



















SPANISH-COLONIAL  
LIFE IN PANAMA







Michinga.

SKETCHES OF  
SPANISH-COLONIAL  
LIFE IN PANAMA

BY  
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By LADY MALLET







## INTRODUCTION

**I**T has ever been a great delight to me to engage elderly people in conversation. As a child, the accounts of incidents during their lives fascinated me, they fascinate me now, and very especially, the reminiscences of Colonial life in Panama.

I acquired many years ago the habit of taking notes of any interesting stories I would hear,—always hoping that my son would make use of them some day, and publish them in book form. I hardly felt equal to doing it myself. But repeatedly, when relating some of these anecdotes, I have been asked, “Why don’t you write that, just as you have told it?” In this way encouragement has come from many a kind listener, and at last I have been persuaded to tell my little stories. I have

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endeavored to tell them just as I would speak them, avoiding all lengthy details which would seem pretentious and form a big book.

My small attempt at story writing does not pretend to be a book—call it conversations or notes—and I trust the facts I enumerate may be found interesting. Everything I mention has happened, and has been told me by the persons themselves, or their descendants. Truthfulness is the only merit I can claim for my little volume.

I dedicate it to my beloved children, Dita and George, for whose entertainment I wrote most of the stories when they had not grown too big to sit on my knees and listen to me with their lovely big eyes watching for every word I said.

I must crave indulgence for my audacity in writing in a language which I only

learned when I went to boarding school, and I have been urged not to have the style corrected or changed by an editor. So here it is, *au naturel*, and may it please you.

The Colonial period to which these notes refer lasted from 1672, when the new town was founded, till 1821 when Panama became independent of Spain; and the description of a dinner party in 1842 is given to show how, twenty-one years after the Republican regime was established, Colonial courteous habits still survived. To better understand the Colonial inhabitants of Panama it should be explained that the town was a very small one within an enormous fort. Inside lived the nobility with their slaves, outside lived the people, and even at the present time when the barriers of the fortifications no longer exist, the idea remains, and the best families

prefer to crowd inside in discomfort, rather than live outside the old town limits.

The destruction of the first city by Morgan in 1671, taught the Spaniards the necessity of strongly fortifying the new town, and the present site, on a rocky peninsula, was found admirably adapted for an important military stronghold, easily defended from attacks by land or sea. At one time this place, more fortress than town, was the most important centre of Spanish domination in America, before Bogota and Lima had been colonized. At the old town the first *Real Audiencia* (Royal Chancellery) of South America had been established in 1538. Previous to that, there had been one in Santo Domingo and one in Mexico.

In 1690 we find Don Pedro José Guzman, Davalos, Ponce de Leon, Santillana



This picture shows how houses have been built on the city walls all along the seashore.



y Mesia, Marques de la Mina, General of Artillery, a native of Seville, arriving here as President of the Royal Chancellery of Panama and Commander General of the Kingdom of New Andalusia, to replace the Count de Palmar. He governed for five years, and then, through political intrigues and unjustified slanders, was confined to the Castle at Fort Lorenzo, where he remained during the four years that his trial lasted. He was succeeded by the Count de Camillas, who perpetrated so many cruelties on the imprisoned Marques that a protest was sent to Spain by the garrison of the fort and the people of Chagres, and on the 7th of July 1699, by order of His Majesty the King of Spain, the Count de Camillas was replaced by the Marques de Villa Rocha and the poor Marques de la Mina was released and went to Porto Bello.

It is worth noting that in most places the President of the Royal Chancellery was nothing else, but in Panama he was Governor and Captain General as well. To prevent him from being influenced in any way, he was forbidden to marry, to be a sponsor at a Christening or at a wedding, to acquire any real estate or to own more than two slaves for his personal service.

Though Panama was never a Viceroyalty in the true sense of the word, three Viceroys at various times have established their seat of government there:

Don Benito Perez, from May 1812 to 1813.

Don Juan Sámano, December 1820 to August 1821, when he died.

Don Juan de la Cruz Murgeon, from August to October 1821.





Ruins of Fort San Lorenzo, also known as Chagres Castle, situated on a hill overlooking the Atlantic. Note the grenades and cannon balls piled on the ground just as the Spaniards left them in 1821. In this fort the Marques de la Mina was imprisoned for four years.



