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The Nation in a Nutshell

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THE NATION IN A NUTSHELL

AN OUTLINE OF

AMERICAN HISTORY.

I.

AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES.

[Sidenote: Geology and Archaeology.]

The sciences of geology and archaeology, working side by side, have made a wonderful progress in the past half a century. The one, seeking for the history and transformations of the physical earth, and the other, aiming to discover the antiquity, differences of race, and social and ethnical development of man, have obtained results which we cannot regard without amazement and more or less incredulity. The two sciences have been faithful handmaidens the one to the other; but geology has always led the way, and archaeology has been compelled to follow in its path.

[Sidenote: Four Eras of Civilization.]

Though we may doubt as to the exactness of the detailed data established by the archaeologists, there are certain broad facts which we must accept from them as established beyond doubt. These facts are of the highest value and interest. The antiquary has been able, from discovered remains of extinct civilizations, to reconstruct societies and peoples, and to trace the occupancy of countries to periods far anterior to that of which history takes cognizance. The general fact seems to be settled that, in prehistoric times, Europe passed through four distinct eras. These were the Rude Stone Age, when man was the contemporary in Europe of the extinct hairy elephant and the cave bear; the Polished Stone Age; the Bronze Age, when bronze was used for arms and utensils; and the Iron Age, in which iron superseded bronze in the making of useful articles.

[Sidenote: Ancient America.]

In the same way it has been established that, on our own continent, the oldest discoverable civilization was one in which rude stone implements were used, and man lived contemporaneously

with the megatherium and the mastodon. Then polished and worked stone implements came into use; and after the lapse of ages, copper. The researches of our antiquaries have rendered it probable that America is as ancient, as an inhabited continent, as Europe. Evidences have been brought to light, leading to the conclusion that many thousands of years before the Christian era, America was the seat of a civilization far from rude or savage. Groping into the remains of the far past, we find skeletons, skulls, implements of war, and even basket-work, buried in geological strata, which have been overlaid by repeated convulsions and changes of the physical earth. But so few are the relics of this dim, primeval period, that we can only conclude its antiquity, and we can infer little or nothing of its characteristics.

[Sidenote: Primeval Races.]

Advancing, however, another stage in research and discovery, we come upon clear and overwhelming proofs of the existence on this continent of a great, enterprising, skilful, and even artistic people, spread over an immense area, and leaving behind them the most positive testimony, not only of their existence, but of their manners and customs, their arts, their trade, their methods of warfare, and their religion and worship. Compared with this people, the Red Indians found here by the Pilgrims and the Cavaliers were modern intruders upon the land. These ancient Americans, indeed, were far superior in all respects to the Red Indian of our historic acquaintance. When the Red Indians replaced them, the civilization of the continent fell from a high to a much lower plane.

[Sidenote: The Mound-Builders.]

The great race of which I speak is known as "the Mound-Builders." Like the "Wall-Builders" of Greece and Italy, they stand out, in the light of their remains, as distinctly as if we had historical records of them. The Mound-Builders occupied, often in thickly settled communities, the region about our great Northern Lakes, the valleys of the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Missouri, and the regions watered by the affluents of these rivers, and a wide and irregular belt along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. There is little or no evidence that the same race inhabited any part of the country now

occupied by the Eastern and Middle States; but some few traces of them are found in North and South Carolina.

[Sidenote: Ancient Mounds.]

The chief relics left by this comparatively polished race are the very numerous mounds, or artificial hills, found scattered over the country. These are sometimes ten, and sometimes forty and fifty, feet in height, with widely varying bases. They present many forms; they are circular and pyramidal, square and polygonal, and in some places are manifestly imitations of the shapes of beasts, birds, and human beings. There are districts where hundreds of these mounds appear within a limited area. Sometimes—as at Aztalan, in Wisconsin, and at Newark, in the Licking Valley—a vast series of earthwork enclosures is discovered, sometimes with embankments twelve feet high and fifty broad, within which are variously shaped mounds, definitely formed avenues, and passages and ponds. These enclosures amply prove, aside from the geological evidences of their antiquity, the existence of a race very different from the Red Indians. They were clearly a people not nomadic, but with fixed settlements, cultivators of the soil, and skilful in the art of military defence.

