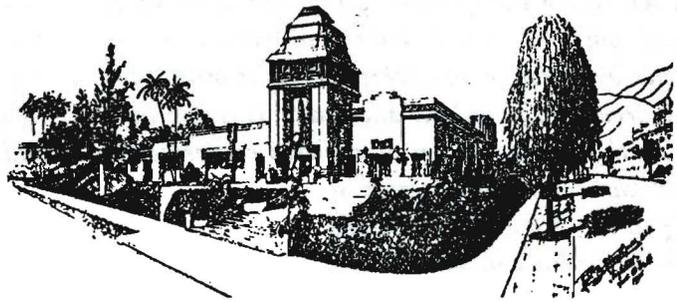


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MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

Los Angeles, Calif. Nov. 1936

QUETZALCOATL

Dear Friend:

At some remote time a great Initiate-King arose among the civilizations of Mexico and Central America. It is impossible at this late date to determine the period during which he lived, but it is safe to say that it was some centuries before the Christian era. Among the people of the Valley of Mexico this Initiate-King was called Quetzalcoatl which means the Feathered Snake, while further south he was called Kukul-Can a word of similar meaning. Other appellations were also bestowed upon him. He was spoken of as Ehecatl, the Air; Yokcuat, the Rattlesnake; Tohil, the Rumbler; Nanihehecatl, Lord of the Four Winds; and Tlauiscalepantecutli, Lord of the Light of the Dawn. The heavens and the stars belonged to him and all the motions of the universe were under his dominion. He was the master of the winds and of the clouds, and the protecting genius of his people.

Modern archeologists at work in the Central American area attempt to prove that Kukul-Can lived in the 9th or 10th century of the Christian era contemporary with Kubla-Khan, warlord of the Mongols. This hypothesis is untenable when we realize that the mask of Kukul-Can, his symbols

and the protective snake, are found upon the most ancient of the Mayan and Toltec ruins. It is our opinion that the first Quetzalcoatl or Kukul-Can was a god or king of the Atlanteans whose worship was brought to the Western hemisphere by the fugitives from the Atlantean cataclysm, having established themselves in the Western hemisphere, the progenitors of the Mayans and Toltecs, perpetuated the mythological systems of their submerged empire, preserving among their traditions the esoteric, magical rites of Quetzalcoatl.

As centuries passed new heroes rose among these people. It is possible and probable that some of the greatest of these heroes might be regarded as incarnations of Quetzalcoatl and were permitted, as a special honor, to assume his name and mask, even receiving worship as the embodiment of the divinity. Ample precedent for such a conclusion may be found in the Greek tradition of Orpheus, the rites of several of that name now being generally confused; or again, the Egyptian Hermes, the Persian Zoroaster, and the Indian Buddha, Gautama being the twenty-ninth of the royal line of sages to bear the same distinguishing title.

If we accept this possibility that the word Quetzalcoatl now signifies a descent of persons bound together by tradition and achievement, it meets most of the needs of the present dilemma. It is also quite possible that the last upon whom was conferred the sacred name was some great soldier or statesman living in the 9th or 10th century of the present era, whose late achievements are confused with the legends of his predecessors.

As in the case of Zoroaster, there are several different accounts of the life and final departure of Quetzalcoatl. These accounts are almost certain to be merely the lives of the different Quetzalcoatl. The composite being formed of these different stories is miraculous indeed. Beneath the legends, however, is a certain amount of fact. Dimly, through the contradictions and lesions in the records, may be perceived a great and noble man, founder of a wide-spread faith, a high priest of sacred mysteries, a scientist, a mystic and a philosopher.

