

CANOEING ON THE CUYUMEL.

BY E. W. PERRY.



"FOR A BRIEF INSTANT HE PAUSED BESIDE A BOWDLER." (p. 237.)

"NO, sir; you can never get up the Cuyumel to the Spanish country. No white man ever did it." So said the whole camp of traders and rubber gatherers at Ualpa-tanti.

"Why not?"

"Because the river is full of rapids and cataracts; the woods are swarming with deadly snakes; there are hundreds of tigers, and warces that are worse than tigers, and there are lots of mountain lions, too. No, there's no use talking about going up the Cuyumel."

It took nearly a week to get a crew for my canoe. There were in it three unwilling men and one still more reluctant woman, wife of one of the crew. I had to buy the accounts of each of the men before they could or would leave the traders to whom they were indebted. Practically the traders own the men who spend months in the depths of the forest, gathering rubber, and skins and sarsaparilla, to exchange for a little powder and shot, a few yards of bright prints, and a goodly

quantity of rum and water, colored red and called wine, in order to dodge customs duties.

One morning we left the dozen or more bamboo-walled, leaf-thatched huts of Ualpa-tanti, crowded with Waikas from the lower Patuca, Sumos from the banks of the Uampu, and renegades from Nicaragua and other places, who found in these forests safe refuge from pursuing justice.

Two days later Dámaso, standing on the broad, shovel-shaped bow of the pipanti in which we were gliding quietly up the river, said:

"El Cuyumel, señor."

The canoe turned toward the clear current that forced itself a little way toward the middle of the cream-colored flood of the Patuca, the Mississippi of Honduras. A minute later we landed on a clean sandbar beside the smaller river, which gets its name from the finely-flavored, hard-fleshed fish which love to lie in its swiftest rapids.

Ebat gathered a few sticks of dry driftwood and made a fire. Dámaso

skinned an iguana, and cut it into bits. Eloy brought ripe bananas from the canoe, and peeled them, and Juliana tenderly carried ashore the pudgy puppy, not yet old enough to look without flinching on a world of sunshine and shadow. She made for him a snug bed in the old wool hat which she took from her head. Then she washed her hands and face in the river, taught to do so by years of dwelling with white people, and was ready to do her part toward getting breakfast. It was high time, for, after the insane custom of these folk, we had started at dawn, before eating a mouthful, and it was now near noon.

A kettle of water was soon boiling, into it Juliana put a bit of salt and a few of the ripe bananas Eloy had peeled. A little later she stirred them briskly with a stick cut from a bush and stripped of its bark. Filling a tin cup with the hot stew, sauce, gruel—call it what you will; they call it "Wabool"—Juliana offered it to me. After supping this I could wait with much show of patience until breakfast was ready.

By the time I had swallowed the wabool the iguana was cooking in one pot, a hatful of iguana eggs were boiling in another, plátanos were sizzling cheerfully in monkey fat in the skillet, and Dámaso was squatted beside the fire watching the roasting of the hind-quarters of a monkey.

Meanwhile the two Sumo lads, splashing about in the river, discovered a dozen baby alligators a little way up stream. They were in a shallow place cut off from the river by a small log half buried in the ooze. The boys quickly captured every one of the unlucky little reptiles. Some they tied up in the vines, scarcely thicker than knitting-needles, that reach from the branches, forty feet above, to the water. They left the unhappy little beasts suspended, squirming and whining with pitiful squeaks like those of a very young puppy in much tribulation,

"Why do you hang the poor things in that way?" I demanded.

"I have much fear that the mother will not find them at home when she comes, if we do not tie them; they might run away," and the rascal grinned slyly, and offered to Juliana three or four of the captives as especially tender tidbits for her breakfast. She waved them aside with an emphatic remark about

scalding both boys if they bothered around her. So the scamps contented themselves with breaking the necks of their victims and chucking them into the river, "For breakfast for the papa lagarto." I made them kill those hanging in the vines, that they might be put out of misery, and also that future danger to cattle, babies, and other live stock might be lessened.

