

CHAPTER VII.

Return to Nohcacab.—Final Departure from this Village.—An Indian Sexton.—Route.—“Old Walls.”—Ruins of Sacbey.—Paved Road.—Journey continued.—Ruins of Xampon.—Imposing Edifice.—“Old Walls,” called by Indians Xlapphak.—Ruins of Hiokowitz and Kuepak.—Zekilna.—Altar for burning Copal.—Ancient Terrace.—Lofty stone Structure.—Remains of a Building.—Sculptured Stones.—Platform.—Rancho of Chunhuhu.—Become involuntary Masters of a Hut.—Its interior Arrangements.—Scarcity of Water.—Pressing Wants.—Visit to the Ruins.—Two Buildings.—Façade.—Ornamented Doorways.—Welcome Visitors.—Another Building.—Plastered Front.—A Building seen from the Terrace.—Visit to the Ruins of Schoolhoke.—Large stone Structure.—Ranges of Buildings.—Circular Stone.—Ruined Edifice.—Representations of Human Figures.—Return to the Rancho.—Benefits of a Rain.

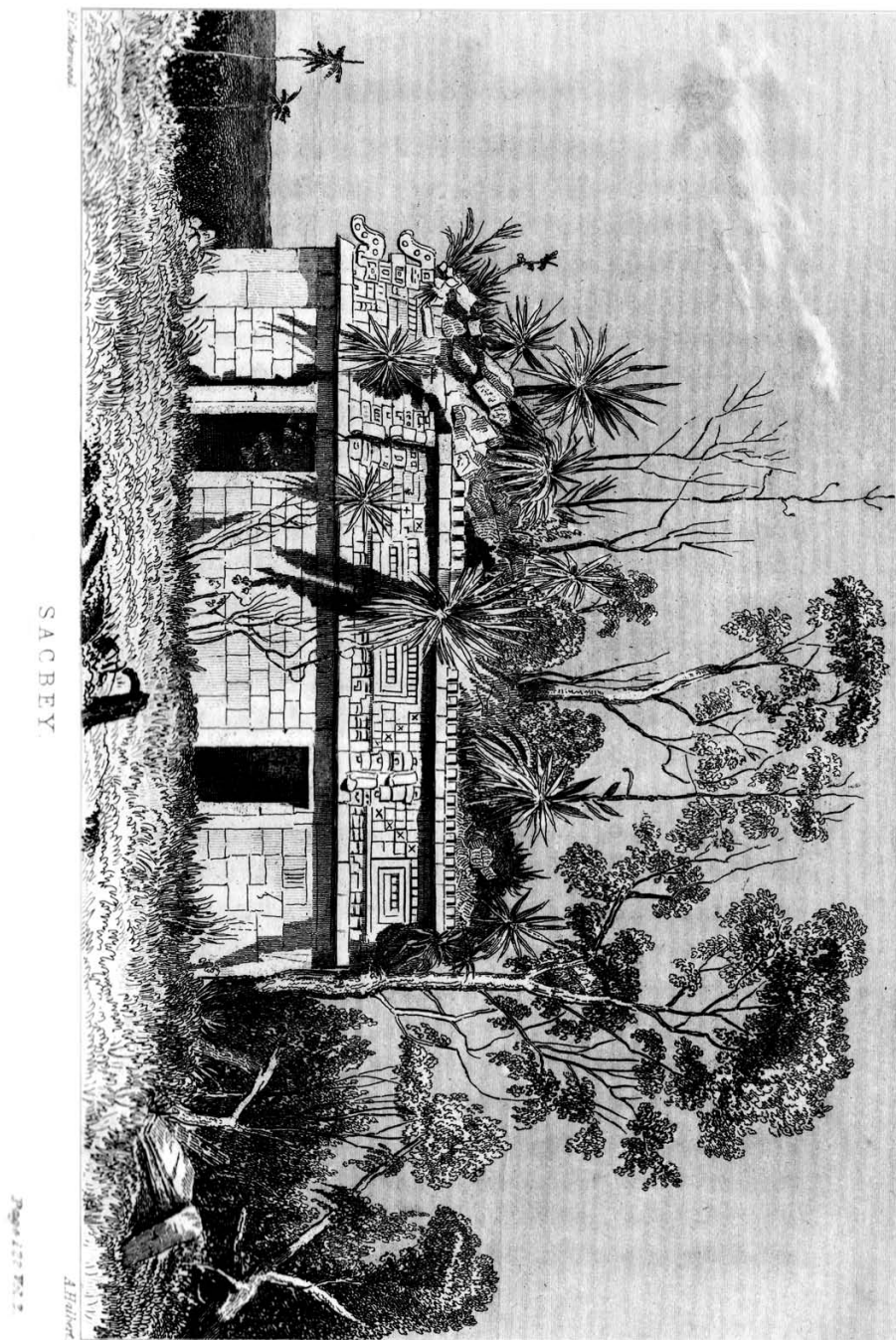
On the fourteenth of February we returned to Nohcacab. We had sent Albino before to make all our necessary arrangements, and on the fifteenth we took our final leave of this village. We had no regret; on the contrary, it was pleasant to think that we should not return to it. Our luggage was again reduced to the smallest possible compass: hammocks, a few changes of clothes, and Daguerreotype apparatus, all the rest being forwarded to meet us at Peto. The chief of our Indian carriers was a sexton, who had served out his time, an old neighbour in the convent, whom we had never seen sober, and who was this morning particularly the reverse.

To understand our route it will be necessary for
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the reader to consult the map. On setting out our direction was again south, and again our road was over the sepulchres of cities. At the distance of two miles we saw "old walls" on an eminence at the right; a little farther three ruined buildings on the same side of the road; and beyond these we came to the ruins of Sacbey. These consist of three buildings, irregularly disposed, one of which is represented in the engraving opposite. It faces the south, measures fifty-three feet front by twelve feet six inches deep, and has three small doorways. Another, a little farther south, is about the size of the former, and has three apartments, with two columns in the centre doorway. The third is so ruined that its plan could not be made out.

Near as they were to the village, the padrecito had never seen them. They stand about a hundred feet from the path, but so completely buried among the trees, that, though I had visited them before under the guidance of an Indian, I passed now without observing them.

