

vast flood of purple light fell softly over the sea, there came up from somewhere the exquisite melody of the *flautin*; and, as the sudden darkness fell, some golden throated donna took up the strain, and even the stars listened. Presently the ship stopped and a boat shot out from the denser shadow of a group of feathery palms; and in a few minutes we were surveying our lodging-place for the night. It was a deserted plank house, the former residence of a sugar-planter of more ambition than capital. Inside, the walls stopped two feet from the rafters, with jalousies that rather united than divided the rooms. By that magic, of which dignitaries are special necromancers, hammocks had been swung; the indispensable mosquito-net hung over couches dilapidated but downy, and a feast of fat things spread upon a table, whereof the legs were three and a-quarter, and the accompanying chairs unreliable exceedingly. A ramble along the shore in the mystic light of the low hung stars was experience enough for one evening. Within a few feet of the water stretched a long avenue or "walk" of tall cocoa-nuts leaning this way and that after the fashion of that erratic tree, and always murmuring far up in the darkness the secrets of the old tragical pirate days. At our feet the waves threw strange forms of sea-weed and tiny pink shells and scraps of coral, and went curling away again; and away behind the house the jungle reflected itself darkly in a still lagoon. True the sand-flies made merry at our individual expense; the "bottle" flies also and the yellow-backed "doctors," compared with which the familiar hornet is an unaggressive insect with limited ability to protect itself. The bottle-flies, exactly the shape of a soda-water bottle, attack the hands chiefly, and leave a tiny black spot, giving the victim the appearance of having been well peppered.

Owing to the peculiar interior architecture aforesaid, nobody slept well that night. Every snore, every infuriated slap, every anathema hurled into the midnight air, resounded from room to room with maddening effect, and in the morning the ablutions of the earliest riser splashed metaphorically in every ear. I arose betimes, and so did her Grace. Her Grace, be it understood, sustains the marital relation toward the Dignitary. You should have been introduced before, only, of course, I had to ask her permission. We descended the crazy steps and wandered around the premises together. The short dry grass was spangled with tiny white flowers that grew close to the ground and perished speedily in the sun. The tiny horses of Central America that were to carry the party, and the mule of sad countenance that was to convey our effects and Ganymede and such fluids as he had special charge of, stood about and whisked their tails with melancholy patience. After breakfast we mounted our diminutive steeds and rode away along a narrow road past the lagoons, through the sugar-cane fields to the estate of Regalia. Here and there the hut of a labourer peeped through the luxuriant cane growth, always well ventilated, if not very scientifically, and thatched with dried palm fronds in the most raggedly picturesque fashion. Strange purple flowers grew among the canes, and everywhere the small yellow blossom of the ipecac, much the colour and shape of a cowslip. Our first glimpse of the Sittee was an exquisite bit of scenery. Ridge beyond ridge the Coxcomb mountains rose into the purple distance, then the riotous dark masses of the tropical forest and the pale green of hundreds of acres of canes, twisting through it all the "silver ribbon" of the river, and in the foreground half-a-dozen of the huts aforesaid, a huge sugar-mill, and scores of brightly-clad coolies. These odd little black creatures, with their bright eyes, expressive features, and yellow bandanas, were imported from the East Indies by Jamaicans originally, and thence here. The Honduranian planters value their services highly and look anxiously for further relays. They work reasonably and respectfully, while the Creoles of the colony are indolent and impudent. We dined at Regalia, and the fact is worth chronicling, for the turtle of gastronomic fame is a staple in British Honduras, and we had the aldermanic delicacy in soup, in steak, in croquette. And how shall I dilate upon the attractions of the yam, which is a corpulent potato brought to the table pinned up in a napkin, with one end cut off to admit the entrance of a spoon? Okra also, a vegetable of a savour much like asparagus, the homely plantain roasted and fried, the soft-shelled crab, the bird of the land, which is the turkey—truly one may live royally in Central America! But the Briton who is planting cacao in a lonely spot thirty miles from Belize, and whose diet is limited to pork and "dough-boys," reminds me that ours was a dinner extraordinary. To horse again for Kendal, the next estate, just five miles further on. The road led into the forest, and presently we were riding in the dense shade of tall cohoon palms, mango, wild fig and bread-fruit trees. The cohoon palm is especially graceful, its great fronds shooting up twenty or thirty feet into the air and curving outward in a lovely arch. The tree bears a great grape-like cluster of nuts, from which is extracted the valuable cohoon of commerce. Here and there we saw the glossy leafing of the noble mahogany, and the lighter bark and foliage of the logwood tree. Cacao grew wild, pineapples, and the vanilla vine. The pod of the cacao, from the seeds of which we obtain our morning chocolate, grows at intervals out of the trunk and branches of the tree. Lady Brassey, who describes it in her last book, must have a peculiar taste in ice-cream. I found nothing even remotely suggestive of that confection in the sticky pulp that surrounds the seeds. "Tie-ties," or jungle rope, hung thickly from the trees, and swung before us like a bamboo screen. A long avenue of arching palms suddenly opened before us; we spurred our willing ponies, and with a mad short gallop of a quarter of a mile, that set the red and yellow macaws chattering overhead, and caused great perturbation to two or three small brown monkeys who stood not on the order of their going, we dashed into Kendal. Two hundred acres of broad-leaved, bowing bananas spread out before us. They bear constantly, the flower, if one may call it such, resembling a great red tulip about to open. Cacao is often planted with the bananas, for the shade of the latter; the banana profits, moreover, being particularly acceptable to the lonely planter during the four years which the more valuable product requires to mature.

