

masters, having a distinct, separate, independent existence; like the plants and fruits of the soil, indigenous.

I shall not attempt to inquire into the origin of this people, from what country they came, or when, or how; I shall confine myself to their works and to the ruins.

I am inclined to think that there are not sufficient grounds for the belief in the great antiquity that has been ascribed to these ruins; that they are not the works of people who have passed away, and whose history has become unknown; but, opposed as is my idea to all previous speculations, that they were constructed by the races who occupied the country at the time of the invasion by the Spaniards, or of some not very distant progenitors.

And this opinion is founded, first, upon the appearance and condition of the remains themselves. The climate and rank luxuriance of soil are most destructive to all perishable materials. For six months every year exposed to the deluge of tropical rains, and with trees growing through the doorways of buildings and on the tops, it seems impossible that, after a lapse of two or three thousand years, a single edifice could now be standing.

The existence of wooden beams, and at Uxmal in a perfect state of preservation, confirms this opinion. The durability of wood will depend upon its quality and exposure. In Egypt, it is true, wood has been discovered sound and perfect, and certainly 3,000 years old; but even in that dry climate none has ever been found in a situation at all exposed. It occurs only in coffins in the tombs and mummy-pits of Thebes, and in wooden cramps connecting two stones together, completely shut in and excluded from the air.

Secondly, my opinion is founded upon historical accounts. Herrera, perhaps the most reliable of the Spanish historians, says of Yucatan: "The whole country is divided into eighteen districts, and in all of them were so many and such stately Stone Buildings that it was amazing, and the greatest Wonder is, that having no Use of any Metal, they were able to raise such Structures, which seem to have been Temples, for their Houses were always of Timber and thatched. In those Edifices were carved the Figures of naked Men, with Earrings after the Indian manner, Idols of all Sorts, Lions, Pots or Jars," &c.; and again, "After the parting of these lords, for the space of twenty years there was such plenty through the Country, and the People multiplied so much, that old Men said the whole Province looked like one Town, and then they applied themselves to build more Temples, which produced so great a number of them."

Of the natives he says, "They flattened their Heads and Foreheads,

their Ears bor'd with Rings in them. Their Faces were generally good, and not very brown, but without Beards, for they scorched them when young, that they might not grow. Their Hair was long like Women, and in Tresses, with which they made a Garland about the Head, and a little Tail hung behind." "The prime Men wore a Rowler eight Fingers broad round about them instead of Breeches, and going several times round the Waist, so that one end of it hung before and the other behind, with fine Feather-work, and had large square Mantles knotted on their Shoulders, and Sandals or Buskins made of Deer's Skins." The reader almost sees here, in the flatted heads and costumes of the natives, a picture of the sculptured and stuccoed figures at Palenque, which, though a little beyond the present territorial borders of Yucatan, was perhaps once a part of that province.

Besides the glowing and familiar descriptions given by Cortez of the splendour exhibited in the buildings of Mexico, I have within my reach the authority of but one eye-witness. It is that of Bernal Diaz de Castillo, a follower and sharer in all the expeditions attending the conquest of Mexico.

Beginning with the first expedition, he says, "On approaching Yucatan, we perceived a large town at the distance of two leagues from the coast, which, from its size, it exceeding any town in Cuba, we named Grand Cairo." Upon the invitation of a chief, who came off in a canoe, they went ashore, and set out to march to the town, but on their way were surprised by the natives, whom, however, they repulsed, killing fifteen. "Near the place of this ambuscade," he says, "were three buildings of lime and stone, wherein were idols of clay with diabolical countenances," &c. "The buildings of lime and stone, and the gold, gave us a high idea of the country we had discovered."

In fifteen days' farther sailing, they discovered from the ships a large town, with an inlet, and went ashore for water. While filling their casks they were accosted by fifty Indians, "dressed in cotton mantles," who "by signs invited us to their town." Proceeding thither, they "arrived at some large and very well-constructed buildings of lime and stone, with figures of serpents and of idols painted upon the walls."