A short distance beyond is one of the most interesting monuments of antiquity in Yucatan. It is a broken platform or roadway of stone, about eight feet wide and eight or ten inches high, crossing the road, and running off into the woods on both sides. I have before referred to it as called by the Indians Sacbey, which means, in the Maya language, a paved way of pure white stone. The Indians say it traversed the country from Kabah to Uxmal; and that





Elitherswood

A. Halbert

SACBEY.

on it couriers travelled, bearing letters to and from the lords of those cities, written on leaves or the bark of trees. It was the only instance in which we had found among the Indians anything like a tradition, and the universality of this legend was illustrated by the circumstances attending our arrival. While we were standing upon the road, an old Indian came up from the other direction, bending under a load, who, in crossing it, stopped, and, striking his stick against the stones, uttered the words Sacbey, and Kabah, and Uxmal. At the same time our carriers came up, the old sexton at their head, who, depositing his burden upon the ancient road, repeated Sacbey, and then favoured us with an oration, in which we could only distinguish Kabah and Uxmal.

It had been my intention to explore thoroughly the route of this ancient road, and, if possible, trace it through the woods to the desolate cities which it once connected, and it was among the vexations of our residence at Nohcacab that we had not been able to do so. The difficulty of procuring Indians to work, and a general recurrence of sickness, rendered it impossible. We could not tell how much time might be required; the whole country was overgrown with trees; in some places the track was but faintly marked, and in others it might be lost altogether. It remains, therefore, an unbroken ground for the future explorer.

Again passing "old walls" on each side of the road, at the distance of two leagues we reached

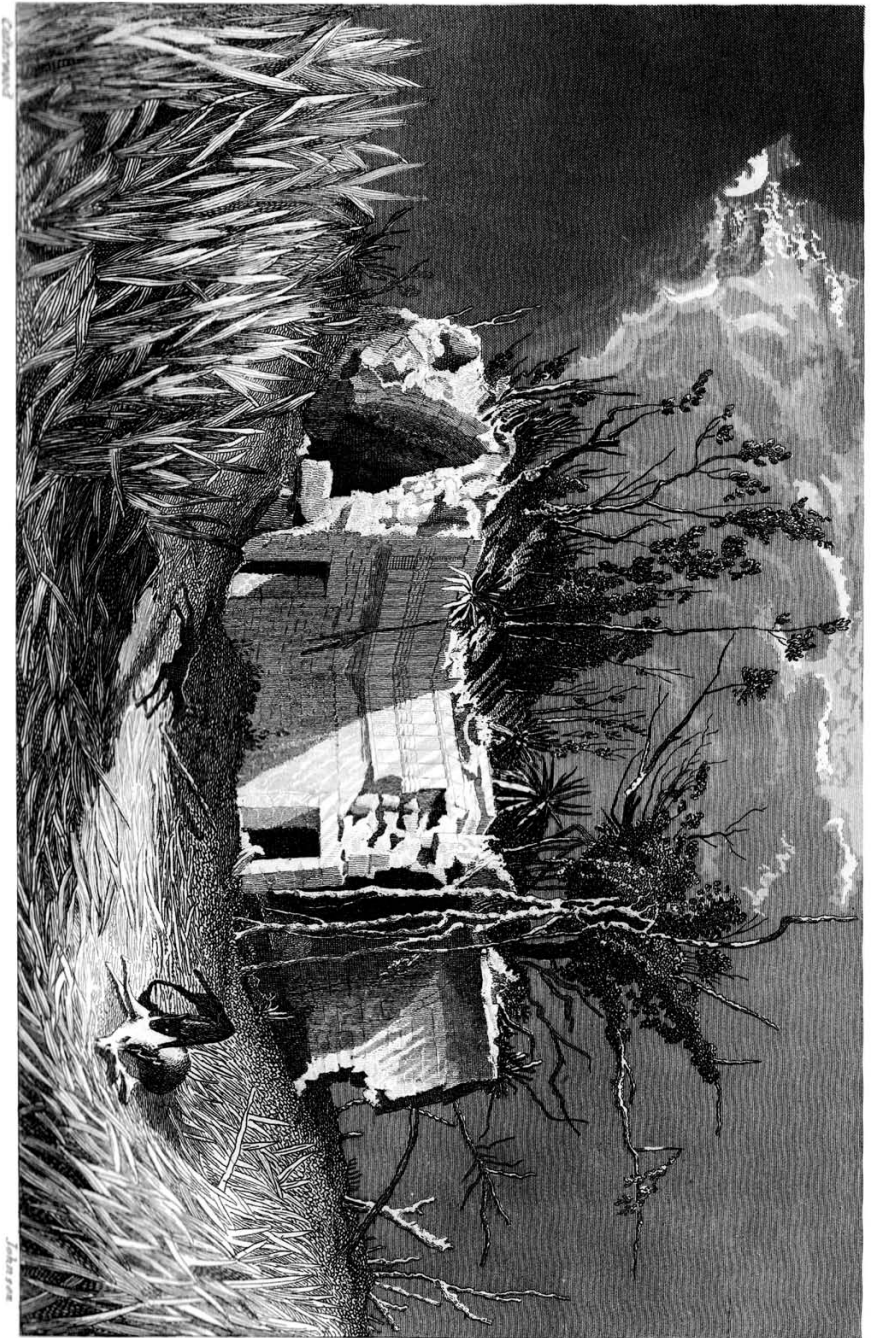
Xampon, where stand the remains of an edifice which, when entire, must have been grand and imposing, and now, but for the world of ruins around, might excite a stranger's wonder. Its form was rectangular, its four sides enclosing a hollow square. It measured from north to south eighty feet, and from east to west one hundred and five. Two angles only remain, one of which is represented in the plate opposite. It stood alone, and an Indian had planted a milpa around it. From this "old walls" were again visible, which the Indians called Kalu pok.

Beyond we saw at a distance two other places, called Hiokowitz and Kuepak, ruined and difficult of access, and we did not attempt to reach them.

It added to the effect of the ruins scattered in this region, that they were not on a camino real, but on a little-frequented milpa path, in some places so overgrown that we found it difficult to force a passage. The heat was intense; we exhausted our waccals of water, and as there was no stream or fountain, our only chance of a supply was from a deposite of rain-water in the hollow of some friendly rock.

At two o'clock we reached a small clearing, in which stood an arbour of leaves, and under it a rude cross, facing the road; beyond, on the left, was an overgrown path, which, for the first time in many years, had been opened for me on a former occasion, to enable me to visit the ruins of Zekilna.

