

ON MULEBACK THROUGH THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA, 1893

by

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Table of Contents

PREFACE	1
(1) FORTY-TWO MILES ON A MULE.	2
(2) FROM SANTIAGO TO LA MESA.	8
(3) THE ISTHMIAN HIGHLANDS.....	16
(4) FOR A RECLUSE OR A LOAFER.	22
(5) AN ISTHMIAN SWAMP TOWN.....	28
(6) A NIGHT IN A ROTTEN BONGO.....	34

PREFACE

"Of all the neglected parts of North America it is likely that none has been visited less or has attracted less attention from the people of the United States than the extreme western part of the Isthmus of Panama... It is fair to suppose that many more Americans (if sailors be included) have visited the coast of Greenland than ever saw this tropical region, for there is a regular line of vessels trading between Philadelphia and Greenland in the summer, while [this region] is entirely out of the way of the tourist. And yet it is not difficult of access, and it is in a variety of ways well worth the attention of the traveler."

(1) FORTY-TWO MILES ON A MULE.

When One May Start on Time—A Belt of Gold May be Uncomfortable—Facts about a Colombian Ferry—Home of a Virginian—In a Crossroads Hostelry—The Children Did Not Look Alike—Possibly a Wheelman Might Like to Try This Road.

The road from Aguadulce to Santiago, the capital of the State of Veraguas in the Isthmus of Panama, is forty-two miles long. It is almost level, and in the month of February it is invariably dry. The scenery is pleasant and the air not too hot. For an expert horseman, well mounted, it is a very delightful ride; for a tender-foot on a jiggling mule the case is different. Mine was the different case when, on the morning of Feb. 16, 1893, I started out with Señor Don Juan José Díaz, ex-Mayor of Panama, to take the ride. I had never learned to ride, and my mount was a mule that neither loped nor paced. It simply jiggled. Luckily it was a big, strong mule—luckily for it as well as myself—for otherwise we should not have covered the route.

As showing how seeming trifles make all the difference between the painful and the comfortable in a weary journey, it is worth telling that I was really worried in the day's ride only by a loose belt of gold that hung pretty well up under my arms. As the mule jiggled, this belt flopped against my ribs. One flop was nothing, and a hundred passed unnoticed, but with every step of the mule the blow was repeated, and at the end of the ten hours the blood had begun to settle under the pounded skin because of the bursting of tiny veins, and the blows became as painful as blows on a boil. It took twelve hours to cover the distance, including a stop for breakfast, but during the last two hours of the time I made my mule walk. In spite of the physical discomfort, however, it was a very interesting ride.

We started from Aguadulce—Señor Díaz, his 17-year-old son Julio, and myself—at about 4:30 in the morning. We had been called at 4 o'clock, and as soon as dressed, went to the house where we had been getting our meals and found a light but comforting breakfast of coffee, white bread, hot corn cakes (tortillas), and fried eggs. The fact that it was ready for us on time is worth noting, for the one thing of which travelers in the Spanish Main complain most is the disposition of the people to delay and idle away the time. As Ben Pears, a Pittsburgh mining engineer whom I met in Honduras said, "*It takes them an hour and a half to boil water, and then it isn't any too ----- hot.*" The fact was and is that the great

men among them can have anything they want and get it on time. I was with Señor Díaz at Aguadulce, and he wanted to make an early start, so we got an early start. When traveling alone I was sometimes mistaken for a foreign ambassador or something of the sort, and then the way matters humped themselves was [...] to behold. At others they thought I was a gringo down on his luck, looking for a job and afraid he'd find one. At such times I had to wait a bit.

Riding out of Aguadulce or any other town on the Isthmus is like riding out of no other towns I ever saw except on the American desert. The moment I passed the last shack of the settlement I was in wilderness. In all fertile America there are gardens around suburban houses, and then come the fields of the nearby farmers. In the Isthmus there are tiny gardens about the houses, sometimes—gardens where a palm tree or two and a few bananas and some tobacco and coffee trees and so on can be found—but the patches of land where the corn, the rice, and the beans grow for the feeding of the village folk lie away off in the woods. They are not even in sight of the main highways leading from town to town.

After riding nearly two leagues the sun came up, and we had an uninterrupted view of the country, a gently rolling prairie well interspersed with clumps and groves of trees that seemed to be regular little jungles. Two of these jungles passed in the first ten miles had coconut palms in them, and the Don said that they were at one time the site of homes. That is as near as we came to a home in a ride of ten miles. Two miles more and we saw off to the right a score of thatched huts—a tiny village with a sort of a garden to each hut—but not a field was in sight.

But when the Santa María River was reached, five leagues out, we found farms on its banks. One farmhouse was right at the river crossing, and its owner was also ferryman, for the river is broad and deep even in the height of the dry season. As we rode down to the water's edge the farmer rolled out of his hammock and followed us. Then we dismounted and removed the saddles and bridles from our mules, while he got a bongo or dugout ready for us. To get it ready he had to untie a rope and put a paddle in it, but he was ready by the time we had our saddles in the boat. Then, while we sat on our saddles and held on to the ends of the long ropes that did duty as halter straps, he pushed the bongo into the stream and paddled it across.

We paid him 30 cents for the service—five cents for each man and five for each mule. The cattleman with a hundred steers has to pay five cents each for the privilege of swimming them across the river there, while a mule with a pack pays ten cents, and a loaded cart with its two oxen 80 cents. The ferry belongs to the Colombian Government, and it is farmed out to the ferryman, who pays \$250 rent for the privilege of doing the work and collecting the tolls. His income is from \$3 to \$5 a day—not far from \$1,400 a year gross. He has an outfit of five dugout canoes, the largest of which will carry four ox-cart loads.

To ferry a cart over, the load is first stowed in the boat; then the oxen are unyoked, and, the boat having been put end on to the bank, the cart is run out over it with a wheel on each side until the axle rests of the gunwales of the boat. In common dry weather two carts and their loads are put on a boat, the cart drivers sit on their loads, towing the oxen by ropes, and the ferryman with an assistant paddles the outfit across. In high water the current is dangerous and but one cart with its load goes over in a boat, and four men are needed at the paddles to get it over even then. There are few, if any, wilder streams in the world than those of the Isthmus of Panama in the rainy season. Many lives are lost every year in attempts to ford or ferry them. The ferryman of the Santa María has no sinecure if he does swing in a hammock, and watch his wife and girls make the crops betimes.

On the further side of the river we passed a great one-story house with a roof that rambled off over a wide veranda in front—a house that was at once more substantial and more cozy and at the same time more picturesque than anything I had seen in the Isthmus. There were palms and no end of fruit and flowering trees about it to add to the beauty of the home. As I looked at it Señor Díaz said:

"That was the home of Mr. Henry Dixon, one of your countrymen. He came here from Virginia before your civil war and married a very fine lady. He was Consul at Aguadulce at one time. He died leaving three very handsome daughters and a comfortable little fortune. But the girls are all married now."

I saw the girls in Santiago and found them very interesting, as will be told.

After a while we came to a little collection of huts scattered among some natural and artificial groves and the Don drew rein. We had been over five hours on our journey.

"We will eat breakfast here," he said.

The place was a combined cross trail store, hotel, and farmhouse. One finds places devoted to such a variety of businesses as that in the States, but this was somewhat different. The house was about 15x35 feet large, with mud walls at least 12 feet high, and a wide veranda in front. There was a red tile roof over all. It contained two rooms, both of which were floored with dry clay that was very much cracked and somewhat dusty. The hostess apologized for the dust and proceeded to get rid of it. She sprinkled it with water from a gourd. I should say from observation that sprinkling was a much easier way of getting rid of dust on a clay floor than sweeping. Moreover, clay has its advantages as a floor. It doesn't have to be mopped, and where the house walls are made of the same material there is never any need for a house cleaning time. At least they never do have a housecleaning time in them, so they say, and after seeing the houses I believe it. The wives of the interior of the Isthmus are not worn out by any such cares. And then the clay floor has its advantages for the man, too. He don't have to stop at the edge of the veranda and clean off his boots with a chip on a muddy day, for instance, and he never hears his wife say: *"There you go, tracking up my floor when I've just got through mopping."*

Nor were the floor and walls alone interesting. The shelves back of the counter were made of cane poles, like the fish poles sold in the States at a nickel each. Little cross pieces were lashed to vertical poles, and on these other poles were placed horizontally. Vines served as lashings. There is no saw mill in the Isthmus and planks are made with an adze. The counter was a large plank made in that way. The chairs were made of sticks split from a log and then planed and matched together, the seat being a piece of raw hide and the back as straight and uncomfortable as a New England church pew.

On the fish-pole shelves were fourteen small, bright-colored bolts of calico, a quarter bolt of American sheeting (unbleached), a quarter bolt of blue overall stuff, two native straw hats, a clock that was not running and nothing else. There were some bottles on the counter and some little gourd cups. I suspect that the bottles contained what they call "toother water," which is as accurately descriptive of the drink as the American Indian term of fire water.

