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INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL

IN

YUCATAN.

BY JOHN L. STEPHENS,

AUTHOR OF "INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL IN EGYPT, ARABIA PETRÆA, AND THE
HOLY LAND," "INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL IN CENTRAL AMERICA, CHIAPAS,
AND YUCATAN," ETC.

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THE SECOND VOLUME.

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CHAPTER I.

Departure from Nohcacab.—Outfit.—Rancho of Chack.—Frigh of the Women.—Rancho of Schawill.—Casa Real.—Scarcity of Water.—Visit from the Alcalde.—Primitive Mode of obtaining Water.—A peculiar People.—Ruins of Zayi.—Great tree-covered Mound.—The Casa Grande.—Fortunate Discovery.—Staircase.—Doorways, &c.—Buildings on the second Terrace.—Doorways.—Curiously ornamented Columns.—Building on the third Terrace.—Doorways, Apartments, &c.—Stone Lintels.—Façade of the second Range of Buildings.—Ground Plan of the three Ranges.—The Casa Cerrada.—Doorways filled up inside with Stone and Mortar.—Finished Apartments, also filled up.—This filling up simultaneous with the Erection of the Building.—A Mound.—Ruined Building.—Its Interior.—Sculptured Head, &c.—A strange Structure.—An Archway.—Perpendicular Wall.—Stuccoed Figures and Ornaments.—Great Terrace and Building.—Apartments, &c.—Want of Interest manifested by the Indians in regard to these Ruins.

ON the twenty-fourth of January we left Nohcacab. It was a great relief to bid farewell to this place, and the only regret attending our departure was the reflection that we should be obliged to return. The kindness and attentions of the padrecito and his brother, and, indeed, of all the villagers, had been unremitted, but the fatigue of riding twelve miles every day over the same ground, and the difficulty of procuring Indians to work, were a constant

source of annoyance; besides which, we had a feeling that operated during the whole of our journey: wherever we were taken ill we became disgusted with the place, and were anxious to leave it.

We were setting out on a tour which, according to the plan laid out, embraced a circuit of ruins, and required us to revisit Nohcacab, although our return would be only to make it a point of departure in another direction.

In consequence of this plan we left behind all our heavy luggage, and carried with us only the Daguerreotype apparatus, hammocks, one large box containing our tin table service, a candlestick, bread, chocolate, coffee, and sugar, and a few changes of clothing in pestaquillas. Besides Albino and Bernaldo we had a puny lad of about fifteen, named Barnaby, a much smaller pattern than either of the others, and all three together were hardly equal in bulk to one fairly developed man.

We were all provided with good horses for the road. Mr. Catherwood had one on which he could make a sketch without dismounting; Dr. Cabot could shoot from the back of his. Mine could, on an emergency, be pushed into a hard day's journey for a preliminary visit. Albino rode a hard-mouthed, wilful beast, which shook him constantly like a fit of the fever and ague, and which we distinguished by the name of the trotter. Bernaldo asked for a horse, because Albino had one, but, instead of riding, he had to put a strap across his forehead and carry his own luggage on his back.

We were about entering a region little or not at all frequented by white men, and occupied entirely by Indians. Our road lay through the ruins of Kabah, a league beyond which we reached the rancho of Chack. This was a large habitation of Indians, under the jurisdiction of the village of Nohcacab. There was not a white man in the place, and as we rode through, the women snatched up their children, and ran from us like startled deer. I rode up to a hut into which I saw a woman enter, and, stopping at the fence, merely from curiosity, took out a cigar, and, making use of some of the few Maya words we had picked up, asked for a light, but the door remained shut. I dismounted, and before I had tied my horse the women rushed out and disappeared among the bushes. In one part of the rancho was a casa real, being a long thatched hut with a large square before it, protected by an arbour of leaves, and on one side was a magnificent seybo tree, throwing its shade to a great distance round.

On leaving this rancho we saw at a distance on the left a high ruined building standing alone amid a great intervening growth of woods, and apparently inaccessible. Beyond, and at the distance of four leagues from Nohcacab, we reached the rancho of Schawill, which was our first stopping-place, on account of the ruins of Zayi in its immediate neighbourhood. This place also was inhabited exclusively by Indians, rancho being the name given to a settlement not of sufficient importance to constitute

a village. The casa real, like that at Chack, was a large hut, with mud walls and a thatched roof. It had an open place in front about a hundred feet square, enclosed by a fence made of poles, and shaded by an arbour of palm leaves. Around the hut were large seybo trees. The casa real is erected in every rancho of Indians expressly for the reception of the cura on his occasional or perhaps barely possible visits, but it is occupied also by small dealers from the villages, who sometimes find their way to these ranchos to buy up hogs, maize, and fowls. The hut, when swept out, and comparatively clear of fleas, made a large and comfortable apartment, and furnished ample swinging room for six hammocks, being the number requisite for our whole retinue.

This place was under the parochial charge of our friend the cura of Ticul, who, however, owing to the multiplicity of his other occupations, had visited it but once. The padrecito had sent notice of our coming, and had charged the people to be in readiness to receive us. Immediately on our arrival, therefore, Indians were at hand to procure ration for the horses, but there was no water. The rancho had no well, and was entirely dependant on that of Chack, three miles distant. For two reals, however, the Indians undertook to procure us four cantaros, one for each horse, which would serve for the night. In the evening we had a formal visit from the alcalde and his alguazils, and half the village besides.

