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American History

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THE ANCIENT PERIOD OF AMERICAN HISTORY ***

**INCENTIVES TO THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT PERIOD
OF AMERICAN HISTORY.**

AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

AT ITS FORTY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1846.

BY

HENRY R. SCHOOLCRAFT.

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At a special meeting of the New York Historical Society, November 17th, 1846, being the Forty-Second Anniversary of the Society, Hon. LUTHER BRADISH in the Chair, on motion of Mr. PHILIP HONE, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks of the Society are due to Mr. HENRY R. SCHOOLCRAFT, for his learned and interesting Address, delivered this evening, and that a copy be respectfully requested to be deposited in the archives of the Society, and published.

Extract from the Minutes.

ANDREW WARNER,

Recording Secretary.

AN ADDRESS.

To narrow the boundaries of historical mystery, which obscures the early period of the American continent, is believed to be an object of noble attainment. Can it be asserted, on the ground of accurate inquiry, that man had not set his feet upon this continent, and fabricated objects of art, long anterior to the utmost periods of the monarchies of ancient Mexico and Peru? Were there not elements of civilization prior to the landing of Coxcox, or the promulgation of the gorgeous fiction of Manco Capac? What chain of connection existed between the types of pseudo-civilization found respectively at Cuzco, west of the Andes, and in the valley of Anahuac? Did this chain ever link in its causes the pyramids of Mexico with the mounds of the Mississippi valley? It is not proposed to enter into the details of this discussion. Such an inquiry would far transcend the limits before me. It is rather designed to show the amplitude of the field as a subject of historical inquiry, than to gather its fruits. It will entirely compass the object I have in view, if the suggestions I am to make shall have the tendency, in any degree, to draw attention to the topic, and to denote the strong incentives which exist, at the present time, to study this ancient period of American history. This is the object contemplated.

Nations, in their separation from their original stocks, and dispersion over the globe, are yet held together by the leading traits, physical and intellectual, which had characterized them as groups. And in spreading abroad, they are found to have left behind them a golden clue, which we recognize in physiology, languages, arts, monuments, and mental habitudes. These traits are so intimately interwoven in the woof of the mind, and so firmly interlaced in the structure and tendencies to action of the whole organization of the man, that they can be detected and generalized after long eras of separation, and the most severe mutations of history. Such is the judgment, at least, of modern research. Ethnology bases its claims to confidence in the recognition of the dispersed family of man, in these proofs. And when they have been eliminated from the dust of antiquity, they are offered as contributions to the body of well considered facts and inferences, which are to compose the thread of antique history and critical inquiry.

And what, it may be inquired, are the evidences the study produces, when these means of scrutiny come to be applied to the existing red race of this continent? or to their predecessors in its occupancy? Do their languages tell the story of their ancient affinities with Asia, Africa, or Europe? Do we see, in their monuments and remains of art, increments of a pre-existing state of advance, or refinement, in the human family, in other parts of the globe? It is confessed, that in order to answer these enquiries, we must first scrutinize the several epochs of the nations with whom we are to compare them, and the changes which they themselves have undergone. Without erecting these several standards of comparison, no certainty can attend the labor. All nations and tribes upon the face of the globe, whom we can make sponsors for the American tribes, are thus constituted the field of study, and we have opened to our investigations a theme at once noble and sublime. Philosophy has no higher species of inquiry, beneath Infinitude, than that which establishes the original affinities of man to man.

We perceive, in casting our minds back on the track of nations from whom we are ourselves sprung, a strong and clear chain of philological testimony, running through the various nations of the great Thuidic¹ type, until it terminates in the utmost regions of the

north. This chain of affiliation, though it had a totally diverse element in the Celtic, to begin with, yet absorbed that element, without in the least destroying the connection. It runs clearly from the Anglo Saxon to the Frisic, or northern Dutch, and the Germanic, in all its recondite phases, with the ancient Gothic, and its cognates, taking in very wide accessions from the Latin, the Gallic, and other languages of southern Europe; and it may be traced back, historically, till it quite penetrates through these elementary masses of change, and reveals itself in the Icelandic. Two thousand five hundred years, assuming no longer period, have not obliterated these affinities of language. Even at this day, the Anglo Saxon numerals, pronouns, most of the terms in chronology, together with a large number of its adverbs, are well preserved in the Icelandic. And had we no history to trace our national origin, the body of philological testimony, which can be appealed to, would be conclusive of the general question.

Does Asia offer similar proofs of the original identity, or parentage of its languages with America? This cannot be positively asserted. But while there is but little analogy in the sounds of the lexicography, so far as known, it is in this quarter of the globe, that we perceive resemblances in some words of the Shemitic group of languages, positive coincidences in the features of its syntax, and in its unwieldy personal and polysyllabical and aggregated forms; and the inquiry is one, which may be expected to produce auspicious results. On the assumption of their Asiatic origin, therefore, it is evident that the Indian tribes are of far greater antiquity than the Anglo Saxon. Not only so, but they appear on philological proofs to be older, in their national phasis, if we except, perhaps, the Chinese, than the present inhabitants of the north-eastern coasts of Asia, and the East India Islands. But we are not to pursue this topic. The general facts are merely thrown out, to denote the far reaching and imperious requirements of philology.

When we examine the American continent, with a view to its ancient occupancy, we perceive its surface scarified with moats and walls—its alluvial level plains and vallies bearing mounds, teocalli and pyramids. Its high interior altitudes, in the tropical regions, are covered with the ruins of temples and cities—and even in the temperate latitudes of the north, its barrows and mounds are now found to yield objects of exquisite sculpture, and many of its forests, beyond the Alleghanies, exhibit the regularity of antique garden beds and furrows,² amid the heaviest forest trees. Objects of art and implements of war, and even of science, are turned up by the plough. These are silent witnesses. With the single exception of the inscription stone, found in the great tumulus of Grave Creek, in Virginia, in the year 1838,³ there is no monument of art on the continent, yet discovered, which discloses an alphabet, and thus promises to address posterity in an articulate voice. We must argue chiefly from the character of the antique works of art.

But although the apparent hieroglyphics of Yucatan and Central America have not been read, nor a history of much incident, or a remote antiquity, deduced from the pictorial scrolls of Mexico, it is impossible not to assign to the era of American antiquities, a degree of arts, science, agriculture and general civilization, to which the highest existing nomadic or hunter tribes had no pretence. It is a period of obscurity, of which inquirers might perhaps say, that the darkness itself is made to speak. It tells of the displacement of light. All indeed beyond the era of Columbus, is shrouded in historical gloom. We are thus confined within the short cycle of some three hundred and fifty years. A little less than twelve generations of men. Beyond this period, we have an ante-historical period, which is filled, almost exclusively, with European claimants of prior discovery. We will name them in their order. They are the Scandinavians, the Cimbri and tribes of Celtic type, and the Venetians. Still prior, is the Asiatic claim of a predatory nation, who, in the days of the Exodus, lived in caves and dens of the earth, under the name of Horites,⁴ and who culminated at a later era, under the far-famed epithet of Phoenicians—a people whose early nautical skill has, absolutely, no cotemporary.

