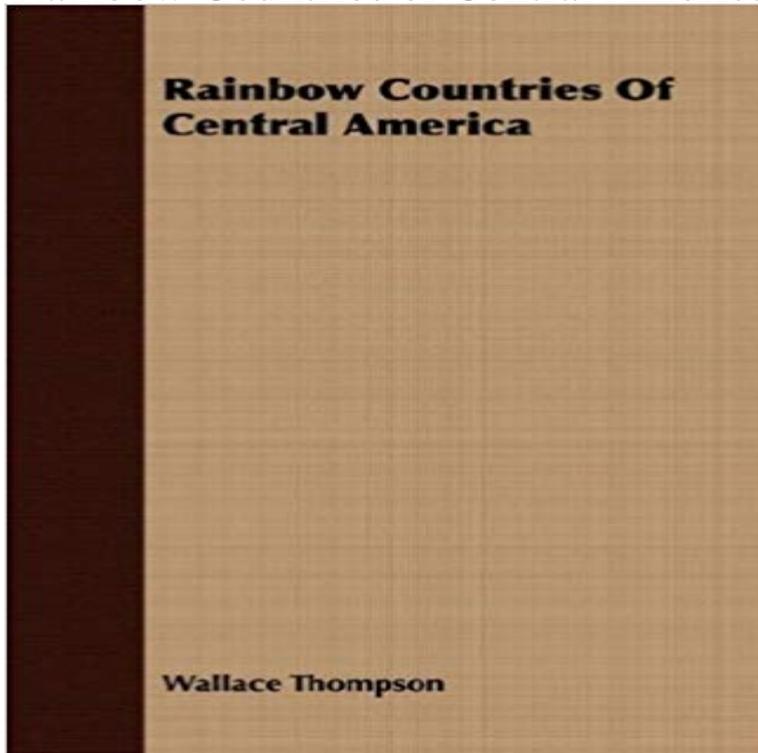


Rainbow Countries of Central America



RAINBOW COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AMERICA The solitary sentinel of Mayan civilization. This Stela at Quirigti Guatemala, is one of the most beautiful aboriginal sculptures in America

PREFACE FEW travelers find their way to the rainbow countries of Central America. Few books have been written about them. Yet they are the most accessible, in time and comfort, of all the unspoiled lands of the world. They are, too, countries where destiny, today, sits on national doorsteps, while tomorrow seems sure to see them not only the goal of tourists, but also centres of new and startling political and commercial development. They have outgrown in slow yet charming years the era of Spanish colonial ease and wealth, and have forgotten, but for superb monuments hidden in their jungles, the time when one of the greatest Indian empires and cultures of old time thrived there. The Indian life of native village and modern plantation, and the heritages of mediaeval Spain that survive everywhere, form a background of strange scenes and colorful customs as fascinating as anything in Cambodia or Peru. Along the highways that time and race have set for them, the Central American countries are making the long, painful trek toward democracy and economic independence. Nationally and individually they are gentle and very wise but at the same time, almost, they are fierce and heedlessly destructive. Hindered and supported, equally, by their own qualities and by the often mistaken helpfulness of others, they are writing, today, one of the most human documents of contemporary history, upon those pages of magnificent past and boundless future. In these facts alone lies my excuse for writing this book. Behind my writing, however, has been a realization that time and history are pressing on the world's appreciation of Central America, as on a larger scale of all Latin

America. In a way the situation is not uncom parable to that great moment of British history when Victorias kingdom awoke from its long dream of little England into the vision of the Empire. In those days, in the late seventies and early eighties, there was a hungering for descriptions and prophecies of that newer England, that greater Britain. To fill that need came books which have become immortal documents of his tory, where Dilke and Froude and Seeley voiced their calls to England in terms which neither yellowing paper nor fading ink can erase or silence. Today no book can fill for Central America the role of these great heralds, for that time is gone or per haps is not yet come again. But may one not play a role of ones own, the role of him who dances in cap and bells before the royal procession, or sounds the first shrill, uncertain note upon the bugle of the awakening that must come, in a year, or a decade or in half a century PREFACE vii But let us be on our way. I have written here a book half travel-tale and half exposition of history sociology and economics, and of the gleaming future. I have written it so, first as an invitation and companion to the journey, and second because I have always felt that if history and life were interesting at all, a book written about them could be just as pleasant if true and even substantial things were set down, as if its pages were confined only to the froth. I have tried here, then, to do what some one must some day do with the travel book merge happily between its covers both the color and charm of the lands he tells of, and those relatively few dependable facts that the reader has a perfectly honest right to want to know, and the availability of which, as he reads, are vital to his full enjoyment and understanding. I shall not here attempt to make a bibliography, for most of it would carry us into the realm of the anti quarry, so few are the reliable modern works on Central America. The definitive study of political conditions and history is The Five Republics of Central Amer ica, written in 1916 by Dr. Dana C. Munro...

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