In the second expedition, sailing along the coast, they passed a low island, about three leagues from the main, where, on going ashore, they found "two buildings of lime and stone, well constructed, each with steps, and an altar placed before certain hideous figures, the representations of the gods of these Indians."

His third expedition was under Cortez, and in this his regard for truth and the reliance that may be placed upon him are happily

shown in the struggle between deep religious feeling and belief in the evidence of his senses, which appears in his comment upon Gomara's account of their first battle. "In his account of this action, Gomara says that, previous to the arrival of the main body under Cortez, Francisco de Morla appeared in the field upon a grey dappled horse, and that it was one of the holy apostles, St. Peter or St. Jago, disguised under his person. I say that all our works and victories are guided by the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that in this battle there were so many enemies to every one of us, that they could have buried us under the dust they could have held in their hands, but that the great mercy of God aided us throughout. What Gomara asserts may be the case, and I, sinner as I am, was not permitted to see it. What I did see was Francisco de Morla riding in company with Cortez and the rest, upon a chestnut horse. But although I, unworthy sinner that I am, was unfit to behold either of these apostles, upward of 400 of us were present. Let their testimony be taken. Let inquiry also be made how it happened that, when the town was founded on that spot, it was not named after one or other of these holy apostles, and called St. Jago de la Vittoria or St. Pedro de la Vittoria, as it was Santa Maria, and a church erected and dedicated to one of these holy saints. Very bad Christians were we, indeed, according to the account of Gomara, who, when God sent us his apostles to fight at our head, did not every day after acknowledge and return thanks for so great a mercy!"

Setting out on their march to Mexico, they arrived at Cempoal, entering which, he says, "We were surprised with the beauty of the buildings." "Our advanced guard having gone to the great square, the buildings of which had been lately whitewashed and *plastered, in which art these people are very expert*, one of our horsemen was so struck with the splendour of their appearance in the sun, that he came back in full speed to Cortez to tell him that the walls of the houses were of silver."

As they approached the territory of Mexico, he continues, "Appearances demonstrated that we had entered a new country, for the *temples were very lofty*, and, together with the *terraced dwellings* and the houses of the cacique, being *plastered* and whitewashed, appeared very well, and resembled some of our towns in Spain."

Farther on he says, "We arrived at a kind of fortification, built of *lime and stone*, of so strong a nature that nothing but tools of iron could have any effect upon it. The people informed us that it was built by the Tlascalans, on whose territory it stood, as a defence against the incursions of the Mexicans."

At Tehuacingo, after a sanguinary battle, in which the Indians "drew off and left the field to them, who were too much fatigued to follow," he adds, "As soon as we found ourselves clear of them, we returned thanks to God for his mercy, and, entering a *strong and spacious temple*, we dressed our wounds with the fat of Indians."

Approaching the city of Mexico, he gives way to a burst of enthusiasm. "We could compare it to nothing but the enchanted scenes we had read of in Amadis de Gaul, from the *great towers*, and *temples*, and other *edifices of lime and stone* which seemed to rise up out of the water."

"We were received by great lords of that country, relations of Montezuma, who conducted us to our lodgings there, in *palaces* magnificently built of *stone*, the timber of which was cedar, with *spacious courts* and apartments furnished with canopies of the *finest cotton*. The whole was ornamented with *works of art painted*, and *admirably plastered* and whitened, and it was rendered more delightful by numbers of beautiful birds."

"The palace in which we were lodged was very light, airy, clean, and pleasant, the entry being through a great court."

Montezuma, in his first interview with Cortez, says, "The Tlascalans have, I know, told you that I am like a god, and that all about me is gold, and silver, and precious stones; but you now see that I am mere flesh and blood, and that my *houses are built like other houses, of lime, and stone, and timber*."

"At the great square we were astonished at the crowds of people and the regularity which prevailed, and the vast quantities of merchandise."

"The entire square was enclosed in *piazas*."

"From the square we proceeded to the great temple, but before we entered it we made a circuit through a number of *large courts*, the smallest of which appeared to me to contain more ground than the great square of Salamanca, with double enclosures, *built of lime and stone*, and the *courts* paved with large white *cut stones*, or, where not paved, they were *plastered and polished*."

