

Among the Guatemalan Indians



Porters on the March

(Copyright, 1912, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

MIXCO, Guatemala—I am writing this in the little Indian town of Mixco, situated on one of the foothills of the Volcano de Agua, in the heart of the Guatemalan republic. I have come here from Guatemala City on muleback, and I am on my way to Antigua, the ruined capital, which was founded by Alvarado, and was a great city when Boston was still more than cowpats.

Mixco is altogether Indian. It has, perhaps, 1,000 inhabitants, who live in low one-story buildings made of brick and stone, covered with stucco and painted in all the colors of the rainbow. The main houses are around a plaza, on which the stores face and where there is a big church, a city hall and a fountain which is painted bright blue. On the porch of the city hall are piles of Indian packs, which the porters have left there for the night, and on the stones of the plaza scores of Indians have squatted around little fires and are cooking their suppers. Each man has a pot or pan resting over the coals, and when he has finished his cooking he will join one of the parties of his fellows who are sitting here out in the open. The men cook their own meals and all eat together. On the other side of the plaza I can see women cooking in the same way. They will eat by themselves, although some, I am told, are the wives of the men opposite.

These people belong to the class of Indian porters which is to be found everywhere in Guatemala, and of whom I met hundreds on my way up to Mixco.



A Peon and His Family

Others have bits of gold and nuggets of silver. Coral beads are common, and many girls have heavy silver crosses which they will not sell to strangers. The men wear shirts, coats and trousers. Those on the road have queer overcoats with loose sleeves. The coats are split up at the sides, and under them is an apron which falls to the knees, while another apron seems to kiss the man's calves at the back. I see some Indians in bare legs who wear such overcoats. They have hats of straw of a sugar loaf shape and as they trot over the country they remind one of the brigands of the stage.

Indian Porters. These Indians are the chief freight carriers of Guatemala, and they do all the work on the plantations. The porters are like those of Korea, in that they belong to a profession which descends from father to son. Longer than man can remember they have carried the baggage and produce of Guatemala from one part of the country to the other, and I am told that they can trot along with 150 pounds on their backs at the speed of a mule.

I have seen hundreds of these porters on my way through the country. They are to be found on every roadway, and they are of all ages. From little boys of 10 to graybeards of 60, in coming here to Mixco I passed many bearing great loads of clay jars. Each jar would hold perhaps two or three gallons, and a man would have a score of them in a crate, so piled up that they rose high above his head, and so that he was half bent as he trotted along. I saw boys of 6 with two or three such jars and children of not more than 4 carrying bundles over the road.

At the capital I passed an Indian carrying an iron plate two feet wide, four feet long and two inches thick. It must weigh more than 150 pounds. It was tied to the man's shoulders and he was trotting along. It is said that the Indians are obliged to carry loads for traveling upon demand if they are paid for their service. The local officials supply them, but they can force them to go only a two-day journey from home, and the load must not be more than 100 pounds.

As to speed, these porters will make five or six miles an hour. In coming here we pushed along as rapidly as we could upon mules, but some loaded porters who were on the same road kept up with us, notwithstanding we went on the trot.

Much Like Japan. I wish you could see the country scenes of Guatemala. Those on the main roads which lead into the capital remind one of the Tokaido of Japan. They are thronged with traffic, which moves along like so many caravans of queerly dressed people, quaint carts and wagons and beasts of burden of various kinds. There are many carts drawn by oxen, which pull them along by yokes tied by straps to their horns. They push against the yokes in going up hill and pull back in going down. The yoke is so tightly fastened to the head that the animal cannot move it, and the flies eat away unimpeded.

And then there are donkeys with packs on their backs, and this never-ending procession of Indians loaded with freight. There are groups of women with bags and trays on their heads, all trotting along through the dust. Now and then you see a party resting by the roadside, and at nightfall you may see their little fires where they have struck camp till daybreak.