Scandinavian antiquities have recently assumed the highest interest, which the press and the pencil can bestow. Danish art and research have achieved high honors in disinterring facts from the dust of forgotten ages. And we may look to the illustrated publications, which have been put forth at Copenhagen, under royal auspices, as an example of what literary costume and literary diligence, may do to revive and re-construct the antiquarian periods of the world's history. The publication of the ancient northern Sagas, and the ballads of the Scandinavian Skalds, has revealed sufficient of the history of the early and bold adventures, in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, to show that these hardy adventurers not only searched the shores of Iceland and Greenland, and founded settlements and built churches there; but pushed their voyages west to the rocky shores of Heluiland, the woody coasts of Markland, and the vine-yielding coasts of ancient Vinland. These three names geography has exchanged in our days, for Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Massachusetts. Perhaps some other portions of New England may be embraced by the ancient name of Vinland.

The ancient songs and legends of a people may be appealed to, as these Sagas and ballads have been, for historical proof, as it is known that the early nations celebrated their

heroic exploits, in this manner. Authors tell us that Homer but recited the traditions of his countrymen. The nautical and geographical proofs, by which portions of the North Atlantic shores have been identified by the bold spirit of northern research, are certainly inexact and to some extent hypothetical. In extending the heretofore admitted points of discovery and temporary settlement, south to Massachusetts and Rhode Island, they carry with them sufficient general plausibility, as being of an early and adventurous age, to secure assent. And they only cease to inspire a high degree of historical respect, at the particular points where the identification becomes extreme, where the pen and pencil have to some extent distorted objects, and where localities and monuments are insisted on, which we are by no means sure ever had any connection with the acts of the early Scandinavian adventurers, and sea kings. This period of the ante-Columbian era, is one of deep interest in American history, and invites a careful and candid scrutiny, with a sole eye to historical truth.

We have also a Celtic period, falling within the same general era of the Scandinavian, which, at least, deserves to be examined, if it be only to clear away the rubbish that encumbers the threshold of the ancient period of our Indian history. This claim to discovery, rests chiefly upon a passage in old British history, which represents two voyages of a Welsh Prince, who in the twelfth century, sailed west from the coasts of Britain, and is thought by some writers, to have reached this continent. The discovery of Columbus was of such an astounding character and reflected so eminent a degree of honor, both on him and the Court which had employed this noble mariner, that it is no wonder other countries of maritime borders, should rake up the arcana of their old traditions, to share in the glory. If these ancient traditions have left but little worthy of the sober pen of history, they have imposed on us, as cultivators of history, the literary obligation to examine the facts and decide upon their probability. If Prince Madoc, as this account asserts, sailed a little south of west, he is likely to have reached and landed at the Azores. It is not incredible, indeed, that small ships, such as the Britons, Danes and Northmen used, should have crossed the entire Atlantic at the era, between the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, although it is not probable. It is nearly certain, however, that should such a feat have been performed in the twelfth century, the natives of the American coasts, who were inimical to strangers, would, in no long period, have annihilated them. With a full knowledge of the warlike and suspicious elements of Indian character, such a result might have been predicted in ordinary cases. But that these tribes, or any one of them, should have adopted, as is contended, the *language* of a small and feeble colony of foreigners, either landing or stranded on the coast; nay more, so fully adopted it as to be understood by any countrymen of the Prince, five hundred years afterwards,⁵ is a proof of the national credulity of men, who are predetermined to find the analogies which they ardently seek.

Italy has likewise a claim to the discovery of this continent, prior to the voyages of Columbus. This claim is made by an ancient family of the highest rank in the city of Venice—once the mistress of the commerce of the world. The voyages of the two Zenos, over the northern seas, in the 14th century, extending to Greenland, appear to be well attested by the archives of that ancient city. The episode of Estotiland, which is apparently used as a synonyme for Vinland, has been generally deemed apocryphal, or of a date posterior to the other incidents described. To examine and set in order both the true and the intercalated parts of these curious ancient voyages, would involve no little degree of research, but would prove, if well executed, a useful and acceptable service to historical letters.

There is another period—we allude to the Horitic element—in the obscurity of the early history of the continent, which may be here mentioned, but from the diversity of the sub-elements which enter into it, some hesitancy exists in giving it a name. In order to secure the purposes of generalization, and include every element of which it is composed, it may be called, provisionally, the MEDITERRANEAN PERIOD. It is the earliest and most obscure of the whole, relying, as it does, almost exclusively upon passages of the imaginative literature of Greece. Yet it is a subject eminently worthy of the pen of original investigation. It includes the consideration of the early maritime power of the Phœnicians, the Etruscans, the Carthaginians, and other celebrated nations and cities who, long before the Christian era, drew the attention and governed the destinies of the world. It was in this quarter of the globe, forming, as it does, the cementing point between Europe and Asia, that an alphabet arose at a very early day, and prior to that of Greece or Rome, which consisted almost exclusively of straight or angular marks. From its use it has sometimes been called the Rock Alphabet. It has its equivalents in the more full and exact Hebrew and Greek characters, so far as the old alphabet extended. It had, as these changes progressed and the family of man spread, the various names of Phœnician, Ostic, Etruscan, Punic, ancient Greek and Gallic, Celtiberic, Runic, Druidical and others. As a system of notation, it appears to occupy an epoch between the hieroglyphic system of Egypt and the Greek alphabet. But whatever may be said of its origin, affinities, changes, or character, it is clear that this simple alphabet spread westward among the barbaric nations of Europe, changing, in some measure, in its forms of notation and the articulate sounds it

represented, until it reached the utmost limits of its western and northern coasts and islands. Here it served as the means of recording human utterance, until it was supplanted and obliterated by the civilization of Rome and the Roman alphabet. To decypher the ancient inscriptions in this simple character, found upon rocks and monuments, is an object, at this day, of learned research; and its importance may be judged of by observing, that, whenever successfully effected, it is a literal restoration, to the present age, of the lost sounds of those parts of the ancient world. I will no farther allude to this period, so important in its means of research, than to add, that the inscription, found in 1838, on opening the gigantic pile of earth, or tumulus, heretofore referred to, on the alluvial plains of Grave Creek in Western Virginia, was in one of the types of this ancient character. This type of the alphabet may be called AONIC⁶—a term derived from the aboriginal vocabulary. I visited the locality in 1843—carefully examined the facts, and having satisfied myself of the authenticity of the discovery, took duplicate copies of the inscription in wax, and transmitted them to Europe. The inscription consists of twenty-three letters, together with a pictorial device, apparently a man's head on a pike. It is made on a small hard stone, of an oval shape, and was found in a vault along with human bones, sea shells, and various ornaments of a rude age. Professor Charles Rafn, of Copenhagen, deems the character Celtiberic. I have recently received a memoir from M. Jomard, at Paris, (the sole survivor of Bonaparte's scientific corps in Egypt,) who considers it as of Lybian origin, and compares it with an inscription found on the African shores of the Mediterranean at Dugga. It relieves, to some extent, the discrepancy existing between these two learned men to remark that the Dugga inscription consists of two parts, one of which is pronounced Celtiberic by Hamaker, and that the generic character of the strokes in this alphabet are preserved to some extent even in the true Libyan. Since the receipt of Mr. Rafn's paper, the number of characters on the Grave Creek stone which are identical with the Celtiberic, as published in the first volume of the Transactions of the American Ethnological Society, has been shown to be fifteen, leaving but eight to be accounted for. By comparison, ten of our Aonic characters of Grave Creek correspond with the Phœnician; four with the ancient Greek; four with the Etruscan; six with the ancient Gallic; seven with the old Erse; five with the Runic proper, and thirteen with the Druidical, or old British, as it existed before the invasion of Julius Cæsar. The latter are, however, almost identical, so far as the comparison goes, with the Celtiberic. Six of the characters, which are several times repeated, however, exist in the right hand portion of the Lybian inscription at Dugga, but the introduction, in other parts of the monumental text, of the Arabic element of notation by curved lines, tends to lessen the probability of the Lybian origin of our western inscription, while it adds additional force to the suggestions of Mr. Rafn. It is also to be noticed that M. Jomard employed an inaccurate copy of the inscription which was furnished him some years ago by Mr. Vail.

