

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE INDIANS OF PANAMA



WHILE that portion of the Panama territory that lies along the border of Colombia known as the Darien is rather ill-defined as to area and to boundaries, it is known to be rich in timber and is believed to possess gold mines of great

richness. But it is practically impenetrable by the white man. Through this country Balboa led his force on his expedition to the unknown Pacific, and was followed by the bloodthirsty Pedrarias who bred up in the Indians a hatred of the white man that has grown as the ages passed. No expedition can enter this region even today except as an armed force ready to fight for the right of passage. In 1786 the Spaniards sought to subdue the territory, built forts on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and established a line of trading posts connecting them. But the effort failed. The posts were abandoned. Today the white man who tries to enter the Darien does so at the risk of his life.

In 1854 a navy exploring expedition of twenty-seven men, under command of Lieutenant Isaac C. Strain, entered the jungle of the Darien at Caledonia Bay, on the Atlantic side, the site of Patterson's ill-fated colony. They purposed crossing the Isthmus and making a survey for a canal route, as an English adventurer not long before had asserted—falsely as it

proved—that he had discovered a route by which a canal could be built with but three or four miles of cutting. The party carried ten days' provisions and forty rounds of ball cartridge per man. They expected to have to traverse about forty or fifty miles, for which the supply of provisions seemed



*Photo by Underwood & Underwood*

#### TRAPPING AN ABORIGINE

In houses and clothing the Darien Indians are decidedly primitive



still holding their tribal organizations and acknowledging fealty to no other government now in the Isthmus. The estimate is of course largely guesswork, for few of the wild Indians leave the jungle and fewer still of the census enumerators enter it. Most of these Indians live in the mountains of the provinces of Bocas del Toro, Chiriquí and Veragua, or in the Darien. Their tribes are many and the sources of information concerning them but few. The most accessible and complete record of the various tribes is in a pamphlet issued by the Smithsonian Institution, and now obtainable only through public libraries, as the edition for distribution has been exhausted. The author, Miss

Eleanor Yorke Bell, beside studies made at first hand has diligently examined the authorities on the subject and has presented the only considerable treatise on the subject of which I have knowledge.

Of life among the more civilized natives she says:

"The natives of the Isthmus in general, even in the larger towns, live together without any marriage-ceremony, separating at will and dividing the



*Photo by Underwood & Underwood*

ON THE RIO GRANDE

children. As there is little or no personal property, this is accomplished amicably as a rule, though should disputes arise the alcalde of the district is appealed to, who settles the matter. This informal system is always stoutly defended by the women, even more than by the men, for, as among all people low in the scale of civilization, it is generally held that the women receive better treatment when not

bound and therefore free to depart at any time. Recently an effort has been made to bring more of the inhabitants under the marriage laws, with rather amusing results in many instances. The majority of the population is nominally Catholic, but the teachings of the church are only vaguely understood, and its practices consist in the adoration of a few battered images of saints whose particular degree of sanctity is not even guessed at and who, when their owners are displeased with them, receive rather harsh treatment, as these people have usually no real



THE FALLS AT CHORRERA



OLD SPANISH CHURCH, CHORRERA

idea of Christianity beyond a few distorted and superstitious beliefs. After the widespread surveys of the French engineers, a sincere effort was made to re-Christianize the inhabitants of the towns in Darien as well as elsewhere, for, until this time, nothing had been done toward their spiritual welfare since the days of the early Jesuits. In the last thirty years spasmodic efforts have been made to reach the people with little result, and, excepting at Penonome, David, and Santiago, there are few churches where services are held outside of Panama and the towns along the railroad.

"The chief amusements of the Isthmian are gambling, cock-fighting, and dancing, the latter assisted by the music of the tom-tom and by dried beans rattled in a calabash. After feasts or burials, when much bad rum and whisky is consumed, the hilarity keeps up all night and can be heard for miles, increased by the incessant howls of the cur dogs lying under every shack. Seldom does an opportunity come to the stranger to witness the really characteristic dances, as the natives do not care to perform before them, though a little money will sometimes work wonders. Occasionally, their dancing is really remarkably interesting, when a large amount of pantomime enters into it and they develop the story of some primitive action, as, for instance, the drawing of the

water, cutting the wood, making the fire, cooking the food, etc., ending in a burst of song symbolizing the joys of the new prepared feast. In an extremely crude form it reminds one of the old opera ballets and seems to be a composite of the original African and the ancient Spanish, which is very probably the case.

"The Orientals of the Isthmus deserve a word in passing. They are chiefly Chinese

coolies and form a large part of the small merchant class. Others, in the hill districts, cultivate large truck gardens, bringing their produce swinging over the shoulders on poles to the city markets. Their houses and grounds are very attractive, built of reed or bamboo in the eastern fashion and marked everywhere by extreme neatness, contrasting so strikingly with the homes and surroundings of their negro neighbors. Many cultivate fields of cane or rice as well, and amidst the silvery greens, stretching for some distance, the quaint blue figures of the workmen in their huge hats make a charming picture. Through the rubber sections Chinese



THE CHURCH AT ANTON

'middlemen' are of late frequently found buying that valuable commodity for their fellow countrymen in Panama City, who are now doing quite a large business in rubber. These people live much as in their native land, seldom learning more than a few words of Spanish (except those living in the towns), and they form a very substantial and good element of the population".

