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THE OLD STONE FORT OF NACOGDOCHES.

TEXAS presents to the pen and pencil a region almost unexplored by the tourist. It is rich in exquisite scenery of hill and vale, stretching prairie, bosky wood and rushing stream. Its flora would delight the heart of a botanist, and its plains and forests gladden the soul of every true sportsman with game inviting pursuit. Its people are as diverse as the blossoms on its prairies, and offer a thousand contrasts to the observer, presenting to view many picturesque phases in their

a few vague traditions gathered from the very old Indians in the days when white men or "Eastern people," as they called them, were rare in the land.

With the site of one of these old Forts and of one of these Missions we have now to deal. The spot is little known to the general public; it has not been touched by the ubiquitous magazine-writer. And yet the time was when the little town was a flourishing commercial centre with a glory all its own, and was



THE OLD STONE FORT : PRESENT CONDITION.

everyday life—a life that is almost foreign to America—bespeaking the customs of sunny Spain, of gay Bohemia, and of the dearly loved, never to be forgotten "Vaterland." To the antiquary it will afford a rich field; its Missions and Forts tell of the old Spanish regime away back in the centuries, when the good priests strove by help of the Bible and the swords of soldiers to civilize and convert the aborigines. Farther yet may the seeker go, for here are found the remains of the Mound Builders, whose history is lost except as supplied by conjecture and

the best-known place in all the territory now forming the great State of Texas. Once again it is coming into notice as the centre of the newly discovered oil region of the State, but the revived hum of business that now distinguishes it, only serves to accentuate the contrasts of its history, while the startling inappropriateness of busy modern life to its many traditions and historical remains, throws into clearer outline its unique record in the endless roll of events.

This town of Nacogdoches claims an antiquity whose history is lost in the

mists of tradition, and a tradition which itself scarcely emerges from the obscurity of the centuries. The story has been handed down through the ages, from generation to generation, that when De Soto's men traversed these wilds, in 1542, on their march from Louisiana to Mexico, they found the Nassonites, or Nacogdoches Indians, established in a town on the same site the place now occupies; hence its name, even unto the present day.

In its location the Indians showed their usual knowledge of wood-craft. Built on the highest point in a lovely valley, it is drained on all sides by two tiny streams, the Banita and Lanana. Too small to be dignified by the name of river, they are nevertheless inexhaustible. During the long hot summer when more pretentious water-courses have been sucked dry by the fierce sun and thirsty earth, these little rivulets flow merrily on, being fed by innumerable small springs along their beds. The valley is surrounded by hills, and their undulating outlines, broken by many a lovely forest or stretch of verdant plain, and again by rocky barren or gleaming red clay destitute of bush or shrub, make a picture upon which the eye delights to rest.

In 1686, La Salle visited this place. Over a hundred and forty years had then elapsed since the red men had beheld a white face. The story of De Soto's advent had become like some mythical fairy tale to the younger generations, when, confirming all that their great-grandfathers had told them, the wonderful strangers came once again, and more numerous, more powerful than before! In consequence of this expedition of La Salle's, the French laid claim to all that country; but the Spaniards held it by right of the priority of De Soto's discovery. To strengthen and enforce its title, the Spanish Government made here, in 1715, a settlement. In the fashion of those days it erected a "Mission," that is, a building which was as much a fortress as a church—adding thereto a complement of priests and goodly garrison of soldiery who were to protect and assist the pious Fathers in their conversion of the natives. This Mission was dedicated to "Our Lady of Nacogdoches," and with its establishment was consummated the first permanent European settlement in the region.

Thus here the epoch of the aborigines was closed, and Spanish history began.

This Mission building did not withstand the attacks of time as well as did others constructed by the Spaniards at about the same period or a very little later. Many of those still exist, but this one has utterly disappeared. It fell into ruins, and little by little its materials were taken away to build chimneys and walls in more modern edifices, until now not a vestige of it remains save a few of its great foundation-stones buried deep in the earth.

About a year ago there died in Nacogdoches a man named Vital Flores. Born in 1788, his great age had not impaired his faculties, and he was in possession of a most remarkable memory. His mother was a pure-blooded Aztec, and his father a grave Castilian, and from them he learned the traditions of both races, which he delighted in recounting. He has given much valuable information of the history of those early times, and his ever-interesting recollections were considered by his hearers to be most trustworthy.