This comprehends the European branch of the obscure period of our early continental history, and includes all the nations known to have put in claims to share, or to anticipate, the glory of the discovery of the continent by Columbus.

The discovery of the continent, was, indeed, a geographical wonder. It was made contrary to the predictions of the times. Such a discovery was not only opposed by popular opinion; but Columbus himself expected no such thing. He sought only a new passage to the East Indies. He insisted, with a noble constancy, that he should find land in sailing west. But he did not expect to find, as if by the power of necromancy, that a vast continent should rise up before his eyes. And it is altogether questionable, whether the great navigator did not die without a true knowledge of this fact. It will be recollected that it was not until six years after his death, which happened in 1506, that Balboa first discovered the Pacific from the heights of Panama, and thus truly revealed the position of the Continent.

Sages and Philosophers do not admire results which have fallen out contrary to their expressed views; but, in this case, the discovery proved so astounding that all Europe joined in extolling, what all Europe had a little before, disbelieved. A continent stretching little under 10,000 miles, from south to north, with a maximum breadth of 2000 miles, between sea and sea, rivers, such as the La Plata and the Amazon—mountains like that of the Andes, whose highest peak rises 20,280 feet above the sea—Volcanoes, which cast their fires over plains of interminable extent—tropical fruits of every kind—mines of gold and silver the richest the world had ever known—these were some of the features that America brought to light, while it added one-third to the known area, and more than one-third to the commercial resources of the world.

But while men gazed at its lofty mountains, and geological magnificence, the ancient race of men, who were found here, constituted by far the most curious and thought-inspiring problem. Volcanoes and vast plains and mountains were elements in the geography of the old world, and their occurrence here, soon assimilated their discovery to other features of the kind. But the red man continued to furnish a theme for speculation and inquiry, which time has not satisfied. Columbus, supposing himself to have found, what he had sailed for, and judging from physical characteristics alone, called them *Indians*. Usage has perpetuated the term. But if, by the term, it is designed to consider them as of that part of

India, which is filled with the Hindoo race, there is but little resemblance beyond mere physical traits. Of the leading idea of the multiform incarnations of the terrible, and degraded Hindoo deities—of the burning of widows at the funereal pile—of infanticide—of the gross idolatry rendered to images, like those of Vishnoo and Juggernaut, there is nothing. The degraded forms of superstition and human vice which are practised on the Ganges and the Burrampooter, are unknown on the Mississippi and the Missouri. Nor have we found, so far as I am aware, a single word in the American languages, which exists in the Hindostanee.

The philosophers and ecclesiastics of the sixteenth century, who discussed the subject of the origin of the American Tribes, have left scarcely a portion of the globe untouched by their researches, or from which, they have not attempted, by some analogies, to deduce them. Generalization, as soon as Columbus returned from his first voyage, took an unlimited latitude; and theories were advanced with a degree of confidence, which was, in some measure, proportioned to the remoteness of the position of the writers, from both the stock of people found, and those of nations with whom they were sought to be compared. Scholars ransacked the archives of European archæology. They found some allusions in the Greek drama, to ancient discoveries beyond the pillars of Hercules. They speculated on the story of Atlantis, and the Fortunate Islands. They drew parallels between the hunter and corn planting tribes of America, and the lost ten tribes of Israel, who were graziers. They located ancient Ophir, where of all places it had certainly never been, namely, in America. They were satisfied with general resemblances in manners and customs, which mark uncivilized nations, in distant parts of the world, who assimilate, in some traits, from mere parity of circumstances, but between whom there are in reality, no direct affinities of blood and lineage. And they left the question, to all practical and satisfactory ends, precisely where they found it. It was still to be answered, WHO ARE THE INDIANS?

The present age is, in many respects, better prepared to undertake the examination of the question. The time which has passed away since Columbus dropped anchor at the island of Guanahani, has rendered distant nations on the globe far better acquainted with each other. This has, indeed, been the most remarkable period for its influence on all the true elements of civilization, which the world has ever known. The advance of general knowledge, the comity of national intercourse, and the policy and friendship of nations, has certainly never before reached its present state. China is no longer a sealed nation. British arms have carried the influence of arts and letters, through Hindostan, Abyssinia, Persia, and the valley of the Euphrates, have been visited and explored. The deserts of the Holy Land have been trod by learned men of Europe and America. The mouth of the Niger and the sources of the Nile, are revealed. Even Arabia, the land where Abraham and his descendants once trod, has sent an embassy of peace, to a government 18,000 miles distant, which has not had a national existence over seventy years. Not only the rulers of Arabia and America have been thus brought into the bonds of intercourse; but the age has exchanged the arts, the science and the philosophy of the utmost parts of the earth. Scientific discovery has reached its highest acme. The sites of many ancient and long unknown, though not forgotten cities, are recovered. Monuments and ruins have been disinterred in the ancient seats of human power, in the oriental world, and inscriptions deciphered, which give vitality to ancient history. Ethnology has arisen to hold up the light of her resplendent lamp, amid these ruins, to guide the footsteps of letters, science and piety.

To these evidences of the inquisitive energy of the age, it has added new and important means of study and investigation. The principles of interpretation which originated in the study of Egyptian monuments, have guided inquiries in other quarters of the globe, and the discovery of a key to the hieroglyphics of the Nile has thus reflected light on the progress of monumental researches throughout the world. The science of philology, so important in considering the affinities of nations, has been almost wholly created within fifty years. Franklin lived and died without a knowledge of it. Astronomy has been employed to some extent to detect the chronology of architectural ruins, and even the antique history of America has been illustrated by the record of an eclipse among the ancient Mexican picture-writings.⁷ Geology, in her labors to determine the character of the exhumed bones and shells of extinct classes of the animal creation of former eras, has not failed to impart the most important knowledge of the physical history of the planet we occupy. Electricity and magnetism have also enlarged their boundaries. Chemistry is in the process of fulfilling the highest expectations. All these sources of knowledge have been poured into the lap of geography and ethnography, and given us a far better and truer knowledge of the character, resources, and position of the nations of the world. And after making every allowance for the literary complacency of the age, we are yet unable to point to a prior epoch of the world when man had so fully recovered his position in the scale of civilization, and in the knowledge of the various phenomena in science, letters and arts, on which his true advance depends.

