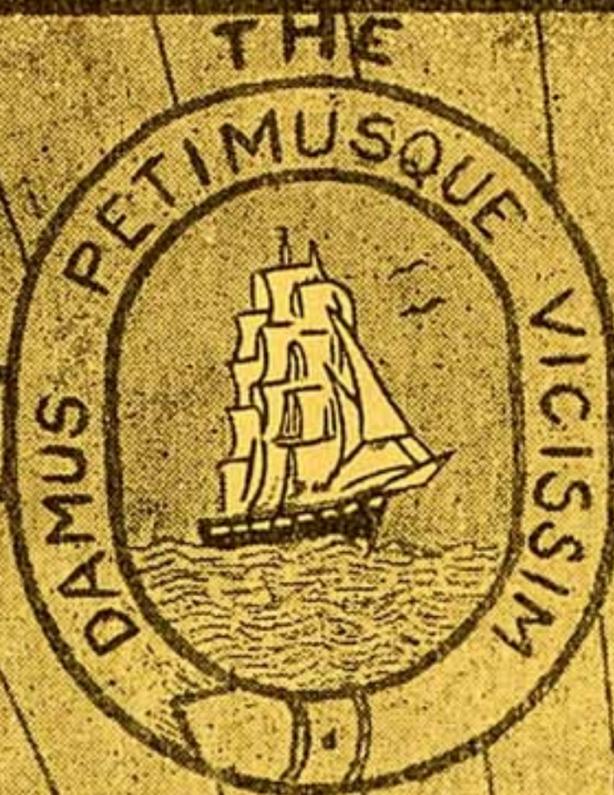


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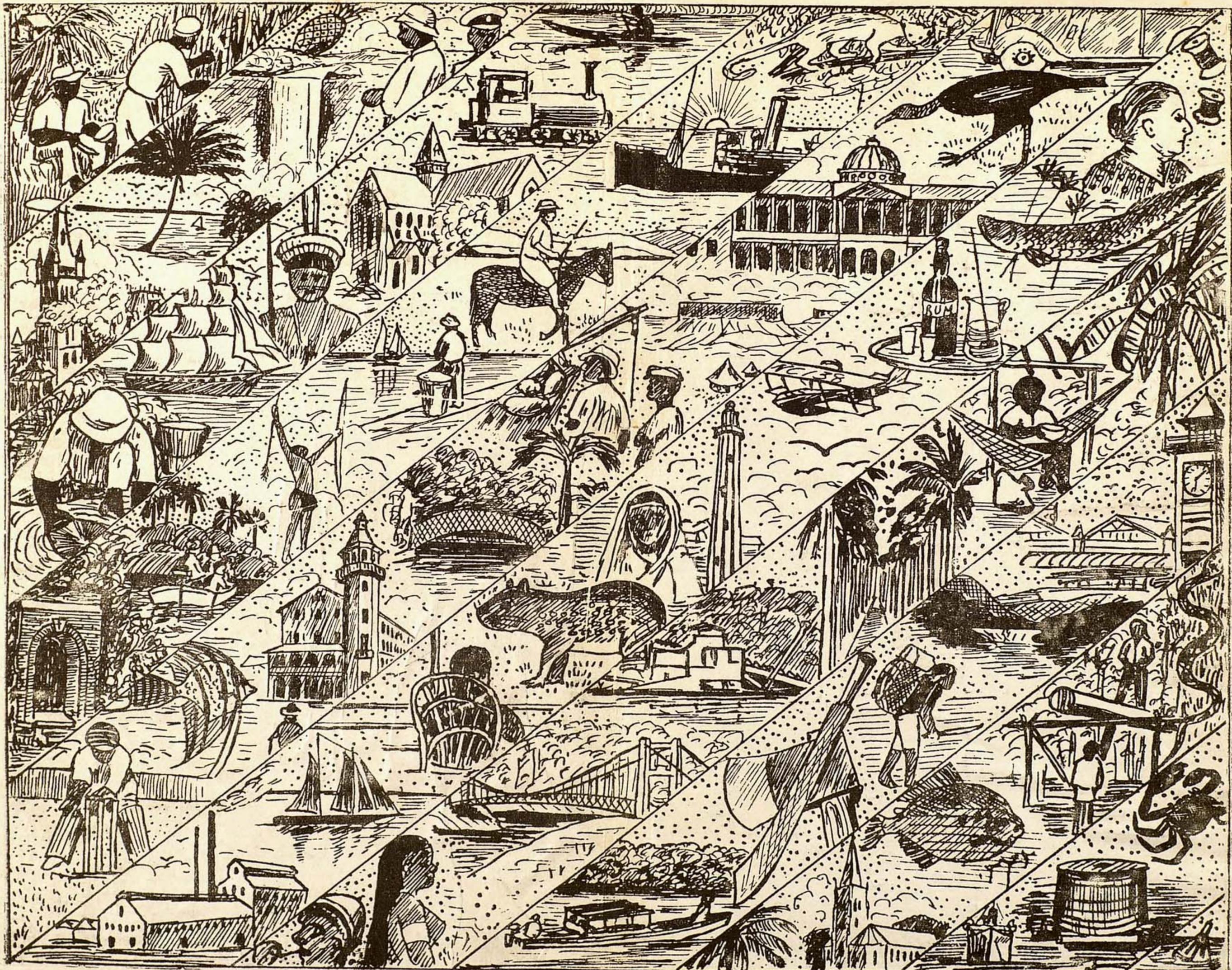
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EXPERIENCES
OF
A DEMERARA MAGISTRATE

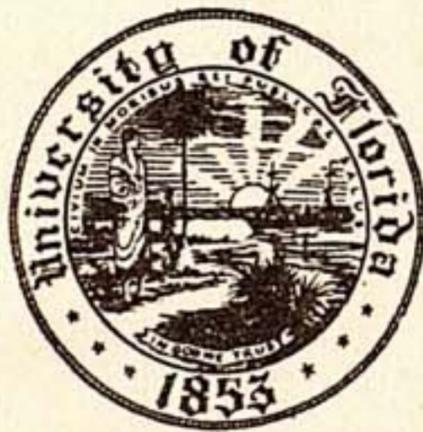
Sir G. WILLIAM DES VOEUX

1865—1870

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THE "DAILY CHRONICLE," LTD.

GEORGETOWN,—BRITISH GUIANA.

1948.

THE GUIANA EDITION—No. 11.

EXPERIENCES OF A DEMERARA
MAGISTRATE

1863—1869

BY

SIR G. WILLIAM DES VOEUX, G.C.M.G.

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WITH AN APPENDIX COMPRISING

**THE AUTHOR'S LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE COLONIES ON THE SUBJECT OF THE TREATMENT
OF EAST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS ON SUGAR ESTATES**

With a Foreword and Edited

BY

VINCENT ROTH

FOR

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD.

To most British Guianese, those of the past generation at any rate, the name of Des Voeux, is and was synonymous with the Royal Commission appointed, as a result of his letter to the Secretary of State to the Colonies, to enquire into the operation of indentured immigration as practised in this country up to 1870. Even up to the present day one occasionally hears this commission referred to as "The Des Voeux Commission". To such a degree was this connection regarded that few people realized that the greater part of Sir G. William (then Mr.) Des Voeux's time in this Colony was spent in the interior, as Stipendiary Magistrate of the Upper Demerara River District.

The eighth of nine children of the Reverend Henry Des Voeux, one time Rector of Stapenhill and younger son of the first baronet of that name, George William was born in 1834 at Baden-Baden and was, through both parents, of Huguenot descent. The first five years of his life were spent travelling on the continent with his father who, in 1839, returned to England. Educated at Charterhouse School and Balliol College, Oxford, his father insisted that he should "take orders" or seek a livelihood in the Colonies. He chose the latter and, in 1856, went to Canada where he entered as a law student at Osgood Hall, Toronto. Subsequently he procured admission to Toronto University where he obtained his B.A. degree. Called to the Canadian Bar in 1861 he began the practice of law in partnership with the man who subsequently became the Right Hon. Sir Samuel Strong, Chief Justice of Canada.

Not finding the legal life agreeable, he applied, through influential friends, to the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Colonies, for a colonial appoint-

ment and, in 1863, was appointed to a Stipendiary Magistracy in British Guiana. His years in his remote interior district were happy ones and it was not until he was moved to the sugar-planting districts on the coast that life became intolerable through the enmity of the planters which he incurred through his alleged partizanship with the "under dogs". His application for a transfer to another colony was successful and in 1869 he was appointed Administrator and Colonial Secretary of St. Lucia.

It was just after his assumption of these new duties that trouble broke out among the Indian immigrants in Demerara and Des Voeux considered it an obligatory duty to acquaint Lord Granville, the then Secretary of State, with the facts as he knew them. His connection with the Colony came to an end with his evidence before the Royal Commission that was appointed as a result of his communication.

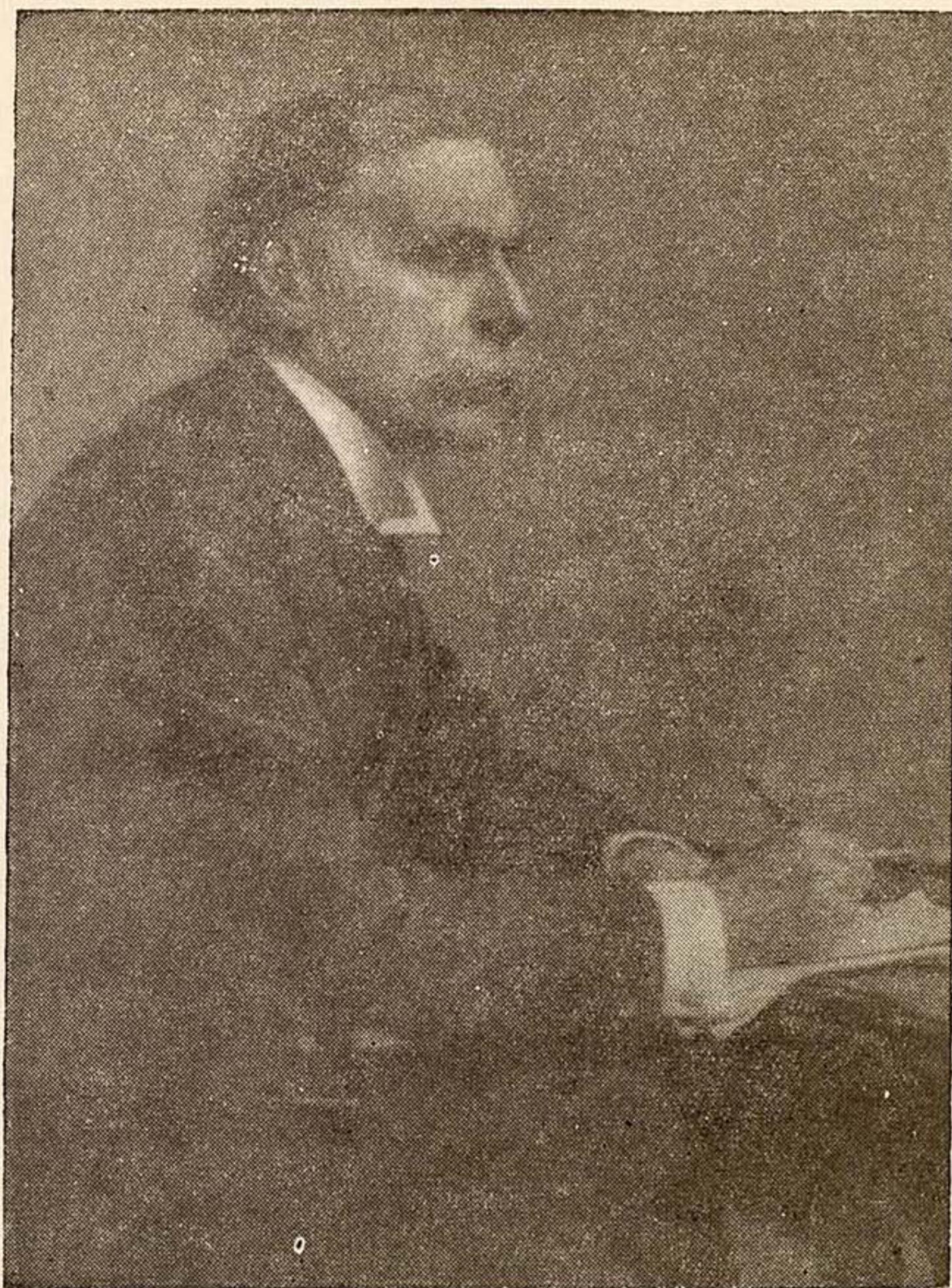
In 1880 he was appointed Governor of the Bahamas, and, the same year, Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner, Western Pacific. In 1886 he was appointed Governor of Newfoundland and, the following year, of Hong Kong, whence he retired from the service in 1891. He was created a G.C.M.G. in 1893 and died on 15th December 1909.

This volume, which comprises the first nine chapters of the author's two-volume book, "My Colonial Service," published 1903 by John Murray, Albermarle Street, London, contains the account of his experiences in British Guiana. Such account, by itself, would be incomplete without the author's letter to Lord Granville which precipitated the famous Commission, the circumstances surrounding the inception, writing and despatch of which letter, he describes in detail, this very enlightening document, extracted from the files of *The Colonist*, has been inserted in the form of an appendix which, it is believed, will add not a little to the historical value of this publication.

With the exception of the picture of the big tree growing on the upper Demerara, which the Author mentions as having been given by him to Charles Kingsley who published it in his book on Trinidad, "At Last", the illustrations are taken from "My Colonial Service" mentioned above.

VINCENT ROTH.

Georgetown.
1948.



The Author

CHAPTER ONE.

Voyage to Guiana in H.M.S. "Nile" — Curious custom — Bermuda and blockade runners—Arrival in Georgetown, British Guiana—Appointed Magistrate of Upper Demerara River district — Guiana travelling boats — Negro boathands and their songs — Description of River.—Hyde Park Police Station—Extraordinary effect of damp—Trial of cases — Great rainfall — Timber punts — Berlin Police Station—Dalgin Court House—Attack of yellow fever there, and experiences connected with it—Bishop Austin — Christianburg — Extraordinary snoring.

In October, 1863, I left Canada to take up my appointment as stipendiary magistrate in British Guiana. Embarking at Boston on a homeward-bound Cunard steamer, which carried me to Halifax, Nova Scotia, it was my intention to take passage there in one of the mail packets which then ran from that port to St. Thomas *via* Bermuda. But having boarded the *Alpha* to see the deck cabin assigned to me, I found that the pleasures of a sea voyage on a small, narrow vessel, certain to roll heavily in any case, were to be enhanced by a deck-load of cattle tied up in such a manner so that their tails were within a few feet of the cabin doors.* A prospect so agreeable was not, however, to be realised; for visiting a friend on board H.M.S. *Nile*, the flagship of the station, then on the point of sailing, I became introduced to the Admiral, Sir Alexander Milne who, on hearing my destination, most kindly offered me a passage.

The *Nile*, her commission nearly expired, was leaving the port for the last time, a circumstance which afforded me the opportunity of witnessing a curious custom, now

* The Civil War in America being in progress, Bermuda obtained its supplies of beef from Halifax, the regular line of passenger steamers being devoted to its transport.—G.W. Des V.

probably fallen into disuse. A bluejacket stood on the truck of each mast, and whirling a barn-door cock round his head threw it into the water, the boats of the other war vessels in the harbour racing to pick up the birds as they fell. This proceeding symbolised, I was told, retirement from the supremacy of the station.

The popularity of the flagship was pleasantly attested at Halifax as we steamed down the harbour by the firing of guns, the waving of flags, and the plaudits of dense crowds.

During the first half of the voyage, or until we reached Bermuda, I spent the greater part of my time in the cockpit, where the first lieutenant, Mr. Phillips, generously gave up to me his cabin. For I was always more or less ill, and found from various experiments that going on deck or into the wardroom only made matters worse, besides bringing my sorrows into public view. I thus saw more of the inner life of a man-of-war than I ever have since, though of the 170,000 miles which I have compassed in ocean voyages, over 6,000 miles have been made in H.M.'s ships. For, as on every subsequent occasion, I was carried officially, and was usually affected with the same weakness, I saw little beyond the quarter-deck and the captain's quarters. On this, my first voyage in a warship, I, as a landsman, had vividly conveyed to me, as no written description could do, what an extraordinary variety of life is compressed into so small a space. One practice I may mention which I have never seen referred to elsewhere. At four o'clock every morning the midshipmen and naval cadets, whose hammocks were slung close by my cabin, were aroused by the boatswain's cry of "Show your legs, show your legs," reiterated as he paced the deck. Each youth thus addressed was expected to put up one of his "nether extremities" to prove that he was awake and ready for the watch. While I knew that to get up under such circumstances was part of the happy life of a sailor, a very rough and cold voyage made me specially commiserate the small boys who were obliged to face a freezing north-easter in the dark hours of the early morning.

Of our fortnight's stay in Bermuda, I spent a week with a cousin, Captain Charles Milligan, whom I unexpectedly found in barracks at St. George's, and who, after some years of service on the staff, had just rejoined his regiment.

In the harbour of St. George's there lay at the time a number of vessels employed in running the blockade of the Confederate ports. These were long, low, narrow steamers, and to my surprise all of them painted white—a colour which I had previously thought the most conspicuous of all, and therefore the least likely to avert the disagreeable attentions of the Union cruisers. The stir and bustle caused by these ships served somewhat to arouse the inhabitants from their normal lassitude, so different from that tireless energy I had recently witnessed in the United States and Canada. But the presence of the crews did not add to the amenities of life, for they spent their enormous pay in continual "drinks", and might be seen day and night perambulating the streets with women of all shades of colour, and loudly vociferating in amatory dialogue or drunken squabbles.

At Bermuda Lady Milne left the ship, having so far accompanied her husband, and the Admiral, having thus at his disposal one of his cabins on the poop, very kindly offered it to me. The better air, though of course more agreeable, scarcely improved my condition, which Sir Alexander playfully attempted to alleviate one morning by the tempting offer of a piece of very fat pork, pretending much concern that I respectfully declined to accept what he represented as a sovereign remedy.

At St. Thomas I heard that a mail steamer would shortly depart for Georgetown, and so felt sorrowfully compelled to quit my friends in the *Nile*, from whom I had received so much kindness. I regretted afterwards that I had been so precipitate, for, owing to delay at St. Thomas, on reaching Barbados I found the *Nile* already there in the roadstead. A very small cabin in the extreme bow of the *Derwent* compared unfavourably in all respects with my comfortable quarters on H.M.'s ship.

I arrived at Georgetown, British Guiana, a few days before Christmas. The Governor, Mr. A.,* at once appointed me to the charge of the Upper Demerara River District (one of the nine or ten into which the colony was divided), the office of Stipendiary Magistrate being in this case combined with that of Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks. The scene of my future work extended, I found, to southward from a point on the river about ten miles from Georgetown, without other definite limit. As my duties nominally included the protection of the Indian tribes of the interior, my jurisdiction might be held to extend to the borders of Brazil, though in practice previous magistrates had never gone beyond, and rarely so far as the Great Falls of the Demerara, which by the windings of the river are about 250 miles from the sea.† There being no suitable house in the district, the magistrate was compelled to have his headquarters in town. I provided myself in this respect, and at once set about procuring a boat, as my travelling could be done only by water.

As I was destined to spend a large proportion of the next four years in them, it may be as well to give here a short description of the boats used for travelling in Guiana by Europeans and the upper class of coloured people. Constructed usually of silverballi (one of the few woods of the country at once hard, durable, and light), they have four to six oars, and are undecked, a space of from seven to eight feet towards the stern being covered by a "tent" of wood. Side awnings protect from sun and rain, while for sleeping removable planks are fitted level with the seats, under which are the lockers for stores. Behind the tent a length of about three feet is uncovered in which sits the "cox". In his absence the boat can be steered from the tent. The rowers were usually negroes or "coloured men," who, when they got away from town and drink, showed marvellous endurance. I have known them of their own accord labour steadily at the oars for

*—The Governor of British Guiana at this time was Francis Hincks Esq., afterwards Sir Francis Hincks—**Editor.**

†—Actually they are little more than 166 miles up the river, measuring along the windings of the stream.—**Editor.**

sixteen to eighteen hours, with scarcely any intermission, when they had any special desire to reach their destination quickly. At first when they began to tire I used to give them spirit, but I soon found by experience that this was worse than useless. It put some additional life into the stroke for a short time, but always caused a very quick collapse afterwards. At night the pace was increased when they sang in chorus. The songs, usually led by a Barbadian negro, were much of a kind described in Marryat's *Peter Simple*, remarkable neither for sense nor tune.* Only one of these songs, as far as I remember, had in it anything approaching to melody. That was the Union battle-song of "John Brown", with the refrain of "Glory, hallelujah, as we go marching on." And even that, reiterated many times, became, to say the least, monotonous; especially during the night hours when sleep in view of the next day's work was desirable. But however wanting in other respects, this singing was always in good time and no doubt lightened the labour, as it seemed absolutely essential to good going; so that whenever there was necessity for expedition I never put an end to it.

A row of about twenty-five miles, or about five hours with the tide, would bring the boat to the first police-station of the district, situate at a village called, for some

*—The chorus of one of them, which I took down in writing and happen to have preserved, ran as follows:—

"He hiha, bow wow wow, the days of the petticoats are coming,
Never mind the weather, but get over double trouble;
Then we're bound for the happy land of Canaan."

The verses of which there are many, preceding this chorus were equally nonsensical. For instance:—

"Tom Sayers and Heenan, they made a night to brag,
They swear'd they'd beat all creation;
But the little Malitia Boy did tap him on the nose,
And knocked him in the happy land of Canaan."

This was, of course, a reference to the celebrated prize fight which had recently taken place in England, "Malitia" being evidently intended for "Benicia", and the singers quite innocent of the fact that the "Benicia Boy" was Heenan himself—G.W. Des V.

occult reason, Hyde Park.* For some eight or nine miles from town the chimneys of sugar plantations appeared, rising above the mangroves on both banks of the river, which is here from three quarters of a mile to a mile wide. After that the banks, still almost level with the water, were lined with low, second-growth trees, broken only here and there by the entrance to a "creek" (the local term for the smaller rivers of the country) or by a few coco palms, which indicated the existence in the present or the past of some negro's house behind them, though this was rarely to be seen from outside.

In front of the forest were even more continuous lines of moka-moka, a tall arum with bare stalks, six to twelve feet high, and several inches in diameter at the base, and bearing here and there a large yellow-white flower, but this never in sufficient quantity to relieve sensibly the prevailing green of the vegetation. These lines of moka-moka are a characteristic of all the larger rivers of Guiana, and extend in the Demerara up to the first fall, or about a hundred and fifty miles from the town—the extreme limit of tidal influence.† The plant becomes gradually smaller with distance from the sea, in the interior being only about four to five feet high, and with proportionately thinner stalks. Another feature of this lower portion of the river is the great number of wading birds (mostly white, with an occasional pink or brown one) standing in the mud and shallow water near the bank. But after some fifteen miles have been passed, except in the early morning or late evening, when parrots of many kinds flew across, signs of all animal life become few. Here, also, the trees on the banks become higher and present the first sight of virgin forest.

At Hyde Park police-station I usually stayed the night after leaving town. This consisted of a one-storied shingled wooden house containing four or five rooms, one

*—Hyde Park was the name of the old plantation on which the village subsequently was built.—**Editor.**

†—Malali Falls, one hundred and five miles up the river.—**Editor.**

of them used and fitted as a court-room, having in front a "stelling", or jetty on piles, stretching out into the turbid stream, here about four hundred yards wide. Though a few cottages, constituting the village, were in the immediate neighbourhood, all of them were hidden by dense foliage, and as no human sound, save from occasional boats passing, reached the house from outside, the impression was one of primeval solitude. Only in the room occupied by the black police-sergeant was there furniture of any kind, and here, as everywhere else on the river, except at Christianburg (to be mentioned later), I slept in a hammock.* According to the advice of old hands, mine was of soft cotton made by the Indians of the interior, and was wide enough to enable the sleeper to lie at will either diagonally or completely cross-wise as well as lengthwise, or to be folded over him for warmth. As a safeguard from insects and, in the forests, from snakes, I had a mosquito net made with arms to cover the ends, and looking in shape like a huge skirt falling to the ground.

On waking in the morning after my first night at Hyde Park, I was astonished to see that my boots, which when taken off were black, had become, during the night, of an equally uniform white, as if from a fall of snow. They were, in fact, completely covered by a growth of fungus—an effect of the extreme dampness of the night air which is observable throughout the interior of Guiana, though not often to the same extent. I may mention with regard to this damp that it sometimes imparts a sensation of extreme chilliness even when the thermometer is in the neighbourhood of 80° Fahrenheit.

On the morning after the magistrate's arrival he usually held his court, the summonses for which had been issued and served by the police or special constables before

*—Except for the addition of separate police quarters in the rear of the building, Hyde Park police-station remained much as the Author describes it up to the period I knew it, 1909-1916. Now, 1948, the scene is very different, the old station being included in the area occupied by Atkinson Field, the American Air Base—**Editor,**

his departure from town. The charges were rarely of a very serious kind. In certain cases the magistrate's jurisdiction included punishment up to six months' hard labour and fifty dollars fine; only on rare occasions was anything beyond this required. So that in my first two years, as far as my memory serves me, I did not send more than a dozen cases to the Supreme Court.

The "parties" in this locality were almost exclusively black and dark-coloured people, the exceptions being Portuguese shopkeepers and more rarely Arowak semi-civilised Indians. Assaults and abusive language formed the great majority of charges; but their triviality by no means rendered it easier to get at the truth. Lying for the defence was the almost invariable practice, while the complainant, even when his charge was a just one, commonly lied also in order to strengthen it. Abusive language was punishable when it was of a kind likely to lead to a breach of the peace, and the frequency of its indulgence obliged me to treat it with severity, it being apt to end in assault with any weapon, however dangerous, within reach. One peculiarity of these cases struck me at once. "Liar", "blackguard", "thief", and even unmentionable words were usually received with comparative equanimity; but the climax of "nigger" almost invariably led to blows, and this though the object of the language was as black as Erebus. Here, as elsewhere within my experience, words contemptuous of race are usually more galling than the foulest aspersion of morals.

These cases, which fortunately were sometimes relieved by a touch of the ludicrous, or their endless reiteration would have become intolerably monotonous, usually began thus:—

Magistrate : "What have you got to say against the defendant?"

Complainant: "Oh, massa, he (or more commonly she) "aboosed me too ba-ad."

Magistrate: "What had you said or done?"

Complainant: "Dun nothing at aal, your wusship, but he" (or she) "called me—" and then issued forth a long stream of evil names as pat as if learned by heart.

It was generally assumed by the excited witness that the magistrate, who had probably never seen either party before, knew by intuition all the preceding facts and circumstances which might have rendered it intelligible. Not until after many questions, involving much patience, was the truth slowly evolved from obscurity, and not unfrequently it was found, even if there were no cross-complaint, that one party was as bad as the other, the event being the dismissal of the case if trivial, or occasionally the convicting and fining of both parties the complaint on a new charge ordered to be made out on the spot. Many of the people occupied a whole day, some even two or three days, in going to and from court, chiefly animated, I imagine, by a desire to obtain a pleasing variation from the dull life of the bush rather than any particular vindictiveness against the offender.

Twenty to thirty cases disposed of, a start was made the same evening if the tide suited, or if not, in the small hours of the next morning, for the next court-house. This was at Berlin, about four or five hours further up the river. A short distance from Hyde Park are "The Sand-hills", the first rising ground seen since leaving Georgetown. These form part of a ridge running a long distance parallel with the sea about forty miles from it, and probably marking a former coast-line—the whole of the land now used for plantations, besides a vast area still unculti-

vated, having probably in the course of time been formed by alluvial deposit of the rivers.*

The Sandhills passed, signs of human existence become fewer. Often in reaches with a perspective of several miles there was visible not a single indication of the presence of man. Sometimes, indeed, a canoe carrying a single Indian or Creole, creeping silently or phantom-like along the bank in the shade of the trees; and now and then in the absolute silence which prevails in the forest at mid-day (save for the occasional shrill note of the pi-pi-yo, or very rarely the metallic toll of the bell-bird) there would be heard the sound of paddles long before any boat was visible. Then most commonly appeared the curial (a canoe dug out from a single tree) of bush negroes, Arawak Indians (clothed and comparatively civilised), or Bovian-

*—The annual rainfall on the coast is about 100 inches, and carefully taken observations on the plantations extending some ten miles up the river showed a quantity regularly increasing with distance from the sea. From my experience, I should say that this progressive increase continues for a long distance inwards, and that at the Great Falls of the Demerara the figure would be nearer 200 than 100 inches, perhaps even more; for during the wet season there is a thunder-storm nearly every afternoon there, when the rain comes down more heavily than, in my long experience of the tropics, I have ever seen elsewhere, even in the "record" storm which I witnessed at Hong Kong in 1889. The weight of the drops causes them to rebound from the water, thus forming with those falling a mass apparently solid for several inches above the surface. With such a rainfall it is probable that the water entering the sea from the Demerara, though little more than 300 miles in length, is greater in quantity than that from any river in Europe, and as there are along the coast of British Guiana alone, besides several small ones, three great rivers, two of them—the Essequibo and the Corentyn, with courses from 500 to 650 miles in length, the solid matter carried down by them must be so enormous as to render the extent of the alluvial land easily intelligible.

ders (as are called the offspring of Indian and negro or "collured"). More rarely would be seen a "woodskin"* manned by Indians from the interior (Accawoios or Macusis), who were absolutely naked but for a very narrow strip round the loins. Furthest of all would be recognised the approach of a timber-laden punt, the shouts of its negro crew being audible miles away over the silent water. These punts, though commonly used for taking back to town the black labourers who had been working for three to six months in the bush under the holder of a wood-cutting grant, served only a subsidiary purpose in the carriage of passengers. Their principal use is floating great loads of logs braced to their outside by strong bush-ropes (lianes) which, being principally composed of green-heart and mora, would otherwise sink to the bottom. I can well remember my surprise at first seeing one of these large punts with its gunwale almost level with the water, though it seemed to carry but a small load within. In fact, many of the exogenous trees of equatorial climates have a specific gravity greater than water. To carry the logs as an inside load would require a much larger vessel of inconvenient draught, so that the mode adopted is probably the cheapest and best that could be devised.

Berlin police-station was merely a three-roomed cottage, standing solitary in a very small clearing closely hemmed in by the forest. There being no landing jetty, getting out of the boat at low water involved the risk of a plunge in the mud. Furniture was even more gloomily conspicuous by its absence than at Hyde Park, for the officer in charge, being only a corporal, contented himself with merely a deal table and two or three chairs. Needless to say, I slept at Berlin only when it could not be avoided, which was only two or three times during my whole service.

*—The woodskin, like the curial, was made from a single tree, but simply of the stripped bark turned up at the ends. The material being softer than the solid wood of the curial, and its low freeboard causing the stroke of the paddle to fall upon it noiselessly, these boats approached much nearer than the others before being heard.—G. W. Des V.

Some few hours' journey above Berlin was the village of Dalgin, in which was the residence of Mr. George Allen, the black Chief Special Constable. In return for the honour and the small pay attached to the office he gave the use of his house for a court-room*. The clearing around it was much larger than at Hyde Park, comprising several small buildings, one a schoolroom, which served also as a church. The surroundings were thus somewhat more cheerful than at the places previously mentioned, and the proprietor was a most worthy man, who quickly became a friend and strong supporter of mine.

