

ethnical revolution, which had already supplanted the autochthones of prehistoric Europe.

The publication in 1848 of the first volume of the Smithsonian Contributions to knowledge, devoted to the history and explorations of the ancient monuments of the Mississippi valley, gave a wonderful stimulus to archaeological research in the United States. For a time, indeed, much credulous zeal was devoted to the search for buried cities, inscribed records, and a reproduction in more or less modified form, in northern areas, of the civilization of the Aztecs; not unmingled with dreams of Phœnician, Hebrew, Scandinavian, and Welsh remains. The history of some of its spurious productions is not without interest; but its true fruits are seen in numerous works which have since issued from the American press, devoted to an accurate record of local antiquities. So thoroughly has this already been carried out, that it may be now affirmed with little hesitation that, to all appearance, the condition of the Indian tribes to the North of Mexico, as shown in the rude arts of a stone age, scarcely at all affected in its character by their use of the native copper of Lake Superior, represents what prevailed throughout the whole Northern continent in all the centuries—however prolonged,—since the hunters in the Delaware valley fashioned and employed their turtle-back celts.

The condition of the nations of North America at the period of its discovery, at the close of the fifteenth century, may be described as one of unstable equilibrium; and nothing in its archaeological records points to any older period of settled progress. The physical geography of the continent presents in many respects such a contrast to that of Europe, as is seen in the steppes of Northern Asia, though with great navigable rivers, which only needed the appliances of modern civilization to make them for the New World what the Euphrates and the Tigris were to southern Asia in ancient centuries. Those vast tablelands, the great steppes of Mongolia and Independent Tartary, have ever been the haunts of predatory tribes by whom the civilization of southern Asia has been repeatedly overthrown; and from thence came the Huns who ravaged the Roman world in its decline. Europe, on the contrary, nursed its youthful civilization among detached communities of its southern peninsulas on the Mediterranean Sea; and in later ages has repeatedly experienced the advantages of geographical isolation in the valleys of the Alps, in Norway and Denmark, in Portugal, the Netherlands, and the British Islands: where nations protected in their youth from predatory hordes, and sheltered during critical periods of change, have safely passed through their early stages of progress.

All that we know, or can surmise of the nations of North America, presents a total contrast to this. In so far as the mystery of its prehistoric Mound-builders has been solved; we see there a people who had attained to a grade of civilization not greatly dissimilar to that of the village communities of New Mexico and Arizona; and who had settled down in the Ohio valley, not improbably while feudal Europe was still only emerging from mediæval rudeness: if not at an earlier date. The great river-valley was long occupied by populous urban centres of an industrious community. Agriculture, though prosecuted only with the simplest implements, chiefly of wood and stone, must have been practised on an extensive scale. The primitive arts of the potter were improved; the value of the copper abounding in the remote region on the shores of Lake Superior was appreciated; though metallurgy in its practical applications had scarcely entered on its first stage. The nation was in its infancy; but it had