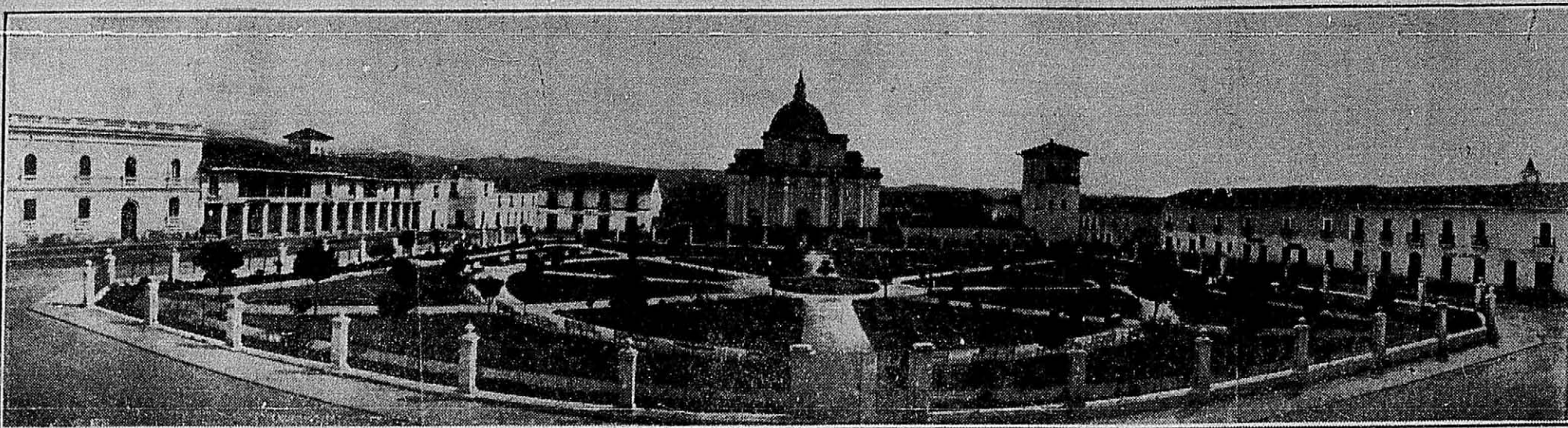


The Country Beyond the Caribbean

BY A LOGAN MAN.



THE PLAZA, POPAYAN—A TYPICAL COLOMBIAN TOWN.

THE building of the Panama canal is attracting the attention of Americans to the countries bordering on the Caribbean sea; countries of which the average reader has heard but very little and of which he still lacks definite information. Most are familiar with the name Caribbean because of its association with the tales of adventure they have read of the days when the pirate and the buccaner bore supreme rule there. But of the country beyond we have known little beyond their geographical limits on the map of the world.

Colombia is the nearest South American neighbor. It occupies all of the northwestern part of that continent and its area is about equal to the states of California, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Idaho. The character of the country is also very similar to that of the states named. There are high mountain ranges enclosing beautiful valleys and there are great plains like those that stretch away from Cheyenne and Denver towards the east. All mountainous countries are noted for their scenery, but owing to the fact that Colombia lies wholly in the torrid zone and has advantages of climate and position over any other country. It also possesses scenery unexcelled anywhere. The writer had the privilege of crossing the three ranges of the Andes and has stood on their summits and looked down into the deep valleys and has seen the wonderful tropic growth which covers the mountain slopes and some of the beautiful falls and cascades which are found there and he does not believe there is another region on the globe so rich in natural attractions.

TRIP OVER MOUNTAINS.

