and nations, all tend to deflect from a given standard the religious life of the individual and the

mass. It is essential to give these due weight, and a necessary preface therefore to an analysis of the myths of the red race is an enumeration of its peculiarities, and of its chief families as they were located when first known to the historian.

Of all such modifying circumstances none has greater importance than the means of expressing and transmitting intellectual action. The spoken and the written language of a nation reveal to us its prevailing, and to a certain degree its unavoidable mode of thought. Here the red race offers a striking phenomenon. There is no other trait that binds together its scattered clans, and brands them as members of one great family, so unmistakably as this of language. From the Frozen Ocean to the Land of Fire, without a single exception, the native dialects, though varying infinitely in words, are marked by a peculiarity in construction which is found nowhere else on the globe,6-1 and which is so foreign to the genius of *our* tongue that it is no easy matter to explain it. It is called by philologists the *polysynthetic* construction. What it is will best appear by comparison. Every grammatical sentence conveys one leading idea with its modifications and relations. Now a Chinese would express these latter by unconnected syllables, the precise bearing of which could only be guessed by their position; a Greek or a German would use independent words, indicating their relations by terminations meaningless in themselves; an Englishman gains the same end chiefly by the use of particles and by position. Very different from all these is the spirit of a polysynthetic language. It seeks to unite in the most intimate manner all relations and modifications with the leading idea, to merge one in the other by altering the forms of the words themselves and welding them together, to express the whole in one word, and to banish any conception except as it arises in relation to others. Thus in

many American tongues there is, in fact, no word for father, mother, brother, but only for my, your, his father, etc. This has advantages and defects. It offers marvellous facilities for defining the perceptions of the senses with the utmost accuracy, but regarding everything in the concrete, it is unfriendly to the nobler labors of the mind, to abstraction and generalization. In the numberless changes of these languages, their bewildering flexibility, their variable forms, and their rapid deterioration, they seem to betray a lack of individuality, and to resemble the vague and tumultuous history of the tribes who employ them. They exhibit an almost incredible laxity. It is nothing uncommon for the two sexes to use different names for the same object, and for nobles and vulgar, priests and people, the old and the young, nay, even the married and single, to observe what seem to the European ear quite different modes of expression. Families and whole villages suddenly drop words and manufacture others in their places out of mere caprice or superstition, and a few years' separation suffices to produce a marked dialectic difference. In their copious forms and facility of reproduction they remind one of those anomalous animals, in whom, when a limb is lopped, it rapidly grows again, or even if cut in pieces each part will enter on a separate life quite unconcerned about his fellows. But as the naturalist is far from regarding this superabundant vitality as a characteristic of a higher type, so the philologist justly assigns these tongues a low position in the linguistic scale. Fidelity to form, here as everywhere, is the test of excellence. At the outset, we divine there can be nothing very subtle in the mythologies of nations with such languages. Much there must be that will be obscure, much that is vague, an exhausting variety in repetition, and a strong tendency to lose the idea in the symbol.

What definiteness of outline might be preserved must depend on the care with which the old stories of the gods were passed from one person and one generation to another. The fundamental myths of a race have a surprising tenacity of life. How many centuries had elapsed between the period the Germanic hordes left their ancient homes in Central Asia, and when Tacitus listened to their wild songs on the banks of the Rhine? Yet we know that through those unnumbered ages of barbarism and aimless roving, these songs, “their only sort of history or annals,” says the historian, had preserved intact the story of Mannus, the Sanscrit Manu, and his three sons, and of the great god Tuisco, the Indian Dyu.9-1 So much the more do all means invented by the red race to record and transmit thought merit our careful attention. Few and feeble they seem to us, mainly shifts to aid the memory. Of some such, perhaps, not a single tribe was destitute. The tattoo marks on the warrior’s breast, his string of gristly scalps, the bear’s claws around his neck, were not only trophies of his prowess, but records of his exploits, and to the contemplative mind contain the rudiments of the beneficent art of letters. Did he draw in rude outline on his skin tent figures of men transfixed with arrows as many as he had slain enemies, his education was rapidly advancing. He had mastered the elements of *picture writing*, beyond which hardly the wisest of his race progressed. Figures of the natural objects connected by symbols having fixed meanings make up the whole of this art. The relative frequency of the latter marks its advancement from a merely figurative to an ideographic notation. On what principle of mental association a given sign was adopted to express a certain idea, why, for instance, on the Chipeway scrolls a circle means *spirits*, and a horned snake *life*, it is often hard to guess. The difficulty grows when we find that to the initiated the same sign calls up quite different ideas, as the subject of the writer varies from war to love, or from

the chase to religion. The connection is generally beyond the power of divination, and the key to ideographic writing once lost can never be recovered.

