

II Amazonia.

One more example of Inca masonry lay along our route, the hill fortress of Machu Picchu, one of the last strongholds of the Incas. Situated on a saddle of the mountains and guarded by precipices, it looks out over the Urubamba Valley with the torrential river far below. High above it towers a solitary mountain peak. Machu Picchu has become a kind of tourist's must, but, since it was only discovered by Professor Hiram Bingham's expedition in 1911 and had not yet been much excavated, it was little visited when I saw it, and retained its lost and lonely air. To reach it you walked perforce up the mountain side, arriving with a pleasant glow of physical achievement and something of the original explorers' sense of discovery. A troupe of small boys volunteered eagerly to carry our supper and sleeping bags up to the site when we decided to spend the night there, but, the moment they had received their reward, they scurried down ~~to~~ again to avoid nightfall and the ghosts of their ancestors. The view was superb, all the more beautiful for being seen both as the sun set and as it rose, an unforgettably lovely and peaceful place.

As you cross the Andes and descend their eastern slopes there is a complete change of vegetation due to the much higher precipitation of rain. You find yourself in a land of tropical luxuriance, ~~and~~ travel along the riverside trails is complicated by frequent landslides and the rapid encroachment of jungle growth, but there was no difficulty about the journey on muleback from Machu Picchu to Rosalina. What stays most in my memory about this area is the multitude of butterflies, vividly hued creatures that ~~took~~ took the place of the colour absent from the ground flora, ~~the~~ ^{they} rose in clouds from beneath your mule's feet and sometimes perched decoratively on someone's hat, sitting there for surprisingly long periods for so volatile an insect. Not having a very refined sense of smell, you would sometimes see a little swarm, all of one species, settled on some nastiness, and looking like miniature flower beds. There

were other less attractive insects, such as the pregnant cockroach that I failed to eject from my sleeping bag. By the time I had rounded up the last of her offspring I had acquired a considerable respect for the reproductive powers of cockroaches. Indeed insects in this region force themselves upon your attention to such an extent that they become part of your total experience. There are brown ants with a moderately vicious bite that run up your arm when you incautiously lay your hand on the trunk of a tree, and giant black ants whose bite is so severe that some of the Indians are said to use them for an endurance test in their initiation ceremonies. I trod on one of these barefoot on the river bank and was so startled that I fell backwards into the river. Admire that pretty woolly caterpillar as much as you like, but treat it with caution in case its hairs are poisonous. Prepare for a shock when you turn over a large stone for you may find yourself face to face with a vast, hairy spider of malevolent aspect. Sandflies bite you, and mosquitos, and a tiresome little midge that leaves your face all over black specks. "When you have been walking through long grass," they said, "Rub yourself all over with alcohol, or an isangué may get you." ~~But~~ I had no alcohol and was scarlet from neck to navel. But the bees were charming, big brown bees, and little bees of a lovely metallic green that looked most decorative when dusted with yellow pollen. They tickled infuriately when they insisted in walking over your face, but, though they did their best to sting you when annoyed, you had to be paying attention before you could feel them at all. The travel books I devoured in my youth were impressed by enormous spiders, but were too busy with ferocious jaguar, anacondas of incredible length and man-eating orchids to pay much attention to the insect world. Alas, I never set eyes on jaguar, man-eating orchid, or snake of any species whatever. There were no dangers in this journey down the Urubamba River except the river itself.

In earlier days Rosalina had been a flourishing settlement where Europeanised Peruvians met the Indians of the forest for an exchange of products. Those days were past and the luxuriant vegetation had swallowed up church and houses as though they had never been. I was told that there had once been two bridges, but the river had swept them away, and you now crossed by canoe ferry, which you summoned by blowing on a large Achatina shell. The Indians who ran the ferry lived in a group of huts near the river, with a hedge of tomato vines, a patch of cultivation, a few geese and a tame toucan. Scattered around were the houses of a few white cultivators now fallen on evil times owing to the world depression. Sending their produce over the mountains to the coast was so expensive a business that it only showed a profit when prices were high. Those who had planted an adequate area with food crops could live in comfort on their own produce, but those who had only planted cash crops, intending to live mainly out of tins, were very badly off, and there was a universal shortage of ready cash. Only one of the local planters seemed reasonably prosperous and he may have had private means. Rumour had it that he had retired to this remote spot owing to a serious disagreement with the law of the land. He owned the derelict cocoa and citrus plantation in which we camped. Whatever else was lacking you could always eat oranges.