To enumerate even by names the aboriginal tribes would be tedious and unavailing. Among the more notable are the Doracho-Changuina, of Chiriqui, light of color, believing that the Great Spirit lived in the volcano of Chiriqui, and occasionally showing their displeasure with him by shooting arrows at the mountain. The Guaymies, of whom perhaps 6000 are left, are the tribe that buried with their dead the curious golden images that were once plentiful in the bazaars of Panama, but are now hard to find. They have a pleasant

inhabiting the Darien. All were, and some are, believed still to be cannibals. Eleven lesser tribes are grouped under this general name. As a rule



NATIVE VILLAGE AT CAPERA



THE PEARL ISLAND VILLAGE OF SABOGA

practice of putting a calabash of water and some plantains by a man they think dying and leaving him to his fate, usually in some lonesome part of the jungle. The Cunas or Caribs are the tribes

they are small and muscular. Most of them have abandoned their ancient gaudy dress, and so far as they are clothed at all wear ordinary cotton clothing. Painting the face and body is still practiced. The dead often are swung in hammocks from trees and supplied with fresh provisions until the cords rot and the body falls to the ground. Then the spirit's journey to the promised land is held to be ended and provisions are no longer needed. Sorcery and soothsaying are much in vogue, and the sorcerers who correspond to the medicine men of our North American Indians will sometimes shut themselves up in a small hut shrieking, beating tom-toms and imitating the cries of wild animals. When they emerge in a sort of self-hypnotized state they are held to be peculiarly fit for prophesying.

All the Indians drink heavily, and the white man's rum is to some extent displacing the native drink of chicha. This is manufactured by the women, usually the old ones, who sit in a circle chewing yam roots or cassava and expectorating

the saliva into a large bowl in the center. This ferments and is made the basis of a highly intoxicating drink. Curiously enough the same drink is similarly made in far-away Samoa. The dutiful wives after thus manufacturing the material upon which their spouses get drunk complete their service by swinging their hammocks, sprinkling them with cold water and fanning them as they lie in a stupor. Smoking is another social custom, but the cigars are mere hollow rolls of tobacco and the lighted end is held in the mouth. Among some of the tribes in Comagre the bodies of the caciques, or chief men, were preserved after death by surrounding them with a ring of fire built at a sufficient distance to gradually dry the body until skin and bone alone remained.

The Indians with whom the visitor to Panama most frequently comes into contact are those of the San Blas or Manzanillo country. These Indians hover curiously about the bounds of civilization, and approach without actually crossing them. They are fishermen and sailors, and many of their young men ship on the vessels touching at Colon, and, after visiting the chief seaports of the United States, and even of France and England, are swallowed up again in their tribe without affecting its customs to any appreciable degree. If in their wanderings they gain new ideas or new desires they are not apparent. The man who silently offers you fish, fruits or vegetables from his cayuca on the beach at Colon may have trod the docks at Havre

or Liverpool, the levee at New Orleans or wandered along South Street in New York. Not a word of that can you coax from him. Even in proffering his wares he does so with the fewest possible words, and an air of lofty indifference. Uncas of the Leather-Stocking Tales was no more silent and self-possessed a red-skin than he.



Photo by H. Plater

Courtesy National Geographic Magazine

A CHOCO INDIAN IN FULL COSTUME  
His cuffs are silver; his head adorned with flowers

In physiognomy the San Blas Indians are heavy of feature and stocky of frame. Their color is dark olive, with no trace of the negro apparent, for it has been their unceasing study for centuries to retain their racial purity. Their features are regular and pleasing and, among the children particularly, a high order of beauty is often found. To get a glimpse of their women is almost impossible, and a photograph of one is practically unknown. If overtaken on the water, to which they often resort in their cayucas, the women will wrap their clothing about their faces, rather heedless of what other portions of their bodies may be exposed, and make all speed for the shore. These women paint their faces in glaring colors, wear nose rings, and always blacken their teeth on being

married. Among them more pains is taken with clothing than among most of the savage Indians, many of their garments being made of a sort of appliqué work in gaudy colors, with figures, often in representation of the human form, cut out and inset in the garment.

So determined are the men of this tribe to maintain its blood untarnished by any admixture whatso-

ever, that they long made it an invariable rule to expel every white man from their territory at nightfall. Of late years there has been a very slight relaxation of this severity. Dr. Henri Pittier of the United States Department of Agriculture, one of the best-equipped scientific explorers in the tropics, several of whose photographs elucidate this volume, has lived much among the San Blas and the Cuna-Cuna Indians and won their friendship.

It was the ancestors of these Indians who made welcome Patterson and his luckless Scotchmen, and in the 200 years that have elapsed they have clung to the tradition of friendship for the Briton and hatred for the Spaniard. Dr. Pittier reports having found that Queen Victoria occupied in their villages the position of a patron saint, and that they refused to believe his assertion that she was dead. His account of the attitude of these Indians toward outsiders, recently printed in the *National Geographic Magazine*, is an authoritative statement on the subject:

"The often circulated reports of the difficulty of penetrating into the territory of the Cuna-Cuna are true only in part", he says. "The backwoods aborigines, in the valleys of the Bayano and Chucunaque rivers, have nourished to this day their hatred for all strangers, especially those of Spanish blood. That feeling is not a reasoned one: it is the instinctive distrust of the savage for the un-



SOME SAN BLAS GIRLS

The dresses are covered with elaborate designs in appliqué work

known or inexplicable, intensified in this particular case by the tradition of a long series of wrongs at the hands of the hated Spaniards.

