

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PANAMANIANIANS

THERE is little real friendship between the Americans on the Isthmus and the natives.

In temperament and tradition we are miles away from the Panamanians. The hostility between Latin and Saxon probably dates back to the old Roman days when the Saxons first began to plunder the Latins.

When the Spanish Empire sprang up in America, its most relentless enemies were the protestants of England. Even in the odd moments when the two mother countries were not at war, the colonists never buried the hatchet. From the days of Drake till the fall of Carthagena, the Latin people of Central America lived in constant fear of the English buccaneers.

Since our revolution they have transferred this dread to us. Gradually, but apparently relentlessly, the United States have expanded—always at the cost of Spanish America. Florida, Texas and California, the Philippines, Porto Rico, one after the other, have disappeared down the maw of what our southern neighbors are wont to call "The Northern Vulture."

Very many of our representatives in the Canal Zone have made sincere efforts to establish friendly relations with the native population. A few still continue such efforts, but most have given it up as hopeless. The two people live side by side, meet occasionally at the theatre or public receptions, but very rarely become intimate.

Perhaps half a dozen American men have married Panamanian wives. I have not heard of a single American woman marrying a native.

The age-old hostility to the "Gringo" is deep-rooted. Differences in language, customs and religious practices keep the breach wide.

So any description of the people is necessarily that of an outsider. Very likely many of the things which seem ludicrous or unlovely to us might be understood and overlooked if they would admit us to greater intimacy.

Panamanian society is sharply divided in classes. The people on top are either old Spanish families, whose income is dependent on land, or well-established families of foreign extraction who have been naturalized for many years and whose source of income is industrial. The descendants of the Conquistadores look down on these parvenu families in private, but are so generally in debt to them that they dare not do so in public. They form a pretty solid social block.

The division in regard to politics is sharper than that of heredity. At present the Liberal party is in power and the Conservatives are getting social as well as political snubs. One of the most noticeable things about these people is their inability to bury political differences. There is a politic of personalities, first, last and all the time. The Conservative members of "The Union Club" are resigning—although the club was formed as a place where the two sides could meet socially—because they feel that they have not been fairly treated in committee appointments. As a general proposition, Conservatives and Liberals will not break any manner of bread together. During the elections for the Queen of the Carnivals, all good Liberals vote for the daughter of a Liberal.

This political bitterness, which shows itself so unpleasantly in social life, goes to even worse extremes in the

business of politics. Every political turn-over means an entire house cleaning. Every government official, from judge to street cleaner, loses his job—to make way for a member of the triumphant party. The Liberal party, now in power, has developed the “machine patronage system” to ludicrous lengths. They seem bent on creating a job for every one of a safe majority of voters. Panama City has enough policemen for a city ten times its size. Consulates have been sprinkled all over the map—often in places that never saw a Panamanian till the consul arrived.

There is absolute unanimity on the question that what the Republic needs before and above everything else are roads. With its long coast lines and many navigable rivers, it is unusually adapted to the cheapest of all forms of transportation—by water. Small amounts of money spent in harbor works in half a dozen places, a few good roads leading inland from the harbors, would open up large districts. Yet the 1910 National Assembly voted to tie up all the reserve capital of the nation in a railroad of doubtful utility. Railroading is always expensive transportation; in tropical countries it is especially so.

The little Republic of Panama made its bow to the world in the enviable position of having several dollars per capita in the bank, when most of its older sisters were heavily in debt. Much of this reserve has been squandered in riotous building of national theatres and national universities or in more riotous pay rolls. Very little of it has gone in real development of the country.

What is not plain graft is grandiose. They are building elaborate buildings for a National Institute to which they tell you quite seriously all the youth of Central America, if not Europe and Asia, will flock. It is admittedly too big for the needs of the Republic. That it takes generations for a university to acquire sufficient fame to attract foreign-

ers seems not to have suggested itself to them. That they may have trouble in collecting a really erudite faculty has also been ignored. The project is on a par with their National Theatre. It is an imposing building which would do credit to a metropolis. It is not lighted fifty nights in a year. During my second visit to Panama (a three months stay) it was only opened once—for an amateur performance arranged by American ladies for the benefit of the Red Cross. But it is possible that Bernhardt may visit the Isthmus again. It is necessary to have a suitable theatre for her. It is possible that one of the youngsters who is getting a very poor sort of an education in the present schools may develop into an Abelard, and forsooth it is necessary to build his Sorbonne in advance—especially when the contract for construction is profitable.

A further consideration is undoubtedly in the minds of the “liberal” statesmen. They cannot hope to keep in power forever, so what is the use of leaving anything for the hated Conservatives to get away with?

My view of Isthmanian politics may be flippant, but if so, the blame is due to several of her prominent citizens who, when I went to them with hope of getting at the real matter of principle involved in their politics, gave me nothing but cheap invective. If there is really any difference in principle between the parties, it is not to be found in the “press” of the country.

Below this class, composed of landed gentry politicians and financial industrial politicians, lies the great mass of the people, who take no more part in government affairs than they do in government receptions. One sees them at their worst in the cities, as is true in every country. The Sanitary Department has cleaned up the slums, and the housing conditions are better than in many more prosperous communities.

In the country they lead a sort of Arcadian life. There is much free land, and those who have not acquired any property "squat" wherever the fancy strikes them.

Of course, the base of the population is Indian—a squat, square-faced type, completely unlike the illustrations in the de luxe editions of *Hiawatha*. There are two main ethnic groups of Indians. The Cholos, a fairly pure type is found in the mountains of Coclé province, are scattered all up and down the west coast, from the borders of Mexico to the edge of Peru. The early Spanish adventurers found that friendly Indians from the Isthmus could act as interpreters within these limits.

In the northeastern part of the country, beginning at the Gulf of San Blas and extending almost to the Colombian border, and inland to the Chucunaque River, are the San Blas. Probably of the same race as the Cholos, they have become differentiated in the four centuries since the visit of Columbus, in that they have never been conquered and have not allowed intermarriage. They boast that "no San Blas woman has borne a half-breed, that no San Blas man has fathered a mongrel." They are estimated at about 20,000, and are reputed to be well armed. As the Republic has no army, they have every prospect of maintaining their independence for a long time to come.

They are not unfriendly to white men, and treasure an especial respect for the English, who, tradition tells them, are irreconcilable enemies of their enemies, the Spaniards. The San Blas men frequently come up to Colon and Panama with cayukas laden with cocoanuts and scrap rubber which they trade for powder and salt and needles and cloth. They allow traders along their coast, but never permit them to stay on shore during the night. They guard their women to such an extent that a white man rarely sees one of them except through glasses. The mo-

ment a stranger approaches a village, the women disappear into the bush.

The San Blas men who come up to town—like the Cholos—speak Spanish, but whether or not they have forgotten their own language I could not make sure. A trader from Yavisa on the Chucunaque told me that Spanish was their only language. Some Atlantic coast traders maintained the opposite, that only a few of the men learned Spanish, and that their native language was still used.

The Cholo Indians have not preserved their ethnic purity and seem to have no sentiment in the matter. Most of the crossing has been with negroes, the slaves of colonial days, their descendants, and the recent immigrants from the West Indies. But the crossing of the races has been varied in the extreme. At El Real on the Tuyra River, a pure type of Cholo girl was married to the leading Chinese merchant, and had two almond-eyed and yellow-skinned youngsters. It is generally affirmed that aside from the San Blas people, no native of Panama is of pure blood. The color line is not drawn very sharply in the official and social circles of the cities, so of course it is not on the country side.

Family life is simple in the extreme. John and Jennie, or more probably José and Dolores, walk off some fine day. If they happen to pass a priest, they may stop and get married. When they find a satisfactory place, it does not take them many days to get settled. They have probably started out with a couple of machetes, an earthen pot and a hammock. They build a roof and hoist it up on four poles. They begin cutting out a clearing, and at the end of the dry season, burn off the fallen timber. Until their first crop comes to harvest, they borrow rice and yams and plantains from their relatives if there does not happen to be a stranger more near at hand. In the course of a few years they have as many children, their original shelter has

been turned into a kitchen, and a new rancho with woven walls has become their residence. They have several acres under mild cultivation. The bananas and oranges have begun to bear. Dolores has woven several new hammocks, has moulded several new pots and pans, and has made a dozen different household utensils out of the fruit of their thriving calabash tree. They have become people of consideration, and are now in a position to lend yams and rice to more recently established homes.

Once a year or so, José sets out for the nearest town. He loads up with various medicinal gums they have gathered, a few pounds of rubber scrap, and, if Dolores is a clever artisan at hat weaving or gourd carving, with her handiwork. On the way he stops at every hacienda he passes and asks for work. In due course he reaches town with a handful of silver, buys what supplies he needs and returns to Dolores for another long sleep. As soon as the oldest boy grows up, he sends him to town instead, and sleeps all the year round.

In all my trips into the interior, I never found a native white man who was truly hospitable, and never found an Indian who was not. However, I would not care to generalize from my experience.

The formal tribal relations have broken down among the Cholo Indians. They appear to be, according to Herbert Spencer's ideal, the happiest of people, for they are certainly the least governed. Half a dozen whom I questioned did not know who was president of the Republic. There seems to be in each community some old man who is generally considered wise. Disputes are informally submitted to him, but he has no authority to back up his decisions.

The jungle stretches on all sides invitingly. Very few of the Indians have acquired sufficient property to bind

them to a locality or community; and if a man felt he was unjustly treated by his neighbors, he would move.

The landed gentry generally live in the cities. Their haciendas are unattractive places, the cultivation of their estates is almost nil. In general, their income comes from cattle raising or those forms of agriculture which require the least human labor. There is none of the slavery of which one hears so much in Mexico, partly because the Panamanian gentry are too indolent to make effective slave drivers, but more because the jungle offers such ready escape.

Almost every time you find an even moderately well-cultivated estate, you will find a foreigner as foreman.

The homes of the rich are strangely unattractive to Northerners, and this is especially remarkable, as most of the upper class have been educated abroad.

I spent nearly a week in a household not far from Panama City. They were the most important people of the village, and reputed to be rich. They were so nearly white that the daughters had been received in a smart finishing school in the States. Several members of the family had been in Europe. One would naturally expect certain traces of advanced culture.

It was a large one-storied house, with unglazed windows. One room, which served as a dining and living room, was papered with a cheap, gaudy, green and gilt paper, stained and moldy from humidity. The walls of the other rooms were bare. In this living room there was a grand piano which had been out of tune at least a generation, and had been superseded by a graphophone. Sousa marches were the family's preference in music. On the wall there was a chromo portrait of Alphonso XIII, advertising a brand of sherry, and a hideous crayon enlargement from a photograph of the father. In a book-shelf there was a fine old set of Cervantes, a couple of French and English dictionaries and



text books, and a file of *La Hacienda*, an illustrated magazine published by and in the interests of an American manufacturer of farm machinery. I did not see any member of the family reading anything but the daily paper from Panama, although they could all read and speak French and English.

The ladies of the household spent the morning in dingy mother hubbards and slippers. After a heavy midday meal they retired to their hammocks. About four o'clock they took a dip in the ocean, sat around the rest of the evening with a towel over their shoulders and their hair drying.

About a month later I encountered one of these young ladies at a ball in Panama. She was dressed in an exquisite Paris gown, and was strikingly beautiful. She would have passed muster in the most exclusive set in any European capital. It was hard to believe that 360 days out of the year she led the slipshod, slovenly life I had seen in her home.

The married life of the better class natives does not seem attractive to Americans. The women have no social intercourse with men, except at infrequent balls and formal dinners. They are expected to keep their feet on the rocker of the cradle all the time. The men lead their social life in cafés and clubs. "Calling" is unknown. Many amusing stories are told of the excitement and astonishment caused by Americans breaking over this custom. There were a great many love feasts in the early days. Everyone talked of friendship between the two nations, and the Americans believed in it. And our young men, having duly met the ladies of Panama at these formal functions, proceeded to "call" in form. Invariably they found the ladies in "deshabille" and tongue-tied with astonishment at the invasion. The husbands were outraged at this attack on the sanctity of their homes, and while the affair fell short of a diplomatic

incident, a lot of explaining had to be done to avoid the duels which threatened.

Considering that several thousands of American bachelors have worked in the Canal Zone, it is remarkable that so few have married Panamanian women.

The religion of the country is Roman Catholic. Most of the men, however, seem to be free thinkers. Even more than in Protestant countries, the congregations at the churches are made up of women. But especially at fiestas the churches are packed. The ceremonial in these Latin-American countries is not as attractive as it is in Europe nor as impressive as it is in Russia. The religious fervor which marked the clergy in the early days of colonization—the missionary spirit—seems to have very largely given place to formalism, and rather shoddy formalism at that. Even the linen on the high altar of the Cathedral is not spotless. The silken finery of *Nuestra Senora del la Merced* is moth-eaten. The worshippers seem uninspired, the celebrants of the mass half asleep. There seems to be no singing to speak of. Only once I heard some sisters—and it was a sadly untrained chorus—chanting a mass in *San Felipe Neri*.

The old journal of an Englishman who was held some months captive by the Indians, before their conversion, tells of how they used to put bunches of flowers and piles of bones at the dark places along the trails—places where evil spirits were supposed to congregate. If you ride back into the interior to-day, in all such fearsome places you will see bunches of flowers—and rude crosses. In every “rancho” you will find a sacred corner presided over by a wooden cross, and sometimes a holy picture. The Indian women like to put broken pieces of looking glass about these shrines. But beyond this it is hard to find any signs of Christianity among the natives.

“Sport,” in the Anglo-Saxon sense, is hardly known in

Panama. The nearest approach to baseball, for instance, is cock-fighting. It holds a place in the hearts of the people on a par with, if not above, political intrigue. There are cock fights every Sunday, and elections only once a year.

The birds are raised with great care, and are trained and fed with as much solicitude as a prize fighter. Sunday morning, while the women are at church, the men crowd into the cock-pit. The excitement is intense, the tobacco smoke dense—and the sport pitiful. Two cocks, most of their feathers shaved off, are brought into the ring by their keepers. There is a long wrangle over odds, and then bets are tossed in from the circle of seats. When the debate between the keepers is ended, they knock the roosters' heads together and then turn them loose. I sat through a couple of hours of it once, and only one bout of a dozen or more had any action to it—or any suspense. In the other cases, after a little sparring, one cock ran and the other chased it, round and round the pit. Every few minutes the backer of the fleeing cock would persuade it to turn round and face the foe, but in a second the chase would begin again. The bout was ended when one cock was smitten with heart failure. Perhaps the worst thing which can be said of the Panamanians is that cock fighting is their national sport.

The hostility to the Gringos is industriously fostered by the merchants of the Republic, few of whom are native-born Panamanians.

The situation furnishes a very interesting study of how far political passion can blind people to their economic interests.

The Isthmian Canal Commission has developed a commissary department for the benefit of the employees. It is an immense coöperative store where great economies are effective, and the prices for almost any article are appre-

ciably lower in the commissaries than in the private stores of Panama and Colon. The merchants of the Republic have organized a bitter opposition to this system, and by their influence on the government have effected, through diplomatic channels, an agreement by which the privilege of trading at the commissaries is strictly limited. No one who is not a canal employee or a member of the diplomatic corps can enjoy the benefit of cheap buying without a special permit from the President of the Republic.

