CHAPTER III

NOMBRE DE DIOS, PORTO BELLO AND SAN LORENZO

ITHIN twenty miles, at the very most, east and west of Colon lie the chief existing memorials of the bygone days of Spanish discovery and colonization, and English piratical raids and destruction, on the Isthmus. All that is picturesque and enthralling — that is to say all that is stirring, bloody and lawless—in the history of the Caribbean shore of the Isthmus lies thus adjacent to the Atlantic entrance of the Canal. To the east are Nombre de Dios and Porto Bello—the oldest European settlements on the North American continent, the one being founded about 1510, almost a century and a half before the landing at Plymouth, and the other in 1607, the very year of the planting of Jamestown, Virginia. To the west is the castle of San Lorenzo at the mouth of the Chagres, the gateway to the Pacific trade, built in the latter years of the sixteenth century and repeatedly destroyed. About these Spanish outposts, once thriving market towns and massive fortresses, but now vine-covered ruins where "the lion and the lizard keep their court" clusters a wealth of historical lore.

Let us for the time turn from the Panama of to-day, and from speculation as to its future, and look back upon the Panama of the past. It is a past too full of incident, too replete with stories of battle, murder and sudden death for full justice to be done to it in a chapter. Volumes, libraries almost, have been written about it, for Panama is not one of the happy countries without a history. Of that history the survey here is necessarily the most cursory.

Twenty miles from Colon to the east is the spacious deep water harbor of Porto Bello, visited and named by Colombus in 1502. Earlier still it had harbored the ships of Roderigo de Bastides who landed there in 1500—probably the first European to touch Panama soil. He sought the strait to the Indies, and gold as well. A few miles east and north of Porto Bello is Nombre de Dios, one of the earliest Spanish settlements but now a mere cluster of huts amidst which the Canal workers were only recently dredging sand for use in construction. Few visit Nombre de Dios for purposes of curiosity and indeed it is little worth visiting, for fires, floods and the shifting sands of the rivers have obliterated all trace of the old town. The native village con-

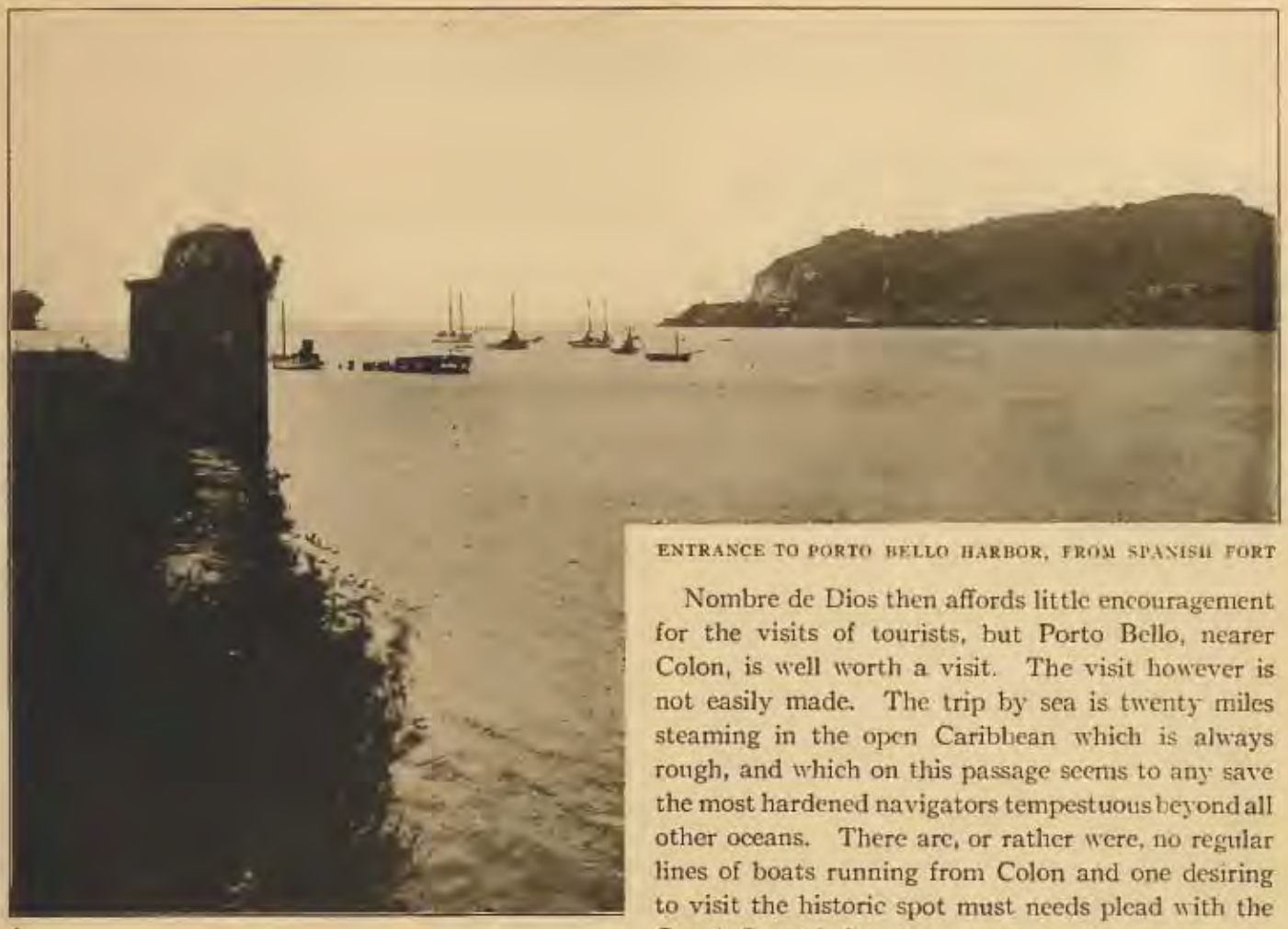
MODERN PORTO BELLO FROM ACROSS THE BAY

sisted of about 200 huts when the American invasion occurred, but a spark from one of the engines set off the dry thatch of one of the huts and a general conflagration ensued. The Americans have since repaired the damages, to the sanitary advantage of the place, but at heavy cost to its picturesqueness.