At Dalgin some nine months after my arrival in the colony occurred one of the great crises in my life. Georgetown and the coast generally were then suffering from a specially severe epidemic of yellow fever. Many newcomers had been attacked, including a considerable number of officers and soldiers of the garrison, and deaths from it had been in even greater proportion than usual. Coming from town I had held court and slept at Hyde Park, had started early the next day for Berlin and held court there

*—Henry Kirke, in his interesting book "Twenty Five Years in British Guiana" has the following to say about Dalgin and its custodian Allen, or Alleyne:

"Dalgin station was a low thatched house, in which one little room was reserved for the magistrate on his periodical visits, the narrow gallery being used as a court-room. There was no lock-up, so when I sentenced a man to imprisonment, Sergeant Alleyne used to chain him to a tree by the leg, until a convenient time arrived to send him to town. The house swarmed with bats, cockroaches, and all sorts of vermin, but one gets accustomed to these things in time and they never disturbed my slumbers as I rocked in my long grass hammock slung from the roof-tree. Alleyne was Barbadian by birth and had been a slave in his youth. He came to British Guiana when only a lad in his master's train, and was employed as a woodcutter and sawyer. When he became free after Emancipation Day, he worked on his own account and soon acquired enough money to take out a woodcutting licence, and, as greenheart was then selling at a good price, he prospered, bought two lots of land at Dalgin and built the house which I have described. His descendants still reside at Dalgin.—Editor.

also. Feeling very unwell, I determined to go on upwards, knowing that if I could reach Dalgin I should be at least somewhat better off than at these places, and should have kindly people to take care of me. Accordingly I started about three o'clock in the afternoon, with my four boathands, and my black servant steering. Having already on a trip to the gold mines on the Cuyuni River had an attack of chills and fever, I hoped that my shivering and sickness proceeded from nothing worse, and that a dose of quinine, aided by the healthier air of the interior, would quickly make me all right. But unfortunately about sundown there came on a severe thunderstorm, which lasted far into the night. The tremendous rain could not be kept out of the tent, and the pitch darkness also sorely delayed us, it being sometimes impossible to steer but with the aid of the lightning flashes. Consequently, when we arrived at our destination, about nine o'clock, I was very ill indeed, and in the still pouring rain had to be carried to my sleeping-place. This was an absolutely bare room about twelve feet by six, only just large enough for my hammock. Beginning to recognise yellow fever, with the signs of which I was unpleasantly familiar, I took one of several doses with which I had come prepared for such an emergency. These were composed each of twenty grains of calomel and twenty-four grains of quinine, the remedy at that time most in vogue. Some hours afterwards, while I was still conscious, another of these was given to me, and I was told that, according to my request, a third was administered after I became delirious. I thus certainly took forty (perhaps sixty) grains of calomel and possibly seventy-two grains of quinine within sixteen hours. It has always been a question with me since whether the medicine cured the disease or whether my constitution proved sufficiently strong to withstand both.

Toward evening of the next day I came to myself, and found my hammock soaked with blood, which they told me had come from my eyes and ears. But I was decidedly better, and I determined to take advantage of a favourable tide for making my way back to town. On the return passage, save for a single brief stoppage, the hands rowed the

eighty miles, or thereabouts*, without rest, and we arrived in the harbour of Georgetown the following afternoon after a "record" passage. When still some ten miles from Georgetown, the boat of an inspector of police came up to us. He looked at me for a moment through the awning, and, I suppose, imagining me to be insensible, said quite audibly, "Row on hard, or you won't get him home alive." But my miseries were not at an end; it took more than an hour to get a conveyance, and meanwhile I was tossed about in the broiling sun by a heavy swell which added sea-sickness to other ills. The result was a relapse, which is usually held to be certainly fatal. But I falsified all prognostications, and chiefly owing to the devoted nursing of the old coloured lady in whose house I lodged, I gradually recovered. I may mention also that another pleasant reminiscence connected with this illness is furnished by the letter of warm sympathy received from a sister-in-law whom I had never seen; my brother Henry having recently married Alice, daughter of Lord Wilton (the first Earl.)

It was at Dalgin about Christmas-time, as he reminded me years afterwards on an Atlantic voyage, that I had the pleasure of entertaining at dinner (which included an English plum-pudding) the late and much-lamented Dr. Austin, Bishop of Guiana (afterwards Metropolitan of the West Indies), who was on one of his annual visitations to the river. I see now in my mind's eye his tall, handsome form emerging from the tent of his boat, dressed as correctly as if he were attending a Pan-Anglican gathering, tights, silk stockings, and buckled pumps included. However uncanonical may have been his garments inside his boat, he was never visible to the profane world in any but the most orthodox episcopal costume. The position which this most estimable man occupied for many years in Guiana was by no means an easy one, and I cannot praise it more highly than by saying that his conduct in it was—in human view—as faultless as his dress.

*—Dalgin lies fifty-five miles up the river.—**Editor.**

Some two hours above Dalgin is Christianburg, which in my time was the only civilised residence in the whole district. To the proprietor, Mr. Paterson and his family, I was on several occasions indebted for a bed and other comforts, which were specially appreciated on returning to town after some weeks spent in the bush.* There was a large sawmill for cutting greenheart into planks, a considerable extent of out-buildings, and a clearing of several acres, which altogether afforded relief to the eye wearied with perpetual forest.

There was resident at Christianburg in my time a book-keeper named M'Connell, remarkable for a peculiarity to which I have never known a parallel. His snoring was so loud and harsh as to be absolutely appalling to one who, being unprepared, heard it for the first time. Though he was a brother of a leading colonist, and would naturally have been lodged in the house, it had been found impossible to keep him there, as his sleep meant the wakefulness of all the other inmates, and so he was given quarters in a distant out-building. Having myself more than once listened to this cacophony, I can well believe the following anecdote told me on good authority. M'Connell and a companion, whom we will call Smith, had started on a journey through the forest, accompanied by several Indians. The party having made their first camp (which in the Guiana forest usually meant a large fire, with the ham-

*—Henry Kirke in his "Twenty-five Years in British Guiana" writes of Christianburg House as follows:—

"The interior of the house was a surprise to me when I first entered it, as it seemed to transport one back to the old country. There was, of course, an absence of carpets, and curtains, but the furniture had all come from Scotland many years before. There was a large grandfather's clock ticking solemnly against the wall, an old spindle-legged side-board with brass handles of lions' heads, with rings in their mouths, and badly painted oil portraits in dingy gilt frames against the walls. Upstairs the bedrooms were nearly filled with huge wooden fourpost beds, with heavy testers, into which one had to climb with the help of a chair."—**Editor.**

mocks of travellers as well as Indians hung round in a circle upon the neighbouring trees), the travellers had gone to sleep, when suddenly Smith awoke, and by the light of the fire saw to his astonishment that the Indians were untying their hammocks. Becoming conscious of the awe-inspiring sounds proceeding from his friend's sleeping-place, he at once divined the cause of the Indians' perturbation, and endeavoured to persuade them to remain, their fear, however, was too great. They bolted in a body, and the expedition had to be given up. Nothing would induce them to return while M'Connell, whom they believed to be an evil spirit, was of the party.

CHAPTER TWO

Seba—Theft by Ants — Adventure with boat hands — Experiences of blood-sucking bats—First Falls — Mr. Forsyth — His reminiscences of Waterton, author of the Wanderings — Practical joke with dead snake — Passage of the rapids—Adventure with criminal half-breed — Difficulty with regard to crime within the jurisdiction of Supreme Court—Child carried off by eagle—Indian path to Essequibo—Charles Couchman's photograph of tree here appears in Charles Kingsley's "At Last"—George Couchman's timber-cutting grants — Last civilised settlement — The Great Falls of the Demerara—Indian modes of capturing fish—Canimapo; his attempt to murder me.

Between Christianburg and the First Falls, which are really only rapids, the aspect of the Demerara River in my time remained much the same as below, the only observable difference being the gradual decrease of width, the lessening influence of the tide, the diminishing size of the moka-moka, and the still greater sparsity of human habitation. The journey upwards occupied about twelve hours, or more in the rainy season, and, save in times of exceptional pressure, I usually gave the boathands a night's rest on the way.

It may be a matter for surprise that there should ever have been pressure in respect of time, but in fact this occurred not infrequently. Some of the witnesses summoned lived far away, at the heads of creeks, and required one or more day's journey to reach the place appointed for court. They would thus lose the better part of a week by their attendance, even if the court were punctually held at the time fixed. If the magistrate then failed to appear, the loss of time would be greater, and any prolonged delay would naturally cause them to return home. As sum-

monses ordinarily required to be issued ten days to a fortnight previous to a court in order to ensure their being all served in time, accidents not unfrequently happened meanwhile rendering it impossible, or extremely difficult, for the magistrate to reach his destination punctually. He might be delayed by official business in town, or while on the way up the river might be suddenly called to hold a coroner's inquest (that being among his functions), which, if in one of the creeks at a distance from the main river, might easily cause a delay of days. So that in fact, in order to be as punctual as possible, it was sometimes necessary to travel night and day whenever the tide suited. Owing to this uncertainty being the greater the longer the distance from town, I used latterly, whenever it was necessary to have a court above the First Falls, to issue summonses only when I arrived there, and then wait in the neighbourhood during the interval.

Few places between Christianburg and the First Falls remain very clearly in my recollection, as I never passed a night more than once or twice at any of them.

I stopped once at the house of a grant owner, by name Alcock. The name of his place was Seba, familiar to readers of Waterton's *Wanderings*, and here occurred an incident impressed vividly upon my memory. Arriving there late one afternoon, I felt too unwell to proceed. The house being temporarily without occupant, I, with permission from the proprietor, made use of it for the night. Having had good reason to suspect the boathands of pilfering my stores (which are specially precious, as I contemplated a three months' excursion into the interior), I caused some of the packages to be brought into the house and placed near my hammock. Among them was an unopened bag of rice, and my surprise and indignation may be imagined when next morning I found about a third of the contents abstracted. I had heard no one about in the night, although I had been the greater part of it awake, had been several times up, and had, moreover, trained myself to wake at the slightest movement near me. It seemed difficult to understand how such a theft could have

been attempted without instant detection in a spot only some eight feet from my sleeping-place. There was no opening in the bag except a very small hole near the bottom, and being unable to imagine the culprit to be other than human, I supposed that the bag must have been lifted up for the purpose of emptying the contents into some convenient receptacle, without reflecting that in the case of so small a hole this would have been an inconveniently slow process, and the thief incredibly maladroit not to have made a larger one while he was about it. I at once summoned the boat hands, and showing them the depleted bag, called upon the delinquent to confess. All loudly asseverated their innocence, and one of them, presuming upon my condition of illness, became excessively insolent. Believing that he was the culprit and that he was adding insult to injury, I lost my temper and knocked him down. Vain punishment. His head was so hard he was not hurt at all, while my knuckles and hand suffered for a week after.

Continuing too unwell to proceed, I passed another day there, and having occasion to get up during the following night, I saw in the bright moonlight a dark line passing through the doorway. It appeared to be composed of living creatures, and at once striking a light I saw it to be a column of ants (of the kind commonly known as "leaf-carrying" or, in the local vernacular "cushi") passing through the door. On closer scrutiny I found that half the column was passing into and the other half out of the house, and thus was the mystery of the theft cleared up; for while the ants entering were all empty-mouthed, those going out were (with the exception of the larger ones, or officers) each carrying a grain of rice. Every few moments, as grains were removed from the hole in the bag, the weight of rice from above caused more to fall out, so that in the course of another night the whole would have been carried off. I traced the column for some hundred and fifty yards, when the density of vegetation upon what had been a recently abandoned patch of cultivation would have compelled me to desist even had I been in better condition for prosecuting the search. The next morn-

ing the ants had totally disappeared; there was a faint mark on the ground showing their line of march, which would doubtless have enabled me, with perseverance and some cutlass work, to find the nest. But as this might have been far distant in the forest, I was unable to afford time for the attempt. I of course made amends to the boat hands, which proved so satisfactory that the physical sufferer expressed a wish to be knocked down again at the same price.

When passing the night on one occasion at a place called Akyma, situate a few miles below the Falls, I was much worried by a bat, which persistently fluttered round my hammock, and I then sought to verify in my own person the blood-sucking habit of these creatures. Having in several instances seen bites involving considerable loss of blood, which had been inflicted during the sleep of the victim without his being conscious of it, I concluded the pain could not be great. There was at that time much scepticism on this subject, notwithstanding the testimony of Waterton, the vampire bat being regarded by many as almost equally fabulous with the vampire itself. That I might be able to speak from personal experience, I put one of my feet outside the mosquito curtain of my hammock and awaited events. The sound of wings soon reached my ear, as if in gradually narrowing circles. All at once I felt puffs of air, as from a fan, on the exposed foot, over which the creature was evidently hovering. But this was too much for nerves weakened by fever and the experiences of the two previous years, and I withdrew the foot into the netting. Summoning courage again, I twice repeated the attempt, each time with the same experience. But though I regretfully confess that I could never sufficiently control myself to receive the bite, I had at least convinced myself as to what would have happened had I permitted it. The blood-sucking habit of these creatures is now, however, too well established to need such confirmation.*

*—Among many instances which at one time or another came under my notice, three are specially prominent in my memory. On my return from England, Nicholson, a young engineer officer quartered in Georgetown, was accompanying

Just below the First Falls in my time, on the left bank of the river, was a small wooden building specially intended

me on one of my trips to the interior. I had strongly urged him to bring a mosquito curtain for his hammock as a protection, not so much against mosquitoes (which in the Demerara River are by no means troublesome) as against bats or snakes falling from the trees. He, however, neglected my advice. We slept the first night at the Chinese settlement in the Camooni Creek. Early the next morning I was awakened by a cry from his hammock, which was close alongside. The white cotton of the latter showed a large patch of blood, and on the toe of the foot he was pitifully examining was a small triangular hole, as though pierced by the end of a file. He had evidently lost much more blood than had been taken by the bat, and had he continued with me would probably have undergone the same experience again. So as it was impossible to obtain the necessary curtain, he wisely returned to town.

On another occasion I had arrived late one evening at a small Indian "clearing" on the Upper River. The occupants of the "benab" (small Indian hut) being excited by the arrival of the magistrate, neglected to attend to their own concerns. They had a small boy, who, they afterwards told me, had been brought to his very visible condition of emaciation by continual blood-letting from bats. As a protection they had recently been in the habit of sewing him up every night in a rice bag: but on the night of our arrival this had been forgotten and though the little fellow had of his own accord inserted himself in the bag, he was not to escape scatheless. He had left the top of his head uncovered, and there in the morning the bat was seen to have left his mark, while a small red patch on the ground showed that the creature had not "taken nothing by his motion."

The propensity of the vampire to come again and again to the same person was shown in another case, which occurred in my experience years afterwards. While I was administering the Government of Trinidad (where the Governor had been compelled to enclose with wire-netting the stalls of his stables, owing to injury from bats suffered by his horses) my wife and I were spending a few days on the island of Monos, in the Gulf of Paria. Her English maid had the bad habit of putting her foot out of her mosquito curtain, and she paid for it on this occasion severely, for she was bitten by a bat two nights successively in the same place, in her foot, and lost much blood on each occasion.—G. W. Des V.

For further information about the vampire and its habits see "Animal Life in British Guiana", Guiana Edition, Page 23.

—Editor

for church service;* on the right bank, somewhat higher up, was a diminutive wooden residence and shop. The latter belonged to a very old Englishman, Forsyth by name, with whom on various occasions I had interesting talks. He told me he came to Guiana as a boy, and that shortly after leaving England on his voyage thither, he had seen the fleet of Nelson returning from the battle of the Nile. He well remembered Waterton, the author of the delightful *Wanderings*, and told me many particulars of his eccentricities. The story told by Waterton, about his ride on the alligator as it was being dragged out of the water, Mr. Forsyth believed to be absolutely true, as it was a matter of common talk at the time. One of the naturalist's peculiarities was the habit of using the smooth surface of the water every morning as a looking-glass while shaving. So imperative in those days was the fashion of smooth lips and chin, that a moustache could not be tolerated even in the bush.†

Though on subsequent occasions I usually had my hammock hung in Mr. Forsyth's house, on my first trip I slept in the church, for which the magistrate had permission from the bishop. Mr. Plimmer, my predecessor in the district, who accompanied me, happened to kill, close to the building, "a labarria" snake, a very deadly species. As the boat hands were at some distance and did not see this, it occurred to him to get some amusement from it. He accordingly coiled up the body of the snake upon the church steps and managed to erect its head in a threatening attitude. When the men who had been ordered to hang our hammocks in the church saw in the rapidly failing light this creature barring the way, their attitude of fright was beyond expression ludicrous. After a time, one of them cut down a sapling some twelve feet long, and with absurdly

*—This old building still stood up to 1910 when it was pulled down and the present Malali Church erected. The Forsyth house also remained up to 1916 at least.—**Editor.**

†—Old Forsyth's descendants dwelt in the Upper Demerara to the fourth generation, but I believe that they have all died out by now.—**Editor.**

cautious approach brought it down bravely on the dreaded reptile snake at a very safe distance. This doughty feat achieved, the fellow strutted about with the air of a conqueror. The incident gave us much amusement, and put some life into a tired and somewhat sulky party.

Though the First Falls are only rapids the current is far too fast to permit of ascent by other means than hauling. This was done in places from the bank, but principally from shallow spots in the stream. The rush of water in the rainy season was such that I have seen men carried off their legs when they were immersed little above the ankles. Descent of the rapids was made with oars or paddles, the time occupied as compared with ascent being as minutes to hours. I always shipped a special coxswain for this purpose, usually an Indian of the neighbourhood, as the experiment would almost certainly have had a fatal end with an inexperienced hand at the helm. Consequently, although narrowly escaping, I never had an accident.

One afternoon, after a long expedition into the interior, we were when some half an hour from the Falls, hailed by an Indian, who informed us that a woman had just been nearly killed by her "Boviander" husband. Going at once to the place she indicated, I found the woman grievously injured, and apparently dying. I at once took her deposition, which, though extracted with much difficulty, fully confirmed the information given. Starting again in my boat, we had reached a point some three hundred yards above the rapids, when the Indian coxswain pointed out the accused man, paddling his curial up-stream. I hailed him, and he, being evidently unaware that I knew of the crime, at once came alongside. I ordered him to get into my boat, and when he showed a disposition to push away and escape, commanded the boat hands to hold fast to his canoe and the constables to arrest him. The latter, however, who on this occasion were Indians, were in too great fright to touch a notorious bully, who was, in fact, the terror of the neighbourhood. Though in those days I was not wanting in strength, it is probable that, in an encounter, the man in question would have been more than

a match for me even on land. When, therefore, I put my hand upon him to arrest him myself, it is tolerably certain that, had he resisted to the utmost, he would have had the best of the struggle, which would have inevitably resulted in our both being thrown into the water. As it was, his resistance being slight, I got him into my boat without great difficulty, when the cries of the Indians drew my attention to our position. During the above scene the boat had been drifting, and was now close to the Falls, going broadside on to them. To have been caught by the rapid in this position was inevitably to have been swamped, and the greater part of us drowned.* But by frantic efforts the boat was turned in the right direction, just as the quick water was reached.

Arriving safely at Mr. Forsyth's, I had the prisoner secured there, but finding that the terror of him was such that he would otherwise be very probably allowed to escape, I was obliged to have my own hammock slung across his door. Next day I tried him. His wife, being then considered better, and having been carried across the portage in a hammock, gave her testimony again, in his presence, and altogether the evidence against him was quite conclusive. Yet I was in some difficulty in coming to a decision. If the case were to be remitted to the Supreme Court, which could alone award a sufficiently severe sentence, it was almost certain that the offender would escape punishment altogether, owing to the absence of the necessary witnesses. The woman on recovering would be made to disappear, while not only fear of making a dangerous enemy, but the Indian dread of appearing in the Supreme Court under any circumstances, would have caused the others to avoid the subpoena by hiding in the interior. On the other hand, as the woman being in a very feeble condition, there was yet a chance of her dying. Under the circumstances I postponed sentence, and carried the man on with me down the river. When a few days afterwards

*—In fact, this actually happened about the same time to a party in a similar rapid of the Massaruni, when several lives were lost, including the son of the Governor and one or more *navai* officers.—G.W. Des V.

I heard that his wife was recovering, I sentenced him myself to six months' hard labour, the heaviest penalty it was in my power to inflict.

About two hours journey above the rapids was an Indian settlement of two or three "benabs" (thatched sheds without walls), which was the scene of a singular occurrence. Passing there one evening in my boat, we saw an Indian woman crying on the bank, and upon inquiry I learnt that her two little children, one about three and the other under two years old, had gone together to play in the forest. Only one returned and he was unable to give any account of what had occurred to his brother. A number of Indians had come to assist in the search; but though two days had passed, the missing child had not been found. It was supposed that some animal or bird of prey had carried him off. On my next journey up the river, which, owing to an intervening visit to England, was not for some months, I heard, on good authority, that a piece of the linen rag that the child had on him was seen on the top of a forest tree, rendering it probable that the captor was a harpy eagle, one of the largest species in the world. I never saw one of these birds, except in flight far up in the sky; but the claw of one, in the possession of the superintendent of the penal settlement on the Massaruni, had a leg nearly as thick as my wrist, making it easy to suppose that the Indian stories as to the size of the prey carried off by these birds are not exaggerated.

Some four hours above the rapids was the woodcutting grant and log house of one Charles Couchman. Here is the nearest point between the Demerara and the Essequibo, and one end of an Indian "path" which I most frequently used for passing from one river to the other, the walk across occupying six to eight hours. At the edge of a small clearing around the house stood a tall mora. Having carried a photographer with me on one of my circuits for the purpose of getting pictures of forest scenes and native groups, he took one of this tree. I appear in the picture standing against the trunk, and one of the boathands is sitting on a log close by. Years afterwards in St. Lucia

I gave a copy of this picture to Charles Kingsley, when he visited me there, and a print of it appears in his book *At Last* over the legend, "The Last of the Giants." It would no doubt be regarded as a giant in Trinidad, where readers of the book probably supposed it to grow; for the greater part of the land in that island has at one time or another been cleared for cultivation, and the trees are thus mostly smaller than those of virgin forest. But being only about 190 feet in height, it is not, I think, a specially tall tree of its kind, which is equalled in this respect by many others, and is, indeed, greatly surpassed by some, the Brazil-nut and the silk-cotton sometimes reaching a height of 250 feet and more.

Above Charles Couchman's, at a distance of some two hours' journey by boat, was the house of his brother, George Couchman, also the owner of a woodcutting grant, for whom I always had a special regard. Though, judging by his full brother Charles, he must have had negro blood in his veins, he might easily have passed for a white man.* He had married an Indian wife and had lived so long among the Indians that no man in the colony understood them better, and it was through him and his interpretation of their languages that I learnt most of what I ever knew of this strange people. His house was always a resting-place for travellers from town, including the itinerant missionary clergymen and the bishop on his annual visit. He and his family, like all inhabitants of the river

*—The father of George and Charles Couchman appears to have been an officer in the Royal Navy who, on retirement from the Service, bought a small ship and went in for contraband slave running from Africa to the West Indies subsequent to the Suppression of the trade in 1808. His ship was eventually captured by a British man-of-war and he ruined. He then came to Guiana and went up the Demerara River where he began a timber cutting business. His son George, whom I knew as an old man of over 90, was better known in later years by his Indian name of "Basakwai" and even up to my days in the district, 1909-16, his home at "Retreat" opposite the mouth of the Yawarabaru Creek, was a point of call for all visitors to the district. He had several sons, one of whom, Stephen, was murdered by the kanaimas at Gravel Bank about 1910. Several of his descendants are still alive.—**Editor.**

above Christianburg, slept in hammocks, such a thing as a bedstead and bedding being an unknown luxury. He had, however, taught his wife the virtue of cleanliness, and on this account, in the many days and nights when my hammock hung on his verandah, I had comfort rarely experienced elsewhere. With him, also, I obtained change of food, which was most welcome after a long course of tinned meats, salt fish, biscuits, and flour dumplings; for he had Indians continually "hunting" and fishing for him, and after this fare a fresh fish "pepper-pot" and the flesh of deer, tapir, accouri, or labba, however inartistically cooked, seemed to be palatial luxury. Mr. Couchman was a Justice of the Peace, and complaints were usually sent to him to await my arrival, unless they were of sufficient gravity to warrant a special messenger. As a rule the only cases of importance tried above the rapids were charges for unlicensed cutting of timber on Crown land. Except, of course, on private land, which above Christianburg existed only in one or two places, the cutting down of greenheart, mora, and other valuable timber trees was legal only under special licence from the Governor. Cutting on the part of persons without any licence was rare, as the necessity of making a timber path* to the water for bringing the logs to market rendered discovery almost certain. The charges, therefore, were almost invariably against licensed holders for transgressing the limits of their grants. For the licences were good only for special areas with fixed boundaries, and any transgression rendered the licensee as liable to penalty as if he had no licence at all. When any new licence was granted, it was the duty of the magistrate to inspect the boundary posts placed by the surveyors. The grant was always an oblong area, usually, I think, about two miles in length and about half a mile in width, with the base on a river or creek. The surveyor always cut a narrow path along one of the long sides and also

*—A timber path was a wide road cut through the forest, across which, at intervals of every few feet, log sleepers were placed in order to permit of the squared logs being dragged more easily to the water. The hauling was done by large gangs of men, sometimes assisted by oxen.—G. W. Des V.

along the short side furthest from the water, being thus able to determine the position of the four corner posts. Though three of the boundaries were thus clearly defined, the fourth, being only an imaginary line through dense forest, was not so obvious. Though this boundary might have been easily ascertained by the grantholder, yet his neglect to do so had been so long tolerated, that during my first year I did not exact a penalty (fifty dollars fine or six months' imprisonment, or both) unless depredation had been very serious. When, however, the trespass had been beyond the surveyor's line and the necessary timber-path for the logs joined that of the grantholder, I had no mercy, as it was then clear the offence must have been committed with the latter's connivance. These cases gave a great deal of trouble, and the conflict of evidence was sometimes such as to involve a delay of one or more days occupied in personal inspection.

Some four hours above Yawaribaro (the Indian name of Mr. Couchman's residence) was the house of one Giles, a negro grantholder, which was at that time farther in the interior than any other non-Indian residence. Thence inwards to Brazil there were only aboriginal inhabitants.

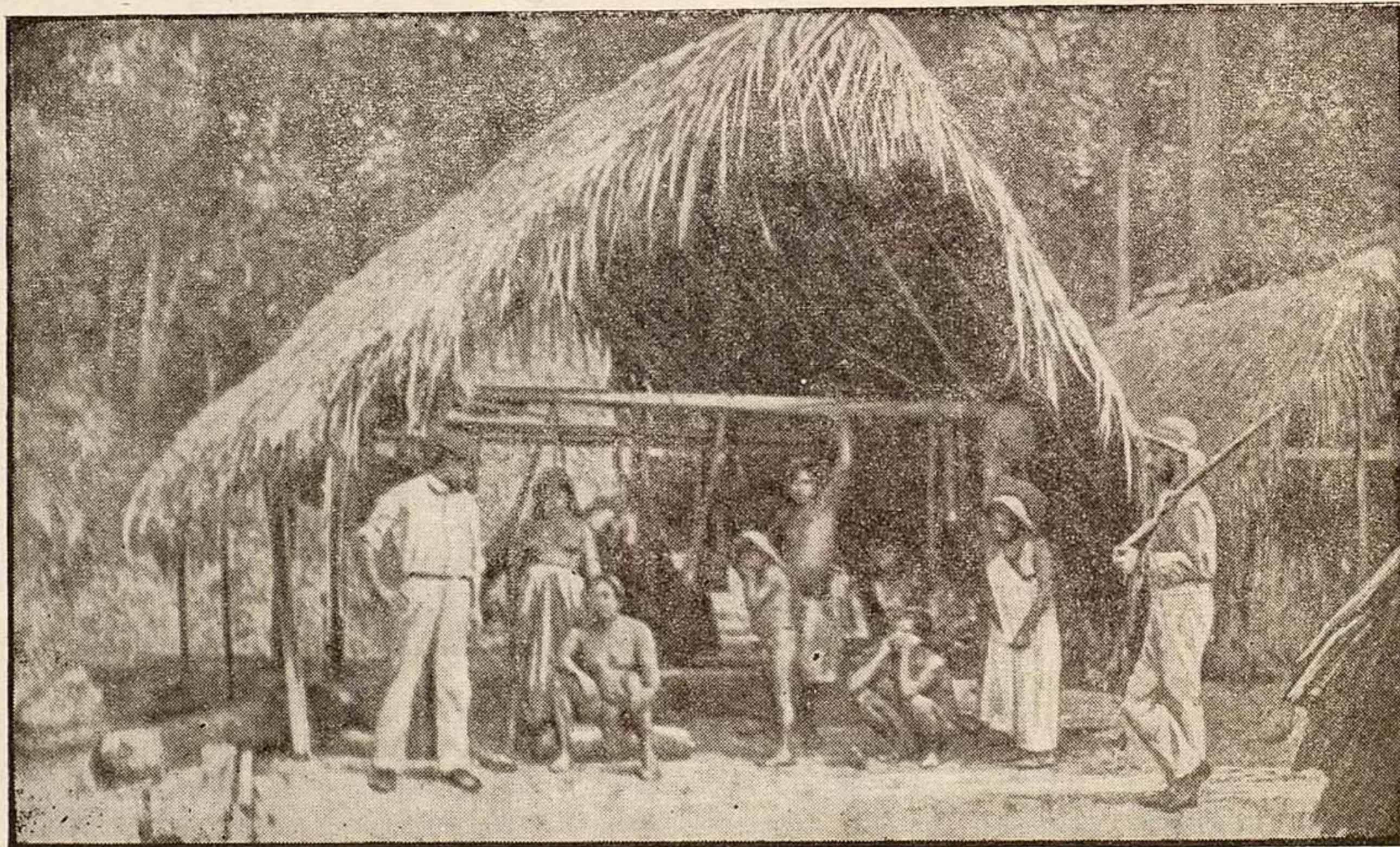
Two hours above this place were the Great Falls, which, in addition to rapids, comprise a most picturesque cascade of about forty feet in height. The pools below of dark, clear water contain many paco, a large flat-fish of about the size of a turbot, which is very good eating, and is easily hit by Indian arrows. These are sometimes attached by string to the bow or the arm, so that the fish, when pierced, can be at once landed. When the object is so far off that the string would spoil the shot, the arrow is allowed to go free. It has a loose point, which, on striking the fish, becomes partly detached, allowing the long reed which forms the shaft and is still held to it by a short cord, to float on the water. The shaft indicates the position of the fish which has carried off the arrow, and if a large one, it becomes the object of an exciting chase in woodskins. On several occasions I had much amusement from this sport, and made frequent efforts to

learn the art of fish-shooting. But I cannot say I ever became proficient, though, having practised archery when a boy, I soon learnt to shoot with the native weapon at a mark above water almost as well as the Indians themselves. Indeed, in this latter respect they never seemed to me to be remarkably expert, the acquisition of guns having probably caused intermittence of practice with the inferior weapon. To hit a mark under water, however, is quite another matter. Not only does refraction cause the object to appear in a different position from its real one—a difference which increases proportionately with the depth—but, unless the shot is perpendicular, the resistance of the water deflects the arrow upwards, both contributing to a miss from aiming at the wrong place. Much practice is needed, therefore, to be able to judge with accuracy the right point at which to strike the surface.

Another method of fishing I have seen practised with great success. The Demerara is unsuitable for it, as, except at very low water in the first rapids, the portion of the river beyond tidal influence as far as the Great Falls, and even many miles beyond them, runs in only one channel. The Essequibo, on the other hand, in most of its rapids is studded with islands and rocks, and so divided into many streams, some narrow enough to be easily stopped with large stones, enabling the water, but no fish of any size, to run through. The place required is a large deep pool with a narrow entrance at both ends. On the day previous to the fishing the Indians have been engaged in finding, cutting into convenient lengths, and then macerating with clubs, a certain bush-rope (liane). The juice is caught in a woodskin and diluted with water, the mixture being a yellowish-brown liquid about the colour and consistency of thin pea-soup. During the night the two means of exit from the pool are suddenly blocked by large stones previously made ready for the purpose, and in the early morning one or more canoe-loads of this liquid, according to the size of the pool, are thrown into the stream above the upper entrance. In the course of a few moments, as the drug mixes with the water in the pool, the paco, partially stupefied, appear rising to the top of the

water, and then the fun begins. Some of the Indians are content to stand on rocks and thence shoot the fish with arrows; but others, screaming with excitement, jump into the pool, and, swimming and wading, endeavour to catch the prey in their arms and carry them to land. This is no easy task, for the paco, though half intoxicated, is quite able to struggle violently when seized, frequently carrying a man off his legs, even when he has already touched ground with his feet. In the course of an hour or so all the fish that it is possible to capture (some recovering themselves after a time) are safely landed; but the excitement and laughing over the ridiculous sights witnessed often continue all day and far into the night. I always enjoyed these scenes greatly, the prolonged merriment serving as a welcome relief to the sombre life of the forest.

