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

FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

NOVEMBER, 1928

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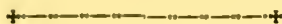
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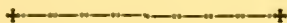
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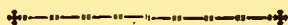
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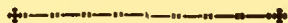


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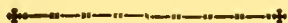
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P. 52

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Insert in following title:

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K

(From the Codex Cortesianus)



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# THE OPEN COURT

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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## THE POPOL VUH: AMERICA'S OLDEST BOOK

BY LEWIS SPENCE\*

NONE of the scanty native records of America which pre-date the Discovery holds for us an importance so great, both from the mythological and the historical viewpoints, as does the *Popol Uuh*, the long-lost and curiously recovered sacred book of the civilized Maya-Quiche people of Guatemala. *The Book of the Cakchiquels* and *The Books of Chilán Balam* are both of moment and great interest because of the historical data with which they provide the student of the Central American past. But neither contains a tithe of the rich mythological information treasured up in the *Popol Uuh*. The pity is that its mythology has not a very direct bearing upon that of the Maya proper as we know it from the manuscript paintings and sculptures of the Maya people of Yucatan, probably because it was written at a different period from the Maya heyday. In all likelihood it is more venerable, but precise criteria are lacking. But it is certainly supplementary to Maya belief and it casts a flood of light on the nature and actions of several gods of the Maya and Mexicans, sometimes under different or slightly altered names, and, above all, it gives us by far the clearest picture of Central American cosmogony and theology which we possess. Whether it has been tampered with, sophisticated by late copyists, is a problem almost as difficult of solution as that of the alteration of the Old Testament, but such indications of this as seem to exist can scarcely be dealt with faithfully and fundamentally in view of our slight knowledge of the whole question.

The text we possess, the recovery of which forms one of the most romantic episodes in the history of American bibliography, was

\* Author of *The Gods of Mexico*, *The Civilization of Ancient Mexico*, etc.

written by a Christianized native of Guatemala some time in the seventeenth century, and was copied in the Quiche language, in which it was originally written, by a monk of the Order of Predicadores, one Francisco Ximenes, who also added a Spanish translation and scholia. The Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, a profound student of American archæology and language (whose euhemeristic interpretations of the Mexican myths are as worthless as the priceless materials he unearthed are valuable) deplored, in a letter to the Duc de Valmy, the supposed loss of the *Popol Vuh*, which he was aware had been made use of early in the nineteenth century by a certain Don Felix Cabrera. Dr. C. Scherzer, an Austrian scholar, thus made aware of its value, paid a visit to the Republic of Guatemala in 1854 or 1855, and was successful in tracing the missing manuscript in the library of the University of San Carlos in the city of Guatemala. It was afterwards ascertained that its scholiast, Ximenes, had deposited it in the library of his convent at Chichicastenango, whence it passed to the San Carlos library in 1830.

Scherzer at once made a copy of the Spanish translation of the manuscript, which he published at Vienna in 1856 under the title of *Las Historias del origen de los Indios de Guatemala, par el R. P. F. Francisco Ximenes*. The Abbé Brasseur also took a copy of the original, which he published at Paris in 1860, with the title *Vuh Popol: Le Livre Sacré de Quiches, et les Mythes de l'Antiquité Americaine*. In this work the Quiche original and the Abbé's French translation are set forth side by side. Unfortunately both the Spanish and the French translations leave much to be desired so far as their accuracy is concerned, and they are rendered of little use by reason of the misleading notes which accompany them. The late Dr. Eduard Seler of Berlin was, prior to his death, engaged on a translation from the Quiche, but it appears to have been left unfinished.

The name "Popol Vuh" signifies "Record of the Community," and its literal translation is "Book of the Mat," from the Quiche words "pop" or "popol," a mat or rug of woven rushes or bark on which the entire family sat, and "vuh" or "uuh," paper or book, from "uoch" to write. The *Popol Vuh* is an example of a world-wide type of annals of which the first portion is pure mythology, which gradually shades off into pure history, evolving from the

hero-myths of saga to the recital of the deeds of authentic personages. It may, in fact, be classed with the *Heimskringla of Snorre*, the *Danish History of Saxo-Græmmaticus*, the *Chinese History in the Five Books*, and the Japanese *Nihongi*.