"So they feel that isolation is their best policy,

and it would not be safe for anybody to penetrate into their forests without a strong escort and continual watchfulness. Many instances of murders, some confirmed and others only suspected, are on record, and even the natives of the San Blas coast are not a little afraid of their brothers of the mountains.

"Of late, however, conditions seem to have bettered, owing to a more frequent intercourse with the surrounding settlements. A negro of La Palma, at the mouth of the Tuyra River, told me of his crossing, some time ago, from the latter place to Chepo, through the Chucunaque and Bayano territories, gathering rubber as he went along with his party.

At the headwaters of the Canaza River he and his companions were held up by the 'bravos', who contented themselves with taking away the rubber and part of the equipment



Photo by H. Tuttle

Courtesy of National Geographic Magazine

CHIEF DON CARLOS OF THE CHOCOES AND HIS SON

and then let their prisoners go with the warning not to come again.

"The narrative of that expedition was supplemented by the reflection of an old man among the hearers that twenty years ago none of the party would have come out alive.

"Among the San Blas Indians, who are at a far higher level of civilization, the exclusion of aliens is the result of well-founded political reasons. Their respected traditions are a long record of proud independence; they have maintained the purity of their race and enjoyed freely for hundreds of years every inch of their territory. They feel that the day the negro or the white man acquires a foothold in their midst these privileges will be-

come a thing of the past. This is why, without undue hostility to strangers, they discourage their incursions.



Courtesy of National Geographic Magazine

THE VILLAGE OF PLAYON GRAND, EIGHTY-FIVE MILES EAST OF THE CANAL

The houses are about 150 x 50 feet and each shelters 16 to 20 families. The members of each family herd together in a single room





Photo by H. Piltner Courtesy Nat'l Geographic Magazine

SAN BLAS WOMAN IN DAILY GARB

"Their means of persuasion are adjusted to the importance of the intruder. They do not hesitate to shoot at any negro of the nearby settlements poaching on their cocoanuts or other products; the trader or any occasional visitor is very seldom allowed to stay ashore at night; the adventurers who try to go prospecting into Indian territory are invariably caught and shipped back to the next Panamanian port".

Among the men of the San Blas tribe the land held by their people is regarded as a sacred trust, bequeathed to them by their ancestors and



Photo by H. Piltner Courtesy Nat'l Geographic Magazine

A GIRL OF THE CHOCO TRIBE

to be handed down by them to the remotest posterity. During the early days of the Canal project it was desired to dig sand from a beach in the San Blas country. A small United States man-of-war was sent thither to broach the subject to the Indians, and the Captain held parley with the chief. After hearing the plea and all the arguments and promises with which it was strengthened the old Indian courteously refused the privilege:

"He who made this land", said he, "made it for Cuna-Cuna who live no longer, for those who are here today and also for the ones to come. So it is not ours only and we could not sell it".

To this decision the tribe adhered, and the wishes of the aborigines have been respected. It has been the policy of the United States to avoid any



Photo by H. Piltner Courtesy National Geographic Magazine

DAUGHTER OF CHIEF DON CARLOS

This young girl is merry, plump and fond of finger rings

possibility of giving offense to the native population of the Isthmus, and even a request from the chief that the war vessel that brought the negotiator on his fruitless errand should leave was acceded to. It is quite unlikely, however, that the Indians will be able to maintain their isolation much longer. Already there are signs of its breaking down. While I was in Panama they sent a request that a missionary, a woman it is true, who had been much among them, should come and live with them permanently. They also expressed a desire that she should bring her melodeon, thus giving new illustration to the poetic adage, "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast". Perhaps the phonograph may in time prove the open sesame to many savage bosoms. Among this people it is the women who cling most



NATIVE BRIDGE OVER THE CALDERA RIVER

tenaciously to the primitive customs, as might be expected, since they have been so assiduously guarded against the wiles of the world. But Catholic missionaries have made some headway in the country, and at Narganá schools for girls have been opened under auspices of the church. It is probably due to the feminine influence that the San Blas men return so unfailingly to primitive customs after the voyages that have made them familiar with civilization. If the women yield to the desire for novelty the splendid isolation of the San Blas will not long endure. Perhaps that would be unfortunate, for all other primitive peoples who have surrendered to the wiles of the white men have suffered and disappeared.

In their present state the San Blas are relatively rich. All the land belongs to all the people—that is why the old chief declined to sell the sandy beach. There is a sort of private property in improvements. A banana plantation, a cocoanut

grove or an orange tree planted and cared for, becomes a positive possession handed down to descendants of the owner through the female line. Perhaps one reason for keeping the women so shut off from the world is that they are the real owners of all individual property. Ownership does not, however, attach to trees or plants growing wild; they are as much communal as the land. So the vegetable ivory, balata and cocoanuts which form the marketable products are gathered by whomsoever may take the trouble. Land that has been tilled belongs to the one who improved it. If he let it lapse into wilderness it reverts to the community. The San Blas Indians have the essence of the single tax theory without the tax.

