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Old America - The Aztecs (Continued)

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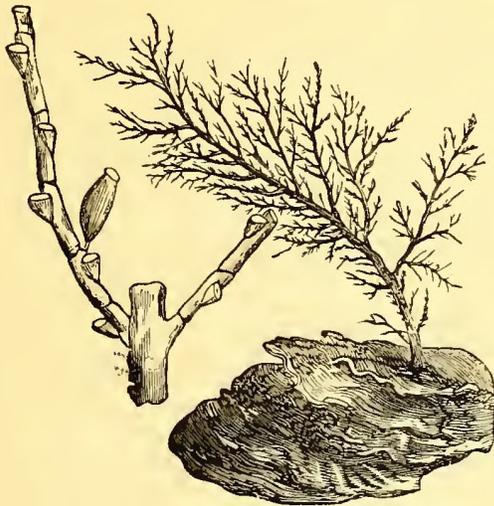
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Abstract: Series of articles dealing with archaeological, anthropological, geographical, societal, religious, and historical aspects of ancient America and their connections to the Book of Mormon, which is the key to understanding “old American” studies.

CORAL.

Who would think that those tiny whitish-yellow, worm-like objects, which anyone who has been in tropical waters may have seen waving about under water, at a depth ranging between one fathom and thirty fathoms, clustered in myriads about a lump of white rock, were the contractors for the great works which, under the name of *coral*, form so prominent a feature on the face of the globe? For a long while it was supposed they were not so; it was even denied that they were animals at all. To the vegetable kingdom they were relegated, and remained its subjects till about the year 1720, when Peyssonnel, a physician at Marseilles, having given much time and study to the subject, announced that corallia were undoubtedly animals. At first he met with the reception every propounder of a new truth must look for—he was ridiculed; but he lived long enough to see his assertion confirmed and adopted by all the eminent men in the scientific world.



HERRINGBONE CORALLINE.

The corallia, though divided into several classes, have certain general characteristics in common. They are all polyps—that is, contractile animals, having an intestinal cavity—with distinct terminal mouth, surrounded by tentacles or radiating lobes. Most of them secrete a hard, calcareous substance, with which they build their habitation, or "polypary," as it is called. This polypary has a different shape, according to the sort of animals working within it. Some polyparies are branched like boughs of trees, as the polypary of the Madrepores and Millipores; some are like bundles of tubes bound together, and are called from that circumstance, "organ coral;" others, as the "Isis hippuris," which is found in the Indian Sea, consist of a number of calcareous bones connected by horny joints. The fan-shaped coral and the curious brain coral are well known. Blood coral, a red coral found only in the Mediterranean, and at some depth, is irregularly shaped, and is rarely of any considerable size though the price it fetches, on account of its rarity and beauty, is very great. Pink coral, also from the Mediterranean, is highly prized.

(To be Continued.)

WHAT relation is your uncle's brother, who is not your uncle? Your father.

Old America.

BY G. M. O.

THE AZTECS.

(Continued.)

THE Mexican calendar stone was found buried in the great square during the year 1790, and is now preserved in the Museum of Antiquities in the City of Mexico, along with the sacrificial stone. The calendar is eleven feet eight inches in diameter, and was carved from a mass of porous basalt. It was a fixture of the Aztec temple. The Aztec year, like ours, consisted of three hundred and sixty-five days; or rather, it was composed of eighteen months, of twenty days each, which would make only three hundred and sixty days; but, at the end of the last month, they added five days, which they called "Nemontemi," or useless, because they did nothing in these days but receive and return visits. Nor did they add what is called the intercalary day every four years, as we do, but, at the expiration of every fifty second year added thirteen days. Their century consisted of fifty-two years, which was subdivided into four periods of thirteen years each. Two centuries—one hundred and four years—formed an age. The method adopted by the Aztecs to compute time was common to all the polished nations of Anahuca (Mexico), without any variation except in names and figures. The Chiapanese, a nation the most distant from the capital, instead of the names and figures of the rabbit, the cane, flint and house of the Aztecs, used the names of "Votan," "Lambat," "Been," and "Chinax;" these were the names of illustrious men among their ancestors.

The religion of the Aztecs was most cruel and superstitious. Clavigero says if we compare the religion of the Mexicans with the mythology of the Greeks and Romans we shall find the latter the most superstitious and ridiculous, the former the most cruel. Those nations of Europe imputed to their gods the most atrocious crimes, and stained their worship with the most scandalous ceremonies. The Mexicans imagined their gods perfect, and however cruel they were in their worship there was nothing about it repugnant to decency.

The Aztecs had an imperfect idea of a supreme independent Being, whom they acknowledged, feared and adored. They represented him in no external form, because they believed him to be invisible, and named only by the common appellation "Teotl" (God). At times they applied to him certain epithets denoting his power, such as "Ipalnemoani"—he by whom we live; and "Tloque Nahuaque"—he who has all in himself. They also believed in an evil spirit, called the "rational owl," and a place called "Mictlan," or hell; here reigned a god called "Mictlantetli"—lord of hell. Among the many deities worshiped by the Mexicans there were thirteen principal or great gods. "Tezcatlipoca"—Shining Mirror—was the greatest after the invisible god. "Quetzalcoatl," the god of air, was of a fair complexion, and was called the "fair god." He was said to have once been high priest of Tula. He was worshiped by the nations of Mexico universally. Dr. Siguenza imagined this god was the apostle St. Thomas. The god most honored by the Aztecs was "Mexitli," or "Huitzilopochtli," the god of war; he was considered their chief protector. Of this god some said he was a pure spirit, others that he was born of woman without man's assistance.