As time went on a good deal was lacking, from ink to carbide for the lamps. We had expected to find canoes waiting for us at Rosalina, but they had not materialised, and it was three weeks before we were able to move on. We lived on our provision box and what we could scrounge, and, since our neighbours had so little, everything they sold us was an act of generosity. It was mostly yucca and plantains, a monotonous and farinaceous diet. We had started with two provision boxes, but our muleteer had substituted a box of dynamite for one of them. He swore it was a mistake, but, since he had revealed to us that he hoped to take a cargo of fish back with him, I felt a little sceptical. Dynamite does not usually form part of an angler's equipment, but

in those parts it was the accepted method of fishing. The explosion stunned the fish, which floated to the surface, and were readily scooped up. The dynamite users swore that it did the fish no permanent harm, but it did not appear to have agreed with the fish at Rosalina for, however much dynamite they now threw into the river, the results were negligible. Undeterred by poor results and the ever present danger of holding on to the dynamite a shade too long and thereby blowing your hand to bits, they went on using it, and a man did blow his hand to bits while we were there.

The Indians showed themselves better guardians of their natural resources. They also liked scooping fish off the surface of the water, but instead of dynamite they used the macerated leaves of a plant they called "kori", which has narcotic properties. This they threw into the water of their fish traps without, apparently, any harmful results. They had other methods of fishing also, sometimes using a coarse mesh net ^{stretched} ~~stretched~~ over a bent bough and fixed to a rod, and sometimes shooting the fish with barbed arrows, the barbs keeping the fish impaled and floating, so that they could recover both fish and arrow. Nor did they despise fish hooks if they could get them. Indeed fish hooks were a favourite article of barter. We paid our way in fish hooks, knives, axes and needles for the women, The only frivolous article we added to these utilitarian objects being a mouth organ.

We camped at Rosalina in a half built house with a timber framework, a thatched roof and half ^{of the} ~~a~~ floor for a top storey, which you reached by a primitive ladder whose ~~steps~~ rungs were lashed on with string. Downstairs a small area was partitioned off and I shared this with three hens and, on one occasion, with an indignant donkey, who regarded it as his stable when he and his master passed that way. Denied his stable he ate all the bowl of rice I had spent the whole evening dehusking. The second night he ate a papaya, and the third he ate a tea cloth. He must have had an admirable digestion. His master was a wandering trader, interesting but less so than another visitor, a man of German origin, who had left his

native country because he was bored with the grocery trade. He had emigrated to the United States where he had studied natural history and agriculture, drifting from there to Peru where he had refused a University Professorship preferring field work. He had travelled widely and modestly, one of the many men in Peru who had made astonishing journeys with a minimum of resources, and whose accounts of their adventures were campfire tales not books of travels.

One of our party set out down river by the overland trail to find out what had happened to the canoes. The rest of us waited. We made little excursions into the surrounding country. We went to see a canoe in the process of construction. A tree had been felled at some little distance from the river bank, and the half completed canoe lay propped on its side. Some of the work was done with tools, some by the use of fire. I scrubbed the massive wooden table which was the only furniture of our airy residence, and found that I had got myself a garden. Every crack and crevice began sprouting seedlings which grew like Jack's beanstalk. I waited anxiously for the appearance of our daily visitor, a vibrant morsel of feathered life attracted by the flowering bush on our threshold, our own special humming bird. We heard no word from down river. And then one day a group of Machiguenga Indians appeared unexpectedly out of the jungle.