I  
MICHINGA



# COLONIAL LIFE IN PANAMA

## MICHINGA

### CHAPTER I

#### BABYHOOD AND DAILY LIFE IN THE HOUSEHOLD

**T**HE advent of baby Michinga, in the already numerous household of Don Ramon, was hailed with great joy by all her sisters and brothers. This was the new doll to play with, and what a beautiful doll it was, with her skin of milk and roses, her hair of golden threads and a most wonderful pair of deep brown eyes! Months had been spent in preparations for the arrival of the little guest. Doña Pepilla's baskets of Mechlin and Venetian

lace had been almost emptied to adorn sheets and pillow cases of transparent linen and pineapple lawn, for the cradle. Every design in the family samplers of drawn thread and cross-stitch had been used in lavish profusion on the bed linen and on the tiny chemises; and wonderful little caps were made to fit tight and keep the baby's ears back. Prominent ears were the horror of mammas in those days, and every precaution was taken to prevent them. Owing to the great heat babies only wore the elaborately embroidered little chemises and these funny little caps.

How busy the slaves had been, working and talking! Would it be a little Master or a little Mistress? Whom would it look like? Which of the slaves would look after it? Who would be the god-parents? Benancio, the cook, gets ready with all kinds of sweets and cakes for



Michinga's Mother.





the christening. Dionisio, the butler, has gathered all the lemons from the garden, his wife is busy in the kitchen sifting wood ashes, and with these and lemon juice all the silver of the house is to be made spotless. Very special attention is given to the large silver basin in which all the babies of the family receive their first bath. This basin and the silver jug for warm water with wings forming the handles and cherubs' heads in relief, will be carried by Dionisio to church on the day of the christening, as he has carried it for all Michinga's brothers and sisters.

Other slaves who have charge of the floors are polishing away with cocoanut husks, sand and salt water until the floors look as smooth and white as a modern pastry board. After all these preparations, all is joy in the household, mixed with small jealousies. All the slaves have *seen*

the baby, the most beautiful baby, but some slaves have been allowed to *carry* it or to rock it in the cradle, and this creates discussions.

Benancia had no business to answer the Señora's bell in such a hurry when it was Angela's turn, all because she wants to be the first to rock the baby's cradle or because she thinks she has the prettiest voice in the house and knows so many cradle songs. And the Señora's broth, her principal nourishment for forty days, is also the cause of much excitement. Benancio, the cook, claims that he always has made it for his mistress, using one nice fat chicken, one pound of best lean beef and various vegetables to make two large cups. Benancia, the white slave, who is lady's maid and sworn enemy of Benancio, reminds him that when Dona Emilia was born she made the Señora's broth and it

was better than his. Benancio is very angry at this because he remembers how his master on that occasion hit him two hard blows on the shoulders with his riding whip and sent him to his room for two days, and Benancia meanwhile reigned supreme in the kitchen.

These two were always in trouble. Benancio fell in love with Benancia from the first day she arrived. He was a very handsome negro and all the slave women liked him, but Benancia, who was thin and ugly, considered herself his superior because her skin was white, and despised all his advances. In revenge, he tantalized her in every way he could and the punishment just mentioned had been richly deserved, as an account of his actions will show.

Benancio had a large monkey which he killed and then tied in a sitting attitude on

one of the kitchen chairs, with a crimson bonnet on its head and the large kitchen knife in one hand. So when Benancia came in at 8 P. M. to make the Señora's chocolate and in the semi-dark kitchen saw this apparition, she promptly had a fit and Benancio *had* to be punished.

Another night he took the matting off his cot, rolled it up, dressed it like a ghost and put it in the kitchen for Benancia, with the same result—Benancia in a fit, Benancio flogged. But he did not mind his flogging if he succeeded in giving Benancia a good fright.

José Antonio Paez, a big handsome slave who had come from Medellin, was the god of the kitchen quarters and the delight of the children. He used to adopt the airs of a grand seigneur, and when any of the slaves called him Pepe (the diminutive of José) he would say, placing his



Photo by Endara.

Old Colonial table, porcelain vases, fruit dishes and fruit plate. On the wall an old picture and under the table a copper *brazero* for burning coal—all from Michinga's home.



thumbs under his armpits and holding his head very high:

*Yo me llamo José Antonio Paez  
Por la mar y por la tierra,  
El que quiere hablar conmigo  
Ponga la rodilla en tierra.*

I am called José Antonio Paez  
By land and by sea,  
Anyone wishing to speak to me  
Must to the ground bend his knee.

