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RUINS IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

ANCIENT MONUMENT AT COPAN.

Mr. Stephens's new work, intitled "Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan."

[From an American Paper.]

We have no hesitation in saying that this is decidedly the most interesting work that has issued from the American press during the present season.

Mr. Stephens being entrusted by the President of America with a confidential mission to Central America, took his departure on the 3rd of October, 1839. After an absence of ten months he returned, having in the meantime made extensive personal explorations, and collected a mass of information respecting that country which forms the material of the present work, and which will make Central America and the other countries through which he travelled a marvel and a wonder through succeeding ages.

Among the most interesting discoveries made during his journeyings, are the wonderful remains of ancient edifices, the moss-covered ruins of cities long since gone to forgetfulness, the relics of by-gone generations, which everywhere met

his eyes. Representations of these were made by Mr. Catherwood, and nearly an hundred beautiful steel engravings of them accompany these magnificent volumes. Among them are the drawings of temples and palaces, colossal statues of the most singular and elaborate workmanship, altars, tablets, and hieroglyphics, and figures and groups of all kinds in relief. These are evidently the workmanship of a people who once were numerous, powerful, far advanced in the arts, and who have yet left behind them the mere foot-prints of their wondrous march through the ages, and have gone down to the graves of nations leaving no sign whereby their history may be known. Strange and awe-inspiring fate! An individual of humble station goes to the grave and is soon forgotten; one of the earth's great men, who may have scourged or blessed her by his presence, steps into the common tomb, and the noise of his tread sounds for some generations along the aisles of the mighty temple where the world worships; but that a nation of breathing men, bound together by bonds of affection, of law, of religion, combining their might for the same ends,

and having but one heart-beat sending its life and love through their farthest extremities, and sounding the same note of glory and of greatness all over the land, should be whelmed in the mighty ocean, and, like some majestic ship, settling in the face of a bright and smiling heaven calmly down into still unruffled depths of the sea, be no more heard from for ever—is something which the mind cannot fully grasp nor dwell upon without being filled with wonder and awe. What shall endure if a nation perish? What man may hope for an unfading remembrance when a nation's very name has perished with her people?

In a chapter near the conclusion of his work, Mr. Stephens advances the opinion that these cities were built by the races who occupied the country at the time of its invasion by the Spaniards, and he supports this belief by the condition of the remains themselves, which he thinks are much more perfect than they could have been after a lapse of two or three thousand years, since the climate and atmosphere are most destructive to all perishable materials; but mainly by reference to the historical account of Herrera, Bernal Diaz, and certain manuscripts found in the libraries at Dresden and Vienna. This conclusion he regards as far more interesting and wonderful than that of connecting the builders of these cities with the Egyptians or any other ancient people. It presents the spectacle, he says, of a people skilled in architecture, sculpture, and drawing, and possessing the cultivation and refinement attendant upon these arts, not derived from the Old World, but originating and growing up here, without models or masters, having a distinct, separate, independent existence: like the plants and fruits of the soil, indigenous.

Beside the description of the remarkable monuments and other remains found in these countries, and the brief speculation touching their age and the origin of the race by which they were produced, a large portion of the work is made up of lively and graphic sketches of the country explored, with curious and

highly instructive details of their social and political condition, including a full and interesting account of the civil war so recently brought to a close by the triumph of the Indian Carrera and the expulsion of Gen. Morazan, late President of the Central Republic. Other matters in rich variety are comprised among the contents; valuable observations relating to the social and general improvement of the country, notices of the character of the inhabitants of the country, and all kindred topics are abundant and entertaining. But we have little doubt that by far the most attractive portion of the book, with all classes of readers, will be the personal narrative of Mr. Stephens—the history of his own encounters with strange incidents and stranger people—his escapes from difficulties, some of them trying and vexatious enough, and his observations of men and character and natural scenery wherever he went. Anecdotes of his personal adventures are abundant—some humorous, others tragic, and all of them intensely interesting. Mr. Stephens's style is peculiarly adapted to narrative; it is lively, unambitious, and though not always scrupulously elegant, is yet never unpleasing.

He has a quick and close observation, great skill in seizing upon the prominent points of any incident and presenting them in a bold, easy, life-like attitude, and excels especially in these off-hand sketches of passing events.

While we thus cheerfully acknowledge the high gratification we have derived from a perusal of Mr. Steven's work, we cannot withhold our warm commendation of the style in which it has been issued by the spirited publishers. In every respect it is one of the most creditable works that have ever been published in America.

The column or monument, discovered at Copan, is thus described by Mr. Stephens:—

“At a short distance from the temple, within terraced walls, probably once connected with the main building, are the ‘idols’ which give the distinctive character to the ruins of Copan. Near

as they are, the forest was so dense that one could not be seen from the other. In order to ascertain their juxtaposition, we cut vistas through the trees, and took the bearings and distance; and I introduce them in the order in which they stand. The first is on the left of the pathway. This statue is fallen and the face destroyed. It is twelve feet high, three feet three inches on one side, and four feet on the other. The altar is sunk in the earth.