Against the wall leaned three cots. This combined store and barroom was a dormitory by night. There were six chairs about the room. To four of them, fighting

cocks were tethered. The combined store, barroom, and dormitory was a chicken coop as well. The combined farmer, merchant, and hotel keeper was a man of sporting blood. These roosters at frequent intervals made the welkin ring with their crowing and strutted about and dragged one wing on the floor and did such other things as roosters might be expected to do under the circumstances. It was a very interesting scene.

After a little the landlord, a large man for a native, black eyed, black haired, and swarthy, but not unpleasant, came along. He was greatly pleased when I praised the cocks as a group and one in particular. Then the wife, a comely woman of perhaps 25, with her long black hair in two braids down her back and her brown eyes smiling a welcome, came to say that breakfast was ready.

As we went into the next room the man told her what I said about his birds. Thereat she called two little girls of about six and eight years from the veranda and told me they were her daughters. The older of the two had eyes and hair and complexion like her father —black as night and swarthy—but she was pretty and attractive, as about all the Ladino children are. I don't know whom the younger girl resembled. She had very light hair, blue eyes, and a pinky white complexion. She was very pretty too. I kissed and praised both the dark and the light one with all the extremely mush adjectives of the language that I had learned. Then I looked at the Don, who chuckled and said we must eat and hurry on.

In the course of the day I saw some signs of game. There were deerskins at the few houses we saw, and rabbits cantered from clump to clump of brush. The Don said the country was alive with deer, and that they could be found easily along the partly dry water courses. Of the variety of the game to be found there I will tell at another time, but I could not imagine greater sport than standing in a runway in that partly open country and taking shots at the deer as the dogs chased them.

They say there is never a season when the trees are not in bloom there. Dry as it was, and hot, I passed many trees covered all over with blossoms. Some trees were solid masses of flowers, without a single green leaf on them. One traveler writes of the Spanish Main as a land where the flowers are without fragrance and the women without virtue. He was a poor observer, for I never saw more fragrant blossoms than these. In places the trail was like a lane between lilac trees in bloom.

Among the readers of THE SUN are many bicycle riders who would like to see an odd foreign country. I can commend them to try the Isthmus of Panama with their wheels, beginning in January. There is not by any means a turnpike roadway there; nor is the route from Panama to Santiago de Veraguas very long, but it can readily be covered with a good wheel, and there are many features of the country to commend it to a traveler. There are but few streams to ford east of Santiago. A guide will always be necessary, unless one speaks the Spanish language well, but he is easily had at a low price. There are a number—at least a dozen—little old villages to be visited, including the little ports of Parita and Los Santos. The trail west of Santiago, though easy enough for mules, would prove a terror to wheelmen. It is a smooth path from a foot to two feet wide, but the way it climbs and pitches and twists about is enough to make a man dizzy to think of it.

There are places where one sees remains of an old stone-paved cart road, the royal highway of other days. Back in the mountains where no bicycler will see it from his wheel are traces of still another and older one. This one they say was the route of those old-time people who built the huge cities that are now buried in the forests of the Spanish Main—a route that extended from Mexico to Peru, and further.

As the sun was sinking well down to the hills in the west, the Don led the way to a house on a little plaza in the edge of Santiago. A portly widow, who had a store and a bakery and a blooming family and a room to let, greeted him and me pleasantly, and then laughed at me because I was lame in dismounting from the mule. A barefooted boy took away the mule and brought my baggage. I got a supper than included five courses of soup, meats, vegetables, and sweets, and then I went to sleep quickly on a cot, in spite of the fact that a lot of rats had a straightaway race track on the fish poles that supported the tile roof immediately my head, and were holding what seemed to be a Futurity,¹ or some such well attended meeting there. What I learned about Santiago—"Santiago, the Holy City" they call it without intending to be sarcastic—will be told at another time.

¹ Futurity Stakes — Name of several horse races

(2) FROM SANTIAGO TO LA MESA.

A Thickly Settled, Picturesque Wilderness of Brush that Produces Nothing for Export but Cattle—The Railroad Might Develop it—Some Low-grade Gold Mines.

In spite of the fact that it has been settled longer than the State of New York, there are probably fewer people in the States who have visited the interior of the Isthmus of Panama, as has been said in THE SUN, than have visited the coast of Greenland. It was with this in mind that on the morning before Washington's Birthday in 1893 I prepared to leave Santiago de Veraguas to continue on mule-back westward through the Isthmus to David.

To anyone who contemplates a similar journey it may be said that no difficulty will be experienced in finding guides to show the way, but in selecting a man one needs to go carefully. I fortunately had the good ex-Mayor of Panama, Don Juan José Díaz, to look after me. Anyone not so well off should go to the Mayor, or, as he is called in Ladinoland, the Alcalde, and describe to him the intended journey. It is a part of the duty of every Alcalde to provide, guides, mules, and fittings for departing travelers—and I believe they almost invariably take a pride in doing it well, and in seeing that the traveler pays the highest possible price for the services rendered. But the Alcalde himself never takes a cent of pay, even where he lodges the stranger. The big prices must be paid to the owners of animals and the purveyors of feed. Nevertheless, the Alcalde is the man to go to, because one gets the exact service he wants.

The would-be guides who came to me invariably said they knew every inch of the road clear through to David, but when questioned as to details of what could be seen along the route no two of them agreed and not one told the truth. Moreover, only one proposed taking what was really the direct route. They were all after the double wages which a foreigner must pay in that country and were anxious to make the journey last as long as possible. They were almost as bad in their greed as guides I have seen in the Adirondacks and around the Yellowstone National Park, but not quite. No Ladino guide ever asked me how big a tip I usually gave, nor did one ever in my presence extol the generous giving of some other person whom he had served. Indeed, when they got a small coin or a bottle of rum beyond the promised pay they acted as if astonished as well as delighted.

So far as one's personal safety is concerned when alone with these guides, I must say I do not believe a more trustworthy lot is to be found anywhere. They can be trusted to take to the woods if any danger should arise, but they would not rob anyone of anything. I did not hear of a highway robber in the Isthmus, although the rich men very often suffer from petty thieving. Under the advice of Don Juan Díaz I trusted my baggage, without reserve of anything but the little Stevens rifle, to the guide, and the effect of this trust was to make him extremely careful that nothing be either injured or lost.

As has been told, the route lies by the way of La Mesa, Las Palmas, Tole and Remedios. We left Santiago at about 9:30 in the morning. That was a bad hour for starting because it was about two hours before the usual midday meal, and the first stopping place was nearly six hours away. But one who will travel here must learn to enjoy the ways of the people if he would enjoy the journey at all. For my morning meal that day I had at 7 o'clock a cup of good coffee and a good wheat flour roll. That was good enough for an ordinary day, but I got nothing more to eat until 5 o'clock that evening, because there was no good stopping place *en route*.

The road led down a steep stone-paved bank to the creek bed and then up again on the further side. Thereafter it climbed up and pitched down over a surface as irregular as that of the ocean in a choppy sea. It was not very much of a road. There was a beaten path for a mile or two out of town over which a cart could have traveled. Then the trail divided, and each fork was like a cow path through the second-growth timber that covered about all the country. Hour after hour we rode along between two dry green walls of brush, varied here and there by an opening which some native had made about a thatched hut—an opening in which he would plant corn and beans and rice and perhaps a little sugar-cane. A swarthy face under a shock of black hair would appear in a doorway or from behind the hut wall as the sound of our mules' feet was carried in the air. Then it would disappear and reappear again quickly, while half a dozen other swarthy faces and shocks of black hair would appear round other corners and in other openings. If one wants to see a similar gathering of dark faces he should go a-horse-back across the Indian Territory², say from Baxter Springs to Tahlequah.

² Indian Territory — (Former name) A part of Oklahoma

The faces would remain absolutely impassive for a time, but the dark eyes glistened with eager curiosity, and with fun, too. On more than one occasion some mischievous youngster would give a playmate a push and send him sprawling into full view of the stranger. A flash of glee would instantly light up every face but the sprawler, who would show a comical mixture of fear and anger until he saw the strangers laughing, when he, too, would partly smile, and the whole lot would disappear with shrieks of laughter.

In Santiago I saw naked youngsters of 5 and 6 years, but now, as we rode along, girls of apparently of 8 or 9 and boys from 12 to 15 were running about the houses without a rag on. As we passed one house a naked boy of perhaps 14 ran indoors the moment we appeared, clothed in a new straw hat, and stood up like a soldier before the door that we might admire him.

The houses were made invariably of poles, with thatched roofs, but some had their verandas covered with tiles. Most of them had the walls made of slender saplings, which were thatched with long grass or some kind of brush, but many had only one corner so filled in, the corner where the bed of the father and his wife stood. A few were not thatched even there. One could look through the walls as through a picket fence. Very inexpensive was the furniture in these houses. The bed was an ox hide, stretched across poles supported by forked sticks. Another hide, on the ground, served for the children. Three or four black earthen pots and jars stood in a corner for water. About it hung a half dozen gourd cups. Some had even fewer pots and gourds than here mentioned, but none was without a gaudy print of a saint.

