

APPENDIX

THE BOGUS RELICS FROM MICHIGAN

Since the foregoing pages were written and placed in the hands of the publishers, the attention of the public has been called to certain supposed "relics," said to have been found in the mounds of the State of Michigan. These purported antiquities are plates of copper, tablets of clay and stone, caskets of clay and other objects, most of which have curious pictographs and hieroglyphics engraved or stamped upon them.

It seems that three men are now most zealously advocating the genuineness of these "finds"—Mr. Daniel E. Soper, formerly Secretary of State; Rev. James Savage, a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, and Elder Rudolph Etzenhouser, a minister of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of whom now reside in the city of Detroit.

These gentlemen have recently put out a booklet, entitled "Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens from Michigan, U. S. A.," which contains forty-four photographic cuts of the objects mentioned, and which is gotten up for the purpose of arousing in these things "the interest of students of philology or those engaged in historical and archæological research." In the introduction to this brochure Mr. Etzenhouser says:

"Students of American archæology will find in the following pages reproductions of the monuments of a race of primitive Americans, monuments of a people

whose existence has hitherto been involved in an obscurity as complete as that which envelopes their history. Some of the specimens are of stone, some of copper and others of clay. They have been unearthed for the most part through the efforts of amateur investigators, and represent the contents of hundreds of mounds scattered over the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. The language inscribed on these tablets has not as yet been interpreted, but will doubtless, some day, succumb to the advance of philology, and they will perhaps yield an interesting chapter to the ancient history of this continent."

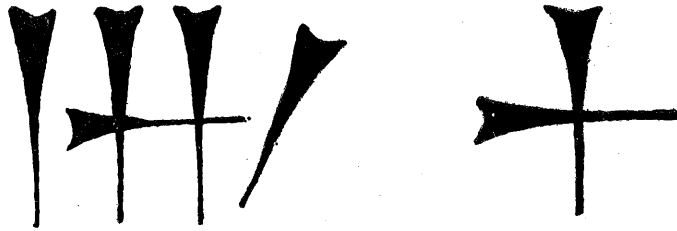
With all due respect to the obvious honesty of the three gentlemen whose names have been mentioned, I must say that these startling "finds" bear on the face of them the very marks of imposture and have undoubtedly been manufactured and buried in the mounds by some individual or some gang of individuals either for pure mischief or to be sold at fancy prices to unwary collectors, and so line the pockets of the fabricators.

My reason for noticing these frauds here is that they have been made to do service in behalf of Mormonism, and have, within the last year, been held up before the public by representatives of that delusion as proof that the ancient Americans wrote upon metallic plates and employed an hieroglyphical system of writing. It is also probable that they will continue to be so employed by the enthusiastic elder unless their fraudulent character is fully exposed, although, I am informed, even some of the representatives of the Reorganized Church questioned their genuineness at their recent Conference, held at Independence, Missouri. It may be that their experiences with the "Kinderhook Plates," the "Newark Tablet" and other similar "finds" have taught them that discretion, after all, is the better part of valor.

About the year 1890 interest in American antiquities had reached a high pitch. The Ohio mounds were being scientifically examined by Professors Putnam and Moorehead, and other archæologists, and the daily papers were full of the accounts of their discoveries. The deep interest in these things created a market for all kinds of archæological specimens, and in some instances fabulous prices were paid for them. It was during this period of interest in American antiquities that the first of these Michigan "relics" were found. In October, 1890, a man digging post-holes, discovered a small clay cup in a field near Wyman, Montcalm County. This created some little stir, but in the following spring, when other and more curious objects were found, the people of that vicinity became highly excited. At Stanton, the county-seat of Montcalm County, a "syndicate" was formed for the purpose of pushing the work of research, and mound after mound and undulation after undulation were excavated with the result that a surprisingly large number of objects were brought to light. These consisted chiefly of clay tablets and clay caskets, whose lids were surmounted with lions, sphinxes and other figures, all bearing certain marks which were taken for hieroglyphics. In order to satisfy the public of the finding of these "relics," affidavits were made, some of them subscribed to by men of probity and honor, and every effort was put forth to establish the fact that these so-called "antiquities" had been found in the mounds as claimed. By this time the attention of scientific men was attracted, and a number of expert archæologists began to make investigations. But these investigations did not prove to be highly creditable to these purported "antiquities." Certain marks of imposture, which would be unobservable to an unpracticed eye, were easily detected.

Prof. Alfred Emerson, of Lake Forest College, after a careful examination on the ground, wrote: "The articles were bad enough in the photograph; an examination proved them to be humbugs of the first water." Other scientists followed him with caustic criticisms, and under these repeated attacks the craze finally subsided and for some years little was heard of these "relics."

