

## OF THE ORIGIN, ANTIQUITY AND OBJECT OF THE MOUNDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

BY ELIPHALET PRICE.

There is no work of antiquity to be met with in the valley of the Mississippi, that we approach with a more eager desire to learn the history of its origin and object, than the innumerable mounds of earth that loom up from hill and valley, almost everywhere contiguous to the shore of the Mississippi and its many tributaries, assuming in their upheaved forms, representations of animals, birds and reptiles. By whom, and at what period in the history of the world they were erected, and for what purpose they were designed, are questions that the most profound and labored research of the antiquarian has been unable to solve with a reliable answer. The only knowledge which we can obtain of that period, anterior to written history, must be sought for among the crumbling monuments and silent artistic upheavals of the earth, that have survived the exterminating wars of infuriated man, the undulating throes of the earthquake, the crash of the elements and the slow corroding power of untold ages.

The two continents of this western hemisphere abound with these mute, enduring records. In Europe, Asia and Africa, the labors of the antiquarian have exhumed and disclosed monuments of art, now in ruins, that were reared by a people whose history has passed down to us in written records. No work of art has ever been discovered in the eastern hemisphere, that is not in some way associated with a written history of the people with whom it originated.

Of the history of the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the Medes and Persians, and of the Egyptians, the Israelites, and the more modern Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans, we are already acquainted, and all the discoveries made by antiquarians in their researches in those countries, among the ruins of ancient palaces, temples and cities, serve but to enlighten us upon some portions of written history that are now dark and obscure, or illustrate others that are imperfectly detailed.

But such is not the case in America, the antiquities of which extend from the great lakes of North America, southward along the luxuriant valley of the Mississippi and the sterile sides of the Sierra Nevada, reposing in silent grandeur among the tropical regions of Central America, then climbing the Peruvian slopes of the Andes, and reappearing upon the pampas of Brazil and the desert wilds of Patagonia.

These vast relics of antiquity are not illustrated nor even alluded to by any written history that has descended to us. In many localities they stand forth as monuments of earth upheaved through the agency of human toil and art. The annual return of vernal Spring throws around and over them a luxuriant mantle of verdure illumed with the variegated hues, and made fragrant with the odors of the wild flower. In other localities, they exist in the crumbling architecture of cities, palaces and temples, from among which the ivy covered column looms up with solemn and isolated grandeur, its rude simplicity and grotesque carvings bespeak for it an origin that is lost to view, behind the impenetrable veil imposed by unnumbered centuries.

The ruins of cities lie canopied beneath forests whose gigantic trees, grown venerable under the decaying influence of time, are everywhere surrounded by indications that other generations of trees have sprung up, and grew and passed away. Since the discovery of America by Columbus, it has been fashionable with its Caucasian race to speak of the eastern continent as the old world, and yet it is not known to be entitled to that venerable appellation. The rude simplicity and grotesque carvings that pervade the monumental records of the ancient American, bespeak for them an origin anterior to the winged lions of Nineveh, or the sculptured temples of the Nile. Who can say that the Andes and the Sierra Nevada are not the seniors of the Alps and the Himalayas? Who is prepared to show that the ruins of Uxmal and Palenque, in Central America, the pyramids of Cholula in Mexico, and the innumerable mounds of the Mississippi, do not take precedence in age over the sphinxes and crumbling temples of Egypt, and

the sculptured Nimrods of Assyria? History traces the rise, grandeur, and fall of Nineveh, Babylon and Thebes. The Homeric verse has sung the power and grandeur of the Ionian cities, and the fate of Troy. But we have no record of the rise, progress and fall of those mouldering forest covered cities in Central America, which the laborious researches of Stevens, and Catherwood, and Humboldt have exhumed and brought to light.

At Uxmal are immense pyramids of earth, coated with stone, so exactly poised that the absence of cement has not lessened their architectural preservation. The highest of these pyramids is one hundred and thirty feet, supporting upon its summit a vast temple of stone, whose broken columns and shattered frescoes exhibit the human form sculptured with great exactness in its proportions, but rude and primitive in finish.

At Palanque are immense ruins of pyramids, palaces and temples, reminding us of the remote origin of a vast and mighty empire, whose silent and enduring memorials of ancient greatness have been for many ages the lair of the tiger and the leopard, whose nightly scream from among its moon-lit columns and sculptured ruins alone disturbs the mournful tranquillity of this the mightiest ruin of human art. This city, whose ruins the European traveller has narrowed down to a circumference of sixty miles, is often referred to as the Thebes of America, the population of which has been estimated at 3,000,000 of human beings.

In moving northward from among the ruins of cities in Central America, we will pause for a time to contemplate the great sacrificial altar that towers from the plains of Cholula. For it is here we find the parent and the model of the mounds that pervade the valley of the Mississippi. This vast mound of earth is known to cover an area of forty acres of ground, rising in a cone-like form to the height of one hundred and eighty feet, its summit being crowned by a plane embracing an area of five acres. Modern travelers have endeavored to show that it is not wholly a work of art, but a mountain ele-

vation upheaved by volcanic action. This view does not appear to be sustained by those internal rocky formations which characterize the mountain ranges and volcanic elevations of Mexico. The material of which it is composed is represented to be an admixture of clay, sand and gravel, resembling in this particular the mounds of the Mississippi, which are known to be devoid of those stratifications which pervade the natural formations of the earth.

[To be continued.]

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**SKETCHES OF HISTORY AND INCIDENTS CONNECTED WITH  
THE SETTLEMENT OF WAPELLO COUNTY, FROM 1843 TO  
1859, INCLUSIVE.**

BY G. D. R. BOYD, OTTUMWA.

[Continued from page 44.]

**OVERMAN AND PRITCHETT CASE.**

Abner Overman, an old man living in the north-western part of the county, entered a tract of land that had formerly been claimed by Bird Pritchett, who is also still a resident of this county. This was in March, 1849. The matter was immediately brought before the club of that vicinity by Pritchett. They met, and in hot haste waited upon Overman *en masse*. Their spokesman communicated the object of their visit, which was to persuade or extort a deed from Overman and his wife to Pritchett for the land in question, and for this purpose the mob had secured the services of a magistrate—a conservator of the peace (?)—one Esquire Colés, to take the acknowledgment of Overman and his wife to their transfer of the property. Overman was urged to accede to the propositions of the mob, but he steadily persisted in refusing to make any concessions whatever. Other appliances were then resorted to. A “ducking” in the river was threatened. Overman was still obstinate. He was then seized upon and led towards the river, which was convenient, when the frantic cries of Mrs. Overman caused him to hesitate, and finally he reluctantly and unwillingly assented. How far he was aided

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