They have a hazily defined religious system, and have curiously reversed the position held by their priests or sorcerers. These influential persons are not representatives of the spirit of good, but of the bad spirit. Very logically the San Blas savages hold that any one may represent the good spirit by being himself good, and that the unsupported prayers of such a one are sure to be heard. But to reach the devil, to induce that malicious practitioner of evil to rest from his persecutions and to abandon the pursuit of the unfortunate, it is desirable to have as intermediary some one who possesses his confidence and high regard. Hence the strong position of the sorcerers in the villages. The people defer to them on the principle that it is well to make friends with "the Mammon of Unrighteousness".

Polygamy is permitted among these Indians, but little practiced. Even the chiefs whose high estate gives them the right to more than one wife seldom avail themselves of the privilege. The women, as in most primitive tribes, are the hewers of wood and drawers of water. Dress is rather a more serious matter with them than among some of the other Indians, the Chocoes for example. They wear as a rule blouses and two skirts, where other denizens of the Darien dispense with clothing above the waist altogether. Their hair is usually kept short. The nose ring is looked upon as indispensable, and other ornaments of both gold and silver are worn by both sexes. Americans who have had much to do with the Indians of the Darien always comment on the extreme reticence shown by them in speaking of their golden ornaments, or the spot whence they

were obtained. It is as though vague traditions had kept alive the story of the pestilence of fire and sword which ravaged their land when the Spaniards swept over it in search of the yellow metal. Gold is in the Darien in plenty. Everybody knows that, and the one or two mines near the rivers now being worked afford sufficient proof that the region is auriferous. But no Indian will tell of the existence of these mines, nor will any guide a white man to the spot where it is rumored gold is to be found. Seemingly ineradicably fixed in the inner consciousness of the Indian is the conviction that the white man's lust for the yellow metal is the greatest menace that confronts the well-being of himself and his people.

The San Blas are decidedly a town-dwelling tribe. They seem to hate solitude and even today, in their comparatively reduced state, build villages of a size that make understandable Balboa's records of the size and state of the chief with whom he first fought, and then made friends. At Nargana are two large islands, fairly covered with spacious houses about 150 feet long by 50 broad. The ridge pole of the palm-thatched roof is 30 to 40 feet from the ground. A long corridor runs through the house longitudinally, and on either side the space is divided by upright posts into square compartments, each of which is supposed to house an entire family. The side walls are made of wattled reeds caked with clay. One of these houses holds from sixteen to twenty families, and the edifices are packed so closely together as to leave scarce room between for a razor-back hog to browse. The people within must be packed about as closely and the precise parental relationship sustained to each other by the various members of the family would be an interesting study.

The Choco Indians are one of the smaller and least known tribes of the Darien. Prof. Pittier—who may without disrespect be described as the most seasoned "tropical tramp" of all Central America—described them so vividly that extracts from his article in the *National Geographic Magazine* will be of interest:

"Never, in our twenty-five years of tropical experience, have we met with such a sun-loving, bright and trusting people, living nearest to nature and ignoring the most elementary wiles of so-called civilization. They are several hundred in number



*Photo by H. Pittier*

*Courtesy National Geographic Magazine*

#### GUAYMI INDIAN MAN

Note the tattooed marking of face and the negroid lips

and their dwellings are scattered along the meandering Sambu and its main reaches, always at short distance, but never near enough to each other to form real villages. Like their houses, their small plantations are close to the river, but mostly far enough to escape the eye of the casual passer-by.

"Dugouts drawn up on the beach and a narrow trail breaking the reed wall at the edge of the bank are the only visible signs of human presence, except at the morning hours and near sunset, when a crowd of women and children will be seen playing in the water, and the men, armed with their bows and long harpooned arrows, scrutinizing the deeper places for fish or looking for iguanas and crabs hidden in the holes of the banks.

"Physically the Chocoos are a fine and healthy race. They are tall, as compared with the Cuna-Cuna, well proportioned, and with a graceful bearing. The men have wiry limbs and faces that are at once kind and energetic, while as a rule the girls are plump, fat, and full of mischief. The grown women preserve their good looks and attractiveness much

longer than is generally the case in primitive peoples, in which their sex bears the heaviest share of every day's work.

"Both males and females have unusually fine white teeth, which they sometimes dye black by chewing the shoots of one of the numerous wild peppers growing in the forests. The skin is of a rich olive-brown color and, as usual, a little lighter in women and children. Though all go almost naked, they look fairer than the San Blas Cunas, and some of the women would compare advantageously in this respect with certain Mediterranean types of the white race.

"The hair is left by all to grow to its natural length, except in a few cases, in which the men have it cropped at the neck. It is coarse and not jet black, as reported of most Indians, but with a reddish hue, which is better noticed when the sun is playing through the thick mass.

"In young children it decidedly turns at times to a blond color, the only difference from the Caucasian hair being the pronounced coarseness of the former. As there are no white people living within a radius of fifty miles, but only negroes, mulattoes and zambos, this peculiarity cannot be explained by miscegenation, and may therefore be considered as a racial feature of the Choco tribe.