Although we had been some time in the country, we regarded this as really the beginning of our travels; and though the scenes we had met with already were not much like any we had ever encountered before, our first day's journey introduced us to some that were entirely new. The Indians assembled under the arbour, where they, with great formality, offered us seats, and the alcalde told us that the rancho was poor, but they would do all they could to serve us. Neither he nor any other in the place spoke a word of Spanish, and our communications were through Albino. We opened the interview by remonstrating against the charge of two reals for watering our horses, but the excuse was satisfactory enough. In the rainy season they had sources of supply in the neighbourhood, and these were perhaps as primitive as in any other section of the habitable world, being simply deposits of rain-water in the holes and hollows of rocks, which were called sartenejas. From the rocky nature of the country, these are very numerous; during the rainy season they are replenished as fast as they are exhausted, and at the time of our visit, owing to the long continuance of the rains, they furnished a sufficient supply for domestic use, but the people were not able to keep horses or cows, or cattle of any kind, the only animals they had being hogs. In the dry season this source of supply failed them; the holes in the rocks were dry, and they were obliged to send to the rancho of Chack, the well of which they represented as being half a

mile under ground, and so steep that it was reached only by descending nine different staircases.

This account saved them from all imputation of churlishness in not giving our horses water. It seemed strange that any community should be willing to live where this article of primary necessity was so difficult to be obtained, and we asked them why they did not break up their settlement and go elsewhere; but this idea seemed never to have occurred to them; they said their fathers had lived there before them, and the land around was good for milpas. In fact, they were a peculiar people, and I never before regretted so much my ignorance of the Maya language. They are under the civil jurisdiction of the village of Nohcacab, but the right of soil is their own by inheritance. They consider themselves better off than in the villages, where the people are subject to certain municipal regulations and duties, or than on the haciendas, where they would be under the control of masters.

Their community consists of a hundred labradores, or working men; their lands are held and wrought in common, and the products are shared by all. Their food is prepared at one hut, and every family sends for its portion, which explained a singular spectacle we had seen on our arrival; a procession of women and children, each carrying an earthen bowl containing a quantity of smoking hot broth, all coming down the same road, and dispersing among the different huts. Every member be-

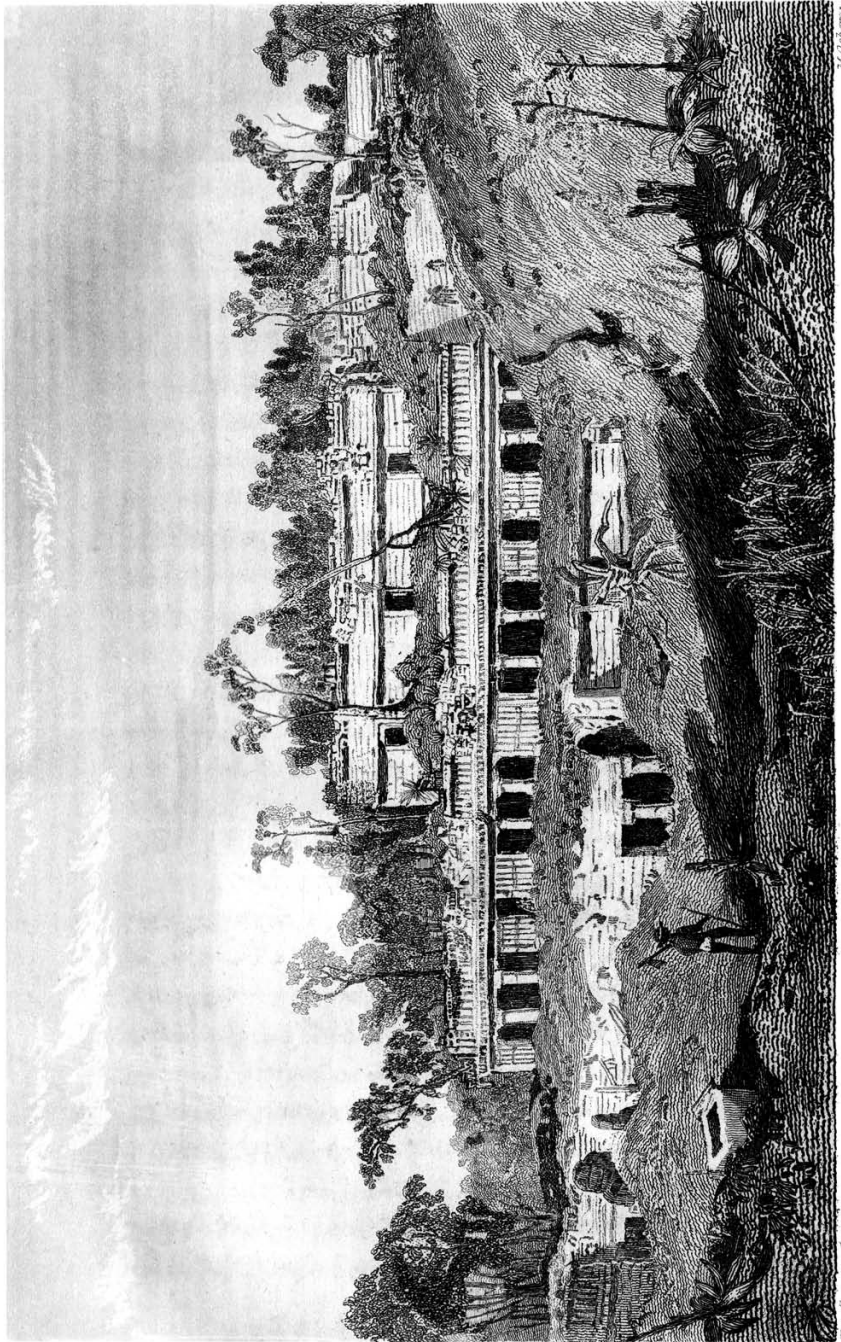
longing to the community, down to the smallest pappoose, contributed in turn a hog. From our ignorance of the language, and the number of other and more pressing matters claiming our attention, we could not learn all the details of their internal economy, but it seemed to approximate that improved state of association which is sometimes heard of among us; and as theirs has existed for an unknown length of time, and can no longer be considered merely experimental, Owen or Fourier might perhaps take lessons from them with advantage.

