

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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VOL. XIII. (NO. 7)

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### MIXE IDOL—MIXISTLAN.

This idol was used on the altar of a Christian Church of native Mexicans for nearly four hundred years, as the image of a saint, and was only lately removed at the command of the Archbishop of Antequera, the Rt. Rev. Eulogio Gillow, who now retains the original in his possession. Photographed with the permission of his Grace the Archbishop. See Prof. Frederick Starr's article in the present *Open Court*.

*Frontispiece to the July, 1899, Open Court.*

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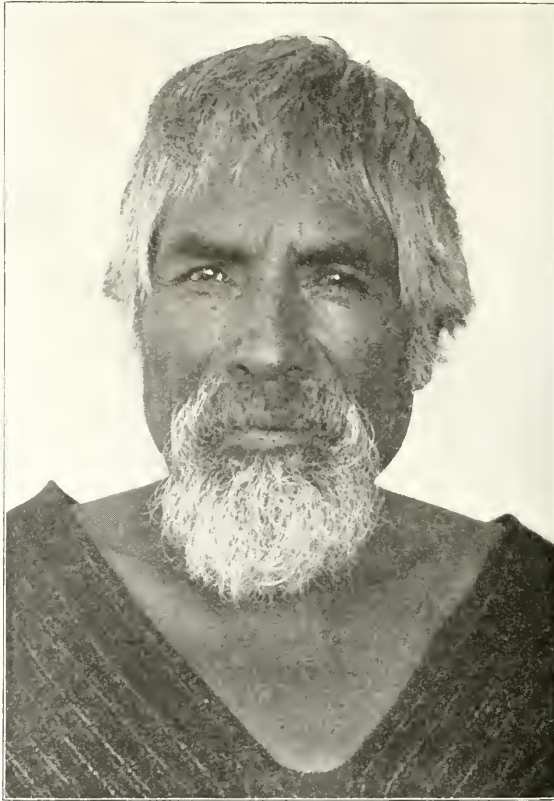
## SURVIVALS OF PAGANISM IN MEXICO.

BY FREDERICK STARR.

EVERY ONE who seriously studies the pure Indians of Mexico must be impressed with the frequent and curious survivals of pagan belief and practice found among them. It would be easy to present examples: we give but one. The Mixes are among the most conservative of Mexican Indians. Their towns are situated in a magnificent mountain district: most of them are perched upon the very summit of lofty ridges. The roads of the district, unlike those of the Mixteca or the Zapotecan serrano, do not zigzag but go straight to the summit and straight down the other side. Governmentally the Mixe towns belong to two districts,—Villa Alta and Yautepec. Among those of Villa Alta, Mixistlan and Tamasalapa are notably conservative. In all the Mixe towns the native language is commonly used, and in some Spanish is but little understood. The Mixes of Mixistlan are said to have practised cannibalism within half a century. All the Mixes are nominally Christian, and religious works were translated and printed in their language in the early half of the eighteenth century. Pagan practices are, however, still common among them. Several years ago the Archbishop of Antequera, Rt. Rev. Eulogio Gillow, collected a considerable mass of data regarding these, and published them in his book *Apuntes historicos*. In that work we find the story of the idol of which a picture is here presented: the photograph was made from the original now in the possession of His Grace. We translate:

“Señor Don Pedro Ortiz, resident Cura of the parish of Ya-  
“lalag and charged with the parishes of Caxonos and Chicacaste-  
“pec, who had gone to the pueblo of Santa Maria Mixistlan, a de-  
“pendency of Chicacastepec, in order to visit the people of that

“ pueblo, as was his duty, went at once to the church to inspect its  
 “ condition: standing before the high altar, he was surprised and  
 “ disgusted at seeing an idol, standing to the right of the crucifix,  
 “ while a sculpture of the Holy Mother of God stood at its other  
 “ side. He bitterly reproached those who accompanied him, se-  
 “ verely charging them with acts of idolatry, doubtless practised  
 “ in the Lord’s house. When he then asked them questions rela-



OTOMI MAN.