"In men the every-day dress consists of a scanty clout, made of a strip of red calico about one foot broad and five feet long. This clout is passed in front and back of the body over a string tied around the hips, the forward extremity being left longer and flowing like an apron. On feast days the string is replaced by a broad band of white beads. Around the neck and chest they wear thick cords of the same beads and on their wrists broad silver cuffs. Hats are not used, the hair is usually tied with a red ribbon and often adorned with the bright flowers of the forest.

"The female outfit is not less simple, consisting of a piece of calico less than three feet wide and about nine feet long, wrapped around the lower part of the body and reaching a little below the knees. This is all, except that the neck is more or less loaded with beads or silver coins. But for this the women display less coquetry than the men, which may be because they feel sufficiently adorned with their mere natural charms. Fondness for cheap rings is, however, common to both sexes, and little children often wear earrings or pendants.

"The scantiness of the clothing is remedied very effectually by face and body painting, in which black and red colors are used, the first exclusively for daily wear. At times men and women are painted black from the waist down; at other times it is the whole body or only the hands and feet, etc., all according to the day's fashion, as was explained by one of our guides. For feast days the paintings are an elaborate and artistic affair, consisting of elegantly drawn lines and patterns—red and black or simply black—which clothe the body as effectually as any costly dress.

"From the above one might conclude that cleanliness and modesty are not the rule among the Chocos. As a matter of fact, the first thing they do in

the morning is to jump into the near-by river, and these ablutions are repeated several times in the course of the day.

"The kitchen utensils are always thoroughly washed before using, and, contrary to our former experience, their simple dishes, prepared mostly in our presence, looked almost always inviting. During our stay among these good people nothing was noticed that would hurt the most delicate sense of decency.

"The Chocoese seem to be exclusively monogamist, and both parents surround their babies with tender care, being raindful, however, to prepare them early



Photoby H. Plittce. Courtesy National Geographic Magazine

INDIAN GIRL OF THE DARIEN

for the hard and struggling life ahead of them. Small bows and arrows, dexterously handled by tiny hands, are the favorite toys of the boys, while the girls spend more time in the water playing with miniature dugouts, washing, and swimming. The only dolls seen among them were imported ones, and they seemed to be as much in favor among grown women as among children. These latter go naked until they are about five years old, when the girls receive a large handkerchief to be used as a 'paruma', or skirt, and the boys a strip of some old maternal dress for an 'autia' or clout.

"The Chocoes are very industrious. During the dry spells their life, of course, is an out-of-door one, planting and watching their crops, hunting, fishing and canoeing. But when the heavy rains come they stay at home, weaving baskets of all kinds—a work in which the women are proficient—making ropes and hammocks, carving dishes, mortars, stools, and other objects out of tree trunks".

In the country which will be traversed by the Panama-David Railroad are found the Guaymies, the only primitive people living in large numbers outside the Darien. There are about 5000 of them, living for the most part in the valley of Mirando which lies high up in the Cordilleras, and in a region cut off from the plains. Here they have successfully defended their independence against the assaults of both whites and blacks. To remain in their country without consent of the Great Chief is practically impossible, for they are savage fighters and in earlier days it was rare to see a man whose body was not covered with scars. It is apparent that in some ways progress has destroyed their industries and made the people less rather than more civilized, for they now buy cloth, arms, tools, and utensils which they were once able to make. At one time they were much under the

influence of the Catholic missionaries, but of late mission work has languished in wild Panama and perhaps the chief relic of that earlier religious influence is the fact that the women go clothed in a single garment. This simple raiment, not needed for warmth, seems to be prized, for if caught in a rainstorm the women will quickly strip off their clothing, wrap it in a large banana or palm leaf that it may not get wet, and continue their work, or their play, in nature's garb.

It is said, too, that when strangers are not near clothes are never thought of. The men follow a like custom, and invariably when pursuing a quarry strip off their trousers, tying their shirts about their loins. Trousers seem to impede their movements, and if a lone traveler in Chiriqui comes on a row of blue cotton trousers tied to the bushes he may be sure that a band of Guaymies is somewhere in the neighborhood pursuing an ant bear or a deer.

As a rule these Indians—men or women—are not pleasing to the eye. The lips are thick, the nose flat and broad, the hair coarse and always jet black. Yet the children are not infrequently really beautiful. Any traveler in Panama who forsakes the beaten track up and down the Canal Zone will be impressed by the wide extent to which beauty is found among the



Photo by H. Piltner. Courtesy National Geographic Magazine  
CHOCO INDIAN OF SAMBU VALLEY  
Silver beads about his neck and leg. Face painted in glaring colors.

children, whatever their race or combination of races. But the charm soon fades. It is seldom that one sees a mature woman who is attractive to Caucasian eyes. Among the women of the Guaymies face painting is practiced only on great occasions, black, red and white being the usual colors. The men go painted at all times, the invariable pattern being a sort of inverted V, with the apex between the eyes, and the two arms extending to points, half an inch or so from the corners of the mouth. The lips are colored to make them seem

thicker than normal, and heavy shadows are painted in under the eyes.