Quetzalcoatl was a name to conjure with from the Southern borders of the United States to the highest peaks of the Andes. His mystery cult was served by a hierarchy of priests who termed themselves "serpents" and by virtue of their rituals of consecration partook of the very nature of the god himself. The Initiates of the Quetzalcoatl cult, according to de Bourbourg, referred to themselves as the Sons of the Snake. There is also reference to a subterranean passageway which leads to the "roots of heaven." This passage was called "the Snake's Hole" and only a serpent could enter it. Here is occult symbolism in no uncertain terms. That the serpent hole which leads to heaven is only for such mortals as have become "snakes" is equivalent to the statement in the Old Testament that the mysteries of God are only for the initiates.

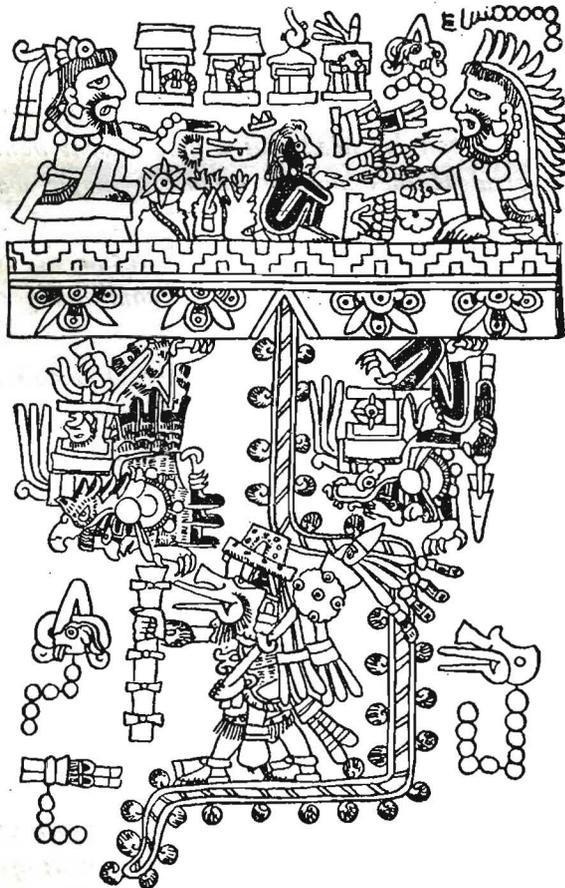
It was customary among ancient people to conceal the elements of their philosophical doctrines under mythical adventures ascribed to the hero-god who was the personification of the whole mystical system. The legends of Hiawatha are of such origin, as well as most of the stories concerning Jesus, Buddha and other great World Teachers. The leg-

ends of Quetzalcoatl are no departure from this well-established rule. In his birth, life and death we have all the elements of a cosmic myth, skillfully treated, with definite emphasis upon the theogonic and astronomical aspects.

As Quetzalcoatl is frequently referred to as the patron god of the Toltecs, it would seem appropriate to examine the beginnings of these people. To show how obscure the subject really is we find serious debate as to whether such a race ever actually existed. Those opposing the historicity of the Toltecs declare that the accounts of these people are so mixed up with astronomical cycles that the whole tradition should be regarded as entirely mythological and related to some previous state of man in the heaven world or possibly to the progression of the planets in constellations. Those affirming the reality of the Toltecs declare them to be one of the earliest migrations of the Nahua stock which moved southward into the Valley of Mexico from the mysterious land of Aztlan, "the place of the reeds" which is the meaning of the word. We have seen a Mexican drawing of Aztlan which depicts it as an island surrounded by dashing waves, the island itself rising in the middle part of a high mountain. Several legends exist concerning the origin of the Nahua peoples whose sacred land was called Tlapallan which means the country of bright colors. It is also believed they may have come from Chicomoztoc, the sacred seven caverns in the earth. Lewis Spence is of the opinion that these two localities might be New Mexico or Arizona. On the other hand some of the most authentic traditions point to the fact that Tlapallan could be reached only by water. It has even been suggested that the legends point towards Tabasco as the homeland. It has been connected with Atlantis by some writers, while others believe that Asia was the origin and that those tribes preserved traditions of their migration across Behring Straits by means of canoes. There is an ever increasing belief in the reality of the Toltec people, but if philosophical facts were known, the whole account might parallel Plato's description of Atlantis which is a symbolical and allegorical depiction based upon historical circumstances. Facts

and fancy have been woven together to serve the purpose of a priest-craft bent on the preservation of metaphysical truths.

