

Topics

Old Treasure, Manors Reborn

The Gold of Ophir

Saudi Arabia, as part of a billion-dollar archeological program, plans field work that it hopes will uncover, among other things, the site of biblical Ophir. That was the place to which Solomon dispatched his ships from Ezion-geber on the shore of the Red Sea. "And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to King Solomon . . . And the navy . . . brought in from Ophir great plenty of sandalwood and precious stones."

It is a worthy undertaking, although the Saudis have no need to find Ophir for its gold. Who knows what they might discover, digging up their past along the ancient trade routes. Understanding the peoples and patterns of antiquity might have pointed relevance for the present and the future. As Job said so long ago, ". . . wisdom, where shall it be found? And where is

the place of understanding? . . . It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir."

Take-Out Chateaux

Anyone who wants a chateau without the bother of constructing or inheriting it can now carry one away — or have it moved, anyway, by a Belgian entrepreneur who has set himself up in the instant castle business. He scouts out old chateaux marked for destruction and he makes them available in knock-down form.

What is offered is a superior product. These are genuine French chateaux from vintage chateau country, the Loire Valley — not prime historical specimens, of course, but very good neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance structures built in the 19th century by the nouveaux riches of a restored monarchy. They come fully turreted and in ready-to-assemble shipments. A good-

sized castle requires about 500 crates.

One has just been packed up in Angers to go to three separate buyers, in Britain, West Germany and the Netherlands. That is the share-a-chateau model. Another has already been sent to California, where many good European castles go when they die. There are about 15 chateaux available, and there's a waiting list for more.

The French, who don't often care for mere 19th-century bourgeois grandeur, have become concerned. Although these buildings aren't protected as landmarks and are seldom in the guidebooks, the protests are rising. They will probably be unavailing. Apparently there's no way to save these structures locally, and a new roof costs more than an original Chambord.

Thus the most comforting way to view the exodus is as a kind of recycling. May the chateaux travel as well as their wines.