Old-fashioned male costume, native make.

“ tive to the idol, they made no reply. He ordered them to carry  
 “ it at once to the curacy. Perceiving that he was not obeyed, he  
 “ took it in his own arms and carried it thither. Seeing that many  
 “ villagers came to the house and viewed the idol with profound  
 “ sadness and equal tenderness, he covered it with clothes to con-  
 “ ceal it. Among those who came to the curacy was an aged man  
 “ of the town, who drew near to the idol with great emotion, gazed

“at it with the most intense sorrow and—before the Cura could  
 “prevent—kissed it, almost weeping, and hurried away. Observ-  
 “ing that the curacy was becoming a pagan shrine, the Cura  
 “judged it necessary to conceal the idol in the way already men-  
 “tioned.

“To avoid disagreeable occurrences in the town, fearing that

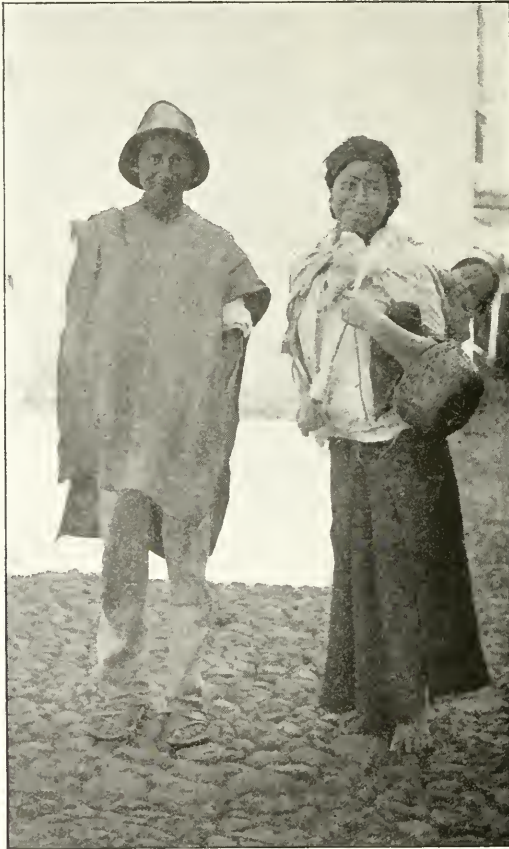


OTOMI MOTHER AND SON.

Location of tribe west of Mexico City: fine valley: agricultural.

“he might be hindered in removing the idol and having some fear  
 “lest he might himself suffer violence on the part of the natives,  
 “on the very night of the occurrence above described, he or-  
 “dered a trusty servant to carry the idol, carefully covered, with  
 “great secrecy to Yalalag. The next day many came to the house  
 “to scrutinise everything cautiously; the object of their scrutiny

“was evident. While they arranged the luggage which the priest  
 “was to carry with him to Yalalag, they carefully examined every  
 “package, wondering at not finding what they so eagerly sought.  
 “After some days passed, the chief men of Mixistlan came to the  
 “Cura and begged him earnestly for his idol, offering him what-  
 “ever he wished for its surrender. He then blamed them to their



FAMILY GROUP OF OTOMIS.

Mother spins as she walks. Note mode of carrying baby. Homespun dress.

“faces for their acts of idolatry and other abominations, but he  
 “could not convince them. A little later they came again upon the  
 “same errand, complaining that heaven denied them rain and that  
 “disease was decimating them, for having permitted the removal  
 “of the saint from the pueblo. Again he harangued them but no-  
 “ticed that his remarks made no impression. They continued to