The number of such arbitrary characters in the Chipeway notation is said to be over two hundred, but if the distinction between a figure and a symbol were rigidly applied, it would be much reduced. This kind of writing, if it deserves the name, was common throughout the continent, and many specimens of it, scratched on the plane surfaces of stones, have been preserved to the present day. Such is the once celebrated inscription on Dighton Rock, Massachusetts, long supposed to be a record of the Northmen of Vinland; such those that mark the faces of the cliffs which overhang the waters of the Orinoco, and those that in Oregon, Peru, and La Plata have been the subject of much curious speculation. They are alike the mute and meaningless epitaphs of vanished generations.

I would it could be said that in favorable contrast to our ignorance of these inscriptions is our comprehension of the highly wrought pictography of the Aztecs. No nation ever reduced it more to a system. It was in constant use in the daily transactions of life. They manufactured for writing purposes a thick, coarse paper from the leaves of the agave plant by a process of maceration and pressure. An Aztec book closely resembles one of our quarto volumes. It is made of a single sheet, twelve to fifteen inches wide, and often sixty or seventy feet long, and is not rolled, but folded either in squares or zigzags in such a manner that on opening it there are two pages exposed to view. Thin wooden boards are fastened to each of the outer leaves, so that the whole presents as neat an appearance, remarks Peter Martyr, as if it had come from the shop of a skilful bookbinder. They also covered buildings, tapestries, and scrolls of parchment with these devices, and for trifling

transactions were familiar with the use of *slates* of soft stone from which the figures could readily be erased with water.11-1 What is still more astonishing, there is reason to believe, in some instances, their figures were not painted, but actually *printed* with movable blocks of wood on which the symbols were carved in relief, though this was probably confined to those intended for ornament only.

In these records we discern something higher than a mere symbolic notation. They contain the germ of a phonetic alphabet, and represent sounds of spoken language. The symbol is often not connected with the *idea* but with the *word*. The mode in which this is done corresponds precisely to that of the rebus. It is a simple method, readily suggesting itself. In the middle ages it was much in vogue in Europe for the same purpose for which it was chiefly employed in Mexico at the same time—the writing of proper names. For example, the English family Bolton was known in heraldry by a *tun* transfixed by a *bolt*. Precisely so the Mexican emperor Ixcoatl is mentioned in the Aztec manuscripts under the figure of a serpent *coatl*, pierced by obsidian knives *ixtli*, and Moquauhzoma by a mouse-trap *montli*, an eagle *quauhtli*, a lancet *zo*, and a hand *maitl*. As a syllable could be expressed by any object whose name commenced with it, as few words can be given the form of a rebus without some change, as the figures sometimes represent their full phonetic value, sometimes only that of their initial sound, and as universally the attention of the artist was directed less to the sound than to the idea, the didactic painting of the Mexicans, whatever it might have been to them, is a sealed book to us, and must remain so in great part. Moreover, it is entirely undetermined whether it should be read from the first to the last page, or *vice versa*, whether from right to left or from left to right, from bottom to top or from top to bottom, around the edges of the page toward the centre, or each line in the opposite direction

from the preceding one. There are good authorities for all these methods,12-1 and they may all be correct, for there is no evidence that any fixed rule had been laid down in this respect.

Immense masses of such documents were stored in the imperial archives of ancient Mexico. Torquemada asserts that five cities alone yielded to the Spanish governor on one requisition no less than sixteen thousand volumes or scrolls! Every leaf was destroyed. Indeed, so thorough and wholesale was the destruction of these memorials now so precious in our eyes that hardly enough remain to whet the wits of antiquaries. In the libraries of Paris, Dresden, Pesth, and the Vatican are, however, a sufficient number to make us despair of deciphering them had we for comparison all which the Spaniards destroyed.

