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Old America - The Aztecs

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Abstract: Series of articles dealing with archaeological, anthropological, geographical, societal, religious, and historical aspects of ancient America and their connections to the Book of Mormon, which is the key to understanding “old American” studies.

Old America.

BY G. M. O.

THE AZTECS.

IT was in the month of April, A. D. 1519, that the renowned filibuster, Hernando Cortez, anchored his fleet in the beautiful bay since known as the Bay of Vera Cruz. Previous to this—in the year 1517—a number of roving spirits, under the command of Francisco Hernandez, of Cordova, discovered the island of Cozumel and the vast promontory Yucatan. This expedition, however, meeting with many disasters, and being opposed in landing so fiercely and successfully by the natives, returned to their last conquest, the island of Cuba. Another expedition, under Juan de Grijalva, sailed during the spring of 1518, following the same course to Yucatan, then north and west along the coast to the point St. Juan de Ulna, or Vera Cruz, on the coast of Mexico. Here they exchanged their glass beads for gold with the kindly disposed natives. They also obtained information of a vast empire, ruled by a great monarch—Montezuma—whose wealth and power was fabulous. The tidings of this discovery led to the organizing of the expedition under Cortez, who hoisted his black velvet banner, embroidered with gold, and emblazoned with a cross, and the characteristic device: "Let us follow the cross. Under this sign, with faith, we conquer." Cortez followed the route of his predecessors. Visiting Cozumel, they found the island not very fertile and thinly inhabited, but containing large and commodious buildings of stone, cemented with mortar. Several of these buildings were spacious temples with lofty towers, all constructed of the same material. One of the greatest surprises to the adventurers was the discovery in one of the courts of a temple the same emblem as that embroidered on their banner: a massive stone cross. This cross was worshiped by the natives. The Spaniards say it was in honor of the god of rain. Historians have never properly explained how the natives of this new world obtained this emblem of Christianity. The natives also believed in original sin, which was removed by performing the baptismal rite.

Sailing from the island, the squadron crossed the narrow strait, and sighted the mainland. Following the contour of the coast northward, they anchored at the mouth of the river Tabasco. Here also was found a well cultivated country, with vast temples and commodious houses. Here our adventurers fought a fierce battle, during which the bullets from the guns of the invaders swept through the crowded ranks of the natives with terrible destruction, covering the ground with their slain and appalling them with the noise and flash, which they imagined to be thunder and lightning. Taking possession of the capital, Tabasco, in a lofty and massive pyramidal temple, one of the chief ornaments of the city, he erected an altar, with images of the Savior and Virgin, took possession of the country in the name of the king of Spain, and changed the name of Tabasco to St. Mary of Victory.

As the ships of Cortez anchored in the placid waters of the Mexican bay, they observed that the shores were covered with a wonder-stricken multitude, who came eagerly to contemplate with awe the unusual spectacle, while grassy slopes, luxuriant groves, villages and rural dwellings charmed the eyes of the Spaniards. It is not necessary to relate the number of bloody battles, or describe the wreck and ruin that marked the route of the Spanish army, from the sea coast to Tenochtitlan (City

of Mexico), they are facts well known to the general reader; but a description of the principal cities, as found by the invaders is more to our purpose.

When they entered the city of Zempoalla they found the streets perfectly clean, and nicely paved, while ornamental trees shaded them and spacious stone houses lined either side. They were thronged, too, with a busy, happy and refined people. A spacious court yard surrounded a pyramidal temple, grand and imposing. The soil of the surrounding country was of astonishing fertility, supplying food abundantly. The Spaniards were never weary of expressing their delight while marching through this earthly Paradise two days. After leaving this city they moved through a country of luxuriant foliage, flowers and waving grain. Villages were thickly scattered around, and one of them—Jalapa—was filled with rural residences of the wealthy natives, of surpassing magnificence.

