

## CHAPTER II.

## THE WORKS AND RELICS OF AN EXTINCT PEOPLE.

IN Fayette County, as in many other parts of Western Pennsylvania, and in a great number of localities farther towards the southwest, there exist evidences of a very ancient occupation of these valleys and hills by a people other than the native Indians who held possession at the time when the first white settlers came here. These evidences are found chiefly in curious mounds and other forms of earthwork, some apparently having been devoted to purposes of sepulture alone, and others having the form and appearance of defenses against hostile attack.<sup>1</sup> The great age of these structures was proved, not only by their general appearance of antiquity, but more decidedly by the fact that in many instances trees of the largest size were found growing on the embankments. In reference to these works and the evidence which they furnish that this region, in common with others, covering the entire Mississippi and Ohio River valleys, had been anciently occupied by a people su-

<sup>1</sup> The Moravian writer, Zeisberger, says, in reference to this subject, "In war they [the builders of these earthen works] used some ramparts about their towns, and round hillocks, in the top of which they made a hollow place to shelter their women and children in; they placed themselves around and upon it to fight; in such battles were commonly many killed, whom they buried all in a heap, covering the corpses with the bark of trees, stones, earth, etc. On the place where Schoënbrunn, the Christian Indian town, was built [in Ohio], one can plainly see such a wall or rampart of considerable extent, and not a great way off, in the plain, is such a burial-place, or made hillock, on which large oaks now stand."

perior in skill and intelligence to the Indian tribes whom the first white visitors found in possession, Judge Veech says,—

"That these [the native Indians] were the successors of a race more intelligent, or of a people of different habits of life, seems clearly deducible from the remains of fortifications scattered all over the territory, and which are very distinct from those known to have been constructed by the tribes of Indians named or any of their modern compeers.

"These remains of embankments or 'old forts' are numerous in Fayette County. That they are very ancient is shown by many facts. The Indians known to us could give no satisfactory account of when, how, or by whom they were erected, or for what purpose, except for defense. While the trees of the surrounding forests were chiefly oak, the growths upon and within the lines of the 'old forts' were generally of large black-walnut, wild-cherry, and sometimes locust. We have examined some which indicated an age of from three to five hundred years, and they evidently of a second or third generation, as they were standing amid the decayed remains of their ancestors. How they got there, whether by transplanting, by deposits of floods or of birds, or otherwise, is a speculation into which we will not go.

"These embankments may have been originally composed of wood, as their débris is generally a vegetable mould. No stones were used in their construction, and among their ruins are always found some remains of old pottery, composed of clay mixed with crushed mussel-shells, even when far off from a river. This composite was not burnt, but only baked in the sun. These vessels were generally circular, and, judging from those we have seen, they were made to hold from one to three quarts.

"These 'old forts' were of various forms,—square, oblong, triangular, circular, and semicircular. Their superficial areas ranged from one-fourth of an acre to ten acres. Their sites were generally well chosen in reference to defense and observation, and, what is a very singular fact, they were very often, generally in Fayette County, located on the highest and richest hills, and at a distance from any spring or stream of water. In a few instances this was otherwise, water being inclosed or contiguous, as they are generally in Ohio and other more western parts of the Mississippi Valley.

"Having seen and examined many of these 'old forts' in Fayette County, and also those at Marietta, Newark, and elsewhere in Ohio, we believe they are all the works of the same race of people, as are also the famous Grave Creek mounds, near Elizabethtown, Va., and if this belief be correct, then the conclusion follows irresistibly that the race of people was much superior and existed long anterior to the modern Indian. But who they were, and what became of them, must perhaps forever be unknown. We will briefly indicate the localities of some of these 'old forts' in

Fayette County. To enumerate all, or to describe them separately, would weary the reader. The curious in such matters may yet trace their remains.

"A very noted one, and of most commanding location, was at Brownsville, on the site of 'Fort Burd,' but covering a much larger area. Even after Col. Burd built his fort there, in 1759, it retained<sup>1</sup> the names of 'the old fort,' 'Redstone Old Fort,' or 'Fort Redstone.'