His principal duty was to carry the young ladies to school at seven in the morning. Little Rita would sit astride on his neck, while he would carry Doña Manuelita and Doña Pepita in his strong arms. With one hand he held a large umbrella against the sun and rain. A little girl slave followed, carrying a basket upon her head with the little frocks to be worn during school time and a change of linen in

case the little damsels in their play hours should moisten their clothes romping in the great heat of the day.

Manuela, the other slave of importance in the house, had charge of the linen. Her needle work was perfection. The sewing slaves of all the families in town would come to Manonga (the diminutive of Manuela) to learn. She knew more stitches in drawn thread and embroidery than any one, and had a veritable talent for beautifying the simplest designs, by introducing little improvements and ornamentations of her own invention.

At half past five the children would be up and run to the beach with their slaves for a dip in the sea, or if it were a rainy morning, their little hands and faces would be washed with rose water made by Benancia, who always kept a plentiful supply, and the bath in the garden would

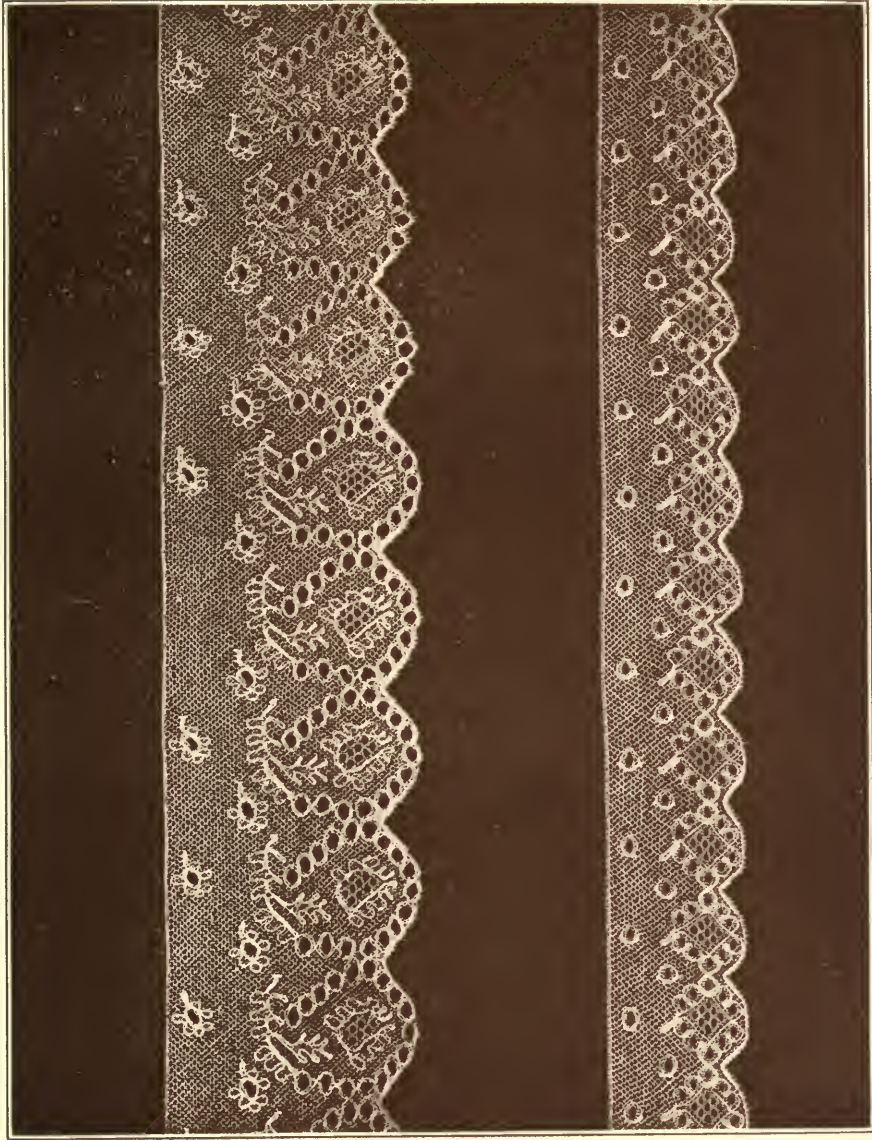


be taken in the afternoon, when the water had been properly sunned. To bathe in water unpurified by the heat of the sun was thought dangerous. Of the soap-wood sticks Benancia had charge also, and one by one the children came to her of a morning to have their teeth polished.