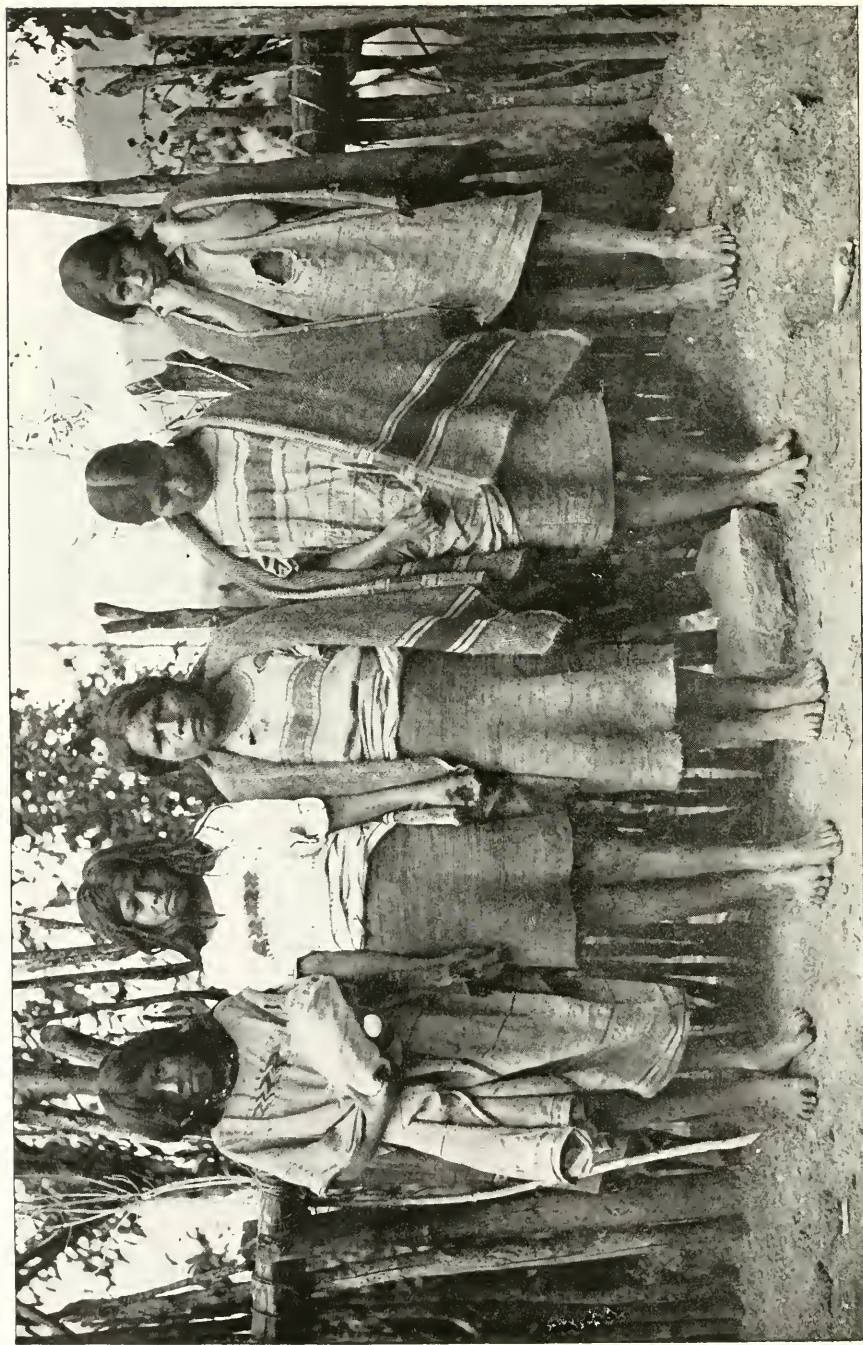


“send delegates to beg back their idol. He diligently sought to  
 “secure data regarding the idol in question, but could learn noth-



OTOMI MAN. Native garment of coarse Ixtli fiber cloth.

“ing more. He only learned that the people of Mixistlan venerate it with ardor, burning candles before it and giving it other



TRIQUI WOMEN—CHICAHUASTLA. Location : high mountains, north-west of Oaxaca. Note native dress ; also feet, toes, legs, etc.

