



Type: Magazine Article

American Antiquities: Corroborative of the Book of Mormon

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Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 21, No. 43 (22 Oct. 1859)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 689–691

Abstract: This 47-part series provides evidence to confirm the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It describes the contents of the Book of Mormon and archaeological findings and discoveries, such as ancient cities, temples, altars, tools, and wells. Each part contains several excerpts from other publications that support the Book of Mormon.

AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES,

CORROBORATIVE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

(Continued from page 658.)

On nearer inquiry, however, into the state of that civilization which was at first so highly lauded by the Spaniards as hardly inferior to that of Europe, it was ascertained that neither the Mexicans nor the nations bordering upon their empire, and who in a great measure participated in their civilization, were acquainted with the use of iron, without which, it has been observed, no nation can advance far in the arts of civilized life; that they had not any tame animals trained to assist man in his labours; that they were unacquainted with the art of writing, and even with the use of hieroglyphics, having no other means of conveying to succeeding ages an account of the past than by the imperfect and tedious process of picture-painting, which, however, they had carried to a considerable degree of perfection; that communication between the different provinces of the empire was rendered almost impossible by the absence of roads and the density of the forests which in a great measure covered the face of the country; that commercial intercourse had attained no higher degree of development than was consistent with a system of barter, the only approach to a standard of value being the establishment of the beans of the cocoa as an instrument of commercial interchange, chocolate being a beverage in universal use throughout the country; and that the religion of the Mexicans, though formed into a regular system, bore the character of a gloomy and atrocious superstition, their divinities (worshipped under the form of stone idols of hideous aspect) being represented as sanguinary and revengeful beings delighting in the sufferings of the human victims sacrificed on their altars, and having their temples decorated with the effigies of serpents, tigers, crocodiles, and other ferocious animals. These facts, together with the still more significant circumstance that they were surrounded by tribes who, in proportion to their distance from this centre of civilization, approached nearer and nearer to a state of savage brutality, seemed sufficient to establish the opinion that the Mexican nation was still in its infancy, and separated by only a few centuries from the condition in which its ruder neighbours were still merged. The traditions of the Mexicans, as they were understood, did not indeed assign to their empire any great antiquity; Montezuma, the monarch who ruled over them at the period of the arrival

of Cortez, being, according to their own accounts, only the ninth ruler since their establishment in those territories. But it will be remembered that they assigned their civilization to an anterior race. This was, however, considered a fond conceit common to every people of recent date. Whatever may in reality have been the state of civilization in the newly-discovered world, its want of vigour was soon proved by its utter subjugation to that of the old. Fifty years after the first landing of the Spaniards on the coast of Yucatan, their authority was established over almost the whole of the vast territory of Central America; and a few years later, the number of the original inhabitants of these countries was so much reduced, that the accounts of their former populousness seemed fabulous. Their monarchs and various rulers were deposed and put to death, their religion was proscribed and persecuted, their temples and palaces were destroyed, their cities razed to the ground, their idols broken into fragments, or, when this could not be effected, buried in the earth, and the dwindled remains of their population reduced to a miserable state of servitude. Even now, when republican institutions have been established throughout the countries which once acknowledged the sway of Spain, and when the inhabitants of all colours and all races are recognized as equal before the law, the poor Indian, in whom every trace of the spirit of a free man has been obliterated, bends meekly before the superior race, kisses the hand which inflicts the punishment of the lash, and repeats the words which have become proverbial among the Spanish Americans—'The Indians do not hear, except through their backs.' . . . Beyond the boundaries of the Mexican and Peruvian empires, and the countries immediately adjoining them, the inhabitants of the American continent were divided into small tribes independent of each other, destitute of industry and arts, forming no regularly-organized societies, and living altogether in a state so rude as to come under the denomination of savages. The physical features of the various tribes distributed over that vast continent were, however, so uniform, that it at once became evident that, although in different stages of civilization, they all belonged to the same race, and were merely subject to such modifications as would necessarily arise from the differences in the