Indian Pilgrimages. These Indians are religious. I find them in every church and see them kneeling at every shrine. They give more of their earnings to the Lord than do the whites, and they are the chief support of the churches. Every one of their towns has its church, and it is often bigger than all of the other houses combined. They are superstitious. They carry waxen images around upon saint days, the whole population kneeling as the procession goes by.

They believe to a certain extent in witch doctors, and when they get any disease they do not understand, they straightway think themselves bewitched and get a medicine man to cure them. The latter mutters some mysterious words over the patient and usually searches the bed upon which he lies, finding an image he has put there. He shows this to the patient and tells him it is the cause of

his sickness, demanding his fee, which he gets.

The Roses of Hell. Another queer superstition is as to the "roses of hell," or certain flowers which grow on a tree on the slopes of the Volcano de Agua. These flowers look not unlike roses, but they are of wood and bark in the outlines of a flower. The petals are similar to those of a half-blown rose and their inbuds are curved with lines which appear to be carved. Some of the blossoms are twelve inches wide. I have bought some of these flowers and am taking them home as a curio. They have no sap and no odor and the bloom seems to be bark or wood.

The Indians call these flowers the "roses of hell," and they say that if they are soaked in tea they will yield a poison which is sure to bring death. They hold the flower in terror and have a tradition that when the volcano once overflowed and burned a city under it nothing was left except these trees.

The Toltec Bible. Mixed with the belief of these Indians are many superstitions which have come down from their ancestors. The Toltecs had a religion of their own and there is in the public library at Chichel Castenango what is said to be the only copy extant of the Toltec Bible. This deals with the origin of man and the creation. It speaks of three gods, one of whom was an Indian whose name was "The Roaring Wind," a second "The Powerful Creator" and a third "The Plumed Serpent." These three gods made everything, including man. They created the heavens and the earth and the waters under the earth and all that is in them. I am told that this book describes the deluge and that it has a story much like the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel.

It relates that after this time man began to travel and that the best of mankind came to Mexico and built cities. I have not seen the manuscript, but the report comes from a missionary and is doubtless correct.

The Indians are peaceable and not at all dangerous to travelers. They are very ignorant and their chief vice is drunkenness. I have seen them reeling along the roadway and lying drunk by the sides of the road almost everywhere during my travels through the interior. At every mile there is a rude drinking place and near the cities such saloons may be found at every few hundred yards. The Indians on the roadway almost invariably have bottles of brandy with them. This is of the sort known as "White Eye." It is made of sugar and is deadly.

Practically Slaves. The labor of Guatemala, as I have said, is almost altogether Indian, and in many cases it is a little better than slavery. Peonage is nominally abolished in that a man cannot inherit a debt from his parents nor can he be forced to work out debts contracted before he comes of age. On the other hand he can go into debt himself and if he does so he is forced to stay on the plantation where the debt is contracted until he works it out. I have before me a contract between a planter and one of his Indian laborers. This provides that he must work out personally any daily wage any debt which he contracts. He must do this after the custom of the plantation work out personally and by daily wage and must stay on the plantation until it is paid without his employer gives him a written permission to leave.

Another provision is that he runs away he must pay all the expenses necessary to get him back and must subject himself to all the laws relating to laborers. Debts are usually supposed to be paid not only by the man himself, but by his family as well, all of whom are expected to work.

According to law a man need not work but eleven months in the year, and he has the right to celebrate the church and national holidays, and he may have a day off when there is a baptism, a birth or a death in his family. He has the right also to rest on his saint's day, and this means the day of the saint after whom he is named.

The pay of the Indians is only a few cents a day. They are given fixed wages in the currency of the country, and the common wage is \$2 or \$3, but 25 Guatemalan are equal to 12 cents American, and \$5 to 15 cents. Many men are employed at 10 cents and 12 cents a day, and of the 12 cents a part often goes to the official who makes the contract to furnish the Indians.

I am told that the mayors of the towns

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The Red Men of Guatemala. But first let me tell you something of the Indians of this part of Central America. The bulk of the red men have always lived south of our boundaries. The most of the inhabitants of Mexico are made up of them, and they there number millions. There are now at least 1,200,000 pure Indians in Guatemala, and this is five or six times as many as we have in our country. Some authorities say that the territory covered by the United States never had more than 300,000 aborigines, while parts of these south lands were more thickly populated than any part of Europe at the time of the discovery of America.

