

Probably every Indian tribe, north and south, had its early hero god, the great doer or teacher of all first things, from the Iuskeha and Manabozho of the rude Iroquoian and Algonquian to the Quetzalcoatl, the Bochica, and the Viracocha of the more cultivated Aztecs, Muyscas, and Quichuas of the milder southland. Among the roving tribes of the north this hero is hardly more than an expert magician, frequently degraded to the level of a common trickster, who, after ridding the world of giants and monsters, and teaching his people a few simple arts, retires to the upper world to rest and smoke until some urgent necessity again requires his presence below. Under softer southern skies the myth takes more poetic form and the hero becomes a person of dignified presence, a father and teacher of his children, a very Christ, worthy of all love and reverence, who gathers together the wandering nomads and leads them to their destined country, where he instructs them in agriculture, house building, and the art of government, regulates authority, and inculcates peaceful modes of life. "Under him, the earth teemed with fruits and flowers without the pains of culture. An ear of Indian corn was as much as a single man could carry. The cotton, as it grew, took of its own accord the rich dyes of human art. The air was filled with intoxicating perfumes and the sweet melody of birds. In short, these were the halcyon days, which find a place in the mythic systems of so many nations in the Old World. It was the golden age of Anahuac." (*Prescott, 1.*)<sup>1</sup> When at last his work is well accomplished, he bids farewell to his sorrowing subjects, whom he consoles with the sacred promise that he will one day return and resume his kingdom, steps into his magic boat by the seashore, and sails away out of their sight to the distant land of sunrise.

Such was Quetzalcoatl of the Aztecs, and such in all essential respects was the culture god of the more southern semicivilized races.

Curiously enough, this god, at once a Moses and a messiah, is usually described as a white man with flowing beard. From this and other circumstances it has been argued that the whole story is only another form of the dawn myth, but whether the Indian god be an ancient deified lawgiver of their own race, or some nameless missionary who found his way across the trackless ocean in the early ages of Christianity, or whether we have here only a veiled parable of the morning light bringing life and joy to the world and then vanishing to return again from the east with the dawn, it is sufficient to our purpose that the belief in the coming of a messiah, who should restore them to their original happy condition, was well nigh universal among the American tribes.

This faith in the return of a white deliverer from the east opened the gate to the Spaniards at their first coming alike in Haiti, Mexico, Yucatan, and Peru. (*Brinton, 1.*) The simple native welcomed the white strangers as the children or kindred of their long-lost benefactor,

<sup>1</sup> Parenthetic references throughout the memoir are to bibliographic notes following *The Songs*.

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