TYPICAL NATIVE HUT IN PORTO BELLO DISTRICT

For that quality you must look to its past, for it figured largely in the bloody life of the Isthmus in the 16th century. It was founded by one Don Diego de Nicuesa, who had held the high office of Royal Carver at Madrid. Tired of supervising the carving of meats for his sovereign he sailed for the Isthmus to carve out a fortune for himself. Hurricanes, treachery, jealousy, hostile Indians, mutinous sailors and all the ills that jolly mariners have to face had somewhat abated his jollity and his spirit as well when he rounded Manzanillo Point and finding himself in a placid bay exclaimed: "*Detengamonos aqui, en nombre de Dios*" (Let us stop here in the name of God). His crew, superstitious and pious as Spanish sailors were in those days, though piety seldom interfered with their profanity or piracy, seized on the devout invocation and Nombre de Dios became the name of the port.

The town thus named became for a time the principal Spanish port on the Caribbean coast and one of the two terminals of the royal road to Old Panama. But the harbor was poor, the climate sickly, for the town was shut in on the landward side by mountains which excluded the breeze. It came to be called the Spanish Graveyard. Children died in infancy, and Spanish mothers sent theirs to Cruces to be reared. Difficult of defense by either land or sea it was menaced alternately by the Cimmaroons and the English, and in 1572



ENTRANCE TO PORTO BELLO HARBOR, FROM SPANISH FORT

Sir Francis Drake took it by assault but gained little plunder by the adventure in which he nearly lost his life. Warned by this, and by other attacks, a distinguished Spanish engineer was sent to examine this, with other Caribbean ports.

He was impressed by Porto Bello and reported "if it might please your Majesty it were well that the city of Nombre de Dios be brought and builded in this harbor." It was so graciously ordered and the "city" having been "brought and builded" at Porto Bello its old site gradually relapsed into wilderness save for the few huts found when the American engineers descended upon it seeking not gold but sand. In the course of this quest they uncovered an old Spanish galleon but did not report any pieces of eight, ingots or doubloons. Indeed looking all over the Canal work we may well say, never was there so much digging for so little treasure, for even in the great Culebra cut no trace of precious metal was found.

Nombre de Dios then affords little encouragement for the visits of tourists, but Porto Bello, nearer Colon, is well worth a visit. The visit however is not easily made. The trip by sea is twenty miles steaming in the open Caribbean which is always rough, and which on this passage seems to any save the most hardened navigators tempestuous beyond all other oceans. There are, or rather were, no regular lines of boats running from Colon and one desiring to visit the historic spot must needs plead with the Canal Commission for a pass on the government tug which makes the voyage daily. The visit is well worth the trouble however for the ruins are among the finest on the American continent, while the bay itself is a noble inlet. So at least Columbus thought it when he first visited it in 1502. His son, Fernando, who afterwards wrote of this fourth voyage of the Genoese navigator, tells of this visit thus:

BULLOCK CART ON THE SAVANNA ROAD

MODERN INDIAN, DARIEN REGION
Note characteristic weapons—machete, javelin and shot-gun

"The Admiral without making any stay went on till he put into Puerto Bello, giving it that name because it is large, well peopled and encompassed by a well cultivated country. He entered the place the 2nd of November (1502), passing between two small islands within which ships may lie close to the shore and turn it out (sic) if they have occasion. The country about the harbor, higher up, is not very rough but tilled and full of houses, a stone's throw or a bow shot one from the other; and it looks like the finest landscape a man can imagine. During seven days we continued there, on account of the rain and ill weather, there came continually canoes from all the country about to trade for provisions, and bottoms of fine spun cotton which they gave for some trifles such as points and pins."

Time changes, and things and places change with it. What are "bottoms of fine spun cotton" and "trifles such as points"? As for the people whose houses then so plentifully besprinkled the landscape round about, they have largely vanished. Slain in battle, murdered in cold blood, or enslaved and worked to death by the barbarous Spaniards, they have given place to a mongrel race mainly negro, and of them even there are not enough to give to Porto Bello today the cheery, well populated air which the younger Columbus noticed more than 400 years ago.

The real foundation date of Porto Bello is fixed at 1607, though probably the moving thither of Nombre de Dios began earlier. Its full name in Spanish was San Felipe de Puerto-vello, for the pious Spaniards were hard put to it to name a city, a mountain, a cape or a carouse without bringing in a saint. Typically enough San Felipe was soon forgotten and the name became Puerto Bello or beautiful harbor. It grew rapidly, for, as already noted, the city of Nombre de Dios was recrected there. By 1618 there were 130 houses in the main town not counting the suburbs, a cathedral, governor's house, kings' houses, a monastery, convent of mercy and hospital, a plaza and a quay. The main city was well-built, partly of stone or brick, but the suburbs, one of which was set aside for free negroes, were chiefly of wattled canes with palm thatch. A few

plantations and gardens bordered on the city, but mainly the green jungle came down to the very edge as it does with Chagres, Cruces or other native towns today.