XAMPON





Catherwood

Johnson

XAMPON

This place had been the object of one of my bootless visits from Nohcacab. The account I had heard was of an apartment containing an altar for burning copal, with traces of its use as left by the ancient inhabitants. When I had arrived where it was necessary to turn off, it was some time before the Indian could discover any signs of a path; and when found, he had to clear every step of the way. By that time my views on the subject of ruined cities had become practical, and, perceiving the discomfort and hardship that must attend an exploration in so desolate a place, I did most earnestly hope that the path would lead to nothing that might require a second visit. I dismounted, and leading my horse as the Indian cleared the way, we came to a broken, stony ascent, climbing up which I discovered that we were upon the top of an ancient terrace. A fine alamo tree was growing on the terrace, under which I tied my horse, and descending on the other side, we crossed a closely-wooded hollow, which, from the excessive heat, I supposed to be between two mounds. In a few moments I found myself ascending the side of a lofty stone structure, on the top of which were the remains of a large building, with its walls fallen, and the whole side of the mound strewn with sculptured stones, a scene of irrecoverable ruin. Descending on the other side of this structure, we reached a broad platform, in a good state of preservation, with trees growing upon it, without brush or underwood, but so teeming with insects and

large black ants that it was necessary to step from stone to stone, and avoid touching the ground. Running off lengthwise from this terrace was a small building, which the Indian pointed out as containing the altar and copal. Passing the first door, he went on to the second, put his head in cautiously, and, without entering, drew back. Going in, I found an apartment differing in nothing from the most ordinary we had seen in the country. For some time I could not get the Indian to enter, and when he did, standing in the doorway, and looking around cautiously, he waved his finger horizontally, according to the manner of the Indians, to indicate that there was nothing. Fortunately, however, I learned that the road we had left led to the ruins of Chunhuhu; and it shows the difficulty I had in ascertaining the juxtaposition of places, that though this was one of the places which I intended to visit, until this man mentioned it I had not been able to learn that it lay in the same neighbourhood. I determined at once to continue on, and it was what I saw on that occasion that now put our whole body in motion in this direction.

To return. It was late in the afternoon when we reached the savanna of Chunhuhu, and rode up to the hut at which I had tied my horse on my former visit.

The hut was built of upright poles, had a steep projecting roof thatched with palm leaves, and the sides protected by the same material; as we stopped

in front, we saw a woman within mashing maize for tortillas, which promised a speedy supper. She said her husband was away; but this made no difference to us, and, after a few more words, we all entered, the woman at the moment bolting for the door, and leaving us in exclusive possession. Very soon, however, a little boy, about eight years old, came down and demanded the maize, which we were loth to give up, but did not consider ourselves authorized to retain. Albino followed him, in hopes of persuading the woman to return; but as soon as she caught a glimpse of him she ran into the woods.

The hut of which we thus became the sudden and involuntary masters was furnished with three stones for a fireplace, a wooden horse for kneading maize upon, a comal for baking tortillas, an earthen olla, or pot, for cooking, three or four waccals, or gourds, for drinking-cups, and two small Indian hammocks, which also were demanded and given up. Besides these, there was a circular dining-table about a foot and a half in diameter, supported by three pegs about eight inches high, and some blocks of wood about the same height for seats. Overhead, suspended from the rafters, were three large bundles of corn in the husk and two of beans in the pod; and on each string, about a foot above these eatables, was half a calabash or squash, with the rounded side up, like the shade over a lamp, which, besides being ornamental, filled the office of a rat-trap; for these vermin, in springing from the

rafters to reach the corn and beans, would strike upon the calabash, and fall to the ground.

Being provided for ourselves, we next looked to our horses. There was no difficulty about their food, for a supply of corn had fallen into our hands, and the grass on the savanna was the best pasture we had seen in the country; but we learned, to our dismay, from the little boy, who was the only person we saw, that there was no water. The place was worse supplied than any we had yet visited. There was neither well, cueva, nor aguada, and the inhabitants depended entirely upon the rain-water collected in the hollows of the rocks. As to a supply for four horses, it was utterly out of the question. Any long stay at this place was, of course, impossible; but immediate wants were pressing. Our horses had not touched water since morning, and, after a long, hot, and toilsome journey, we could not think of their going without all night.

The little boy was hovering about the rancho in charge of a naked sister some two years old, and commissioned, as he told us himself, to watch that we did not take anything from the hut. For a medio he undertook to show me the place where they procured water, and, mounting his little sister upon his back, he led the way up a steep and stony hill. I followed with the bridle of my horse in my hand, and, without any little girl on my back, found it difficult to keep up with him. On the top of the hill were worn and naked rocks, with deep hollows in

them, some holding perhaps as much as one or two pails of water. I led my horse to one of the largest. He was always an extraordinary water drinker, and that evening was equal to a whole temperance society. The little Indian looked on as if he had sold his birthright, and I felt strong compunctions; but, letting the morrow take care of itself, I sent up the other horses, which consumed at a single drinking what might, perhaps, have sufficed the family a month.

In the mean time our own wants were not slight. We had been on the road all day, and had eaten nothing. Unluckily, the old sexton had taken for his load the box containing our table furniture and provisions for the road, and we had not seen him since we left him at Sacbey. All the other carriers had arrived. I had hired them to remain with us and work at the ruins, and then carry the luggage to the next village. Part of my contract was to feed them, and, knowing the state of things, they scattered in search of supplies, returning, after a long absence, with some tortillas, eggs, and lard. We had the eggs fried, and would, perhaps, have been content but for our vexation with the sexton. While we were swinging in our hammocks, we heard his voice at a distance, and presently he entered in the best humour possible, and holding up his empty bottle in triumph.