Ice is almost a necessity of life in the tropics. A private monopoly in Panama City manufactures it and sells it at exorbitant prices. The Commissary has a fine modern plant and furnishes ice to canal employees at cost. A few families reap immense profit from the ice monopoly. All the natives pay exorbitant prices for it. If the National Assembly should pass a resolution instructing the President to request the Commission to extend its commissary privileges to the people of Panama, nine-tenths of the population would benefit immensely, and only half a dozen already rich families would suffer. It pays these families to stir up patriotism to the extent that the natives prefer to go without ice rather than touch that of the Gringos.

An even more striking case is furnished by the situation in regard to electric power and light. The same clique who own the ice monopoly have an antiquated electric plant, operated by coal brought all the way from the States. The unit cost is ludicrously high, and the monopolistic profit is extortionate. A few miles out of Panama, the Commission is installing a large electrical power plant to operate the Locks. They must make it large enough to handle the maximum of traffic, and there is no possibility of the maximum being reached for years to come. It would certainly pay our Government to furnish light and power to Panama at less than cost.

A small clique, probably not one hundred people, including relatives, is succeeding in blinding the entire city to these easy economies, by its ardent anti-Gringo patriotism.

I am sorry to have a so unfavorable impression of these people. Their virtues they carefully hide from the foreigner. Their statesmen may have real interest in the welfare of their country, but they will talk to you only about their political animosities. Their women, on close acquaintance, may be lovable in the extreme. The American rarely sees them, except in frowsy attire on the balconies of their unattractive homes.

It is hard to like people who have evidently made up their mind to dislike you.

## CHAPTER VII

### “THE DARIEN”

“THE DARIEN” is a vague term for the eastern end of the Isthmus. There is a Gulf of Darien on the Atlantic side, and a Darien Harbor on the Pacific. The old maps give the same name interchangeably for the two rivers now called the Atrato and the Tuyra. It is a territory about which very little is known. Part of it—nobody knows exactly how much—is occupied by the San Blas Indians

Once a month, on the spring tide, the National Navigation Company of Panama send one of their boats to “The Darien.” It is a five-day cruise, and the most interesting side trip which a visitor to the Isthmus can make.

I went down towards the end of the dry season, on the steamer *Veraguas*. It was late afternoon when we left the busy harbor of Panama. The lowering sun set the mother-of-pearl on the Cathedral towers afire, shone a blazing red on the many windows of the Tivoli Hotel and the American town on Ancon Hill. We passed close inshore by the site of Old Panama, the ruined tower of St. Anastasius outlined above the jungle against the sunset, and then out across the bay, towards Brava Point. The water, as smooth as a ballroom floor, was blue past description, except where it caught some of the red of the western sky.

After an amazingly good supper for so small a craft, the captain spun yarns for us up on the bridge. He had good ones to spin. He had started out on the service of the Royal Mail, after long years of waiting had received a ship, and on the second run had gone ashore on an uncharted

bar off the coast of Africa. He had been completely exonerated by the board of inquiry. But little good that does a captain. The iron law of the sea says that once a skipper has put his ship ashore, he is a broken man. A dozen investigating committees may report him blameless, may praise his bravery and cool-headed ability—he is black-listed at Lloyds. No company which insures its ships can afford to employ him. So our captain had been forced out of the beaten paths, into the by-ways of the sea. During the Russo-Japanese War, he had enlisted in the Mikado's service. After peace had been re-established, he had drifted about from one tramp steamer to another, at last to get command of the minute *Veraguas*.

So slipping along through the motionless sea, our mast barely missing the immense and imminent disk of the moon, we sat half the night, listening to bizarre tales of the China Sea, the Blockade of Vladivostok, pearl smuggling, Boxer pirates and Dyak head-hunters. Even Robert, the Well-Beloved, failed to get from his magic pen an adequate picture of the glamor and romance of night on the Southern Sea—so what's the use?

I woke up to find that we were rounding Brava Point in the Gulf of San Miguel. The expanse of water about us was the first of the Pacific Ocean seen by European eyes from America. On one of those mountains—in the long chain which formed the horizon on the left—Balboa, near four centuries ago, accomplished fame, when

“ . . . with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.”

Somewhere along that white sandy beach on St. Michael's Day (September 29), 1513, he strode into the water to his waist and flaunted abroad the banner of Castile and Leon.

Time has rotted away the wooden cross they erected, to the wonder of the Indians. The tooth of Time has bitten deep into the sovereignty of the royal house of Spain—which was growing so mightily in those days. Only the name—"Golfo de San Miguel"—which he gave the place has remained. Also in memory of his great discovery, the name of Balboa has been given to the busy port thirty miles up the coast, the terminus of the great canal which is to be—a place where they built ships which would as much have amazed Balboa as his muskettes did the Indians.

Somewhere across this placid bay, Balboa ventured forth in a native canoe—most probably the Indian cayukas of to-day are no bigger than those the first Spaniards found. Galvano, an old chronicler, writes: "He embarked himself against the will of Chiapes, who was lord of the coast, who wished him not to do so, because it was dangerous for him. But he, desirous to have it known that he had been upon these seas, went forward, and came back again in safety and with great content, bringing with him good store of gold, silver, and pearls."

The view is beautiful and I also returned "with great content," although not with so rich spoils.

Within the Gulf of San Miguel, the water loses its glorious blueness. Three mighty rivers, running through alluvial valleys, have turned it into a Missouri brown.

From Brava Point it is fifteen miles across the mouth of the Gulf. Inside it broadens out to twice that width. The shores are irregular and there are several islands. The channel up the Gulf is twenty miles long. The banks are generally precipitous, getting higher as one gets inland. There are few signs of human habitation. Here and there a break in the dense foliage of the hillsides showed where some natives had made a clearing. We passed close to one island, but we saw no Indians.



Beyond the Gulf is the great Darien Harbor. A large island, blocking the entrance, separates the two channels, the Boca Chica from the Boca Grande. When our battle-ships visited the harbor, on their trip around the world, they used the Boca Grande. This channel is not only the deeper, but also the longer. The native boats all use the Boca Chico. The banks at the head of the Gulf are hidden by mangrove swamps. The entrance to this narrow passage is invisible to uninitiated eyes. When our captain threw the head of the boat around, I thought he had a brain-storm and was running us aground. A few yards from the shore, the opening suddenly appears. The channel is about three hundred feet wide and not a quarter of a mile long. Once headed into it, we shot through on the tide at incredible speed.

Before I realized that we had entered the passage, we were slowing down in the placid water of the harbor.

The spring tide rises nearly twenty feet. Darien Harbor is thirty miles long, and averages ten in width. A tremendous amount of water—considerably more than a cubic mile of it—has to rush through those two narrow mouths every six hours. I doubt if the famous tides of the Bay of Fundy run any stronger.

William Dampier, who, besides being a pirate of parts, was a keen observer of geography, has left this account of the place as he found it two centuries ago:

"The Gulf of St. Michael . . . is a place, where many great rivers having finished their course, are swallowed up in the sea. . . . On either side the Gulf runs in towards the land somewhat narrower, and makes five or six small islands, and good channels between the islands; beyond which, further in still, the shore on each side closes so near with two points of low mangrove land as to make a narrow or strait, scarce half a mile wide. This

serves as a mouth or entrance to the inner part of the Gulf, which is a deep bay, two or three leagues on every way; and about the east end thereof are the mouths of several rivers, the chief of which is that of Santa Maria; this is the way that the privateers have generally taken as the nearest between the North and South Seas. The river of Santa Maria is the largest of all the rivers of this gulf; it is navigable eight or nine leagues up, for so high the tide flows. Beyond that place the river is divided into many branches, and is only fit for canoes; the tide rises and falls in this river about eighteen feet."

Around a corner of headland, just after entering the harbor, our boat stopped at the picturesque little town of La Palma. It is built on a very steep hillside. The houses on the water front are perched on twenty-foot piles—almost awash when the tide is in and high, and dry when it falls.

I counted about two hundred roofs, of which ten or fifteen were of corrugated iron—a sign and criterion of progress. El Real de Santa Maria, a town which we visited later, has less than half of its roofs of the old-fashioned thatch. The Alcalde boasted to me about it. I suppose corrugated iron roofs are a sign of progress in Panama, just as tunnels are in New York, but I prefer thatch and ferries.

In La Palma happened to me an amazing adventure. I cheated a native! In any place of Spanish civilization, this is something to boast of. It works the other way around with such sickening regularity.

My friend and I went ashore in one of the native cayukas—a ride of not more than two minutes. When we stepped ashore the boatman calmly demanded one peso apiece. As a general rule, I think that in a strange country, where you do not know the language very well, it is wise to allow yourself to be robbed without making an uproar. Otherwise you lose your breath as well as your money. But there are

limits, and this seemed to be one of them. So individually and collectively, we yelled all the mean things we knew in Spanish at that cayuka man. He disappeared on a run.

“Gone for the Alcalde and the police,” my friend remarked.

“Well, let’s get a look at the town before they lock us up,” I said.

We strolled around for half an hour, expecting trouble every minute. When there was no more to be seen, we went down to the shore, and another cayuka man offered to take us both out for four reals. So back we went to the boat, without having paid any fare for the ride ashore.

I think the first boatman must have had a stroke. We expected to see him waiting for us with a warrant when we put in at La Palma on the return trip. For a month afterwards I expected to have him turn up in Panama. But I never saw him again. He is the only Panamanian who ever let me get by him without paying.

The cruise up the harbor was delightful. The hills come down sheer to the water’s edge, their sides thick with heavy timber. Three different species of *lignum vitæ*—each with its own color—were in bloom. Blossoming hibiscus, like Fourth of July red-fire, was everywhere. And most gorgeous of all were the Royal Poincianas or Peacock flowers. A few islands, also bright with blossoms, broke the expanse of water in just those places which would have been chosen by a Japanese landscape gardener.

Perched on one promontory is the large country place of a Panama merchant. It looks desolately alone. The shores of such a body of water in a less torrid clime would be crowded with summer houses.

A few hours beyond La Palma, we passed the mouth of the Rio Las Savanahs. It looks as broad as the Mississippi and very much more sluggish. The entrance to the river is

almost choked with water lilies, only a narrow channel is left free. For a mile on either side of it, the green pads of the leaves—which are not very large, but innumerable—entirely hide the water. There were thousands and thousands of small white and golden blossoms. The air was heavy with their fragrance.

Beyond this river the harbor begins to narrow rapidly. About four in the afternoon, we anchored for half an hour off the little village of Chepigana. Of its fifty houses only the barn-like trading station had a corrugated iron roof. This little place and La Palma are the only towns on all the coast of this great bay.

Twilight was just beginning when we reached the head of the harbor and the mouth of the Tuyra River—in Dampier's day the Spaniards called it the Rio del Santa Maria del Darien. We steamed up it as far as we could before night-fall.

Here we began to meet cayukas loaded with Cholo Indians. They are of the same squat, square-faced breed as those to be seen in the western provinces. But they seem much less touched by civilization. The men seldom wore more than a breech-cloth. The prevailing mode among the women was a short skirt, hardly more than a fringe. In fact, the children, who wore nothing at all, wore very little less than their elders.

Our boat followed a tortuous course, now close to one shore, now to the other. And ever as we proceeded, we were disturbing the innumerable birds who were settling down for the night. The aigrette herons were a sight worth all the long journey. There were hundreds of them, and they are the whitest things which live. None of the other animals which we call "white"—polar bears, white elephants, silver foxes—are really white. But these herons are as dazzlingly white as the crest of Mont Blanc at noon.



*Photo by Fishbaugh.*

THE FLAT ARCH OF THE CHURCH OF ST. DOMINIC.



*Photo by Fishbaugh.*

THE CATHEDRAL OF PANAMA.



In zoological gardens, herons and flamingoes and all that genera of birds seem awkward and unlovely. They need their native setting. These tropical rivers are their real home. As our steamer fumed up the river, it disturbed them mightily. As far as I could see ahead of us, was a string of them on either side, flying sleepily up stream to escape us. There is an unspeakable beauty in the moth-like way they flap their ghostly wings, outlined so strikingly against the dead green of the river banks. When it became too dark for navigation, we dropped anchor and let them sleep.

It was too hot to sleep in the cabin, so we swung our hammocks on deck. I find going to sleep in a hammock an easy habit to acquire. But how to wake up with any degree of grace or dignity is an art which requires long practice.

I have a vague recollection of opening one eye and realizing with profound satisfaction that there was yet at least an hour before dawn. The next thing I knew was a fusillade from the after deck. It was not just one shot—it sounded like platoon firing. I woke with a start and tried to jump out of bed, but I was in a hammock, and could not. There was nothing to set foot on. I kicked out wildly, expecting to strike the floor. I only barked my shins on a stanchion. At this stage of the affair, a field gun came to the support of the rifle brigade, and the string which held up the mosquito netting broke and I tumbled four feet onto the deck. It was probably fifteen minutes before I got myself untangled and reached the after deck.

Every man on board with a firearm was pumping lead into the mud flats left bare by the receding tide. Rifles, revolvers, automatic pistols! The captain had an English elephant gun, which I had mistaken for a field-piece. I followed the line of his aim, and could see nothing until he fired—then a great red chasm opened in the mud. It

was the mouth of an alligator. I have never seen anything in nature which has carried "protective imitation" as far as these saurians. Half a dozen men were standing about me, shooting right and left, and I could see nothing but mud. It was several minutes before my eyes caught the trick of seeing them. Then I ran for my gun and joined in the slaughter.

From the ordinary point of view there is no sport in shooting alligators. They lie quiet—a too easy mark—and unless the bullet penetrates the brain, it is impossible to get them. They waddle down to the water and slip in. A day or two later their dead bodies come up somewhere down stream.

There is, however, a great temptation to find out whether it really is an alligator or just a hunk of mud on the bank or a dead log floating down stream. The only way to make sure is to shoot. It is a good betting game, for even the Indians will sometimes be fooled.

As soon as the tide began to come in, we lifted anchor and continued up stream. There is a never flagging fascination to river navigation. At sea, if it is rough, it is uncomfortable, and if it is smooth, it is monotonous. Here every turn brought a new vista. Sometimes the jungle trees scraped the upper works of the boat. There was always the chance of seeing a monkey or a paroquet or a cayuka full of Indians.

About noon we dropped anchor in the channel off El Real del Santa Maria. It was in this progressive little town that the Alcalde proudly pointed out the two score corrugated iron roofs. There was also a two-story municipal building to boast of and a new billiard table.

Here we unloaded three Chinamen who were going on a trading expedition up the Chucunaque River, which joins the Tuyra just below El Real. They caused great excitement, for, in trying to keep down their expenses, they put



all their worldly goods into one cayuka. I think another half pound would have sent it to the bottom. Once they had cast off from the *Veraguas* and saw how precarious was their position, the three of them began to chant their funeral dirge. All the good people of El Real, attracted by the unearthly noise, rushed out to the river bank. One of the passengers bet me a peso that they would sink. It did not look like a good bet to me, but I had stuck him every time on the alligator game, so took him on. By the very narrowest margin, the Celestials reached the shore in safety. When the passenger paid me the peso, he wanted to bet me that he would die inside of a year.

"You've got such a luck, you can't lose," he said. "I'd feel better than if my life was insured."

Two twists of the river above El Real, we ran into a mud bank. There was nothing to do but twirl our thumbs for six hours till a new tide lifted us off.

The geological formation of this district is very interesting. In some prehistoric time, it was a country of high mountains and deep, precipitous valleys. Then in some great convulsion, it all sank so that the original bed of the valleys was several hundred feet below sea level. The rivers have washed down an alluvial deposit and filled up the old valleys.

