

THE MYSTERIOUS CITY OF HONDURAS.

AN ACCOUNT OF RECENT DISCOVERIES IN COPAN.

BY THE EXPLORER, GEORGE BYRON GORDON.



THE exploits of Cortez and the conquest of Mexico, rendered into popular literature by Prescott, are chiefly responsible for the common belief that north of the Isthmus of Panama the high-water mark of pre-Columbian civilization on the American continent was that reached by the Aztecs. It is true that at the time of the conquest the Aztecs were the dominant race; they were then at the height of their power and glory, and their influence was more extended than that of any other nation. It is not intended to detract from the brilliancy of the Aztec civilization as set forth in the testimony of eye-witnesses at the time of the conquest; but, compared with that of another civilization that had already passed away, it was as the brightness of the full meridian moon to the splendor of the sun that has already set. Nor is it claimed that the Aztec culture was a borrowed culture. That is a matter involving vast differences of opinion; and it is characteristic that, while so much ingenuity has been wasted in vain speculation, so little has been accomplished by actual investigation that it is still a matter of dispute whether the Maya culture was developed on the soil where its remains are found, or brought with the people from parts unknown; whether the Aztecs borrowed from the Mayas, or the Mayas from the Aztecs; or whether both these great nations derived their culture from the Toltecs. And again, it is claimed that the Toltecs themselves are nothing more than the figures of a sun-myth.

The two great aboriginal civilizations of the North American continent that furnish us with material for investigation and study are those of the Aztecs and the Mayas. The relationship between them is not clearly defined; but it is noteworthy that these two peoples, having an entirely separate political existence, differing radically in language and

customs, had legends which appear to have had a community of origin in some indefinitely remote past.

From the valley of Mexico, the center of its power and influence, the Aztec civilization at the time of the conquest had spread itself to the Gulf of Mexico and to the Pacific Ocean, to the river Panuco on the north and to the Gulf of Tehuantepec on the south, with small outlying colonies still farther south.

The broad plains of Yucatan and the fertile valleys of Central America comprise the theater where the much older Maya civilization had its rise, culmination, and decline—the unrecorded acts in a very imposing drama played long ago by actors whose names have been forgotten. Yes; long before the dream of western empire began to fill the minds of Europeans, firing the ambition of kings, and inciting the adventurous spirits of the time, full of the romantic daring of the age of chivalry, and thirsting for conquest, to seek fortune and fame at all hazards in the golden regions to the west,—centuries before the kingdom of the Montezumas, whose evil destiny it was to fall a prey to these avaricious and unprincipled men, had risen to power and glory in the beautiful valley of Mexico,—the curtain had already fallen on the last sad scene that closed another empire's career. On the arrival of the Spaniards the scepter of the Mayas had already passed away, and their ruined cities were the conqueror's spoil.

It is true that at the time of the conquest there was a remnant of a population on the peninsula of Yucatan,—a number of tribes who still haunted the vicinity of the deserted cities,—and these are generally believed to have been the descendants of the builders, though this is by no means certain. They called themselves Maya people; their language, they said, was Mayathan, the Maya speech; and their ancient capital they called Mayapan, which means literally the Maya banner, and in this connection means the Maya capital. This was the first acquaintance of Europeans with the name Maya. At the present day the name is applied ge-

nerically to all the affiliated tribes speaking dialects derived from the same ancient stock as the Maya proper, and specifically to that ancient civilization the remains of which are found scattered over Yucatan and Central America.

Whatever the origin of the people whom the Spaniards found in Yucatan, they doubtless had traditions, however vague, reaching back to the time when the great changes involving the rise and fall of the populous cities were going on. Some of these traditions have been handed down to us by the early missionaries—perverted, indeed, through the efforts of the ecclesiastical mind to interpret them in the light of the Holy Scriptures, but still of inestimable value to the student who, by a vigorous application of critical analysis, may be able to restore them to some semblance of their natural shape. Even then they will serve not to satisfy, but only to whet, his appetite. His task will not be an easy or yet altogether a pleasant one; for it is a melancholy picture these monkish writings present of the intellectual thralldom that bore the name of learning in that day. Full of the fantasies and imagery of the East, those who undertook to teach the Indians were unable to comprehend a traditional knowledge of institutions more advanced and an intelligence far more liberal than their own.

THE MAYAS A LITERARY PEOPLE.

