

ON AMERICAN LOT-GAMES, AS EVIDENCE OF ASIATIC INTERCOURSE BEFORE THE TIME OF COLUMBUS.

BY

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(With plate V.)

It is now nearly twenty years since I brought forward in the Journal of the Anthropological Institute and elsewhere ¹⁾ a comparison between two elaborate games of mingled chance and skill, namely *pachisi*, an ancient and still popular sport in Hindustan, and *patolli*, which was an established diversion in Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest. My argument was that the principle and even the details of these two games bear so close a resemblance, as to make their independent invention improbable, justifying the inference that at some date before 1500 the Asiatic game had passed over to America. Such a theory, if well-founded, supports the opinion long ago enunciated by ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT, that the old civilization of Mexico bears unmistakable traces of Asiatic influence. Accordingly, the problem of the two games became matter of anthropological controversy, their alleged connexion being claimed by some as convincing, and by others not less positively rejected, while admitted on both sides as bringing to a definite issue the question of American civilization before the European period. New evidence which has since come in, makes it desirable for me to return to the discussion. Especially not only has the text of FATHER DIEGO DURAN'S History of the Indies been published, but the picture-writing on which he commented has been reproduced; his chapter on *patolli* is thus fully available, and with it the authentic representation of two Aztecs playing the game, which is here copied in Plate V, Fig. 2. I have to thank Sir ALFRED LYALL for providing the fit pendant to this picture by having a photograph taken in India, of a match at *pachisi* between a Hindu and a Mohammedan, from which Fig. 1 is a copy. The mere comparison of the two groups seems to me sufficient to set up a *prima facie* case, that the gamesters of the Old and New World are engaged at games which, though not quite the same, are closely connected varieties from one original.

¹⁾ On the Game of Patolli in Ancient Mexico and its probably Asiatic Origin; Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1878. — Backgammon among the Aztecs, in Macmillan's Magazine, Dec. 1878, etc. etc.