The Indians of Guatemala have always been many. The climate is fine, the soil is fertile and it is far easier to get a living here than in the colder parts of the union. I have already written of the ruins of Quirigua, which are now being uncovered by our American archeologists. There are other ruined cities in other parts of Guatemala, and the evidences are that we once had a great civilization here made up of the ancient Toltecs of Mexico, who were the great race of Mexico about 1,000 years after Christ, but who were driven south by the Aztecs into Guatemala and the republics near the Isthmus of Panama.

These people have never been fighters like our Indians. They have been rather farmers than hunters, and today they are engaged in tilling the soil and in laboring for the whites.

I am told there are eighteen different tribes of them in this country, and there are at least six tribes to be found among the inhabitants of this town of Mixco. These are the Itzas, Mopans, Pokonians, Chols, Pokonchi and the Lacagons. These tribes all come from Maya stock, and they are the descendants of those who lived in Mexico long before Cortez came.

Short and Anemic. The Guatemalan Indians seem to be smaller and weaker than the copper-colored population of the United States. The average height of the men is under five feet and there are many women here who could walk under my arm. They look anemic, and I am told that some of them are clay eaters. They have a kind of yellow earth mixed with sulphur which they consider a dainty, and when they go upon pilgrimages they find fringes made of this earth at the shrines and eat them, thinking that they thereby ward off disease.

The faces of the Indians are a little lighter in color than those of the Sioux or Choctaws, and some of the men have thin, straggling beards. I doubt whether any one ever shaves. Both men and women are very straight, and the women even more so than the men. This probably comes from their carrying burdens on their heads. They will put fifty or a hundred pounds there and go off on a trot. The women do not bend back as they walk, and the movement is all most altogether from the hips downward, although most of them swing the arms as they go.

Queer Costumes. These Indians have never dressed like ours, and today they wear clothes rather than blankets. Both men and women delight in bright colors, and the girls have waists which are gaily embroidered in red, yellow and blue, and some have sashes of rainbow hues. The dress of the woman usually consists of three pieces. First she has a long cloth wound around her waist and legs, reaching to below the knees. Above this is the jupit, or shirt, which is richly embroidered and of as many colors as Joseph's coat. The shirt comes down over the cloth, and a gaudy belt or sash holds the two garments together. The women have luxuriant hair and they wear it in two long braids down their backs. In some places they tie up the hair and in others they have head bands which are wound around the head several times and tied in a knot over the forehead.

All of the women are fond of jewelry, and a woman often carries her savings in the shape of silver and gold ornaments with which she decorates her person. Some have necklaces of silver coins and

and other officials can force the Indians to give a certain amount of their work to whomsoever they please. A German planter who needs labor has only to cross the palm of the mayor and the Indian is told that if he does not do the work he will be drafted into the army. The Indians are densely ignorant and they have no idea of what their rights are. They have been in their present condition or worse ever since the Spaniards conquered the country, and there seems to be no present prospect of their getting out of it. The rule of Spain lasted three centuries, and during it the natives were the slaves of the Spaniards. If they rebelled they were killed without mercy and thequisition aided the government.

A Savage Tribe in Central America. In addition to the descendants of the ancient Mayans there are other Indians in Central America. The Indians of Panama have their own peculiar customs and ways, and there is one tribe in Guatemala which is said to be like no other on the continent. I have not seen them, but their home is in the backwoods jungle of the tropical coast lands. The people are almost black and are somewhat like the Papuans. They have small calves, but powerfully developed chests and arms. They go almost naked and the children entirely so. They dwell in dilapidated built in the tree tops. They take three or four cocoa palms and make a platform in them about thirty feet from the ground, roofing it with thatch. The floor is reached by climbing, which men, women and children do with agility. It is said that the toes of these people are abnormally developed by climbing. They almost walk up the coconut tree.