Beyond all others the Mayas, resident on the peninsula of Yucatan, would seem to have approached nearest a true phonetic system. They had a regular and well understood alphabet of twenty seven elementary sounds, the letters of which are totally different from those of any other nation, and evidently original with themselves. But besides these they used a large number of purely conventional symbols, and moreover were accustomed constantly to employ the ancient pictographic method in addition as a sort of commentary on the sound represented. What is more curious, if the obscure explanation of an ancient writer can be depended upon, they not only aimed to employ an alphabet after the manner of ours, but to express the sound absolutely like our phonographic signs do.13-1 With the aid of this alphabet, which has fortunately been preserved, we are enabled to spell out a few words on the Yucatecan manuscripts and façades, but thus far with no positive results. The loss of the ancient pronunciation is especially in the way of such studies.

In South America, also, there is said to have been a nation who cultivated the art of picture writing, the Panos, on the river Ucayale. A missionary, Narcisso Gilbar by name, once penetrated, with great toil, to one of their villages. As he approached he beheld a venerable man seated under the shade of a palm tree, with a great book open before him from which he was reading to an attentive circle of auditors the wars and wanderings of their forefathers. With difficulty the priest got a sight of the precious volume, and found it covered with figures and signs in marvellous symmetry and order.14-1 No wonder such a romantic scene left a deep impression on his memory.

The Peruvians adopted a totally different and unique system of records, that by means of the *quipu*. This was a base cord, the thickness of the finger, of any required length, to which were attached numerous small strings of different colors, lengths, and textures, variously knotted and twisted one with another. Each of these peculiarities represented a certain number, a quality, quantity, or other idea, but *what*, not the most fluent *quipu* reader could tell unless he was acquainted with the general topic treated of. Therefore, whenever news was sent in this manner a person accompanied the bearer to serve as verbal commentator, and to prevent confusion the *quipus* relating to the various departments of knowledge were placed in separate storehouses, one for war, another for taxes, a third for history, and so forth. On what principle or mnemotechnics the ideas were connected with the knots and colors we are totally in the dark; it has even been doubted whether they had any application beyond the art of numeration.14-2 Each combination had, however, a fixed ideographic value in a certain branch of knowledge, and thus the *quipu* differed essentially from the Catholic rosary, the Jewish phylactery, or the knotted strings of the natives

of North America and Siberia, to all of which it has at times been compared.

The *wampum* used by the tribes of the north Atlantic coast was, in many respects, analogous to the quipu. In early times it was composed chiefly of bits of wood of equal size, but different colors. These were hung on strings which were woven into belts and bands, the hues, shapes, sizes, and combinations of the strings hinting their general significance. Thus the lighter shades were invariable harbingers of peaceful or pleasant tidings, while the darker portended war and danger. The substitution of beads or shells in place of wood, and the custom of embroidering figures in the belts were, probably, introduced by European influence.

Besides these, various simpler mnemonic aids were employed, such as parcels of reeds of different lengths, notched sticks, knots in cords, strings of pebbles or fruit-stones, circular pieces of wood or slabs pierced with different figures which the English liken to “cony holes,” and at a victory, a treaty, or the founding of a village, sometimes a pillar or heap of stones was erected equalling in number the persons present at the occasion, or the number of the fallen.

This exhausts the list. All other methods of writing, the hieroglyphs of the Micmacs of Acadia, the syllabic alphabet of the Cherokees, the pretended traces of Greek, Hebrew, and Celtiberic letters which have from time to time been brought to the notice of the public, have been without exception the products of foreign civilization or simply frauds. Not a single coin, inscription, or memorial of any kind whatever, has been found on the American continent showing the existence, either generally or locally, of any other means of writing than those specified.

Poor as these substitutes for a developed phonetic system seem to us, they were of great value to the uncultivated man. In his legends their introduction is usually ascribed to some heaven-sent benefactor, the antique characters were jealously adhered to, and the pictured scroll of bark, the quipu ball, the belt of wampum, were treasured with provident care, and their import minutely expounded to the most intelligent of the rising generation. In all communities beyond the stage of barbarism a class of persons was set apart for this duty and no other. Thus, for example, in ancient Peru, one college of priests styled *amauta*, learned, had exclusive charge over the quipus containing the mythological and historical traditions; a second, the *haravecs*, singers, devoted themselves to those referring to the national ballads and dramas; while a third occupied their time solely with those pertaining to civil affairs. Such custodians preserved and prepared the archives, learned by heart with their aid what their fathers knew, and in some countries, as, for instance, among the Panos mentioned above, and the Quiches of Guatemala,16-1 repeated portions of them at times to the assembled populace. It has even been averred by one of their converted chiefs, long a missionary to his fellows, that the Chipeways of Lake Superior have a college composed of ten “of the wisest and most venerable of their nation,” who have in charge the pictured records containing the ancient history of their tribe. These are kept in an underground chamber, and are disinterred every fifteen years by the assembled guardians, that they may be repaired, and their contents explained to new members of the society.17-1

