

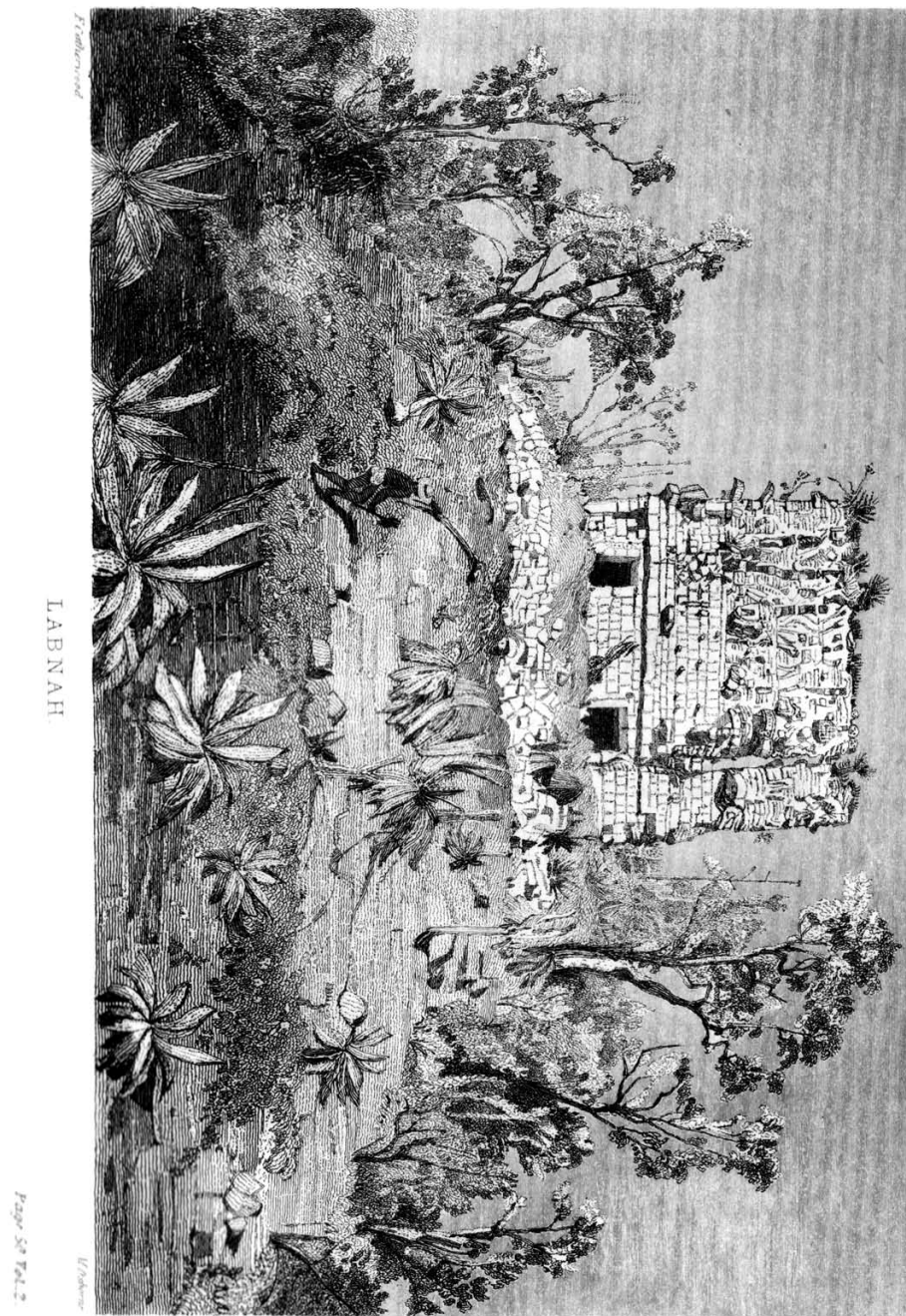
CHAPTER III.

Ruins of Labnà.—Accounts of the Indians not to be relied on.—Irretrievable Ruin.—Extraordinary Structure.—Doorways.—Chambers.—Gigantic Wall, covered with Designs in Stucco.—Death's Heads.—Human Figures in Alto Relievo.—Colossal Figure seated.—Large Ball and Figures.—Dilapidated State of this Structure.—An arched Gateway.—Other Buildings.—Richly ornamented Doorway.—Courtyard.—Ornaments in Stucco.—Large Building.—Magnificent Edifice.—Façade ornamented with sculptured Stone.—Circular Hole leading to a subterraneous Chamber.—The Ramon Tree.—A Cave.—Conversation with the Indians.—A Ride to the Hacienda of Tabi.—Sculptured Ornament.—Other Figures.—Visit to a Cave.—Tree-encumbered Path.—A Vaquero.—Descent into the Cave.—Fantastic Scene.—Return to the Rancho.—A Warm Bath.

