



Type: Magazine Article

---

## Old America - Ancient Ruins (6)

Author(s): G.M. Ottinger

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 10, No. 16 (7 August 1875), pp. 182–183

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

---

**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.

---

The light-house keeper and his family had slept little through that rough and stormy night, and with the grey dawn they stood upon the rock. Even now the sea was raging fiercely, and a heavy mist almost hid all the islands from sight. Grace, looking through a telescope, saw a dark mass looming through the mist, and with some difficulty made out that it was a wreck. She even saw a few figures clinging to its bows.

In one moment she was at her father's side.

"Oh, father, see, there is a wreck about a mile from here, and some poor creatures are clinging to it. What shall we do to save them?"

"God help them!" answered the old man, sadly, "for no human help can reach them there, the sea will soon swallow them, wreck and all. We can do nothing; it is too rough."

"Oh, father! father! we cannot see the poor creatures lost before our eyes!" cried Grace, "let us try and save them. God will help them through us, perhaps. Pray come, we cannot stay here and see them perish without making an effort to save them." And though the stout old seaman shook his head, declaring that it was throwing away their lives, the brave girl persuaded him to launch the boat and put to sea with her. No slight peril, little folks. I can assure you, for these rocks are rugged and the coast dangerous, at the best of times.

And a fearful journey it was, as Grace and her father made their way, often in danger of foundering on the rocks, or of being dashed to pieces, boat and all. But still they toiled on, and never thought of turning back. Our delicate Grace knew little about rowing, for she had only been a little way out sometimes, when the sea was very calm, but now she worked like any man, straining every nerve to rescue those poor suffering people from their awful position. With streaming hair and tearful eyes she worked, cheering on her father, and praying aloud for strength. I wonder how those poor people on the wreck felt when they first beheld the little boat, and heard the kindly voices calling to them across the waters! How anxiously they must have watched its approach, and how surprised they must have felt, when at last it came near enough through the angry beating waves for them to distinguish that their preservers were only a grizzled old man and a fair slight girl.

At length the whole nine of the survivors were rescued. Half dead and cold with despair, they were dragged off from the broken spars, and soon found themselves in the little boat—saved! some weeping, some pinching themselves, believing that they must be dreaming; some, we hope, thanking God in humble gratitude, but all blessing the calm and earnest pair who had ventured so much to save them.

And the mother and her two children?

The mother was still alive; but the two little ones were dead on her bosom.

It was ebb tide, and had not some of the wrecked party been able to row, I do not know how they would ever have got back to Longstone. As it was they did return in safety, but it was some days before they could again leave it, for the sea dashed about the island as though angry at having lost its prey.

Don't you think, children, that Grace Darling was a true heroine? I do.

VANITY makes men ridiculous, pride odious, and ambition terrible.

## Old America.

BY G. M. O.

### ANCIENT RUINS.

(Continued.)

IN Yucatan, a peninsula which lies north of the great forest, the remains of ancient cities are abundant. M. Charnay found "the country covered with them from north to south." Mr. Stephens states in his work on Yucatan that he visited "forty-four ruined cities and places," most of which were unknown to white men, even those inhabiting the country. Previous to the Spanish conquest Yucatan was called Maya. The natives still use this as the true name of the country.

When Cordova landed on the coast in 1517 Yucatan was much more populous than at present. The people had more civilization, more industry and more wealth; they had cities and large towns, and dwelling houses built of timber. They were much more highly skilled in the arts of civilized life. The Maya kingdom was broken up by a rebellion about one hundred years previous to the arrival of the Spaniards. According to the Maya chronicles the downfall occurred in the year 1420, when the capital city, Mayapan, was destroyed, and never afterwards inhabited. Merida, the present capital, was built on the site of an ancient Maya city called Titoo. Old Spanish records state that it was built on that site because there was in the ruins an abundance of building material. Mr. Stephens noticed in some of the buildings "sculptured figures from the ruins of ancient buildings." The remains of the ancient city of Mayapan are spread over an extensive plain, overgrown by trees and other vegetation. The most prominent object seen is a great mound sixty feet high and one hundred feet square at the base. Four stairways twenty-five feet wide, in a ruined condition, lead up to an esplanade within six feet of the top, which is reached by a smaller stairway. The summit is a plain stone platform fifteen feet square. Sculptured stones are scattered over the mound and at its base, and subterranean chambers have been discovered in the mound. Another remarkable edifice, a circular stone building, twenty-five feet in diameter, stands on a foundation of a pyramidal form, thirty-five feet high. On a terrace projecting from this mound was a double row of columns eight feet apart.

Mr. Baldwin says: "Brasseur de Bourbourg classes some of the foundations at Mayapan with the oldest seen at Palenque and Copan. This point, however, cannot be determined with sufficient accuracy to remove all doubt. Mayapan may have stood upon the foundations of a very ancient city, which was several times rebuilt, but the city destroyed in 1420 could not have been as old as either Palenque or Copan."