Among some tribes the wealth of a man is reckoned by the number of his cattle; among the Guaymies by the number of his wives. For this reason, perhaps, the attainment of marriageable age is an occasion of much festivity for children of both sexes. The boy is exposed to tests of his manly and war-like qualities, and, in company with his fellows of equal age, is taken by the wisemen of the tribe into the solitude of the forest that by performing tasks assigned to him he may prove himself a man. There, too, they learn from the elders, who go masked and crowned with wreaths, the traditions of their tribes told in rude chants like the Norse sagas. Until this ceremony has been fulfilled the youth has no name whatsoever. After it he is named and celebrates his first birthday.

The ceremonies in which the girls play the chief part are less elaborate, but one would think rather painful, since they include the breaking of a front tooth in sign that they are ready for marriage. They marry young and mothers at twelve years are not uncommon.

Once a year the Guaymies have a great tribal feast—"balceria" the Spaniards call it. Word is sent to all outlying huts and villages by a mystic symbol of knotted rags, which is also tied to the branches of the trees along the more frequented trails. On the appointed day several hundred will gather on the banks of some river in which a general bath is taken, with much frolicking and horseplay. Then the women employ several hours in painting

the men with red and blue colors, following the figures still to be seen on the old pottery, after which the men garb themselves uncouthly in bark or in pelts like children "dressing up" for a frolic. At night is a curious ceremonial dance and game called *balsa*, in which the Indians strike each other with heavy sticks, and are knocked down amid the pile of broken boughs. The music—if it could be so called—the incantations of the wisemen, the frenzy of the dancers, all combine to produce a sort of self-hypnotism, during which the Indians feel no pain from injuries which a day later often prove to be very serious.

There are a multitude of distinct Indian tribes on the Isthmus, each with its own tribal government, its distinctive customs and its allotted territory, though boundaries are, of course, exceedingly vague and the territories overlap. The Smithsonian pamphlet enumerates 21 such tribes in the Darien region alone. But there seems to be among them no such condition of continual tribal warfare as existed between our North American Indians as long as they survived



PANAMANIAN FATHER AND CHILD

in any considerable numbers the aggressions of the white settlers. It is true that the historian of Balboa's expedition records that the great leader was besought by chieftains to assist them in their affairs with rival tribes, and made more than one alliance by giving such assistance. But the later atrocities perpetrated by the Spaniards seem to have had the effect of uniting the Indians in a tacit peaceful bond against the whites. Picturesque and graphic as are the writings of men like Esquemelin, the Fray d'Acosta and Wafer, who saw the Indians



## CHAPTER XVII

### SOCIAL LIFE ON THE CANAL ZONE



FROM ocean to ocean the territory which is called the Canal Zone is about forty-three miles long, ten miles wide and contains about 436 square miles, about ninety-five of which are under the waters of the Canal, and Miraflores and Gatun Lakes. It is bounded on the north by the Caribbean Sea, on the south by the Pacific Ocean, and on the east and west by the Republic of Panama. It traverses the narrowest part of Panama, the waist so to speak, and has been taken out of that body politic by the diplomatic surgeons as neatly as though it had been an obnoxious vermiform appendix. Its territory does not terminate at low water-mark, but extends three marine miles out to

sea, and, as I write, a question of jurisdiction has arisen between the two Republics—hardly twin Republics—of Panama and the United States concerning jurisdiction over three malefactors captured by the Zone police in a motor boat out at sea. It may be noted in passing that Panama is properly tenacious of its rights and dignity, and that cases of conflicting jurisdiction are continually arising when any offender has only to foot it a mile or two to be out of the territory in which his offense was committed. The police officials of the Zone affect to think that the Panama authorities are inclined to deal lightly with native offenders who commit robbery or murder on the Zone and then stroll across the line to be arrested in their native State.

There was a quarrel on while I was on the Zone over the custody of a Panamanian who killed his wife, with attendant circumstances of peculiar



A SQUAD OF CANAL ZONE POLICE OFFICERS



brutality, and then balked the vengeance of the Zone criminal authorities by getting himself arrested in Panama. "We want to show these fellows", remarked a high police official of the Zone, "that if they do murder in our territory we are going to do the hanging". That seemed a laudable purpose—that is if hanging is ever laudable—but the Panama officials are quite as determined to keep the wheels of their criminal law moving. The proprietors of machines like to see them run—which is one of the reasons why too many battleships are not good for a nation.

To return, however, to the statistics of the Zone. Its population is shifting, of course, and varies somewhat in its size according to the extent to which labor is in demand. The completion of a part of the work occasionally reduces the force. In January, 1912, the total population of the Zone, according to the official census, was 62,810; at the same time, by the same authority, there were employed by the Canal Commission and the Panama Railroad 36,600 men. These figures emphasize the fact that the working force on the Zone is made up mainly of unmarried men, for a working population of 36,600 would, under the conditions existing in the ordinary American community, give a popula-



VINE-CLAD FAMILY QUARTERS

tion of well over 100,000. Though statistics are not on hand, and would probably be impossible to compile among the foreign laborers, it is probable that not more than one man in four on the Zone is married.



QUARTERS OF A BACHELOR TEACHER

From this situation it results that the average maiden who visits the Zone for a brief holiday goes rushing home to get her trousseau ready before some young engineer's next annual vacation shall give him time to go like a young Lochinvar in search of his bride. Indeed, the life of the Zone for many reasons has been singularly conducive to matrimony, and as a game preserve for the exciting

sport of husband-hunting, it has been unexcelled.