Fifty miles up, the Tuyra is still at sea level. Marri-ganti, the head of navigation, has a tide of eight or ten feet. On either side of the river are broad mud flats, heavily overgrown with jungle. The surface is not five feet above high tide in the dry season, and it is continually drowned in the wet. If some system of Holland dykes could be installed and these bottomlands kept dry, they would be immensely fertile.

While we were stuck on that mud bank, fighting mosquitoes, an incident illustrative of the all-pervasiveness of

progress occurred. One of the deck-hands, who looked like an Italian, was enlivening his job of stitching a patch on a pair of overalls, by singing the Duke's song from "Rigoletto." And he sang it well. He had a rich baritone. His voice had evidently not been trained, but he sang true. Sitting there on a dry-goods case, beating time against it with his bare heels, he threw into his singing a large measure of the nonchalance, the very spirit of the song, which so often is lacking in the performance of professionals.

"Now, listen to that," the captain said. "That's the real Latin for you. Music born in him. I don't suppose he can read or write. But once when he was a little shaver, back in Italy, his father took him to the opera in Naples, and he heard some great artist sing that. And he remembers it still. Sings it down here in the jungle, without any accompaniment but his heels, a lot better than an English or American university man could sing it with an orchestra."

"Let's get him to tell us about it," I suggested.

The captain called him up and asked him where he was born.

"New York," he said.

"Mulberry Street?" I asked.

"Sure."

"Where did you learn that song?"

"Oh! That? That's a Caruso song. I learned it out of a phonograph."

"If I hear you singing that again, I'll kick you overboard!" the captain said, in disgust. But I was so delighted at the skipper's discomfort that I gave the boy the peso I had won on the Chinamen.

Marriganti, where we arrived a couple of hours after the tide lifted us over the bar, is the station of the Darien Gold Mining Company. Our cargo was principally machinery

for their new plant. It was to be taken up stream in small boats and then, by miniature railroad, to the mine site.

We also had a large consignment of goods for up-river traders, cases of nails, boxes of starch and sugar, bags of coffee and salt, bolts of cloth. Every civilized country in the world was represented in that merchandise. Some of the people up river are Germans, for we unloaded several cases of Augustiner Brau from Munich.

Here at Marriganti we met the first white man since leaving Panama. He was an Italian, in charge of the mining company's station. We had letters of introduction to him, and he started in to perform the rites of hospitality by mixing what he called a “Nitroglycerine cocktail.” He said it was so strong that if you dropped a cigarette ash into it, it would blow the roof off. When he found out that we did not care to get drunk with him, he lost all interest in us, and went surlily about the business of unloading his consignment of machinery. I once met a Belgian judge from the Congo Free State, who said the only objection he had to his post was that there was no opportunity to get drunk with a white man. This Italian of Marriganti is in the same fix. For the population of El Real and La Palma seems to be pure Nubian. They are descendants of the colonial slaves. A few West Indian negroes have drifted into the district. They are mostly men who were stranded on the Isthmus when the French canal company failed. They are indistinguishable from the natives—except when they startle you by speaking English.

The trip down stream was uneventful. At La Palma we picked up a cargo of lumber and the Bishop of Panama and his retinue. He was a picturesque type in his frayed and faded purple. His face was round and wrinkled and amiable. In his youth he had been a scholar and had travelled widely. He seemed pleased to talk to a foreigner.

He was curious to know if the "modernism" heresy was making headway in America. I asked him if it was troubling Panama, and he said: "Alas, no! My clergy are too ignorant. They have not heard of it." But his English was decidedly rusty, and I think he got his "Alas" in the wrong place.

We slipped through the Boca Chica with the last of the tide and the last of the sun. All the way down the Gulf of San Miguel, we had to fight for every inch against the rush of the flow.

As soon as night fell, we were treated to a gorgeous display of phosphorescence. It is a different species of animalcule which sets the sea ablaze in these waters from what one sees at Nassau and Bermuda. Instead of sparkles in the water, there is an undifferentiated glow. Their light is a soft electric blue, like what one sees when the sun shines through a mass of ice.

The minute little creatures only turn on their light when disturbed. Probably only a very small proportion of them ever do light up. Ships pass through these waters rarely, and their only other cause of fear are the rapacious fish. Often far out from the ship, the black water would blaze out with a streak of light where the fin of some marauder cut the surface.

Their glow is a symptom of distress. But I think that if I were one of them, I would pray to be frightened at least once in my life. With such potentiality of glory, it would be dismal indeed to die without having ever blazed forth.

The friend who was with me is a rich man. I am never quite at ease when I think of next month's rent. The glow of these marine fireflies lit up his face as he leaned over the rail beside me. When he spoke, I understood why his bank account was more substantial than mine. While I had been foolishly trying to humanize these brilliant infusoria, wast-

ing time in imagining for them a soul tragedy, his mind had been bent to practical things.

"If I knew how to do what those bugs are doing," he said, "I'd make a fortune. They are generating light without heat. A real phosphorescent lamp—a good light without heat—is worth a million—easy."

It was still deep night when we anchored off San Miguel, the principal village of the largest of the Pearl Islands. A pinnace went ashore with the monthly bag of mail, but there was no chance to land. The dawn—when the sun came up out of the sea—among the islands was glorious beyond forgetting. It was noon before we passed the last of the islands. Browning speaks of "the sprinkled isles, lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea and laugh their pride when the light waves lisp 'Greece'." If lilies are the flowers which picture the Greek isles, one would have to work cocoanut palms into the figure to conjure up these Pearl Islands. They stick in the mind as the symbol of the tropics, all the world around. They are at their most unforgettable best when mingled with a sea scene. There are hundreds of big and little islands in this group—each with its own distinctive bunch of cocoa-palms, waving against the horizon.

The beauty of the Royal Palm is architectural; they are attractive only when arranged in geometrical design—living Doric columns of a formal peristyle. The charm of the cocoanut palm is unconventional, personal. But, as I said before, even Stevenson could not get the grace of the southern seas down on paper.

As the islands dropped astern, Panama called our attention over the bow. It is a beautiful city from the sea—beautiful still in spite of the scar made by the American quarry on Ancon Hill and the smudge of smoke from the machine shops and shipping of Balboa.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE THIRST FOR GOLD

It was the quest for gold which brought the first white man to the Isthmus of Panama. The same "*execrable sed d'oro*"—as the brave old missionary, Fray Bartholomé Las Casas, called it—was the motor power of Balboa and Pizarro. Gold built old Panama City. Gold was the bait which drew the buccaneers. And again it was the thirst for gold—Californian gold—which woke the Isthmus from its forgotten sleep in '49 and made it once more the World's great Short Cut.

In 1911 there is but one gold mine in profitable operation in the Republic—the Darien Gold Mining Company at Cana, close to the Colombian border.

But the "*sed d'oro*" is still a motor power on the Isthmus. Any day you can find some more or less sane looking individual—in the barroom of the "Metropole" or the "Panazone"—who has a gold project to share with you.

There is a man who in some indefinite way discovered in the moldy archives of Madrid a letter from a monk of Old Panama which tells where the rich treasures of the Monastery of San Francisco were buried at the time of Morgan's raid. The list of jewels and plate reads like an inventory of the Cave of the Forty Thieves. Only a few thousand dollars is needed to discover the hiding place.

A large outfit is now at work in the Province of Chiriqui trying to relocate the old "Tisangel" mine. The bullion records of the Spanish archives show that this was one of the richest mines they discovered in the Americas. The

methods of the Conquistadores were very crude and a modern engineer could make large profits working over their waste. This outfit has plenty of money and intend to find the old vein if it takes a decade. They are running five-foot contour lines over a large area—which means in surveyor's jargon that they are using a fine-tooth comb.

Then there is an endless stream of prospectors, men of every nationality and color, men who have followed the scent from Australia to Alaska. They come out of the jungle sallow with fever, gaunt from hunger, with a sack of "dust" or a sample of quartz. All they need is a little capital to open an El Dorado. They are more than anxious to share their enterprise with you.

That gold is widely distributed on the Isthmus is beyond dispute. Columbus found the natives wearing gold ornaments. The early Spaniards stole immense quantities of it. And when this bonanza gave out they began digging themselves. The archives are explicit on this subject. Even more conclusive are the reports of many reliable experts. Placer gold has been located in hundreds of places; veins of quartz have been charted which assay as high as twenty dollars a ton.

But only the Darien Company pay regular dividends.

The labor costs are prohibitive. The natives will not work steadily. The Spaniards got around this difficulty by the simple expedient of slavery. But this method has gone out of fashion. Imported labor crumples up before the manifold fevers of the jungle. It is impossible, in the absence of roads and bridges, to install machinery or provision a large camp ten miles from navigable water. The Darien Company is in an unusually salubrious region and within striking distance of the great Tuyra River. It is the proverbial exception. Yet the thirst for gold is unslackable. And a new company is launched every few weeks.

The present status of mining on the Isthmus was carefully explained to me by a Mr. Moody, a man heavily interested in fruit-growing. Long residence in Central America has given him an intimate knowledge of conditions.

"Not for mine," he said. "I suppose I've turned down a couple of million mining propositions."

"Have none of them panned out?" I asked.

"One. I might have got into a Honduras mine which is paying. But I'm a business man—not a gambler. If I was a gambler I'd hit the roulette wheel, where the chances are only 32 to 1 against you."

About a week later I met Moody in the Cathedral Plaza.

"Well," he said with a sheepish grin, "I've just bought a gold mine."

A negro, named Pedro, who had once worked for him, had come that morning to his office with a bag full of samples—black sand and quartz. He had staked out a claim on the head waters of the Rio Obré on the Atlantic slope. He had made a preliminary denouncement and had come to Moody to borrow money to pay the fee necessary to gain permanent possession. The samples, when submitted to a mining engineer named Duncan, had assayed very high. The two white men had advanced the necessary money for a controlling interest in the enterprise. Duncan was going up in a few days to look over the claim.

It was part of the country very rarely visited by foreigners so I went along.

"Roughing it" would be an insultingly inadequate term for that expedition.

As it was just before Easter our little boat was vastly overcrowded. There were twenty bunks aboard and thirty women and as many men. The berths were allotted to the women in the order of their social standing, an easy matter to determine in Panama, for the ladies use perfume instead





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**BANANA MARKET AT GATUN, ON THE CHAGRES.**



of soap. The Upper Ten use attar of roses. The Four Hundred take to heliotrope from the world famous atelier of M. Rouget. It costs in Panama five pesos for a very small bottle. And so on down the social ladder to the *hoi polloi* who use a greenish-yellow smell at one peso the gallon. The extra ten women and all the men were stowed away in hammocks.

To add to the discomfort we had no sooner passed beyond the shelter of the Taboga Islands when we ran into one of the very rare storms which visit those parts.

I have crossed the Black Sea in a Russian boat overloaded with Moslem pilgrims for Mecca. I have crossed from Tangier to Gibraltar in the dinky little *Djibel Dersa* with a gale blowing out of the west. The waves rising higher and higher all the way across the Atlantic get frightfully mussed up when they enter the funnel of Trafalgar Bay and the Straits. And I have seen the bottom nearly blown out of the barometer off Cape Hatteras. I thought I knew what it was to be tossed about. But I did not.

Our little coastwise steamer was built to cross the bars which form at the mouths of tropical rivers, and if she was loaded with lead to her funnel she would not draw eight feet. In the morning my knees and elbows were black and blue where the rolling of the ship had swung my hammock into the ceiling.

A little after sun-up we swung into the placid, sluggish Rio Grande and an hour and a half up stream we came to a pier and a corrugated iron storehouse called Puerto Passado. The steamer can only get up on the crest of the tide, and for six hours it rests its flat bottom on the mud, waiting the next tide to go out.

We found Pedro on the dock waiting for us with three of the sorriest looking horses it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. But even these sick, mangy, ulcerated

brutes were welcome. For the water was falling rapidly and a tropical river with the tide out is the most desolate spectacle on earth. There is a revolting lewdness in the naked slimy roots of the mangrove swamp on either side. The bottomless mud of the river bed is like a nightmare from Doré's "Inferno." Here and there a hump of muddier looking mud moves sluggishly—it takes a decided effort of the will to believe that it really is an alligator. It would be much easier not to believe that such things live—in such a place.

Penonomé, the capital of the Province of Coelé, is only thirteen miles inland from Puerto Passado, but with Pedro's horses it took us three hours.

It is a typical Central America town—a plaza and church and barn-like government building in the center, a circle of whitewashed, red-tiled adobé houses, and on the edge an irregular cluster of native "ranchos," built of cane and thatch. It is impossible to say where the town ends and the jungle begins.

We had intended to lay in our provisions here, but Pedro told us it would be unnecessary. While prospecting on his claim he had taken to his bosom a widow and her farm. We would stop the first night with a family of his friends, and the next be at his place, where the fatted calf would be waiting us already dressed in pepper-sauce. So all we did was to secure some real horses and buy some salt—a present much prized by the Cholo Indians—some cans of butter and jam.

A friend of Pedro brought us some news which promised excitement. While he had been in Panama his claim had been "jumped." Three Americans, with a Mexican woman who passed as their cook, had drifted into Penonomé a few days after Pedro's departure. They heard of his strike, bribed the Alcalde and denounced the same claim. Then they went out to look it over.

The Alcalde was much disturbed by our appearance. He had thought that he had no one to deal with except the negro, Pedro, who was evidently too poor a person to make trouble. But Duncan is a man of some prominence in Panama, on friendly terms with the Administration. The speed with which the Alcalde got down on his knees was amazing.

As we started out the next morning, Pedro's friend told us that the Alcalde had despatched a messenger during the night to warn the claim-jumpers.

But we had hardly gone a mile from Penonomé when all speculation about the disposition of the intruders was driven from mind by the immediate difficulty of the trail. It was at the height of the dry season and the best time of year for inland travel. During the eight months of rain the way would have been utterly impassable. Duncan had prospected all over the Rockies, he had run an asbestos mine at the bottom of the Grand Cañon and had lived for years in Nicaragua. He said he had never seen a worse trail. It would be nearer the truth to say it was no trail at all. It is, however, marked on the Government map—"comino real."

I found out afterwards that it was a beautiful and interesting country through which we passed. But on that trip I saw nothing but the tail of my horse. Once in every few hours we would come to a bit of "Savannah" where we could get on and ride—and breathe. But most of it was foot work, pushing the beasts up a fifty per cent. mud grade or shoving them down one that was worse. Wading neck deep in a river to find a ford was a pleasant relief. I could not make up my mind which was worse, prying the horses out of quagmires or the machete work when we had to slash a passage through the jungle to get past some impossible barrier.

I remember once—we had just dragged the horses up a long hill which was about as good going as climbing the wall of the hot room in a Turkish bath—and a mile long. I leaned up against a giant *lignum vitæ* tree, its wide spreading branches gorgeous with wistaria-colored blossoms. Wiping the perspiration out of my eyes, I could look out over a wide valley, half the tree tops in bloom. Ten feet away from me hung a giant “Annunciation” orchid, white as the wings of the Archangel. I was about to remark, “By Jove! this is glorious,” when there was a snap and a clatter. The cinch had broken! My companions were already a good ways down the trail. And by the time I had the pack rearranged on the horse they were out of sight, and I had no time to enjoy the view.

The sun had already gone down when we reached the “rancho” where we were to pass the night. I have a vague memory of hanging my hammock, of eating a sort of stew which Pedro called a “Sancochi” and said was good—and of a dog who bayed intermittently the night through.

