

Spain May Yield Aztec Literature

Archæology

Historians Seek Books Monk Spent Lifetime Compiling

LARGE quantities of Aztec literature, believed to have been lost forever when the Spanish conquerors entered Mexico and destroyed the pagan writings of the Indians, are still in existence. This idea of Prof. John Hubert Cornyn, authority on Aztec language and literature at the National University of Mexico, is based on his studies of Bernardino Sahagun, a sixteenth century Franciscan monk who compiled a most ambitious history of the Mexican people.

Sahagun arrived in Mexico in 1529, eight years after the Spanish conquest, and became a teacher in mission schools which the Spaniards were establishing in order to educate the young Aztecs. Children of Aztec nobility gathered into these schools were eager and brilliant.

Sahagun began to use the most active students to aid him in his researches into Aztec life and customs. For his benefit, these pupils took down from their elders all kinds of stories, poems, legends,

rituals, songs, wise old sayings, and a vast body of other knowledge which had been imparted in Aztec schools. Sahagun also came into continuous contact with Aztec Princes, nobles, priests, and their descendants, and through these he collected and copied documents and other data for his Mexican history which he intended to write.

Twelve books were compiled, and Sahagun sent the vast collection of Aztec documents back to Spain, as his monumental history. Some of these are now in the Library of the Royal Palace and some are in the Royal Academy of History in Madrid. These portions have been photostated and published in facsimile by the Mexican government. There is little doubt, Prof. Cornyn says, that most of Sahagun's valuable manuscripts are still buried in archives in Spain, and their recovery

will add enormously to knowledge of Indian Mexico.

The very nature of the documents disprove Sahagun's own claim that he was the author of these books in Aztec, Prof. Cornyn says. He believes that rather than representing the work of the Spaniard, the history is a real Aztec literary work, for the Indians collected the material and made the pictures that accompany the text, and Sahagun's part fortunately consisted only of arranging, selecting, and editing. The language is often so markedly poetic and unfamiliar that the text is difficult to understand. An air of strangeness runs through the account, from the unusual figures of speech which no Spaniard would use, and from modes of thought that are distinctly Indian. The literary form is in the trochaic meter of Aztec literature. Sahagun's history was first published in a free Spanish translation in 1829, under the title "General History of New Spain."

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

The Answer Is In This Issue

Why is it likely that *Aztec Literature* will be found in *Spain*? p. 162—Do moving electrons make *Arctic winds* or do Arctic winds cause a flow of *electrons*? p. 163—How plentiful is *helium* now? p. 165—How has a Richmond, Va., college professor made *talking movies* for *class room* use? p. 165—What *U. S. Senator*, formerly a college professor, has made important discoveries in the South American Andes about the *Incas*? p. 166—How much are *parents to blame* for boys and girls leaving home? p. 168—Where do *hurricanes come from*? p. 170—Is it possible for a *male toad* to become a *mother*? p. 173.

Thieving Birds Bribed

F EATHERED robbers that have been raiding the Texas State forest nursery and gobbling up pine seedlings have been conquered by kindness. Birds that attacked seedlings last year were not deterred from their careers of crime by either shotguns or scarecrows, V. V. Bean, superintendent of the nursery, found. Whereupon, Mr. Bean cudged his brain and hit upon the plan of serving a daily free lunch of oats. The birds responded to the courtesy campaign by leaving the little pines alone.

One bushel of oats has been sufficient to reform—or buy off—the robbers for the entire season, until the seedlings passed the tender age at which they were tempting bird food.

Ornithology

Science News-Letter, September 13, 1930

More Infantile Paralysis

I NFANTILE paralysis is increasing throughout the country. The number of cases reported to the U. S. Public Health Service, Washington, D. C., has nearly reached the high figure of the 1928 outbreak. For the week ending August 23, there were 325 cases throughout the entire country, with over 60 cases in California alone. This state has had a high number of cases for several weeks, but the disease has lately spread considerably in eastern and middle western sections. It is probable that the outbreak will last for two or three weeks, but it is not considered alarming, officials stated.

Public Health

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