The language in which the *Popol Vuh* was written, was, as has been said, the Quiche, a dialect of the great Maya-Quiche tongue spoken at the time of the Conquest from the borders of Mexico on the north to those of the present States of Nicaragua on the south; but whereas the Maya was spoken in Yucatan proper, and the State of Chiapas, the Quiche was the tongue of the peoples of that part of Central America now occupied by the States of Guatemala, Honduras and San Salvador, where it is still used by the natives. It is totally different from the Nahuatl, the language of the peoples of Anahuac or Mexico, both as regards its origin and structure, and its affinities with other American tongues are even less distinct than those between the Slavonic and Teutonic groups. Of this tongue the *Popol Vuh* is practically the only monument; at all events the only work by a native of the district in which it was used.

At the period of their discovery, subsequent to the fall of Mexico, the Quiche people of Guatemala had lost much of that culture which was characteristic of the Maya race, the builders of the great stone cities of Guatemala and Yucatan. They were broken up into petty states and confederacies not unlike those of Palestine, yet seem to have retained the art of writing in hieroglyphs. Whether or not the *Popol Vuh* was first written in their own script it is impossible to say, but the probability is that the record of it was kept memonically, or memorized by the priestly class, one of whose number reduced it to writing in European characters at a later date. Indeed it seems unlikely that it was written down at all until penned in the sixteenth century by the Christianized native whose manuscript was found by Scherzer, and who, knowing most of it by rote was doubtless inspired to preserve it much as Ixtlilxochitl in Mexico set down the history and traditions of his race from patriotic motives.

The *Popol Vuh* is divided into four books, the first three of which are almost entirely mythologic in their significance. The First Book opens with an account of the creation. At the beginning was only the Creator and Former, and those whom he engendered were Hun-Apu-Vuch, the hunter with the blowpipe; Hun-Ahpu-

Utiu, the blow-pipe hunter, the coyote; Zaki-nima-Tzyiz, the white hunter, and the Lord, the serpent covered with feathers, the heart of the lakes and of the sea. There were also the father and mother gods, Xpiyacac and Xmucane. Concerning the first three we can only infer that they were among the numerous hunting-gods of the gods of the Maya-Quiche who resembled the Maya archer-god Ahulane, whose shrine was situated on the Island of Cozumel off the coast of Yucatan. "The serpent covered with feathers" is obviously Kukulcan or Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent of Yucatec and Mexican mythology, while the parental deities seem to be the same with the Mexican Cipactonal and Oxomoco, who may be described as the Adam and Eve of the human race, its first semi-divine progenitors.

Over the earth brooded the Creator and Former, the Mother, the Father and the life-giver of all who breathe and have existence both in heaven, earth and in the waters. All was silent, tranquil and without motion beneath the immensity of the heavens. All was without form and void. Here the Creator seems to be identified with the Feathered Serpent, and a little farther on he takes plural form, like the Elohim of Genesis. He is now "those covered with green and blue who have the name of Gucumatz." Gucumatz is merely the Quiche name of Kukulcan or Quetzalcoatl, but whether he was actually one and the same with the Creator we are left in doubt, as we are now told that he held converse with "the Dominator." The passage is confusing and we are left with the impression that there were at least two deities of the Gucumatz type. They took counsel, and the dawn appeared. Trees and herbs sprouted. Then arose the heart of the heavens, Hurakan, the wind-god, from whom the hurricane takes its name, who is now known to be the same as the Mexican Tezcatlipoca, the god of wind and fate.