We made an early start the next morning. Eleven hours more of the trail which was ever just one shade this side of impossibility.

In the middle of the afternoon we topped the Continental Divide and started down the Atlantic Slope. Our barometer registered only a little more than one thousand feet. But it must have been broken—I would have sworn to five thousand.

The Rio Obré was the boundary to Pedro’s claim and just beyond it we came to the camp of the claim-jumpers. As we rode towards their tent they made a demonstration in force.

The Mexican girl stood in the background with a Winchester. The three men, looking as bold and bad as they knew how, strode out to meet us, making a great show of

jerking their pistol belts into position. I never saw a more melodramatically rigged out bunch of "bad men" off the Bowery stage—leather "chaps," sombreros, red handkerchiefs, mighty spurs. They certainly had made up for the part.

The outcome was ludicrous anti-climax. I had never realized how utterly dead the Wild West "bad man" is. He has crossed the Great Divide into ancient history.

Duncan tipped me the wink and we threw up our hands and cantered towards them.

"My sons," he said, "I've got a twenty-two single-shot target-pistol somewhere in my saddle bags. My friend here is unarmed. The coon has a gun but he couldn't hit a barn. We're not much on armament, but—we've—got—the—cash. You bought the Alcalde for twenty pesos. I could buy him back for twice as much, but it's cheaper to have him fired. Your claim's no good, you can't afford to fight in court. Your guns are out-of-date. Money talks. You'd better lope. There's lots of trails leading out of this place. You might get run in if you hang around. Adios!"

Their bold, bad manner wilted. When we passed that way again they were gone.

Although we had so easily brushed aside these desperados our troubles had only begun. It was nightfall when we reached the end of our journey—the farm which Pedro had taken to his bosom along with its fair owner. It was deserted.

Pedro said he could not understand it. But it looked plain to an outsider. Some handsomer man had come along in his absence and waltzed off with the lady.

The matrimonial arrangement of these people is simple or complex, according to your point of view. As nobody ever gets married you hear no scandal about bigamy or

divorce. Pedro himself was not in a position to wail over this desertion. I gathered from his camp-fire reminiscences that he had been born in British Honduras where he had had a "church-wife" and child. He had lived for a while in Carthagena where he had left a woman and child, a performance which he had repeated in Boca del Toro and again here.

However, we had little time to wonder over Pedro's domestic status. We were two days hard riding from the nearest store, without adequate provisions and no cooking utensils. We burglariously entered the deserted rancho—I had never realized how sturdily they are built, till I tried to break into this one. A careful search revealed two broken bowls and some gourd cups. We went over the place with a fine tooth comb and our one candle and could find no more. We made a shift to boil rice in one of the cracked pots. It was a sorry meal! But we were too tired to worry much. In the morning we hoped to find, if not the fatted calf, at least some growing vegetables.

We found nothing. The lady in departing had taken everything—even digging up the yams. The more we looked about, the less tenable our position appeared. As I had not been stung by the gold microbe, I was all for a quick retreat to our base of supplies. But not so with these prospectors, white and black; they had the thirst. They were on the scent and a little matter like nothing to eat was a mere bagatelle. The prospector's fever is like first love in its wild insistency. It is unlike it in that it is just as wild the seventy times seventh time as it is the first.

They scraped together a scant breakfast and off we went. It was machete work all the day, except when we waded knee-deep in a stream. When we reached the place where Pedro had found his samples it was shovel out and intense excitement. Duncan held the pan and Pedro filled it with



gravel and yellow mud. Side by side, on their knees, by the edge of the stream they nursed and rocked the pan. Gradually the coarse refuse washed away and only the coal black sand was left. The tension grew steadily as the process continued. The supreme moment comes when you drain off the water and look for the "streak." Their two pairs of eyes peered over the edge. Yes. There was "color!" At the very edge of the handful of black sand there were half a dozen specks of dull gold. Even my inexperienced eyes could see it. But I—hungry and tired and ill-tempered—pretended not to. How they waved their hands and shouted at me!

All day long the scent held them. Slashing through the jungle, clambering over the rocks, wading up the river—again and again washing out a panful of gravel—and always vain efforts to make me admit that I saw "color."

Near the place where the quartz vein cropped out they washed one pan of dirt which was really rich. I could see twenty or thirty minute specks of gold. Duncan said there were fifty "colors."

"Why," he said, "it's like a star-chart! Can't you see them sparkling in the black sand background?"

They may have sparkled for him, but I was no-end hungry, having had a poor sort of breakfast and no lunch at all.

About four o'clock we struck our first and only piece of good fortune. In the midst of the jungle we stumbled onto a deserted farm. There were some cocoanut palms and some yams. With much shooting we knocked down half a dozen nuts. We were well supplied with best of sauces, and those cocoanuts certainly were welcome. Pedro dug up some yams, and we made camp again just at dusk.

One day of prospecting did not satisfy them, but it was enough for me and I spent the next days exploring the neighborhood.

Close to the deserted "rancho" there was a little river with the queer name of the "Rio Brassos de U." Taking an early morning bath in it, I suddenly set eyes on a most appetizing looking fish. It was a foot and a half long with silver scales, splashed with black and red. We were short on cooking utensils, but a fish can be planked. A waterfall cut off his escape up-stream, I built a makeshift dam and weir a hundred feet below where he was so peacefully digesting his morning haul of sand flies. A very gorgeous parouquet, in a motley of green and scarlet, jeered at me from a coco bolo tree. Every time I made a jump at that fish he croaked out a phrase in his jungle lingo which sounded like, and certainly meant, "Foiled again!" After half an hour's splashing about I gave up hope of catching him in my hands or spearing him. But I kept at it, hoping to scare him to death. But he had nerves of iron. At last I lost interest in the fish and began throwing stones at the parouquet. Even a Paris cab-driver could have learned something new in profanity by listening to that bird's conversation.

In the afternoon help came. I was dozing in my hammock and suddenly awoke with the startled feeling that someone was looking at me. In the doorway of the rancho was a sour looking old "brave." It gave little comfort to remember that the Cholo Indians are a peaceful tribe. I had an uncomfortable conviction that he was probably the man who had superseded Pedro in the affections of the owner of the "rancho." Our right to make free with the place was decidedly vague.

However he was more surprised to see me than I was to see him. With my six words of Spanish I soon made peace with him. He and his family appeared to be moving. There were two women in the party—each one had a baby astraddle of her hip and the younger one also had a papoose

strapped to her back. A boy of twelve and a girl of ten were superintending the manœuvres of a donkey piled high with household goods. By means of slight of hand tricks and pantomime and the six Spanish words, I succeeded in trading our salt for all the food they had and two usable kettles.

So although I had no planked fish nor paroquet stew for the prospectors I managed quite an elaborate supper.

The Indian family camped with us for the night and by despatching the youngster off to a settlement some miles away we found fresh eggs and vegetables waiting for our breakfast and also three husky young Cholos—eager for work and a chance to go to town.

So we took our time on the home trail. And leaving the care of the horses and luggage to the Indians were able to walk at our ease and enjoy the manifold wonders of the jungle.

Whether or not the samples we brought back to civilization will assay high enough to make the claim valuable, I have, of course, no way of knowing. That is a matter for experts. But of one thing I am sure. Before machinery could be taken up that trail or any sort of a labor camp installed, a great many thousands of dollars would have to be sunk in road building.

The memory of those hungry days and that bitter hard trail make it easy for me to understand that even in this country, where gold is found on every hand, only one mine is paying dividends.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE JUNGLE

To the lover of our northern woods, the jungle is a never-ending surprise.

There is the old story of the Irishman who went to a circus. When he saw the kangaroo he threw up his hands and said, "You can't fool me. There ain't no such creature." To the person who has never been nearer the tropics than the orchid room of some great botanical garden, a trip into the jungle is a constant strain on his credulity.

A hundred times in the interior of Panama my soul has longed for Old John Petrie, who knows the north shore of Lake Superior with uncanny precision. How utterly he would be at sea in a mangrove swamp! It would have been joy unspeakable to watch his woodlore crumple up in a forest where no bark was familiar to this touch, to see him helpless in the bottom of a cayuka watching the amazing feats of the Cholo Indians poling their heavy dug-out against a current—just as I have sat in humble admiration of his skill in driving a paper-weight birch-bark up the rapids of the Sand River. And then I would have had no end of evil glee watching the tears of helpless rage in his eyes as he turned the edge of that marvellous axe of his against an iron-reed or *lignum vitæ*. Anyone who knows him or his kind can picture his disgust at having to give it up, while the natives brought in the firewood with their machetes. How a North Woods guide would despise a machete! And how his eyes would pop out when he saw what a Spanish-Indian can do with one.

In one respect the jungle is like the great Sahara or the sea. It is a thing of fear—and death—to the people who must live in it. A thing of beauty—a rich experience—only to the traveller who passes through for pleasure.

There are two old sisters down Cape Cod way who keep a summer boarding house. Their guests come to play with the ocean, to splash in the surf, to build castles in the sand and sail in toy boats. The two old women are fisher folk, their father and brothers, the husband and son of one, the lover of the other, have been swallowed up in the sea. And when their guests, tired of romping with the monster, troop up from the beach, laughing, there is a look of concentrated horror in the eyes of the sisters.

It is the same with the jungle. There is a man whom you may meet in Panama, yellow with fever, bent and twisted with rheumatism, the wreck of a strong man, old before his time. He has been defeated in a five-year struggle with the jungle. He has sunk not only his health and his own money, but all he could borrow from friends—and strangers. He has gone broke in an effort to cash in some of the luxuriant wealth of the jungle. He hates the word. His scheme sounds perfectly good. As he tells it to you in some café, despite the gaunt ruin of his face, it sounds good. There was no fraud to his failure, no carelessness. He was a man used to success, he appreciated all the importance of the minute details which go to make it. His scheme was well thought out and his face and bent figure show you how utterly he spent himself in the enterprise. The jungle had made sport of him. Freshets had swept away his camp. The thousands he had put into his road had been washed out in a night. Three separate times the river had upset his canoes, swallowing each time a season's provisions. A rare disease, of which only a few cases have been observed in Ancon Hospital, killed two of his foremen, one after the

other. Lightning had smashed a derrick and a donkey-engine which he had brought into the jungle with incredible exertion. The jungle had said, "No."

And so at Biskra, on the edge of the desert, one can see gaunt-faced, spare-limbed Bedouins looking in uncomprehending wonder at the ecstasy of tourists raving over the beauties of their barren, hungry home. The natives of the Isthmus do not share my enthusiasm for the jungle. To them it means fields which will not stay cleared. Just as the Hollander cannot stop work on his dykes, so the Panamanian can never lay down his machete. In three weeks his farm would be engulfed.

The jungle, with all its wondrous beauty, is the enemy of the man who works in it. But for the traveller, who has a week or so to spare, it offers endless variety, endless interest and "newness."

Thousands of tourists visit the Isthmus every year. It is remarkable how few of them seize the opportunity for a jungle excursion—an experience which does not offer itself often to the busy American.

Of course with the wrong equipment one can be just as bitterly uncomfortable in the tropics as one would be in Greenland in a bathing suit. But with ordinary common-sense one can cross the Isthmus anywhere west of the Canal Zone with as few hardships as one would expect in Canada.

One wants khaki clothes, as light as is consistent with toughness, leggings, a poncho, and a hammock. Above all, one must be prepared for the wet. Many of the trails lead up the bed of a stream, and in the mountains one must expect some rain.

If you go into the jungle for pleasure, go afoot. What look like automobile roads on the map turn out to be steps in the hillside—and slippery ones. I do not know anything

more vexatious than a horse without a trail. Two Indians can carry more freight than a horse, and will do it cheaper. Best of all, they will put on their own packs. The natives are not initiated into the mystery of the "diamond hitch," or any other hitch for that matter.

Two tenderfoots ought to be able to make a two weeks trip on less than five dollars a day. Unless they can speak Spanish fluently, they should hire a "boss" in Panama. It is expedient to make your contract explicit and to register it at the consulate. The Panamanians have considerable skill in charging for extras. It is also well to pay a call of respect on the Alcalde of every village you enter. It flatters him and puts him on your side in case of a dispute.

In making out a list of provisions, it is worth while to include salt, powder and shot, or knives. They are presents much appreciated by the Indians. Needles will win the hearts of the older ladies, cheap mirrors those of the belles.

Once out of sight of the American-built houses of the Canal Zone, you enter a wonderland. If you encounter any living thing which even remotely resembles any tree or beast or bird you ever saw in the States, it is something to talk about all day.

On my first trip into the interior, it was necessary for me after a few days to leave the outfit and make my way back to civilization alone. It was one of the pleasantest days in my memory. There was a bit of excitement to it, as I was green to the jungle, did not know the trail and had only a few words of Spanish. However, the Indians said they could make the distance in five hours, with an early start, I had twice as many. And to enjoy nature, or anything worth while, one must have leisure.

My horse would have spoiled it all, if it had not been for him a home trail. Very little of the way was practicable for riding. But as his nose was aimed toward his manger he

followed readily. At times it was necessary to cut a way for him through the jungle, around a fallen tree, a bottomless quagmire or other obstacle impossible for a horse, but beyond these delays, he bothered me very little. On the out trip, going away from his stable, he had been a constant nuisance. Most of the time I scouted far enough ahead to find the jungle undisturbed by his noise.

The most striking thing about the jungle, the thing which hits you in the face, is the color. There is none of the modulation, the melting of one shade into another, of the North.

Back of everything is the all-pervading green. So slight are the differences in values of the various greens that it is almost impossible to get a photograph of tropical foliage. No matter how small a diaphragm I used, nor how long the exposure, my negatives came out a blank. The ever-present background is an almost undifferentiated green. And spattered all over it, like a post-impressionist painting, are masses of color in most vivid contrasts. And this is one of the hard-to-believe things about the jungle—these slap-dash daubs of lurid yellow, crimson, green and dazzling white are beautiful. Somehow the intense southern light reduces this unspeakable gaudiness to a rich, but real, harmony. Somehow the jungle, to use theatrical slang, “puts over” bizarre color schemes which at home would justify homicide. Look through any book on color for a list of shades which *will not harmonize*. You will find them side by side in the jungle. I cannot ask you to believe that such indecent combinations are beautiful. I could not believe it when I saw them, but it is true.

A few details of that gorgeous tapestry stick in my memory. There is a tree—its bare stalk, six inches round, rises ten or fifteen feet—with a crest of giant buttercups, half a foot across. There are *lignum vitæ*—immense trees, the



hardest kind of wood that grows—whose myriad tiny blossoms are the color of wistaria. There are a dozen flowering trees—the Royal Poinciana, it is known to people who have wintered in Florida. Another—its name I could not discover—which breaks out into great clouds of honey yellow—you can see them blazing out on the mountain sides miles and miles away.

Side by side these giant flowers of the Eocene, the ten-foot festoons of maiden-hairish ferns and Cyclopiian tufts of grass, there is an innumerable variety of minute flowers. There is a tiny hair-like stalk which balances a little bluebell no bigger than one blossom of a mignonette.

And then there are the orchids. A little wax-white blossom of tube rose texture is common, but no orchid can be commonplace. Even the simplest of them have an element of mystery, of the unbelievable, about them. The natives express this by the names they give them. This common white orchid they call "The Tears of the Virgin." A red variety they have christened "The Seventh Deadly Sin." "The Annunciation," "The Bride of Christ," all the names suggest the unearthliness of these air-plants. The daffodil-yellow variety, the kind one looks at longingly in the florist's shop and, remembering next month's rent, turns from to buy her roses, can be found here by the score.

