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Old America - The Aztecs (Continued)

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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.

(Continued.)

REMAINING two days at Ayotzingo, the march was again resumed, following along the southern shore of Lake Chalco. Gardens containing flowers of every hue, luxuriant foliage, crimson, green and gold, embowered villages, clustered under the shade, and lined the edge of the lake whose waters were covered with the boats of the natives gliding in every direction. Reaching a narrow causeway, so narrow that but three horsemen could ride abreast, and some five miles in length, stretching to the northward and dividing Lake Chalco from Lake Xochicalco, the army crossed to the town of Chitlabuac, built in the middle of the causeway. Cortez described it as the most beautiful town he had yet seen. Temples and lofty towers of massive architecture, beautiful mansions before which were lawns ornamented with trees and shrubbery. Floating gardens were constructed in the lake, and innumerable boats covered the water.

After crossing this narrow causeway they entered the city of Iztapalapan, containing about fifteen hundred houses. In the centre of the city was a vast public garden, blooming with flowers and foliage of gorgeous colors. There was a large aviary filled with birds of beautiful plumage, and an immense reservoir, well stocked with fish, which contained water to irrigate the grounds.

Resting over night, at early dawn the Spanish army was again on the march, and the lofty temple of Tenochtitlan (Mexico) glittered in the sunlight before them. The capital was built on an island near the western shore of Lake Tezcuco. On the east, the island had no connection with the mainland, and could only be approached by canoes; on the west, the city was entered by an artificial causeway, built of earth and stones; it was about thirty feet wide and a mile and a half in length. On the shore end of this causeway was the city of Tacuba. There was a similar causeway on the southwest, and one three miles long on the north, connecting with the city of Tepeaca, and still another on the south six miles long. It was over this last one the Spaniards entered the city. Half way between the city and the mainland, on this narrow road, was the town of Xoloc. When the army drew near the city a procession of the principal inhabitants, adorned with plumes and clad in finely embroidered mantles, met them. They announced that the great emperor, Montezuma, was advancing to welcome the strangers. The avenue was thronged with a countless crowd, while the lake was darkened with boats.

When the glittering train of the emperor appeared Cortez dismounted and advanced to meet him. Montezuma was seated in a magnificent palanquin, glittering with gold, and gorgeous with waving plumes of many colors. He was borne on the shoulders of four noblemen; others held over his head a canopy of beautiful workmanship, decorated with green feathers (the Aztec insignia of royalty) and gold and precious stones. Upon his head the monarch wore a crown of gold, surmounted with plumes. A richly embroidered mantle, with costly ornaments, was folded gracefully upon his shoulders. Buskins, fringed with gold, fitted closely to his legs, and the soles of his shoes were of gold. He was of good stature, well

formed and peculiarly handsome, with a melancholy and anxious expression. His age was fifty-three years. When Cortez dismounted, he alighted from his palanquin, and, leaning upon the arms of two of his nobles, approached the Spaniard. His attendants in the meantime spread carpets of rich materials upon the ground, that his sacred feet might not come in contact with the earth. After an exchange of courtesies, the blended cortege marched into the city. "Who," exclaims Bernal Diaz, one of the invaders, "could count the number of men, women and children which thronged the streets, the canals, and terraces on the tops of houses on that day." Their route led through the heart of the imperial city and the Spaniards gazed with astonishment at the size, architecture and beauty of the houses. They were built of a porous red sandstone, and faultless in construction. Most of the streets were narrow, and contained buildings of a less imposing character. The great streets went over numerous canals spanned by well built bridges. The palace of the emperor was of stone, covering a large space of ground. But among the many interesting features of the Aztec capital the great "teo calli," or temple, stood foremost. It was situated in the centre of a vast square, which was surrounded by a wall eight feet high, built of cut stone. This enclosure was entered by two gateways, opening on the four principal streets of the city. The temple was a solid structure of earth and cobble, faced from top to bottom with hewn stone laid in cement. It was five stories or stages high, each receding so as to be smaller than that below it. In outline it was a rectangular pyramid, three hundred feet square at the base, with a level summit of considerable extent, on which were erected two towers and two altars, where "perpetual fires" were kept burning. The ascent was by a flight of one hundred and fourteen steps on the outside, which went four times around the structure. On the summit of the temple the religious ceremonies were conducted. The Spaniards were quartered in an immense palace erected by the father of Montezuma. The buildings enclosed a large courtyard, and the whole was surrounded by a strong wall, surmounted with towers for defense and ornament. The apartment assigned to Cortez was tapestried with the finest embroidered cotton. "This edifice was so large," writes one of the historians of that day, "that both the Spaniards and their allies, who, together with the women and servants whom they brought with them, exceeded seven thousand in number, were lodged in it. Everywhere there was the greatest cleanliness and neatness. Nearly all the chambers had for beds mats of rushes, and of palm; they had coverlets of fine cotton, and chairs made of single pieces of wood. Some of the chambers were also carpeted with mats, and the walls were hung with tapestry beautifully colored."