On one visit the country was entered from the Pacific side. As the writer approached the coast he could see the high summits of the mountains stretching along the horizon for a hundred miles or more, while hundreds of ridges and spurs broke away and ran down to the very water's edge. The country on that side is covered with a dense tropic forest and owing to the great

rainfall, is very unhealthy. Gold abounds there in great quantities and a great many people risk their lives to obtain it. To reach the interior from the west coast it is necessary to cross the mountains. This is done on mule back and with good luck will require two days. The region along the coast is very hot, but as you ascend the mountain the weather grows cooler and when you come out on the grassy slopes near the summit the temperature is delightful; while on the very summit it is rather too cold to be comfortable. From the mountain summit you get a view of the great valley of the Cauca with its grassy plains and groves of valuable woods and the river winding through it like a thread of silver. Our Utah valleys viewed from the mountain top present the aspect of a great checker board with alternating squares of green and yellow fields, but the Cauca is a great plain with alternating stretches of woods and grassy pastures. If there are cultivated spots they are so small that they are not noticeable. Beyond the valley is the great range of the Central Andes. Our guide told us it was 40 miles to the mountain range opposite. It did not seem twenty. He pointed to a ridge running down into the valley away to the north and said it was beyond Cartago, more than 200 miles distant. On the south the mountains were hid in cloud banks, but on a clear day peaks can be seen beyond the smoking summit of Purace more than 150 miles away.

DIFFICULT JOURNEY.

The journey over the central range is a very difficult one. The elevation of the peak is nearly 12,000 feet. The road is a mere mule trail and the aim in the mind of the locator must have been to climb the mountain twice before reaching the summit. The first day in the mountains every ascent was followed by a corresponding descent. So that while we had surmounted many summits which would have passed for respectable mountains in this country, we were at night no nearer the goal than we were in the morning. The second day we were more successful. A steep climb came early and lasted

long. Sometime we were ascending at a rate which would have brought us to the top in a very short time if continued. Then we would wind around the edges where the deep chasm would cause one to hold his breath and lean in toward the upper slope. On one of the steep climbs our cargo mule was not equal to the occasion and although he struggled manfully, he could not make it and fell over backwards and rolled down the slope. We recovered the baggage water soaked and covered with mud, but the mule was so badly injured that we were compelled to transfer the cargo to our riding mules and do the rest of the mountain on foot. The writer has camped on the desert without water and without grass, and on the mountains in winter with only the snowdrift for a companion, but he thinks the scene on the Andes the most gloomy and the night passed there the most dreary in his experience. Rain fell constantly and the thermometer was as near freezing as it could be and not get there. The scrub wood was saturated to the core. There was no grass. The party was wet, hungry and cold, but could not make a fire. The next day an Indian cabin was reached in a more congenial climate where food was obtained.

BEAUTIFUL VALLEYS.

The upper Magdalena valley is very different from the Cauca. It is much lower and is frequently broken by ridges and hills which enter it from the great ranges on either side. Up above Neiva is a most beautiful valley about the size of Utah valley, but possessing a much finer climate than the latter does during the summer months. Below Neiva is a stretch of bad lands resembling very much the country about Princeton, Utah. From Princeton, Honda the valley is more open on the west of the river and the grassy plains are covered with cattle.

The famous tableland of Bogota lies in the top of the central range and really extends along that range far into Venezuela. Of these valleys, that of Bogota, is the largest, being about 40 miles wide and 120 long. Most of the valleys in the plateau range

around 9,000 feet above sea level and the climate is very healthful. Great crops of wheat and potatoes are grown and some corn. At Bogota the thermometer ranges from 55 at night to 85 at noon and rarely goes above or below these figures throughout the year.

MARVELOUS CROPS.

The lower Magdalena valley extends from about 25 miles below Honda to the shores of the Caribbean sea, a distance in a straight line of nearly 400 miles. Nearly all of this vast region is covered with a dense tropic forest. Above Banco the valley ranges from 30 to 40 miles in width, and has very few inhabitants, but below that town it widens out to more than 100 miles and has many flourishing towns and villages. This is one of the richest districts in Colombia if not the entire world. The soil is alluvial and is replenished by the periodic overflow of the river. The way crops grow there is something marvelous. One variety of corn matures in 40 days from date of planting. Sugar cane grows for 80 years from one planting, and can be cut every seven months. Bananas and plantains yield a crop in eight months after planting and repeat on an enlarged scale every eight months for more than 10 years. Yuccas begin to yield after 10 months and you can continue to dig them regularly for 15 years. This plant is very rich in starch and takes the place of the common potato. All such plants as tomatoes, sweet potatoes, melons, etc., continue to grow and yield until they run wild. Cotton requires but one planting in 10 years and yields two crops a year. Almost every known tropical fruit flourishes there in rich abundance.

