

Were the Toltecs an Historic Nationality?

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In the first edition of my *Myths of the New World*,* published in 1868, I asserted that the story of the city of Tula and its inhabitants, the Toltecs, as currently related in ancient Mexican history, is a myth, and not history. This opinion I have since repeated in various publications,† but writers on pre-Columbian American civilization have been very unwilling to give up their Toltecs, and here lately M. Charnay has composed a laborious monograph to defend them.‡

Let me state the question squarely.

The orthodox opinion is that the Toltecs, coming from the north (-west or -east), founded the city of Tula (about forty miles north of the present city of Mexico) in the sixth century A.D.; that their State flourished for about five hundred years, until it numbered nearly four millions of inhabitants, and extended its sway from ocean to ocean over the whole of Central Mexico;§ that it reached a remarkably high stage of culture in the arts; that in the tenth or eleventh century it was almost totally destroyed by war and famine;|| and that its fragments,

* *Myths of the New World*. By D. G. Brinton. Chap. vi, *passim*.

† Especially in *American Hero Myths, a Study in the Native Religions of the Western Continent*, pp. 35, 64, 82, etc. (Philadelphia, 1882).

‡ M. Charnay, in his essay, *La Civilisation Tolteque*, published in the *Revue d'Ethnographie*, Tome iv, p. 281, 1885, states his thesis as follows: "Je veux prouver l'existence du Toltèque que certains ont niée; je veux prouver que les civilisations Americaines ne sont qu'une seule et même civilisation; enfin, je veux prouver que cette civilisation est toltèque." I consider each of these statements an utter error. In his *Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, M. Charnay has gone so far as to give a map showing the migrations of the ancient Toltecs. As a translation of this work, with this map, has recently been published in this country, it appears to me the more needful that the baseless character of the Toltec legend be distinctly stated.

§ Ixtlilxochitl, in his *Relaciones Historicas* (in Lord Kingsborough's *Antiquities of Mexico*, Vol. ix, p. 333), says that during the reign of Topiltzin, last king of Tula, the Toltec sovereignty extended a thousand leagues from north to south and eight hundred from east to west; and in the wars that attended its downfall five million six hundred thousand persons were slain!!

|| Sahagun (*Hist. de la Nueva España*, Lib. viii, cap. 5) places the destruction of Tula in the year 319 B. C.; Ixtlilxochitl (*Historia Chichimeca*, iii, cap. 4) brings it down to 969 A. D.; the *Codex Ramirez* (p. 25) to 1168; and so on. There is an equal variation about the date of founding the city.

escaping in separate colonies, carried the civilization of Tula to the south, to Tabasco (Palenque), Yucatan, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Quetzalcoatl, the last ruler of Tula, himself went to the south-east, and reappears in Yucatan as the culture-hero Cukulkan, the traditional founder of the Maya civilization.

This, I say, is the current opinion about the Toltecs. It is found in the works of Ixtlilxochitl, Veitia, Clavigero, Prescott, Brasseur de Bourbourg, Orozco y Berra, and scores of other reputable writers. The dispersion of the Toltecs has been offered as the easy solution of the origin of the civilization not only of Central America, but of New Mexico and the Mississippi valley.*

The opinion that I oppose to this, and which I hope to establish in this article, is as follows :

Tula was merely one of the towns built and occupied by that tribe of the Nahuas known as *Azteca* or *Mexica*, whose tribal god was Huitzilopochtli, and who finally settled at Mexico-Tenochtitlan (the present city of Mexico); its inhabitants were called Toltecs, but there was never any such distinct tribe or nationality; they were merely the ancestors of this branch of the Azteca, and when Tula was destroyed by civil and foreign wars, these survivors removed to the valley of Mexico and became merged with their kindred; they enjoyed no supremacy, either in power or in the arts; and the Toltec "empire" is a baseless fable. What gave them their singular fame in later legend was partly the tendency of the human mind to glorify the "good old times" and to merge ancestors into divinities, and especially the significance of the name Tula, "the Place of the Sun," leading to the confounding and identification of a half-forgotten legend with the ever-living light-and-darkness myth of the gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca.

To support this view, let us inquire what we know about Tula as an historic site.

