

# Peon Debt Slaves of the Andes



A pango or man servant of Cuzco



Three Indians at work.



Indian village officials with their staffs of office

Copyright, 1914, by Frank G. Carpenter. UZCO, Peru—I write of the debt slaves of the Andes. They are numbered by the hundreds of thousands and the most of them are in the direct of bondage. This mighty plateau, between the two ranges of the mountains, is divided into farms or haciendas, owned by the whites, the descendants of the Spaniards, or by the Indians, a mixture of Spaniards and Indians. These estates are large. You may see all day across many of them and not come to the end of the property. Each of them has a large number of Indians upon it and these Indians are practically the debt slaves of the owners. They live in villages or in huts, scattered over the property. The land belongs to the hacendados and the Indians have their huts and small pieces of land, which are leased to them under certain conditions. One of these is that the Indian must work a part of each week for his master. He may have cattle, llamas, alpacas and sheep, but he has to give a certain percentage of the increase to the hacendados. There are, also, fixed rules as to how the stock must be sold, and the estate owner controls the disposition of this and of all the products that the Indians raise. He practically fixes the prices and he gets everything for a song. The hacendados make such advances to the Indian as keep him in a state of debt slavery, and this state is transmitted to his children. The conditions are different in different provinces and in some places they are milder than in others. But all over the plateau they are such that the real man has practically no chance of accumulating property or of advancing in the state of civilization.

I have just had a long talk with a hacendado who lives in Cuzco. He owns 25,000 acres of land at Cuzcopata, in the province of Paucartambo, but he goes there only during a part of the summer, and spends his money abroad. He has a house here at Cuzco, and his Indians bring the crops here to market. This man's estate represents about the worst of the conditions on the high Andes. He was very free in talking about them, and he seemed to have no shame in the part he is taking in them. I shall give our conversation as it occurred. Said he:

### Land Is Cheap.

"Land here is cheap. The estate at Cuzcopata cost us only about 4 cents an acre. We got the whole, including the stock, which consisted of a large number of cattle, alpacas and sheep, for 20,000 soles, or about \$10,000. I think we would sell it for twice that amount today. Much of the land is high, running up to 15,000 feet above the sea. This is fit only for pasture. We have also some which is as low as 10,000 feet, upon which barley, potatoes, quinoa and other crops can be grown. We have big flocks of alpacas, and altogether about 5,000 sheep. We have also cattle and horses and llamas and donkeys.

"The most important possession of the farm, however, is our Indians. Our lands are valuable not according to their area, but according to the number of families of Indians who have homes upon them and are therefore obliged to work for the owners. The great trouble here is labor. If we do not have the Indians on the estates we can get no one to work them. Therefore we hold them by keeping them more or less in debt to us. We advance money for their expenses, and also for the purchase of the cattle, llamas, alpacas and other stock that they own. This is done from time to time until they are so deep in our debt they cannot get out. We want to keep them in debt, for this is the only way we can be sure of holding them to the land. The Indian seldom pays his debts. He has been accustomed for generations to our system, and the only way he could pay would be by getting some other farmer to assume his obligation to us. In that case he could move, but he would be only going from one master to another."

### Indians Practically Enslaved.

"But how do the Indians begin their life on the farm?" I asked. "They come first to get homes and pastures for their stock, as well as to have lands to cultivate. They have no land of their own and no money to buy it, so they rent the land of us. As they have no money, the conditions of the rent are that they must work a part of each week for us. According to my contracts every Indian man has to work five days for the estate. In his lease he agrees to give all of his Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays to me and to have only Saturday

and Sunday for himself. This is the rule throughout the year with the exception of holidays and saint's days. In addition we have special arrangements as to his stock, providing that it must be sold to us at fixed prices."

"Can you give me those arrangements?"

"Yes," said the hacendado, as he picked up a ledger filled with writing and accounts of one kind or another. "Here is my farm book. It contains all of the data regarding the running of the estate, including our terms of contract with the Indians. These terms are the same as have been in use upon this farm since it was established away back in colonial times. I will give you them as they are read to all the Indians when they are hired. As you will see, the last record of these rules was put down in May, 1902."

### Workers Get Short End.

"In the first place, the Indians agree to work for us from Monday to Friday without any other pay except an ounce and a half of coca per day. This is about a handful and it costs us, per man, four cents a week. It is also agreed that each of the three Indian villages on the farm shall furnish me from time to time throughout the year a man servant or pango, and a woman servant to work in my house, or for some one else if I so direct. I bring one of these pangos to Cuzco and use him here, keeping the two others to work on the farm. The pangos are changed from month to month and the village authorities see that a new one is on hand before the old one leaves. In this way we always have house servants."