Animals now appeared and birds great and small. But as yet man was not. To supply the deficiency the divine beings resolved to create mannikins carved out of wood. But these soon incurred the displeasure of the gods, who, irritated by their lack of reverence, resolved to destroy them. Then by the will of Hurakan, the Heart of Heaven, the waters were swollen, and a great flood came upon the mannikins of wood. They were drowned and a thick resin fell from heaven. The bird Xecotcovach tore out their eyes; the bird

Camulatz cut off their heads; the bird Cotzbalam devoured their flesh; the bird Tecumbalam broke their bones and sinews and ground them into powder. Because they had not thought on Hurakan, therefore the face of the earth grew dark, and a pouring rain commenced, raining by day and by night. Then all sorts of beings great and small, gathered together to abuse the men to their faces. The very household utensils and animals jeered at them, their mill-stones, their plates, their cups, their dogs, their hens,



THE MAYA TREE OF LIFE,  
(From the Codex Cortesianus)

Said the dogs and hens, "Very badly have you treated us, and you have bitten us. Now we bite you in turn." Said the mill-stones, "Very much were we tormented by you, and daily, daily, night and day, it was squeak, screech, screech, for your sake. Now you shall feel our strength, and we will grind your flesh and make meal of your bodies." And the dogs upbraided the mannikins because they had not been fed, and tore the unhappy images with their teeth.

And the cups and dishes said, "Pain and misery you gave us, smoking our tops and sides, cooking us over the fire, burning and hurting us as if we had no feeling. Now it is your turn, and you shall burn." Then ran the mannikins hither and thither in despair. They climbed to the roofs of the houses, but the houses crumbled under their feet; they tried to mount to the tops of the trees, but the trees hurled them from them; they sought refuge in the caverns, but the caverns closed before them. "Thus was accomplished the ruin of this race, destined to be overthrown. And it is said that their posterity are the little monkeys who live in the woods."

There was now left on the earth only the race of giants, whose King and progenitor was Vukub-Cakix, a being full of pride. The name signifies "Seven-times-the-colour-of-fire," and seems to have had allusion to the emerald teeth and silver eyes, and golden and silver body of the monster. Vukub-Cakix boasted that his brilliance rendered the presence of the sun and the moon superfluous, and this egotism so disgusted the gods that they resolved upon his destruction. He seems indeed to have been, like the Babylonian Tiawath, the personification of earth or chaos, or the material as opposed to the spiritual, and as the gods of the Babylonians sent Bel to destroy Tiawath; the creators of the Quiches decided to send emissaries to earth to slay the unruly titan. So the twin hero-gods Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque were dispatched to the terrestrial sphere to chasten his arrogance. They shot at him with their blow-pipes and wounded him in the mouth, although he succeeded in wrenching off Hun-Ahpu's arm. He then proceeded to his dwelling, where he was met and anxiously interrogated by his spouse Chimalmat. Tortured by the pain in his teeth and jaw, he, in an access of spite, hung Hun-Ahpu's arm over a blazing fire, and then threw himself down to bemoan his injuries, consoling himself, however, with the idea that he had adequately avenged himself upon the interlopers who had dared to disturb his peace.

But Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque were in no mind that he should escape so easily, and the recovery of Hun-Ahpu's arm must be made at all hazards. With this end in view they consulted two venerable beings in whom we readily recognize the father-mother divinities, Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, disguised for the nonce as sorcerers. These personages accompanied Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque to the abode of Vukub-Cakix, whom they found in a state of intense



agony. They persuaded him to be operated upon in order to relieve his sufferings, and for his glittering teeth they substituted grains of maize. Next they removed his eyes of emerald, upon which his death speedily followed, as did that of his wife Chimalmat. Hun-Ahpu's arm was recovered, re-affixed to his shoulder, and all ended satisfactorily for the hero-gods.

The sons of the giant had yet to be accounted for, however. These were Zipacna, the earth-heaper, and Cabrakan, the earthquake. Four hundred youths (the stars ?) beguiled Zipacna into carrying numerous tree-trunks wherewith to build a house, and when he entered the foundation-ditch of the structure they overwhelmed him with timber. They built the house over his body, but rising in his giant might, he shattered it, and slew them all. But, his strength weakened by a poisoned crab, the divine brothers succeeded in dispatching him by casting a mountain upon him. In a similar manner they accounted for Cabrakan.

