



IMAGINE THIS THROUG STRUNG THROUGH THE NARROW STREETS IN ONE GORGEOUS ANIMATED PANORAMA.

Eves of an Unknown Eden.

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It all began with a cafe table discussion in Astrakhan.

"Which way are you headed, friend?" inquired my vis-a-vis, a world wanderer of engaging manners and strange turns of speech, who, in a half hour's acquaintance, had shown an amazingly intimate knowledge of every thing from the Tenets of the Free Kirk to the tactics of the Foreign Legion.

"To Circassia — to see the pretty women," said I.

"You're headed wrong," said he. "The only women pretty enough to be worth the seeing are in Tehuantepec."

"It sounds like the name of a patent medicine or a Pullman car," said I.

"It's neither," said he. "It's a district in the Mexican hot lands. Boat from New Orleans to Coatzacoalcas, rail from

there to Tehuantepec, and you're among the Venuses and Dianas and Aphrodites of the world. I ought to know," he added, "for I've seen 'em all."

That is why a twelvemonth later found me in that strange corner of Middle America where the oceans try to meet and are foiled by scarce a hundred miles of Mexican jungle.

It is a far cry from New York or Chicago to the Tehuantepec of deadly fevers and lovely women, but the restless spirit of the wanderer stirred within me, and it needed no urging to set my feet on the long trail which leads due south from steam heat to hammock-land. The tierra caliente, or "hot country," is another and distinct Mexico—in climate, people, manners, and speech as different from those portions of the republic familiar to the tourist as Equatoria is

from Egypt. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is, with the exception of Panama, the narrowest neck of land between the two great oceans, and across this neck a British contractor, with the vision of a prophet, has built a railway which is destined to threaten seriously the financial success of the much heralded canal. The Tehuantepec route between New York and San Francisco, remember is nearly thirteen hundred miles shorter than that by way of Panama, and to cover this additional distance the average freight steamer will require from four to five days. Now the Tehuantepec National Railway not only will, but does, unload a cargo, carry it across the Isthmus, and reload it in forty-eight hours. As it will probably require a day for a steamer to pass through the canal,

but so quickly does another crop arise that the operation of drenching the right of way must be almost continuous to be effective.

Our train chugs on. The sand sifts in and fills our eyes and ears and hair; the mosquitoes get in their work on neck and wrist and ankle; the heat is so sweltering that we feel like molting; tallow candles rather than human beings. The jungle plants flap wet feelers against the cars, which move forward through a veritable tunnel of dank, rank foliage. On the black, oily surface of the cross-ties are small pools of dew, and tiny rills of moisture trickle down the upright steel rails employed in lieu of wooden telegraph poles, which, if planted here, would either rot or sprout.



A CHILD OF THE HOT COUNTRY.



TEHUANA BELLES IN FESTIVAL DRESS.

this means a net saving of from three to four days by the Tehuantepec route. Vessels now come alongside the wharf at Coatzacoalcas—or Puerto Mexico, to give it its new official name—electric cranes dip down and lift the merchandise out of their holds and transfer it to waiting cars through hatches in their roofs, and before the ships are loaded again their discharged cargoes are being lowered into the holds of other ships at Salina Cruz, 125 miles away, for their journey across the Pacific.

This ten-hour trip from ocean to ocean has not its like in all the world. From Coatzacoalcas, an unkempt, fever-stricken hamlet, huddled on the sandy shores of a horseshoe bay, we slide past gray-green fields of pineapples, and then, without warning, plunge straight into the twilight of the jungle, where for mile after mile, hour after hour, the trees are smothered in ferns and orchids, where monkeys chatter at us from the branches, and where inconceivably gorgeous blooms of red and orange and yellow light up the home of panthers, pythons, and parrots. So rapid is the growth of vegetation in this torrid region that the passage of the trains is made possible only by the constant use of chemicals to repel the alarming encroachments of the creepers on the rail. The chemical compound, in the form of a scalding liquid, is sprayed from a heated tank-car by means of a steam-heated atomizer, the application killing all plant life;

In this zone the white man fights the good fight with ruin and nature—and loses. For, though he labours hard, he drinks harder. "A man must drink more in this climate," he meditates. "It is well to keep one's liver afloat." Scrupulous and pinolias assail him; numberless gnats, countless flies, unpeppable bugs, persistent fleas make life a petty hell. The heat thins him, the fevers rack him, the ceaseless rain depresses him, but still he labours doggedly, stringing his telegraph wires or driving his gang of Indian plate-layers or pruning his wretched plantation of sickly rubber trees. Presently he takes to himself a native woman who provides him with meals and many yellow children, but eventually she gives place in his affections to a black bottle and a sack of greasy cards, and after that comes tropical paresis. Slowly and surely the insatiate jungle closes in about him, claiming its own. After a time there will be another painted headstone in the little cemetery at Lincoln Antonio. Thus passes one more pioneer.

Presently the jungle through which we are stomping dwindles into scrub, and the scrub into barren, wind-swept hills dotted, like lonely sentinels, with spindly organ cacti. We have topped the Cordillera, the backbone of the continent. The descent becomes abrupt, with a succession of loop-the-loop-like curves and roller-coaster inclines. Strong gusts of sea air sweep up from the cunucos—sign that the Pacific is near a hand-