This brings us to the old Stone Fort—a curiosity indeed, as a relic of a pre-historical era—a relic which is in the very best of repair, for it stands to-day as perfect as when it was built. Not a stone has moved, no portion has crumbled: only the roof has been changed. That was originally flat and heavy, with overlapping stones; it fell in, and more than fifty years ago was replaced by the one which now covers the Fort. The outside stairs and gallery were affixed at the same time, and additional openings cut. Before that, the structure had stairs on the inside only, but one door—the one in the centre of the lower story—and only three windows, all in the story above, these four openings being iron-barred. The edifice is ninety feet long by twenty broad. Its walls are about twenty feet high and from two and a half to three feet thick, and they seem to have been built by laying solid blocks of stone irregularly upon each other, and in as compact a form as possible, while the interstices were filled in with a composition of powdered limestone, clay and pebbles, which has baked as hard as the rock itself.

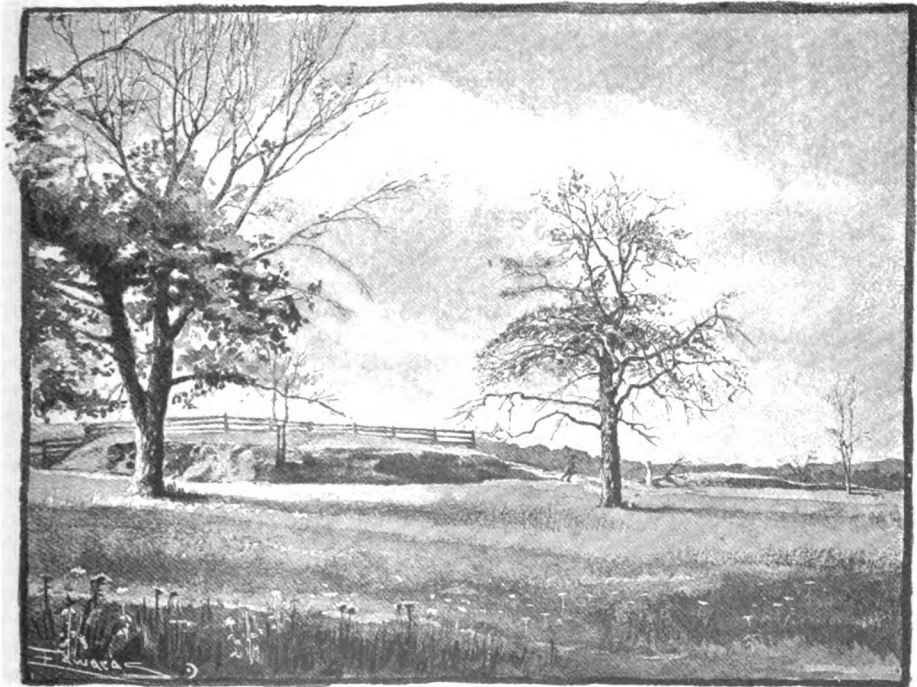
The materials of which this structure is composed are common to this part of the country, but no indications have ever been found of the locality where this mass was quarried. Either the excavations have been filled up by the growth of vegetation and the accumulations of hundreds of years, or the rock was brought from some great distance on the backs of animals or by laborers.

It is to be regretted that so ancient an edifice has been touched by modernizing hands. It seems a sacrilege against the antique that it should have been converted to common uses. The light, wooden gallery, stairs and pitched roof are utterly incongruous with its massive proportions and hoary aspect.

The date of the erection of this Fort can only be conjectured. Some Texas historian has stated that it was the work of the Spaniards who settled there, or, at furthest, that of La Salle in 1686. A little investigation disproves this. Flores related that his parents had often spoken to him about the Fort; that when the old Mission was built his father was a tiny

boy; but, he said, no one was then living who could remember the period of the Fort's erection; it was as great a mystery at that time as it is now, and presented the same appearance, with the exception of the additions mentioned above. It will thus be seen that the Spaniards found the Fort there in 1715, and even then the Indians could not remember its architects. La Salle had been there but twenty-nine years previous, and, if built by him, surely all memory of his erecting such a work would not have died out in so short a time, for many must have been still living who were grown men when the French explorer visited them. Indeed, they did not attribute the work to him, but ever insisted that it was built by the first white men who came to their country, before the grandfathers of their oldest men were born.

Thus all Indian traditions point to De Soto's expedition as its date, and fathers have related to sons the wonderful story of the strange visitors and their marvelous work. The tale was never forgotten,



INDIAN MOUND.

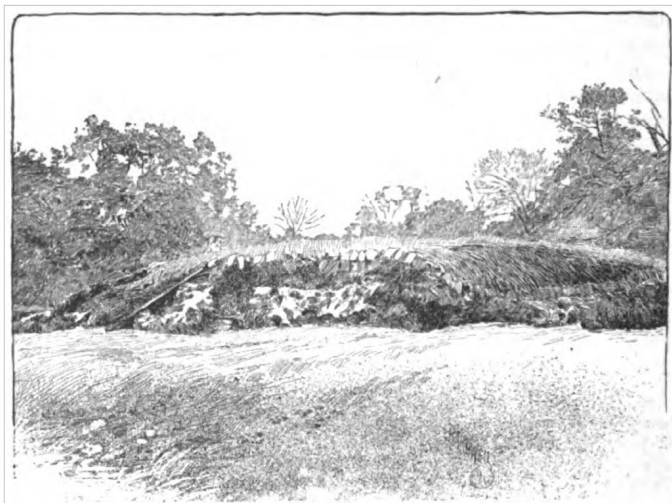
for the Fort was ever there—a silent witness to the truth of the tradition.