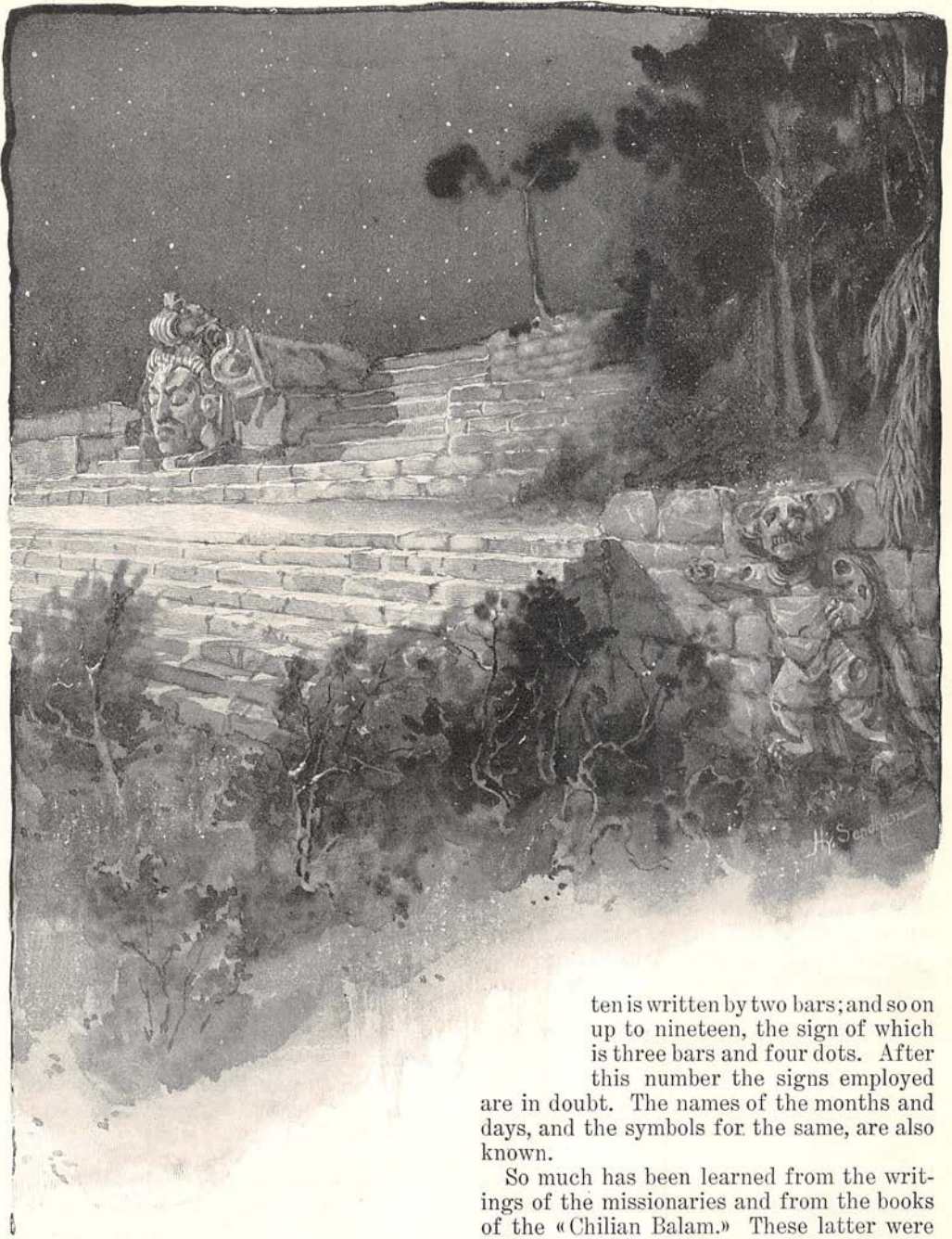
NOT only did traditions exist in the minds of the people, but many of the old Indian families still preserved their books, the remnants of once extensive libraries, in which the history, traditions, and customs of the people were recorded. All these books that the Spanish priests could lay their hands upon they burned. Four only have come down to us—priceless relics that in some unknown manner found their way into European libraries, where they lay hidden until unearthed by scholars of recent years. The books of the Mayas consisted of long strips of paper made from maguey fiber, and folded after the manner of a screen so as to form pages about nine by five inches; these were covered with hieroglyphic characters, very neatly drawn by hand, in brilliant colors. Boards were fastened on the outside pages, and the completed book looked like a neat volume of large octavo size. The characters in which they are written are the same as those found upon the stone tablets and monuments in the ruined cities of Palenque and

Copan. This system of writing, which is entirely distinct from the picture-writing of the Aztecs, was the exclusive possession of the Mayas. It was a highly developed system, and, as investigations have shown, embraced a number of phonetic elements. In this respect, as in many others, the Mayas were far in advance of any other American people. A venerable but vague and elusive legend that has come down to us ascribes the invention of these characters to Itzamná, the Maya Cadmus, a great hero-god who, in the beginning of their history as a nation, led the people from the East across the sea, gave them laws, and ruled over them for many years.

It is not possible here to enter into a discussion of this system of writing, the explanation of which forms one of the great problems in American archæology; nor shall I attempt to review what has been accomplished toward its solution. Although nothing has yet been found that will enable any living man to decipher a single inscription, the results attained by the labor of a number of eminent scholars here and abroad give ground for the hope that future investigations will bear more fruitful results.

Not only were the Mayas a literary people, but they had also a turn for mathematics, and attained considerable proficiency in the use of figures. They possessed a well-developed system of numeration, in which they counted by units and scores—a vigesimal system. Its chief application seems to have been in their time-reckoning and the adjustment of the calendar. The Maya chronological scheme embraced two time-counts. The basis of one was the astronomical year of three hundred and sixty-five days, beginning on the day of the transit of the sun by the zenith; it was divided into eighteen months of twenty days each, which gave a period of three hundred and sixty days, just as in the Egyptian year, which was divided into twelve months of thirty days each; and, like the Egyptians, the Mayas added the remaining five days required to complete the solar year at the end of the last month. The years were arranged in cycles of twenty years, called *katunes*; and thirteen *katunes*, or two hundred and sixty years, made an *ahau katun* or *king katun*.