natural features of the districts which they inhabited and the state of the society to which they belonged. Thus in the more northerly regions of the North American continent, where the English made their first settlements, the Indians were in a much ruder state than in Central America, but possessed a more warlike spirit and greater physical vigour; and the struggle between them and the invaders of their country was consequently of longer duration and of a somewhat different character. Here the red man never submitted, and the European settlers could not boast of having conquered the land until they had utterly expelled or exterminated the tribes to whom it belonged by right of prior occupation. As to the country itself, with the exception of the territories occupied by the Mexicans and Peruvians, and to a certain degree those immediately adjoining them, it was untouched by the hand of industry, and presented throughout one great uncultivated wilderness, save where a small patch of Indian corn proved the neighbourhood of a native encampment. It was covered with immense forests, which, particularly in the southern and naturally most fertile regions, were rendered almost impervious by the rank luxuriance of vegetation. The vast plains were overflowed by the constant inundations of the rivers, and were converted into unwholesome and impenetrable marshes. In a word, nature presented throughout a picture of wild desolation, though abounding in all the features most favourable to the development of civilization and prosperity. . . . So little credence was generally attached to any high state of civilization having existed in these regions previous to the Spanish conquest, that when the ancient remains of which we are about to treat were first brought to light by the industry of adventurous travellers, all minds set to work to discover who could have been the authors of these remarkable works, few being inclined to ascribe them to the ancestors of the despised race which had been so easily subjugated by small bands of Spanish adventurers. So little, indeed, was the existence of these monuments known, that the able, philosophic, and conscientious Scottish historian, Dr. Robertson, in his 'History of America,' published 1777, affirmed, on the authority of persons long resident in those countries, that there was not throughout Spanish America 'a single monument or vestige of any building more ancient than the Conquest;' and his general estimation of the state of the inhabitants of those countries at that period led him to the conclusion that the progenitors of the American race must have been in a very barbarous state when they left the cradle of

mankind to populate these unknown regions. In one of his reports to Charles V., Cortez describes his manner of proceeding in Mexico as follows:—'I formed the design of demolishing on all sides all the houses in proportion as we became masters of the streets, so that we should not advance a foot without having destroyed and cleared out whatever was behind us.' These words characterize the policy of the Spaniards throughout the whole of New Spain—a policy followed up during two centuries, and resulting in the almost total obliteration from the face of the country of every trace of the state of things which preceded their arrival. The few ruins that were left to tell the tale of desolation, and the gigantic pyramidal structures which the untiring industry of the conquered race had reared, and which even the insatiable hatred of their conquerors was unable to destroy, remained utterly unheeded, failing to awaken the interest of the natives of Spanish descent, and lying beyond the reach of European curiosity, through the jealous policy of Spain, which placed innumerable impediments in the way of explorers. However, at the commencement of the present century, the illustrious Humboldt, braving all difficulties in pursuance of those scientific objects to which he devoted his life, visited New Spain; and through his reports Europe learned, for the first time, from an authority which admitted of no doubt, the existence of ruins fully confirming the statements of the early Spanish writers relative to the cities and temples of Mexico. Since then, tourists innumerable, scientific and unscientific, have visited and explored the ruins of Mexico. But the territory which stretches from Mexico to the Isthmus of Darien, including the peninsula of Yucatan, remained for a long time comparatively unknown. Yet within the impenetrable forests of those very partially-cultivated States are concealed the most remarkable remains of ancient cities, many of whose buildings and sculptures are in a state of such extraordinary preservation as to render it difficult to believe that they have been abandoned for centuries. In the year 1750, some Spaniards travelling in the interior of Mexico are said to have penetrated into the province of Chiapas, and to have discovered there, either by chance or through means of information received from the Indians, the remains of a city consisting of ancient stone buildings, and extending, according to their account, over an area of from eighteen to twenty-four miles. So utterly unknown had the city been until then, that no tradition of the country gives any clue even to its name. Among the few Indians who were acquainted with the existence of the ruins, they were known as Las

Casas de Piedras—that is, the Stone Houses; and the travellers who have since explored them have bestowed upon them the appellation of Palenque, from the name of the little village in the vicinity of which they are situated. The news of this discovery, though it reached the ears of the Spanish authorities, failed to awaken their interest.