[Sidenote: Altars and Temples.]

The excavations of the wonderful mounds have brought to light many things more curious than the mounds themselves. It seems to be established that the mounds were used for four distinct purposes. They were altars for sacrifice, and, like the Persians, whose sacrificial ceremonies strikingly resembled those of the Mound-Builders, they were sun-worshippers. They offered up the most costly gifts, and even human victims. The pyramidal mounds, with avenues leading to the summits, were the sites of the stately sun and moon temples. Here, undoubtedly, imposing ceremonies were often performed. The lower or "knoll" mounds were used as the sepulchres of the dead. They yield up to the modern antiquary numberless skulls, of a type distinctly different from those of the Red Indians. The Mound-Builders buried their dead, most often, in a sitting posture, adorned with shell beads and ivory ornaments. Sometimes the dead were burned. Finally, the mounds were employed as points of observation.

[Sidenote: Relics of the Mounds.]

[Sidenote: Early Arts.]

That the Mound-Builders were a far more civilized race than the Indians is clearly revealed by the relics found in and about the mounds. They have left behind them thousands of flint arrow-heads, many of beautiful workmanship. They used spades, rimmers, borers, celts, axes, fleshers, scrapers, pestles, and other implements whose use cannot now be determined, made of various stones, such as porphyry, greenstone, and feldspar. They knew well the use of tobacco, for among their most artistic and elaborately carved remains are pipes, some of them representing animals and human heads. It seems to be certain that they had even attained the art of weaving cloth fabrics; for pieces of cloth, of a material akin to hemp, have been found in the mounds, with uniform and regularly spun threads, and every evidence that they were woven by some deft invention or mechanical device. It is certain that the Red Indian was ignorant of this valuable art.

[Sidenote: Primeval Mining.]

Among the highly wrought remains of the mounds are fanciful water-jugs, well carved and symmetrical in shape, some of which were evidently made to keep water cool. The human heads represented on these bear no resemblance to the Indian types. Drinking cups with carved rims and handles, sepulchral urns with curious ornaments, kettles and other pieces of skilful pottery, copper chisels, axes, knives, awls, spear and arrow heads, and even bracelets, come to light, here and there. There is no doubt that the Mound-Builders were miners. For, on the southern shores of Lake Superior, great excavations indicate an extensive and skilful mining of copper at a very remote period. It is singular, on the other hand, that no iron implement has ever been discovered in the mounds. The builders used iron-ore as a stone, but never learned the art of moulding it into weapons or utensils.

Thus the fact that vast areas of what are now the United States were once occupied by an active, skilful, imaginative, and progressive race, seems fully established. Not less certain is it that in their physical type, in their government, in their arts, habits, and daily pursuits, they were separated by a wide gap from the Red Indians

whom our ancestors found in possession of the continent. The Indian was roving, and hunted for subsistence. The Mound-Builders were sedentary, and undoubtedly cultivated maize as their chief article of food.

[Sidenote: Origin of the Mound-Builders.]

But how remote the Mound-Builders were from the era of European settlement, whence they came; how, whither, and when they vanished,—these are questions before which science stands harassed, impotent to answer positively. There are those who, marking certain apparent resemblances between the implements, religious rites and customs, and cranial formations, of the Mound-Builders, and those of the Asiatic Mongols, conclude that the former were originally Asiatic hordes, who, crossing Behring Straits, when, perhaps, the two continents were united at that point, formed a new home and established a new empire here. Others, with more proof, connect them with that great Toltec race which occupied Central America and Mexico, before they were driven out by the ruder and more warlike Aztecs.

[Sidenote: The Aztecs.]

The Toltecs have left ample records of their existence and gorgeous civilization, in noble monuments and very numerous though till recently undecipherable inscriptions; and many similarities lend weight to the theory that the empire of the Mound-Builders, in the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri valleys, was the result of a great Toltec migration from Central America, which they left to Aztec dominion. Thus while we call our continent the "New World," it is not improbable that we may be living in a country which was alive with art, splendor, invention, and power, when Europe was a dreary waste, over which the now extinct monsters roamed unmolested by man.