"There was one on land formerly of William Gee, near the Monongahela River, and just above the mouth of Little Redstone, where afterwards was a settler's fort, called Cassel's or Castle Fort; and an old map which we have seen has another of these old forts noted at the mouth of Speers' Run, where Belle Vernon now is.

"Two or three are found on a high ridge southwardly of Perryopolis, on the State road, and on land late of John F. Martin. Another noted one is on the western bank of the Youghiogheny River, nearly opposite the Broad Ford, on land lately held by James Collins.

"There are several on the high ridge of land leading from the Collins' fort, above referred to, southwardly towards Plumsock, on lands of James Paull, John M. Austin, John Bute, and others; a remarkable one being on land lately owned by James Gilchrist and the Byers, where some very large human bones have been found. There is one on the north side of Mounts' Creek, above Irishman's Run.

"A very large one, containing six or eight acres, is on the summit of Laurel Hill, where the Mud pike crosses it, covered with a large growth of black-walnut.

"One specially noted as containing a great quantity of broken shells and pottery existed on the high land between Laurel Run and the Youghiogheny River, on a tract formerly owned by Judge Young.

"There are yet distinct traces of one on land of Gen. Henry W. Beeson, formerly of Col. McClean, about two miles east of Uniontown.

"There was one northeast of New Geneva, at the locality known as the 'Flint Hill,' on land now of John Franks.

"About two miles northeast of New Geneva, on the road to Uniontown, and on land late of William Morris, now Nicholas B. Johnson, was one celebrated for its great abundance of mussel-shells.

"On the high ridge southwardly of the head-waters of Middle Run several existed, of which may be named one on the Bixler land, one on the high knob eastwardly from Clark Breeding's, one on the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Veech did not (as some of his critics have appeared to suppose) intend to say that Burd's fort occupied the site and took the name of Redstone Old Fort. It was built a short distance from the site of the old earthwork, and was always called Fort Burd. But the *locality*—a prominent point on the Monongahela—did retain the appellation of "Redstone Old Fort" for a great many years; and even at the present day no reader of history is at a loss to understand that the name designates the site of the present borough of Brownsville.

Alexander Wilson tract, and one on the land of Dennis Riley, deceased, formerly of Andrew C. Johnson.

"These comprise the most prominent of the 'old forts' in Fayette. Of their cognates, mounds erected as monuments of conquests, or, like the Pyramids of Egypt, as the tombs of kings, we have none. Those that we have seen are of diminutive size, and may have been thrown up to commemorate some minor events, or to cover the remains of a warrior.

"Piles of stones called Indian graves were numerous in many places in Fayette, generally near the sites of Indian villages. They were generally on stony ridges, often twenty or thirty of them in a row. In many of them have been found human bones indicating a stature of from six to seven feet. They also contained arrow-heads, spear-points, and hatchets of stone and flint, nicely and regularly shaped, but how done is the wonder. On a commanding eminence overlooking the Youghiogheny River, upon land now (1869) of Col. A. M. Hill, formerly William Dickerson, there are great numbers of these Indian graves, among which, underneath a large stone, Mr. John Cottom a few years ago found a very curious chain, consisting of a central ring and five chains of about two feet in length, each branching off from it, having at their end clamps, somewhat after the manner of handcuffs, large enough to inclose a man's neck, indicating that its use was to confine prisoners, perhaps to fasten them to the burning stake. The chains were of an antique character but well made, and seemed to have gone through fire."

Of all the prehistoric works noticed in the above account by Mr. Veech, none was so famed, none so widely known as the first one he mentions,—Redstone Old Fort. In the early years it was frequently visited and examined by antiquarians, and many descriptions of it (all of them, however, apparently exaggerated and embellished) were written. One of these accounts is found on page 84 of "American Antiquities," by Josiah Priest, 1834, being taken from an earlier account in the "Travels of Thomas Ashe," who claimed to have visited the old fort and made some excavations there in the year 1806. The account is as follows:

"The neighborhood of Brownsville, or Redstone, in Pennsylvania, abounds with monuments of antiquity. A fortified camp of a very complete and curious kind, on the ramparts of which is timber of five feet in diameter, stands near the town of Brownsville. This camp contains thirteen acres inclosed in a circle, the elevation of which is seven feet above the adjoining ground. This was a herculean work. Within the circle a pentagon is accurately described, having its sides four feet high, and its angles uniformly three feet from the outside of the circle, thus leaving an unbroken communication all around. A pentagon is a figure having five angles or sides. Each side of the pentagon has a postern or small gateway, opening into a passage between it and the circle, but the circle

itself has only one grand gateway outward. Exactly in the centre stands a mound thirty feet high, supposed to have been a place of lookout. At a small distance from this place was found a stone measuring eight feet by five, on which was accurately engraved a representation of the whole work, with the mound in the centre, whereon was the likeness of a human head, which signified that the chief who presided there lay buried beneath it.

"The engraving on this stone is evidence of the knowledge of stone-cutting, as it was executed with a considerable degree of accuracy. On comparing the description of this circular monument with a description of works of a similar character found in Denmark, Sweden, and Ireland, the conclusion is drawn that at some era of time the authors of this kind of monumental works in either of those countries have been the same."

Having given the above account, as written by Ashe, it is proper to remark that he did, without doubt, enlarge upon the plain facts,—in some particulars, at least. Old residents of this locality—among them Mr. Nelson B. Bowman, who was born in 1807, within rifle-shot of the place indicated—say that the account is unsupported by anything they have ever seen or heard narrated by their fathers. Still, the fact remains unquestioned that the first white explorers found here, within the present limits of Brownsville, and occupying an elevated site which commands the Monongahela River above and below, an inclosure of several acres, surrounded by an earthen embankment, evidently centuries old, antedating even the most ancient traditions of the Indians, and this mysterious work they christened Redstone Old Fort. But the hand of Time has obliterated all traces of it, and neither parapet nor central mound have been visible for many years. So it is with the mounds which have been mentioned as having existed in other parts of Fayette County. By the processes of agriculture, continued for generations, and by various other means, they have become so far leveled that in many cases not a trace remains, and in others the outline is barely discernible of works which a century ago stood out bold and clearly defined.

With regard to the origin of these ancient works and relics many theories have been advanced, some apparently reasonable and others wholly absurd. Some writers on the subject have believed that they were built by the French, while some have attributed their construction to the Spanish.<sup>1</sup> Others, with more

<sup>1</sup> De Witt Clinton, in an address delivered before the New York Historical Society in 1811, in alluding to the various improbable theories which ascribed the building of these works to Europeans, said, "An American writer of no inconsiderable repute pronounced some years ago that the two forts at the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio Rivers, one covering forty and the other twenty acres, were erected by Fernando De Soto, who landed with one thousand men in Florida in 1539, and penetrated a considerable distance into the interior of the country. He allotted the large fort for the use of the Spanish army, and after being extremely puzzled how to dispose of the small one in

apparent show of reason, have endeavored to prove that the builders were the ancient Aztecs, and finally some have advanced the opinion that they were erected by descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Whatever may be said of these latter theories, the idea of their construction by the French or Spanish seems wholly inadmissible, on account of the number and extent of the works west of the Alleghanies; again, on account of their evident antiquity, many of them having from every appearance been erected long before the discovery of America, and finally by their form, which is entirely different from any system of European fortification, ancient or modern.

This much and no more may be set down as reasonably certain, that these works were reared by a people who preceded those found here by the first European visitors, but whether they were Aztecs, Toltecs, or of Jewish origin, as some have supposed, is a question which will probably never be solved. The imagination, unrestrained by facts, may roam at will in the realm of ingenious speculation, but the subject is one of pure conjecture which it is not profitable to pursue.

its vicinity, he at last assigned it to the swine that generally, as he said, attended the Spanish in those days, it being, in his opinion, very necessary in order to prevent them from becoming estrays and to protect them from the depredations of the Indians.

