

A STORY OF THE AMERRIQUE INDIANS OF
NICARAGUA.

By J. Crawford.

Records exist in the "Palacio Episcopal," in the city of Leon, Nicaragua, dated about 1608, which date is however indistinct, of the renouncement of idolatry by a cacique of the Amerrique people in Nicaragua, and of his baptism into the Christian faith, and his marriage then and there with a young, educated Spanish woman.

Some of the descendants of that union now reside at Jeri-galpa, the capital of the department of Chontalis, Nicaragua; and they declare from their family traditions that the conversion of the Indian chieftain to Christianity, and the marriage of those two different types of people was the result of true love.

Its history is this: About the year 1600 the young Spanish lady above referred to came with her parents from Europe to Jerigalpa, then at the eastern margin of Spanish occupation in Nicaragua, and finding herself without congenial society, and no convent then in that part of the country into which she could retire, determined to occupy her time at home as a missionary, and to teach letters and Christianity to Indian children. Among her scholars was an Indian maiden a few years her junior, who, her teacher often noticed, was treated with marked deference and respect by all Indians, old and young, in the town. The two young women soon became very friendly and devotedly attached to each other, and after a companionship of over two years, interrupted occasionally by a visit of the Indian girl to her home in the distant eastern mountain ridges, the missionary discovered that her Indian friend was a princess much beloved by her brother, the young cacique of the great Amerrique tribe, and by that people, who were at that date dominant in Eastern Nicaragua.

Once upon the return of the Amerrique girl to Jerigalpa, from a visit to her home, she informed her Spanish friend and* teacher that she was instructed by the cacique and his chiefs to invite the missionary and her parents to come accompanied by some of their friends, and visit the Amerriques at their principal city, about forty-five miles distant, and there to teach them how to know and love the Great Spirit whom she knew and loved, and whose priestess they believed she was. They declared that she could return to Jerigalpa or elsewhere whenever she wished, also that she and her family would be cared for, provided with every necessary comfort, and respected in every way; also that properly equipped horses and an escort of Indians under the direction of the young princess, should be their guide and companion to and from the city of the Amerriques. The young missionary desired to accept this invitation, and her family agreed to accompany her, greatly to the delight of the Indian princess, who promised to interest them daily with almost endless varieties of semi-tropical beauties of fauna and

flora; but the other Spanish families in the town prohibited the visit, saying it would result in the loss of the family, or, in war to regain them. This opposition offended the princess who returned to her home and related the facts.

In a few days thereafter the Amerriques came in large numbers, armed and led by their cacique, entered the town of Jerigalpa, and drove many of the Spanish families from that part of the country, and, capturing the missionary and her family, placed them in charge of an escort under the direction of the princess, who with kind treatment, and with many evidences of esteem and respect, conducted them to the principal city of her tribe where they remained for several months.

The young missionary and the cacique became very fond of each other, and finally, earnest and true lovers, so that soon after the former had safely returned to Jerigalpa she consented to marry the Amerrique chieftain: but only on the condition that he would renounce idolatry, and go far west to the city of Leon and be baptized there by the Roman Catholic Bishop into the Christian faith and church. After this ceremony the two were to be married by the Bishop and return to the city of the Amerriques where the woman was to be the priestess of her husband's people.

After the attack by the Indians above related on Jerigalpa, that town was deserted by nearly all the Spaniards, so the missionary and her family on their return from the Indian city also moved to the former city of Leon, where they resided for many months.

A few days previous to the day appointed for the baptism of the Cacique and of his marriage to the Spanish lady, the Negradian Indians living near Subtiava* arrived in large numbers at a mountain near to the old city of Leon, and from there escorted to that city the young chieftain, his sister the princess, and about 5,000 of his people, all armed, and, each one wearing ornaments of gold, and profusely decorated with their wonder-kil, brilliant, beautiful and varied colored plumage.

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1 Many of the incidents related in this paper in reference to the Amerriques, their chieftain and the young Spanish missionary and her family, the attack by the Indians on Jerigalpa, etc., are on record in the archives of the department of Chontalis, or in the National Archives, or in those of the "Episcopal Palace" in Leon.

2 The old city of Leon was then the stronghold of the Spaniards in Nicaragua. It was buried beneath rocks and peperins ejected from the volcano Momotamba in 1610. and the survivors moved westward to **Subtiava, the present city of Leon.** It was situated at the foot of the large, tall volcano Momotomba at the western termination of Lake Xolotlan, Managua.

3 Subtiava is now a part of the present city of Leon, and about 25

miles west from the old buried city of Leon. The **Negrandian Indians living there how have lost their native language, and all speak Spanish.**

Early on the appointed and notable day, preceded by the Bishop and other hierarchy of the church, the Cacique and hundreds of his people entered the cathedral, then more than half a century old, and, after burying numerous idols at the foot of the ^"Sanctum Sanciorum^^ were baptized into the Christian faith. **The Bishop then united the chieftain and Spanish missionary.**

Then mounted on decorated horses in front of thousands of the Amerriques, and preceded by many of the Negrandian Indians, both were escorted with great demonstrations of joy through the old city of Leon to near the foot of the mountain volcano Momotombo, where after celebrating a feast and friendly farewell, the two tribes parted never to meet again even unto this date, 1894.

The Negrandians returned to Subtiava and declined' into subjugation and slavery to the Spaniards and their Latin-American successors.

The Amerriques returned to their home and freedom on the east side of the Amerrique range of mountains where every tree and plant robed in beauty and perpetual verdure is continually flowering and fruiting.

The few remnants at this date, 1896, of these Indians are free and roam over the same mountain ranges familiar through many centuries past to their ancestors alike undisturbed by other types of man.