They differ from professed reformers in one important particular—they seek no converts. No stranger is allowed, upon any consideration, to enter their community; every member must marry within the rancho, and no such thing as a marriage out of it had ever occurred. They said it was impossible; it could not happen. They were in the habit of going to the villages to attend the festivals; and when we suggested a supposable case of a young man or woman falling in love with some village Indian, they said it might happen; there was no law against it; but none could *marry* out of the rancho. This was a thing so little apprehended that the punishment for it was not defined in their penal code; but being questioned, after some consultation they said that the offender, whether man or woman, would be expelled. We remarked that in their small community constant intermarriages must make

them all relatives, which they said was the case since the reduction of their numbers by the cholera. They were, in fact, all kinsfolk, but it was allowable for kinsfolk to marry except in the relationship of brothers and sisters. They were very strict in attendance upon the ceremonies of the Church, and had just finished the celebration of the carnival two weeks in advance of the regular time; but when we corrected their chronology, they said they could celebrate it over again.

Early in the morning we set out for the ruins of Zayi, or Salli. At a short distance from the rancho we saw in an overgrown milpa on our left the ruins of a mound and building, so far destroyed that they are not worth presenting.

After proceeding a mile and a half we saw at some distance before us a great tree-covered mound, which astonished us by its vast dimensions, and, but for our Indian assistants, would have frightened us by the size of the trees growing upon it. The woods commenced from the roadside. Our guides cut a path, and, clearing the branches overhead, we followed on horseback, dismounting at the foot of the Casa Grande. It was by this name that the Indians called the immense pile of white stone buildings, which, buried in the depths of a great forest, added new desolation to the waste by which they were surrounded. We tied our horses, and worked our way along the front. The trees were so close that we could take in but a small portion of it at



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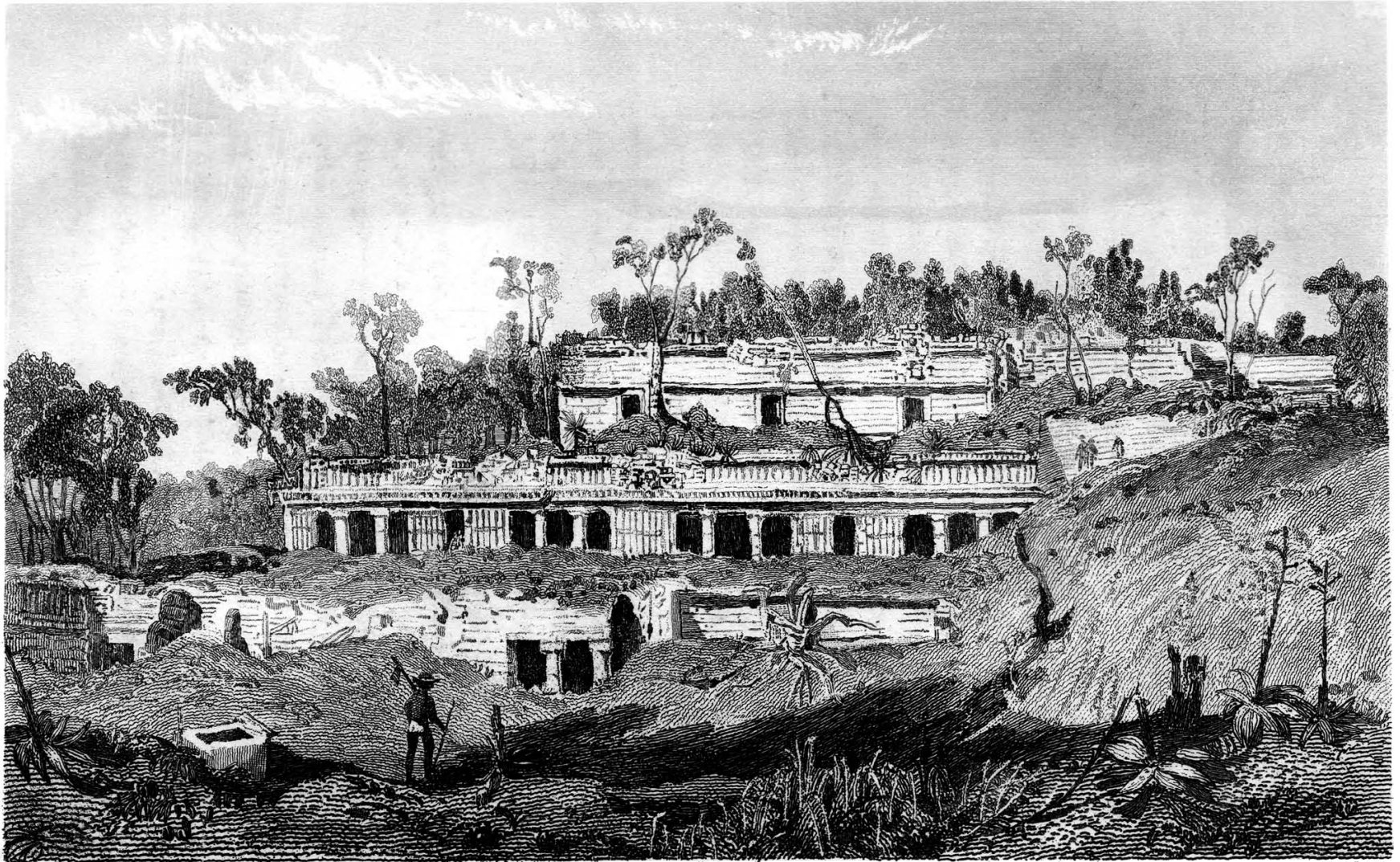
once. If we had encountered these woods at Kabah, where we had such difficulties in procuring Indians, we should have despaired of being able to accomplish anything, but, fortunately so far, where our labours were great we had at hand the means of performing them.