They were an imposing set of men, muscular of body, skins faintly tinged with copper, black hair, straight or wavy and a grave dignity of manner that reminded me of the crofters I had met as a child in the Highlands of Scotland. They came in the evening and we packed up ready to leave next day. The last job was to catch the hens, which we regarded as an emergency ration. It was my fault that they were loose. I could not bear to see them tethered perpetually by the leg, and I was flattered by the confiding manner in which they came to me to be fed and shared my sleeping quarters, perched in a row along the partition at the foot of my bed. At that time I had no experience of hens and their skill at evading capture, and these birds had all Amazonia at their

disposal. One by one we joined in the chase, three Europeans, one dog and twelve Indians. It was not a dignified proceeding. We captured two, and an Indian, doubled up with laughter, put an arrow into the third. Did it help to break the ice with our new companions, or did they merely think us daft? They returned at once to their gravity of manner.

Next evening saw us at the Roman Catholic Mission at Koribeni where we thankfully handed over the responsibility for the dynamite accident to the senior father, deploring our feeble attempts at first aid. The man's wife had been sent for; she would undoubtedly come, perhaps in eight days time. A doctor had been sent for; he might or might not come. The senior father sighed. A serious accident so far from medical aid! He was no surgeon, but he would do what he could. Next day he would go to Rosalina, meanwhile would we like to see round the village. There were small round houses and *also* small oblong houses, open at each end and with the roof reaching to the ground. Each of these housed one family, but there were larger buildings with cane walls and neat roofs of palm leaves and ~~each~~ ~~of~~ these housed more than one family, each with its own cooking place. Large wooden troughs stood ready for the preparation of the drink known as chicha, made from fermented maize or yucca, and gourds stood ready to store the finished product. Everything was clean and neat and tame birds abounded. The crops were varied and well tended and there was a fishtrap down a backwater. How much of this orderliness and apparent prosperity was Machiguenga and how *much* Mission? The fathers said they were a fine people, clean and courteous by nature, ~~they were~~ industrious cultivators and clever in making use of the natural products by which they were surrounded, and they were so scrupulously honest that you could leave all your possessions in their care and return some months later to find your belongings exactly as you left them.

"They have their own code of manners," said one of the fathers, "And have a simple method of dealing with visitors who have overstayed their welcome. The host just gets up and goes away, and the guest, realising that he is not going to be fed, gets up and

goes away too."

The senior father had baptised many of them, but was not prepared to commit himself as to what they made of Christian doctrine.

Men and women alike wore the cushma, a simple garment made by sewing together two lengths of cotton cloth, leaving a hole for the head. It differed from the poncho of the mountains in being sewn up under the arms so as to form a loose Magyar sleeve. The cushma normally hung loose to a little below the knee, but was girded up when it got in the way. The women made necklaces of seeds and monkey's teeth and such interesting objects, but the men preferred a gay little streamer of feathers attached to the vee at the back of their necks. The cushmas were dyed a lovely autumnal red, a wonderful colour, but unfortunately not a fast one. It came off on everything. After some weeks of living with the Machiguenga even our coffee pot had a reddish hue.

The senior father had departed for Rosalina before we embarked on our first experience of travelling in a forty foot dug out canoe on the Urubamba River. The paddlers, six to a canoe, sat, three fore and three aft, and, as I watched them, I felt a growing admiration for the way they worked as a team. In calm water all they had to do was to steer, the current carrying us rapidly along, but calm water never lasted for long. When it grew turbulent they had to paddle vigorously to keep the canoe from turning broadside on, and strenuous effort was also necessary when we got into the back wash along the edge of a strong current. When we struck a rapid, procedure varied according to the nature of the rapid and also of the river bank. Sometimes the passengers were made to get out and walk while the Indians took the canoe down, sometimes, when the shore was low, they let the canoe down stern first on liana ropes attached to the prow. Two Indians held the ropes, the others, waist deep in the water, clung to the canoe. It frequently grated over rocks, and sometimes got stuck on top of one of them with water swirling over the sides. This necessitated much heaving from behind and hauling from in front, followed by a pause to bale out, using gourds and a large shell for the finishing touches. The trouble with these minor

rapids is that they are so often caused by accumulations of material brought down by side streams and are consequently liable to change, so that knowledge of the river has to be kept up to date. At one point the leader of the Indians handed over his authority to another, who knew that particular stretch better than he did, a change of command effected so quietly that you scarcely noticed it taking place. It looked very hard work and, as a stimulant, some of the Indians chewed coca, the plant from which cocaine is obtained.