In spite of these precautions, the end seems to have been very imperfectly attained. The most distinguished characters, the weightiest events in national history faded into oblivion after a few generations. The time and

circumstances of the formation of the league of the Five Nations, the dispersion of the mound builders of the Ohio valley in the fifteenth century, the chronicles of Peru or Mexico beyond a century or two anterior to the conquest, are preserved in such a vague and contradictory manner that they have slight value as history. Their mythology fared somewhat better, for not only was it kept fresh in the memory by frequent repetition; but being itself founded in nature, it was constantly nourished by the truths which gave it birth. Nevertheless, we may profit by the warning to remember that their myths are myths only, and not the reflections of history or heroes.

Rising from these details to a general comparison of the symbolic and phonetic systems in their reactions on the mind, the most obvious are their contrasted effects on the faculty of memory. Letters represent elementary sounds, which are few in any language, while symbols stand for ideas, and they are numerically infinite. The transmission of knowledge by means of the latter is consequently attended with most disproportionate labor. It is almost as if we could quote nothing from an author unless we could recollect his exact words. We have a right to look for excellent memories where such a mode is in vogue, and in the present instance we are not disappointed. “These savages,” exclaims La Hontan, “have the happiest memories in the world!” It was etiquette at their councils for each speaker to repeat verbatim all his predecessors had said, and the whites were often astonished and confused at the verbal fidelity with which the natives recalled the transactions of long past treaties. Their songs were inexhaustible. An instance is on record where an Indian sang two hundred on various subjects.18-1 Such a fact reminds us of a beautiful expression of the elder Humboldt: “Man,” he says, “regarded as an animal, belongs to one of the singing species; but his notes are always associated with ideas.”

The youth who were educated at the public schools of ancient Mexico—for that realm, so far from neglecting the cause of popular education, established houses for gratuitous instruction, and to a certain extent made the attendance upon them obligatory—learned by rote long orations, poems, and prayers with a facility astonishing to the conquerors, and surpassing anything they were accustomed to see in the universities of Old Spain. A phonetic system actually weakens the retentive powers of the mind by offering a more facile plan for preserving thought. "*Ce que je mets sur papier, je remets de ma mémoire*" is an expression of old Montaigne which he could never have used had he employed ideographic characters.

Memory, however, is of far less importance than a free activity of thought, untrammelled by forms or precedents, and ever alert to novel combinations of ideas. Give a race this and it will guide it to civilization as surely as the needle directs the ship to its haven. It is here that ideographic writing reveals its fatal inferiority. It is forever specifying, materializing, dealing in minutiæ. In the Egyptian symbolic alphabet there is a figure for a virgin, another for a married woman, for a widow without offspring, for a widow with one child, two children, and I know not in how many other circumstances, but for *woman* there is no sign. It must be so in the nature of things, for the symbol represents the object as it appears or is fancied to appear, and not as it is *thought*. Furthermore, the constant learning by heart infallibly leads to slavish repetition and mental servility.

A symbol when understood is independent of language, and is as universally current as an Arabic numeral. But this divorce of spoken and written language is of questionable advantage. It at once destroys all permanent improvement in a tongue through elegance of style, sonorous periods, or delicacy of expression, and the life of the language itself is

weakened when its forms are left to fluctuate uncontrolled. Written poetry, grammar, rhetoric, all are impossible to the student who draws his knowledge from such a source.

Finally, it has been justly observed by the younger Humboldt that the painful fidelity to the antique figures transmitted from barbarous to polished generations is injurious to the æsthetic sense, and dulls the mind to the beautiful in art and nature.

The transmission of thought by figures and symbols would, on the whole, therefore, foster those narrow and material tendencies which the genius of polysynthetic languages would seem calculated to produce. Its one redeeming trait of strengthening the memory will serve to explain the strange tenacity with which certain myths have been preserved through widely dispersed families, as we shall hereafter see.

Besides this of language there are two traits in the history of the red man without parallel in that of any other variety of our species which has achieved any notable progress in civilization.