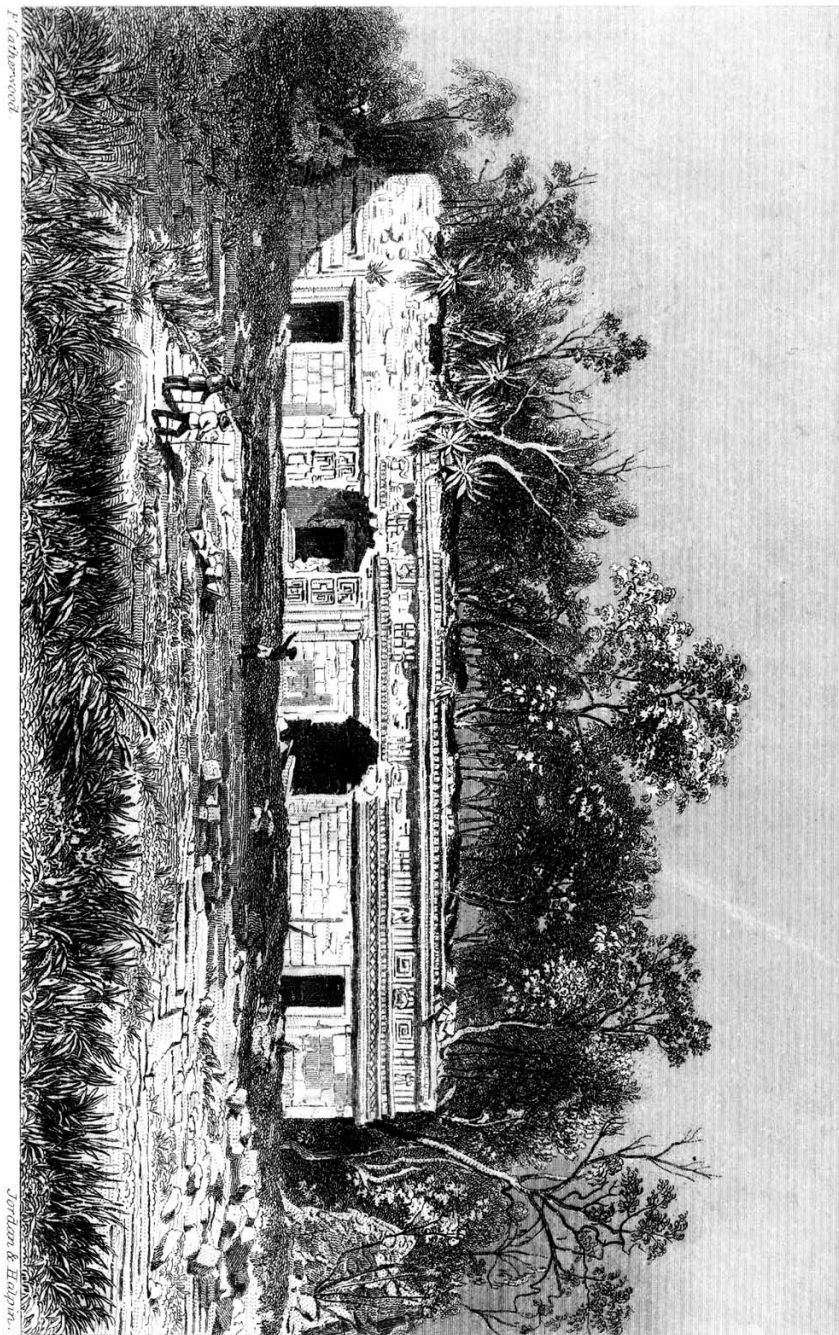
The next morning at daylight we sent Albino
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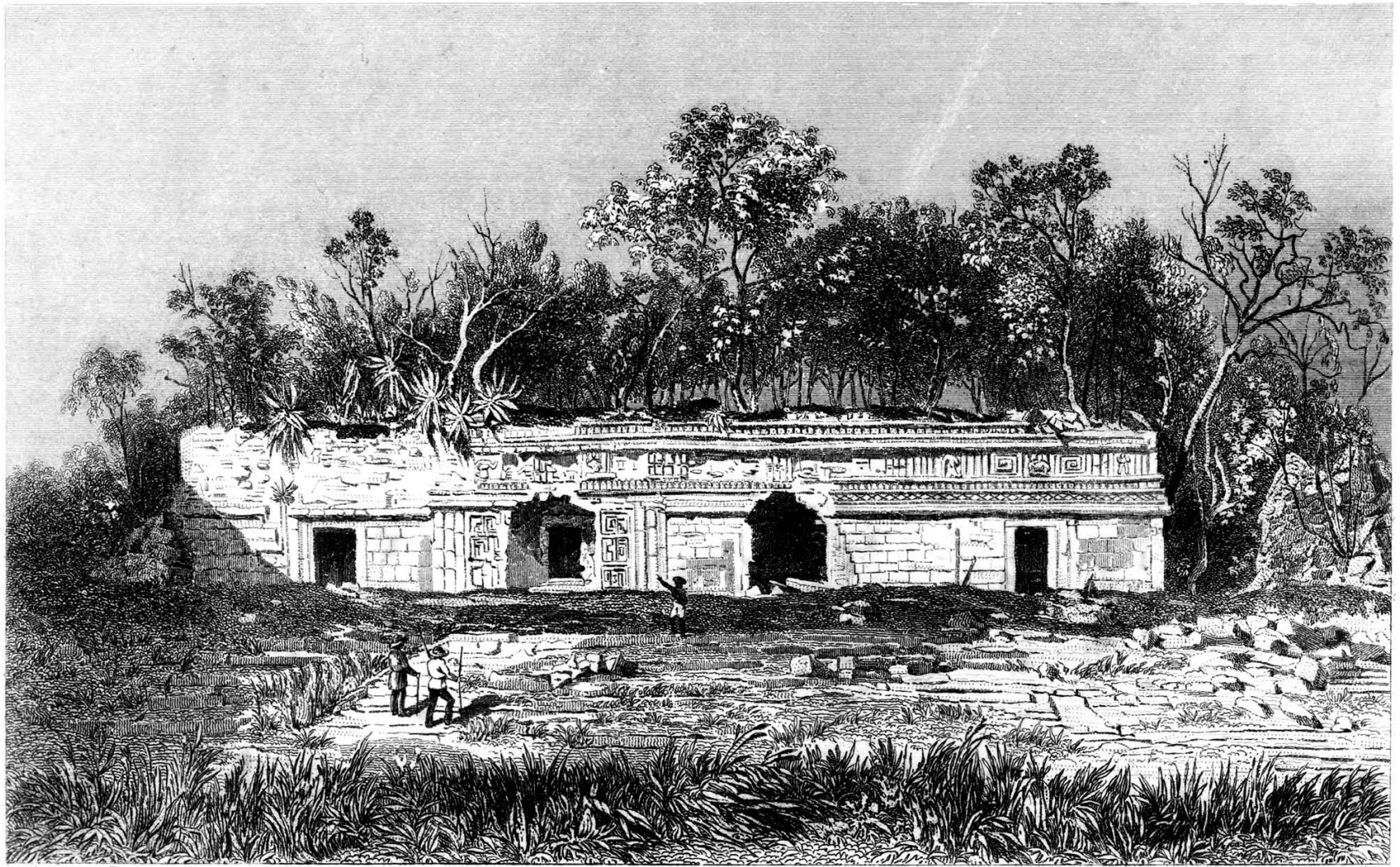
with the Indians to begin clearing around the ruins, and after breakfast we followed. The path lay through a savanna covered with long grass, and at the distance of a mile we reached two buildings, which I had seen before, and were the inducement to this visit.