I encountered one orchid which was new to me, which I have never found listed in any catalogue. A thin twisted stem, which looked like a telephone wire, hung down ten feet or more from a great branch which stretched across the trail. Just above my reach, standing in the saddle, was a battery of a score of buds, like those of a gladiola. Half of them had broken open. The blossoms were unutterably red—intenser scarlet than the hibiscus. I spent an hour trying to encompass its downfall, but old Dame Nature had been especially proud of this bit of handiwork and had

hung it safely out of reach. It was so perfect it would be hard to believe in its counterpart.

Of vines and creepers there is an equally dizzying variety. One of them is, I am sure, the original inspiration of the "clinging vine" tradition. It kills the tree it grows upon not by strangulation, but by smothering. Its leaves grow with a precision which seems intelligent. They lay flat on the bark of the tree, overlapping each other about a quarter of an inch, until they have enveloped the doomed trunk in an air tight sheath. And a tree must breathe.

"Luxuriant" is not a strong enough word to describe the vegetation of the jungle. I know no word which is. There is a prolificness about it which makes shad roe look like a symbol of race suicide. One is oppressed by a feeling that the jungle is continually giving birth—that it is guilty of mad, ungoverned spawning. Death comes to the things of the jungle, not so much from extraneous accident as from the sheer pressure of birth. The new is pushing into life with such indecent haste, such irresistible insistence, that nothing has a chance to reach a ripe maturity. The rotting leaves underfoot seem to have been only half developed.

So strenuous is the vegetable life, that animals are crowded out. The largest quadruped is a stunted deer. Most of the fauna are pre-glacial types which have persisted in degenerate form. Walking along the trail that day I encountered a tapir. It seemed a dwarf strayed out of the Age of Mammoths. It is the same with the iguana. They are often referred to as the "giant lizard." I have seen several in the jungle, two and three—one close to five—feet long. But they are "giants" only because the day of lizards is gone. They are degenerate offspring of monsters which have long since passed away. Even the representatives of the cats—which the natives call a "tiger"—is a puny thing.

But if the plants have preempted the ground space, to

the exclusion of the prouder animal forms, the air is free for abundant insect life. You cannot walk ten feet without crossing the trail—a well-beaten path—of some variety of ants. The tropics are the happy hunting grounds of the entomologists. Mr. Busek, a unit in the Biological Survey, which the Smithsonian Institution is making on the Canal Zone, has collected several thousand varieties of moths—from the ghostly venus moth to the minute, almost microscopic species, which are his special interest. I have been afield with Professor Schwartz, the beetle-man of the Survey. I recall one time when he spread a sheet under a low-hanging palm blossom. He struck the great pod with the flat of his machete and the sheet was covered with hurrying, scurrying life. Over forty varieties of bugs had fallen out of that one flower.

Details—all these things I have recounted! They are the proverbial trees which distract the view from the forest. Back of them all stands the jungle, an entity, one and indescribable. I think everyone who has ever entered the jungle has felt it as a personality—hardly lovable, but infinitely fascinating. No one can escape the spell of its beauty, a beauty rich and luxuriant and threatening, a beauty underlaid with dread—it is something like a tiger's paw, rich in color, caressingly soft and dangerous. If you could make a woman out of the ideals of Rubens, da Vinci and Manet she—a compound of the exuberant vulgarity of the Dutchman's nymphs, of Mona Lisa's exotic, ineffable smile, and of the cold cruelty of "Olympia"—she would have the charm I spoke of. But no painter ever put such a woman on canvas. No writer has, or ever will, give an adequate description of the jungle.

One experience stands out, from all my memories of the jungle, like a vignette.

Working my way along the unknown trail that day I

questioned the few people I met about the directions. At one time I passed a field where an Indian and his wife and several children were at work, but too far from the path to be hailed. A little beyond them I came to more open country and a chance to ride—and then the trail forked. Whether to turn to the right or left I had no way of knowing. Should I go back the half mile and ask or take a chance? I pitched a penny and took the right-hand road. But a pitched penny has its limitations as an oracle and I was not at all sure that I had been wise in blindly accepting its advice. But hardly a hundred yards beyond the fork I came to a clearing and a rancho. In a little lean-to kitchen a girl of about sixteen was pounding rice. Like all the Indian women outside of towns she wore only a meagre skirt. At sight of a stranger, she gave a dismayed squeal and darted into the house. I did not want to frighten her, but I did want to know if I was on the right trail. I rode up to the house and without dismounting, I hailed her.

“Buenos dios, *Senorita*.”

No reply. Through some crevice in the wattle wall of the rancho, I knew she was watching me. I endeavored to assume a harmless expression. “*Senorita*,” I called again.

No reply. Well, if she was going to be obstinate, I could be as stubborn as any Cholo Indian. So I sat tight and waited. I could feel her eyes spying at me. After awhile she seemed reassured and peeked around the door post and asked what I wanted.

“Is this the main trail?” I asked.

If all I wanted was to inquire my way, she decided that she had nothing to fear and came out on the threshold.

“Si, *Senor*. . . .” And then a string of rapid Spanish which I guessed to be detailed directions but which I could not understand.

I asked her to speak slowly—told her that I knew very

little Spanish. Her big eyes opened wider. I suppose she had never known of anyone, except new-born babies, who could not talk fluently. I tried to explain the situation to her, telling her that I was a Gringo and came from another country very far away. But this was entirely beyond her comprehension. The pitying look came to her face which we use on the hopelessly insane. I doubt if she had seen six white men in her life—and they had all been able to talk. But she had seen Indians who had been touched by God—*loko*—and I was more like them than the Spaniards.

No one likes to be thought crazy, and besides she was a very pretty youngster. The face of the Cholos is broader than we like, the bodies of the older folk are heavy and squat. But this slip of a girl might well have served as model to some dainty eighteenth-century painter.

I tried desperately to appear intelligent. I succeeded in asking her if she had any oranges or bananas. Yes. She had a tree full of oranges back of the rancho. The way she went up that tree was a wonder to see. She had all the agility, but none of the ungracefulness, of a monkey. I could not think of the Spanish word for “enough” or “stop,” and she threw down almost two dozen. I tied up my horse and sat down at the foot of a cocoanut palm and began to eat. I tried to get her to join me. But I suppose an Indian woman does not eat in the presence of the Lord of Creation. She squatted down a little way apart and watched me closely. I think she was wondering if I was crazy enough to try to eat with my ear.

Whenever I could think of two Spanish words which hang together I would say them. At first she took it very solemnly, but after awhile some of my incongruous output twitched her sense of humor, and she laughed. And that is a notable thing about primitive peoples, they have not learned to cut themselves up into fractions. A civilized

woman can laugh with her eyes, or her lips, while her shoulders droop mournfully. But this little Minnehaha laughed all over—her knees, her toes, her whole body wriggled with mirth. And somehow it relieved the depression of my spirit. Even if she did think I was an imbecile, she evidently considered me an amusing one. That was some comfort.

She brought me a calabash of spring water for a finger bowl. I pleased her mightily with the gift of a little round looking-glass—and so rode away.

I know she will treasure the mirror, and when she admires herself in it, she will remember me. There is something warming in the thought that I will be often in her mind. I wonder if she tells everybody about the crazy Gringo who made her laugh. I have a feeling that she has kept the adventure rather secret. I wonder if the husband who will sometime claim her will be subtle enough to be jealous of me.

A banal experience, when written down. Just a usually unsentimental Yankee globe-trotter, who is a poor linguist, and a half-naked, woefully ignorant Indian girl who met in the jungle and laughed together. And yet it is not banal.

Once upon a time I was in Venice—and bitterly blue. Two friends who were very happy took me out in their gondola to hear the evening singing on the Lagoon, by Santa Maria della Salute. They sat in front of me and were so happy they forgot everything but each other—which helped to intensify my "blues." The gondolas crowd about the singing barges so close that the man who passes the hat can step from one to another. My thoughts were very far away, when a gondola aimed in the opposite direction grated alongside of ours. I looked up—into a pair of very wise brown eyes. I do not know whether there were others in that boat, nor how the woman was dressed. I

saw only those quiet, gentle eyes—and something very vague and unwriteable behind them. Very slowly the boats slipped apart—gradually those glowing eyes disappeared in the dusk. What manner of woman she was I have no idea. But the something I saw back of her eyes straightened out and smoothed many things which were awry. The moonlight on the stained and faded palaces was sheer glory. The music found a perfect harmony. Even the succulent happiness of my friends took on a mystic beauty. I think that in that one night under the influence of those wonderful eyes, I saw Vencie as Whistler and the great artists have seen it.

This Lady of Venice has passed utterly out of my life—and yet she remains, a more vivid reality than Venice itself. It is the same with this Cholo girl in the jungle. I will never see her again. And yet she stands out in my memory as a definite, indestructible addition to my treasure store of real experiences.

Almost all of us, I think, have some such memories hoarded away. Life would be barren indeed if there was nothing to it except the things which can be written down explicitly—catalogued.

The charm of the jungle is just such a floating, haunting thing. In the reports of the Smithsonian Institution you will find its details catalogued but you will not find it. Henri Bergeson would say that it makes its appeal to that “intuitional fringe of consciousness” which cannot find expression in words—the language of reason.

## CHAPTER X

### THE COMING OF THE WHITE MAN

THE first Europeans to visit the Isthmus of Panama were those who, under the leadership of Rodrigo de Bastides, sailed from Cadiz in October, 1500. Vasco Nunez de Balboa was among them. The records of this expedition are meagre, but we know that they picked up the main land of South America near Trinidad and coasted westward, past the Gulf of Darien and along the Isthmus as far as Nombre de Dios.

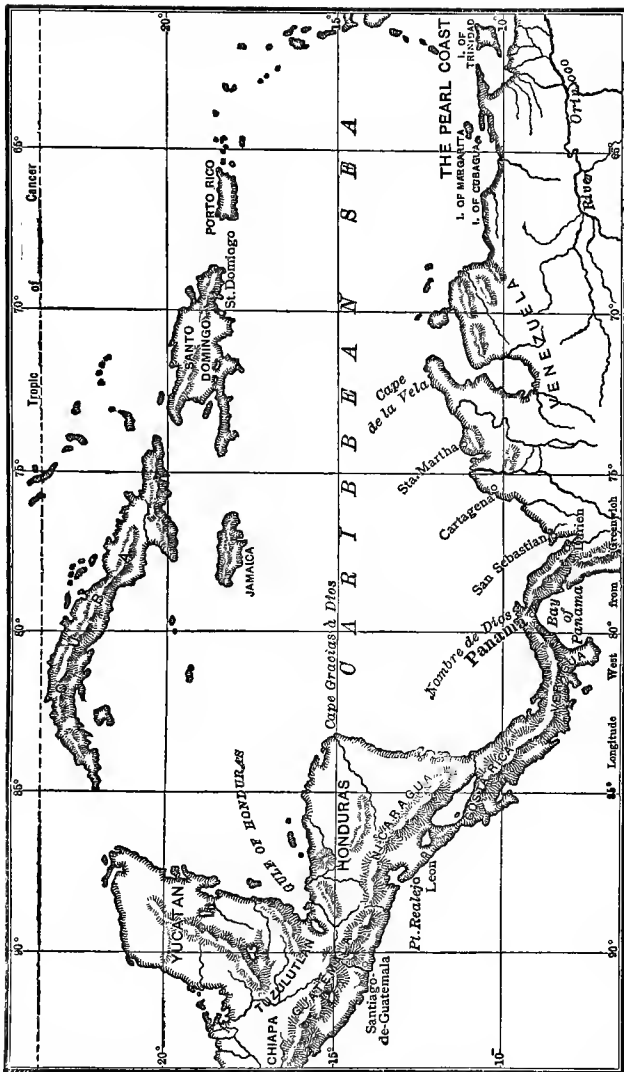
The "Lettera Rarissima di Cristoforo Colombo," an Italian version of a despatch from the great discoverer to Ferdinand and Isabella, contains the earliest account of the Isthmus in existence. He wrote this letter while shipwrecked on the coast of Jamaica at the end of his fourth and last voyage to the Indies.

It is interesting to note in passing one of the great ironies of history. Above all others the English-speaking peoples have profited from the discoveries of Columbus. During his lifetime they did not know of his existence. The Old World took little interest in the finding of a new one.

The earliest allusion to Columbus in English literature is in "The Shyppe of Fooles," a satirical poem which Henry Watson translated from the German. It is written in the spirit of Juvenal's satire "On the Vanity of Human Wishes." One chapter is headed "Of hym that wyll wryte and enquire of all regyons," and the following lines refer to Columbus:

"There was one that knewe that in ye ysles of Spayne was enhabitantes. Wherefore he asked of Kynge Ferdynandus & wente & founde them, the whiche lyved as beestes."





WILLIAMS ENGRAVING CO., N.Y.



This book was printed in London in 1509, three years after the death of the admiral—more than fifteen years after his discoveries were known in Spain and Italy.

“Until the middle of the sixteenth century,” writes John Fiske, “no English chronicler mentions either Columbus or the Cabots, nor is there anywhere an indication that the significance of the discoveries in the western ocean was at all understood.”

As a matter of fact, the westward cruises had not been “good business.” The Portuguese, sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, were finding real treasure houses in the Orient. Compared with this trade, Columbus had little to show. At best he had found a shorter course, to a very poor section of the Indies. It was the failure of any of the western expeditions to reach the Court of the Great Khan which was the motive of Columbus’s last voyage. He had made himself intensely unpopular at court by insisting that the king should keep his promise. He had discredited himself during his governorship of Santo Domingo. And now, an old man of over sixty, he set out again to retrieve his reputation. He would bring back from this voyage not some naked savages, a few handfuls of gold dust and pearls, but presents from the Great Khan.

On the 9th or 11th of May, 1502 (the date is uncertain), he sailed from Cadiz with four caravels, the largest of which was under fifty tons. He was accompanied by his brother Bartholomew, the Adelantado and his younger son, Ferdinando, the child of the mysterious noble woman of Cordova, Donna Beatriz Enriquez de Arana. The boy was less than fourteen years of age.

It was a little over a month when they sighted the first of the Caribbee Isles, and on the 29th of June they cast anchor before the port of Santo Domingo. But the Governor Ovando refused to admit them, so they put to sea again and

were forced by a hurricane to put into Puerto Hermoso at the western end of the island. The admiral remained here several days to repair his ships and refresh the men. Another storm forced him to seek shelter again and he was weather-bound in Jacquemel until the 14th of July.

On the 30th they reached a new island, called by the natives "Guanaja." It was close to the coast of Honduras. Here they met a large cayuka which had come from the west. It was cut from a single trunk and was eight feet wide. Near the centre of this immense canoe was a thatched cabin which reminded Columbus of the gondolas of Venice. There were twenty-five oarsmen, besides the chieftain and his family. The natives had implements of copper, the first metal tools seen by the Spaniards in America. Among other novelties mentioned in the "*lettera rarissima*" were two new beverages which the Indians offered to the voyagers—cocoa and a fermented drink made from maize. The visitors were also surprised to find that the wives of the chief covered their bodies with great care. The account says that they were as modest as Moorish women.

