

Cities, Pyramids and Buildings of Old Mexico

SO much has been written about Mexico that I should feel constrained from adding more, except that I deem some observations necessary by way of introduction to deductions that I wish to make relative to the cities, pyramids and buildings now lying in heaps and ruins in Mexico and Central America.

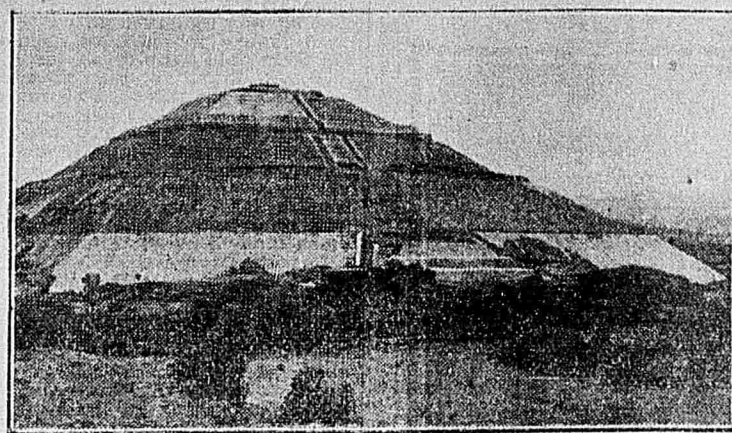
When Cortez conquered the Aztecs they were an advanced race of people, combining, however, barbarism with refinement. They possessed some knowledge of writing, but it was not phonetic, and could only be styled picture writing, scarcely approaching the status of hieroglyphics. They knew nothing of science, and had no educational system. Education, such as they had, was confined to a few leading nobles and priests. Much that was necessary for their manner of life was manufactured by them, such as fine clothing, jewelry, etc., but they were deficient in agricultural implements and weapons of war. The people had never seen ships, despite the fact that the City of Mexico was built upon water, surrounded by the water of Lake Texcoco. The streets were waterways, like those of Venice, and the city proper could only be approached by high causeways or dykes.

It is well to bear these facts in mind when comparing Aztec culture and achievements with the remains of works of art found throughout the country. In America may be seen more evidences of ancient civilization than in any other country in the world. It would be intensely interesting could it be known when and by whom these

wonders of architecture, sculpture and art were brought into existence. There is much in holy writ that serves as a guide, and it is from that source that the writer expects to draw to back his conclusions.

WHO BUILT THE PYRAMIDS?

To the question, who built the pyramids and the ancient cities, it is safe to answer, not the Indians as known to the Christian era. It is equally sure that they were not built by the peoples whose histories are contained in the Book of Mormon. The Lamanites, who were low and barbarous, cannot be considered at all. The Nephites, who were a more advanced race, were a humble people, devoted to agriculture and stock raising. Their cities were generally built of perishable materials, probably adobe and sun-dried brick. This is proven by the very hasty manner in which they erected cities, usually in from two to 10 years. The fact is they were constructed much after the order of ancient Hebrew cities, precisely as you find them in the Orient today. It must be remembered that the Israelites had only one city, properly speaking, before the division of the tribes. That city was Jerusalem, and its one great building was the temple of Solomon. All other buildings of the ancient city dwindle into insignificance when compared with the structures put up subsequently by other nations. Travel where you will in the Holy Land, and you will find very few places of note that are not of Grecian or Roman construction. The cities and villages of Palestine of Jewish origin were of a very humble, make-shift kind. The writer has often noted how the Arabs and other tribes now there follow the customs of 3,000 years ago, in their



TYPICAL AZTEC PYRAMID IN MEXICO TODAY.

mode of living, in agriculture and harvesting. Such people do not leave monuments in architecture and sculpture; they do not leave evidences of advanced art and science. Their mission in the earth was different. They were to be the messengers of the Lord spiritually, bearers of the priesthood and recorders of the word. They were the covenant people of Jehovah, through whom Shiloh should come, and their monuments are divine and imperishable.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEPHITES.

Coming back to the Nephites, we find them much the same. Before they reached the Land of Promise their mission was pretty well defined. They were to be the recipients of a higher knowledge of the gospel—perhaps not so much a higher as a plainer view of the cardinal principles of the gospel and of their author, the Lord Jesus Christ. Soon after they landed on the promised land, they separated from the Lamanites, their brethren. Then,

like the Jews, they built a small temple, after the manner of Solomon's temple. That this temple was of necessity small is evident from the fact that the Nephites were as yet but a small colony. In after years they built synagogues and judgment seats, etc., none of which give any idea of structural greatness and importance. It is most likely that in this they followed ancient Israelish customs of doing all their legal business at the gates of their cities. There sat the judges, the elders and other officials to judge and direct the affairs of the people. This, however, may have been different with the Nephites, but it is true that by their own writings we are told that the people had a tendency to degenerate to the level of the Lamanites in morals and civilization. They did fall whenever left to their own inclinations. They were frequently at war with the Lamanites and always shifting and having their works destroyed or possessed by their enemies. Under such conditions

no people could progress very much in architecture, sculpture or fine arts. Neither could be ascribed to them the works that show so many heathenish tendencies. A people so intensely religious would not and could not make such hideous idols and divinities as those found in the land now. Nor is it likely that they ever did, because the Lord expressly forbade all image work of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath. The Lamanites could not make these either, because they were a low, heathenish people, filthy and lazy. If further proofs are necessary that the Nephites did not leave the great monuments alluded to, let the reader scan the history of Moroni, one of their greatest generals, and a man of God as well. Note his fortifications, built mostly of earth and wood. His cities sprang up in mushroom fashion, and were defended by fortifications of the most temporary and perishable materials. When his day was past they were abandoned. The contribution of that people to the world's collection of knowledge is the Book of Mormon and other writings, which tower above all other monuments for the benefit of the human family.

THEIR PROPER RATING.

This view may differ somewhat from opinions that we may have held or now hold, in our desire to magnify the descendants of Lehi; it may appear like disconnecting them from the ancient American works of art. But little by little all nations, past and present, will be better understood, and the true status of all will be discovered. This does not in any way underrate nor reflect upon the Nephites, but attempts to give them their proper rating. The most that can be said of the Aztecs and their progenitors, the nations back to Father Lehi, is that the Nephites and Lamanites may in some instances have possessed themselves of these ruins, repaired and occupied them when they, at a later date, occupied and Lamanites may have used these idols and worshipped them and named

them anew, in conformity with their religious cults. This the Aztecs evidently did. The divinities found in their temples or worship by Cortez and his followers were evidently not made by them, but were appropriated by them when they, at a later date, occupied the country. Neither do I believe they made the so-called calendar stone, nor sacrificial stone, nor, so to speak, any of those pieces of art which they used that so much resembled Egyptian art. They belong to an earlier and more highly educated and much more advanced age.

F. P. HINTZE.

City of Mexico, Dec. 15, 1908.

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