It was the Atlantic port of entry for not Panama alone, but for the entire west coast of South America and for merchandise intended for the Philippines. Its great days were of course the times of the annual fairs which lasted from 40 to 60 days, but even at other times there were 40 vessels and numbers of flat boats occupied in the trade of the port. Yet it was but an outpost in the jungle after all. No man alone dared tread the royal road from the city's gate after nightfall. In the streets snakes, toads and the ugly iguana, which the natives devour eagerly, were frequently to be seen. The native wild cat—called grandiloquently a lion or a tiger—prowled in the suburbs and, besides carrying off fowls and pigs, sometimes attacked human beings. The climate was better than that of Nombre de Dios yet sufficiently unhealthful. Child-birth was so often fatal and the rearing of children attended with so much mortality that all mothers who were able resorted to Panama or Cruces at such a time.

It was for a time a considerable market place and for the privilege of trading there the brokers paid into the public coffer 2,000 ducats a year. Another source of revenue was a tax of two reales on each head of cattle slaughtered in the shambles—a tax still retained in form in the Republic of Panama. He who brought in a negro slave had to pay two pesos for the privilege and from this impost a revenue of some $1,000 a year was obtained, most of which was used in cutting down the jungle and in maintaining roads.

Before Porto Bello had even the beginnings of a town, before even the settlement at Nombre de Dios had been begun, there landed at the former port a Spaniard to whom the Isthmus gave immortality and a violent death—two gifts of fortune which not uncommonly go hand in hand. Vasco Nunez de Balboa was with Bastides in the visit which preceded that of Columbus. Thereby he gained a knowledge of the coast and a taste for seafaring adventure. Having tried to be a planter at Santo Domingo and failed therein, he gave his creditors the slip by being carried in a barrel aboard

NATIVE FAMILY IN CHORRERA

a ship about to explore the Panama coast under the Bachelor Encisco. Though they laughed at him for a time as "*el hombre de casco*", "the man in a cask", his new companions in time came to accept while: "Here's gold, Spaniards! Here's gold. Take a plenty; drink it down! Here's more gold."

Balboa was a pacifier as well as a fighter and it is recorded of him that even on the warpath he was

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY RUIN AT PORTO BELLO
This edifice, still well preserved, is believed to be the Casa Real, or Custom House

his leadership and ultimately discarded that of Encisco, for besides gallantry Balboa possessed a genius for intrigue. Except for his great achievement of the discovery of the Pacific, and his genius in making friends of the tribes he had subdued, Balboa's career does not differ greatly from that of the leaders of other remorseless Spanish hordes who harried the hapless people of Central America, robbing, enslaving and murdering them with brutal indifference to their rights and totally callous to their sufferings. One can hardly read of the Spaniards in Central America and Peru without sympathizing somewhat with the Indian cacique who, having captured two of the marauders, fastened them to the ground, propped open their jaws and poured molten gold down their throats saying the not unnecessarily brutal. Indeed one cacique whom he overthrew was so impressed with his forbearance that he entered into alliance with the Spaniard and gave him his favorite daughter. Though he never married the girl Balboa "always lov'd and cherish'd her very much", according to Herrera, which is perhaps more than some wives get with a wedding ceremony.

To anyone who has seen the Isthmian country as it is today, when the stateliest native house is but a hut, and when it would appear that the barest necessities of life are all that are sought by its people, the story told by Herrera, the official historian of the Spanish court, suggests a pitiful deterioration in the standard of native life. Of the home and village of Comagre, the greatest cacique of the Darien region, he writes:

"His palace was more remarkable and better built than any that had yet been seen either on the Islands, or the little that was known of the Continent, being 150 paces in length and eighty in breadth . . . so beautifully wrought that the Spaniards were amaz'd at the sight of it and could not express the Manner and Curiosity of it. There were in it several Chambers and Apartments and one that was like a Buttery was full of such Provisions as the Country afforded, as Bread, Venison, Swine's Flesh, etc. There was another large Room like a Cellar full of earthen Vessels, containing Several sorts of white and red Liquors made of Indian Wheat, Roots, a kind of Palm-Tree and other Ingredients, the which the Spaniards commended when they drank them!"

How ingenuous the historian's closing line! Doubtless the Spaniards commended as lavishly as they drank. The blood they shed, the gold they stole, the houses they burned, the women they violated and the Indians they foully tortured and murdered form a long count in the indictment of civilization against Spain in Central America and the West Indies. That today the Spanish flag waves over not one foot of the territory ravaged by Pizarro, Nicuesa, Cortez, Balboa, and Pedrarias is but the slenderest of justice—the visitation upon the children of the sins of their fathers. It is fair to say that of all the ruffianly spoliators Vasco Nuñez de Balboa was the least criminal. If he fought savagely to overthrow local caciques, he neither tortured, enslaved nor slew them after his victory, but rather strove to make them his friends. He left the provinces somewhat depleted of gold and pearls after his visits, but one of the evidences of the complete lack of the cultivating grace of civilization among the Indians

Canal Commission Photo.

STREET IN MODERN PORTO BELLO

was that they did not care so much for these gewgaws as they did for their lives, the honor of their women and their liberty. This would of course stamp them as sheer barbarians on Fifth Avenue or the Rue de la Paix.

