

# Popular Science Monthly/Volume 15/October 1879/Atlantis Not a Myth

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## ATLANTIS NOT A MYTH.

BY EDWARD H. THOMPSON.

**O**UR sturdy worker in the copper mines of Lake Superior, finding both himself and his vein of copper growing poorer day by day, determines to seek some more paying claim in the as yet unexplored portion of the copper country. He gathers his kit of tools together and starts, and, after many a hard hour's travel over the wild and rugged country, finds a region with abundant signs of copper, and where seemingly no human foot has trod since creation's dawn.

He strikes a rich vein and goes steadily to work digging and blasting his way to the richer portions, when suddenly, right in the richest part, he finds his lead cut off by what looks to his experienced eye marvelously like a mining shaft. Amazedly he begins to clear out of the pit the fallen earth and the *débris* of ages, and the daylight thus let in reveals to his astonished gaze an immense mass of copper raised

some distance from the original bottom of the pit on a platform of logs, while at his feet lie a number of strange stone and copper implements—some thin and sharp like knives and hatchets, others huge and blunt like mauls and hammers—all being left in such a manner as though the workman had but just gone to dinner and might be expected back at any moment. Bewildered, he ascends to the surface again and looks about him. He sees mounds that from their positions are evidently formed from the refuse of the pit, but these mounds are covered with gigantic trees, evidently the growth of centuries; and, looking still closer, he sees that these trees are fed from the decayed ruins of trees still older—trees that have sprung up, flourished, grown old, and died since this pit was dug or these mounds were raised. The more he thinks of the vast ages that have elapsed since this pit was dug, that mass of copper quarried and raised, the more confused he becomes: his mind can not grasp this immensity of time.

"Who were these miners? When did they live, and where did they come from?" are the questions he asks himself, but gets no answer. However, one fact is patent to him—that, whoever they were, they will not now trouble his claim; and, consoled by this reflection, he goes to work again.

The traveler in wandering through the dense and almost impenetrable forests of Central and South America, suddenly finds himself upon a broad and well-paved road, but a road over which in places there have grown trees centuries old. Curiously following this road, he sees before him, as though brought thither by some Aladdin's lamp, a vast city, a city built of stone—buildings that look at a distance like our large New England factories—splendid palaces and aqueducts, all constructed with such massiveness and grandeur as to compel a cry of astonishment from the surprised traveler—an immense but deserted city, whose magnificent palaces and beautiful

sculpturing are inhabited and viewed only by the iguana and centiped. The roads and paths to the aqueducts, once so much traveled as to have worn hollows in the hard stone, are now trodden only by the ignorant mestizo or simple Indian. Of this deserted home of a lost race, the traveler asks the same question as the miner, and the only answer he gets from the semi-civilized Indian is a laconic "*Quien sabe?*" And who does know?

The curious and scientific world, however, are not so easily answered, and various are the theories and conjectures as to these diggers of mines and builders of mounds and strange cities. One of the most plausible of these—one believed by many scientists to be the true theory—is this: Ages ago the Americas presented a very different appearance from what they now do. Then an immense peninsula extended itself from Mexico, Central America, and New Granada, so far into the Atlantic that Madeira, the Azores, and the West India Islands are now fragments of it. This peninsula was a fair and fertile country inhabited by rich and civilized nations, a people versed in the arts of war and civilization—a country covered with large cities and magnificent palaces, their rulers according to tradition reigning not only on the Atlantic Continent, but over islands far and near, even into Europe and Asia. Suddenly, without warning, this whole fair land was engulfed by the sea, in a mighty convulsion of nature.

Now, this catastrophe is not impossible or even improbable. Instances are not wanting of large tracts of land, several hundred miles in extent, disappearing in a like manner. The island of Ferdinanda suddenly appeared, and after a while as suddenly disappeared. In 1819, during an earthquake in India, an immense tract of land near the river Indus sank from view, and a lake now occupies its place.