We were at no loss what to do, our great object now being to economize time. Without waiting to explore the rest of the ground, we set the Indians at work, and in a few minutes the stillness of ages was broken by the sharp ringing of the axe and the crash of falling trees. With a strong force of Indians, we were able, in the course of the day, to lay bare the whole of the front.

Dr. Cabot did not arrive on the ground till late in the day, and, coming upon it suddenly from the woods, when there were no trees to obstruct the view, and its three great ranges and immense proportions were visible at once, considered it the grandest spectacle he had seen in the country.

The plate opposite represents the front of this building. The view was taken from a mound, at the distance of about five hundred feet, overgrown and having upon it a ruined edifice. In clearing away the trees and undergrowth to this mound we discovered a pila, or stone, hollowed out, and filled with rain-water, which was a great acquisition to us while working at these ruins.

The plate represents so much of the building as now remains and can be presented in a drawing.



F. Catremwood

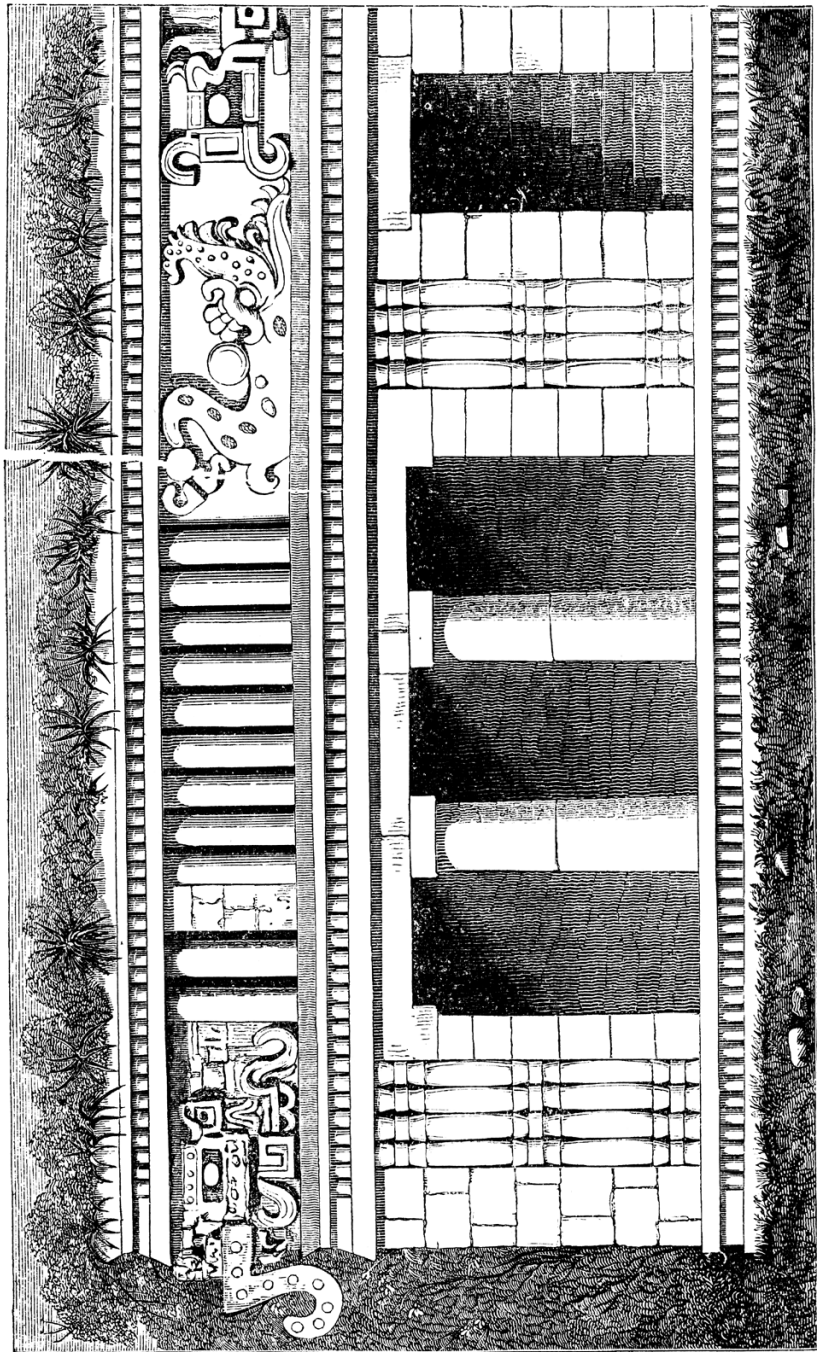
J. Osborne

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It has three stories or ranges, and in the centre is a grand staircase thirty-two feet wide, rising to the platform of the highest terrace. This staircase, however, is in a ruinous condition, and, in fact, a mere mound, and all that part of the building on the right had fallen, and was so dilapidated that no intelligible drawing could be made of it; we did not even clear away the trees. The engraving represents all that part which remains, being the half of the building on the left of the staircase.

The lowest of the three ranges is two hundred and sixty-five feet in front and one hundred and twenty in depth. It had sixteen doorways, opening into apartments of two chambers each. The whole front wall has fallen; the interiors are filled with fragments and rubbish, and the ground in front was so encumbered with the branches of fallen trees, even after they had been chopped into pieces and beaten down with poles, that, at the distance necessary for making a drawing, but a small portion of the interior could be seen. The two ends of this range have each six doorways, and the rear has ten, all opening into apartments, but in general they are in a ruinous condition.

The range of buildings on the second terrace was two hundred and twenty feet in length and sixty feet in depth, and had four doorways on each side of the grand staircase. Those on the left, which are all that remain, have two columns in each doorway, each column being six feet six inches high,