ANCIENT TRAIL FROM PORTO BELLO

Over this trail Balboa may have led his men on the march that led to the still unknown Pacific

As a matter of fact the Indian scorn of the Spanish greed for gold was the cause of Balboa's first hearing of the Pacific Ocean. He had made an alliance with Careta, a cacique of some power, who gave his daughter to Balboa, together with 70 slaves and about 4000 ounces of gold. As usual the Spaniards were quarreling over the plunder, when a son of the cacique, one Panciano, strode amongst them and, kicking the gold out of his way, addressed them in language thus reported by the historian Quintana:

"Christians! why quarrel and make so much turmoil about a little gold, which nevertheless you melt down from beautifully wrought work into rude bars? Is it for such a trifle that you banish yourselves from your country, cross the seas, endure hardships and disturb the peaceful nations of these lands? Cease your unseemly brawl and I will show you a country where you may obtain your fill of gold. Six days' march across yonder country will bring you to an ocean sea like this near which we dwell, where there are ships a little less in size than yours, with sails and oars, and where the people eat out of vessels of gold and have large cities and wealth unbounded."

In the light of our later knowledge we know that he referred to the Pacific and to Peru. At the conclusion of his address he volunteered to lead the Spaniards to the unknown sea, provided they first would aid him and his father in the overthrow of a hostile tribe, and further that they increase their own numbers to 1000 men, for he foresaw hard fighting.

To recuperate his force and add to it Balboa returned to his base at Santa Maria. Here he found trouble of divers kinds. Part of his men were mutinous. Letters from friends at Madrid told that his enemies there were conspiring for his undoing—had even caused a new governor to be sent out to replace him, with orders to send him home for trial. But the most immediate danger was an Indian plot to raid and wholly obliterate the Spanish town—an enterprise which we can hardly blame the oppressed aborigines for cherishing.

An Indian girl, whom a cavalier had first converted to Catholicism, then baptized and then taken for his mistress, revealed the plot to her lover. It had been told her by her brother who, knowing of the wrath to come, in the quaint language of Peter Martyr, "admonyshed her at the days appoynted by sume occasion to convey herselfe oute of the way leste shee shuld bee slayne in the confusion of bataile." Instead of doing this the faithless one, "forgettinge her parentes, her countrie and all her friendes, yea and all the kinges into whose throates Vaschus had thrust his sworde, she opened uppe the matter unto hym, and conceled none of those things which her undiscrete broother had declared unto her."

Balboa was never accused of hesitation. The girl was forced to reveal her brother's hiding place. He was put to the torture and the information thus extorted enabled the Spaniards to strike at once and strike hard. With 150 men he went into the Indian territory of Darien, surprised the natives and put them to total rout. The almost invariable victories of the Spaniards, except when they were taken by surprise, do not indicate superior valor on their part. To begin with they carried fire arms which affrighted the Indians as well as slaughtered them. Further, they wore partial armor—leather gerkins, helmets and cuirasses of steel—so that the unhappy aborigines were not only exposed to missiles, the nature of which they could not comprehend, but saw their own arrows and javelins fall useless from a

Canal Commission Photo

SPANISH FORT AT ENTRANCE TO PORTO BELLO HARBOR

fairly struck target. In one battle the Indians were even reduced to meeting their foes with wooden swords, and, after the inevitable victory, one of the victors to further impress the vanquished with the futility of their defensive weapons ordered the fallen chief to stretch forth his right arm, and with one blow struck it off.

The Indians were superstitious. Anything out of the ordinary filled them with dread. Many refused to stand and fight because Balboa rode into battle on a white horse. Some trained blood hounds that the Spaniards took into battle with them also terrified them. Doing battle with them in the open was almost like slaughtering sheep. Only in ambush were they formidable. It may be noted in passing that not all the barbarities were on the Spanish side. One of Balboa's most trusted lieutenants, Valdivia, was caught in a tempest and his ship wrecked. Those who escaped were captured by the natives, penned up and fattened for a cannibal feast. The day of festivity arriving Valdivia and four of his companions were conducted to the temple and there offered up a sacrifice. Their hearts were cut out with knives of obsidian and offered to the gods while their bodies were roasted and devoured by the savages.

News from Madrid convinced Balboa that he was in disfavor at court. Some great exploit was needed to reëstablish his prestige. He determined to seek without delay that new sea of which he had been told, and to this end gathered an army of 190 Spaniards and about 1,000 Indians. A pack of the trained European war dogs were taken along. The old chroniclers tell singular tales about these dogs. Because of the terror they inspired among the Indians they were held more formidable than an equal number of soldiers. One great red dog with a black muzzle and extraordinary strength was endowed with the rank of a captain and drew the pay of his rank. In battle the brutes pursued the fleeing Indians and tore their naked bodies with their fangs. It is gravely reported that the Captain could distinguish between a hostile and a friendly native.

It is practically impossible to trace now the exact line followed by Balboa across the Isthmus. Visitors to the Canal Zone are shown Balboa Hill, named in honor of his achievement, from which under proper climatic conditions one can see both oceans. But it is wholly improbable that Balboa ever saw this hill. His route was farther to the eastward than the Zone. We do know however that he emerged from the jungle at some point on the Gulf of San Miguel. What or where the hill was from which with "eagle eyes he star'd at the Pacific" we can only guess. It was one of the elevations in the province of Quareque, and before attaining it Balboa fought a battle with the Indians of that tribe who vastly outnumbered his force,

Photo, Prof. Otto Lutz

A GROUP OF CHOLO INDIANS

but were not armed to fight Spaniards. "Even as animals are cut up in the shambles," according to the account of Peter Martyr, "so our men, following them, hewed them in pieces; from one an arm, from another a leg, here a buttock, there a shoulder." The chief Porque and 600 of his followers were slain and as usual dead and living were robbed of their golden jewelry.