On the fourth day of their march they arrived at Naulinco, a large and populous town, containing many massive temples. Here Cortez rested for five days, after which he continued his march, following along the banks of a broad and picturesque stream, skirted by an unbroken line of neat and populous villages. After traveling some sixty miles they entered a large town, called Xalacingo. They were now on the borders of a very powerful nation of republicans, called the Tlascalans, who had thus far succeeded in resisting the aggressions of the Aztecs. The entrance to this territory was guarded with an extensive wall of solid masonry, built like the great wall of China, to protect the country from invasion. This wall was some six miles long, and the only entrance gate was so constructed that a small army stationed there could make a very determined resistance. After many bloody and hard-fought battles, the Spanish adventurers entered Tlascala, the capital of the republic. Historians say it was indeed a large and magnificent city, more populous and more imposing in its architecture than the Moorish capital, Granada, in old Spain. Among the many wonderful things found, the invaders were astonished at the effective police regulations, the well-kept baths, both hot and cold, and the barber shops attached. Cortez, in his letter to the emperor, Charles, of Spain, stated that so populous was Tlascala, that he presumed thirty thousand persons appeared daily in the market-place, buying and selling.

Cortez remained in the conquered republic for twenty days, to refresh his troops and gain all the information he possibly could respecting the Aztec empire. The Tlascalans, hating their ancient foes, the Mexicans, forgot in a few days their own subjugation, and joined the Spaniards in their proposed expedition against Montezuma. All the forces of the republic were raised and placed at the disposal of Cortez.

About eighteen miles from Tlascala was situated the city of Cholula, the population of which at that time was over one hundred thousand. It was in Aztec or Mexican territory. Cortez found it a beautiful city, with wide, neatly arranged streets, and handsome dwellings. It was a sacred city, and contained many costly and grand temples; it was in this city that the great and grand pyramid of adobies, or sun-burnt brick, reared its towering head. Nothing of this beautiful city now remains but the ruins of this great pyramid. A Catholic chapel now crowns the summit, and it is covered with trees and grass. Humboldt gives its dimensions as follows: base, 1440 feet; present height, 177; area on the summit, 45,210 square feet. Originally, it was in four stages, and dedicated to Quetzacoatl (the fair god), of whom we shall

speak in a future article. It was called in the Aztec language a *Teocalli*, from *teo*—god, and *calli*—house or houses: "God's house." By order of Cortez, the inhabitants of Cholula were massacred most inhumanly, and the beautiful city was reduced by fire to a heap of ruins. Delaying for a fortnight, to rest his army, he resumed his march towards the capital of the Aztec empire, sixty-five miles distant, and, after several days' toil, they reached the heights of Ithualco, and the great valley of Mexico greeted their eyes. Forests, orchards, rivers, lakes, cultivated fields, gardens, and beautiful cities and towns composed the landscape. Resting upon islands, in the bosom of a great lake, was the queenly city, Tenochtitlan, or Mexico. A series of smaller lakes, with innumerable towns, with lofty temples and white dwellings, fringing their margins, picturesquely reflected their forms in the crystal waters. The circumference of this valley, surrounded with a line of pale blue mountains, was some two hundred miles. Over forty large cities, and towns and villages without number, covered its space. The Spaniards gazed upon the scene with amazement and wonder. The indications of power and civilization were far beyond their anticipation. Resting two days at the city of Amaquemecan, where two large stone buildings were provided for their accommodation, they proceeded to Ayotzingo, their path to which place led through smiling villages, fields of maize, gardens of beautiful flowers and groves of Arcadian splendor. The city was built on wooden piles, in the waters of Lake Chalco. Boats of every variety of color, and graceful design, glided through the streets. One historian says, "This city was the Venice of the new world."

(To be Continued.)

HOME MANUFACTURES. PAINTS.

BY BETH.

