

CHAPTER II.

Visit to a ruined Building near Chack.—A Field of Tájé.—Description of the Building.—Hornet's Nest.—Young Vulture.—Picturesque View from the Terrace.—Well of Chack.—Exploration of its Passages.—Return to the Rancho.—Departure from Schawill.—The Camino Real.—Rancho of Sennacté.—Wild Appearance of the Indians.—Continued Scarcity of Water.—Another ruined City.—Two ruined Buildings.—Apartments, Columns, &c.—High Wall.—Journey continued.—Rancho of Sabachshé.—Casa Real.—Well.—Hut of the Alcalde.—The Señora.—Ruins of Sabachshé.—Picturesque Edifice.—Alacrity of the Indians.—Façade.—Pilasters, Cornices, &c.—Encounter with an Iguana.—Another Ruined Building.—The Agave Americana.—More Ruins.—The Red Hand.—The Red Hand used as a Symbol by the North American Indians.—Conclusions to be deduced from this Circumstance.—Delicate Manner of doing a Service.

THE next morning, while Mr. Catherwood was engaged in drawing the building represented in the last engraving, Dr. Cabot and myself set out to visit the one which we had passed in coming from the rancho of Chack.

In the suburbs of the rancho we turned off to the right by a path, which we followed for some distance on horseback, when it changed its direction, and we dismounted. From this place our guides cut a path through the woods, and we came out upon a large field of tájé, being long stems growing close together, eight or ten feet high, straight, and about half an inch thick, having a yellow flower on the

top, which is a favourite food for horses. The stems, tied up in bundles three or four inches thick, are used for torches. On one side of this field we saw the high building before referred to, and on the other side was a second not visible before. A bird which the doctor wished to procure lighted on a tree growing upon the latter, and we went to it, but found nothing of particular interest, and struck across the field of táje for the former. This táje was as bad as the woods to walk through, for it grew so high as to exclude every breath of air, and was not high enough to be any protection against the sun.

The building stood on the top of a stony hill, on a terrace still firm and substantial. It consisted of two stories, the roof of the lower one forming the platform in front of the upper, and had a staircase, which was broken and ruined. The upper building had a large apartment in the centre, and a smaller one on each side, much encumbered with rubbish, from one of which we were driven by a hornet's nest, and in another a young vulture, with a hissing noise, flapped its plumeless wings and hopped out of the door.

The terrace commanded a picturesque view of wooded hills, and at a distance the Casa Grande, and the high wall before presented. They were perhaps three or four miles distant. All the intermediate space was overgrown. The Indians had traversed it in all directions in the dry season, when

there was no foliage to hide the view, and they said that in all this space there were no vestiges of buildings. Close together as we had found the remains of ancient habitations, it seemed hardly possible that distinct and independent cities had existed with but such a little space between, and yet it was harder to imagine that one city had embraced within its limits these distant buildings, the extreme ones being four miles apart, and that the whole intermediate region of desolation had once swarmed with a teeming and active population.

Leaving this, we toiled back to our horses, and, returning to the road, passed through the rancho, about a mile beyond which we reached the pozo, or well, the accounts of which we had heard on our first arrival.

Near the mouth were some noble seybo trees, throwing their great branches far and wide, under which groups of Indians were arranging their calabashes and torches, preparing to descend; others, just out, were wiping their sweating bodies. At one moment an Indian disappeared, and at the next another rose up out of the earth. We noticed that there were no women, who, throughout Yucatan, are the drawers of water, and always seen around a well, but we were told that no woman ever enters the well of Chack; all the water for the rancho was procured by the men, which alone indicated that the well was of an extraordinary character. We had brought with us a ball of twine, and made

immediate preparations to descend, reducing our dress as near as possible to that of the Indians.

Our first movement was down a hole by a perpendicular ladder, at the foot of which we were fairly entered into a great cavern. Our guides preceded us with bundles of *táje* lighted for torches, and we came to a second descent almost perpendicular, which we achieved by a ladder laid flat against the rock. Beyond this we moved on a short distance, still following our guides, and still descending, when we saw their torches disappearing, and reached a wild hole, which also we descended by a long rough ladder. At the foot of this the rock was damp and slippery, and there was barely room enough to pass around it, and get upon another ladder down the same hole, now more contracted, and so small that, with the arms akimbo, the elbows almost touched on each side. At this time our Indians were out of sight; and in total darkness, feeling our way by the rounds of the ladder, we cried out to them, and were answered by distant voices directly underneath. Looking down, we saw their torches like moving balls of fire, apparently at an interminable distance below us.

