

AN ACCOUNT

OF

ANCIENT REMAINS

ON THIS CONTINENT.

MOUNDS and tumuli covering human relics, have been traced from Wales across the continent, through Russia and Tartary. I have been able to find no account of these works on the western side of the Rocky mountains, or in the direction of Behring's Straits; but, from the limits of Ouiskonsin, they constantly increase in number and extent.*

On the south side of Ontario, one of these remains, not far from Black river, is, I am informed, the farthest that has been discovered in a north-eastern direction. One on the Chenango river, at Oxford, is the farthest south on the eastern side of the Alleghanies, of undoubted and untraditional antiquity.

In travelling westwardly toward Lake Erie, some are to be found in Genesee County, but they are scarce and small until we arrive at Cattaugus Creek, where, according to the late Governor Clinton, a chain of forts commences, extending southwardly upward of fifty miles, at a distance from each other of not more than four or five.

South of these again, extensive works were discovered at Circleville, at Chillicothe, at the mouth of the Scioto and Muskingum, at Cincinnati, at St. Louis, and at numerous points along the Valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi.

Among these tumuli and fortifications, a variety of interesting relics have been found by their explorers. Vessels of earthenware, utensils of copper, painted pottery, vases of curious form, copper beads, and circular plates of the same material, carvings in stone, silver and gold ornaments; and, at Natchez and near Nashville, *idols of stone*, which are not unlike those heretofore represented in my letters as existing in Mexico. Drawings of these idols are given in the *Archæologia Americana*, at pages 211 and 215 of the first volume.

* Most interesting accounts, accompanied by plates, of the ancient remains in Ouiskonsin Territory, and on the great war-path from the Mississippi to Lake Michigan, are to be found in the January number of Silliman's Journal for 1843, and also in the 34th volume of that valuable work.

Extensive mural remains are scattered over the immense plain, from the southern shore of Lake Erie to the Gulf of Mexico, and may be traced around the Gulf, across Texas into New Mexico, increasing in size and splendor as they advance toward the south. The student who desires to examine the subject more minutely, may refer to the before-mentioned volume of the *Archæologia Americana*, where he will find a long and interesting treatise by Mr. Attwater;—the plates of which will illustrate the size and character of these works more satisfactorily than any mere verbal descriptions.

I have thus traced a continuous chain of structures, chiefly of earthen mounds, and trifling relics pertaining to the necessities of life, defence, and worship, throughout the greater portion of our western territory until it joins the soil of Mexico. I will now proceed with the account of such antiquities, of an architectural character, besides those already described by me, as have come to my knowledge in the latter Republic.

In the year 1773, the Padre Francisco Garcés, accompanied by Padre Font, in the course of their travels in the northern departments of Mexico, arrived at a vast and beautiful plain on the south bank of the river Gila, running westwardly from the great chain of the Rocky mountains, and falling into the Gulf of California between the thirty-third and thirty-fourth degrees of north latitude. There the travellers discovered remains of extensive works and ruins, covering a square league of ground, in the midst of which was an edifice, called by them the "CASA GRANDE."

Like most of the Indian works, it was built of unburned bricks, and measured about four hundred and fifty feet in length, by two hundred and fifty in breadth. Within this edifice they found traces of five apartments. A wall, broken at intervals by lofty towers, surrounded the building, and appeared to have been designed for defence. The remains of a canal were still perceptible, by which the waters of the Gila had been conveyed to the ruined town.

The neighboring plains were covered (like the ruins I have recently described at Tezcoco and Tezcosingo,) with fragments of obsidian, and glazed and painted pottery; the Indians of the vicinity were found by the explorers to be mild, civil, and intelligent people, *devoted to the cultivation of the soil*, and possessing in no degree the ferocity or savage habits of the Cumanchés or Apachés.

Northwestwardly from Chihuahua, and southwestwardly from these ruins, near the thirtieth degree of latitude, are similar remains; and in the mountains in the latitude of 27° 28', there is a multitude of caverns excavated from the solid rocks, on the sides and walls of which are painted the figures of various animals, and of men and women, in dresses by no means unlike the habiliments of the ancient Mexicans, as depicted in drawings and pictures that have been preserved until our day,

Some of the caves discovered by Father Joseph Rotéa, are described as being thirty feet in length by fifteen in breadth, and are supposed by writers to have been, perhaps, the "*seven abodes*" from which the Mexican tradition describes their ancestors as having issued when they began their emigration.

QUEMADA.