Its location is on one of the great ancient trails leading from

*Since writing the above I have received from the Comte de Charencey a reprint of his article on *Xibalba*, in which he sets forth the theory of the late M. L. Angrand, that all ancient American civilization was due to two "currents" of Toltecs, the western, straight-headed Toltecs, who entered Anahuac by land from the north-west, and the eastern, flat-headed Toltecs, who came by sea from Florida. It is to criticise such vague theorizing that I have written this paper.

the north into the Valley of Mexico.* The ruins of the old town are upon an elevation about 100 feet in height, whose summit presents a level surface in the shape of an irregular triangle some 800 yards long, with a central width of 300 yards, the apex to the south-east, where the face of the hill is fortified by a rough stone wall.† It is a natural hill, overlooking a small muddy creek, called the *Rio de Tula*.‡ Yet this unpretending mound is the celebrated *Coatepetl*, Serpent-Mount, or Snake-Hill, famous in Nahuatl legend, and the central figure in all the wonderful stories about the Toltecs.§ The remains of the artificial tumuli and walls, which are abundantly scattered over the summit, show that, like the pueblos of New Mexico, they were built of large sun-baked bricks mingled with stones, rough or trimmed, and both walls and floors were laid in a firm cement, which was usually painted of different colors. Hence probably the name *Palpan*, "amid the colors," which tradition says was applied to these structures on the Coatepetl.|| The stone-work,

* Motolinia, in his *Historia de los Indios de Nueva España*, p. 5, calls the locality "el puerto llamado Tollan," the pass or gate called Tollan. Through it, he states, passed first the Colhua and later the Mexica, though he adds that some maintain these were the same people. In fact, Colhua is a form of a word which means "ancestors;" *colli*, forefather, *no-col-huan*, my forefathers, *Colhuacan*, "the place of the forefathers," where they lived. In Aztec picture-writing this is represented by a hill with a bent top, on the "ikonomatic" system, the verb *coloa*, meaning to bend, to stoop. Those Mexica who said the Colhua preceded them at Tula, simply meant that their own ancestors dwelt there. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (pp. 29, 33) distinctly states that what Toltecs survived the wars which drove them southward became merged in the Colhuas. As these wars largely arose from civil dissensions, the account no doubt is correct which states that others settled in Acolhuacan, on the eastern shore of the principal lake in the Valley of Mexico. The name means "Colhuacan by the water," and was the State of which the capital was Tetzcoco.

† This description is taken from the map of the location in M. Charnay's *Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, p. 83. The measurements I have made from the map do not agree with those stated in the text of the book, but are, I take it, more accurate.

‡ Sometimes called the *Rio de Montezuma*, and also the *Tollanatl*, water of Tula. This stream plays a conspicuous part in the Quetzalcoatl myths. It appears to be the same as the river *Atoyac* (= flowing or spreading water, *atl*, *toyaua*), or *Xipacoyan* (= where precious stones are washed, from *xixtli*, *paca*, *yan*), referred to by Sahagun, *Hist. de la Nueva España*, Lib. ix, cap. 29. In it were the celebrated "Baths of Quetzalcoatl," called *Atepanamochco*, "the water in the tin palace," probably from being adorned with this metal (*Anales de Cuauhtitlan*).

§ See the *Codex Ramirez*, p. 24. Why called Snake-Hill the legend says not. I need not recall how prominent an object is the serpent in Aztec mythology. The name is a compound of *coatl*, snake, and *tepetl*, hill or mountain, but which may also mean town or city, as such were usually built on elevations. The form *Coatepec* is this word with the postposition *c*, and means "at the snake-hill," or, perhaps, "at Snake-town."

|| Or to one of them. The name is preserved by Ixtlilxochitl, *Relaciones Historicas*, in Kingsborough, *Mexico*, Vol. ix, p. 326. Its derivation is from *palli*, a color (root *pa*), and the postposition *pan*. It is noteworthy that this legend states that Quetzalcoatl in his

represented by a few broken fragments, appears equal, but not superior, to that of the Valley of Mexico. Both the free and the attached column occur, and figure-carving was known, as a few weather-beaten relics testify. The houses contained many rooms, on different levels, and the roofs were flat. They were no doubt mostly communal structures. At the foot of the Serpent-Hill is a level plain, but little above the river, on which is the modern village with its corn-fields.

These geographical particulars are necessary to understand the ancient legend, and with them in mind its real purport is evident.*

That legend is as follows: When the Azteca or Mexica—for these names were applied to the same tribe †—left their early home in Aztlan—which Ramirez locates in Lake Chalco in the Valley of Mexico, and Orozco y Berra in Lake Chapallan in Michoacan ‡—they pursued their course for some generations in

avatar as *Ce Acatl* was born in the Palpan, "House of Colors," while the usual story was that he came from Tla-pallan, the place of colors. This indicates that the two accounts are versions of the same myth.