But some two or three years ago they were again brought to the front by the finding of similar objects in other parts of the State, and to-day are creating no little attention in some sections and with a certain class. The fabricators, profiting by the criticisms of the past,



have improved their wares and have been more careful in hiding them away, and the archæologist is now confronted with a perplexing medley of representations of the Deluge and the Tower of Babel, war scenes in which bands of American Indians are meeting in mortal combat a race to us unknown, views probably suggested by Egyptian mythology and Egyptian, Assyrian and Phœnician characters.

Fortunately for science, however, there are certain common characteristics which link all these frauds together into one grand deception. Whether they come from Montcalm, Wayne or Crawford County, whether they were found in 1891 or 1908, they all, with few, if

any, exceptions, have on them one character (Fig. 1) which has been called the "sign manual" of the forger. This being true, to expose one is to expose all.

One of the chief reasons for rejecting these objects as spurious is their anomalous character. They are wholly unlike the general run of relics that have been taken from the mounds throughout the rest of the United States. In 1819 Caleb Atwater surveyed and excavated the prehistoric works at Circleville, Ohio; between the years 1845 and 1847 Squier and Davis opened more than two hundred mounds throughout the Mississippi Valley; and since then thousands upon thousands have been examined in all parts of the country (some of them in Michigan), and that, too, by such experienced archæologists as Thomas, Moorehead, Fowke and Putnam, and yet, throughout all this time and territory, not a single relic like those found in Michigan has ever been discovered. It remained for the "amateurs" of that State to find in a few hundred mounds of insignificant size what our experts failed to find during nearly one hundred years of research in the largest and most skillfully constructed monuments of the mound-building people. If the Mound Builders employed Egyptian and Assyrian hieroglyphics in the State of Michigan, they certainly would have employed them elsewhere, and our archæologists would have discovered them ere this.

Another reason for rejecting these "finds" is that they have no concomitant and cumulative evidence to support the claim of their genuineness. If they represent a people at all, it is a people who were familiar with the civilization of Egypt, Assyria and Palestine. And yet, what have they left as traces of their existence? Nothing but a few caskets, plates and tablets. They

built no temples, no palaces, no pyramids; they lived like Indians, fought like Indians, died like Indians and were buried like Indians; but they knew all about the flood, Noah's ark and the tower of Babel; were familiar with Egyptian mythology and employed characters from the languages of the Egyptians and Assyrians! If a colony of people had come to Michigan centuries ago from Egypt or Assyria, they would have done more than simply to engrave Deluge tablets or to make clay caskets; they would have cultivated the soil, built roads, cut stone and erected structures consistent with their knowledge of civilization. When a few ruined temples, palaces and pyramids have been discovered it will then be time for archæologists seriously to consider the claims of the Detroit trio relative to these "relics."

The evident marks of imposture that some of these objects bear is still another reason for rejecting them. On this point, Professor Emerson says of those found in Montcalm County:

"They were all of unbaked clay, and decorated with bogus hieroglyphics in which cuneiform characters appeared at intervals. These were all stamped. By way of economizing labor the characters were turned upside down sometimes, or laid sideways. On the back of one piece the characters were represented whole lines at a time. There were incumbent lions on some lids of the caskets. Of these, one or two had no tail. I told one of the gentlemen that a *primitive* artist would never make such an omission. He said that the society had found the same fault, and that afterward pieces with good tails had been found. On opening one casket we found that the lid had been dried on a machine-sawed board."—*Quoted in "Some Archaeological Forgeries from Michigan," a paper by Prof. Francis W. Kelsey,*

published in the "American Anthropologist" for January-March, 1908.

On these forgeries Professor Kelsey also speaks as follows:

"Some of the tablets were found in the caskets, as were also small pieces of copper, apparently made by beating common coins out smooth and impressing characters upon them with a small chisel. In one casket fifteen of the dies used in stamping on clay were said to have been found, but I know nothing of their character. A few crude vases and some other objects were brought to light. The material of the caskets, the tablets and the small sphinx which after a time I myself examined, was a light-colored clay, containing so large a percentage of drift sand as to make the objects fragile. The drying, done either in the sun or by exposure to mild heat, had left cracks, the edges of which were sharp and fresh. The material disintegrated readily in water; the objects could therefore have been in the ground only a short time before they were dug out."

Still another objection to be urged against these "finds" is the preposterous jumbling together of characters and signs from different written languages. The "sign manual" is undoubtedly drawn from the Assyrian, in which the first character, the perpendicular wedge, is frequently used as a determinative placed before male proper names.—*First Steps in Assyrian*, p. 39. Figure 2, which occurs on some of the tablets, is also frequently employed in Assyrian as the ideogram for "chief."—*Ibid*, p. 97. In Plate 21 of Mr. Etzenhouser's booklet we have several columns of hieroglyphics in which certain Egyptian characters are readily made out, especially those for a, k and t. Beneath these columns of characters we have, very probably, a scene suggested by Egyptian mythology.

