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Old America - Ancient Ruins (3)

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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.

ANCIENT RUINS.

(Continued.)

IN the department of Zacatecas, north of the city of Mexico, situated on the level of a hill top which rises out of a plain, are the extensive remains of an ancient city, known as the ruins of Quemada. The northern side of the hill rises with an easy slope from the plain, and is protected by a double wall and bastions, while on the other side the steep and precipitous rocks of the hill itself form a natural defense. The whole of the elevation is covered with ruins. On the southern side chiefly may be traced the remains of temples and pyramids. The rock-built walls of these edifices are joined with very little mortar; the stones, many of which are twenty-two feet in thickness, and of a corresponding height, are retained in their positions mainly by their own massiveness. Captain Lyon, in his volume of travels in Mexico, gives a very minute and interesting description of Quemada, and says: "There is no doubt that the greater mass of the nation which once dwelt here must have been established upon the plain beneath, since from the summit of the hill we could distinctly trace three straight and very extensive causeways diverging from that over which we passed" (called the grand causeway) southwest from the hill, a distance of two miles. One of these causeways measures forty-six feet in width. These roads were all paved with stone. Nothing but confused heaps of stones thickly strewn over the plain remains of this once great city. The citadel alone still remains to tell of the strength and grandeur of a city whose name is lost, and the history of which, with that of its inhabitants, remains an unsolved mystery.

On the river Tecolutla M. Nebel found the ruins of ancient structures, to which he gives the name of a near Indian rancho, called Mapilea. He states that it is impossible to define the limits of this ancient work, because it is now entirely covered with thick vegetation and a forest, the silence of which has, perhaps, never been disturbed by an ax. He, nevertheless, describes some pyramids, many large sculptured stones and the indications of an extensive city once inhabited by a highly civilized people.

Fifteen leagues west from Papantla, near the eastern coast of Mexico, lie the remains of Tusapan. Nothing of this city remains in great distinctness but the pyramidal monument of Teo-calli. This edifice has a base line of thirty feet on every side, and is built of regular and nicely cut stones. A single stairway leads to the upper part of the first story, on which is erected a quadrangular house or tower, while in front of the door still remains the pedestal of the idol, or perhaps the altar of worship. The interior of the apartment is twelve feet square; the ceiling terminates in a point, like the exterior roof. The walls have been painted, but the outlines of the figures are no longer distinguishable. The door and the two friezes are formed of sculptured stones. From the fragments of carving and the variety of figures of men and animals that lie in heaps about the rest of the city, this temple was, in point of adornment, by no means the most splendid edifice of Tusapan. Nebel found a statue of a woman nineteen feet high, cut from the solid rock, with the remains of a water-pipe

connected with the body, from which he infers that it was the remains of a fountain; from this figure the stream was carried by a canal to a neighboring city.

Near the city of Jalapa, and not far from the main road to the city of Mexico, were discovered, in the year 1835, the ruins known as Misantla. On a lofty ridge of mountains in the canton of that name there is a hill called Estillero, near which lies a mountain covered with a narrow strip of table-land, perfectly isolated from the surrounding country by steep rocks and inaccessible canyons. Beyond these are lofty walls of hills, from the summit of one of which the sea is visible. The only part of the country by which this plain is accessible is the slope of Estillero; on all other sides the solitary mountain seems to have been separated from the neighboring land by some violent earthquake, that sunk the land to an unfathomable depth. On this isolated and secluded eminence are situated the remains of an ancient city—Misantla. As you approach it by the slopes of Estillero a broken wall of stones united with cement is first seen. This appears to have served as a protection to a circular plaza, in the centre of which is a pyramid eighty feet high, forty-nine feet front, and forty-two in depth. It is divided into three stories; at least, that is all that remains. On the broadest front a stairway leads to the second body, which, in turn, is ascended at the side, while the top of the third is reached by steps cut in the corner edge of the pyramid. Around the plaza commence the remains of a town, extending northerly for near a league. Immense square blocks of stone buildings, separated by streets at the distance of three hundred yards from each other, mark the sites of the ancient habitations, fronting upon four parallel highways. In some of the houses the walls are still four feet high, but of most of them nothing but the outline of their foundations is to be seen. On the south the city was defended by a long, narrow wall. In the cemetery connected with the city several bodies were found, parts of which were in tolerable preservation. Two stones, a foot and a half long, by half a foot wide, bearing hieroglyphics, were discovered; several figures cut out of stone and many domestic utensils have also been found.

Forty years after the conquest of Honduras the ruins known as Copan were discovered; they were then, as now, densely covered by a forest. At the time of their discovery by Europeans they were wholly mysterious to the natives. They are situated in so wild and solitary a part of the country that they have not been very carefully explored. It is known that they extend two or three miles along the left bank of the river Copan; how far from the river into the forest they extend, no one has told. Mr. Stevens describes his first view of them as follows: "We came to the right bank of the river, and saw, directly opposite, a stone wall from sixty to ninety feet high, with frieze growing out of the top, running north and south along the river six hundred and twenty-four feet, in some places fallen, in others entire." This wall supported the rear and elevated side of the foundation of a great building. It was built of cut stone laid in cement; the blocks of stone being six feet long. He saw a stone column standing by itself, fourteen feet high and three feet on each side from top to bottom. It was richly ornamented with sculptured designs on two opposite sides, the other sides being covered with inscriptions finely carved on the stone. On the front face, surrounded with sculptured ornaments, was the figure of a man. Fourteen other obelisks of the same kind were seen by Mr. Stevens, some being higher than this; some of them had fallen. The great building first noticed stood on a pyramidal foundation, supported along the river by the high back wall.