At six Dionisio, the butler, had early breakfast ready,—hot coffee for the masters, milk for the little ones, with slices of *bollo* and cheese. *Casave*, or *bollo*, was always served in lieu of bread.

The first week passed of Michinga's arrival, for the first time she was taken out into the garden, and on the fortieth day of her advent the period of confinement ended. Doña Pepilla could leave her room and again partake of the varied and delicious food Benancio provided for the family. At 5 A. M. the great José Antonio Paez was busy with the baths in the

garden, two large marble tubs sunk into the ground and screened from view by pretty creepers. Water had to be carried from the well to fill them and then jasmine and roses were thrown in to perfume the baths, which must be got ready with special care on this occasion, as the mistress is out and about again and the water must be exposed to the sun in flat tins to warm it and absorb the dew, that dew which was supposed to be the cause of most illnesses. The *aromas* were collected from the trees in the garden very early that morning by Benancia to place in her mistress's clothes. During the forty days no perfumes had been allowed in the house; they would have harmed Michinga and mama; only incense was used, burning in a silver receptacle, with a tall conical wicker frame over it, on which all the linen would be



I. Old Malines lace of the XVIIIth century. The favorite lace of the Colonial ladies of Panama.  
II. The same sort of lace, copied by an Indian lace maker of Quito in 1892.



placed to be purified and perfumed before wearing it.

At ten o'clock lunch was always ready; the children came back from school running, all wishing to be first in kissing the hands of their father and mother and receiving the blessing from them after José had given the report of their conduct at school. To have this blessing withdrawn was the greatest disgrace that could befall a child, and the unblest one had a bad time of it all day. No nice children liked to play with one who deserved such punishment.

Lunch was the heavy meal of the day, but it had to be served quickly for the children were due at school again at eleven, and on rising from the table it was a cry of "Me first" and a rush for the large silver salvers (basins) which the slaves

held with clear water and verbena leaves to wash the hands and face, and another rush for the carved mahogany *tinajero* with heavy stone filter and terra cotta *tinaja* underneath to receive the water. Each member of the family had on the *tinajero* shelf his or her *jarro*, a red clay cup with silver cover, and discussions arose among the children who could not read their names on the cover, and refused to believe the older children who could. *Jarros* with silver covers were also kept in small openings made in the heavy masonry walls. This made the water cool; and to give the water a nice flavor the *jarros* when washed were rubbed with *guayaba* leaves.

José would carry a dessert to school at twelve,—sometimes fruit, sometimes a fruit drink, or cakes with sweets and jam.

At three the children were back, and all



Drawn thread and embroidery on pillow sham of finest linen lawn. The garland is embroidered on a background of the most delicate drawn thread work.





the slaves busy bathing them, doing the little girls' hair up in wonderful fashions with curls, gold and pearl ornaments and ribbons, the slaves vying with each other that their special charge might look the best. Benancia gathered the roses, the hibiscus and the prettiest flowers of the garden to decorate the dinner table, and at four the event of the day took place. Dinner was a formal affair. The Master wore one of his best embroidered white satin waistcoats. Dionisio had to be careful that the turquoise buttons with a tiny pearl in the centre should match the sprays of forget-me-nots embroidered all down the front. The silver buckles of the patent leather shoes were properly rubbed and made to shine with the palm of the hand, the lace ruffles of the shirt and the soft silk scarf round the neck were carefully examined to see that all was right,

for the Master was very particular about two things: his personal appearance and the jasmine essence for his handkerchief which Benancia prepared for him.

The Mistress spent quite an hour discussing her evening toilette before deciding what to wear. First the petticoats had to be chosen, two or three of them, so that modesty should not be shocked by discerning her form—and the dresses, they were all *so* wonderful; of silks and velvets all the way from Italy. The material of one of those skirts would make four of our present day skirts, the bodices low-necked, the sleeves usually to the elbow, or at any rate, long enough to be considered decent.