At the foot of this ladder there was a rude platform as a resting-place, made to enable those ascending and descending to pass each other. A group of naked Indians, panting and sweating under the load of their calabashes, were waiting till we vacated the ladder above; and even in this wild

hole, with loads on their backs, straps binding their foreheads, and panting from fatigue and heat, they held down their torches, and rendered obedience to the blood of the white man. Descending the next ladder, both above and below us were torches gleaming in the darkness. We had still another ladder to descend, and the whole perpendicular depth of this hole was perhaps two hundred feet.

From the foot of this ladder there was an opening to the right, and from it we soon entered a low, narrow passage, through which we crawled on our hands and knees. With the toil and the smoke of the torches the heat was almost beyond endurance. The passage enlarged and again contracted, descending steeply, and so low that the shoulders almost touched the roof. This opened upon a great chasm at one side, and beyond we came to another perpendicular hole, which we descended by steps cut in the rock. From this there was another low, crawling passage, and, almost stifled with heat and smoke, we came out into a small opening, in which was a basin of water, being the well. The place was crowded with Indians filling their calabashes, and they started at the sight of our smoky white faces as if *El Demonio* had descended among them. It was, doubtless, the first time that the feet of a white man had ever reached this well.

On returning we measured the distance, Doctor Cabot going before with a line of about a hundred feet, in the wild and broken passages being

soon out of sight, and sometimes out of hearing. I followed, with an Indian winding up the line, while I made notes. I had two Indians with long bundles of lighted sticks, who, whenever I stopped to write, either held them so far off as to be of no use, or else thrust them into my face, blinding the eyes with smoke and scorching the skin. I was dripping as if in a vapour-bath; my face and hands were black with smoke and incrustated with dirt; large drops of sweat fell upon my book, which, with the dirt from my hands, matted the leaves together, so that my notes are almost useless. They were, no doubt, imperfect, but I do not believe that, with the most accurate details, it is possible to convey a true idea of the character of this cave, with its deep holes and passages through a bed of solid rock, and the strange scene presented by the Indians, with torches and calabashes, un murmuring and uncomplaining, at their daily task of seeking, deep in the bowels of the earth, one of the great elements of life.

The distance, as we traversed it, with its ladders, ascents and descents, winding and crawling passages, seemed a full half league, as represented by the Indians. By measurement it was not quite fifteen hundred feet, which is about equal to the length of the Park fronting on Broadway. The perpendicular depth to the water I am not able to give, but some idea may be formed of these passages from the fact that the Indians did not carry their cala

bashes on their shoulders, because, with the body bent, they would strike against the roof or roll over the head; but the straps across the forehead were let out so long that the calabashes rested below the hips, and in crawling on the hands and feet their loads did not rise above the line of the back.

And this well was not, as at Xcoch, the occasional resort of a straggling Indian, nor the mere traditionary watering-place of an ancient city. It was the regular and only supply of a living population. The whole rancho of Chack was entirely dependant upon it, and in the dry season the rancho of Schawill, three miles distant.

The patient industry of such a people may well be supposed to have reared the immense mounds and the great stone structures scattered all over the country. We consumed a calabash of water in washing and quenching our thirst, and as we rode back to the rancho of Schawill, came to the conclusion that an admission into the community of this exclusive people was no great privilege, when it would entail upon the applicant, for six months in the year, a daily descent into this subterraneous well.

We arrived at the rancho in good season. Mr. Catherwood had finished his drawing, and Bernaldo was ready with his dinner. We had nothing to detain us, ordered carriers forthwith for our luggage, and at half past two we were in the saddle again in search of ruined cities.

