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## American Antiquities

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**Abstract:** Correct answers concerning the origins of past civilizations in the Americas were not found until the Book of Mormon was published. Discusses mounds in North and South America. Notes distinct historical periods in Mexico, Central America, and Peru.

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and answered my prayer; and He will also listen to your petitions and grant you blessings if you will only ask of Him in faith.

### AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES.

BY J. R. F.

THE Autumn of 1492 opened a new era to the world. Columbus, the great chief among navigators, had succeeded, after a voyage fraught with many difficulties and in direct opposition to the theories and traditions of his time, in crossing the unknown sea, in lifting a veil, as it were, and revealing a new world. A world in extent nearly five times as large as Europe, and teeming with a people numbered by millions.

Nearly four hundred years have passed away since then, and now if we look for that race of antiquity we find them not. They have vanished like the dew before the morning sun, or like snow upon the hills. It fades away before the increasing heat of Summer, and if we would search for it we would find here a patch and there a patch, hid away under some overhanging rock or in some low ravine, where the piercing rays of the sun never penetrate, all crusted and grained or perhaps melted and frozen, and remelted and frozen, until we can scarcely recognize in it any resemblance to the soft white flakes that first fell. So it is with them. They are gone. But here and there in the lone wilds of the far west or hid up in the mountain fastnesses we find a few, but so changed that we can scarcely identify them with their predecessors. Even their history is almost forgotten. True, in some small corner a generous historian has allotted a few pages to tell of Indian cruelties, wars and horrible massacres. Another perhaps gazing upon some ruins of ancient civilization has indulged in a little speculation as to their probable origin. This is about all.

It was not until the excitement of discovery, of conquest and the acquiring of wealth in the new world had subsided, that men commenced to take a different view of things and to admire the proofs of a civilization that had existed here. Everywhere were to be found huge mounds, monuments and ruins of great cities. Relics were found which went to prove that a civilized nation, or a nation approaching to civilization had in ages past inhabited this continent.

In an unbroken line extending from the great lakes in the north to far off Chili in the south, covering nearly eighty degrees of latitude, are yet to be found extensive fortifications, temples, palaces and edifices of every kind, showing that the constructors had an extended knowledge of the arts and sciences. Who were these people? From whence came they? And whither did they go? These are questions many have asked, but before the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, no one could answer. Here and there we find hieroglyphical characters engraven on some wall or tablet of stone, but who shall read them? Unless some power more potent than that which man possesses can be made manifest, countless ages may yet roll around before these characters will yield their secrets.

Some writers assert that America knew no other civilization than that found in Mexico and Peru. There was a people

advancing near to European civilization at that time. They understood the art of working in gold and silver almost as well as did the Europeans themselves. They were masons, carpenters, and manufacturers of fine clothing, rivaling the most civilized nations in this and the manufacturing of pottery. They were an agricultural and horticultural people and possessed a knowledge equal, if not superior, to that found in the most civilized communities of Europe. They were a religious people, believing in a plurality of gods. Their traditions lead us to believe they at one time had a knowledge of the creation, of the fall of man and of the deluge. In Mexico they had a tradition that the great pyramid of Cholula—180 feet high—was built by a family of giants who desired to raise the building to the clouds. Guetzateotl was the white man with a long beard who came from the east, taught them the arts and sciences and who, after presiding over the golden age of Anabuac, disappeared as mysteriously as he had come. He promised to return and his coming was looked for with confidence by each succeeding generation. Their written language consisted of hieroglyphical paintings. At the time of the conquest many books and scrolls containing hieroglyphical writings were extant, which no doubt would have given us much valuable information had it not been for Catholic fanaticism and bigotry. By them they were gathered together from all parts of the country and burned. So complete was this work of destruction that only a very few can now be found, and they give us no information beyond the century of the conquest.

Whatever might have been the civilization attained in Mexico, it seems clear that it was only a shadow of what had been. Cortez found in Mexico a great city, but its palaces cannot be compared with those of ancient Uxmal and Palenque. Mr. Baldwin says, "If the country had never in the previous ages felt the influence of a higher civilization than that of the Aztecs it would not have now, and never could have had ruined cities like Mitla, Copan and Palenque."

The traditions of Mexico and Peru are that a great race inhabited the country previous to their time. These traditions are vague and unreliable. It is clear, however, that they were preceded by a race to whom the arts and sciences were known, a race that raised in America a government greater than it has known for many centuries. The principal ruins of this ancient civilization are to be found in Mexico and Central America. This entire region is now, and was 350 years ago, covered with a dense, tropical forest. How many additional centuries it had existed we are unable to say. But when the country was filled with inhabitants the forest must have been cleared away, to make room for cities, villages and farms; at the least calculation it would take several centuries for such a forest to grow as the Spanish found there 350 years ago. "The ruins were then as strange," says Baldwin, "to natives dwelling near, as the old Chaldean ruins are to the Arabs who wander over the wasted plains of Lower Mesopotamia: native tradition had forgotten its history and became silent in regard to it. How long had ruined Copan been in this condition? No one can tell. Manifestly it was forgotten, left buried in the forest without recollection of its history long before Montezuma's people, the Aztecs, rose to power. And it is easily understood that the old city had an important history previous to that unknown time in the past, when war, revolution, or some other agency of destruction, put an end to its career and left it to become what it is now."

(To be Continued.)