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INDIAN MOUNDS.

QUESTIONABLE ANTIQUITY OF INDIAN MOUNDS.

THE following correspondence with the late Professor Henry, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, will serve as an introduction to this article on the age of Indian mounds and Indian relics in Iowa. The disposition to exaggerate the age of these and other remains, and of claiming great antiquity for them, may well be questioned. An appeal to the facts, in any single case, is sufficient to disprove all claims to very great antiquity for these remains of past times, and to establish their more recent origin.

IOWA CITY, IOWA, April 26th, 1875.

Prof. J. Henry, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

DEAR SIR:—I have received and read with much interest your report for 1873. The memoirs and ethnological matters are very attractive, and so I suppose the scientific articles to those more versed than I am in such studies.

I see the writer on Michigan Mounds and Mines of Copper, conjectures that they may be seven or eight hundred years old. But the only evidence he gives is a pine tree in an artificial channel some two or three hundred years old.

I have for thirty years past, given some attention to Indian remains, or evidences of ancient structures, and I am well persuaded, that the expedition of Francis I. of France, to Canada, of three ships full of men of all arts and pursuits, one of which ships remained with all manner of boats and implements for exploring and working in metals, will give long enough time, with the assistance of natives, for all structures or works now remaining.

The fact that stone implements remain and are often found with the earliest remains now known, is only evincive of their use at the period of their deposit, iron and steel taking their place in subsequent times, for the aborigines would naturally continue to make and use them long after arts and commerce introduced metallic ones, just as some western tribes still use the bow while firearms are within their reach.

From 1541 to 1875, we find 334 years, a period long enough for the largest trees in the northern states to grow.

I wish some man would carry out this idea so that the tendency to exaggerate the antiquity of mounds and mines might be brought to reasonable bounds. There is too much disposition to antiquate every thing on earth and under the earth, as connected with human skill, and also as concerns the operations of nature.

I believe the facts are well authenticated as to copper and iron implements having been found imbedded in coal, and should it be found that they are so imbedded, it would go to show more recent formations than geologists affirm. So of stone, as where in a short time in certain soils, the human body takes (in its place and form) a petrified state after death.

Some years ago, a French philosopher made a calculation how long the Delta of the Mississippi had been forming making the time many thousands of years. Now, every navigator of the river or port of New Orleans, as well as every resident near either, well knows that no such estimate can be made with any certainty, since one such flood as 1851 would work greater changes in one year, than twenty-five years of common stages of water in the river.

I do not know that these hints are of much account, but such considerations make me inclined to restrict existing remains within proper limits.

I have not made any discoveries here worthy of note, nor have I been able to reduce the Sac and Fox vocabulary, which I have got, into a proper shape to send, and I may be under the necessity of forwarding it as it is to you. If I lived near the remnant of these Indians still in Iowa, or had the opportunity that the Indian Agent at Toledo (Iowa) has, I might make a worthy vocabulary for your Indian archives.

My health has not been very good since I returned from the east last autumn, during which absence I saw you at your office. With my best wishes for your health and prosperity,

I remain, most sincerely yours,

SAML. STORRS HOWE.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, }
WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL, 30TH, 1875. }

S. S. Howe, Iowa City, Iowa.

SIR:—Many thanks for your interesting letter of the 26th inst. I fully agree with you as to the difficulty of fixing the dates with any degree of precision of geological or archæological events.

There is in the human mind an innate love of the marvelous which no degree of culture can entirely remove. To a philosophical person there is noth-

ing more grateful than precision of knowledge, yet, to the great majority of mankind the dissipation of the mysteries with which almost every subject is enveloped is not a desirable object, since it would be the loss of that reign of fogginess in which the imagination has an unbounded field to revel.

The Stone Age is a condition of the human race and not a chronological period. It may, therefore, coexist with a higher degree of civilization. There is the same difficulty in regard to establishing the epoch of the commencement of a geological change, since causes do not act in all cases with the same energy. Indeed, from the hypothesis now well established by analogy—that the earth was once in a state of incandescence like the sun—we must infer that the energies producing change were in a much greater state of activity than at the present time.

I am, very truly yours,

JOSEPH HENRY, *Sec. S. I.*

Much is said, of late, about “pre-historic” times. Now, what is pre-historic among savage and barbarous tribes, who have no written languages or history, is no evidence of antiquity. For example, the North American Indians have had no native written languages or history, and their remains and traditions go no further back than the coming of civilized and lettered white men, who were doubtless concerned with the natives in their rude structures of art, such as stone arrow-heads, axes, pestles, chisels, or copper axes and implements, with articles of clay for domestic use.

A CHILD'S CUP.

A very curious article of family use was found near Iowa City, Iowa, in excavating an Indian mound. It resembles a toad or turtle, head and all, with a hollow and hole for drinking purposes underneath. It has, besides other marks unknown to the writer, a circle with seven lines from the center to the circumference, indicative of seven years of life, and of futurity, of which the circle is an emblem.

All attempts thus far to get a heliotype or engraving of it, have been vain. The owner, Mr. Davis, a druggist of Iowa City, claims it, and refuses to part with it. Professor Baird, now Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, D. C., wishes, at least, the loan of it, to make a cast of it; and

should any cut or engraving of it be hereafter obtained, it may be inserted in a future number of the ANNALS.