According to the historian *Txtlilxochitl*, the Toltecs founded the city of Tollan about the year A. D. 566. Tollan is now identified with the Mexican city of Tula about 50 miles from Mexico City.



QUETZALCOATL DESCENDING FROM HEAVEN ON A LADDER OF THIRTY-THREE RUNGS.

There is a tradition that the Toltecs were led in this migration by a magician who finally, with the aid of divination, selected the spot upon which the great center of empire was to be established. Now, if the Toltec civilization did not arise until the 6th century A. D. it is scarcely probable that it was to these people that Quetzalcoatl came. He would seem to be much earlier, his magical arts already

practiced in Mayapan to the South. This leads us to believe that the term Toltec is susceptible to two interpretations. While the term has been given to the first migrations of the Nahuas, it may also apply to the mythological period which preceded historical civilization, a period such as we find recorded as the Golden Age in Greece during which the gods walked with men. While dates and places are hopelessly confused, the astonishing profundity of the Quetzalcoatl story and its correspondences to the mystery rituals of the classical pagan world cannot but awaken admiration and a desire to understand its meaning more clearly.

THE LIFE OF QUETZALCOATL

On a certain day in the mythological country of Tlapallan three sisters were sitting together in their home when there suddenly appeared in their midst a heavenly apparition so fearsome in appearance that two of the sisters died of fright upon beholding it. To the third sister, who seemed strangely calm, the spirit addressed itself, declaring that it had come as an ambassador from the god of the Milky Way to search on earth for a virgin called Chimalman or Sochiquetzal, who was to bear a son by an immaculate conception and whose name was to be Quetzalcoatl. The tradition then declares that the father of Quetzalcoatl was the great god Ometecutli who is called "the lord of our flesh" and who was the direct creator of mankind. No one apparently has noticed the first two significant letters of this god's name—OM. This can scarcely be a coincidence. The omnific name of the Creator commences with these two letters in so many of the ancient mystical systems. Here is a definite link with the metaphysics of Asia.

Lord Kingsborough notes the significant fact that the name Sochiquetzal signifies in the ancient dialects "the lifting up of roses" and that in the Islamic traditions concerning the birth of Christ he was conceived as the result of the Virgin Mary smelling of a rose. In another tradition, the god Ometecutli, who was the personification of the procreative attributes of abstract divinity, is declared to

have overshadowed the Virgin Sochiquetzal as an invisible spiritual being, impregnating her with his breath so that Quetzalcoatl was the breath-born son of a divine father and a human mother. Here we have a parallel to Pythagoras whose father is supposed to have been the god Apollo, or Jesus conceived of the Holy Ghost which literally means "spiritual air or breath," and again in the folklore of Britain the magician Merlin whose father was an invisible creature, a fire salamander or dragon and his mother a vestal.

In due time the child Quetzalcoatl was born, his birth being accompanied with the mysterious omens and wonders in the heavens which always accompany a divine incarnation. Some legends affirm that when he entered into terrestrial life he was already perfect in wisdom so that even as a babe he had the reasoning faculties of a man. There are fantastic stories to the effect that he issued into this life wearing his plumed bonnet and adored alike by gods and men. There are accounts that Quetzalcoatl was the youngest of the seven sons of Ometecutli, but the more persistent tradition is that he was the one and only son of his heavenly father and that he came into this world only for a short time to act as a mediator and to reinstate a relapsed humanity in the favor of the heavenly one. The Aztec chronicles state definitely that Quetzalcoatl is the only one of the gods who ever actually possessed the body of a man; all of the other deities were incorporeal, existing in an azonic state like the God of the Christians who is regarded as being everywhere at all times. Thus Quetzalcoatl fulfills all the requisites of the Platonic definition of a demigod. He is the superman, the link between heaven and earth, who of his own nature constitutes the bridge which connects the two worlds. He is the Son through whom all men must come unto the Father. Quetzalcoatl was born on the day of the seven Canes, and as in the case of nearly all divine children, tradition is silent as to his childhood years. There is a rumor of greatness but no distinct account. At this point a considerable difficulty arises in an effort to reconcile several legendary accounts. According to some stories, Quetzalcoatl was actually