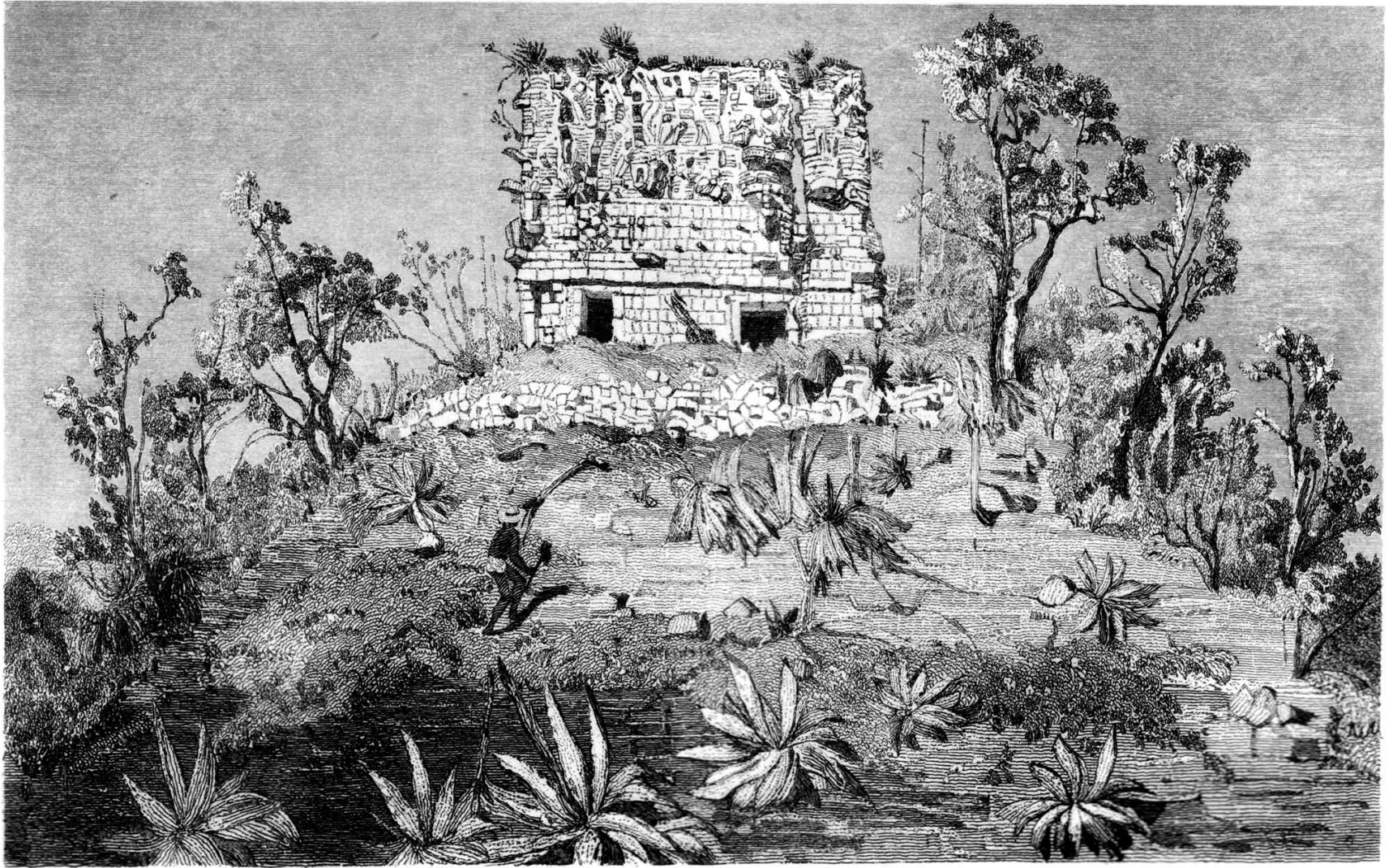
THE next morning we set out for the ruins of Labnà. Our road lay southeast, among hills, and was more picturesque than any we had seen in the country. At the distance of a mile and a half we reached a field of ruins, which, after all we had seen, created in us new feelings of astonishment. It was one of the circumstances attending our exploration of ruins in this country, that until we arrived on the ground we had no idea of what we were to meet with. The accounts of the Indians were never reliable. When they gave us reason to expect much we found but little, and, on the other hand, when we expected but little a great field presented itself. Of this place even our friend the cura Carillo had never heard. Our first intelligence of ruins in this region was from the brother of the padrecito at