A short distance below the Great Falls, on a rising ground, was the settlement of an Accawoio Indian, named Canimapo. He always had a large number of dependants who were much in awe of him, and he was in this respect more like one of the native chiefs whom I have known elsewhere than any other Indian of my acquaintance in Guiana. Though my relations with him were, in appearance, friendly during the whole of my service in the district, they were on my part cautious after the following occurrence. Accompanied by the photographer above mentioned, I stayed two nights in his settlement. On the first morning after arrival, with much difficulty I induced him and some of his people to be photographed in groups, and perhaps imprudently allowed him to see the negatives. He appeared not merely astonished, but alarmed, and the whole day and far into the night the sound of excited talking could be heard coming from his benab. In the evening he sent me as a present a fresh-fish pepper-pot, which the Indians usually made very well, and which, though far too pungent for the taste of a newly-arrived European, is grateful to the jaded palate of one who has been a few months in the equatorial heat. Fortunately for me, when the present arrived, we had already finished our dinner, and I gave the pepper-pot to my boat hands,



Indian Chief Canimapo sitting on log in front of his house.
Couchman standing at left. The Author at right.

who partook of it freely. In a short time all became ill, two so violently that I began to fear fatal results. Yet whether through strong doses of brandy and chlorodyne, or from strength of constitution, they quickly recovered, and at daybreak next day they were ready and, I may add, anxious to proceed with our journey. I did not then suspect intentional poisoning, but a circumstance occurred almost immediately after starting to arouse our suspicion. I was sitting on the top of the tent of my boat, as I frequently did before the sun rose above the trees, for enjoyment of fresh air, and on the look-out for a passing shot. Hearing a flight of parrots coming, I asked for my gun. As it was handed up to me, stock upwards, some dirt fell out of the muzzle. Examination showed that both barrels had been plugged with mud, some of which, having dried, had thus betrayed its presence. This could not have been the result of accident, as a space of some two inches at the end of each barrel was clean and bright. However caused, the obstruction would inevitably have burst the gun had I fired it. The escape was therefore a narrow one.

On this discovery I at first thought of going back and charging Canimapo with attempt to murder me; but on second thoughts I refrained from doing so. In view of the awe in which he was held, I reflected that with the very imperfect interpretation at my command, it was scarcely conceivable that I could bring the offence sufficiently home to him to warrant referring the case to the Supreme Court, while to fail in obtaining a conviction would be far worse than leaving the matter alone. It happened also to be important that I should get to town quickly, and all things considered, I determined to ignore the matter altogether. Mr. Couchman informed me afterwards that the old savage had probably been much frightened by seeing the picture of himself. He conceived the notion that this gave me some occult power over him, and that his only hope of safety would be in my death. My double escape doubtless made him regard me as invulnerable. More than once afterwards I stopped for the night at another settlement of the same chief, at

some distance above the Great Falls, when he showed me a respect which amounted almost to servility, and strikingly unlike the ordinary indifference of the aborigines. But "once bitten twice shy," and on the principle of "Timeo Danaos," I was after the above occurrence, always wary of his presents.

At the Great Falls the Magistrate's jurisdiction practically ended. Without the aid of a force of men I never had at command it would have been impossible to carry a tent boat over the portage, and any travelling beyond was necessarily done in an Indian woodskin, which having no shelter, was by no means comfortable in rain. The population, moreover, being entirely composed of Indians who had very rarely or never been in contact with white men, was so sparse that settlements, rarely exceeding a dozen people, were several days' journey apart. British law nominally prevailed; but it was in my time utterly unknown there, and any attempt to enforce it would have been fruitless. For these reasons no Magistrate before my time, as far as I could ascertain, had ever ascended the river further; and though, taking advantage of my office as Protector of Indians, I on several occasions made expeditions into the further interior, I cannot say that I did so from any strong sense of duty, or from expectation of any great good to arise therefrom. In fact, I much preferred the wild life of the bush to the Society of the Coast with its never-ending talk, and all-pervading atmosphere of sugar; and I was, moreover, curious to visit an almost unknown region, and to observe the habits of people, many of whom had never seen a European, as well as to learn something from the unaccustomed sights and sounds of an almost untrodden forest.

CHAPTER THREE

The tributaries of the Demerara—Scenery of creeks—The trootie palm—Delusion about tropical vegetation—The Camoonie Creek—A settlement of Chinese—Instance of Chinese honesty—First experience of tropical forest—Its distinctive characteristics—Verification of timber-grant boundaries—Savannahs—Adventure with snake—Day sounds of the forest—Cries of goat-suckers.

Hitherto I have been dealing with the main river; but there are many creeks tributary to the Demerara, which in any climate with less rainfall would themselves be regarded as rivers.* Some of them are navigable by boats for two or more days' journey. Though I never held court upon their banks, the duty of inspecting wood-cutting grants, and once or twice of holding a coroner's inquest, necessitated considerable acquaintance with them. Indeed, in selecting a suitable site for the Chinese settlement, to be described later, I went almost to the limit of canoe navigation, up most of the streams entering the Demerara within forty miles of Georgetown. In their vicinity the luxuriance of tropical vegetation is perhaps more striking than anywhere else—and by "equatorial" I distinguish the flora within a few degrees of the line from the less luxuriant vegetation of countries nearer the outskirts of the tropics. The light furnished by the opening to the sky between the trees on each bank permits of a dense undergrowth which is almost entirely absent in the eternal gloom of the forest, and is seen elsewhere only in swamps in which large trees are extremely few. Though no description, however vivid, of a whole which is made up of such an infinity of details ever presents a true picture to the mind, it may be mentioned that the principal characteristic which distinguishes the banks of

* In these days any stream approximating ten miles in length is officially designated a river.—**Editor,**

these streams from those of temperate climates is the total invisibility of the soil which supports the vegetation, every inch of it, even in places recently laid bare by the water, being covered with plants struggling for the mastery. Here a clump of tree-ferns, there a single wild banana or a group of prickly palms show themselves above the confused chaos beneath; more rarely a great bunch of feathery bamboos, which I always, rightly or wrongly, regarded as exotic and indicating former civilised residence.* But in the creeks within seventy miles of the coast the most striking object is the troolie palm, which shoots its enormous fronds directly out of the ground at the edge of the bank to a height of thirty feet or more.† I am inclined to think that these palms do not exist, or are at least very rare, in the far interior, for I never saw one growing there; the Indian benabs were not thatched with them, though their leaves are for this purpose incomparably superior to any others, and are, when obtainable invariably used for it, both by the Indians and the coloured people who live nearer the coast. Other leaves which especially attract notice are those of what I supposed was an arum, and are larger than any I have ever seen elsewhere.

I recall one in an upper reach of one of the creeks (I think that named Hibibia) which was so large that drooping down from its stalk it made a graceful arch over the channel through which my canoe passed. When approaching the source of one of these streams, way has to be made through the water-lilies growing completely across the channel, while the giant trees on either bank seem to make a special effort to occupy the narrowing avenue of light, and are joined together by innumerable lianes, until at

* There is occasionally found a small species of bamboo which, I believe, is indigenous—**Editor**.

† The Author is mistaken. Like most palms the troolie when young throws fronds direct from the seed, but as it grows it forms a substantial trunk which sometimes attains a height of twenty feet before breaking out into fronds.—**Editor**.

length, while there is still water for the canoe, they meet overhead, and there is thus a midday twilight scarcely less obscure than that of the forest.

I may mention here that those who, excited by the glowing descriptions of imaginative writers, expect the green of the vegetation to be diversified by great masses of other colours, will almost certainly be disappointed. In Trinidad frequently, and occasionally in Guiana, I have seen here and there a great tree covered with blossoms of yellow or red; but these were never otherwise than very sparse, except in the immediate neighbourhood of civilised dwellings, so that for the most part they had in all probability been artificially planted. Such a sight in the Guiana forest is not a common one, and the picture of a creek would ordinarily be untrue to nature if, beyond the immediate foreground, it showed any other colour than the blue of the sky-path above, the clear coffee-brown of the stream, and the varied shades of green in the vegetation. Other colours, showing here and there in some red or purple orchid, or cream-white water-lily, cover what is comparatively so insignificant a space that they require to be very close to the eye to have any appreciable effect.

The largest perhaps most important of these creeks is the Camoonie, familiar to the readers of Water-ton's *Wanderings* as being the scene of his famous interviews with big snakes. It was here that I selected the site for the Chinese settlement which Mr. Edward Jenkins, the well-known author of *Ginx's Baby*, has described in *The Coolie: his Rights and Wrongs*. As that book was published nearly thirty years ago, I may mention here that, through the representations of a specially intelligent Chinese, by name O Tye Kim, having become interested in the forlorn conditions of many of his countrymen who had completed the terms of their indentures on the sugar estates, I induced the Governor to move in the Legislature for a grant in aid of a settlement for them. The amount voted, however, was so small as to permit of nothing beyond maintenance for the people during such time as was required for the clearing of the lands, the building of

their houses, and the reaping of the first crops. All the Crown land within reasonable distance of a market was occasionally flooded, and as no expense could be incurred for dams, it was necessary to select what was least subject to this scourge, and that, according to the best available advice, was on the left bank of the Camoonie Creek at a short distance from the main river. When I last saw the settlement some six years after its establishment, and some three years after I had ceased to have the power to take active interest in its concerns, it appeared to be in a somewhat languishing condition, owing to a great flood, and I am unaware whether it still exists; but it will probably in any case have been of one permanent benefit to the colony in showing the economical superiority of the Chinese method of charcoal burning in large clay kilns over the comparatively clumsy and wasteful system previously in use by Creoles and natives. Certainly it caused some two hundred people for several years to be freer and happier than they had ever before been in the colony, and so I never repented the labour expended on its establishment.*

One circumstance connected with the settlement afforded a touching instance of combined honesty and gratitude. The public money being insufficient for the number of people desirous of taking plots, I had helped some few of them with small sums for their maintenance. Among these were two whose strength proved insufficient to make much headway with the great hardwood trees on their lot, and they suddenly disappeared, being in my debt at the time. Never expecting to hear from them again, I was astonished some months afterwards by the receipt of the money in full. The men had indentured themselves anew to a plantation in Berbice, and the payment of this money had taken much the greater part of the fifty dollars which they had each received in bounty money.

*—For a detailed account of the establishment and history of Hopetown, as this Chinese settlement was called, see Sir Cecil Clementi's book "The Chinese in British Guiana."—**Editor.**

It was, if my memory serves me, in the Camoonie that I had my first experience of a tropical forest while inspecting the boundaries of a new grant. I am bound to say that at first all other sensations were subordinate to an instinctive fear of snakes. In walking along the narrow and new-cut path, the least stir in the herbage around seemed to indicate the presence of the dreaded enemy; for I did not then know that in the great majority of cases it was caused by lizards, which exist in Guiana in many shapes and sizes, including the big bloated iguana which has its home in the tree, and the more slender salim-penter, sometimes exceeding five feet in length, which lives on the ground, and, as the natives know to their cost, is addicted to carrying off chickens. But though there is, of course, considerable danger from snakes in the forest, and though every native, whether Indian or Creole, keeps his eye on the ground when walking there, and rarely omits to look at each place where he puts his foot, yet in all my marches, of several hundreds of miles in the aggregate, the number of snakes met with scarcely exceeded a dozen. Owing to the remarkable manner in which the colour of snakes assimilates to their surroundings, it is certain that the majority escaped notice, and as so few were seen, the fear of the creature soon ceased to be troublesome.

One cannot help being immediately struck with the dissimilarity of the Guiana forest from any to be seen in a temperate climate. This is not so noticeable in the foliage, for in the depths of the forest palms are rare, the superior height of the exogenous trees depriving them of light, and so for the most part killing those few which spring up; and the mora, everywhere abundant, is not unlike a gigantic elm. But the trunks of this and many other trees are, near the ground, surrounded by buttresses which seem to be provided by nature for the support of the huge columns above them, so that a transverse section at the base, instead of being round, is star-shaped. Again, up to a height of eighty to a hundred feet, no branches appear, all the strength of each being apparently required for success in the desperate struggle for light far above. So dense is the

green canopy thus created that one may walk for miles without seeing a single peep of blue sky, and it is wonderful that the prevailing gloom is not even more intense.

But though forest-walking on Indian paths always gave me a certain pleasure, I must confess that this grand duty, when the novelty wore off, was almost wholly disagreeable. The necessity for straightness in the path caused it to be made through or over every intervening obstacle. It passed through swamps where every foot of progress had involved severe cutlass work, and where consequently the abundance of lopped plant-stems rendered walking arduous and painful, while razor-grass insufficiently cleared was continually tearing clothes or skin. Moreover, the path went up and down steep gulleys, where many a tumble was caused by rock or root hidden under the carpet of decayed leaves—all these disagreeables being bearable enough in the excitement of sport, or when passing through unexplored country, but trying the temper far more severely when experienced in the performance of a by no means interesting duty. When, in addition, one was soaked with rain and covered from head to foot with *bete rouge*, causing an almost maddening irritation during the momentary stoppage of exertion, not to mention ticks requiring to be scraped off the skin with a knife, and leaving a burn as if made with fire, the circumstances were indeed trying, and would have exercised the patience even of an archbishop.

But the scenery of these creeks was not exclusively of forest. Occasionally one came up upon a savannah of a few hundred acres—a flat expanse of very long grasses, pools of water being visible here and there, mostly covered with water-lilies. The only prominent objects rising above the general level were a few palms, chiefly of the *Eta* variety with great fan-shaped leaves. These are the trees which the Warrau Indians of the Lower Orinoco, the Barima and the Waini use, or formerly used, for their temporary homes, for their principal food, and other useful purposes. To protect themselves while engaged in fishing from the floods and other enemies, biped and quadruped,

they built their huts up in the branches, while a farinaceous diet, much resembling sago, was made from the pith. The enormous number of these trees in the places named gave a practically inexhaustible supply for these and all other purposes.

Now and then on the savannahs a great crane showed himself above the surface of the grass, intently watching for his prey in the water, while a kind of bittern (called here and in the United States by an unmentionable name which describes his peculiar habit in getting up), rising lazily before the canoe, gave a tempting shot. I never but once, however, attempted to kill one of these, having then learned that the bird when dead was totally useless, except to a collector.

Ducks were occasionally seen in the open water, but they were few and very difficult to approach. The endeavour to get a shot caused me one of my few disagreeable experiences with snakes. I was in a very small "curial" (or dug-out canoe) with a single Indian steering, using the bow paddle myself. A flight of ducks was marked entering the forest at the side of the creek, and on reaching the spot I found that the water had overflowed the bank and covered the ground as far as it was possible to see. Being doubtful whether the birds had settled in it, or upon the trees (where, as in the case of the wood-duck of North America, they not infrequently alight), I had put down my paddle and taken hold of a branch for the purpose of dragging the canoe inwards, when suddenly a large labarria snake dropped from the tree into the exceedingly short space between me and the bow—in fact, within a foot of my bare leg. The start which I gave nearly upset the rickety craft and half filled it with water. But unfortunately the snake was even more alarmed than I was, and, making off over the side, disappeared before I could take up my gun.

My only serious encounter with a snake was in the course of one of my longer journeys. From an Indian settlement above the Great Falls, and near the source of the

Demerara, I had gone with a single Indian for a day's walk into the forest in search of something to shoot. We had had no luck, and in the afternoon, when far from home, met with heavy rain. It would be thought that the naked skin of the Indian would be so inured to the climate as to feel no inconvenience from the heaviest storm; but in fact he has a feline dislike of the least downpour, especially when the heat produced by hard exercise makes the drops feel the colder. Consequently he will place himself under the densest foliage he can find until that no longer affords shelter, and then, when obliged to move, he will, if possible, find a large palm-leaf which he uses umbrella-fashion while walking.

On this afternoon we were delayed many precious minutes by this shelter-seeking, which was to me all the more irritating, as being myself scarcely more clothed than the Indian himself, I was suffering no unbearable inconvenience. It was late when we started for home. The Indian went off at a tremendous pace, making it difficult with my tired legs and sore feet to keep up with him. But I knew from experience that getting home before dark is, with the Indian, a sufficiently powerful motive to make him forget all other considerations; and to be left alone in the forest, with nothing to indicate the route except a few twigs which had been broken for the purpose when passing in the morning, and which night would render entirely invisible, was no pleasant prospect. While hurrying along in this way, I was suddenly startled by a frightful shriek from the Indian, and I immediately saw that he was jumping away from the coils of a great "bush-master" snake (called by the Indians Cooni-Cushi). The creature had no doubt been asleep, and was aroused by the touch of the Indian's foot. Before I could stop myself I was close up to the brute, whose head with laterally waving tongue was raised for striking within a yard of my thigh. In an instant I covered him with my gun and pulled the trigger; but the rain had damped the cap (it was before the day of breech-loaders), and it missed fire. My sensation at the moment may be imagined, but it was fortunately as short-lived as the snake; for the other barrel, fired instantly, took the

brute's head off, and I was safe. When brought to camp, the headless trunk was found to measure over six feet in length, while its thickness in the middle was about that of my forearm.

Although the encounter has taken so long to describe, all that occurred between the Indian's cry and the fatal shot probably did not occupy more than two or three seconds, yet the impression created has remained vivid to this day, and as long as I live I shall never forget the eyes of the creature as they gleamed in the twilight. Those of other animals when angry convey the idea of heat, while these seemed cold beyond expression, and long after haunted me in dreams. The snake in question is regarded as the most deadly of those which inhabit the Guiana forest, and had he struck me on the bare thigh which was nearest to his head, these memoirs would never have been written, for I should probably have been dead within half an hour.

Except as regards the low hum of insects, other life than that of the vegetable world was, in creek journeys, not visible or audibly abundant. Early in the morning there was now and then a flight and much chattering of parrots, which afforded some sport for the gun and very tolerable soup for the pot. Only at the time when wood-ants were taking wing and clouds of them were rising above the trees, there would be seen high up a number of large swallow-tailed birds sailing round and round in graceful circles and presumably in the act of taking prey.* Of smaller creatures, sometimes a great blue butterfly would rise over the trees, flashing his silvern underwings in the sunlight, or a buzzing as of an exaggerated bumble-bee, and a gleam of iridescence near at hand would betray the presence of a humming-bird passing from flower to flower and probing each as he fluttered over it. In midday, as in the main stream, there was silence broken only now and then by the shrill note of the pi-pi-yo, and rendered not less evident by the low whirring of grasshoppers and the constant hum of other insects.

*—I once shot a specimen of these birds, and in so far as I remember identified it as an insect-eating eagle, which has sometimes been seen in Europe.—G. S. Des. V.

When passing the night in this lower part of the district, I was often startled by a weird, shrill sound close to my hammock, much resembling "Who are you?", pronounced very quickly, this being the onomatopoeic name given to a species of goatsucker by the English-speaking natives. Further up the river a large goatsucker, mentioned also by Waterton, makes itself heard early in the night, though I cannot say I was ever able to recognise the sound attributed to him of "Work, work-away", or "Willie-come-go". There is, however, another bird of the same species, which though I never saw him, I should judge from the extreme loudness of his note to be larger still. This sound is one of the most beautiful, and by far the most melancholy, of any within my experience proceeding from a bird or any other animal. I heard it only in the depths of the forest, and after nightfall. It consists of four notes in a regularly descending scale, separated one from the other by a short interval. Other goatsuckers convey by their cries the idea of wailing; but this particular one does so to such a degree as almost to affect the spirits. In fact, it gives the impression of a lost soul mourning its unhappy fate. It may be mentioned here that, except about an hour before daybreak, when the gallinaceous birds begin to crow, most of the cries emitted at night by the inhabitants of the forest, of larger size than frogs, are very far from exhilarating, and would seem to indicate distress.

CHAPTER FOUR.

Another path from Demerara to Essequibo—Indian mode of marking route traversed—Lost in the forest—Upper Essequibo—Kaieteur Falls unknown—Mythical settlement of women—Birds' eye view of forest country—Electric eel as source of amusement—Canaimas, and fear of them—Indian drinking-bouts—Curious custom connected with child-birth—Cassava the Indian's principal food—Dangerously poisonous when uncooked—Guiana no country for the sportsman—Peccaries—Supposed trap set for them by boa-constrictor—Huge size of the latter—Toucans—The blow-pipe—Wourali poison.

From the Demerara to the Essequibo, by the path which reaches the former river between the first rapids and the Great Falls, is a march of six to eight hours, the longer time being required in the wet season; but the path between the two rivers principally used by me, and always on my longer journeys, was one about two days' paddle above the Great Falls. This was too long for a single march, and involved camping once or twice *en route* in the heart of the forest. The characteristics of both paths were much the same, and, except as regards length, the description of one would almost equally apply to the other. Neither was really a path in the ordinary sense of the word. The upper one, indeed, was trodden by human feet, and this only by the Indians of the far interior, not probably more than two or three times a year. Consequently, to the untrained eye, no track was to be seen, and the only visible mark of the route to be taken was furnished by saplings, broken and turned down for the purpose by the passing Indian. By this device the light colour of the under leaves, invisible when the plant is erect, at once catches the eye, and serves as a valuable guide. The quickness with which the operation is performed, and the strength of wrist it demands are remarkable. In an instant, without slackening his gait at all, the man will

break a growing stick, a quarter of an inch thick, and double it down so that the broken top will hang down the stem. The habit of doing this is so ingrained in the Indian that he indulges in it mechanically and unconsciously when other broken saplings in the neighbourhood render it unnecessary. If he failed to keep up the practice thus, he might neglect it when it is all-important. But for such landmarks in the excitement of hunting, he would certainly lose himself in the forest; and I have more than once had occasion to bless them, when, by accident, I have been left alone to find my way to camp. For want of this precaution I once had a most disagreeable experience, which might easily have ended disastrously, though it was in the immediate neighbourhood of civilised dwellings.

Being at the penal settlement on the Massaruni, subsequently described, I went out early in the morning with a companion for a short walk in the forest. In half an hour we turned round towards home, but after going a much longer distance than that of our outward stroll, and finding that our position was still quite unrecognisable, we were in a dilemma. We had, unfortunately, no compass with us, and the sun was, as usual in the forest, entirely invisible; but a single glimpse of the sky to show its direction would enable us to make for the river, and thus find our way. After a long search we found a fallen tree, the gap made by which, though nearly filled up by the surrounding foliage, was still sufficiently large for the purpose. At length we reached the river, but were not, in a double sense, "out of the wood." It turned out we were several miles from the settlement, and in order to keep touch with the stream, we had to proceed nearly in a straight line, forcing ourselves through swamps and over all other obstacles. Fortunately we had cutlasses with us, or we should never have reached home before night. Even so, it was late when we arrived, exhausted with heat, hunger, and fatigue, with our clothes and skin lacerated with the razor-grass, and altogether in a pitiable condition. That we must have traversed a considerable distance was shown by the fact that the convicts had been sent in all directions for some miles round, and though continually yelling, were not heard by us until our trouble was nearly over.

Of the Upper Essequibo I can remember little beyond general impressions, as except at the ends of the paths from the Demerara I never stopped more than once at any particular place. It has always been a matter of deep regret to me that I never saw the Kaieteur Falls, discovered by Mr. Barrington Brown during his geological survey; shortly after I left the colony. Oddly enough, I never heard of these falls from the Indians, from whom I received accounts, true or imaginary, of many natural objects in the country; for on more than one occasion I passed the mouth of the Potaro, from which that natural wonder is distant only two or three days' journey. As neither Schomburg nor Waterton saw these falls, I incline to think there must have been some superstitious reluctance on the part of the natives to mention them to strangers. Another subject of regret is that I never reached the site of the fabled city of Manoa, nor the wonderful mountain plateau of Roraima, practically unique as regards the great area practically cut off from the rest of the world by lofty, perpendicular, and almost unscalable cliffs. Illness, accidents, delays in rapids, and once a sudden call to the lower part of my district, always shortened the time at my disposal, and so my cherished intention to see these places was never fulfilled.

Roraima was first mentioned to me by the Indians as the site of a wonderful settlement of women, who admitted men to their society only once a year. As a similar account, with equally curious details not to be mentioned here, was given me at other times, the locality described being always different, I began at length to regard the story as a survival of the ancient myth of the Amazons. Once, however, a Macusi strenuously asserted to me he had been one of the visitors of a community of this kind, which lived in this case on one of the rivers falling into the Essequibo above the Rupununi. His account was full of such minute particulars of the severe, and by no means altogether pleasant, ordeal which he had had to undergo that I scarcely believed them to be all imaginary, especially as he offered to take me to the place. But as the month in which alone he would venture to approach these formidable ladies was one when, owing to the rain, it was specially difficult to ascend the

river, I never had an opportunity of satisfying my curiosity as to whether there was not some slight foundation for his story. I may mention that Mr. McClintock, for many years Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks in the extreme west of the colony, and whose knowledge of Indians was unsurpassed among white men, subsequently informed me that he did not altogether disbelieve the story, as a similar settlement of women had once appeared on the Pomeroon, but had left after a few months' residence.

Of the mountains of Guiana I had only distant views, but the ascent of hills, which I should say never exceeded 2,000 feet, cost far more labour than would ordinarily be required elsewhere for mountains several times higher. One experience of this kind in the neighbourhood of the Demerara I have special reason to remember on this account. For some five or six hundred yards before reaching the summit the gradient was so precipitous that I was forced to seize a sapling or liane almost at every step for the purpose of dragging myself up the next one. Each time the support gave way, I had an unpleasant fall, which, but for the abundance of vegetation enabling me to arrest descent, would have been dangerous.

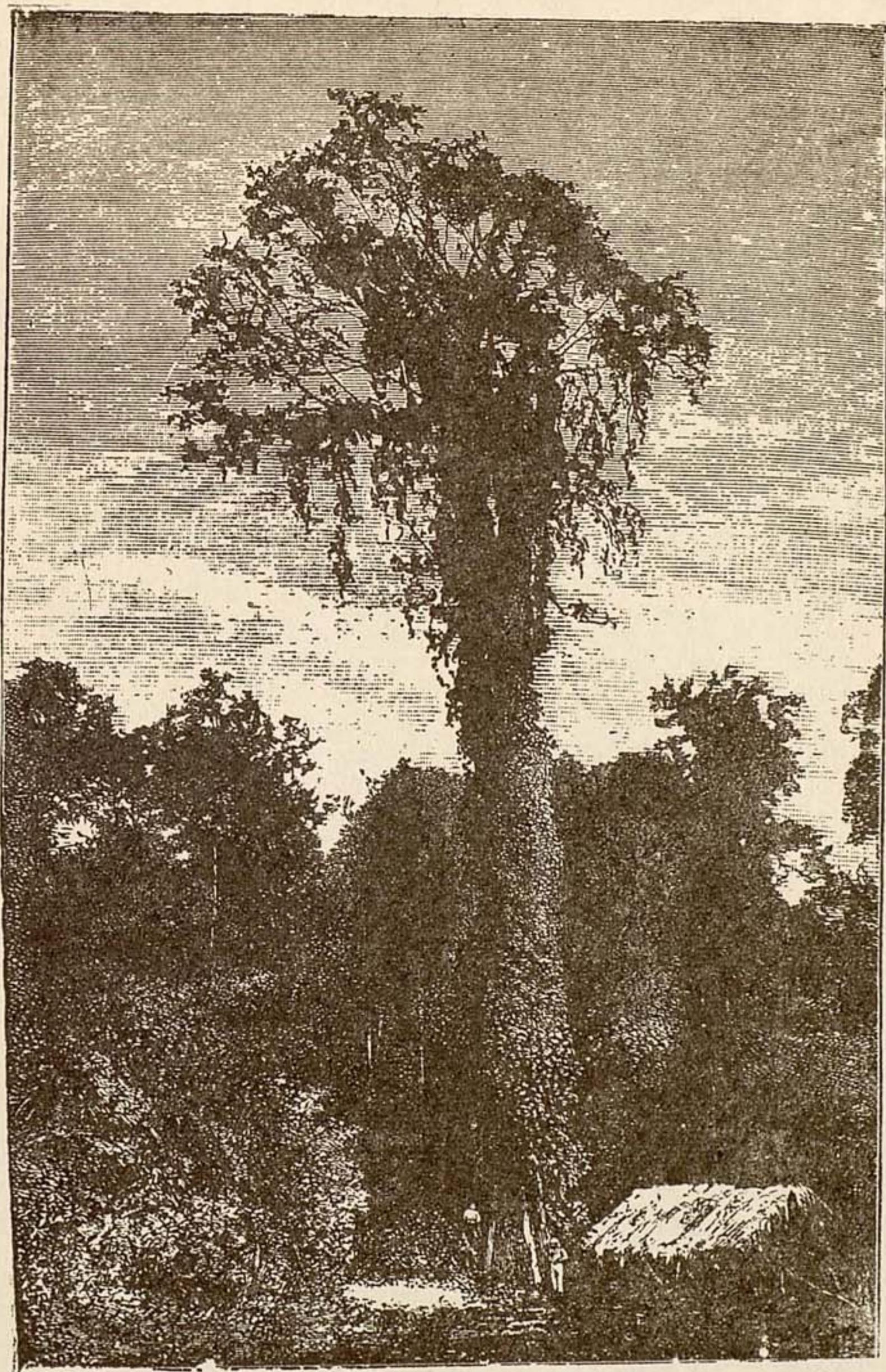
From the top of this hill, which was the highest ground I ever ascended in Guiana, the view was a remarkable one. Except a glimpse of water here and there, probably bends in rivers, the whole area beneath was covered with a dense mass of foliage. The tops of the trees had almost the effect of a huge undulating grass plot, with a bush rising out of it here and there, indicating the position of some specially large giant.*

On my longer journeys I was always accompanied by Indians. While marching they were usually silent, the forest seeming to affect them with its gloom.^o But during the early hours of the night, especially if we had reached

*—The hill mentioned must have been Mabora Mountain, at head of Mabora Creek, 163 miles up the Demerara River.—**Editor.**

^o—Only those who have experienced gloom can fully appreciate an illustration of one of Mr. Stanley's books of African travel, and the delight at emerging from the forest, which is shewn in the special liveliness of the gait of the long line of porters.

—**G. W. Des V.**



**“Last of the Giants”—see chap. II.
from Charles Kingsley’s “At Last.”
The Author stands in front of the tree.**

a river, they were continually talking and laughing, busily relating grotesque stories of their hunting adventures,† and sometimes, I suspect, making merry over the peculiarities of the white man. The seemingly utter indifference to the presence of strangers which is ordinarily shown by Indians coming from the Interior—probably the product of mingled shyness and pride—entirely wears off on closer acquaintance, and they exhibit the utmost curiosity about the white man and all belonging to him. All awe quickly disappears when they are kindly treated, yet I recall one instance when it was suddenly revived in a ludicrous manner.

My camp being on the bank of the Essequibo, I was, as usual early in the morning, about to bathe. I had just passed beyond the edge of the water, when there came a sharp, warning cry from an Indian. Following with my eye the direction of his finger, I saw, a few feet in front of me, what seemed like a snake moving slowly in the shallow water. An arrow, shot at a range of only two or three yards, quickly pierced the creature, which, by means of the attached string, was forthwith hauled on shore, and proved to be an electric eel, some four or five feet in length, so that I had had a narrow escape. When it had been some time on land, and had, therefore lost much of its dangerous power, I touched it with a cutlass, receiving a severe shock. It then occurred to me, as I had suffered no unpleasant effect beyond the momentary sensation, that the curious power of the creature was still sufficient to afford amusement to a somewhat jaded party. Accordingly, I caused the Indians to join hands, and giving a cutlass to the foremost, made him touch the eel with the point. At the moment of contact he threw the cutlass violently down, and the whole row of five or six men got a shock which produced at first consternation, followed by intense amusement when they found no harm was done. In order to increase their astonishment, I took a piece of wood about two inches long and

†—A particularly “creepy” one I still remember. The man told how, when he was intently engaged in following a herd of peccari, he suddenly discovered that he was himself being stalked by a jaguar.—G. W. Des V.

pressed it upon the creature's skin. When the Indians saw that this had no effect on me, they were easily induced to repeat their first experiment with the cutlass. The result being, naturally, much the same as before, they regarded me with deep respect, and, I afterwards learnt, as something of a "pe-i" (or medicine-man). I may add that the vitality of this eel was remarkable, as even after several hours on land it could still make its power very sensibly felt.

Occasionally, on the upper waters both of the Essequibo and Demerara, I met a single, haggard, unkempt, and strangely painted Indian, paddling himself silently down-stream, and usually close under the bank. Such men were, I was informed, Canaimas, who were under an inherited obligation, considered by them as sacred, to revenge upon one or more of the family of the offender some wrong perpetrated, perhaps long ago—an obligation, in fact, very similar to that of the Corsican vendetta. They paid attention to a signal only by paddling away faster than before, and even if I had thought it of any use to follow them, it was doubtful if any of my Indians would have consented to do so; always evincing a strange fear, even of talking about these supposed murderous devotees. From all I could gather, a Canaima usually came from a distance, and, being always a young man, who had undertaken his task immediately on arriving at manhood, had, consequently, never been seen in the neighbourhood where his design was to be accomplished. Except when unavoidably travelling on the water, he remained concealed in the bush, and would remain in hiding for long periods, awaiting a favourable opportunity. The victim, at length taken unawares, would be clubbed, and, while insensible, would be subjected to a horrible operation for prolonging his torture*. I was never able to verify such stories; but it is not improbable that sudden deaths, of which I some-

*—The "operation" consisted in piercing the victim's tongue with a small splinter of hardwood, generally greenheart, rendering him, on recovery, dumb, and then the pulling out with a small hooked stick specially made for the purpose, of the lower part of the rectum to which a small tourniquet was applied, before it was pushed back in place.—**Editor.**

times heard months after their occurrence, may have been so caused. In a thinly populated country, so large in extent and so difficult to traverse, with a climate productive of exceedingly rapid decomposition, it is obvious that the chances would be infinite against the capture and conviction of the criminal.