The first is that represented in the plate opposite. It stands on a substantial terrace, but lower than most of the others. The front is one hundred and twelve feet long, and when entire must have presented a grand appearance. The end on the left in the engraving has fallen, carrying with it one doorway, so that now only four appear. The doorway was the largest and most imposing we had seen in the country, but, unfortunately, the ornaments over it were broken and fallen. In the centre apartment the back corridor is raised, and the ascent to it is by three steps.

All the doorways were plain except the centre one (the second to the left in the engraving), which

CHUNHUCHU.

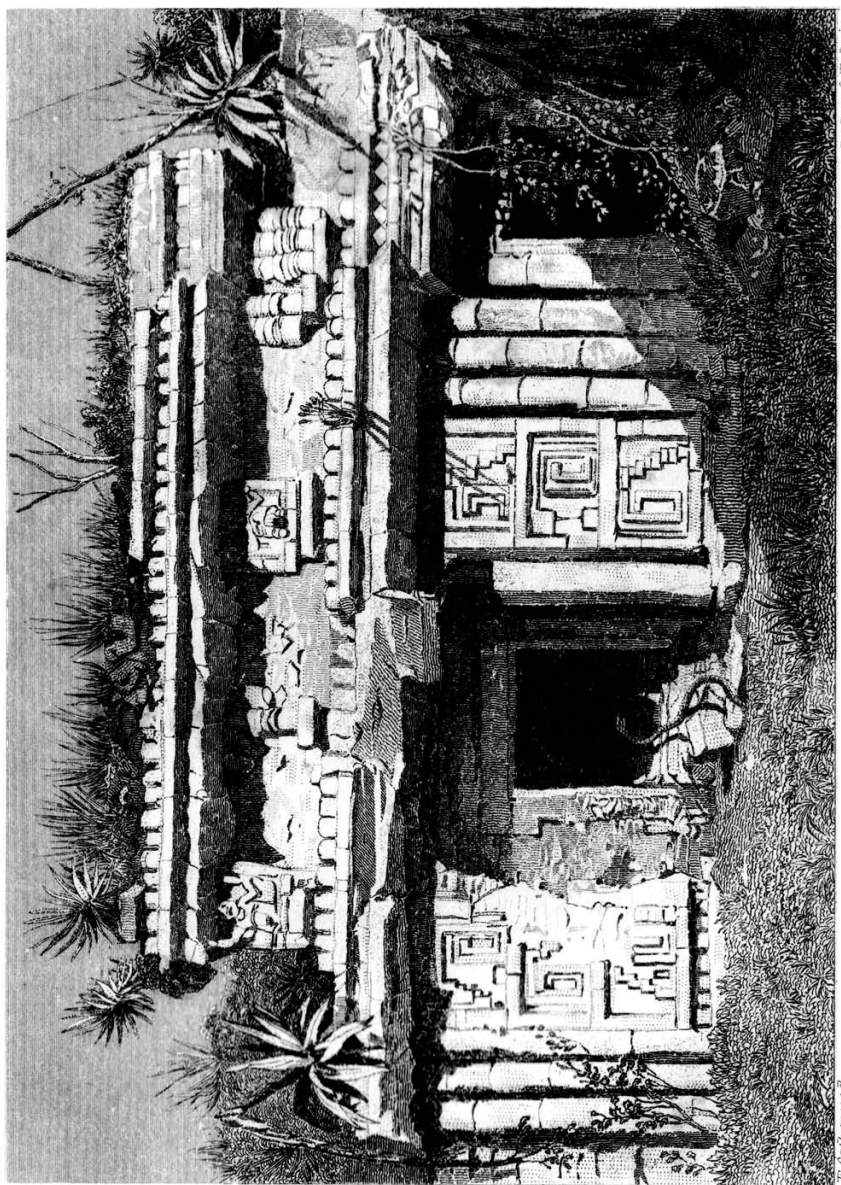




F. Catherwood

Jordan & Halpin.

CHUNHUHU.



Jordan, S. H. 1843 p. 11.

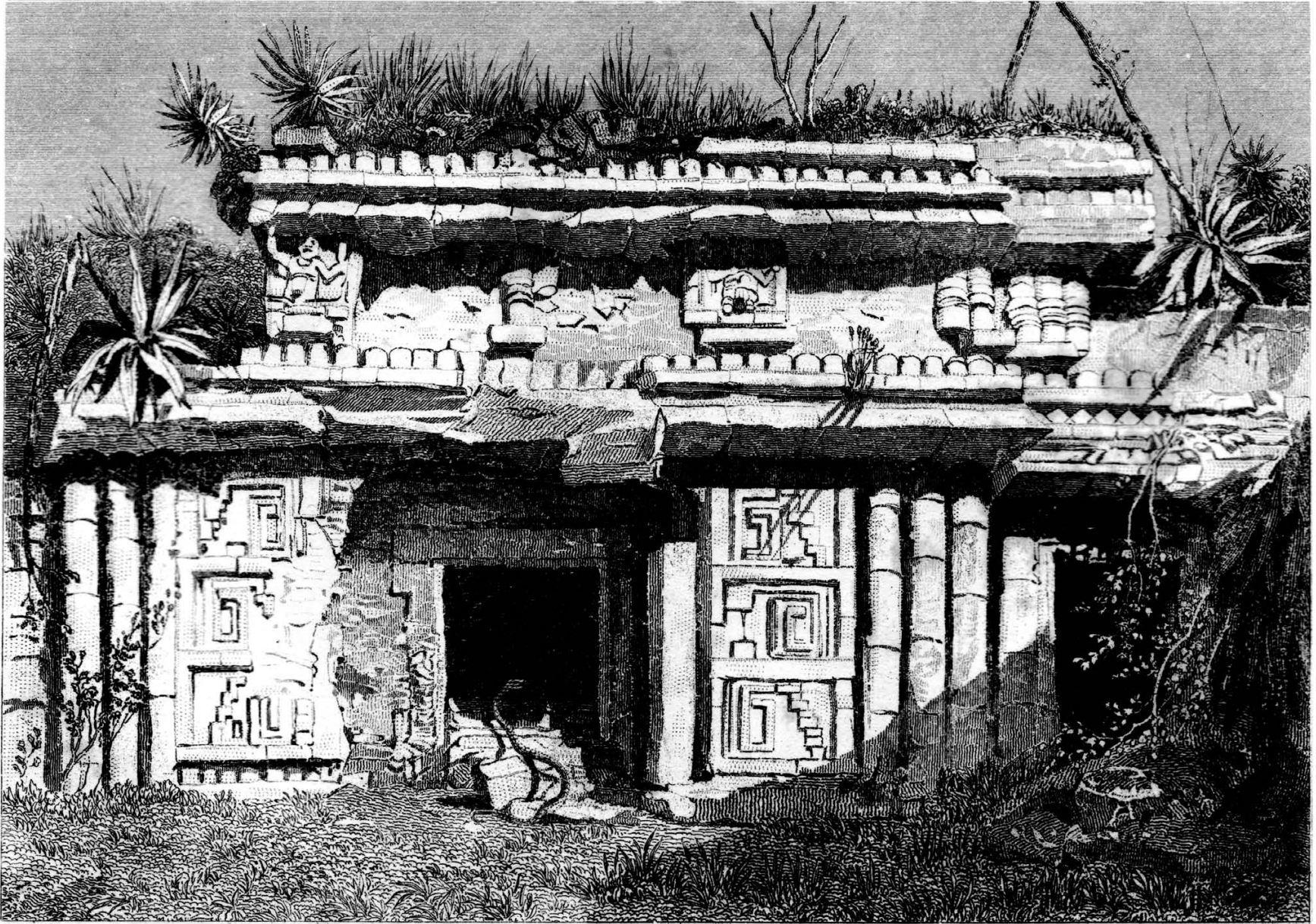
Plate 131. Vol. 2.