Nohcacab, who, however, had never seen them himself. Since our arrival in the country we had not met with anything that excited us more strongly, and now we had mingled feelings of pain and pleasure; of pain, that they had not been discovered before the sentence of irretrievable ruin had gone forth against them; at the same time it was matter of deep congratulation that, before the doom was accomplished, we were permitted to see these decaying, but still proud memorials of a mysterious people. In a few years, even these will be gone; and as it has been denied that such things ever were, doubts may again arise whether they have indeed existed. So strong was this impression that we determined to fortify in every possible way our proofs. If anything could have added to the interest of discovering such a new field of research, it was the satisfaction of having at our command such an effective force of Indians. No time was lost, and they began work with a spirit corresponding to their numbers. Many of them had hachas, or small axes, and the crash of falling trees was like the stirring noise of felling in one of our own forests.

The plate opposite represents a pyramidal mound, holding aloft the most curious and extraordinary structure we had seen in the country. It put us on the alert the moment we saw it. We passed an entire day before it, and, in looking back upon our journey among ruined cities, no subject of greater interest presents itself to my mind. The mound is



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forty-five feet high. The steps had fallen; trees were growing out of the place where they stood, and we reached the top by clinging to the branches; when these were cleared away, it was extremely difficult to ascend and descend. The maguëy plants cut down in making the clearing appear fallen on the steps.

A narrow platform forms the top of the mound. The building faces the south, and when entire measured forty-three feet in front and twenty feet in depth. It had three doorways, of which one, with eight feet of the whole structure, has fallen, and is now in ruins. The centre doorway opens into two chambers, each twenty feet long and six feet wide.

Above the cornice of the building rises a gigantic perpendicular wall to the height of thirty feet, once ornamented from top to bottom, and from one side to the other, with colossal figures and other designs in stucco, now broken and in fragments, but still presenting a curious and extraordinary appearance, such as the art of no other people ever produced. Along the top, standing out on the wall, was a row of death's heads; underneath were two lines of human figures in alto relievo (of which scattered arms and legs alone remain), the grouping of which, so far as it could be made out, showed considerable proficiency in that most difficult department of the art of design. Over the centre doorway, constituting the principal ornament of the wall, was a colossal figure seated, of which only a large tippet and girdle, and

some other detached portions, have been preserved. Conspicuous over the head of this principal figure is a large ball, with a human figure standing up beside it, touching it with his hands, and another below it with one knee on the ground, and one hand thrown up as if in the effort to support the ball, or in the apprehension of its falling upon him. In all our labours in that country we never studied so diligently to make out from the fragments the combinations and significance of these figures and ornaments. Standing in the same position, and looking at them all together, we could not agree.

Mr. Catherwood made two drawings at different hours and under a different position of the sun, and Dr. Cabot and myself worked upon it the whole day with the Daguerreotype. With the full blaze of a vertical sun upon it, the white stone glared with an intensity dazzling and painful to the eyes, and almost realizing the account by Bernal Dias in the expedition to Mexico, of the arrival of the Spaniards at Cempoal. "Our advanced guard having gone to the great square, the buildings of which had been lately whitewashed and plastered, in which art these people are very expert, one of our horsemen was so struck with the splendour of their appearance in the sun, that he came back at full speed to Cortez, to tell him that the walls of the houses were of silver."