It was this god they said conducted them for so many years in their pilgrimage and at length settled them where they afterwards built the great city of Mexico. It is from his name the word Mexico is derived. The Aztecs' gods were generally the same as those of the other nations of Anahuae, differing only in a greater or less celebrity in some of their rites. The god most celebrated in Mexico was "Mexitli;" in Cholula and Huexotzinco, "Quetzalcoatl;" among the Totonacas, "Cent-eotli; among the Otomatics, "Mixcoatl." The Tlascalans, although the constant enemies of the Mexicans, worshiped the same gods, and their most favored one was Mexitli, but under another name—"Camaxtle." The number of the images by which these deities were represented in the temples, streets, houses and groves, was infinite. They were made of stone, clay, wood, gold and other metals. The divinity of these gods was acknowledged by prayers, kneeling and prostrations, with vows, fasts and other austerities, with human sacrifices and offerings. They not only believed the soul of man, to be immortal, but that the same was the case with that of the brute. But "Quetzalcoatl"—Feathered Serpent, or Fair God—demands the most interest from us. They figured him tall and of a fair complexion, with long hair and beard. From a love of decency he always wore a long robe; he possessed the greatest industry; he was supposed to have had the most profound wisdom, which he displayed in the laws which he left to mankind; in fact, he is said to have been most rigid and exemplary in manners. Besides the decency and sweetness of his manners, he showed aversion to all kinds of cruelty, so much so that he could not bear to hear the very mention of war. To him they owed their knowledge of melting metals, the laws governing their religious rites, and by some to him is attributed the arrangement of the calendar. It was generally believed that he suddenly disappeared, but would in time return to the country and again, as their great high priest, govern the people. So firmly was this tradition impressed on the mind of Montezuma, and, in fact, upon the minds of the Aztecs generally, that when Cortez landed, the emperor summoned his council, consisting of the king of Tezcuco and other high dignitaries, and it was unanimously decided that he was the "fair god," returning to the country, as predicted, and this was one of the main causes of the easy subjugation of the emperor and his people.

The Aztecs had not only made a great proficiency in astronomy, but their political and military government, their social law and customs, their language, poetry, music, painting, sculpture, mosaic works and architectural knowledge were of an advanced order. Laying aside their inhuman sacrificial superstitions, their morality was above that of the fillibustering horde that subjugated them.

The Aztecs or Mexicans were themselves invaders, whose extended dominion was less than two hundred and fifty years old, although they had been much longer in the valley of Anahuae; in fact, but a few years previous to the landing of Cortez, they had completed this conquest. But they did not come from abroad; they belonged to the country, dwelling somewhere in the south in obscurity. By some writers it has been assumed that they came to Mexico from the north; but investigations have made it probable that they went from the south. Mr. Squire says: "The hypothesis of a migration from Nicaragua and Cuscutlan to Anahuae is altogether more consonant with probabilities and with tradition than that which derives the Mexicans from the north; and it is a significant fact that on the map of migrations, presented by Gemelli, the place of the origin of the Aztecs is designated by the sign of

water—"atl"—standing for Aztlan, a pyramidal temple with grades, and near these a palm tree. Humboldt and Baldwin also think this indicates a southern origin. According to the native histories, as reported by Clavigero, they began their migration about A. D. 1600. Another result of investigation is reached as follows. Says Mr. Baldwin: "The Mexicans stated that their calendar was reformed some time after leaving Aztlan, and that, in the year 1519, eight cycles of fifty-two years each, and thirteen years of a ninth cycle, had passed since the reform was made. This carries back the beginning of their migration beyond the year 1090 A. D. They grew to supremacy by conquest of the small states into which the country was divided, and learned from their more cultivated neighbors to reform their calendar."

(To be Continued.)

THE ART OF COINING.

BY R. J. FILCE, KAYSVILLE.

FOR several centuries a system has obtained of circulating coins or money in exchange for articles of commerce. This circulating medium, when first introduced in England, was manufactured by what is known as hand power, a very slow process indeed compared with the improvements of to-day, the contrast between which is what I wish to show to the rising generation.

In the year 1650 an improvement was made in the manufacture of coins, at which time perfection was no doubt aimed at, and, in the minds of some, really reached. After these improvements were made it took the arduous labors of seven men and two boys one week to accomplish what can easily be performed by one youth at the present time, with the aid of powerful and ingenious machinery, in about eight hours. Again, so rapid has been the advancement in the art of coining of late years that what required the combined labors of twelve men and two boys to perform in 1850, by the most improved machinery then known, can now be accomplished with ease by one little boy, with the aid of more recent machinery, in about one-fourth of the time. In some instances modern inventions have superseded the use of men and boys altogether, which has been the case in many other manufactures as well.

Gold is a metal known by its color, of which there are three different shades or colors, according to the country in which it is found. These various shades are very apparent when placed side by side with each other. The gold obtained from Peru and Chili, in the west and south-west of South America, is, when pure, of a brownish color, that from California is of a pale yellow color; while that from Australia, or New Holland, is of a pale green, with the yellow predominating. Gold is also one of the heaviest metals (it was supposed to be the heaviest of all, but modern scientific discoveries have proved platinum to be of denser specific gravity), and its great scarcity, value, beauty and usefulness cause it to be held in high esteem by mankind. It is remarkable for its malleability, or tension; it is so very tenacious that one fourth part of an ounce weight of it is capable of being drawn out without breaking a distance of one English mile, 1,760 yards or 5,280 feet; and, the more it is hammered, rolled or drawn, the softer it becomes. To prepare it for public usefulness, that is, to give it hardness, or durability, it has to be "alloyed," that is, mixed up with inferior metals, the details of which would come under the head of "metallurgy." The different qualities