



Type: Magazine Article

Old America - The Mound Builders (Continued) (3)

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Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 10, No. 21 (16 October 1875), pp. 244–245

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

Abstract: Series of articles dealing with archaeological, anthropological, geographical, societal, religious, and historical aspects of ancient America and their connections to the Book of Mormon, which is the key to understanding “old American” studies.

Old America.

BY G. M. O.

THE MOUND BUILDERS.

(Continued.)

THE mummies were wrapped in a coarse kind of linen cloth, similar in texture to cotton bagging. A second envelope was a kind of network of coarse threads, formed in very loose meshes. The outer or third covering was like the first, or sometimes of leather sewed together. There was a small vessel found in the State of Ohio made of the same material as that of which the mortars now in use among apothecaries are manufactured. It holds about three quarts, and has a groove around it near the middle, with two ears to insert a chain, so as to suspend it over a fire, and was probably a crucible for melting metals. The chain handle shows the ingenuity of its construction, by its being placed near the middle for the convenience of the refiner when pouring out his copper, iron or silver.

When removing the earth which composed a mound, to open the way for a new street in Marietta, in the year 1819, several curious articles were found. They had been buried with the body of the person to whose memory the mound was erected. On the forehead of the skeleton were three large circular ornaments composed of copper overlaid with a plate of silver. The fronts, or show sides, were slightly convex, with a deep depression in the centre. They measured two inches and a quarter across the face of each. On the reverse side, opposite the depressed portion is a copper rivet, around which are two separate plates. By these plates they were fastened to a leather belt, evidently a sword belt. The pieces of leather seemed to have been preserved by the salts of copper, the plates being nearly reduced to an oxide or rust. The silver was quite black but not much corroded, as, on being rubbed, it became bright and clear. Around one of the rivets was a small quantity of hemp or flax in a tolerable state of preservation. Near the side of the skeleton was found a silver plate, which appeared to have been a sword scabbard. This piece of silver was six inches long and two inches broad, with two longitudinal ridges corresponding with the edges or ridges of the sword once sheathed by it. Several holes were in the plate, evidently to rivet it to the scabbard. Two or three broken pieces of a copper tube were also found filled with iron rust. These pieces from their appearance composed the lower end of the scabbard near the point of the sword. The sword itself was not discovered, but a streak of rust its whole length. Near the feet was found a piece of copper, a piece of ochre or paint, and a piece of iron ore, which had been partially vitrified. This bit of ore was nearly pure iron. From the appearance of the earth surrounding the body and the pieces of charcoal, it would appear that the funeral obsequies had been celebrated by fire (Report American Antiquarian Society, p. 168-172, 1820).

At Circleville the handle of a small sword or large knife was found. This handle was made of an elk's horn. Around the end where the blade had been inserted was a ferrule of silver, in good preservation. Though the handle showed the hole where the blade had been inserted, no iron was found, but an oxide remained of similar shape and size. At the same place, lying on a mirror of isinglass, a plate of iron was found, of course oxidized. Before being broken it resembled a plate of

cast iron. Dr. Hildreth, of Marietta, has in his possession among many relics found in the mounds of that vicinity some pieces of copper which evidently at one time formed the front part of a helmet.

Mr. Atwater (Report A. A. Society 1820) says, besides the various stone instruments "There have been found very well manufactured swords and knives of iron, and possibly steel." Gold ornaments are said to be found in several of the mounds. Silver, very well plated on copper, has been found in several tumuli besides those at Circleville and Marietta. "Weapons of brass have been found in many parts of America and in the Canadas, with curiously sculptured stones, all of which go to prove that this country was once peopled with civilized industrious nations." (Priest's Am. Ant. p. 224). Pages might be written describing the many curious and interesting relics unearthed from time to time, all proving the assertion of Mr. Priest, and creating a deeper interest in the mystery that shrouds the intelligent and industrious mound building people who dwelt in our valleys long years ago.

The narratives of the early discoverers and travelers in America are so meagre and indefinite, that many modern writers consider their few assertions as exaggerations. This has been done without just foundation. Such assertions are easily made, and have been made by writers who have failed to examine the various testimonies given by authors who traveled through or settled in our country three or four centuries ago.

At the time the Spaniards discovered that part of the United States now known as Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia there were certain nations inhabiting those States greatly advanced in the arts of civilization; far beyond any of the adjoining tribes. It is true they were in almost a ruined state, from wars and other calamities. When De Soto marched through the country occupied by the Cherokees and Chickasaws he found part of the land desolated by pestilence. The Nat-chez and other nations were living under certain and fixed forms of government, and although they procured a part of their substance by hunting and fishing, the agricultural arts were in much greater perfection and more extensively pursued. They did not change their residence as other tribes, consequently their houses and furniture were more convenient, comfortable and various in their uses. The historian of De Soto's expedition, (Portuguese Gentleman p. 46) says the houses of the natives were like the farm houses in Spain, and collected together into large towns. In other places he speaks of large dwellings with out houses, lake houses, granaries, etc. The nation consisted of numerous villages, each of which was governed by a chief called a "sun." These admitted their inferiority to one great chief, styled the "great sun." The "great sun" had several officers acting under him: two were chiefs, two masters of ceremonies for their temple rites, two officers who presided at councils, four who directed the festivals, and others who directed the public works. They believed mankind to be immortal, that after death their souls went to reside in another world, where they were rewarded or punished according to their conduct in the present life. They recognized a Supreme and all ruling Being, who governs the universe and was called the "Great Spirit." They also believed in an evil spirit, who was inferior in power to the good spirit, (Du Pratz' Hist. La. II. 173-208). The "great sun," who was considered a brother to the sun, honored the appearance of his elder brother every morning as he rose above the horizon; and to its honor a perpetual fire was maintained in their temples. The "great sun" being chief priest as well as ruler of the nation, appointed from the order of

priests a certain number as guardians of the sacred fire. Charlevoix (Hist. of Canada, 319) says that the first fruits of every thing they gathered were brought to the temple, and no land was sown until the seed had been presented there. The same author says, "We have abundant evidence that a perpetual fire was maintained by various other nations inhabiting the southern United States." According to Du Pratz, the historical tradition of the Nat-chez was, that before they came into the land they were then living in, they lived in a land nearly south-west towards Mexico, but by defeat in repeated battles, they had finally been driven eastward across the great river (Mississippi). So numerous was the nation that they occupied the land from the Gulf of Mexico on the south to the Ohio on the north having over five hundred "suns" or princes to rule over the nation. Their traditions relate that their ancient enemies "lived in a great number of large and small villages which were built of stone, in which were houses large enough to lodge a whole village; their temples were built with great labor and art, and they made beautiful works of all kind of materials." Like the Aztecs they had a tradition that the country had been once inhabited by white people who had the use of iron tools, (Mr. Atwater Rep. Am. Ant. Soc., 273). The Nat-chez were exterminated in 1730 by the French whom they had treated with great kindness. The few who escaped death were sent to Santo Domingo and sold as slaves. Though oral tradition may be of little authority, still there are facts handed down from one generation to another that we must admit were originally true, and cannot be gainsayed. Having no means of fixing dates or for correcting their chronology or separating events blended and interwoven together, events separated by intervals of perhaps centuries, it is impossible for us to arrive at any conclusion or assume to fix the time when the Nat-chez first occupied Louisiana or when the white people dwelt in the land.

(To be Continued.)

THE RAPACIOUS COOPER.

IN the story of Napoleon's life we are told that shortly after he became King of Rome the Emperor planned the erection of a large palace for himself on the banks of the Seine, nearly opposite the bridge of Jena.

The Government set about securing the necessary ground and had finally succeeded in purchasing all but one small bit of land upon which stood the hut and workshop of a poor cooper. This piece of property the commissioners estimated to be worth, at the very highest, \$200; but the owner, mulish and grasping, having ascertained that the possession of his hut was absolutely essential to the proposed plan, demanded \$2,000. The exorbitant demand was reported to the emperor.

"It is exorbitant, indeed," he replied. "But the poor man is not to be turned out from his old home. Give it to him."

The old man finding his demands so promptly acceded to, immediately declared, that, upon further reflection, he could not afford to sell for less than six thousand dollars. All expostulations were in vain. The architect was at a stand-still. He was afraid to annoy the Emperor again with the matter, and yet he could not proceed with his plans. Napoleon was finally informed of the state of affairs.

"This fellow trifles with us," he said; "but there is no help for it. We must pay the money."

The cooper, now grown utterly rapacious, increased his demand to ten thousand dollars. The emperor, when informed of it, said indignantly:

"The man is a wretch. I will not purchase his hovel. It shall remain where it is a monument of my respect for the laws."

The plans were changed, and the work was in progress, when Napoleon was overthrown. The unfortunate cooper when he found the golden opportunity gone from him, bitterly lamented his folly, and his sad repining soon wore his life away.

TEN MINUTES TO LIVE.

ON board an English steamer, a little ragged boy, aged nine years, was discovered the fourth day out from Liverpool to New York and carried before the first mate whose duty it was to deal with such cases.

When questioned as to his object of being stowed away and who brought him on board, the boy, who had a beautiful sunny face and eyes that looked like the very mirror of truth, replied that his stepfather did it because he could not afford to keep him nor pay his passage to Halifax, where he had an aunt who was well off, and to whose house he was going.

The mate did not believe the story, in spite of the winning face and truthful accents of the boy. He had seen too much of stowaways to be easily deceived by them he said, and it was his firm conviction the boy had been brought on board and provided with food by the sailors. The little fellow was very roughly handled in consequence.

Day by day he was questioned and re-questioned, but always with the same result. He did not know a sailor on board and his father alone had secreted him and given him food which he ate.

At last the mate wearied by the boy's persistence in the same story, and perhaps a little anxious to inculpate the sailors, seized and dragged him on the fore-deck, told him unless he told the truth in ten minutes from that time, he would hang from the yard arm.

He then made him sit down under it on the deck. All around him were the passengers and sailors of the middy watch, and in front of him stood the inexorable mate with his chronometer in his hand and the officer of the ship by his side.

It was the finest sight, said our informant, that I ever beheld, to see the pale proud, sorrowful face of that noble boy, his head erect, his beautiful eyes bright through the tears that surfaced them. When eight minutes had fled the mate told him he had but two minutes to live, and advised him to speak the truth and save his life; but he replied with the utmost simplicity and sincerity, by asking if he might pray.

The mate said nothing but nodded his head and turned pale as a ghost and shook with trembling like a reed shaken by the wind. And then all eyes turned on him, the brave and noble little fellow—the poor boy whom society owned not, and whose step-father could not care for him—there he knelt with clasped hands and eyes turned up to heaven, while he repeated audibly the Lord's prayer, and prayed for the Lord Jesus to take him to heaven.

Our informant adds that there then occurred a scene as of pentecost. Souls broke from strong, hard hearts, as the mate sprang forward to the boy and clasped him, and blessed him, and told him how sincerely he believed his story, and how glad he was that he had been brave enough to face death and be willing to sacrifice his life for the truth of his word.

WHEN a man talks of himself he is more apt to be fluent than agreeable.