The one is his *isolation*. Cut off time out of mind from the rest of the world, he never underwent those crossings of blood and culture which so modified and on the whole promoted the growth of the old world nationalities. In his own way he worked out his own destiny, and what he won was his with a more than ordinary right of ownership. For all those old dreams of the advent of the Ten Lost Tribes, of Buddhist priests, of Welsh princes, or of Phenician merchants on American soil, and there exerting a permanent influence, have been consigned to the dustbin by every unbiased student, and when we see such men as Mr. Schoolcraft and the Abbé E. C. Brasseur essaying to

resuscitate them, we regretfully look upon it in the light of a literary anachronism.

The second trait is the entire absence of the herdsman's life with its softening associations. Throughout the continent there is not a single authentic instance of a pastoral tribe, not one of an animal raised for its milk,21-1 nor for the transportation of persons, and very few for their flesh. It was essentially a hunting race. The most civilized nations looked to the chase for their chief supply of meat, and the courts of Cuzco and Mexico enacted stringent game and forest laws, and at certain periods the whole population turned out for a general crusade against the denizens of the forest. In the most densely settled districts the conquerors found vast stretches of primitive woods.

If we consider the life of a hunter, pitting his skill and strength against the marvellous instincts and quick perceptions of the brute, training his senses to preternatural acuteness, but blunting his more tender feelings, his sole aim to shed blood and take life, dependent on luck for his food, exposed to deprivations, storms, and long wanderings, his chief diet flesh, we may more readily comprehend that conspicuous disregard of human suffering, those sanguinary rites, that vindictive spirit, that inappeasable restlessness, which we so often find in the chronicles of ancient America. The law with reason objects to accepting a butcher as a juror on a trial for life; here is a whole race of butchers.

The one mollifying element was agriculture. On the altar of Mixcoatl, god of hunting, the Aztec priest tore the heart from the human victim and smeared with the spouting blood the snake that coiled its lengths around the idol; flowers and fruits, yellow ears of maize and clusters of rich bananas decked the shrine of Centeotl, beneficent

patroness of agriculture, and bloodless offerings alone were her appropriate dues. This shows how clear, even to the native mind, was the contrast between these two modes of subsistence. By substituting a sedentary for a wandering life, by supplying a fixed dependence for an uncertain contingency, and by admonishing man that in preservation, not in destruction, lies his most remunerative sphere of activity, we can hardly estimate too highly the wide distribution of the zea mays. This was their only cereal, and it was found in cultivation from the southern extremity of Chili to the fiftieth parallel of north latitude, beyond which limits the low temperature renders it an uncertain crop. In their legends it is represented as the gift of the Great Spirit (Chipeways), brought from the terrestrial Paradise by the sacred animals (Quiches), and symbolically the mother of the race (Nahuas), and the material from which was moulded the first of men (Quiches).

As the races, so the great families of man who speak dialects of the same tongue are, in a sense, individuals, bearing each its own physiognomy. When the whites first heard the uncouth gutturals of the Indians, they frequently proclaimed that hundreds of radically diverse languages, invented, it was piously suggested, by the Devil for the annoyance of missionaries, prevailed over the continent. Earnest students of such matters—Vater, Duponceau, Gallatin, and Buschmann—have, however, demonstrated that nine-tenths of the area of America, at its discovery, were occupied by tribes using dialects traceable to ten or a dozen primitive stems. The names of these, their geographical position in the sixteenth century, and, so far as it is safe to do so, their individual character, I shall briefly mention.

Fringing the shores of the Northern Ocean from Mount St. Elias on the west to the Gulf of St. Lawrence on the east,

rarely seen a hundred miles from the coast, were the Eskimos.23-1 They are the connecting link between the races of the Old and New Worlds, in physical appearance and mental traits more allied to the former, but in language betraying their near kinship to the latter. An amphibious race, born fishermen, in their buoyant skin kayaks they brave fearlessly the tempests, make long voyages, and merit the sobriquet bestowed upon them by Von Baer, “the Phenicians of the north.” Contrary to what one might suppose, they are, amid their snows, a contented, light-hearted people, knowing no longing for a sunnier clime, given to song, music, and merry tales. They are cunning handicraftsmen to a degree, but withal wholly ingulfed in a sensuous existence. The desperate struggle for life engrosses them, and their mythology is barren.