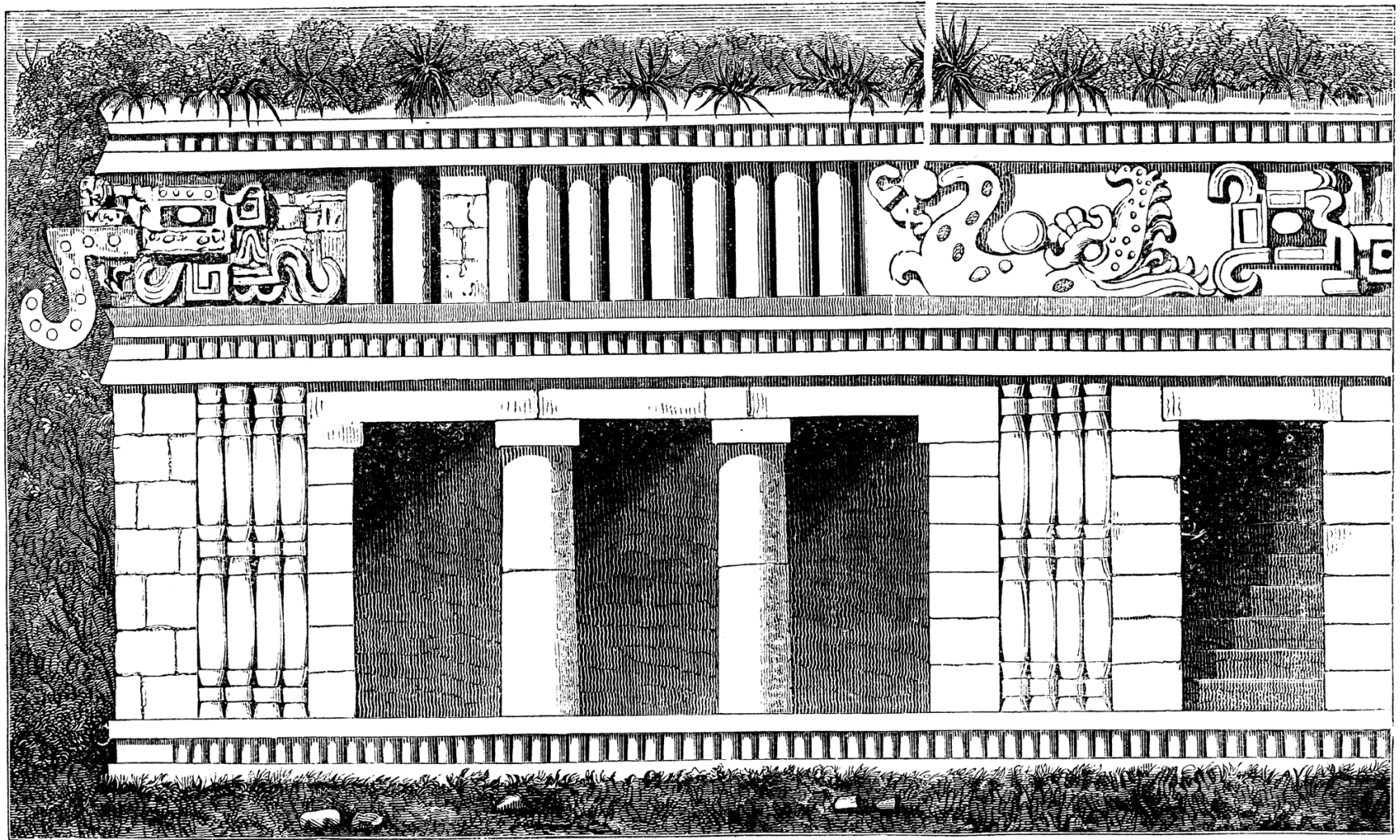


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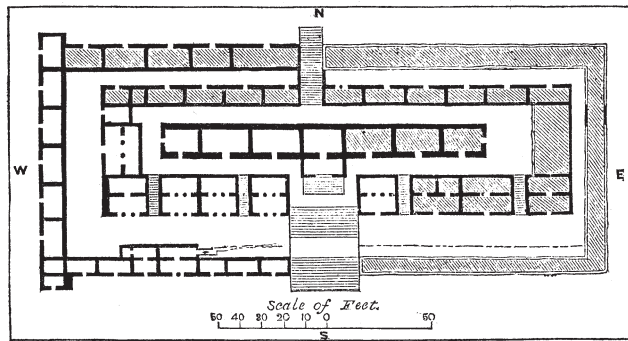
roughly made, with square capitals, like Doric, but wanting the grandeur pertaining to all known remains of this ancient order. Filling up the spaces between the doorways are four small columns curiously ornamented, close together, and sunk in the wall. Between the first and second and third and fourth doorways a small staircase leads to the terrace of the third range. The platform of this terrace is thirty feet in front and twenty-five in the rear. The building is one hundred and fifty feet long by eighteen feet deep, and has seven doorways opening into as many apartments. The lintels over the doorways are of stone.

The exterior of the third and highest range was plain; that of the two other ranges had been elaborately ornamented; and, in order to give some idea of their character, I present opposite a portion of the façade of the second range. Among designs common in other places is the figure of a man supporting himself on his hands, with his legs expanded in a curious rather than delicate attitude, of which a small portion appears on the right of the engraving; and again we have the "large and very well constructed buildings of lime and stone" which Bernal Dias saw at Campeachy, "with figures of *serpents* and of idols painted on the walls."

The following engraving represents the ground plan of the three ranges, and gives the dimensions of the terraces. The platforms are wider in front than in the rear; the apartments vary from twenty-three to



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ten feet, and the north side of the second range has a curious and unaccountable feature. It is called the Casa Cerrada, or closed house, having ten doorways, all of which are blocked up inside with stone and mortar. Like the well at Xcoch, it had a mysterious reputation in the village of Nohcacab, and all believed that it contained hidden treasure. Indeed, so strong was this belief, that the alcalde Segundo, who had never visited these ruins, resolved to take advantage of our presence; and, according to agreement in the village, came down with crow-bars to assist us in breaking into the closed apartments and discovering the precious hoard. The first sight of these closed-up doorways gave us a strong desire to make the attempt; but on moving along we found that the Indians had been beforehand with us. In front of several were piles of stones, which they had worked out from the doorways, and under the lintels were holes, through which we were able to crawl inside; and