NORTH of the city of Mexico, in the department of Zacatecas, (a country that is supposed to have been inhabited by the Chicimecas and Ottomies at the period of the conquest,) situated on the level of a hill top, which rises out of the plain like another Acropolis, are the extensive remains of an Indian city, known as the "*RUINS OF QUEMADA*."

The northern side of the *cerro* rises with an easy slope from the plain, and is guarded by bastions and a double wall, while, on the other sides, the steep and precipitous rocks of the hill itself, form natural defences. The whole of this elevation is covered with ruins; but on the southern side, chiefly, may be traced the remains of temples, pyramids, and edifices for the priests, cut from the living rock, and rising to the height of from two to four hundred feet above the level of the surrounding country. These rock-built walls are sometimes joined by mortar of no great tenacity, and the stones (many of which are *twenty-two feet in thickness, and of a corresponding height*,) are retained in their positions mainly by their own massiveness.

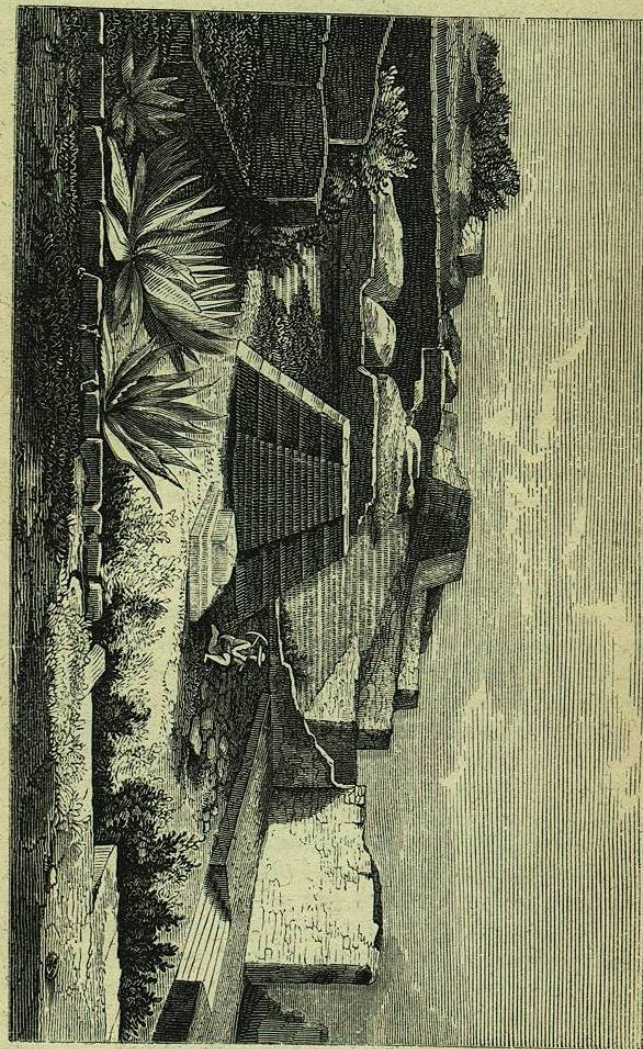
The opposite engraving represents the *patio*, or courtyard of a temple, as drawn by M. Nebel. On the back part of the square is raised the pyramid, or *teocalli*, on which was placed the altar and idol. The stairs behind the *teocalli* conduct to other temples and pyramids beyond, and served, perhaps, as seats for the spectators of the bloody rites that were celebrated by the priests.

The most satisfactory account I have seen of these ruins, is given by Captain Lyon in a volume of his travels in Mexico.

"We set out," says he, "on our expedition to the Cerro de los Edificios, under the guidance of an old ranchero, and soon arrived at the foot of the abrupt and steep rock on which the buildings are situated. Here we perceived two ruined heaps of stones, flanking the entrance to a causeway ninety-three feet broad, commencing at four hundred feet from the cliff.

"A space of about six acres has been inclosed by a broad wall, of which the foundations are still visible, running first to the south and afterward to the east. Off its southwestern angle stands a high mass of stones, which flanks the causeway. In outward appearance it is of a pyramidal form, owing to the quantities of stones piled against it either by design or by its own ruin; but on closer examination its figure could

* This name has been given from that of an adjacent hacienda.



RUINS OF QUEMADA.

be traced by the remains of solid walls, to have been a square of thirty-one feet by the same height: the heap immediately opposite is lower and more scattered, but in all probability formerly resembled it. Hence the grand causeway runs to the northeast until it reaches the ascent of the cliff, which, as I have already observed, is about four hundred yards distant. Here again are found two masses of ruins, in which may be traced the same construction as that before described; and it is not improbable that these two towers guarded the inner entrance to the citadel. In the centre of the causeway, which is raised about a foot and has its rough pavement uninjured, is a large heap of stones, as if the remains of some altar; round which we could trace, notwithstanding the accumulation of earth and vegetation, a paved border of flat slabs arranged in the figure of a six-rayed star.