CHUNCHUHU

is represented in the plate opposite. It is in a dilapidated condition, but still presents bold and striking ornaments. Even on this scale, however, the details of the sitting figures above the cornice do not appear.

While we were engaged in making a clearing in front of this building, two young men came down upon the terrace from the corner that was fallen, and apparently from the top of the building, with long guns, the locks covered with deer-skin, and all the accoutrements of *caçadores*, or hunters. They were tall, fine-looking fellows, fearless and frank in appearance and manner. Dr. Cabot's gun was the first object that attracted their attention, after which they laid down their guns, and, as if for the mere sport of swinging their machetes, were soon foremost in making the clearing. When this was finished, Mr. C. sat up his camera lucida, and though at first all gathered round, in a few minutes he was left with only the two brothers, one of them holding over him an umbrella to protect him from the sun.

Except the little boy and the woman, these were the first persons we had seen within speaking distance. We were so pleased with their appearance that we proposed to one of them to accompany us in our search after ruins. The elder was quite taken with the idea of rambling, but soon said, with a rather disconsolate tone, that he had a wife and children. His *hermanito*, or younger brother, however, had no such ties, and would go with us. We made an agreement on the spot; and nothing can



F. Catherwood.

Jordan & Halpin.

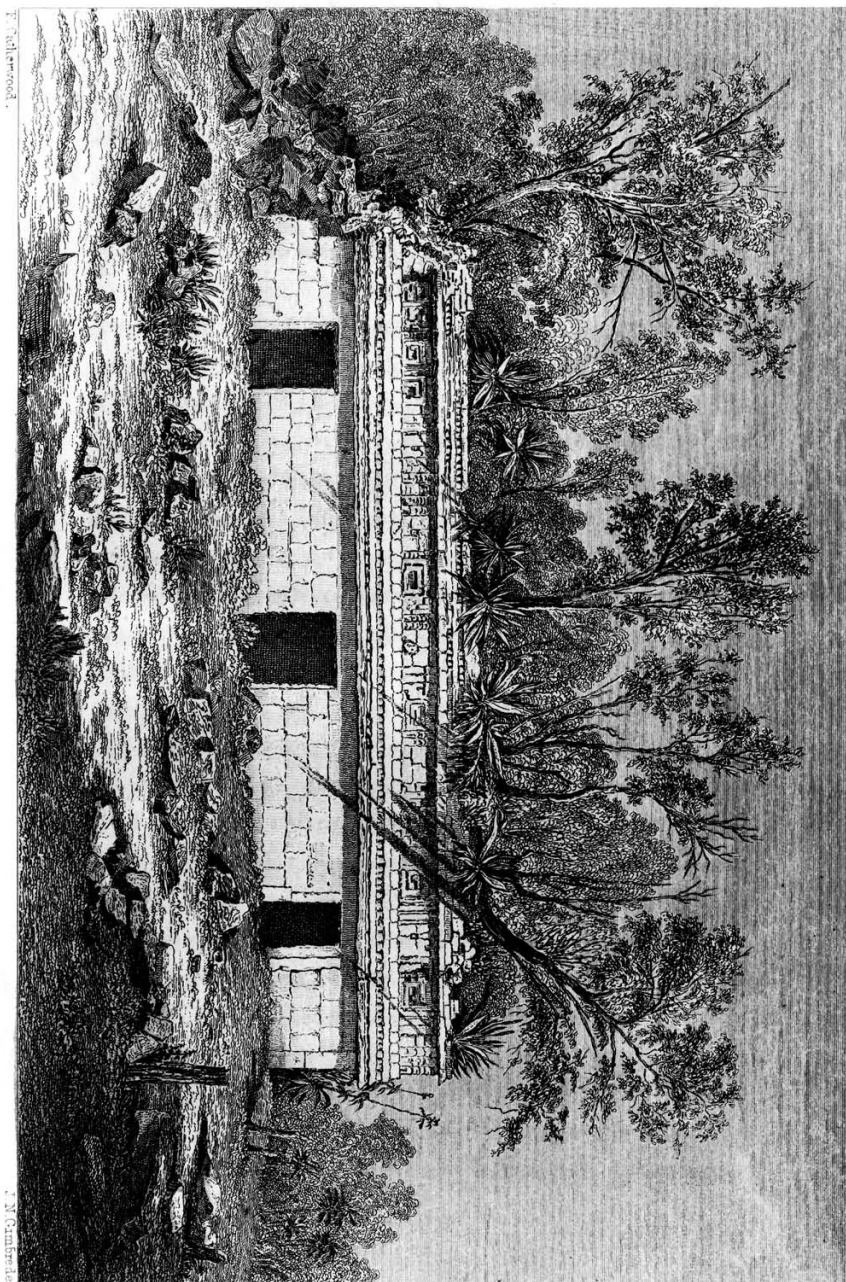
CHUNHUHU.

show more plainly the sense which we entertained of the security of travelling in Yucatan. In Central America we never dared to take a man into our service without strong recommendations, for he might be a robber or an assassin. These men we had never heard of till they came upon us with their guns. Their manly bearing as hunters inspired confidence, and the only suspicious circumstance was that they were willing to take us without references; but we found afterward that they had both known us at Nohcacab. The one whom we engaged was named Dimas, and he continued with us until we left the country.