But in matters pertaining to their sacred functions and religious rites the Maya priests adhered to the older reckoning, the basis of which was the ceremonial year of two hundred and sixty days, not derived from astronomical relations, but from mythical notions. The task of reconciling these two time-counts and pre-



DRAWN BY HENRY SANDHAM.

THE JAGUAR STAIRWAY.

venting confusion occupied the attention of the scholars, and led to the development of a very capable system of mathematics.

In this connection we are familiar with the numeral signs from one to nineteen, thus: the numbers from one to four are represented by dots; a bar signifies five; a bar and a dot, six;

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ten is written by two bars; and so on up to nineteen, the sign of which is three bars and four dots. After this number the signs employed are in doubt. The names of the months and days, and the symbols for the same, are also known.

So much has been learned from the writings of the missionaries and from the books of the «Chilian Balam.» These latter were written during the half-century immediately following the conquest, in different parts of Yucatan. They are written in the Maya language, but in Roman characters, by natives who had acquired a knowledge of writing from the missionaries. The name «Chilian Balam» seems to have been the title of a class of native priests whose duty it was to teach the sciences, and who doubtless con-

tinued, long after their forced profession of Christian doctrines, to transmit in secret the learning derived from their ancestors.

EXPLORATIONS, EARLY AND LATE.

WITH such preparation as is afforded by this preliminary outfit of knowledge, the archæologist turns to the material remains that lie buried in the soil of the ancient empire to seek a clue to the history of the people and the origin of their civilization. He is met at the outset by the problem of the inscriptions. There stand the tablets and monuments the silent characters of which contain the very clue he is in search of; and until these are read the lost page of history can never be restored. Still, we shall not remain altogether ignorant of that history. We may never know when or by whom the cities of Palenque and Copan were built; when and why they became a desolation and a ruin we may never learn: but by a careful study of the material relics at our command we may, without any claim to supernatural vision, in a measure unveil this mystery of the past, and hold our discourse with the vanished people.

Stephens and Catherwood led the way, and opened up a path into this previously unknown field of exploration. Much has since been accomplished by others, chiefly in Yucatan; and the names of Maudslay, Thompson, Charnay, and Le Plongeon will always be known in connection with important discoveries.

In 1891 the Peabody Museum of Archæology at Harvard University, after having carried on explorations in Yucatan, established, under an edict of the government of Honduras, a systematic course of explorations on the site of the prehistoric city of Copan. These have been continued with gratifying results, and, with the additional fruit of a few more years of uninterrupted labor, will be the means of letting a flood of light into this obscure corner of human history.

The explorations have been brought about by Mr. Charles P. Bowditch, who, in conjunction with other patrons of science, has facilitated the work which has been carried on with remarkable success under the supervision of Professor Putnam, the curator of the museum.

The first expedition was in charge of Mr. M. H. Saville and Mr. J. G. Owens. The history of the second, which set out in the fall of 1892, was made tragic by the melancholy death of Mr. Owens, the director, who fell a victim to a malignant fever contracted on the deadly lowlands. This was the occasion

of my first experience at Copan; since then I have visited the ruins each year, remaining from six to nine months, or until the heavy rains put a stop to the excavations. Our supplies of provisions, tools for clearing the forest and excavating, surveying apparatus, matrix-paper for taking impressions of the monuments, photographic materials, etc., were shipped to Yzabal, on the Atlantic coast of Guatemala, and from there transported on pack-mules to the scene of our labors. The only roads are rough mountain trails, which in places are sometimes impassable; and the journey from Yzabal to the ruins is a toilsome one of several days. We have been beset by many difficulties; for, besides the vicissitudes of climate, the hardships to be endured in a wild and secluded region, and the constant persecution arising from the teeming activity and pernicious habits of insect life that make existence a bitter curse, our work has frequently been obstructed by wars, the strife of rival factions arising from the unsettled political condition of the country, so that the men upon whom we depended as workmen, if not employed in the defense of the government, were avoiding that occupation by hiding in the mountains.

Copan is the name by which the most remarkable and ancient of the prehistoric cities of the New World is known to us. Whether or not this was the name by which the city was known to its ancient dwellers we do not know; but when we consider the etymology of the word, its appropriateness would seem to suggest a probability in its favor. In the Maya language the substantive *pan*, as has already appeared, signified primarily «standard»; and when applied to a city as a part of its name, it was equivalent to «capital.» Thus, as Mayapan was the capital of Maya, so Copan would be the capital of Co, a name that appears in no written record known to us. The internal evidence of the ruins tends to convince us that Copan is still more ancient than Palenque in Chiapas; and while both belong to that great civilization known to us as Maya, they were not necessarily contemporaneous. It seems more probable that the former was the earlier home of the race that founded the later empire of Maya in Yucatan and Chiapas. Co may have been the ancestor of Maya.

ONE OF THE GREATEST MYSTERIES OF THE AGES.