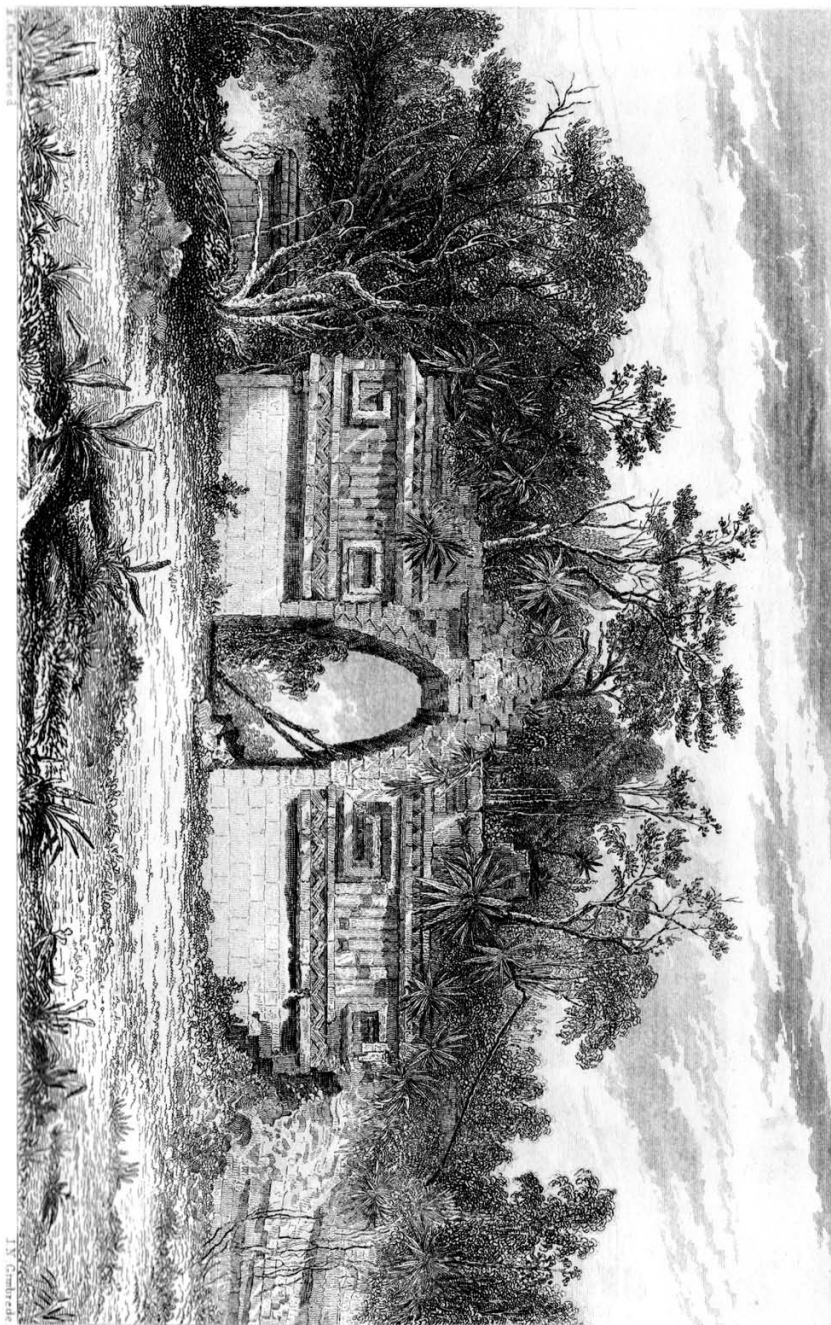
Our best view was obtained in the afternoon, when the edifice was in shade, but so broken and

confused were the ornaments that a distinct representation could not be made even with the Daguerreotype, and the only way to make out all the details was near approach by means of a ladder; we had all the woods to make one of, but it was difficult for the Indians to make one of the length required; and when made it would have been too heavy and cumbersome to manage on the narrow platform in front. Besides, the wall was tottering and ready to fall. One portion was already gone in a perpendicular line from top to bottom, and the reader will see in the engraving that on a line with the right of the centre doorway the wall is cracked, and above is gaping, and stands apart more than a foot all the way to the top. In a few years it must fall. Its doom is sealed. Human power cannot save it; but in its ruins it gave a grand idea of the scenes of barbaric magnificence which this country must have presented when all her cities were entire. The figures and ornaments on this wall were painted; the remains of bright colours are still visible, defying the action of the elements. If a solitary traveller from the Old World could by some strange accident have visited this aboriginal city when it was yet perfect, his account would have seemed more fanciful than any in Eastern story, and been considered a subject for the Arabian Nights' Entertainments.

At the distance of a few hundred feet from this structure, in sight at the same time as we approach-

ed it, is an arched gateway, remarkable for its beauty of proportions and grace of ornament. The plate opposite represents this gateway. On the right, running off at an angle of thirty degrees, is a long building much fallen, which could not be comprehended in the view. On the left it forms an angle with another building, and on the return of the wall there is a doorway, not shown in the engraving, of good proportions, and more richly ornamented than any other portion of the structure. The effect of the whole combination was curious and striking, and, familiar as we were with ruins, the first view, with the great wall towering in front, created an impression that is not easily described.

The gateway is ten feet wide, passing through which we entered a thick forest, growing so close upon the building that we were unable to make out even its shape ; but, on clearing away the trees, we discovered that this had been the principal front, and that these trees were growing in what had once been the area, or courtyard. The doors of the apartments on both sides of the gateway, each twelve feet by eight, opened upon this area. Over each doorway was a square recess, in which were the remains of a rich ornament in stucco, with marks of paint still visible, apparently intended to represent the face of the sun surrounded by its rays, probably once objects of adoration and worship,