These natives tried to impress the Spaniards with the might and magnificence of their country. Such stories were what Columbus was hungry for and he probably exaggerated them in his report. If he had accepted their invitation to visit their homes he would undoubtedly have come to Yucatan and the Aztec peoples and his career would have ended in a new glory instead of disappointment. But he was keen for the greater accomplishment of finding the "Strait," the short cut to Cathay. Besides he thought that Cuba was part of the mainland and that to have gone toward the west was to return to lands he had already visited.

So he sailed on in his hopeless quest. On the 14th of August he struck the mainland at Cape Honduras. Three days later the Adelantado landed and took possession of the

coast in the name of the Spanish Crown. This occasion is said to have been the first time that a Christian service was held on the continent of America.

They sailed eastward along the coast of Honduras, tacking continually against a head wind and opposing current, never making more than five leagues, sometimes less than two. The sailors became so exhausted with the constant struggle that they confessed to each other and prepared themselves for death.

Even in the days when the Almirante was going back to Spain in chains, his condition does not seem to have been as pitiable as at this time. He himself was wracked with "gout"—more probably what we would call rheumatism. His crazy little ships were in a sore plight from the continual buffeting of the storms.

In the "lettera rarissima" he writes, "I have seen many tempests but none so violent nor of so long duration." "The distress of my son," he writes in another paragraph, "grieved me to the soul, and the more when I consider his tender age; for he was but thirteen years old, and he enduring so much toil for so long a time." And again, "My brother was in the ship that was in the worst condition and the most exposed to danger; and my grief on his account was the greater that I had brought him with me against his will."

For a full month after reaching Cape Honduras they fought their way against the gale. On the 14th of September they came to a sharp turn in the coast. Able now to head due south, with favorable wind and current, they were so relieved that they named the place "Cape Gracios á Dios."

On the 25th they came to a beautiful island off the mouth of a river which they named "La Huesta," The Garden. The natives were friendly and Columbus wishing to give the impression of magnanimity refused to accept their presents although he gave them many trinkets. This breach of

barbarian hospitality insulted the Indians and they returned all his gifts. But peace was soon restored and two young girls were sent out to the ships as hostages. There is some obscurity in the narrative as to just what happened to these girls while on board. But Columbus seems to have considered them a bad lot.

On the following day the Adelantado went ashore. He began to dictate to his clerk the information he could gather about the coast. But at the sight of pen and paper the Indians took fright, thinking it was magic. They would not return until their medicine-men had made some counter-magic and had burned a lot of protective incense. Now, in reverence for the black art, the Europeans of that day were not a bit behind the naked inhabitants of America.

Marco Polo in describing a vague country which he calls Soccotera, had written: "The inhabitants deal more in sorcery and witchcraft than any other people, although forbidden by their archbishop, who excommunicates and anathematizes them for this sin. . . . If any vessel belonging to a pirate should injure one of theirs, they do not fail to lay him under a spell, so that he cannot proceed on his cruise until he has made satisfaction for the damage. . . . They can in like manner cause the sea to become calm, and at their will can raise tempests, occasion shipwrecks and produce many other extraordinary effects that need not be particularized."

Certainly some of Columbus's crew had read this narrative. And of course this made the cause of all their mishaps very clear. They were in the neighborhood of Soccotera. No matter what form the hospitality of the rough sailors took toward the two hostages, the young ladies were undoubtedly lucky to escape from the ships without having been burned as witches.

On the 5th of October, the squadron sailed from La

Huestra and its magic, along the shore of Costa Rica, to Almirante Bay and Chiriqui Lagoon, the limit of the present Republic of Panama.

Here the Spaniards found the natives wearing ornaments of pure gold and also masonry walls. The first they had seen which even distantly resembled civilized architecture.

In one place they secured seventeen plates of gold, worth one hundred and fifty ducats, for three hawks' bells. At another village they got nineteen gold ornaments. And always the natives told them of richer countries down the coast. All these vague stories—they must have been much distorted by the lack of knowledge of the native language—confirmed Columbus in the delusion that he was nearing Cathay. His report is full of a country which the natives called "Ciguare," where gold was as common as mud, where even the beggar women wore strings of priceless pearls, and where there were great ships like his own and a widespread commerce. "I should be content," he wrote, "if a tithe of this which I hear is true. . . . They also say that the sea surrounds Ciguare and that ten days journey from thence is the river Ganges." They told him that by proceeding on his course he would soon come to "a narrow place between two seas." Of course they were speaking of the Isthmus. But Columbus, with a fixed idea, interpreted this to mean the long sought "straits of Malacca." His writings show that he thought he was coasting down one side of a long peninsular, like his native Italy, and that he would soon round the end of it and sail into the fabulous water of the Indies.

Despite the desire of his crew to stop and explore this country so rich in gold, Columbus persistently held his course along the coast.

Washington Irving, whose extravagant admiration for Columbus makes him grasp every opportunity to eulogize him, makes this comment:

“Nothing could evince more clearly his generous ambition, than hurrying in this brief manner along a coast where wealth was to be gathered at every step, for the purpose of seeking a strait which, however it might produce vast benefit for mankind, could yield little else to himself than the glory of the discovery.”

But the insistence with which the great navigator demanded the recognition of his titles, the payment of all his perquisites—in striking contrast to the modesty of such men as di Gama—forces one to doubt if Columbus was so disinterested as Irving would have us believe. His arrogance and cruelty had made him impossible as a governor of Santo Domingo, his pride and greed had destroyed his original popularity at the Spanish court. The discovery of the straits—the quick route to the Spice Islands and Cathay—meant not only personal rehabilitation, reinvestment in his high dignities, but also restoration of his right to lay tribute on the lands he had discovered. And Columbus, more than the stay-at-home official of Spain, foresaw what a gigantic income this would grow to be. He had come on this cruise to load his caravels not with gold—with vindication. He needed the Straits.

On November 2d, he came to the magnificent harbor which he named Puerto Bello. They were stormbound here for a week, then continued eastward, past Nombre de Dios. Rough weather forced them again to seek shelter in a harbor, which they called Puerto de Bastimentos.

The ships were in a pitiful state. Besides the strain from the continued storms, they had been eaten by ship worm, the pest of tropical waters, until they leaked like sieves. The “teredo” is a jelly-like animal, about the size of a man’s finger. It is all soft except its formidable mandibles with which it penetrates the hardest wood as easily as cheese. They swarm in these waters and no wooden vessel unpro-



tected by copper can resist them. The Spaniards described them as "worms," but they are a subdivision of the mollusks.

Having somewhat repaired his ships, the Admiral again set sail, again to be driven to shelter by a storm. This harbor was so small they called it El Retrete, or The Closet. The natives at first were friendly. Irving says they "received them into their dwellings with their accustomed hospitality, but the rough adventurers, instigated by avarice and lust, soon committed excesses which aroused their generous hosts to revenge." The ships were anchored so close to shore that Columbus could not keep his men on board. There were a number of brawls and at last it was necessary to disperse the natives with the ship's cannon.

Columbus had now overlapped the voyage of Bastides. Spaniards had followed the coast westward from Trinidad and southeastward from Cape Honduras past Nombre de Dios. If Columbus knew the details of the earlier voyage he knew that his dream of the Strait had been an illusion. But there is nothing in his writings to show that he did know it.

However his caravels were scarcely seaworthy, his sailors were mutinous, and he was sick. They were all—ships and men—worn to the breaking point by the long and bitter struggle with adverse winds.

On the 5th of December, Columbus sailed out of Puerto El Retrete and turned back. If he could not win the fame he had sought the gold was not to be despised. He had hardly set out on the return voyage when the seasons changed and the wind completely shifted. For three months they had longed for such a wind. Now, as though truly bewitched, it turned just as they did. Off Puerto Bello they ran into the worst hurricane they had yet encountered. To add to the terror of the phosphorescent waters, the blinding lightning, they were nearly swamped by a waterspout. The sailors

almost gave up hope. As a last chance they recited portions of the Gospel of St. John. It proved a more powerful charm than that of the girl hostages from La Huesta, and the water-spout turned aside and left them unharmed.

All during Christmas week they were buffeted by this storm. They were further dispirited by a school of sharks which persistently followed them. So troublesome and changeable were the winds and tides that Columbus named the isthmus, "La Costa de los Contrastos."

But on Epiphany Sunday they came to a sheltered harbor which they called Santa Maria de Belen—St. Mary of Bethlehem.

While the sailors were busy repairing the ships the Adelantado with a handful of soldiers began the quest for gold. On the 9th of January they visited the Cacique whom they called Quiban. They traded some European trumpery for some valuable gold ornaments and persuaded him to visit the ships. There they courteously traded a handful of hawks' bells for his remaining ornaments.

On the 24th of January a typical Panamanian freshet nearly ended the expedition. The Rio Belen rose so rapidly that it tore the ships from their anchors, drove them against each other and carried away the foremast of the flagship. In the hope of changing his luck, Columbus named the highest mountain he could see after his own saint—San Christoval. He says in his letter that the peak rose far above the clouds. The clouds must have hung very low in those days.

Early in February the Adelantado with sixty-five men went up the coast to the Rio Veraguas, the seat of the Cacique Quiban, who gave him some guides to the gold fields. They went six leagues into the interior and found rich placer gold. Columbus wrote, on the basis of their report, that he had seen more signs of gold here in a few days, than in the four

years he had spent in Santo Domingo. He was convinced that he had reached the Aurea Chersonesus of the Ancients.

"Josephus thinks," he wrote, "that this gold of the Chronicles and the Book of Kings was found in the Aurea. If it were so, I contend that these mines of the Aurea are identical with those of Veragua. David in his will left 3,000 quintals of Indian gold to Solomon, to assist in building the temple, and according to Josephus it came from these lands."

He decided therefore to leave the Adelantado with eighty men to found a colony; he would return to Spain for reinforcements. Santo Domingo which he had discovered and settled had been given to his enemies. The king refused to recognize his title to the pearl coast. Cheated of his other possession, he would begin again and create a new viceroyalty.

Work was begun at once. A few thatch cottages were built on a little eminence near the mouth of the Rio Belen. One of the four caravels, stocked with provisions, was to be left to the colonists. Bananas, cocoanuts, plantains and other fruit grew in abundance. The river and sea were full of fish. There appeared to be no danger of famine. The Indians were friendly.

When these arrangements had been completed, a new obstacle arose. The dry season had set in and the river had fallen to such an extent that he could not get the three caravels out across the bar at the mouth of the river. He was forced to wait until a rain would cause a new freshet.

Meanwhile Diego Mendez, one of the most daring and venturesome of these adventurers, began to suspect that Quiban, the Indian chief, was plotting their destruction. Whether or not there was any foundation for this suspicion it is now impossible to determine. Mendez seems to have persuaded the Adelantado without much trouble; it was harder to convince Columbus of such treachery. But at last

it was decided to strike before the Indians had matured their plot, and on the 30th of March, Bartholomew Columbus took the warpath with seventy-five men. They approached Quiban village without being discovered. The main body remained hidden in the woods, with instructions to rush out as soon as they heard an arquebuse. They were to try to capture as many prisoners as possible.

The Adelantado, having stationed his men thus, entered the village with Mendez and four others. Quiban came out of his house and greeted them courteously. After a moment's conversation the Adelantado gave the signal, Mendez fired his arquebuse and they all fell on the Cacique. While they were tying him up the main force hurried up and captured about fifty people, old and young, women and children and half a dozen of the elders of the tribe. The Indians were completely taken by surprise and were overpowered without bloodshed.

The prisoners were bundled into the boats to be taken to the ships as hostages and eventually sold as slaves. Quiban was especially entrusted to the care of one Juan Sanchez, who swore that if the Cacique escaped they might pluck out his beard, hair by hair. However, the Cacique did escape. He worked some of his bonds loose and dove overboard, preferring the society of the sharks to that of the Spaniards. Whether or not Sanchez lost his beard is not recorded. The Adelantado's loot was considerably over \$1,000 worth of gold.

The Spaniards hoped that this "lesson" would strike terror into the hearts of the natives. They believed that Quiban was dead, but even if, tied hand and foot, he had managed to swim safe to shore, they thought that knowing that all his family were held as hostages would discourage any plan of revenge.

A fortunate freshet lifted the three caravels over the bar

and Columbus, taking leave of his brother and the little colony, started on the long voyage home. But adverse winds, soon growing to a gale, forced him to anchor just outside the river's mouth. On the 6th of April he sent in a small boat, under the command of Diego Tristan, to get some fresh water. Tristan never returned.

Quiban had not drowned. And once on shore he set about for revenge in earnest. He gathered all his tribesmen and allies, and within a few days after Columbus had left the harbor, made an attack on the colony. The Indians crept up under cover of the jungle which grew close to the settlement. They rushed out, catching the colonists completely off their guard. The Adelantado had his arms at hand and with seven or eight men held the savages at bay until the rest of his men could rally. With the aid of their bloodhounds, of which the Indians were even more afraid than of firearms, they repulsed this first attack. One Spaniard and a number of Indians were killed.

Tristan arrived in his boat during the *mêlée*, but seems to have taken no part in it. As soon as the Indians disappeared in the woods, he proceeded up stream, against the orders of the Adelantado, to fill his water casks. The river was deep and narrow, overhung with trees. About a league above the village, war whoops rang out from both shores, the woods seemed to rain javelins. Canoes full of naked Indians darted out at them from all sides. One man, Juan de Noya, a cooper from Seville, dove for it and, being able to swim a long distance under water, escaped to tell the tale.

The colony was completely disorganized. This sort of warfare, eighty of them against myriads, was not the sort of gold hunting they had bargained for. Above all they feared that the Almirante would sail for Spain and leave them to their fate. Defying the Adelantado they mutinously tried to put to sea in their caravel. But the water had fallen

again and they could not get it across the bar. They tried the small boats, but a gale was blowing in from the sea and piling up an impassable surf on the bar.

The Indians, exulting over their massacre of Tristan's crew, were blowing their conch shells in the forest preparing for a new attack. The bodies of Tristan and his men came floating down the river. About them circled and screamed and fought a great cloud of vultures.

The fear which had at first driven them to mutiny now drove the colonists back to discipline. The Adelantado was about the only one with a cool head on his shoulders. Believing it impossible to hold the scattered houses of the village, he changed his base to an open place on the beach. There they erected a small fort of casks and boxes. They took two falconets from the caravel. These little cannon had a very wholesome effect on the Indians. And in this new position the Spaniards had nothing to fear as long as their ammunition and provisions held out.

Affairs had not been going any better aboard the caravels in the offing. The hostages who had been captured in the raid on Quiban's village had managed to break out of the hold of the flagship and most of them jumped overboard and had swam ashore. The few who were recaptured had promptly strangled themselves. This not only knocked a big hole in the expected profit of these slave dealers, but Columbus rightly felt that the arrival of the hostages on shore would make the Indians more determined on war than ever. He became immensely worried as day after day Tristan failed to return. He had only one small boat left in the fleet and he did not dare to risk losing it in the pounding surf on the bar.

At last a pilot named Pedro Ledesma, inspired by example of the escaping Indians, volunteered to swim the surf. "Surely," he said, "if they dare to venture so much to pro-

cure their individual liberties, I ought to brave at least a part of this danger to save the lives of so many comrades."

The small boat took him as near the surf as it dared. Ledesma stripped and went overboard into the turmoil of the surf, and won safe to shore. He found the little garrison in sore straits and they were overjoyed to find that the caravels had not yet sailed. Ledesma risked his life again in the surf to take the sad news back to the Almirante.

