YUCATAN, EGYPT OF THE AMERICAS

AN ILLUSTRATED LECTURE

by

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Shunting up from the south into the great Gulf of Mexico, is a huge chunk of land as large as the peninsula of Florida. This is Yucatan, unbelievedly fascinating and equally unbelievedly little known. Although within only two and a half days by steamer from New Orleans and five hours and 25 minutes by Pan American Airway from Miami, this land of the Mayas is only now being discovered by American tourists.

Although politically a state of Mexico, geographically, ethnically and psychologically Yucatan is a place apart and distinctive. It boasts one of the world's great ancient civilizations. This civilization, a counterpart in some ways of that of both Egypt and Cambodia since the days of the conquistadores, has lain smothered beneath thousands of square miles of sub-tropical jungle.

Glistening cities with temple-crowned pyramids, palaces of kings and nobles, observatories of their astronomers, nunneries, paved roads and great stadia for their ball games, greeted the astonished eyes of Montejo and the other conquistadores. Here they found an ordered government, and a culture in which the sciences of astronomy and mathematics were well developed, and the arts of writing, architecture, sculpture, painting, weaving, pottery and woodcarving contributing to the beauty of peace and panoply of war.

But there were also ornaments of gold and jade which spelled to those early Spanish adventurers one word, loot. These ancient cities were destroyed, the inhabitants enslaved and the forests closed over them. Only in recent years have systematic efforts been made, principally by the Carnegie Institute and the Mexican government, to uncover and partially restore a few of the buried ruins of this Egypt of the Americas.

The pomp of their kings have gone but the gentle, smiling Maya folk still carry on the life amidst the ruins of a bygone day. In the clean little capital of Merida still stand the old Colonial Palaces occupied by the descendants of the eighty aristocratic Spanish families who founded the city.

Colonel Furlong has but recently returned from Yucatan where, as honor guest of its Governor, he was extended unusual opportunities during his travels there. His narration of the re-discovery of this ancient civilization, of the life of the Maya people, of the Sacred Well where virgins were sacrificed, of the great hennequen estates from which Yucatan derives its wealth, spiced with his own interesting experiences and adventures, is a revealing and enticing story.

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