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Progression and Retrogression

Author(s): Joseph Fielding Smith

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Abstract: In rebuttal to the theory of evolution, this article points out that the first man on earth was intelligent, kept records, and knew the gospel. Then the children of men rebelled and fell into a degenerate state. Ancient America and the Book of Mormon are good examples of progression and retrogression.

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Progression and Retrogression

Culture and Ignorance Have Run in Parallel Directions at the Same Time

By Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, of the Council of the Twelve

We have been informed that "history is the narrative of what civilized man has done," and that it "cannot go back of written records." Some writers on ancient history say that "pre-historic man" dwelt in caves, under overhanging cliffs, and in other places of shelter which nature could afford as protection from wind, rain, and the ravages of wild animals stronger than man. His weapon was a branch of a tree which served as a club or spear. His club was oftentimes reinforced by a stone or tusk. Later he learned to use hard stone or flint, which could be chipped or sharpened by friction and fastened to his club with thongs from the skins of animals. This was in the age of stone before he discovered metals.

This poor savage, these same writers are careful to instruct us, lived several hundred thousand years ago. Just how long ago they do not know; but a slight matter of two or three hundred thousand years makes such a little difference anyway! He had no written language and the words he used were limited to a few monosyllables or grunts. In course of time, along with other attainments which came gradually, he learned to communicate with his fellows by means of a few crude signs and drawings cut in clay or soft stone. This was the beginning of communication by writing. As time passed, his means of expression were improved, and signs were made to represent "sounds of the human voice." The dawn of history, so these theorists say, came when the writers learned to make their records permanent by baking their tablets made of clay, or carving their thoughts in stone. These great changes did not come in a

day, but "after many millenniums" of progress, through the "stone age," which was followed by the "age of metals," which is of comparative recent time. Gradually man progressed, increasing in knowledge and power until he reached the wonderful state of intelligence which he possesses today.

This is a very pretty story with just one defect—it is not true! Yet, such is the information our children are taught in our schools. I shall be bold enough to say that such theories should have no place in our schools in the manner in which they now appear. That I may not be misunderstood, let me say that I do believe that there has been a "stone age," a "copper age," and development and increase of knowledge through the centuries. I do not, however, accept the statement that the first man evolved from lower forms of life, and roamed over the earth hundreds of thousands of years ago as a savage, uncultured, ignorant, and with no spoken or written language. I know better than that, for the Lord has declared otherwise.

The first man placed upon this earth was an intelligent being, created in the image of God, possessed of wisdom and knowledge, with power to communicate his thoughts in a language, both oral and written, which was superior to anything to be found on the earth today. This may sound very sweeping and dogmatic to those who hold to the other view, but it is not any more so than their statements to the contrary. Moreover, I do not say it of myself, but merely repeat what the Lord has said; and surely the Creator, above all others, ought to know! The first man was instructed by the best Teacher man ever had, for he was taught of God, and spoke the language of the Most High, in which angels conversed. This language he taught to his children. It is true that he was left to work out, through the use of his faculties, many of nature's great secrets; but the Lord did not leave him helpless, but instructed him, and he was inspired by the Spirit of the Lord.

I am just simple enough to accept what the Lord has revealed to his servants, in preference to the theories of uninspired men, who in our great age of wonderful discovery, are ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth that saves. They rely on their own judgment, and are oftentimes mistaken in their theories and led astray, being forced from time to time to modify, change, and even reverse their teachings, as new discoveries are made.

In the Pearl of Great Price—which every Latter-day Saint accepts as the word of the Lord—the following very significant statement is found:

And then began these men to call upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord blessed them;

And a book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in



Photo by O. F. Cook, in *National Geographical Magazine*, May, 1916.

THE COURSE OF AN ANCIENT AQUEDUCT

"The indistinct dark line that crosses the high slope, shown about two inches below the top of the photograph, represents the course of an ancient aqueduct carried for many miles along a mountain wall hundreds of feet above the valley. In the foreground, near the ruined town of Pumamarca, is a group of Inca storehouses. The stream in the bottom of the valley is carried in a straight course along the farther side of the valley bottom. Note canals cutting across mountains."

the language of Adam, for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration;

And by them their children were taught to read and write, having a language which was pure and undefiled.—Moses 6:4-6.

It was not until after man rebelled and rejected the word of God that he fell into mental degeneracy, and lost the power to converse in written language. Man was intelligent in the beginning, and understood many fundamental truths, but when he refused to receive divine guidance, the Spirit of the Lord withdrew, and then he was left alone and became a savage, for the light in him was turned to darkness. Tubal-Cain was "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron," long before the flood. Yet, as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, when Speke, Grant, Livingstone, and others, explored the wilds of Africa they found the descendants of Cain living in savagery in the depths of the "stone age." Columbus, in 1492, found the "stone age" flourishing in all its glory here in America. Likewise our Utah pioneers, in 1847, discovered similar conditions in the valleys of these mountains.

Shall we argue from this that the poor, benighted savage of Africa, and the equally uncultured Indian of America, were slower in their development than the people in Europe and Asia? If we do, our conclusion will be hastily reached, without an investigation of all the facts to be considered. The "stone age," the "copper age," the "age of iron," and the age of culture and refinement, run in parallel directions at one and the same time, but the age of knowledge and inspiration preceded all.

Nations have risen to great power and dominion, only to fall into decay and be superseded by other nations. So it has been from the beginning. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome, each had their day of greatness, culture and might, but their glory has departed forever. In some respects, also, much of their culture and knowledge of the arts and sciences perished with them, and cannot be duplicated in this great age of wonderful advancement. All this reminds us of the words of Byron; so aptly expressed:

There is the Moral of all human tales;
 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past.
 First Freedom, and then Glory—when that fails,
 Wealth, vice, corruption—barbarism at last.
 And History, with all her volumes vast,
 Hath but one page.

Here in America, thousands of years ago, there flourished a civilization equal, if not superior, to that which could be found in Egypt or Asia at that time. These ancient people developed the arts and were especially skilled in agriculture to a marked degree. We read that they were, at one period in their history:



Photo by Hiram Bingham, in *National Geographical Magazine*, May, 1916.

ONE OF THE HIGHEST AGRICULTURAL CANALS IN THE WORLD

"The rich bottom lands of this elevated valley were desired by the Incas for growing potatoes. Accordingly, the meandering stream was straightened and enclosed so as to prevent it from occupying any more land than was absolutely necessary. It is in the upper valley of the Pampacahuana, a tributary of the Urubamba, and is at an elevation of 12,800 feet. Potatoes are still raised on the slopes of this valley at an elevation of slightly more than 13,000 feet."

Exceeding industrious, and they did buy and sell, and traffic one with another, that they might get gain.

And they did work in all manner of ore, and they did make gold, and silver, and iron, and brass, and all manner of metals; and they did dig it out of the earth; wherefore they did cast up mighty heaps of earth to get ore, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of copper. And they did work all manner of fine work.

And they did have silks, and fine twined linen; and they did work all manner of cloth, that they might clothe themselves from their nakedness.

And they did make all manner of tools to till the earth, both to plow and to sow, to reap and to hoe, and also to thrash.

And they did make all manner of tools with which they did work their beasts.

And they did make all manner of weapons of war. And they did work all manner of work of exceeding curious workmanship.

And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it.—Ether 10:22-28.

Nevertheless this people forsook the Lord. They turned from the covenants they had made with him. Contentions arose, bloody conflicts followed, until they were entirely destroyed. There are in parts of the United States and in other places on this continent some mute evidences of their former glory. In Michigan the ruins of ancient copper mines have been found.*

Likewise in other localities there are indications that ore has been extracted from the earth, great heaps have been thrown up that still remain. Was it not done by these ancient people as indicated in this passage quoted?

Six hundred years before the birth of Christ another civilization supplanted that previously mentioned which was destroyed about that time. This second civilization flourished about one thousand years. The people multiplied and spread over the face of the entire continent. They were highly cultured, and when they hearkened to the voice of their prophets and kept the commandments of the Lord, they prospered and, like the nation which preceded them, they became skilled in the weaving of all manner of fine linen and other cloth. They tilled the soil and delved into the earth, having also among them many "curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore, and did re-

*"When we consider the extreme extent of country traced to obtain mica and copper, added to the earthworks of Ohio, and other states, and when we remember how extensively these mining operations were carried on, the Mound Builders must appear to us to have been a great and mighty nation.

* * * *

"An industrious people, well settled and extensively engaged in mining operations and various other mechanical pursuits, must have been well skilled and far from a state of barbarism. * * * It is evident that the Mound Builders were somewhat advanced in the arts and sciences, and occupied no mean position in life. For their time and surroundings, they had made great strides towards a permanent civilization, and must be ranked as one of the great people of ancient times."—J. P. MacLean, *The Mound Builders*, pp. 88, 89.

fine it; and thus they did become rich" (Helaman 6:11). But, like their predecessors, they forgot the Lord; his Spirit was withdrawn, and the greater part of the people was destroyed. Their civilization perished. Those who remained became ferocious and blood-thirsty. In their decadence they lost their knowledge of agriculture, and the working of the metals, and became more or less nomadic tribes. Their descendants, the American Indians, were wandering in all their wild savagery when the Pilgrim Fathers made permanent settlement in this land.

Recent exploring parties have made wonderful discoveries in various parts of Central and South America. The ruins of great cities of a former civilization have been uncovered such as Chichen Itza in Yucatan, and Sacsahuaman and Machu Picchu, in Peru. These ancient builders were a megalithic race. Their great cities were built of stones, some of which weighed from five to fifteen tons or more. So closely and so skilfully have these stones in their houses and monuments been placed together that even now it is difficult to penetrate between the joints with a knife. Mr. Hiram Bingham, director of the Geographical Society and Yale University Expedition, in 1915, has said: "They thought nothing of handling blocks of stone weighing five tons and upwards. Indeed, there are numerous stones that weigh over fifteen tons which fitted together with a skill that has amazed all beholders" (*National Geographical Magazine*, May, 1916, p. 459).

Again he writes: "It is remarkable, indeed, that a people who succeeded in equaling the ancient Egyptians in architecture, engineering, pottery, and textiles, should have fallen so far behind in the development of a written language.* This is the most serious obstacle that stands in the way of our learning more of that enterprising race" (*National Geographical Magazine*, May, 1916, p. 463).

This ancient race built canals, said by the Spanish conquerors to be 55 and 120 leagues in length. Some of these canals are in use today. They were skilled in the use of cement and built long roads through the Andes, which have become harder with the passing of time. To do this great work they, of necessity, had skilled engineers with wonderful mathematical knowledge. Their aqueducts, according to our modern explorers, are "unequaled in any other part of the world."

*Strange as the fact may appear that this race of Peruvians had no written language, yet still stranger does the fact appear when we know that their ancestors were a record-keeping people, and that they were also in possession of the ancient Hebrew scriptures which they carried with them from the old world when they came to this land, choice above all other lands on the face of the earth. This is a case of retrogression, not advancement.—
J. F. S.

They built terraces, or hanging gardens, that were so wonderful that by comparison those of Babylon were insignificant. Of these terraces, Mr. O. F. Cook, botanist of the expedition previously mentioned, has this to say:

The hanging gardens of Babylon have long been reckoned as one of the wonders of the Oriental world; and yet they were a mere transient toy and for 3,000 years have been only a tradition. The hanging gardens of Peru, though of unknown antiquity, are still in existence, and doubtless as worthy of our admiration as were those of Babylon in the days of Herodotus and Strabo.

The Babylonian gardens are said to have been 400 feet square and as high as the walls of the city, variously stated as from 75 to 300 feet. The structure had the form of a pyramid, with broad steps, on which earth was placed for the growth of plants. No doubt such an artificial hill was a striking object in the plain of Babylon, and gave Nebuchadnezzar's Median queen a pleasant reminder of her mountain home, where, it may be, there were valleys with terraced slopes as in Peru.

Many banks of terraces in Peru are very much longer and very much higher than the Babylonian wonder. A bank of 50 terraces 10 feet high means a vertical height of 500 feet. Many slopes have more than 50 terraces, forming huge staircases as high as the Washington monument, resting against the lower slopes of mountains that tower for thousands of feet above. It is only by taking the ancient works out of their natural setting that we can appreciate their gigantic proportions.—*National Geographical Magazine*, May, 1916, pp. 476-493.

In spite of the wonderful engineering skill of these ancient inhabitants, their remarkable carvings in stone, building of cities, canals and roads, together with the fact that in agricultural knowledge they were in advance of the world,* our modern scientists would have us believe that they "had no better tools than stone hammers and fiber ropes, and understood no more advanced mechanical principles than the level and the inclined plane." Such a thought, of course, we are not forced to believe. The Peruvians of the days of the Spanish conquest, like the Mexicans of the same period, were but the blighted remnant of the greater civilization which flourished on this continent from 600 B. C. until 400 A. D. While the civilization of these two countries, Mexico and Peru, were far in advance of anything else on the American continent at the time of the discovery, it was not the rising, but the setting of the sun. The glory, power and dominion which had flourished, were departed. There was a time when those people hearkened to the Lord and

*"Even irrigation agriculture appears to us as a new and very specialized branch of the art, and we think ourselves very enterprising to have undertaken the reclamation of our so-called "deserts" in the Western states, where wide expanses of nearly level and very fertile soil have been made richly productive simply by being supplied with water. The native agriculture of Peru reached the stage of reclamation projects long before America was discovered by Europeans. *Our undertakings sink into insignificance in the face of what this 'vanished' race accomplished.*"—O. F. Cook, in *National Geographical Magazine*, May, 1916, pp. 475, 476.

worshiped our Savior Jesus Christ, then they were led by inspiration and were filled with light. But when they transgressed against that light and sought ways of darkness, all inspiration was withdrawn, just as it had been from other nations which became corrupt and filled with all manner of abomination. Their day came to a close. When America was discovered intellectual night prevailed through all the land. The people were wandering aimlessly, groping in the darkness of ignorance which they brought upon themselves because they had sinned most grievously against the truth of the everlasting gospel which, centuries before, had been declared to them. The Lord in his tender mercy has promised that the full radiance of the noon-day

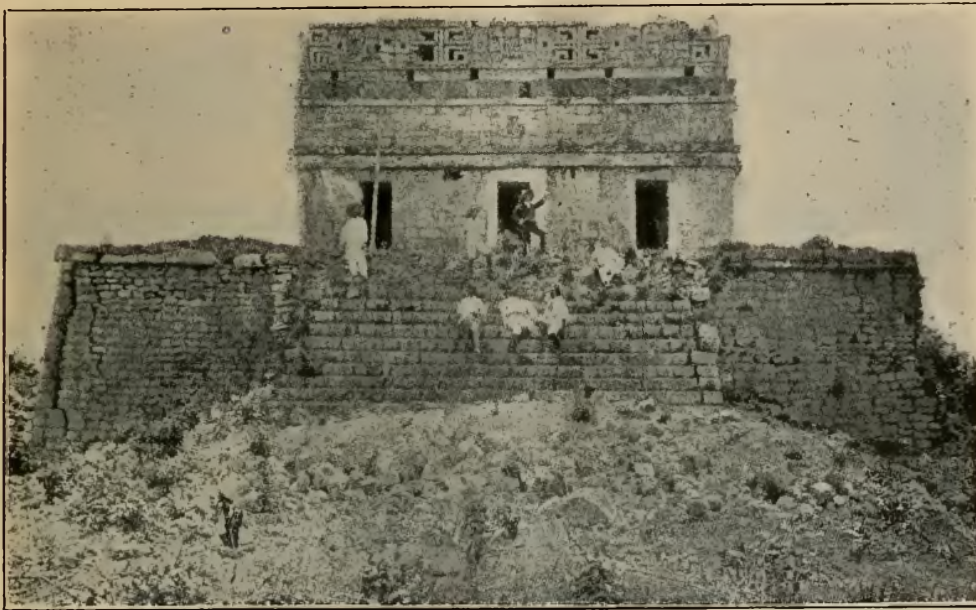


Photo by Edward H. Thompson, in *National Geographical Magazine*, June, 1914.

THE PRISON, OR CHICHEN CHOB

Said to be the most perfect existing unit of ancient Maya architecture.

sun shall again shine upon these benighted peoples, when they have been sufficiently chastized and are ready to return unto him.

In concluding these scattered thoughts, let me say that the fact that there has been a "stone age," a "copper age," or any other age or degree of development in the civilization of the world, does not prove that there has been a constant and steady advancement in knowledge and skill from the beginning, whenever that may have been. The evidence in history is abundant to show sufficient proof that even where enlightenment has prevailed and men have refused to continue in the light, degenerating influences have set in, and the age of brass, copper, or stone, are just as likely to follow the age of progress and development as to precede it.