HIDDEN away among the mountains of Honduras, in a beautiful valley which, even in that little-traveled country, where remoteness

is a characteristic attribute of places, is unusually secluded, Copan is one of the greatest mysteries of the ages. After the publication (in 1840) of Stephens's account of his visit to the ruins, which made them known for the first time to the world, the interest awakened by his graphic description, and the drawings that accompanied it from the skilful pencil of Catherwood, relapsed; and until within the last decade writers on the subject of American archæology were dependent entirely for information concerning Copan upon the writings of Stephens, which were regarded by many with skepticism and mistrust. Not only do the recent explorations confirm the account given by Stephens as regards the magnitude and importance of the ruins, but the collection of relics now in the Peabody Museum is sufficient to convince the most skeptical that here are the remains of a city, unknown to history, as remarkable and as worthy of our careful consideration as any of the ancient centers of civilization in the Old World. Whatever the origin of its people, this old city is distinctly American—the growth of American soil and environment. The gloomy forest, the abode of monkeys and jaguars, which clothed the valley at the time of Stephens's visit, was in great part destroyed about thirty years ago by a colony from Guatemala, who came to plant in the fertile soil of the valley the tobacco for which, much more than for the ruins, that valley is famous throughout Central America to-day. They left the trees that grew upon the higher structures, forming a picturesque grove, a remnant of which still remains—a few cedars and ceibas of gigantic proportions, clustered about the ruins of the temples, shrouding them in a somber shade, and sending their huge roots into the crevices and unexplored chambers and vaults and galleries of the vast edifices.

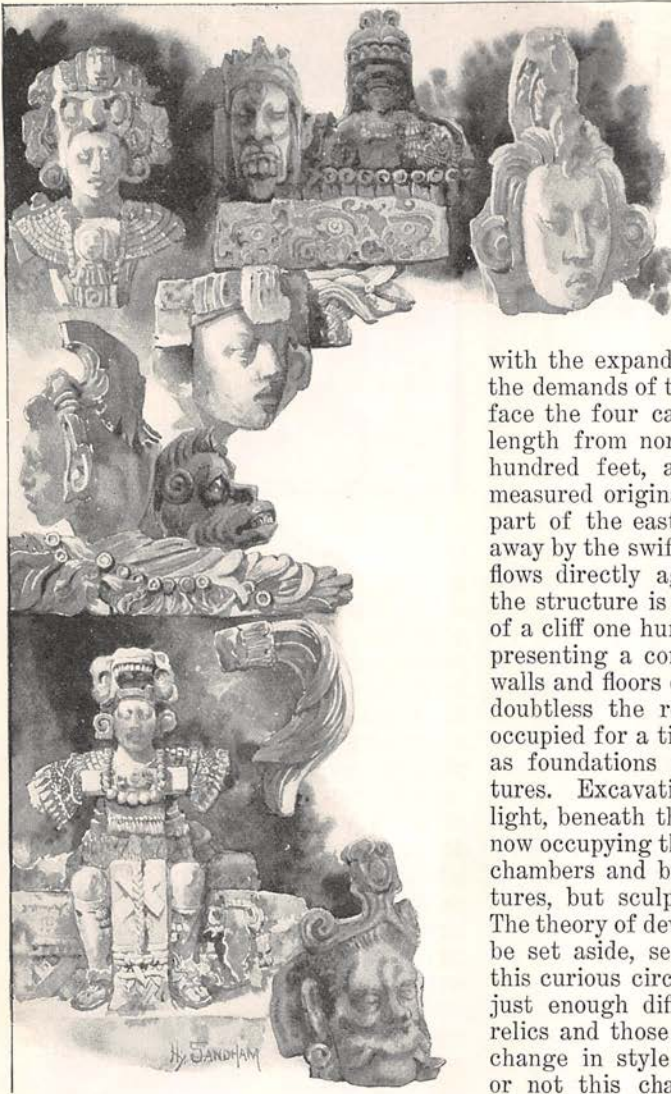


MORTUARY VASES.



The area comprised within the limits of the old city consists of a level plain seven or eight miles long and two miles wide at the greatest. This plain is covered with the remains of stone houses, doubtless the habitations of the wealthy. The streets, squares, and courtyards were paved with stone, or with white cement made from lime and powdered rock, and the drainage was accomplished by means of covered canals and underground sewers built of stone and cement. On the slopes of the mountains, too, are found numerous ruins; and even on the highest peaks fallen columns and ruined structures may be seen.





FRAGMENTS OF SCULPTURE.

On the right bank of the Copan River, in the midst of the city, stands the principal group of structures—the temples, palaces, and buildings of a public character. These form part of what has been called, for want of a better name, the Main Structure—a vast, irregular pile rising from the plain in steps and terraces of masonry, and terminating in several great pyramidal elevations, each topped by the remains of a temple which, before our excavations were begun, looked like a huge pile of fragments bound together by the roots of trees, while the slopes of the pyramids, and the terraces and pavements below, are strewn with the ruins of these superb edifices. This huge structure, unlike

the great pyramids of Egypt and other ancient works of a similar character, is not the embodiment of a definite idea, built in accordance with a preconceived plan and for a specific purpose, but is rather the complex result of a long process of development, corresponding to the growth of culture, and keeping pace

with the expanding tastes of the people or the demands of their national life. Its sides face the four cardinal points; its greatest length from north to south is about eight hundred feet, and from east to west it measured originally nearly as much, but a part of the eastern side has been carried away by the swift current of the river which flows directly against it. The interior of the structure is thus exposed in the form of a cliff one hundred and twenty feet high, presenting a complicated system of buried walls and floors down to the water's edge—doubtless the remains of older buildings, occupied for a time, and abandoned to serve as foundations for more elaborate structures. Excavations have also brought to light, beneath the foundations of buildings now occupying the surface, not only the filled chambers and broken walls of older structures, but sculptured monuments as well. The theory of development, though it cannot be set aside, seems inadequate to explain this curious circumstance; and yet there is just enough difference between these art relics and those of later date to indicate a change in style and treatment. Whether or not this change continues in regular sequence lower down has not yet been determined. If, as I am inclined to believe, we shall find, away down in the lower levels, the rude beginnings from which the culture of the later period developed, we shall have pretty conclusive evidence not only that Copan is the oldest of the Maya cities, but that the Copan valley itself, with the immediate vicinity, was the cradle of the Maya civilization.