* There are two ancient Codices extant, giving in picture-writing the migrations of the Mexi. They have been repeatedly published in part or in whole, with varying degrees of accuracy. Orozco y Berra gives their bibliography in his *Historia Antigua de Mexico*, Tom. iii, p. 61, note. These Codices differ widely, and seem contradictory, but Orozco y Berra has reconciled them by the happy suggestion that they refer to sequent and not synchronous events. There is, however, yet much to do before their full meaning is ascertained.

† The name Aztlan is that of a place and Mexitl that of a person, and from these are derived *Aztecall*, plural, *Azteca*, and *Mexicatl*, pl. *Mexica*. The Azteca are said to have left Aztlan under the guidance of Mexitl (*Codex Ramirez*). The radicals of both words have now become somewhat obscured in the Nahuatl. My own opinion is that Father Duran (*Hist. de Nueva España*, Tom. i, p. 19) was right in translating Aztlan as "the place of whiteness," *el lugar de blancura*, from the radical *iztac*, white. This may refer to the East, as the place of the dawn; but there is also a temptation to look upon Aztlan as a syncope of *a-izta-llan*, = "by the salt water."

Mexicatl is a *nomen gentile* derived from *Mexitl*, which was another name for the tribal god or early leader Huitzilopochtli, as is positively stated by Torquemada (*Monarquía Indiana*, Lib. viii, cap. xi). Sahagun explains Mexitl as a compound of *mell*, the maguey, and *cilli*, which means hare and grandmother (*Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. x, cap. 29). It is noteworthy that one of the names of Quetzalcoatl is *Meconetzin*, son of the maguey (Ixtilxochitl, *Rel. Hist.*, in Kingsborough, Vol. ix, p. 328). These two gods were originally brothers, though each had divers mythical ancestors.

‡ Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua de Mexico*, Tom. iii, cap. 4. But Albert Gallatin was the first to place Aztlan no further west than Michoacan (*Trans. American Ethnological Society*, Vol. ii, p. 202). Orozco thinks Aztlan was the small island called Mexcalla in Lake Chapallan, apparently because he thinks this name means "houses of the Mexi;" but it may also signify "where there is abundance of maguey leaves," this delicacy being called *mexcalli* in Nahuatl, and the terminal *a* signifying location or abundance. (See Sahagun, *Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. vii, cap. 9.) At present, one of the smaller species of maguey is called *mexcalli*.

harmony; but at a certain time, somewhere between the eighth and the eleventh century of our era, they fell out and separated. The legend refers to this as a dispute between the followers of the tribal god Huitzilopochtli and those of his sister Malinalxochitl. We may understand it to have been the separation of two "totems." The latter entered at once the Valley of Mexico, while the followers of Huitzilopochtli passed on to the plain of Tula and settled on the Coatepetl. Here, says the narrative, they constructed houses of stone and of rushes, built a temple for the worship of Huitzilopochtli, set up his image and those of the fifteen divinities (*gentes*?) who were subject to him, and erected a large altar of sculptured stone and a court for their ball play.* The level ground at the foot of the hill they partly flooded by damming the river, and used the remainder for planting their crops. After an indeterminate time they abandoned Tula and the Coatepetl, driven out by civil strife and warlike neighbors, and journeyed southward into the Valley of Mexico, there to found the famous city of that name.

This is the simple narrative of Tulan, stripped of its contradictions, metaphors and confusion, as handed down by those highest authorities, the Codex Ramirez, Tezozomoc and Father Duran.† It is a plain statement that Tula and its Snake-Hill were merely one of the stations of the Azteca in their migrations—an important station, indeed, with natural strength, and one that they fortified with care, where for some generations, probably, they maintained an independent existence, and which the story-tellers of the tribe recalled with pride and exaggeration.

How long they occupied the site is uncertain.‡ Ixtlilxochitl

* It is quite likely that the very stone image figured by Charnay, *Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, p. 72, and the stone ring used in the *tlachtli*, ball play, which he figures, p. 73, are those referred to in the historic legend.