“offerings. Evidence of the candle-burning was left on the knees  
“of the idol, which were somewhat blackened.”

#### EDITORIAL REMARKS ON PROFESSOR STARR'S ARTICLE.

The importance of anthropology is increasing at a rapid rate, and it is the result of natural conditions that the United States of America is the center of in-



ZAPOTEC TOWN. Santiago Guevea, not far from Tehuantepec, but high up in the mountains.

terest of this new science. We still have the Indian with us, and, as Major Powell pointed out of late, the Indian is rather increasing than decreasing. The various types are in very different conditions: some take kindly to Western civilisation, and others oppose it with might and main. While Christian missionaries exercise

a powerful influence upon them, a number of young anthropological emissaries have induced them to divulge their secret thoughts, and give us the key to their strange practices, rituals, and customs.

There are a great number of prominent anthropologists in Europe, such as Ratzel, Ranke, Müller, Topinard, Sergi, Tyler, etc., but none of them can afford to neglect the information drawn from America.

Major J. W. Powell, with his staff of well-trained assistants, has laid a basis for American anthropology in a truly scientific manner, in the magnificent series of the publications of the American Bureau of Ethnology. It is on account of this work

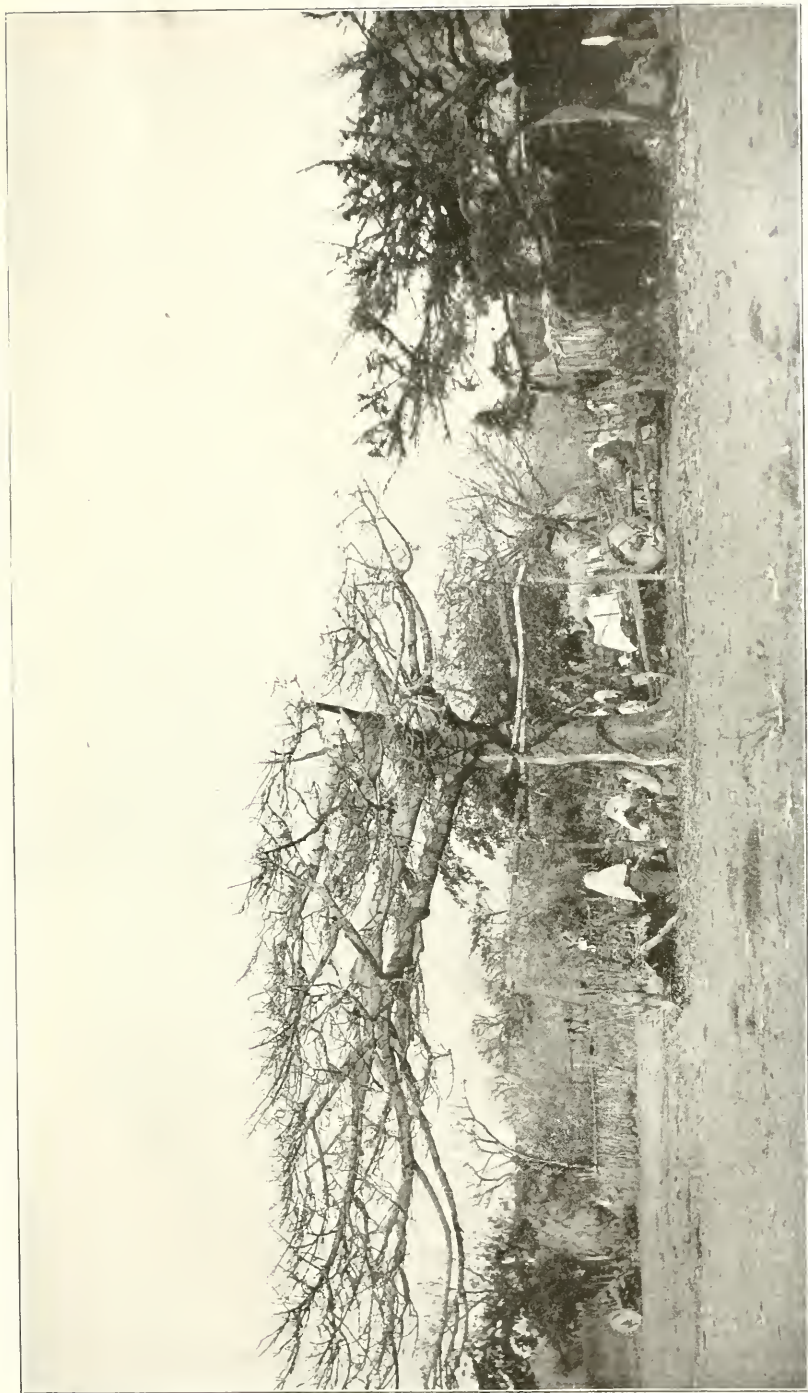


ZAPOTEC WOMAN—TEHUANTEPEC.

Note the fine physique. Women are *the* leaders in this tribe, which is the finest and best Mexico. Juarez, the great president, was a Zapotec. They are much mixed with Mixtecs. Diaz has Mixtec blood. Both tribes are progressive and industrious.

that the University of Heidelberg conferred upon him the highest academic honor at their command, that is, the dignity of *doctor philosophicæ honoris causa*.

The magnificence with which the reports of the American Bureau are published is apt to conceal the systematic and scientific spirit in which they have been made, and may actually in some cases, where the books are only superficially in-



SCENE IN JUAVE TOWN—SAN MATEO

The Juaves are seaside fishers; little known; and interesting. There are only four towns; location near Tehuantepec.

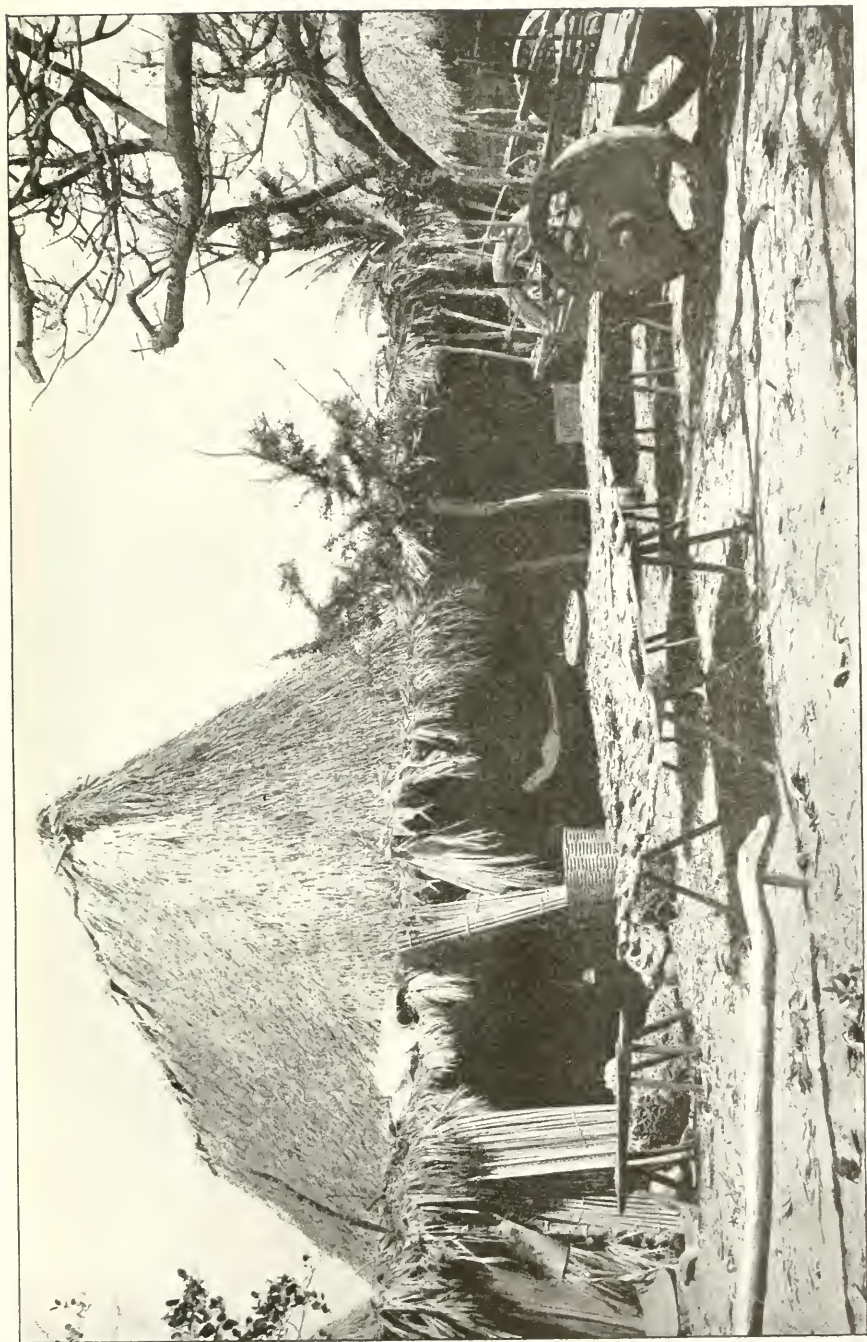
spected, prove a hindrance to the appreciation of their intrinsic value; but the work remains, and will be more appreciated the more the Indian passes away. Now is the last moment to do this work of saving genuine and direct reports of this interesting phase of a past civilisation; and if it were neglected now, it would be impossible to make good the loss of direct and authentic reports.