Within the Main Structure, at an elevation of sixty feet, is a court one hundred and twenty feet square, which, with its surrounding architecture, must have presented a magnificent spectacle when it was entire. It was entered from the south through a passage thirty feet in width, between two high pyramidal foundations, each supporting

a temple. A thick wall, pierced in the center by a gateway, now stripped of its adornments and in ruins, guarded this passage to the south. The court itself is inclosed by ranges of steps or seats rising to a height of twenty feet, as in an amphitheater; they are built of great blocks of stone, neatly cut, and regularly laid without mortar. In the center of the western side is a stairway projecting a few feet into the court, and leading to a broad terrace above the range of seats on that side. The upper steps in this stairway are divided in the midst by the head of a huge dragon facing the court, and holding in its distended jaws a grotesque human head of colossal proportions.

To the north of the court stood the two magnificent temples, 21 and 22,¹ the massive ruins of which create a feeling that they were the work of giants. The ranges of seats and the floor of the court below are buried beneath the huge stones thrown from their walls, and by the massive sculptures that adorned the elaborate façades, as completely as if the place had been the scene of a land-slide. The excavations that have been made in these ruined buildings have brought to light a very interesting lot of material. Although their ruin is too complete to allow us to form a very accurate conception of their original appearance, enough remains to prove the symmetry and excellence of their design, and the high artistic merit and sumptuous splendor of their architecture.

Temple 22, in many ways the most interesting yet explored, furnishes a typical example of this class of building. From the stone-paved terrace above the western side of the court, a great stairway, with massive steps, leads up to a platform which runs the whole length of the building, and is carried out at each end upon solid piers to the line of beginning of the steps. From the head of the stairway two graceful wing stones, extending across the platform, guard the approach to the first entrance, which gives access to the outer chambers. This doorway is nine feet wide, and was covered with a vaulted roof, now fallen. Directly opposite it, in the interior, is a second doorway, leading to the inner chambers. In front of this second entrance is a step two feet high, ornamented on the face by hieroglyphics and skulls carved in relief. At each end a huge death's-head forms a pedestal for a crouching human figure supporting the head of a

dragon, the body of which is turned upward, and is lost among the scrollwork and figures of a cornice that runs above the doorway. All the interior walls were covered with a thin coat of stucco, on which figures and scenes were painted in various colors; and the cornices were adorned with stucco masks and other ornaments, likewise painted. The roofs, with the massive towers which they supported, had fallen and filled the chambers completely. The horizontal arch formed by overlapping stones was always used in the construction of roofs—a type that is common to all the Maya cities. The outside of the building, profusely ornamented with grotesques at every line, bears witness to the ambitious prodigality of the architect, his love of adornment, and his aversion to plain surfaces—a characteristic that is manifested on all the monuments and carvings at Copan. An elaborate cornice with foliated design, adorned with plumage, all beautifully carved, ran around the four sides. Higher up, a row of portrait-like busts was also carried around the entire building. Whatever of plain surface remained was covered with pure white stucco, and the same material was used upon the sculptures to give a finish to the carving and a suitable surface for the colors that were used to produce the desired effect.

There is still another court on the same level as the one I have attempted to describe. Here rise the great stairways that lead to temples 11 and 16, the one covered with carvings and painted stucco, and the other adorned with rows of death's-heads, which give the place an air of solemnity and gloom. So deep was the impression they made on the mind of Stephens that for once he departed from his cautious reserve to indulge



SCULPTURED STONE WITH GREAT SERPENT,
SUSPECTED TO BE AN ALTAR.

¹ For convenience of description, the different structures have been designated by numbers or by letters. See «Memoirs Peabody Museum,» Vol. I, No. 1, 1896.



ALTAR Q. WEST SIDE.

in speculations. He fancied they resembled the skulls of monkeys rather than of men; they reminded him of the four monstrous animals that once adorned the base of the obelisk of Luxor, now in Paris, and which, under the name of *Cynocephali*, were worshiped at Thebes. The analogy led him to make the suggestion that monkeys may have been worshiped as deities by the people who built Copan.

Here also stands the great altar, or table Q, with its procession of priests on the four sides, and an inscription on the top.

THE MONOLITHS OF COPAN.

