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Guiana's Wild Blacks

For nearly two hundred years in equatorial South America a race of wild negroes has existed, remarkable enough in itself, but the more so from the fact that the first members of it were brought from the coast of Africa as slaves. Although many strange people have been discovered in the great north central portion of South America, none of those indigenous to the country has had the Ethiopian characteristics of color, form or facial type. In the great swamps of the Guianas, however, lying to the north of the Amazon River, and between it and the Orinoco, live the 'bush niggers,' numerous, well organized, in settled villages, and as much at home in the poisonous, impenetrable jungles and on the waters of the black lagoons which penetrate them as is the resident of New York in the streets of his native city.

On a map of South America, published in Paris in 1748, of which the original is in the library of Harvard College, there is laid down at the head of the Surinam River, in Dutch Guiana, at a distance of about two hundred miles inland, a settlement of 'negros marons' or runaway negroes. Considerable mention is made in the early history of the Guiana plantations of negro slaves escaping from their masters and flying, no one knew where, into the jungle. The map of D'Anville, however, cited above, appears to have been the first record of their having established a settlement. Undoubtedly the malarial climate of the swamps bordering on the Essequibo, Sarra-macca, Surinam and Marrowine rivers was the protection of the fugitives. For while harmless or nearly so to the negro, it was little short of deadly to the white man. Thus the probability is that the negro, once he got a hundred miles or so up one of the rivers in his canoe, was not pursued. Although increased precautions were naturally taken by the planters to prevent their slaves from joining their fellows in the bush, the flight of the negroes to the jungle appears to have continued in a desultory way until the abolition of slavery in the colonies. The bush niggers even became very bold, and frequently made sorties on the plantations for the purpose of procuring wives.

At present the bush niggers, as they are universally called, number about ten thousand, and inhabit principally the part of Dutch Guiana or Surinam, situated at from 100 to 200 miles inland from, and to the south of, the north coast of South America. A few are found in Demerara or British Guiana, and still more in Cayenne or French Guiana. They have about fifty villages of various sizes, and these are generally well hidden in the forest, at some distance from the rivers, which are the only means of traversing these tropical wildernesses. The region lies from three to five degrees of latitude north of the equator, and is generally reckoned as one of the most unhealthy localities known to white men. It seems to have no bad effect on these wild negroes however. The very fact that the race has thrived and increased in the 200 years since it was established, so to speak, proves that the negroes are naturally fitted for it. It should be noted at the same time that town negroes, when taken from Georgetown or Paramaribo, and put in the jungle to work, are subject to malarial fever, although not nearly to the extent to which the malady affects white men.

The bush niggers fashion canoes out of tree trunks with great facility, and these dugouts, when made, are both serviceable and graceful. As the only woods available in the country are those whose specific gravity is greater than that of water, both canoes and paddles are very heavy, and the boats, if allowed to fill partially with water will sink like so much iron. The most careful manipulation is therefore necessary in order to keep the canoes afloat. The negroes frequently make a speed of from eight to ten miles an hour. It is difficult to say whether the bush nigger considers his home on the land or on the water, for he may be seen at any hour of the day or night, either padding listlessly up and down the lagoons, singing fragments of a weird song, or engaged in the more serious occupation of freighting a

stick of letter-wood down to the coast. The letter-wood, one of the most valuable of the rare woods, grows abundantly in Surinam, and the bush niggers, although having little use for money, are not averse to earning a few gulden by getting out logs of this and other heavy woods for which there is a market, and transporting them, one log at a time, down to the coast, sometimes a distance of 200 miles, in their canoes.