The Second Book takes for its first theme the birth and parentage of Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque, and the scribe intimates that a mysterious veil enshrouds their origin. Their respective fathers were Hun-hun-Ahpu, the hunter with the blowpipe and Vucub-Hunahpu, sons of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Hunhun-Ahpu had by a wife, Xbakiyalo, two sons, Humbatz and Hunchouen, men full of wisdom and artistic genius. All of them were addicted to the recreation of dicing and playing at ball, and a spectator of their pastimes was Voc, the messenger of Hurakan. Xbakiyalo having died, Hunhun-Ahpu and Vucub-Hunahpu, leaving the former's sons behind, played a game of ball which in its progress took them into the vicinity of the realm of Xibalba (the underworld). This reached the ears of the monarchs of that place, Hun-Came and Vucub-Came, who, after consulting their counsellors, challenged the strangers to a game of ball, with the object of defeating and disgracing them.

For this purpose they dispatched four messengers in the shape of owls. The brothers accepted the challenge, after a touching farewell with their mother Xmucane and their sons and nephews, and followed the feathered heralds down the steep incline to Xibalba from the playground at Ninzor Carchah. After an ominous crossing over a river of blood they came to the residence of the kings of Xibalba, where they underwent the mortification of mistaking two

wooden figures for the monarchs. Invited to sit on the seat of honour, they discovered it to be a red-hot stone, and the contortions which resulted from their successful trick caused unbounded merriment among the Nibalbans. Then they were thrust into the House of Gloom, where they were sacrificed and buried. The head of Hunhun-Ahpu was, however, suspended from a tree, which speedily became covered with gourds, from which it was almost impossible to distinguish the bloody trophy. All in Xibalba were forbidden the fruit of that tree.

But one person in Xibalba had resolved to disobey the mandate. This was the virgin princess Xquiq (Blood), the daughter of Cuchumaquiq, who went unattended to the spot. Standing under the branches gazing at the fruit, the maiden stretched out her hand, and the head of Hunhun-Ahpu spat into the palm. The spittle caused her to conceive, and she returned home, being assured by the head of the hero-god that no harm should result to her. This thing was done by order of Hurakan, the Heart of Heaven. In six months' time her father became aware of her condition, and despite her protestations, the royal messengers of Xibalba, the owls, received orders to kill her and return with her heart in a vase. She, however, escaped by bribing the owls with splendid promises for the future to spare her and substitute for her heart the coagulated sap of the blood-wart.

In her extremity Xquiq went for protection to the home of Xmucane, who now looked after the young Hunbatz and Hunchouen. Xmucane would not at first believe her tale. But Xquiq appealed to the gods, and performed a miracle by gathering a basket of maize where no maize grew, and thus gained her confidence.

Shortly afterwards Xquiq became the mother of twin boys, the heroes of the First Book, Hun-Ahpu, and Xbalanque. These did not find favour in the eyes of Xmucane, their grandmother, who chased them out of doors. They became hunters, but were ill-treated by their elder brothers, Hunbatz and Hunchouen, whom they transformed into apes. They cleared a maize-plantation by the aid of magical tools and otherwise distinguished themselves thaumaturgically. But the rulers of the Underworld heard them at play, and resolved to treat them as they had done their father and uncle. Full of confidence, however, the young men accepted the challenge

of the Xibalbans to a game of ball. But they sent an animal called Xan as *avant courier* with orders to prick all the Xibalbans with a hair from Hun-Ahu's leg, thus discovering those of the dwellers in the Underworld who were made of wood—those whom their fathers had unwittingly bowed to as men—and also learning the names of the others by their inquiries and explanations when pricked. Thus they did not salute the mannikins on their arrival at the Xibalban court, nor did they sit upon the red-hot stone. They even passed scatheless through the first ordeal of the House of Gloom. The Xibalbans were furious, and their wrath was by no means allayed when they found themselves beaten at the game of ball to which



#### MAYA TYPES.

(From a Vase From Chanià).

they had challenged the brothers. Then Hun-Came and Vucub-Came ordered the twins to bring them four bouquets of flowers, asking the guards of the royal gardens to watch most carefully, and committed Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque to the "House of Lances" the second ordeal—where the lancers were directed to kill them. The brothers, however, had at their beck and call a swarm of ants, which entered the royal gardens on the first errand, and they succeeded in bribing the lancers. The Xibalbans, enraged, ordered that the owls, the guardians of the gardens should have their beak split, and otherwise showed their anger at their third defeat.