Without bread or vegetables breakfast might have not been entirely satisfactory, if we had not been well supplied with plantains, or plátanos. This species of banana is the only variety I know of that is fit to cook, and is always a most welcome substitute for bread and vegetables. The sub-variety named butuco, from which the river Patuca probably gets its name, is seldom more than six or seven inches long, and has a cross section like a somewhat rounded triangle one and one-half to two inches across. Fried, it tastes like fried greening apples; when stewed it resembles stewed peaches, and in an uncooked, ripe condition its firm, yellow substance is a nutritious and most pleasant food. The natives roast, bake, boil and fry them, and they have been made up in as many different ways as are possible with the potato. No matter how served, they are far more palatable than the tuber, and what will interest practical political economists, and the farmer more particularly, the plátano will yield vastly more food per acre for a given amount of labor, time and money, than can be had from potatoes. When it comes to living under stress of circumstances, without benefit of meat or fire, most people would, doubtless, prefer ripe plátanos to raw potatoes.

On the whole, our breakfast was rather tempting. The stewed iguana was as white and tender as any spring chicken; the iguana eggs, each in size and shape much like a large olive, were mealy as to yolk, while the albuminous part was a clear fluid, or it would have been if the boiling had been long continued. The monkey meat was dark, tender and toothsome, as might be expected of flesh fattened on fruits alone. Above all, the coffee was excellent. Indeed, if there is any one thing at which Juliana is better than anything else, not excepting steering a canoe through troubled waters, it is at making coffee. But then, she is a superior woman,



Painted for *OUTING* by Hermann Simon.

"TILBA, SENOR! TILBA WASS!" (p. 239.)

skilled in all the ways of woodcraft in the wilds of Mosquitia.

How delightful the siesta after breakfast. The sand was warm and fitted comfortably to one's back. The breeze blew softly, cooling the noonday air deliciously, and the shade of the overhanging honey locust was beautiful in its delicate tracery against the sky flecked with snowy clouds.

"Al camino, señor."

"Oh, yes; the road. Is it time to start? Can it be that two hours have gone while I blinked once or twice at those clouds?"

For half a mile or more the river was wide and deep, gliding placidly beneath beautiful overhanging arches of bamboo, or under gigantic branches of the ceiba—the silk-cotton tree, *bombax ceiba*. Here and there stood a rubber tree, killed by the deep gashes of reckless rubber-gatherers. Occasionally there was a locust from which dangled pods a foot long or more, filled with plump seeds bedded in snow-white, cotton-like down as sweet as honey. Where the sunlight fell on the banks it warmed into riotous blossoming fuchsias and lovely orchids, and curious plants of names unknown were reflected in the unruffled current.

From limbs that reached far out over the stream hung vines that, as soon as they touched the water, sent out a multitude of threadlike roots. In time, as these vines grow they will become thick and hard and rough, and will draw themselves up into short, wavy folds, and curious twists and strange knots. Sometimes they extend many a rod through the forest, held up, by other vines, to form suspension bridges much used by monkeys, coons and other animals that climb.

In many places the banks were walled by grass so dense and strong that a man, could not force his way through without cutting a path. In such places the iguana loves to stretch his green length on the grass tops, basking in the sunlight, or nibbling the tenderest of the young leaves, or dozing away the midday hours. If he becomes alarmed, he skims over the bending tops of the tall grasses and is gone. If the day is unusually warm he may lie at ease along some branch, from which, if frightened, he will drop to the water, perhaps twenty feet below, with pro-

digious splashing, and flash across its surface. He doesn't swim. He simply skims along the top. So marvelously quick are his movements that he has no time to sink deep enough to make swimming possible.

Iguanas are stupid animals, or whimsical; or it may be that curiosity keeps them from moving at times, when danger threatens. For they will often lie as still as death while watching the coming of a canoe, and make no move when the Indian points out to his dull-eyed white *patrone* the exact location of the reptile. They have lain in this way while I have fired two and even three shots at them, and at other times have gone like a flash at the first motion toward the gun.