These Indians are genuine savages. They use bows and arrows and are shy, treacherous and afraid of foreigners.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

PAY CASH OR GO WITHOUT

About the beginning of December Mrs. A. W. J. Pohl, wife of a wealthy builder, with offices at No. 56 9th street, Manhattan, six days at a desk in the boulevard of her home, No. 126 Flatbush avenue, Brooklyn, and thinks of all the friends to whom it would be nice and charming to give Christmas presents.

About the same time Mr. Pohl, in his office, dreads the very mention of the day when presents come and go. To him the list his wife makes out gets larger and larger every year, and necessitating, of

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The DOCTOR'S ADVICE

by Dr. Lewis Baker

The questions answered below are general in character, the symptoms or diseases are given and the answers will apply to any class of similar nature. Those wishing further advice free, may address Dr. Lewis Baker, College-Hill, Dayton, O., enclosing self-addressed stamped envelope for reply. Full names and addresses must be given, but only initials or fictitious names will be used in my answers. The prescriptions cannot be filled at any well stocked drug store. Any druggist can order of wholesaler.

"Sarah" writes: "Will you please repeat the formula for the tonic which you gave to 'Helen' some time ago? I am nervous, sleepless, and have no appetite whatever."

Answer: I shall very gladly repeat the tonic and I am sure that it will help you as it has many other girls who suffer as you do. Get at any up-to-date drug store the following ingredients: Syrup of hypophosphites comp., 5 oz.; tincture cod-liver-oil comp., 1 oz.; castor-oil, 1/2 oz.; Mix and shake well before using. This should be taken regularly and in a few weeks you will have a good appetite and be well and strong.

"Alice" writes: "I should like a good reliable treatment for the hair and scalp. Something that will cure dandruff and stop falling hair, also cure an itching scalp."

Answer: The most reliable treatment for the scalp is said to be a 40-cent jar of 'Drug Store' and is called plain yellow sulphur. It is superior to anything known for the scalp. It gives new vigor and helps the hair to keep its natural color. This will positively cure your dandruff and stop the itching of the scalp.

"Harry M." writes: "I am quite tall and do not weigh enough for my height. What can I do to gain weight and build up my system?"

Answer: You can readily increase your weight by taking three grain hypophosphites tablets regularly for several months. These tablets will also overcome nervousness, help digestion and assimilation and thus improve the color of the skin. Many report gaining 10 to 20 pounds with improved health in every way after a thorough course of treatment. The tablets are packed in plastic cartons with directions and are widely prescribed for your ailment.

"Pearl" writes: "Every winter I am troubled with slight attacks of rheumatism. I have tried many things, but with no avail."

Answer: The best thing for rheumatism is made by mixing the following ingredients and taking a teaspoonful at meal times and again at bedtime: Tonic of potassium, 5 grains; salicylate, 4 grains; wine of colchicum, 1/2 ounce; comp. essence cod-liver-oil, 1/2 ounce; tincture of iodine, 1/2 ounce; syrup of sassafras comp., 1/2 ounce. I have used this remedy with success.

"Mrs. A. C." writes: "My little daughter has a very bad cold and cough which we do not seem able to even relieve. What shall I do?"

Answer: Purchase a 1/4 oz. bottle of eucalypti-menthol-lavender and make a syrup according to directions given and your daughter will be cured within a few days. This is very pleasant to take and will drive the cold out of the system.

"Jane M." writes: "Kindly publish a remedy for constipation. I feel irritable and cross and cannot sleep which I am sure is due to the stomach trouble. Please advise."

Answer: The following simple medicine will cure all your stomach troubles and if your food digests your whole system will be in a better condition. Get at any drug store tablets comprising: Tonic of potassium, 5 grains; salicylate, 4 grains; wine of colchicum, 1/2 ounce; comp. essence cod-liver-oil, 1/2 ounce; tincture of iodine, 1/2 ounce; syrup of sassafras comp., 1/2 ounce. Take two or three tablets at each meal.

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