The bush niggers are governed by a chief or governor, as he is called, who moves his camp during the course of the year from one part of the area to another, and once a year pays a visit to the Dutch governor of Surinam, at his executive mansion at Paramaribo. The relations of the negro to the Dutch who govern the colony are very unusual. Once a year a large flat boat or bateau with a capacity of about four tons is brought from the chief's camp down to the coast and tied up at one of the piers near the executive grounds. The chief, accompanied by all his subchiefs, of whom there are about thirty, receives from the government officials with great ceremony a donation consisting of delicacies in the way of provisions, an immense number and variety of print cloths of loud and brilliant patterns, hammocks, blankets and other articles, which though necessities to white men in the bush, may be considered as luxuries to these simple savages. Ordinarily, the bush niggers wear no clothes except a breech cloth, but on the occasion of this state visit to town, all the chiefs are resplendent with silk hats and an approximation to white men's dress in other particulars. Their followers made a concession to the uses of civilization only so far as to don a short blanket or shawl in which to parade the streets of the town. This is generally the most startling hue or combination of colors, and set off against the smooth black muscular arms and legs of the wearers, the costume is one that attracts universal admiration from the town negroes.

The custom of making a yearly donation to a half wild race of negroes living in the interior of its own territory, seems to resemble very much the paying of tribute. It is likely, however, that as the money value of the gift is next to nothing, it is considered on the part of the Dutch much more advisable to keep peace with these natives of the jungle in this simple way than to run the risk of losing their friendship. Although it is not likely the bush niggers could make a determined and long continued attack on Paramaribo, they could harass the river plantations to a considerable extent, and retreating to the jungle far up the country, would be next to impossible to dislodge. European troops would stand but a poor show against the ravages of the Surinamian climate.

The women among the bush niggers are not comely to look at, but they avoid the hideous custom which obtains among the African negroes, as among the Alaska Indians, of nose and lip ornamentation. In their dress, as one sees them passing in the canoes, they are somewhat more lavish than the men and the single garment which partially covers them is generally of some brilliantly colored cotton fabric.

The physique of the men is superb. They are generally tall, a height of six feet being not at all uncommon. Their legs, although shapely, are not especially muscular, since they give them comparatively little exercise. The black, chest and arms of these men are, however, of almost heroic development. Constant paddling of their heavy canoes with paddles which are also necessarily very heavy, gives these men arms and shoulders unmatched except in the case of professional strong men, whose development is acquired by the constant lifting of heavy weights. They appear to take no little pride in their physical proportions and when a boat with white men or town negroes passes they will often stand upright in the canoes laughing, showing their flashing white teeth, and talking incessantly all the while and even after the boat has passed they will continue shouting and laughing until a turning of the river has taken them out of sight.

'The bush niggers are expert in hunting, and for this purpose use to a great extent bows and arrows. They use also long spears in fishing, and their weapons which are of their own manufacture, are very well made. It is said that they use poisoned arrowheads and it is not improbable, for they could easily have learned the trick of poisoning weapons from the Indians who live in the back part of the Guianas, on, on the border of Brazil. The 'wurra-wurra' poison of the Indian sorcerers is known and feared by all explorers who attempt to penetrate the inner parts of these countries. The more advanced bush niggers are armed with muzzle-loading shotguns, and less often rifles.

They are not hostile by nature, and do not seem to care greatly about money. White men are not afraid to trust themselves quite alone in a company of them, far removed from the coast, or from one of the Dutch police stations of the interior. To some of the gold mines located far in the interior of Surinam or Cayenne the only means of transportation is by the canoes of the bush niggers. The river is so full of rapids that it is only the bush niggers who are sufficiently expert paddlers to accomplish the journey. Consequently each white man who goes must trust himself for ten days or more in a canoe with a single bush nigger, who has the passenger practically at his mercy. Yet there is no record of any case where foul play has occurred.

The language talked by these people is one utterly foreign to any other spoken in the region, either by negroes, Indians or white men. Very few inhabitants of the colonies are familiar with it outside of their own race. A means of communication is afforded with them, however, from the fact that the more intelligent among them speak a curious jargon used by the negroes of the towns and plantations, known as 'Taky-taky.' This is a mixture of English, French and Dutch and Portuguese, with probably an admixture of African languages, and it is easy to acquire a knowledge of it. Many of the white miners and traders speak it fluently.