Rounding a sharp bend, we faced a wall of black lava. It once formed a dyke that made a lake of all the valley for miles above. Now there is a tortuous cleft, scarce ten feet wide in places, through which the river slips, turned up on edge. So short and sharp are the bends, that hard labor and much skill are necessary to work a forty-foot pipanti through to the open reach above.

The walls of this gorge, jeweled with millions of angular bits of snow-white, shining quartz, are of thin sheets, crumpled as one might crush a quire of tissue paper out of shape. Many of these layers of tar-colored lava are no more than a sixteenth of an inch thick, and, all are polished smooth by the countless floods that have come tearing down from the mountains near, to hurl themselves with resistless force through this slit in the rocky barrier.

The pass is only a few rods long. Above it the river is broad and still for half a mile. At the head of this quiet reach is a rapid where one of the Sumo lads caught up his spear and stepped overboard. Wading against the rushing stream he stopped now and then to balance on one foot, away from side to side, peer intently into the swift waters, glance sidewise at us to see whether or not we were filled with admiration of his grace and beauty, give a jab at the place where the fish was—and look silly.

Dámaso stood this foolishness as long as his patience held out, then caught up his own spear and plunged through the racing flood. For a brief instant he paused beside a bowlder. There was at

quick thrust, and the shaft of the spear darted spasmodically to and fro down the current. There was no flourish about the act, nor did Juliana make any fuss about guiding the pipanti, by a slight turn of the paddle, so that we intercepted the floating shaft. Drawing it gently to her, she lifted the cuyumel into the canoe. It was full twenty inches long, and seven inches from back fin to white belly.

The spear was a bit of steel five inches long and half an inch wide, with barbs along the edges. The girl killed the fish by a blow, then forced the barbed steel on and out, turned it and pushed it back through the wound. This freed the cord of spun pita fiber, which passed through a hole in the spearhead and was fastened to the shaft. She wound the cord tight around the lower end of the slender pole, pressed the bit of steel into the socket fitted for it, and the spear was ready for the capture of another fish.

When sunset drew near the pipanti was beached on a sandbar. The two boys gathered firewood. Dámaso stuck deep into the sand two of the tough poles used for pushing the canoe upstream, and used the third as a ridgepole for supporting the tent-fly. Under this my folding cot was set up, the rubber bag that kept my clothing dry during the day was opened, and a pair of thick, heavy blankets, woven on primitive looms by Indians of Honduras, were spread on the cot. Towels, dry woolen underclothing and an old suit of clothes were laid on the blankets, and I plunged into the river that is always at the right temperature for bathing, as the rivers are usually in the tropics.

After a thorough rubbing down, the woollens felt delightfully warm and soft. An ample supper of fish, monkey, iguana, plátanos and eggs followed, and a generous bowl of coffee finished the feast. By that time the stars were gleaming in the narrow strip of sky visible between the tree-tops, and were reflected from the dark river.

The Sumos squatted near the fire, murmured gossip of the traders' camp; and told yarns of adventure in the forest hereabout. Once in a while some bird of the night lifted up his voice in a wild squall. Then every monkey within hearing jabbered violently, and a score of other beasts and birds stirred into

noisy life. Floating on the night air came now and then the hoarse bellowing of the alligators, and once there was a curious rumbling, snarling growl. The group at the fire looked nervously around, huddled closer together, and stirred the fire into brighter blaze. Dámaso glanced toward the hut where I sat on the edge of my cot, and remarked, in Spanish:

"The black tiger cries. He smells the smoke and the meats. I have no fear, Besides, the patrone has a good rifle, and a pistol that fires many times. I have no fear."

"The tiger wants my dog," said Juliana. "He smells him. He shall not have him. Give your machete to me, Dámaso."

"Many tigers are in this forest," said Ebat, peering into the flickering shadows. "My father was a brave hunter. Many he killed beside this river—many."

Some conversation in the Sumo tongue followed, then Dámaso asked permission to spread their blankets near my cot under the tent-fly.

"The rain may come to-night," said he.