Then came the third ordeal in the "House of Cold." Here the heroes escaped death by freezing through being warmed with burning pine-cones. In the fourth and fifth ordeals they were equally lucky, for they passed a night each in the "House of Tigers" and the "House of Fire" without injury. But at the sixth ordeal misfortune overtook them in the "House of Bats," Hun-Ahpu's head being cut off by Camazotz, "Ruler of Bats," who suddenly appeared from above. The head was, however, replaced by a tortoise which chanced to crawl past at that moment and Hun-Ahpu was restored to life. Later the brothers performed other marvels, and, having conquered the Princes of Xibalba, proceeded to punish them, forbidding them the game of ball, and reducing their lordship to government over the beasts of the forest only. The passage probably refers to a myth of the harrying of Hades, and the defeat of a group of older deities by a new and younger pantheon, similar to the replacement of Saturn by Jupiter, the elder gods becoming "demons."

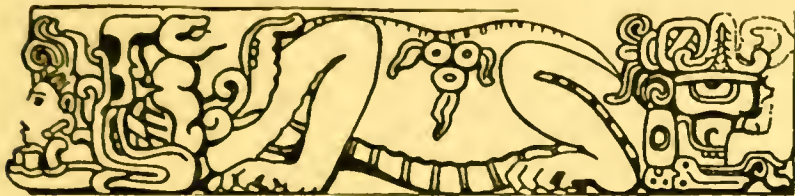
The Third Book opens with another council of the gods. Once more they decided to create men. The Creator and Former made four perfect men. These beings were wholly created from yellow and white maize. Their names were Balam-Quitx (Tiger with the Sweet Smile), Balam-Agab (Tiger of the Night), Mahucutah (The Distinguished Name), and Iqui-Balam (Tiger of the Moon). They had neither father nor mother, neither were they made by the ordinary agents in the work of creation. Their creation was a miracle of the Former, the Shaper.

But Hurakan was not altogether satisfied with his handiwork. These men were too perfect. They knew overmuch. Therefore the gods took counsel as to how to proceed with man. They must not become as gods. "Let us now contract their sight so that they may only be able to see a portion of the earth and be content," said the gods. Then Hurakan breathed a cloud over their eyes, which became partially veiled. Then the four men slept, and four women were made, Caha-Paluma (Falling Water), Choinha (Beautiful Water), Tzununiha (House of the Water), and Cakixa (Water of Aras or Parrots), who became the wives of the men in their respective order as mentioned above.

These were the ancestors of the Quiches only. Then were created the ancestors of other peoples. They were ignorant of the

methods of worship, and lifting their eyes to heaven prayed to the Creator, the Former, for peaceable lives and the return of the sun. But no sun came, and they grew uneasy. So they set out for Tulan-Zuiva, or the Seven Caves, and there gods were given unto them, each man, as head of a group of the race, a god. Balam-Quitiz received the god Tohil. Balam-Agab received the god Avilix, and Mahucutah the god Hacavitz. Iqui-Balam received the god Nicahtagah.

The Quiches now began to feel the want of fire, and the god Tohil, the creator of fire, supplied them with this element. But soon afterwards a mighty rain extinguished all the fires in the land. Tohil, however, always renewed the supply. And fire in those days



THE MAYA EARTH-MONSTER.

was the chief necessity, for as yet there was no sun.

Tulan was a place of misfortune to man, for not only did he suffer from cold and famine, but here his speech was so confounded that the first four men were no longer able to comprehend each other. They determined to leave Tulan, and under the leadership of the god Tohil set out to search for a new abode. On they wandered through innumerable hardships. Many mountains had they to climb, and a long passage to make through the sea which was miraculously divided for their journey from shore to shore. At length they came to a mountain which they called Hacavitz, after one of their gods, and here they rested, for here they had been instructed that they should see the sun. And the sun appeared. Animals and men were transported with delight. All the celestial bodies were now established.

Following this, many towns were founded and sacrifices offered, and the narrative shades into tribal history mingled with legend.

The four founders of the Quiche nation die, singing the song "Kamucu," "We see," which they had first chanted when the light appeared. They are wrapped together in one great mummy-bundle, the allusion being obviously an ætiological myth explanatory of the origin of mummification and wrapping in ceremonial bindings later prevalent among the Central American peoples. The remainder of the account is genealogical and semi-historical.

