

Ceremony recalls night of drinking

A few months ago, I wrote about the ancient Indian mounds and pyramids. In connection with that, I would like to tell you about a very old and unusual ceremony which is still carried out today, in what is now called Mexico.

A long time ago, before there was a Mexico, United States or Canada, there were two Indian villages. Even though they were only a few miles apart, they each spoke a different language and had different beliefs.

The people of one village were known for the fine honey wine that they made. The keeping of bees for making honey was carried on by the Indians long before the Europeans arrived. These people also had a tall pyramid in the centre of their village, with a fine wooden temple on top. It was dedicated to Tlaloc, the Spirit of the Wind.

One day they decided to offer some of their fine wine to Tlaloc as a sacrifice. They filled several large vases as big as barrels and left them on top of the pyramid as an offering. When the men of the neighboring village heard of this, they decided to sneak out to the pyramid at night and drink the honey wine themselves.

A little boy, who was hiding in the bushes, heard his father and the other men talking over their plan, so he decided to follow them. That night after everyone was asleep, he saw his fa-

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ther get up and slip out of the house. He got up and slipped out, too. As he watched from the shadows, he saw his father walking down the moonlit street. One by one his father's friends joined him. Then they set out for the pyramid where the wine was. The boy followed them.

The pyramid had steep, stone steps on all four sides. The men hurried to the top and began to drink the honey wine. As they got more and more inebriated, they spilled the wine and it ran down the stone steps. Some of them spilled the wine over themselves and laughed.

Suddenly there was a crack of thunder and the sky turned black. The wind began to howl. Too late, they realized that they had angered Tlaloc, the Wind Spirit. As they stumbled about, drunkenly, there was more lightning and thunder. When the light of morning appeared, the boy saw that his father and his friends had been changed into birds. They all flew away toward the rising sun.

The boy went back to his village and told

what he had seen. The villagers were sad when the men did not return. One day when the boy was grown up, he called his friends who had lost their fathers and they planned an unusual memorial to them. They set up a strong, tall pole in the centre of their village, with a small platform on top. Around the top of the pole, they wrapped long ropes.

Then while the young man played a flute which made bird-like sounds, his friends, one by one, slid off the platform. A rope was fastened to each one's waist and feathers were fastened to their arms to make them look like giant birds. Slowly they circled the pole, coming lower and lower, until they reached the ground.

Although it was first done centuries ago, this ritual is still performed today in some villages. The pole is sometimes 90 feet high. The men are called "la voladores", the fliers or birdmen in Spanish. At Mohawk College last year, when I told this story, a young man excitedly told me that he had seen this exact ceremony in Acapulco while on vacation. He had not understood what it was about and was glad to find out.