It was indeed dissipating news for Columbus. He could spare no men to reenforce the garrison. There was no alternative to giving up the colony. His own position was by no means devoid of danger. Any moment his crazy little ships might fall apart, so serious had been the attack of the teredo. He was riding at anchor in a gale off a lee shore. Any moment his frayed cables might part. His own sickness wore heavily upon him. His mind seems to have weakened under the strain. At least it was at this period that he had the vision he so solemnly recounts in the "Lettera rarissima."

"Wearied and sighing," he wrote, "I fell into a slumber, when I heard a piteous voice saying to me. 'Oh fool and slow to believe and serve thy God, who is the God of all! What did he more for Moses, or for his servant David, than he has done for thee? . . . When he saw thee of fitting age he made thy name to resound marvellously throughout the earth. . . . Of the gates of the ocean sea, shut up with such mighty chains, he delivered to thee the keys; the Indies, those wealthy regions of the world, he gave thee for thine own, and empowered thee to dispose of them to others, according to thy pleasure. What did he more for the great people of Israel when he led them forth from Egypt? . . . He has many and vast inheritances yet in reserve. Fear not to seek them. Thine age shall be no impediment for any great undertaking. Abraham was above a hundred years when he begot Isaac. And was Sarah





boats he steered north toward Santo Domingo and out of the story of the Isthmus.

Desperate as had been his misfortunes along the coast of Panama he had to face worse ones. Unable to reach Santo Domingo, he had to run his sinking ships ashore on Jamaica. There were months of waiting for rescue, and at last a neglected death in Valladolid, Spain, on the 20th of May, 1506.

The historians of to-day are engaged in a bitter controversy over the character of Columbus. Irving set the fashion among modern writers of indiscriminate praise. Roselly de Lorgues and a few ecstatic French writers are trying to persuade the Roman Church to canonize him. Their praise is even more fulsome than Irving's statement that "the finger of the historian will find it difficult to point to a single blemish in his moral character." They have gone to the length of developing an elaborate argument, which lacks nothing but substantiating facts, to prove that Columbus married the mother of his son Fernando.

Henry Harrisse has given us much light on the subject by his tireless collecting of original documents. The facts are not at all as pleasing as the "canonizers" would desire. Dr. Shea, an eminent Catholic historian, writes, "He seems to have succeeded in attracting but few men to him, who adhered loyally to his cause. Those under him were constantly rebellious and mutinous; those over him found him impracticable. To array all these as enemies, inspired by a satanic hostility to a great servant of God, is to ask too much for our belief."

Justin Winsor, one of the foremost of our historians, has applied the modern critical method, the studying of original documents, to Columbus. He brings forward strong evidence of many unlovely characteristics. Winsor accuses him of inordinate greed, shows that he had a penchant for slave stealing that even Queen Isabella could not control, convicts

him of having at one time tried to force his crew to swear to false statements about the land they had discovered. Winsor certainly brings in overwhelming evidence of the Admiral's appalling conceit. In his treatise on the prophets Columbus wrote, "Human reason, mathematics and maps have served me in no wise. What I have accomplished is simply the fulfillment of the prophecy of David." This overweening vanity, this pretence of being the special envoy from on High is, according to Winsor, the reason he was unable to keep any friends.

Winsor's long attack on the character of Columbus ends with this paragraph:

"We have seen a pitiful man meet a pitiful death. Hardly a name in profane history is more august than his. Hardly another character in the world's record has made so little of its opportunities. His discovery was a blunder, his blunder a new world; the New World is his monument! Its discoverer might have been its father; he proved its despoiler. He might have given its young days such a benignity as the world likes to associate with a maker; he left it a legacy of devastation and crime. He might have been an unselfish promoter of geographical science; he proved a rabid seeker for gold and a vice-royalty. He might have won converts to the cause of Christ by the kindness of his spirit; he gained the execrations of the good angels. He might, like Las Casas, have rebuked the fiendishness of his contemporaries; he set them an example of perverted belief. The triumph of Barcelona led down to the ignominy of Valladolid, with every step in the degradation palpable and resultant."

Fortunately it is no more necessary to accept without qualification this dark picture which Mr. Winsor draws than to believe that the great voyager was a model of all the domestic and ecclesiastical virtues as Irving and the "canonizers" would have us.

Columbus lived in an age when the vices, Mr. Winsor so energetically denounces, were as common as freckles. And the virtues, for the absence of which he denounces Columbus, were just as rare as they are to-day. The cruelties charged against Columbus were no worse than those of their most Catholic majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, against the Moors. He drove a sharp bargain with the throne and made himself very unpleasant when deprived of what he thought was due him. His famous lawsuits were just the kind we have to-day: efforts to get what his friends called justice and his enemies called graft. If he had been a more courteous loser he would probably have lost less. The worst thing proved against him is his lack of friends. There can, I think, be little doubt that his character was unpleasant. But we of this latter day, who do not have to serve in one of his caravel, nor listen to the flow of his petulant temper, are free to give him in admiration what he so sadly lacked in affection.

The wisest word I have found in this controversy is in the preface of John Fiske's "The Discovery of America."

"No one can deny," he writes, "that Las Casas was a keen judge of men, or that his standard of right and wrong was quite as lofty as anyone has reached in our own time. He had a much more intimate knowledge of Columbus than any modern historian can hope to acquire, and he always speaks of him with warm admiration and respect. But how could Las Casas ever have respected the feeble, mean-spirited driveller whose portrait Mr. Winsor asks us to accept as that of the discoverer of America?"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE FIRST COLONISTS

THE reports which Columbus brought home from his last voyage, his stories of rich goldfields, won for the Isthmus the glittering name of Castilla del Oro. Expeditions to Nueva Andalucía, as the north coast of South America was called, came home with even richer cargoes. Cristoval Guerra and Pedro Alonzo Niño returned in 1500, "so laden with pearls," according to an old chronicler, "that they were in a maner with every mariner as common as chaffe."

Yet many years passed before any serious effort was made to colonize the Mainland. The Spanish king had his hands more than full with domestic wars. Not until 1508 did the matter force itself on the attention of the Council of the Indies.

Herrera, the official historian of the Court, writes (translation of Capt. John Stevens, 1725): "The king was very intent upon having Colonies settled there, and none was so ready to perform it as Alonso de Ojeda, but he not being rich, could not contract with the King, unless supported by some other. John de la Cosa offer'd to be assisting with his Estate, and accordingly went to Court, relying on the Favour of John Rodriquez de Fonseca, Bishop of Palencia, who had Management of the Affairs of the Indies and was a Friend to Alonso de Ojeda."

It would have been difficult for His Catholic Majesty to put finger on a man more fitted for New World adventure than this same Alonso de Ojeda. He had been born in Cuenca, of the inevitably poor but honest parents. He had



CHEPIGANA.



EL REAL DE STA. MARIA.



served as a page, then as an esquire in the retinue of the Duke of Medina Celi. Under the tutelage of this flower of Spanish nobility he had been through the bitterest campaigns of the Moorish wars. He was short and stocky, but graceful; he excelled in the arts of chivalric wars. He was said not to be good to look at, but men adored him. When twenty-one he had sailed with Columbus on his second voyage. He had been a member of a later expedition along the coast of Nueva Andalucía. and had lived some years in the Indies.

Besides his own experience, and as a counterbalance to his always empty purse, he had a wealth of friends. It was his good fortune, as Herrera says, to have for friend the great Bishop of Palencia, who was supreme in the Council of the Indies.

But undoubtedly his greatest asset was the loyalty of the old pilot Juan de la Cosa. Peter Martyr, one of the most trustworthy of the contemporaneous chroniclers of the Discovery, says that the navigators of the day valued above all other maps those made by de la Cosa—"to whom these tracks were as well known as the chambers of his own house." He had sailed more miles in the Caribbean Sea than even the great Almirante. He had a sagacious head and the quiet sort of bravery which was badly needed to balance the dashing impetuosity of Ojeda. And he loved the younger man with a fidelity such as is seldom recounted in the stories of those days. If the king had been making a selection solely on merit, he could not have done better than to choose this team.

But there was another applicant for the honor of colonizing the Mainland—Don Diego de Nicuesa. He had the advantage over Ojeda of being not only much richer but also the more polished. He held the high courtly office of Royal Carver. He wore some of the smartest clothes ever seen in

Madrid. But in spite of his dandified manners and his popularity with the ladies-in-waiting, he was a gentleman of unquestioned integrity and valor. But he had had no special schooling for the bitter hard work in hand. There is not much of good which can be said of Nicuesa. Above all, he was a stubborn fool, but he was not white-livered or he would never have sought to lay aside the Royal Carving Knife for the sword of the conqueror.

For a long time Merit and Favoritism balanced each other in the mind of the king. Being able to make no choice, he appointed them both. Nicuesa was to govern the Castilla del Oro from Cape Gracios á Dios to the border of Nueva Andalucía. Ojeda was given Nueva Andalucía from Cape de la Vela to the domains of Nicuesa. The dividing line between their jurisdictions the wise king left for them to fight out.

In the fall of 1509, the two governors met in Santo Domingo and began the quarrel. The king had further complicated matters for them, by giving them as a joint source of provisions the Island of Jamaica. This embroiled them at once with Diego Columbus, the son of the Admiral, who was governor of Santo Domingo and laid claim to all lands discovered by his father. There could be no question that Jamaica was legally his. To have it given away to others made him so hostile to the interlopers that instead of helping them with ships and men, as the king had ordered, he did all he could to embarrass them. Of course the obvious thing was to fan the fire of jealousy between the two governors.

Alonso de Ojeda soon lost his head and challenged his rival to a duel. However, Juan de la Cosa was able to avert bloodshed and under his mediation they agreed to accept the Darien River, now called the Atrato, as the boundary between their provinces.



But the peace between them was precarious. Nicuesa, having the more ready money, was able to outbid his rival for ships and equipment. Two things counterbalanced this advantage. First of all Ojeda's experience in those parts, his reputation and personal charm attracted to his standard the pick of the volunteers. Among them were two who were later to paint their names in great letters of blood and fire on the chronicle of fame, Hernado Cortes and Francisco Pizarro. At the last moment he won a new ally in the person of the Bachelor of Law, Martin Fernandez de Enciso. This clever attorney had amassed a fortune of over ten thousand dollars in a few years of colonial practice. But he had not realized the fact that it is easier to get money from adventurers than by adventures. In an evil day he began to listen to the alluring tales of Ojeda. Like so many another he fell under the man's charm. Under the promise of being made "Alcalde Mayor"—chief justice—of the to-be-conquered vice-royalty of Nueva Andalucía, he turned his bankbook over to Ojeda.

On the 12th of November, 1509, Ojeda sailed from Santo Domingo, with two ships, two brigantines, three hundred men and twelve brood-mares. At the last moment Hernando Cortes was disabled by a wounded knee and was unable to accompany them. A few days later Nicuesa set out with two large ships, two brigantines, a caravel, seven hundred men and six horses. His was by far the more brilliant company, but they were mostly fresh from Spain, less hardened for the work before them than his rival's companions.

It was a remarkable group of men, these discoverers and conquistadores. They were a strong breed, whom Irving calls the "chivalry of the sea." The old feudal manner of life was breaking down in Europe—the expulsion of the Moors from Spain had been the last great crusade. These

men who came over to the New World were the remnant of the feudal nobility. We are wont to think of them as pioneers—progressives. They were apostles of an old and dying régime. To a romancer like Washington Irving the word “chivalry” conjured up a gorgeous tapestry, woven of brave deeds, and many heroic virtues. To the modern student of history the word means an epoch when famine and plague stalked unchecked over Europe, when brute passion, unrefined by any shade of culture, ruled those in high places, when shameless cruelty was the daily commonplace. It was an age of Inquisitions and of trial by tortures. When the finest ladies of Madrid enjoyed the “divertissement” of an *auto de fe*. An era, the passing of which no sane man could regret. These empire-founders, compared to the great men of the dawning Renaissance, were black reactionaries. Their day had passed at home; to the west they brought all the old barbaric morality of mediævalism, all the religious intolerance of the Dark Ages. The one man who stands out in the early history of America as touched with the new Humanism which was illuminating Europe—Las Casas—was stoned by the conquistadores.

These men who sailed from Santo Domingo four centuries ago were of a type hard to sympathize with to-day. Bloody from their infernal massacres they gave fanatical thanks to the Holy Virgin. With stolen gold, the prize of rapine and slaughter, they adorned the Crucifix. From silver, dug by the defenceless women and children whom they scourged down into their deadly mines, they hammered out magnificent vessels for the service of the Mass. They wore some fair lady’s gage on their helmets, and committed the vilest outrages on women. They were insanely courageous, and afraid of the dark. They were never daunted by real difficulties, they trembled before the croaking of a fortune-teller. They were more often defeated by their own petty jealousies,

or the treachery of trusted comrades, than by the innumerable enemy.

All these contradictory elements seem to have focused in Alonso de Ojeda. The Bishop of Palencia had given him a miraculous portrait of the Virgin. He carried it in the belief that it made him invulnerable. It is only the united voices of many witnesses which make it possible to believe that he actually lived through the innumerable adventures which make up his biography. But we have here to do only with that chapter of his life which affected the Isthmus.

In due time his little fleet touched the mainland—his as yet unconquered vice-royalty—near the present city of Carthagena, in Colombia. He went ashore with part of his force and at once set about establishing his authority. There was the ordinary formality of waving the Spanish flag, erecting a cross and so forth. The few white men who had previously visited this coast had come to trade. The Indians crowded down on the shore with hospitable intention. Having satisfied his own idea of taking possession, Ojeda turned his attention to the natives. He ordered some of his friars, who had come to look after the spiritual welfare of the new domains, to read aloud the following proclamation. This curious treatise had been drawn up by learned divines at home and with slight alterations was employed by the other conquistadores under similar circumstances:

“I, Alonso de Ojeda, servant of the high and mighty kings of Castile and Leon, civilizers of barbarous nations, their messenger and captain, notify and make known to you, in the best way I can, that God our Lord, one and eternal, created the heavens and earth, and one man and one woman, from whom you, and we, and all the people of the earth, were and are descendants, procreated, and all those who shall come after us; but the vast number of gen-

erations which have proceeded from them in the course of more than five thousand years that have elapsed since the creation of the world, made it necessary that some of the human race should disperse in one direction, and some in another, and that they should divide themselves into many kingdoms and provinces, as they could not sustain and preserve themselves in one alone. All these people were given in charge, by God our Lord, to one person, named Saint Peter, who was thus made lord and superior of all the people of the earth, and head of the whole human lineage; whom all should obey, wherever they might live, and whatever might be their law, sect, or belief; he gave him also the whole world for his service and jurisdiction; and though he desired that he should establish his chair in Rome, yet he permitted that he might establish his chair in any other part of the world, and judge and govern all the nations, Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and whatever other sect or belief might be. This person was denominated Pope, that is to say, Admirable, Supreme, Father and Guardian, because he is father and governor of all mankind. This holy father was obeyed and honored as lord, king, and superior of the universe by those who lived in his time, and, in like manner, have been obeyed and honored all those who have been elected to the pontificate; and thus it has continued unto the present day, and will continue until the end of the world.