"We did not enter the city by the principal road, but led our horses with some difficulty up the steep mass formed by the ruins of a defensive wall, inclosing a quadrangle two hundred and forty feet by two hundred, which, to the east, is still sheltered by a strong wall of unhewn stones, eight feet in thickness and eighteen in height. A raised terrace of twenty feet in width passes round the northern and eastern sides of this space, and on its southeast corner is yet standing a round pillar of rough stones, of the same height as the wall, and nineteen feet in circumference.

"There appear to have been five other pillars on the east, and four on the northern terrace; and as the view of the plain which lies to the south and west is hence very extensive, I am inclined to believe that the square has always been open in these directions. Adjoining to this, we entered by the eastern side to another quadrangle, entirely surrounded by perfect walls of the same height and thickness as the former one, and measuring one hundred and fifty-four feet by one hundred and thirty-seven. In this were yet standing fourteen very well-constructed pillars, of equal dimensions with that in the adjoining inclosure, and arranged, four in length and three in breadth of the quadrangle, from which on every side they separated a space of twenty-three feet in width: probably the pavement of a portico of which they once supported the roof. In their construction, as well as that of all the walls which we saw, a common clay having straw mixed with it has been used, and is yet visible in those places which are sheltered from the rains. Rich grass was growing in the spacious court where Aztec monarchs may once have feasted; and our cattle were so delighted with it that we left them to graze while we walked about three hundred yards to the northward, over a very wide parapet, and reached a perfect, square, flat-topped pyramid of large unhewn stones. It was standing unattached to any other buildings, at the foot of the eastern brow of the mountain, which rises abruptly behind it. On the eastern face is a platform of twenty-eight feet in width, faced by a parapet wall of fifteen feet, and from the base of this extends a second platform with a parapet like the former, and one hundred and eighteen feet wide. These form the outer defensive boundary of the mountain,

which from its figure has materially favored their construction. There is every reason to believe that this eastern face must have been of great importance. A slightly raised and paved causeway of about twenty-five feet descends across the valley, in the direction of the rising sun; and being continued on the opposite side of a stream which flows through it, can be traced up the mountains at two miles distance, until it terminates at the base of an immense stone edifice, which probably may also have been a pyramid. Although a stream (Rio del Partido) runs meandering through the plain from the northward, about midway between the two elevated buildings; I can scarcely imagine that the causeway should have been formed for the purpose of bringing water to the city, which is far more easy of access in many other directions much nearer to the river, but must have been constructed for important purposes between the two places in question; and it is not improbable, that it once formed the street between the frail huts of the poorer inhabitants. The base of the large pyramid measured fifty feet, and I ascertained, by ascending with a line, that its height was precisely the same. Its flat top was covered with earth and a little vegetation; and our guide asserted, although he knew not whence he received the information, that it was once surmounted by a statue. Off the southeast corner of this building and at about fifteen yards distant, is to be seen the edge of a circle of stones about eight feet in diameter, inclosing, as far as we could judge on scraping away the soil, a bowl-shaped pit, in which the action of fire was plainly observable; and the earth, from which we picked some pieces of pottery, was evidently darkened by an admixture of soot or ashes. At the distance of one hundred yards southwest of the large pyramid, is a small one, twelve feet square, and much injured. This is situated on somewhat higher ground, in the steep part of the ascent to the mountain's brow. On its eastern face, which is toward the declivity, the height is eighteen feet; and apparently there have been steps by which to descend to a quadrangular space, having a broad terrace round it, and extending east one hundred feet by a width of fifty. In the centre of this inclosure is another bowl-shaped pit, somewhat wider than the first. Hence we began our ascent to the upper works, over a well-buttressed yet ruined wall, built to a certain extent, so as to derive advantage from the natural abruptness of the rock. Its height on the steepest side is twenty-one feet, and the width on the summit, which is level, with an extensive platform, is the same. This is a double wall, one of ten feet having been first constructed, and then covered with a very smooth kind of cement, after which the second has been built against it. The platform (which faces to the south, and may to a certain extent be considered as a ledge from the cliff,) is eighty-nine feet by seventy-two; and on its northern centre stand the ruins of a square building, having within it an open space of ten feet by eight, and of the same depth. In the middle of the quadrangle is to be seen a mound of stones eight feet high. A little farther on, we entered by a broad opening between two perfect and massive walls, to a

square of one hundred and fifty feet. This space was surrounded on the south, east, and west, by an elevated terrace of three feet by twelve in breadth, having in the centre of each side steps, by which to descend to the square. Each terrace was backed by a wall of twenty feet by eight or nine. From the south are two broad entrances, and on the east is one of thirty feet, communicating with a perfect inclosed square of two hundred feet, while on the west is one small opening, leading to an artificial cave or dungeon, of which I shall presently speak.