† The *Codex Ramirez*, p. 24, a most excellent authority, is quite clear. The picture-writing—which is really phonetic, or, as I have termed it, *ikonomatic*—represents the Coatepetl by the sign of a hill (*tepetl*) inclosing a serpent (*coatl*). Tezozomoc, in his *Cronica Mexicana*, cap. 2, presents a more detailed but more confused account. Duran, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, cap. 3, is worthy of comparison. The artificial inundation of the plain to which the accounts refer probably means that a ditch or moat was constructed to protect the foot of the hill. Herrera says: "Cercaron de agua el cerro llamado Coatepec." *Decadas de Indias*, Dec. iii, Lib. ii, cap. 11.

‡ The *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*, a chronicle written in the Nahuatl language, gives 309 years from the founding to the destruction of Tula, but names a dynasty of only four rulers. Veitia puts the founding of Tula in the year 713 A. D. (*Historia de Nueva España*, cap. 23). Let us suppose, with the laborious and critical Orozco y Berra (notes to the *Codex Ramirez*, p. 210) that the Mexi left Aztlan A. D. 648. These three dates would fit

gives a list of eight successive rulers of the "Toltecs," each of whom was computed to reign at least fifty-two years, or one cycle; but it is noteworthy that he states these rulers were not of "Toltec" blood, but imposed upon them by the "Chichimecs." This does not reflect creditably on the supposed singular cultivation of the Toltecs. Probably the warrior Aztecs subjected a number of neighboring tribes and imposed upon them rulers.*

If we accept the date given by the *Codex Ramirez* for the departure of the Aztecs from the Coatepetl—A. D. 1168—then it is quite possible that they might have occupied the site for a couple of centuries or longer, and that the number of successive chieftains named by Ixtlilxochitl should not be far wrong. The destructive battles of which he speaks as preceding their departure—battles resulting in the slaughter of more than five million souls—we may regard as the grossly overstated account of some really desperate conflicts.

That the warriors of the Azteca, on leaving Tula, scattered over Mexico, Yucatan and Central America, is directly contrary to the assertion of the high authorities I have quoted, and also to most of the mythical descriptions of the event, which declare they were all, or nearly all, massacred.†

The above I claim to be the real history of Tula and its Serpent-Hill, of the Toltecs and their dynasty. Now comes the question, if we accept this view, how did this ancient town and

into a rational chronology, remembering that there is an acknowledged hiatus of a number of years about the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the Aztec records (Orozeo y Berra, notes to *Codex Ramirez*, p. 213). The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* dates the founding of Tula after that of Tlaxcallan, Huexotzinco and Cuauhtitlan (p. 29).

* As usual, Ixtlilxochitl contradicts himself in his lists of rulers. Those given in his *Historia Chichimeca* are by no means the same as those enumerated in his *Relaciones Historicas* (Kingsborough, *Mexico*, Vol. ix, contains all of Ixtlilxochitl's writings). Entirely different from both is the list in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*. How completely euhemeric Ixtlilxochitl is in his interpretations of Mexican mythology is shown by his speaking of the two leading Nahuatl divinities Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli as "certain bold warriors" ("ciertos caballeros muy valerosos." *Relaciones Historicas*, in Kingsborough, Vol. ix, p. 326).

† See the note to page 3. But it is not at all likely that Tula was absolutely deserted. On the contrary, Herrera asserts that after the foundation of Mexico and the adjacent cities (después de la fundacion de Mexico i de toda la tierra) it reached its greatest celebrity for skilled workmen. *Decadas de Indias*, Dec. iii, Lib. ii, cap. 11. The general statement is that the sites on the Coatepetl and the adjacent meadows were unoccupied for a few years—the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* says nine years—after the civil strife and massacre, and then were settled again. The *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas*, cap. 11, says, "y así fueron muertos todos los de Tula, que no quedó ninguno."

its inhabitants come to have so wide a celebrity, not merely in the myths of the Nahuas of Mexico, but in the sacred stories of Yucatan and Guatemala as well—which was unquestionably the case?

To explain this, I must have recourse to some of those curious principles of language which have had such influence in building the fabric of mythology. In such inquiries we have more to do with words than with things, with names than with persons, with phrases than with facts.

First about these names, Tula, Tollan, Toltec—what do they mean? They are evidently from the same root. What idea did it convey?