With these evidences of intellectual progress and the increased power of modern inquiry,

there are redoubled incentives to investigate the obscure period of American history. It has been said, prematurely, in the arrogance of European criticism, that America has "no fallen columns" to examine—"no inscriptions to decypher." We answer the assertion by pointing to the enigmatical walls of Palenque and Chi Chen Itza, and to the polished ruins of Cuzco, and the valley of Anahuac. Researches in this field of observation have just commenced. Bigotry and lust of conquest, led the early Spanish adventurers to sweep as with the besom of destruction every object and monument of art which stood in their way. Cortez razed the walls of ancient Mexico to the ground as he entered it, and his zealous followers committed to the flames whatever was light and combustible. This spirit marked the entire conquest which was carried on under the triple mania of religious bigotry, the lust of gold, and the unchastened spirit of national robbery. We have to glean for facts among that which is left. It is still an interesting field, but it has been hedged up since the conquest, by the jealous spirit and narrow policy of by far the most gloomy and non-progressive nation of Europe. Spanish chivalry has been extolled to the skies, but it has ever been the chivalry of the dark ages. She has fought for the antiquity of opinion, while she has guarded the avenue to facts. There are immense districts of Central and South America, which are yet a perfect terra incognita to the traveller and the antiquarian.

Entire tribes and nations in the gloomy ranges of the Andes and the Cordilleras have never submitted to the Spanish yoke, and still enjoy their original customs and institutions. So far as modern explorations have been made, the results are, in a high degree, auspicious. Mr. Stephens has opened vistas in our antiquarian history by his two exploratory journies, which tend to show how little we yet know of the ancient epochs of the country, and the field of inquiry is about to be occupied at various points under the highest advantages. Some of the figures and devices on the antique walls and temples of equinoctial America, appear to contain information for a future Young or Champollion to reveal. Time and scrutiny will do much to lift the veil of mystery from these ancient ruins, and to form and regulate sound opinion upon the ancient inhabitants of that quarter, and their state of arts. There can be no doubt that evidences exist in buried antiquities which will tend to connect the arts and religion, mythology and astronomy of the eastern and western hemispheres—to unravel the difficulties in the way of comparative philology, and to reconstruct and connect the links in the broken chain of national affiliation.

Even in our less attractive latitudes and longitudes, a more auspicious and healthy tone has been given to the spirit of investigation. A voice from one of our western mounds (which has been alluded to) promises to restore the reading of an inscription in one of the earliest alphabets of the world. Sculptures have recently been disclosed in some of the minor mounds of the West, which are executed in a polished style of art, and strongly connect the Mexican and American tribes. The figures of animals and birds, taken from some barrows in the Scioto valley, are executed in a manner quite equal to anything of the kind found in Mexico or Peru.

Mythological evidence is also assuming more distinctive grounds. An imitative mound of a gigantic serpent swallowing an egg, has been discovered in one of the forest counties of Ohio, while I have been engaged in penning these remarks. The discovery of this curious structure, which is coiled for the distance of a quarter of a mile around a hill, transfers to our soil a striking and characteristic portion of oriental mythology. Scarcely a season passes, indeed, which does not add, by the extension of our settlements, or the direct agency of exploration, to the number of monumental evidences of antique occupancy.

But were these, indeed, wanting—were there no mounds or pyramids of sepulture or sacrifice—no remains of art—no inscriptive testimonies to speak of by-gone centuries—we have before us one of the most interesting of all monumental proofs in the lost and enigmatical race, who yet rove the boundless forests of the West and South. Whether there be evidences to separate the eras and nations of the most ancient inhabitants from those whose descendants yet remain, is one of the very points at issue. If the descendants of the mound and temple builders yet exist, the traditions of the era have passed from them in the process of their declension. But whoever the builders were, and whether their blood still flows in the existing race or not, they clung, like this race, so firmly to their ancient mythology and religion as to impress it indelibly on the features of their architecture, and in almost every work or labor which they attempted.

Viewed in every age, the existing tribes have exhibited such a fixity and peculiarity of character, as to have rendered them at once a paradox and a bye-word. The Turk has not been more inflexible; nor the Jew shown more individuality. We have hardly begun systematically to examine this subject. If the ancient builders were nomads—mere hunters of the bear, the deer, and the bison, who were too happy in the Parthian attainments of the bow and arrow to need towns and temples—certainly no such development arose in these more northern latitudes. And yet, if we make some peculiar exceptions, it appears difficult to suppose that the entire race, viewed in its generic and ethnological aspect, did not present a unity. While the very amplitude of the continent, and the variety of its soil, climate and productions, would lead, inevitably, to divisions and sub-divisions of tribes

and languages, there are characteristics so deeply seated in their organization and habits, physical and mental, as to mark them as a peculiar family of the Red Type of man. Adopting this idea of unity as a basis of study, there are, at least, fewer obstacles in grouping the phenomena from which our deductions are to be drawn. The proof of negation is not the strongest proof, but it is something to assert that they are neither of Japhetic or Hamitic origin. In the traditions of one of the most celebrated North American tribes, namely, the Iroquois, the continent or "island," as it is termed, is called Aonio,⁸ and we may hence denominate the race Aonic, and the individuals Aonites. If we do not advance by this term in the origin of the people, we at least advance in the precision of discussion.

But where shall we find a basis, on which to rest their Chronology? Must we run back to the epoch of the original dispersion of man, or can we rest at a subsequent point? Has the era of christianity any definite relation to their migration? Was the migration designed, or accidental? Did it consist of one tribe, or twenty tribes? Did it happen at one epoch, or many epochs? Have they wandered here eighteen centuries, or double that period? These are some of the inquiries that naturally occur.

The first great question to be decided in the history of the Red Race, is, whether they were, as they have been vaguely called, the *aborigines*, or were preceded, on the continent, by other races? The second, whether the type of civilization, of which we behold evidences in Mexico, Yucatan and South America, was an *indigenous development* of energies latent in the human mind, or derived its leading and suggestive features from *foreign lands*? There is intermingled with these inquiries, the scarcely less important one, whether or not, the *antiquarian ruins of America*, denote an element or elements of *European population*, in the later eras, whose fate became involved in the hunter mass, and who may be supposed to have been completely obliterated from the traditions of the existing tribes, prior to the discovery by Columbus.