"To the north, the square is bounded by the steep mountain; and, in the centre of that side, stands a pyramid with seven ledges or stages, which in many places are quite perfect. It is flat-topped, has four sides, and measures at the base thirty-eight by thirty-five feet, while in height it is nineteen. Immediately behind this, and on all that portion of the hill which presents itself to the square, are numerous tiers of seats, either broken in the rock or built of rough stones. In the centre of the square, and due south of the pyramid, is a small quadrangular building, seven feet by five in height. The summit is imperfect, but it has unquestionably been an altar; and from the whole character of the space in which it stands, the peculiar form of the pyramid, the surrounding terrace, and the seats or steps on the mountain, there can be little doubt that this has been the grand Hall of Sacrifice or Assembly, or perhaps both.

"Passing to the westward, we next saw some narrow inclosed spaces, apparently portions of an aqueduct leading from some tanks on the summit of the mountain; and then were shown the mouth of the cave, or subterranean passage, of which so many superstitious stories are yet told and believed. One of the principal objects of our expedition had been to enter this mysterious place, which none of the natives had ever ventured to do, and we came provided with torches for the purpose: unfortunately, however, the mouth had very recently fallen in, and we could merely see that it was a narrow, well-built entrance, bearing in many places the remains of good smooth plastering. A large beam of cedar once supported the roof, but its removal by the country people had caused the dilapidation which we now observed. Mr. Tindal, in knocking out some pieces of regularly burnt brick, soon brought a ruin upon his head, but escaped without injury; and his accident caused a thick cloud of yellow dust to fall, which on issuing from the cave assumed a bright appearance under the full glare of the sun;—an effect not lost upon the natives, who became more than ever persuaded that an immense treasure lay hidden in this mysterious place. The general opinion of those who remember the excavation is, that it was very deep; and, from many circumstances, there is a probability of its having been a place of confinement for victims. Its vicinity to the great hall, in which there can be little doubt that the sanguinary rites of the Mexicans were once held, is one argument in favor of this supposition; but there is another equally forcible—its immediate proximity to a cliff of about one hundred and fifty feet, down which the bodies of victims may have been precipitated, as was the cus-

tom at the inhuman sacrifices of the Aztecs.* A road or causeway, to be noticed in another place, terminates at the foot of this precipice, exactly beneath the cave and overhanging rock; and conjecture can form no other idea of its intended utility, unless as being in some manner connected with the purposes of the dungeon.

"Hence we ascend to a variety of buildings, all constructed with the same regard to strength, and inclosing spaces on far too large a scale for the abode of common people. On the extreme ridge of the mountain were several tolerably perfect tanks.

"In a subsequent visit to this extraordinary place, I saw some other buildings, which had at first escaped my notice. These were situated on the summit of a rock terminating the ridge, at about half a mile to the N. W. of the citadel.

"The first is a building originally eighteen feet square, but having the addition of sloping walls to give it a pyramidal form. It is flat-topped, and on the centre of its southern face there have been steps by which to ascend to the summit. The second is a square altar, its height and base being each about sixteen feet. These buildings are surrounded at no great distance by a strong wall, and at a quarter of a mile to the northward, advantage is taken of a precipice to construct another wall of twelve feet in width upon its brink. On a small flat space, between this and the pyramid, are the remains of an open square edifice, to the southward of which are two long mounds of stone, each extending about thirty feet; and to the northeast is another ruin, having large steps up its side. I should conceive the highest wall of the citadel to be three hundred feet above the plain, and the bare rock surmounts it by about thirty feet more.

