

ANCIENT RUINS IN YUCATAN.

BY THE CHEVALIER FRIEDRICHSTHAL.

I LANDED in the month of December, 1833, at the mouth of the river S. Juan, in the Central American state of Nicaragua, with the intention of exploring that unknown part of the western continent. I proceeded first to the large lake, bearing the name of the state, and penetrated into the interior of the province of Chondales, on its north-eastern shore, inhabited by some scattered tribes of Mosquito Indians, and passed round its northern shore to the city of Granada.

After having visited the interesting islands of the lake, the largest of which, from its innumerable burying-places, seems to have been another Meroe of the extinct nation once settled in those regions, I directed my steps to the neighbouring lake of Managua, then crossed the Cordilleras, and took the route, bordering the Pacific, towards the southern gulf of Nicoya. I ascended and measured the most important of the isolated volcanoes to be met with in this track, collected many geological specimens, and a rich booty of mountain plants. Having passed the Aguacate mountain, I ascended to the high plain of Costarica, almost surrounded by extinguished volcanoes, among which one, situated between the city of Caotago and the shore of the Atlantic, rises to the height of nearly 12,000 English feet. At the commencement of the rainy season I descended through the wild forests of the river Zarapiqui to the northern harbour of S. Juan, and embarked for the United States, touching in my passage at Jamaica, St. Domingo, and Cuba.

Highly gratified with the results of this first voyage, and animated by the accounts of the American traveller, Mr. Stephens, respecting the antiquarian riches of the southern provinces of Mexico, I left the States in the month of July, 1840, and entered the peninsula of Yucatan at its eastern shore, resolved to connect with my physical and botanical researches an examination of these ancient monuments.—The actually independent State of Yucatan bears the appearance of a poor and sterile country, far inferior to the lands on the Atlantic borders in general. Its crust of stone marl is in many parts of the inhabited districts, to a great extent, bare and without any alluvial soil. The deepenings and basins only, peculiar to that kind of formation, where mould is accumulated, are fit for cultivation. There are, however, on the north-eastern coast, and in the

south of the peninsula, very rich woodlands, but these are in possession of the indolent Indians, who scarcely produce enough for their own immediate wants. There are no mountains, and only a chain of low hills in the west, and not even a single river throughout the whole monotonous plain; consequently, the breeding of cattle is attended with great difficulties.

It is 350 years since the Caucasian race first set foot on the soil of the western continent; but wherever the Spaniard held his dominion, jealousy and avarice excluded all other nations from intercourse with the monopolized country. The accounts of the first conquerors contain many notices of the splendid buildings which they met with in Mexico and Yucatan; Ecclesiastical chronicles of the country likewise some superficial descriptions of the buildings. Ignorance and avarice, however, not only forbid the government to publish to the world any particulars of these remarkable works, but fanaticism left no means untried to destroy the most innocent objects connected with the heathens, and it succeeded; not a tradition remains among the tribes of Maya Indians respecting the former state of the country. Thus, too, those interesting structures, the only witnesses of the power and knowledge of past ages and nations, have gradually fallen to ruin without having even excited the attention of the conquerors; and their hieroglyphics, and statues, and bas-reliefs, which covered their walls, and from which, in the perfect state, important information might have been obtained, are now disjoined, fallen, broken, and mere antiquarian curiosities. We have no means of determining the number of those ancient works scattered over the surface of Yucatan, but they are very numerous. They are found sometimes isolated, sometimes in large masses, which, according to appearance, are the remains of great cities. This tract of country, which extends from the coast of Laguna do Terminos to the north-east, exhibits an almost uninterrupted range of monasteries and towns, till it reaches the sanctuaries of the island of Cozumel.

Three different epochs of art may be distinguished in these structures; and they bear doubtless traces of identity of origin with the remains of Palenque. This is especially the case with the earlier works, which are composed of large rough blocks, put together without cement; and such are the buildings at a place near the Hacienda Aki, situated twenty-seven English miles E.S.E. from Merida. At Co-