NATIVES GRINDING RICE IN A MORTAR OWNED BY ALL
It never occurred to the Indians to let one man own the mortar and charge all others for its use

Balboa's force of Spaniards was now reduced to 67 men; the rest were laid up by illness, but notwithstanding the ghastly total of Indian lives taken, no Spaniard had been slain. With these he proceeded a day's journey, coming to a hill whence his native guides told him the sought-for sea might be seen. Ordering his men to stay at the base he ascended the hill alone, forcing his way through the dense undergrowth under the glaring tropical sun of a September day. Pious chroniclers set down that he fell on his knees and gave thanks to his Creator—an act of devotion which coming so soon after his slaughter of the Quarequa Indians irresistibly recalls the witticism at the expense of the Pilgrim Fathers, that on landing they first fell upon their knees and then upon the aborigines. Whatever his spirit, Balboa never failed in the letter of piety. His band of cut-throats being summoned to the hilltop joined the official priest in chanting the "Te Deum Laudamus" and "Te Dominum confitur." Crosses were erected buttressed with stones which captive Indians, still dazed by the slaughter of their people, helped to heap. The names of all the Spaniards present were recorded. In fact few historic exploits of so early

a day are so well authenticated as the details of Balboa's triumph.

Descending the hill they proceeded with their march for they were then but half way to their goal. Once again they had to fight the jungle and its savage denizens. Later exploring parties, even in our own day, have found the jungle alone invincible. Steel, gunpowder and the bloodhounds opened the way, and the march continued while the burden of gold increased daily. It is curious to read of the complete effrontery with which these land pirates commandeered all the gold there was in sight. From Comagre were received 4000 ounces—"a gift"; from Panca, ten pounds; Chiapes disgorged 500 pounds to purchase favor; from Cocura 650 pesos worth of the yellow metal and from Tumaco 640 pesos besides two basins full of pearls of which 240 were of extraordinary size. The names of these dead and gone Indian chiefs signify nothing today, but this partial list of contributions shows that as a collector Balboa was as efficient as the Wiskinkie of Tammany Hall. Not counting pearls and girls —of both of which commodities large store was gathered up—the spoil of the expedition exceeded 40,000 pesos in value.

Photo T. J. Marius.

FAMILY TRAVEL ON THE PANAMA TRAIL

It was September 29, 1513, that at last Balboa and his men reached the Pacific. Being St. Michael's day they named the inlet of the sea they had attained the Gulf of St. Michael. On their first arrival they found they had reached the sea, but not the water, for the tide which at that point rises and falls twenty feet, was out and a mile or more of muddy beach interspersed with boulders intervened between them and the water's edge. So they sat down until the tide had returned when Balboa waded in thigh deep and claimed land and sea, all its islands and its boundaries for the King of Spain. After having thus performed the needful theatrical ceremonies, he returned to the practical by leading his men to the slaughter of some neighboring Indians whose gold went to swell the growing hoard.

The Spaniards made their way along the Pacific coast to a point that must have been near the present site of Panama City, for it is recorded that on a clear day they could see the Pearl Islands in the offing. Balboa wanted mightily to raid these islands, but felt it more prudent to hasten back to

the Atlantic coast and send reports of his discovery and tribute of his gold to the King before his enemies should wholly undo him. So he made his way back, fighting and plundering new tribes all the way and leaving the natives seemingly cowed, but actually full of hatred. They had learned the folly of standing against the white man's arms.

rainy season he had marched 190 men through the unknown jungle, fighting pitched battles almost every day, taking food and drink where he could find it or going without, and finally brought all back without losing a man. No expedition since, even the peaceful scientific or surveying ones of our own days, has equaled this record. He had left

DESERTED NATIVE HUT

Note the profusion of pineapples growing wild, without further attention they will thrive and multiply

"Who that had any brains," asked one chieftain touching Balboa's sword, "would contend against this macana which at one blow can cleave a man in two?"

The return was made to Antigua where Balboa was received with loud acclaim. Indeed he had accomplished the incredible. Not only had he discovered a new ocean, not only had he brought home booty worth a dukedom, but in the height of the

the Indians pacified, if resentful, and the letter which he sent off to King Ferdinand was a modest report of a most notable achievement. "In all his long letter," says Peter Martyr, "there is not a single leaf written which does not contain thanks to Almighty God for deliverance from perils and preservation from many imminent dangers."

But Vasco Nunez de Balboa now approached the unhappy and undeserved close of a glorious career.

As his letter went slowly across the seas in a clumsy galleon to Spain, one Pedrarias with a commission to govern Balboa's province and to deal out summary justice to Balboa, who had been represented to the King as a treacherous villain, was on the Atlantic making for the New World. When Ferdinand received Balboa's letter he would have given much to recall his hasty commission to Pedrarias, but there was no wireless in those days, and the new governor, with power of life and death over Balboa, was now well out at sea.

The blow did not fall at once. On arrival at Santa Maria de la Antigua in June, 1514, Pedrarias sent a courier to Balboa to announce his coming and his authority. The devoted followers of Vasco Nunez were for resisting the latter, assuring him that the King could not have received the report of his notable discovery, else he would not thus have been supplanted. Balboa however submitted gracefully, promising the newcomer implicit obedience. Pedrarias, though charged to try Balboa for treason, concealed his orders until he had gathered all the useful information that the old chieftain could impart and won many of his followers to his own personal support. Then he arrested Balboa and put him on trial, only to have him triumphantly acquitted. Pedrarias was disgusted. He hated Balboa and feared his influence in the colony. For his own part he was tearing down the little kingdom his predecessor had erected.