here we found ourselves in apartments finished with walls and ceilings like all the others, but filled up (except so far as they had been emptied by the Indians) with solid masses of mortar and stone. There were ten of these apartments in all, 220 feet long and ten feet deep, which being thus filled up, made the whole building a solid mass; and the strangest feature was that the filling up of the apartments must have been simultaneous with the erection of the buildings, for, as the filling-in rose above the tops of the doorways, the men who performed it never could have entered to their work through the doors. It must have been done as the walls were built, and the ceiling must have closed over a solid mass. Why this was so constructed it was impossible to say, unless the solid mass was required for the support of the upper terrace and building; and if this was the case, it would seem to have been much easier to erect a solid structure at once, without any division into apartments.

The top of this building commanded a grand view, no longer of a dead plain, but of undulating woodlands. Toward the northwest, crowning the highest hill, was a lofty mound, covered with trees, which, to our now practised eyes, it was manifest shrouded a building, either existing or in ruins. The whole intervening space was thick wood and underbrush, and the Indians said the mound was inaccessible. I selected three of the best, and told them that we must reach it; but they really did not know

how to make the attempt, and set out on a continuation of the road by which we had reached the ruins, and which led us rather from than to the mound. On the way we met another Indian, who turned back with us, and a little beyond, taking his range, he cut through the woods to another path, following which a short distance, he again struck through the woods, and, all cutting together, we reached the foot of a stony hill covered with the gigantic maguey, or *Agave Americana*, its long thorny points piercing and tearing all that touched them. Climbing up this hill with great toil, we reached the wall of a terrace, and, climbing this, found ourselves at the foot of the building.

It was in a ruinous condition, and did not repay us for the labour; but over the door was a sculptured head with a face of good expression and workmanship. In one of the apartments was a high projection running along the wall; in another a raised platform about a foot high; and on the walls of this apartment was the print of the red hand. The doorway commanded an extensive view of rolling woodland, which, with its livery of deep green, ought to have conveyed a sensation of gladness, but, perhaps from its desolation and stillness, it induced rather a feeling of melancholy. There was but one opening in the forest, being that made by us, disclosing the Casa Grande, with the figures of a few Indians still continuing their clearings on the top.

In front of the Casa Grande, at the distance of five hundred yards, and also visible from the top, is another structure, strikingly different from any we had seen, more strange and inexplicable, and having at a distance the appearance of a New-England factory.