Early in the morning the voice of the howling monkey rose in the forest, loud enough for a brute fifty times his size. At dawn we started, and a little later stopped to get a bunch of plantains and a few pine-apples growing on the river bank. As we made our way against the stream an occasional band of capuchin or white-faced monkeys scrambled about in the tree-tops. More frequently their larger black cousins gathered in some tree near the river, and berated us soundly for intruding in wilds for centuries given up to untamed life. It was easy to shoot two or three of them each day, and so keep the dinner-pot well supplied with meat. A well grown and fully fattened one weighs from twelve to fifteen pounds, and is as tender and sweet as a year, old baby. How tender and sweet that is anybody can learn easily by experiment, for there are plenty of babies.

One morning we turned into a little creek, where a fish smaller than the cuyumel was supposed to abound. A fallen tree soon stopped the canoe, so Dámaso and his two aids waded upstream to hunt for dinner. Juliana held the pipanti against the grassy

bank, and waited with that fullness of patience which comes of firm belief in the truth of the Spanish saying, "Mañana es otra día," and a deep conviction that as "to-morrow is another day," there can be no reason for hurrying.

Juliana petted her fat and clumsy puppy a few minutes, meditated for a while, then lazily plucked a flower growing on the bank beside her. Pulling off the fleshy petals she broke off the curled stigma and pressed it repeatedly against the rich brown skin of her plump arm. The white pollen left a distinct imprint. With the stamen of another of the flowers she printed a row of the white marks across her breast, from armpit to armpit, like this,



a line of perfect scrolls, and a hint of the origin of the scroll in decorative art. One day while waiting for breakfast I saw another illustration of the ways by which primitive artists may have received suggestions of designs often seen in the ornamentation of pottery and other works of simple handicraft. One of my Indians broke off a hard tendril from a vine and threw it on the sand, where it was trampled under foot. During the siesta that followed the meal he picked up the tendril, which left in the sand a deep imprint of a scroll. He amused himself by printing lines of such impressions in various combinations. Is it not more than likely that women, having moulded their vessels of clay, used such tendrils and sticks of pleasing shape to print in the plastic material a border of pretty lines like those they had seen accidentally made by such sticks pressed into the earth?

One afternoon the paddles dipped silently into the still river. The warm sun was high overhead, beyond the fleecy clouds floating before the never ceasing northeast trades. The forest was asleep. The breakfast had been unusually good, and I had eaten heartily, for one is always hungry for such late breakfasts in these forests—and all was peace. Juliana poked my foot with the paddle, with which she was steering, and whispered:

"Tilba, señor! Tilba wass!"

"Where?" I awoke at the word.

Her only reply was a glance in the

direction of the tapir, asleep in his bath. Only the upper part of his face and his ears showed above the water. I carefully rolled over on the floor of split bamboo, on which I had been sleeping, gently raised my rifle, and blazed away. The ball passed over the animal's head. The next bullet struck the water, as much too low as the first had been too high, and skipped over his face. He started for the bank in a hurry, and caught in his shoulders the third ball, and down he tumbled in a heap.

The men dug their paddles deep into the water, and slapped the surface with the dripping blades. They yelled like fiends and pulled for the shore, and whooped again. The bow of the canoe drove up on the sand, and the men pitched out and ran to the tapir. He gave one kick and was dead. The bullet had passed through his spine.

Borrowing my sharp knife, for those beggars never have a sharp blade of their own with them. Dámaso began skinning the loins of the game. The skin was like that of an old Berkshire boar, blue-black, and covered by scattered hairs or bristles. It was half an inch thick on the back, and so firm in texture that it would have made leather of great use in disciplinary schools.

As he rose from the river this tapir was as big as a yearling bullock. But he served me a scurvy trick by shrinking under the merciless tape-line until he was no bigger than a fully grown and well-fattened porker of Western culture. Is it possible that big game ever serves other people in that way? Nevertheless his flesh did not shrink in the pot, possibly because he was killed in the dark of the moon. In appearance and flavor the loin was much like lean pork, and yet somewhat like beef.

