



THE SIXTH MONTH OF THE YEAR

¶Which contained twenty days. The sign of the first day celebrated at the beginning of this month was called Etzalcualiztli, which means Day of Eating Cooked Corn and Beans.

I am aghast at the silly and childish customs of these people under their heathen law! On what lowly things they based their solemnities and their great variety of feasts! So that the reader may perceive the foundation of this feast, I wish to explain its name, and in this way we shall understand its low character. This first day of the sixth month [is] Etzalcualiztli, which means Day on Which *Etzalli* is Allowed to be Eaten. Since during my childhood I ate [*etzalli*] often, I can explain that is a sort of bean stew containing whole kernels of corn. It is considered very tasty, so coveted, so greatly desired, that it is small wonder it had its own special day and feast on which it was honored.

This day or festival was held for many reasons. In the first place, it was at this time that rain began to fall copiously and that corn and other plants were growing and were beginning to bear fruit. Thus the sign of this day was shown, proud and handsome, as a hand holding a cornstalk in the water [Plate 43]. This denoted fertility and predicted a good season, since the water had come at the proper time. Another hand held a small pot, which meant that

the people could eat without fear of that food of beans and corn. There was to be no famine, since the year was proceeding in a satisfactory way. It also meant that there was general permission to eat corn and beans in the same plate as one dish. This is considered costly, and not all can afford it. In times of famine the eating of a handful of beans is comparable to the plucking of a handful of eyelashes. If they ate corn, they abstained from beans, and if they ate beans, they abstained from corn, adjusting themselves to the season. But once this day arrived, if it was not a barren but a fertile year, indulgence was given to eat this combination, thus indicating abundance. These feasts fell upon the ninth of June, when there are native cherries and other small fruits to eat. Many people who suffer a lack of corn live off these fruits, like people in Spain who sustain themselves throughout the summer with lima beans and cherries. Thus when the Indians are able to get the *capulin* (which is the name of the native cherry), though there may be a corn famine, they fill their bellies with native cherries and a thousand other edible plants, until the corn is ripe.

It was a precept or law (I believe) that under pain of death no one could eat of this food [etzalli] except at this time. This was obeyed, because the laws of the Indians (especially those of divine nature) were kept with such rigor that the death penalty was certain for the transgressor. These people considered it a small thing to slay a man. It was as natural in those times as the killing of a hen or a chicken to us, without fear of punishment.

On this day there was a ceremony, a heathen rite, which our confessors and ministers should be warned of, since they may find this knowledge useful. All the native farmers and common people performed a ceremony with their agricultural implements: hoes; sharp sticks for sowing; spades with which the earth is dug; tumplines with which they carried things; *cacaxtles*, consisting of some small crossed boards placed within a wooden framework where the load is tied; the cord with which the load is carried; and the basket within which the load is placed. On the day of the feast all these things were placed by the Indians upon a small platform in their homes, and the objects were revered and thanked for their

help in the fields and on the road. Food and pulque were offered to them, together with the dish eaten on this day, already described. Incense was offered before them and a thousand salaams, salutations, and speeches. This rite was called *Repose of the Servile Implements*. Oh, strange brutishness of people who in many ways possessed good discipline, social order, keen intelligence, ability, and breeding! In other things, however, they displayed a strange bestiality and blindness—greater even than what we have described. Let me give warning: In our own times I have beheld some iron implements attached to digging sticks used in tilling the soil, and at the end of them were carved faces of monkeys, dogs, or devils. This did not seem good to me, though it is such a common custom that there is not an Indian who does not use these effigies, especially in the area of Chalco and in the nearby mountain range. I asked certain friars to look into this, but they claimed that these images were just decorative. I shall do the same; it is better to give the benefit of the doubt.

At the temples, in front of the large idols, offerings were made of that coarse heathen food which I described, corn and beans. To it were added pieces of fowl, turkey, and human flesh. This was done especially when a man wished to honor the gods—and occasions were never lacking. One of his slaves was killed, part of the flesh was offered up, and the rest was eaten. After having eaten, everybody, children and adults, young and old, without exception, went to wash in the rivers or springs. He who did not wash was held to be addicted to the god of famine, known as *Apizteotl*, which means Hungry God. At the same time the people washed their agricultural implements and all the tools used for sowing. After everyone had bathed, the noblemen came out to dance in the courtyards of the temple and in the market place. All these men were adorned in the manner which can be seen in the illustration at the beginning of the account of this month. They held their cornstalks in one hand and in the other some small pots, such as have been described. This solemn dance lasted almost all day.

While the lords and noblemen were dancing, the common people took part in another solemn dance. They carried some of

the branches with which the temple was adorned, and from the leaves they made wreaths or hoops which they placed around their eyes, tying them behind with strings. Without exaggeration they looked like blinders for a donkey. Wearing these things on their eyes, with a staff in one hand and an empty pot in the other, they went from house to house. They stopped in the courtyard of each house and cried out, "Give me to eat of your *etzalli*!" This was the dish of corn and beans we have described.

With this we finish our description of the feast falling in the sixth month and of the servile and ridiculous heathen ceremonies which these people practiced, indulged in. These rites lacked a sound basis, were such products of the imagination to the extent that today the Indians laugh at and mock them. In spite of this, they are abandoning their ceremonies with great difficulty. This is especially true in things having to do with food, because these people are worse than Epicureans and more sensual!