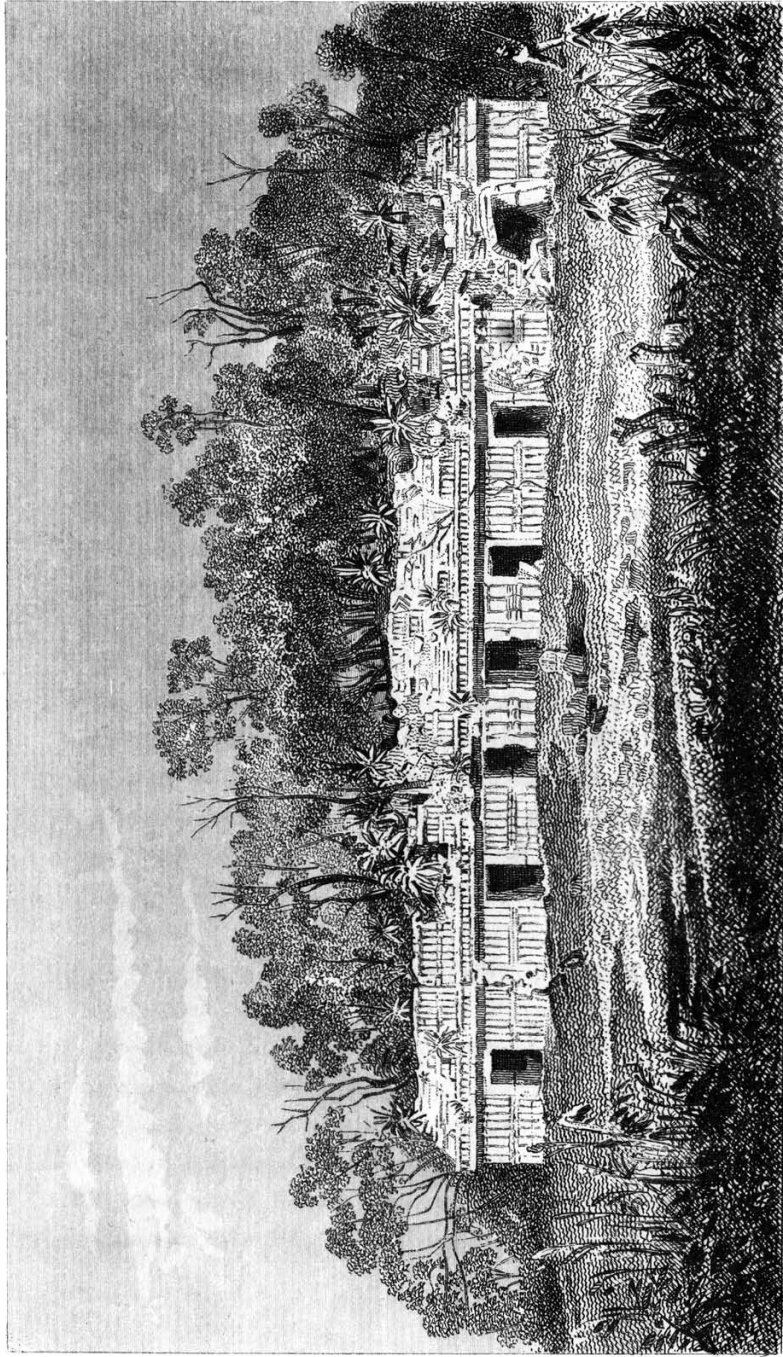
The engraving which follows represents this build-



ing. It stands on a terrace, and may be considered as consisting of two separate structures, one above the other. The lower one, in its general features, resembled all the rest. It was forty feet front, low, and having a flat roof, and in the centre was an

archway running through the building. The front is fallen, and the whole so ruined that nothing but the archway appears in the engraving. Along the middle of the roof, unsupported, and entirely independent of everything else, rises a perpendicular wall to the height of perhaps thirty feet. It is of stone, about two feet thick, and has oblong openings through it about four feet long and six inches wide, like small windows. It had been covered with stucco, which had fallen off, and left the face of rough stone and mortar; and on the other side were fragments of stuccoed figures and ornaments. An Indian appears before it in the act of killing a snake, with which all the woods of Yucatan abound. Since we began our exploration of American ruins we had not met with anything more inexplicable than this great perpendicular wall. It seemed built merely to puzzle posterity.

These were the only buildings in this immediate neighbourhood which had survived the wasting of the elements; but, inquiring among the Indians, one of them undertook to guide me to another, which he said was still in good preservation. Our direction was south-southwest from the Casa Grande; and at the distance of about a mile, the whole intermediate region being desolate and overgrown, we reached a terrace, the area of which far exceeded anything we had seen in the country. We crossed it from north to south, and in this direction it must have been fifteen hundred feet in length, and probably was quite