At five all the family went out, the Señora's shoulders covered with a priceless Brussels or Spanish lace scarf, and all the children with their best dresses. This was

a solemn occasion, no romping allowed when out for the daily walk with papa and mama. It was delightful to wear the lovely lace-befrilled and elaborately embroidered little frocks which had taken Manonga so long to make, and which other little girls and their mamas would admire and envy, but to walk slowly two by two, to remember to answer salutations, to keep silent or speak in a whisper, and to kiss the hand of the old ladies, all this was really too much restraint, and at six o'clock when one had made the rounds of the city walls, meeting all one's friends and answering the salute of the sentries, what a joy to return home, and be rid of all the finery and make up for the restraint of two hours, with a pillow fight, or a game of blindman's bluff; or hide and seek in the big garden! Another lovely game was to climb the cherry trees and plum

trees and pelt the slaves who tried to catch their young masters.

Mama Chepita, the oldest slave, would come along with her silver candle lighter at dusk, when the call to prayer rang from the Cathedral towers, followed by Clara, who carried the silver clipper and tray, to trim and light all the candles in the house. And to each member of the family the two women would give the formal salutations as they met, saying, "*Ave Maria Purisima, Buenas Noches de Dios a Su Merced,*" which means, "Ave Maria Purisima, may the Lord grant your Grace a good night."

When the lights were lit all the family and favorite slaves would meet in the drawing-room. The children recited the last bit of poetry they had learned, friends came in, they played the piano, and sang the latest French ballad or recited the latest French poem, with purest French ac-

cent. Other evenings would be devoted to dancing among the Señores, or the slaves were made to dance for the amusement of their masters.

This was the form of entertainment which pleased the children best. The drums and rattles would be brought, Benancia would start the singing, her clear mellow voice sounding above all the other voices. Everyone would join in clapping, to keep time, and the dance began. Mama Chepita always danced first. She would start making the gliding step forward, and bow, first to the Masters, then to the musicians, and with a gracefulness and quickness unbelievable at her age, would go through all the graceful contortions of the *Tamborito*, always from the waist and arms, her limbs unbending, and her feet gliding along as though she were on wheels. Very soon the men would be-

come enthusiastic and come to her,—pirouetting in strange fashion, hat in hand. They would simulate the intention of catching her, getting near enough sometimes to pretend, with open arms, to embrace her, she quickly getting away. When the excitement of the dance had reached its height, a man would fan Mama Chepita with his hat, following her with the same graceful gliding step, she always pretending to get away. And then another man would come into the ring, bow to him and go through the same movements, Mama Chepita going on with her steps and movements as though she had not noticed the change of partner.

Presently another couple came into the ring and Mama Chepita would retire and join those who were singing and clapping. When the girl was young and pretty and a good dancer her partner placed his hat



Mahogany desk used by Michinga's father when Governor of Panama, with silver lock-plates, silver inkstand and candle sticks inside glass shades. Glass candle shade from Michinga's home hangs from the ceiling. Picture of Michinga's father and mother on the wall.





on her head. This always created the greatest excitement. *Opa!* was heard on every side, and the men partners succeeded each other with great rapidity, always placing the hat on the girl's head, one hat on top of another until a veritable tower of hats was formed and the girl had to use all her skill so they should not fall off. Sometimes hats and money would be thrown at her feet by the spectators during the dance.

*Punto* was the name of another favorite dance, but very few could do it. The performance consisted of intricate steps and movements of the abdomen. In fact it was *La danse du ventre*, and a woman danced it alone. Another slave dance was the *Cumbia*. For this the couples stepped into the centre of the room, the men facing the women, and gradually a solid ring of couples was formed. The man's step was a sort of little jump, going backwards, the

woman sliding in front of him, a lighted candle in her hand held with a large bandana. The spectators gave more candles to the favorites as the circle passed by until sometimes the girls could with difficulty hold eighteen or more candles in one hand with the bandana around them to keep them together.

Michinga and her little brother, Don Prospero, became experts in *Tamborito*. Michinga would always stipulate before beginning that she should have lots of hats and lots of money thrown at her feet, because then she could dance better. But she had little need to ask, if she only knew. When she did dance, her audience were absolutely electrified. Dionisio and Mama Chepita always wept copiously on these occasions, and the *Opas!* and *Ipas!* from all were deafening. Every clever move, every graceful motion of the little

beauty set the slaves on strings, and they would clap hard enough to break their hands if they could have been broken.

Sometimes, when Mama Chepita had had a long enough siesta in the afternoon and could keep awake, she would sit on the floor in the middle of the room and tell of the deeds of conquest when she first came to America, or recite fairy tales of India and Arabia which she remembered as in a dream, for her master, who was jealous of her mother loving any living thing but himself, had sold little Chepita to be taken to the New World when the child was five years old.

