

STORIES FROM TUXTEPEC, OAXACA

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THE following stories were collected in Tuxtepec, in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, during the past winter, while studying the dialect of that village for the International School of American Archaeology and Ethnology. Since very little is known about the ethnology of that part of Mexico, a short description of Tuxtepec and its inhabitants may not be out of place.

Tuxtepec is a pretty, tropical town on the Rio Popolohuápam, not far from the Vera Cruz border. Being the outlet of the famous tobacco of the Valle National, and of the coffee of the Ejutla district, it is a rather prominent place in that region. It is only about two hundred feet above the sea-level, and therefore resembles the state of Vera Cruz climatically more than the state of Oaxaca.

The language formerly spoken was Mexican. This has been superseded by Spanish, partly as the result of the influx of new settlers. Out of the entire population of several thousand, there are to-day not over a hundred who understand Mexican. Of these, not over one-half speak it fluently, while not over one-eighth use it habitually. I did not find any of the latter number satisfactory informants.

Though Tuxtepec itself is an old Aztec village, all the surrounding villages are either Chinantec or Mazatec. The nearest Aztec village is quite a distance away, over a hundred kilometres (and, by the way, the people speak a different dialect of Aztec).

Tradition says that Tuxtepec was occupied by a garrison of Aztec troops, who collected tribute from the Chinantecs, Mazatecs, and Popolocos, for the Mexican Emperor. If this is true, the soldiers must have come from another place than the valley of Mexico, for the dialect spoken at Tuxtepec does not belong to that group of Mexican.

There are several places not far from Tuxtepec where archaeological remains are found, which, I regret to say, I did not have sufficient time to study carefully. The most important of these is about a mile above Tuxtepec, and within a hundred yards of the river. On the river side of the road are several mounds. However, there are no traces of architecture or pottery on them.

A little farther along, on the opposite side of the road, entirely hidden by the jungle, is what is locally known as "The Fort," but more probably it was a temple.

Opposite the mounds large quantities of obsidian rejects are found. In all probability a workshop of obsidian implements was located

there. Broken pieces of pottery may be picked up practically anywhere within a radius of a quarter of a mile. The type of this pottery is quite different from that found in the valley of Mexico. It is very thin and fine, and has very little decoration in colors. Small heads of men and animals, a little over an inch high, are quite numerous.

There does not seem to be an abundance of folk-lore of any description among the present inhabitants of Tuxtepec, and what can be found is chiefly European. However, I managed to collect two versions of the Coyote story. They are very much alike. The only episode that is different is the last one.

The first episode — "Rabbit and Tar Baby" — is quite a common one, and is found widely distributed over America. It occurs among the Yuchi in almost identical form. In California (Yana) and Oregon (Takelma) it is interesting to note that Coyote is substituted for Rabbit. The other incidents of these myths call for no comment.

The story of Lion is typical of the European folk-lore, which has largely replaced the native American.

COYOTE STORY (*first version*)

An old woman had one son. This son cultivated a field and planted beans, but Rabbit came and did them much harm. Indeed, he did them much damage. Said the son to his mother, "What shall we do to catch Rabbit?" His mother answered, "We will make a doll-baby, and place it where Rabbit enters the field." So they made the doll-baby and placed it where Rabbit entered.

That night Rabbit came and fell over the doll-baby, and stuck fast with one foot. Then Rabbit said, "Let go, and give me room to pass!" The doll-baby did not answer; so this made Rabbit angry, and he said, "If you do not give me room to pass, I shall hit you." But the doll-baby did not answer. Then Rabbit struck him, and said, "You will see how I shall hit you." But his hand stuck fast, and he cried, "Let me go, or I will give you another blow!" So he kicked him, and his foot stuck fast; and Rabbit cried, "Let me go, or I shall strike you again!" The doll-baby did not answer; so this made Rabbit more angry, and he struck him again. Then he was fast with both hands and feet.

Now Rabbit said, "Let me go, or I shall bite you!" Again the doll-baby did not reply, and again he got angry and bit the doll-baby.

Now he was fast with hands and feet and mouth. A little later the old woman came, and said, "What are you doing, Rabbit? Now you have finished eating my bean-field." Then she seized Rabbit and put him in a bag, and tied the mouth of the bag. Next the old woman went to her house to heat a spit. While she was gone, Coyote came, and found Rabbit in the bag. Coyote said to him, "What are

you doing here?" Rabbit answered, "I am tied in here, because the old woman wants me to marry her daughter; but I don't want to marry her, because I am very small, and the girl is very large." Then Coyote said, "Come out, and I will get in!" So Rabbit jumped out, and Coyote got in. Then Rabbit tied up the mouth of the bag and ran away.