Perhaps it may be as well to turn aside from the orderly and informative discussion of the statistics of the Zone to expand a little further here upon the remarkable matrimonial phenomena it presented in its halcyon days—for it must be remembered that even as I am writing, that society, which I found so hospitable and so admirable, has begun to disintegrate. Marriage, it must be admitted, is a somewhat cosmopolitan passion. It attacks spiggotty and gringo alike. In an earlier chapter I have described how the low cost of living enabled Miguel of the Chagres country to set up a home of his own. Let us consider how the benevolent arrangements made by the Isthmian Canal Commission impelled a typical American boy to the same step.



A PRIMITIVE SUGAR MILL

Probably it was more a desire for experience and adventure than any idea of increased financial returns that led young Jack Maxon to seek a job in engineering on the Canal. Graduated from the engineering department of a State university, with two years or so of active experience in the field, Jack was a fair type of young American—clean, wholesome, healthy, technically trained, ambitious for his future but quite solicitous about the pleasures of the present, as becomes a youth of twenty-three.

The job he obtained seemed at the outset quite ideal. In the States he could earn about \$225 a month. The day he took his number on the Canal Zone he began to draw \$250 a month. And that \$250 was quite as good as \$300 at home. To begin with he had no room-rent to pay, but was assigned comfortable if not elegant quarters, which he shared

in the States for seventy-five cents, but I prefer to quote that statement rather than to make it on my own authority. By taking two meals a day and making the third of fruit, or a sandwich at a Y. M. C. A. clubhouse, he would cut his restaurant charges to \$18 a month; the whole three meals would come to \$27.80, so however voracious his appetite Bachelor Jack's charges for food are light and for shelter nothing. Clothing troubles him little; his working clothes of khaki, and several suits of white cotton duck will cost him less than one woolen suit such as he must have "up home". All seasons are alike on the Zone, and there is no need of various types of hats, overcoats and underwear.

All in all Bachelor Jack thinks he has come in for a good thing. Moreover, he gets a vacation of forty-two days on pay, a sick leave of thirty days

on pay—and the sanitarium on the Island of Taboga being a very pleasant resort few fail to have slight ailments requiring precisely thirty days' rest—and nine holidays also with pay. All in all Jack is neither overworked nor underpaid. His letters to his chums at home tell no stories of adversity but rather indi-



MAIN STREET AT GORGONA

with one other man, carefully screened and protected from all insects by netting, lighted by electricity, with a shower-bath handy and all janitor or chambermaid service free. Instead of a boarding-house table or a cheap city restaurant, he took his meals at a Commission hotel at a charge of thirty cents a meal. People say that the fare could not be dupli-

cate that he is enjoying exceedingly good times. With reasonable care he will have ample means for really lavish expenditures on his vacation. Indeed it would require rather unreasonable effort to spend an engineer's salary on the zone unless it went in riotous living in Panama City or Colon.

But a vision of better things opens before him—is always spread out before his enraptured vision. His friend who came down a year or two before him and who is earning only a little bit more money sets a standard of living which arouses new ambitions in Jack's mind. His friend is married. Instead of one room shared with one or more tired engineers subject

to grouches, he has a four-room apartment with bath—really a five-room flat, for the broad sheltered balconies shaded by vines form the real living room. Instead of eating at the crowded, noisy hotels, he has his quiet dining-room, and menus dictated by individual taste instead of by the mechanical methods of a Chief of Subsistence. Practically everything that can be done for the household by official hands is done free by the Commission—free rent, free light, free janitor service, free distilled water, free fuel for cooking—the climate saves that bugbear of married life at home, the annual coal bill. Moreover the flat or house comes to its tenant freely furnished. The smallest equipment supplied consists of a range, two kitchen chairs, a double bed, a mosquito bar, two pillows, a chiffonier, a double dresser, a double mattress, a dining table, six dining chairs, a sideboard, a bed-room mat, two center tables and three wicker porch chairs. This equipment is for the moderately paid employees who live in four-family quarters. The outfit is made more comprehensive as salaries increase.

Housekeepers must buy their own tableware, bedclothes, light furniture and bric-à-brac. But here again the paternal Commission comes to the

rescue, for these purchases, and all others needful for utility, comfort or beauty, are made at the Commissary stores, where goods are sold practically at cost. Moreover, there is no protective tariff collected on imported goods and it would take another article to relate the rhapsodies of the Zone women over the prices at which they can buy Boulton tableware,



IN THE LOBBY OF A Y.M.C.A. CLUB

Irish linen, Swiss and Scandinavian delicatessen, and French products of all sorts. And finally, to round out the privileges of married life on the Zone, medical service is free and little Tommy's slightest ill may be prescribed for without fear of the doctor's bill—though, indeed, the children you see romping in the pleasant places do not look as though they ever needed a prescription or a pill.

So Jack looks from his bachelor quarters over toward Married Row and it looks good to him. His amusements are but limited and his life does verge on the monotonous. His only place of recreation is the Y. M. C. A., which, while filling the want admirably week days, is a bit solemn Sundays

his only day off. The only theaters on the Zone are at Colon and Panama, and those are in the main only exhibitions of "movies." Moreover, the Panama Railroad has thoughtfully arranged its schedule



STREET SCENE IN CULEBRA

so that no Zone employee can go to the theater save on Saturday or Sunday night without staying out all night. As Jack smokes in his half a room (perhaps only a quarter) or wrangles with his roommate for place at the table lighted by one electric light his mind naturally turns toward the comforts enjoyed by his married friends, and he sees himself greeted on his return from toil in the jungle or the "Cut" by a cool, trim divinity in white, instead of by a lumbering giant in muddy khaki, as weary, hungry and grouchy as he.