At eight o'clock Benancia and Dionisio came with the chocolate and crisp gauffres, and at nine every member of the household, even to the stable boys, had to be in the drawing-room for prayers. The Señora knew them all by heart, beautiful prayers

such as only in Spanish sound so lovely. The Litanies, however, the Señora had found easier to learn by heart in Latin. Then came the blessing from the Master of the house, and everyone to bed as soon as possible, for home-made tallow candles don't last long and there are so many ghosts in the darkness!

One day poor Angela, the slave who washed the clothes in one of the *patois*, in Michinga's home had a great misfortune. Her little girl was drowned in one of the *botijas*. The *botija* is an earthenware jar about four feet high and eighteen inches in diameter, which used to be kept in the kitchens and gardens with water for all purposes in the house. They constituted a great danger always with children, who, trying to get water out of them, would fall in head first and be unable to get out again. So that for a child to be drowned in this

manner was by no means an infrequent occurrence.

Angela's little girl was the children's live doll, and they missed her sadly. All the tube roses in the garden were gathered by the little ones to make her a cross; for her name was Margarita, and tube roses in Spanish are margaritas also. The men slaves of the house carried the remains to the cemetery, and Don Ramon with his two eldest sons walked at the head of the procession. Little Margarita was one of the family, and Don Ramon would be with her till the end. The death of Mama Chepita occurred the same week, but the death of a child and that of an old woman made a very different impression on the slaves. The child was an angel, the church bells did not toll for it, but rang their liveliest chimes, and one should rejoice that there was one more angel in heaven.

But Mama Chepita! . . . her groans, her ugly face,—she would come back and frighten Benancio for a certainty because he killed the monkey. Everyone remembered what he had done to displease Mama Chepita and wondered how she would punish them. For months, no man or woman in that house would walk alone in the dark; special prayers were said to beg the departed friend not to return. Frequently in the night screams would be heard in the servants' quarters. Mama Chepita had come, someone had seen her or felt her, and every one of the slaves must get out of bed and say prayers, because evidently the fire of Purgatory was hurting her more than usual and they must pray for her prompt release.

## CHAPTER II

### CHRISTENING, EDUCATION AND MARRIAGE COSTUME

**T**HE christening of Michinga was a great affair. The parents were very proud of her, and there was a long deliberation about names, and god parents who would do credit to the baby,—fifteen little brothers and sisters had preceded her into the world, but her beauty surpassed anything anyone had ever seen. Everyone came to admire this wonderful little bit of live Sèvres.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the christening took place with much ringing of bells at the Cathedral. Everybody who was anybody was present in church, and all

the street boys of the town were waiting at the door for the godfather, who was equal to the occasion and threw handful after handful of silver coins into the Plaza.

At the house of the parents the godfather and godmother distributed gold coins of different values, glued to ribbons with the name of the child engraved in gold letters, date of birth and of christening, and the names of the godparents. Don Ramon and his Señora provided a good dinner for their guests, and music, so that dancing was kept up to a late hour.\*

At Michinga's christening great excitement was caused by the appearance of the first carriage in Panama, belonging to Michinga's godfather. Drawn by a beautiful team of Arab horses, he used it on this

\* This form of christening, I would mention, is still kept up in all its details, with the tips to the sacristan and to the nurse who carries the baby to church.





Part of the City Wall.



occasion for the first time. Up to then only Sedan chairs, more or less elaborately gilded and painted, were used by the ladies when their slaves took them to church or when visiting their friends. To see the owners in the open berlina going round and round upon the broad massive city walls was a novelty indeed, and was for a long time after the christening the event of the day.

On the covered pavement of the old Town Hall a regular gossip den was formed in the evenings. All the women who sold sweets and cakes and fruit drinks would gather there with their tables and trays, a dismal tallow candle lighting their goods. The berlina and horses were much discussed by the saleswomen. There the children came with their nurses to buy *cocada*, *golloria*, *millo*, and other dainties, and of course news was exchanged.

These saleswomen were the best informed people in the town, and often in troubled times they acted as spies, diffusing and gathering information according to the pay they had received. Politicians, soldiers, merchants, everyone made friends with them.

