

XXXIV.—*An Account of some Golden Articles brought from South America by MR. CHARLES EMPSON, and laid before the Society on the 6th February, 1828, with Remarks thereon. See Plates IX. and X.*

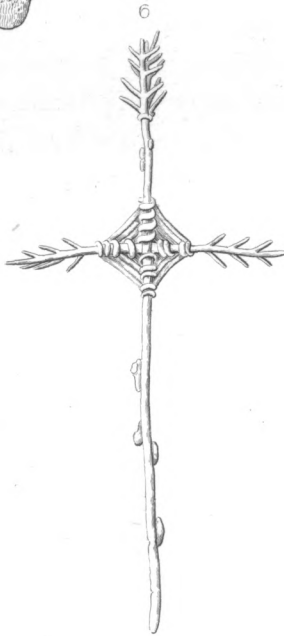
MR. EMPSON having communicated with Mr. Adamson, as to the exhibition of these curious articles, he was requested to furnish such an account as to their discovery, &c. as his information might enable him to give the Society, which he was pleased to do in a letter to Mr. Adamson, from which the following is an extract.

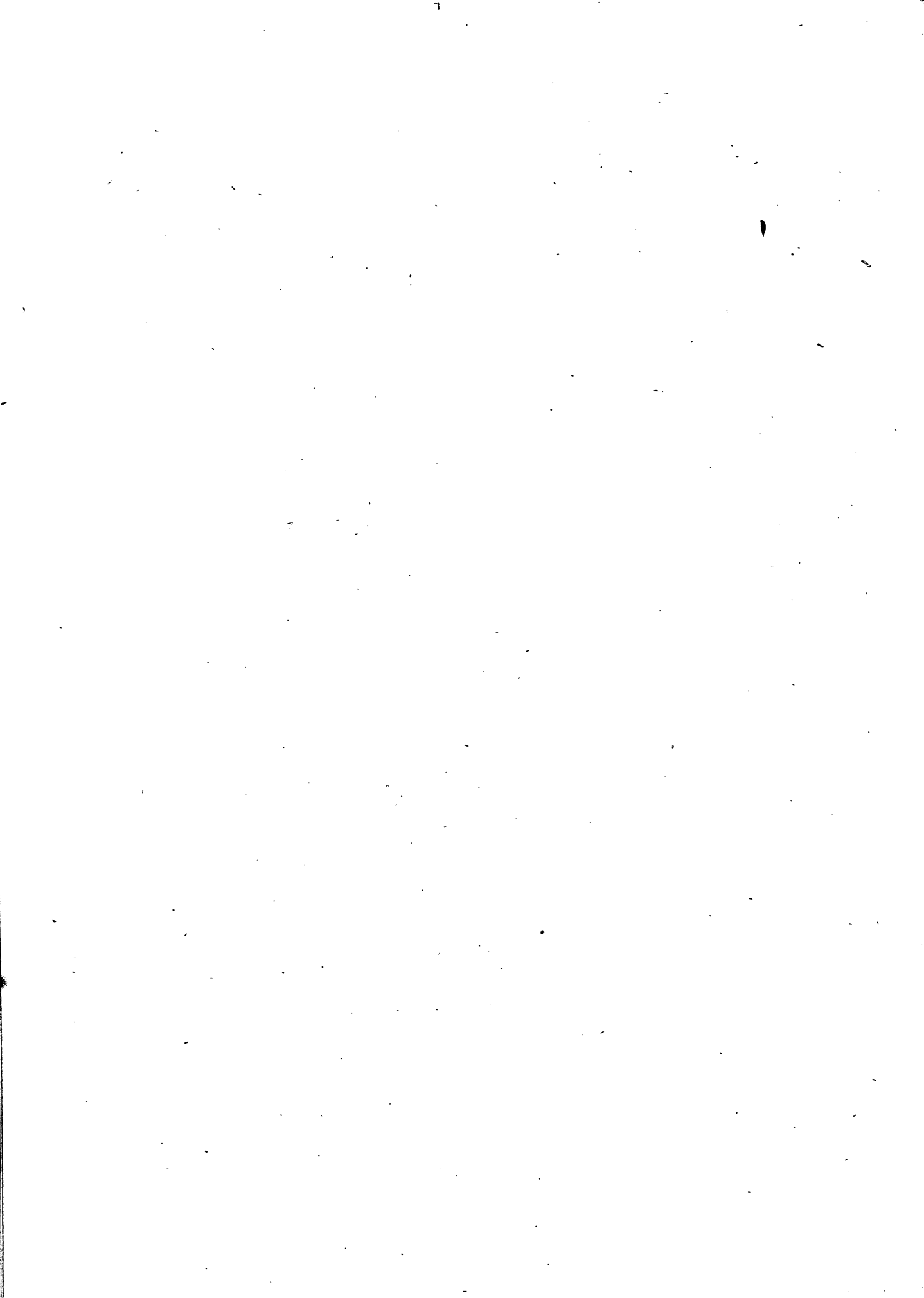
It may be as well here to state, that the engravings represent the articles of their proper size, and that their weights are as under.