CLIMBING the steep flight of steps at the north side of the court, and standing among the ruins of temple 11, we command a view of what must have been one of the finest sights in this marvelous city, where, it would seem, the genii who attended on King Solomon had been at work. To our right are the ruins of another lofty temple (26), from the entrance of which the hieroglyphic stairway, to be described later, descended to the pavement one hundred feet below. Right in front of us the northern slope of the main structure goes down abruptly, in a broad, steep flight of steps, to the floor of the plaza, which stretches away to the north, and terminates in an amphitheater about three hundred feet square, inclosed on the eastern, northern, and western sides by ranges of seats twenty feet high. The southern side is open, except that its center is occupied by a pyramid that rose almost to a point, leaving a square platform on top. In the plaza stood the principal group of obelisks, monoliths, or stelæ, as they are variously designated, to which Copan owes its principal fame. There are fifteen in all scattered over the plaza, some overthrown and others still erect. Although affording infinite variety in detail, in general design and treatment these

monuments are all the same. No verbal description can convey any idea of their appearance; the illustrations will have to speak for themselves. They average about twelve feet in height and three feet square, and are carved over the entire surface. On one side, and sometimes on two opposite sides, stands a human figure in high relief, always looking toward one of the cardinal points. Upon these personages is displayed such a wealth of ornament and insignia that the figures look overburdened and encumbered, giving the idea that the chief object of the artist was the display of such adornment. While nearly all these human figures are disproportionately short, the accurate drawing and excellent treatment of the smaller figures in the designs surrounding the principal characters show that this is not owing to deficient perception on the part of the sculptor.

The sides of the monuments not occupied by human figures are covered by hieroglyphic inscriptions. In front of each of the figures, at a distance of a few feet, is a smaller sculpture, called an altar. These measure sometimes seven feet across and from two to four feet in height. The design sometimes represents a grotesque monster with curious adornments; but a common form of altar is a flat disk seven or eight feet in diameter, with a row of hieroglyphs around the edge. Much



STELA B. FRONT.

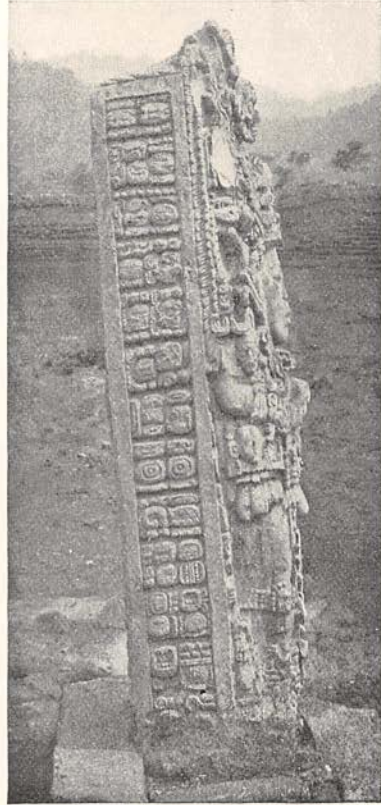
of the carving on these obelisks and altars is doubtless symbolical; and until this is better understood it is useless to speculate upon the character of the monuments themselves —speculations in which our ignorance would allow us unlimited scope. Two of the figures have their faces hidden by masks, a circumstance which seems to preclude the theory that they are portraits, although that is suggested by the striking individuality of many of the faces. But who can tell? The statues may be those of deified kings or heroes; on these altars a grateful people may have paid the tribute of affection; or, as some would have us believe, they may have been idols, insatiate monsters, on whose reeking altars the bloody sacrifice prevailed. But there is nothing in all the sculptures at Copan to suggest the sacrifice of human or any other victims; nothing to recall the revolting traffic in human blood that was common in Mexico down to the time of the conquest; no trace of analogy with the frightful orgies that marred the history of the Aztecs, pervading every phase of their national life, finding constant expression in their decorative art, and filling their picture-written annals with scenes of blood. We would fain believe that the Mayas were a humane and gentle people, given to generous impulses and noble deeds; that these relics of their art, in which the thought and feeling of the people strove to find expression, had for their object and inspiration a better motive than the deliberate shedding of human blood.

THE HIEROGLYPHIC STAIRWAY.

THE most extraordinary feature that our excavations have yet brought to light is the hieroglyphic stairway already referred to. Facing the plaza at the southern end, it occupied a central position on the western side of the high pyramidal elevation that forms the northern wing of the Main Structure. Even in the sad state of ruin in which we behold it now, it affords a magnificent spectacle. What must it have been in the days when it was entire, and reached from the floor of the plaza to the entrance of the temple that stood on the height a hundred feet above!

When discovered, in 1894, this stairway was completely buried beneath the debris fallen from the temple, of which not one stone remained upon another. The upper part of the stairway itself had also been thrown from its place as if by an earthquake, and lay strewn upon the lower por-

tion. When, at length, after months of labor on which from fifty to one hundred men were employed, the fallen material was cleared away, an acre of ground was covered with broken sculptures removed during the progress of the work, and the lower steps were found unharmed. In the center of the stairway, at the base, is a throne or pedestal rising to the fifth step, and projecting eight feet in front. The design upon its face



STELA A. SOUTH SIDE.

is rich in sculpture and delicate in detail. It is made up in part of handsome faces, masks, death's-heads, and scrolls, beautifully carved, and disposed with perfect symmetry; but the ensemble is perfectly unintelligible. On the face of each step in the stairway is a row of hieroglyphs, carved in medium relief, running the entire length. At intervals in the ascent the center is occupied by a human figure of noble and commanding appearance, arrayed in splendid attire, seated on the steps. The upper parts of all these figures were broken away, but the pieces of several were recovered and restored. On each side was a solid balustrade two feet thick; the upper



DRAWN BY HENRY SANDHAM.

HIEROGLYPHIC STAIRWAY (RESTORED).

parts of these were also broken away, but by careful study and comparison enough was recovered to enable us to make out the curious and complicated design. Portrait-like busts issuing from the jaws of grotesque monsters, standing out upon these balustrades, and repeated at regular intervals, formed their principal adornment.

