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Old America - The Mexican Calendar

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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.

(Continued.)

THE MEXICAN CALENDAR.

THE abbe Don Lorenzo Hervás, having read the work of Clavigero, when in manuscript, made some curious and learned observations on the old Toltec calendar, and communicated them to the author of the Mexican history in a letter dated July 31, 1780. We will give a few extracts from the learned abbe's epistle:

"The year and century have, from time immemorial, been regulated by the Mexicans with a degree of intelligence which does not at all correspond with their arts and sciences. In them they were certainly extremely inferior to the Greeks or Romans; but the discernment which appears in their calendar equals that of the cultivated nations. Hence we ought to imagine that this calendar has not been the discovery of the Mexicans, but a communication from some more enlightened people; and as the last are not to be found in America, we must seek for them elsewhere in Asia or in Egypt. The Mexican year began upon the twenty-sixth of February, a day celebrated in the era of Nabonassar, which was fixed by the Egyptians 747 years before the Christian era; for the beginning of their month—'Toth' corresponded with the meridian of the same day. If those priests fixed also upon this day as an epoch, because it was celebrated in Egypt, we have there the Mexican calendar agreeing with the Egyptian. But independent of this, it is certain that the Mexican calendar conformed greatly with the Egyptian. . . . Boturini determines by the Mexican paintings the year of the confusion of tongues, and the years of the creation of the world, which determination appears not to be difficult. As the eclipses are noted in the Mexican paintings, there is not a doubt but the true epoch of chronology may be obtained from them. Respecting the symbols of the Mexican months and year, they discover ideas entirely conformable with those of the ancient Egyptians. The latter distinguished, as appears from their monuments, each month or part of the zodiac, where the sun stood, with characteristic figures of that which happened in every season of the year. Therefore, we see the signs of Aries, Taurus, and the two young goats (which now are Gemini), used to mark the months of the birth of those animals; the signs of Cancer, Leo, and Virgo, with the ear of corn, for those months in which the sun goes backward like a crab, in which there is greater heat, and in which the harvests are reaped. The sign of the scorpion (which in the Egyptian sphere occupies the space which at present is occupied by the sign Libra), and that of Sagittarius, in the months of virulent, contagious distempers, and the chase; and lastly, the signs of Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces, in those months in which the sun begins to ascend—in which it rains much and in which there is abundant fishing. These ideas at least are similar to those which the Mexicans associated with their clime. They called their first month 'Acahualco,' that is the cessation of the waters, which began on the twenty-sixth of February, and they symbolized this month by a house, with the figure of water above it; they gave also to the same month the name 'Quahuitlehua,' that is the moving or budding of trees. The Mexicans

afterwards distinguished their first month by two names, of which the first, "Acahualco," or the cessation of the waters, did not correspond with their climate, where the rains came in October; but it agrees with northern climes of America, from whence their ancestors (Toltecs) came; and from that the origin of this name appears evidently very ancient. The second name, that is "Quahuitlehua," or the budding of the trees, agrees much with the word "Kimath," used by Job to signify the pleiades (chap. ix verse 9) which in his time announced the spring, when the trees begin to move. The symbol of the second Mexican month was a pavilion, which indicated the great heat prevalent in Mexico in April, before the rains of May came on. The symbol of the third month was a bird which appeared at that time. The twelfth and thirteenth months had for their symbol the plant 'pactli,' which springs up and matures in these months. The fourteenth month was expressed by a cord and a hand which pulled it, expressive of the binding power of the cold in that month, which is January, and to this same circumstance the name 'Titil,' which they gave it alludes. The constellation 'Kesil,' of which Job speaks to signify winter, signifies in the Arabic root (which is Kesal) to be cold and asleep, and in the text of Job it is read, 'Couldst thou break the cords or ties of Kesil?' The symbol for the Mexican century convinces me that it is the same which the ancient Egyptians and Chaldeans had. In the Mexican symbol we see the sun as it were eclipsed by the moon, and surrounded with a serpent which makes four twists, and embraces the four periods of thirteen years. This very idea of the serpent with the sun has, from time immemorial, in the world, signified the periodical or annual course of the sun. The Egyptians more particularly agree with the Mexicans; for to symbolize the sun they employed a circle with one or two serpents, but still more the ancient Persians, among whom their 'Mitrás' was symbolized by a sun and a serpent. There is no doubt that the symbol of the serpent is a thing totally arbitrary to signify the sun, with which it has no physical relation; wherefore then, I ask, have so many nations dispersed over the globe, and of which some have had no reciprocal intercourse, unless in the first ages after the deluge agreed in using one same symbol, and chose to express by it the same object. When we find the word 'sacco' in the Hebrew, Greek, Teutonic, Latin languages, etc., it obliges us to believe that it belongs to the primitive language of man after the deluge, and when we see one same arbitrary symbol, signifying the sun and his course, used by the Mexicans, the Chinese, the ancient Egyptians and Persians, does it not prompt us to believe the real origin of it was in the time of Noah, or the first men after the deluge? This fair conclusion is strongly confirmed by the Chiapanese calendar (which is totally Mexican), in which the Chiapanese, according to De la Vega, bishop of Chiapa, in his preface to his synodal constitutions, put forth the first symbol or name of the first year of the century, as 'Votan,' nephew of him who built a wall up to heaven, and gave to men the languages which they now speak."