born in Tollan and ruled over that Toltec state as its prince, but the most popular legend declares that he departed from Tlapallan and appeared at Vera Cruz, either riding upon a raft of serpents or being carried in a magical canoe made from the skins of snakes. In appearance he is generally represented as a man of mature years, even a patriarch with a long beard and fair, white skin. The image of him in the pyramid of Cholula, however, depicts the god as black, his body adorned with astronomical symbols. When seen upon the raft, Quetzalcoatl was covered from shoulders to feet in a black robe which was ornamented with a fringe of white crosses. Upon his head was a magnificent bonnet of quetzal plumes and he carried a magic wand with which he performed all those wonders ascribed to Moses' sacred staff. With this wand he controlled invisible creatures and was continually surrounded with magical forces.

When Quetzalcoatl took over the affairs of the Toltec nation, the people were suffering from droughts and famines so that great distress was upon the face of the land. Knowing that sin was the curse of the fourth age and that the departure of men from the piety prescribed by the divinities was responsible for their tribulation, Quetzalcoatl set himself the task of reordering Toltec culture. Among other things he instituted sacrifices to the gods and revived the interest in spiritual things. His offerings however were of no avail until at last he offered his own blood for the redemption of his people. He inflicted several wounds upon his own body and catching the blood in sacred utensils offered it as a covenant to the deities. We remember that Odin, in German, Wotan, wounded himself with his own spear that he might be qualified to enlighten the world. Both Odin and Quetzalcoatl became gods of thieves even as Christ was crucified with thieves, and one of the names by which Quetzalcoatl was known in the Mexican mysteries was Votan. One of the Spanish authors calls attention to the fact that many of the criminals of Mexico worshipped Quetzalcoatl and Odin was the patron of executed criminals because he voluntarily hung himself from a branch of the Tree of Life. The

self-inflicted wounds by which Quetzalcoatl appeased the heavenly wrath were made with sacred thorns which reminds one of the wreath of thorns. There is most certainly a connection between all of these curious correspondences but others more startling come to light as we proceed.

At last, to signify that they had accepted the sacrifices and had forgiven the sins of the people, the Toltec gods on their high Olympus, sent a lizard as their messenger to inform Quetzalcoatl that the period of his penance had come to an end. The Valley of Mexico then blossomed as a rose and all good things came to the people. Prescott writes: "During his residence on earth he (Quetzalcoatl) instructed the natives in husbandry and the arts of government. His influence was most benign. Under his tutelage the people were happy; the air was filled with intoxicating perfumes and the sweet melody of birds. The halcyon days he spent with his people represented to them the Golden Age of Anahuac. At his command the earth teemed with fruits and flowers, without the pains of culture. An ear of Indian corn was as much as a man could carry. The cotton, as it grew, took, of its own accord, the rich dyes of human art. Wherever he went all manners of singing birds bore him company, emblems of the whistling breeze." Thus we see the great magician with a wave of his magic wand re-established paradise upon the earth and over his happy realm he ruled in the capacity of a priest rather than a king.

Concerning the personal life of Quetzalcoatl contradictions also exist. Some declare that he was a celibate initiate living in the true manner of a priest, concerning himself only with the spiritual well-being of the race; other accounts refer to his consort, Quetzalpetlatl, who is described as the female counterpart or complement of himself. Here we have the Oriental doctrine of shaktis in which each divinity is completed by a female attribute usually personifying the gentler virtues of the divinity. Even the accounts of the Mayas on the Peninsula of Yucatan agree that it would be a mistake to consider Quetzalcoatl or, to them Kukul-Can, as a king or

temporal ruler. He placed princes upon thrones and defended the dignity of states but remained ever aloof from temporal entanglements, too high and too far removed to enter into the petty disputes of men.

