

## PRE-HISTORIC AMERICA.

William Niven, a well known mineralogist of New York, has discovered a prehistoric city in Mexico, which, in point of size and interest, outranks anything of the kind brought to light for many years. More than that, he thinks he has found the remnants of a distinct civilization.

Mexico was the home of many prehistoric races, and the whole country from the American border to Guatemala bears silent testimony to the people who lived and died many generations before the white men came. Excavations have been carried on with more or less regularity since the settlement of the country, and many interesting and useful discoveries have been made concerning the habits and lives of these early people. But Mexico is still a new country—although so old that some enthusiasts claim that it was actually the cradle of the human race. A strange but true paradox. Mexico, with an area of 751,700 square miles, has less than 11,000,000 inhabitants, and 80 per cent of that number are Indians. In the remote sections of the country the Indians are still independent of the Mexican government, and in these same sections lie vast ruins of the cities of other days, zealously guarded by the aborigines. The Indians are very superstitious in all things, but especially so in matters connected with these mute reminders of the past. Mr. Niven encountered the same obstacles as other scientists that have gone before him. But he seems to have profited by past failures, and his perseverance has been well rewarded. The state of Guerrero, where the prehistoric city was found, is one of the wildest of the Central Mexican States. There are no railroads, and in many places only few trails. These are rugged and in many places difficult of passage. Impenetrable forests, dizzy barrancas, barren deserts, where the sun shines straight from overhead and the water never runs, are the natural guardians of these cities of the dead.

"I always feel, when I come back from one of these trips," said Mr. Niven, "as though I never cared to make the venture again. But civilization wears away the remembrances and the old hankering comes back again. Besides, there is a strange fascination in digging down into the past. A piece of broken pottery or a stone idol conveys little pleasure or meaning to the uninitiated, but to those who have made any study of archaeological matters they often speak volumes.

"The ruins which I was fortunate enough to discover in Guerrero are very extensive—much more so than I at first supposed. At a rather rough estimate I should say that territory of over 900 square miles was literally covered, foot by foot, with sections of ruins. Every ridge and hilltop bore the remains of ancient temples, some of them mammoth in proportions. In most instances these prehistoric structures, owing to the wind and rain of centuries, were little more than foundations, beneath which I invariably found some unique and curious objects. Still, many of them stand from three to eight feet high and are substantially built of stone and lime.

The ruins have the appearance of belonging to one vast city, and subsequent investigations bore out my first impressions on the matter. During the time I

was occupied in excavating I visited the ruins of twenty-two temples, with altars in the center of all of them from five to twenty feet high and from ten to fifteen feet square. The altars were in a much better state of preservation than the buildings themselves, being, as a rule, constructed of a superior material and laid with more care. At Quechomictlipan (an Aztec word, meaning, "What a quantity of bones on top,") I found that the building-stone in some of the edifices had been carefully cut of equal dimensions, and while excavating there a great quantity of bones of animals were unearthed. This proved to be a circular chamber or tower about twelve feet in diameter, and filled with dust and broken plaster painted a brilliant red and white. Whatever pigment was used, the color has been remarkably well preserved and apparently is as fresh as the day it was painted by the hand of some dusky artist in the remote past. On the floor, which was also of plaster, there were a large quantity of stone beads and many other interesting objects that do not exist in any collections that I have ever seen.

Excavations at Jabalin revealed plastered walls and a great quantity of broken pottery of a peculiarly distinct type from that usually found in the ancient mounds of this country. Near this place in the great Barranca of Xilatlalco, over 1500 feet deep, the altar of one of the temples was over twenty feet high and eighteen feet square. It was constructed in the form of a pyramid and the stones were all faced with much care and labor and put together with an excellent quality of cement.

At Yerba Buena the walls of the temples are in some places eight feet high, while the altar is twelve feet, with parts of the ancient stair still remaining. In this place I found many handsome specimens in terra cotta and still intact. At Organos, one of the most interesting places visited, the ruins were mostly under ground. An excavation was made into one of them and at ten feet the foundations of the walls were not reached. Three chambers were cleaned out with much difficulty, owing to the thick tropical growth of vegetation. They were found to be filled with clay, ashes and pottery. Most of the pottery was broken, but the pieces give an excellent idea of the art of the period, and I consider them quite valuable. Another temple was found at a place called Tejas, and more subterranean chambers with it.

One large cut stone at Xochocolzin, seven feet long by two feet wide, had a figure of an idol carved on one side, with headdress all complete. About 800 yards west on the summit of a hill were two large idols weighing about 500 pounds each. They bear not the slightest resemblance to the Axtec, Toltec or Maya figures of the same class.

At Texal, we came upon ruins nearly all under ground. Near the roof of one of the largest of these were twelve prepared stones nearly the shape and size of a sugar loaf. They were built into the wall and placed side by side with their ends projecting. It was a unique arrangement and an entirely new departure in ancient architecture. Here, as well as in many other localities, were found large circular stones, which bear a marked resemblance to our grindstones. From their appearances and location I should judge that they were

originally intended as caps for the enormous pillars used in all the sacred edifices. Not far distant we also found, on the summit of the mountains, several pyramids, perfectly formed and about sixty feet high.

But the really most remarkable find of all was near a place called Guayabo. Here were the ruins of an ancient temple 600 feet by 200 feet. At the depth of nine feet from the surface, under the altar, an olla of terra cotta was discovered filled with dirt. Upon a careful examination there were found inside seventy-two beautifully wrought objects of mother of pearl. These were made up into the most fanciful and grotesque figures imaginable. Four of them were carved heads with a peculiarly shaped headdress very much after the pattern of ancient Egyptian and Assyrian figures. Others were representations of fish and animals. Many more were fanciful designs, possibly caricatures or even more probable, intended images of unseen, but much-believed-in deities.

The olla was broken by the pick of the poen, but the fragments were carefully collected and one-half of it with the earth and objects sticking to it, was secured undisturbed.

I imagine that these trinkets might have been the prized belongings of some prehistoric maid or housewife. Indeed, looking at the gewgaws I am almost persuaded that I really invaded the boudoir of some dark-skinned princess. They were the work of a master hand of her people. Perhaps that is why, when she passed into the land of the good spirits they laid them in the grave beside her.

It might be interesting to know that Mr. Niven made three trips, including the present, in search of the lost city, about which the Indians are always talking. The first was unsuccessful, and it was upon the second trip, in 1894, that he really located the place. He left the town of Cuautla, in Morelos, on the 24th of May of that year, and plunged into the wilderness. "It is an erroneous idea," he says, "that many people have, that Guerrero is an unsafe state to travel in," and he attributes to this false report the fact that these ruins remained so long undiscovered. On the 29th of the same month information was gained of some archaeological ruins near San Miguel, and, after a hard climb of several hours, up a rough trail, the party arrived at the summit more than 8,000 feet above the level of the sea. The people had never had a white man in their town before, they said, and they examined curiously the rifles, revolvers and camera of the visitors. A great many interesting objects were found here and are now in the American Museum of Natural History. Nearly every town visited in the next three weeks had some prehistoric ruins, mostly mounds. The party reached Xochipala on June 29th, and the story of the actual discovery of the ruined city soon afterward is best given in Mr. Niven's own words:

"It was the day of the festival of San Pedro, and we were awakened shortly after 4 o'clock by the sound of drums, which were being vigorously pounded in honor of the event. While we were preparing to return to Coacoyula, the Alcalde called upon us and advised us to stay a few days and make a trip into the mountains west of the town, where, he said, was a ruined city covering many leagues. He also offered to furnish us with a guide. I had met an Indian at