Michinga went to school with her twin sisters; they all learned to write a pretty hand, to recite poetry, speak French, play the spinet, sing, dance, do fine needlework, and were lectured every day on good manners and respect to their elders. Once a week they had a history lesson, another day a little geography. Add, subtract, multiply, divide, and at fifteen, having learned all this, education was finished, and it was time to get married.

The twins' turn came first; they were older than Michinga, and what fun they had at the dances, these two pretty girls!

So identical were they that their lovers often were uncertain if they were dancing with the right one, and it was a bargain between the two sisters that they would never tell. When they were babies their mother tied different colored ribbons on their right wrists to be able to tell one from the other. They lived seventy-four years, and to the end they were alike.

Their fifteenth birthday was cause for festivity at the house of Don Ramon, and from that day many were the suitors seen at the street corner, gazing up at the balcony. During the afternoon walk they were followed at a safe distance. Bits of poetry found their way into the house mysteriously. Some of it was liked and acknowledged by the young ladies by a smile or a sign, and when sufficient encouragement had been given, permission was asked by the young man to call. Twenty

calls would be paid before by any chance a word could be said to one's beloved. But poems became a daily occurrence. At the evening visit a little pressure of the hand and a look would tell if one's poetical declarations had been received with favor. When the girls were ready to be spoken to, the strategem most commonly resorted to was a ball, and the interested parties would endeavor to bring this about, and when they understood each other, or thought they did, after a few words whispered during the one dance allowed by etiquette at the ball, the young man's father, accompanied by a friend to bear witness, would solemnly ask the young lady's father for his daughter's hand. After the engagement the visits continued to be witnessed by the entire family, and not until after the young couple were married did they have a chance for exchange of caresses



Scapular of gold repoussé work and gold chain, worn with the national costume of Panama.





or exchange of ideas. It was a mark of respect for a man to kiss the hand of any lady, but not of the one he intended to make his wife. A public demonstration of affection was the acme of vulgarity and the young lady would have resented it bitterly, and, if a high spirited person, she would have broken the engagement then and there.

Twin No. 1, who married a Spaniard, went through all these experiences. Twin No. 2 married a Russian, and the poor man was distracted in his ignorance of all these customs. So he had to ask the lover of Twin No. 1 to help him, and the feelings of this man, writing love poems for the two sisters, must have been ludicrous. But he helped the Russian to success, and they decided to get married together. The double wedding was a great event. One bride in pink, the other in blue pineapple

silk, with dozens of yards of priceless lace and garlands of jasmine and orange blossoms decorating the skirt and bodice. Wreaths of the same flowers decorated their pretty heads. The Russian, who was a wealthy man, insisted that for the wedding pudding only Tokay wine should be used, so that the forty or fifty large silver dishes of it which were prepared, represented a small fortune.

Marriage was the one and only ambition of a girl of that epoch, but it really meant the end of all amusement for her. A married woman who went to dances while she was still young was branded a coquette. If she dressed prettily, as she had done before her wedding, and sat to enjoy the breeze on the balcony, surely she must be encouraging some new admirer. Poor thing, there was nothing left for her to do if she wanted to keep her reputation, but

remain at home, and look after as large a family as she would have time to bring into the world during her lifetime. If her first child were a daughter, lucky for her; then her absolute seclusion would only last fifteen years, because she would go out to chaperone her daughter. But at thirty, a woman who was the mother of at least ten children was an old woman. However, they were not unhappy, and their devotion to their children is proverbial. Their world was their family. The husband considered he had done his duty if he paid the bills, took his meals at home, and slept with his wife, keeping her carefully at home, out of harm's way. The street was for men only. If a lady went out to church or to visit her relatives in the morning it would be very bad form to go out again in the evening; *infra dig.* to mix with the common herd too often. If two or more

invitations were received for dances in one week only one must be accepted for the young ladies of the house. It was dignified to be unbending, and to have it understood that one's presence was a rare honor. Michinga was preaching this doctrine to her daughters as late as 1890.

The marriage of the twins was the last festival in Michinga's home. Equality and independence had set the country on fire. Benancia the white slave was the first to leave her masters. She married a Spanish soldier who later became governor of one of the provinces. Benancio enlisted with the insurgents and became a General, and because his former master, meeting him in the street one day, did not salute him with due respect, he used his influence and had the master's property confiscated.