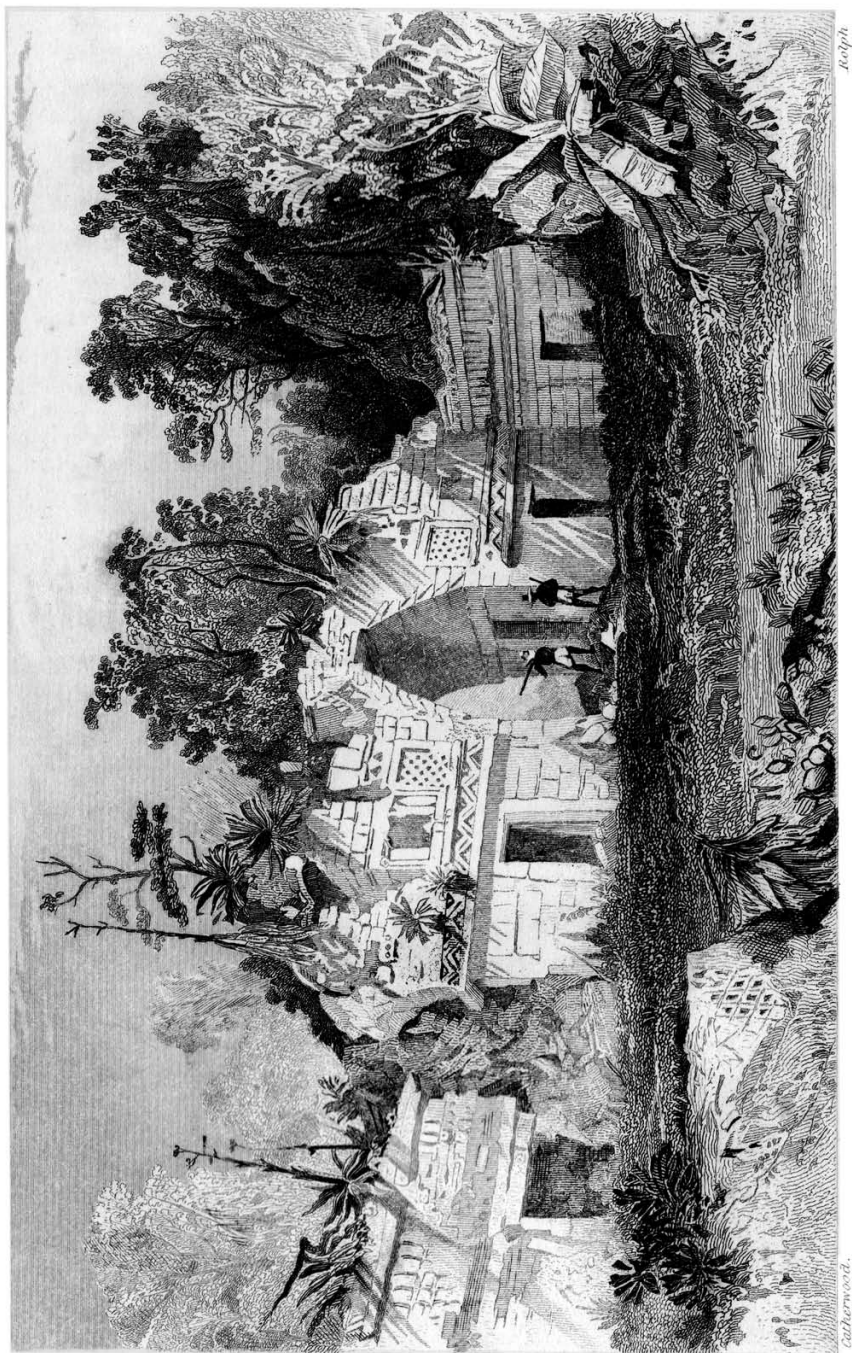
GATEWAY AT LABNA



F. Catherwood

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GATEWAY AT LABNA



INTERIOR OF GATEWAY AT LABNÁ.

but now wilfully destroyed. The plate opposite represents this front. The buildings around the area formed a great irregular pile, measuring in all two hundred feet in length. The plan was different from that of any we had seen, but, having so many subjects to present, I have not had it engraved.

Northeast from the mound on which the great wall stands, and about one hundred and fifty yards distant, is a large building, erected on a terrace, and hidden among the trees growing thereupon, with its front much ruined, and having but few remains of sculptured ornaments. Still farther in the same direction, going through the woods, we reach the grand, and, without extravagance, the really magnificent building represented in the frontispiece to this volume. It stands on a gigantic terrace, four hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty feet deep. The whole terrace is covered with buildings. The front represented measures two hundred and eighty-two feet in length. It consisted of three distinct parts, differing in style, and perhaps erected at different times. At a distance, as seen indistinctly through the trees, we had no idea of its extent. We came upon it at the corner which appears on the right in the engraving. Our guide cut a path along the front wall, and stopping, as we did, to look at the ornaments, and entering the apartments as we went along, the building seemed immense.

