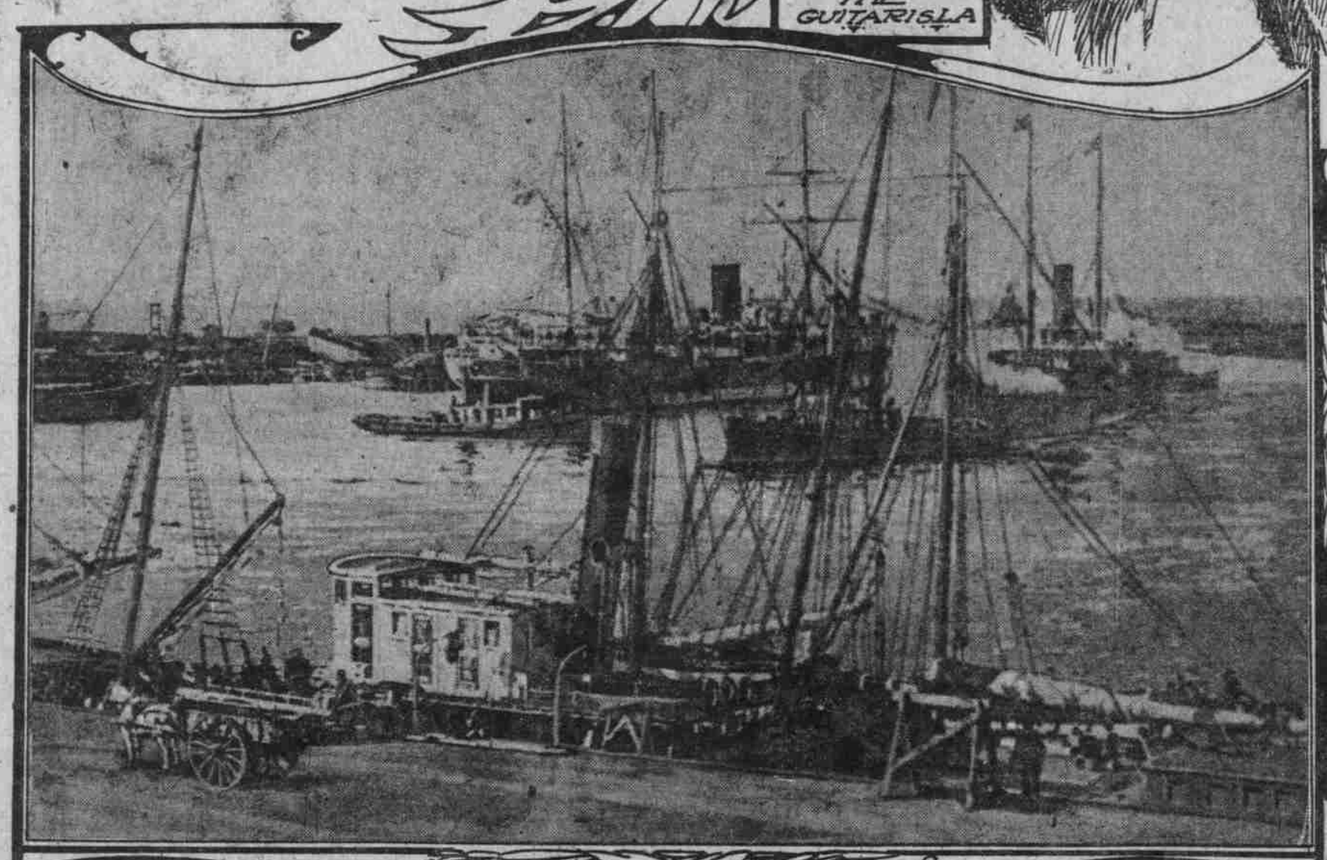
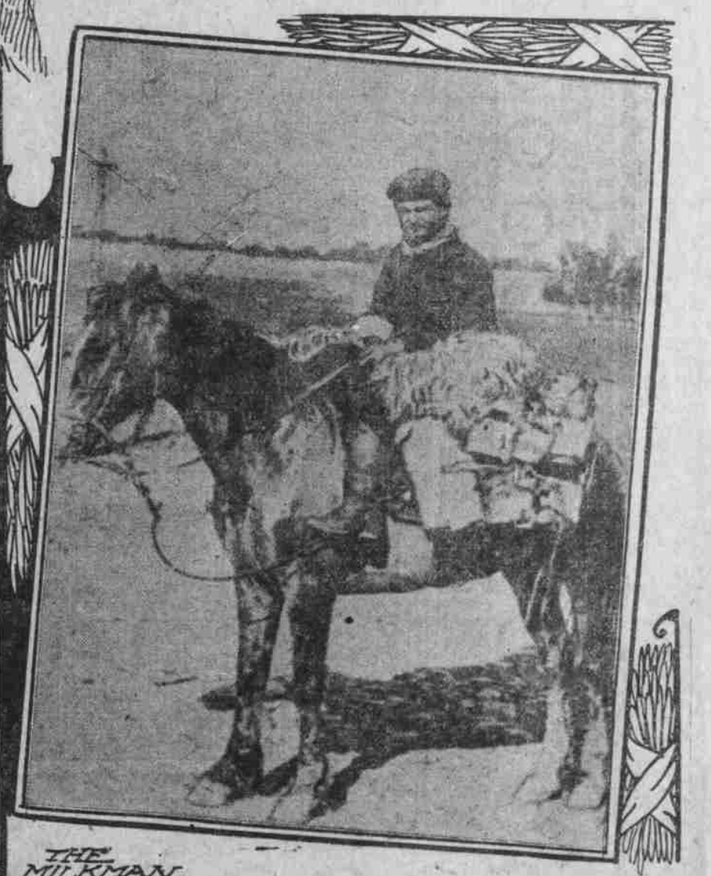
CALLAO, A CITY THAT LIVES IN THE STREETS