The water in the lakes was brackish, or salty; the city was supplied by means of an aqueduct, which extended to Chapultepec. There were several market-places or squares in the city, with one great square, where an immense concourse assembled to engage in peaceful traffic. Three judges sat in state at the end of the square, to settle all difficulties. A numerous body of police kept moving through the crowd to prevent riot and confusion. The police regulations were unsurpassed by those of any city in Europe. Many of the streets were lined with shade trees. The houses of the common people were small but comfortable, built of reeds or adobies. The houses of the nobles and wealthy inhabitants were strongly built of stone, generally but one story high; they were enclosed in gardens blooming with flowers, and fountains

of cool water, conveyed through earthen pipes, played in the courtyards. A thousand persons were employed continually sweeping and watering the streets. The Spaniards estimated the population of the city at five hundred thousand.

This substantially is the account given of the cities lining the route of Cortez by every writer who saw them before the conquest. But during the bloody conflict that followed nearly every building was destroyed, the invaders burning what was combustible and tearing down the stone edifices, turning over the inhabitants to extermination, and but little of the ancient city of Mexico was left. Some few relics recovered from the ruins of the old temple have been preserved. Among these is the great Aztec calendar stone, on which are carved hieroglyphics representing the months of the year.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

BY CILAS. W. STAYNER.

THERE are few people, whether old or young, who do not like to hear good music, and it is a pleasure to notice the vast improvement made in this study, during the last twenty years, in our settlements. There was a time when a cabinet organ, or a piano could not be found in Utah, scarcely any person was able to obtain one, principally owing to the immense distance between our Territory, and the eastern cities, where such articles could be purchased.

If persons were able to raise the funds necessary to buy an instrument in the east, they perhaps could not afford to pay the high rates of transportation, as everything had to be freighted with either ox or mule teams, over a thousand miles.

Hence an organ was looked upon as a luxury, beyond the reach of the humble citizen, and the taste for music had to be gratified by instruments that cost less, especially for carriage; a concertina or an accordeon was the highest aspiration of a young lady who desired to accompany her voice; and most of our choirs were supplied with violins, flutes or bass viols, instead of the powerful tones of the church organ as at the present.

Brass and martial bands were also scarce, and those that were organized had to labor under difficulties, owing to the scarcity of proper instruments.

Many plans were adopted to gratify the public taste for music, and especially was this visible at our celebrations, sometimes a mixture of string and brass instruments was introduced. The writer remembers hearing an eye witness give a detailed description of a fourth of July procession, in one of the settlements, which was headed by a "band" consisting of a cornet and a bass viol.

Let the reader imagine a procession, comprising the fathers of the present young men and women, attired in the best apparel that a condition of pioneer isolation would permit, and filled with patriotic enthusiasm and veneration for the common cause of liberty, marching by companies, representing different branches of our religious and civil government, while the stars and stripes floated in the breeze, and mottoes supported by the tender branches of a well patronized Sunday school, denoted the sentiments of an oppressed but undaunted people. Yet this display would be nothing without music, and the means at hand were limited; but two performers were provided with the necessary instruments, so they were enlisted and marched over the rude and rocky streets of that rural city,

the one filling the air with the soul-stirring strains of "Hail Columbia," on a battered cornopean; the other supporting with his left hand a dilapidated bass fiddle, while with the right he played an ample and suitable accompaniment, that did justice to his calling and the solemnity of the occasion.

But now how different! Brass bands and martial bands, unexcelled for talent or equipments, adorn our processions, and cheer the surroundings with the latest musical productions from the east and west; and the performance of many pieces of home composition show that Utah is second to none in musical ability. Our Tabernacles are furnished with pipe organs, one of which has probably cost as much as any in the United States.

Cabinet organs can now be heard discoursing their melodious music in the homes of the Saints, even in the remote parts of the Territory. The voice of melody, singing praises to the God of our deliverance, gladdens the hearts of the people everywhere; and it is evident to the observer that a refined taste for the "divine art," induced by the facilities for procuring instruments, is springing up among the young, causing them to seek the joys of the home circle, and the pleasures of intellectual associations, instead of the wild and uncultivated society of the giddy and profane.

"NOBODY LIKE MOTHER!"

Now tell me truly, boys and girls,
As sisters and as brothers,
Does any one in this wide world
Come up to our kind mothers?

Can anybody else be found
In all this big creation,
That makes such puddings and such pies
As this same dear relation.

And when a fellow bumps his head,
And hardly can endure it,
(Don't be ashamed to own the truth,)
No kiss put hers will cure it!

When we have disobeyed, she tries
From punishment to screen us,
And in our little quarrels, like
An angel comes between us.

Dear mother! Ah, how hard she works
To keep us dressed with neatness,
And ever greets us when we come
From school, with smiles of sweetness.

Father is splendid, that we own,
And so is that big brother;
Sisters, and aunts, and cousins, but
There's nobody like mother!

CONUNDRUMS.

- WHAT is the best thing out? An aching tooth.
What is it that always stands on its head? A barrel.
What tree bears the most fruit, when other trees have none? A Christmas tree.
Why is B like a hot fire? Because it makes oil boil.
Why is a pen maker the most dishonest man in the world? Because he makes people steel pens, and says they do write (right).
What is the difference between a barber and a mother? One has razors to shave, and the other shavers to raise.