The reader has some idea of the caminos reales

of this country, and they were all like English turnpikes compared with that upon which we entered on leaving this rancho. In fact, it was a mere path through the woods, the branches of the trees being trimmed away to a height barely sufficient to admit of an Indian passing under with a load of maize on his back. We were advised that it would be very difficult to get through on horseback, and were obliged to keep dodging the head and bending the body to avoid the branches, and at times we were brought to a stand by some overhanging arm of a tree, and obliged to dismount.

At the distance of two leagues we reached the rancho of Sannacté, the Indians of which were the wildest people in appearance we had yet seen. As we rode through, the women ran away and hid themselves, and the men crouched on the ground bareheaded, with long black hair hanging over their eyes, gazing at us in stupid astonishment. The same scarcity of water still continued. The rancho was entirely destitute; it had no pozo or well of any kind, either ancient or modern, and the inhabitants procured their whole supply from the village of Sabachshé, two leagues, or six miles, distant! This supply, too, was brought daily on the backs of Indians; but again in this arid and destitute region was still another evidence of ancient population—another desolate and ruined city.

Beyond the outskirts of the rancho was a large clearing for a milpa, within which, naked and ex-

posed to full view, were two ancient buildings. The milpa was enclosed by a fence, and was overgrown with táje. We tied our horses to the stems of the táje, and, leaving them eating the flowers, followed a path which led between the two buildings. The engraving which follows represents the one on the



left. It stands on a terrace, still strong and substantial, and, fortunately, clear of trees, though many were growing on the top. It has five apartments; the façade above the cornice is fallen, and between the doorways are fragments of small columns set in the wall. On the other side of the milpa was an-

other edifice, holding aloft a high wall, like that we had seen at Zayi, extraordinary in its appearance and incomprehensible in its uses and purposes. From the tact and facility we had now acquired, a short time sufficed for our examination of this place, and, with one more added to our list of ruined cities, we mounted, and resumed our journey.

At half past five we reached the rancho of Sabachshé, lying on the camino real from Ticul to Bolonchen, and inhabited entirely by Indians. The casa real stood on an elevation in an open place; it was thatched with palm leaves, had mud walls, and an arbour before it, and a table and benches within. Altogether, it was better in appearance and furniture than the others we had encountered, which, as we afterward learned, was owing to the circumstance that, besides its regular uses, it was intended for the residence of the mistress on her annual visits to the rancho. But much more interesting and important was the fact, that this rancho was distinguished by a well, the sight of which was more grateful to us than that of the best hotel to the traveller in a civilized country. We were scratched with thorns; and smarting with garrapata bites, and looked forward to the refreshment of a bath. Very soon our horses had the benefit of it, the bath being in that country, where the currycomb and brush are entirely unknown, the only external refreshment these animals ever get. The

well was built by the present owner, and formerly the inhabitants were dependant entirely upon the well at Tabi, six miles distant! Besides its real value, it presented a curious and lively spectacle. A group of Indian women was around it. It had no rope or fixtures of any kind for raising water, but across the mouth was a round beam laid upon two posts, over which the women were letting down and hoisting up little bark buckets. Every woman brought with her and carried away her own bucket and rope, the latter coiled up and laid on the top of her head, with the end hanging down behind, and the coil forming a sort of headdress.

Near the well was the hut of the alcalde, enclosed by a rude fence, and within were dogs, hogs, turkeys, and fowls, which all barked, grunted, gobbled, and cackled together as we entered. The yard was shaded by orange-trees loaded with ripe and unusually large fruit. Under one of them was a row of twenty or thirty wild boars' jaws and tusks, trophies of the chase, and memorials attesting the usefulness of the barking dogs. The noise brought the alcalde to the door, a heavy and infirm old man, apparently rich, and suffering from the high living indicated by his hogs and poultry; but he received us with meekness and humility. We negotiated forthwith for the purchase of some oranges, and bought thirty for a medio, stipulating that they should all be the largest and best on the trees; after which,

