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ANCIENT MEXICAN HERALDRY.

BY AGNES CRANE.

THERE can be no more striking instance of separate evolutions on the same plane of thought in different grades of culture than the independent development of a system of heraldry, or "armory" as it should be rightly called, in the western hemisphere by the aborigines of ancient Mexico long anterior to the epoch of the Spanish Conquest in 1521. It was based, like the heraldic systems of Europe, on personal distinction in battle, which seems to have been originally the sole source of ennoblement among all people, and possessed the same intent to blazon forth personal exploits and record individual achievements.

It may seem a strange anomaly to refer to the "coat armour" of painted warriors not overburdened with clothing, adorned with labrets, nose-crescents of gold and other barbaric ornaments, whose personal prowess in warfare was exerted to capture their enemies alive in order that they might be offered as living sacrifices to the gods of the victor in the combat. Yet we have the authority of Logan, the historian of the "Scottish Gael," for the statement that so late as 1644 the Highlanders under Montrose fought divested of most of their clothing at the battle of Tippermuir. It is equally true that the war-shields and gala-shields of the ancient Mexican warriors were "charged," in many instances, with "animate designs" and various emblems recording the gallant deeds of arms, of the individuals who bore them, and the distinctions and "augmentations" granted them in recognition thereof by their so-called "emperor" or chief-priestly ruler. In others, again, they carried phonetic symbols rudely expressing the name and rank of the owner, like the "canting arms" or *armes parlantes* which formed the larger proportion of the early coats in European heraldry with as great an effect as the spear in the much discussed coat of Shakespeare, the padlocked heart of the Lockharts, the four emblazoned hands of the Quatermaines, the three cocks of Cockaigne, and the whelk shells of Shelley. A similar canting-shield was carried by the leader of the Tlaxcallan forces which accompanied Cortes on his way to Tetzco. It

is depicted in a native chronicle as exhibiting a monstrous face with eyes borne on the palms of severed hands and belongs evidently to the same category. The name of this Tlaxcallan ruler, Maxixcatl, is expressed in the same pictorial record by the hieroglyph of an eye on the palm of a hand, and the symbol for water which yields in the Aztec or Nahuatl language the elements *ma*, *ix*, *atl* from *maïtl*, hand; *ixtli*, eye; and *atl*, water. It is obvious that the elements *maix* are conveyed by the eyes on the palms of the severed hands on the shield to which we refer.

Much that is both interesting and suggestive on this subject will be found in the remarkable memoir "On Ancient Mexican Shields," from which this example is taken, contributed by Mrs. Zelia Nuttall, special assistant in Mexican archæology of the Peabody Museum of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to a recent issue of the "Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie," Vol. V., Part I., 1892. It gives full details with colored illustrations of the heraldic devices on war-shields and gala-shields borne in religious dances as figured in various native MSS. and Codices, described in the Spanish inventories, or depicted on ancient Mexican shields still preserved in the museums of Mexico City, Vienna, Stuttgart, London, and at Castle Ambras in the Tyrol. The supplemental accounts derived from native sources and old Spanish chronicles of the system of rewards granted by the chief ruler to successful Mexican braves in savage warfare are of special interest and value.

This system was, to say the least, peculiar. The neophyte went forth to battle clad in white raiment, with a blank shield. On capturing an enemy alive he was granted the privilege of painting his body yellow, his face red and his temples yellow, and the right to wear a colored uniform and a shield to match his war-paint. The Mexican war-shield was round, like the Highland Targe

"Whose brazen studs and tough bull hide
Had death so often dashed aside,"

and described by bards more ancient than Sir Walter Scott as painted red, spotted, varied, or chequered. In Old Mexico the capture of two foes was rewarded with a more elaborate costume, a gold *yacumetz* or nose-crescent and a shield decorated with feather pellets. The warrior who took three prisoners alive received a wooden shield with a border of blue, the royal color, or one displaying parti-colored stripes with a fringe attached to it. Further captures were rewarded with ornaments of gold, or precious stones, and the images of these quartered on the shields "in augmentation" record the nose-crescents and labrets won and worn by those who had performed such signal deeds of valor.¹ One shield bears four, and another ten of these designs which present some resemblance to the thirty-seven crescent-shaped ornaments of beaten gold adorning the magnificent feather headdress of the time of Montezuma described by Mrs. Nuttall in the first number of the first volume of "The Peabody Museum Papers." They recall, also, the buckles considered by recent authorities on European heraldry as a military badge, one of which is actually borne on the shield of the Pelhams, Earls of Chichester, to commemorate the ancestral share in the capture of King John of France at Poitiers. In the same manner a negro's head is quartered on the family shield of a "highly well-born" German family as a record that an ancestor took prisoner a black princess during one of the crusades.

¹ It would be interesting to know if the additional labrets and nose-crescents were quartered on the shield because of the personal inconvenience of wearing more than one of these distinctions.