

YUCATAN.

During my stay in Mexico in 1887-1888, I determined to visit the province of Yucatan with the object of exploring the wonderful ruins of Chichen Itza. Taking my passage in a steamer from Vera Cruz, I landed at Progreso, a port of Yucatan situated on a spit of sand separated from the mainland by marshy swamps, which, during the stormy northers that prevail in winter, is occasionally inundated.

After spending a day or two at Merida, the capital, I visited Dr. Gaumer at Izamal about fourteen leagues distant. This American gentleman, long resident in the country, had made considerable collections of birds and insects, some of which he had previously forwarded to us in England.

My original intention had been to ask him to accompany me to Chichen Itza, but, owing to the disturbed state of the Indians in the vicinity, he advised me not to attempt the journey, volunteering instead to go with me to Ticul and Uxmal, a journey we performed on horseback. On leaving Merida we passed through a forest with patches of open ground, some of which were cultivated with Indian corn and an agave, from which a fibre called 'sisal' is obtained and exported in large quantities. The name 'sisal' is derived from an old port on the north coast, six leagues from Progreso, from whence the fibre was originally shipped. As we proceeded further south, the forest trees became larger, but still not of the great size usually found in the tropics. The ruins of both Uxmal and Ticul have been very much despoiled, a vast number of the stones having been carried away for building purposes, while many of the carved pieces formed part of the 'hacienda' at which we resided. From a detailed account of these ruins when described by Mr. A. P. Maudslay in the 'Archæology' of the 'Biologia,' it is evident that they were enormously reduced in size since the visit in 1839 of J. L. Stephens, who published in 1843 an account of them in his 'Incidents of Travel in Yucatan,' with admirable illustrations by Catherwood.

The peninsula of Yucatan is flat and of a recent limestone formation; there is a low range of hills which stretches from a point a few miles south of Merida to the neighbourhood of Peto some distance south of Ticul, but nowhere exceeding 500 feet in height.

The coast is very low and swampy, while further inland are forests, which in a few cases have been cleared, but the whole country is very sparsely inhabited. The southern part is, so far as I could learn, but little known, but it is said to be largely covered with forest and the trees are much finer than those in the north.

The following description of the country is mainly taken from Dr. Gaumer's notes published in Boucard's account of a 'Collection of Birds from Yucatan' (P. Z. S. 1883, pp. 434-439), supplemented by my own observations in 1887-1888. At Tizimin the country, like the rest of Northern Yucatan, is on a low level, but to the north east and south lie vast forests, for the most part uninhabited since the migration of the Indians