[1]

THE MAYAS, THE SOURCES OF THEIR HISTORY.

DR. LE PLONGEON IN YUCATAN, HIS ACCOUNT OF DISCOVERIES.

BY STEPHEN SALISBURY, JR.

From Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, of April 26, 1876, and April 25, 1877.

PRIVATELY PRINTED.

WORCESTER: PRESS OF CHARLES HAMILTON. 1877.

[2]

WITH THE RESPECTS OF THE WRITER.

CONTENTS.

[3]

THE MAYAS AND THE SOURCES OF THEIR HISTORY.

[Proceedings of American Antiquarian Society, April 26, 1876.]

The most comprehensive and accurate map of Yucatan is that which has been copied for this pamphlet. In the several volumes of travel, descriptive of Maya ruins, are to be found plans more or less complete, intended to illustrate special journeys, but they are only partial in their treatment of this interesting country. The *Plano de Yucatan*, herewith presented—the work of Sr. Dn. Santiago Nigra de San Martin—was published in 1848, and has now become extremely rare. It is valuable to the student, for it designates localities abounding in ruins—those not yet critically explored, as well as those

which have been more thoroughly investigated—by a peculiar mark, thus [rectangular box], and it also shows roads and paths used in transportation and communication. Since its publication political changes have caused the division of the Peninsula into the States of Yucatan and Campeachy, which change of boundaries has called for the preparation of a new and improved map. Such an one is now being engraved at Paris and will soon be issued in this country. It is the joint production of Sr. Dn. Joaquin Hubbe and Sr. Dn. Andres Aznar Pérez, revised by Dr. C. Hermann Berendt.

The early history of the central portions of the western

[4]

hemisphere has particularly attracted the attention of European archæologists, and those of France have already formed learned societies engaged specifically in scientific and antiquarian investigations in Spanish America. It is to the French that credit for the initiative in this most interesting field of inquiry is especially due, presenting an example which can not fail to be productive of good results in animating the enthusiasm of all engaged in similar studies.

The Société Américaine de France (an association, like our own, having the study of American Antiquities as a principal object, and likely to become prominent in this field of inquiry), has already been briefly mentioned by our Librarian; but the reception of the *Annuaire* for 1873, and a statement of the present condition of the Society in the *Journal des Orientalistes* of February 5, 1876, gives occasion for a more extended notice. The Society was founded in 1857; and among those most active in its creation were M. Brasseur de Bourbourg, M. Léon de Rosny, and M. Alfred Maury. The objects of the association, as officially set forth, were, first, the publication of the works and collections of M. Aubin, the learned founder of a theory of American Archæology, which it was hoped would throw much light upon the hieroglyphical history of Mexico before the conquest;[4-*] second, the publication of grammars and dictionaries of the native languages of America; third, the foundation of

[5]

professorships of History, Archæology, and American Languages; and fourth, the creation, outside of Paris, of four Museums like the

Museum of Saint Germain, under the auspices of such municipalities as encourage their foundation, as follows:

A.—Musée mexicaine.
B.—Musée péruvienne et de l'Amérique du Sud.
C.—Musée ethnographique de l'Amérique du Nord.
D.—Musée des Antilles.

The list of members contains the names of distinguished archæologists in Europe, and a foreign membership already numerous; and it is contemplated to add to this list persons interested in kindred studies from all parts of the civilized world. The publications of the Society, and those made under its auspices, comprehend, among others, *Essai sur le déchiffrement de l'Ecriture hiératique de l'Amérique Centrale*, by M. Léon de Rosny, President of the Society, 1 vol. in folio, with numerous plates: This work treats critically the much controverted question of the signification of Maya characters, and furnishes a key for their interpretation.5-* Also, *Chronologie hiéroglyphico phonétique des Rois Aztéques de 1352 à 1522, retrouvée dans diverses mappes américaines antiques, expliquée et précédée d'une introduction sur l'Écriture mexicaine*, by M. Edouard Madier de Montjau. The archæology of the two Americas,

[6]

and the ethnography of their native tribes, their languages, manuscripts, ruins, tombs and monuments, fall within the scope of the Society, which it is their aim to make the school and common centre of all students of American pre-Columbian history. M. Émile Burnouf, an eminent archæologist, is the Secretary. The *Archives* for 1875 contain an article on the philology of the Mexican languages, by M. Aubin; an account of a recent voyage to the regions the least known of Mexico and Arizona, by M. Ch. Schoebel; the last written communication of M. de Waldeck, the senior among travellers; an article by M. Brasseur de Bourbourg, upon the language of the Wabi of Tehuantepec; and an essay by M. de Montjau, entitled *Sur quelques manuscripts figuratifs mexicains*, in which the translation of one of these manuscripts, by M. Ramirez of Mexico, is examined critically, and a different version is offered. The author arrives at the startling conclusion, that we have thus far taken for veritable Mexican manuscripts, many which were written by the Spaniards, or by their order, and which do not express the sentiments of the Indians.

Members of this Society, also, took an active part in the deliberations of the *Congrès international des Américanistes*, which was held at Nancy in 1875.

It was a maxim of the late Emperor Napoléon III., that France could go to war for an idea. The Spanish as discoverers were actuated by the love of gold, and the desire of extending the knowledge and influence of christianity, prominently by promoting the temporal and spiritual power of the mother church. In their minds the cross and the flag of Spain were inseparably connected. The French, however, claim to be ready to explore, investigate and study, for

[7]

science and the discovery of truth alone. In addition to the *Commission Scientifique du Mexique* of 1862, which was undertaken under the auspices of the French government, and which failed to accomplish all that was hoped, the Emperor Maximilian I. of Mexico projected a scientific exploration of the ruins of Yucatan during his brief reign, while he was sustained by the assistance of the French. The tragic death of this monarch prevented the execution of his plans; but his character, and his efforts for the improvement of Mexico, earned for this accomplished but unfortunate prince the gratitude and respect of students of antiquity, and even of Mexicans who were politically opposed to him.[7-*]

The attention of scholars and students of American Antiquities is particularly turned to Central America, because in that country ruins of a former civilization, and phonetic and figurative inscriptions, still exist and await an interpretation. In Central America are to be found a great variety of ruins of a higher order of architecture than any existing in America north of the Equator. Humboldt speaks of these remains in the following language: “The architectural remains found in the peninsula of Yucatan testify more than those of Palenque to an astonishing degree of civilization. They are situated between Valladolid Mérida and Campeachy.”[7-†] Prescott says of this region, “If the remains on the Mexican soil are so scanty, they multiply as we descend the southeastern slope of the Cordilleras, traverse the rich valleys of Oaxaca, and pene

[8]

trate the forests of Chiapas and Yucatan. In the midst of these lonely regions, we meet with the ruins recently discovered of several eastern cities—Mitla, Palenque, and Itzalana or Uxmal,—which argue a higher civilization than anything yet found on the American Continent."[8-*]

The earliest account in detail—as far as we know—of Mayan ruins, situated in the States of Chiapas and Yucatan, is presented in the narrative of Captain Antonio del Rio, in 1787, entitled *Description of an ancient city near Palenque*. His investigation was undertaken by order of the authorities of Guatemala, and the publication in Europe of its results was made in 1822. In the course of his account he says, "a Franciscan, Thomas de Soza, of Mérida, happening to be at Palenque, June 21, 1787, states that twenty leagues from the city of Mérida, southward, between Muna, Ticul and Noxcacab, are the remains of some stone edifices. One of them, very large, has withstood the ravages of time, and still exists in good preservation. The natives give it the name of Oxmutal. It stands on an eminence twenty yards in height, and measures two hundred yards on each façade. The apartments, the exterior corridor, the pillars with figures in medio relievo, decorated with serpents and lizards, and formed with stucco, besides which are statues of men with palms in their hands, in the act of beating drums and dancing, resemble in every respect those observable at Palenque."[8-†] After speaking of the existence of many other ruins in Yucatan, he says he does not consider a description necessary, because the identity of the ancient inhabitants of Yucatan and Palenque is proved, in his

[9]

opinion, by the strange resemblance of their customs, buildings, and acquaintance with the arts, whereof such vestiges are discernible in those monuments which the current of time has not yet swept away.

The ruins of Yucatan, those of the state of Chiapas and of the Island of Cozumel, are very splendid remains, and they are all of them situated in a region where the Maya language is still spoken, substantially as at the time of the Spanish discovery.[9-*]

Don Manuel Orosco y Berra, says of the Indian inhabitants, "their revengeful and tenacious character makes of the Mayas an

exceptional people. In the other parts of Mexico the conquerors have imposed their language upon the conquered, and obliged them gradually to forget their native language. In Yucatan, on the contrary, they have preserved their language with such tenacity, that they have succeeded to a certain point in making their conquerors accept it. Pretending to be ignorant of the Spanish, although they comprehend it, they never speak but in the Maya language, obeying only orders made in that language, so that it is really the dominant language of the peninsula, with the only exception of a part of the district of Campeachy."9-†

In Cogolludo's Historia de Yucatan, the similarity of ruins throughout this territory is thus alluded to: "The incontesta

[10]

ble analogy which exists between the edifices of Palenque and the ruins of Yucatan places the latter under the same origin, although the visible progress of art which is apparent assigns different epochs for their construction."10-* So we have numerous authorities for the opinion, that the ruins in Chiapas and Yucatan were built by the same or by a kindred people, though at different periods of time, and that the language which prevails among the Indian population of that region at the present day, is the same which was used by their ancestors at the time of the conquest.

Captain Dupaix, who visited Yucatan in 1805, wrote a description of the ruins existing there, which was published in 1834; but it was reserved for M. Frédéric de Waldeck to call the attention of the European world to the magnificent remains of the Maya country, in his *Voyage pittoresque et archaeologique dans la province de Yucatan, pendant des années 1834-1836*, Folio, with plates, Paris, 1838. This learned centenarian became a member of the Antiquarian Society in 1839, and his death was noticed at the last meeting. Following him came the celebrated Eastern traveller, John L. Stephens, whose interesting account of his two visits to that country in 1840 and 1841, entitled *Incidents of travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, in two volumes, and Incidents of travel in Yucatan, in two volumes, is too familiar to require particular notice at this point. It may not be uninteresting to record the fact, that Mr. Stephens' voyages and explorations in Yucatan were made after the

suggestion and with the advice of Hon. John R. Bartlett, of Providence, R. I., a member of this

[11]

Society, who obtained for this traveller the copy of Waldeck's work which he used in his journeyings. Désiré Charnay, a French traveller, published in 1863 an account entitled *Cités et Ruines Américaines*, accompanied by a valuable folio Atlas of plates.

The writer of this report passed the winter of 1861 at Mérida, the capital of the Province of Yucatan, as the guest of Don David Casares, his classmate, and was received into his father's family with a kindness and an attentive hospitality which only those who know the warmth and sincerity of tropical courtesy can appreciate.[11-*] The father, Don Manuel Casares, was a native of Spain, who had resided in Cuba and in the United States. He was a gentleman of the old school, who, in the first part of his life in Yucatan, had devoted himself to teaching, as principal of a high school in the city of Mérida, but was then occupied in the management of a large plantation, upon which he resided most of the year, though his family lived in the city. He

[12]

was possessed of great energy and much general information, and could speak English with ease and correctness. Being highly respected in the community, he was a man of weight and influence, the more in that he kept aloof from all political cabals, in which respect his conduct was quite exceptional. The Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, in his *Histoire des nations civilizées du Mexique*, acknowledges the valuable assistance furnished him by Señor Casares, whom he describes as a learned Yucateco and ancient deputy to Mexico.[12-*]

Perhaps some of the impressions received, during a five months' visit, will be pardoned if introduced in this report. Yucatan is a province of Mexico, very isolated and but little known. It is isolated, from its geographical position, surrounded as it is on three sides by the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean; and it is but little known, because its commerce is insignificant, and its communication with other countries, and even with Mexico, is

infrequent. It has few ports. Approach to the coast can only be accomplished in lighters or small boats; while ships are obliged to lie off at anchor, on account of the shallowness of the water covering the banks of sand, which stretch in broad belts around the peninsula. The country is of a limestone formation, and is only slightly elevated above the sea. Its general character is level, but in certain districts there are table lands; and a mountain range runs north-easterly to the town of Maxcanu, and thence extends south-westerly to near the centre of the State. The soil is generally of but little depth, but is exceedingly fertile.

[13]

There are no rivers in the northern part of the province, and only the rivers Champoton, and the Uzumacinta with its branches, in the south-western portion; but there are several small lakes in the centre of Yucatan, and a large number of artificial ponds in the central and southern districts. The scarcity of water is the one great natural difficulty to be surmounted in most parts of the country; but a supply can commonly be obtained by digging wells, though often at so great a depth that the cost is formidable. The result is that the number of wells is small, and in the cities of Mérida and Campeachy rain water is frequently stored in large cisterns for domestic purposes. From the existence of cenotes or ponds with an inexhaustible supply of water at the bottom of caves, and because water can be reached by digging and blasting, though with great effort and expense, the theory prevails in Yucatan that their territory lies above a great underground lake, which offers a source of supply in those sections where lakes, rivers and springs, are entirely unknown.

A very healthful tropical climate prevails, and the year is divided into the wet and the dry season, the former beginning in June and lasting until October, the latter covering the remaining portions of the year. During the dry season of 1861-2, the thermometer ranged from 75° to 78° in December and January, and from 78° to 82° in February, March and April. Early in the dry season vegetation is luxuriant, the crops are ripening, and the country is covered with verdure; but as the season progresses the continued drouth, which is almost uninterrupted, produces the same effect upon the external aspect of the fields and woods as a northern winter. Most of the trees lose their leaves, the herbage dries up, and the roads

[14]

become covered with a thick dust. During exceptionally dry seasons thousands of cattle perish from the entire lack of subsistence, first having exhausted the herbage and then the leaves and shrubbery.

The population of the peninsula is now about 502,731, four-fifths of which are Indians and Mestizos or half-breeds. The general business of the country is agricultural, and the territory is divided into landed estates or farms, called haciendas, which are devoted to the breeding of cattle, and to raising jenniken or Sisal hemp, and corn. Cotton and sugar are also products, but not to an extent to admit of exportation. Some of the plantations are very large, covering an area of six or seven miles square, and employing hundreds of Indians as laborers.

Farm houses upon the larger estates are built of stone and lime, covered with cement, and generally occupy a central position, with private roads diverging from them. These houses, which are often very imposing and palatial, are intended only for the residence of the owners of the estate and their major-domos or superintendents. The huts for the Indian laborers are in close proximity to the residence of the proprietor, upon the roads which lead to it, and are generally constructed in an oval form with upright poles, held together by withes of bark; and they are covered inside and out with a coating of clay. The roofs are pointed, and also made with poles, and thatched with straw. They have no chimneys, and the smoke finds its way out from various openings purposely left. The huts have no flooring, are larger than the common wigwams of the northern Indians, and ordinarily contain but a single room. The cattle yards of the estate, called corrals, immediately join the

[15]

residence of the proprietor, and are supplied with water by artificial pumping. All the horses and cattle are branded, and roam at will over the estates, (which are not fenced, except for the protection of special crops), and resort daily to the yards to obtain water. This keeps the herds together. The Indian laborers are also obliged to rely entirely upon the common well of the estate for their supply of water.

The Indians of Yucatan are subject to a system of péonage,

differing but little from slavery. The proprietor of an estate gives each family a hut, and a small portion of land to cultivate for its own use, and the right to draw water from the common well, and in return requires the labor of the male Indians one day in each week under superintendence. An account is kept with each Indian, in which all extra labor is credited, and he is charged for supplies furnished. Thus the Indian becomes indebted to his employer, and is held upon the estate by that bond. While perfectly free to leave his master if he can pay this debt, he rarely succeeds in obtaining a release. No right of corporal punishment is allowed by law, but whipping is practiced upon most of the estates.

The highways throughout the country are numerous, but generally are rough, and there is but little regular communication between the various towns. From the cities of Mérida and Campeachy, public conveyances leave at stated times for some of the more important towns; but travellers to other points are obliged to depend on private transportation. A railroad from Mérida to the port of Progreso, a distance of sixteen miles, was in process of being built, but the writer is not aware of its completion.

[16]

The peninsula is now divided into the States of Yucatan, with a population of 282,634, with Mérida for a capital, and Campeachy, with a population of 80,366, which has the city of Campeachy as its capital. The government is similar to our state governments, but is liable to be controlled by military interference. The States are dependent upon the central government at Mexico, and send deputies to represent them in the congress of the Republic. In the south-western part of the country there is a district very little known, which is inhabited by Indians who have escaped from the control of the whites and are called Sublevados. These revolted Indians, whose number is estimated at 139,731, carry on a barbarous war, and make an annual invasion into the frontier towns, killing the whites and such Indians as will not join their fortunes. With this exception, the safety of life and property is amply protected, and seems to be secured, not so much by the severity of the laws, as by the peaceful character of the inhabitants of all races. The trade of the country, except local traffic, is carried on by water. Regular steam communication occurs monthly between New York and Progreso, the port of Mérida, via Havana, and occasionally barques freighted with corn, hides, hemp and other

products of the country, and also carrying a small number of passengers, leave its ports for Havana, Vera Cruz and the United States. Freight and passengers along the coast are transported in flat bottomed canoes. Occasional consignments of freight and merchandise arrive by ship from France, Spain and other distant ports.

The cities of Mérida and Campeachy are much like Havana in general appearance. The former has a popula

tion of 23,500, is the residence of the Governor, and contains the public buildings of the State, the cathedral—an imposing edifice,—the Bishop's palace, an ecclesiastical college, fifteen churches, a hospital, jail and theatre. The streets are wide and are laid out at right angles. The houses, which are generally of one story, are large, and built of stone laid in mortar or cement; and they are constructed in the Moorish style, with interior court yards surrounded with corridors, upon which the various apartments open. The windows are destitute of glass, but have strong wooden shutters; and those upon the public streets often project like bow windows, and are protected by heavy iron gratings. The inhabitants are exceedingly hospitable, and there is much cultivated society in both Mérida and Campeachy. As the business of the country is chiefly agricultural, many of the residents in the cities own haciendas in the country, where they entertain large parties of friends at the celebration of a religious festival on their plantations, or in the immediate neighborhood. The people are much given to amusements, and the serious duties of life are often obliged to yield to the enjoyments of the hour. The Catholic religion prevails exclusively, and has a very strong hold upon the population, both white and Indian, and the religious services of the church are performed with great ceremony, business of all kinds being suspended during their observance.

The aboriginal ruins, to which so much attention has been directed, are scattered in groups through the whole peninsula. Mérida is built upon the location of the ancient town Tihoo, and the materials of the Indian town were used in its construction. Sculptured stones, which formed the ornamental finish of Indian buildings, are to be seen in the

walls of the modern houses.[18-*] An artificial hill, called “El Castillo,” was formerly the site of an Indian temple, and is curious as the only mound remaining of all those existing at the time of the foundation of the Spanish city. This mound is almost the only trace of Indian workmanship, in that immediate locality, which has not been removed or utilized in later constructions.[18-†] It appears that a large part of the building material throughout the province was taken from aboriginal edifices, and the great number of stone churches of considerable size, which have been built in all the small towns in that country, is proof of the abundance of this material.

The ruins of Uxmal, said to be the most numerous and imposing of any in the province, were visited by the writer in company with a party of sixteen gentlemen from Mérida, of whom two only had seen them before. The expedition was arranged out of courtesy to the visitor, and was performed on horseback. The direct distance was not more than sixty miles in a southerly direction, but the excursion was so managed as to occupy more than a week, during which time the hospitality of the haciendas along the route was depended upon for shelter and entertainment. Some of the plantations visited were of great extent, and among others, that called Guayalké was especially noticeable for its size, and also for the beauty and elegance of the farm house of the estate, which was constructed entirely of stone, and was truly palatial in its proportions. This building is fully described by Mr.

[19]

Stephens.[19-*] The works of this writer form an excellent hand-book for the traveller. His descriptions are truthful, and the drawings by Mr. Catherwood are accurate, and convey a correct idea of the general appearance of ruins, and of points of interest which were visited; and the personal narrative offers a great variety of information, which could only be gathered by a traveller of much experience in the study of antiquities. Such at least is the opinion of the people of that country. His works are there quoted as high authority respecting localities which he visited and described; and modern Mexican philologists and antiquaries refer to Stephens’ works and illustrations with confidence in his representations, and with respect and deference for his opinions and inferences.[19-†]

At various points along the route, portions of ruined edifices were seen but not explored. The ruins of Uxmal are distant about a mile from the hacienda buildings, and extend as far as the eye can reach. They belong to Don Simon Peon, a gentleman who, though he does not reside there, has so much regard for their preservation that he will not allow the ruins to be removed or interfered with for the improvement of the estate, in which respect he is an exception to many of the planters. Here it may be remarked, that the inhabitants generally show little interest in the antiquities of their country, and no public effort is made to preserve them. The ruins which yet remain undisturbed have escaped destruction, in most instances, only

[20]

because their materials have not been required in constructing modern buildings. Much of the country is thinly inhabited, and parts of it are heavily wooded. It is there that the remains of a prior civilization have best escaped the hand of man, more to be dreaded than the ravages of time.

The stone edifices of Uxmal are numerous, and are generally placed upon artificial elevations; they are not crowded together, but are scattered about singly and in groups over a large extent of territory. The most conspicuous is an artificial pyramidal mound, upon the top of which is a stone building two stories in height, supposed to have been used as a sacrificial temple. One side of this mound is perpendicular; the opposite side is approached by a flight of stone steps. The building on the top, and the steps by which the ascent is made are in good preservation. Some of the large buildings are of magnificent proportions, and are much decorated with bas reliefs of human figures and faces in stone, and with other stone ornaments. The writer does not recollect seeing any stucco ornamentation at this place, though such material is used elsewhere. What are popularly called “House of the Governor” and “House of the Nuns,” are especially remarkable for their wonderful preservation; so that from a little distance they appear perfect and entire, except at one or two points which look as if struck by artillery. The rooms in the ruins are of various sizes, and many of them could be made habitable with little labor, on removing the rubbish which has found its way into them.

The impression received from an inspection of the ruins of Uxmal

was, that they had been used as public buildings, and residences of officers, priests and high dignitaries. Both

[21]

Stephens and Prescott are of the opinion that some of the ruins in this territory were built and occupied by the direct ancestors of the Indians, who now remain as slaves upon the soil where once they ruled as lords.[21-*] The antiquity of other remains evidently goes back to an earlier epoch, and antedates the arrival of the Spaniards. If the Indians of the time of the conquest occupied huts like those of the Indians of to-day, it is not strange that all vestiges of their dwellings should have disappeared. Mr. Stephens gives an interesting notice of the first formal conveyance of the property of Uxmal, made by the Spanish government in 1673, which was shown him by the present owner, in which the fact that the Indians, then, worshipped idols in some of the existing edifices on that estate, is mentioned. Another legal instrument, in 1688, describes the livery of seizin in the following words, “In virtue of the power and authority by which the same title is given to me by the said governor, and complying with its terms, I took by the hands the said Lorenzo de Evia, and he walked with me all over Uxmal and its buildings, opened and shut some doors that had several rooms (connected), cut within the space several trees, picked up fallen stones and threw them down, drew water from one of the aguadas (artificial ponds) of the said place of Uxmal, and performed other acts of possession.”[21-†] These facts are interesting as indicating actual or recent occupation; and a careful investigation of documents relating to the various estates, of which the greater part are said to be written in the Maya language, might throw light upon the history of particular localities.