"The ascent to the great temple was by a *hundred and fourteen steps*."

"From the platform on the summit of the temple, Montezuma, taking Cortez by the hand, pointed out to him the different parts of the city and its vicinity, all of which were commanded from that place." "We observed also the temples and adoratories of the adjacent cities, built in the form of *towers* and *fortresses*, and others on the causeway, all whitewashed and wonderfully brilliant."

"The noise and bustle of the market-place could be heard almost a league off, and those who had been at Rome and Constantinople said that for convenience, regularity, and population they had never seen the like."

During the siege he speaks of being "quartered in a lofty temple;" "marching up the steps of the temple;" "some lofty temples which we now battered with our artillery;" "the lofty temples where Diego Velasquez and Salvatierra were posted;" "the breaches which they had made in the walls;" "cut stone taken from the buildings from the terraces."

Arrived at the great temple, instantly above 4,000 Mexicans rushed up into it, who for some time prevented them from ascending. "Although the cavalry several times attempted to charge, the stone pavements of the courts of the temple were so smooth that the horses could not keep their feet, and fell." "Their numbers were such that we could not make any effectual impression or ascend the steps. At length we forced our way up. Here Cortez showed himself the man that he really was. What a desperate engagement we then had! Every man of us was covered with blood."

"They drove us down six, and even ten of the steps; while others who were in the corridors, or within side of the railings and concavities of the great temple, shot such clouds of arrows at us that we could not maintain our ground," "began our retreat, every man of us being wounded, and forty-six of us left dead on the spot. I have often seen this engagement represented in the paintings of the natives both of Mexico and Tlascala, and our ascent into the great temple."

"We proceeded to another town called Terrayuco, but which we named the town of the serpents, on account of the enormous figures of those animals which we found in their temples, and which they worshipped as gods."

Again: "In this garden our whole force lodged for the night. I certainly never had seen one of such magnificence; and Cortez and the treasurer Alderete, after they had walked through and examined it, declared that it was admirable, and equal to any they had ever seen in Castille."

"I and ten more soldiers were posted as a guard upon a wall of lime and stone."

"When we arrived at our quarters at Jacuba it rained heavily, and we remained under it for two hours in some large enclosed courts. The general, with his captains, the treasurer, our reverend father, and many others of us, mounted to the top of the temple, which commanded all the lake."

"We crossed the water up to our necks at the pass they had left open, and followed them until we came to a place where were large temples and towers of idols."

"As Cortez now lodged at Cuejoacan, in large buildings with white walls, very well adapted for scribbling on, there appeared every morning libels against him in prose and verse. I recollect the words of one only:—

'Que trista esta el alma mea
Hasta que la parte vea.'

How anxious I am for a share of the plunder."

"When our party (for I went with Sandoval) arrived at Tustepeque, I took up my lodgings in the summit of a tower in a very high temple, partly for the fresh air and to avoid the mosquitoes, which were very troublesome below, and partly to be near Sandoval's quarters." "We pursued our route to the city of Chiapas, in the same province with Palenque, and a city it might be called, from the regularity of its streets and houses. It contained not less than 4,000 families, not reckoning the population of the many dependent towns in its neighbourhood." "We found the whole force of Chiapas drawn up to receive us. Their troops were adorned with plumage."

"On our arrival we found it too closely built to be safely occupied by us, and we therefore pitched our camp in the open field. In their temples we found idols of a horrid figure."

Now it will be recollected that Bernal Diaz wrote to do justice to himself and others of the "true conquerors," his companions in arms, whose fame had been obscured by other historians not actors and eye-witnesses; all his references to building are incidental; he never expected to be cited as authority upon the antiquities of the country. The pettiest skirmish with the natives was nearer his heart than all the edifices of lime and stone which he saw, and it is precisely on that account that his testimony is the more valuable. It was written at a time when there were many living who could contradict him if incorrect or false. His "true history" never was impeached; on the contrary, while its style was considered rude and inelegant, its fidelity and truth have been acknowledged by all contemporaneous and subsequent historians. In my opinion it is as true and reliable as any work of travels on the countries through which he fought his way. It gives the hurried and imperfect observations of an unlettered soldier, whose sword was seldom in its scabbard, surrounded by dangers, attacking, retreating, wounded, and flying, with his mind constantly occupied by matters of more pressing moment.