"The next provisions of the lease are as to trade. The Indians cannot trade with a stranger without our permission, and we have the first chance as to everything they sell. As an ordinary thing they will not trade with anyone else under any condition, and that not even if the prices offered were ten times what we give. For instance, although my Indians are now selling me their lambs for 30 cents each, you could not buy a lamb from them for \$2. The same is true of horses and cattle, and, in fact, of everything."

### Haciendado Reaps Big Profit.

"According to our contracts we have fixed prices at which certain things shall be sold by the Indians to us. I will give you them in American money. Bulls 3 years old are sold for \$2.50 each. When we resell them we get \$10 or more. If the bull is 4 years old the Indian gets \$3.50, and he must sell his cows at \$3.25. He receives \$5 for a full grown ox. For a cow we get \$17 and for an ox about \$20. "And then take the prices of sheep," this man continued. "According to our written contracts with the Indian he must sell his lambs at 30 cents each, his ewes, full grown, at 50 cents, and his wethers at 60 cents. A hog sells for about \$2.50—that is, when it represents a weight of at least 200 pounds. If it is only a shoat of 8 months it brings 50 cents. We resell the hogs for their meat and lard, and get good prices for them. It is the same with the sheep; they bring us many times as much as the Indian receives. We have also an agreement as to the pastures, by which the Indians pay us 10 per cent of the increase of the sheep each year for their use. They also pay 20 cents per annum for the feed of each llama and alpaca, and 60 cents for each head of cattle. It is provided that the sheep and cattle

be branded, and that they be counted over at certain times by the farmer. This is in order that we may collect our share of the stock as it grows up."

### Natives Do the Hauling.

"Another provision is as to the carrying of the crops to the market. We are fifty-four miles from Cuzco, and, according to our contracts, the Indians who own llamas must take the products of the farm to that point or to anywhere else we may direct without extra pay than that stipulated in the contract. The rate we have established for the fifty-four-mile trip to Cuzco is \$2 for 100 arrobas, or 2,000 pounds. If the goods are taken to Sicuani they get twice this amount, but the distance to that point is 100 miles. The Indians do not have to work on the farm at the time they are engaged in transporting these goods, and we furnish them food to use on the way. They will load the grain in bags upon llamas and drive them to the market. It takes them about a week to go to Cuzco and back, and they sleep at night on the road. They may stay a day in Cuzco, and then they will start and walk back, driving their llamas loaded with supplies for the farm. It takes twenty-five or thirty llamas to carry 100 arrobas. Each llama has a bag of grain on his back weighing seventy-five or eighty pounds. This is taken off when it reaches Cuzco, and a load of some other kind is put on for the return trip. We allow the Indians to keep as many llamas as they please, for every additional llama adds to the freight possibilities of the farm."

"It would seem that the farmers ought to make money on such contracts," said I.

### Can't Help Making Money.

"They cannot help it," was the reply. "Think of it! I buy a lamb of an Indian for 30 cents, and the understanding is that he is to pasture and care for it until it is six months old or older. At that age he brings it to me, and I can sell it for \$1.50 or \$2. If the lamb dies he has to replace it. We have a fixed price for hides, which are now selling in Cuzco for 23 cents a pound, or \$23 per hundred weight. We buy these hides from the Indians at 30 cents each, making no account of the weight. As to wool we buy that by the fleece without regard to the weight. Every fleece of sheep's wool is sold to us for 3 cents, and we sell it for ten, fifteen or twenty times that amount. This is by our contract, made at the time of the lease. As to the alpacas, we pay for their wool according to the quality, but the amount is a bagatelle in comparison with what we get from the exporters."

"But if the man works five days for you how is he to take care of his own crop and to watch his cattle and sheep?" "That is done by his wife and children," was the reply. "The children learn to herd the sheep and cattle almost as soon as they are able to walk, and the women keep the weeds out of the potatoes and help hoe the crops. The Indians can do the same on Saturday and Sunday. All of the Indian women work, and the husband selects his wife as much for her strength as her beauty. The women are industrious. They are always spinning or knitting while looking after their sheep and alpacas. They do their own weaving and make all the clothes for the family. They do all the cooking, and, in

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