The negroes cross the country from one river to another, with no apparent difficulty, even sleeping out at night on the way. Cross-country travelling is very rarely attempted by white men in Surinam. It being regarded by the most experienced prospectors there as almost certain death to sleep one night in the jungle without a hammock to lie in and a net for a covering. In that climate the bite of an insect brings on a fever, which without proper care will prove fatal. The bush is, moreover, infested with many varieties of poisonous serpents, of which the smaller kinds are the most to be feared. One of these the 'cappasee,' more dangerous than the 'fer de lance' of Martinique, is said to be the most deadly snake of the Western Hemisphere. Inoculation against snake bite is common among negroes of Surinam and its efficiency in the case of the ordinary poisonous snakes is said to be proven. No form of preventive, before or after the attack, however, avails against the cappasee.

The Guianas have long been known as the seat of important gold deposits, and some of the largest nuggets of rough gold with quartz ever discovered have come from the colony of Surinam. There are many placer mines scattered through the interior of the colony, as also in Cayenne and Demerara. Rich fines of coarse gold are made yearly by white men in the jungle but strangely enough, the bush niggers seem to take no interest as a rule in the gold seeking. They can rarely be induced to work at any of the mines, even for the offer of good pay, and it must be inferred that natural indolence of disposition is the prevailing characteristic of these wild people of the forest. When paid for labor for transporting goods or passengers, or for other services, they will take nothing but silver, this appearing to satisfy them by its bright color and the comparatively large size of the coins.

The bush niggers of Surinam appear to afford an illustration of the reversion of a portion of a race, originally savage, but which had been subjected to civilizing influences of a certain kind, in a strange environment during a period of several generations. The slaves who, leaving their life on the plantations, or in the towns, which must at least have brought them in contact with beings of a higher intellectual quality than themselves, escaped to the forest found their conditions nearly approaching those which they or their immediate ancestors had left in Africa. These conditions soon had their influence in destroying whatever progress up the scale of life had been made, and certainly the bush nigger of today has little to distinguish him from the races of his ancestors in Central Africa.

Apple Dealers Are Puzzled

'If you want a rare fruit and don't mind expense, buy apples,' said the proprietor of a retail fruit store that caters to New York's most exclusive trade. 'Hothouse grapes and winter strawberries are common enough, but I give you my word, half the time we can't get first-class apples at any price.

'Some of them look well enough, at first, but they haven't a good flavor and they rot while you stand looking at them. I don't know what's wrong. The old orchards are played out and new ones haven't been planted to take their place, and the trees that are bearing don't get the proper care.

'Why, I can remember when delicious, juicy, sound apples were a drug on the market. Every one kept a few barrels of apples in his cellar; and, with a little sorting, the fruit was good all winter. I'd like to see you try that now. We don't even buy barrels of apples for our trade. It doesn't pay. The apples will not keep until the barrel is emptied.

Look at those pippins. We've had them three days and they are speckled and unattractive already. The only good apples we get come from Oregon. They are packed in small quantities in boxes and they keep fairly well. We've handled 1,000 of this winter, and we get from 50 cents to \$1.60 a dozen. What would our great grandfathers have thought if they had been asked to pay \$1.60 a dozen for apples? I've paid 50 cents a piece for apples in Europe and we'll reach that record here before long if something isn't done to improve our orchards.

'It's a pity for more reasons than one that apples are getting scarce. A physician was talking about it in here just the other day. He will have apples no matter what he has to pay for them, and he says they are the most wholesome fruit anyone can eat. His children are allowed to have all the apples they want, and he says that if all the children were allowed to eat apples whenever they felt like it, there wouldn't be half so much sickness among them.

'Maybe that's one of the reasons children used to be healthier than they are now. I remember when I was a youngster I always had apples in my pockets, and so did every other boy, but we didn't often see candy. Then in the evening at home there was always a big silver bowl of shiny apples on the sitting room table, and every body in the family ate at least one or two during the evening. That sort of thing would bankrupt a millionaire nowadays.'

'This is rather an off season for fine fruit — 'between hay and grass,' as farmers say. Some fruits are about played out, and others have hardly begun to come in, but we manage to keep a pretty big variety on hand.