It was difficult for the passengers to feel anything but so much useless lumber, ~~but~~ ^{and} we had plenty of time to observe the scenery. The jungle here was not particularly dense. My general impression was one of many shades of green, broken by the silver of tree trunks, and sometimes given a misty appearance by the multitudinous nests of weaver birds that festooned their branches. In places the green was touched with a treetop yellow, probably from creepers. Steep wooded hills sloped down to the river with exposures of black quartzite at their base. It was a peaceful scene.

In due course we arrived at Malanquiata, whence our canoes had come and where our companion awaited us nursing a sprained ankle acquired on the overland trail. He introduced us to Pereira and Landa, who had, rather reluctantly, agreed to hire us both canoes and crews. I suppose one could describe them as a firm, though, at that time, one was perhaps more impressed by Pereira as an Indian chief. He was of part Indian, part Spanish blood, had received a European style education, married a Machiguenga wife and assumed control over a group of Machiguenga. His wife and sons could read and speak Spanish, and his wife fell happily on a peculiarly dull novel with which I had been trying to improve my negligible Spanish., but, though Pereira ^{himself} wore European clothes, his wife and sons wore the chshma. Landa was a down on his luck wanderer from, I believe, Cuba, whom Pereira had befriended and was completely European style. Pereira had theories as to the amount of contact with white civilisation that his people should

be allowed. He did not despise modern products, steel tools are always useful, even a needle being much more efficient to sew with than ~~than~~ the sharpest thorn, but he did not wish to replace things his Indians could produce for themselves with imported modernities. They could grow their own food, weave their own cloth from home grown cotton, shape their own canoes, and make their own bows and arrows, barbed arrows for fishing, cane tipped for war and hunting and arrows with a pointed knob at the end for shooting birds. Too much contact with an alien and dominating culture would, in his opinion, demoralise his group, destroying their own excellent way of life without replacing it by anything better, and certainly recent experience of contact between white men and Indians in this region had been unfortunate. This particular area was too inaccessible to have been much affected by the rubber boom, but other tributaries of the Amazon had been less fortunate. The Indians had reason to regard Europeans as potentially dangerous savages, apt to any enormity. Poor Pereira, one of a handful of like minded men trying to stem the rising tide of modernity, exposed, not only to outside pressures, but also to revolt from within his own family. For better or for worse the Urubamba River is no longer as it was when I was there. For ~~himself~~ himself Pereira had some sophisticated needs, books for example, and ammunition for the firearms that only he, his sons and one or two of his leading Indians were allowed to use. Periodically he floated timber down the river to meet his requirements and those of his tribe. I liked Pereira.

Below Malanquiata lies the most dangerous of the Urubamba rapids, the Pongo de Mainique. Here the river strikes a belt of hard rocks and is forced to dig its channel deeper and narrower, forming a steep sided gorge through which the water pours in a ~~fast~~ tumultuous torrent. You cannot ease your way through the Pongo de Mainique. Once in it you are swept along in a confusion of sound and motion. The forty foot canoes are very buoyant and will bestride a whirlpool, but a human being in the water is at its mercy. Many people have come to grief in the Pongo de Manique

and so did we, with the loss of two lives. When we had assessed the extent of our disaster we split into two groups. One of us had to take up an appointment at the other side of the ~~road~~ world, and could only do so on time if he caught the river launch on the Ucayali. He took one canoe and Landa, who had come with us, went too, since the Indians refused to go without him. Two of us stayed in the not really believed in hope that our companions might somehow have escaped.