In the valleys we were continually in the brush, save when passing the little huts, but on top of many hills we found a natural opening, with occasionally a great sugar-cane field owned by some rich don. We shall never be able to see the full beauties of the earth until we can look down on them from a flying machine, but the views from the hill tops of the Isthmus lack but little of the beauties which an aerial bicycle will give. Every such view as that showed that all the lowlands were thickly covered with brush and yet were more thickly inhabited than the region between Santiago and Aguadulce.

On every side columns of blue smoke were seen arising from the forest and drifting away on the gentle breeze. The air was hazy with the smoke, and the hills and mountains were as beautiful as in a northern Indian summer. The natives were everywhere preparing for the coming of the rainy season by clearing

land on which the brush had been growing for four or five years, in order to plant their little patches of grain. The smoke came from the burning brush heaps they made.

After riding a few miles, a great wedge-shaped ridge was seen a long way off before us, and the guide pointed to it and said that La Mesa was there. We climbed the side of the ridge by a winding woody path at about 1 o'clock in the afternoon and found that the top was an odd-looking table land, indeed. It did not average more than forty rods in width, and was over three miles long. It was as near barren on top as any part of the American desert. There were great stretches of reddish-yellow sand, with here and there patches of short, thin, gray, hair-like grass. It might well have been called a bald-headed mountain, for trees grew down the sides as hair does usually on the sides of the heads of bald men.

Another physical peculiarity of this table land was the black, porous lava that in chunks, knobs, and ridges was found along its surface, with here and there a scrubby tree rooted among the black blocks. It was a picture in miniature—or rather a reminder—of the black lava beds in the Snake River Valley of Idaho, of which THE SUN has told something.

At frequent intervals along this part of the route I saw stakes a yard long and an inch or more thick standing in the sand. The guide pointed to them and said they were put there by the American engineers surveying the route for an intercontinental railway.

Everywhere along the Isthmian route thereafter I found the people greatly interested in the railroad project. They held the idea that the road was to be built at once by American capitalists and had no doubt of its speedy completion and success. The facts I gathered bearing on it will be given at another time, but it may not be out of place to say here that, in spite of the cost and the fact that the road would have to make its traffic at the start, it would pay interest on the investment to the end and should have the immediate and continued attention of American statesmen.

It was right in the heat of the day as we rode over this little table land, and one group of native travelers was passed. They had stopped before noon in the shade of a bunch of trees on the edge of the plateau and were waiting for 3 o'clock to come before starting on. It is by stopping in the shade to avoid the

torrid heat of midday that these Ladinos have among other things given travelers an idea that they were a lazy lot. But where a man "has all the time there is," as they have, stopping in the shade at midday is a comforting and sensible thing to do. After a time, we arrived at the westerly end of this plateau, and found it had a broken surface, with a little brook that divided it from what seemed to be an entirely different and somewhat higher plateau, and here was the woody fringe surrounding the settlement called La Mesa, from the table land or *mesa* on which it stood.

We rode into the plaza, for every Spanish-American town has at least one plaza, to which all travelers go, and stopped before the frame of a pretentious mansion, the home of Señor Don Sal de C. Muerado [Murado?]. It was a curious looking house. A substantial timber frame, large enough for a house say 40x30 feet in size, with a wing in the rear, had been erected. The frame was built to divide the main structure into four rooms—two large front rooms and two comfortable rear ones. It was planned to make the rooms lofty and airy. It had then been tiled over, after which the two rear rooms were enclosed and floored, as was the wing in the rear, while the frame of the front part was left naked and floorless. To all appearances this work had been done many years before, for the timber was dry and weather beaten, as were some whip-sawed boards cut to complete the structure, but left piled under the roof.

The Don, a rugged, well-built man, who looked like a New York farmer, and so not at all like a Ladino, came out to greet us, and gave me a most hearty welcome after reading the letter of introduction I had brought. Then I went out to look at the village. It was not much of a town, but was interesting because of the work of some ambitious priest, long ago. At one end of the big plaza he had begun building a church with adobe walls not less than 50 by 120 feet large. The walls had been run up almost far enough for a low-walled structure. Some of the windows had been arched over, but there the work ceased. Grass, weeds, and tiny shrubs were growing in and on the neglected walls, making a very picturesque ruin.

The majority of the houses about the plaza were of adobe walls, whitewashed on the outside. Señor Muerado seemed to be the only gentleman living on the plaza who did not keep a store.

La Mesa was really a cowboy town of the Isthmus type. The people who lived in the adobe-walled houses were the cattle owners, and those in the thatched

houses the cowboys and their families. The population was about 450, Señor Muerado said, and there were a dozen cattle owners among the sixty odd families. The range lay off to the north and west, a succession of hills and table lands that stretched to the main cordilleras on the north. It was an ideal country for the business, but the business was conducted in a fashion which American cowboys would call slow. There was no hogging of the range. There was no riding the range to rope mavericks. No one carried a revolver save the cattle owners, and they did it just as they wore shoes—because it was the fashion. There wasn't a Stetson hat on a head of long hair in the entire cowboy outfit. All of the cowboys were even so far forgetful of cowboy dignity as to cultivate little patches of corn, beans, and sugar cane. To make amends for this condition of affairs, however, there was all the rum that any set of cowboys could ask for, and ten cents paid for a big bottle.

Señor Muerado said there were any veins of gold ore in the mountains to the north, where there was a little settlement called Santa Fe, but they were all low grade, and no one could afford to work them. He was sure that if the intercontinental railroad were ever completed—something of which he had no hope—these mines would all be developed. Then, too, the magnificent coffee land which lay idle would be utilized. He was not sure but Santa Fe would soon be a coffee district, anyway, for he said that everybody had a few trees and the number was rapidly increasing. The Santa Fe climate, he said, was quite different from that of the lower altitudes through which I had passed.

"People can go about without hats," he said in describing it. That is, the heat of the direct rays of the sun would not produce a fever, as they will near the sea. Moreover, it rains there, as it does in favored localities in the States, in showers of a few hours' duration, once a week or so the year round, and even in the height of the rainy season storms do not last more than three days. The heat of the sun is always tempered by the breeze from the sea, that can be seen sparkling in the sun in the dry season, or is hidden by driving mists in the wet far below and away to the south. The forests were forever mantled, and the open lands carpeted with flowers. The grass was forever green. The breezes were perfumed with fragrant breaths of flowers and of pines and balsams.

"You must not go up there, for if you do you will never more enjoy your own home."

La Mesa's climate is almost as fine, for they have pleasant showers all along the table lands south of the Cordilleras for eight months of the year, and only in the height of the dry season is the direct heat of the sun like that on the low ground.

As I strolled about the plaza a man came with several others from a door that had "Recreation Hall" painted above it, and said:

"Good-day."

"Good-day. You speak English, eh? I thought no one here talked anything but Spanish," said I.

"All right. Railroad?"

"I beg pardon?"

"All right—know railroad?"

"Yes."

"You?"

"Oh, do you mean if I am a railroad man?"

"All right. Soon make?"

"The intercontinental? No."

"Ah, mil gracias. All right."

He turned to the others and told them in Spanish that I was one of the engineers of the intercontinental railroad, and that I said it would not be built for a year yet, just as he had told them all along. Then he turned to me once more and went over some fifteen or twenty English words that he knew, turning at intervals to relate to the others in detail things I had not said, and meantime impressing them greatly with his knowledge of English. The words *"all right"* were repeated with about every attempt to say anything, and he used them correctly once. I said, *"Well, let's take a drink."* He did not understand what I said, but I held my right hand as if it grasped a whiskey glass before my mouth. Then I

tilted the little finger into the air. It is a beautiful specimen of the sign language. He instantly said "*all right.*" So did all his friends in chorus.

Every man on the Isthmus knows the meaning of "*all right.*" They learned it in the days of the 49ers. They all know the sign language also.

That night there was such a religious procession in the plaza as I had seen in Santiago, save that there were no soldiers in it. It tarried much longer before some of the houses than others and did not stop at all before Señor Muerada's. They told me that the procession remained before each house in proportion to the amount of money that each family gave to the priest for the occasion.

As we watched the procession and the women who brought burning candles to place on the veranda rails, Señor Muerada said:

"It is done only where they burn candles. Imagine women putting electric lights before an image."

(3) THE ISTHMIAN HIGHLANDS.

The Bridle Path is Kept in Good Repair—They have Bridal Veil Falls but NO Lovers' Rocks in that Country—A Pair of Musicians—Isthmian Hospitality.

To illustrate the hospitality of the region, it is worth telling that on the morning after my arrival in La Mesa I found on leaving my bed that my host had prepared a hearty breakfast for me, "*because the Yankees can travel more comfortably if they have meat with their coffee,*" as he said. It was genuine hospitality, too, for no charge was made for the trouble I had made him.

I had engaged a guide with ponies the night before. He came promptly at the hour agreed upon, and by 8 o'clock I was mounted—a novelty in the experience of travelers in Spanish American countries. The route was for the most part over an open rolling region. The air was really bracing in the early hours, and not at all oppressive at midday.