"Toward the south, at a distance of fifty feet, is a mass of fallen sculpture, with an altar; and at ninety feet distance is a statue, standing with its front to the east, twelve feet high and three feet square, on an oblong pedestal seven feet in front and six feet two inches on the sides.— Before it, at a distance of eight feet three inches, is an altar, five feet eight inches long, three feet eight inches broad, and four feet high.

"The face of this 'idol' is decidedly that of a man. The beard is of a curious fashion, and joined to the mustache and hair. The ears are large, though not resembling nature; the expression is grand, the mouth partly open, and the eye-balls seem starting from their sockets. The intention of the sculptor seems to have been to excite terror. The feet are ornamented with sandals, probably of the skins of some wild animal, in the fashion of that day.

"The back of this monument contrasts remarkably with the horrible portrait in front. It has nothing grotesque or pertaining to the rude conceits of Indians, but is noticeable for its extreme grace and beauty. In our daily walks we often stopped to gaze at it, and the more we gazed the more it grew upon us. Others seem intended to inspire terror, and, with their altars before them, sometimes suggested the idea of a blind, bigotted, and superstitious people, and sacrifices of human victims. This always left a pleasing impression; and there was a higher interest, for we considered that in its medallion tablets the people who reared it had published a record of themselves, through which we might one day hold conference with a

perished race, and unveil the mystery that hung over the city."

On the general subject of the ruins of Copan, Mr. Stephens remarks as follows:—

"The wall was of cut stone, well laid, and in a good state of preservation. We ascended by large stone steps, in some places perfect, and in others thrown down by trees which had grown up between the crevices, and reached a terrace, the form of which it was impossible to make out, from the density of the forest in which it was enveloped. Our guide cleared a way with his matchete, and we passed, as it lay half buried in the earth, a large fragment of stone elaborately sculptured, and came to the angle of a structure with steps on the sides, in form and appearance, so far as the trees would enable us to make it out, like the sides of a pyramid. Diverging from the base, and working our way through the thick woods, we came upon a square stone column, about fourteen feet high and three feet on each side, sculptured in very bold relief, and on all four of the sides, from the base to the top. The front was the figure of a man curiously and richly dressed, and the face, evidently a portrait, solemn, stern, and well fitted to excite terror.— The back was of a different design, unlike any thing we had ever seen before, and the sides were covered with hieroglyphics. This our guide called an 'idol' and before it, at a distance of three feet, was a large block of stone, also sculptured with figures and emblematical devices, which he called an altar. The sight of this unexpected monument put at rest at once and for ever, in our minds, all uncertainty in regard to the character of American antiquities, and gave us the assurance that the subjects we were in search of were interesting, not only as the remains of an unknown people, but as works of art, proving like newly-discovered historical records, that the people who once occupied the Continent of America were not savages. With an interest perhaps stronger than we had ever felt in wandering among the ruins of Egypt, we followed our guide, who

sometimes missing his way, with a constant and vigorous use of his matchete, conducted us through the thick forest, among half-buried fragments, to fourteen monuments of the same character and appearance, some with more elegant designs, and some in workmanship equal to the finest monuments of the Egyptians; one displaced from its pedestal by enormous roots; another locked in the close embrace of branches of trees, and almost lifted out of the earth; another hurled to the ground, and bound down by huge vines and creepers; and one standing with its altar before it, in a grove of trees which grew around it, seemingly to shade and shroud it as a sacred thing; in the solemn stillness of the woods, it seemed a divinity mourning over a fallen people. The only sounds that disturbed the quiet of this buried city were the noise of monkeys moving among the tops of trees, and the cracking of dry branches broken by their weight. They moved over our heads in long and swift processions, forty or fifty at a time, some with little ones wound in their long arms, walking out to the end of boughs, and holding on with their hind feet or a curl of the tail, sprang to a branch of the next tree, and, with a noise like a current of wind, passed on in the depths of the forest. It was the first time we had seen these mockeries of humanity, and with the strange monuments around us, they seemed like wandering spirits of the departed race guarding the ruins of their former habitations.

