

Who and Whence

Myths concerning "vanished races" die very hard. When the pioneers of the white race discovered the great mounds and earthworks of prehistoric man in the Mississippi Valley, they formed the apparently spontaneous judgment that the country had once upon a time been occupied by a race of "mound builders," superior to the painted redskin. In the middle forties of the last century, excavations in the mounds of Ohio which produced finely wrought implements of stone and copper seemed to be conclusive evidence that predecessors of the Indians had reached a high level of civilization and then vanished before the onslaughts of their savage inferiors.

Surely, thought the pioneer, no wild Indian could ever have constructed works of such colossal proportions or wrought art objects of such delicacy and beauty. In part this judgment was justified by the fact that the Indian of the nineteenth century was no longer the Indian of primitive times and customs; in part the judgment was falsified by prejudice and superficial observation. At best it is difficult for one race to understand another. When, after the first friendly greetings, the contest for land engenders hatred and then warfare,

mutual understanding becomes all but impossible.

But, as the evidence now stands, neither North nor South America has any vanished race to record. The American Indian, by every test that it has been possible to apply, is the same man who built the great earthworks of the Mississippi Valley, the cliff dwellings and the pueblos of the Southwest, the pyramids of Mexico, towering less high than those of Egypt but surpassing them in beauty, and the ruined cities of Central America and Peru. The native peoples from Alaska to Patagonia were of one race. Inasmuch as a number of the Indian tribes are known to have built mounds since the coming of the white man, it is quite unnecessary to look farther for a race of mound builders. When Julien Dubuque died in 1810, he was buried in Iowa soil by his friends, the Fox Indians, who built a mound over him.

Not only is a lost race of mound builders a fanciful myth, but up to this time there is no proof that the New World ever had a race of men who, in the physical sense, were really primitive. The oldest known remains show a high type of physical development, indicating that man had no such independent origin and long history on our side of the ocean as he is known to have had in the Old World. In short, he must be looked upon as an immigrant from Asia, not a Mongol, but very similar to some of the Mongolian peoples — a foreigner whose migrations by way of Bering Strait, or per-

haps rather at the same place by land before the two continents became separated, were accomplished sometime during a late, probably the latest, stage of the paleolithic, or Old Stone Age. The longer preceding eras of the paleolithic are not represented in the Americas at all. As compared with the antiquity of man in Europe and Asia, the American Indian migrated in a comparatively late period, whether he arrived as long as twenty-five thousand years ago, as some students think, or as recently as ten thousand years ago, as others believe. But in any event, it was a long, long time ago as measured by human progress.

The Indian came as a savage, apparently with the spear and the stone ax as his only weapons and the faithful dog at his side as his first-found and only friend from the animal world — a hunter and not a tiller of the soil. The home folks had evidently not yet tamed the familiar domestic animals of a later period of husbandry; nor had they developed those grains that were later to become the staples of Old World agriculture. If they had done these things, then surely these easy means of a livelihood would have migrated with their hosts. As it was, the American Indians were destined to develop arts and crafts and methods of agriculture that were almost entirely their own.

No even approximate time can be assigned to the discovery by early man of the upper Mississippi region. From Alaska a few hardy souls may

have taken the inhospitable Pacific Coast route southward. Some probably took the Fraser River valley into the Great Basin; as now believed, a majority followed the Yukon and Mackenzie valleys and the eastern slope of the Rockies, until the Great Plains were reached; two routes, so the geologists tell us, that were comparatively ice free, even when the glaciers of the closing Ice Age still lay heavy on the upper Mississippi country. Certain it is that human beings were living on the High Plains and hunting successfully the great beasts, largely now extinct, belonging to the cool, moist climate of the time when the glaciers were on the wane.

In 1926 a bed of bison bones was found near the town of Folsom in northeastern New Mexico, the bones of an extinct species larger than the bison the white man knew some thousands of years later. With these bones were javelin points of flint, of a unique type, very skillfully made by the hands of men. In the following years not only the bison kill of Folsom men, as they are now called, but also their home sites have been found along the High Plains from eastern New Mexico nearly to Canada. The bones of the great bison, beaver, sloth, and bear; of the mammoth, largest of the elephants; of two species of camel, and a small, chunky horse, all contained in his camp refuse, help tell the story. When conditions permitted, eastward migrations took place. Early habitation

sites of people belonging to the so-called Archaic have been found in recent years, all the way from the Plains to the Atlantic, where people little, if at all, in advance of Folsom men culturally, established their villages and adapted themselves to environments ever new and ever strange. And of course migrations went southward too, into Mexico, and into Central America and South America. But these are beyond our present view.

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