The most interesting feature of the day's journey was the trail traveled. It was over a soil that is cut and slashed by the water in remarkable fashion in the rainy season. The trail at that time becomes a trough to convey a roaring flood down each hillside, and a badly worn trough it becomes in most cases before the rains are past. But once they are past, along comes a Government roadmaster, who turns out the natives and compels them to repair the trail. This they do generally by digging down the sides of the trough until they have levelled up (in cross sections) the bottom; but occasionally an entire new route for the trail is laid out and graded down instead of up. That is, they make a new ditch instead of throwing up an embankment for the animals.

Because there is not a wheeled vehicle in that part of the Isthmus, the road is made not more than two feet wide, but no better pathway for mules can be found in the world than the "royal road" in the dry season from La Mesa through Las Palmas to Tole, save only that the grade, in places, is often as steep as 45° and on one river bank actually steeper. The pack animals of the interior of the Isthmus have some of the powers of a squirrel.

To dig down the sides of the road they use a two-inch chisel on the end of a six-foot pole. It is not so good as a pick, a Yankee would say, but it suits the workmen there, and moreover it can be used in parts of the road where there is scant

room for swinging a pick. In places the annual digging has been carried on until one travels through a ditch anywhere from ten to thirty feet deep, with steep banks that seem to be ready to tumble down and bury the traveler. The trail in these places, however, is through a stiff soil that does not cut down easily—a clay that is almost a rock, and I saw old chisel marks on the walls as high up as my head. They had been made years before and were actually moss-grown, as rocks come to be.

Uncle Sam's special consular report on *Streets and Highways in Foreign Countries* makes no reference to the Isthmus of Panama, and very little to any part of Spanish America north of it, but, as will be told at another time, great sums of money have been spent in roadmaking there with interesting results.

Two little cemeteries were passed during the day. Both were collections of little crosses standing about a large one in a stretch of wild sterile pasture, dotted with little copses beside the road. Both were near the intersection of two trails, but not a house was in sight, although one could see over the region for miles.

The large cross was the mark of the cemetery as a whole, of course, while the little ones were for the graves. The crosses seemed to be made of a size in proportion to that of the grave and were from a foot to two feet high. The great crosses were in one case six and the other about fourteen feet high. Curiously enough, the arms of the great crosses carried smaller ones set on each end. All the crosses were made of saplings with the bark removed.

I watched the guide as we passed these graves, and other guides as I passed others, because I had read that the natives always said a prayer and crossed themselves devoutly when a cross appeared. Perhaps I happened on a careless lot of guides, or else times have changed. My guides showed no interest whatever in either crosses or graves.

An interesting manifestation of religious zeal is found in the placing of crosses, some of them made of monstrous timbers, on prominent hilltops within view of the trails and settlements. The peaks selected are always the loftiest of the vicinity. At las Palmas one stands on a hill at least 1,500 feet above the plaza. In no other way have the natives interfered with the natural scenery. There is neither patent medicine nor soap advertisement to be found painted along the trails.

We stopped at the plantation of one of the wealthier landowners along the route for a luncheon about noon. It had the only house with a tile roof that I saw outside of the villages. There was a shed 30x50 feet large behind the house, and under that were a wooden cane mill and two large vats for making the coarse brown sugar of the country. The proprietor had at least twenty acres of cane growing near the house, and much more in other fields, he said. He was dressed in a thin and molasses-stained cotton shirt and a pair of cotton trousers that he had rolled to his hips after the fashion of the men who work in the region. Though dressed like the two men who helped him, no one would have failed to recognize him as the proprietor. He had the air of one who gives orders and never receives them; besides, he rolled down his trousers when he saw the guest, while the workmen kept theirs up.

The mistress of the house was dressed, too, very much as her servants were, but the real ruler of the house, a bright young woman, the daughter of the old folks, had a dress of fine thin woolen goods, with a silk *rebozo* or scarf with tassels, which she kept shifting about from her shoulders to her head in a way that showed her natural grace and a tinge of vanity as well.

We had wheat rolls for our luncheon, and that was a very good evidence of the wealth of the family. It is expensive bringing flour from Panama. The master and I ate alone at a little table in the house, and the mistress and her daughter ate at a table out under the shed. When I had finished and left the table with the master the guide took my place while the house servants ate where the mistress had been. We had coffee with the meal, but the servants got only a thin syrup from the sugar vats to drink.

Judging from the reports found in the books, Spanish America was the last place where one might expect to find manifestations of civic pride, or that spirit which prompts the people to take a stranger to view the show places of the town. We have in St. John, New Brunswick, the falls "where the water runs both ways;" in Boston the Bunker Hill; in Chicago, the stock yards, and so on across the continent. But I found every little hamlet in the interior of the Isthmus had its show place, too. About the smallest place that I visited was Las Palmas. I stopped at the house of Señor Don Manuel de Alamos. The Don was not at home, but his oldest son, a bright lad of eighteen, did the honors of the occasion to perfection. Learning that I was a newspaper writer and, in the country to find matters that would interest readers of THE SUN, he immediately carried me off to see the show place of the town, a cataract seventy feet high. A lazy tadpole

stream wound along through a shallow valley near the town, with scarcely enough trees or brush about it to keep the sun from licking it up clean from the rocks. Eventually, however, it seemed to run against a solid mass of green foliage that rose out of a narrow gulch, and there it disappeared. Going down into the gulch one found that on the lip of the dam the water was spread by a rounded rock, so that it fell for a few feet in the form of a half cylinder and then burst into a fleecy white mass of spray that tumbled with a gentle crash on the broken rocks below. Of course, they called it the Bridal Veil. Everybody calls every high, narrow waterfall by that name, just as every point of rocks high above a stream of water is called the Lover's Leap. However, this particular waterfall was charming to look at, and there was no Lover's Leap in the whole Isthmian region. In fact, the Isthmian girls aren't built that way. When a lover deserts one of them for some other girl, she doesn't go away and jump off a high rock to cure herself of what ails her, but she takes a good sharp knife and sticks it into the other girl in a way to end all rivalry. Then her lover comes back and they live together joyously ever after. The Ladino romances are stirring rather than pathetic.

After showing me the cataract, young Alamos turned the conversation on music. He said he was the best musician of the place and the leader of the village string band. Every settlement in that country has a string band, whose chief functions are serenading the sweethearts of its members and escorting the priest when he goes to give the holy sacrament to a dying parishioner. It sounds very odd to an American to hear a string band playing a lively march around a priest in robes on his way to a deathbed, but to the Isthmian people it is an occasion so solemn that they all fall on their knees as the priest goes by and say their prayers devoutly.

Young Alamos said he had been the leader of the Las Palmas band on many such occasions, and so I asked him to order out the band in full regalia that I might photograph them. He was delighted at the prospect, and in half an hour he called to say that he was ready on the sunny side of the house. I went out there and found him and another—a little humpbacked man, the top of whose head was just on a level with the boy's belt, and the boy was only about 5 feet 3 inches tall at that.

They were posed as folks usually pose when the photographer says "*Look pleasant now,*" the boy with his legs spread and hat on one side and the man with an ambitious, made-to-order smile of full width. It was a comical picture as a

whole, but there was that in the thin face of the little old dwarf, in spite of his made smile, that gave one the heartache. Directly the photograph had been taken they sat down to play, the young man his violin and the dwarf his guitar. They forgot to pose then: they very soon forgot that anyone was there to listen, I think, for they played as though inspired by dreams of beauties that others could not see—a melody that was at one time as soft and sweet as the air that drifted through the trees, and at another as fierce as a blast from the naked peaks of the cordilleras that rose in the northern sky. Two more diverse human figures than this bright, rosy-cheeked boy and the withered little dwarf could scarce be found, and yet in their music they were as of one soul, and that a great one.

The young man had two sisters, 15 and 17 years of age. They had never been photographed and were delighted at my offer to take them. They were typical beauties of the shoe-wearing class, with forms unrestrained by corsets or other pinching devices. But their dresses were of the most expensive material, and they would have passed unnoticed in a Broadway crowd, unless, indeed, they were smiling, when the brightness of their faces would have attracted attention.

If one could judge by the architecture of the old church of Las Palmas, the priest who built it expected an earthquake, for he used a framework of timber well braced, which he filled in with adobes—a style of building which can be found wherever in Ladinoland earthquakes prevail. The traveler can never forget for any length of time the existence of a church in any Ladino town, for the bells are kept ringing in most remarkable fashion. Every church has at least two bells hung in a stout little shed somewhere near the main building, but between Aguadulce and David there is not one sound or uncracked bell to be found. Nor did I see a single bell with a clapper. They were all hung in rigid frames, and the torturer who would make them shiver and shriek pounded them with smooth round pebbles as big as his fist. Penance of one kind is imposed on saint and sinner in these towns. Their ears must be tortured daily.

Another religious feature of the town was a huge cross at the end of the plaza opposite the church. These plaza crosses can be found in small villages north into Mexico. They sometimes have figures of the square and compass, the all-seeing eye, and other things that can be found on the charts of the Masonic order. And yet Masons who displayed their symbols in public in those countries have often been mobbed.