The University of Chicago is perhaps the first American institution which has created a special chair of anthropology, the incumbent of which is Prof. Frederick Starr. He appears specially adapted for this kind of work, for he loves the Indian and sees even in a savage more marks of civilisation than the average civilised man



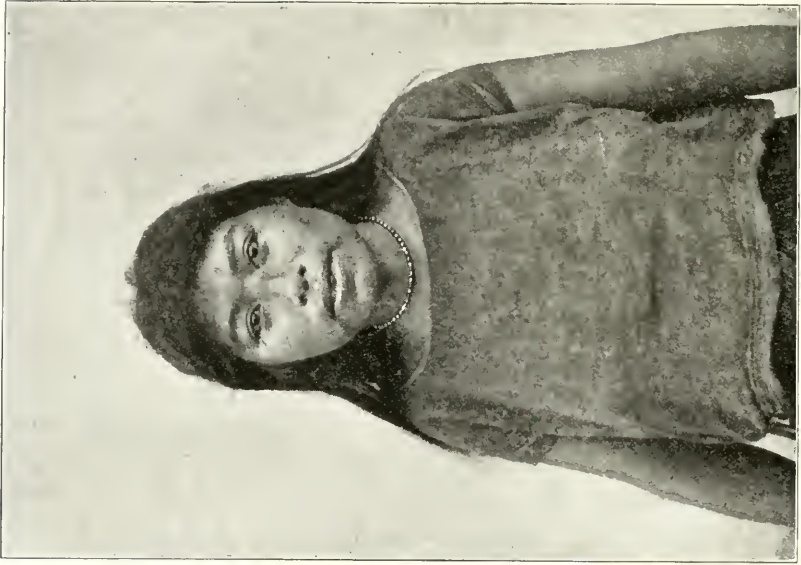
ZAPOTEC WOMAN—TEHUANTEPEC.

is able to detect. It is natural, therefore, that Professor Starr loves to contradict the usual opinions, not only concerning Indians and savages in general, but also on other subjects. Whatever may be the topic of conversation, Professor Starr will be on the side of those who protest. While he discovers the vestiges of a finer and higher type in the uncivilised, he at the same time points out the vestiges of barbarism in our own half-civilised conditions. And thus it is natural that he has sometimes antagonised those who do not appreciate his temper, and fail to take into consideration his characteristic personal equation.