This Fort has played a prominent part in the history of the town, and is connected with innumerable anecdotes of the great men of Texas. It has looked down upon riot, revolution and bloodshed; defied attack, and sheltered patriots. It was in that room with the grated window that David Crockett took his oath of allegiance to the "new government of Texas or any other which may be

weld them together; building as they were ordered, with the sense to labor but not to plan; erecting with their own hands an edifice to strengthen the new-comer and subjugate the native!

De Soto tarried not long, and took up his march into Mexico, leaving only this sign to show to coming dusky generations that the tales of their grandsires were true. A century and more rolled on, when again the white man came and passed by, and in scarce thirty years more, lo! two

great nations claimed the land where stood the old Stone Fort. Then Spanish rule began, and for one hundred and six years the flag of Spain on its walls streamed in the breeze. In 1821 that emblem gave place to the eagle, snake and cactus of Mexico, which remained until the battle of San Jacinto made Texas a republic, and presented a new banner, "the lone star," to the world. Then for nine years that flag fluttered, till annexation made



INDIAN EXCAVATION.

established," first stipulating, however, that the word *republican* be inserted. Here Gen. Sam Houston had his headquarters, and it sheltered at one time or another most of the prominent men of the early days of the Texas Republic.

It is such a solid piece of masonry that it will doubtless resist the wear of centuries yet to come, and be to succeeding generations an object of as much speculation and interest as it has been to those gone before. It has existed under five distinct generations, and forms beside a visible link between our times and the day of the aborigines. Thought travels back to the Nassonites as found by De Soto; sees them gazing on the white men as visitants from another sphere; beholds them quarrying the great stones at the command of these strange people, piling them in place, crushing the rocks for lime to make the cement which would

Texas one with the United States and the stars and stripes waved over the hoary walls. But 1861 brought yet another change, and during four short years the ensign of the Confederacy greeted the morning sun, until the spring of 1865 once more placed the Fort under the colors of the United States.

Wonderful as is the stretch of years and multiplicity of historical events thus associated with the locality, a visit to Nacogdoches carries the mind back still further; to pre-traditionary times, when even the red man was not, and where imagination may run riot in speculation—for in the very heart of the town rise the **unmistakable evidences of the Mound Builders' existence. Here are two great mounds which even now, after the detrition of hundreds of years, are ten feet high and more than a hundred feet in diameter at the base. They are only a**

few yards apart, and occupy a beautiful site, being the highest point in the valley and exactly midway between the streams which flow on either side of the town. The Indians used to say that these mounds were always there and were built by a people who lived long, long before the very first of their tribes were born. They regarded these relics of a lost race with superstitious reverence, and the Nassonites buried their dead contiguous to their bases. Not far from these mounds is an excavation from which the earth must have been taken for their construction. Huge trees have grown, rotted and grown again in this hollow, and now it is not

of much depth, seeming to have gradually filled up through the eons which have rolled by.

The mounds have never been opened; no one has attempted to penetrate the mysteries they hide in their bosoms; and though probably they would yield a rich harvest to scientific investigation, one feels that it is well these monuments of a dim past have not been sacrificed for even such a desirable end. Like the old Fort, they remain to speak to us of an antiquity almost beyond the knowledge of man—a memorial of the nations passed away forever from the face of the earth.

Lee C. Harby.

INTIMACY.

THERE was a time when I was taught to look
 Upon the infinity of worlds and space
 With a mere tender and untutored awe ;
 When, like a simple, wondering child, I took
 No heed of what lay hid beyond the face
 And form of what I saw.

Then Nature seemed to me a fairy thing,
 A fantasy of seasons, light and bloom,
 Remote from men and their old, common woes ;
 It was a brief enchantment of the spring,
 A glimpse of moonshine in a ghostly gloom,
 The sweetness of a rose.

But now I stand with eager eyes and soul,
 One with the joy and sorrow of the earth,
 One with the fire of rhythmic stars above,
 And think of Nature as a sentient whole
 Thrilled by the flutter of an atom's birth,
 By any breath of love :

The secret heart of Nature throbs within
 My young heart's passion, as the sunlight burns
 In the glad grace of wildwood leaves or flowers ;
 It has no subtle music not akin
 To some old voice that wanders or returns
 Through my dream-haunted hours!

George Edgar Montgomery.