The young man and I dined alone that night. The stranger will not infrequently eat with his host only in traveling through Spanish America. We had wheat rolls in addition to the beans, corn cakes, soup, beef, fried rice, fried eggs, &c., that constitute the food of the wealthier Isthmians, and then we drank coffee made from berries that grew in the back yard of the house and smoked cigars, made from tobacco that grew beside the coffee bushes. The cigars are especially worth mention, because they were of the only good native tobacco I found south of Mexico.

(4) FOR A RECLUSE OR A LOAFER.

An Ideal Town Site on the Panama Isthmus Plateau—Where they make a Wayfarer Comfortable—The Greetings of Ladinos—Two Tramps who Found Life Pleasant.

If there is anyone among the readers of THE SUN who would like to find a home in a part of the world where he would be undisturbed by the rush and bang of civilization, a place where life may be passed in meditation or contemplation of beautiful scenery or some other occupation well suited to gentle natures, let him try the interior of the Isthmus of Panama—Tole, for instance. The founders of Tole selected the banks of a tiny brook that with its fringe of green trees wound its way across one of the thousand upland parks of the Isthmian plateau. It was a park on the edge of the plateau, where one could stand out on the natural lawns and look away across two or three leagues of wood-covered lowland to the shining waters of the Pacific, with a couple of green islands in the offing to add beauty to the broad expanse of the sea, and then turn inland and look over the tumbled, rounded hills, and away to the naked cordilleras. No more charming house sites can be found in the world than about Tole. Nor are they attractive solely because of natural scenery, for the town lies so that every breath from the sea must drift through the open portals of its houses. It is a tiny hamlet—only forty houses all told, and all of these, save two, are of the picturesque thatch that abounds everywhere south of Mexico. Indeed, a part of the charm of a home there would be in the character which these houses, with their overhanging palms and orange trees, would give to the scenery.

And yet the place is not perfect, even to the eye. It is at least a week's journey from Panama, however that journey be made: it is even three days away from that ancient interior capital, Santiago, but the rude hand of civilization has come to destroy the symmetry, the fitness of each part of the lovely picture to the rest. A priest has erected a new church, using unplanned, whip-sawed plank placed vertically for the walls, and roofing it with zinc-plated corrugate iron. It is 30x60 feet large and about 12 feet high to the eaves. To the eye it is an exact counterpart of the first livery stable built in Creede, Col., and a very good imitation of a dance house in Cripple Creek. Imagine the effect of the white glare of that iron roof where the restful color of the dark red tiles might have been had. Imagine one trying to hold religious services in the quivering hot atmosphere within those thin, unbattened board walls where the thick, cool walls of adobe might have been had for less money. However, the roof will not last over five

years, and then the tiles, which cost more at first, but are cheaper in the long run, will be substituted. Meantime a would-be recluse can find plenty of house sites on the hills from which the church could not be seen on account of the trees.

I left Las Palmas bound for Tole at 1½ in the afternoon. The road was eight leagues long. It crossed a divide three leagues or so out from Las Palmas—a north and south range that runs away down to the mountains on the thick peninsula that forms the west side of the bay of Panama. From the crest of this divide one had the finest view of the interior plateau of the Isthmus to be found anywhere, but the picture spread out before the eye was only one of a thousand almost as beautiful to be seen in the journey.

Not a house or a field was to be seen, but dozens of columns of blue smoke rising from among the hills showed that homes were scattered everywhere over it. Curiously enough these columns of smoke showed where farmers were clearing the timber from the land to make ready for planting their crops, although tens of thousands of acres of prairie land were within sight. The prairie land is never cultivated there, but is allowed to lie untouched for pasture for the cattle.

In the course of the journey we forded three large branches of the Tabasara River. The trails down the banks of these streams are the steepest I ever saw, even steeper than that over the Trail Creek Pass of the Teton range into Jackson's Hole, Wyoming, where they hitch big trees to the wagons downhill to keep them from over-running the horses. The way the mules hustled up the zigzag paths would have pleased even the most pessimistic Rocky Mountain prospector. But I cannot speak well of the mule fittings. My crupper broke twice and the cinch three times. But I didn't fall very far. The trail, as has been explained in *THE SUN*, is always made as a ditch in the hillside, and I commonly had to hold my knees pretty well up toward my chin to keep the ditch walls from tearing my shoes. So, when the cinch or crupper gave way, I put my feet on the ground and stood up. Then I called the guide to make repairs. People bound on an overland journey anywhere among the Ladinos are advised to carry their own saddles. The banks of the trail ditch are not always conveniently located for receiving the tumbling rider.

The rivers of the Isthmus are remarkably beautiful and interesting streams—especially interesting. More than half a dozen of them show a color of gold to every panful of gravel. And then they are full of fish, and game of all sorts comes

down to the pools to drink during the dry season. At any but the driest season the rivers have a fashion of filling up at the most unexpected moments. The traveler enters the gently rippling ford and stops to let his mule drink. While he gazes at the deep, white water pools above or whistles at the chattering monkeys that make faces at him from the big-branched trees hard by, a roar as of a prairie tornado comes around the next bend above, and a wall of water, maybe higher than his head, comes frothing and tearing down upon him. The mules in terror dance and plunge, or fly away downstream in a mad, vain effort to escape. The flood rushes after and in a minute has buried rider and animal out of sight forever. Dozens of people are drowned in these rivers every year, they say, although everybody there knows the dangers of the fords well. The floods that kill come from sudden squalls on the mountain sides back among the main cordilleras, and the grade of the water channels is so steep that mighty torrents quickly rise and as quickly disappear. The fords of some, even at the best season, make a tenderfoot quake for his baggage if he has any perishable property, for the current is swift and the bottom a mass of round boulders over which the animals labor and slide, as if constantly at the point of failing.

When the sun went down we were still ten miles from Tole and had one river to ford. The guide wanted to camp for the night by the river, until I asked him if he was afraid to go on. That settled it. He led the animals over the stream that was almost deep enough to make them swim, with reckless speed, and thereafter trotted along with an air that showed he was greatly hurt by any thought of his being afraid of anything. Then we had a journey of more than three hours by night. One reads of the briefness of tropical twilights, but in the dry season they are just about as long as a New York twilight on a pleasant day in October. Such a ride in the gathering gloom will be found worth all the trouble of the long journey that precedes it. Imagine the delight of passing up and down through different strata or layers of perfumes from the flowering shrubs and trees that border the trail, odors that are heavy and strong and faint and delicate by turns, but always delightful. And then, as night comes on, new forms of bird and insect life and the animals that have made no sign of their presence by day begin to stir about. Screams and squeaks mingle with the songs of sweet-voiced birds, while the brush rustles beside the trail, and there is crash after crash in the boughs above. The thoughts of panthers and jaguars come in spite of philosophy, and one shivers lest the deadly tree snake may be just falling from some branch above. One may know very well that the shrieks of seeming distress from the depths of the woods are really the love notes of a bird no larger than his thumb; that the rustle in the brush is made by a rabbit or a harmless iguana;

that the flaming eyes he thinks he sees are only the lamps of a species of firefly, but there will be a thrill in his nerves while the journey lasts that will make him congratulate himself a thousand times over having made the trip—that is, he will do so after it is over. While it is making, he thinks what a fool the man with "the wandering foot" makes of himself.

We reached Tole at 10 o'clock. Everybody but the dogs had gone to bed. The dogs were not accustomed to the appearance of a Gringo at any hour, and they now made the welkin ring. But I must say for the Ladino dogs that they are the best-mannered in the world. Not one ever tried to bite me, although I encountered dozens of them under all sorts of circumstances likely to provoke dog nature to wrath, and they rarely even barked or acted displeased in any way.

We stopped at the house of Señor Don Sebastián Rosa. After rapping on the door, we heard a stir within, and directly a sturdy, full-bearded man came to the door to see what was wanted. If he was vexed at being disturbed at such an hour or astonished to find a newspaper man from New York there, he did not show it in any way whatever. He acted exactly like a man who expected an old friend to arrive and was right glad he had at last come. In short, he extended a welcome that was simple and unostentatious, but perfectly hearty. The way he made the servants hustle would have done credit to an old-fashioned Virginia planter, and in half an hour I was swinging asleep in a huge hammock hanging where the air was coolest and most refreshing.

As I learned next day, Señor Rosa was one of the most enterprising and successful farmers of the Isthmus. He was just loading a schooner down at the mouth of the river, some four leagues away, with produce—chiefly corn, beans, and rice. He sent away a dozen ox loads of stuff at 4 o'clock in the morning. It was the only time or place at which I saw oxen used as pack animals.

The oxen were large, well-kept beasts. Each had a ring in its nose, and each had been broken to carry a pack without protest. The pack saddle was made of rawhide with a grass mat below and a wooden sawbuck³ on top. To this wooden frame was attached on each side a panier about the size of a sugar or flour barrel made of stiff ox hide. Each would hold at least three bushels of grain, and the load of each ox was therefore more than 300 pounds on the average.

³ Sawbuck — With X-shaped ends (by analogy to a saw-horse)

When loaded the animals were made up into a string, one behind the other, with a rope from each nose ring to the saddle of the next beast in front. A peon on a pony led the procession and another mounted came on behind.