We are first struck with the fact that the Tula I have been describing was not the only one in the Nahuatl district of Mexico. There are other Tulas and Tollans, one near Ocoingo, another, now San Pedro Tula, in the State of Mexico, one in Guerrero, San Antonio Tula in Potosi,* etc. The name must have been one of some common import. Herrera, who spells it *Tulo*, by an error, is just as erroneous in his suggestion of a meaning. He says it means “place of the tuna,” this being a term used for the prickly pear.† But *tuna* was not a Nahuatl word; it belongs to the dialect of Haiti, and was introduced into Mexico by the Spaniards. Therefore Herrera’s derivation must be ruled out. Ixtlilxochitl pretends that the name Tollan was that of the first chieftain of the Toltecs, and that they were named after him;‡ but elsewhere himself contradicts this assertion. Most writers follow the *Codex Ramirez*, and maintain that Tollan—of which Tula is but an abbreviation—is from *tolin*, the Nahuatl word for rush, the kind of which they made mats, and means “the place of rushes,” or, where they grow.

The respectable authority of Buschmann is in favor of this derivation; but according to the analogy of the Nahuatl language, the “place of rushes” should be *Toltitlan* or *Tolinan*, and there are localities with these names.§

Without doubt, I think, we must accept the derivation of

* See Buschmann, *Ueber die Aztekischen Ortsnamen*, ss. 682, 788. Orozco y Berra, *Geografía de las Lenguas de Méjico*, pp. 248, 255.

† *Historia de las Indias Occidentales*, Dec. iii, Lib. ii, cap. 11.

‡ *Relaciones Historicas*, in Kingsborough’s *Mexico*, Vol. ix, p. 392. Compare his *Historia Chichimeca*.

§ Buschmann, *Ueber die Aztekischen Ortsnamen*, ss. 682, 797.

Tollan given by Tezozomoc, in his *Cronica Mexicana*. This writer, thoroughly familiar with his native tongue, conveys to us its ancient form and real sense. Speaking of the early Aztecs, he says: "They arrived at the spot called Coatepec, on the borders of *Tonalan*, the place of the sun."*

This name, Tonallan, is still not unusual in Mexico. Buschmann enumerates four villages so called, besides a mining town, *Tonatlan*.† "Place of the sun" is a literal rendering, and it would be equally accurate to translate it "sunny-spot" or "warm place" or "summer-place." There is nothing very peculiar or distinctive about these meanings. The warm, sunny plain at the foot of the Snake-Hill was called, naturally enough, Tonallan, syncopated to Tollan and thus to Tula.‡

But the literal meaning of Tollan—"Place of the Sun"—brought it in later days into intimate connection with many a myth of light and of solar divinities, until this ancient Aztec pueblo became apotheosized, its inhabitants transformed into magicians and demigods, and the corn-fields of Tula stand forth as fruitful plains of Paradise.

In the historic fragments to which I have alluded there is scant reference to miraculous events, and the gods play no part in the sober chronicle. But in the mythical cyclüs we are at once translated into the sphere of the supernal. The Snake-

* *Cronica Mexicana*, cap. 1. "Partieron de allí y vinieron á la parte que llaman Coatepec, términos de Tonalan, lugar del sol." In Nahuatl *tonallan* usually means summer, sun-time. It is syncopated from *tonalli* and *tlan*; the latter is the locative termination; *tonalli* means warmth, *suniness*, akin to *tonatiuh*, sun; but it also means soul, spirit, especially when combined with the possessive pronouns, as *to-tonal*, our soul, our immaterial essence. By a further syncope *tonallan* was reduced to Tollan or Tullan, and by the elision of the terminal semi-vowel, this again became Tula. This name may therefore mean "the place of souls," an accessory signification which doubtless had its influence on the growth of the myths concerning the locality.

It may be of some importance to note that Tula or Tollan was not at first the name of the town, but of the locality—that is, of the warm and fertile meadow-lands at the foot of the Coatepetl. The town was at first called Xocotitlan, the place of fruit, from *xocotl*, fruit, *ti*, connective, and *tlan*, locative ending. (See Sahagun, *Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. x, cap. 29, secs. 1 and 12.) This name was also applied to one of the quarters of the city of Mexico when conquered by Cortes, as we learn from the same authority.

† Buschmann, *Ueber die Aztekischen Ortsnamen*, ss. 794, 797 (Berlin, 1852).