Many incidents and legends have been preserved among the Indians and Spaniards referring to the Amerriques from the time of the discovery of Nicaragua in 1502 by Christopher Columbus, to the early known evidences of man's existence on the continent of America. Some of them are dim and mythical, others either transmitting or reflecting the impressions of truth. Among them are the following, which are specially referred to in this paper because of **their connection, or probable connection, with the origin of the name America,* which the writer believes has been established beyond question to have been derived originally through Christopher Columbus and his accompanying mariners, from the Amerrique people, with whom he was in daily communication for ten days in October, 1507.** In 1891 there was removed from the Island of Momotombito in Lake Xocoltan or Xolotlan, Managua, to the city of Leon, Nicaragua, three stone statues of men, the remnant of six original similar statues which had been sculptured in a past geological epoch by artists of much intelligence and skill, with implements of flint and felsite. These statuettes are portraits of a type of man differing from, and evidently

4 The origin of the name America from the Amerriques has been proven with great clearness by Prof. Jules Marcou Cambridge, Mass., U. S: A., in his many publications on the derivation of the name America. See especially his paper on this subject in Smithsonian Report, Part i, P.

647, entitled "Amerriques, Amerigho Vespucci, and America," and also "Origin of Name America," Goldthwaite's Geographical Magazine, New York City, Feb., 1893.

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long antedating on this continent the oldest types of aborigines, known by their sculpturing, pottery and glyphs, to have existed in Mexico.^

During the time, now long distant, when those artists among the earliest people in Nicaragua were completing the above referred to six stone statues, which evidently portrayed the distinctive features of their own type, a subsidence occurred of all or part of the island of Momotombito, and also of all that part of western Nicaragua to a depth beneath the Pacific Ocean of about twenty-five feet,** inundating the heated subterranean volcanic caverns in all that region, causing terrific explosions, and violent expulsions of volcanic bombs, fused aquaigeneous and other rock materials. In the face of such terrible cataclysms, the sculptors of the six stone images and their people would either have perished, or if saved, were forced to move eastward, their only route toward safety: across lakes Xolotlan and Nicaragua, Nicaragua, to the verdure covered Amerrique range of mountains, visible from the small elevated plateaus on the cone shaped mountain island, Momotombito.^

The Amerriques of the present time resemble so closely the type of man portrayed on the statues referred to, that it appears reasonable to infer that they were made by ancient ancestors of the above people.

The dissimilarity of the Amerrique Indians to the descendants in Nicaragua of the Nahuatl invaders from Mexico who nearly surround them west and north, and also of the Chibchas - Chibchas Muyscas - who are to the south of them, especially in Colombia, indicate a different origin of the Amerriques, and so far as we now know, their language having not yet been studied, they were in Nicaragua previous to the Nahuatl invasion, and were forced by floods and subsidences of land in western Nicaragua to emigrate to their present locality, about latitude 12° 15' north in Eastern Nicaragua.

It has recently been satisfactorily proven by Prof. Jules Marcou, of Cambridge, Mass., that it was the Amerrique people that Christopher Columbus and his men met and stayed with for about ten days in October, 1502, at or near the present town of Bluefields, situated on the Caribbean Sea.

In his Leiierra rarrissima Columbus relates incidents of his fourth voyage of discovery, describing this people, and was deeply impressed by their manners and appearances, and also by the fact that each of the Amerriques was observed to "wear a mirror of gold," being the first natives of the "New World" that he discovered who wore ornaments of

this metal.

5 An eminent American Anthropologist however declares from linguistic consideration that the Central 'American Aborigines came from Mexico. See D. G. Brinton, M, D., in Presidential address before "The American Association for the Advancement of Science."

6 Evidences of this subsidence are still to be traced in that section of country. See Proceedings Boston Society of Natural History, Vol. XXVI, Fol. 49-59-

7 The ancestors of these sculptors either came across the Pacific Ocean from Polynesia or Micronesia, at that date probably a part of Asia, or the latter were descendants of the former, who had crossed the ocean on a continental land route, or over a chain of nearly connected islands. Many eminent geologists believe that there was a connected land route between Asia and America during or immediately preceding the Glacial Epoch.

Columbus and a part of his mariners "ascended the river," evidently the present named Escandido or Bluefields river, but then probably known as the Carpa or Rama, for about sixty miles, with that people in search for gold. Because of obstructions, as fallen trees, cascades and falls, impeding navigation, the searchers for the yellow metal returned to their ships in the harbor at Bluefields. **No doubt the one hundred and fifty men who accompanied the great discoverer on his last voyage, returned to Europe deeply impressed with the Amerriques, the only people seen by them, natives of the newly discovered world who wore habitually heavy ornaments and charms of brightly burnished gold, and, most probably, these mariners often and enthusiastically repeated in Europe the name Amerrique until it became familiar there to designate the newly discovered lands, known only as the "New Wofld; " but thereafter as America. At present the Amerriques are few in numbers and appear to be dying off with unaccountable rapidity, although they are free from oppression and not afflicted, so far as known, by any deadly epidemic. They are at liberty to wander in their forests, and over their valleys and mountains in search of game undisturbed by other men.**

Their great national destiny seems to have been accomplished and their end drawing near. Ere long they will no more be numbered among the living proud claimants of that great name, derived from their ancestors, and emblazoned in undying letters on one. of the World's hemispheres. **They will die in freedom unconquered by any other people, but their name, America, will live long after their existence and tribe or nation has become only an incident in Anthropology, a name unsullied by subjection, but brilliant on freedom's shield, from man's early history through thousands* of centuries, and to continue a synonym symbol and sacred name to freemen's sons and daughters until the Earth is wandering dark and cold without a living tongue to lisp a name.**