On the same line, and but a short distance removed, though on a lower terrace, is another building, measuring eighty-five feet in front, which is represented in the plate opposite. It had a freshness about it that suggested the idea of something more modern than the others. The whole was covered with a coat of plaster but little broken, and it confirmed us in the opinion we had entertained before, that the fronts of all the buildings had been thus covered.

Our meeting with these young men was a fortunate circumstance for us in exploring these ruins. From boyhood their father had had his rancho on the savanna, and with their guns they had ranged over the whole country for leagues around.

From the terrace of the first building we saw at a distance a high hill, almost a mountain, on the top



CHUNHUHU.



F. Catherwood.

J. N. Gimbrede.

CHUNHUHU.

of which rose a wooded elevation surrounding an ancient building. There was something extraordinary in its position, but the young men told us it was entirely ruined, and, although it was then but eleven o'clock, if we attempted to go to it, we could not return till after dark. They told us, also, of others at the distance of half a league, more extensive, and some of which, they said, were, in finish and preservation, equal to these.

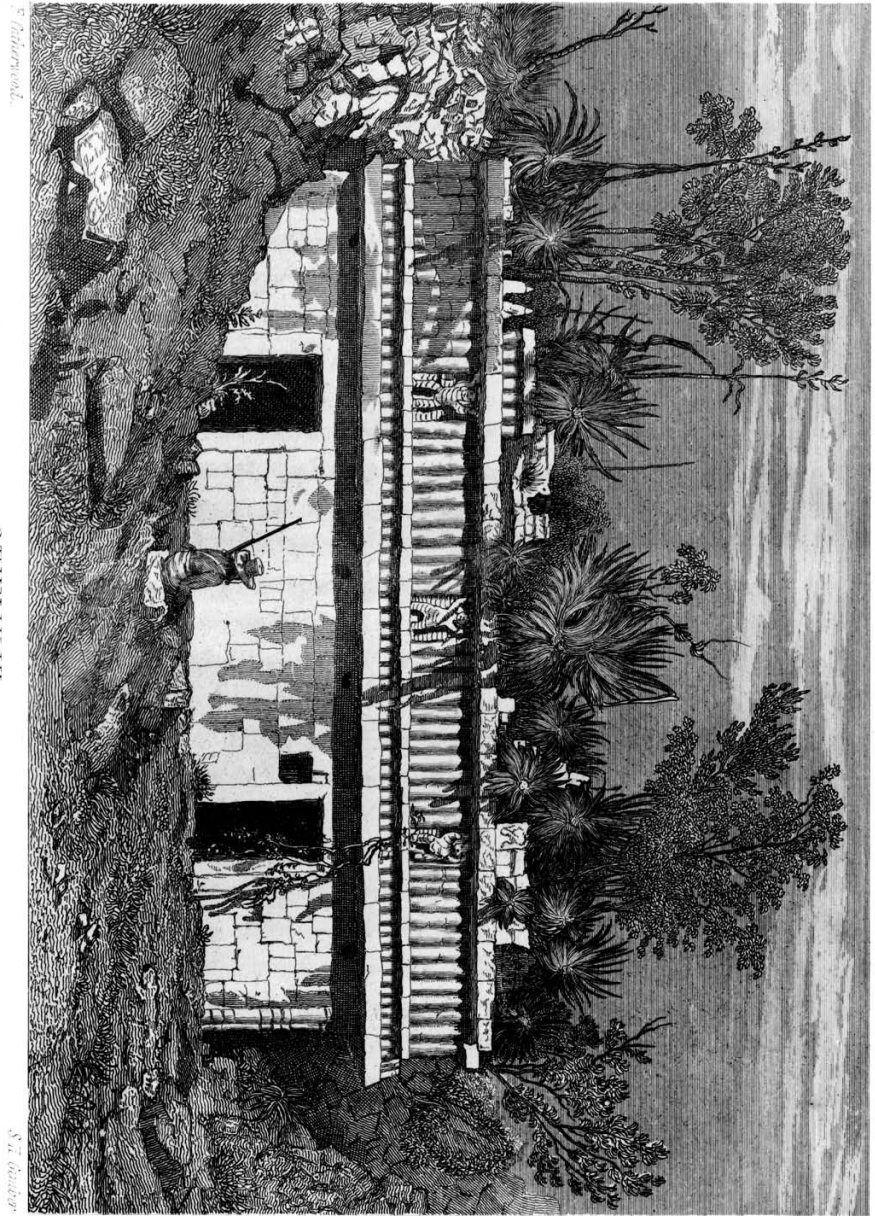
At one o'clock Doctor Cabot and myself, under the guidance of Dimas, set out to look for them. It was desperately hot. We passed several huts, and at one of them asked for some water; but it was so full of insects that we could barely taste it. Dimas led us to the hut of his mother, and gave us some from a vessel in which the insects had settled to the bottom.

