

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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CONTRIBUTORS' BULLETIN

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MEXICAN MUSINGS CONTINUED



DEAR FRIENDS:



hereas Uxmal gives one a feeling of magic and mystery, Chi-Chen Itza, for many centuries the capital of the Empire of the Itzas, conveys-- even in its ruin--the impression of a great metropolis. We are told that it once had a population of one-and-a-half million. Uxmal is purely Mayan, but Chi-Chen Itza shows several civilizations. Nearly all of the larger buildings encased smaller ones from as many as six or seven different periods of reconstruction. There has been considerable research in this area but the jungle has not yet been fully explored. Incidentally, there is no surface water in this area and the natural vegetation is a tangle of parched underbrush.

The trip to Chi-Chen Itza is considerably longer than that to Uxmal. It is tedious rather than arduous. The train stops at innumerable stations revealing villages with thatched huts where the remnants of a once proud race carry on their ancient ways. In each community there is a little plaza or square with an over-shadowing cathedral where the conquered worshipped the god of the conquerors. Chi-Chen Itza stands in the midst of a wilderness, but the space around the principal buildings has been neatly cleared away. The excavated parts of the city may be roughly divided into three groups of structures. The first group is dominated by the great pyramid of Kukul-Can now called the Castillo. The second group, about a mile and a half distant, is called old Chi-Chen Itza, and in this area a number of artifacts have been excavated. The third group is dominated by the great mass of the Nunnery, the only three story building as yet found. Close to this stands the famous astronomical observatory inside of which is a spiral stairway.

The Mayans themselves were a peaceful people and their gods were strangers to cruelty and deceit. The nations which later invaded the city imposed upon it the warlike cultures of the Toltecs and Aztecs who introduced the practice of human sacrifice. The people depended upon the Sacred Well for their water supply, and in this well were tunnels leading downward to the home of the rain

god. In desperate times of drought, virgins were sacrificed to this deity by being cast into the well, and at the same time jewelry and valuable artifacts were also deposited. Some years ago Eduard Thompson, equipped with diving apparatus, descended into the well and brought to the surface a variety of objects. There were surprisingly few human bones, indicating that human sacrifice was a rare occurrence.

From the top of the Castillo or the pyramid there was a splendid view of the House of the Warriors on the one side and the Ball Court and Tiger Temple on the other. The House of the Warriors is roughly pyramidal and rich in sculpturing. In front of the House of the Warriors and to the right of the main structure were eight rows of columns, each decorated in low relief with figures of richly attired warriors. The nearby Ball Court is over a thousand feet in length. The game played there consisted of two teams of fifteen men each and required extraordinary skill. It was in the area directly under the Temple of the Tigers and the wall of the Ball Court that I met Theodore Arthur Willard who had a hacienda at Chi-Chen Itza. Mr. Willard developed the Willard storage battery and with the development of the automobile he became a wealthy man. The accompanying photograph shows him seated, framed by broken columns and ruined masonry. The light in the region is very deceptive and I wish to acknowledge with gratitude Mr. Willard's assistance in my photographic endeavors. We had many walks together and he pointed out a number of interesting details which might otherwise have been overlooked. He was especially interested in a building now generally called the House of the Dark Writings. Mr. Willard felt that the structure might have been involved in the religious customs and secret rites of the Mayans.

There is an interesting story associated with the largest building in the group which is called the Nunnery for no reason in particular. The central structure rises in three platforms, each of which was originally a building but was filled in to form a foundation for another building above it. When the first Spanish expedition under Montejo attempted to subdue the Indians of Yucatan, he met with several military reverses and finally took refuge with his remaining soldiers in the upper part of the Nunnery. The Indians camped around the foot of the building to starve out the conquistadores. Montejo devised an unusual strategy. He erected a small scaffold upon which he hung a large bell. To the tongue of the bell he tied rope, the other end of which was fastened to the tail of a hungry dog. Just out of reach of the animal he placed several pieces of meat. After nightfall, Montejo and his soldiers climbed down the back wall of the Nunnery and escaped into the jungle and headed for their ships. The hungry dog, jumping for the meat, rang the bell all night, which deceived the Indians who believed that Montejo was saying his prayers while expecting annihilation the next morning.

When considering the civilization of the Mayans, the archaeologist is confronted with a number of problems. These people were highly developed when they first appeared upon the peninsula of Yucatan. They must have existed, according to their calendar system, for at least three-thousand years before they established the cities now associated with their memories. Strangely

enough, they did not know the use of the bow and arrow. None of the early codices show this instrument although it was common among the Indians to the north. Their main weapon was a spear which was launched by means of a throwing stick. They never learned to make use of the wheel and as far as we know they had no currency, but their language was more complicated than that of the Chinese. It is believed that their alphabet contains ten-thousand arbitrary characters. Originally, the Mayans were monotheistic, worshipping Itzamna, the supreme deity. They were well advanced in arts and sciences and during the Dark Ages in Europe, the Mayas in the Western Hemisphere are said to have been one of the most highly civilized nations on earth.

Augustus LePlongeon believed that he had decoded sections of the surviving Mayan sacred books. He was convinced that they were survivors of a universal deluge, probably the same one that destroyed the Atlantean civilization. They brought with them into the new world knowledge of the motions of the stars, the arts of healing, and the laws governing agriculture. To wander about their deserted cities helps one to understand the wonderful cultural heritage which is descended to us through the wonders of the past.

At this Christmas season I would like to express to you all my very best wishes for your happiness and well-being in the year ahead. May you all enjoy the yuletide spirit and follow the examples of the ancient Mayas. They worshipped their gods by forgiving their enemies and preparing for that distant day when their savior-god would return to them. On that glorious occasion he would find all his children dwelling together in peace. When he arrived they would place upon his head the crown of quetzal plumes and deliver the wealth which would be his proper tribute. There would be no crime, no evil thoughts, no wicked deeds, for they had prepared for his coming and were ready.

With all the blessings of the season,

Most sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall