

ORIGIN OF THE AZTECS IN AMERICA.

A birch-bark manuscript, now being examined by the authorities of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington is likely to change the entire theory as to the origin so far as America is concerned of the Aztecs, held to be the original inhabitants of Mexico. Professor Warren K. Moorehead, archaeologist of the Ohio state university and a man famous for being versed in Aztec lore and knowledge, makes this article the first accurate statement and the only one regarding the manuscript, which was discovered by a workman at Fairfield, Iowa.

Despite his learning regarding the hieroglyphics in which the Aztecs transmitted their history from generation to generation, Professor Moorehead has been unable to satisfactorily decipher the inscription upon the birch bark. For this reason he forwarded the manuscript to the Smithsonian Institution. The results of the examination by the experts there will be far more important than might be thought at first consideration. Unquestionably it is the first genuine Aztec manuscript ever un-

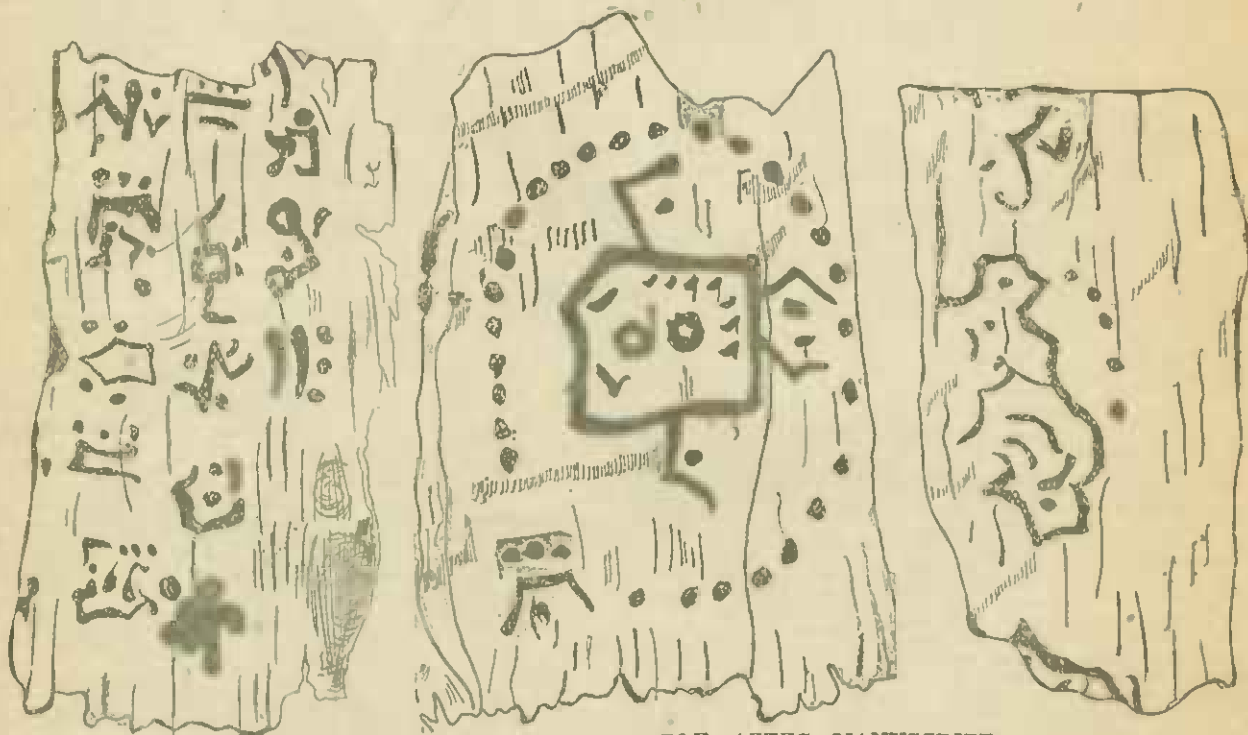
encased with a coating of pitch. The object was found about three feet below the surface. Its dimensions are something over a foot in length by eight inches and five or six inches thick.

"Out of curiosity the workman struck it a blow with a pick, causing it to split open, revealing a space in the center in which lay a roll of birch bark covered on one side with strange hieroglyphics. The workman was intelligent enough to know that the find was of some value, and, taking it to his home, carefully spread out the manuscript and encased it between glass in a frame. The matter was brought to the attention of Miss Emma Clark of Fairfield, who had heard of the museum at Columbus, and she wrote there, describing the find in all its details. I concluded that the find was certainly worth examining, and persuaded Miss Clark to send the wooden receptacle and manuscript for my inspection.

"The bark is extremely thin and its natural color is well preserved. This is due to the fact that it was sealed almost airtight. The edges are torn and broken and there is every evidence that a part of it is missing. I had fur-

"A tree some fifty or sixty years old grew directly over the spot, the hollow log, or wood being found under its roots. The gum or wax, which not only fastened the pieces together but made the receptacle practically water and air tight, had been evenly distributed by turning the block over a fire. This was plain, because the block was not only covered with soot, but was also slightly charred. The characters are written in red, evidently the juice of some plant. The work is neat.

"After a careful examination I decided that I could not read the characters and, furthermore, that no one could read them, that a great deal had been published on Aztec and Maya manuscripts, but that no one could translate them and that one-half of the archaeologists who claimed to read them gave different translations of the same manuscript. The characters are manifestly Aztec or Maya and were made, I think, by some of the highly cultured tribes of Mexico or Yucatan. A party, for some unknown reason, set out north, carrying this little box and on account of a decrease in strength, either



REPRODUCTION OF THE VALUABLE AZTEC MANUSCRIPT.

earthed within the borders of the United States.

Professor Moorehead says, over his own signature, there is small doubt of its genuineness. It has long been held that the Aztecs inhabited certain portions of this country as early, if not before, their advent into Mexico. This find and the ancient appearance of the hieroglyphics as compared with those even many centuries old, seem to give strong color to the belief regarding the United States. Professor Moorehead states succinctly in following, which is from his own pen, the status of the find from an archaeological standpoint. This is what he says:

The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society of Columbus received early in February a most remarkable relic. On September 2, 1896, a laboring man of Fairfield, Iowa, while excavating for the waterworks, brought to light what was apparently a chunk of wood, except that its surface was

ther excavations made, but there was no more fragments or relics of any description, and the workman positively asserted that the manuscript was found in a fragmentary condition and that he had sealed between glass all that he had found of it.

"The wood is of oak, and shows marks on the end of having been rudely hewn with stone axes. With the manuscript were received letters from prominent citizens certifying to the character of the workman. A letter from the editor of the Ledger, the country paper published at Fairfield, states 'Griffith is a laboring man of about average intelligence and information, and would have neither the ability or the knowledge to mislead anybody as to the circumstances. Nor is there any practical joker in this vicinity who would have the knowledge to execute a plan like this and keep quiet about it. Nor has there been interest sufficient in matters of this kind in the community to furnish such people basis for work.'

through sickness or war, buried the manuscript at the point where it was found. It is not at all probable that the whole thing is a hoax, for if it were a 'fake' we must account for the knowledge on the part of the workman who found it of Aztec and Maya glyphs, which is not in the least probable. There are very few men in this country who know anything about these hieroglyphics, and it would be impossible for any one in Fairfield to make them unless he had a work at hand containing plates of the Maya hieroglyphics. There are only a few such books in existence and they are very high priced.

"The characters are not Indian. For instance, take the grotesque human figure shown in the middle section, around which is the sun symbol. The sun symbol with the character in the left-hand upper corner of this middle piece and all the characters in the upper piece are very like those upon the tablets of Cen-