What the Officers and Men in Our Fleet Will See to Amuse Them in the Most Interesting Port in South America



ENTRANCE TO CALLAO DOCKS



IN the old days Callao was famous as a refuge for men who were "wanted" elsewhere, and there were times in the '80s when the accumulated rewards for the British fugitives alone within its sacred precincts would have footed up into the hundreds of thousands of pounds. The most lucrative part of the business of the speedy old clippers of these times was the smuggling of ex-bank presidents, get-rich-quicksters, and the like, away from New York and London and the transporting of them—and their loot—to the snug Peruvian refuge beyond the line. This traffic was carried on so extensively, and, moreover, so openly, that the part of the cargo that did not appear upon the bills of lading, and the passengers whose names did not appear upon the purser's list came to be looked upon as regular routine business. Evidences of this attitude are found in some of the sailors' chanteys still sung, and when these are heard some old tar may knock the ashes out of his pipe and tell you how they used to walk round the capstan and bring up the anchor out of the Thames mud to—

> Extradition does not go
> To the port of Cal-la-o;

Or whiled away dog watches becalmed in the windless Sargasso with—

> Oh, he won't come back any more,
> He's salted down shekels galore,
> And he's off for his ease
> O'er the tropical seas,
> Where the breakers of Cal-la-o roar.

It was the Callao of these days that Kipling had in mind when he wrote his lament of "The Broken Men":

> We took no tearful leaving,
> We bade no long good-byes;
> Men talked of crime and thieving,
> Men wrote of fraud and lies.
> To save our injured feelings
> 'Twas time and time to go—
> Behind was dock and Dartmoor,
> Ahead lay Callao.

With the march of progress extradition came to Peru in time, and Callao ceased to shelter picturesque fugitives from justice and sank into comparative oblivion. All the "Broken Men" of the good old days have either gone up or down, and no fresh, new faces have come to take their places. Those who failed in their new environment one rarely meets, while those who succeeded have become strangely sensitive in regard to their pasts and refuse to acknowledge any connection with them. I recall with amusement the admonition I received in the Progresso Club of Lima one evening as I was about to be introduced to one of the most prominent importers of Callao. "Be careful not to try and joke with M— about the arrest of that Birmingham defaulter when your steamer comes in, in case the subject is brought up," a friend warned me; "it will make him think you know all about how he made his 'start' and be sure to turn him against you. Try and stick to local topics."

Legion of Street Vendors.

But if Callao has ceased to be of importance as a haven for the big defaulters of Europe and North America, to it still belongs the distinction of presenting the most interesting phases of street life, and the most varied types of street characters, of any city in the Western hemisphere. The way the clouds of the Pacific have of banking in against the Peruvian Andes without precipitating any of their moisture gives a climate which, for coolness accompanied by dryness, is quite without parallel in similar latitudes. The conditions for out-of-door life are as near the ideal as in any place in the world, and as a result of this, probably nine-tenths of Callao's buying and selling is done on the streets. The city has no large shops whatever, and even the small arcade stores so common in most South American cities are very rare. Itinerant street venders and hucksters, on the other hand, are legion, and among them practically monopolize the retail trade of the whole town.