The whole bed of the Atlantic, where Atlantis is said to have been situated, consists of extinct volcanoes. The terrible Lisbon earthquake of 1755, and the later American shock, created a commotion throughout the whole Atlantic area.

That Atlantis possessed great facilities for making a sudden exit can not be doubted. Its very situation gives good color to the narratives of ancient Grecian historians and Toltecian traditions, that "it disappeared by earthquakes and inundations."

Not only is it within the bounds of possibility that it might have occurred, but if traditions so clear and distinct as to be almost authentic history are to be believed, then it did occur. Listen to what one of the most cautious of ancient writers, Plato, says: "Among the great deeds of Athens, of which recollection is preserved in our books, there is one that should be placed above all others. Our book tells us that the Athenians destroyed an army that came across the Atlantic seas, and insolently invaded Europe and Asia, for this sea was then navigable; and beyond the straits where you place the Pillars of Hercules was an immense island, larger than Asia and Libya combined. From this island one could pass easily to the other islands, and from these to the continent beyond. The sea on this side of the straits resembled a harbor with a narrow entrance, but there is a veritable sea, and the land which surrounds it is a veritable continent. On this island of Atlantis there reigned three kings with great and marvelous power. They had under their domain the whole of Atlantis, several of the other islands, and part of the continent. At one time their power extended into Europe as far as Tyrrhenia, and uniting their whole force they sought to destroy our country at a blow, but their defeat stopped the invasion and gave entire freedom to the countries this side of the Pillars of Hercules. Afterward, in one day and one fatal night, there came mighty earthquakes and inundations, that engulfed that warlike people. Atlantis disappeared, and then that sea became inaccessible, on account of the vast quantities of mud that the engulfed island left in its place." It is possible that the *débris*, said to have been left by this catastrophe, might be identical with or the nuclei of the *sargazo* fields that, many

centuries later, Columbus found almost impenetrable. Again, Plato, in an extract from Proclus, speaks of an island in the Atlantic whose inhabitants preserved knowledge from their ancestors of a large island in the Atlantic, which had dominion over all other islands of this sea.

Plutarch, in his life of the philosopher Solon, Herodotus, and other ancient writers, speak of this island as a known fact, and it is impossible to believe otherwise than that Seneca thought of Atlantis when he writes in his tragedy of "Medea": "Late centuries will appear, when the ocean's veil will lift to open a vast country. New worlds will Thetsys unveil. Ultima Thule" (Iceland) "will not remain the earth's boundary." He evidently believed in the unknown island and continent, and knew it would not remain for ever unknown.

Diodorus Siculus says that "opposite to Africa lies an island which, on account of its magnitude, is worthy to be mentioned. It is several days distant from Africa. It has a fertile soil, many mountains, and not a few plains, unexcelled in their beauty. It is watered by many navigable rivers, and there are to be found estates in abundance adorned with fine buildings." Again he says, "Indeed, it appears on account of the abundance of its charms as though it were the abode of gods and not of men."

The situation, the description of the country, in fact every particular, agrees precisely with our idea of Atlantis; and what other land now in existence agrees in any way with this description—what islands of magnitude that contain navigable rivers, large fertile plains, and mountains?

Turning from our well-known ancient writers, we find in all the traditions and books of the ancient Central Americans and Mexicans a continual recurrence to the fact of an awful catastrophe, similar to that mentioned by Plato and others.

Now, what are we to believe? This, that either the traditions and narratives of these ancient writers and historians of both lands are but a tissue of fabrications, evolved from their own brains, with perhaps a small thread of fact, or else that they are truths, and truths proving that the Americas, instead of being the youngest habitation of man, are among the oldest, if not, as De Bourbourg affirms, the oldest.

Brasseur de Bourbourg, who Baldwin says has studied the monuments, writings, and traditions left by this civilization more carefully and thoroughly than any man living, is an advocate of this theory, and to him are we indebted for most of our translations of the traditions and histories of the ancient Americans.