It will thus be understood why the natives of by far the greater part of the interior of Guiana, though nominally British subjects, are practically amenable to no other law than their own.^o

Of other unpleasant customs of the Guiana natives, their drinking-bouts most commonly attract the stranger's attention. They have at least two intoxicating drinks—one "piwari", produced from the cassava (manioc), the other "caseeri", from the sweet potato*, both made in the disgusting manner which I have seen practised by the South Sea Islanders in the making of kava (the Fijian "yaghona"), namely, by chewing the root † into a pulp, which, when mixed with water, produces the necessary fermentation. When a canoe has been filled with the drink, the guests assemble, join hands, and walk sideways round it, chanting at the same time what, no doubt, they regard as a convivial song, but which is more like a dirge. It consists entirely of two notes in the minor key, the higher

^o—It always struck me as curious that the Canaima should make himself conspicuous by painting and otherwise, and thus advertise his deadly mission, the success of which depended on secrecy. This point I never had cleared up, and I can only suppose that while to render himself thus hideous was for some reason obligatory, he obviated the effects of the exposure by never allowing to be seen the place where he slept. As a matter of fact I never saw a Canaima except in the act of paddling on a river, which he was obliged to use for making a journey of any great length, and I am inclined to think that the other natives were in too great awe of his mysterious and unknown errand to think of following him.—G. W. Des V.

*—Both the drinks mentioned are made from cassava. Red sweet potato is used only to colour the caseeri.—Editor.

†—In the case of piwari, it is not the raw root, but the bread made from the root which is chewed.—G. W. Des V.

one coming first and the lower one occasionally long drawn out—"Ay-ah, ay-ah, ay-a-a-ah." Now and then the chain is broken and two or more dip calabashes (gourds cut in half) into the canoe, and having drunk the contents at one draught, complete the circle again, the droning chant continuing sometimes for twenty-four hours and more until the liquor is finished, all the performers, however—women as well as men—being, before the end, very drunk indeed.

Curiously enough, the effect of these liquids seems to be exactly the reverse of that produced by the Polynesian kava. For while the latter renders the legs useless, the head still remaining clear, the former never seems to preclude an upright posture, even when all other signs of intoxication, even the most disgusting, are only too evident. Thus when anyone chooses to leave the circle for a time he has no difficulty in returning, and is at once admitted again. One presumes that there must be some pleasure in these orgies, or indulgence in them would not be so frequent, but it is difficult to understand in what it consists. The hilarity of which the Indians — the Accawoios and Macusis especially—are so capable is entirely absent. The faces of all are funereal in expression, even from the first, while the subsequent sickness one would think destructive of all other agreeable sensations. But whatever pleasure these revels may afford to the participants, to one sleeping in the neighbourhood and compelled to listen hour after hour to the melancholy tones they become at last intolerable. In fact, once when I was ill they affected my nerves to such an extent that, though it was the rainy season, I preferred to take my hammock out of shelter into the neighbouring forest.

Arawaks, who inhabit the creeks near the coast (and were thus at an early period brought into contact with the Dutch and used by them to catch escaped slaves), seemed to be as fond of these drinking-bouts as the more unsophisticated natives, though the sparseness and small size of their settlements, which rarely exceed a single dwelling,

rendered prolonged orgies on their part of less frequent occurrence. In fact, in mode of life and habits all the natives of Guiana—not excluding the so-called tree-inhabiting Waraus—were much alike, the Arawak differing from the Indian of the interior merely, as far as I could see, in wearing more clothes, having a slightly paler skin and a somewhat superior intelligence, with greater gravity of demeanour. This gravity seemed imperturbable. I do not think I ever saw an Arawak smile, and I am sure I never heard one laugh.

One peculiar custom of the interior natives has, I think, been abandoned by the Arawaks. Arriving once at a settlement, I asked why the father of the family, who seemed quite well, did not get up to receive us, but remained lying in his hammock. Mr. Couchman, who was with me, informed me that this was because his wife had just been delivered of a child. She, poor woman, naturally not looking very happy, was busy with her work, paying only very casual attention to the squalling infant, and evidently with no intention of lying down. The husband was being treated exactly as if he was the invalid, and I was told would continue recumbent for several days lest any accident happening to him should affect the child. During this vicarious illness, moreover, the man was forbidden certain meats, for fear that the qualities of the animal from which it came would attach to the child. Venison, for instance, being tabooed in fear of its causing timidity, and the flesh of other animals for similar reasons. The natives themselves are very uncommunicative on the subject of this custom, being apparently ashamed of it.

The principal food of the natives, and also of myself when far away from town, was bread made from cassava (manioc). This, when carefully made, is excellent in taste as well as most nutritious, and as it is superior in both of these respects to oat-cake, I have often wondered that it is not better known in Europe. If Professor Crooke's prognostication should prove correct as to the coming failure of the world's wheat crop to supply the ever-growing

population, I apprehend that some day both this and plantain flour will largely enter into the consumption of non-tropical countries.

The poisonous quality of the bitter variety of cassava when in its natural state, and the mode of its preparation, are well known. But a peculiarity of the pressed juice before boiling, which I have never seen mentioned, is its attractiveness to animals. The natural instinct which ordinarily distinguishes the nutritious from the harmful seems in this case to be wanting, for it is generally believed in Guiana that all four-footed beasts have a liking for it. At all events, cattle and goats drink it greedily, even when abundance of water is within easy reach, and a knowledge of this furnishes an easy and safe means of killing stock to anyone having a grudge against its owner. In more than one instance I had little doubt that the destruction of a woodcutter's cattle had been maliciously caused in this way; but unhappily it proved impossible to bring the offence home with sufficient certainty for a conviction.

For sport the forest of Guiana cannot be recommended. To get near any game is a matter of extreme difficulty, and to see it, even when close at hand, is scarcely more easy, owing to insufficiency of light. Presumably, because the Indian hunter has left them no peace in the past, all the wild quadrupeds, from the jaguar to the accouri (the agouti of the Spaniards), fly from the approach of men, which must be stealthy indeed to give the chance of a shot. As far as I could learn, the only exceptions to this rule are one of the varieties of peccari and the Waracaba tiger, the latter, in my time at all events, unknown to naturalists.*

*—It has not been definitely ascertained whether the Waracaba Tiger is a myth or not. From all the evidence at hand this mysterious animal would appear to be identical with the Bush Dog or Karasisi (*Icticyon venaticus*). See "Animal Life in British Guiana," Guiana Edition, Page 55.—Editor.

Peccaries are always in herds. The largest and smallest variety are said to be comparatively timid, and therefore less dangerous, unless actually brought to bay; but those of the middle size, or about that of a three-quarters grown Berkshire pig, were frequently described as being very awkward customers indeed°. The Indians told me that when they came across any they at once ran to the nearest climbable tree, and one described to me that he had, after climbing, been kept aloft for many hours until a jaguar put the herd to flight. Though I often walked for many hours in search of larger game, sometimes going long distances in their track, I am not absolutely certain that I ever saw any in the forest. As regards the last-mentioned variety of peccaries, my failure was perhaps fortunate, as a single gun would have been useless against such a number, and, as weighing some fourteen stone I was never very active in tree-climbing, I should probably have come off very badly in the encounter.

Camoodies grow to an enormous size in the colony. A planter told me of one killed on the West Coast, which had measured forty feet in length, and I recollect seeing many years ago, in a book by Stedman on Dutch Guiana, a picture—largely I should say, imaginative—of a huge monster hanging from a tree, with two slaves swarming up the carcass while in the act of skinning it. Twice only did I get a sight of these creatures. Once, while on shore at a negro's plantation about fifteen miles from Georgetown, I saw, what was of no uncommon occurrence, a porpoise floating down rapidly with the tide, and at short intervals coming to the surface. In this case, however, it had been caught by a big snake, in all probability a water camoodie, whose coils were plainly visible for the two or three minutes during which the object remained in sight. On another occasion, when travelling with Sir William Holmes

°—Actually there are but two varieties of peccari known in the Colony, the Texan, or Collared Peccary, *Dicotyles torquatus*, locally known as Abouya, and the White-Lipped Peccary, known as Kairuni, *Dicotyles labiatus*. See "Animal Life in British Guiana", Guiana Edition, Page 97.—Editor.

(then Provost-Marshal of the colony) on the River Waini, towards the western extremity of the colony, we, while going down the stream as fast as oars would carry us, passed quite close to a floating island, a disgusting smell from which would, even without sight of them, have made evident the presence of snakes. Two of these monsters were lying upon the grass coiled up in separate heaps. Four barrels were quickly fired at short range, which caused the creatures to move; but the pace we were going prevented us from seeing any other effect, and they were quickly beyond our sight.

As regards shooting, a considerable number of parrots might sometimes be obtained early in the morning on the river or in clearings of the forest, and now and then, sitting on the tent of my boat, I had a chance of bringing down a toucan while crossing the river high up above the trees. The latter have a curious flight, unlike that of any other bird. They seem unable to carry their large beak on a level plane, and their movement is one of constant curve, ascending and descending. For the same reason, probably, they are very easily shot, and fall at once if struck by only a single pellet. Other birds, such as "powie" (curassow), maams, etc., were only obtained by "pot shots" when sitting in the trees, and even if I had cared for such shooting I should have had but little success, as again and again I failed to see a bird, even after looking hard at the place where it was sitting, until my Indian killed it.

The instrument ordinarily used by the Indians for killing game was a cheap "Brummagem" gun; but when they did not possess one, the home-made bow and arrow served them fairly well. For small game, sitting on the ground or on second-growth timber, they took a blow-pipe. The effective use of the latter weapon I found by no means difficult after very little practice. Though it is impossible, of course, to take aim along it as with a gun, the eye seems instinctively to point the tube straight at the object. I have seen a complete trio hit an orange at ten to fifteen yards' distance after very few attempts. Both arrows and

blow-pipe darts are poisoned with wourali, which, when fresh, will cause a powie or monkey to drop to the ground in a few seconds. This preparation being almost, if not entirely identical with the curare of Brazil (though its makers in Guiana pretend that the vegetable juice which produces its potent effect is mixed with virus from snakes, tarantulas, and manourie ants), has been too often described to need extended reference here; but I may mention, from my own experience, that arrows so poisoned lose their peculiar efficacy very rapidly, and I have seen a hen walking about picking up grains with complete indifference, though she had sticking in her several blow-pipe darts, one of which had instantly paralysed another only a few weeks before. Probably the strength might be preserved if the paste were kept air tight, but this I never had the opportunity of trying.

CHAPTER FIVE.

Deer-shooting from canoe—Jaguars—The Warracaba tiger—Night sounds of the forest—The kinkajou—Appalling roar of howling monkey—The houtou and his tail-trimming—Onomatopoeic names—Cushi ants—Jager ants and their service to man—Night invasion by jagers—Tenacity of life in ants—Termites—Their extraordinary voracity—Ant intercommunication—Killing a monkey, and its effect on the killer—Burning of a hollow tree.

As regards larger game in Guiana, the only kind the shooting of which ever afforded me sport in the English sense of the word was the deer, which is about the size of the fallow-deer, but with short, unbranching horns. I usually took with me two woodskins, myself and an Indian in one, and in the other two Indians with a dog. Arriving at what seemed a likely place, one of the Indians went ashore with the dog. With him he carried a horn made out of a hollow gourd, which, when blown in these solitudes, was audible for miles. From time to time he would thus indicate his whereabouts, and so enable us to keep as near him as possible on the river. After we had paddled an hour or two following the direction of the sound, the horn, if we were to be lucky, would emit a different note, indicating that game had been found. Presently the barking of the dog would be heard, faintly at first, and becoming gradually louder as it approached the water, for which the hunted deer invariably makes. Sometimes the sound would become suddenly very loud at a considerable distance from us up or down stream, and then began a frantic paddling in order to reach the spot in time. The deer would then be seen entering the water, or sometimes only the splash would be heard, and the animal would first become visible when actually swimming. The paddling would now become still more frantic, until the deer was close to the other bank. A few seconds more, and unless

stopped by a bullet he would be safe in the forest, at all events for that day. Paddle is breathlessly exchanged for rifle, and crack, crack, echoes over the water just as the quarry has topped the bank. Has the animal fallen, or has he escaped? Once or twice it was the latter, involving a lost day, the miss due, as I flattered myself, to a hand shaking from violent exertion; but after some experience such failures were rare. I did not carry a second Indian to relieve me of all work, partly because my dead weight would have diminished speed, and also because without the violent exercise the excitement would have been far less.

The tapir and the labba (the lap of Trinidad) may be shot by the same method, but do not afford by any means so exciting a run.

Jaguars were sometimes heard near our camp, at night, but only on two occasions did I see one. The puma (which, I suppose, is the brown tiger, specially feared by the Indians) and all the smaller cats, including the Waracaba, which the natives dread more than any other animal, also eluded me. These creatures are said to be about the size of pointer dogs, and are never met with except in large packs (for which reason I imagine them to be rather canine than feline). When they are heard approaching, safety is only to be obtained by getting on the other side of the stream, which they will rarely or never cross. Once when camped by the side of a burn in the forest I heard strange cries which seemed to proceed from a great number of animals. My Indians, very frightened, began to take down their hammocks, calling out, "Waracaba, Waracaba." But the sounds gradually died away and we were able to sleep in peace. Possibly the stream saved us; at all events, I never saw the animals so as to be able to verify whence the sounds proceeded. In my time the existence of this gregarious tiger was, I believe, much doubted by naturalists, but the subsequent

narrative of Mr. Brown, the discoverer of the Kaieteur Falls, serves to confirm the Indian stories about these animals, though, like myself, he never actually saw one.*

Night in the forest has many other strange sounds, most of which, however, quickly become familiar and are easily recognisable. At dusk, in the neighbourhood of a river or other opening, is heard, almost exactly at the hour from which its name is derived, the shrill burr of "the six o'clock bee." In reality, it is a small cicada under two inches in length, and yet its note is so loud as to be audible over water at a distance of at least one-third of a mile. At the same time begins the croaking of a great variety of frogs, one, called by the Creoles the paddle frog, giving out a sound so extremely like that of an approaching boat that I more than once could scarcely believe it anything else. Later the more subdued chirruping of tree frogs becomes incessant, and now and then in the depth of the forest one is suddenly startled by the hoarse staccato grunt of the bull-frog, sounding from some hollow trunk close by. Then there are the notes of the various goatsuckers; and about midnight the inexpressibly melancholy, yet melodious wail of the largest one above referred to. Once only I heard the low yap of an animal moving in the trees above my head. It was, I was told, the night-prowling kinkajou†.

But of all the night sounds of the forest, that of the howling monkeys is unquestionably the loudest. To a

* See footnote in previous chapter on subject of Waracaba Tiger.—Editor.

†—This animal also inhabits the island of Trinidad, and one of them subsequently caused myself and my family a very unpleasant experience. Years after my departure from Guiana, when I was administering the government of the colony in question, and sleeping in Government House, the household was awakened in the middle of the night by the agonized screaming of a wild parrot in a tree close at hand. This continued for fully a quarter of an hour, growing fainter and fainter until it died away. In the morning the partly devoured remains of a green parrot was found at the foot of the tree—the victim of the kinkajou.—G.W. Des V.

stranger it is really appalling and may be heard for miles. One or two man-of-war sirens and half a dozen angry bulls bellowing in unison, would be required to produce music equally loud and melodious. According to the natives, the creatures roar thus while hanging upon branches by their tails, and swinging backwards and forwards.

The approach of day is always announced by different gallinaceous and other birds, and by degrees I came to know the time from them with considerable exactness. An hour before the first sign of dawn, or about half-past four o'clock, is heard several times repeated the crow which gives its name to the small partridge called "Douraquarra". Half an hour later comes the short whistle of the maam (tinamou), a bird also resembling a partridge but much larger; and finally, actual daybreak is announced by the hannaqua, the so-called pheasant of the country, though extremely unlike one. Also, in the early morning, but not so regularly, is heard the sad note of the houtou called elsewhere, I believe, the motmot, a bird which has the curious propensity of biting off a part of its tail. I would observe that the picture of this bird, given in the explanatory index of Mr. Wood's edition of Waterton, is unlike the specimens which I saw in Guiana, and evidently is that of a distinct species. The birds seen by me had the vanes of the long tail-feathers bitten off for an inch or more exactly at the point which, when the tail was doubled back, would be reached by the beak, the end of the tail, unlike that in the illustration referred to, being of much the same size as the part above the gap. The Indians believe that this bird has the habit of thrusting his tail into bees' nests and that the gap in the tail-vanes is caused by the wearing process of eating off the honey. In this way they accounted for the fact that some sticky substance was adhering to the end of the tail of a specimen obtained by me.

All these names, with most of those given by Indians to birds and animals are so strictly onomatopoeic that when locally pronounced, it would be scarcely possible for

the human voice to approach more closely to the sounds intended to be imitated. The many variety of parrots are all, I think, named on the same principle, as *kissi-kissi*, *hua-hia*, *toa-toa*, and many others.

As regards other inhabitants of the forest, the *cushi*, or leaf-carrying ants, already referred to, can hardly escape notice, even in a short walk. Their going and returning legions, always close to one another, and together making a solid column several inches wide, are so numerous that it would be difficult to go many miles in any direction without meeting them. These ants are most destructive of useful vegetation and are regarded simply as a pest; but there is in Guiana one species of ant which is really serviceable to mankind. I refer to the *jagers* or hunting ants.

At night, when an inmate of a woodcutter's house or an Indian hut is asleep, sharp bites in various parts of his body cause him to spring up and strike a light. He finds that hundreds of *jager* ants have marched down the ropes of his hammock. Looking on the ground, on the posts supporting the roof, on the rafters, and on the thatch, he sees countless legions of the same insects covering all, and a dense column still pouring in. Cockroaches in abundance are now seen rushing about the thatch and occasionally falling to the ground. If examined closely, these are found to have several ants fastened on to them. The fall attracts the ants on the ground, which immediately close round the struggling victim, and in the course of a few seconds he is being borne off on a line parallel with the legions still entering. Scores of cockroaches are thus dealt with, and now and then a great centipede shares the same fate. Falling from the roof, he writhes for a moment on the ground, apparently endeavouring to free himself from his clinging enemies; but that moment is fatal. Hundreds rush upon him from all sides, and in less than a minute he also is borne off, though still alive, and sufficiently strong to give his carriers a very unpleasant time with his contortions. Occasionally a gecko lizard comes scampering down a post, and though he gets away

for a moment, it is doubtful whether he will escape altogether; for there may be sufficient ants upon him to ensure a fate scarcely less rapid than that of the cockroaches. After an hour or two occupied in searching every nook and cranny, the ants depart as suddenly as they came, and nothing more is seen of them perhaps for many months. They have, however, left the place completely cleared of all insects and vermin, even of rats, which, if not destroyed, are at least driven away, so that however disagreeable for the moment, they have really done a most useful service. Meat requires to be protected from these ants by an impermeable covering, or they quickly tear it to pieces; and their attacks upon people asleep render it probable that, if unable to move, one would quickly meet a horrible fate.

Other ants which are familiar objects are the black manouri, about an inch in length, and the diminutive red ant, which, relatively in his size, is quite as venomous. The former resembles a long, wingless, black wasp, and, like the latter, uses his mouth to hold his prey, while he stings with his tail. His venom is so powerful as invariably to give fever, and it is therefore not improbably true, what I was told, that even a single sting has been known to cause death. Fortunately I never was stung by a manouri, but the red ants once caused me a most unpleasant experience. Coming out of the water after bathing, I inadvertently sat down in a nest of them. My Indians laughed, and I do not doubt I furnished a sufficiently amusing spectacle, but the incident was no joke to me. For several hours I suffered severe pain, as if red pepper had been rubbed into numerous pin-pricks, and fever followed which I did not get rid of for two days.

Ants of several different kinds have their home in orchids, and I do not think I ever procured one of these plants without finding in it a numerous colony. On one occasion, when a large cattleya had been obtained, together with the elbow of a branch on which it was growing, the ants were so numerous and venomous that I caused both

them and their home to be thrown into the water and dragged behind my boat, using a stick frequently for the purpose of keeping the whole under the surface. For hours afterwards ants were coming up and floating away, until they appeared to be all gone; but when the log was taken up the next day several others astonished us by running out apparently quite uninjured. Either, therefore, they must have been able to survive without air, or sufficient for them had remained in the many cavities of the plant.*

Even more noticeable in the forest than any of the above are the wood-ants. In most other parts of the world they are called "white ants", though they are never white, and are not ants, but termites, which belong to an entirely different order of insect. As one passes through openings in the forest, and especially along the river, one cannot help being struck with a great number of trees completely bare of foliage, but still standing erect as ever and with naked branches sharply outlined against the sky. On many of these will be noticed, high up, what are seemingly huge excrescences, most of them looking in shape like enormous footballs. These are nests of the wood-ant, and an examination of the trunk shows the covered passages leading to them. These bare trees could hardly all have been killed by lightning, as commonly supposed by the natives. Yet death had certainly come neither from strangulation by lianes, of which there was never any sign, nor from the ordinary decay of old age; so that possibly there was some connection between the condition of the trees and the residence of the termites whose local name betokens their fondness for wood. But, though wood is probably the principal food of these creatures, they seem to be almost as omnivorous as the cockroach; for on one of my passages from the Demerara to the Essequibo, when accompanied by Captain (afterwards Colonel) Morley, of the Buffs, we left two umbrellas and some pairs of boots on the bank of the Demerara to await our return.

*—This is a very common experience with orchid collecting.

—Editor.

After an interval of only a few days we found of the former nothing but the frames, while the latter were simply skeletons, the seams only being left, the cobbler's wax having proved distasteful. The destroyers had evidently finished their repast, as there were none visible on the spot.

What a mysterious faculty of communication have ants. Once, lying in a hammock close to the floor in the covered verandah of my house in Georgetown, I observed an ant which, after discovering a large piece of sponge cake, immediately scampered over it in apparent excitement, and then went off without taking any away. As the ant was one of those with a special liking for sweet food, this proceeding was so strange that I resolved to observe the further action of the creature. I was at the time weak with fever; but I managed to crawl to the other end of the verandah, a distance of some ten yards, where I saw the ant make for a hole in an interstice between the boards. In less than two seconds ants began to pour out of the hole in great numbers, and all went in a straight line to the cake, which in the course of an hour was all carried off. No doubt, though indistinguishable from the others, the discoverer had led the column; but the question arises, How did he so instantaneously communicate his discovery? Was it by sound inaudible to human ears, or by a touch which permeated in a moment the dense mass of his fellows like a shock of electricity?

The Indians are by no means averse to the flesh of monkeys, and indeed at one time I myself found it by no means intolerable when other food was scarce. In Guiana, however, no kind of monkey is easy to shoot, as they are rarely to be seen except on the tops of the trees. When there, I found them too difficult to hit, as they were only visible for an instant when moving rapidly, while loose shot even of large size would not bring them down from such a height. However, having one day fired with an Eley's green cartridge, there fell down a large one of the spider variety. To my horror I saw that a young one,

clinging to her, had fallen also, though apparently it had not been touched by the shot. The piteous and almost human look of the mother when dying was such as I shall never forget. I felt like a murderer, and from that day I never killed another monkey. Nor, however hungry, did I ever consciously eat one again. But as in pepper-pot all meat, after a day or two, tastes much alike, I cannot say that I may not have done so unconsciously.

The burning of hollow trees close to our camp was a favourite amusement of Indians. Once when I permitted mine to indulge in it, the spectacle presented was a grand one. The hollow trunk made a tremendous draught, and the fire running up in it quickly a great mass of flame poured out from the lofty top with a roar like that of an enormous blast furnace. Showers of sparks rose in the air, as though hundreds of Roman candles were being fired together, with the difference, however, that this pyrotechnic display and its accompanying noise lasted for several hours and precluded sleep until long after midnight. However wonderful the sight, I cannot say that on reflection I contemplated it with unmixed satisfaction. It is certain that with the dead tree must have been destroyed a vast number of living creatures, including frogs, ants, many kinds of insects, bats, and probably owls.* Even at the risk, then, of being regarded as a sentimentalist, I could not on this account regard tree-burning as justifiable when done for mere amusement, and it was not repeated.

*—Whilst undoubtedly numerous insects do perish under such circumstances, my own experience is that the bats and owls are the first to escape on the first sign of smoke.—**Editor,**

CHAPTER SIX

Inspection of Massaruni penal settlement—The Lower Essequebo—The coconut palm and its taste for salt—Sound of tropical rain in forest heard at great distance—Sanitary benefit of bare feet—Capon sitting on eggs—Scenery of Essequebo above rapids—Adventure in ascending rapid—A rash swim—Jiggers and their extraction—Scarcity of animal life in Upper Essequebo—Kingfishers and jacamars—Fireflies of different varieties—Mosquitoes and gallinippers; story illustrating difference between them—River Waini—The balata tree and its gum—Water communication between Pomeroon and Upper Orinoco—Deserted missionary settlement—Experience with bats.

Among the duties of magistrates in British Guiana was the inspection of the penal settlement,* which was made each month by two public officers especially appointed for the purpose. It was situated on the Massaruni River, near the mouth, and near also the junction of that and another great river, the Cuyuni, with the still greater Essequebo. The journey was usually made in one of the colonial steamers from Georgetown, along the west coast of Demerara as far as the mouth of the Essequebo, and then some sixty miles up that river. On the passage up are several islands, some of them a mile or more in length, that near the junction of the three rivers being Kykoveral, which was one of the principal settlements of the Dutch (recently, I understand, used for a leper asylum).* Besides the real islands one is certain to meet a large number of

*—The settlement was a prison for persons convicted in the colony and sentenced to penal servitude.—G.W. Des V.

*—The Author here is somewhat shaky in his geography and hearsay facts. The penal settlement is only forty-five miles from the mouth of the Essequebo, and lies between the junctions of the Mazaruni and Cuyuni and the Mazaruni and Essequibo. In the lower Essequebo the majority of the islands

so-called floating islands, which are commonly seen also on the Demerara, though in less numbers. These are composed of great masses of growing grass, which, having spread from the river-bank, have been torn away when the water has risen to an unusual height. Once let loose, they float up and down with the tide, and as the ebb, assisted by the stream, is of course the stronger, they eventually are carried into the sea, though sometimes occupying many days in getting there. I have occasionally seen small trees growing on these islands, so it is evident that there was soil on them, which must have lodged there before the supporting grass became detached from the land. Population on the Essequibo was in my time still more sparse than on the Demerara; and probably seemed even less numerous than it was owing to the practice of concealing residences from view with a mass of foliage in front. To one passing up the centre of the river the banks appear to present an almost unbroken line of forest; and it is only on nearer approach that one saw here and there a narrow boat channel and one or two coconut palms, indicating the existence of a house at the back.

The mention of the coconut palm reminds me of a peculiarity of this tree, which though probably familiar to naturalists, I have found to be by no means generally known to others. I refer to its extreme liking for salt. According to my somewhat varied and extended experience in the Southern and Eastern Oceans, as well as in the West Indies, this tree naturally bears well only in the immediate neighbourhood of the sea, and the quantity of fruit steadily diminishes with distance inland. I have occasionally seen one or two nuts on a tree near water which is now and then brackish; but at a distance of only a few miles from salt water these palms, though often appearing healthy and well-grown, were all except in one instance,

are well over a mile in length, three of them being nearer ten miles long. Kykoveral was never a settlement but the original Dutch fort and lies at the confluence of the Mazaruni and Cuyuni. It was never a leper asylum, this being at one time on Kaow Island, at the mouth of the Mazaruni.—**Editor.**

absolutely barren. The exception was noticed by me on the Demerara, and when I remarked on the unusual circumstances, the proprietor informed me that he produced a crop on the tree in question by artificial means. Whenever he finished a barrel of salt fish or pork, he poured the whole of the brine on the roots. He did not consume enough salt provisions for the service of more than one tree, so that the others, of which there were several, all remained barren.

The Mazaruni penal settlement has often been described by travellers. A day or two before I arrived on one occasion a monster herd of peccaries, in attempting to cross the river, was attacked and hundreds killed by the occupants of boats collected from all directions. It may be imagined how formidable would be the meeting of such a crowd in the forest.

The large expanse of water in front of the settlement gave me more than once an opportunity of observing at how great a distance one can hear the sound of equatorial rain falling in the forest. One heard the dull roar for over five minutes before the effect of the rain became visible, by falling into the water at the further bank of the Essequibo, some two miles away. As the storm then took over ten minutes more to reach the settlement, it may be gathered that the rain must have been at a distance of at least three miles when the sound of it was first heard.

The children of Capt. Kerr, the genial superintendent of the settlement, were never allowed to wear shoes and stockings and were perhaps the healthiest offspring of white people I ever saw in the tropics, the two circumstances being regarded by their father as cause and effect. This may be worth the consideration of parents in hot countries; the more especially as, other things being equal, the superior robustness caused by bare feet has evidence in its favour from many quarters, and constitutes

a theory adopted in the therapeutic system of the celebrated Father Kneipp, of Worishofen, which has attained so much success in Bavaria and Austria.*

While at the penal settlement I once saw what was to me a novel and curious sight—a capon sitting on five and twenty eggs. Captain Kerr informed me that this distortion of nature was advantageous, not only because the number of eggs so hatched was much larger than could be covered by a hen, but because the foster-father was more faithful to his charge than the natural mother. I cannot remember the process by which the quasi-maternal instinct was induced, except that a part of it was the pulling out of some feathers from the breast and giving the bird a dose of spirits. I know, however, it was not a difficult one, and as it is well-known that the males of some species of birds take turn and turn about in setting with the females, it is possible that the same instinct once existed in the gallinaceous family or its ancestors, and may be easily revived.

At different times I made several journeys into the interior, starting from the Massaruni settlement. One of these was up the Cuyuni, to the diggings of the British Guiana Gold Company, an enterprise which, initiated in 1864, had but a short existence. An account of this journey written at the time is given in a separate chapter.

Between the first rapids of the Essequibo and the lower path used by me between it and the Demerara, there is much beautiful scenery. Though with little high ground on either bank, the river is interspersed with beautiful islands, and in several places divided into many separate channels, containing rapids more or less dangerous to navigation even in small boats. On one occasion I was ascending one of these rapids in a large barge belonging to Captain Kerr. The rest of the party, which included two or

* This was written before the discovery of the life-history of the hookworm which enters the body through the bare feet.—
Editor.

three other Europeans, had gone ashore to walk along the bank, while the boat was being dragged up by a number of men hauling at a long rope. Two Indians (Arawaks) remained with me, one at the bow and one at the stern, each fortunately wielding a large paddle. While lying down in the tent, imagining myself in perfect security, I was admiring the grand sight afforded by the great river lashed into white foam for several hundred yards in front of me, watching too with interest the struggles and tumbles of the men as they tugged against the great rush of water. Suddenly I became aware that the boat had reversed its course, and was going rapidly down-stream. The rope had snapped, and we were running headlong down the rapids, after having, by the labour of some two hours, nearly reached their head. The swamping of the boat seemed inevitable, in which case my fate would have been sealed; as in a rapid so full of rocks even the Indians with their wonderful powers of swimming had but little chance of escape. At this crisis there was *not* presented to my mind an instantaneous picture of my past life, such as others have described in similar circumstances. My sole thought was of getting out of the tent and rid of my clothes as quickly as possible, and this I achieved with a rapidity which the spectators described as marvellous. The excitement of the moment enabled me to drag off in a few seconds a pair of long boots, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have taken as many minutes. By this time the boat was hurrying along at a tremendous speed in a position diagonal to the stream. I was not left long in suspense; for almost immediately the stern grated heavily on a rock, and the bow, still in deep water, swung round until we were at right angles to the bank. This, ordinarily the most dangerous position of all, now proved our safety. In an instant we were at the edge of a long eddy, in which the water coursed upward; and the Indians, who had seemed up to now paralysed and helpless, at once recovered courage. Dashing in their paddles, they with a few frantic strokes, brought us into safety—the whole occurrence having occupied probably not more than two or three minutes of time.

While encamped overnight on an island not far above the head of these rapids during a short trip made with Mr. Quintin Hogg (of London Polytechnic fame), my companion started to swim across a channel of the river some hundred and fifty yards wide. The stream was not very rapid, and for a strong swimmer, as he evidently was, there was no reason for alarm on that account. But noticing unusual excitement among the boathands, I was informed on inquiry that that part of the river was greatly infested with perai—a flat broad fish much dreaded by the Indians owing to its propensity to take large bites of flesh from the person of the unwary swimmer. Nothing would induce my men to enter the water at that place. Fortunately, Mr. Hogg got back safely, but not before I had had a very *mauvais quart d'heure*; for, in addition to other anxiety, the thought struck me that, had a disaster happened, I, being supposed to be better “up to the ropes”, would certainly have been held responsible.

