

All along the road winding down into Ambato were the Indians--hundreds of them practically all on foot with heavy loads of their produce on their backs and some driving burrows with huge packs on them. And when I say they were carrying just about everything, I mean just that. Most of the women and some of the children had babies strapped to their backs and many had additional huge loads besides them (the babies). They had all kinds of fruit, vegetables, chickens, hemp (that was stripped into long strings that hung on their backs like huge capes of fringe), wool and hides, jars and pots, grain and dried beans and nuts, and heaven only knows what else. They never take the loads off their backs until they reach the market, but they rest with the load sitting or resting against a hillside or some embankment. Many of them walk all night and half a day to reach Ambato. Some of them drive sheep, pigs, goats or cows to sell or exchange. Most of them are filthy; the women have no shoes and wear a shawl, the men wear ponchos, hats and usually sandals. Some of the men ride but few of the women. Many of them go in a dog trot all the time, up or down the mountain side. How can they do it?

As we drove into Ambato we stopped on a hill above the market and looked down on the seething mass of humanity. From that distance it was beautiful--even scintillating. Here were these thousands of Indians who had come in from every direction, dressed in their ponchos, shawls and hats--every color of the rainbow. You could all but imagine the mass of color had been made by the sun shining through some huge prism that had broken the light into the myriad of colors.

But--the illusion soon vanished as we drove down into this crowd. All the Central and South American countries have similar markets but the multitude in the market at Ambato was more appalling than any I have seen in any other place. Some of their produce was wonderful. Their beautiful blankets and yard goods of the finest wool and weave are unexcelled. Their "Panama" hats--which are a true product of Ecuador as you know--are the most beautiful in the world. They raise good cattle, sheep, hogs and goats, and sell meat, hides, milk and wool. They also have grain, fruits, and vegetables. Some of the largest apples I ever saw, fine oranges, some bananas, papayas, pineapples, and many other small fruits and berries--among them a black cherry and luscious strawberries. There were beans, corn, tomatoes, peas, potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, artichokes, and flowers by the bushel basket and gorgeous ones. But the dirty, filthy, unkempt looking people that you had to look at and mix with took your appetite for food. I suppose most of these people don't know what it is to bathe--and you see them occasionally bathing in a contaminated stream or a muddy pool. They sit with their dirty children around them picking vermin out of their heads, all of them using the streets or open sewers for refuse of every kind (and when I say every, I mean just that). Their stands for feeding them hot soup, or stew, some kind of fried cakes or tortillas, were swarming with flies and no doubt other insects. I had to keep a very firm hold on myself to keep my stomach from rebelling.

Of course no fruit or vegetable can be eaten here unless it can be peeled or scalded first. We got strawberries and made jam, peas and made soup, oranges for the juice, avacados and pineapples--all were delicious.

Before returning to Quito we had another delicious meal at Villa Hilda's.

As days go by I find myself meeting a few more Americans (U. S. citizens) connected with schools, central educational organizations, missions, and the embassy.