PLENTY OF ROOM.

Colombia has been described as a land of opportunity and when one sees the large tracts of unoccupied lands and understands the great fertility of the soil and the wide range of valuable crops that can be produced there it seems that the claim is justified. Within the last two years a great many Americans have gone to Colombia. The large majority of them have invested in mines, but others with a keen in-

sight into the future, have secured large tracts of valuable lands which are almost certain to advance rapidly in value when the Panama canal is completed. The writer does not believe that there is a country on the earth today which offers greater inducements to young men of small capital who wish to begin life at the bottom of the ladder and work up.

The popular opinion that the tropics were hot, unhealthy regions unfit for white folks to live in is a great mistake. The canal strip via one of the hottest, swampiest places on earth, yet under American rule it has become one of the healthiest places in all the tropics. The Magdalena valley is naturally healthy. One is surprised to see the healthy look in the faces of the people of the river towns and is told that outside of some malaria there was little or no sickness. On two or three occasions the thermometer reached 90 degrees at mid day, but this was in a room exposed to the direct rays of the sun. For a month the thermometer in the writer's room did not rise above 84 or fall below 78 degrees. This range might be taken as the average for the year. Ex-minister Barrett predicts that within a few years Colombia will be one of the richest countries in the world, made so by American capital and American enterprise.

Before closing the writer wishes to refer to one item which will be of interest to the Mormon people. While roaming around in the forest country referred to above, he came one day up on the top of a hill for the purpose of making observations of the surrounding country, and was greatly surprised to find there the ruins of an old stone fort. The guide stated it was the work of the ancient Indians, but after examining it the Utahns were satisfied it belongs to the same people and the same period as the old remains which are in the upper valleys and which they feel reasonably certain were the works of the Nephites of the Book of Mormon. Later other ruins were seen and heard of hid up in the depths of the forest which demonstrate that the entire forest region was once the home of an industrious, happy people.



STREET SCENE, BOGOTA.

From the fort hill there is a magnificent view of the valley. Out to the north the plains stretch away until they fade into the dim haze. Eastward 20 miles away is the Magdalena, visible, now and then, amidst the dark green of the forest, and away on beyond so far that one would not suspect their presence but for the clear-out outlines of their summits against the deep blue of the sky, are the mountains. All of this vast area was once the home of that old people. Their cultivated fields covered the rich alluvial plains. Their villages lined the river banks and their canoes trafficked on its waters. It was the season of drought, but the lowering cloud banks on the distant mountains warned the husbandman that rain was at hand; and as the writer looked he saw slender columns of smoke shoot up from the plain as evidence that the fields were being prepared for the planting. Just as they must have been in the long forgotten past. The sun sank slowly behind the

western hills and the night shades crept up from beyond the eastern mountains. The monkeys ceased their chattering in the distant wood. Birds brushed by seeking their nightly roost. An owl hooted in the forest and from the distant plain came a child's cry. The shades thickened, and the mountains, the river, and the plain faded away into the gathering darkness, just as that old civilization passed into the mists of the years and has been forgotten. Tomorrow the sun will rise again and the mountain, the river, and the plains will emerge out of the night. But for those others whose bones lie there, whose history is lost in the dark mystery of the past, will the mists disappear and will the sun ever shine again for them? Will the story of their lives ever be known? When the forest has been thoroughly explored and the old tombs have been made to give up their secrets, more will be known about the original dwellers on the plains and their great wars. JOEL RICKS.

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