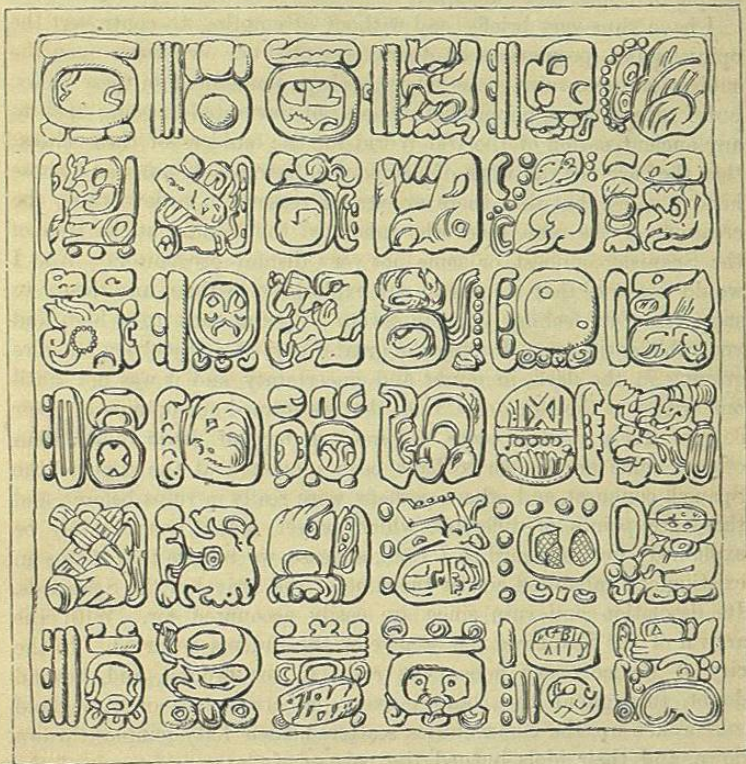
The reader cannot fail to be struck with the general resemblance

between the objects described by him and the scenes referred to in these pages. His account presents to my mind a vivid picture of the ruined cities which we visited, as they once stood, with *buildings of lime and stone, painted and sculptured ornaments, and plastered; idols, courts, stone walls, and lofty temples with high ranges of steps.*

But if this be not sufficient, I have farther and stronger support. After the siege of Mexico, on the re-entry of the Spaniards, a ruthless and indiscriminate destruction fell upon every building and monument in the city. No memorials of the arts of the Mexicans were left; but in the year 1790, two statues and a flat stone, with sculptured characters relative to the Mexican calendar, were discovered and dug up from among the remains of the great Teocalli in the plaza of the city of Mexico. The statues excited great interest among the Mexican Indians, and the priests, afraid of their relapsing into idolatry, and to destroy all memorials of their ancient rites, buried them in the court of the Franciscan convent. The calendar was fixed in a conspicuous place in the wall of the Cathedral, where it now stands. In the centre, and forming the principal subject of this calendar, is a face, published in Humboldt's work, which in one particular bears so strong a resemblance to that called the mask, in Plate No. 72 of this volume, as to suggest the idea that they were intended for the same. There are palpable differences, but perhaps the expression of the eyes is changed and improved in the engraving published, and, at all events, in both the peculiar and striking feature is that of the tongue hanging out of the mouth. The calendar is in bas-relief, and the sculpture is very good.*

And, lastly, among the hieroglyphical paintings which escaped destruction from monkish fanaticism are certain Mexican manuscripts now in the libraries of Dresden and Vienna. These have been published in Humboldt's work, and in that of Lord Kingsborough, and, on a careful examination, we are strongly of the opinion that the characters are the same with those found on the monuments and tablets at Copan and Palenque. For the sake of comparison I have introduced again the engraving No. 82, of the top of the altar at Copan, and another from a hieroglyphical manuscript published in Humboldt's work. Differences, it is true, are manifest; but it must be borne in mind that in the former the characters are carved on stone, and in the latter written on paper (made of the Agave Mexicana). Probably, for this reason, they want the same regularity and finish; but, altogether, the reader cannot fail to mark the strong similarity, and this similarity cannot be accidental. The inference is, that the Aztecs or Mexicans,

* Vues de las Cordilleras, vol. xiii. p. 276.



at the time of the conquest, had the same written language with the people of Copan and Palenque.

I have thus very briefly, and without attempting to controvert the opinions and speculations of others, presented our own views upon the subject of these ruins. As yet we perhaps stand alone in these views, but I repeat my opinion, that we are not warranted in going back to any ancient nation of the Old World for the builders of these cities; that they are not the work of people who have passed away and whose history is lost, but that there are strong reasons to believe them the creations of the same races who inhabited the country at the time of the Spanish conquest, or some not very distant progenitors. And I would remark, that we began our exploration without any theory to support. Our feelings were in favour of going back to a high and venerable antiquity. During the greater part of our journey we were groping in the dark, in doubt and uncertainty, and it was not until our arrival at the ruins of Uxmal that we formed our opinion of their comparatively modern date. Some are beyond doubt older than others; some are known to have been inhabited at the time of the Spanish conquest, and others, perhaps, were really in ruins before; and there are points of difference which as yet cannot very readily be explained; but in regard to Uxmal, at least, we believe that it was an existing and inhabited city at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards. Its desolation and ruin since are easily accounted for. With the arrival of the Spaniards the sceptre of the Indians departed. In the city of Mexico every house was razed to the ground, and, beyond doubt, throughout the country every gathering-place or stronghold was broken up, the communities scattered, their lofty temples thrown down, and their idols burned, the palaces of the caciques ruined, the caciques themselves made bondmen; and, by the same ruthless policy which from time immemorial has been pursued in a conquered country, all the mementoes of their ancestors and lost independence were destroyed or made odious in their eyes. And, without this, we have authentic accounts of great scourges which swept over, and for a time depopulated and desolated, the whole of Yucatan.

It perhaps destroys much of the interest that hangs over these ruins to assign to them a modern date; but we live in an age whose spirit is to discard phantasms and arrive at truth, and the interest lost in one particular is supplied in another scarcely inferior; for, the nearer we can bring the builders of these cities to our own times, the greater is our chance of knowing all. Throughout the country the convents are rich in manuscripts and documents written by the early fathers, caciques, and Indians, who very soon acquired the knowledge of

Spanish and the art of writing. These have never been examined with the slightest reference to this subject; and I cannot help thinking that some precious memorial is now mouldering in the library of a neighbouring convent, which would determine the history of some one of these ruined cities; moreover, I cannot help believing that the tablets of hieroglyphics will yet be read. No strong curiosity has hitherto been directed to them; vigour and acuteness of intellect, knowledge and learning, have never been expended upon them. For centuries the hieroglyphics of Egypt were inscrutable, and, though not perhaps in our day, I feel persuaded that a key surer than that of the Rosetta stone will be discovered. And if only three centuries have elapsed since any one of these unknown cities was inhabited, the race of the inhabitants is not extinct. Their descendants are still in the land, scattered, perhaps, and retired, like our own Indians, into wildernesses which have never yet been penetrated by a white man, but not lost; living as their fathers did, erecting the same buildings of "lime and stone," "with ornaments of sculpture and plastered," "large courts," and "lofty towers with high ranges of steps," and still carving on tablets of stone the same mysterious hieroglyphics; and if, in consideration that I have not often indulged in speculative conjecture, the reader will allow one flight, I turn to that vast and unknown region, untraversed by a single road, wherein fancy pictures that mysterious city seen from the topmost range of the Cordilleras, of unconquered, unvisited, and unsought aboriginal inhabitants.

In conclusion, I am at a loss to determine which would be the greatest enterprise,—an attempt to reach this mysterious city, to decipher the tablets of hieroglyphics, or to wade through the accumulated manuscripts of three centuries in the libraries of the convents.