

The Man On Horseback.

I

One night Puanah, the Great Snake, entered the body of Landaeta, whose soul had gone visiting in the Land of Kuma, and led the Yaruros in this song:

" Pumah, Pumah ! (People, People). Kuma is waiting for you. Soon the White Man will kill all of you. He will kill all the crocodiles, the turtles, the jaguars, the ~~manxan~~ snakes, the mokeys, and the birds. He will take the all the world for himself. How foolish, for the world will then be dark and barren.

"Let the White Man kill. Let him destroy the very things which cost him so much pain to make. Let him waste his life in hate and blood. He will make himself even uglier than when he first appeared mounted on horseback, a diseased and mishapen thing. He will inherit a desert. But the Pumah, the children of Kuma, will return to the Land of Kuma to live with their mother.

"The birds sing beautifully but the White Man does not hear them. He does not listen, nightly, to the song of the monkeys, and does not dance to their music on moonlit nights. The skies are covered with color when Kuma sends her greetings to us, her children, but the White Man does not understand. At night all the dead walk across the sky but the White Man will not talk with them. He thinks that they are truly dead. The White Man lives hidden from the light of the day and is afraid of the night.

" Once the earth was a fair place. There was peace. Man killed only what Kuma permitted as food. Then the White Man appeared. He came mounted on a horse. He was pock-marked and rotting with disease. He put fear into all living things. He killed many Pumah, Kuma's children. Now there only a few Pumah left. Soon all the Pumah will die but they will go to the beautiful Land of Kuma. The dead Pumah are there with

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her , in her land, and they are waiting for the living. The White Man will live with his diseases, and fight with his own kind. The world will become dark except in Kuma's land where the Pumeh will dwell in peace."

II

Two hundred years ago the Yaruros or Pumeh as they call themselves made their debut in European literature. Catholic missionaries reported their existence in the great plains, the "llanos" , of Venezuela. They didn't have much to say about them. The nomadic Yaruros were reputed to be parricides and clay eaters. Occassionally they came to the missions but they were so shy and gentle that they would flee at the slightest sign of displeasure on the part of the missionaries. A look was enough to send them away and they would never return. Their feelings were as fragile as "fine Venetian glass."

Having other tribes to tame the missionaries seemed to have forgotten the Yaruros with this result: whereas all of the other tribes of the Llanos, the Achaguas, the Otomacos, the Aruacos, Tamanachi, have become extinct , the Yaruros have managed to survive to this day. Their time to disappear has come though, as they themselves were aware at the time of my visit.

Judged by our standards of life the Yaruros at the lowest possible ^{everything} subsistence level. They lack in the way of material comforts and means to produce which we find so indispensable. The possessions of a whole family may not consist of more than several baskets and jars, bows, arrows, digging stick, sacred objects and trinkets, and possibly a piece of iron fashioned into a knife.

They inhabit one of the hottest areas of South America. The Llanos

lie but a few degrees north of the equator and practically at sea level. For the most part they are treeless and so flat that a slight rise in the ground such as may be made by shifting sand disturbs the inhabitants. They call them mountains.

Were it not for the heavy seasonal rains the region would be a vast desert. As it is some months of the year it becomes a vast swamp, but for the most part it is a sandy desert across which, though, flow several rivers fed by the high Andes. ~~The Yaruros live~~ ~~There~~ Temperatures are always very high. Humboldt recorded 130 degrees at the height of a man on ~~xxx~~ horseback. High winds sweeping in from the east make life bearable and lower the temperatures considerably at night.

The Yaruros live exposed to the elements with no more shelter in camp than what some leafy branches thrust into the sand can give them. Their life is one ~~xxxxxxx~~ continuous fight against the sand which is bombarding their bodies, and a struggle to gather their daily dinner. Meat spoils so quickly that none can be kept for the morrow. Occasionally they are able to preserve seeds and roots for several days by burying them in the sands. Their days are ~~xxx~~ on the rivers, the Capanaparo and the Sinaruco, hunting crocodile and turtle while the women search the banks for turtle eggs and dig up edible roots.

Yarurox camps are never large. The family forms the hunting unit unless they gather together for religious ceremonies. When dawn breaks over the hills of nearby Guayana we can find the Yaruro camps on the sand bars of the rivers, recognizable by the leafy branches thrust into the sand and vultures flying over the remnants of the previous day's hunt. The long morning shadow point to the ~~xxxxxxx~~ piles of crocodile bones and turtle shells stripped clean of all flesh the previous evening by dogs and vultures. Sitting quietly under the branches are the Yaruros shivering in the

morning wind, but watching the sky for any sign sent by their mother goddess, Kuma. There is no chanting as in the villages of the Xingu, no whistling and calling in imitation of the morning birds, and scarcely any conversation. When blood red sky gives way to the white heat of the day the men pick up their bows, arrows, and paddles, and make their way to the canoes with dogs and boys at their heels. Sometimes the women, naked ~~as the men~~ but for a breechclout as the men, accompany them with their baskets and digging sticks, or they may instead make for inland. In the camp, if it is not to be moved that day, may remain the old women and the sick. For them there will be nothing to do except to wait for the hunters, suffering their hunger and the heat the best they can. If they have the strength they may occupy themselves weaving baskets or fashioning arrows.

About the mid-afternoon the hunters and the women straggle in. The men bring crocodile and turtles, the women baskets full of changuango an edible root which resembles a potato. -----

----- (Continued description of a Yaruro day) -----