Indian tradition has little or nothing to offer on this head. Time and barbarism have blotted out all. The entire sum of the traditions of all the various races of Red men, on the continent, when sifted from the mass of fabulous and incongruous matter by which it is accompanied, and when there is any allusion to it at all, amounts to this: that their ancestors came from the east; a few tribes, assert that they had come by water.⁹ The land from whence they set out, the time devoted to the purposes of their long migration, and the actual period of their landing, and all such questions, are indefinite. And we must reconstruct their chronology, in the best way possible, from a careful system of patient historical and antiquarian induction. Exactitude it cannot have, but it may reach plausibility. Granting to the Scandinavian, the Cimbrian and the Italian periods of adventure, which have been named, the fullest limits, in point of antiquity, which have under any circumstances been claimed, we cannot carry even this species of history beyond the year A. D. 1001; leaving 999 years to be accounted for, to the commencement of the Christian era. The Aztec empire which had reached such a point of magnificence when Mexico was first entered by Cortez, in 1519, did not, according to the picture writings and Mexican chronologists, date back farther than 1038, or by another authority, 958. The Toltecs, who preceded them in the career of empire, and whom together with the Chichimecs and their allies they overthrew, do not, allowing them the most liberal latitude of authors, extend their reign beyond A. D. 667. Prior to this, Indian chronology makes mention of the Olmecs—a people who are described as having mechanical arts, and to whom even the Toltecs ascribed the erection of some of their most antique and magnificent monuments. According to Fernando D'Alva, himself of Aztec lineage, the most ancient date assigned to the entire group of Mexican dynasties is A. D. 299. There are monuments in those benignant latitudes of perpetual summer, exempted as they are from the disintegrating effects of frosts, which corroborate such a chronology, and denote even a more ancient population, who were builders, agriculturists and worshippers of the sun. But we require a far longer period than any thus denoted, to account for those changes and subdivisions which have been found in the American languages.

Language is itself so irrefragable a testimony of the mental affinities of nations, and so slow in the periods of its mutations, that it offers one of the most important means for studying the history of the people. Grammars and vocabularies are required of all the tribes, whose history and relations we seek to fathom, before we can successfully compare them with each other, and with foreign languages. It is a study of high interest, from the diversity and curious principles of the dialects. There is a general agreement in the principles of Indian utterance, while their vocabularies exhibit wide variances. Some of the concords required, are anomalous to the occidental grammars, while there is a manifest general resemblance to these ancient plans of thought. The most curious features consist in the personal forms of the verbs, the constant provision for limiting the action to specific objects, the submergence of gender in many cases into two great organic and inorganic classes of nature, marked by vitality or inertia, and the extraordinary power of syllabical combination, by which Indian lexicography is rendered so graphic and descriptive in the bestowal of names. They are all, or nearly all,

transpositive and polysynthetic; yet although now found in a very concrete form, this appears to have been not their original form, but rather the result of the progress of syllabical accretion, from a few limited roots and particles, which are yet when dissected found to be monosyllabic. That they have incorporated some of the Hebrew pronouns, and while like this language, wanting the auxiliary verb *to be*, have preserved its solemn causative verb, for existence, are among the points of the philology to be explained. But I have not time to pursue this subject. Even these notices are made at the sacrifice of other and perhaps more generally interesting traits of their antiquity.

The *Astronomy* of the American tribes, has been thought to merit attention, in any attempts to compare them with foreign nations. The evidences of the attainments of the ancient Mexicans in this science, as well as the facts of their general history, chronology and languages, have been examined by the venerable archæologist and ex-statesman, who presides over this society, in a critical dissertation, published by the American Ethnological Society, which is the ablest paper of the age. The results of Mr. Gallatin's labors, and his reading of the ancient scrolls of Mexican picture writing, preserved in the folios of Lord Kingsborough, while they limit the amount of precise historical information in these unique records to very narrow grounds, yet denote a degree of system and exactitude, both in their chronology and astronomy, which are very remarkable.

The simple astronomy of our Aonic tribes of the north, gave them a lunar year, consisting of twelve moons. They consequently had a year of about three hundred and sixty days. As they had no names for days, no week and no subperiods of a moon, but noticed and relied simply on the moon's phases, they did not become acquainted with the necessity of intercalations for the true length of the year. The Aztecs of Mexico, on the contrary, had a solar year, and had made an extraordinary advance in computing the true time. Their year consisted of eighteen months, of twenty days each, a perfectly arbitrary system. This division would give but three hundred and sixty days to the year. The remaining five were called *empty* or superfluous days, and were added to the last month of the eighteen. A tropical year is, however, about six hours longer than three hundred and sixty-five days, and by throwing away six hours annually, there would be an entire day lost every four years. The Mexican astronomers were well aware of this fact; but instead of supplying the deficiency every fourth year as we do, they disregarded it entirely, till a whole cycle consisting of fifty-two years was completed, and then they intercalated thirteen days, to make up the time and complete their cycle. In this way they came to the same result as the Egyptians, but by a different process, since the Egyptian calendar was founded on a computation of twelve lunar months of thirty days each. It was precisely the same in the old Persian calendar, which consisted of a year of three hundred and sixty days, made up of twelve months of thirty days each.

The Aztecs divided their cycle of fifty two years, into four periods of thirteen years; called TLALPILLI, and their month of twenty days, into four sub-periods, or weeks, of five days. The cycle was called XIUHMOLPILLI, which signifies, "the tying up of years." Each day of the month had a separate *name*, derived from some animate, or inanimate object, as *Tochtli*, a rabbit, *Calli*, a house, *Atl*, water, *Tecpatl*, Silex, *Xochitl*, a flower, *Cohuatl*, a serpent. The fifth day, was a fair or market day. The names of the days were represented by hieroglyphic figures of the objects described. The divisions were perfect and regular, and enabled them to denote, in their scrolls of picture writing, the chronology of the month, and of the Tlalpilli, or period of thirteen years.¹⁰

The scheme itself denotes, not only a very certain mode of keeping the record of time, but a very exact knowledge of the tropical year. It is now known that the length of the year is precisely three hundred and sixty five days, five hours, forty eight minutes, and forty eight seconds; and it is perfectly well ascertained, that the Aztecs computed its length, at the period of their highest advance, at three hundred and sixty five days, five hours, forty six minutes, and nine seconds, differing only two minutes and thirty nine seconds from our own computation.¹¹ There is evidence, indeed, that the ancient inhabitants of this continent, had more science, than is generally conceded. If we are to credit writers, the Aztecs understood the true causes of eclipses, as well as we do. Diagrams exist, in their pictorial records, in which the earth is represented as projecting its disc upon the moon—thus indicating, clearly, a true knowledge of this phenomenon. Mr. Gallatin remarks that the Indian astronomical system, as developed in Mexico, is not one of *indigenous origin*, but that they had, manifestly, received it, at least their calendar, from a foreign source. Its results could not have been attained without long and patient observations. Some of its methods of combination, in the double use of names and figures, in their cycles, are thought to denote an ancient primitive system of oriental astronomy, reaching back to the earliest times. Here, then, we have one probable fact to serve as the nucleus of antiquarian testimony. We begin it abroad.

The *architecture* of the ancient inhabitants of Mexico and Peru, has been illustrated, within a few years, by several elaborate works; and the subject may be deemed to have been brought, by these works, within the scope of study and comparison. There are two

features in this unique order of architecture, which appear to denote great antiquity in the principles developed, namely, the arch and the pyramid. These nations appear to have had the use of squares and parallelograms, in their geometry, without circles, or parabolic lines. The only form of the arch observed, is that called the cyclopean arch, which is made by one course of stones overlapping another, till the two walls meet, and a flat stone covers the space. This is the earliest type of the arch known among mankind, and is believed to be more ancient than the foundation of any city in Europe.

