

PROOFS

OF THE

FORMER EXISTENCE OF A PEOPLE IN NORTH AMERICA,
DISTINCT FROM THE INDIANS AND EUROPEANS.

Letter from Samuel L. Mitchell, M. D. to the Earl of Buchan.

New-York, October 26, 1815.

MY LORD,

I SEIZE with interest the opportunity afforded me by Mr Patterson to write you a few lines. They refer chiefly to a new class of American antiquities that have latterly attracted attention.

The great mounds and fortifications which overspread the internal parts of North America, between Lake Ontario and the Mexican Gulf, are already well known to you. It is equally well understood by you, that both the white men and the present race of red men are equally ignorant of the time they were built and of the persons that constructed them.

After a pause of uncertainty, commencing with the time when those ancient works were discovered, and continued to the present day, I think we are enabled to form maturer conjectures concerning the former population of this continent. As far as I can form an opinion, that race which preceded the existing tribes of Indians were of Malay or Tatar origin, and were habited and accoutred after the manner of the people now inhabiting the islands of the Pacific Ocean; for their bodies have been found in an extraordinary state of preservation in various places.

So late as September 1810, some persons were occupied in exploring, for copperas, a cavern situate on the Carry Fork of Cumberland River, ten miles below the falls. This was in Warren county, state of Tennessee. Six feet beneath the bottom of the cave, something like clothing was discovered. This, on examination, was found to be the shrouding of dead bodies. Upon further investigation, two human bodies were found; one that of a man, and the other of a woman. The man was enveloped in a fine linen shirt. His legs were drawn up. Then five dressed deer-skins were closely bound round his body. A twilted blanket was wrapped over them; and a cane-mat, sixty feet long, rolled over the whole. The frame was entire, save the bowels. The hair of a fair complexion,—teeth, remarkably sound,—age, apparently twenty-five years; and his stature above the common. The body of the female was found about three feet distant from the other. The posture was similar. Her body was enveloped first with two undressed deer-skins. Under these, a small cane-mat covered the face. Then four dressed deer-skins were wrapped round it. And over these a cane-mat, large enough to cover the whole. There were afterwards five sheets, supposed to have been manufactured of the fibrous bark of the nettle, wrought up curiously around each

side, with feathers of various kinds and colours. Two fans of feathers were found lying upon the breast. The body, with all its wrappings, was inclosed in something that resembled a hair trunk or box, having a cane cover, enwrapped in two well dressed deer-skins of the largest size. All this was girthed with two straps. Her age is conjectured to have been from twelve to fifteen years; her hair—short and black; her body—entire; and the eyes as full and prominent as if alive.

It is further stated, that one of the boxes or baskets, not being long enough to receive the body conveniently, the feet were cut off, and laid on the breast. And it is a fact, that one of these very lower extremities is an article in the museum of Mr Saudder, at the city of New York, as perfectly preserved as any thing can be by drying.

A very short time since, a human body, apparently that of a lad from twelve to fifteen years of age, was brought to New York for exhibition, and a market. It had been found within a saltpetre cave in Kentucky. I had many opportunities of examining it for myself. It was a perfect exsiccation. All the solids were preserved as entire as in an anatomical preparation, or rather in dried bacon. The posture was squatting, with one hand embracing the right knee, and the palm of the other bent under the left buttock. It was inclosed in four distinct wrappers: First, A mantle of cloth and feathers, exactly like those worn at this day by the chiefs of Wakash and Owhyhee: Second, A shawl of cloth, manufactured after the manner now practised by the natives of the Sandwich and Feejee Islands. In both these, the material of the cloth is neither flax nor hemp, nor the product of any vegetable known to us as an indigenous plant; and the preparation, the twist and manner of connecting the threads, is wholly unlike any fabric of

the present Indigenes, or the European emigrants. I have in my possession various clothes brought by our navigators from the Pacific islands; and, by comparison, I find a remarkable similitude between some of these cloths and those which enwrapped this Kentucky mummy. The mayor, the recorder, and other distinguished gentlemen of New-York, who made the comparison of the respective fabrics a few days ago, were as deeply struck with the resemblance as I was; and this, in my judgment, is a most curious circumstance, inasmuch as it indicates pretty strongly a similar state of the arts in these two races or tribes of people. The hair of the individual now at New-York is a brown sorrel or dark chestnut, and not either a sandy or a black. Thirdly, The next wrapper was a deer-skin, whose hair had been cut away by a sharp instrument, that had left incisions on the hide exactly like those on the pelt of a beaver by a hatter's knife. And, fourthly, the outside envelope was a deer-skin that had been simply dried, without any such cutting or marks at all.

There are natural caverns in the vicinity of the Green River, Kentucky, that are more extensive perhaps than any which the terraqueous globe can furnish. One of these has been already explored a distance of nine or ten miles. I have a map of this subterranean wonder. At Albany, I lately conversed at large with (Mr Gratz) the proprietor. He confirmed substantially the accounts I had heard and read of its extraordinary branchings and windings, and of its saline contents. He added his persuasion, that the chambers of this cavern had been used in days past as places of refuge by the inhabitants; that there were vestiges of the residence of human beings within them: and particularly, there were heaps of mockassons or coverings for the feet, all worn more

or less, and thrown by like old shoes. This gentleman said he had brought a parcel of them with him as curiosities to Philadelphia, and that he would send me some of them to New-York. I hope shortly to receive them, especially as he assured me both the materials and the workmanship were wholly different from those practised by the red men or the white men, and referred to a people possessing greater progress in the arts by far than the present Indians, and a different state of the arts, most distinguishably from any practised or known by the whites. In this, and other similar excavations of nature, have human bodies, and remnants of human clothing, been found from time to time. And it cannot be doubted that, with the progress of research, more antiquities of this kind will come to light.

I have in my collection, my Lord, pieces and vases of pottery, found in the settlements of the ancient natives, and supposed to have been manufactured by them.

The inference I draw from the communication I have the honour to make to you is, that we have now evidence before us to establish the fact, that there was a race of men in North America prior to the present savages; that they were farther advanced in the arts; that they resembled the Malay or Tatar races of men, and the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands and settlements; that they constructed the ancient fortifications, whose authors are equally unknown to the Indians as to ourselves, during their residence between the river Mississippi and the Alleghany mountains; and that they have been exterminated by the fiercer tribes who have succeeded them.

These are the openings of a novel field of inquiry among us. It promises much information to our historians and antiquaries. I

hope they will profit of the grand opportunity thus afforded them. And I shall be much gratified, if my sketch of what has occurred shall be capable of affording a moment's gratification to the Antiquaries of Scotland.

Most respectfully your's,

SAM. L. MITCHELL.

A specimen of the cane-mat, with which the bodies were covered, was transmitted with this letter, and is preserved in the repositories of the Society.