As regards the genuine American origin of the *Popol Vuh*, that is now generally conceded. To any one who has given it a careful examination it must be abundantly evident that it is a composition that has passed through several stages of development; that it is unquestionably of the aboriginal origin; and that it has only been influenced by European thought in a secondary and unessential manner. The very fact that it was composed in the Quiche tongue is almost sufficient proof of its genuine American character. The scholarship of the nineteenth century was unequal to the adequate translation of the *Popol Vuh*; the twentieth century has as yet shown no signs of being able to accomplish the task. It is, therefore, not difficult to credit that if modern scholarship is unable to properly translate the work, that of the eighteenth century was unable to create it; no European of that epoch was sufficiently versed in Quiche theology and history to compose in faultless Quiche such a work as the *Popol Vuh*, breathing as it does in every line an intimate and natural acquaintance with the antiquities of Guatemala.

The *Popol Vuh* is not the only mythi-historical work composed by an aboriginal American. In Mexico Ixtlilxochitl, and in Peru Garcilasso de la Vega, wrote exhaustive treatises upon the history and customs of their native countrymen shortly after the conquests of Mexico and Peru, and hieroglyphic records, such as the "Wallam Olum," are not unknown among the North American Indians. In fact, the intelligence which fails to regard the *Popol Vuh* as a genuine aboriginal production must be more sceptical than critical.

At the same time it is evident that its author had been influenced to some slight extent by Christian ideas, though not to the degree believed in by some critics. Many of the surviving Pentateuchal notions enshrined in the *Popol Vuh*, such as the description of the earth as being "without form and void" (though these are not the actual terms employed) the flood or heavy rain and the confusion

of tongues are common to more than one mythic system, and when we depart from the cosmogonic account there is little else to strengthen the theory of Biblical influence.

In the Cosmogony of the *Popol Vuh* we can discern the sum of more than one creation-story. A number of divine beings seem to exercise the creative function, and it would appear that the account summarized above was due to the fusion and reconciliation of more than one cosmogonic myth, a reconciliation, perhaps, of early rival faiths, such as took place in Peru and Palestine. We find certain traces of the cosmogonic belief common to both Maya and Mexicans that time had been divided into several elemental epochs governed by fire, water, wind, etc., each culminating in a disaster brought about by the governing element. For the first creative essays of the Quiche gods are destroyed in a manner reminiscent of the Mexican destruction of suns. A disaster to mankind by fire is mentioned, and the legend of the giants seems to point to a similar overthrow by earthquake. But the belief as foreshadowed in the *Popol Vuh* is evidently in an elementary stage. This might afford grounds for thinking that in the *Popol Vuh* we have the remains of cosmogonic ideas considerably earlier than those found either in Maya or Mexican myth, and the supposition that the material it contains is more ancient than either, pre-dating the fixed and carefully edited cosmogonies of Mexico and Yucatan.

The Maya, as can be gleaned from the Book of Chilán Balam of Mani, believed the world to consist of a cubical block, *tem* "the altar" of the gods, on which rested the celestial vase *cum*, containing the heavenly waters, the rains and showers, on which depended all life in their arid country of Yucatan. Within it grew the *yax che*, the Tree of Life, bearing the life-fruit known as *yol*. In the Codex Cortesianus we find such a design. In the centre rises the Tree of Life from the celestial vase. On the right sits Xpiyacoc, on the left Xmucane, the Adam and Eve of the Maya race. The earth is alluded to in the *Popol Vuh* as "The quadrated castle, four-pointed, four-sided, four-bordered," so that it is plain that the same idea concerning its structure and shape was entertained by the author of that book as by the later Maya.