supporting himself by his cane, he hobbled on to the casa real, had it swept out, and assigned Indians to attend upon us. If he wanted alacrity himself, he infused it into his people, and made up for all deficiencies by unqualified personal deference and respect. It was a fine evening, and we spread our supper-table under the arbour. The old alcalde remained with us, and a group of Indians sat on the steps, not like the proud and independent race of Schawill, but acknowledging themselves criados, or servants, bound to obey the orders of their mistress. La señora was, in their eyes, a miniature print of Queen Victoria, but skill in the use of figures may arrive at the value of at least this part of her possessions. There were fifty-five labradores, or labouring men, under an obligation to plant and harvest ten micates of maize for her benefit. Each micate produces ten cargas, or loads, making in all five hundred and fifty, which, at three reals per carga, gives as the revenue this lady comes regularly to collect, about two hundred dollars per annum; but this gives more power than lands or money to any amount in our country could give; and the labradores being all free and independent electors, fifty-five votes could always be calculated upon in an emergency for the side of principle and la señora.

Having made our arrangements for the next day, we went into the hut and shut the door. Some time afterward the old alcalde sent in to ask permission to go home, as he was very sleepy, which we

graciously granted, and, by his direction, three or four Indians swung their little hammocks under the arbour, to be at hand in case we should need anything. During the night we found it extremely cold, and, with the little covering we had brought, could hardly keep ourselves comfortable.

Early in the morning we found a large gathering round the house to escort us to the ruins. In the suburbs of the rancho we turned off to the left, and passed among the huts of the Indians, almost smothered by weeds, and having at the doors rude boxes of earth set up on posts, for vegetables to grow in out of the reach of the hogs.

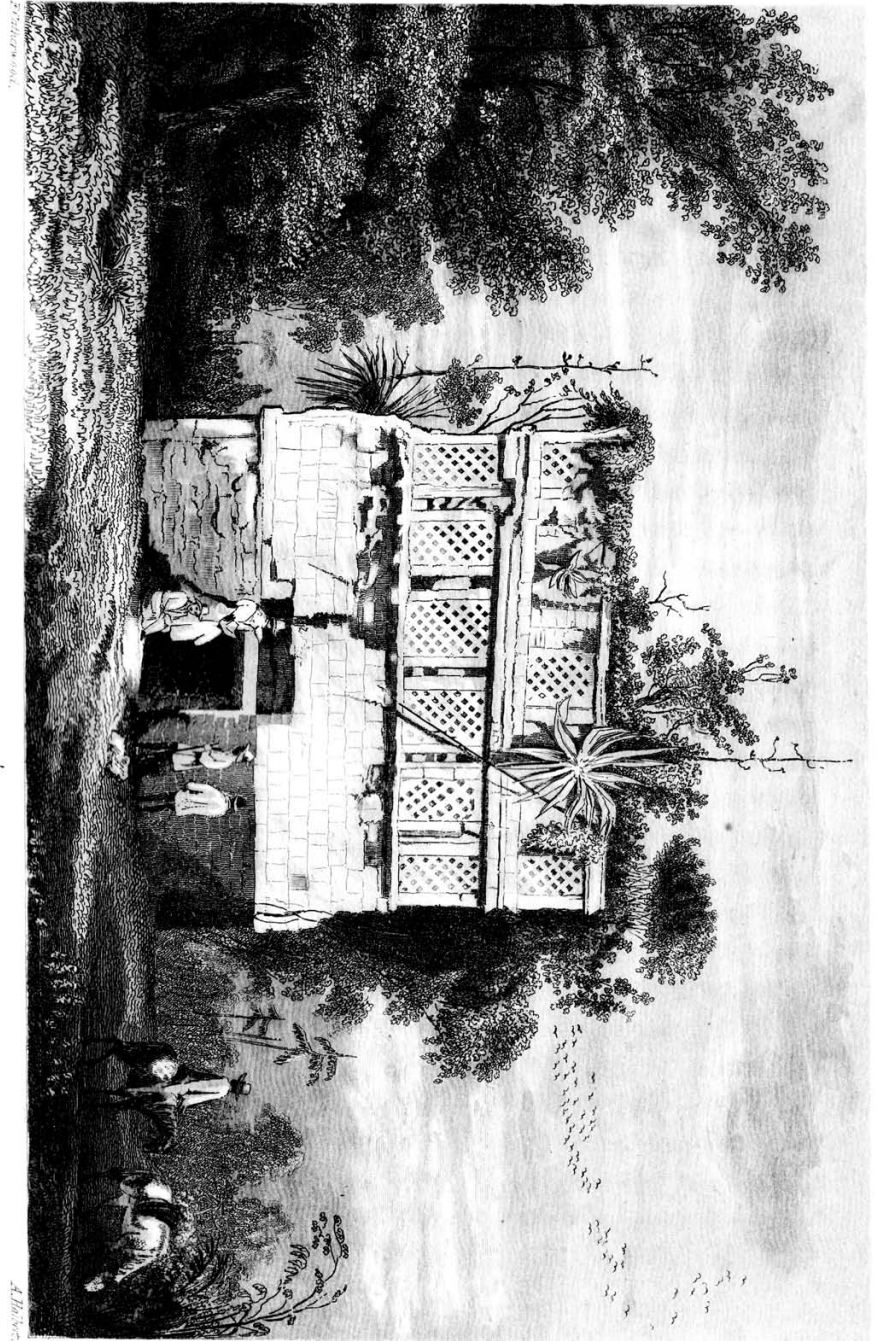
Crossing the fence of the last hut, we entered a thick growth of trees. As if instinctively, every Indian drew his machete, and in a few minutes they cut a path to the foot of a small building, not rich in ornament, but tasteful, having some shades of difference from any we had seen, overgrown by trees, and beautifully picturesque. On one corner of the roof a vulture had built her nest, and, scared away at our approach, hovered over our heads, looking down upon us as if amazed. We gave directions, all the Indians fell to work, and in a few minutes the small terrace in front was cleared. I had not expected so many Indians, and, not knowing what occasion I might have for their services, told them that I did not need so great a number, and should only pay those whom I had engaged. All stopped, and when the purport of my words was explained

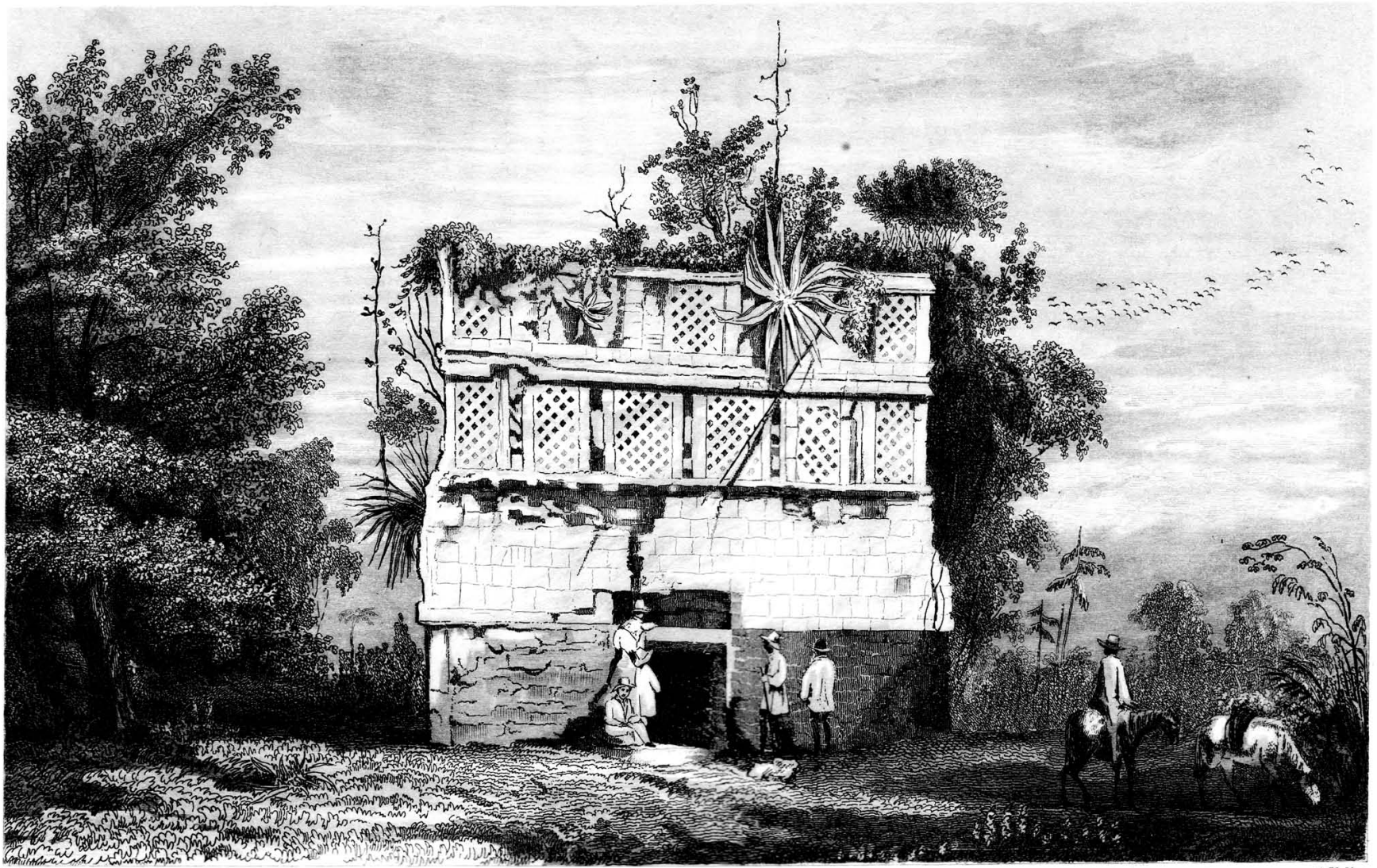
to them, said that made no difference; they immediately set to work again, and the machete fell with a rapidity unparalleled in our experience. In half an hour space enough was cleared for Mr. Catherwood to set up his camera lucida. The same alertness was shown in preparing a place for him to stand in, and half a dozen stood ready to hold an umbrella for his protection against the sun.