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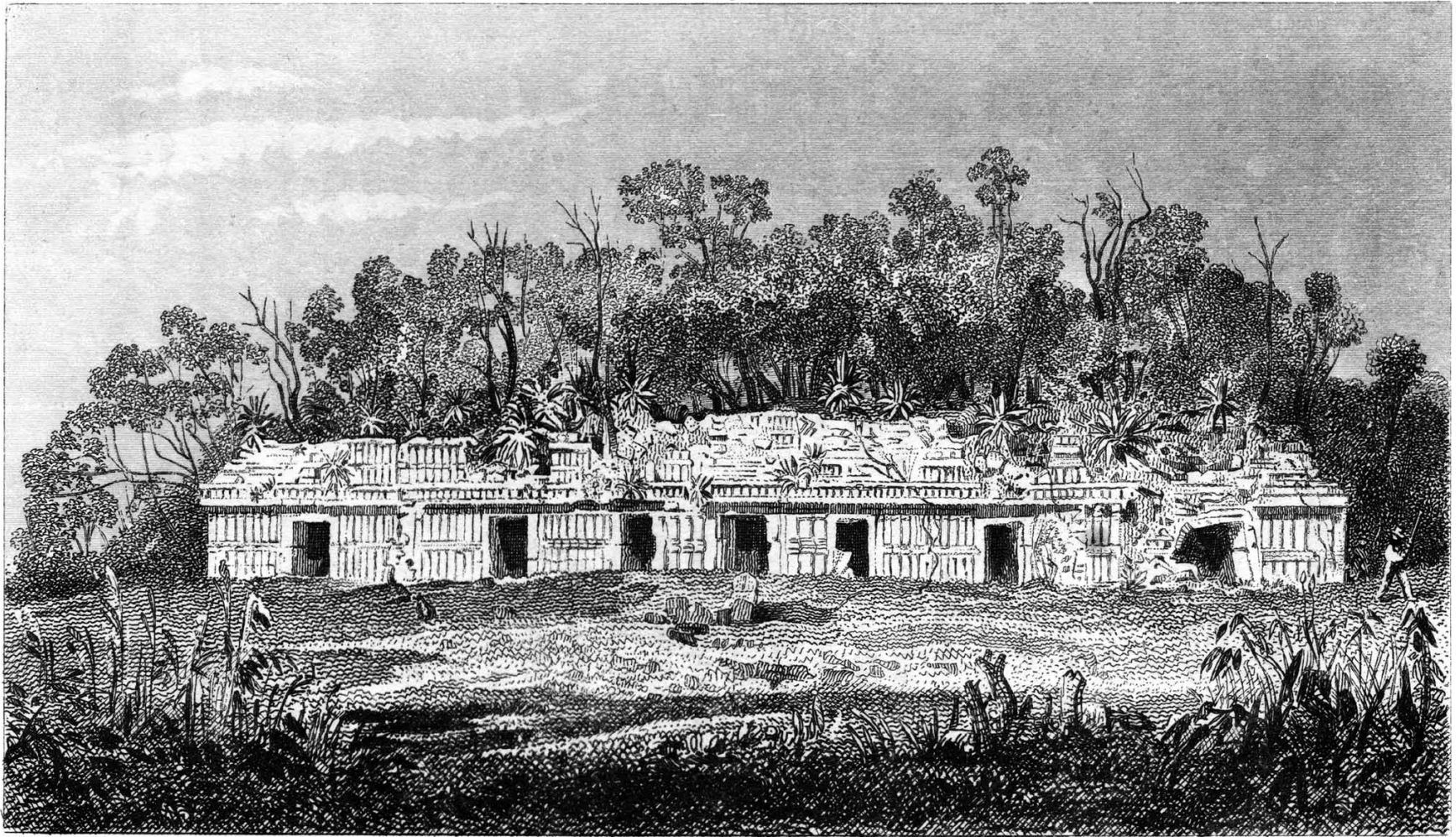
GREAT TERRACE AND BUILDING. 27

as much in the other direction ; but it was so rough, broken, and overgrown, that we did not attempt to measure it.

On this great platform was the building of which the Indian had told us ; I had it cleared, and Mr. Catherwood drew it the next day, as it appears in the engraving opposite. It measures one hundred and seventeen feet in front, and eighty-four feet deep, and contains sixteen apartments, of which those in front, five in number, are best preserved. That in the centre has three doorways. It is twenty-seven feet six inches long, by only seven feet six inches wide, and communicates by a single doorway with a back room eighteen feet long and five feet six inches wide. This room is raised two feet six inches above the one in front, and has steps to ascend. Along the bottom of the front room, as high as the sill of the door, is a row of small columns, thirty-eight in number, attached to the wall.

In several places the great platform is strewn with ruins, and probably other buildings lie buried in the woods, but without guides or any clew whatever, we did not attempt to look for them.

Such, so far as we were able to discover them, are the ruins of Zayi, the name of which, to the time of our visit, had never been uttered among civilized men, and, but for the notoriety connected with our movements, would probably be unknown at this day in the capital of Yucatan. Our first accounts of them were from the cura Carillo, who, on the



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occasion of his only visit to this part of his curacy, passed a great portion of his time among them.

It was strange and almost incredible that, with these extraordinary monuments before their eyes, the Indians never bestowed upon them one passing thought. The question, who built them? never by any accident crossed their minds. The great name of Montezuma, which had gone beyond them to the Indians of Honduras, had never reached their ears, and to all our questions we received the same dull answer which first met us at Copan, " Quien sabe ?" " Who knows ?" They had the same superstitious feelings as the Indians of Uxmal; they believed that the ancient buildings were haunted, and, as in the remote region of Santa Cruz del Quiché, they said that on Good Friday of every year music was heard sounding among the ruins.

There was but one thing connected with the old city that interested them at all, and that was the subject of a well. They supposed that somewhere among these ruins, overgrown and lost, existed the fountain which had supplied the ancient inhabitants with water; and, believing that by the use of our instruments its site could be discovered, they offered to cut down all the trees throughout the whole region covered by the ruins.