The Don told me to make myself at home until night, when he would return, and then he rode away on a gray stallion after the oxen.

The Don lived in a two-story house built of white-sawed lumber, with a neat two-story veranda in front. The veranda had a railing on both floors, and that was something I saw nowhere else in the Isthmus. The household consisted of the *señora*, a charming little daughter of about twelve years, and a dozen servants all told. At the head of the servants was a housekeeper of half Indian blood, who had her teeth filed to a point after the manner of an Isthmian tribe, so I was told. Her mouth would have been pleasant but for this effort to follow the behests of Isthmian mountain society, but I fancy if one were to live in a village where all the people had filed teeth he would soon cease to notice the deformity. At least, I soon ceased to think of the pointed teeth of the housekeeper, although she was a smiling widow who had her mouth open all the time.

The Ladino way of expressing delight or pleasure on meeting an intimate friend or relative is peculiar. It was well illustrated when Señor Rosa returned that night and greeted his little daughter. She was plainly his idol, and she was a remarkably affectionate child, but instead of taking her on his knee and kissing her, he put his arm around her waist and gently pressed her shoulder while she put one arm around him and patted his shoulder just once with her chubby little hand. This form of embracing is universal in the Spanish Main. The only enthusiastically affectionate greeting that I saw in all the journey was when Gen. J. M. Agüero of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, met Mr. M. I. Aguilera of Mamaroneck, Westchester county, N. Y., at a little hotel in Amapala on an island in the Gulf of Fonseca. They were old friends and had not met in a long time. When they saw each other, they paused for a moment motionless and then threw their arms around each other and kissed repeatedly.

Don Sebastián Rosa's formal embrace of his sweet little daughter, whom he loved as his life, and the kissing of two bearded men who were simply good friends, are contrasting pictures that illustrate the customs of a mighty interesting people.

Although there are no tramps—peripatetic beggars—on the Isthmus, I met two Jamaica negroes at Tole that were but one remove from it. Like nearly all others of their race, these had come over to the Isthmus when the canal was digging and had survived the fevers of the Chagres district to finally wander away to the West. They had lived a vagabond life for several years and were as sleek and happy as any tramp I ever saw. One had been employed, however, for three months as hostler by Señor Rosa to care for the gray stallion already mentioned. It was a sort of work just suited to the darkey, for he liked horses and he had but the one to look after. He received \$4 a month and food for his services, and from the looks of the horse I think he just about earned his wages. It was fairly well cared for. The other fellow said he "*travelled on his shape.*" He was a glib-tongued rascal who had begged his living for months and was counted one of the gayest beaus in the village. He became very confidential, after I gave him 10 cents in return for answering a lot of questions, and urged me to stay in Tole until I had mastered the Spanish language. He assured me that either the Don or any other citizen would keep me as long as I wished to stay, if I would but flatter them a little every day, and that once I could speak Spanish fluently I could travel up and down the land living like a sybarite and at no expense.

"Yah-h—you c'u'd have de pick of de bes' der is. Look at me," he said.

No one need doubt what he said. The Isthmus is a paradise for a suave loafer.

(5) AN ISTHMIAN SWAMP TOWN.

A Chiriquí Indian and his Outfit—Pearl Hunters—The Table of a Wealthy Isthmian—Cowboy Characteristics—One Priest's idea of a Scandal—Impossible to Organize a Labor Union—Ipecac and Quinine.

The great number of skins of deer, panthers, and jaguars that can be seen in the stores of the interior of the Isthmus of Panama has been mentioned in THE SUN, together with the fact that these animals were usually killed by the natives, using little pot metal guns that sell there for \$3 or thereabouts in silver. On the way from Tole to Remedios I saw a Chiriquian Indian hunter who was armed with a bow and arrow meant for murderous business. The bow was only three and a half feet long, but it was at once strong and flexible. I could not learn what kind of wood it was made of, but it was strung with sinew and backed by sinews that had been chewed to the consistency of glue and then placed along the back of the bow. It was a greasy black weapon to look at. The single arrow carried was the chief feature of the man's outfit. It was 4½ feet long, absolutely straight, was tipped at the finger end with two stiff red feathers, and at the point was armed with a four-inch blade of steel that was polished to a beautiful razor edge on both sides.

My admiration for the weapon pleased its owner, but he would not sell it. He said he killed the tiger, as they call the jaguar sometimes, and plenty of deer. He said he could shoot that arrow clear through a deer easily, and then showed me that its shaft was bloody and the feathers new. The old ones had been torn off in passing through an animal.

Nor would the man allow me to take a photograph of him, and that was too bad, because his dress consisted solely of a low-necked shirt and a Masonic-like apron. He was sitting on a rock when I stopped to talk to him, a smooth, warm, comfortable rock, too, but the moment he understood what my camera was for he jumped up greatly excited. So, I put away the camera to please him. One like to humor a man who carries arrows with four-inch steel blades on the points.

At another place in the trail while crossing a small sluggish stream (we had come down from the plateau to the lowlands) a young buck Indian and his squaw were seen wading the stream. I asked the man what he was looking for, and he put his hands together somewhat in the shape of a clamshell.

"Good," said I; "what do you do with them?"

His mouth opened very wide and he gave his right hand a quick jerk, as if throwing into the opening, whereat the squaw and my guide and, in fact, all hands smiled appreciatively.

"Do you find any pearls in them?" said I.

The buck frowned heavily and shook his head, while the guide licked up his mule. A half mile further on the guide turned and said:

"He was looking for pearls, but they say always that they find none. The river pearls are worth not much."

Remedios is known as a seaport of the Isthmus because schooners come to a landing, four miles away, and there is a cart road from the landing to the town. It has 800 inhabitants. The trail from Tole runs almost continuously downhill through the broken lands that border the great plateau. Numerous streams were crossed, and the further we travelled the hotter the air became. When at last the low, alluvial plain on which Remedios stands was reached, men and beasts were in a profuse perspiration, while the mules kicked up a dust from the rich, black soil, which gave a depth of color to the hands and face, where the moisture did not run it off, that was comical to see on the guide. I was thinking of this as we rode into town, and saw a rollicking young girl call a whole family from a shack to come and look at us. A dozen people, old and young, gathered about a door and gazed at us earnestly.

"Did they never see any one covered with dust, before?" said I.

"You do not know the manner of the people," replied the guide. *"It is not the dust, but the size of the gentleman. They have never seen one so tall."*

That was a new idea to me, but it is a fact that a man who is more than six feet tall and weighs 200 pounds is regarded as a giant by the feather weights of the Isthmus. Besides, the sight of any kind of foreigner there was a novelty, as was shown when people asked me to say something in my own language that they might hear it spoken.

We stopped at the combined home and store of Señor Don Celestino Aristole, the wealthiest merchant of the place. The Don was asleep in his hammock (it was at 2:30 o'clock), and so the guide and I sat in the store on two boxes full of flasks of powder until 4 o'clock, when he came in. He welcomed us after the manner of the country and took me to a guest chamber—the first I had seen since leaving Santiago—where a servant brought towels and water for a bath, and a mug of boiling water for a shave. By the time I had made my toilet the Don came to say dinner was ready, and the table was found spread on a back veranda facing a garden full of tropical plants and flowers. There was real china on the table, and real silver beside the china. The waiter brought macaroni soup, and after that stewed chicken, a salad of the alligator pear, a roast of venison and a roast of fresh pork, a native plum sauce and a variety of fruits, a pudding, and a cup of black coffee. Meantime we had a bottle of excellent claret. The vegetables included fried rice, beans, fried plantains and succotash, and there was good white bread, of course. The bill of fare is worth giving because it was the best found between Panama and San José de Costa Rica. In fact, no hotel in either city served anything better.

It was Saturday, Feb. 25, when I reached Remedios, and when the Don said he would have difficulty in getting a guide for me on Sunday, and wouldn't I give him extremely much pleasure by remaining with him over Sunday and partaking of his *"homely fare,"* I said with enthusiasm that I would. It reminded me of the days when Commodore Gerry,⁴ as skipper of the flagship in the international yacht races of some years ago, invited the reporters to *"partake of the plain and simple fare of the Electra,"* and then led the way to a spread of boned turkey and champagne frappé.

The cowboys began coming down from the interior very early on Sunday morning. They were as liberally supplied with ten-cent pieces as the cowboys at Fort Dodge used to be with double eagles, and they were almost as reckless in squandering them, too, as the Kansas boys were with the gold. Every store in town was open, and every store sold rum—sold plenty of it. But there was only one little fight, of which THE SUN has told, wherein a cowboy got his head split open with the Isthmian substitute for a quirt,⁵ and only a half-hour or so of racing horses up and down the plaza. It was all interesting, because characteristic of the country, but in no way exciting, for no one had a gun. In general, the effect

⁴ Eldridge Thomas Gerry (1837-1927)— Commodore of the New York Yacht Club, 1886-1892

⁵ Quirt — Forked type of whip used as a horse whip or cattle goad.

of the rum was to incline the crowd to love-making. The conduct of the boys was decorous while in the stores, but on the street, they geyed, as it seemed to me, every girl that was dressed in holiday attire unmercifully, crying out:

"Ah, my life! my sweetheart! see the most beautiful! Ah! I love thee extremely much!"