The plate opposite represents the front of the building. Its design is tasteful and even elegant, and when perfect it must have presented a fine appearance. It has a single doorway, opening into a chamber twenty-five feet long by ten wide. Above the door is a portion of plain masonry, and over this a cornice supporting twelve small pilasters, having between them the diamond ornament, then a massive cornice, with pilasters and diamond work, surmounted by another cornice, making in all four cornices; an arrangement we had not previously met with.

While Mr. Catherwood was making his drawing, the Indians stood around under the shade of the trees, looking at him quietly and respectfully, and making observations to each other. They were a fine-looking race. Some of them, one tall old man particularly, had noble Roman faces, and they seemed to have more respectability of appearance and character than was consistent with the condition of men not wearing pantaloons. All at once an enormous iguana, or lizard, doubled the corner of the building,

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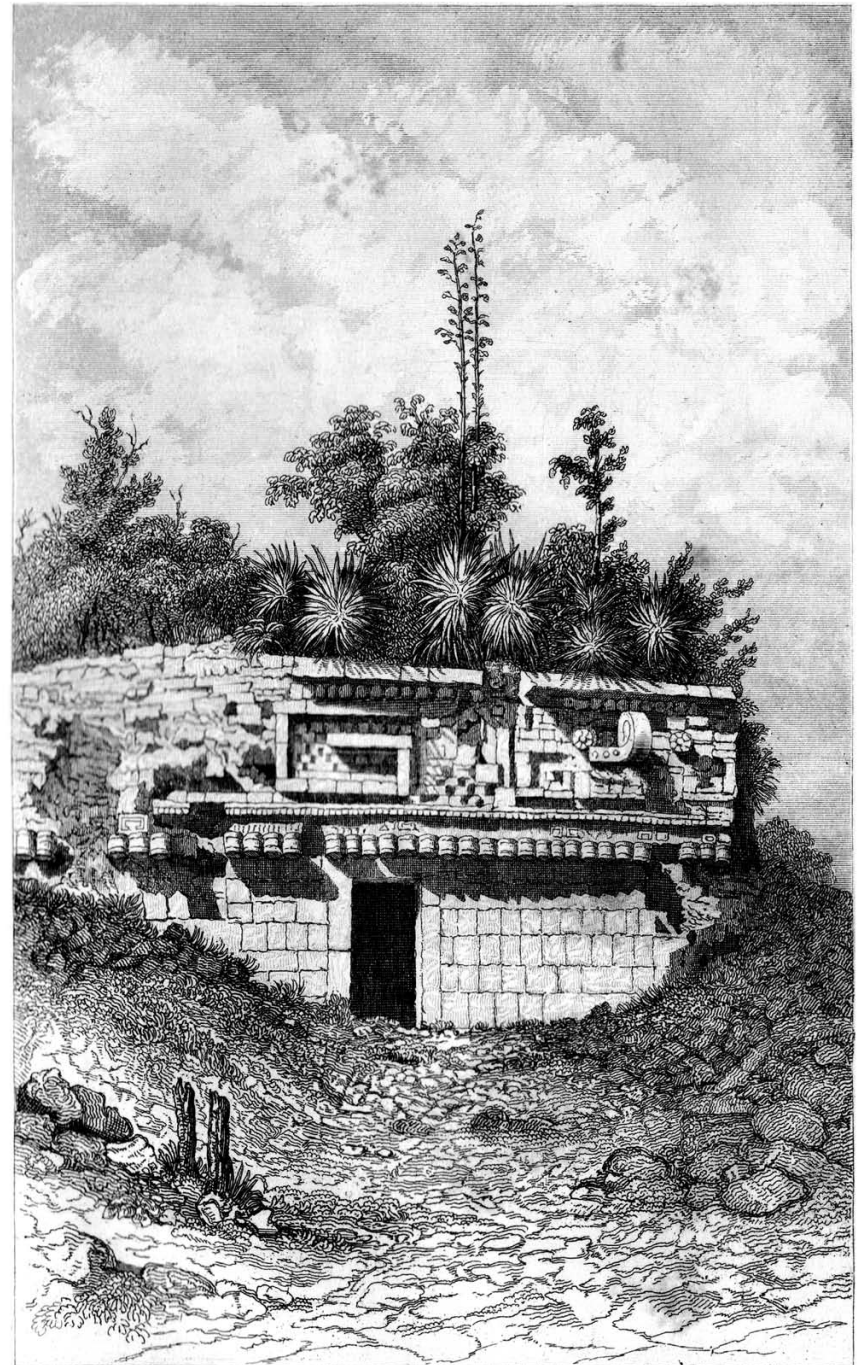
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SABACHTSCHE

ran along the front, and plunged into a crevice over the door, burying his whole body, but leaving the long tail out. Among these unsophisticated people this reptile is a table delicacy, and here was a supper provided for some of them. Machetes flew out, and, cutting down a sapling with a crotch in it, they rested it against the wall, and, standing in the crotch, pulled upon the tail; but the animal held on with his feet as if a part of the building. All the Indians, one after the other, had a pull at the tail, but could not make him budge. At length two of them contrived to get hold together, and, while pulling with all their strength, the tail came off by the roots, a foot and a half long in their hands. The animal was now more out of their reach than before, his whole body being hidden in the wall; but he could not escape. The Indians picked away the mortar with their machetes, and enlarged the hole until they got his hind legs clear, when, griping the body above the legs, they again hauled; but, though he had only the fore legs to hold on with, they could not tear him out. They then untied the ropes of their sandals, and, fastening them above the hind legs, and pulling till the long body seemed parting like the tail, they at length dragged him out. They secured him by a gripe under the fore part of the body, cracked his spine, and broke the bones of his fore legs so that he could not run; pried his jaws open, fastened them apart with a sharp stick so that he could

not bite, and then put him away in the shade. This refined cruelty was to avoid the necessity of killing him immediately, for if killed, in that hot climate he would soon be unfit for food; but, mutilated and mangled as he was, he could be kept alive till night.