	oz.	dwt.	gr.		oz.	dwt.	gr.
No. 1.....	0	16	17	No. 7.....	2	2	0
No. 2.....	0	3	19	No. 8.....	0	0	19
No. 3.....	0	1	18	No. 9.....	0	2	15
No. 4.....	0	2	4	No. 10.....	0	2	14
No. 5.....	0	5	4	No. 11.....	0	1	6
No. 6.....	0	3	2	No. 12.....	0	1	0

“Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.—These Golden Figures were obtained at Bogota, in that part of South America which is called Colombia. I believe them to have been found in the Lake of Guataveta, into which it was said the Indians annually threw many images of gold and other valuables, to obtain the favour of the Gods which preside over the waters. There are many lakes which are known to have been sacred amongst the Aborigines, and in which golden figures have often been discovered. The lake of Guataveta was always believed to be the spot into which the Indians of Tequardama threw their treasures on the approach of the conquerors. Persons have been constantly diving for, and seeking by other means, these Indian remains; but as they were only valued as

PLATE IX





gold, and as the precious metals are always preferred in grains or ingots, it was common for the persons into whose hands they fell, to put them immediately into the crucible, so that it is impossible to say what may have been found. At present it is so difficult to meet with any curiosities of this nature, that I was upwards of three years in the country before I could obtain any, or even a sight of them. The gentleman, who procured these interesting objects for me, was intimately connected with the parties who caused the lake of Guataveta to be drained, doubtless with the expectation of meeting with treasures that would repay them for the outlay of many thousands of dollars. The speculation was ruinous to the projectors: they found some images and other articles of gold, a few amethysts and emeralds, but nothing of great value. The gems were from the mines of Muso, which is but a few days' journey from the Lake, and the gold is of the same quality as that which is still found in the alluvial depositions of the neighbourhood. Nothing occurred that was foreign to the country, or even to the immediate vicinity. There was no silver, nor indeed is there any evidence of this metal having been known in the country before the conquest. It is curious, however, that a stone, which was guarded by the Indians, and removed by them as they were driven from place to place by the Spaniards, and which was the first thing which the subjugated natives stipulated to retain, is a large mass of very rich grey silver ore.