Beyond this we ascended the spur of a high hill, and coming down into a thickly-wooded valley, after the longest half league we ever walked, we saw through the trees a large stone structure. On reaching it, and climbing over a broken terrace, we came to a large mound faced on all sides with stone, which we ascended, and crossing over the top, looked down upon an overgrown area, having on each side a range of ruined buildings, with their white façades peering through the trees; and beyond, at a distance, and seemingly inaccessible, was the high hill with the ruins on the top, which we had seen from the terrace of the first building. Hills rose around us

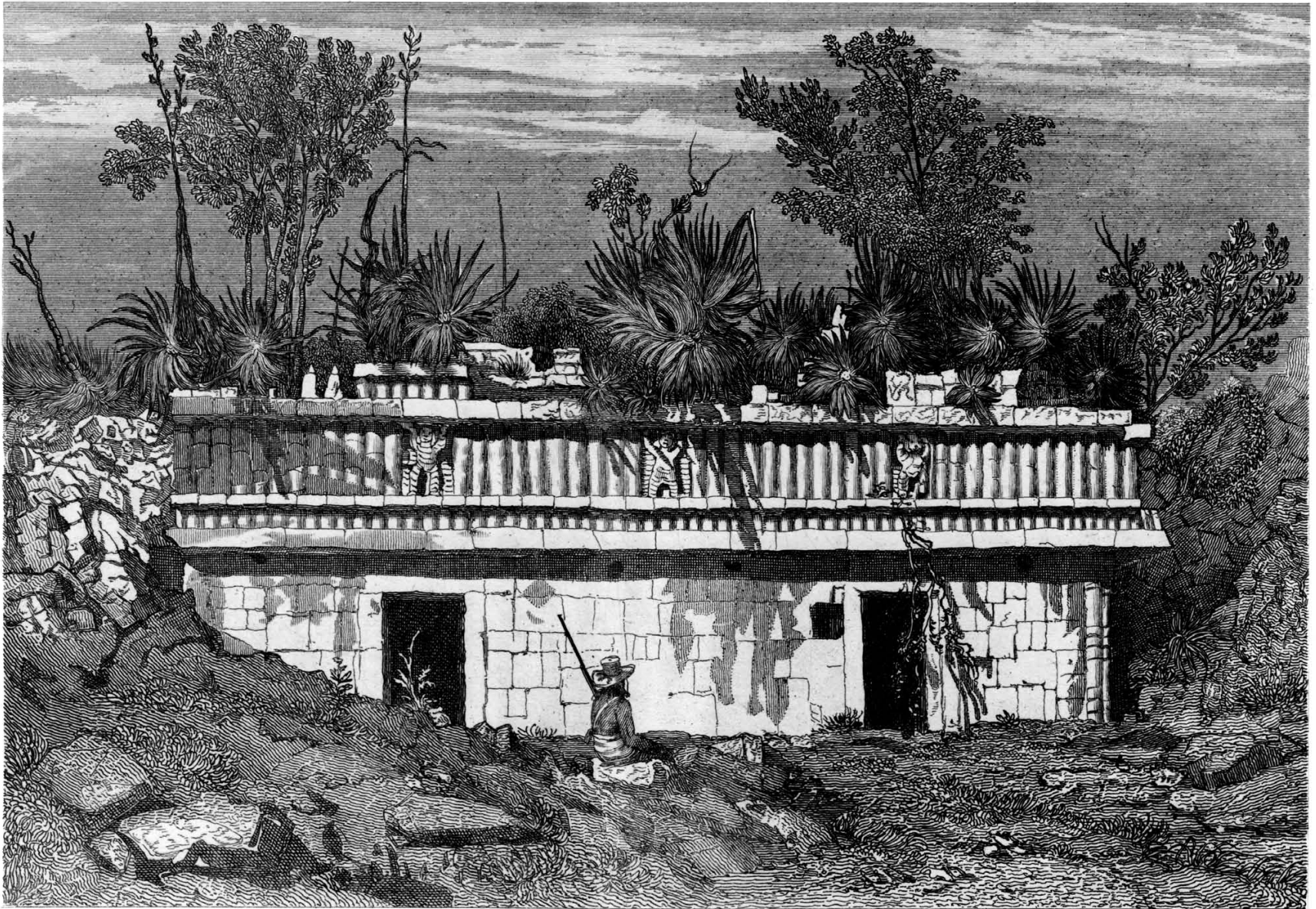
on every side, and, for that country, the scene was picturesque, but all waste and silent. The stillness of the grave rested upon the ruins, and the notes of a little flycatcher were the only sounds we heard.

The ruins in sight were much more extensive than those we had first visited, but in a more ruinous condition. We descended the mound to the area in front, and, bearing down the bushes, passed in the centre an uncouth, upright, circular stone, like that frequently referred to before, called the picote, or whipping-post, and farther on we reached an edifice, which Mr. Catherwood afterward drew, and which is represented in the engraving opposite. It is thirty-three feet in front, and has two apartments, each thirteen feet long by eight feet six inches deep, and conspicuous in the façade are representations of three uncouth human figures, in curious dresses, with their hands held up by the side of the head, supporting the cornice.

These ruins, Dimas told us, were called School-hoke, but, like the others, they stand on what is called the savanna of Chunhuhu; and the ruined building on the top of the hill, visible from both places, seems towering as a link to connect them together. What the extent of this place has been it is impossible to say. Returning, overtaken by night, and in apprehension of rain, we were an hour and a half, which would make the two, by the path we took, at least five miles apart, though much nearer in a straight line. Supposing the two piles of ruins to



CHUNHUUHU.



F. Gatherwood.

CHUNJUJU.

S. H. Gilder

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have formed part of the same city, there is reason to believe that it once covered as much ground and contained as many inhabitants as any that has yet been presented.

The first intelligence I received of the existence of these ruins was from Cocom, who, the reader may remember, was our guide at Nohpat; and this is all that I am able to communicate in regard to their history.

We returned to the rancho worn down with fatigue, just in time to escape a violent rain. This brought within, as an accompaniment to the fleas of the night before, our carriers and servants, and we had eleven hammocks, in close juxtaposition, and through the night a concert of nasal trombones, with Indian variations. The rain continued all the next day, and as no work could be done, Mr. Catherwood took advantage of the opportunity to have another attack of fever. We were glad of it on another account, for we had kept a man constantly employed in the woods searching for water; our horses had exhausted all the rocky cavities around, and we could not have held out another day. The rain replenished them, and relieved us from some compunctions.

In the afternoon the little boy came down with a message from his mother, desiring to know when we were going away. Perhaps the reader is curious to know the costume of boys at Chunchuhu. It consists of a straw hat and a pair of sandals. This one

had, besides, some distinguishable spots of dirt, and Mr. Catherwood made a drawing of him as he stood. Soon afterward the poor woman herself was seen hovering about the house. She considered that it was really time to come. We had made a great inroad upon her provisions; given the corn to our horses, and cooked the frigoles; but the special cause of her coming was to return a medio, which she said was bad. She was mild, amiable, and simple as a child; complained that we said we were only going to remain one night, and now she did not know when we were going away. With great difficulty, we prevailed upon her to enter the hut, and told her she might return whenever she pleased. She laughed good-naturedly, and, after looking round carefully to see that nothing was missing, went away comforted by our promise to depart the next day.