About seventeen leagues south of the city of Merida are the ruins of Uxmal. They have been regarded as the most important in Yucatan, chiefly because they have been more visited and more explored than the others. Circumstantial evidence appears to warrant the supposition that this city had not been wholly deserted at the time of the conquest, although it had previously begun to go to ruin. However, it was wholly deserted and in ruins in 1673. The area covered by its remains is a league or more in diameter. The most important of the ruined buildings was named by the Spaniards "Casa del Gobernador" (House of the Governor.) It is, like all the

other important buildings, situated on an artificial elevation, which rises in three terraces from the level plain. The first terrace is 575 feet long, 3 feet high and 15 feet broad; the second is 20 feet high, 250 feet wide and 545 feet long; the third, on which stands the stately edifice, is 19 feet high, 30 feet broad and 360 feet long. The sides of all are supported by substantial stone walls, rounded at the angles. In the centre of the platform of the second terrace commences a stairway 130 feet wide, and leading up to the third terrace in front of the building, the facade of which is 322 feet long. The walls of the palace are constructed entirely of stone. From the base to the cornice, which runs around the building immediately above the doorways and about half the height of the building, is presented a smooth surface; but above the cornice, the four sides of the building present one solid mass of rich, complicated and elaborately sculptured series of ornaments. Eleven doorways are in the front of the building, and one at each end, while the back is one solid mass of masonry, nine feet thick, without doorways or openings of any kind. Above the doorways the ornamentation is very rich and elaborate, representing small human figures with head dresses of plumes, that above the centre door being larger than the others. The roof of this building is flat, and was originally covered with cement. The two principal rooms are sixty feet long and thirteen feet wide. The lintels of the doorways have all been of wood; some were still in their places, and in very good condition, when examined by Mr. Stephens. This is no proof against the antiquity of the building, as these beams are of a very hard wood, which does not grow in the neighboring forests, but must have been transported from forests three hundred miles distant. On one of these lintels were carved hieroglyphics, similar to those of Copan and Pa'enque. No stucco figures or carved monoliths, like those found at those two cities, have been found at Uxmal. On the second terrace stands the dilapidated walls of an edifice 94 feet long and 34 feet wide; it is finished in a still more simple style than the great building on the upper terrace. The figures of turtles sculptured along the upper edge of the cornice have given it the name of "Casa de la Tortugas" (House of the Turtles.) The rectangular court enclosed by the walls of this building was paved with stones, each six inches square and exquisitely cut in demi-relief with the accurate figure of a tortoise, and arranged in groups of four, with the heads of the tortoises together. The number required to cover the court is said to have been 46,660. On the same terrace are other remains, but in so ruinous a condition as to be indescribable. Such is, for instance, an oblong structure 200 feet long, by 15 feet wide, and about three feet high, along the foot of which runs a range of pedestals and broken columns. Near the "House of the Governor" are two buildings, each 128 feet long and 30 feet deep; they stand opposite each other, 70 feet apart; they are precisely similar in plan and ornaments, of which the coils of serpents have formed the principal part. These edifices have no doorways or openings of any kind, and when broken into, proved to be nothing but solid walls. In the centre of each wall, and exactly opposite to each other, are the remains of two large stone rings.

Another important edifice is situated 240 feet south of these structures; it has been named the "Casa de las Monjas" (House of the Nuns.) It stands on a terraced foundation, and is arranged around a quadrangular courtyard 258 feet one way, and 214 feet the other. The front building is 279 feet long, and has a gateway ten feet eight inches wide, with four doors on each side of it, leading into the court. These buildings

are more richly ornamented than the "House of the Governor," "surpassing any other now seen in the ruins." On the side facing the entrance of the main building high turret-like towers crowned the doorways, all covered with sculptured ornaments.

The next building stands on an artificial mound, oblong in form, but not cut into terraces, rising very steep from the plain, and accessible by a range of uncommonly steep steps. This building is of stone, exceedingly plain from the base to the cornice over the doorways, and from this to the roof elaborately sculptured. From the front of this building runs an incline 22 feet long, paved with cement, and leading to the roof of a building occupying a lower position, and the walls of which are likewise richly sculptured. This group of buildings goes under the name of the "House of the Dwarf." Another group of buildings, built of stone and covered with stucco ornaments, has been called the "Casa de las Palamos" (House of the Pigeons), from the peculiar appearance of the gables, which are perforated with small oblong holes, having some resemblance to pigeon houses. Other less important buildings have been described by explorers, some of which stand on high, pyramidal mounds. And inscriptions are found here, but they are not so numerous as at Palenque and Copan.

It must be remembered that the different names given to these buildings are entirely unconnected with their past history, or with the edifices themselves, and have only been applied by writers in consequence of some fancied resemblance.

Our space will not permit us to describe the many other buildings crowning terraces and pyramids and hidden in the dense mass of foliage that covers the site of Uxmal.

(To be continued.)

## A LIFE SKETCH.

DR. SILAS WALSH one day sat in his office reading a very interesting book. It was a part of his business, this reading, for the book was of a science within the scope of his profession. He was comparatively a young man, and had the reputation of being an excellent physician. While he read, some one rang his office bell. He laid aside the book and went to the door, and when he saw what was on the stepping stone he was indignant.

He was a ragged, dirty boy, known in Ernsworth as "Hammer Jim"—ragged and dirty, and with all the vileness of the slum about him—a boy vicious and profane, against whom every other boy in town was warned—a boy who was called a thief and a villain, whom no effort of the overseers had been able to reclaim, and who seemed to care for nothing but to make people afraid of him. His true name, as the overseers had it, was James Ammerton. About his father nobody in Ernsworth had ever known. His mother had died an inmate of the poor-house.

On the present occasion, Jim's face was not only dirty, but it was bloody; and there was blood upon his grimed and tattered garments.

"Please, sir, won't you fix my head? I've got a hurt."

"What kind of a hurt?" asked the doctor.

"I'm afeard its bad, sir," said the boy, sobbingly. "One of Mr. Dunn's men hit me with a rock—Oh!"

"What did he hit you for?"

"I dono, sir."

"Yes, you do know. What did he throw the stone at you for?"