The pyramid, as developed in the temple of the sun at Tezcuco, the Mexican teocalli, and the Aonic mounds of North America, compose a form of architecture equally ancient; which can be traced back over the plains of Asia, to the period of the original dispersion of mankind. The temple of Belus, was but a vast pyramid, raised for the worship of Bel. Originating in the Hamitic tribes, in the alluvial vallies and flat-lands of Asia Minor, a perfect infatuation, on the subject, appears to have possessed the early oriental nations, and they carried the idea into the valley of the Nile, and, indeed, wherever they went. It appeared to be the substitute of idolatrous nations, on alluvial lands, for an isolated hill, or promontory. It was at such points that Baal and Bel were worshipped, and hence the severe injunctions of the sacred volume, on the worship established in the oriental world "on high places." Such was the position of the pyramids in the vallies of the Euphrates and the Nile, and the idea appears to have reached America without any deviation whatever in its relative position, or its general design. It was every where, throughout America, as we find it, in the vallies of Mexico and the Mississippi, erected in rich and level vallies, or plains, and dedicated to idolatrous worship.

The mound builders of North America, north of the tropical latitudes, appear like bad copyists of a sublime original. They retained the idea of the oriental pyramid, but being no mechanics constructed piles of earth to answer the ancient purpose, both of worship and interment. Our largest structures of this kind, are the mound of Grave Creek in Western Virginia, containing about three millions of cubic feet, and the great group of the Monks of *La Trappe* in Illinois, estimated at seven millions of cubic feet.¹² Those of Saint Louis, mount Joliet, and the Blue mounds respectively are now known to be of *geological* origin.

But the Mexican and South American tribes built more boldly, and have left several specimens of the pyramids, which deserve to be mentioned, as well from the evidences they afford of mechanical skill, as from their magnificent proportions, and their Nilotic power of endurance. The pyramid of Cholula, in the valley of Mexico, exists in three vast steps, retreating as they ascend, the highest of which was crowned with a temple, whose base was one hundred and seventy-seven feet above the plain. This is nine feet higher than that of Myrcerinus, the third of the great group of Ghiza on the Nile; but its base of one thousand four hundred and twenty-three feet, exceeds that of any edifice of the kind found by travellers in the old world, and is double that of Cheops. To realize a clear idea of its magnitude, we may imagine a solid structure of earth, bricks and stone, which would fill the Washington parade ground, squared by its east and west lines, and rising seventy-five feet above the turrets of the New York University.

The pyramids of the empire of the Incas are not less remarkable. There are at Saint Juan Teotihuacan, near lake Tezcuco, in the Mexican valley, two very large antique pyramids, which were consecrated by the ancient inhabitants to the Sun and Moon. The largest, called Tonatiuh Ytzalqual, or the House of the Sun, has a base of two hundred and eight metres, or six hundred and eighty-two English feet in length, and fifty-five metres or one hundred and eighty feet perpendicular elevation; being three feet higher than the great pyramid of Cholula. The other, called Meztu Ytzaqual, or House of the Moon, is thirty-six feet lower, and has a lesser base. These monuments, according to the first accounts, were erected by the most ancient tribes, and were the models of the Aztec Teocalli. The faces of these pyramids are within fifty-two seconds, exactly north and south and east and west. Their interior consists of massive clay and stone. This solid nucleus is covered by a kind of porous amygdaloid, called tetzontli. They are ascended by steps of hewn stone to their pinnacles, where tradition affirms, there were anciently statues covered with thin lamina of gold. And it was on these sublime heights, with the clear tropical skies of Mexico above them, that the Toltec magi lit the sacred fire upon their altars, offered up incense, and chanted hymns.

One fact in connexion with these ancient structures is remarkable, on account of its illustrative character of the use of our small mounds. Around the base of these pyramids, there were found numerous smaller pyramids, or cones of scarcely nine or ten metres—twenty-nine to thirty feet elevation, which were dedicated to the STARS. These minor elevations, were generally arranged at right angles. They furnished also places of sepulture for their distinguished chiefs, and hence the avenue leading through them, was called Micoatl, or Road of the Dead. We have in this arrangement a hint of the object of the numerous small mounds, which generally surround the large mounds in the Mississippi valley—as may be witnessed in the remarkable group of *La Trappe*, in Illinois. A similar arrangement, indeed, prevails in the smaller series of the leading mound groups

west of the Alleghanies. They may be called Star-mounds. If this theory be correct, we have not only a satisfactory explanation of the object of the smaller groups, which has heretofore puzzled inquirers; but the presence of such groups may be taken as an evidence of the wide spread worship of the Sun, at an early period in these latitudes.

Sun-worship existed extensively in North America as well as South. There is reason to believe that the ancestors of all the principal existing tribes in America, worshipped an ETERNAL FIRE. Both from their records and traditions, as well as their existing monuments, this deduction is irresistible. Not only the Olmecs and Toltecs, who built the temples of the sun and moon, near the lake of Tezcuco—not only the Auricaneans, who obeyed the voice of the First Inca, in erecting the temple of the Sun at the foot of the Andes; but the Aztecs, even at the later and more corrupted period of their rites, adhered strongly to this fundamental rite. It is to be traced from the tropical latitudes into the Mississippi valley, where the earth-mound it is apprehended, rudely supplied the place of its more gorgeous, southern prototype. When they had raised the pile of earth as high as their means and skill dictated, facts denote that they erected temples and altars at its apex. On these altars, tradition tells us, they burned the tobacco plant, which maintains its sacred character unimpaired to the present day. From the traditions which are yet extant in some of the tribes, they regarded the sun as the symbol of *Divine Intelligence*. They paid him no human sacrifices, but offered simply incense, and dances and songs. They had an order of priesthood, resembling the ancient magi, who possessed the highest influence and governed the destinies of the tribes. It is past all doubt that Manco Capac, was himself one of these magi: and it is equally apparent, that the order exists at this day, although shorn of much of its ancient, external splendor, in the solemn *metais*, and sacrificial *jossakeeds*, who sway the simple multitudes in the North American forests. Among these tribes, the graphic *Ke-ke-win*, which depicts the Sun, stands on their pictorial rolls, as the symbol of the Great Spirit; and no important rite or ceremony is undertaken without an offering of tobacco. This weed is lit with the sacred element, generated anew on each occasion, from percussion. To light and to put out this fire, is the symbolic language for the opening and closing of every important civil or religious public transaction, and it is the most sacred rite known to them. It is never done without an appeal, which has the characteristics of prayer, to the Great Spirit. To find in America, a system of worship which existed in Mesopotamia, in the era of the patriarch Job, one thousand five hundred and fifty years before the advent of Christ, is certainly remarkable, and is suggestive both of the antiquity and origin of the tribes.