The whole long façade was ornamented with



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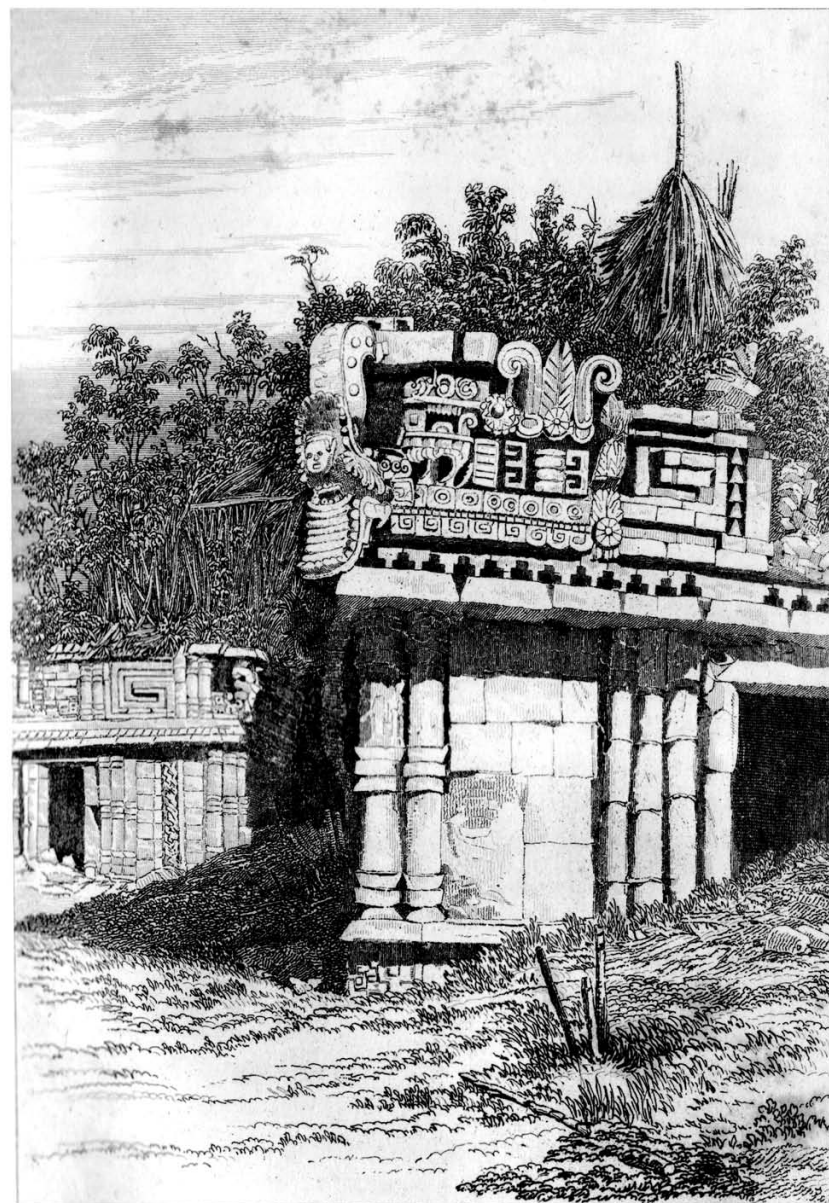
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INTERIOR OF GATEWAY AT LABNA.

sculptured stone, of which, large as the engraving is, the details cannot appear; but, to give some idea of their character, a detached portion is represented in the engraving opposite, and, I ought at the same time to remark, is perhaps the most curious and interesting of any. It is at the left end of the principal building, and in the angle of the corner are the huge open jaws of an alligator, or some other hideous animal, enclosing a human head.

The reader will form some idea of the overgrown and shrouded condition of this building from the fact that I had been at work nearly the whole day upon the terrace, without knowing that there was another building on the top. In order to take in the whole front at one view, it was necessary to carry the clearing back some distance into the plain, and in doing this I discovered the upper structure. The growth of trees before it was almost equal to that on the terrace, or in any part of the forest. The whole had to be cleared, the trees thrown down upon the terrace, and thence dragged away to the plain. This building consists of single narrow corridors, and the façade is of plain stone, without any ornaments.

The platform in front is the roof of the building underneath, and in this platform was a circular hole, like those we had seen at Uxmal and other places, leading to subterranean chambers. This hole was well known to the Indians, and had a marvellous



F. Catherwood, Del.

Jordan & Halpin, Sc.