'The oranges have been unusually fine. Orange growers are improving their grades right along, and this is a good season. A comparatively new orange is first favorite among epicures just now. It's the King of Siam. Here's one. You see it looks like a big tangerine with a rough loose skin. We are getting them from Florida now. A little later they'll come in from California.

'There's another orange that has jumped into New York popularity, all of a sudden, the little Kumquat, I mean, this little thing that looks like a plum dressed in orange skin. They are used for garnishing and for salads, and then they are preserved and candied. Three years ago it was almost impossible to sell fresh Kumquats here, save to confectioners, but some of the caterers took them up, as salad relishes, and the swells fancied them, and now we sell any quantity of them.

'The hothouse peaches aren't so good as they should be this season, but then one ought not to expect much of them, after the trip they have to make. You know we get them from Cape Town in South Africa. They come by way of England, and we sell them for \$10 a dozen. Pretty soon hot house peaches will come in from Massachusetts, and sell as low as \$5 or \$6 a dozen.

'Home hot house grapes will soon be in season too, but now we get our best hot house grapes from England. Only two

wholesale dealers in the city are handling the hot house grapes now, and they have only about 700 pounds a week for all their retail trade.

'We can't buy fresh pears anywhere this season, and pineapples are unusually good. The pineapples are cheaper than they used to be, too. You can get a good one for from 50 cents to \$1. The early strawberries are another out of season fruit that is finer in quality and lower in price than it was formerly. Florida berries that used to sell for \$1.25 a box are going for 65 cents a box now, and they are much larger and more delicious in flavor than early berries used to be.

The tomatoes have been the bothersome proposition this winter. They've been shrivelled and small and tasteless, yet they've brought big prices. The only decent ones we've been able to get have come from Canada and are worth 75 cents a pound.

'Asparagus is plenty. The long, green hothouse asparagus from Illinois is worth \$7.50 a dozen bunches and the white hothouse asparagus grown around here brings \$9 a dozen bunches. There are seven stalks in a bunch, you know.

'Mushrooms? Why all the world seems to have gone to raising mushrooms lately. The market is flooded with them. Luckily their popularity seems to be increasing with the supply. But after all, the price of first class selected mushrooms hasn't dropped. They are still worth a dollar a pound though you can get all the small mushrooms you want for 50 cent a pound. American cooks are using the fresh mushrooms more and more in sauces and seasoning.

'In fact, the demand for all sorts of out-of-season vegetables and fruits is increasing enormously in this country. I don't know whether we are becoming more extravagant or whether the class that can afford luxury is increasing rapidly, but where ten years ago one person bought the kinds of winter fruit and vegetables we sell a hundred buy them now.'—N. Y. Sun.

His Awful Blunder.

A Chicago clergyman says that while travelling in Europe last summer he visited Venice, and among the institutions of that city which particularly interested him was a public bathing resort.

A few days later, while in Pisa, and wandering about its famous leaning tower, he encountered two young ladies, whose conversation, a few words of which he overheard, satisfied him they were Americans. He introduced himself, and they were delighted to meet him. They had just arrived in Pisa, and were very dusty and travel stained.

On learning that he had come from Venice they questioned him eagerly concerning the attractions of the place, as that was next on their itinerary.

'Well,' he began, 'you will want to go to the Malamocco and take a bath—'

'Sir!' they exclaimed, turning away instantly and leaving him to the realization of the fact that, in all innocence, he had made one of the great mistakes of his life.

The Old Home Paper.

Noting the fact that many country bred men in the large cities take the local paper in their old home, the Philadelphia Record says: 'The head of a large Market street wholesale business house, a man now advanced in years, has been a regular subscriber to one of the Bucks county papers for 50 years. 'He wouldn't give it up for anything,' said this man's son. 'He gets more real enjoyment from it than from anything he reads. A daily edition has been started within the last ten years, but he doesn't want that. He only gets the weekly edition, which prints gossip of a personal nature from the various towns throughout the county. He will pore over this by the hour and his comments on the various items of news are often amusing. Scarcely a name is mentioned that he doesn't say, 'Why I used to go to school with his father,' or 'I once licked his Uncle Jim for tying my clothes up when we used to go swimming in the Neshaminy.'

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