To the imaginative and lovers of the marvelous, this theory is peculiarly fascinating, and the fact that there is plausible evidence of its truth adds to the effect. With their mind's eye they can see the dreadful events, as recorded by Plato, as in a panorama. They see the fair and fertile country, filled with people, prosperous and happy; the sound of busy life from man and beast fills the air. Comfort and prosperity abound. The sun shines clear overhead, and the huge mountains look down upon the cities and villages at their feet, like a mother upon her babes: all is a picture of peacefulness. Suddenly, in a second, all is changed. The protecting angels become destroying fiends, vomiting fire and liquid hell upon the devoted cities at their feet, burning, scorching, strangling their wretched inhabitants. The earth rocks horribly, palaces, temples, all crashing down, crushing their human victims, flocked together like so many ants. Vast rents open at their very feet, licking with huge, flaming tongues the terrified people into their yawning mouths. And then the inundations. Mighty waves sweep over the land. The fierce enemies, Fire and Water, join hands to effect the destruction of a mighty nation.

How they hiss and surge, rattle and seethe! How the steam rises, mingled with the black smoke, looking like a mourning-veil, that it is, and, when that veil is lifted, all is still, the quiet of annihilation! Of all that populous land, naught remains save fuming, seething mud. It is not to be supposed that all perished in that calamity. Long before this they had spread over the portion of the Americas contiguous to the peninsula, building cities, palaces, roads, and aqueducts, like those of their native homes; and adventurous pioneers continually spreading north, east, and westward, their constant increase of numbers from their former homes enabling them to overcome the resistance offered to their progress by both natives and nature, till at last they reached and discovered the copper country of Lake Superior. That they appreciated this discovery is evinced by the innumerable evidences of their works and of their skill in discovering the richest and most promising veins. Wherever our miners of the present day go, they find their ancient fellow craftsmen have been before them, worked the richest veins and gathered the best copper; and it is supposed that they continued thus till the terrible blotting out of their native country cut short all this, and left this advancing civilization to wither and die like a vine severed from the parent stem.

Having no further accession to their numbers, and being continually decimated by savages and disease, they slowly retreated before the ever-advancing hordes. Gradually, and contesting every step, as is shown by their numerous defensive works along their path, they were forced back to their cities on this continent, that had been spared them from the universal destruction of their country, where the dense and almost impassable forests afforded them their last refuge from their enemies, and where, reduced by war, pestilence, and other causes, to a feeble band, their total extinction was only a matter of time. Such is probably the history of this lost civilization, and such would have been the history of our civilization had we in our infant growth been cut off from receiving the nourishment of the mother countries.

Within the last twenty-five years, all sciences relating to the past and present of man have been enormously developed. Old, worn-out, useless theories have been discarded, new facts have taken their places, discoveries have followed discoveries, each discovery helping to form, link by link, the chain of human history.

We are beginning to perceive that we are but yet young in the knowledge of human history, that we have as yet picked up but a bright pebble of thought or glittering shell of theory, while before us lies the whole vast sea of human history unexplored. That we are beginning to acknowledge this is a good sign, for, when a man or mankind acknowledge their ignorance, they have at least a sure foundation to build upon.

Again, the spirit of bigotry, the spirit that told men to scorn and deride Galileo and Columbus, is fast passing away, and in its stead comes the spirit of rationality, a spirit that tells men to look upon a new idea or theory, even if it does run outside of the accustomed rut, with a reasoning if not favorable eye. And we have faith, as science grows to grander proportions and dispels some of the mist that now envelops it, that some day not far distant will bring forward an historic Edison that shall bring together the faint voice of the prehistoric past and the bright, clear voice of the present; that some future Champollion will discover, among the ruined cities of the Americas, an American Rosetta-stone that will complete the chain of human history. "The noblest study of mankind is man."



"Logic" with avidity, and took up Corote with equal avidity. These two works, I believe, gave him his start in philosophy; for, although he had studied in Germany for some time, I am not aware that he was much impressed by German philosophy. In an article in the "British and Foreign Review," in 1843, on the modern philosophy of France, he led up to Comte, and gave some account of him.

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