

THE ALABAMA STONE.

BY HENRY W. HAYNES.

ON May 1, 1824, Mr. Silas Dinsmore, of Mobile, Alabama, who had been elected a councillor of this society, in recognition of the compliment thus paid to him, forwarded for its cabinet the large, unwrought piece of sandstone, of a rudely conical shape and bearing an inscription in Roman letters and Arabic figures, which is now before us. It measures $21\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height, 18 in breadth, and from 10 to 13 in thickness; and weighs 204 pounds. In regard to the inscription Dr. Haven says: "To our eyes it reads HISPAN.ET.IND.REX as plainly as the same inscription on a Spanish quarter of a dollar that is somewhat worn. The figures may be as above represented (1232), but of course they cannot be intended for a date."¹

Sir Daniel Wilson calls it "an innocent piece of blundering," and suggests that the figures may be intended for 1532; but an inspection of the original does not sustain this opinion.²

The circumstances attending the discovery of the stone were related at the time in a letter, now in the possession of the Society, written from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, April 12, 1824, by Mr. Levin Powell to Mr. Henry A. Snow, from whom Mr. Dinsmore had obtained it. The following extract contains all that is of any consequence upon that point: "In the year 1816, about which time the country around Tuscaloosa was for the first time traversed by the

¹ *Archæology of the United States . . .* by Samuel F. Haven, p. 134. (Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, vol. viii.)

² *Prehistoric Man . . .* by Daniel Wilson. 3d ed. vol. ii., p. 110.



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feet of civilized man within our knowledge, the rock here-with presented was found in an extensive plain six or seven miles below this place, precisely in the same shape and with the same inscriptions which it now has. Shortly after which it was taken and brought to town, and has ever since been under my inspection and care. One circumstance, going

conclusively to show that it is not the work of some person merely for the sake of exciting speculation, is that the rock must have been taken from the falls of the Black Warrior river, or somewhere equally as distant, and carried to the place where it was found, which is a distance of six or seven miles, as rock of the same description, or any other, is not to be found anywhere nearer."

Some further information in regard to the discovery is contained in a paper read by Mr. Thomas Maxwell before the Alabama Historical Society, July 1, 1876.¹ He says: "In 1817 Mr. Thomas Scales, a worthy citizen of the neighborhood, when a boy, removed with his father from North Alabama to the new settlement at Tuscaloosa Falls. The first work they did was to clear a piece of ground on the north bank of the river, six miles from our wharf, just below the mouth of Big Creek. In clearing away the tim-

¹ Tuscaloosa; the origin of its name, its history, etc. . . . by Thomas Maxwell, p. 79.

ber they found an earthwork or embankment, in the nature of a fortification, which ran across the peninsula formed by the junction of the creek and the river. This embankment was about four feet high, and on the top of it, all the way across from river to creek, were growing the largest trees of the forest. At the foot of one of these (a large tulip-tree which stood on the very edge of the embankment), they found a stone set up against the tree, with the lower end of the stone half buried in the soil. On the stone they discovered some curious letters, which, being in Latin, they could not understand; and this, Mr. Scales said, induced his father to take the stone up to the settlement at the falls, now the town of Tuscaloosa, where it stood for a long time near to Squire Powell's office, a subject of constant speculation for the curious." . . . "As to the date upon the stone (1232), if it is a date, the theory of the writer is that the whole of the inscription had been copied from an old Spanish dollar by a portion of De Soto's men, who had been sent out in various directions searching for gold. . . . That they had such old coins with them is evident from the statement of Mr. Hudgins, who had one in possession, found not far from Valley Head, bearing the date 1114."¹ I think, however, that this theory of Mr. Maxwell's is scarcely tenable, for it was subsequent to the discoveries of Columbus that the King of Spain assumed the title of King of the Indies; but I am not able myself to suggest any more probable explanation of the meaning of the figures.

I can see no reasonable objection to supposing that the stone may be indeed a relic of the expedition of De Soto in 1540; and it appears to be not the only one remaining of that expedition. We are told that De Soto brought with him as far as Cofa (or Ocute as it is called by the anonymous Portuguese gentleman), a piece of ordnance, which he left behind at that place.² Mr. Maxwell says that this cannon

¹Tuscaloosa; the origin of its name, its history, etc., p. 80.

²Garcilaso de la Vega, *La Florida del Inca*, B. iii., ch. 3.

was seen by Mr. T. L. Hudgins, of Tuskalooza, in 1845, "after it had been bursted by firing it off near Rockford, in Coosa county. It was found between the mouth of Hatchet Creek and Wetumpka (or sounding water), on the Coosa river. He describes it as being of brass, about four and a half feet long and four inches in the bore."¹ In his history of Alabama, Pickett relates, upon the authority of a half-breed named George Stiggins, that one of the Indian tribes of that State had still in its possession a brass kettle-drum and several shields that had been handed down among them from De Soto's time.² In the year 1832 two silver crosses were taken from a grave-mound at Coosawattee Old Town, Murray county, Georgia, associated with Indian remains. They are described and figured by Col. Charles C. Jones, who regards them as relics of De Soto's expedition, and who believes that the spot where they were found was the site where he encamped in June, 1540.³

I will take this opportunity to correct an error in regard to De Soto's expedition, into which Mr. John Gilmary Shea has fallen in his chapter entitled "Ancient Florida," in the *Narrative and Critical History of America*.⁴ He says: "We are without the means, in any of the original sources, to determine without dispute the most northerly point reached by Soto. He had evidently approached, but had learned nothing of, the Missouri river. Almost at the same time that Soto, with the naked, starving remnants of his army, was at Pacaha, another Spanish force under Vasquez de Coronado, well handled and perfectly equipped, must, in July and August, 1541, have been encamped so near that an Indian runner in a few days might have carried tidings between them. Coronado actually heard of his countryman and sent him a letter; but his messenger failed to find Soto's party." The only authority adduced by Mr. Shea for this

¹Tuskaloosa, etc., p. 13.

²History of Alabama, by Albert J. Pickett, vol. 1., p. 20 (note).

³Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1881, p. 619.

⁴Vol. iv., p. 292.

statement in regard to Coronado is the *Relacion* of Jaramillo. But there is no such statement to be found in Jaramillo's narrative. What he actually says is: "The general (Coronado) wrote a letter to the governor of Harahei and Quivera, thinking that he was a Christian belonging to the lost army of Florida (*evidently meaning De Soto's expedition*). This we were induced to believe by what the Indian had told us about his manner of government and policy." But Jaramillo goes on to say: "We arrived at the last village, which they told us was called Quivera. . . . We asked if there were any other villages on this side of the river Teucarea, and they replied that beside Quivera there was only Harahei, which resembled it and was equally large. The general had the chief and the Indians who inhabited Harahei summoned before him. They came to the number of two hundred, all naked, with bows, etc."¹ Thus it appears that Mr. Shea has accepted as truth the lie told to Coronado by his Indian guide.

¹Jaramillo, *Relacion*, p. 160 (Buckingham Smith's *Coleccion de varios documentos*); the Same, in Pacheco's *Documentos Ineditos*, tom. xiv., p. 313; translated in Ternaux-Compan's *Voyages*, etc., ix., 376.

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