It is worthy of notice that the Quiche myth embodies the general aboriginal idea of creation which prevailed in the New World. In

many of them the central idea of creation is supplied by the brooding of a great bird over the dark primeval waste of waters. Thus the Athapascans thought that a mighty raven, with eyes of fire and wings whose clapping was as the thunder, descended to the ocean and raised the earth to its surface. The Muscokis believed that a couple of pigeons, skimming the surface of the deep, espied a blade of grass upon its surface which slowly evolved into the dry land. The Zuñis imagined that Awonawilona, the All-father, so impregnated the waters that a scum appeared on their surface which became the earth and sky. The Iroquois said that their female ancestor, expelled from heaven by her angry spouse, landed upon the sea, from which mud at once arose. The Mixtecs imagined that two winds—those of the Nine Serpents and the Nine Caverns—under the guise of a bird and a winged serpent respectively, caused the waters to subside and the land to appear. The Costa Rican Guaymis related, according the Melendez, that Noncomala waded into the water and met the water-nymph Rutbe, who bore him twins, the sun and moon. In all these accounts, from widely divergent nations, it is surprising to note such unanimity of belief; and when the tenacity of legend is borne in mind, it is perhaps not too rash to state a belief in an original American creation-myth, which seems none the less possible when the fact of the ethnological unity among the American tribes is remembered.

As regards the mythology of the *Popol Vuh*, we must bear in mind that we are dealing with Quiche and not with Maya myth, but it is now possible to draw certain parallels.

Deities who early arrest our attention are Gucumatz and Hurakan. As has already been indicated, the former name is merely a translation of the Mexican Quetzalcoatl or the Maya Kukulcan. Readers of *The Open Court* will recall that in a recent article on "The Gods of the Maya" I collated Kukulcan with the deity known in Schellhas' "alphabet" of the Maya gods with "God B", a deity with a long proboscis and tusk-like fangs, whom the native manuscripts present as identified with water and aqueous symbols, and who is connected with the serpent, the animal usually associated with water. There is no question that the Gucumatz of the *Popol Vuh*, "the heart of the lakes, the heart of the sea" is one and the same with God B. He is regarded in the *Popol Vuh* as a deity of



the highest rank, and this alone is important as permitting the Mayologist to assume an equal status for God B. Moreover, he casts considerable light on the nature of his Mexican parallel Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl is usually assumed to have been the deity of a cult relatively alien to the Mexican sphere and at doctrinal variance with cults more native to it. It may be that it was an introduction from the Maya-Quiche region. It was certainly a form of religion considerably more exalted than anything Mexico itself produced, eschewing to some extent human sacrifice, and cultivating a higher cultural standard in its priesthood.

Hurakan is also merely the Aztec god Texcatlipoca, the god of wind, who came, however to have a much more complicated character in Mexico. From his name the word "hurricane" is derived. But nowhere in what may be called a definitely Maya myth, nor in any early work or dictionary dealing with the Maya faith and language can I find any allusion to Hurakan. Indeed I believe the word to be Antillean rather than Maya or Quiche in origin, and to have originated in the idea of the furious tempests which sweep the archipelago of the Antilles. It is therefore impossible at present to identify Hurakan with any Maya deity of whose name and nature we are reasonably certain. Hurakan had three demiurges as assistants, according to the *Popol Uuh*: Cakulha-Hurakan, (the lightning) Chipi-Cakulha, the lightning-flash) and Raxa-Cakulha (track-of-the-lightning). But I can find no parallels for these in Maya myth, where the dog is the lightning-beast.

For Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque, the "hunters with the blowpipe" or serbatana, I cannot conscientiously trace precise parallels in either Mexican or Maya myth. That they are hunting gods seems probable, but they appear to me to have characteristics which might permit of comparison with the Dioscuri or the (very obscure) Cabiri. They are divine brethren, the sons of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, the Quiche "Adam and Eve." Hun-Ahpu means "magician" and Xbalanque "Little Tiger," and we know that the jaguar *balam*, was regarded as a god among the Maya.