Notwithstanding the arduous toil under the fierce rays of a tropical sun, the exhuming of this stairway, in the construction of which the ancient sculptors exhausted the resources of their art, was a fascinating labor, and was performed under the constant stimulus of expectation and the excitement of discovery. When the last day's work was done, and I stood upon the broken throne at the base of the stairway, to take a last look at the scene of my labors, so familiar had I grown with every feature of the place that it seemed to cost but little effort of the mind to roll aside the mist that hid the past, and restore again the shattered fabric. From my position I could see the whole plaza, with its monuments and temple-crowned pyramids. In front of me the smooth, cemented pavement stretched away westward to a range of terraces that bounds it in that direction, but leaves unobstructed the view of the mountains beyond the valley. In other days the parting shafts of the sun struck the temple, and its sculptured walls, adorned with paint and stucco, flashed in the light, until the shadows, mounting the throne and climbing the stairway, shot above the highest tower, and left the city wrapped in gloom. For a moment the peaks stood dark and gigantic against the dazzling sunset hues, crowned with glory; then the colors faded rapidly, giving way to a pale glow above the mountains, while sudden darkness fell upon the valley.

Musing on the scene, I was dimly aware of a long array of shadows projected from the past. Nor was it altogether fancy. This plaza has witnessed many a scene of august pomp and many a glittering pageant. Many a priestly procession with solemn rites has trod these sculptured stairs; and here, doubtless, on many a day famous in the annals of the nation, the plumed warriors of Co, returning with victorious banners, bowed before the throne where their monarch sat in state and proudly reviewed them as they passed.

No regular burying-place has yet been found at Copan, but a number of isolated tombs have been explored. The location of these was strange and unexpected—beneath the pavement of courtyards and under the foundations of houses. They consist of small

chambers of very excellent masonry, roofed sometimes by means of the horizontal arch, and sometimes by means of slabs of stone resting on the top of the vertical walls. In these tombs one, and sometimes two, interments had been made. The bodies had been laid at full length upon the floor. The cerements had long since moldered away, and the skeletons themselves were in a crumbling condition, and give little knowledge of the physical characteristics of the people; but one fact of surpassing interest came to light concerning their private lives, namely, the custom of adorning the front teeth with gems inlaid in the enamel, and by filing. Although not all of the sets of teeth found had been treated in this way, there are enough to show that the practice was general, at least among the upper classes; for all the tombs opened, from their associations with prominent houses, seem to have belonged to people of rank or fortune. The stone used in the inlaying was a bright-green jadeite. A circular cavity about one sixteenth of an inch in diameter was drilled in the enamel of each of the two front teeth of the upper row, and inlaid with a little disk of jadeite, cut to a perfect fit, and secured by means of a bright-red cement.

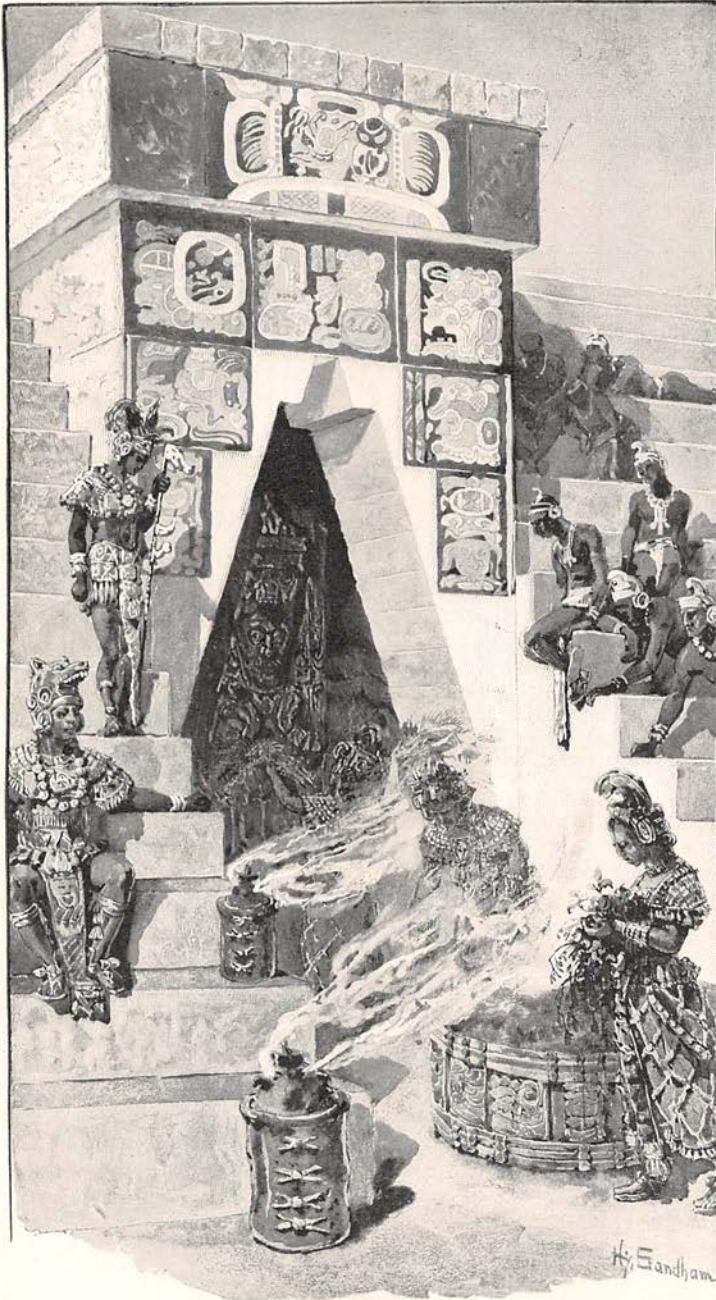
Besides the human remains, each tomb contained a number of earthenware vessels of great beauty and excellence of workmanship, some of them painted with figures in various colors, and others finished with a peculiar polish resembling a glaze. Some of these vessels contained charcoal and ashes; in others were various articles of use and adornment. The beads, ear-ornaments, medallions, and a variety of other ornaments, usually of jadeite, exhibit an extraordinary degree of skill in the art of cutting and polishing stones, while the pearls and trinkets carved from shell must have been obtained by trade or by journeys to the coast. In the same tombs with these ornaments were frequently found such objects of utility as knives and spear-heads of flint and obsidian, and stone hatchets and chisels. These were doubtless family vaults, though none of them contained the remains of many burials.