"Lewis Dennie, a Frenchman, aged upwards of seventy, and who had been settled and married among the Coufederates (Six Nations) for more than half a century, told me in 1810 that, according to the traditions of the ancient Indians, these forts were erected by an army of Spaniards, who were the first Europeans ever seen by them (the French next, then the Dutch, and finally the English); that this army first appeared at Oswego in great force, and penetrated through the interior of the country searching for the precious metals; that they continued there two years and then went down the Ohio." After giving several reasons why this account was to be considered unworthy of belief, Mr. Clinton continued: "It is equally clear that they were not the work of the Indians. Until the Senecas, who are renowned for their national vanity, had seen the attention of the Americans attracted to these erections, and had invented the fabulous account of which I have spoken, the Indians of the present day did not pretend to know anything about the origin of these works. They were beyond the reach of all their traditions, and were lost in the abyss of unexplored antiquity."

<sup>1</sup> Zeisberger, the Moravian, says, "The Shawanos, a warlike people, lived in Florida, but having been subdued in war by the Moshkos, they left their land and moved to Susquehanna, and from one place to another. Meeting a strong party of Delawares, and relating to them their forlorn condition, they took them into their protection as *grandchildren*; the Shawanos called the Delaware nation their *grandfather*. They lived thereupon in the Forks of the Delaware, and settled for a time in Wyoming. When they had increased again they removed by degrees to the Allegheny." When they came from the East to the Ohio, they located at and near Montour's Island, below the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela. The Delawares came with them to the West, both tribes having been ordered away from the valleys of the Delaware and Susquehanna by the Iroquois, whom they were compelled by conquest to recognize as their masters.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that the Six Nations were the acknowledged owners of this region of country, and that the Shawanese and Delawares were here only on sufferance, seems clear. At the treaty held with the Indians at Fort Pitt, in May, 1768, a Shawanese chief complained bitterly to the English of their encroachments, and said, "We desired you to destroy your forts. . . . We also desired you not to go down the river." In the next day's council, Guyasutha, a chief of the Six Nations, rose, with a copy of the treaty of 1764, and said, "By this treaty you had a right to build forts and trading-houses where you pleased, and to travel the road of peace from the sun rising to the sun setting. At that treaty the Delawares and Shawanese were with me and they know all this well; and they should never have spoken to you as they did yesterday." Soon after, the Shawanese chief, Kissinaughta, rose and said, apologetically, to the English, "You desired us to speak from our hearts and tell you what gave us uneasiness of mind, and we did so. We are very sorry we should have said anything to give offense, and we acknowledge we were in the wrong."

In the same year (1768), when the Pennsylvania commissioners, Allen and Shippin, proposed to the Indians to send a deputation of chiefs with the white messengers, Frazer and Thompson, to warn off the white settlers who had located without authority on the Monongahela River and Redstone Creek, in what is now Fayette County, the "White Mingo" (whose "Castle" was on the west side of the Allegheny, a few miles above its mouth) and three other chiefs of the Six Nations were selected to go on that mission, but no notice was taken of the Delaware or Shawanese chiefs in the matter, which shows clearly enough that these two tribes were not regarded as having any ownership in the lands.

And it is related by George Croghan, in his account of a treaty council held with the Six Nations at Logstown, on the Ohio, below Pittsburgh, in 1751, that "A Dunkard from Virginia came to town and requested leave to settle on the Yo-yo-gaine [Youghiogheny] River, a branch of the Ohio. He was told that he must apply to the Onondaga Council and be recommended by the Governor of Pennsylvania." The Onondaga Council was held on a hill near the present site of Syracuse, N. Y., and the central headquarters of the Six Nations.

Another fact that shows the Six Nations to have been the recognized owners of this region of country is that when the surveyors were about to extend the Mason and Dixon line westward, in 1767, the proprietaries asked, not of the Delawares and Shawanese but of the Iroquois (Six Nations) permission to do so. This permission was given by their chiefs, who also sent several of their warriors to accompany the surveying party. Their presence afforded to the white men the desired protection, and the Shawanese and Delawares dared not offer any molestation. But after the Iroquois escort left (as they did at a point on the Maryland line) the other Indians became, in the absence of their masters, so defiant and threatening that the surveyors were compelled to abandon the running of the line west of Dunkard Creek.

Finally, it was not from the Delawares and Shawanese but from the Six Nations that the Penns purchased this territory by the treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768.