Mr. Stevens describes it as an "oblong inclosure," which it is customary to call the temple. The other three sides are formed by a succession of pyramidal structures and terraced walls, measuring from thirty to one hundred and forty feet in height. It is accessible from the river side by flights of steps, similar flights leading down on the inner side into the enclosed area. Two small pyramidal structures are on the south west angle of the river wall. Running at right angles with the river, and within the boundary marked by these structures, is the southern wall of the temple, beginning with a range of steps thirty feet high. At the south-eastern extremity of this wall is another massive pyramid one hundred and twenty feet high on the slope. To the east of this are the remains of other terraces and pyramids, and a passage twenty feet wide, which seems to have formed a gateway. The temple wall, running from south to north, continues for a distance of four hundred feet, and then turning at right angles to the left, runs again southwards and joins the other extremity of the river wall. Within the area enclosed by these walls are other terraces, and pyramids one hundred and forty feet high, enclosing two smaller areas, or courtyards, one of which, situated near the eastern boundary wall, is two hundred and fifty feet square, and the other, close to the river wall, one hundred and forty feet by ninety, both being forty feet above the level of the river, and accessible by steps cut in the sides of the sloping walls that enclose them.

SUNDAY LESSONS. FOR LITTLE LEARNERS.

ON THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET.—LESSON XII.

- Q.—Was the box entirely covered with soil?
A.—No; a small portion of the lid was to be seen.
Q.—After removing the soil from around the lid, what did Joseph do?
A.—He raised it up with a lever.
Q.—What did he then see?
A.—He saw the plates, the urim and thummim and the breast-plate.
Q.—Did Joseph try to take them out?
A.—Yes; but the angel told him not to touch them.
Q.—Did the angel tell him when he might have them?
A.—Yes, in four years from that time.
Q.—Did the angel give him any further instructions?
A.—Yes; he told him to meet him there one year from that day.
Q.—What day and month was it.
A.—On the 22nd of September, 1823.
Q.—What else did he tell him?
A.—He told him to meet him on the same day the three following years at the same place.
Q.—How long had the plates been buried there?
A.—Fourteen hundred years.
Q.—Who buried those plates there?
A.—A prophet of God by the name of Moroni.
Q.—When did Moroni put them there?
A.—About four hundred and twenty years after the birth of Jesus Christ.
Q.—Was Moroni, who buried the plates, the same person who came to Joseph and told him where to find them?
A.—Yes.

HARRY and CUNNING are two apprentices of Despatch and Skill; but neither of them ever learned their masters' trade.

DISCONTENT.

A man in his carriage was riding along,
His gaily-dressed wife by his side;
In satins and laces she looked like a queen,
And he like a king in his pride.

A wood-sawyer stood on the street as they passed;
The carriage and couple he eyed,
And said, as he worked with his saw on a log,
"I wish I was rich and could ride!"

The man in the carriage remarked to his wife;
"One thing I would give if I could—
I would give all my wealth for the strength and the health
Of that man who is sawing the wood."

ENIGMA.

I am composed of six letters:

- My 6, 2, 4, 5 is a seasoning;
My 3, 2, 4 is the name of an animal;
My 4, 2, 1 children sometimes do while eating;
My 2, 4, 5 we must all arrive at;
My 1, 2, 4, 5 is used by a carpenter;
My 6, 3, 2, 4 is a source of annoyance to fishermen;
My whole is a noted river of Asia.

THE answer to the Enigma published in No. 11 is JERUSALEM. We have received correct solutions from Abbie Hyde, Hyde Park; Maria M. Miller, Richfield; Lydia L. Allred and Luanna A. Booth, St. Charles; Diana Radford, Kanosh; Thomas Wheeler and C. Elkins, Sugar House Ward; Charles Brain, S. Waite, E. S. Bismore, Louie Snelgrove; Daniel Spencer and W. T. Cooper, Salt Lake City. We have also received the following answer in rhyme from James Stirling, Salt Lake City:

King JESUS is the Lord of Saints; His name we should revere;
But wicked MEN reject His laws, His gospel scorn to hear.
The gospel teaches us to shun the use of wine and ALE,
And thus gain strength of mind and ARM to make God's work prevail.
The Prophet SAMUEL from his youth, grew up in all God's ways,
And JAMES, the Apostle of the Lord, taught wisdom in his days.
True, SALES are made in every store, and SALEM we extol;—
I must conclude my "Enigma" with JERUSALEM, "my whole."

If you form a resolution, and then break it, you set yourself a bad example, and you are very likely to follow it.

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