[22]

The Maya Indians are shorter and stouter, and have a more delicate exterior than the North American Savages. Their hands and feet are small, and the outlines of their figures are graceful. They are capable of enduring great fatigue, and the privation of food and drink, and bear exposure to the tropical sun for hours with no covering for the head, without being in the least affected. Their bearing evinces entire subjection and abasement, and they shun and distrust the whites. They do not manifest the cheerfulness of the negro slave, but maintain an expression of indifference, and are destitute of all

curiosity or ambition. These peculiarities are doubtless the results of the treatment they have received for generations. The half-breeds, or Mestizos, prefer to associate with the whites rather than with the Indians; and as a rule all the domestic service throughout the country is performed by that class. Mestizos often hold the position of major-domos, or superintendents of estates, but Indians of pure blood are seldom employed in any position of trust or confidence. They are punctilious in their observance of the forms and ceremonies of the Catholic religion, and a numerous priesthood is maintained largely by the contributions of this race. The control exercised by the clergy is very powerful, and their assistance is always sought by the whites in cases of controversy. The Indians are indolent and fond of spectacles, and the church offers them an opportunity of celebrating many feast days, of which they do not fail to avail themselves.

When visiting the large estate of Chactun, belonging to Don José Dominguez, thirty miles south-west of Mérida, at a sugar rancho called Orkintok, the writer saw a large

[23]

ruin similar to that called the “House of the Nuns” at Uxmal. It was a building of a quadrangular shape, with apartments opening on an interior court in the centre of the quadrangle. The building was in good preservation, and some of the rooms were used as depositories for corn. The visiting party breakfasted in one of the larger apartments. From this hacienda an excursion was made to Maxcanu, to visit an artificial mound, which had a passage into the interior, with an arched stone ceiling and retaining walls.[23-*] This passage was upon a level with the base of the mound, and branched at right angles into other passages for hundreds of feet. Nothing appeared in these passages to indicate their purpose. The labyrinth was visited by the light of candles and torches, and the precaution of using a line of cords was taken to secure a certainty of egress. A thorough exploration was prevented by the obstructions of the *débris* of the fallen roof. Other artificial mounds encountered elsewhere had depressions upon the top, doubtless caused by the falling in of interior passages or apartments. There is no account of the excavation of Yucatan mounds for historical purposes, though Cogolludo says there were other mounds existing at Mérida in 1542, besides “El grande de los Kues,” which, certainly, have now

disappeared; but no account of their construction has come down to us.[23-†] The same author also says, that, with the stone constructions of the Indian city churches and houses were built, besides the convent and church of the Mejorada, and also the church of the Franciscans, and that there was still more material

[24]

left for others which they desired to build.[24-*] It is then, certainly, a plausible supposition that the great mounds were many of them constructed with passages like that at Orkintok, and that they have furnished from their interiors worked and squared stones, which were used in the construction of the modern city of Mérida by the Spanish conquerors.

When the Spanish first invaded Mexico and Yucatan they brought with them a small number of horses, which animals were entirely unknown to the natives, and were made useful not only as cavalry but also in creating a superstitious reverence for the conquerors, since the Indians at first regarded the horse as endowed with divine attributes. Cortez in his expedition from the city of Mexico to Honduras in 1524, passed through the State of Chiapas near the ruins called Palenque,—of which ancient city, however, no mention is made in the accounts of that expedition,—and rested at an Indian town situated upon an island in Lake Peten in Guatemala. This island was then the property of an emigrant tribe of Maya Indians; and Bernal Diaz, the historian of the expedition, says, that “its houses and lofty teocallis glistened in the sun, so that it might be seen for a distance of two leagues.” According to Prescott, “Cortez on his departure left among this friendly people one of his horses, which had been disabled by an injury in the foot. The Indians felt a reverence for the animal, as in some way connected with the mysterious power of the white men. When their visitors had gone they offered flowers to the horse, and as it is said, prepared for him many savory messes of poultry,

[25]

such as they would have administered to their own sick. Under this extraordinary diet the poor animal pined away and died. The affrighted Indians raised his effigy in stone, and placing it upon one of their teocallis, did homage to it as to a deity.”[25-*] At the hacienda of