When I lay half asleep one afternoon, Dámaso picked up his conch and blew a most sonorous blast. His two dusky assistants clapped their paws to their mouths and yelled. Then I knew that we were nearing some dwelling where women were. In those woods it is not quite polite for strangers to enter a village or go to a house without first announcing their coming, by firing a gun, blowing a blast on a shell, or yelling like maniacs. The women might be busied about beating tano bark for palpuras, or blankets, or they might be

picking up stray crawling things among each other's raven tresses; anyway, they are likely to be in severe undress, consisting of a palpura, six or eight inches wide, wound about their hips. It is but fair that time should be given them to put at least a width of cotton sheeting on over the breechcloth. It will be evidence of greater tact if time be given for painting faces and bosoms and arms with stars and angles, circles and streaks of lovely red, and yellow and black, and to adorn arms and legs and ankles with strings of beads wound round and round until they form bands an inch or more wide.

When they have done all this the dames are in full dress, although some there be who are rich and full of vanity, and will display a loose blouse of cotton print. But this has not yet gained wide favor, perhaps because public opinion sets against such extravagance, perhaps because a blouse hides the pretty devices in ochre, painted on the brown and glossy skin. But, whether or not their full dress consists of more than a necklace and paint above the hips, the ladies are ready and willing to welcome the stranger, and to offer to him the best hammock in the place and urge on him the hospitable bowl of yucca, fermenting, refreshing and nutritious. Then the women of the village will, on one sufficient pretext or another, manage to pass through the hut, slowly enough to allow the visitor's glances to take in each and every charm. The more lingering the glances the better, and mortal offense will not be given by pointed compliments audibly expressed.

Our pipanti rounded a point, and before us stretched a half a mile of broad

and quiet river. Three huts stood on the edge of a bold bank at the farther end of the placid reach of water. It was the camp Lanuza, the "Hulero." His was the only family living within twenty miles of the spot. On a low, flat rock at the base of the bluff we found an easy landing, and at the top of the ascent were half a dozen dogs of familiar manners, barking vociferously. At the edge of the bluff stood a plump, middle-aged woman and a pretty girl who might have been anywhere between sixteen and twenty—an expert *may* be able to tell the age of an Indian girl of the tropics without looking at her teeth.

At a word from Dámaso the women grinned cheerfully, the girl clubbed the curs vigorously, and all came scrambling down the path together. The women grunted a salutation to Juliana and began helping her unload our trastos from the canoe, and lugged them up to the huts. Although they were old friends, very few words were spoken by any of the party. Of course we knew that we were welcome. Anybody would have been welcome if he brought news from the metropolis of Ualpa-tanti and the great stirring outside world of the lower Patuca, where at least three hundred people dwell.

In a few minutes after we reached the landing the mistress of the camp was grinding corn at the metatl, the girl was cutting up an armadillo captured that day by the boy, and Juliana was squatted by the fire, baking tortillas. The two Sumo lads were paddling about the river, in vain search for fish, and I was swimming in the clear mountain waters of the Rio Blanco, which there joins the Cuyumel.

JACK FROST.

HO! Old Jack Frost is a jolly sprite,
Tho' his touch be chill and his head be
white;
For he skims the vale and he climbs the hill
Just as in days of yore.
His cheery note in the woods you'll hear
When the dead leaves tell of a dying year,
And the dry twigs clash, with a whistle shrill,
His icy breath before.

The brown leaves whirl as he scurries by
In the dim starlight of the wintry sky,
As tho' mad with joy. But he hurries past
And laughs them all to scorn.

He binds the brook with his icy bands,
And he breathes hoar-frost on the gray uplands;
Longer grows each night than the last,
And colder grows each morn.

Hu! sings the wind through the bare tree-tops,
As he rushes by and never stops;
While on hill and valley and plain there lies
A blanket, soft and white,
Of snow, bright glistening in the sun,
That tells of a winter just begun;
And the snow-bird cries, as o'er-head he flies,
In gladness at the sight.

FREDERIC COURBIÈRE.