II.

THE ERA OF DISCOVERY.

[Sidenote: Historic Myths.]

We live in times when the researches of scholars are minute, pitiless, and exhaustive, and when no hitherto received historical fact is permitted to escape the ordeal of the most critical scrutiny. Many are the cherished historical beliefs which have latterly been assailed with every resource of logical argument and formidably arrayed proofs, unearthed by tireless diligence and pursuit. Thus we are told that the story of William Tell is a romantic myth; that Lucretia Borgia, far from being a poisoner and murderess, was really a very estimable person; and that the siege of Troy was a very insignificant struggle, between armies counted, not by thousands, but by hundreds.

In the same way the old familiar question, "Who discovered America?" which every school-boy was formerly as prompt to answer as to his age and name, has in recent years become a perplexing problem of historical disputation; and at least can no longer be accurately answered by the name of the gallant and courageous Genoese who set forth across the Atlantic in 1492.

[Sidenote: Icelandic Discoverers.]

Bancroft, on the first page of his history, pronounces the story of the discovery of our country by the Icelandic Northmen, a narrative "mythological in form and obscure in meaning"; and adds that "no clear historical evidence establishes the natural probability that they accomplished the passage." But the first volume of Bancroft was published in 1852. Since then, the proofs of the discovery of the continent by the Icelanders, very nearly five hundred years before Columbus was thrilled with the delight of beholding the Bahamas, have multiplied and grown to positive demonstration. They no longer rest upon vague traditions; they have assumed the authority of explicit and well attested records.

[Sidenote: Discoverers of America.]

The discovery of the New England coast by the Icelanders is the earliest which, down to the present, can be positively asserted. But it has been recently urged that there are some evidences of American discovery by Europeans or Asiatics long prior to Leif Erikson. There are certain indications that the Pacific coast was reached by

Chinese adventurers in the remote past; and it is stated that proofs exist in Brazil tending to show that South America was discovered by Phoenicians five hundred years before Christ. The story is said to be recorded on some brass tablets found in northern Brazil, which give the number of the vessels and crews, state Sidon as the port to which the voyagers belonged, and even describe their route around the Cape of Good Hope and along the west coast of Africa, whence the trade-winds drifted them across the Atlantic.

[Sidenote: Icelandic Voyagers.]

Confining ourselves to credible history, it appears that in the year 986 (eighty years before the conquest of England by William of Normandy), an Icelandic mariner named Bjarne Herrjulsón, making for Greenland in his rude bark, was swept across the Atlantic, and finally found himself cast upon dry land. He made haste to set sail on his return voyage, and succeeded in getting safely back to Iceland. He told his story of the strange land beyond the seas; and so pleased had he been with its pleasant and fruitful aspect that he named it "Vineland."

[Sidenote: Leif Erikson.]

The story of Bjarne impressed itself upon an intelligent and adventurous man, Leif Erikson; who, having purchased Bjarne's ship, set sail for Vineland in the year 1000, with a crew of thirty-five men. He reached what is now Cape Cod, and passed the winter of 1000-1 on its shores. Returning to Iceland, his example was followed, two years later, by another Erikson, who established a colony on the shores of Narragansett Bay, not far from Fall River, where the founder died and was buried.

[Sidenote: Columbus in Iceland.]

It is well nigh certain that Christopher Columbus, in the year 1477, visited Iceland, and even sailed one hundred leagues beyond it, discovering there an unfrozen sea. The idea of western discovery was already in his mind, and he had received hints of a western continent, from certain carved objects picked up in the Atlantic by other navigators. It is altogether probable that the conjectures of Columbus were confirmed into conviction by the Icelandic traditions of Leif's discovery, during his sojourn at Rejkjavik. From this

time Columbus was more than ever intent upon the enterprise which, fifteen years after, conferred upon him imperishable glory.

[Sidenote: Voyage of Columbus.]