In the Mexican legends of Quetzalcoatl appear fragmentary bits of significant symbolic lore. We read of the temptation of Quetzalcoatl, how during his penance the spirits of evil came to him and tried to divert him from his course. In another place is the account of his fasting for 40 days which later became a definite part of the Mexican religious ritual. Then there is the cup which was given to him to drink in a mystic sacrament, and one of his many titles was that of "the Morning Star." Throughout the Toltec mythology he is the Lord of the Eastern Light and must be regarded as a solar divinity as well as a wind spirit. One of his many appellations in the ancient language signifies a vine or the juice thereof. Votan, which means the human heart, was a term sacred to him, and the Mexicans had a ceremony in which they made a model of his body from dough which they baked and then divided amongst themselves and ate with great solemnity. Lord Kingsborough calls attention to the fact that according to the old Jewish prophecies the Messiah who was to come to Israel was to be of marred or deformed countenance and that his person would be without beauty. Quetzalcoatl fulfils this requirement exactly. Nearly all of the images which have been found of him have been mutilated in the face and those not thus disfigured show the divinity as of most unprepossessing countenance, usually deeply wrinkled and with a single protruding tooth.

Among the Mayan legends is one to the effect that although Quetzalcoatl was held in high esteem by millions of devoted subjects and followers, he brought down upon himself the animosity of the priestcraft probably because he delivered his people from bondage to the ignorance and superstitions by which these wily sorcerers maintained their own fortune and dignity. They plotted in many ways to destroy him and at least on one occasion actually brought him to the sacrificial stone. But his magic

seems to have been greater than theirs and he was victorious over his priestly adversaries. The myth of the dying god is certain evidence of the presence of the Mystery ritual. Therefore, we seek in the legend of Quetzalcoatl for this all-important keynote, nor do we need to seek far, for the curious illuminations in the Vatican Codex reveal the whole story. Here are numerous representations of the god crucified and even with curious marks resembling nail wounds in his hands and feet. To quote again from Lord Kingsborough: "The seventy-third page of the Borgian MS. is the most remarkable of all: for Quetzalcoatl is not only represented there as crucified upon a cross of Greek form, but his burial and descent into hell are also depicted in a very curious manner." After forcing the lord of the underworld to pay him homage, Quetzalcoatl rises victoriously from the grave, thus perfecting in every part the mystical system which he had come to institute. At just what period in his life the crucifixion episode took place, we cannot discover, but, as in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, the elements involved are metaphysical rather than physical and the date would be of no great value.

At this point the cosmic myth again mingles itself with what may be at least in part an historical account. We cannot tell just what connection exists between the Golden Age of Quetzalcoatl which crowned the allegorical story of the Toltec civilization, but we do know that the civilization itself, weakened by internal decay and the deterioration of moral fabric, was overthrown by other Nahua tribes led by the sorcerer god, Tezcatlipoca. This demon elected himself the adversary of Quetzalcoatl and determined to break the reign and power of the magician priest. At this point Quetzalcoatl seems to become for at least an instant identical with the Toltec nation itself and Tezcatlipoca and his two fellow conspirators with three tribes of Nahua barbarians. It is said, for instance, that Tezcatlipoca, assuming the appearance of an aged man, gained audience with Quetzalcoatl and as a physician prescribed a remedy for an illness which had befallen the aged priest. The medicine which Tezcatlipoca gave Quetzalcoatl was in reality pulque, an intoxi-

cating drink, which benumbed the senses of Quetzalcoatl. The story evidently intends to convey that the evil spirits drugged the Toltec empire and brought about its destruction through dissipation and intemperance.