Close to the third series of rapids I was, on another occasion, for the first time, made alive to the extraordinary numbers of “jiggers” (the Spanish chegoes) which infest abandoned Indian settlements. I determined to use a deserted shed as shelter for the night; and being very tired, as soon as my hammock was slung I went straight to it from my boat in my bare feet. The distance was not more than thirty yards and was only traversed once again, and yet in the next two days over twenty jiggers were taken from my feet. The Indian process of extracting them is by no means a painful one; in fact, it gives rather a pleasant sensation. It is done with a sharp piece of very hard wood, which is far better than the needle usually employed, as it enables the whole “sac” to be removed without puncture. More painful, however, is the application of tobacco ash to the wound for the purpose of preventing the spread of infection by killing such germs as may be left.

In the Essequibo, over a hundred and fifty miles from the coast, animal life, apart from insects, and in the morning and evening birds, was rarely visible. Caymans were

sometimes pointed out to me by the Indians, and a commotion in the water as we approached showed where one or more had entered it; and the muffled roar which was said to proceed from these creatures was common enough at night to show that they must have been plentiful. But I am not sure that I ever saw one; in fact, the only wingless animals which were ordinarily visible were the great iguana lizards, and these only for an instant, when now and then one would flop into the water from an overhanging branch at our approach.

As far as I remember, the only human beings I ever saw in this upper portion of the river, with the exception of one or two Canaimas, were Indians from the interior in large canoes making their way to town for the purpose of selling hammocks, tame monkeys, parrots, toucans, etc. These people are always too shy to take notice of the strange intruder on their domain, and passed by in apparently total unconcern, the row of brown bodies bending to the paddles, with parrots perched along the gunwale, and perhaps one or two sakawinki or marmoset monkeys squatting on a heap of hammocks in the bow, forming a curious spectacle.

The Guiana kingfishers, though all apparently have the same habits as the one familiar to us in England, are very unlike him in one respect; being comparatively shabby in plumage and entirely without the bright feathers of their English cousin, a circumstance the more remarkable inasmuch as birds in Guiana are generally far more brilliantly decked than in Europe. As though to compensate for this defect, nature has created another bird, the jacamar, also in several varieties, all of which are singularly like the kingfishers in shape and habits, but with plumage of a beautifully iridescent green. They have the same habit of sitting on low bows over the water, of dashing off now and then and quickly returning, but unlike them, they do not touch the water, and their flights seem aimless. But perhaps as they live entirely on insects, the prey seized is ordinarily invisible at a short distance.

Fireflies are sometimes attracted by the camp fire in such numbers as to become a nuisance. I once tried, after the example of Waterton, to read by the light of many of them collected in a bottle. It was possible to do so by passing the bottle over the letters as they were read, but the operation was a tedious one. I do not doubt the light would be useful, as mentioned by Waterton, for finding a note in a pocket-book: but as there is in the forest an entire absence of wind, I should even for this purpose prefer a lucifer match, which in Waterton's day was unknown. There are two kinds of fireflies in Guiana, one of them common in town, which emits its light from its tail, and only, I think, when it opens its wings; the other met exclusively in the forest, which gives a continuous light from two round membranes in its head, having the effect of eyes. In Fiji I have seen a variety of the same insect which combines both of these lights.

Mosquitoes are not common away from the coast of Guiana. A bluish variety sometimes paid me a visit in the forest, but there was never more than one or two at a time. In the towns, however, and on the coast they are a veritable plague. The urban variety is quite distinct from the rural one, being far more active and elusive. It would indeed almost seem as if the continual presence of the enemy, man, had produced special alertness against his attacks; for however quick the motion of the hand in the endeavour to kill him, the town mosquito generally escapes; whereas his country cousin permits himself to be crushed with comparative ease. On some parts of the coast these creatures are in enormous numbers. Driving once along the Berbice coast with an officer of police, and observing a great number of these plagues on my companion's back, I, with his permission, struck his coat with the flat of my hand, and there remained a very fair impression of the palm and fingers in dead mosquitoes. As it was midday with a bright sun, when the insects are in least abundance, it may be imagined what the numbers must have been at night.

There is a less common variety of mosquito, the "gallinipper", which, unlike the others, drives into the flesh so long a proboscis that when it is entirely inserted the creature seems to be standing on his head. Some years before my time, when troops were quartered in New Amsterdam, Berbice, two officers after mess went out into the marsh close to the barracks, with bared backs, for the purpose of deciding a bet as to which would withstand the mosquitoes the longer. They were allowed to smoke. At length one of them could bear the pain no longer, and he began to get up, when, seeing his companion writhing with his head buried in his arms, it occurred to him to touch his naked back with the lighted end of his cigar. This proved too much for endurance. The patient, jumping up, ejaculated, "By heavens. I can stand mosquitoes, but I'm hanged if I can stand a gallinipper."

The doubt which is commonly expressed as to whether mosquitoes are more prevalent in tropical or temperate regions I have good reason to share from my own experience. The two places where I found them most numerous were the Mahaicony Creek, one of the smaller rivers which falls into the sea east of the Demerara, and on the Lake St. Clair in Canada, where I was once duck-shooting. In either place it was impossible to open one's mouth after dark without a number going down the throat, and even before dark, by a rapid motion of the hand, one could make a visible lane in the dense cloud surrounding one's head. In Newfoundland, also, as regards the unsettled districts, I found them almost equally numerous. With reference to the recent discovery of mosquitoes as the source of malaria, it becomes of special interest to inquire into the cause of the common experience that malaria is usually most virulent on the windward, and not, as might be expected, on the leeward side of the marsh, where mosquitoes are bred and malaria is supposed to arise.

During my service in the Upper Demerara River district, taking advantage of short periods of leave, I made two expeditions with Sir William Holmes, one up the head of the Mahaicony Creek (which after a course of

some eighty miles in length falls into the sea to the east of Demerara) and one to the Waini River. Sir William was interested in the production of balata, a gum which is contained in the bully tree, bearing a close resemblance to gutta-percha, and said to be quite equal to it for non-conducting purposes. Though the tree in question is abundant in Guiana, especially about the lower courses of the Waini and the Barima, the cost of labour is too great for obtaining gum in sufficient quantity by the process of tapping. To meet this difficulty, Sir William conceived the idea of crushing the bark of felled trees by machines, several of which he had at work in different parts of the colony. Unfortunately this process extracted from the bark other ingredients besides the gum, which was thus rendered valueless, and so the enterprise failed. If, however, there should be some day discovered an inexpensive means of separating the tannin from the gum, the millions of bully trees in Guiana would thus be rendered available for increasing the world's supply of gutta-percha, of which the continual rise in price shows that it has become very inadequate to the demand.*

In the expedition to the Waini we went by sea to Plantation Anna Regina, at the extreme end of the cultivated portion of the coast beyond the Essequibo. There we took a tent-boat, and proceeded by a canal which connects this plantation with the Pomeroon River. Descending that river to a point near its mouth, we entered the Moruca channel which connects the Pomeroon with the Waini. Another channel connects the Waini and the Barima; and had we chosen, we might have entered the Orinoco and, without leaving the boat, have ascended it and its tributaries to the immediate neighbourhood of Santa Fe de Bogota, making altogether a journey of something like 2,000 miles, all by fresh-water navigation. But we went no further than the Barima, and after spending two days on the Waini returned by the route we came, the

* Since the above was written an economical method of "bleeding" the trees has been evolved with the result that the balata is one of the principal forest industries in the colony.—**Editor.**

journey occupying some ten days altogether. After leaving Anna Regina, the only white man seen was Mr. McClintock, the Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks of the Pomeroon district, at whose house on that river we spent a night both going and returning. McClintock was a singular character, who, however, earned liking and respect from all who came in contact with him. He had for years lived a solitary life, surrounded only by Indians, of whom his knowledge was unsurpassed. As he was the only educated man in the colony with similar experience, I always regretted that I was able to see so little of him. His visits to the civilised part of the colony were very rare; and so this was the first as well as the last time we ever met.

When in the Moruca channel on that journey we came to a long-abandoned Catholic missionary station called, I think, San Antonio*. The building, though much dilapidated and with vegetation forcing itself through the walls in all directions, nevertheless afforded enough shelter to induce us to spend the night there. When preparing to sling our hammocks we were astonished to see what looked like a black curtain hanging from one of the rafters. On closer inspection this turned out to be entirely composed of bats hanging to one another by their feet, with their heads downwards. We were told they were vampires. As the windows had altogether disappeared, and there were abundant other openings in the buildings which did not form part of the original design, it was impossible to get rid of the creatures altogether. During the whole night we were disturbed by the frequent whirr of their wings, and the boathands, who had no mosquito curtains, showed their belief in the blood-sucking propensity by huddling all together in the tent of the boat with the curtains fastened down.

* Santa Rosa de Lima or, as it is more popularly known, just Santa Rosa, was subsequently re-established and today is one of the most successful missions in the colony.—**Editor.**

CHAPTER SEVEN

Visit to River Cuyuni, Lower Essequibo, and mouth of Massaruni—First rapids of Cuyuni—Weight carried by Indians—Bargain with Indians—Fast in a rapid—Arrival at gold-diggings—British Guiana Gold Company—First touch of fever—Humming-birds (?) at night—Primitive gold-washing—Passage down rapids—Wonderful swimming.

I have in a former chapter referred to a visit paid by me within the first few months of my service to the gold-diggings on the River Cuyuni, and I insert here an account of it, written immediately after my return, and almost the only contemporary record of my impressions now in my possession.

On Saturday, July 9th, 1864, having obtained a week's leave from the Governor, I started on a trip to the gold-diggings of British Guiana. It has been long known that gold existed in the tributary of the Essequibo called the Cuyuni. The Venezuelans, who occupy the territory at its source, have for some years had "diggings" there. Some miners, making their way thence towards British territory found pieces of auriferous quartz much nearer the mouth of the river, and this discovery led to the formation of "The British Guiana Gold Company, Limited." A grant was obtained from the Government of a tract of land on either side of Waria Creek, where the gold had been found. This stream falls into the Cuyuni about twenty-five miles from its mouth*. The place is most difficult of access, owing to a large number of almost impassable rapids intervening between it and the nearest settlement. An idea of these may be formed from a knowledge of the fact that, without anything deserving the name of a cas-

* This was the Wariri Mine.—**Editor.**

cade, the river in twenty-five miles falls about one hundred and twenty feet. Owing to this difficulty in the way of the projected enterprise, the Government was very liberal in its terms, granting the exclusive right of mining for twenty-one years over about thirty square miles of land. Only a few acres of this tract, however, were known to be auriferous, the rest being entirely unexplored, and the whole covered by a dense forest.

I started from Georgetown in the colonial steamer at 8.30 a.m. Mr. A., the Managing-Director of the Gold Company, who was to be my *compagnon de voyage*, being also on board. After leaving the Demerara two hours of roughish sea brought us to the mouth of the Essequibo. I am ashamed to say that before my arrival in Guiana this river was scarcely known to me even by name. It is, however, nearly as long as the Elbe, and has four or five tributaries longer than the Thames, two—the Massaruni and Cuyuni—probably twice as long*. A strong ebb tide was against us, so that it took us nearly seven hours to reach our destination at the mouth of the Massaruni. In this fifty odd miles of its course the stream was, I should say, never less than a mile wide**. Islands abound, covered down to the water's edge with dense masses of foliage. It is thus, frequently for miles together, impossible to see both banks at the same time. Inhabitants are few and far between. Here and there a narrow opening in the "bush", and a boat at the bank, indicated the presence of a settler. The house, however, is almost invariably concealed from view. One solitary black, paddling a "curial", was the only human being we saw until we reached Macouria Creek^o, about thirty-five miles up. Here several sea-going vessels were lying alongside the bank. The crews appeared to be moving about busily on deck, the

* The Cuyuni, big as it is, is but a sub-tributary of the Essequibo, flowing into the Mazaruni, four miles above its confluence with the Essequibo.—Editor.

** The average width of the Essequibo in this section is three miles.—Editor.

^o Macouria Creek now forms the southern boundary of the U.S. Naval Air Base.—Editor.

distance preventing us from seeing what they were about. There is, however, little doubt that they were taking in timber, the only cargo to be obtained there. With these exceptions, nothing was to be seen but sky, trees, and water. The colour of the latter, as in most other rivers of Guiana, is that of porter or beer, according to the depth—much, in fact, like that of a Scotch burn which had run through a peat country. When held up to the light in a tumbler it appears, however, only slightly discoloured, and is by no means unpleasant to the taste.

A short distance up the Massaruni, itself about a mile wide at its mouth, is Her Majesty's penal settlement for the convicts of British Guiana. From there, after a night passed in our hammocks on board the steamer, we started again at daybreak. Our conveyance was a "curial", or dug-out, that is, a large tree hollowed out into a canoe-shaped boat. Our locomotive power consisted of twelve men with paddles. Proceeding a short distance up the same bank of the Massaruni, we then crossed over to the other side to get some provisions for the men at a store belonging to the Gold Company. Here some huge rock-boulders and an occasional house relieved the monotonous outline of forest. A brown object appeared, motionless, on one of the rocks, which, on nearer approach, proved to be a naked Indian, squatting on his haunches, and fishing with a short rod and line. His eyes were intently fixed on the water, and he never raised his head or moved a muscle of his body, though we passed within twenty yards of him, and such a boatload as ours must have been an extremely rare sight. Only when we had gone a considerable distance did he condescend to look up. I have observed the same behaviour in Indians inhabiting the far interior. What appears to be a total absence of curiosity is really shyness. When they become acquainted with you they will examine everything you possess with the minutest scrutiny, though they usually pass a stranger without appearing to be aware of his presence.

We soon reached the Cuyuni, which, at its mouth, is also more than a mile wide. After about three and a half

hours' paddling up that river the rapids came in sight. Here we left our "curial" and walked over the portage on a road recently cleared by the Gold Company*. The party consisted of twenty, chiefly Indians and Bovianders^o, besides myself and Mr. A. and even this number hardly sufficed to carry our impedimenta, which included several days' rations for the workmen at the diggings, besides our own canisters and hammocks. Not for the first time was I struck by the ease with which Indians manage to carry an enormous weight. One sturdy little fellow had on his back, nearly a foot below the position of a soldier's knapsack, a bunch of plantains weighing probably about eighty pounds, and then took upon his head a canister of provisions weighing nearly a hundredweight. The latter was put down once only during a march of about five miles, which was accomplished under the two hours. The plantains were hung on the back by means of a broad belt, made of a single leaf, passing across the chest and over the arms.

All along the road we heard the roar of the rapids near us, though dense foliage prevented even a glimpse of the water. On reaching the river again we embarked in a tent-boat awaiting us, in which we were rowed against a rapid current for five hours. The stream was, in many places, as picturesque as running water, studded with green wooded islands and banks, could possibly be, in the absence of high ground and all signs of human existence. Occasionally I was reminded forcibly of the Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence, the scenery of which somewhat falls short, in my opinion, of the description usually

* The Kamaria Falls, 13 miles up the Cuyuni.—**Editor.**

^o The term **Boviander**, the local meaning of which is a cross between an Indian, a White and a Negro, is applied solely to those residents of such descent residing on the great rivers of the country. Its origin, according to the late Dr. Walter E. Roth, is from the Dutch "bovenlander", i.e., highlander, as distinguished from "nederlander", lowlander. The term is still used in Essequibo, but I never heard it used to describe the similar people on the Demerara who are referred to as "kaba-kurus".—**Editor.**

given of it by enthusiastic travellers, owing to the wants above mentioned. Just before starting again, an Indian, paddling alone in a woodskin, came alongside. We saw that he had game, which proved to be a Winebisere deer, a powie (bush-turkey), and an accouri. "What for you sell 'um?" says Mr. A., pointing to them. "Knife", replies the Buck*. "Give you dollar—one, two, three, four shillings", rejoins Mr. A., holding up that number of fingers. Buck: "No, six." Mr. A.: "Well, give 'um here." The money was paid. The Indian placed it alongside him without remark. (He had no pocket, for the good reason that he had no breeches, and only a strip of cloth round the loins). After handing over the game, he looked up and pointed to his mouth. "Soapy"?^o asked Mr. A. An infinitesimal toss of the head signified "Yes". A large allowance of rum was handed to him. He took it down neat with the utmost sang-froid. Not a word or gesture of thanks. A very slight elevation of the eyebrow on finishing the draught was the only sign of satisfaction. Otherwise not a muscle of his face moved. He handed back the cup, and paddled off silently as he came. He was probably off to town to get drunk on one shilling of the six, and while in that condition to be cheated out of the rest—a handsome reward for a hundred and fifty miles of paddling.

At five o'clock we reached another rapid, which it was necessary to avoid in order to accomplish our journey in a day. The baggage had again to be carried, this time only a distance of a hundred yards. A large "banaboo", or thatched shed, had been erected here for the benefit of people benighted on the way. Now came the exciting part of the day. We had to pass a long rapid before dark, and every nerve had to be strained to reach it by daylight. In order to inspirit the men, who were beginning to show signs of fatigue, I took a paddle myself and began to work it vigorously, much to the astonishment of the natives. An hour's hard work and we reached the foot

* Buck is the local name for Indian.—G. W. Des V.

^o The Dutch *soupe*, a little sup.—G. W. Des V.

of the rapid just as the sun was going down. In this equatorial latitude twilight does not last long, so that we had no time to spare. Paddling was now useless owing to the rapidity of the current, and all hands had to jump into the water, some to pull at a long rope fastened to the bow, and others to shove. By a slow process of alternate paddling and hauling we got about three-quarters through the quick water, when we suddenly stuck fast. All our strength failed to move the canoe either forwards or backwards. It would now have been quite dark but for the meagre light of the moon, wanting about two days of its first quarter. A dense bank of clouds had nearly reached us. Here was a pretty fix. At least two hundred yards of roaring, foaming water was on either side of us, being far too deep in many places to admit of wading. The prospect of passing a night in an open boat in such a position was, with rain impending, by no means pleasant. We found at last, however, that the canoe was fast on a narrow ledge, so that, by applying all our force at the extremities, we managed to turn her round, and thus got her into deep water again. We now made various unsuccessful efforts to grope out a passage in the darkness, each time having to go back, until at last by a tremendous effort, stimulated by a liberal allowance of grog served out to all hands in the water, we managed to get through, and in a short time arrived at our destination.

A light shining on the bank announced the neighbourhood of human beings, of whom save the Indian we had seen none since the early morning. A house was ready for our reception, such as I was surprised to find in this wild neighbourhood. A substantial meal also was prepared, our voices having been heard through the still night air long before our arrival; and last, but far from least, there was the cheery face of Mrs. P., the wife of the manager, to welcome us.

I was kept awake the greater part of the night by mosquitoes (having neglected to bring my curtain). I mention this because, after some four months of travel on

the rivers of Guiana, this was the first time that I saw any mosquitoes in the bush. Why they should be here and not in the Demerara it is hard to say. To make up for this annoyance there were no bats. Mr. P., the manager of the Gold Company, told me he had never seen any there. I suppose that, having been so recently settled by men, these interesting blood-suckers, so prevalent elsewhere in the Guiana forest, had not yet discovered so promising a field for their operations.

The next day neither Mr. A nor I was fit for much, being tired with the long day's journey of the day before. A pain in my back and a feeling of extreme lassitude, Mr. A. told me, betokened "Colony fever." Feeling up to nothing, I spent most of the day in my hammock reading the batch of the *Times* brought by the last mail. Meanwhile I had ample opportunity of looking about me. The house in which we were was raised many feet from the ground on piles. It was built throughout of wood, which had been cut and sawn on the spot. Only the nails and glass had been brought from town. The work done on the place in little over two months certainly did credit to Mr. P.'s energy. I could see from the verandah that a space of about ten acres had been cleared, and on it had been built several large and substantial-looking "logies" for the workmen. The river was close in front, about three hundred yards wide, with a very rapid current. I was told that the land opposite is an island, there being a wider branch of the river on the other side of it.* The island must have been a very long one, as there was no sign of its coming to an end in the long reach down which I was looking.

The following night I was astonished by a loud humming, like that of a monstrous bee. I lit a candle and found two humming-birds flying about and occasionally dashing themselves against the windows. I could not catch them, and they would not fly out, though I gave them the opportunity; so I had to endure the nuisance, and soon went to sleep in spite of it. These little creatures

* This is Swarima Island, about eight miles in length.—Editor.

announced their presence in like manner the two following nights, disappearing during the day. As the bird is not nocturnal, there was a mystery which was not solved in our short stay.*

July 12th, 1864. I was ill all day with unmistakable fever, and was thus unable to accompany Mr. A. "aback", whither he went to inspect the gold-washing. I managed, however, in the afternoon to stroll over a little hill close by the house. It was almost entirely composed of quartz boulders. Being unable to find in these a single trace of gold, and knowing that this was to be the site of the crushing-machinery, and this the stone to be operated on, I almost came to the conclusion that the company would not pay. When, however, in the evening I told Mr. A. my impressions about the absence of gold from the quartz, he smiled quietly and said he would convince me to the contrary before we left.

The next day, after coffee, we started with Mr. P., the manager, for the washing-ground. The latter is situated on a little creek two miles from the river. A road thither had been made through the bush, that is, the trees had been cut down, leaving an avenue about twelve feet wide. In other respects morass would better describe what we walked upon. Labour and perseverance, such as employed by Stephenson on Chat Moss, would be required to justify the name of road. However, we waded through at last, and found the diggers hard at work. A space of about two acres had been cleared, and two logies erected for the workmen, who preferred sleeping there to the walk out and in. A little brook had been dammed to form a reservoir. The dam appeared to be unnecessarily strong for so small a body of water, being composed of a

* Years after the above was written, on seeing an illustration in M. Bates' books on the Amazons, showing an extraordinary likeness in shape between humming-birds and sphinx moths, the noise made by both in flying being also much alike, there occurred to me, as the possible explanation of the mystery, that the disturbers of my night's rest on this occasion might not have been humming-birds at all, but specimens of the insect which imitates them so strangely,—G. W. Des V.

double row of piles with clay puddled in between. I was informed, however, that a barrier nearly as strong had been swept down a few weeks previously by one night's rain. Nowhere in the world, I imagine, is the proverb, "It never rains but it pours", more true than in Guiana.

(Here follows, in the original, a minute description of the gold-washing process as I saw it. Being the primitive mode adopted in the early days of Californian and Australian "diggings", it has been so often described that its details may be omitted here. It may be mentioned, however, that the soil being washed was taken from a stratum of yellow clay about two feet thick and about two feet below the surface, and that when a large barrellful had been washed, I had the satisfaction of seeing a few grains of gold drop through the small residue of heavy black sand which was left by the process.)

The rain poured down in torrents during the whole of our walk home, rendering the road even less "negotiable" than before.

During our absence one of the large boulders near the river had been blasted. Many of the pieces contained small specks of gold, and, according to Mr. A., stone of that character would give about five ounces to the ton, whereas two ounces would pay handsomely. I hope for the sake of the company that all the stone in the neighbourhood is like this. I have, however, strong doubts on the point, as much of it appeared to my inexperienced eye as of a very different character. Besides, only boulders are apparent, and though possibly rich veins exist, it is problematical whether the capital of the company will hold out until they are found. The following day we started homewards. Our speed down-stream was a great contrast to the long and weary toil upwards, and we accomplished in five hours what had before taken twelve. Instead of walking over the path, we "ran" the rapids. This was an operation more exciting than safe, several lives having been already lost by it in the year the company has been at work. The water was so low that one of the rapids had become a cataract, which it was impossible to pass by "running." So the boat was brought to

shore and turned round with her stern to the water. She was then dragged out into the current by a long rope tied to her bow, all hands wading, some holding the rope and others the gunwale of the boat. In this way we were gradually lowered down the fall, and also down about a hundred yards of rapid below it. When the water was too deep for wading, some of the hands would swim down to a rock, one of them holding the end of the rope, the others meanwhile holding the boat, and only letting her go when their companions were safe on *terra firma*.*

These half-breeds swim in a wonderful manner. For pure amusement they would throw themselves into and under a current running faster than the fastest mill-stream with sharp rocks jutting out in every direction. In a few moments they would reappear scrambling out a hundred yards down, laughing and screaming in a way which showed clearly that they were not out of breath. It was a marvel that they had not been dashed to pieces. I was told, however, that they only use one hand in swimming, the other being held out to act as a buffer.

We found that the superintendent of the penal settlement was absent from home, and not expected until next day. As the steamer had gone and there was no other means of conveyance but what he could afford us, we were compelled to await his arrival. The next afternoon he came, and kindly lent us his large boat with a crew of ten convicts. After pulling the whole night, with the exception of a very short rest when the tide was too strong against us, we arrived at daybreak at Plantation Philadelphia, whence there is a road along the coast the whole way to the Demerara. The boatmen sang, or rather yelled, during the whole passage, rendering sleep impossible. As they do not pull as well without this licence and time was an object to us, we let them have their way. That they were in a condition to pull and sing for twelve hours with scarcely any intermission argued well for their treatment at the settlement. Having procured a conveyance, we arrived at Georgetown about noon.

* This method of lowering a boat down a fall is now known as "streaking."—**Editor.**

CHAPTER EIGHT.

Visit to England in 1865—Interview with Lord Brougham, the ex-Chancellor—Conversation with Mr. Gladstone—Return to Guiana—Political condition of the Colony—Negro vanity—Act in new district; experiences there—Mr. Crosby—Chief Justice Beaumont—Appointed to West Coast district—My disagreeable position—Appointed Administrator of St. Lucia.

In December, 1865, bad health obtained for me leave for six months to visit England. . . . In March, 1866, I went to the Riviera to visit my aunt and sister at Cannes. . . . During my stay at Cannes I had an interesting interview with the celebrated Lord Brougham. Coming out of church one day, he said to my aunt: "Lady Grey, I hear the Governor of Demerara is staying with you, and I should so much like to see him." He had, at that time, so entirely lost his memory as regards the people about him that his mention of her name was remarkable. . . . Though the attempt was made to explain to him what was the actual nature of my office, nevertheless, when I visited him a few days after, he still regarded me as Governor of Demerara. After putting to me various questions with regard to the present state of the colony, he gave me a most interesting account of its condition at the time of the court-martial on the missionary Smith, in connection with which case he made one of the earliest of the great speeches of his life.* His familiarity with minute details of the events of that time was extraordinary, this being one of the many instances when memory of the distant remains vivid when that of the recent past is altogether extinguished. The notes made of our conversation, which lasted for over an hour, have unfortunately been lost. I, however, remember this of him. At the time I had never previously heard of the missionary Smith, the memory of

* For the speech in question, see "The Demerara Martyr", Guiana Edition.—**Editor**,

whose grossly unjust trial and brutal treatment had already, I think, died out in the colony; but being deeply interested in what was then told me, and especially so because the spirit manifested in connection with the court-martial in question had, notwithstanding the abolition of slavery, by no means altogether disappeared from the colony, I subsequently read up the subject, and was then astonished at the accuracy with which the veteran lawyer had, after the lapse of forty-two years, restated the facts of the case and his arguments in connection with it. During his relation he became much excited by a revived indignation. With one hand he took repeated pinches of snuff, which before the end of the interview was abundantly sprinkled over his shirt-front, while his other hand made quick gestures as though he were addressing a large audience

Just previous to my return to Guiana I had an interesting conversation with Mr. Gladstone. I happened to be at an evening party at his house in Carlton House Terrace; and when he heard from Frederick Cavendish where I was serving he became much interested, and detained me in conversation a considerable time after most of the guests had taken their departure. He asked me many questions as to the condition of the colony, as to the extent to which it had recovered from the effects of slavery abolition, as to the state of the emancipated negroes, and of the coolie indentured labourers (about which I then knew comparatively little), and as to the continued existence of several estates of which he knew the names. He did not tell me, and I did not then know, that his family had owned property and slaves there; and I was naturally struck, therefore, by the extraordinary extent and minuteness of his local knowledge. His reputation for interest in the Colonies was at the time not great, and this, if it were to be taken as an average sample of his acquaintance with them, was therefore the more wonderful. When I afterwards came to know the facts, his knowledge ceased to be so astonishing, though it was still remarkable, considering that some thirty years had elapsed since his family's connection with the colony had ceased

Some months after my return to Guiana a Government letter informed me that, in consequence of the absence of the senior magistrate, I had been appointed to act in the east coast and east bank Demerara district. This comprised the east bank of the Demerara for some fifteen miles up to the southern limit of my own district and about an equal portion of the east coast, Georgetown being in the centre. It contained a considerable number of important sugar estates besides several negro villages, including Plaisance, the largest in the colony. I cannot say I liked the prospect of the change, but when I expressed to the Acting Governor how more than willing I should be to be left in my own district, usually considered much less desirable, he informed me that as being one of the only two magistrates with legal training I had been chosen on that account.

In order that my reluctance may be understood, some description is necessary of the constitution and condition of the colony. Trollope had termed the government of British Guiana a "despotism tempered by sugar". It appeared to me rather a despotism of sugar—and a sugar which in this, as in some human constitutions, is apt to turn acid. Though the legislative body, the Court of Policy, had a bare majority of officials, some even of these were permitted, as I think improperly, to own, or to be pecuniarily interested in, sugar estates, while the whole of the unofficial members owed their position and livelihood to the same product. Again, the additional members, composing with the Court of Policy "the Combined Court", which alone had the power of voting supplies, were nearly all either directly interested in sugar as managers of estates, or were carrying on a trade which chiefly depended on it. The revenue also was largely affected by the sugar crops, and that depended on a regular supply of labourers from the East. For though the negro is by fits and starts a far more effective workman than the coolie, it is only where, as in Barbados, density of population renders it difficult to obtain a livelihood otherwise, that reliance can be placed on him by the *average employer* for that regularity of work, or that special work in emergency, which

is absolutely necessary not only for sugar, but for coffee, cacao, and, in fact, all of the more valuable West Indian exports. It may be easily understood, therefore, that the Governor, while of course bound largely to consider the sugar interest, required to be, in an exceptional degree, strong and upright, in order to act independently of that interest for the welfare of the unrepresented classes which are the great majority of the population. Unless almost superhumanly politic also, his independence would meet with unmitigated abuse from the Press, he would have had a social life very far from agreeable, and might even have failed to obtain necessary supplies.

Very early in my career I had observed with dismay the effect produced on officials by this condition of things, and the awe in which the omnipotent planter was held by those of them who, not having been brought up in a West Indian atmosphere, were not always inclined to fall in with his view. I had, moreover, when occasionally holding a court for a brother magistrate, seen enough of the system of coolie indentured labour to dislike extremely the task of enforcing its draconic laws. Before I knew that such a task was to be imposed on me, I had expressed freely this dislike, with my reasons for it, in a letter to Lord Frederick Cavendish, who, as I knew, sympathised strongly with my views on the subject. When, in the angry excitement caused by my representations to Lord Granville, subsequently referred to, it was alleged against me that this dislike was due to personal feeling against planters, Lord Frederick considerately published this letter, in order to show that my view had been formed when I was still in the Upper Demerara district, and when, as I had had at the time scarcely any relations with planters, personal feeling against them was impossible. So the existence of this letter proved to be fortunate.

But however disagreeable the task before me, it had to be faced, and my life, which, owing to the comparatively small amount of official work, had up to this time been largely occupied in the observation of nature, was now to be monopolised by labour which became more and more distasteful as time went on.

As Georgetown was now in the centre of my district, I arranged to live there, and to "keep house" with my friend Sir Willam Holmes, whose family was in England. The mention of his name recalls an amusing incident occurring about this time, and curiously illustrating the extreme fondness for display which characterises the lower class of negro. Sir William's housekeeper had suddenly lost her husband, and seemed to be plunged in the deepest grief. She had received assistance towards the funeral, which she had caused to be made as imposing as possible, after the foolish custom which is prevalent in other parts of the world besides Demerara. On her return she was asked whether the ceremony had gone off to her satisfaction, when she replied: "Ah, funeral too sweet, Massa — fourteen silk umbrellas." The fact of this special respectability of following had much tempered, and for the moment had entirely overcome grief, which was, nevertheless, undoubtedly genuine. An amusing illustration of the same weakness is given by Trollope, in his story of the two young black girls, who each, going to church, took by turns the part of the finely dressed lady and the kerchief-turbaned servant carrying the prayer-books behind her. One of these young ladies was afterwards pointed out to me by a West Coast planter, who confirmed the truth of the story.