DRYING FISH—JUAVE TOWN.

It will be interesting to our readers to furnish them with a sample of the work which Professor Starr has done for anthropology, in a number of pictures repre-



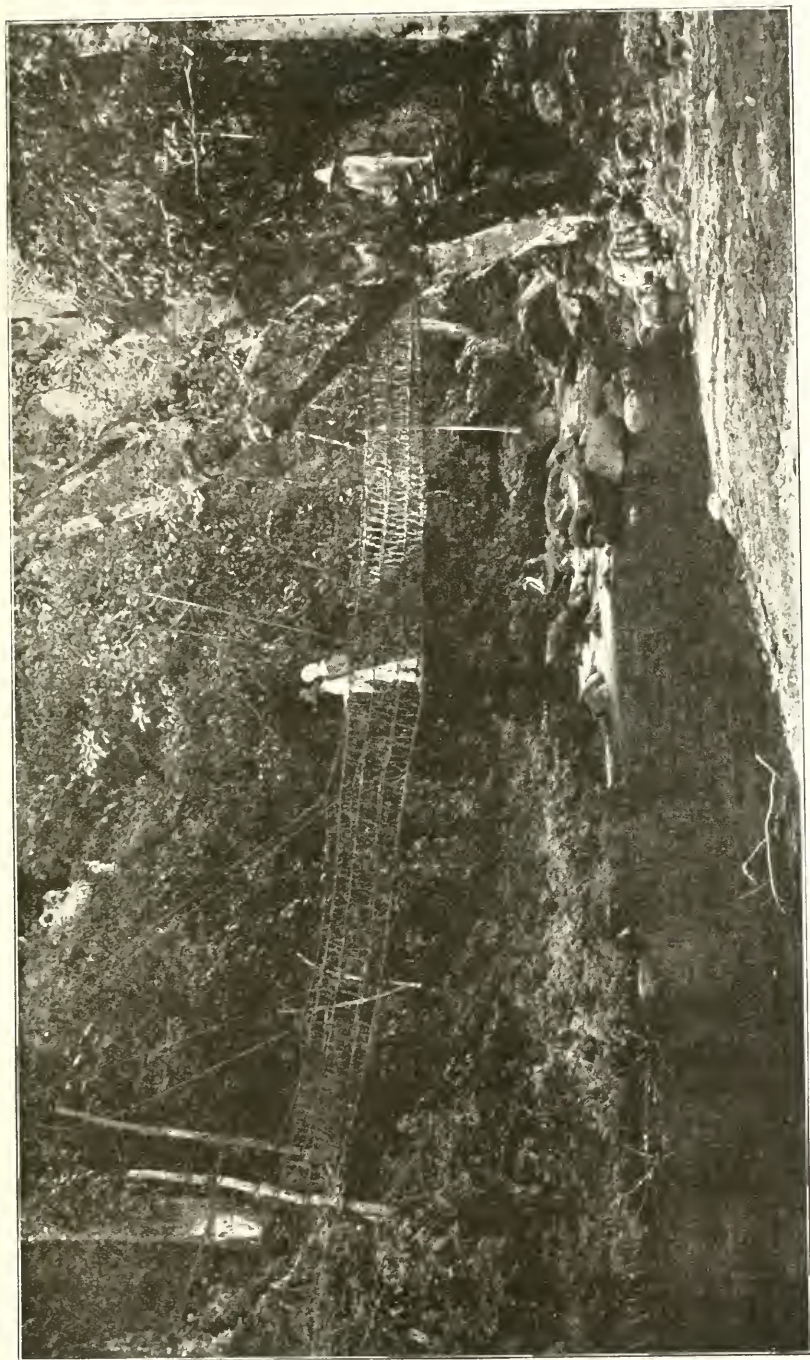
JUAVE GIRL.



senting Mexican types, villages, and landscapes, photographed by him during his recent trip through Central America.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On a former trip Professor Starr had taken photographs of pictures representing the history





BRIDGE OF VINES—INCUNTEPEC.