South of them, extending in a broad band across the continent from Hudson’s Bay to the Pacific, and almost to the Great Lakes below, is the Athapascan stock. Its affiliated tribes rove far north to the mouth of the Mackenzie River, and wandering still more widely in an opposite direction along both declivities of the Rocky Mountains, people portions of the coast of Oregon south of the mouth of the Columbia, and spreading over the plains of New Mexico under the names of Apaches, Navajos, and Lipans, almost reach the tropics at the delta of the Rio Grande del Norte, and on the shores of the Gulf of California. No wonder they deserted their fatherland and forgot it altogether, for it is a very *terra damnata*, whose wretched inhabitants are cut off alike from the harvest of the sea and the harvest of the soil. The profitable culture of maize does not extend beyond the fiftieth parallel of latitude, and less than seven degrees farther north the mean annual temperature everywhere east of the mountains sinks below the freezing point.25-1 Agriculture is impossible, and the only chance for life lies in the

uncertain fortunes of the chase and the penurious gifts of an arctic flora. The denizens of these wilds are abject, slovenly, hopelessly savage, “at the bottom of the scale of humanity in North America,” says Dr. Richardson, and their relatives who have wandered to the more genial climes of the south are as savage as they, as perversely hostile to a sedentary life, as gross and narrow in their moral notions. This wide-spread stock, scattered over forty-five degrees of latitude, covering thousands of square leagues, reaching from the Arctic Ocean to the confines of the empire of the Montezumas, presents in all its subdivisions the same mental physiognomy and linguistic peculiarities.25-2

Best known to us of all the Indians are the Algonkins and Iroquois, who, at the time of the discovery, were the sole possessors of the region now embraced by Canada and the eastern United States north of the thirty-fifth parallel. The latter, under the names of the Five Nations, Hurons, Tuscaroras, Susquehannocks, Nottoways and others, occupied much of the soil from the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario to the Roanoke, and perhaps the Cherokees, whose homes were in the secluded vales of East Tennessee, were one of their early offshoots.25-3 They were a race of warriors, courageous, cruel, unimaginative, but of rare political sagacity. They are more like ancient Romans than Indians, and are leading figures in the colonial wars.

The Algonkins surrounded them on every side, occupying the rest of the region mentioned and running westward to the base of the Rocky Mountains, where one of their famous bands, the Blackfeet, still hunts over the valley of the Saskatchewan. They were more genial than the Iroquois, of milder manners and more vivid fancy, and were regarded by these with a curious mixture of respect and contempt. Some writer has connected this difference with their preference for the open prairie country in contrast to

the endless and sombre forests where were the homes of the Iroquois. Their history abounds in great men, whose ambitious plans were foiled by the levity of their allies and their want of persistence. They it was who under King Philip fought the Puritan fathers; who at the instigation of Pontiac doomed to death every white trespasser on their soil; who led by Tecumseh and Black Hawk gathered the clans of the forest and mountain for the last pitched battle of the races in the Mississippi valley. To them belonged the mild mannered Lenni Lenape, who little foreboded the hand of iron that grasped their own so softly under the elm tree of Shackamaxon, to them the restless Shawnee, the gypsy of the wilderness, the Chipeways of Lake Superior, and also to them the Indian girl Pocahontas, who in the legend averted from the head of the white man the blow which, rebounding, swept away her father and all his tribe.27-1

Between their southernmost outposts and the Gulf of Mexico were a number of clans, mostly speaking the Muscogee tongue, Creeks, Choctaws, Chikasaws, and others, in later times summed up as Apalachian Indians, but by early writers sometimes referred to as “The Empire of the Natchez.” For tradition says that long ago this small tribe, whose home was in the Big Black country, was at the head of a loose confederation embracing most of the nations from the Atlantic coast quite into Texas; and adds that the expedition of De Soto severed its lax bonds and shook it irremediably into fragments. Whether this is worth our credence or not, the comparative civilization of the Natchez, and the analogy their language bears to that of the Mayas of Yucatan, the builders of those ruined cities which Stephens and Catherwood have made so familiar to the world, attach to them a peculiar interest.27-2

North of the Arkansas River on the right bank of the Mississippi, quite to its source, stretching over to Lake Michigan at Green Bay, and up the valley of the Missouri west to the mountains, resided the Dakotas, an erratic folk, averse to agriculture, but daring hunters and bold warriors, tall and strong of body.28-1 Their religious notions have been carefully studied, and as they are remarkably primitive and transparent, they will often be referred to. The Sioux and the Winnebagoes are well-known branches of this family.