Then the old woman came with her spit which she had heated, and, thinking Rabbit was in the bag, she stuck the spit into Coyote. Then Coyote ran away. Meanwhile Rabbit had gone into a wood, and was in a zapote-tree eating zapotes. Coyote passed by, and Rabbit called to him, "Where are you going, Uncle Coyote?" Coyote answered, "Now I am going to eat you." But Rabbit answered, "Don't eat me! I am going to give you a zapote." — "Well," said Coyote, "throw me one!" So Rabbit threw him first a good one, but afterwards he threw him a green one, which stuck fast in his throat. While Coyote was choking, Rabbit ran away, and hid in a place where there were many reeds. Here he was playing on a guitar when Coyote passed.

He said to Coyote, "Where are you going?" Coyote answered, "Now I am going to eat you." Rabbit answered, "Don't eat me! I am hiding here, waiting for the bride and groom. They have just gone to get married. Come here and play! When you hear the noise of their approach, play louder." So Rabbit went to set fire to the reeds, and then ran and hid in the thick underbush.

The fire came and burnt Coyote, who then fled in search of Rabbit. Meanwhile Rabbit had gotten under a stone. Coyote passed by; and Rabbit shouted, "Halloo, Coyote!"

Then said Coyote, "Now, surely, I am going to eat you." — "No, don't eat me! If you do, the world will end. Come here, Uncle Coyote, and get under this stone; for, if this stone is thrown down, the world will come to an end."

So Coyote got under the stone; and Rabbit ran behind him and threw another stone on top of it, so that Coyote died; and Rabbit said, "Now you are dying, but I am free."

COYOTE STORY (*second version*)

This version is not as clear as the first, and seems to have several omissions. It differs but slightly from the first.

The old woman bought a doll-baby (*muñeco*), and placed it at the entrance of her bean-field. When Rabbit came there and found the doll-baby, he said to it, "Friend, give me room to pass." Since the doll-baby did not answer, Rabbit got angry, and slapped the doll-baby. His hand stuck fast. [The doll-baby was evidently made of tar, or some such adhesive substance, although neither version states this to be the case.]

He then repeated, "Give me room to pass!" Since the doll-baby did not seem to want to give him room, he kicked it, and found that his foot also stuck fast. Then Rabbit said, "Let me go, or I'll bite you!" Since the doll-baby did not answer, he bit him. Then his hands and feet and teeth were all fast.

Then the old woman came up, and said to the knave (*picaro*), "Have you already fallen into my hands?" Saying this, she picked him up and put him in a bag. Then she went away to heat a spit to cook Rabbit on.

While she was gone, Uncle Coyote came up, and said, "Nephew, what are you doing in that bag?"

Rabbit answered, "They want me to get married; but I don't want to, because I am very small, while the girl is very large. You, uncle, are very large, so get inside in my place." Coyote did as was suggested, and Rabbit ran away.

A little later the old woman returned with her spit, and stuck Coyote with it; so Coyote jumped up and ran in search of Rabbit. He found him in a zapote-tree, eating zapotes.

Coyote said to the knave, "Now I am going to eat you." But Rabbit answered, "Now, look here, uncle! Don't eat me! See what fine zapotes these are, eat a fine ripe one of these!"

"Well, then, throw me one!" said Coyote; and Rabbit threw Coyote a ripe one, which he ate. The next one that Rabbit threw him was a green one, and this stuck in Coyote's throat and choked him. Rabbit climbed down and ran away, while Coyote was choking.

When Coyote recovered, he went in search of Rabbit. He found him in a place where reed-grass abounds, lying in a hammock and playing a guitar.

Coyote said to Rabbit, "Now, surely, I am going to eat you!" But Rabbit answered, "No, Uncle, don't do that! Don't you see why I am hidden here? Now there is going to be a wedding, so I am waiting to serenade the bride and groom; you can help me. I will go to find the rest of the party. When you hear the noise of the wedding party approaching, play all the louder and faster until the couple arrives." Coyote agreed, and in this manner Rabbit was able to escape, leaving Coyote playing. So Rabbit set fire to the reeds. When Coyote heard the noise of the fire, he played all the louder, thinking it was the wedding party approaching.

Finally Coyote saw the fire; so he fled in search of Rabbit, in order to revenge himself. He found Rabbit on the shore of a lake, and said to him, "Now, knave, surely you will not escape from my hands!" But Rabbit answered, "First let us eat some cheese! Don't you see that one out in the lake? We will drink all the water we can, and then take a rest."

So they started to drink; and Coyote drank so much, that he burst his stomach and died. However, it was not cheese, but the reflection of the sun in the lake.

THE LION

A hungry lion pursued a calf and a lamb, which, full of fear, fled, and hid in a dense forest. The Lion, who was very weak from hunger, said to himself, "I am going to die." Then he shouted and yelled, saying that he was very sick, for he thought this pretext would serve to bring some animals to him.

There were several who were in the vicinity; but they remembered that the Lion was sick on account of hunger, and would eat all who came to see him.

The Fox was one of these. He drew near to the door of the Lion's den. When the Lion saw him, he said, "Come in and sit down beside me, just as the other animals do, for I am very fond of the Fox!" But the Fox answered, "I can come in, but I couldn't go out." So he departed.

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