Professor Starr's work in Mexico on his last two excursions has been to establish the physical types of the aborigines. There are in the State of Oaxaca alone fifteen languages spoken to-day. This suggests that there is a rich field for the anthropologist.

The work of the Professor was threefold: Making measurements, taking photographs, and making plaster casts. In the two years, he studied twelve tribes in the States of Mexico, Haxcala, Puebla, Michoacan, and Oaxaca, taking thirteen or fourteen measures on each person. In each village he aimed to measure 100 men and 25 women; in all, he measured more than 1150 men and 300 women. He made 700 negatives of types, life, groups, houses, villages, and scenery, and made 50 casts in plaster from living subjects. Most of this work was done in mountainous districts remote from railroads, mostly with suspicious and superstitious natives. On his last trip alone he rode 1000 miles on horseback, while his plaster, plates, etc., had to be carried principally on human backs.

The tribes which Professor Starr visited are: in the State of Mexico, the Otomis; in Michoacan, the Tarascans; in Haxcala, the Haxcaltecs; in Puebla, the Aztecs; in Oaxaca, the Mixtecs, *Triquis*, Zapotecs (Mitla), Zapotecs (Tehuantepec), *Mixes*, *Juaves*, *Chontals*, *Cuicatecs*, and *Chinantecs*.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Starr proposes to publish the results of his labors in Mexico in the shape of an album and in pamphlets. The pamphlets will be published partly by the University of Chicago and partly by other institutions, such as the Davenport Academy of Science. Some will appear as articles in anthropological publications. Professor Starr has consented to our publishing in the present number of *The Open Court* a most interesting and instructive experience of his in the types of the religious life of the Mexicans. The Mexican Indians are Christians in name, but it will be noticed that Christianity is often only superadded to their previous paganism, and it will take a long time before their ancient Indian creed has been obliterated by a more rational and purer religion. The fact that an Indian idol was worshipped in a Christian church throws much light on the development of the human mind, and on the law of persistence which was so well set forth by Rev. Th. Trede in the last number of *The Open Court*. How much Protestant Christianity is saturated with the spirit of Teuton paganism, its proud combativeness and the ethics of struggle, we have seen in a former article.<sup>2</sup> The case is quite analogous in Asia where the spread of Buddhism consisted in an assimilation of the indigenous religions of Taoism in China and Shintoism in Japan.

The illustrations of this article will give some idea of the Album which Professor Starr intends to publish, being reduced to about half the original size.<sup>3</sup> They explain themselves and stand in no need of further comments. We may add only that the faces bespeak a peculiar intelligence and good nature, and we may expect that future centuries will develop from these artistically inclined children of our continent a noble race with features of their own, and that they may make contributions to civilisation in lines in which the European races are lacking. P. C.

of the Spanish conquest of Mexico under Cortez, painted by native contemporaneous artists, the chronologers of the Spanish allies. The most interesting of them were published in the December number of *The Open Court* for 1898.

<sup>1</sup> Those italicised are almost unknown in science.

<sup>2</sup> *The Open Court*, Vol. II, No. 3, p. 177, "The Religion of Our Ancestors."

<sup>3</sup> The Album will be 11 x 14 inches, groups 8 x 10 inches, and portraits 5 x 7 inches, and pains will be taken to bring out all the beauties of these pictures, which were taken by an expert photographer who accompanied Professor Starr's little party on its expedition through Mexico. Mr. Synnberg, of Chicago, a photographer of artistic tastes and accomplishments, has been engaged to reproduce 141 plates on heavy plate paper, and these will be accompanied by a descriptive text.