For the second of our memorable dinners, our Jamaican host and the Dignitary concocted a curry of inestimable East Indian quality. It was a beef curry, and over the compounding of it much anxious discussion took place. For an instant the Dignitary's spoon poised in mid-air as he partook of the dish so dear to the colonial British palate, then over his features stole a look of unutterable anguish. Investigation proved that Ganymede, influenced by Rocquet and responsibility, had added to the mixture two cans of preserved peaches!

Then we all sat out in the luminous darkness under the verandah, and listened to the sounds that fill a tropical night. Suddenly, above the hoarse cries of the tree-cricket and the melancholy howlings of distant monkeys, there came a clear, low bird-whistle, "Who are you?" The query was as impudent and inquisitive as possible, and the effect was startling. Presently, from another tree across the river, came the answer, clearly and melodiously, a trifle higher, "Who are you?" All night long we heard the snobbish interrogation and reply. Next morning a scorpion, a tarantula, a Tommy Geff and an iguana enlivened proceedings, brought in by a couple of Caribs bent upon our edification and accustomed to the British tip. The Tommy Geff is a small light-green snake with a fatal bite. The iguana is a sort of lizard, varying in length from three to five feet: a hideous, grayish-green animal, with a short, square head, green eyes and webbed feet. It is harmless, however, and the flesh is much sought after as food. It is said to resemble chicken, but your informant deponeth not as to the fact, having lacked experimental courage. The Caribs brought it in the usual cruel manner, with the feet crossed upon the back, the claws of one foot caught in the bleeding sinews of the other. In this way they keep the unfortunate creatures lying for days upon the market-place, waiting for customers. The particular iguana of our entertainment, however, found a pitying champion in her Grace, who indignantly demanded its release. With difficulty they unfasted the claws, and, like a swift green flash, the creature made for the river and was gone.

Down upon the banks sat our Carib boatmen sunning themselves. A dory and a pitpan rocked in the shade, and in them we cautiously established ourselves. A dory is hollowed out of a single log, usually cedar; a pitpan is a craft from thirty to forty feet in length, and from two to three in width. Both are paddled, and are used exclusively for transporting freight and supplies in the Colony. The boatmen stand at either end, the passengers and load being stationed in the middle.

Off we went. In some places the river banks were high and rocky; in others, fifty feet of dense vegetation rose straight up in every shade and shape. Underneath alligators might be creeping, and snakes uncoiling in the slime, but overhead the sun shone and the tall tree-ferns waved, and brilliant birds with strange cries flashed among the green. The water was crystalline purity itself, sparkling and dashing over moss-covered stones, here in pale shallows, there in dark, mysterious pools, but always green and cool and enticing. Rapids were frequent where the river foamed and lashed itself, in its furious and often steep descent. There our boatmen sprang over and hauled the pitpan with their sturdy arms, the water dashing often over the sides to the serious detriment of her Grace's skirts and equanimity. Weeds and mosses of the daintiest green and gray and pink and brown swayed under the transparent water, or floated in lovely patches in the shallows. Here and there, from the upper branches of a tall dead tree, hung like long bags the ingenious nests of the yellow-tail, the clever little architects constantly darting in and out of them. On we went. The river widened and narrowed, twisted and turned. Great branches met over our heads, and the sunlight filtered softly down through the fluttering green roof. Two or three fruit-laden native dories passed us on their rapid way down stream, in each a Carib woman or two in wide straw hat and scanty attire lying lazily back, puffing a short pipe. To the chaffing of the private secretary, they responded shrilly and sharply, their black eyes twinkling and their mahogany countenances illuminated by an ecstatic grin. Occasionally we passed a "bank," or clearing, teeming with dark-skinned life. Nine miles of this brought us to a spot where the river rushed between two immense boulders at a width of about five feet—Hell Gate. Beyond, the water eddied and foamed about innumerable rocks; one could see the pebbly bottom everywhere, and the banks rose steep and jagged. Half-a-mile farther on we disembarked and lunched. Only a horror of giving my article too gastronomic a colouring restrains me from describing that picnic. Worse than the caterpillar is the centipede; worse than the mosquito the inexpressible bottle-fly; but never, I fancy, was marmaladed bread-and-butter discussed more enjoyably than there in the shade of the mangoes overhanging that high-spirited little Central American river.

By-and-by we stepped again into our rocking craft for the return journey. Little or no paddling was necessary, the chief responsibility being the steersman's, who stood in the stern with watchful eye and paddle alert, as the pitpan shot along in her mad course. Through Hell Gate with marvellous speed, some agitation and a great deal of water, from rapid to rapid in foaming succession, we sped along. The sun sank lower and lower till the last ray glorified the cedar tops; through the wonderful palms the golden afterglow floated mysteriously for a little space, and the broadening river gave back the shadows in magical silence. Then darkness fell, and as we swung around a bend and drew swiftly near the friendly light at the landing-place, there came musically from the shadows on the other side the not irrelevant inquiry, "Who are you?"

GARTH GRAFTON.

THE late Franz Abt, the song writer, was a surprising gourmand. Coming out of a restaurant one day, a friend said to him: "You seem to have dined well." "Yes, I had a fair dinner; it was a turkey." "And was there a good company round the board?" "Yes, two; indeed, the turkey and myself."