THERE has been some talk lately about preparing the various pigments that are found in the earth, so as to make them useful as paints. Many substances sold here for paints are largely adulterated with natural ochre, and we pay a large price for them, too, compared with the same class of goods if made here. The processes of making white lead have been described in the last volume of the *JUVENILE INSTRUCTOR*; it would "pay well" now to begin this manufacture upon a large scale. But there are other preparations of lead that we could make that could be used as substitutes for much of the white lead of commerce. To this there would probably be some objection offered by those interested in present practices; for it must be admitted that pure white lead, when you can get it, is preferable to use, as it "spreads better" and goes farther. Suppose, however, we have a good substitute for this article at half the price; that would make a very material difference; and, in addition, if made of our own materials, this should make a greater difference in its favor.

It happens now that the crude oxyd of lead can be obtained in abundance. This substance finds a market in the east for manufacture; much of it is reduced here to lead again for "cupellation," or separating silver from the baser metals. From this crude oxyd not only can litharge be made suitable for painting and for manufacture into "red lead," but it also can be prepared as an oxy-chloride of lead, white as white lead, soft and usable as a substitute for that paint.

This would also have the advantage of being cheap, and its manufacture on a large scale would obtain for us another very

important article—soda. It is only necessary to bring together common salt (chloride of sodium) and oxyd of lead, when an interchange of elements takes place; the metal sodium goes over to the oxygen of the lead forming soda, and the chlorine of the salt unites with the lead, forming chloride of lead. By using proper proportions a bleached oxyd of lead may be also obtained, and, by further processes, even carbonate of lead, if required.

It is now customary in large cities to almost discard the use of white lead and lead preparations generally, on account of their poisonous properties; besides which, paints prepared in oil are inflammable. It so happens that a white substitute is found in certain white pigments, prepared in "water-glass," a silicate of soda. This will not burn; and, it also has the property of being made water-proof. We may see what advantage it would be to make soda, in preparing our lead—white paint: the soda could be fused with our glass-making sand in that proportion which makes soluble glass, or silicate of soda (water-glass). This would be available for many purposes: fire-proof paint, water-proof paint, for making soft sand stones hard and enduring, or water-proof (hydraulic) cement, etc. And there is nothing new, uncertain or speculative in these things: they are being done, profitably, extensively and satisfactorily, in all our large cities.

FIGHT WITH A LEOPARD.

A TERRIFIC combat has taken place, says the *Pall Mall Gazette*, on the shores of Lake Tantalus, in the vicinity of Bournabat, Asia Minor, between a professional sportsman, named Caramouchi, and a leopard which had for some time been devastating the neighborhood. So heavy were the losses of the inhabitants of the district owing to the ravages of this animal that they agreed to have a battle for him, but in the meantime Caramouchi determined to attack the leopard alone. Sallying forth one morning, accompanied by two friends, he found the tracks of the animal in the snow, and followed it up to a cavern in the rock. The three men fired their guns simultaneously into the entrance of the cavern, and were rewarded by the sudden appearance of the leopard, who, bounding forward, seized Caramouchi, lacerating him severely in the arms and legs.

After a desperate struggle, the leopard, which had been wounded by the discharge of guns into the cavern, quitted its prey and withdrew to the brink of a ravine a few yards off. Caramouchi's friends at this juncture prudently proposed to retreat, but Caramouchi signified his intention of pursuing the sport, and, reloading his gun, fired another shot at the object of his pursuit. The leopard was now thoroughly out of temper, and bounding again at its assailant, the fight commenced in earnest. Caramouchi was horribly mangled, but just as his strength was giving way he drew out a knife, and, stabbing the beast in the stomach, by a vigorous effort he shook it off and chucked it down the ravine. The leopard was killed by the fall. Caramouchi fainted, but, partially reviving, was carried with the dead leopard in triumph to the village. He was then put to bed, where he is likely by latest accounts, to remain for several weeks, and a subscription has been opened for him by his grateful neighbors.

THERE is nothing which wings its flight so swiftly as calumny, nothing which is uttered with more ease; nothing is listened to with more readiness, nothing dispersed more widely.—