In the new district I found the cases to be tried very numerous, and the great majority of them, though of small importance, presented difficulties in the way of ascertaining the truth, which, if justice were to be done, required much patience in overcoming them. Even with three to four courts a week I was continually obliged to sit far into the afternoon; and I was vain enough to consider myself not so inferior in brains to the other magistrates as to preclude continual wonder how it was that they managed to dispose of sixty to eighty cases in the course of three or four hours. The difficulties were caused by (1) lying, which in the case of the Indian coolie indicated such fertility of imagination and invention of pictorial detail as almost to amount to a fine art; (2) by extreme want of intelligence on the part of many of the

witnesses; and (3) chiefly, by the necessity of employing interpreters in the majority of cases. These were never good, speaking and understanding English very imperfectly, and sometimes knowing the witness's language but little better; while frequently I had reason to suspect, and sometimes was morally certain, that they had been rendered even more incompetent by bribery. At nearly every court there was required interpretation for two or three Indian languages and one or more varieties of Chinese; while rarely a week passed without cases in which witnesses or "parties" spoke only Portuguese or some dialect of savage Africa. In the latter case to get anything beyond the vaguest idea of what was said was sometimes, even with the employment of the utmost patience, impossible. As regards the character of the cases to be dealt with, there was rarely a court day without one or more serious charges, either of the gravest crimes, such as murder, wounding with intent, etc., the evidence of which had to be carefully recorded for trial by the Supreme Court; or of offences, some of them scarcely less serious, such as plantain-stealing in gangs, practice of obeah, certain kinds of grave assaults and breaches of the Revenue laws, for the first two of which the magistrate could award up to thirty-nine lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails, and for all of which his jurisdiction extended to six months' imprisonment with hard labour. Then there were in abundance petty theft, assault, and abusive language cases, brought not merely by Creoles,* as in my former district, but in about equal number by the many-tongued, indentured immigrants, and there was also a considerable number of petty debt suits.

But far surpassing all in number were complaints against immigrants and free labourers for breaches of the labour laws. While many of the other cases caused doubt and much consideration as to where lay the truth, these were the subject of special anxiety. The law had been so framed and its net, covering all possible offences, was

* Creoles are not necessarily of mixed blood, the term being applied to all persons born in the West Indies, whether white or coloured.—G. W. Des V.

woven so closely, that not even the smallest peccadilloes could escape its meshes; so that, in fact, the manager, whenever a labourer annoyed him, had almost always in reserve some trifling neglect or other legally defined offence on which he could bring a complaint involving fine or imprisonment with hard labour, or both. Though probably only a few managers availed themselves of this power to its full extent, I came by degrees to see that, even in the case of the most humane, there was necessity for inquiry whether their grievances were really those of which they were complaining.

Now that I have the light afforded by a long official experience, I am inclined to regard this matter less harshly than I did; and I am willing to allow that a hatred of tyranny and a repulsion against anything indicating an approach to slave-driving may have caused me to have too little appreciation of the very great difficulties of the manager's position, and that I characterised perhaps with undue severity his occasional loss of temper.

I am not conscious that I ever did any substantial injustice to a manager, and most certainly I did not intentionally run my head against a stone wall by giving an opening to attack from the all-powerful interest which he represented; yet it was possibly true, what was afterwards said of me, by the only newspaper which dared to say a word in my favour, namely, that in my effort to stand upright against the pressure of that interest I may sometimes have seemed to lean backwards.

On the other hand, when tyrannous or illegal conduct, even such as was to a certain extent excusable, was justified in a hectoring tone, indicating that the planter's point of view would of course be accepted, and the labourer's plea necessarily rejected, public rebuke was plainly justifiable. Many symptoms pointed to the fact that this kind of tone was not merely adopted for the purpose of "trying it on" with a new magistrate, but was induced by previous experience of facile persuasion. In fact, it became very easy for me to understand how, without supposing

great inferiority in myself, it was possible for other magistrates to dispose of the business so much more quickly than I could do. Indeed, it is probable that here might have been found one of the principal causes of the universal want of confidence* in magistrates' decisions, which was afterwards found to exist by the Royal Commission.

While the careful examination which, for the reasons above indicated, was required for even the most simple cases no doubt restored confidence to the subject races, it also probably had the effect of prolonging inquiry in other cases as suggesting possibilities of success by means of false excuses. But however this may have been, notwithstanding all possible efforts to get at the truth, I feel little doubt that I sometimes failed, and that such failure was much more often at the cost of the labourers than of employers. For the conviction gradually forced itself upon me that with doctors entirely under the control of estate owners and having so much duty imposed upon them that, however conscientious, they could not do it otherwise than perfunctorily, it was quite impossible in many cases to decide with any confidence whether the labourers' excuses of illness for failure in work were just or not. And thus, though managers showed a growing displeasure because of the few of their charges which I dismissed, I was continually troubled with the feeling that I ought to have taken this course more often than I did.

Moreover, while the law compelled me to punish for desertion, and the fear of causing wholesale abandonment of the estates rendered it necessary to make this substantial, the half-starved appearance of most of those convicted could not but raise unpleasant doubts as to the conditions of life on the plantations which caused them to prefer the precarious existence of a fugitive.

* A minor, though by no means insignificant, cause of this want of confidence was the practice, which I refused to follow, of permitting the more influential managers to sit on the bench alongside the magistrate during the trial of their cases. For such a privilege could not but give the subject races the impression that decisions against them were unfairly obtained.

Altogether, what with work in its nature intensely disagreeable and in quantity such as to make physically impossible its proper performance, what with the feeling that while causing bitter discontent to employers, I was probably not doing complete justice to the labourers, and what with health suffering severely from depressed spirits thus produced, my position was by no means an enviable one; indeed, it was only the sympathy of three or four warm friends which prevented it from becoming intolerable. But for the consideration urged upon me by them that resignation, even if it proved a relief to myself, would certainly not lead to improved conditions, I should have "thrown up the sponge", as I was more than once on the point of doing.

Among these friends was Mr. Crosby, the Immigration Agent-General. Nature had made him thoroughly kindly and courteous, and though his long residence in the colony had made him so accustomed to its atmosphere that it disagreed with him less than myself, he on the whole regarded the immigration system much as I did, and his patient attention to the complaints of immigrants, even though, from want of the Governor's support, he was but seldom able to redress their grievances, made him so popular with them that they commonly spoke of him with respect bordering on affection. Though he has now been dead many years, I am told his name is still preserved among them—the Immigration Department being called, and still, I trust, deservedly, "Crosby Office."* As in addition to his amiable qualities and to sympathies akin to my own, he was an educated man and a Cambridge graduate, we became great friends. I regarded him as one of the most upright public officers of the colony, and my subsequent resentment against Governor A.† was in no small degree to his unjust treatment of Crosby, as brought to light by the Royal Commission.

* Although this was written forty years ago, the East Indians still speak of "Crosby"—see APPENDIX II.—**Editor.**

† Mr. (afterwards Sir) Francis Hincks.—**Editor.**

Other valued friends were Chief Justice Beaumont and his clever and amiable wife. They occupied on Plantation Houston, in my district, a house which had formerly been the residence of the proprietor, and it was to their kindly hospitality that I was indebted for some agreeable society at a time when it was specially valuable. Mr. Beaumont united with much legal and general ability a fearless independence which was not at all in accord with the spirit which had previously predominated in the colony. Recognising, as I did, the undue consideration for planters' interests which was evidently expected from the courts, he bestowed a specially careful scrutiny upon the proceedings of the magistrates, who he believed to be generally biassed in this direction, and he offended the dominant class by frequently overruling their decisions on account of apparently trivial defects in procedure. Then his equity training caused him to regard and condemn with severity the irregularities of trustees and executors, which must have been unusually prevalent in a colony where it was a familiar saying: "Don't make me your heir, make me your executor." As the trustees of estates of any value were usually men of prominence, and the *cestui-que-trusts* were often coloured people, the language employed by him in such cases, while earning for him universal respect from the weak, added greatly to the bitterness of the strong. But what perhaps more than all caused the enmity of the ruling class was his disregard of what had apparently come to be accepted by the courts as a settled principle, *viz.*, that when the evidence of "white" and "coloured" was opposed, that of the "white" must necessarily prevail; his view, that the adoption of this principle would render the weak hopeless of redress when really injured, having been strengthened by cases where wrong and falsehood were unquestionably on the side of the white.

The animosity thus caused induced a hostile movement against the judge which received powerful co-operation from Governor A., who did not lose the opportunity of conciliating those who could do so much to assist or obstruct his policy. Mr. Beaumont was drawn into controversies with the Executive in which he usually had right

on his side, and as he wielded a forcible pen, he would, I have no doubt, have been ultimately victorious, but that he allowed himself to be goaded into indiscretions which laid open his guard and gave the opportunity for a fatal thrust.

Eventually, on the petition of the Court of Policy, strenuously supported by Governor A., Mr. Beaumont was removed from office on the recommendation of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, despite the eloquent, and to my mind convincing, appeal in his favour by Sir Roundell Palmer (afterwards Lord Chancellor Selbourne).*

But whether the Committee's recommendation was right or wrong, I have not the least doubt that the removal of Mr. Beaumont and the temporary triumph of Governor A. was, in a high degree, harmful to the colony; for it rendered independence on the part of judges and magistrates doubly difficult and dangerous, and I am much inclined to think that the disturbances which subsequently occurred on estates were, to a considerable extent, traceable to this cause. The evil would not have been so great if the judge had been offered another place elsewhere, as I venture to think he ought to have been, especially after the revelations respecting the administration of the colony which were made by the Royal Commission. For no act of his was in the least dishonourable. In fact, he had done vastly more good by his uprightness than any possible harm from his indiscretions, and most decidedly he did not deserve punishment which meant his ruin. But official forgiveness is not often extended to those who cause trouble. Mr. Beaumont remained in private life, and died a few years afterwards of a broken heart.

I have referred to Mr. Beaumont's case in what may appear to be somewhat unnecessary detail because it had a very important effect upon my own future. I was one of an exceedingly select number of Europeans who did not

* Sir Roundell Palmer evidently recognised that the real ground for attacking the judge was not that put forward, and regarding this as insufficient to warrant so heavy a penalty, he to his great honour, sacrificed many hours of several days in the busiest legal season by undertaking the judge's defence gratuitously.—**G.W. Des V.**

disguise their sympathy with the unfortunate Chief Justice. We took no open part with him, as that would have been quite useless; but our feelings were not concealed, and we were quickly to suffer for entertaining them. Mr. Crosby, who was the only leading official among us, shortly afterwards received that treatment from the Governor which was condemned by the Royal Commission, while the demeanour of His Excellency towards myself made me apprehensive that I should in no long time feel his displeasure. The opportunity soon came to him. The senior magistrate having returned to his district, I had some months previously taken up again the charge of my former district. On returning from one of my journeys up the river, I asked to breakfast with me at Hyde Park station a clergyman who had been visiting the Chinese settlement before referred to. In the course of conversation I expressed disapproval of some recent Government policy. I had never seen this person before, and have, happily, never met him since; but it was quickly evident that he had lost no time in relating our conversation to the Governor. For a few days afterwards I received a letter from the Colonial Secretary containing a request, which was practically a demand, on the part of His Excellency for the particulars of this conversation. Had I been asked in a proper way for my view on the impugned policy, I should have given it without hesitation; but being naturally indignant at the use made of a private conversation by one who had taken part in it while partaking of my hospitality, and especially at the Governor's conduct in taking advantage of it, I met the request with a firm, but entirely respectful refusal. I heard no more of this matter, but within a week came what was, practically, the Governor's rejoinder. This was an order to take charge immediately of the West Coast of Demerara district.

This transfer involved the removal of my headquarters to a distance from town, the hire of a house in the district, and the disturbance of all arrangements for comfort which I had made in the expectation of permanent residence. Moreover, as the new district was one which could only be worked by road and also extended to

such a distance from town that the use of a hired conveyance was out of the question, I had at once to purchase a carriage, horses, and harness. As the Government allowed nothing for these changes, and my boat and canoes had to be sacrificed for a nominal price, the cost to me was severe. Even when such transfers are made purely in the public interest, such expenses operate as a heavy fine, which ought not to be inflicted in this form even in the case of misconduct. Of this, however, there was no pretence in my case. For whatever my sympathy with the deposed Chief Justice, I had done nothing to deserve, and had never received anything approaching to, censure of my acts, official or unofficial. But, however this may have been, it quickly became evident that pecuniary loss was the least of the evils which I had to suffer from the change.

Of the work of this district I need say little, except that it was almost precisely similar to that described in connection with the other sugar district in which I had acted, and was even more disagreeable. For being compelled to live at a distance from town, whither I could go but rarely, I had practically no society, and having to drive on the average from seventy-five to a hundred miles a week, such little time as was not occupied by courts, and going to and from them, was for the most part spent in solitude amid the dreary surroundings of a half-abandoned plantation, having a pasture, usually sodden, in front of it and the view of the sea entirely cut off by a dense row of mangroves at a distance of some two hundred and fifty yards.

The planters of this district were among the most influential in the colony, and as they were a very united body, their displeasure was therefore the more formidable. But though there were some who under circumstances I should have liked to know well, I quickly found that nothing beyond a distant acquaintance was possible, so diametrically opposed were our views as to what should be my line of conduct in court, where we were necessarily thrown into frequent contact.

It may be imagined that under these circumstances my life was not a happy one, and I should have found it even more difficult to bear but for an occasional visit to my friend Colonel Herbert,* then in command of the troops, who was one of the few who sympathised with my position, and who, whenever a few days' change was required, always afforded me a ready hospitality.

At last, after some six months of this life, the planters having become more and more hostile, one of them insulted me in open court, because I had discharged from custody two of his coolies, who, having been merely absent from work, had been illegally arrested without warrant. The only redress which the law permitted to me was the removal of the offender from the court, but as he was a Justice of the Peace, the case was one in which the Executive might have properly intervened by offering him the alternative of a public apology or the loss of his commission.

Meanwhile Governor B.† had succeeded Governor A., but the change was nothing in my favour. It was King Log following King Stork; and so, in making application to him, I had little hope that he would have the energy to accord me proper support. My doubt on this point proved to be only too well justified. While listening courteously to my representations that Executive support to the magistrates was absolutely necessary for securing a decent measure of justice to the subject races, he declined to take any action, being evidently too afraid of the planting interest to run the risk of offending it.

Under these circumstances my position became well-nigh intolerable, and I almost made up my mind to resign my office; for I foresaw that if this were not done voluntarily, it would ere long be rendered compulsory, if not by my increasing ill-health, by concerted action on the part of the planters, such as had proved fatal to Chief Justice Beaumont.

* The Hon. William Herbert (now General)—**G.W. Des V.**

† John Scott, Esq. (afterwards Sir John)—**Editor.**

Before finally throwing up the sponge, however, I determined to make an effort to obtain a transfer to another colony, and I accordingly applied to Lord Granville, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, for an appointment elsewhere, expressing willingness to accept one even with a smaller salary if it offered any prospect of promotion. Magistrates in Guiana had very rarely been promoted at all, and so far as I could ascertain, had never been transferred to another colony. Though for this reason I had little hope of success, I was quickly and agreeably disappointed.

In less than two months from the despatch of my application a letter from Lady Jocelyn, followed the next mail by a despatch to the Governor, announced to me the offer of the appointment of Administrator of the Government and Colonial Secretary of St. Lucia. Needless to say, I gladly accepted it, though the salary was no greater than that which I was receiving, and the house free of rent would not be compensation for the necessary expenditure upon entertainment. On this account the new appointment was not generally held to be to my advantage, and this consideration added to the pleasure of the sugar magnates at my departure—a pleasure which received emphatic expression in the daily newspaper which was published in their interest.

From some half dozen of friends I parted with great regret, though with the hope that my future residence being at no great distance I should occasionally see them again. As regards the coloured people, I had much touching evidence of their sorrow at the loss of one of their few sympathisers among the dominant race, and this enabled me to feel that I had done for them at least some little good, and that my five years in the colony had not been altogether thrown away.

I left Guiana early in May, 1869, my pleasure at getting away from the colony being enhanced by the feeling that I should henceforward be, comparatively speaking,

my own master, and that there would be now before me an opening for ambition and the chance of doing some good work of more than merely temporary effect.

But little as I guessed it at the moment of my departure, Destiny had already ordained that I was to return to the scene of five years' official labours in Guiana.

The cause of my return was singular and my sojourn brief—almost dramatic; but it was to mark what up to that moment was the most impressive page of my public career.

CHAPTER NINE

Rising of coolies in British Guiana—My letter to Lord Granville as to causes of discontent; its composition under pressure—Appointment of Royal Commission to inquire into Guiana immigration system—During visit to Trinidad suffer from concussion of the brain; my nervous system permanently injured—Proceed to Guiana to attend Commission—Am boycotted—Postponement of Commission—I return to St. Lucia—Sympathy of friends—Return again to Guiana—Mr. Jenkins, author of "Ginx's Baby"—Embarrassed by crowds of coolies—My difficulties—Governor's passive obstruction—My examination by Commission—Helplessness against libels—Report of Commission satisfactory.

I had been some seven months at my new post studying a new set of problems and engaged in a new round of duties, when information came to me that there had been a rising among the coolies in Guiana, and the Governor, in apprehension of more extended disturbance, had applied to the General at Barbados for additional troops. This news caused me much perturbation of spirit. What I had long feared had, or was about to, come to pass; the oppressed had risen against those who, either rightly or wrongly, they regarded as oppressors. Believing that I knew at least some of the causes of discontent, I felt keenly that I ought to disclose them; but though my position now enabled me to do so with some probability of practical effect, my time was, if possible, even more fully engrossed by immediate duties than it had been in Guiana. But after anxious consideration, I determined that I would write directly to Lord Granville, giving him my view of the causes of what appeared to be a very grave condition of affairs, and suggesting the directions in which remedies were to be sought. With no time for this purpose during the day, in order to catch the next outgoing mail, I had to take many hours

from my night's rest. When I came to face the subject I found myself in great difficulty for want of notes to refresh my memory as to dates, etc. For it may be imagined from the account of my life in Guiana that having insufficient time for obligatory duty, I had none whatever for a private diary, and I had also been compelled to forego almost entirely correspondence with friends and family in England. Moreover, I was at a distance from all official records; so that I was reduced to the necessity of giving my general impressions of the state of the colony with such illustrations of it as were possible from memory. My letter was for these reasons defective. Had I had more time at my disposal, and in any case if I had had more experience of the higher official life, I could have written with equal force and effect, and yet with more prudent consideration for myself. But as it was, carried away by enthusiasm for the cause, and by the sense of urgency, I took no account of personal consequences, forgetting altogether that what was so real and true to my own mind might turn out to be very difficult of proof.

However, the letter was commenced, finished, and sent off within a few days of the arrival of the above news, and in order that it might be placed without the least delay under Lord Granville's own eye, I forwarded it to Lord Frederick Cavendish, who I knew to be on intimate terms with him, and who at once recognised its importance.*

In the course of a few weeks the information reached me that my letter had had the effect desired: that a Royal Commission would be appointed to inquire into the treatment of immigrants in Guiana, and that I should be required to give evidence before it. I had at first unmixed gratification at the thought that the truth would at length be revealed: but I did not even then recognise the full effect of what I had written. Had I been told that my letter was, as *The Times* afterwards termed it, the severest indictment of public officers "since Hastings was impeached for tyranny over the Lord of the Holy City of Benares and

* See Appendix for Author's letter to Lord Granville.—Editor.

over the Ladies of the Princely House of Oude", I should have repudiated the statement with indignation; for I had intended, however imperfectly the intention was carried out, to attack not individuals, but a system. I felt that magistrates, doctors, and others were placed in a position in which impartiality was well-nigh impossible, and while I mentioned cases by way of illustration of my views, I gave no names and did not at the time contemplate the necessity of their ever being mentioned. The only exception was in the case of the Governors, whose designation could not be avoided. But even against them I had not a particle of vindictive feeling; and in the case of all others, even those who had been most embittered against me, I had no wish that they should suffer at all from the inquiry. I simply hoped that they would be taught by independent outside opinion what was due from them to a people towards whom they all stood in a quasi-fiduciary relation.

But that my hasty writing had permitted other views to be taken of my action I was soon to learn to my cost. As the Commission was not to meet for some months, and I was in a condition from overwork which imperatively required a change, I obtained leave of absence for a short visit to Sir Arthur Gordon (now Lord Stanmore) then Governor of Trinidad, whose views in respect of coolie immigration and the subject races generally were much in accord with my own, and who had already carried out in Trinidad some of the reforms which I desired for British Guiana. During this visit a fall from a horse caused me a concussion of the brain, which rendered me insensible for some eight hours. Sir Arthur Gordon and his private secretary, Mr. Arthur Gordon (now C.M.G.), who kindly watched the whole night by my bedside, informed me afterwards that I had, while entirely unconscious of my surroundings, talked incessantly, and chiefly about Newman's *Apologia*, which I had recently been reading; the thought of this book having been perhaps excited by the place in which I had only a few months before met Charles Kingsley.

When I recovered consciousness, not only had I no knowledge of this talk, but memory of the events of the

preceding weeks was almost completely extinguished, and was never altogether recovered. This however, was of little consequence compared with another effect of the accident. My nervous system was so shaken that I found it impossible without great strain to maintain connected thought about any subject which caused me strong interest; and for months afterwards, including the whole period of my attendance upon the Commission, I suffered from insomnia, sometimes for many days together being deprived completely of sleep save that induced by narcotics. When proceeding some weeks afterwards to Demerara in order to attend the Commission, in passing Trinidad I stayed again for a night or two with Sir Arthur Gordon, who was on the point of quitting the island to assume the government of Mauritius.

On my arrival at Georgetown I found that the Colony was, and had been for some months, in a state of intense excitement. Abuse of me had been poured out wholesale, and keepers of hotels and lodging-houses had been threatened with boycott if they presumed to receive me within their doors. Such indeed was the power of the dominant class over the livelihood of every person in the colony, whether white or coloured above the rank of labourer, that it is doubtful whether I should have found a roof to cover me if I had not been offered hospitality by one of the officers of the garrison, who were almost the only independent people in the colony.

My stay in Georgetown on this occasion was only of a few days' duration, as, delay having occurred in the formation of the Commission, the sittings were not expected to begin for some weeks. On touching at Barbados I happened to mention my difficulty as regards lodging to the General in command of the troops, who at once kindly undertook to provide for my accommodation on my return during any further time which I should require to spend in Demerara.

During the interval previous to my return, I heard that at the instance of an old Oxford friend, Walter Morrison,

M.P. for Plymouth (and lately for the Craven Division of Yorkshire), the Aborigines Protection Society and the Anti-Slavery Society in combination had engaged a barrister to go out for the purpose of taking the part of the coolies before the Commission, Morrison himself having contributed a large sum towards the expense. This was only one of many instances of his unpublished munificence.

Besides this mark of sympathy from an old friend, I received another about this time from a newer one, in a letter from Arthur Gordon. Writing under date June 29th, 1870, from St. Thomas, when on board *The Elbe*, which was carrying him to England, he said—

“I write one line to tell you we are so far on our way and to wish you God-speed under your present difficulties. I am hearing you abused as I write, but I think you may get something out of—, one of the magistrates. His wife’s brother, a rather nice young fellow, is on board, and swears that what you say is true, though you may not be able to prove it, and that there are many in Demerara who rejoice at the Commission.”

I give this extract in order to show that there was secret sympathy with my views on the part of at least one of the Demerara magistrates, though for obvious reasons he never dared to express it openly. In order to save him from the obloquy and danger which would ensue from honest testimony of the kind which he was obviously able to give, or from the temptation to dishonestly suppress it, I never called this officer as a witness, nor made any approach to him with a view to gain his evidence, though, as will be seen, such support was at one time very grievously required.

On reaching Georgetown again I found that Mr. Edward Jenkins, the barrister above referred to (well known as the author of *Ginx’s Baby*), had arrived more than a week before me. He had already visited several sugar plantations, and having been much feasted by the planters, appeared to have been somewhat biassed towards their side of the question at issue. In view of the torrent

of slander which was being poured on my devoted head, he would scarcely have been human if he had not been. I should mention, moreover, that in the several months which had elapsed since the announcement of the Commission, the planters had made great exertions and had expended large sums (estimated at the time in hundreds of thousands of pounds) with a view of improving the estates for the inspection of the Commission. Hospitals were enlarged and improved, water-tanks erected, coolie barracks built or improved, and yards cleansed, so that, as Mr. Crosby and others informed me, some of the inferior estates had had their aspect entirely altered.

In view of this outward appearance of comfort in the coolie surroundings, I should probably have had greater difficulty in persuading Mr. Jenkins that something was rotten in the state of Denmark, but for the crowds of immigrants who, from the moment of my arrival, came from all parts of the colony to besiege me with their complaints. In truth, the continual pressure of these people proved to be a very serious embarrassment. From earliest dawn they began to collect round the little house which I occupied on the Crown reserve adjoining the barracks, and whenever I showed my face there came a great cry of supplication, touching to hear, but impossible to satisfy. When I went out I was followed, and during all the hours of daylight I was left no peace. I did not apply to the police, partly because I knew that the chiefs of the force were, or were obliged to pretend to be, as bitter against me as the rest of the white population, and chiefly because I dreaded the rough treatment of the men who had come looking to me for help. Some of those who had come long distances seemed to be exhausted with fatigue and want of food; and my slender purse was continually being drained to supply what appeared to be very urgent want. Possibly, and even probably, much of this was feigned to excite commiseration; but time was wanting for inquiry, even were it possible, and I could not discriminate between deserving and undeserving. Mr. Jenkins and I, assisted by his clerk, took down very many of their statements; not that I held them of much value, but rather with a view of preventing

a sense of complete disappointment. Even if the Commissioners were unable to investigate the individual complaints, the general tenor of these might prove useful as clues for inquiry. Moreover, I had the hope, which proved to be justified, that the apparently universal sense of injustice might have some effect, not only upon them, but upon Mr. Jenkins, who, as before mentioned, was not at first by any means enthusiastic for the cause which he had come to advocate. Stories of ill-usage, arbitrary cutting of wages, improper refusal of admission to hospital, ejection from it involving obligation to work before complete cure, denial of comforts ordered by the doctor, forcible turnings out from dwellings to work, together with the utter uselessness of appeal to magistrates, came from all parts of the colony and were reiterated *usque ad nauseam*. Probably there was much exaggeration, but that considerable reality lay beneath all this alleged grievance, could hardly be doubted. But however this may have been, they took up nearly the whole of my time, and left scarcely any for work useful to the Commission.

But even with more leisure I doubt whether I could have been very useful in this direction. Though, with great effort and much patience, I could manage to take down a statement, a brain weary with sleeplessness and and shattered nerves rendered me almost incapable of connected thought.

Fortunately the feeling that, whatever happened to myself, some good must come, and, indeed, already had come, from my action, sustained me against the depressing sense of isolation. For that isolation was almost complete. The Governor had taken no notice of my official call; and though, after persistent application, he permitted me to have access to the books containing the list of cases which had been tried before me, he made not the slightest offer of assistance, and I felt it to be hopeless to have made, or to make myself, those searches of records which were necessary for the complete presentation of my case. As regards others than the Governor, a few friends and sympathisers came to me in secrecy and under cover of

night; but, with the exception of Mr. Crosby and a merchant named Perot, not a single white person, and very few others except coolies, dared to visit me in the daytime. Even among the officers of the garrison, with whom I messed, there were one or two whose remarks or silence showed antagonistic sentiments. For my friend Herbert had unfortunately left the colony, and the commanding officer who had succeeded him was as unlike him in feeling on this point as in every other respect.

Mr. Perot was at this time regarded as the first merchant in the colony. Other firms may have done larger business, but no single man at that time had such credit, or was in a position of equally complete independence. Though he had intimate business and social relations with the planters of the West Coast, his friendly attitude towards me in no way altered in consequence of my differences with them. He recognised, almost as well as Mr. Crosby, the substantial truth of my allegations, and though I had never been intimate with him, he knew me well enough to be indignant at the general attitude assumed towards me, and at the anonymous libels directed against my character. And now, alone among the upper unofficial world, he had the courage, at whatever cost to himself, to outrage the popular sentiment by showing me open countenance; and my breakfasts under his hospitable roof are among the very few agreeable memories of an otherwise most painful experience.

At the opening of the Commission I appeared as the first witness, and the ordeal through which I had to pass was indeed a severe one. Including the Commissioners, white persons occupied the whole space in front of me, among whom I could recognise, besides Mr. Crosby, only one other familiar face.* And now my rash offer of proof recoiled upon me with a vengeance. For having determined to take no personal part against anyone, and neither to call nor cross-examine any witnesses; I, for this and other reasons above indicated, had little evidence to offer beyond

* That of Mr. Darnell Davis, the Secretary to the Commission, now Auditor-General of British Guiana.—G. W. DEB. V.

my own bare word. Even as to this my physical and mental condition was such as to render it very far from being as forceful as it might have been. Not desiring to hurt individuals, I refrained from saying much which was likely to do so, having full confidence in the character of the two Commissioners that their investigation would bring out the general correctness of my views, whatever might be said in mitigation or disproof of my specific allegations.

By this very uncomfortable position my nervous state was naturally not improved, and my thoughts became so confused that I sometimes failed to understand the simplest questions. My examination lasted, I think, three days altogether, and though I remained in the colony several weeks, in case I should be wanted again, I did not further attend the sittings of the Commission.

The latter portion of my sojourn was even less agreeable. The pressure from crowds of coolies continued, and I was depressed by the sense of personal failure. Mr. Jenkins, whose assurance of the final success of our cause had latterly done much to comfort me, was obliged to leave the colony; and immediately after, perhaps in consequence of his departure, there issued from the local Press a series of anonymous libels against my character and conduct, even more gross than any that had previously appeared. But while the falsity of these attacks was on a par with their malice, I was absolutely defenceless. Their authors knew perfectly well that, even if there might be individual men brave enough to take the side of truth and justice, no Guiana jury would ever render a verdict in my favour. Yet the bitterness of my enemies was such as to render absolutely certain that these charges, if just, would long previously have been brought to official notice, instead of being made anonymously in the newspapers, and the fact that this course was not taken would, I considered, reveal their untruth to any impartial mind. But, apart from the truth or untruth of these imputations (which, being made in the principal organs of the planters, must undoubtedly have been favoured if not originated by their executive committee), only the blindness of passion could fail to see

their specially gross indecency under the circumstances, and that their publication during the sitting of the Commission was a serious tactical mistake. Abuse of the plaintiff's attorney is always held to be an indication of a weak case, and I think it probable that this consideration rendered the investigations of the Commission even more searching than they would otherwise have been, and thus tendered to its generally satisfactory result.

When some months afterwards the Report of the Commission reached me in St. Lucia I, though expecting much from two of the members, was yet agreeably surprised by the thoroughness with which the work had been done. It is true that as regards myself the Commissioners did not spare censure wherever such was possible, while, as *The Times* pointed out in its review of Mr. Jenkins' book, *The Coolie: His Rights and Wrongs*, they ignored altogether how much they were indebted to me for the direction of their lines of inquiry, and in how many respects the facts elicited by them proved the justice of my representations. But when they expressed the opinion that the planters had extricated themselves from "dear bargains" with Chinese immigrants in a manner not creditable to the colony; when they pointed out how Governor A. had gradually withdrawn all power from the officer charged with the protection of the immigrants; when they reported the universal want of confidence among the coolies in the administration of justice by the magistrates; when they recommended for valid reasons that the doctors should be rendered independent of the estates and be made public officers; when they showed how completely the state of the law put every indentured immigrant at the mercy of an unscrupulous employer; that there was "here and there excessive indulgence in the practice of arbitrary stoppage of wages"; that various arrangements necessary for the well-being of the coolies were in some cases extremely defective, and that when these defects were pointed out to the Executive, extreme weakness had been shown in enforcing remedies—they had brought to light more than I expected and almost as much as I desired.

Thus ill as was performed my part in this coolie question, I have never for a moment regretted that I undertook it. It involved a heavy cost to me in health which never recovered its former robustness, and it probably contributed largely to the long delay in my promotion. But I have always felt compensated by the thought that the improvements in legislation and the increase of executive vigilance not only in Guiana, but in Mauritius and several other colonies which resulted directly or indirectly from this Commission, must have added at least something to the comfort and happiness of several hundreds of thousands of indentured immigrants.

With my attendance on the Commission my connection with British Guiana came to an end. Though life on the coast was always distasteful to me, I have often looked back to my experiences in the interior with a wistful regret that they could never be renewed. Despite all the drawbacks of solitude, of disagreeable work, of insect and other pests and of general discomfort, there was to me, as a lover of nature, a fascination about the tropical forest which has created a continual desire to return to it. Often in after years have I had a longing, now, alas, never to be gratified, to visit again the scenes described above, and to pursue at leisure the investigation of the wonders there present in such special abundance, with which I never had time nor opportunity for more than a very superficial acquaintance.*

*—If my enthusiasm on the subject should be at all shared by any of my readers, let me recommend them to a book, **In the Guiana Forest**, by Mr. James Rodway, F.L.S. The work of a trained observer and most graphic writer, it contains more vivid impressions of the scenes described, and presents pictures more attractive than any which have appeared since Water-ton's **Wanderings**. Also as of exceptional interest may be mentioned the more recent work of Mr. E. im Thurn, who seems in later days to have equalled, if not surpassed, my friend McClintock in his knowledge of the Guiana interior and its inhabitants.—G. W. Des. V.