We have seen that Dr. Richardson assigned to a portion of the Athapascas the lowest place among North American tribes, but there are some in New Mexico who might contest the sad distinction, the Root Diggers, Comanches and others, members of the Snake or Shoshonee family, scattered extensively northwest of Mexico. It has been said of a part of these that they are "nearer the brutes than probably any other portion of the human race on the face of the globe."28-2 Their habits in some respects are more brutish than those of any brute, for there is no limit to man's moral descent or ascent, and the observer might well be excused for doubting whether such a stock ever had a history in the past, or the possibility of one in the future. Yet these debased creatures speak a related dialect, and are beyond a doubt largely of the same blood as the famous Aztec race, who founded the empire of Anahuac, and raised architectural monuments rivalling the most famous structures of the ancient world. This great family, whose language has been traced from Nicaragua to Vancouver's Island, and whose bold intellects colored all the civilization of the northern continent, was composed in that division of it found in New Spain chiefly of two bands, the Toltecs, whose traditions point to the mountain ranges of Guatemala as their ancient seat, and the Nahuas, who claim to have come at a later period from the northwest

coast, and together settled in and near the valley of Mexico.29-1 Outlying colonies on the shore of Lake Nicaragua and in the mountains of Vera Paz rose to a civilization that rivalled that of the Montezumas, while others remained in utter barbarism in the far north.

The Aztecs not only conquered a Maya colony, and founded the empire of the Quiches in Central America, a complete body of whose mythology has been brought to light in late years, but seem to have made a marked imprint on the Mayas themselves. These possessed, as has already been said, the peninsula of Yucatan. There is some reason to suppose they came thither originally from the Greater Antilles, and none to doubt but that the Huastecas who lived on the river Panuco and the Natchez of Louisiana were offshoots from them. Their language is radically distinct from that of the Aztecs, but their calendar and a portion of their mythology are common property. They seem an ancient race of mild manners and considerable polish. No American nation offers a more promising field for study. Their stone temples still bear testimony to their uncommon skill in the arts. A trustworthy tradition dates the close of the golden age of Yucatan a century anterior to its discovery by Europeans. Previously it had been one kingdom, under one ruler, and prolonged peace had fostered the growth of the fine arts; but when their capital Mayapan fell, internal dissensions ruined most of their cities.

No connection whatever has been shown between the civilization of North and South America. In the latter continent it was confined to two totally foreign tribes, the Muyscas, whose empire, called that of the Zacs, was in the neighborhood of Bogota, and the Peruvians, who in their two related divisions of Quichuas and Aymaras extended their language and race along the highlands of the

Cordilleras from the equator to the thirtieth degree of south latitude. Lake Titicaca seems to have been the cradle of their civilization, offering another example how inland seas and well-watered plains favor the change from a hunting to an agricultural life. These four nations, the Aztecs, the Mayas, the Muyscas and the Peruvians, developed spontaneously and independently under the laws of human progress what civilization was found among the red race. They owed nothing to Asiatic or European teachers. The Incas it was long supposed spoke a language of their own, and this has been thought evidence of foreign extraction; but Wilhelm von Humboldt has shown conclusively that it was but a dialect of the common tongue of their country.31-1

When Columbus first touched the island of Cuba, he was regaled with horrible stories of one-eyed monsters who dwelt on the other islands, but plundered indiscriminately on every hand. These turned out to be the notorious Caribs, whose other name, *Cannibals*, has descended as a common noun to our language, expressive of one of their inhuman practices. They had at that time seized many of the Antilles, and had gained a foothold on the coast of Honduras and Darien, but pointed for their home to the mainland of South America. This they possessed along the whole northern shore, inland at least as far as the south bank of the Amazon, and west nearly to the Cordilleras. It is still an open question whether the Tupis and Guaranis who inhabit the vast region between the Amazon and the Pampas of Buenos Ayres are affined to them. The traveller D’Orbigny zealously maintains the affirmative, and there is certainly some analogy of language, but withal an inexplicable contrast of character. The latter were, and are, in the main, a peaceable, inoffensive, apathetic set, dull and unambitious, while the Caribs won a terrible renown as bold warriors, daring navigators, skilful in handicrafts; and

their poisoned arrows, cruel and disgusting habits, and enterprise, rendered them a terror and a by-word for generations.32-1