From the only partial correspondence of the pantheon of the *Popol Uuh* with that of the Maya we may, perhaps, assume that its subject-matter issues either from a highly specialized local cultus, or else was invented at a period somewhat remote from the era of

the development of the Maya pantheon. Certain of its deities are assuredly Maya in origin, while others seem to be of Quiche provenance only. On the other hand there is a considerable degree of correspondence with the pantheon of the Aztecs, due, perhaps, either to Maya-Quiche penetration of the Aztec sphere in early "Toltec" times or a similar and later invasion of the Central American area by Aztec or Nahua elements, which we know to have been accomplished about the middle of the thirteenth century A. D. But the likelihood is that Guatemala, the area in which the *Popol Vuh* was composed, had for long been uninfluenced by later Maya ideas, which developed in Yucatan, to which the great body of the more progressive Maya had emigrated many centuries prior to its first appearance, and that therefore it combines older Maya belief with a later Nahua or Mexican imported theology.

A word may be ventured regarding Xibalba, the Quiche Underworld, described in the *Popol Vuh* as a shadowy subterranean sphere not unlike the Greek Hades. A hell, an abode of bad spirits as distinguished from beneficent gods, Xibalba was *not*. The American Indian was innocent of the idea of maleficent deities pitted in everlasting warfare against good and life-giving gods until contact with the whites coloured his mythology with their idea of the dual nature of supernatural beings. The transcriber of the *Popol Vuh* makes this clear so far as Quiche belief went. He says of the Lords of Xibalba, Hun-Came and Vucub-Came: "In the old times they did not have much power. They were but annoyers and opposers of men, and, in truth, *they were not regarded as gods.*" If not regarded as gods, then, what were they?

"The devil," says Cogolludo of the Mayas, "is called by them Nibilba, which means he who disappears or vanishes." The derivation of Xibalba is from a root meaning "to fear," from which comes the name for a ghost or phantom. Xibalba was, then, the Place of Phantoms. But it was not the Place of Torment, the abode of a devil who presided over punishment. The idea of sin is weak in the savage mind; and the idea of punishment for sin in a future state is unknown in pre-Christian American mythology.

"Under the influence of Christian catechising," says Brinton, "the Quiche legends portray this really as a place of torment, and its rulers as malignant and powerful; but as I have before pointed

out they do so protesting that such was not the ancient belief, and they let fall no word that shows that it was regarded as the destination of the morally bad. The original meaning of the name given by Cogolludo points unmistakably to the simple fact of disappearance from among men, and corresponds in harmlessness to the true sense of those words of fear, Scheol, Hades, Hell, all signifying hidden from sight, and only endowed with more grim associations by the imaginations of later generations."

Still, the story of the visit of the younger hero-gods to Xibalba bears a close resemblance to other legends, pagan and Christian, of the "Harrying of Hell," the Conquest of Death and Sin by Goodness, the triumph of light over darkness, of Ra-Osiris over Amenti. So, too with the game of ball, which figures very largely throughout the Third Book. The father and uncle of the young hero-gods were worsted in their favourite sport by the Xibalbans, but Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque in their turn vanquish the Lords of the Underworld. This may have resembled the Mexican game of *tlachtli*, which was played in an enclosed court with a rubber ball between two opposite sides, each of two or three players. It was, in fact, not unlike hockey. This game of ball between the Powers of Light and the Powers of Darkness is somewhat reminiscent of that between Ormuzd and Ahriman in Persian myth. The game of *tlachtli* had a symbolic reference to stellar motions.

The search for and vigil on the sun seems to enshrine the memory of a people or tribe who migrated from the cold north to the warm south.

Much remains to be done ere the dark veils of obscurity which enshroud the *Popol Vuh* can be raised. We still know far too little of the history, mythology and archæology of the Maya peoples to make it possible for us to speak decisively on the many difficult problems with which it confronts us. In the first place the Quiche account requires to be adequately translated by a scholar well-equipped to control its somewhat archaic etymology and render its frequently abstruse language into plain English. Again the somewhat chaotic condition of Maya myth does not presently permit us to draw conclusive or even satisfactory parallels between the pantheons of the *Popol Vuh* and those on the one hand of the older Maya as represented on the stelæ and temples of Guatemala, or the

later Maya as found in the painted manuscripts or on the walls of the cities of Yucatan. These yield their secrets but slowly and to the most patient research only. And until they impart much more than they have done, we must be content to employ the evidence contained in the *Popol Vuh* as "self-contained" and applying only to the place and period of which it treats—a "place" we can locate, a period of which it would be rash to attempt to lay down the limitations in the present state of our knowledge.