

*The Sumario Compendioso of Brother Juan Diez: The Earliest Mathematical Work of the New World.* By David Eugene Smith. Boston, Ginn and Company, 1921. vii + 65 pp.

To the historian and to the bibliophile the publication of this little volume will be an event of importance. But even to one who, like the reviewer, can lay no claim to such distinction the possession and perusal of the work will be a source of genuine interest and pleasure.

The original was printed in the City of Mexico in 1556 "long before the migration of the pilgrims to this continent was thought of, a half century before Henry Hudson discovered the river that bears his name, and nearly two centuries before the first mathematical work in English appeared from the pen of an American scholar." The author was one Juan Diez, a priest and companion of Cortez in the conquest of Mexico.

The greater part of the original consists of an elaborate set of tables intended to minimize as far as possible the computations arising in the sale of gold and silver. Only one page of these tables is reproduced in the present edition. All of the remainder of the work, however, consisting of a brief textbook on arithmetic "suited to the needs of apprentices in the counting houses of the New World" and of six pages of algebra (devoted largely to the quadratic equation), is reproduced in facsimile with an English translation appearing on the opposite pages. When it is recalled that only a small number of books on algebra had appeared in Europe before 1556 it is indeed "remarkable"—as the editor points out—"that an obscure writer in Mexico should have produced even six pages on the subject in this early period in the development of printed scientific literature."

The fact that only four copies of the original are known to exist made it desirable to make a facsimile reproduction of the work more generally available. This has been made possible through the cooperation of the distinguished editor and translator, an anonymous "public spirited gentleman" who subscribed to the greater part of the limited edition in advance of publication, and of a publishing house which has in the past given evidence not merely of high proficiency in the art of book-making but also of scholarly ideals not unduly influenced by the balance-sheet. To them the cordial thanks of the scientific fraternity are due.

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