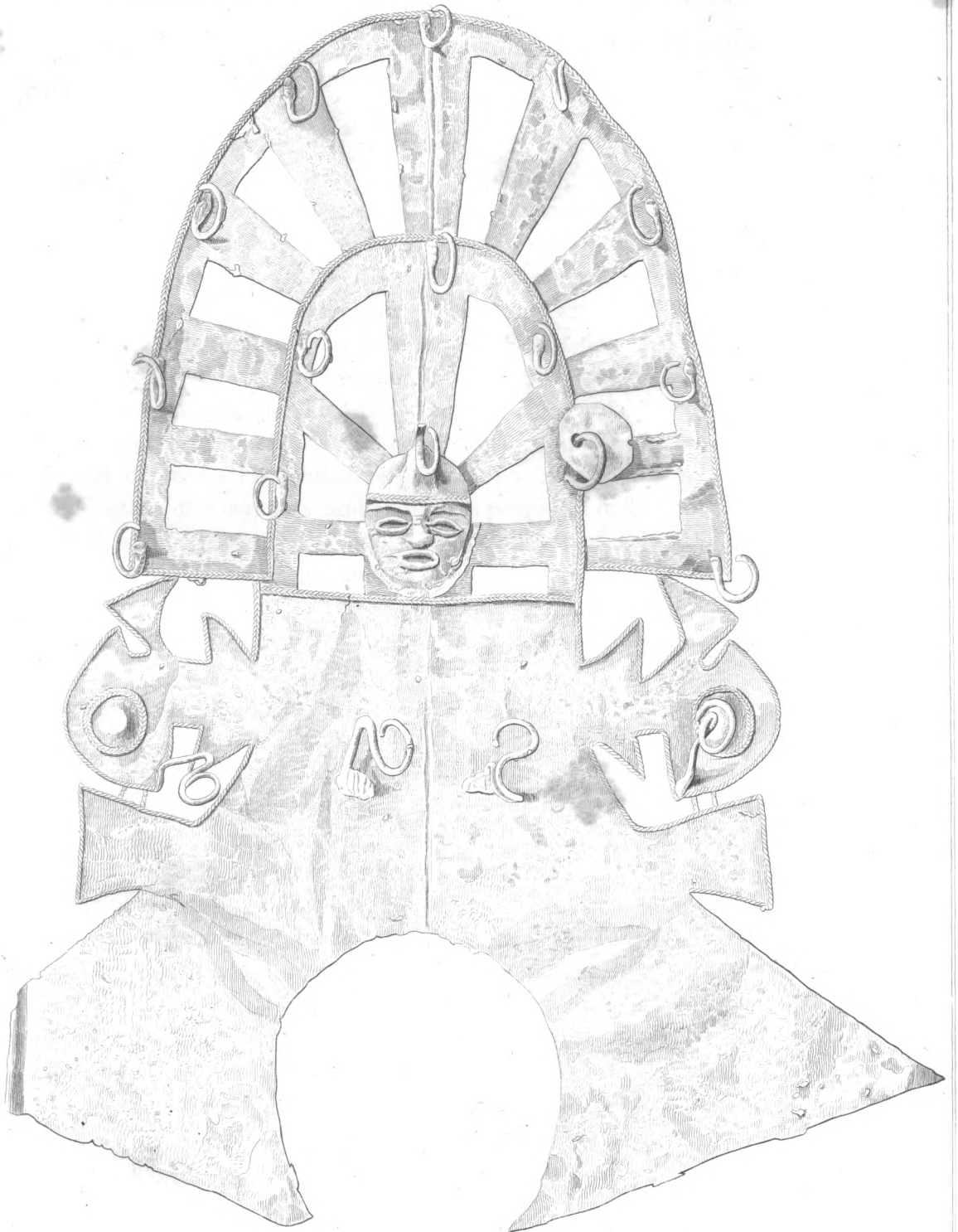
“ No. 6.—I have been assured that this cross was found in one of those burial places, or sacred depositaries, called *Guachas*; it was obtained in Antioqua, a province remarkably rich in treasures which have been buried by the Indians. It was natural for me to doubt, that an emblem so sacred amongst Christians should have been an object of veneration amongst the Aborigines of South America. For some time I thought that, during the progress of the conquerors, some Christian might have been buried in one of the tombs which were used by the natives, and that this symbol of his faith had been deposited with the stranger; but upon comparing its workmanship with that of those ornaments worn by Cortes and his followers, it is impossible to ascribe to the European artizans of that period so rude a fabrication. I thought, also,