The story of Columbus is, or should be, familiar to every American who can read. How he sailed forth from the roads of Saltez on the 3d of August, 1492, with three vessels and a crew of one hundred and twenty men; how the voyage was stormy and full of doubts and discouragements; how, finally, early on the morning of October 12, Rodrigo Triana, a seaman of the *Pinta*, first descried the land which Columbus christened San Salvador; how they pushed on and found Cuba and Hayti; how, after returning to Spain, Columbus made two more voyages westward,—one in 1493, when he discovered Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Porto Rico: and another in 1498 when the Orinoco and the coast of Para rewarded his researches; and his subsequent unhappy fate—all these events have been related by many writers, and most vividly of all by the graphic pen of Washington Irving.

[Sidenote: Menendez.]

The era of American discovery may be said to have continued till the memorable fourth day of September, 1565, when the Spaniard Menendez founded the first town on this continent, on the Florida coast, which he called St. Augustine. In one sense, indeed, the era of discovery did not cease down to within the memory of men still living; for the discovery of a path across the Rocky Mountains might well be regarded as included in it. But during the period which intervened between the return of Columbus from his first voyage and the building of St. Augustine, the extent and character of the eastern portion of our continent was revealed to Europe by many and successful navigators.

[Sidenote: The Cabots.]

The story of Columbus inspired the cupidity and territorial ambition of England, France, Spain, and Italy; and in the year 1497 John Cabot, a Venetian by birth, but long a resident of Bristol, England, set out thence across the Atlantic. He was accompanied by his son Sebastian. On the 24th of June he came in sight of Newfoundland, and then of Nova Scotia; then he sailed southward and reached

Florida. As this was a year before the third voyage of Columbus, in which he saw the coast of the mainland, to John Cabot belongs the honor of having landed upon the American continent before Columbus.

[Sidenote: Amerigo Vespucci.]

Voyages to the new land now followed each other in quick succession for many years. It was in 1499 that the accomplished but unscrupulous Amerigo Vespucci made his first voyage to Hispaniola, following it up by voyages along the coast of South America. He returned thence to claim, after the death of Columbus, the honors due to the great Genoese.

[Sidenote: Verrazzani.]

Portugal and France, jealous of the success of the Spanish and English expeditions, lost no time in entering into this perilous and brilliant competition for maritime honor and western possession. Portugal sent out Cortereal, and France Verrazzani. The former skirted the coast for six hundred miles, kidnapping Indians, and spending some time at Labrador, where he came to his death. Verrazzani, in 1524, sailed for the Western Continent in the *Dolphin*, ranged along the coast of North Carolina, and so northward until he espied the beautiful harbor of New York, and anchored for a brief rest in that of Newport. Verrazzani returned to France with glowing accounts of the beauty, fertility, and noble harbors of the country.

[Sidenote: Jacques Cartier.]

Within ten years France sent forth another expedition, under the command of the famous Jacques Cartier, which was destined to acquire for that nation its claim to the possession of Canada. Cartier sailed from St. Malo to Newfoundland in twenty days. He went up the St. Lawrence, and returned home to tell the thrilling tale of his adventures. The next year he came back to discover the sites of Montreal and Quebec; and he made two more voyages, in 1540 and 1542.

[Sidenote: Ponce de Leon.]

Meanwhile, Spain was resolved to sustain the great prestige she had gained by the expeditions of Columbus, and to yield to no rival

her claims to dominion on the new continent. In 1512, Don Juan Ponce de Leon, a brave soldier and adventurous man, who had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, landed on the peninsula of Florida, and established the right of Spain to its possession. Five years after, Fernandez landed on the coast of Yucatan; and ere long Garay explored the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

[Sidenote: De Soto.]

It is not possible, in this survey, to follow, or even to name, the Spanish expeditions of discovery and conquest between 1512 and 1550. Suffice it to say that during this period subjects of the Spanish king landed on the coast of South Carolina, entered the harbors of New York and New England, crossed Louisiana and northern Mexico to the Pacific, explored Mexico and Peru, marched across Georgia under the lead of the renowned Ferdinand de Soto, penetrated to the interior, and, after many romantic adventures and desperate hardships, discovered the magnificent river which we call the Mississippi; made perilous excursions into the wild depths of Arkansas and Missouri, and even to the remote banks of the Red River.