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reputation ; and yet they never mentioned it until I climbed up to examine the upper building. They said it was the abode of el dueño de la casa, or the owner of the building. I immediately proposed to descend, but the old Indian begged me not to do so, and said apprehensively to the others, "Who knows but that he will meet with the owner?" I immediately sent for rope, lantern, and matches; and, absurd as it may seem, as I looked upon the wild figures of the Indians standing round the hole, and their earnest faces, it was really exciting to hear them talk of the owner. As there was a difficulty in procuring rope, I had a sapling cut and let down the hole, by means of which I descended with a lantern. The news of my intention and of the preparations going on had spread among the Indians, and all left off work and hurried to the spot. The hole was about four feet deep, and, just as my head sunk below the surface, I was startled by an extraordinary scratching and scampering, and a huge iguana ran along the wall, and escaped through the orifice by which I had entered.

The chamber was entirely different in shape from those I had seen before. The latter were circular, and had dome-shaped ceilings. This had parallel walls and the triangular-arched ceiling ; in fact, it was in shape exactly like the apartments above ground. It was eleven feet long, seven wide, and

ten high to the centre of the arch. The walls and ceiling were plastered, and the floor was of cement, all hard and in a good state of preservation. A centipede was the only tenant after the evasion of the iguana.

While I was making these measurements, the Indians kept up a low conversation around the hole. A mystery hung around it, transmitted to them by their fathers, and connected with an indefinable sense of apprehension. This mystery might have been solved at any time in five minutes, but none of them had ever thought of doing it, and the old man begged me to come out, saying that if I died they would have to answer for it. Their simplicity and credulity seem hardly credible. They had all sense enough to take their hands out of the fire without being told, but probably to this day they believe that in that hole is the owner of the building. When I came out they looked at me with admiration. They told me that there were other places of the same kind, but they would not show them to me, lest some accident should happen; and as my attempt drew them all from work, and I could not promise myself any satisfactory result, I refrained from insisting.

This chamber was formed in the roof of the lower building. That building contained two corridors, and we had always supposed that the great interval between the arches of the parallel corridors was a

solid mass of masonry. The discovery of this chamber brought to light a new feature in the construction of these buildings. Whether the other roofs, or any of them, contained chambers, it is impossible to say. Not suspecting anything of the kind, we had made no search for them, and they may exist, but with the holes covered up and hidden by the growth and decay of vegetation. Heretofore I had inclined to the opinion that the subterraneous chambers I had met with were intended for cisterns or reservoirs of water. The position of this in the roof of a building seemed adverse to such an idea, as, in case of a breach, the water might find its way into the apartment below.

At the foot of the terrace was a tree, hiding part of the building. Though holding trees in some degree of reverence, around these ruined cities it was a great satisfaction to hear them fall. This one was a noble ramon, which I had ordered to be cut down, and being engaged in another direction, I returned, and found that the Indians had not done so, and they said it was so hard that it would break their axes. These little axes seemed hardly capable of making any impression upon the trunk, and I gave them directions, perhaps still more barbarous, to cut away the branches and leave the trunk. They hesitated, and one of them said, in a deprecating tone, that this tree served as food for horses and cattle, and their mistress had always charged them not to cut down such. The poor fellow seemed

perplexed between the standing orders of the rancho and the special instructions to do what I required.

The ramon tree was growing out of the mouth of a cave, which the Indians said was an ancient well. I should perhaps not have observed it, but for the discussion about cutting down the tree. I had no great disposition for another subterraneous scramble, but descended the cavity or opening for the purpose of taking a bird's-eye view of the mouth. On one side was a great ledge of stone projecting as a roof, and under this was a passage in the rock, choked up by masses of fallen stone. It was impossible to continue if I had been so disposed, but there was every reason to believe that formerly there had been some wild passage through the rocks as at Xcoch and Chack, which led to a subterraneous deposit of water, and that this had been one of the sources from which the ancient inhabitants procured their supply.

From the number of Indians at our command, and their alacrity in working, we had been enabled to accomplish much in a very short time. In three days they finished all that I required of them. When I dismissed them, I gave a half dollar extra to be divided among seventeen, and as I was going away Bernabé exclaimed, "Ave Maria, que gracias dan a vd." "Ave Maria, what thanks they give you."