The girl, to the casual observer, did not seem to hear a word that was said or to know that a soul was in sight, but, if looked at closely, one saw the big, dark eyes roll to one side when passing some jolly fellow, and there would be just the faintest crinkle of the eyelids before passing out of crinkling range. And if one watched the jolly fellow at whom the eyes were crinkled he was seen to slip around the nearest corner within a short time, and he did not return again soon.

It happened that the cowboy who got his head split open in the fight, while afterward crossing the plaza, almost stumbled against the parish priest. For a moment he gazed with drooping jaw and then fell on his knees, and with clasped hands and upturned, blood-covered face burst into tears and implored forgiveness. He was ordered to go and wash himself, and he started to obey, but very quickly forgot the injunction and turned back to curse the one who had hit him.

The priest was on his way to call on me at the time, and I was carried off to his home, a little mud-walled, thatch-roofed house on the plaza opposite the church. It had a dirt floor. It was divided into three rooms, and a notched log served in place of a stairway to reach an attic. We had a bottle of sweet wine and, while drinking it, the priest showed me an ounce bottle of pearls which his parishioners had picked up on the beach, he said, and had given to him. Most of them were seed pearls, but one, a quarter of an inch in diameter, was of exquisite beauty and valuable.

Another character of the Isthmus was a man who had been a sailor in a San Francisco coasting schooner for nearly a year and had accumulated a knowledge of longshore and forecastle English that was funny to hear, but not quite of a nature to print. His continuous use of American profanity was characteristic of the Ladinos who have gained a smattering of English as he had gained his. It shows, I think not so much a natural depravity in the Ladino as a deficiency in the English language, or perhaps an [...] longing for something more expressive than the one vile little word with which they relieve their

feelings. It may be admitted that profanity is a needless sin, and still one can sympathize with the poor fellows who are blindly groping about for more vigorous expletives. This chap was from David and had come to Remedios to work as a mason in building an adobe house. He said he got \$1.20 a day for his services, which he thought was very low for a first-class man.

"Ah, in San Francisco, where they find a union, wages is \$5 by day. The union makes the wages good, no?" said he.

"It certainly does sometimes. Why don't you make a union of masons down here and bring up prices?"

He looked astonished, and then said:

"How can I? I am the only mason."

All the stores of Remedios are lighted at night by kerosene lamps. Don Celestino's store had one of the huge lamps such as are used in the gambling halls of the Rocky Mountain mine camps. It was very pleasant to find a good light after having lived in a candle country for some days, but the traveler of taste would rather endure the candles, I think, than suffer from the unavoidable views of the oil cans on the streets. The oil all comes from Williamsburgh in ten-gallon cans, but just how a ten-gallon tin can ruins the scenery of an Isthmian town will be told at another time.

When I asked about the resources of the country about Remedios the people with one accord said, *"Ipecac and quinine bark."* The ipecac⁶ vine grows in the forest there as blackberry bushes and moss grow on barren, abandoned New York fields. It is perennial, and it attains unusual size and covers vast areas of land. Any merchant will take a contract to deliver a quintal or a ton or ten tons of it at any time within reason. They allege that the most luxuriant emetic fields of Brazil are as naught to the region of Remedios. If anyone wants to flood the New York market with it let him apply at Remedios.

But on no other account would I advise any one to go to the place—unless it were to enjoy the admirable hospitality of Don Celestino. The town lies by the swamps. A heavy fog hangs over it every morning, even in the driest season.

⁶ Ipecac — A plant whose extract is used as an expectorant, and to cause vomiting.

There is no drainage. There is rarely a breeze for ventilation. The sweltering people do not know the meaning of sanitation. In spite of the flocks of buzzards that swoop down to clean the streets of offal—that serve the butchers, for instance, by cleaning the hides of slaughtered cattle, as well as by clearing up refuse of all kinds—malarial fevers must attack an unacclimated person quickly even if the natives do seem to thrive. In spite of the pleasure I found in the society of easily made friends there I was right glad when a guide and his mules came to say he was ready to take the road to Horconcity, where the mule ride through the Isthmus was to end and a new mode of traveling to be tried. Remedios, however, was the only town I visited west of Panama where I felt the slightest concern about the sanitary conditions. I found that the common American notion that the Spanish Main is an unhealthful region was not well founded.

(6) A NIGHT IN A ROTTEN BONGO.⁷

Jaguars and Wildcats Mounted in Indian Fashion—Escaping the Penalty for Crime—Horconcitos Looks like a Lot of Haystacks—Not a First-Class Bed.

Muleback travelers who have written and printed their experiences invariably complain of the varying estimates of distances they receive from the natives along their routes. In this respect I had very little trouble in the journey through the Isthmus of Panama. I cannot say positively that the men of intelligence never made a mistake in estimating the length of a day's journey, but if they did so it was in regard to the road from Remedios, a town that appears on all maps of the Isthmus, to Horconcitos, that does not appear even on the coast charts issued by the Americans or the British, although it is a port from which considerable produce is shipped, as THE SUN has told. They said in Remedios that it was eight leagues to Horconcitos, but we were just twelve hours in making the journey on strong, quick-stepping mules that for many miles at a stretch kept up a swinging pace that was at least good for four miles an hour on a trail as good as the one we were on. Indeed, we had but three miles of poor road in the whole day, and that was over a small mountain covered with broken rock.

The direct route from Remedios west—the old cattle trail—runs by the way of San Felix and San Lorenzo. It is said to be almost a good cart road for most of the distance, but I went by the way of Horconcitos because the latter stands on a stretch of water very much like the Albemarle Sound and is navigated by dug-outs only.

The route taken was interesting in every respect, even though lacking in the magnificent scenery of the uplands. It wound through a region of detached hills and mountains but was comparatively free from grades. The guide said it would be found live with Indians and snakes. Not a snake did we see, but a plenty of what would be called in the States blanket Indians live in that region. Not that they wear blankets, as some United States Indians do—the weather is too warm for wool—but they live much as the Six Nations of New York used to do—on the uncultivated products of the wilderness, with a little corn and beans, which the squaws raise.

⁷ Bongo — Small punt or dugout canoe

We stopped to talk to one group that we found camped on the bank of a creek. The men all wore shirts of blue or white cotton. They had little bunches of pink or red cotton [...] sewed on one breast or the other, for the same reason that gentlemen in New York put bright-colored flowers on their lapels. Some of the men wore cotton trousers, too, but some had aprons only. The women all wore cotton dresses on the model of a night gown.

Among the household goods were the skin of a jaguar and the skin of a tiger cat, mounted or set up taxidermist fashion. Nothing but the skin had been preserved, and there was no attempt to substitute artificial for the natural eyes. The beasts were posed as if climbing up a tree, and when I asked what they were used for they said "in the festival." Then a big buck picked up the jaguar by a strap fastened under its forelegs and suspended it on his back, with its head partly concealed in his long hair. The limbs were so well posed, and there was such a vicious curve in its back, it was so surprisingly like a live beast that had alighted on his back from a tree and was burying its teeth in his neck that I shivered involuntarily. Thereat, the whole crowd laughed.

The guide said that these Indians gather by the hundred at their festivals in the villages along the coast and there, form in line, with their vicious-looking beasts on their backs, and with reed flutes and ox-horn bugles in their hands, and then go marching about the plaza making such screaming noises as never were heard before. I got one Indian to blow his ox horn, a long Texas-steer-like affair. The sound was precisely like that made by a Congo war trumpet that I once heard used by an African traveler in Chickering Hall.⁸

Half way to Horconcitos we came out of the woods and entered a lowland prairie region. These prairies had all been fenced in for pastures, Yankee barbed wire being as abundant there as in Missouri. The grass grew luxuriantly, and the cattle seen in some of the fields were fit to make a stockman's eyes snap. Nothing finer ever came from the Arkansas Valley. We rode for miles through this region without seeing a house. When I asked why that was so, the guide said the people all lived together in villages. He was surprised to learn that people elsewhere in the world preferred to live in houses scattered up and down the highways.

⁸ Chickering Hall — Concert hall in Boston, Mass.

I did not see a single graveyard along this day's trail, but one lone cross stood on the edge of the wide prairie, on the further side of which was a village. The guide said it was erected over the blood of a man who had been hashed up with machetes. He had had trouble with three men whom he employed, and they had gone on strike in the most effectual way known to the Isthmus.

"Were they hanged?" said I.

"For God, no." he replied.

"To prison?"

"Jesus! To Costa Rica."

We were approaching the border line. There is no extradition of criminals between the so-called republics of the Spanish Main, and once over the line, the worst character is safe and sure of a welcome from those gone before him.