Humboldt has devoted several pages of his "Researches in America" in describing the similarity which exists between the Chinese, Japanese, Calmucks, Moguls, and other Tartar nations, also the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Phœnicians, Greeks, Romans, Hebrews, and ancient Celtic nations of Europe with the Mexicans in their representations of astrology, astronomy, and divisions of time. For his interesting and minute description of the Aztec calendar stone the reader is referred to the edition of his Researches Vol. I, translated by Williams.

In the centre of the stone is sculptured the god "Tonatiuh," (the sun) opening his mouth. This yawning mouth is like the image "Kala," or Time, a divinity of Hindostan. Its meaning denotes that Tonatiuh, or time, devours the world, days, months, years, as fast as they come. The same figure or image, under the name "Moloch," was used by the Phœnicians. Humboldt says the Mexicans have evidently followed the Persians in the division of time, judging from the figures carved on the calendar stone. The Persians flourished fifteen hundred years before Christ.

(To be Continued.)

WORLD-MAKING.

BY BETH.

How worlds are made, has been a subject of speculation from a very early period; the various cosmogonies are the hypotheses by which men have sought to satisfy curiosity which has been common to perhaps all of our race. In recent times men have had recourse to methods entirely different to those formerly pursued. They have sought information from the earth itself, by examining its rocks, to see how they were made, the order in which they were brought into existence, and the kind of beings that lived upon the earth when the various rocks were formed. In their investigations a large number of facts have been brought to light that have shown the condition of the earth, in its atmosphere, in the amount of light shining upon the earth, and the kind of life existing at different periods in the earth's history.

The great advantage of making inquiry of the earth itself as to the way in which it was made is that the answers given will be truthful, if correctly interpreted. Besides this, every fresh fact brought to light will confirm and elucidate other facts discovered. It is true there may appear to be contradictions at times, but they will be explained away as fresh facts present themselves.

Only quite recently it has been found that rocks are being made precisely of the same kind as those that have been looked upon as the very first rocks that were formed, or supposed to have been formed-rocks, which for convenience in referring to them, were called "Primary;" and, because no trace of organic structure, such as fossils, were found in them, were called "Azoic," a word which simply means "without life." To discover that rocks are being formed by the agency of microscopic plants and animals; that are filling up the existing seas with silicious or flinty, cretaceous or chalky or lime-like, and clayey sediments, such as may have formed the entire crust of the earth, is calculated to throw much light upon the history of the earth and the process of world-making.

It appears that at this very time, in the Polar regions, immense beds of silicious rocks are being formed by the agency of minute life, rocks that resemble the earliest geological strata. Then, in warmer regions rocks are being formed by the subsidence of calcareous matter, by which a chalk or limestone stratification is being made. At very great depths in the ocean this kind of formation does not appear possible, as by some unknown process, probably by the lime matter being redissolved in the water, only clay containing iron, oxide remains, which would form a rock in every respect like the red clay formation of the earth's crust.

By these great discoveries some geologists are rather disconcerted, because they do not agree with existing theories, and

make the earth's history go back into a more remote period than was supposed. Some who are predisposed to question the divine origin of the earth are even more disposed to doubt. The truth is, the discovery of these new facts is rather in favor of the Mosaic account, in which vast epochs and results are spoken of, rather than the time that elapsed and a detailed account of the order of creation given.

It is no new discovery that chalk is of organic origin, and the same has been suspected in relation to the entire mass of the limestone rocks. Marble is only lime rock changed by heat. The quartzite are sand-rocks of silicious origin, changed in a similar manner. Even granites and similar rocks have been thought to be metamorphic, a grand word which means "changed in shape" or conlition, which has generally been done by heat.

How much do these discoveries by such accurate observers as we have in these days, simplify the operations by which worlds are formed! This does not explain all the causes that have been operating to make this beautiful world in which we live. There are changes by the action of fire as well as water; volcanic and eruptive operations by reason of internal heat, and the influence of the atmosphere as affected by the heat of the sun's rays, have also to be taken into account; also the effects produced by high mountain ranges and climatic influences.

Of this we may rest assured: the process of world-making will not be learned without reading nature's own record, which is written in the rocks; to understand the ancient characters there written we may notice the records being made to-day. This is what is being done by Professor Thompson and other scientists; and, if it does make old mother earth a few centuries older, never mind, it gives us more insight into the methods of world-making.

(To be Continued.)

A VENERABLE TREE TOAD.—At Lexington, Ky., a short time ago, a remarkable discovery of a living frog in the heart of a large tree was made. A section of a sycamore tree, four feet in diameter and three feet wide, intended for a butcher's block, was cut in two equal sections with a cross-cut saw, thus making two blocks of the same size. In the centre of the tree an irregular fissure was discovered which measured six inches in length and three-eighths of an inch in width, and extended into each block. One of the blocks was placed upon its end, the newly cut surface being uppermost. One of the workmen, happening to look into the narrow crack, noticed the green and slimy surface of what he supposed was a snake. Having procured a small stick, he thrust it into the orifice, when a green frog jumped out, and fell, apparently lifeless, upon the surface of the block. In a few moments it commenced to breathe. The pulsations of the blood could be plainly seen on the under surface of the throat, and it soon revived. It was placed in a glass jar, half filled with water, when it immediately climbed up the slippery surface and stuck to the side of the glass, where it could be plainly observed. Its back was dark green, and the under part of the body was of a pale blue, like the colorless appearance of vegetables which have grown in a dark cellar. It was about three inches in length, and was evidently a tree frog (*rana hyla*). At latest reports it was still alive and made the nights melodious with its singing.

To accuse another who is not present to answer for himself is mean, sneaking, cowardly, and base.