Quetzalcoatl remained with the Toltecs until his empire was so demoralized by the schemings and plottings probably of his political enemies that it was no longer possible to maintain the integrity of the people. Feeling that the task which he had come to accomplish was ended and that there was no further good which he could accomplish for the Toltecs, Quetzalcoatl departed from Tollan to return to Tlapallan the mysterious "Orient" from which he had come. Departing from the city which he had elevated to dignity, he set out in his very advancing years for Cholula which was to be his first important stopping place. That his treasures should not fall into the hands of the demon Tezcatlipoca he destroyed the buildings which he had erected, hid his treasures and jewels in caverns over which he caused mountains to appear by magic. With a wave of his wand, in the words of Lewis Spence, he changed the cocoa trees into mesquites and ordered all of the birds of rich plumage and song to quit the valley of Anahuac and to follow him in his pilgrimage. Thus he left the land as he had found it—a desert—and his curse has remained upon it. His adversaries, seeing that he was rendering valueless the land which they were striving to steal from him, besought him to reveal before his departure the secrets of smelting, of painting and lapidary which he had communicated to his chosen people. But the god refused and continued his journey preceded by musicians who played soft melodies to cheer his weary footsteps.

In some accounts it is stated that Quetzalcoatl remained for twenty years in Cholula, others give a much shorter period for his stay. In honor of his presence there the great pyramid was built. From Cholula, in one account, he continued on to the shore of the Gulf of Mexico where he called to the sea and there immediately appeared above the water the wizard skiff of serpent skins drawn by dragons.

Turning to his followers gathered upon the shore, the aged Quetzalcoatl made the prophecy that was to prove the future undoing of the Aztec empire. He said that in a later age he would come back and with his descendants establish the fifth great epoch which would bring with it the permanent paradise of which the Eden he had invoked by magic was but a taste. Then, stepping into his ship, he disappeared over the curved mystery of the horizon, returning to his sun-father who had called him back to the fabled land of Tlapallan.

There is also another account of the passing of Quetzalcoatl, which though entirely different also possesses much symbolic interest. In the Aztec mythology is described how the aged prince, Feathered Serpent, after his departure from Cholula, journeyed as far as Coatzacoalcos where he died full of years and honored for his wisdom. His body was carried in a stately procession to the high peak of Mt. Orizaba, where, as the multitudes gathered about it, was consumed by a divine flame which descended from heaven as in the passing of Zoroaster, the Persian Fire Magus. As the flames surrounded his body, there appeared in the midst of the conflagration a bird of such magnificence that its plumage darkened the flames by contrast. It was the spirit of Quetzalcoatl ascending to heaven in the royal guise of the peacock.

Lewis Spence gives a still different account of the passing of the Feathered Serpent magician. He writes that Quetzalcoatl "cast himself upon a funeral pyre and was consumed and that the ashes rising from the conflagration flew upward and were changed into birds of brilliant plumage. His heart also soared into the sky and became the morning star. The Mexicans averred that Quetzalcoatl died when the star became visible, and thus they bestowed upon him the title 'Lord of the Dawn.' They further said that when he died he was invisible for four days, and that for eight days he wandered in the underworld, after which time the morning star appeared, when he achieved resurrection, and ascended his throne as a god."

That certain parts of the Quetzalcoatl legend

have an astronomical interpretation is quite evident. The Mexicans had periods composed of what they called the binding of years. These bindings contained fifty-two years and constituted a cycle. According to traditions the end of the world would occur at the termination of one of these fifty-two year cycles, therefore this period was always marked with greatest solemnity and the new year was announced when the stars of the Pleiades passed the zenith on the fatal day. This passage promised an extension of fifty-two years to the life of the empire and during the period of Aztec supremacy human sacrifices were offered to propitiate the gods at this time that they might prolong the duration of the world. Quetzalcoatl remained in Mexico for fifty-two years (one of these binding periods) and, as has already been noted, the Spaniards also arrived on one of these psychological periods. Quetzalcoatl disappeared from the sight of men after the great fifty-two year festival at Cholula, journeying in the magical direction of all great Initiates—towards the east, his eternal home. Humbolt says that at the end of the fifty-two year cycle the Aztecs extinguished all their lights, a peculiar ceremony which the Druids performed annually. The Indians also at this period crucified a victim, believing that by this crucifixion they would gain a respite from the destructive powers of the gods.