[Sidenote: Character of the Discoverers.]

The enterprises of Spaniards, English, Portuguese, and French were alike prompted by the greed of gain. All sought the fabled El Dorado; all craved the power of colonial dominion. None the less were the navigators and soldiers, whom the nations sent forth to reveal a new world to civilization, men of courage and fortitude, able in achieving the momentous tasks assigned to them. Columbus and Cabot, at least, thought less of riches and fleeting honors than of the proper and noble glories of discovery; it was left to their Spanish successors to kidnap the Indians, to rob their settlements and murder their women, and to invade the peaceful wilds of America, with fire and the sword.

III.

THE ERA OF COLONIZATION.

[Sidenote: Voyages of Colonization.]

To acquire a title to the fertile and fruitful lands and fabled riches of the newly discovered continent, became the aspiration of the great maritime states of Europe, which had shared between them the honors of its discovery. From the middle of the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century, the voyages of adventure and projected colonization were almost continuous. Spaniards, Frenchmen, and Englishmen fitted out vessels and crossed the ocean, to make more extended researches, and to found, if possible, permanent settlements. Although failure generally attended these attempts at colonization, they gradually led the way to the final occupation of the continent.

[Sidenote: The Huguenots in America.]

Of these abortive efforts, that of Admiral Coligny to found a settlement of the Huguenots, who were persecuted in France, on the new shores, was the earliest and one of the most romantic. As long ago as 1562, America became a refuge of the oppressed for conscience's sake. The Huguenot colony, taking up their residence on the River May, gave the name of "Carolina" (from King Charles IX.) to their new domain. After many and terrible hardships, they returned again to France, to be soon succeeded by another colony of Huguenots, also sent out by brave old Coligny, which settled on the same soil of Carolina.

[Sidenote: Menendez in Florida]

This aroused the jealousy and cupidity of Spain. The "most Catholic" king was not only enraged to find the soil which he claimed as his own by right of discovery, taken possession of by the subjects of his French rival, but was scandalized that the new colonists should be Calvinistic heretics. It was the very height of the

gloomiest period of religious fanaticism and persecution in Europe. Menendez was accordingly sent out to Florida by King Philip, and assumed its governorship; and on September 8, 1565, Saint Augustine, the oldest town in the United States, was founded, and Philip of Spain was solemnly proclaimed sovereign of all North America. Menendez lost no time in attacking the Huguenot colonists of Carolina. They were speedily defeated, and most of them were ruthlessly massacred; and our almost virgin soil was thus early the scene of another St. Bartholomew.

Meanwhile, England was not idle in contesting with France and Spain the supremacy of the western land. Very early in the sixteenth century projects of colonizing America were formed in England.

[Sidenote: English Colonization.]

Numerous voyages hither were undertaken during the reign of Henry VIII.; but the accounts which remain of them are rare and meagre. Some of them resulted in terrible disasters of shipwreck and death. Late in the century a courageous and determined navigator, Martin Frobisher, made three voyages to America, but without establishing a colony, or finding the treasures of gold and gems which he sought. Later, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the half-brother of Raleigh, and Barlow, made attempts to found colonies, but in vain.

[Sidenote: Raleigh's Expedition.]

It was in the spring of 1585 that Sir Walter Raleigh fitted out his famous expedition of seven ships, and one hundred and eight emigrants, and sent it forth, bound for the shores of Carolina. At first it seemed as if our English colony were really about to prosper in the new land. They established themselves at Roanoke, and explored the country. Hariot, one of the shrewdest of them, discovered the seductive properties of tobacco, the succulence of Indian corn, and the nutritive quality of potatoes.

[Sidenote: Sir Francis Drake.]

The hostility of the natives, however, soon became so bitter, and their attacks so frequent, that the colony was glad to return to England in the visiting ships of Sir Francis Drake. Two years later Raleigh, undismayed by the failure of his first colony, sent out another, under John White, which settled on the Isle of Roanoke, and found-