Few carts are used in trade, most of the vendors carrying the wares on their heads, or on horse or muleback. Prominent among the latter class is the panadero or baker. He bakes his bread in a big stone outdoor oven during the early hours of the morning and delivers it during the day. His delivery outfit consists of two big skin-covered baskets thrown on either side of a horse, between which he perches himself—usually with both feet on one side, as though mounted on a side-saddle—and hands out his bread to his customers as they respond to his lusty hail at their doors. Sacks of stale bread for chicken feed are also occasionally carried, being tied to thongs, like the reef-points on a sail, on the outside of the big bags. The bread loaves consist of long, slender sticks of glazed gluten, with crust so hard as to almost scratch glass when fresh, and which, stale, will resist the thrust of a knife blade like a piece of hippo hide. Loaves of five or six feet in length are baked for certain feast days; in fact, it is said that the length of the loaves on these gala occasions are only limited by the width of the extremely narrow streets through which they must be delivered.

Groceries in Saddle Bags.

The grocer boy delivers in two big bags made of untanned cowhide, and his mount is usually a mule. On the out trip, when his bags are full, he rides on the neck of the mule, but going back empty he either rides with one foot in each bag, or else climbs in one bag, invites a friend to climb into the other to make a balanced load, and thus has company for the home trip. One of the most amusing recollections I have of Peru is that of a stand-up, give-and-take slugging match between two youngsters, one in either bag of a delivery outfit. They had evidently come to a serious misunderstanding over something, and were having it out then and there, while the old mule, unmoved by a diversion which furnished unlimited entertainment for everyone along three or four blocks of Callao's principal thoroughfares, neither batted an eye nor deviated an iota from the sober measure of his even, plodding tread.

The lechero or milkman has a light case or frame of untanned cowhide fitted to his horse, and in this rests his cans. At the bottom of each can is a little brass faucet for drawing off the milk. As the cream and richer milk, of course, rise to the tops of the cans, it has become a common trick of the lecheros to leave the last four or five inches, after the rest has been drawn off, for their own use, or for that of some favorite customer. Food thus carried on horseback comes in for a good deal of jolting, and a shrewd housekeeper is able to tell about how long her purchases have been on the way by the amount of chafing her loaf has received, and the quantity of butter that floats on her milk.

Perhaps the strangest of all the mounted merchants of Callao is the pollero or poultryman. His stock is carried in two huge cages, one on either side of his horse, and in compartments in one or the other of these you may be pretty sure of finding doves, ducks and chickens, and sometimes even geese and turkeys. They buy fowls as well as sell them, and are always ready to enter into any kind of exchange. The polleros, as a class, have the name of being rather rascally fellows. They are supposed to have an uncontrollable propensity for annexing any stray property that may be left lying around, and "cuidado, ninos, el pollero" (look out, children, the poultryman) is the usual admonition his coming evokes.

An amusing story was told me of a pollero, who, in leaving a Callao hotel, to the kitchen of which he had been delivering some fowls, walked out through the front entrance and past the ladies' parlor. An expensive Parisian hat belonging to one of the guests chanced to be lying on a chair near the door, and without hesitation the deft-fingered fellow transferred it beneath his coat, made his way out to his horse and rode away. The hat was missed almost immediately, and a bellboy, recalling the bulge he had noticed beneath the pollero's coat, telephoned the police, with the result that, in less than five minutes, the man was intercepted in front of the police station, and three blocks from the hotel. A most careful search, however, failed to reveal the lost hat, and the officers were finally compelled to let the smiling rascal go his way. Stirred by a promise of substantial reward, the police raked the second-hand stores of the city for a week with a fine-tooth comb, but with no tangible result. At the end of that time, chancing to be searching the premises of the pollero in question on the complaint of a merchant who had lost a box of toilet soap, the police, among other things of various and sundry descriptions, found the missing hat. In court the man made a full confession, when it transpired that immediately on reaching his horse with the stolen hat, he had thrust the dainty thing in to an empty compartment in one of his poultry cages, and there, with its gaudy streamers and feathers sticking out through the wire mesh, it had been all the time that the police were holding its pre-emptor down on the cobbles and searching for it in his pockets, in his hat and even in his shoes.

Candies and Fruit.

Candy and fruit are usually sold by women, the former from little stands under the trees in the plazas and along the streets, and the latter from baskets carried about on the heads. The sweets are a fearful and wonderful array, very saccharine and sticky, and with rather too many marks of flies and fingers upon them to prove really tempting to anyone but a native. The fruit, both in variety and excellence, is well up to the usual tropical standard; it is, moreover, ridiculously cheap. The oranges are mostly of an inferior variety of seedling, but still very thin skinned and surprisingly sweet. The most popular fruit appears to be one with an unpronouncable Indian name, which bears a very close resemblance to that called the star-apple in the British islands of the West Indies. It has a large seed and a thin skin like the mango, but is possessed of a far more agreeable flavor than the latter. Cool drinks of prismatic colors—mostly made from diluted fruit juices—are for sale at little stands all along the streets, but the untidy old stone ollas that hold them, like the candy, bear too much evidence of handling to encourage one to sample their contents.

Callao Bay teems with fish, and its waters being several degrees cooler than those of similarly located points on the

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