

name, title, and a list of his deeds, confirms or invalidates the scriptural account not only of that particular event but indirectly of other details of the city's annals not recorded in stone. In America material relics acquire increased importance as corroborative and corrective witnesses, in comparison with those of the old world, from the absence of contemporary written annals. Beside constituting the only tangible supports of the more ancient triumphs of American civilization, they are the best illustrations of comparatively modern stages of art whose products have disappeared, and by no means superfluous in support of Spanish chroniclers in later times, "very many, or perhaps most of whose statements respecting the wonderful phenomena of the New World culture," as I have remarked in a preceding volume, "without this incontrovertible material proof would find few believers among the sceptical students of the present day."

The importance of monumental remains as incentives to historical study and research results directly from the interest and curiosity which their examination invariably excites. Gibbon relates that he was first prompted to write the annals of Rome's decline and fall by the contemplation of her ruined structures. Few even of the most prosaic and matter-of-fact travelers can resist the impulse to reason and speculate on the origin of ruins that come under their notice, and the civilization to which they owe their existence; and there are probably few eminent archæologists but may trace the first development of a taste for antiquarian pursuits to the curiosity excited at the sight of some mysterious relic.

This irresistible desire to follow back remains of art to the artist's hand and genius, prompted the oft-repeated and so long fruitless attempts to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphics and the cuneiform inscriptions of Persia and Assyria. These efforts were at last crowned with success; the key to the mysterious