WHAT THEY STILL CALL A ROAD IN PANAMA

Balboa had fought the Indian tribes to their knees, then placated them, freed them without torture and made them his allies. Pedrarias applied the methods of the slave trader to the native population. Never was such misery heaped upon an almost helpless foe, save when later his apt pupil Pizarro invaded Peru. The natives were murdered, enslaved, robbed, starved. As Bancroft says, "in addition to gold there were always women for baptism, lust and slavery." The whole Isthmus blazed with war, and where Balboa had conquered without losing a man Pedrarias lost 70 in one campaign. One of these raids was into the territory now known as the Canal Zone. On one raid Balboa complained to the King there "was perpetrated the greatest cruelty ever heard of in Arabian or Christian country in any generation. And it is this. The captain and the surviving Christians, while on this journey, took nearly 100 Indians of both sexes, mostly women and children, fastened them with chains and afterwards ordered them to be decapitated and scalped."

Ill feeling rapidly increased between Pedrarias and Balboa. The former with the jealousy and timidity of an old man continually suspected Balboa of plotting against him. His suspicion was not allayed when royal orders arrived from Spain creating Balboa adelantado and governor of the newly discovered Pacific coast. The title sounded well but he would have to fight to establish his government over the

Indians and even then Pedrarias would be his superior. But he determined to make the effort, though with the whole Isthmus in war-paint because of the cruelties of Pedrarias he would have to fight every inch of his way. Moreover he tried to carry across the isthmus the hulls of four brigantines, constructed on the Atlantic coast and designed to be put together on the Pacific. Just why he attempted this exploit is perplexing, for there were as good timber and better harbors for shipyards on the Pacific side. Nearly 2000 Indian lives were sacrificed in the heart-rending task of carrying these heavy burdens through the jungle, and when the task was ended it was found that the timbers of two of the ships were useless, having been honeycombed by worms. Two however were seaworthy and with them he put forth into the Pacific, but a great school of whales encountered near the Pearl Islands, where even today they are frequently seen, affrighted his men who made him turn back.

In his party was a man who had fallen in love with Balboa's beautiful mistress, the daughter of the Indian cacique Careta. She had been annoyed by his advances and complained to Vasco Nunez, who warned the man to desist, accompanying the warning with remarks natural to the situation. This man overheard a conversation, really concerning some pitch and iron for the ships but which might be distorted to convey the impression that Balboa was plotting the overthrow of Pedrarias. By an unlucky chance the eavesdropper was chosen as one of a party to carry dispatches to Pedrarias, and had no sooner reached the presence of that bloodthirsty old conquistadore than he denounced Balboa as a traitor. Moreover he roused the old man's vanity by telling him that Balboa was so infatuated with his mistress that he would never marry the governor's daughter—a marriage

OUTDOOR LIFE OF THE NATIVES

The tree is a mango so loaded with fruit that the boughs droop. The fruit is seldom liked by others than natives

which had been arranged and announced as an affair of state.

In a rage Pedrarias determined to put an end to Balboa. Accordingly he wrote a pleasant letter, beseeching him to come to Santa Maria for a conference. That Balboa came willingly is evidence enough that he had no guilty knowledge of any plot. Before he reached his destination however he was met by Pizarro with an armed guard who arrested him. No word of his could change the prearranged program. He was tried but even the servile court which convicted him recommended mercy, which the malignant Pedrarias refused. Straightaway upon the verdict the great explorer, with four of his men condemned with him, were marched to the scaffold in the Plaza, where stood the block. In a neighboring hut, pulling apart the wattled canes of which it was built that he might peer out while himself unseen Pedrarias gloated at the sight of the blood of the man whom he hated with the insane hatred of a base and malignant soul. There the heads of the four were stricken off, and with the stroke died Vasco Nunez de Balboa, the man whose name more than any other's deserves to be linked with that of Columbus in the history of the Isthmus of Panama. It was in 1517 and Balboa was but forty-two years old.

Had the bungling and cruel Pedrarias never been sent to the Isthmus that part of the country known as the Darien might by now be as civilized as the Chiriqui province. As it was, the thriving settlements of Acla and Antigua languished and disappeared, and the legacy of hatred left by the Indians of that day is so persistent that the white man has never been able to establish himself on the eastern end of the Isthmus.

NATIVE HUT AND OPEN-AIR KITCHEN

Fate has dealt harshly with the memory of Balboa. Keats, in his best known and most quoted sonnet, gives credit for his discovery to Cortez. Local tradition has bestowed his name on a hill he never saw, and Panamanian financial legislation has given his name to a coin which is never coined—existing as a fictitious unit like our mill. He did not himself realize the vastness of his discovery, and gave the misleading name of the South Sea to what was the Pacific Ocean. But time is making its amends.

COCOANUT GROVE ON THE CARIBBEAN COAST

History will accord with the verdict of John Fiske who said of him:

"Thus perished in the forty-second year of his age the man who, but for that trifle of iron and pitch, would probably have been the conqueror of Peru. It was a pity that such work should not have fallen into his hands, for when at length it was done, it was by men far inferior to him in character and caliber. One cannot but wish that he might have gone on his way like Cortez, and worked out the rest of his contemplated career in accordance with the genius that was in him. That bright attractive figure and its sad fate can never fail to arrest the attention and detain the steps of the historian as he passes by. Quite possibly the romantic character of the story may have thrown something of a glamour about the person of the victim, so that unconsciously we tend to emphasize his merits while we touch lightly upon his faults. But after all, this effect is no more than that which his personality wrought upon the minds of contemporary witnesses, who were unanimous in their expressions of esteem for Balboa, and of condemnation for the manner of his taking off."