‡ The verbal radical is *tona*, to warm (hazy calor, Molina, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Mexicana*, s. v.); from this root come many words signifying warmth, fertility, abundance, the sun, the east, the summer, the day, and others expressing the soul, the vital principle, etc. (Siméon, *Dict. de la Langue Nahuatl*, s. v. *tonalli*.) As in the Algonkin dialects the words for cold, night and death are from the same root, so in Nahuatl are those for warmth, day and life. (Comp. Duponceau, *Mémoire sur les Langues de l'Amérique du Nord*, p. 327, Paris, 1836.)

Hill Coatepetl becomes the Aztec Olympus. On it dwells the great goddess "Our Mother amid the Serpents," *Coatlán Tonan*,* otherwise called "The Serpent-skirted," *Coatlícue*, with her children, The Myriad Sages, the *Centzon Huitznahua*.† It was her duty to sweep the Snake-Hill every day that it might be kept clean for her children. One day while thus engaged, a little bunch of feathers fell upon her, and she hid it under her robe. It was the descent of the spirit, the divine Annunciation. When the Myriad Sages saw that their mother was pregnant, they were enraged, and set about to kill her. But the unborn babe spake from her womb, and provided for her safety, until in due time he came forth armed with a blue javelin, his flesh painted blue, and with a blue shield. His left leg was thin and covered with the plumage of the humming-bird. Hence the name was given to him "On the left, a Humming-Bird," *Huitzilopochtli*.‡ Four times around the Serpent-Mountain did he drive the Myriad Sages, until nearly all had fallen dead before his dart, and the remainder fled far to the south. Then all the Mexica chose *Huitzilopochtli* for their god, and paid honors to the Serpent-Hill by Tula as his birthplace. §

* *Coatlán*, *to-nan*, from *coatl*, serpent; *tlán*, among; *to-nan*, our mother. She was the goddess of flowers, and the florists paid her especial devotion (Sahagun, *Historia*, Lib. ii, cap. 22). A precinct of the city of Mexico was named after her, and also one of the edifices in the great temple of the city. Here captives were sacrificed to her and to the *Huitznahua*. (Ibid., Lib. ii, Appendix. See also Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, Lib. x, cap. 12.)

† *Centzon Huitznahua*, "the Four Hundred Diviners with Thorns." Four hundred, however, in Nahuatl means any indeterminate large number, and hence is properly translated myriad, legion. *Nahuatl* means wise, skillful, a diviner, but is also the proper name of the Nahuatl-speaking tribes; and as the Nahuas derived their word for south from *huiztli*, a thorn, the *Huitznahua* may mean "the southern Nahuas." Sahagun had this in his mind when he said the *Huitznahua* were goddesses who dwelt in the south (*Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. vii, cap. 5). The word is taken by Father Duran as the proper name of an individual, as we shall see in a later note.

‡ *Huitzilopochtli*, from *huiztlin*, humming-bird, *opochtli*, the left side or hand. This is the usual derivation; but I am quite sure that it is an error arising from the ikonomatic representation of the name. The name of his brother, *Huitznahua*, indicates strongly that the prefix of both names is identical. This, I doubt not, is from *huiztlan*, the south; *ilo* is from *iloa*, to turn; this gives us the meaning "the left hand turned toward the south." Orozco y Berra has pointed out that the Mexica regarded left-handed warriors as the more formidable (*Historia Antigua de México*, Tom. i, p. 125). Along with this let it be remembered that the legend states that *Huitzilopochtli* was born in Tula and insisted on leading the Mexica toward the south, the opposition to which by his brother led to the massacre and to the destruction of the town.

§ This myth is recorded by Sahagun, *Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. iii, cap. 1, "On the Origin of the Gods." It is preserved with some curious variations in the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas*, cap. 11. When the gods created the sun they also formed

An equally ancient and authentic myth makes Huitzilopochtli one of four brothers, born at one time of the uncreated, bi-sexual divinity, the God of our Life, Tonacatecutli, who looms dimly at the head of the Aztec Pantheon. The brothers were the black and the white Tezcatlipoca and the fair-skinned, bearded Quetzalcoatl. Yet a third myth places the birthplace of Quetzalcoatl directly in Tula, and names his mother, Chimalman, a virgin, divinely impregnated, like Coatlicue, by the descending spirit of the Father of All.*