“One of these pontiffs, of whom I have spoken, as lord of the world, made a donation of these islands and continents of the ocean sea, and all that they contain, to the Catholic kings of Castile, who, at that time, were Ferdinand and Isabella, of glorious memory, and to their successors, our sovereigns, according to the tenor of certain papers, drawn up for the purpose (which you may see if you desire). Thus his majesty is king and sovereign of these islands and continents by virtue of the said donation, and, as king and

sovereign, certain islands, and almost all, to whom this has been notified, have received his majesty, and have obeyed and served, and do actually serve him. And, moreover, like good subjects, and with good will, and without any resistance or delay, the moment they were informed of the foregoing, they obeyed all the religious men sent among them to preach and teach our holy faith; and these of their free and cheerful will, without any condition or reward, became Christians, and continue so to be. And his majesty received them kindly and benignantly, and ordered that they should be treated like his other subjects and vassals. You also are required and obliged to do the same. Therefore, in the best manner I can, I pray and entreat you, that you consider well what I have said, and that you take whatever time is reasonable to understand and deliberate upon it, and that you recognize the church for sovereign and superior of the universal world, and the supreme pontiff, called Pope, in her name, and his majesty, in his place, as superior and sovereign king of the islands and terra firma by virtue of said donation; and that you consent that these religious fathers declare and preach to you the foregoing: and if you shall so do, you will do well, and will do that to which you are bounden and obliged; and his majesty, and I, in his name, will receive you with all due love and charity; and will leave you your wives and children free from servitude, that you may freely do with them and with yourselves whatever you please and think proper, as have done the inhabitants of the other islands. And, besides this, his majesty will give you many privileges and exemptions, and grant you many favors. If you do not do this, or wickedly and intentionally delay to do so, I certify to you that, by the aid of God, I will forcibly invade and make war upon you in all parts and modes that I can, and will subdue you to the yoke and obedience of the church and of his majesty;

and I will take your wives and children and make slaves of them, and sell them as such, and dispose of them as his majesty may command; and I will take your effects, and will do you all the harm and injury in my power, as vassals who will not obey or receive their sovereign and who resist and oppose him. And I protest that the deaths and disasters, which may in this manner be occasioned, will be the fault of yourselves, and not of his majesty, nor of me, nor of the cavaliers who accompany me. And of what I tell you and require of you, I call upon the notary here present to give me his signed testimonial."

How much the natives understood of these ponderously intoned Spanish sentences, we do not know. But the gist of it seems to have been made plain to them, for the accounts say that they replied with great dignity that they were satisfied with their own chiefs and were entirely ready to protect their wives and children.

The Spaniards made short work of them on the open beach—but they had not yet learned the danger of following the natives into the jungle. Nor had they learned the horror of poisoned arrow. Juan de la Cosa urged Ojeda to be content with his victory and to postpone further fighting until they had found a suitable place for their settlement and had established themselves. But it was not Ojeda's nature to be cautious. He gave the order for pursuit. They came in an hour or so to a large Indian village. In a moment they had scattered in quest of booty. And then the natives fell upon them. They were off their guard and most of them fell during the first surprise. Juan de la Cosa rallied a few of them and made a desperate resistance. Only one of this group escaped. Ojeda also with his marvellous luck got away into the jungle. But separated from his men he went astray. Without food and in constant danger of discovery he struggled through the dense

underbrush. With his last strength he reached the seaside. And there his men found him in an almost dying condition. The sailors left on shipboard had become desperate at the long absence of the landing party. Just when things were at their darkest some sails came up over the horizon—it was the fleet of Nicuesa.

The two governors had parted in anger, and Ojeda feared that his rival would take advantage of his distress. But Nicuesa—it is the one really noble incident related about him—sent word that “A Spanish hidalgo does not harbor malice against a prostrate foe.” He turned aside from his own errand to land a party and help Ojeda wreak a bloody vengeance for the death of Juan de la Cosa. They surprised the Indians, who were feasting in their village, in celebration of their victory, and massacred them to the last child. The blood lust of the Spaniards was whetted by the sight of the corpse of de la Cosa, horribly bloated and discolored as a result of the poisoned arrows. Incidentally the share of Nicuesa’s men in the booty was over thirty-five thousand dollars.

Ojeda sailed on to the Gulf of Darien, the western boundary of his province, and disembarked on the eastern shore. In memory of Juan de la Cosa and as a protective charm he named the place San Sebastien, after the saint who died from arrow wounds. It was the first European settlement on the American continent. He despatched his fastest ship back to Santo Domingo, with booty already won and glowing letters to the bachelor Enciso, urging him to hurry along with his law book, and the needed reinforcements and provisions.

After separating from Ojeda, Nicuesa sailed on westward in search of the Aurea Chersonesus he had come to govern. The booty had already been rich; from Columbus’s account of the gold of the Rio Veragua, he had every reason to expect even fatter pluckings.

When he picked up the coast of the Isthmus, he ordered his two large ships to stand well out to sea. Lope de Olano, his second in command, was to keep in sight of him in the brigantine, while he in the little caravel would scout in close to shore. They passed the Veragua by mistake. Some of the sailors who had skirted the coast with Columbus seven years before discovered the error. They urged him to turn back. But with the cock-sure pigheadedness which was his salient characteristic he pushed on.

A sudden storm, for which the coast is famous, caused the ships to tack out, away from the lea shore. Nicuesa, in his little cockle-shell boat, had to seek shelter in the cove made by a river's mouth. A sudden freshet wrecked the caravel. With great difficulty the company won safe to shore, in the long boat, but without provisions. In the morning Lope de Olano and his brigantine were nowhere to be seen. For awhile the little company waited on the beach for rescue. But Lope de Olano did not come for them. As the same gentleman had been one of the mutineers against Columbus, in the Rebellion of Santo Domingo, he has generally been accused of deliberately deserting Nicuesa, in the hope of inheriting his governorship. Whatever his motives were, he rejoined the ships after the storm, told the company that the caravel had been lost with all on board.

Nicuesa and the crew of the caravel found themselves in an exceedingly precarious position. They had no resources beyond those which the jungle and the sea offered them. They had no means of communication but the long boat. With a persistence worthy of a better cause Nicuesa insisted on pushing westward. The sailors, who knew they had passed the Rio Veragua—which had been agreed upon as a rendezvous in case of separation—urged him to turn back. But whatever his shortcomings, Nicuesa was a commander who commanded. And he marched his company



westward along the beach. Four men in the long boat rowed along close inshore and ferried them across the innumerable streams which empty into the sea.

It was desperately slow progress, desperately scant fare, nothing but sea food and occasional cocoanuts. The silk raiment of the noble cavaliers was not built for such work. Nor were many of the men prepared for it.

One day as they were passing along under a high cliff a javelin hummed down from the overhanging trees. It pierced the heart of Nicuesa's little page. The lad's white satin jacket, frayed as it was by the thorns, soiled by the mud of the rivers, had proved a good mark for the Indian. But beyond this they were not attacked—they met no other sign of man.

One evening they came to a large river, just before sundown. There was hardly time to ferry them across before the darkness. In the morning the long boat had disappeared. Their situation was made more desperate by the fact that they were not on the mainland, but on a delta of the river. Marooned on this island, without provisions, entirely dependent on shell-fish for food and on uncertain pools of rain-water for drink, most of them gave up hope. Nicuesa seems to have proved himself a brave man. He did what could be done to keep up their spirits. Three different times he persuaded them to build a raft, but they had no tools, no nails. Each time the surf smashed their flimsy floats to pieces.

“There they continued a long time,” Herrera writes, “some say above three months. Some of them dying daily through drinking brackish water; those that remain'd alive crawling about on all four, as not having Strength to walk.”

But the long boat had not foundered at sea, nor were Ribero, the boatswain, and his three companions guilty of malicious desertion. They knew the coast, knew that Nicu-

esa was leading his followers every day farther from help and hope. So, taking things in their own hands, they slipped away during the night to see if they could bring a rescue.

Lope de Olano, when he had assumed command of the main force of the expedition, had led them to the Rio Belen. They started a new settlement on the spot where Columbus and his brother Bartholomew had tried to found one seven years before. After incredible hardships, Ribero and his comrades found the encampment. Lope de Olano may not have welcomed the news that his governor was still alive, but he at once despatched the brigantine to the rescue.

It arrived just in time. Nicuesa and the remnant of his company were too weakened to signal from the shore. They had watched so long for a sail in vain that they could hardly believe it, when they were carried on board and fed.

Nicuesa's first act on rejoining his colony was to order the imprisonment of Lope de Olano. Only the intercession of all the company saved his head. Once more in the saddle, Nicuesa rode hard. His arrogance returned, his unpopularity grew rapidly. In this unformed colony he tried to rule like a great monarch of an established kingdom.

Quiban, the native chieftain, who had discomfited Bartholomew Columbus, was still lord of the coast. But he had discovered that famine was a surer weapon than his arrows. He had gathered his people together; they had rooted up all their plantations and had moved inland. The Spaniards very soon had to give up looking for gold. They needed food.

"All those People being in such Distress, to add to it Nicuesa grew daily worse condition'd, and treated those few who remain'd very harshly."

At last sickness and hunger forced them to give up the colony. They set sail in the hope of finding a kinder spot for their enterprise. As they coasted along eastward, one of the old sailors of Columbus's crew told them of the beautiful Puerto Bello and generous supply of cool springs. He guided the fleet thither—half buried in the sand they saw an anchor which had been left by the Great Admiral. But when a party went ashore to fill their water casks they were attacked by Indians. The Spaniards were so weak from exposure and hunger that they could not wield their heavy weapons and were driven back to their boats. Not six months had passed since they had sailed so blithely from Santo Domingo to win and rule a kingdom. Now these old veterans of the Moorish wars had to retreat before a handful of naked savages.

A little farther down the coast they came to a fair haven. They had hardly enough strength left to navigate.

"*Paremos aquí en el nombre de Dios!*" (Let us stop here in the name of God), Nicuesa exclaimed.

The superstitious sailors accepted his words as an omen; they disembarked, calling the place "Name of God."

But even the magic of so great a name did not improve their condition. With their last energy they built a little fort. Then once more disease and hunger sat down among them.

Nicuesa had left a few men at the Rio Belen to await the ripening of some corn. The party he sent to bring them to Nombre de Dios found them so reduced by starvation, that they were eating leather. His united forces mustered but one hundred. Six hundred had already perished.

"Nicuesa and those few who remain'd with him were reduc'd to such Distress by Sickness and Famine, that not one of them was able to watch or stand Sentinel at Night, and thus they wasted away."

Meanwhile the rival colony in Nueva Andalucía, was faring little better. The little town of San Sebastien did not at first suffer so much from hunger. Their scourge was the poison, with which the natives tipped their arrows. So deadly was the venom that the slightest scratch meant a horrible death. Herrera gives interesting details as to the method of its manufacture:

“This Poison was made with certain stinking grey Roots found along the Sea Coast, and being Burnt in Earthen Pipkins, they made a Paste with a sort of very black Pismires, as big as Beetles, so poisonous, that if they happened to bite a Man, it put him beside himself. They add to this Composition large Spiders, and hairy Worms, as long as half a Man’s Finger, the Bite of which is as bad as that of the Pismires above mentioned, as also the Wings of a Bat and the Head and Tail of a Sea Fish called Tavorino, very venomous: besides Toads, the Tails of Snakes, and Manganillas, which are like beautiful Apples, but a deadly Poison. All these ingredients being set over a great Fire, in an open Field, remote from their towns, were boil’d in Pots, by a Slave, till they came to the proper Consistence and the Person that look’d to it dy’d of the Steam.”

This receipt was probably the work of someone’s imagination, but it shows vividly how fearfully the Spaniards regarded these poisoned arrows.

If the Bachelor Enciso had hurried with his reinforcements, San Sebastien might have won the distinction of enduring. But for some reason he delayed. Provisions began to run low. No more booty was to be found close by. And in the depths of the jungle the poisoned arrows reaped too deadly a harvest to make forays popular with the men. So efficacious had been Ojeda’s picture of the Virgin, that as yet he had never lost blood in battle. So extraordinary had been his luck—for he never spared him-

self, was always in the front of the fight—that the Indians began also to believe that his life was charmed.

In order to test his vulnerability they set a trap for him. Four of their best marksmen hid in the trees, while their comrades made an attack on the colony. As was always his custom, Ojeda led the sortie. The wily savages retreated and the governor followed them into the ambush. Three of the arrows missed him, but one drove clear through his thigh.

The colony was thrown into despair by this wound. It seemed that the Virgin had withdrawn her protection. In all their stay in the New World they had never seen one of their company recover from an arrow wound. But Ojeda was not the kind to despair, even when the Fates seemed to have decreed his death. One of the symptoms of the poisoning was a feeling of icy numbness about the wound. This suggested a heroic remedy to the governor. He ordered his surgeon to heat two iron plates to the point of redness and clap them on the two orifices of the wound. Only under the threat of immediate hanging could the surgeon be persuaded to apply so stringent a medicine. Ojeda stood the ordeal without flinching—and recovered! Certain modern historians, with the skepticism of their tribe, suggest that perhaps this particular arrow was not poisoned. But whether or not so painful a remedy was necessary there is no doubt that it was applied.

After this accident—Ojeda was a long time recovering from the burns—the colony lost heart. The natives pressed so close to the fort that even the excursions for fresh water became dangerous. Famine came to them as it had to Nicuesa and his following.

At last a ship was seen approaching. The fainting colonists were cheered by the thought that it was the Bachelor Enciso. But once more they were to be disappointed.

The brigantine turned out to be in the hands of a band of pirates, under the command of a dare-devil adventurer named Tolavera. When the brigantine, which Ojeda had despatched from San Sebastien, laden with the first spoils from his new province, reached Santo Domingo, every one who had not accompanied him cursed their luck, cursed the prudence which had kept them from joining him. Tolavera collected a gang of cut-throats from the taverns of the water front, marched them overland to a little cove where a Genoese brigantine was taking on lumber. They murdered the crew and set sail to join Ojeda.

The small stock of provisions which they had brought relieved the immediate famine at San Sebastien but did not permanently strengthen their position. And when the pirates saw the ill condition of affairs, they decided that they would be better off in Santo Domingo, taking a chance at hanging for their piracy, rather than stay in Nueva Andalucía to die of hunger or poisoned arrows.

Ojeda decided to sail with them and see what he could do to hurry up reinforcements. He left what was left of his forces under the command of Francisco Pizarro, with instructions to hold on for fifty days. If in that time no word had been received either from him or Enciso, they could give up the colony and retreat to Santo Domingo in the two brigantines. The two ships had gone to pieces under the attack of the "Teredos."

Ojeda, taking with him all the gold he had collected, embarked with Tolavera. This debonaire pirate was no sooner out of sight of land than he put the unfortunate governor in chains and appropriated the treasure. Ojeda offered to fight the whole ship's company if they would come at him two at a time. But they had not the courage to accept his challenge. And besides they were poor sailors and had had trouble navigating their ship and thought it



the brigantines." And Irving laconically continues: "A brief space of time was sufficient for the purpose." They killed and salted down the four horses which were left to them, and gathering up what meagre provisions they could find, embarked. Pizarro commanded one of the brigantines, Valenzuela the other.

Outside of the port they at once encountered a storm. Valenzuela's boat suddenly fell apart and all hands were lost.

To quote again from Irving's picturesque narrative: "The other brigantine was so near, that the mariners witnessed the struggles of their drowning companions, and heard their cries. Some of the sailors, with the common disposition to the marvellous, declared that they beheld a great whale, or other monster of the deep, strike the vessel with its tail, and either stave in its sides or shatter the rudder, so as to cause the ship-wreck."

And so Pizarro with about thirty men, pitching about on the storm-swept sea in a crazy, worm-eaten vessel, and Nicuesa with his hundred starving, despairing men at Nombre de Dios, were all that was left of the two brave companies which set out to colonize the Mainland.