"We returned to the base of the pyramidal structure, and ascended by regular stone steps, in some places forced apart by bushes and saplings, and in others thrown down by the growth of large trees, while some remained entire. In parts they were ornamented with sculptured figures and rows of death's heads. Climbing over the ruined top, we reached a terrace overgrown with trees, and crossing it, descended by stone steps into an area so covered with trees that at first we could not make out its form, but which, on clearing the way with the matchete, we ascertained to be a square, and with steps on all sides al-

most as perfect as the Roman amphitheatre. The steps were ornamented with sculpture, and on the south side, about half way up, forced out of its place by roots, was a colossal head, evidently a portrait. We ascended these steps, and reached a broad terrace a hundred feet high, overlooking the river, supported by the wall which we had seen from the opposite bank. The whole terrace was covered with trees, and even at this height from the ground were two gigantic ceibas or wild cotton trees of India, above twenty feet in circumference, extending their half-naked roots fifty to a hundred feet around, binding down the ruins, and shading them with their wide spreading branches.

"We sat down on the very edge of the wall, and strove in vain to penetrate the mystery by which we were surrounded. Who were the people that built this city? In the ruined cities of Egypt, even in the long-lost Petra, the stranger knows the story of the people whose vestiges are around him. America, say historians, was peopled by savages; but savages never reared these structures, savages never carved these stones. We asked the Indians who made them, and their dull answer was 'Quien sabe?' 'Who knows?'

"There were no associations connected with the place; none of those stirring recollections which hallow Rome, Athens, and

'The world's great mistress on the Egyptian plain;'

but architecture, sculpture, and painting, all the arts which embellish life, had flourished in this overgrown forest; orators, warriors, and statesmen, beauty, ambition, and glory, had lived and passed away, and none knew that such things had been or could tell of their past existence. Books, the records of knowledge, are silent on this theme. The city was desolate. No remnant of this race hangs round the ruins, with traditions, handed down from father to son, and from generation to generation. It lay before us like a shattered bark in the midst of the ocean, her masts gone, her name effaced, her crew perished,

and none to tell whence she came, to whom she belonged, how long on her voyage, or what caused her destruction; her lost people to be traced only by some fancied resemblance in the construction of the vessel, and, perhaps, never to be known at all. The place where we sat, was it a citadel from which an unknown people had sounded the trumpet of war? or a temple for the worship of the God of peace? or did the inhabitants worship the idols made with their own hands, and offer sacrifices on the stones before them? All was mystery, dark, impenetrable mystery, and every circumstance increased it. In Egypt the colossal skeletons of gigantic temples stand in the unwatered sands in all the nakedness of desolation; here an immense forest shrouded the ruins, hiding them from sight, heightening the impression and moral effect, and giving an intensity and almost wildness to the interest."

We publish the foregoing for the purpose of giving our readers some ideas of the antiquities of the Nephites—of their ancient cities, temples, monuments, towers, fortifications, and inscriptions now in ruin amid the solitude of an almost impenetrable forest; but fourteen hundred years since, in the days of Mormon, they were the abodes of thousands and millions of human beings, and the centre of civil and military operations unsurpassed in any age or country.

What a satisfaction it is for the lovers of intelligence to realize, that while the minds of Mr. Stephens and many others of the learned world have been and still are enveloped in mystery, impenetrable, dark, and drear on the subject of ancient America; and while they contemplate the ruins of a nation, whose very name they say is lost in oblivion, and whose history they say has not come down to us; we have their entire history,—their origin, laws, government, religion, wars, and lastly their destruction; lately discovered in their own hand-writing, unfolded by the power of him whose "spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God"—by him who has declared that there is nothing secret that shall not be

revealed, and nothing hid that shall not be known, and come abroad, and that this history is now extensively published on both sides of the Atlantic, and tens of thousands of copies of it are multiplied and scattered among the people.

The "mystery" which Mr. Stephens and the wise men of Babylon acknowledge themselves entirely unable to fathom, has, by a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, been opened, brought forth from amid the mouldering archives and sepulchral ruins of a nation and a country before unknown to the other parts of the world. It is a striking and extraordinary coincidence, that, in the Book of Mormon, commencing page 563, there is an account of many cities as existing among the Nephites on the "narrow neck of land which connected the north country with the south country;" and Mormon names a number of them, which were strongly fortified, and were the theatres of tremendous battles, and that finally the Nephites were destroyed or driven to the northward, from year to year, and their towns and country made most desolate, until the remnant became extinct on the memorable heights of Cumorah (now western New York),—I say it is remarkable that Mr. Smith, in translating the Book of Mormon from 1827 to 1830, should mention the names and circumstances of those towns and fortifications in this very section of country, where a Mr. Stephens, ten years afterwards, penetrated a dense forest, till then unexplored by modern travellers, and actually finds the ruins of those very cities mentioned by Mormon.

The nameless nation of which he speaks were the Nephites.

The lost record for which he mourns is the *Book of Mormon*.

The architects, orators, statesmen, and generals, whose works and monuments he admires, are, *Alma, Moroni, Helaman, Nephi, Mormon*, and their cotemporaries.

The very cities whose ruins are in his estimation without a name, are called in the Book of Mormon, "Teancum, Boaz, Jordan, Desolation," &c.