Tula was not only the birthplace, but the scene of the highest activity of all these greatest divinities of the ancient Nahuas. Around the Coatepetl and on the shores of the Tollanatl—"the Water of Tula"—as the stream is called which laves the base of the hill, the mighty struggles of the gods took place which form the themes of almost all Aztec mythology. Tula itself is no longer the hamlet of rush houses at the foot of the Coatepec, surmounted by its pueblo of rough stone and baked brick. It is a glorious city, founded and governed by Quetzalcoatl himself, in his first avatar as Hueman, the strong-handed. "All its structures were stately and gracious, abounding in ornaments. The walls within were incrustated with precious stones or finished in beautiful stucco, presenting the appearance of a rich mosaic. Most wonderful of all was the temple of Quetzalcoatl. It had four chambers, one toward the east finished in pure gold, another toward the west lined with turquoise and emeralds, a third toward the south decorated with all manner of delicate sea-shells, and a fourth to the north resplendent with red jasper and

four-hundred men and five women for him to eat. At the death of the women their robes were preserved, and when the people carried these to the Coatepec, the five women came again into being. One of these was Coatlicue, an untouched virgin, who after four years of fasting placed a bunch of white feathers in her bosom, and forthwith became pregnant. She brought forth Huitzilopochtli completely armed, who at once destroyed the Huitznahua. Father Duran translates all of this into plain history. His account is that when the Aztecs had occupied Tollan for some time, and had fortified the hill and cultivated the plain, a dissension arose. One party, followers of Huitzilopochtli, desired to move on; the other, headed by a chieftain, Huitznahua, insisted on remaining. The former attacked the latter at night, massacred them, destroyed the water-dams and buildings, and marched away (*Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, Tom. i, pp. 25, 26). According to several accounts, Huitznahua was the brother of Huitzilopochtli. See my *American Hero Myths*, p. 81.

* I have discussed both these accounts in my *American Hero Myths*, chap. iii, and need not repeat the authorities here.

shells."* The description of other buildings, equally wondrous, have been lovingly preserved by the ancient songs.† What a grief that our worthy friend, M. Charnay, digging away in 1880 on the Coatepec, at the head of a gang of forty-five men, as he tells us,‡ unearthed no sign of these ancient glories, in which, for one, he fully believes! But, alas! I fear that they are to be sought nowhere out of the golden realm of fancy and mythical dreaming.

Nor, in that happy age, was the land unworthy such a glorious city. Where now the neglected corn-patches surround the shabby huts of Tula, in the good old time "the crops of maize never failed, and each ear was as long as a man's arm; the cotton burst its pods, not white only, but spontaneously ready dyed to the hand in brilliant scarlet, green, blue and yellow; the gourds were so large that they could not be clasped in the arms; and birds of brilliant plumage nested on every tree!"

The subjects of Quetzalcoatl, the Toltecs, were not less marvelously qualified. They knew the virtues of plants and could read the forecasts of the stars; they could trace the veins of metals in the mountains, and discern the deposits of precious stones by the fine vapor which they emit; they were orators, poets and magicians; so swift were they that they could at once be in the place they wished to reach; as artisans their skill was unmatched, and they were not subject to the attacks of disease.

The failure and end of all this goodly time came about by a battle of the gods, by a contest between Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli on the one hand, and Quetzalcoatl on the other. Quetzalcoatl refused to make the sacrifices of human beings as required by Huitzilopochtli, and the latter, with Tezcatlipoca, set about the destruction of Tula and its people. This was the

* The most highly-colored descriptions of the mythical Tula are to be found in the third and tenth book of Sahagun's *Historia de Nueva España*, in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, and in the various writings of Ixtlilxochitl. Later authors, such as Veytia, Torquemada, etc., have copied from these. Ixtlilxochitl speaks of the "legions of fables" about Tulan and Quetzalcoatl which even in his day were still current ("otras trecentas fabulas que aun todavia corren," *Relaciones Historicas*, in Kingsborough, *Mexico*, Vol. ix, p. 332).

† In the collection of *Ancient Nahuatl Poems*, which forms the seventh volume of my *Library of Aboriginal American Literature*, p. 104, I have printed the original text of one of the old songs recalling the glories of Tula, with its "house of beams," *huapalcalli*, and its "house of plumed serpents," *coatlacuetzalli*, attributed to Quetzalcoatl.