Our information of the natives of the Pampas, Patagonia, and the Land of Fire, is too vague to permit their positive identification with the Araucanians of Chili; but there is much to render the view plausible. Certain physical peculiarities, a common unconquerable love of freedom, and a delight in war, bring them together, and at the same time place them both in strong contrast to their northern neighbors.33-1

There are many tribes whose affinities remain to be decided, especially on the Pacific coast. The lack of inland water communication, the difficult nature of the soil, and perhaps the greater antiquity of the population there, seem to have isolated and split up beyond recognition the indigenous families on that shore of the continent; while the great river systems and broad plains of the Atlantic slope facilitated migration and intercommunication, and thus preserved national distinctions over thousands of square leagues.

These natural features of the continent, compared with the actual distribution of languages, offer our only guides in forming an opinion as to the migrations of these various families in ancient times. Their traditions, take even the most cultivated, are confused, contradictory, and in great part manifestly fabulous. To construct from them by means of daring combinations and forced interpretations a connected account of the race during the centuries preceding Columbus were with the aid of a vivid fancy an easy matter, but would be quite unworthy the name of history. The most that can be said with certainty is that the general course of migrations in both Americas was from the

high latitudes toward the tropics, and from the great western chain of mountains toward the east. No reasonable doubt exists but that the Athapascas, Algonkins, Iroquois, Apalachians, and Aztecs all migrated from the north and west to the regions they occupied. In South America, curiously enough, the direction is reversed. If the Caribs belong to the Tupi-Guaranay stem, and if the Quichuas belong to the Aymaras, as there is strong likelihood,34-1 then nine-tenths of the population of that vast continent wandered forth from the steppes and valleys at the head waters of the Rio de la Plata toward the Gulf of Mexico, where they came in collision with that other wave of migration surging down from high northern latitudes. For the banks of the river Paraguay and the steppes of the Bolivian Cordilleras are unquestionably the earliest traditional homes of both Tupis and Aymaras.

These movements took place not in large bodies under the stimulus of a settled purpose, but step by step, family by family, as the older hunting grounds became too thickly peopled. This fact hints unmistakably at the gray antiquity of the race. It were idle even to guess how great this must be, but it is possible to set limits to it in both directions. On the one hand, not a tittle of evidence is on record to carry the age of man in America beyond the present geological epoch. Dr. Lund examined in Brazil more than eight hundred caverns, out of which number only six contained human bones, and of these six only one had with the human bones those of animals now extinct. Even in that instance the original stratification had been disturbed, and probably the bones had been interred there.35-1 This is strong negative evidence. So in every other example where an unbiased and competent geologist has made the examination, the alleged discoveries of human remains in the older strata have proved erroneous.

The cranial forms of the American aborigines have by some been supposed to present anomalies distinguishing their race from all others, and even its chief families from one another. This, too, falls to the ground before a rigid analysis. The last word of craniology, which at one time promised to revolutionize ethnology and even history, is that no one form of the skull is peculiar to the natives of the New World; that in the same linguistic family one glides into another by imperceptible degrees; and that there is as much diversity, and the same diversity among them in this respect as among the races of the Old Continent.35-2 Peculiarities of structure, though they may pass as general truths, offer no firm foundation whereon to construct a scientific ethnology. Anatomy shows nothing unique in the Indian, nothing demanding for its development any special antiquity, still less an original diversity of type.

On the other hand, the remains of primeval art and the impress he made upon nature bespeak for man a residence in the New World coeval with the most distant events of history. By remains of art I do not so much refer to those desolate palaces which crumble forgotten in the gloom of tropical woods, nor even the enormous earthworks of the Mississippi valley covered with the mould of generations of forest trees, but rather to the humbler and less deceptive relics of his kitchens and his hunts. On the Atlantic coast one often sees the refuse of Indian villages, where generation after generation have passed their summers in fishing, and left the bones, shells, and charcoal as their only epitaph. How many such summers would it require for one or two hundred people to thus gradually accumulate a mound of offal eight or ten feet high and a hundred yards across, as is common enough? How many generations to heap up that at the mouth of the Altamaha River, examined and pronounced exclusively of this origin by Sir Charles Lyell,36-1 which is about this height, and covers ten acres