This over, we moved on in a body, carrying the iguana, to the next building, which was situated in a different direction, about a quarter of a mile distant, and completely buried in woods. It was seventy-five feet long, and had three doorways, leading to the same number of apartments. A great part of the front had fallen; the plate opposite represents that which remains. With some slight difference in the detail of ornament, the character is the same as in all the other buildings, and the general effect pleasing. Growing on the roof are two maguey plants, *Agave Americana*, in our latitude called the century plant, but under the hot sun of the tropics blooming every four or five years. There are four species of this plant in Yucatan: the maguey, from which is produced the pulqué, a beverage common in all the Mexican provinces, which, taken in excess, produces intoxication; the henneken, which produces the article known in our markets as Sisal hemp; the sabila, with which the Indian women wean children, covering the breast with the leaf, which is very bitter to the taste; and the peta, having leaves twice as large as the last, from which a very fine white hemp is made. These plants, in some or all of their varieties, were found in the neigh-



J. Dillerwood.

S. J. Diller.

bourhood of all the ruins, forming around them a pointed and thorny wall, which we were obliged to cut through to reach the buildings.

While Mr. C. was engaged in drawing this structure, the Indians told us of two others half a league distant. I selected two of them for guides, and, with the same alacrity which they had shown in everything else, nine volunteered to accompany me. We had a good path nearly all the way, until the Indians pointed out a white object seen indistinctly through the trees, again uttering, with strong gutturals, the familiar sound of "Xlap-pahk," or old walls. In a few minutes they cut a path to it. The building was larger than the last, having the front ornamented in the same way, much fallen, though still presenting an interesting spectacle. As it was not much overgrown, we set to work and cleared it, and left it for another, in regard to which I formed some curious expectations, for the Indians described it as *very new*. It lay on the same path, to the left in returning to the rancho, and separated from us by a great field of táje, through which we were obliged to cut a path for several hundred yards to the foot of the terrace. The walls were entire and very massive; but climbing up it, I found only a small building, consisting of but two apartments, the front much fallen, and the doors filled up, but no sign or token distinguishing it as *newer* or more modern; and I now learned, what I might have done before by a little asking, that all they meant by their

description of it was, that it was the *newest* known to them, having been discovered but twelve years before, accidentally, on clearing the ground for a milpa, until which time it was as much unknown to them as to the rest of the world. This intelligence gave great weight to the consideration which had often suggested itself before, that cities may exist equal to any now known, buried in the woods, overgrown and lost, which will perhaps never be discovered.

On the walls of this desolate edifice were prints of the "mano colorado," or red hand. Often as I saw this print, it never failed to interest me. It was the stamp of the living hand; it always brought me nearer to the builders of these cities, and at times, amid stillness, desolation, and ruin, it seemed as if from behind the curtain that concealed them from view was extended the hand of greeting. These prints were larger than any I had seen. In several places I measured them with my own, opening the fingers to correspond with those on the wall. The Indians said it was the hand of the master of the building.

The mysterious interest which, in my eyes, always attached to this red hand, has assumed a more definite shape. I have been advised that in Mr. Catlin's collection of Indian curiosities, made during a long residence among our North American tribes, was a tent presented to him by the chief of the powerful but now extinct race of Mandans, which ex-

hibits, among other marks, two prints of the red hand; and I have been farther advised that the red hand is seen constantly upon the buffalo robes and skins of wild animals brought in by the hunters on the Rocky Mountains, and, in fact, that it is a symbol recognised and in common use by the North American Indians of the present day. I do not mention these as facts within my own knowledge, but with the hope of attracting the attention of those who have opportunities and facilities for investigation; and I suggest the interesting consideration that, if true, the red hand on the tent and the buffalo robes points back from the wandering tribes in our country to the comparatively polished people who erected the great cities at the south; and if true that it is at this day used as a sign or symbol by our North American Indians, its meaning can be ascertained from living witnesses, and through ages of intervening darkness a ray of light may be thrown back upon the now mysterious and incomprehensible characters which perplex the stranger on the walls of the desolate southern buildings.

On my return to the rancho I learned the cause of the extraordinary attention shown us, which, though we had received it as a matter of course, and no more than what, for some unknown reasons, was justly due to us, had, nevertheless, somewhat surprised us. Our movements in that neighbourhood were matters of some notoriety. Albino's preliminary visit and our intentions had reached the

ears of the señora, and the evening before our arrival orders from her had arrived at the rancho for all the Indians to put themselves at our command; and this delicate manner of doing us a service is one of the many acts of kindness I have to acknowledge to the citizens of Yucatan. The old alcalde again waited till he became sleepy, when he asked permission to go to his hut, and four or five Indians again hung up their hammocks under the arbour.