And finally the United States government has acted wisely and justly when in decreeing a great port, lined with massive docks, the stopping place for all the argosies of trade entering or leaving the Canal at its Pacific end, they conferred upon it the name Balboa. It will stand a fitting monument to the great soldier and explorer whose murder affected for the worse all Central America and Peru.

Ramsay, Photo

CANAL COMMISSION STONE CRUSHER, PORTO BELLO

NATIVE HUTS NEAR PORTO BELLO

The Indians of this region are fishermen and famous navigators. They ship on vessels leaving Colon for far distant ports

But to return to Porto Bello. Balboa's own association with that settlement was of the very briefest, but the influence of his discovery was to it all important. For the discovery of the Pacific led to the conquest of Peru under Pizarro, the founding of Old Panama and the development at Porto Bello of the port through which all the wealth wrung from that hapless land of the Incas found its Atlantic outlet.

The story of Old Panama may be reserved for a later chapter, even though the rise and fall of both Nombre de Dios and Porto Bello were chiefly dependent upon the chief Spanish city of the Pacific coast. For great as was the store of gold, silver and jewels torn from the Isthmian Indians and sent from these Spanish ports back to Spain, it was a mere rivulet compared to the flood of gold that poured through the narrow trails across the Isthmus after Pizarro began his ravishment of Peru. With the conquest of the Land of the Incas, and the plunder thereof that made of the Isthmus a mighty treasure house attracting all the vampires and vultures of a predatory day, we have little to do here. Enough to point out that all that was extorted from the Peruvians was sent by ship to Panama and thence by mule carriage either across the trail to Nombre de Dios or Porto Bello, or else by land carriage to some point on the Chagres River, usually Venta Cruces, and

AN INDIAN FAMILY OF THE DARIEN

thence by the river to San Lorenzo and down the coast to Porto Bello. Nor did the mules return with empty packs. The Peruvians bought from the bandits who robbed them, and goods were brought from Spain to be shipped from Panama to South America and even to the Philippines.

perts" of whom we are hearing so much these days, it might be worth while to add some experts in enterprise.

As this Spanish trade increased the French and English corsairs or buccaneers sprung into being—plain pirates who preyed however on Spanish com-

Photo by Underwood and Underwood

RUINED SPANISH FORT AT PORTO BELLO

Now used as an American cemetery. The site is one of infinite beauty, but the cemetery is neglected

It seems odd to us today with "the Philippine problem" engaging political attention, and with American merchants hoping that the canal may stimulate a profitable Philippine trade, that three hundred years ago Spanish merchants found profit in sending goods by galleons to Porto Bello, by mule-pack across the Isthmus and by sailing vessel again to Manila. Perhaps to the "efficiency ex-

merce alone, the English finding excuse in the fact that the Spaniards were Catholics, and the French in the assertion that Spain had no right to monopolize all American trade. The excuses were mere subterfuges. The men offering them were not animated by religious convictions, nor would they have engaged in the American trade if permitted. For them the more exciting and profitable pursuit of

Photo by Underwood and Underwood

SAN BLAS LUGGERS AT ANCHOR

piracy, and this they pushed with such vigor that by 1526 the merchant vessels in the trade would sail together in one fleet guarded by men-of-war. At times these fleets numbered as many as forty sail, all carrying guns. The system of trade—all regulated by royal decree—was for the ships to sail for Cartagena on the coast of Colombia, a voyage occupying usually about two months. Arrived there, a courier was sent to Porto Bello and on to Panama with tidings of the approach of the fleet. Other couriers spread the tidings throughout the northern provinces of South America.

The fleet would commonly stay at Cartagena a month, though local merchants often bribed the general in command to delay it longer. For with the arrival of the ships the town awoke to a brief and delirious period of trading. Merchants flocked to Cartagena with indigo, tobacco and cocoa from Venezuela, gold and emeralds from New Granada, pearls from Margarita and products of divers sorts from the neighboring lands. While this business was in progress, and the newly laden galleons were creeping along the coast to Nombre de Dios and Porto Bello, word had been sent to Lima for the plate fleet to come to Panama bearing the tribute to the King—gold stripped from the walls of temples, pearls pried from the eyes of sacred images, ornaments wrested from the arms and necks of native women by a rude and ribald soldiery. With the plate fleet came also numerous vessels taking advantage of the convoy, though indeed there was little danger from pirates on the Pacific. The Atlantic, being nearer European civilization, swarmed with these gentry.

At Panama all was transferred to mules and started for the Atlantic coast. So great was the volume of treasure and of goods to be transported that the narrow trail along which the mules proceeded in single file, usually 100 in a caravan or train, was occupied almost from one end to the other, and the tinkling of the mule-bells, and

THE TEETH OF THE TROPICS

Skeletonized jaws of a Bayano river crocodile

NATIVE BRIDGE IN THE DARIEN

the cries of the muleteers were seldom stilled. Indians sometimes raided the trail and cut out a loaded mule or two, and the buccaneers at one time, finding robbery by sea monotonous, landed and won rich booty by raiding a treasure caravan. The bulkier articles of commerce were packed in carts at Panama and sent to Venta Cruz where they were transferred to flat boats, and taken down the river to San Lorenzo and thence to Porto Bello by sea. When the galleons had cast anchor at that port, and the merchants and caravans were all arrived the little town took on an air of bustle and excitement astonishing to the visitor who had seen it in the hours of its normal life.