(To be continued.)

PASSING EVENTS.

GENERAL.—The decree has been signed for the fortification of the French port of Grandille and some small islands opposite Jersey. An immense floating battery is building at Bordeaux, which is to have bulwarks three feet in thickness. The different powers of Europe have despatched vessels of war to be present on the spot during the period of the Spanish expedition to Morocco. England has a squadron at Gibraltar, and cruisers on the coast; and France has sent a squadron to Algeiras. Russia, Naples, Austria, Prussia, Portugal, and Denmark have each one or two ships. Madrid letters state that the Spanish Consul at Tangiers had received orders to quit his post on the 15th instant, and on the 18th Spanish troops would enter the Moorish territory, unless the pending dispute was previously arranged.

AMERICAN.—An extraordinary appearance of northern lights in California is reported in the *Herald*, which says—"The colour of the northern sky was that of a fiery crimson: it seemed as if a hundred thousand buildings were burning at one moment: the sight was awfully sublime: the appearance now is positively awful: the red glare is over houses, streets, and fields; and the most dreadful of conflagrations could not cast a deeper hue ahead." Accounts from Venezuela state that the Foreign Consuls at Ciudad Bolivar had issued an appeal to the Governors of the French, English, and Danish West India islands to interpose in the intestine troubles of the country, as nothing but foreign intervention will save the inhabitants from entire destruction. In this appeal, the Consuls say that the contest now going on is not one of ordinary revolution having for its object a political end; but, on the contrary, the motto now is violence, death, and pillage. The acts of atrocity committed by these vandals are, they say, so numerous that it would be difficult to enumerate them. In the provinces of the interior whole communities have disappeared, and the country is rapidly depopulating. A despatch from Puerto Cabello, dated Sept. 6, says—"The troops from this city, together with the marines, landed at Maento 400 strong, and assailed Laguayra from the east, while the fleet, composed of nine sailing vessels and one steamer mounting thirty guns, bombarded the port in every direction: 2,600 men from Caracas made a simultaneous attack at various points to the west of the port. At Maracay, 150 men of our troops, commanded by Menendez, captured that city after a severe struggle. The city of Baul, defended by two hundred men, under the brave F. L. Vasques, was attacked on the 20th ult. by the revolutionists, 600 strong, under C. Perez and Felix Puerto, who were repulsed with a loss of 150 men and on the 28th a new attack met with a similar fate."

VARIETIES.

"WHY, Tom, my dear boy, how old you look!"—"Dare say, Bob; for the fact is, I never was so old in my life."

A MEDICAL student under examination being asked the different effects of heat and cold, replied, "Heat expands, and cold contracts."—"Quite right. Can you give me an example?"—"Yes, sir. In summer, which is hot, the days are longer; but in winter, which is cold, the days are shorter."

STEAM GAS.—A new mode of generating illuminating gas by steam has been lately discovered. This new process is carried on without the use of coal, but with the use of some resinous substance. The mode is so economical that a machine of three-horse-power would be able to light a large town, and at a cost considerably less than ordinary gas.

TRICKS WITH FLOWERS.—There is a very curious trick that can be played with flowers. In one quarter of a minute, a dahlia that is all purple can be changed, so that every petal shall be tipped white; and a scarlet one changed, so that every petal shall be tipped yellow. This is done by simply burning some brimstone, and holding the flower a few seconds in the fumes. The change is instantaneous. Other flowers are subject to change by the fumes of brimstone, which discharges the colour wherever it reaches. The experiment is easily tried by lighting a few lucifer matches.