As to the antiquity of the city, although we have no data that will enable us to fix a date, there are certain historical facts that remove it from the reach of history or tradition, and place the era of its destruction long anterior to the discovery of America.

In 1524 Alvarado subdued the tribes in the province of Guatemala, and founded the city of that name. From this as a center the

dominion of the Spanish arms was gradually extended over all of Central America, and intercourse opened with settlements already established.

tended influence, had it still existed, would not have escaped the ambitious enterprise of the conquerors. According to custom, the exploits of boasting generals and the zeal of



DRAWN BY HENRY SANDHAM.

STELA I AND ALTAR (RESTORED).

What was the condition of Copan at this time? Surely such a center of wealth and power, with all its barbaric splendor and ex- missionaries ought to have spread its fame through the length and breadth of the Spanish dominions. All that we find, however, in

the written records of that time is a brief mention of an expedition sent in 1530 from Guatemala, under the leadership of Hernando de Chaves, who conquered an Indian stronghold called Copan, situated somewhere in this region; but from the brief and ambiguous account given, it is evident that the place, in strength and importance, must have been insignificant compared with the city of antiquity the ruins of which are called Copan to-day, and concerning which history and tradition are silent.

Moreover, Hernando Cortez, during his march from Mexico to Honduras in 1525, must have passed within a few days' journey of Copan; yet neither he nor any of his companions makes any mention of such a place, though several of them give detailed accounts of the journey. Would the conqueror of Mexico have turned aside when such a prize was in his way?

Furthermore, in 1576 Don Diego Garcia de Palacio, an officer of the King of Spain, journeying from Guatemala to San Pedro, passed through the ruins, and in a letter to Philip II—a letter that is still preserved in the British Museum—describes what he saw there. His description is such as might be written to-day by any intelligent traveler; the buildings were in complete ruin, and the Indians who lived in the vicinity were unable to give him any enlightenment concerning them. Yet this was only forty-six years after the expedition of Chaves.

There is but one reasonable conclusion: the city was abandoned and in ruins long before the arrival of the Spaniards; all tradition concerning it was lost, and its name forgotten. Its glory was never beheld by Europeans. Could we conceive of that privilege as having been theirs, what would have been their astonishment when, issuing from the rocky passes and dangerous defiles of the cordilleras, they first beheld the vision of this enchanted valley with its guardian city! Standing in such a situation, and gazing on that scene in its present aspect, clothed in

the melancholy charm of the wilderness, I was filled with admiration at the consciousness of what must have been, from the beauty of the situation and the barbaric grandeur of its architecture, the effect of that proud city in its prime.

The moral effect of the ruins on one who sojourns among them is not easily described. The more familiar they become, the more the mind is impressed with the strength and magnitude of the structures; with the character of the monuments, so elaborate in composition, so strange in design, so rich in ornament, and yet so perfectly unintelligible; the lavishness of the sculpture, its beauty and solemnity; and then, the silence, the desolation, and the mystery of it all. The cause of the city's destruction we have yet to learn, but history is full of suggestions. The trees that flourish over it may have been nourished by the blood of its slaughtered population; the terrific subterranean forces that have shaken the foundations of still greater cities may have driven the stricken inhabitants in terror from their homes; they may have died of famine, or pestilence may have piled the streets with dead. Who shall tell the story of their fall?

The tale of Troy divine has not a more pathetic human interest than this picture of a nameless city with its unknown story. One fell amid the clash of arms, while gods and godlike men wrought deeds that poets wrought in song. Against the darkness of the former night the heroic action fills the golden dawn, and they who fought and fell are still the foremost heroes of the world. The other filled its destiny obscurely, perished in obedience to the will of Heaven, and, with its name, its virtues, and its very gods, went down into the darkness of a voiceless past, unhonored and unsung.

. . . Who shall trace the void,
O'er the dim fragments cast a lunar light,
And say «Here was or is» where all is doubly
night?

ROSE-RENT.

BY HELEN GRAY CONE.

LIFE! lordly giver and gay!
I, for this manor of Time,
Lightly and lovingly pay
Rent with the rose of a rhyme.