"The spectator," says Alcedo, "who had just before been considering Porto Bello in a poor, unpeopled state, without a ship in the port and breathing nothing but misery and wretchedness, would remain thunderstruck at beholding the strange alteration which takes place at the time of this fair. Now he would see the houses crowded with people, the square and the streets crammed with chests of gold and silver, and the port covered with vessels; some of these having brought by the river Chagres from Panama the effects of Peru, such as cacao, bark (quina), vicuna wool, bezoar stone, and other productions of these provinces. He would see others bringing provisions from Cartagena; and he would reflect that, however detestable might be its climate, this city was the emporium of the riches of the two worlds, and the most considerable commercial depot that was ever known."

The visitor to Porto Bello today may see still standing the long stone façade of the aduana, or

custom house, facing the ancient plaza. In that square the merchants erected cane booths and tents made of sails, while all available space was filled with bales of goods drawn thither on sledges. With the fleet came 5000 or 6000 soldiers, who besides the sailors needful to man the vessels, the merchants and their clerks, the porters, the buyers of all nationalities and the native sightseers crowded the little town of a few hundred houses so that it appeared to be in possession of a mob.

An itinerant preacher, Thomas Gage, who has left some entertaining reminiscences of his experiences on the Isthmus, tells quaintly of seeking lodgings during the fair:

"When I came into the Haven I was sorry to see that as yet the Galeons were not come from Spaine, knowing that the longer I stayed in that place, the greater would be my charges. Yet I comforted myselfe that the time of year was come, and that they could not long delay their coming. My first thoughts were of taking up a lodging, which at that time were plentifull and cheape, nay some were offered me for nothing with this caveat, that when the Galeons did come, I must either leave them, or pay a dear rate for them. A kind Gentleman, who was the Kings Treasurer, falling in discourse with me, promised to help me, that I might be cheaply lodged even when the ships came, and lodgings were at the highest rate. He, interposing his authority, went with me to seeke one, which at the time of the fleets being there, might continue to be mine. It was no bigger than would containe a bed, a table, a stoole or two, with roome enough beside to open and shut the doore, and they demanded of me for it during the aforesaid time of the fleet, sixscore Crownes, which commonly is a fortnight. For the Towne being little, and the Soldiers, that come with the Galeons for their defence at least four or five thousand; besides merchants from Peru, from Spain and many other places to buy and sell, is causes that every roome though never so small, be dear; and sometimes all the lodgings in the Towne are few enough for so many people, which at that time doe meet at Portobel. I knew a Merchant who gave a thousand Crownes for a shop of reasonable bignesse, to sell his wares and commodities that yeer I was there, for fifteen daies only, which the Fleet continued to be in that Haven. I thought it much for me to give the sixscore Crownes which were demanded of me for a room, which was but as a Mouse hole, and began to be troubled, and told the Kings Treasurer how I had been lately robbed at sea, and was not able to give so much, and bee besides at charges for my diet, which I feared would prove as much more. But not a farthing would be abated of what was asked; where upon the good Treasurer, pitying me, offered to the man of the house to pay him threescore Crownes of it, if so be that I was able to pay the rest, which I must doe, or else lie without in the street. Yet till the Fleet did come I would not enter into this deare hole, but accepted of another faire lodging which was offered me for

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Photo by Henry Putler

CHOCO INDIAN GIRLS

Note the toes. With them they pick up the smallest objects

nothing. Whilst I thus expected the Fleets coming, some money and offerings I got for Masses, and for two Sermons which I preached at fifteen Crownes a peece. I visited the Castles, which indeed seemed unto me to be very strong; but what most I wondered at was to see the requa's of Mules which came thiether from Panama, laden with wedges of silver; in one day I told two hundred mules laden with nothing else, which were unladen in the publicke Market-place, so that there the heapes of silver wedges lay like heapes of stones in the street, without any feare or suspition of being lost. Within ten daies the fleet came, consisting of eight Galeons and ten Merchant ships, which forced me to run to my hole. It was a wonder then to see the multitude of people in those streets which the weeke before had been empty.

"Then began the price of all things to rise, a fowl to be worth twelve Rialls, which in the mainland within I had often bought for one; a pound of beefe then was worth two Rialls, whereas I had in other places thirteen pounds for half a Riall, and so of all other food and provisions, which was so excessively dear, that I knew not how to live but by fish and Tortoises, which were very many, and though somewhat deare, yet were the cheapest meat I could eate."

On this annual fair, and on trade with the back country, both Nombre de Dios and Porto Bello waxed prosperous and luxurious. Prosperity was a dangerous quality for a town or a man to exhibit in those days when monarchs set the example of theft and extortion, and private plunderers were quick to follow it. So Nombre de Dios was early made the point of a piratical raid by Sir Francis Drake. Though this gentleman was a pirate he is given a measure of immortality by a statue in Baden the inscription on which celebrates him as the introducer of potatoes into Europe. Plunder, not potatoes, however, engaged his chief attention, though as a side issue he engaged in the slave trade. July 29, 1572, he made a descent upon Nombre de Dios with 73 men armed, according to a writer of the time, with "6 Targets; 6 Fire Pikes; 12 Pikes; 24 Muskets and Callivers; 16 Bowes and 6 Partizans; 2 Drums and 2 Trumpets." His men landed from pinnaces and after encountering "a jolly hot volley of shot" in the plaza put the Spaniards to flight. At the point of a sword a captive was forced to lead the raiders to the Governor's house where to his joy Drake discovered a stack of silver ingots worth a million pounds sterling. But 'twas an embarrassment of riches, for the bars

INDIAN HUTS NEAR PORTO BELLO