APPENDIX I.

Des Voeux's Letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (extracted from "The Colonist," May 23, 1870).

Government House, St. Lucia,
25th December, 1869.

My Lord,—I have long had the intention, which I have been prevented by various causes and lately by the pressure of other public duties from carrying out, of drawing your Lordship's attention to the state of the Colony of British Guiana, where I was lately holding the appointment of Stipendiary Magistrate when your Lordship graciously acceded to my application for promotion.

2.—But in view of the serious disturbances which lately took place at plantation Leonora, and the more recent meeting of West Indian proprietors in London, which has shown that, while alive to the unsettled state of the Colony and anxious of obviating its effects, they are either unaware of, or are regardless of removing, its causes, I felt that I should no longer delay the performance of what I conscientiously believe an obligatory duty.

3.—Knowing as I do that there is a very wide-spread discontent and disaffection existing throughout the Immigrant population, both Indians and Chinese (and especially among the latter though their small numbers make the fact less apparent) and believing as I do, that these ill feelings, which have already vented themselves in disturbance, will 'ere long, unless checked by remedial measures, result in far more serious calamities, and believing also that my five years' peculiar experience in the Colony enables me to throw a light on the causes of grievance

which may not reach your Lordship from any other source, and may be useful at the present moment, I trust that I need no other apology for communicating with you on a subject unconnected with my present duties.

4.—If your Lordship should approve, I would in a future letter explain the peculiar grievances of which the Chinese have to complain, and which I believe to be so real and just as to furnish a strong argument against a renewal of that description of immigration, unless under far more stringent supervision. At present I propose to confine myself to those suffered by all classes of Immigrants alike.

5.—To superficial observation it would seem that persons who have been rescued from a state said to be bordering on destitution in their own country, who are provided with free houseroom, regular work, and wages when they are in health, and in sickness have the advantages of a hospital, the attendance of a medical man and medicines free of expense, who have moreover a magistrate always at hand to hear their complaints, and a department of officers with the especial duty of securing their good treatment, can have no ground for dissatisfaction. A closer scrutiny however, would detract much from the apparent value of these advantages, and would show that some of them at least are more nominal than real.

6.—I propose to point out that each of them is in fact a separate cause of discontent and in each case most respectfully to suggest what appear to me the best remedial measures.

7.—And first as to the medical men who attend estates. These gentlemen have the right to retain as patients in Hospital all sick Immigrants, and to order for them at the Estate's expense nourishing food and medicine. It would be thought that Managers would always see their advantage in providing these of good quality. I fear, however, that there are not many who are sufficiently enlightened to take this view, and I have strong reason for believing that

on some Estates the food at least usually provided in Hospitals, in all but the severer cases, is of a wretched description, and that this fact is well known to the medical men, who dare not make complaint.

8.—I am, moreover, confident that it is a common practice of medical men to discharge immigrants from treatment before they are completely cured; and to this may be attributed a large proportion of the cases of so-called idleness which are brought before magistrates. By the strict letter of the law an indentured immigrant is bound to do his daily task of work, if he is not in Hospital; and though the magistrate has a discretionary power of declining to convict, if he believes the accused is physically unable to work, it is difficult for him on account of the accomplished malingering propensities of the Coolies, to decide in other than extreme cases against the expressed opinion of the doctor.

9.—The consequence of this I believe is that of the great numbers of immigrants who are weekly committed to gaol for breaches of contract, a very considerable proportion are convicted of neglect to do what they were physically incapable of doing; and whether my belief is just or not I know that a sense of the injustice of such convictions is a very potent cause of the prevailing discontent.

10.—The remedy which I would most respectfully suggest for this serious evil, and which I have urged without success on more than one Governor, is simple.

11.—It is to make the estates' medical men Government officers, payable either out of the Immigration Fund, or by a tax directly levied for this purpose on the proprietors.

12.—At present their tenure of office is almost entirely dependent on the will, or rather the caprice, of the managers of estates. Several of the most upright of them have at different times deplored to me their position in this

respect, and have shewn me that any serious complaint on their part in respect of abuses, which they saw going on under their eyes, would only be followed by the loss of their livelihood, and the instalment in their practice of less scrupulous practitioners.

13.—It is scarcely to be wondered at that few are to be found sufficiently high-minded, especially when they have families dependent upon them, to adopt so dangerous a course. One, however, to my knowledge, did so, and he has in consequence, though known to be of great skill and ability in his profession, obtained but a very small practice, while Estates almost at his door were entrusted to a person who is notoriously incompetent.

14.—I could mention several startling instances from my own observation of the evils attending this dependence of medical men. But two of more than ordinary gravity, your Lordship will probably deem sufficient for my purpose.

15. (1) A Chinese immigrant had been dreadfully beaten by an Indian watchman, while in the act of stealing. He was taken to the Estate's Hospital with five fractures of limbs,—two compound and three simple, both legs and both arms being broken, if I recollect rightly. His wounds were dressed by the sick-nurse, but the doctor on arrival ordered his removal in a cart to his own Estate, a distance of $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles, the very day on which he had received the injuries. The natural result followed. The patient died the following day. On the inquest held before the Magistrate of the District the doctor justified his order on the ground that the man was "doing extremely well" (if I recollect the words rightly) when he was removed, while another medical man who attended the patient on his own Estate, gave his opinion that he would probably have lived, but for his removal. I sent the proceedings in this case to the Attorney-General,* but no notice was taken, as far as I know, of the doctor's conduct, who sacrificed a life in order to save a trifling expense to his employer.

*.—Mr. Trounsel Gilbert (acting)—*G. W. Des. V.*

16.—It is a significant fact that this gentleman, although holding a lucrative government appointment, and having a large practice in town, is employed by several large Estates, at a distance of several miles, and that some of these are separated from him by the river which, owing to the ferry-boat ceasing to run, is practically impassable at night, while they are within easy reach of two equally competent but reputedly more scrupulous medical men residing on the same bank of the river.

17. (2)—A Coolie boy about twelve years old, a general favourite on his Estate, had been barbarously murdered for the sake of the silver and gold ornaments on his person. An inquest had been held before an ordinary Justice of the Peace and an open verdict returned. On reading the evidence I ordered the exhumation of the body and a further *post mortem* examination. Your Lordship will find it difficult to believe, but it is nevertheless true that it was then for the first time discovered by the surgeon that one of the boy's arms had been cut off. The nature of the first examination can therefore easily be imagined.

18.—The medical man who was thus neglectful of his duty has one of the best if not the best Estate's practice in the colony; and, although resident in town, is allowed to have the sole medical charge of a hospital which in my time contained frequently over 80 patients, at a distance of seven miles, and several other Hospitals at distances of from four to six mile, one of them in a direction opposite to that of the others.

19.—The present Governor contemplated, he informed me, a reform of this and similar abuses, and I can well understand that the heavy legacy of duty and difficulty which was left to him, has prevented its speedy accomplishment.

20.—These illustrations of the system of medical attendance were both derived from my personal experience in one district. From all accounts I believe them to be by no means exceptional, and I would remind your Lordship that there are ten other districts in the colony containing sugar estates.

21.—The reform which I propose would not only render all the medical men more fearless in the performance of their duty, but would give even the more conscientious among them increased power of usefulness. Their practice would be concentrated and they would avoid the necessity which now exists of making visits at long distances, while rivals are in charge of hospitals in their immediate neighbourhood. The change would therefore be an equal boon to the profession and to the immigrants.

22.—The independence of the Stipendiary Magistrates is of even greater importance to the immigrants than that of the doctors. But, at present, these officers are almost equally though not as directly, subject to planting influence; and their decisions in consequence are, I believe, the chief cause of the prevailing discontent. They have, for the most part, risen from inferior positions, and have been long resident in the colony before their appointment as magistrates. They have thus insensibly acquired that awe of the powerful planting interest which more or less pervades all classes and reaches to the highest places.

23.—Moreover, while by their antecedents and their education they are, as a rule, not superior, in position and emoluments they are actually inferior, to the managers of estates who form their society, and are the chief suitors in their Courts.

24.—Again, these latter are enabled by the large resources at the command of the estates in many ways (singly too insignificant to describe) to soften the harsher features of the Magistrate's life, and have still larger means of heaping upon him trouble and annoyance.*

* As an illustration of the low comparative estimation in which the Stipendiary Magistrates are held in Demerara, I may mention that they are habitually known among persons who claim to represent "education and intelligence" by an opprobrious nickname peculiar to that colony. The Government, moreover, in its public notices assists in degrading their position by almost always, if not always, placing them after the "Gentlemen in charge of Estates." As to the character and social position of these, I would refer your Lordship to the report to

25.—Your Lordship will readily understand that against such persons and in the Courts of such magistrates an immigrant is by no means certain of obtaining his rights, and I do not hesitate to assert, not only from what I have commonly heard, but from personal observation, that they do not; and that they are thus often reduced to a position, which in some respects is not far removed from slavery. The most trifling offences too often subject them to loss of wages and exorbitant fines, or the alternative of certain punishment in gaol and they are governed, not by kindness and good treatment, but through fear of the severity of the law*.

26.—There are some well known Managers who give out publicly that the immigrants on their Estates shall be always, during the hours of work, either actually at work, or in hospital, or in gaol; a rule which can undoubtedly be enforced by the strict letter of the law, but which, invariably and rigorously carried out, inflicts extreme hardship in many individual instances, especially in the case of women who are *enciente*† or nursing young children, or

his government of a highly educated and intelligent Hungarian gentleman, Colonel Figglesmesey, who is Consul of the United States : a report which though made by a comparative stranger in the country and within a year of his arrival (1864), confirms to a great extent many of the statements of this communication as to the condition of the indentured immigrants.

—G.W. Des V.

* I speak only for the majority of estates. There are a very few notable exceptions which, as will be shown below, have reaped both direct and indirect advantages from the better treatment of their labourers.—G.W. Des V.

† A manager was once highly indignant with me for refusing to punish for neglect to perform the ordinary task of work a woman who pleaded her delicate condition in this respect, and was evidently by her appearance, near her confinement. He actually went so far as to appeal from my decision as a means of testing my right to withhold a conviction on such a ground. I may mention that the support of my decision in this and other immigration cases, was one of the chief real, though not ostensible, causes of the hatred of the Planters for the late unfortunate Chief Justice, a gentleman who incurred far more hostility in Demerara from his many sterling virtues, than from the indiscretion which was the cause of his removal from the Bench.—G.W. Des V.

when the immigrants are weakened from the effects of fever and illness, but being convalescent are not retained in the hospital.

27.—It is commonly said that the Governor has the power of counteracting the influence of the planters to a great extent by changing the districts of magistrates who have become too popular with them. But this power, instead of checking, has as frequently used, contributed in fact to increase this influence, for it is generally believed, whether truly or not I forbear to express an opinion, that changes of districts which have been ordered of late years, have been brought about not on account of the magistrates' familiarity with the planters but of their being obnoxious to them. Changes, unless for some private reason specially asked for, are as a rule dreaded by magistrates on account of the great expense which is necessarily involved. Owing to difficulties of carriage and, too often, of pecuniary embarrassment they are obliged to sell their furniture and effects. The price realized by these, owing to the persons in a condition to purchase being mainly planters, is notoriously dependent on the popularity among them of their owner.

28.—So that to avoid, not only removal, but the loss consequent on possible removal, the magistrate has an inducement to curry favour with the planters.

29.—In order to convey to your Lordship a real and vivid illustration of what I have above described, I am reluctantly compelled, from want of other means of doing so, to relate somewhat minutely my own personal experience; though I have the less fear of incurring suspicion of egoistic motives from the belief that I have already gained your Lordship's good opinion, and the knowledge that any material reward which I could hope for any service in Demerara has been already obtained from your Lordship's favour.

30.—In February, 1867, during the absence on a year's leave of the regular magistrate, having been previously in

a district containing only one sugar Estate, I was appointed, in highly complimentary terms, by Major Mundy, then administering the government to take charge of the most populous and important district in the colony; a recognition of my public merits, the more honourable to its author in that there were at the time existing causes of private difference between us. The gentleman who had been my predecessor in the district is by common repute one of the best and most impartial of the magistrates. He is possessed of some private means, and as the district extends to an equal distance on either side of Georgetown, and thus enables residence there, he is comparatively independent of the planters and their society. He is moreover from his age, long service, and experience entitled to more than ordinary respect.

31.—His district, as I found it, may therefore be taken, for my purpose, as a fair, if not a favourite, example of the others.

32.—Almost the first, if not the first, week of my entry upon my new duties, I found confined in the "lock up" of the police stations, a number of persons, and immigrants among others, who had been arrested without warrant, on the mere order of managers of estates, for neglect of duty and other simple breaches of contract. On the mere sight of the charges, I, of course, discharged them as being in illegal custody, and continuing this practice subsequently I at once aroused the indignation of several influential managers; who severally, at one time or another, in no very courteous language, threatened legal proceedings and other means of intimidation. But finding that their pressure did not affect my course, and that it was moreover supported by the law, they devised various contrivances to evade its effects.

33.—I should be occupying too much of your Lordship's time by particularizing these, but I would venture to describe one as characteristic of the class which furnished its author.

34.—The magistrate sits as a rule only once a week at each Police station. From the knowledge of this the expedient* was adopted of sending the prisoners to the lock-ups the day after the Court, in order to insure their being at least a week in confinement, “remands” being provided from brother managers who were also Justices of the Peace.

35.—To defeat so glaring a breach of the Law I was obliged to order the police at each station to forward me daily returns of the prisoners and thus the evil was eventually checked.

36.—I found that it had been the practice to bring before the magistrate for breaches of contract the Immigrants of particular estates in gangs, for the purpose of their being tried all together, and thus more rapidly disposed of, and my refusal to allow this practice was taken as a great grievance. As the charges are nine times out of ten for various forms of neglect to work, an offence which, except in the rare instance of a conspiracy, is never “joint”, and involves in each case different circumstances and a different line of defence, your Lordship will understand that my course was necessitated by the commonest dictates of justice. Though, possibly, in the large majority of cases the Immigrants are really idle and culpable, the practice which I have described must have rendered it almost impossible to detect the exceptions.

37.—I found in existence a practice which I believe is still prevalent all over the colony of forcing the doors of immigrant’s houses for the purpose of what is called turning them out to work, and also of doing the same and searching their rooms without warrant for stolen goods, and even sometimes when there was only a suspicion of theft. I frequently suggested to the immigrants in their

* Subsequent experience has convinced me that this expedient is a common one throughout the country, even in the Districts of the most complacent magistrate, as it ensures some punishment, is done with perfect impunity, and obviates the trouble of prosecuting in court.—G.W. Des. V.

complaints respecting such acts that they should bring criminal charges against the aggressors; but, although their fears invariably prevented their adoption of this course, I believe that the mere hint had the effect of checking a practice which I was given to understand had never before met even with reproof from the Bench.

38.—I found that invidiously distinct positions in Court were assigned to managers of Estates, some of them, on the ground of their being Justices of the Peace, being allowed to remain on the Bench even during the trial of their own cases.* This may seem a trivial matter, and in England it probably would be so, but it is otherwise in a country where race-jealousies are so predominant and where suspicion of undue favour is so easily and often I fear so justly aroused. Indeed my further experience convinced me more and more than the tolerance of such a practice was the origin of much discontent, as giving the appearance of partiality even to the conscientious magistrate.

39.—In this district the ordinarily extreme severity of the magistrate's work, which involves the trial annually of between four and five thousand separate informations and complaints, besides inquests and depositions for the Superior Court, was greatly increased in my case, not only by attempted reforms of the above abuses but by another circumstance for which I was in no way responsible.

40.—The regular clerk (only one is allowed), went away on leave, and when I had, after great trouble, educated his "locum tenens" to work of which he knew but little before, the latter was removed at three days' notice, and in spite of my firm and most respectful remonstrance, and replaced by another who had actually no acquaintance whatever with the routine of a magistrate's office, consequently I was obliged, though in very weak health, after sitting the greater part of the day, to spend a large por-

* One of these indeed was made highly indignant by my refusing to permit his whispering to me upon the subject of a case before me in which he was complainant.—G. W. Des V.

tion of the night in teaching the simplest duties of the office, rather than give my openly-avowed enemies among the planters, who believed that they were supported by the Governor*, the opportunity of complaining that the district work was getting into arrear.

41.—No complaint was, or ever could have been, made against me on this ground, and I can conscientiously say that I performed the whole of my duties thoroughly, and, as I have reason to know, to the satisfaction of the large majority of the inhabitants of the district I was, however, for reasons not stated to me, removed from the district at a few days' notice a month before the expiration of the leave of the regular magistrate, and the public naturally concluded that the planters had been the cause.

42.—After an interval of eight months during which I had no concern with immigrants, I was again, at a few days' notice, and without reasons given and at an expense of £250 to myself, removed† to another district which I had been offered and declined a few months before, my respectful request for only a month's delay on the ground of peculiar inconvenience to myself being refused.

43.—In the new district, called that of the West Coast, which is only second in importance to that abovementioned,

* This belief was a matter of notoriety, but in proof of it, I may mention that one of my most determined and powerful enemies, whom I had curbed in various illegalities, delayed for two months, while Major Mundy was acting, to make a complaint against two of my decisions, which I venture to say was not only groundless, but should never have been entertained by the Executive. I respectfully remonstrated against it, being referred to me, both the acts complained of being the proper subject of legal appeal; but with no other effect than a reprimand. I should, however, never have referred to the subject again, but that I am otherwise unable to show in the strongest light the pressure under which a magistrate may be subject in Demerara, and how very strong are his inducements to quietly submit to the planters' wish.—G. W. Des V.

† Two days before this occurred I had firmly but respectfully declined to disclose officially a private conversation which occurred at my own table.—G. W. Des V.

I found all the abuses before alluded to existing in an even more exaggerated form, and moreover that cruelties were being practised on the immigrants apparently without check or hindrance.

44.—The Manager of the largest estate, which, as making annually close upon two thousand hogsheads of sugar, is second to none in the British possessions, was brought before me on the complaint of a coolie for assault.

45.—It appeared from the evidence that the man had been knocked down for leaving the sugar house at eight o'clock on Sunday morning (a day on which the immigrants are legally entitled to rest), he having been at work, with the mere intermission of meals from an early hour on the Saturday previous.*

46.—Another manager at an almost equally large estate was proved before me to have knocked down a coolie immigrant and to have kicked him repeatedly while on the ground, causing bruises about his chest and other parts of his body.

47.—With respect to this "gentleman" I was informed afterwards that he had been repeatedly guilty of similar acts, and that the sufferers had been either afraid to complain or believed that there would be little use in doing so.

* I have strong reason for believing, though the fact is concealed from the Authorities, that it is no uncommon practice to enforce from the immigrants (in spite of the law) from 16 to 20 hours' work in the sugar house. In proof I may mention that a part proprietor of several very large estates, Mr. Quintin Hogg, (a partner in the firm of Bosanquet, Curtis & Co.) expresses to me, during his visit to Demerara last year, his horror at finding that the immigrants on one of his estates, had been for some days worked for 22 hours per day, and added that the manager was aggrieved at his interference in ordering the employment of relays. It is hardly possible to conceive that human nature could have stood so severe a strain, and the time may have been exaggerated but inasmuch as the statement, as coming from a proprietor, was in the nature of a confession, it could hardly have been far from the truth.—G. W. Des V.

On one occasion, however, the assault had been upon a coolie who had saved money, and who, having employed a lawyer, compelled his assailant to pay a large sum to compromise an action for damages in the Supreme Court.

48.—In these cases, I fined the guilty persons heavily, and informed them that a second offence would involve either imprisonment or the sending of the case before the Supreme Court. I believe that this had the effect of checking the evil to a great extent for the time at least. But it is a significant fact that the first of these offences was committed on Plantation *Leonora*, where the disturbance broke out three months after my departure.

49.—The reform of these abuses was not accomplished without arousing against me the enmity of the planting body, while my compulsory residence among them gave them opportunities of displaying it in a more disagreeable form.

50.—The simplest and plainest public duty, whenever clashing with the supposed interests of an individual, was instantly treated as a personal injury. Beginning with the withdrawal of ordinary courtesy, the managers, as one after another was interfered with in his mal-practices, at length in concert began to subject me to a series of petty insults and annoyances which were beginning to make life intolerable. Without a description of these Your Lordship will readily understand that they were easily in their power in the case of one who was living alone upon a sugar estate, (no house being procurable elsewhere), and whose only neighbours were persons connected with the plantations.

51.—After other expedients had failed of effect, and a new Governor having by this time arrived, they at length attacked me in the press, availing themselves of a newspaper called the *Colonist*, which is the organ of the planting interest.

52.—I mention this, because the occasion which called forth the attack singularly illustrates the spirit of the planting body.

53.—The person offended I had believed to have been more high minded than his fellows, and capable of appreciating strict performance of duty, even when apparently adverse to his own interest. For this reason, and because I was informed that he never entered a magistrate's court, I had accepted from him a short time previously some trifling hospitality.

54.—However, when I had discharged from custody, as being in illegal confinement three of his Chinese labourers, who had been arrested in their own houses, without warrant for mere breach of contract, this gentleman came deliberately down to the police station where I was holding court, and grossly insulted me before a crowd of people and a large number of managers, who had evidently collected for the purpose of witnessing the scene. Having no power of committing for contempt, I could merely order his removal from the court, but as he was a special justice of the peace, and the last who should have set such an example, I appealed in person to the Governor for the purpose of having him removed from the Bench. But neither on that occasion or any other, except during the short regime of Major Mundy, did I receive support from the Executive against a planter. I was in too weak health (having been unable for some weeks previously to walk without support, and being subject to continual attacks of fever) to press the point warmly at the time, and Your Lordship's gracious offer of my present appointment reaching me immediately afterwards, I was relieved from a painful position which my physical condition could not have supported much longer.

55.—The article of the *Colonist* of March 2nd, above referred to, while ostensibly written for another purpose, set forth the real grievance against me, *viz.* :—That I did not “please the planters.” As to my particular act complained of, *viz.* :—the discharge of the three Chinese, the

essential fact is omitted, that their arrest had been without warrant. While I, of course, took no notice of the attack, I found an unexpected defender in the *Creole*, the organ of the coloured races. The articles in that paper of the 29th and 31st, though containing trifling errors and remarks which might have been better omitted, are nevertheless a complete answer to the attack, and are most useful in shewing the opinion of intelligent coloured people on the manner in which justice is usually administered. Ultimately the planting organ threatened an appeal, which was however very advisedly never attempted, as the exposure of the legality of my course would have precluded from a contrary one more complacent magistrates in other districts. But a movement was on foot when the news of my promotion arrived to obtain from the Executive my removal from the district, though I have no reason to believe that such pressure would have had any effect on Mr. Scott.

56.—Had I been ever unduly lenient to the coloured races, and could I have been considered in any sense their champion, it would have been easy to understand the estimation in which, I am proud to say, I was held by them, and the bitter enmity of the planters. But this was very far from being the case. No magistrate was, I believe, ever more severe on proved crime or misconduct, and in proof I may mention that in the eleven months during which I held office in the first district named I ordered more floggings than had ever taken place before in a similar time, and out of a population of twenty thousand at the most I sentenced over twelve hundred* to imprisonment with hard labour, and of these probably two-fifths were indentured immigrants convicted chiefly of breaches of contract. During the same time, however, I have the authority of the chief of the district police for saying, that the “feeding returns” of the “lock-ups” had been reduced by more than one-third, which affords some indication of the extent to which improper imprisonment had been previously carried.

* I have not the returns by me, but I know that these figures are considerably within the mark.—G. W. Des V.

57.—I have, as I have said, entered thus minutely into my personal experience simply and solely as the only means within my power of proving to Your Lordship that under the present system in Demerara independence and impartiality on the part of the magistrates is not and cannot be the rule, and that the discontent which pervades all the labouring classes might under the circumstances be naturally expected.

58.—If there was, as I trust there was, an exception in my case, I take no credit to myself whatever. Had I lived as long as most of my brother magistrates amidst the demoralizing influence of all-pervading West Indian moral cowardice, or had I, as they mostly have, a family dependent on me, my course might have been, though I trust not, only parallel with theirs. At all events, the difficulty and even danger of any other would have been vastly increased.

59.—For the reform of the system described, of which I trust I have shewn the extreme and urgent need, I would most respectfully suggest the following measures as the only ones which in my opinion would thoroughly meet the exigencies of the case.

60.—As I consider that the attempt would be hopeless to obtain impartiality from district magistrates in Demerara, and it is yet desirable for the sake of order, that those officers should still reside in the country, I would suggest the creation of a new and superior class with sole jurisdiction in all cases both Civil and Criminal between employers and employed, both indentured and free, and in cases of trespass.* They should be required to reside in

* A common practice exists among managers of estates which are conveniently situated for the purpose of coercing the neighbouring villagers to work for them by vexatious charges of trespass. I have known cases where individuals have been thus charged for using a right of way which had existed for many years, though hundreds of others were passing over it daily whom there was no intention or even desire of prosecuting.—G. W. Des V.

town, and to hold a Court at each police station not more than once a month. They should moreover be invested with a power of summarily punishing illegal stoppage of wages and also false arrests, and imprisonment both in its authors and its agents: the ordinary redress of a civil action being practically out of the reach of ninety-nine labourers out of a hundred.

61.—The residence in town would secure them against much of the pressure above described, and the diminished frequency of courts would check the tendency of governing immigrants by fear rather than by good treatment.*

62.—Except perhaps at first, the new measure need be attended with no expense. The district magistrates being relieved of a large portion of their work, would be able to take charge of much larger districts, and would be able to take exclusive charge of coroner's inquests, which, when before ordinary justices, are not only attended with expense, but as I have shewn, are most unsatisfactorily conducted.

63.—Seven district magistrates would therefore amply suffice instead of twelve, and thus £3,500 a year would be saved for the payment of three circuit magistrates.

64.—Finally, with respect to these officers I would respectfully suggest that they should be appointed exclusively by the Secretary of State, and from persons who had had no previous connection with the West Indies, except perhaps in an independent position such as the army, or otherwise the object of the new creation would be partially defeated.

* That this is not only possible, but profitable, I would mention the notorious fact that some of the most successful estates (as once admitted by Mr. Hincks in the Court of Policy) are those which least frequently trouble the Magistrate. Mr. Clementson, a late member of the Court of Policy, who is in some respects the most successful planter in the colony (having from very humble beginnings acquired a large fortune) has not for years

65.—The effect of this reform would be, I feel confident, the removal of much of the prevailing discontent, not only among the immigrants, but among the Creole labourers, who are also under the present system too often on insufficient grounds and on hardly plausible pretences, deprived of their rightful wages. Another though less potent cause of discontent among the immigrants is their house accommodation.

66.—Although I believe it would be found on enquiry that the immigrants are allowed considerably less room on the average than convicts in English prisons; I do not allude to the question of “cubic space”, for, even if the importance of this subject has not been too much exaggerated elsewhere, I believe that when houses are as little impervious to the air as those of the lower classes in the tropics, bad ventilation, if an existent evil at all, is the least of those produced by overcrowding.

67.—The great majority of the houses in the “nigger yards” (as they are still ordinarily called) which are allotted to immigrants are built of two stories and consist of a number of very small rooms. These are ordinarily, as far as my limited observation has extended, from 9 to 10 feet square, and are divided by thin and easily-scaled partitions.

68.—Most managers have, I believe, though I am far from sure, been compelled to allow a separate room to each married couple and their children, though three, four and even more single men, are, I know, frequently crowded in the same place. But married and single alike have to use passages, sheds, euphemistically termed kitchens, and other conveniences common to many others differing in caste* and sometimes in race. Moreover, from the filthy and lazy habits of the people, the occupants of the

* Although all Indians lose their caste on leaving Hindostan, the distinctions and jealousies are kept up to a great extent in Demerara. There are even many calling themselves Brahmins, who while averse from work themselves, obtain the performance of their tasks by working upon the superstitions of their fellows.—G. W. Des V.

upper story are a continual source of discomfort and annoyance to those on the ground floor, and hence, in a great measure, arise the endless quarrels, abusive language and assaults which occupy so large a portion of the Magistrate's time.

69.—A proof of the discontent of the Coolies with this state of things, even if there were no complaints on the subject, exists in the fact that whenever allowed to do so, they invariably erect for themselves private cottages of mud. These are generally, as may be supposed, one of a wretched description, and the preference of them by the immigrants to the comparatively substantial houses provided by the estates, is usually cited by the planters as the deliberate preference of squalor to comfort.

70.—From personal enquiries among many immigrants I am satisfied that this inference is incorrect, their invariable answer has been to the effect that these houses are their own; their privacy is not so continually invaded, and they are more secure from loss of their goods and attempts on the chastity of their wives.

71.—This evil would not admit of so immediate a remedy as the others mentioned. But a long step towards its alleviation might be made by compelling all the estates which have surplus front lands (and these are very many) to devote drained spaces for the erection of these cottages by deserving immigrants who have the means and desire to do so; and also by preventing new immigrant barracks being built of more than one storey, but with kitchens, etc, for at most every ten people.

72.—The permission to erect private houses is already largely granted on some estates to free immigrants as an inducement to them to remain on the estate. But this mode of living is otherwise discouraged by the Planters, as the people being scattered over a larger area, there is a great difficulty of what is called "enforcing discipline", which really means turning them out to work.

73.—Another frequent cause of complaint is *want of water*, either of proper quality or in sufficient supply. And this in dry seasons, such as occurred last year, becomes a cruel hardship. Though the country is everywhere intersected by canals and trenches, these in the dry season become mostly tainted with salt water, while many are poisoned by the “lees” from the rum distilleries. On the Estate on which I resided last year, I have repeatedly seen the people obliged after their day’s work in the field to go more than a mile for water, which even when procured was putrid in smell and disgusting to the taste, and I was informed that this evil existed in even a more exaggerated form on other Estates. Efforts were undoubtedly made to procure pure water at a great expense from a distance of 20 miles up the Demerara River, but even this was muddy and unfit for drinking, and moreover the distance and difficulty of transport inevitably rendered the supply meagre and irregular.

74.—There is no excuse for such a want of water in Demerara. The average fall of rain of 100 inches (there were even from 60 to 70 inches last year) is amply sufficient to supply all the wants of the estates if the commonest precautions were taken for preserving it.

75.—One or two estates are now setting a good example in providing iron tanks, but this could not probably be afforded by all. But from whatever source derived, a sufficient supply of comparatively pure water should and could easily be enforced from all estates to which immigrants are allotted.

76.—Another much needed reform is that of the Immigration Department. Its present head is a thoroughly upright, conscientious and indefatigable public officer, and he is, as far as possible, in his circumstances independent. The difficulties of his position have been very much lightened by the present Governor even before I left the colony, but under the present system his time must necessarily be chiefly taken up by the

mere routine of the office, leaving but little time for the proper and searching investigation of the complaints which are continually pouring in upon him from all quarters.

77.—His subordinates are insufficient in number for the proper performance of their present duties, and entirely so, if others such as it is desirable should be performed by the office, were added to them.

78.—At present, the Sub-Immigration Agents visit estates at stated periods for the purpose of re-indenturing and paying bounty, or of granting free tickets to immigrants whose term of service has expired, and only at other times for the investigation of some matter of complaint of more than ordinary gravity. As they almost invariably, when on their travels, accept the hospitality of managers, it is hardly to be expected that their duties should be strictly, regularly and impartially performed.

79.—And, indeed, I have good reason to believe that they are not. For I have myself known cases where immigrants' indentures have been improperly and carelessly extended, and where complaints have been but cursorily and far from thoroughly investigated. Moreover, by the very anomalous system introduced by the late Governor of granting them travelling allowance individually, they were made virtually independent of the head of the office and free of proper control.*

80.—But even granting that the present work is efficiently performed, there is another duty, which, for the sake of justice to the immigrants, should be performed by the office.

81.—Under the present law an employer is bound to pay to his indentured labourers the same price for their work as is paid to free labourers. It is, however, notorious that this obligation is as a rule evaded, and sometimes openly broken.

* I believe that this anomaly has been removed by the present Governor since my departure from the colony.—G. W. Des V.

82.—The former is easily done, where all field labour, as in Demerara, is done by tasks, by allotting to both indentured and free, an equal area for weeding, ploughing, or cane-cutting, at the same price, but selecting the more distant* field or ground with more labour for the indentured.

83.—As regards actual breaking of the law, I have known cases and believe them to be not uncommon where immigrants have been compelled to work for a price which free labourers would have, and sometimes actually have, refused.