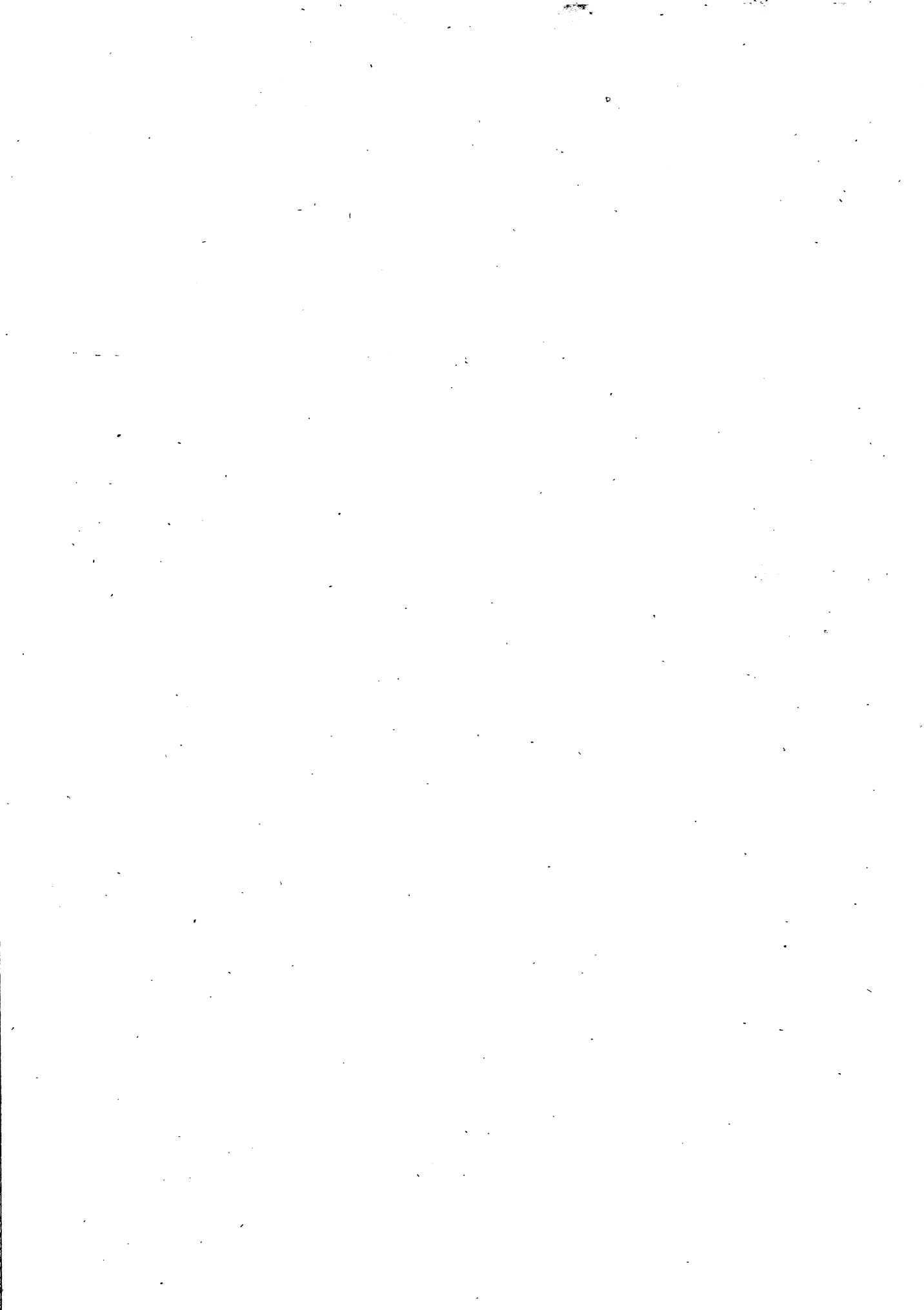
that this cross might have been made by some Christian soldier, from grains of gold which he could so easily and so abundantly obtain; for even to this day the Spanish soldiers are constantly fashioning ornaments of this nature out of pieces of iron, copper, or silver. But my doubts of its being a genuine relick, of a nearly exterminated race, are entirely removed; for I have seen a similar figure of a cross, sculptured upon a rock, with many other devices, and especially representations of the human form. This rock is believed to have been a place of worship anterior to the conquest, and may be seen near Talamaque, about ten miles from the great river Magdalena.