Geology is not without its testimony in this connexion. The antiquity of human occupancy in the Mississippi valley is so extreme, that it appears to mingle its evidences with some of its more recent geological phenomena. The gradual disintegration and replacement of strata in that quarter of the country, involve facts which are quite in accordance with evidences of ancient eras drawn from other sources. It is some seven and twenty years since the earliest evidences of this kind arrested my attention. I was then descending the valley of the UNICAU or White river, in the present area of Arkansas. This is one of that series of large streams which descends the great slope or *Wasserschied*, extending from the foot of the Rocky Mountains into the lower Mississippi. These streams have carried down for ages the loosened materials of the elevated and mountainous parts of that great range into the delta of the Mississippi, filling up immense ancient inlets and seas, and pushing its estuary into the Mexican gulf. They are still to be regarded as the vast geological laboratory in which so large a part of the plains, islands and shores of that great off-drain of the continent have been prepared. The evidences referred to in the descent of the Unicau, consisted of antique, coarse pottery, scoria and ashes, together with a metallic alloy of a whitish hue, but capable of being cut partially with a knife. There were also deposits of bones, but so decayed and fragmentary as to make it impossible to determine their specific character. All these were, geologically, beneath the various strata of sand, loam and vegetable mould, supporting the heavy primitive forest of that valley. At Little Rock, in the valley of the Arkansas, vestiges of art have recently been found in similar beds of denudation, at considerable depths below the surface of the wooded plains. They consisted of a subterraneous furnace, together with broken clay kettles. In other portions of this wide slope of territory, a species of antique bricks have been disinterred.¹³ It is in this general area, and in strata of a similar age, that gigantic bones, tusks and teeth of the mastodon, and other extinct quadrupeds, have been so profusely found within a few years, particularly in the Osage valley.

But the greatest scene of superficial disturbance of post-human occupancy, appears in the great alluvial angle of territory which lies between the Mississippi and Ohio, extending to their junction. This area constitutes the grand prairie section of lower Illinois. The Big Bone Lick of the Ohio, the original seat of the discovery of the bones of the megalonyx and mastodon, announced by Mr. Jefferson to the philosophers of Europe, connects itself with this element of continental disturbance. Its western limits are cut through by the Mississippi, which washes precipitous cliffs of rock, between a promontory or natural pyramid of limestone, standing in its bed called Grand Tower, and the city of St. Louis, extending even to a point opposite the junction of the Missouri. Directly opposite these

secondary cliffs, on the Illinois shore, extends transversely for one hundred miles, the noted alluvial tract called the American bottom. This tract discloses, at great depths, buried trunks of trees, fresh-water shells, animal bones and various wrecks of pre-existing orders of the animal and vegetable creation. On the banks of the Sabine river, which flows into the Ohio, there was found, some few years ago, in the progress of excavations made for salt water, coarse clay kettles of from eight to ten gallons capacity, and fragments of earthenware, imbedded at the depth of eighty feet. The limestone rocks of the Missouri coast, above noticed, which form the western verge of this antique lacustrine sea, have produced some curious organic foot-tracks of animals and other remains; and the faces of these cliffs exhibit deep and well marked water lines, as if they had been acted on by a vast body of water, standing for long and fixed periods, at a high level, and subject to be acted on by winds and tempests. Indeed, it requires but little examination of the various phenomena, offered at this central point of the Mississippi valley, to suppose that the southern boundary of this ancient oceanic-lake, ran in the direction of the Grand Tower and Cave in rock groups, and that an arm of the sea or gulf of Mexico, must have extended to the indicated foot of this ancient lacustrine barrier. At this point, there appear evidences also of the existence of mighty ancient cataracts. The topic is one which has impressed me as being well entitled to investigation, and is hastily introduced here among the branches of inquiry bearing on my subject. But it cannot be dwelt upon, although it is connected with an interesting class of kindred phenomena, in other parts of the west.

I have already occupied the time, which I had prescribed to myself in these remarks. It has been impossible to consider many topics, upon which a true understanding of the antique period of our history depends. But I cannot close them, without a brief allusion to the leading traits and history of the Red Race, whose former advance in the arts, and whose semi-civilization in the equinoctial latitudes of the continent, we have been contemplating.

That these tribes are a people of great antiquity, far greater than has been assigned to them, is denoted by the considerations already mentioned. Their languages, their astronomy, their architecture and their very ancient religion and mythology, prove this. But a people who live without letters, must expect their history to perish with them. Tradition soon degenerates into fable, and fable has filled the oldest histories of the world, with childish incongruities and recitals of gross immoralities. In this respect, the Indian race have evinced less imagination than the Greeks and Romans, who have filled the world with their lewd philosophy of genealogy, but their myths are quite as rational and often better founded than those of the latter. To restore their history from the rubbish of their traditions, is a hopeless task. We must rely on other data, the nature of which has been mentioned. To seek among ruins, to decypher hieroglyphics, to unravel myths, to study ancient systems of worship and astronomy, and to investigate vocabularies and theories of language, are the chief methods before us; and these call for the perseverance of Sisyphus and the clear inductive powers of Bacon. Who shall touch the scattered bones of aboriginal history with the spear of truth, and cause the skeleton of their ancient society to arise and live? We may never see this; but we may hold out incentives to the future scholar, to labor in this department.

Of their origin, it is yet premature, on the basis of ethnology, to decide. There is no evidence—not a particle, that the tribes came to the continent after the opening of the Christian era. Their religion bears far more the characteristics of Zoroaster, than of Christ. It has also much more that assimilates it to the land of Chaldea, than to the early days of the land of Palestine. The Cyclopean arch, and the form of the pyramid, point back to very ancient periods. Their language is constructed on a very antique plan of thought. Their symbolic system of picture writing is positively the oldest and first form of recording ideas the world ever knew. The worship of the sun is the earliest form of human idolatry. Their calendar and system of astronomy reveal traits common to that of China, Persia, or Hindostan. Mr. Gallatin, from the consideration of the languages alone, is inclined to think that they might have reached the continent within five hundred years after the original dispersion. That they are of the Shemitic stock, cannot be questioned. The only point to be settled, indeed, appears to be, from what branch of that very widely dispersed, and intermingled race of idolaters and warriors they broke loose, and how, and in what manner, and during what era, or eras, they found their way to these shores?

But, however these questions may be decided, this is certain, that civilization, government and arts began to develop themselves first in the tropical regions of Mexico and Central America. Mexico itself, in the process of time, became to the ancient Indian tribes, the Rome of America. Like its proud prototype in Europe, it was invaded by one barbaric tribe after another, to riot and plunder, but who, in the end, adopted the type of civilization, which they came to destroy. Such was the origin of the Toltecs and the Aztecs, whom Cortez conquered.

When we turn our view from this ancient centre of Indian power, to the latitudes of the

American Republic, we find the territory covered, at the opening of the sixteenth century, with numerous tribes, of divers languages, existing in the mere hunter state, or at most, with some habits of horticulture superadded. They had neither cattle nor arts. They were bowmen and spearmen—roving and predatory, with very little, if any thing, in their traditions, to link them to these prior central families of men, but with nearly every thing in their physical and intellectual type, to favor such a generic affiliation. They erected groups of mounds, to sacrifice to the sun, moon and stars. They were, originally, fire-worshippers. They spoke ONE general class of transpositive languages. They had implements of copper, as well as of silex, and porphyries. They made cooking vessels of tempered clay. They carved very beautiful and perfect models of birds and quadrupeds, out of stone, as we see in some recently opened mounds. They cultivated the most important of all the ancient Mexican grains, the zea mays. They raised the tobacco plant, to be offered, to their Gods, as frankincense. They used the Aztec drum in their religious ceremonies and war dances. They employed the very ancient Asiatic art of recording ideas, by means of representative devices. They believed in the oriental doctrines of transformation, and the power of necromancy. Their oral fictions on this head, are so replete with fancy, that they might give scope to the lyre of some future western Ovid. They held, with Pythagoras, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. They believed, indeed, in duplicate souls. They believed with Zoroaster, in the two great creative and antagonistical principles of Ormusd and Ahriman, and they had THEN, and have STILL, an influential and powerful order of priests, who uphold the principles of a sacred fire.