Some more minute description, however, can be given here of it. It is of pounded stone and clay, burnt hard and rough, with some figures or marks on it, not understood by the Editor of this paper. It is rough and unglazed, with some flakes broken off, as if used by a child, and so buried in the mound beside its owner in life. The mention and description of it in this article are given for two reasons: First, it shows the recent origin of Indian mounds. Messrs. Davis and Rev. S. M. Osmond, now of Lawrence, Kansas, with others, opened the mound, and discovered the cup by the side of a child's bones. A stump of an oak tree, about three feet through, stood on the mound, which could not have been over two hundred years old. Thus all the "fogginess" of antiquity, as Professor Henry calls it, vanishes with the bare discovery of it by the bones of a child, since they would have crumbled to dust if long thousands of years had passed over so simple an earth mound. The arrival of French artists in metals and in all manner of pottery, about 1640, when Francis I sent three ships to Canada, with soldiers, sailors, and laborers in all the arts of civilized life, one of which remained, while the other ships returned—would give time enough for all remains of Indian articles to have been constructed, without going to India or Egypt for the origin of these relics of Indian skill. French art and native skill are sufficient to answer the purposes of conjecture as to the date of all Indian remains in Iowa, or in the United States, if we include the Spaniards in Florida.

In Marietta, Ohio, there is a conical mound, now inclosed in a cemetery, this and the ground being given to the city by Israel Putnam, Jr., on the express condition that it is never to be opened. It is about twenty-five feet high, of a conical shape, and overlooks the plain as far as the Muskingum river—a sort of Indian grave-mound, and Indian look-out. Near is a regular military earth-work or redout, oblong, with an ascent pro-

jecting at one end, and a descent receding at the other. Also, there is (now gone to decay) an underground passage to the Muskingum river, for safe access to the river for water. These were evidently constructed by French and Indian art and labor. They occupied this point between the Ohio and Muskingum (Marietta now) as early as Braddock's defeat at what is now Pittsburgh and vicinity. This is a clear instance of modern mound-builders.

A late writer in Missouri affirms that the mound-builders are still at work there, and throws to the winds the antiquity of these structures of the Indians. The writer states that they revisit the mounds from time to time, and increase the earth on them.

The design of these mounds, no doubt, was first for burial uses. Many of them contain charcoal and embers on the surface, showing either that they were burnt upon them to prevent wild beasts from disturbing the dead, or as a place where Indians constructed their rude huts. Some of them may be places for storing their roots and provisions; but, in the main, they are Indian graves, erected by loving hands of surviving relatives, who thus followed their dead to the spirit land by their kind, monumental offices.

The foregoing, by the Editor of the ANNALS, is a protest against the antiquity of Indian remains and relics.

INDIAN MOUND-BUILDERS.

“We are not, moreover, without testimony to the fact that the present Indian tribes did build mounds. Lewis and Clark mention the custom among the Omahas, saying that ‘one of their great chiefs was buried on a hill, and a mound twelve feet in diameter and six feet in height erected over him.’ Bertram states that the Choctaws covered the pyramid of coffins taken from the bone-house with earth, thus raising a conical hill or mound. Tomochichi pointed out to General Oglethorpe a large conical mound near Savannah, in which he said the Yamacraw chief was interred, who had, many years

before, entertained a great white man with a red beard, who entered the Savannah river in a large vessel, and in his barge came up to the Yamacraw bluff. Featherstonhaugh, in his 'Travels,' speaks of the custom among the Osages, referring to a mound built over the body of a chief, called Jean DeFoe by the French, who unexpectedly died while his warriors were absent on a hunting expedition. Upon their return they heaped a mound over his remains, enlarging it at intervals for a long period, until it reached its present height. Bradford says that many of the *tumuli* formed of earth, and occasionally of stones, are of Indian origin. They are generally sepulchral mounds—either the general cemetery of a village or tribe, funeral monuments over the graves of illustrious chiefs, or upon a battle-field, commemorating the event and entombing the fallen, or the result of a custom prevalent among some of the tribes, of collecting at stated intervals the bones of the dead, and interring them in a common repository. A mound of the latter description was formerly situated on the low grounds of the Rivanna river, in Virginia, opposite the site of an old Indian village (Jefferson's "Notes on Virginia," pp. 100, 103). It was forty feet in diameter and twelve feet in height, of a spheroidal form, and surrounded by a trench, whence the earth employed in its construction had been excavated. The circumstances attending the custom alluded to were, the great number of skeletons, their confused position, their situation in distinct strata, exhibiting different stages of decomposition, and the appearance of bones of infants. A mound of similar character, and constructed in layers of strata at successive periods, existed near the south branch of the Shenandoah, in the same State. A *tumulus* of stones in New York State is said to have marked the grave of a distinguished warrior (McCauley's 'History of New York,' vol. II, p. 239). 'Beck's Gazetteer' (p. 308) states that a mound of the largest dimensions has been thrown up within a few years in Illinois, over the remains of an eminent chief."—*Popular Science Monthly*.