"The whole place in fact, from its isolated situation, the disposition of its defensive walls, and the favorable figure of the rock, must have been impregnable to Indians; and even European troops would have found great difficulty in ascending to those works, which I have ventured to name the Citadel. There is no doubt that the greater mass of the nation which once dwelt here, must have been established upon the plain beneath, since from the summit of the rock we could distinctly trace three straight and very extensive causeways, diverging from that over which we first passed. The most remarkable of these runs southwest for two miles, is forty-six feet in width, and, crossing the grand causeway, is continued to the foot of the cliff, immediately beneath the cave which I have described. Its more distant extreme is terminated by a high and long artificial mound, immediately beyond the river, toward the hacienda of La Quemada. We could trace the second, south and southwest to a small rancho named Coyoté, about four miles distant; and the third ran southwest by south, still farther, ceasing, as the country people informed us, at a mountain six miles distant. All these roads had been slightly raised, were

* The writings of Clavigero, Solis, Bernal Diaz, and others, describe this mode of disposing of the bodies of those whose hearts had been torn out and offered to the idol.

paved with rough stones, still visible in many places above the grass, and were perfectly straight.

"From the flatness of the fine plain over which they extended, I cannot conceive them to have been constructed as paths, since the people, who walked barefoot and used no animals of burthen, must naturally have preferred the smooth, earthy footways, which presented themselves on every side, to these roughly paved ones. If this be allowed, it is not difficult to suppose that they were the centre of streets of huts, which, being in those times constructed of the same kind of frail materials as those of the present day, must long since have disappeared. Many places on the plain are thickly strewed with stones, which may once have formed building materials for the town; and there are extensive modern walls round the cattle farms, which, not improbably, were constructed from the nearest streets. At all events, whatever end these causeways may have answered, the citadel itself still remains, and from its size and strength confirms the accounts given by Cortéz, Bernal Diaz, and others of the conquerors, of the magnitude and extent of the Mexican edifices, but which have been doubted by Robertson, De Pau, and others. We observed also, in some sheltered places, the remains of good plaster, confirming the accounts above alluded to; and there can be little doubt that the present rough, yet magnificent buildings, were once encased in wood and whitened, as ancient Mexico, the towns of Yucatan, Tobasco, and many other places are described to have been.*

"The Cerro de los Edificios, and the mountains of the surrounding range, are all of gray porphyry, easily fractured into slabs, and this, with comparatively little labor, has furnished building-materials for the edifices which crown its summit. We saw no remnants of obsidian among the ruins or on the plain—which is remarkable, as being the general substance of which the knives and arrow-heads of the Mexicans were formed;† but a few pieces of a very compact porphyry were lying about, and some appeared to have been chipped to a rude form resembling arrow-heads.

"Not a trace of the ancient name of this interesting place, or that of the nation which inhabited it, is now to be found among the people in the neighborhood, who merely distinguished the isolated rock and buildings by one common name, 'Los Edificios.' I had inquired of the best instructed people about these ruins; but all my researches were unavailing, until I fortunately met with a note in the Abbé Clavigero's History of Mexico, which throws some light on the subject. 'The situation of Chicomoztoc, where the Mexicans sojourned nine years, is not known; but it appears to be that place, twenty miles distant from Zacatecas, toward the south, where there are still some remains of an immense edifice, which, accord-

* See the Voyage of Juan de Grijalva, in 1518; also Bernal Diaz, Cortéz, Clavigero, and others.

† It is not improbable, however, that this material was unknown to the nation who dwelt here, if, according to the Abbé Clavigero, this city was one of the earliest settlements of the Aztecs, before they established themselves in the Valley of Mexico, near which (at Real del Monte principally) the obsidian is found in great abundance, although I believe that no traces of it are seen in the more northern provinces.

ing to the tradition of the Zacatecanos, the ancient inhabitants of that country, was the work of the Aztecs on their migration; and it certainly cannot be ascribed to any other people, the Zacatecanos themselves being so barbarous as neither to live in houses nor to know how to build them.*

MAPILCA.

Following the course of the river Tecolutla from its mouth near Nautla, and directing himself across the Virgin mountains and plains, Mr. Nebel found, at the distance of a few leagues from Papantla, the ruins of a city, near an Indian rancho called Mapilca.

It is impossible, he states, to define precisely the limits of this ancient work, because it is now entirely covered with thick vegetation, and a forest, the silence of which has, perhaps, never been disturbed by an axe. He nevertheless discovered some pyramids, many large sculptured stones, and some other indications of an extensive city and civilized people.



SCULPTURED STONE AT MAPILCA.

* Clavigero, vol. i. book ii. p. 153.—Torquemada says, that the capital city of the Chechemecas was called Amaquemacan. He says this place was 600 miles distant from where the city of Guadalajara now stands. Clavigero, who quotes this passage and comments upon it in a note, remarks that "in more than one thousand two hundred miles of inhabited country beyond that city, there is not the least trace or memory of Amaquemacan." May not the city I have described be the capital in question?