“That nations so totally unknown to each other should apparently revere the same emblem, and that emblem not having reference to any natural object, is a remarkable coincidence; but after all, the figure may be purely accidental, and its signification altogether at variance with the thing represented, as the cross stones occasionally found in the cromlech of antiquity, which, after Christianity was introduced into this country, served for sepulchral ornaments, or to place in those temples in which the new faith was promulgated.

“On reading Moore’s tale of the Epicurean, I was struck with his assertion, that the cross was amongst the Egyptians the emblem of future life. His notes to illustrate this opinion are very curious.

“No. 7.—This ornament was found in that district of New Granada, which was inhabited by a race of Indians, called Guayaberros: the Spaniards found them the most obstinate of the indigenous tribes.—Their Cazique was a person of superior talent and uncommon bravery; after many perilous encounters, he was taken prisoner, but neither threats nor persuasions could prevail upon him to disclose the place in which he had concealed his treasures. At length, upon the prospect of immediate torture, he apparently consented to make known the hiding place of his vast wealth. The cave, in which it was secured, was in a situation to which he could not direct the Spaniards, but he offered to conduct them to the spot. Dreading the escape of so important a prisoner, six slaves were chained to the fetters of the fallen chief, but he refused to move until persons of consequence were substituted for the slaves; they were replaced by six of the most noble followers of the





Spanish General. The Cazique led them to one of those frightful paths, of which there are so many in crossing the Andes, where a false step might lodge the traveller at the bottom of a chasm, which the noontide beams of a tropical sun have not the power of penetrating. From this path the Cazique threw himself with such a sudden and effectual plunge, that he dragged after him the six Spaniards to whom his chains were attached. It is said that the bodies were never found, but that shrieks issued from the gulph for several days: even yet the ravine is known by an Indian term, which signifies the "unburied dead." This story does not rest solely upon tradition; in the archives of a convent in Bogota, there is a curious and most interesting manuscript, written by one of the earliest missionaries, in which the history of this native prince and his exterminated race is most carefully narrated. To this MS. a very learned and ingenious Frenchman is permitted a free access, and as it tends to illustrate the manners and state of a people so little known, I trust that it will be given to the public. The author of this MS. describes the dress of this Cazique and all his family as having been perfectly regal. "They all wore crowns made with plates of gold, and breast-pieces of the same precious metal," says this authority; but the descriptions are not sufficiently minute to enable me to judge whether this ornament was worn upon the head or some other part of the person.

"No. 8 resembles various figures which were found near Popayan, and which are now placed in the Museum at Bogota.

"Nos. 9, 10.—The locality in which these figures were found is unknown. They were procured at Mariquita, and it may be interesting to know, that in the neighbourhood of that city, there is a rock which, for about thirty feet high and two hundred feet wide, is elaborately covered with similar figures, and many others which approximate more nearly to the Egyptian hieroglyphics. The sculpture is apparently effected without tools of metal. The monument is situated in the Quebrado Seco, on the road from Honda to Mendez, and is still called "el Altar de los Antiguos."

"Nos. 11, 12, were found in a cave which formerly, it is thought, was a burial place. It is near the salt mines of Zipaquira."