84.—It is quite impossible, even for the most impartial magistrate under the present system to do justice in such cases, or in many others, in which immigrants are aggrieved. The manager can always produce a number of overseers, drivers, and others dependent on him, to make an overwhelming weight of testimony in his favour, while the immigrant, who is perhaps generally in the wrong, has not the intelligence and cannot produce proper witnesses to present his case clearly when he is in the right. He has thus a direct inducement to supplement his ignorance by falsehood and suborned perjury, which being usually transparent, of course invalidates other very possibly truthful testimony on the same side.

85.—On the other hand my experience has taught me that falsehood in court is by no means confined to the coloured races, and that the whites connected with estates, whether managers, overseers or engineers, are often by no means scrupulous about the truth when their interest or their fears enter into the question at issue: and this class of falsehood as proceeding from greater intelligence, is of course the more difficult of detection.

86.—As a result of all these difficulties in the path of a most conscientious magistrate, an immigrant but rarely

* Distance is of great importance, where, as on most of the estates, some fields are 3 to 5 miles from, while others are in the immediate vicinity of the buildings.—G. W. Des V.

wins a case against his estate, either civil or criminal, either as prosecutor, plaintiff or defendant. The magistrates' return would, indeed, indicate otherwise from the large number of cases which appear there as dismissed. But of these but a very small portion have been really pressed by the managers. For it is notorious that very many informations are most improperly compromised by money payments, and in these cases but a slight show of resistance, if any, is maintained in court.

87.—These evils and many others like them can in my opinion, only be remedied by the appointment of Government officers whose duty it would be to make unexpected visits to estates, and whenever occasion might require, for the purpose of personally inspecting work assigned and the payment offered to immigrants, and of ascertaining the true facts in any doubtful case where these labourers were concerned, so that there might be always forthcoming, when necessary, independent and disinterested evidence as a guide to the magistrate in his decision.

88.—The police would not answer for this duty, as in the first place they are, for the most part, entirely ignorant of any of the eastern languages, and moreover would be too much under the influence of the managers, many of whom are also justices of the peace, and would thus be furnished with a ready means of bringing pressure to bear upon them.

89.—I would respectfully suggest that for this purpose the number of Sub-Immigration Agents should be increased, that they should be instructed to acquire a practical knowledge, as might be sufficiently done in a very short time, of the different kinds of work on the sugar plantations, and should be forbidden to accept under any circumstances the hospitality of managers, which is certain to be largely proffered to them.

90.—As tending to prove the propriety of this restriction, I may mention that it is voluntarily placed upon himself by an officer of considerably higher standing than the

Sub-Immigration Agents, and I have the less hesitation in mentioning his name in a matter which redounds so much to his credit in that I have no personal acquaintance with him; I mean Dr. Shier, the Inspector of estates' hospitals.

91.—So strictly scrupulous is he in this respect that he is frequently obliged for his night's lodging to put up with such very scanty accommodation as is afforded by the Court Rooms at the police stations: and I cannot but think that such scruples should be encouraged as could easily be done by furnishing a room with necessary furniture at stations for the use of all public officers on their official circuits.

92.—As Your Lordship might deem it a matter of difficulty to find proper persons to fill such offices as I have proposed, I would most respectfully venture to suggest that such might be found among discharged non-commissioned officers of the Army who had served in India.

93.—Their residence there would have to a great extent acclimatized them to all tropical climates, and would possibly have given them a sufficient knowledge of one or other of the Indian languages to enable them to make themselves understood to a few of the immigrants of each estate. Their pensions would moreover assist their salaries, and if they had been engaged in regimental or brigade offices, they would have learnt something of official routine and correspondence.

94.—In conclusion, it is not without earnest thought and a profound conviction of the good policy as well as justice of the measure that I venture to suggest a reform of the present artificial system of immigration which is taking place in British Guiana, and this almost as much for the interest of the planters as of the immigrants themselves.

95.—For, notwithstanding the superior value of the acclimatized immigrant, I am satisfied that the power of obtaining an unlimited amount of new hands, to so great

an extent at the public cost, is an encouragement of an uneconomical use of existing labour, and of carelessness and even cruelty in the treatment of those already under indenture.

96.—And I would respectfully urge that on higher grounds the limit has been reached at which immigration should be allowed to continue in its present footing as a direct burthen on the public purse. It was, no doubt, fair enough that the general revenue of the colony should at first pay a third of the cost of immigration. Labour was absolutely required, not only for the advancement of the general prosperity, but to prevent the wholesale abandonment of cultivation. The negro labourers, moreover, required competition as an incitement to industry, and the lesson which has been taught them has been doubtless wholesome and just, though a very severe one. But I would most respectfully urge that its severity is now becoming disproportionate to its justice, and every year more so.

97.—Though production has greatly increased it has not done so in proportion to the labour introduced and wages have consequently fallen in value all over the colony. In the dry seasons planters have often difficulty in finding employment for their indentured immigrants and have therefore but very little for free labourers, whom I saw last year in large gangs, perambulating the country unable to find work at all. Moreover the excessively high taxation (raised chiefly from articles of general consumption), which is necessitated by the annual charge* for the colony's share of immigration, makes exceptionally dear—nearly all the necessaries of life used by the labourers, both Creole and Immigrants.

* £65,000. I have not the exact figures at hand but I believe that this is an approximate amount. A comparison between the tariff and prices existing in British Guiana with that of the other West Indian colonies would show in how high a degree this is true.—G. W. Des V.

98.—These are thus paying in two ways for what, instead of a benefit, is a direct, and is becoming a grievous injury to them. On the other hand the planters obtain free of duty the greater part of the supplies peculiarly required by the estates, and thus pay but a mere trifle towards the general revenue.

99.—I believe that on a close investigation of this subject your Lordship would be convinced that the time has come when the planters should pay the whole cost of immigration which now far more than formerly exclusively **benefits themselves**.

100.—They are well able to do so, for it is notorious that all the well managed estates (and no others have a right to be considered) have for some years been making large profits*. These were greatly increased by the destruction of the estates in Louisiana^o, which alone besides produced the peculiar kind of crystallized (or as it is technically called vacuum pan) sugar which is so greatly in demand in the United States, and were again largely increased by the enhanced value of all kinds of sugar produced by the troubles in Cuba. †

* The estate of "Schoon Ord" has for three years just published net profits averaging £15,000 (last year £17,000 if I recollect rightly). It has no superiority over 100 others beyond freedom from embarrassment, command of capital and good management, the land is considered inferior to the average, and not many years ago was nearly being abandoned as worn out and worthless. Ammonia has worked the change.—**G.W. Des V.**

^o Except Mauritius, but this supplies mainly the Australian market.—**G.W. Des V.**

† To shew what the profits must have been this year I would mention that I was informed by the proprietor of an estate of an average size making crystallized sugar that he made a "handsome" profit when his crystallized sugar sold at 6 cents per lb. but the average price this year has been \$6.50 and has been as high as \$7.50. Supposing 40,000 of the 80,000 hogs-heads made in the colony to be crystallized, the increased profits on the above would amount for the year to \$540,000 £108,000. The value of common sugar has also been enhanced but not in proportion.

101.—If any portion of these profits in any way benefited the labourers there would be less cause for the measures proposed. But so far from that wages as I have shewn are falling rather than rising.

102.—Even when the whole direct cost of immigration is borne by the planters, the general revenue will still be charged for expenditure indirectly occasioned by it with an amount fully proportionate to any advantage gained from it by others than planters, these being the very small mercantile and shopkeeping community who are not owners of or directly connected with the sugar estates.

103.—I have, as I have said, no statistics to guide me, but I feel sure that your Lordship by reference to them will find that the £80,000 or thereabouts annually paid for police, hospitals, asylums, gaols and expenses of justice, at least £25,000 has been the direct result of Coolie immigration. This amount is annually increased and to it must also be added the expense of the immigration office, or £3,000 more. The reduction of the general expenditure by the £6,500 or thereabouts devoted to immigration would permit of the admission free of duty, of all the articles which are necessaries of life to the labourers (both Creoles and Immigrants) and thus would be, not only an enormous immediate boon to them, but in accordance with the ordinary operation of free trade would eventually benefit the planter himself.

104.—Were the production of the country to be lowered or even its progress checked by the proposed measure, considerations of policy might still be allowed their weight against abstract justice. But I believe this would be in no degree the case. For even if less immigrants were applied for which in view of the very large margin of profit on sugar cultivation, I consider very unlikely, their additional cost would secure better treatment for those already in the country, which with cheaper living would render already-acquired labour more willing and therefore more productive. In the end I believe that the gain would be not less that of the planters than of the labourers.

105.—In conclusion I feel bound to answer three plausible arguments usually put forward by the planters in proof of the well-being of Immigrants, viz. :—1st, the large number of them who re-indenture, 2nd, the present small death rate, and 3rd the large sums taken away by those who return to their own country.

106.—It is true that a large number of Coolies annually re-indenture themselves at the expiration of their service, but this may be partly ascribed to many other causes than their well-being in servitude.

107.—The \$50 (£10.8s. 4d) paid to them for re-indenturing often increased \$5 or \$10 by individual proprietors, is alone a very powerful temptation. The present advantage of a year's income paid down may well make blind the ignorant Coolie to the possibilities of the future. A similar advantage would be apt to distort the judgement and overcome the prudence of persons in a far higher rank of life, and this tangible temptation is to my knowledge sometimes increased by false allurements held out by "drivers" of their own race, who have been promised premiums for the procurement of "hands".

108.—But notwithstanding these temptations it would be found on enquiry that but very few of the stronger and more provident, who have saved any considerable sum of money, can be induced to re-indenture except on estates where the treatment is generally known to be good.*

109.—Planters as a rule do not exercise any discrimination in the choice of those to whom they give bounty.

* To give another almost unneeded proof of the actual profit attending considerate treatment of the labourers, I may mention that an estate, called **Vreed-en-Hoop**, obtains all its required supplies of labour among old hands who have been attracted from other estates; and these apply in such large numbers as to enable the selection of the best after probation. They are of course far more valuable on account of their being acclimatized, and being practised in the various operations of agriculture and manufacture, than new importations for whom the same price has to be paid.—G.W. Des V.

Enquiries are but seldom made about character or precedent, and as though a large number of re-indentures redounded to the credit of the management with proprietors at home, hands are often accepted respecting whom the slightest enquiry would have discovered that they had spent the greater part of their previous service in idleness, desertion and imprisonment, consequently complaints are frequent of desertion following immediately after receipt of bounty.

110.—But there is another, and, perhaps, the strongest reason of all for the amount of re-indentures, viz., that for those who have no capital freedom is of little value as against indentures made more attractive by the bounty and (as I have above described) privacy of living. Land is only to be obtained at a high price (the Government rate practically precludes sales) and the Indian coolie is not fond enough of agriculture to make any immediate sacrifice, such as uncleared land requires, to engage in it on his own account. Neither stock-raising (his favourite occupation) or shopkeeping can be commenced on nothing, so free coolies without capital are almost necessarily obliged to work upon the sugar Estates. It is thus that the bounty comes in as so peculiarly strong a temptation to all such, the strong industrious and practical labourer feeling that he will avoid the severe pressure of servitude, and the weak and idle looking to desertion, or at the worst imprisonment* to which he has probably been well accustomed before.

111.—2nd. The death rate has certainly been largely reduced by the sanitary measures forced upon the Estates by the Inspector of Hospitals, and if as I am informed it was last year little over 2 per cent. is hardly above the ordinary European average. But the returns

* It is far from uncommon for immigrants (especially those who in their own country have been accustomed merely to indoor work) to break the law with the especial view of going to gaol. Many have told me that they were unable to earn sufficient food on the Estates, and preferred the regulations of the gaol, though accompanied by shot-drill and confinement.

give I believe a far from correct idea of the actual rate, and for this reason that no account is taken of deserters.

112.—Many have deserted from their Estates, chiefly from inability*, but some of course from want of will to earn proper sustenance to earn a precarious livelihood by begging and stealing, die whilst still deserters. These deaths are probably for reasons stated below, many of them not known, and even when known do not enter into Estates' returns from the impossibility of identification.

113.—It is well known that but a very small number of immigrants have left the country other than those exported by Government.

114.—Some, chiefly Chinese, have gone to Surinam and Trinidad, but these are known from the frequent communications between the two countries and from the strict watch kept upon outgoing vessels to be very few, and their loss has probably been more than compensated by immigration from the French and other islands. But even deducting these and the 7,500 or thereabouts who have returned to their own country from the total number imported, there still remains an enormous loss to be accounted for. If I recollect rightly about 79,000 Indians

* Several most intelligent Chinese, one of them having emigrated free being in a position which gave him no inducement to speak untruth on the subject, has told me that three-fourths of the Chinese labourers, imported from Canton, were artisans and other workmen who had never been accustomed to outdoor labour, and had been informed in China that they would be allowed to follow their trades in British Guiana. These are the people who find it impossible to earn sufficient sustenance from labour in the sun and become deserters and thieves.

This remark holds good in a less degree of labourers imported from the other Chinese ports, and even in some degree of the Indians. I am satisfied from a general concurrence of testimony that a large amount of imposition has at one time or another been practised upon them, and that their condition in British Guiana has been a grievous disappointment to all the Chinese and very many of the others.—
G. W. Des V.

and Chinese have been imported to which moreover are to be added the births which in the absence of statistics, I put down at 15,000 during the twelve years of immigration and yet there are not now in the country 45,000 at the highest. The death returns cannot account for this fearful depopulation and if not it becomes certain that from some cause or other they are not accurate.

115.—These figures alone, if there were no other proof, would serve to show that the lots of immigrants in British Guiana has not been an easy one.

116.—3rd. The 6,000 who have returned to India have undoubtedly taken with them a large sum of money, and there is also a very considerable sum remaining in the country belonging to Indian Coolies* being invested in stock, gold and silver ornaments and other kinds of property. But one who knows the habits and saving disposition of the Coolies and at the same time considers the amount which should have been earned by them during the 20 years of immigration is astonished, not at the large amount saved, but at its comparative littleness.

117.—A very low estimate of the amount actually earned by the 65,000 Indian Coolies imported during twenty years and their children would be £3,000,000, considering that the value of the Sugar, Rum and Molasses made mainly by them is little under £2,000,000 per annum, and that they are earning at the present moment at least £300,000† per annum, that 39,000 had been already imported in 1861, and that wages have greatly fallen since their first introduction.

* For reasons which, if Your Lordship should desire, I will explain in a future letter, only a small fraction of Chinese leave any property whatever, and the few exceptions are chiefly gaming-house keepers, "duous" and perhaps a dozen small shopkeepers.—G. W. Des V.

† Supposing the amount of Indian Coolies in the country to be now 38,000, and allowing 8,000 for ineffective, such as prisoners, sick, etc., who are supported by others, this would only afford 6½d per head for food and clothing. Whereas the Government, buying at wholesale prices, cannot feed its prisoners at less than 8d per day.—G. W. Des V.

118.—The Emmigration Commissioners' report states the amount taken away by returned coolies up to 1867 at about £104,000 allowing for omissions in that, for money taken away in the last two years, and for the value of property in the houses of Coolies, still in the country, I am sure that £300,000 would be a very high estimate for the whole amount of property realized, because it is to be remembered that the richer Coolies return to India, when they have the opportunity, and I know that a majority of those left behind possess nothing at all.

119.—But from this £300,000 must be deducted at least £50,000 for profit made on savings, much of them being invested in cattle and other profitable securities so that the actual saving would be only £250,000 or 1d. per 1s. of the whole amount earned.

120.—No one who knows the extremely meagre diet of the Coolies and the penurious habits of the great majority of them, could consider such a saving as any argument for their general prosperity.

121.—I believe that a careful enquiry into this subject would show that property has almost entirely been realized by the exceptionally strong and that the many die prematurely and penniless.

122.—Your Lordship, if you should have been kindly induced to read this lengthy communication (which I would most gladly have abridged if I had found it possible to do so with justice to the subject) will I fear think I have produced a picture overcoloured as a whole, and incorrect in delineation and detail.

123.—I can only say that I have anxiously endeavoured not to do so, and I firmly believe that if the whole truth could be unveiled, my case would be found rather under than overstated.

124.—I am quite prepared to bear the great responsibility of all I have said, and if, as I fear will one day be

necessary, a Commission of Enquiry should be appointed, I shall be ready and willing to produce strong evidence in proof of my facts and in support of my opinions.

125.—There is a gentleman said to be on his way to England who formerly governed British Guiana; I mean Sir Philip Wodehouse. I only know him from his reputation and his legislation. From these however, especially from the Ordinance passed by him which took away all summary jurisdiction from the ordinary justices of the peace, I feel sure that he had already begun to see the germs of evil which have been greatly aggravated since his time.

126.—Though for this reason he would of course not be able to support my statements to their full extent, I am confident that if Your Lordship should see fit to lay this letter before him he would allow the possibility and even perhaps the probability of their truth.

127.—Should Sir Francis Hincks, the late Governor, be of a contrary opinion, and I presume from his administration and legislation which obtained for him so great a popularity among planters, that he would be, I confidently refer to a great number of the clergy of all denominations in support of my statements. The Bishop, with whom I have always been on very intimate terms and who, though he has not had my opportunities of being behind the scenes and having been formerly a plantation proprietor himself is inclined to look upon planters' failings with a somewhat lenient eye, I know agrees with me to a great extent, and would, at all events, give me credit for sincerity.

128.—The present Governor has been so short a time in the colony that it is impossible he can have yet seen all the evils pointed out, or any to their full extent, and his position must always screen from him many of them. But I know that he has already discovered some of them, and was meditating their alleviation or removal.

129.—From few others could the whole truth within their knowledge be obtained unless they were put upon oath. For practically there are no educated men in the country who are not directly or indirectly either dependent for their livelihood on, or under the control and influence of, the planters.

130.—The Portuguese merchants and shopkeepers, and the Creole peasant proprietors who form the only independent class, are almost wholly illiterate, the first entirely so.

131.—The exclusive* power of the planters in the Legislature, added to their other influence, makes the whole body of public officers, and even the Clergy in colonial pay in awe of them, especially since their success against the late Chief Justice.

132.—But two public officers whom I have already mentioned, one well known, the other personally unknown to me, I believe to be sufficiently high-minded to speak out what they know, and their knowledge of the subjects on which I have treated is inferior to none their respective duties having given them peculiar means of acquiring it. I mean Mr. Crosby, the Immigration Agent General, and Dr. Shier, the Inspector of Estates' Hospitals.

133.—The reforms which I have suggested, I believe to be absolutely necessary, not only for the sake of justice, and of the comfort and happiness of the labouring classes, but for the interests of the whole colony, and especially to secure the public peace which has been so seriously threatened as to alarm† the planters themselves.

*—I mean representative powers, the Governor being if he desires, almost absolute, through the interest which he can exercise over Immigration.—G. W. Des V.

†—This is shewn by the meeting in London, mentioned above, and strongly confirmed by a gentleman, Mr. Clementson, previously mentioned, as one of the most successful and humane, and, I believe, one of the most intelligent planters in the colony. In a visit to me the other day he informed me that he was seriously contemplating the sale of his estate (which owing to the want of capital would probably not realize more than five years' profits) owing to his belief in approaching troubles among the Coolies.
—G. W. Des V.

They could not be achieved of course without strenuous opposition and some difficulty, nor at first without expense. But the expense would be trifling compared with the ultimate gain, and the difficulty and opposition would be readily overcome by a Government which is or might be so absolute as that of British Guiana.

134.—Should these reforms, or others better adapted to secure the same ends, proceeding from your Lordship's riper judgement and more extended experience, be accomplished through your intervention, not only will an enormous boon be at once conferred upon 140,000 out of the 150,000 people in the colony, but the ultimate gain to the whole community would be such as to cause you to look back upon them in after days as not the least among the successes of your colonial administration.

I have, etc.,

(Signed) G. Des Voeux,

Administrator of the Government of St. Lucia.

The Right Honorable,
The Earl Granville, K. G.

APPENDIX II.

JAMES CROSBY, IMMIGRATION AGENT GENERAL

During the preparation of this volume the following verse appeared in the "*Daily Chronicle*" of 24th March 1934. The composer was Mr. Peter Ruhomon, a descendent of one of the Immigrants over whose welfare Mr. Crosby so ably presided. Mr. Ruhomon added the following note:—

"James Crosby was a schoolfellow of that distinguished Victorian statesman—Lord Beaconsfield. He was educated at Cambridge University, and through the force of adventitious circumstances, came to the Colony where he was appointed in 1858 to the important office of Immigration Agent General.

"His warm espousal of the immigrants' cause and his vigorous advocacy of their rights and privileges under the Immigration Ordinance won for him the confidence, esteem and veneration of the whole immigrant population, such as is seldom accorded to an officer of Government.

"The term "Krazbi," by which he was popularly known by the immigrants has since passed into currency as a synonym for all subsequent Immigration Agents."

"He died in 1880."

"In the words of an obituary notice which appeared in the *Colonist*, he was "a gentleman such as England sends but few enough to the Colonies."

“KRAZBI”

“Who comprehends his trust,
and to the same,
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim.

Wordsworth's Happy Warrior.

With heart keen-sensed to cries of human pain,
And mind right-poised to claims of human worth
He faced his task, and strove to bring relief
To those whom Fate constrained to toils of earth.

He brooked no parley with the overlords;
His was a task of holiness to do;
And to the task he bent an iron will,
With high resolve and with a courage new.

The meek, untutored sons of Hindustan,
In him a Ma-Bap* and Protector found;
Who wrought with skill their sorrows to assuage
And ease the strain from stringent laws that bound.

And from his lips they heard and understood;
And in his brave and kindly eyes they read
The message of a clearer, surer, hope,
In thoughts full-well expressed; in thoughts unsaid.

Ages may roll and deeds of lesser men
Recede to region of forgotten things;
The name of this good man shall still be blessed
And held aloft on Time's sustaining wings.

*—Mother-Father.

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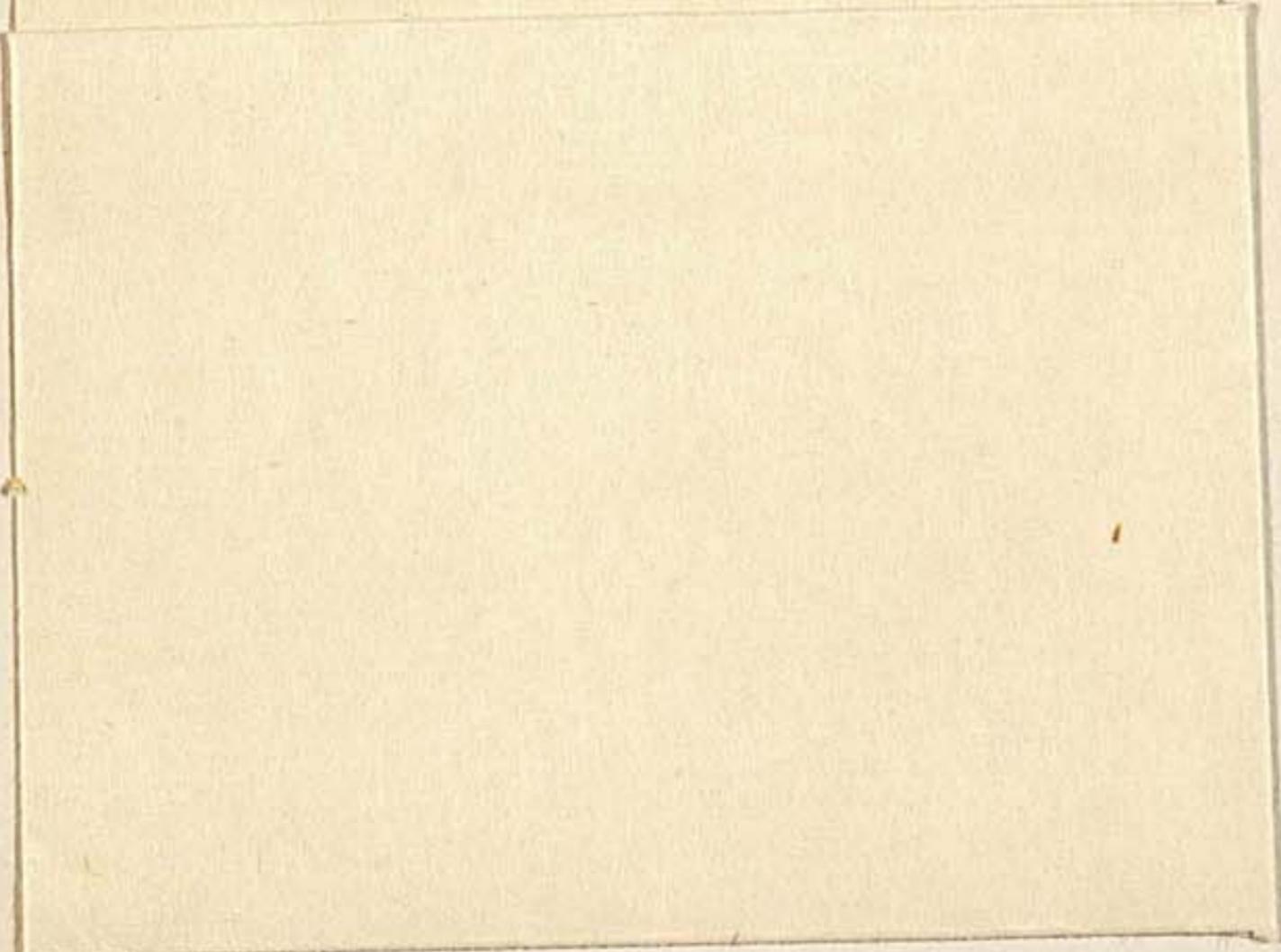
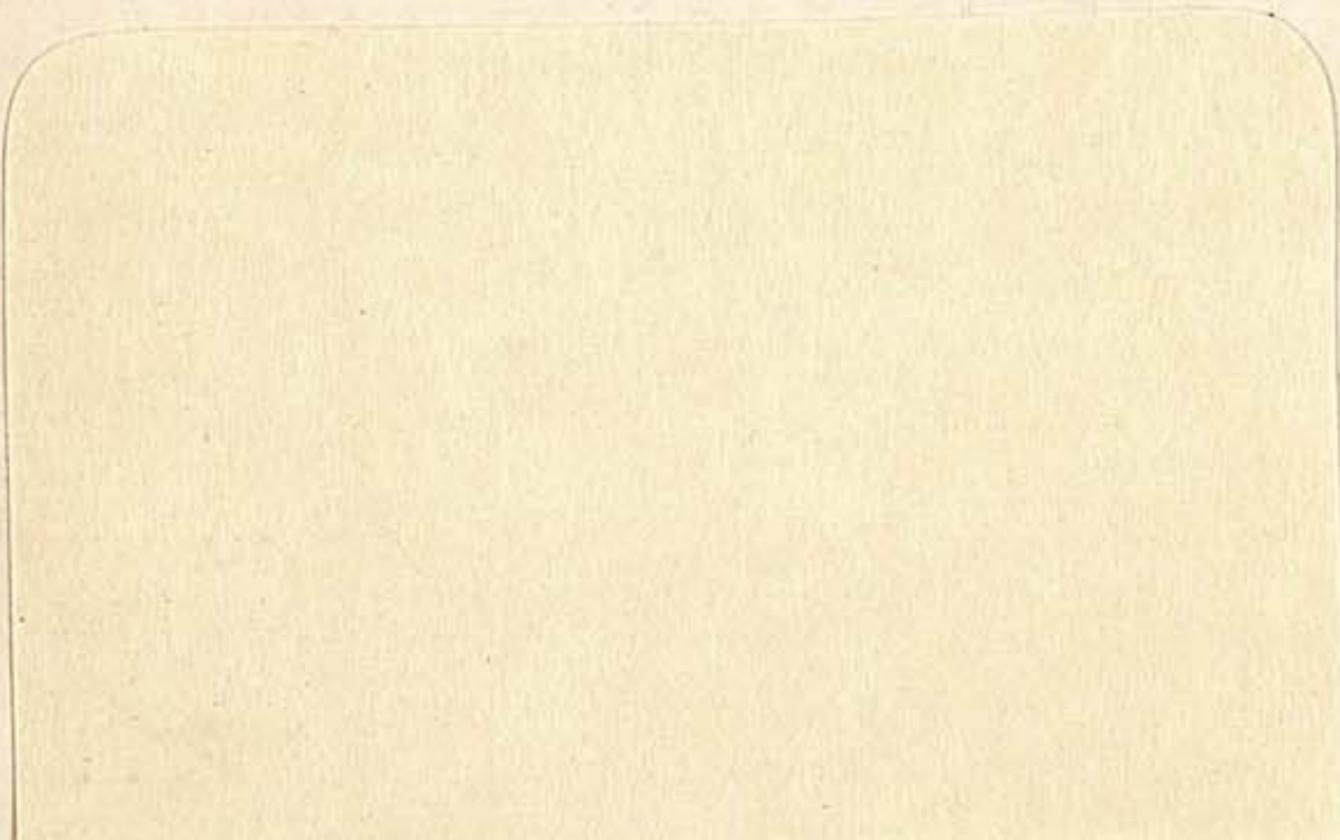
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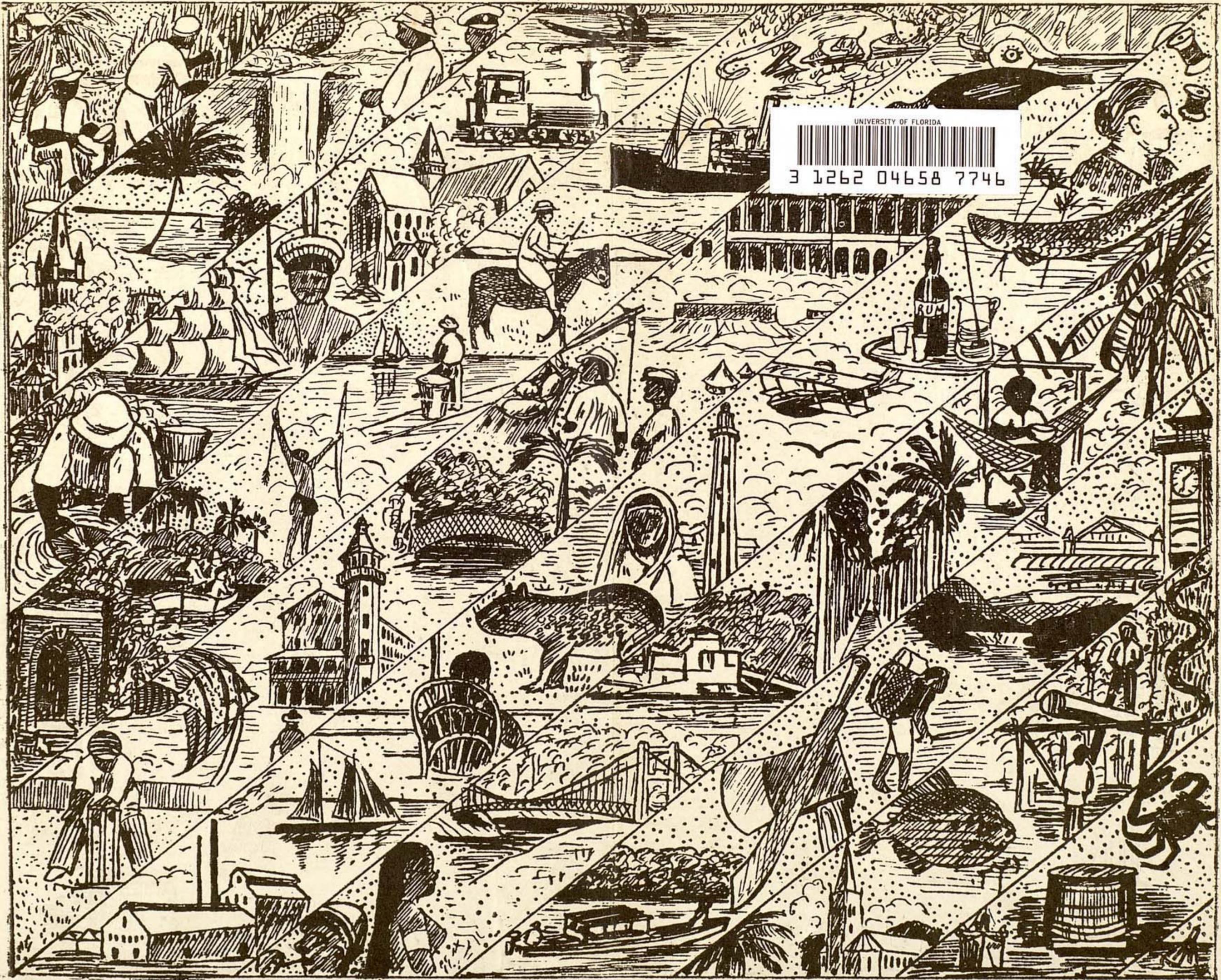
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