Were he at home prudence would compel the consideration of cost. Here the paternal Commission puts a premium on matrimony. Very often, so often, indeed, that it is almost the rule, Jack returns from his first vacation home with a wife, or else coming alone is followed by the girl, and all goes merry as a marriage bell. But the time comes when Jack, a bachelor no longer, but a husband and perhaps a father, must leave the Isthmus. That time must come for all of them when the work is done. Enough, however, have already gone home to tell sad tales of the difficulty of readjusting themselves to normal conditions. Down comes the salary at least twenty-five per cent, up go living expenses at least thirty per cent. Nothing at home is free—coal, light, rent, and medical service least of all. Where Jack used to be lordly, he must be parsimonious; where he once bought untaxed in the markets of the

world, he must buy in the most expensive of all market places, the United States. He absolutely cannot maintain at home the standard of life he adopted here, and the change with the endless little economies and pettinesses it entails gets on the nerves of both husband and wife. To start life thriftily and learn to be free-handed as prosperity increases is the natural line of development and does not mar happiness. But to be forced to pinch after a long period of lavishness is wearing. Back to the Zone come so many stories of romances begun by the Canal and ended in the divorce courts that one wonders if the paternalism of the Commission has been good for those who enjoyed it.

But it has been good for the supreme purpose of digging the Canal and that was the one end sought.

Let me return from this excursion into the domain of matrimonial philosophy and take up once again the account of the population of the Zone and its characteristics. It must be remembered that a very large part of the unskilled labor on the Canal is done by negroes from Jamaica and Barbadoes. But not all of it. The cleavage was not so distinct that the skilled labor could be classed as white, and the unskilled black, for among the latter were many Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians and the peoples of Southwestern Europe. The brilliant idea occurred to someone in the early days of the American campaign that as the West Indians, Panamanians and



YOUNG AMERICA AT PLAY



in pieces the ancient system of free competition and the contract system for public work. While I was on the Zone a very distinguished financier of New York, a banker of the modern type with fingers in a host of industrial enterprises, delivered himself of this interesting forecast of the results of the education in collectivism which the United States government is giving to some thousands of men upon the Isthmus:

"The big thing is the spirit of paternalism, of modern socialism, of governmental parenthood, if you will, which is being engendered and nursed to full strength by Federal control of the Canal. This is no idle dream, and within five years, yes, within three years, it will begin to be felt in the United States.

"Quietly large corporations are studying this

feature of the unloading of the skilled, highly intelligent Canal workers on the industries of the United States. There are thousands of trained employees of the Panama Canal Commission—which is to say of the United States government. When these well paid, lightly worked, well and cheaply fed men return to their native land they will form a powerful addition to the Socialist party.

"These workmen will take up tasks for private corporations. They will find lower salaries, longer hours and a greatly increased cost of living. The conveniences and amusements which they have found either free or very cheap in the Canal Zone will be beyond the reach of many of them, and they are going to chafe under the changed conditions.

"They will compare private or corporate ownership with government control as manifested in the



COMMISSION ROAD NEAR EMPIRE

Canal works, and the comparison will inevitably result to the detriment of the methods followed in the United States. This will be in no sense an array of capital against labor. It will be a psychological and political movement for the betterment of the conditions of the trained worker irrespective of party or class or union affiliations. That is one reason that it will be so powerful.

"These men will be engaged in industries subject to strikes and other industrial and sociological disturbances. They will give their fellow workmen, who have always been employed in the United States, a new and logical idea of the value of government ownership and its advantages to the workingman as shown on the Canal Zone.

"Around them will gather the socialists, the union men who think for themselves and all other upper class workingmen. Do not mistake my meaning. This will be no Coxe's army movement, no gathering of the riffraff of failures seeking to rob the toiler of his gains or the investor of his dollars, but earnest men, whose weapon will not be the torch and the dynamite bomb, but the ballot. By their votes and the enormous following they can rally to their standard they will force the government to take over the public utilities, if not all the large corporations, of the country. They will force the adoption of government standards of work, wages and cost of living as exemplified in the work on the Canal.

In other words the influx of workers will lead directly to paternalism".

Let us, however, consider this bogey of socialism fairly. Before proceeding to a more detailed account of the manner of life upon the Canal Zone let me outline hastily the conditions which regarded super-



THE FIRE FORCE OF CRISTOBAL

ficially seem socialistic, and with a line or two show why they are not so at all.

Our Uncle Sam owns and manages a line of steamships plying between New York and Panama, carrying both passengers and freight and competing successfully with several lines of foreign-built ships. The largest vessels are of ten thousand tons and would rank well with the lesser transatlantic liners. On them Congressmen and Panama Zone officials are carried free, while employees of the Isthmian Canal Commission get an exceedingly low rate for themselves and their families. The government also owns and conducts the Panama Railroad, which crosses in less than three hours from the Atlantic to the Pacific, while the privately owned railroads