To these principles, they appeal *now*, as they did in the days of the discovery. They believe in the sacred character of Fire, and regard it as the mysterious element of the Universe, which typifies the Divinity. They believe, and practice strictly, with the descendants of Abraham, the law of separation, but not the practice of circumcision. With the ancient Phœnicians, they attribute extraordinary powers, to the wisdom and subtlety of the Serpent, and this reptile holds a high place in their mythology. They regard the Tortoise, as the original increment, and medium of the creation of the Earth, and view the Bear and the Wolf as enchanted heroes of supernatural energies. And they have adopted the devices of these three animals as the general Totemic types and bond of their separation into clans. They are as observant as any of the orientalist were, of the flight of birds. They draw, with the ancient Chaldeans, prognostications from the clouds. They preserve the simple music of the Arcadian pipe, which is dedicated to love. They people their woods and mountains, and romantic water-falls, with various classes of wood and water nymphs, fairies and genii. They had anticipated the author of the "Rape of the Lock" in the creation of a class of personal gnomes, who nimbly dance over the lineaments of the human frame. They have a class of seers and prophets, who mutter from the ground, the decisions of fate and Providence. They believe in the idea of ghosts, witchcraft, and vampires. They place the utmost reliance on dreams and night visions. A dream and a revelation, are synonymous. Councils are called, and battles are fought on the prognostications of a dream. They are astrologers and star-gazers, and draw no small part of their mythology from the skies. They fast to obtain the favor of the Deity, and they feast, at the return of the first fruits. They have concentrated the wisdom and fancy of their forefathers and sages, in allegories and fables. With the Arabs, they are gifted in the relation of fictitious domestic tales, in which necromancy and genii, constitute the machinery of thought. With the ancient Mesopotamians, Persians and Copts, they practice the old art of ideographic, or picture writing. They are excellent local geographers, and practical naturalists. There is not an animal, fish, insect or reptile in America, whose character and habitudes they do not accurately and practically know. They believe the earth to be a plain, with four corners, and the sky a hemisphere of material substance-like brass, or metal, through which the planets shine, and around which the sun and moon revolve. Over all, they install the power of an original Deity, who is called the Great Spirit, who is worshipped by fire, who is invoked by prayer, and who is regarded, from the cliffs of the Monadnock,¹⁴ to the waters of the Nebraska,¹⁵ as omnipotent, immaterial, and omnipresent.

That this race has dwelt on the continent long centuries before the Christian era, all facts testify. If they are not older as a people, than most of the present nations on the Asiatic shores of the Indian ocean, as has been suggested, they are certainly anterior in age, to the various groups of the Polynesian islands. They have, it is apprehended, taken the impress of their character and mental ideocracy from the early tribes of Western Asia, which was originally peopled, to a great extent, by the descendants of Shem. These fierce tribes crowded each other, as one political wave trenches on another, till they have apparently traversed its utmost bounds. How they have effected the traject here, and by what process, or contingency, are merely curious questions, and can never be satisfactorily answered. The theory of a migration by Behring's straits, is untenable. If we could find adequate motives for men to cross thence, we cannot deduce the tropical animals. We cannot erect a history from materials so slender. It may yield one element of population; but we require the origin of many. But while we seek for times and nations, we have the indubitable evidences of the general event or events in the people before us, and we are justified by philology alone, in assigning to it an epoch or epochs, which are

sufficiently remote and conformable to the laws of climate, to account for all the phenomena. No such epoch seems adequate this side of the final overthrow of Babylon, or general dispersion of mankind, or the period of the conquest of Palestine. One singular and extraordinary result, in the fulfilment of a very ancient prophecy of the human family, may be noticed. It is this. Assuming the Indian tribes to be of Shemitic origin, which is generally conceded, they were met on this continent, in 1492, by the Japhetic race, after the two stocks had passed round the globe by directly different routes. Within a few years subsequent to this event, as is well attested, the humane influence of an eminent Spanish ecclesiastic, led to the calling over from the coasts of Africa, of the Hamitic branch. As a mere historical question, and without mingling it in the slightest degree with any other, the result of three centuries of occupancy, has been a series of movements in all the colonial stocks, south and north, by which Japhet has been immeasurably enlarged on the continent, while the called and not voluntary sons of Ham, have endured a servitude, in the wide stretching vallies of the tents of Shem.¹⁶

Such are the facts which lend their interest to the early epoch of our history. They invite the deepest study. Every season brings to our notice some new feature, in its antiquities, which acts as a stimulus to thought and inquiry. It is evident that there is more aliment for study and scrutiny in its obscure periods, than has heretofore been supposed. Vestiges of art are found, which speak of elder and higher states of civilization, than any known to the nomadic or hunter states. And the great activity which marks the present state of antiquarian and philological inquiry, in the leading nations of Europe, adds deeply to our means and inducements to search out the American branch of the subject. Man, as he views these results, gathers new hopes of his ability to trace the wandering footsteps of early nations over the globe. There is a hope of obtaining the ultimate principles of languages and national affinities. Already science and exact investigation have accomplished the most auspicious and valuable results. The spirit of research has enabled us to unlock many secrets, which have remained sealed up for centuries. History has gleaned largely from the spirit of criticism; Ethnology has already reared a permanent monument to her own intellectual labors, and promises in its results, to unravel the intricate thread of ancient migration, and to untie the gordian knot of nations. Shall we not follow in this path? Shall we not emulate the labors of a Belzoni, a Humboldt, and a Robinson?

Footnotes

¹ Forster.

² MSS. of the Am. Ethn. Society. Vide Catalogue, Vol. I.

³ Trans. Am. Ethn. Society. Vol. I.

⁴ Forster.

⁵ Vide Stoddart's Louisiana.

⁶ Vide Notes on the Iroquois.

⁷ Vide Gallatin's paper—Trans. Am. Ethn. Society, vol. I.

⁸ Notes on the Iroquois.

⁹ Such are the traditions of the Aztecs and of the Athapascas. Nearly every Aonic tribe, on the contrary, affirm that their ancestors came out of the ground.

10 As to the market day or week of five days, Sir Wm. Jones and Sir Stamford Raffles, tell us that the same period, existed, for the same purpose, in India. In the symbols for days, we find four to correspond exactly with the zodiacal signs of India, eight with those of Thibet, six with those of Siam and Japan, and others with those of the Chinese and Moguls.

11 With respect to intercalations, various periods have been taken by ancient nations. And while we take the shortest possible one, of four years; and the Aztecs took fifty two, the Chinese took sixty, and the Persians one hundred and twenty.

12 The central mound of this group has been cut through since the date of my paper before the Ethnological Society, and proved to be *artificial*.

13 Arkansas paper.

14 A mountain in New Hampshire, seen from the sea.

15 The Indian name of the river La Plate.

16 Genesis, 9. 27.

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