Three American Indians appear to be making an offering to Osiris or some other god whose lower extremities are encased in garments that strongly resemble a pair of baggy pantaloons, while he holds in his hand an Egyptian key. The offerings consist of rings, which were used for money in ancient Egypt (Smith's "Bible Dictionary," Art., "Money"), and probably fowls and beasts, as the head and neck of the first is portrayed, while above this is a figure which strongly suggests the head, rump and tail of a calf. Beneath this mythologic device are scratched marks to us unknown, with others that bear a very close similarity to the Egyptian. On the opposite side of the tablet we have the bust of a personage with strongly marked Anglo-Saxon features. This personage has on his head a peculiarly shaped helmet. This is a sample of the curious medley which Mr. Etzenhouser says "will doubtless, some day, *succumb* to the advance of philology." It might not be out of place to state here that it has undoubtedly *succumbed* already.

I have taken considerable pains to ascertain the opinions of a number of our leading archæologists on these "finds," and, while one of them has expressed himself somewhat perplexed over the external evidences, they all, with one accord, declare that the internal evidences plainly indicate cases of fraud. In a letter, which I received April 28, 1910, Mr. F. W. Hodge, Ethnologist-in-charge of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, says:

"Answering your letter of the 25th instant, addressed to the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, I beg leave to say that members of this Bureau have examined a number of the objects referred to by you, and also many photographs of others, and it is the general opinion that they were made by some one for purposes of

deception. You will find an article on the subject by Prof. Francis W. Kelsey, president of the Archæological Institute of America, published in the *American Anthropologist* for January-March, 1908."

In the article referred to, Professor Kelsey says:

"The forgeries of which I have spoken differ from all others which I have examined in this, that they are unsophisticated. The forger did not know enough about genuine relics of any class to make intelligent imitations. He had never seen the things which he undertook to reproduce; he translated roughly into substance a medley of representations which he had found in books or magazines and which, in his working sketches, he jumbled together after the manner of a child. It is fortunate for collectors that so wily a forger had not a better understanding of his business. His product is in a class with the 'petrified man' of William Ruddock, which was alleged to have been found in 1876, in the Pine River region of Michigan, whence most of the Scotford 'finds' have come. The 'petrified man' was itself an echo of the Cardiff Giant, and may possibly in turn have suggested these ventures in a new field. One of my friends thinks 'forgeries' too dignified a word to apply to such objects; he would call them simply 'fakes.'"

In a letter, dated at Salem, Massachusetts, May 10, 1910, Rev. S. D. Peet, editor of the *American Antiquarian*, says:

"The booklet I have not seen, but I should call the relics frauds. You may rely on one thing, that anything found underneath the soil with an alphabet or letters from any alphabet on it is a fraud. There might be pictographs—snakes, birds, animals and human forms—but prehistoric alphabets are not found in America."

Under date of May 4, 1910, Prof. James H. Breasted,

director of the Haskell Oriental Museum, University of Chicago, wrote:

"I have received your inquiry regarding the Michigan antiquities, or the so-called 'antiquities,' with great interest. I did not know that Mr. Etzenhouser is a Mormon or that the Mormons are pushing these Michigan finds in their own behalf. Mr. Etzenhouser wrote me a short time ago, asking my opinion of these finds and mailing me at the same time a copy of his brochure containing cuts of the slate and copper tablets. I enclose you a copy of my reply to Mr. Etzenhouser. There can be absolutely no doubt of the modern origin of these alleged antiquities. Forgeries pass over my desk in this museum every few days. This Michigan lot are about the worst I ever saw."

In his letter to Mr. Etzenhouser, which was written before he was aware of the fact that that gentleman was a Mormon or that the Mormons were making use of these "finds" to support their claims Professor Breasted said:

"I have no hesitation in saying that the inscriptions on these slate tablets and copper plates, etc., are clumsy forgeries, made by combining badly drawn Egyptian hieroglyphs, cuneiform signs of Assyria, and other signs into a preposterous and impossible whole."

In closing this paper I recommend that every anti-Mormon polemic obtain the booklet put out by Mr. Etzenhouser, "Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens from Michigan, U. S. A.," and also Professor Kelsey's paper, "Some Archæological Forgeries from Michigan," in the *American Anthropologist* for January-March, 1908. The first can be obtained of Mr. Etzenhouser at 57 Selden Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, for \$1; the second, from Mr. B. Talbot B. Hyde, treasurer of the American

Anthropological Association, 542 Fifth Avenue, New York City, New York, for \$1.25.

CHARLES A. SHOOK.

PALMER, Illinois, June 1, 1910.