FRAGMENTS OF ANCIENT MEXICAN METAPHYSICS

One has but to examine the surviving fragments of Nahutian mythology and history to realize that a high order of metaphysical learning existed among the original Americans. Even Roman Catholic writers admitted that magic flourished among the peoples of Mexico and that the priests and philosophers of that nation were deeply versed in astrology and the necromantic arts. The episode of the arrest and detention of two Aztec sorcerers, accused by the church of attempting to weave spells against the Christian clergy, is especially interesting for even the pious fathers were forced to admit that their prisoners dissolved into empty air before their very

eyes—a circumstance which was passed over very lightly. The ill-fated Montezuma was surrounded by seers and prophets who, from signs which appeared in the heavens, warned the emperor that the conquistadores with their horses and guns were not emissaries from the sun-god but plundering mortals with an eye for loot.

Montezuma, being a great prince, was well learned in the lore of his people and it was this very learning that proved his undoing. The most ancient traditions of his race, perpetuated by the wisest of each generation, declared that the history of the world was divided into five great epochs. These five vast periods were separated from each other by great cataclysms in which great portions of mankind perished. In the *CODEX VATICANUS* it is written that in the first age water reigned supreme until at last it rose up and swallowed all creatures save two who escaped by means of a tree. As the form of a ship appears in this tradition it is likely that the tree was hollowed out to form a crude boat in which the Mexican Noah and his wife rode safely over the deluge. In this first age there were also giants and strange monsters with teeth that weighed three pounds each. The second age was that of wind which by the force of its blowing finally destroyed the whole world. One man and one woman survived this destruction also by concealing themselves within a hollow stone which was so heavy that the wind could not blow it away. During this period great masses of humanity were changed into apes. The third age was that of fire and was ended by a terrible outburst of flames which burned up the world. Again a Noah and his wife were saved this time by seeking refuge in subterranean caverns where the terrible heat could not reach them. The fourth age was that of present humanity and its destruction will be brought about by sin—the sin of man. It is called in the old *Codex* THE AGE OF THE BLACK HAIR. It was in the early centuries of this age that the great race of the Toltecs, under their divine priest-king, Quetzalcoatl,

were destroyed by the sorcery of the Nahuas under their demon war-god, Tezcatlipoca. All this Montezuma knew and from the same traditions he had also learned that a fifth age was to come, a golden age in which the gods would return, or more correctly, turn with favor to the Aztec nation through their ministering intermediary, the Feathered Snake.

EXTRACTS FROM AN AZTEC PRAYER

“O, Mighty Lord, under whose wing, we find defense and shelter, thou art invisible and impalpable, even as night and the air. How can I, that am so mean and worthless, dare to appear before thy majesty? Stuttering and with rude lips I speak, ungainly is the manner of my speech as on leaping among furrows, as one advancing unevenly.”

“Yea, what doest thou now, O Lord, most strong, compassionate, invisible and impalpable, whose will all things obey, upon whose disposal depends the rule of the world, to whom all are subject,—what in thy divine breast hast thou decreed?”

“O Lord, all-powerful, full of mercy, our refuge, though indeed thine anger and indignation, thine arrows and stones, have sorely hurt this poor people, let it be as a father or a mother that rebukes children, pulling their ears, pinching their arms, whipping them with nettles, pouring chillwater upon them all being done that they may amend their puerility and childishness.”

“Let the small birds and thy people sing again, to approach the sun; give them quiet weather; so that they may cause their voices to reach thy highness, and thou mayst know them.”

Yours sincerely,

Manly P. Hall