‡ *Les Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, p. 84 (Paris, 1885).

chosen theme of the later Aztec bards. What the siege of Troy was to the Grecian poets, the fall of Tula was to the singers and story-tellers of Anahuac—an inexhaustible field for imagination, for glorification, for lamentation. It was placed in the remote past—according to Sahagun, perhaps the best authority, about the year 319 before Christ.* All arts and sciences, all knowledge and culture, were ascribed to this wonderful mythical people, and wherever the natives were asked concerning the origin of ancient and unknown structures, they would reply, “The Toltecs built them.”†

They fixedly believed that some day the immortal Quetzalcoatl would appear in another avatar, and would bring again to the fields of Mexico the exuberant fertility of Tula, the peace and happiness of his former reign, and that the departed glories of the past should surround anew the homes of his votaries.‡

I have elsewhere so fully represented this phase of the mythical cyclus that I need not emphasize it further; nor need I explain the significance of these myths as revealed to us by an application of the principles of comparative mythology; for that, too, would be repeating what I have already published in ample detail.

What I wish to point out in clear terms is the contrast between the dry and scanty historic narrative which shows Tula with its Snake-Hill to have been an early station of the Azteca, occupied in the eleventh and twelfth century by one of their clans, and the monstrous myth of the later priests and poets, which makes of it a birthplace and abode of the gods, and its inhabitants the semi-divine conquerors and civilizers of Mexico and Central America. For this latter fable there is not a vestige of solid foundation. The references to Tula and

* *Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. viii, cap. 5.

† Father Duran relates, “Even to this day, when I ask the Indians, ‘Who created this pass in the mountains? Who opened this spring? Who discovered this cave? or, Who built this edifice?’ they reply, ‘The Toltecs, the disciples of Papa.’” *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, cap. 79. Papa, from *papachtli*, the bushy-haired, was one of the names of Quetzalcoatl. But the earlier missionary, Father Motolinia, distinctly states that the Mexica invented their own arts, and owed nothing to any imaginary teachers, Toltecs or others. “Hay entre todos los Indios muchos oficios, y de todos dicen que fueron inventores los Mexicanos.” *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, Tratado iii, cap. viii.

‡ Quetzalcoatl announced that his return should take place 5012 years after his final departure, as is mentioned by Ixtlilxochitl (in Kingsborough, *Mexico*, Vol. ix, p. 332). This number has probably some mystic relation to the calendar.

the Toltecs in the *Chronicles of the Mayas* and the *Annals of the Kakchiquels* are loans from the later mythology of the Nahuas. It is high time for this talk about the Toltecs as a mighty people, precursors of the Azteca, and their instructors in the arts of civilization, to disappear from the pages of history. The residents of ancient Tula, the Tolteca, were nothing more than a sept of the Nahuas themselves, the ancestors of those Mexica who built Tenochtitlan in 1325. This is stated as plainly as can be in the Aztec records, and should now be conceded by all. The mythical Tula, and all its rulers and inhabitants, are the baseless dreams of poetic fancy, which we principally owe to the Tezcucan poets.

In conclusion, I have no hesitation in repeating the words which I printed some years ago, and which gave considerable offence in certain quarters: "Is it not time that we dismiss, once for all, these American myths from the domain of historical traditions? Why should we try to make an enlightened ruler of Quetzalcoatl, a cultured nation of the Toltecs, when the proof is of the strongest that they are the fictions of mythology? Let it be understood hereafter that whoever uses these names in an historic sense betrays an ignorance of the subject he handles, which, were it in the better-known field of Aryan or Egyptian lore, would convict him of not meriting the name of scholar."*

* *American Hero Myths*, p. 35. The only writer on ancient American history before me who has wholly rejected the Toltecs is, I believe, Albert Gallatin. In his able and critical study of the origin of American civilization (*Transactions of the American Ethnological Society*, Vol. i, p. 203) he dismissed them entirely from historical consideration with the words: "The tradition respecting the Toltecs ascends to so remote a date, and is so obscure and intermixed with mythological fables, that it is impossible to designate either the locality of their primitive abodes, the time when they first appeared in the vicinity of the Valley of Mexico, or whether they were preceded by nations speaking the same or different languages." Had this well-grounded skepticism gained the ears of writers since 1845, when it was published, we should have been saved a vast amount of rubbish which has been heaped up under the name of history.

Dr. Otto Stoll (*Guatemala; Reisen und Schilderungen*, ss. 408, 409, Leipzig, 1886) has joined in rejecting the ethnic existence of the Toltecs. As in later Nahuatl the word *toltecall* meant not only "resident of Tollan," but also "artificer" and "trader," Dr. Stoll thinks that the Central American legends which speak of "Toltecs" should be interpreted merely as referring to foreign mechanics or pedlars, and not to any particular nationality. I quite agree with this view.