The evening closed with a general gathering of the Indians under the arbour in front of the casa real. Before setting out in the morning the alcalde

asked me whether I wished them to assemble for the purpose of talking with them, and we had provided for their entertainment a sheep and a turkey, to which Bernaldo had devoted the day. At sundown all was ready. We insisted upon seating the old alcalde on a chair. Bernaldo served out meat and tortillas, and the alcalde presided over the agua ardiente, which, as it was purchased of himself, and to prove that it was not bad, he tasted before serving the rest, and took his share afterward. Supper over, we began our conversation, which consisted entirely of questions on our part and answers on theirs, a manner of discourse even in civilized life difficult to be kept up long. There was no unwillingness to give information, but there was a want of communicativeness which made all intercourse with them unprofitable and unsatisfactory. In fact, however, they had nothing to communicate; they had no stories or traditions; they knew nothing of the origin of the ruined buildings; these were standing when they were born; had existed in the time of their fathers; and the old men said that they had fallen much within their own memory. In one point, however, they differed from the Indians of Uxmal and Zayi. They had no superstitious feelings with regard to the ruins, were not afraid to go to them at night, or to sleep in them; and when we told them of the music that was heard sounding among the old buildings of Zayi, they said that if it were heard among these, they would all go and dance to it.

There were other vestiges and mounds, all, however, in a ruinous condition. The last day, while Mr. Catherwood was finishing at Labnà, I rode with Bernaldo to the hacienda of Tabi, two leagues distant, which, and those of Xcanchakan, already presented in these pages, and Vayalke, belonging to the Señora Joaquina Peon, where we stopped on our first visit to Uxmal, were distinguished as the three finest in Yucatan. Before the gate were some noble seybo trees, and near it a tiendicita, or small shop, supplied with articles adapted to the wants of the Indians appertaining to the hacienda. The great yard was lined with buildings, among which were the church and an enclosure for a bullfight, prepared for a festival which was to commence the next day. In the wall of the hacienda were sculptured ornaments from the ruins of ancient buildings. At the foot of the steps was a double-headed eagle, well carved, holding in his claws a sort of sceptre, and underneath were the figures of two tigers four feet high. In the back of the house was a projecting stone figure, with its mouth open, an uncomfortable expression of face, arms akimbo, and hands pressing the sides, as if in a qualmish state. It was used as a water-spout, and a stream was pouring out of the mouth. The buildings from which these stones were taken were near the hacienda, but were mere piles of ruins. They had furnished materials for the construction of the church, walls, and all the edifices on the hacienda.

Besides this there was a great cave, of which I had heard in Merida from the owner, who said he had never visited it, but wished me to do so, and he would read my description of it. The major domo was an intelligent Mestizo, who had been at the cave, and confirmed all the accounts I had heard of it, of sculptured figures of men and animals, pillars, and a chapel of rock under the earth. He furnished me with a vaquero as a guide and a relief horse, and, setting out, a short distance from the hacienda we turned into a tree-encumbered path, so difficult to pass through that, before we had gone far, it seemed quite reasonable in the owner to content himself with reading our description of the cave, without taking the trouble to see it for himself. The vaquero was encased in the equipments with which that class ride into the woods after cattle. His dress was a small, hard, heavy straw hat, cotton shirt, drawers, and sandals; over his body a thick jacket, or overall, made of tanned cowhide, with the sleeves reaching below his hands, and standing out as if made of wood; his saddle had large leather flaps, which folded back and protected his naked legs, and leather stirrup flaps to protect his feet. Where he dashed through the bushes and briers unharmed, my thin blues got caught and torn; but he knew what garrapatas were, and said with emphasis, "Estos chicos son muy Demonios." "Those little ones are the very d—l."

At the distance of a league we reached the cave,

and, tying our horses, descended by a great chasm to the depth of perhaps two hundred feet, when we found ourselves under a great shelf of overhanging rock, the cavern being dark as we advanced, but all at once lighted up from beyond by a perpendicular orifice, and exhibiting in the background magnificent stalactites, picturesque blocks and fragments of rock, which, in the shadows of the background, assumed all manner of fantastic shapes, and, from their fancied resemblance, had been called the figures of men and animals, pillars and chapels. I saw at once that there was another disappointment for me; there were no monuments of art, and had never been anything artificial; but the cave itself, being large and open, and lighted in several places by orifices above, was so magnificent that, notwithstanding the labour and disappointment, I did not regret my visit. I passed two hours in wandering through it, returned to the hacienda to dine, and it was after dark when I reached the rancho, and for the last time had the benefit of its well in the shape of a warm bath. Throughout Yucatan, every Indian, however poor, has, as part of the furniture of his hut, a baño, or sort of bathing-tub; and, next to making tortillas, the great use of a wife is to have warm water ready for him when he returns from his work. We had not the latter convenience, but at this place, for a medio, we had the alcalde's baño every evening. It was a wooden dug-out, flat bottomed, about three feet long, eighteen inches wide, three or four

inches deep, and bathing in it was somewhat like bathing in the salver of a tea-table, but, covered as we were constantly with garrapata bites, mere ablution was as grateful as a Turkish or Egyptian bath.

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