Although Horconcitos has over 1,000 inhabitants, according to its merchants, there was very little of the appearance of a town about it. There was wide street rather than a regular plaza, and this street forked at both ends. The plan of the town might be called an attenuated A. Near the center the walls of a huge church in the form of a cross 150 feet long, had been carried up five feet from the ground and then abandoned, and the nearest place of worship was in a suburban settlement about three miles back. There were a few stores with adobe walls, but the rest of the town was like a mile-long collection of hay stacks; that is, it was built of poles and grass. It stood on a small flat prairie surrounded by dense brush. There was an opening through the brush at one end of the town that led down a slight declivity to an arm of the sea, such as can be found in the swamps along the Great South Bay of Long Island—a tidal ditch that was full and twenty feet deep at high tide and empty at low. But instead of the small grass and tiny brush to be found along the tidal ditches of the Great South Bay there was remarkable tangle of trees—trees that were all roots and branches. There was not a tree trunk to be distinguished, nor could one be sure that any stem he looked at was either root or branch until he followed it for some distance with his eye, for every root rose high in stem fashion from the mud to join some other root in forming a branch which in turn divided at once into other branches, and from these branches the roots reached down to the mud again. In fact, the banks of this ditch presented the nearest approach to a natural-

growth net I have ever seen, but the same trees grow in all the swamps of the Pacific coast of Central America.

At Horconcitos I stopped with Señor Don Emilio Olave, whose house was built of adobes, neatly whitewashed, and whose roof was a very good thatch. Of the town and country around, he said that ague⁹ prevailed the year through, but in December when the season changed from wet to dry, everybody became affected. The month of September was the height of the rainy season, and for four weeks the rain fell incessantly day and night. The months of July and August were only a little better. The picture that he drew of the inhabitants of the place huddled together in their grass-covered huts besides smoky fires of wet wood, over which they shivered with the chills of disease while the rain fell remorselessly without, was one of utter wretchedness. But everything was pleasant and cheerful about the place in March. (I was there in March,) and the town was growing. A man was building a new shack at the end of the street toward the landing.

On the day after my arrival in town I was obliged to wait until 4 o'clock before starting on the journey to David. It was flood tide at 4:30. A grizzled old man, who looked like a story-book pirate and carried a four-foot paddle with a pear-shaped blade came after me and we soon reached the landing on the tidal ditch, where a number of bongos or dugout canoes lay. The boatman drew one that was 12 feet long, 16 inches wide, 12 inches deep, and had the model of a saw log chopped from a tree, to the back. It was half full of water, but he bailed it out and then built up a pile of sticks fit for stove wood in the center and thereon placed my baggage. Then he cut five more lengths of stove wood from a crooked pole and put them on the bottom in the bow.

"Seat yourself there," said he to me.

"Good," said I. *"But cut two more to put across on top, so I can sit upon them part of the time."*

He shook his head, humped his shoulders, and spread the palms of his hands upward.

"Why not?" said I.

⁹ Ague — Feverish disease, such as malaria.

He put the point of his machete against the side of the boat near the top and pushed gently. The blade slid through the wood as it might have done through soft cheese.

"It is too rotten to bear my weight up there, eh?"

"Why not?"

"But it will carry us to David?"

"To be sure."

I got in and sat down partly crossed-legged on the five crooked round sticks. The pirate took off his shirt and placed it on the poop deck of the canoe, so to speak, gave the boat a shove, stepped lightly in, sat down on his shirt, and began to swing his paddle and drive the boat through the glass-smooth water.

In a minute, a turn in the channel hid the landing from view, and we were gliding along between the net-like walls of the gray-green brush. There was a continual snapping on both sides as of the breaking of twigs. One would have thought some animals were fleeing from the canoe but for the fact that the water had overflowed both banks to an unmeasured depth, and no animals, and but here and there a heron, could be seen anywhere. A few minutes later we saw a rocky promontory protruding through the swamp, and on this was a very fair imitation of the cattle-shipping platform to be found at any plains railway station in the States, save that it was made of poles and the chute led down instead of up. It was to this chute that cattle schooners came to get fat steers for the Costa Rican market. Another was found further on, and then the ditch opened out into what looked like a lake.

We had now been about ten minutes afloat and the boatman ceased paddling. I looked around and found him about to begin bailing out the canoe. The water was two inches deep at least in the deepest part of the canoe, which was abaft the baggage. It seemed to me to be a tolerably good leakage for ten minutes, and I said so.

"Wait till we reach the wide water," said he.

I waited, although I would just then have much preferred going ashore and walking the rest of the distance.

The wide water was reached an hour later through a strait that led into a sound that was more like the Albemarle than any I have seen—a shallow trench, with low sand dunes toward the sea and banks of vegetation shoreward.

A lump of a swell was coming in from the ocean, bearing a rippling breeze on its back, and the canoe began to roll and jump in a way that would have been pleasing in a craft approved as a cruiser by the American Canoe Club; but where one sits on five crooked round sticks on the bottom of a leaky dugout the case is different. Moreover, the water was seeping into the boat more rapidly now, and the pitching made it slush around until it swamped the sticks on which I sat. That is to say, I took a sitz bath¹⁰ at every plunge.

I turned to the man with the paddle and told him I did not need any sitz bath, and he stopped paddling to bail out, but the canoe immediately broached to¹¹, and we narrowly escaped taking a bath of another kind.

Then he passed the gourd scoop to me and invited me to work my passage, which I felt obliged to do. The water was not deep—he showed me that he could reach bottom with his paddle—and there was no immediate danger of drowning if we did swamp. But the walking was bad and the trail under water to the shore indistinct. I bailed till we got out of the seaway. By that time the sun was sinking out of sight in a gorgeous red haze, and yet the point of land toward which we were heading was at least five miles away. I said:

"When will we reach our landing?"

"After ten hours."

"What? You told me it was a passage of but two (dos) hours from Horconcitos."

"No señor, I said twelve (doce) hours."

¹⁰ Sitz bath — Bath in which the bather sits, being immersed only sufficiently to cover buttocks and hips.

¹¹ Broach — (of a boat) Veer or pitch dangerously, presenting a side to the wind and sea

That was true. I had misunderstood the Spanish word and had practically the whole night ahead of me. I have seen men catch short naps in the saddle. I have seen them sleep well in a lumber wagon on a corduroy road in the swamps of the Maumee,¹² but for hard luck in lodgings I have never seen the equal of those five crooked, wet, round sticks in the bottom of the leaky dugout. Besides, having supposed we would arrive in two hours, I had brought nothing to eat.

If I can ever afford it I'll go back there and make that voyage over again in a flat-bottomed cruiser, well supplied with cushions. The trip had the elements of a delightful night as well as the elements of complete misery. The salt air drifted in from the sea in a way to at once sooth and refresh. Fish of many sizes leaped and played about the boat. As the night fell lights twinkled on the far-away shore and the sound of human voices came out to us marvelously clear and distinct. Then, when the night wore in and these voices were hushed, the screams of night birds and possibly of wild animals, were heard. And through all that time there was constantly before me the picture of that naked-chested, dark-skinned boatman sitting on the stern of the boat, wielding the paddle with tireless stroke. We read with admiration of the *coureur des bois*¹³ who could drive his birch bark canoe from the peep of dawn to the setting of the sun over the streams of Canada. The *coureur* was a mighty man with the paddle. But here was this Ladino, of the race whom all travelers call unutterably lazy, driving without rest a water-soaked log during more than eleven weary hours in the torrid zone.

By 2 o'clock in the morning we were paddling up a river that was bordered by rich pastures, where many fine cattle were feeding and lolling about. We saw no sign of human habitation, however, until at about 3:30 o'clock, when a house appeared on the left bank, and then some timbers for another house were passed. Here a man was seen asleep on the ground with slight covering, and the canoe was brought to the bank under the roots of a big tree, up which we climbed to land.

A walk of four miles, I now learned, was still before me.

¹² Maumee — River in northwest Ohio, flowing into Lake Erie.

¹³ *Coureur des bois* — Early (17th-century) French-Canadian trader who traveled the north woods, often by canoe, trapping and trading beaver skins with the native peoples.

"Do I carry your baggage for you?" asked the canoe man after we landed. I would not have carried that sixty pounds of stuff four miles after such a night for its weight in gold, but I said:

"I thought you were to take me to David."

"Yes; why not?"

"Do you want more pay for carrying the baggage? I gave you \$2.50 to take me, baggage and all, to David."

"Sir, that was for the bongo."

"How much do you want?"

"Sir, it is a long road. It is a league and a half to the hotel. The baggage weighs much. I want 18 cents if I carry it."

He had paddled a heavy dugout for eleven and a half hours, but he trotted away under the load of sixty pounds at a speed that took us to the hotel in one hour and ten minutes. When I gave him ten cents more than I had agreed to do and told him to get a drink, he was very much surprised. I do not know whether he was delighted or not. I fancy he wished he'd charged me twenty-one cents instead of eighteen for carrying the baggage.

The first streak of light was showing in the east when the man knocked at the door of a house over the veranda of which was the sign "Hotel," and to an inquiry from within said, "Friends—one an American." The door opened and an old woman peered out. Then a well-built and well-armed man, Señor Don Nicolás Delgado, the most noted revolutionist west of Panama, came out and conducted me to a room at the other end of the block, where I was made comfortable and was soon asleep.