Doña Pepilla, who had only known riches all her life, was utterly miserable



The rosary worn with the Panama national costume is made of gold filigree work.



and helpless. To keep her house clean she must sweep it herself, for only two of her many slaves remained with her. Ironing the clothes was out of the question; only dresses were ironed, everything else was only rough-washed, very often by poor Doña Pepilla's beautiful hands, which had never done harder work than wave a fan.

Doña Pepilla's hands had been renowned for their beauty, and her mother was so proud of them that until she married it was a known fact that the young lady had never been allowed to turn the handle of a door, for fear she might strain the muscles and spoil the perfection of her hands. Benancia used to massage them every night, as well as the Señora's tiny feet, which were also lovely, with perfumed cocoanut oil and cocoa butter, most carefully prepared with untold labor by one of the slave women. The nails were

made shiny with a little white of egg.

The same slave prepared the sachet powder from sandal wood, aromas and innumerable spices and aromatic herbs. All the egg shells in the house were used in making the face powder. They were crushed on a marble slab first of all, then sifted, washed, drained, dried in the sun, washed again and again, and the final result would be a cake of dazzling whiteness. With a small square of flannel enough powder would be rubbed off to apply to the face, neck and arms. Doña Pepilla's complexion was the wonder of all her friends, and she undoubtedly owed it to her Arabian slave woman who prepared for the household every toilet requisite. To wash the face every morning there was a dainty soap made of almonds and goat's milk, and to keep the face white and smooth and prevent sunburn, the gelatinous substance





*Photo by Endara.*

Silver frame and holy picture used to hang in Michinga's home and other ornaments of private chapel.



from inside the stem of the cactus commonly called *penca de savila* would be carefully spread over the skin of the face and neck. If the children got sunburned yucas were peeled and their little faces smeared with the juice. From the same yucas the starch was extracted for starching all the clothes of the family.

All these little fads disappeared one by one. Hands that were too delicate to even turn the handle of a door lost all their beauty washing clothes, and when washing, cooking and sweeping became an almost daily occupation, there was no time to think of beauty culture. Later on, when the family again became more prosperous, the art of making toilet lotions was lost, as well as the habit of using them.

Decay and poverty eventually overtook the happy and prosperous colonial community, and in the fight for liberty every

class met on a level. The slaves were given their freedom, the impoverished noblemen who would not abandon their allegiance to the Motherland had to fly from the country, and their property was confiscated. Wives and children were abandoned by husbands who hoped to return or send for them, but never could afford to do either, and the result was a painful decay socially and financially. Doña Pepilla became la Niña Pepilla, and her former slave Benancia la Señora Benancia, and Benancia's daughter married a Spanish Don, and so did the daughters of other Benancias. Education was neglected, and morals became loose. When the men were always fighting, or away preparing revolutions, the wives, left alone, penniless and idle, were often consoled by the attentions of other men. Poverty and misfortune are the surest murderers of morality.

And some of these unfortunate noblemen and noblewomen lost with their other possessions their dignity, their energy and their self-respect. The generation that followed bears the consequences of these misfortunes, and but few families in Panama and the other South American colonies have remained distinctly Spanish, refined, educated and virile, as were their ancestors.

But the indomitable courage and perseverance of the conquerors have not died out, and after more than a hundred years of revolutions we find South America a prosperous country. It has prospered, passing through a million calamities, and some of its nations have placed themselves, in a few years, on a level with the nations of Europe in many respects. Any one who has travelled in Argentina, Chile and other countries, can testify to that.

All this has been accomplished while the Republican children were having their nursery quarrels, commonly called revolutions. Now these nations are almost grown up. They have arrived at the age when a man goes to the university. Their nursery and college squabbles are becoming academical discussions, and very soon the boys will be men, full of knowledge and appreciation of the untold wealth which is theirs to develop. And they will develop it, and form great nations.

## CHAPTER III

### PRIVILEGES AND POMPOSITY OF THE NOBLEMEN

**S**OME of the old Spanish noblemen were very pompous people and enjoyed extraordinary privileges. Soon after Michinga's parents were married a criminal was being taken to the Chiriqui prison, and on passing their house he escaped the vigilance of the police and fled into the *patio*. Now this was what they called a "*casa de cadena*," or "chain house." A chain could be placed across the entrance, but even without the chain, no earthly power, ecclesiastical or civil, could exercise authority within, and so it happened that the convict lived and died

in that house, the most faithful and devoted servant Doña Pepilla ever had. The privilege of asylum was inherited by the families. This house and others were also "*Casa de Catorce*" or "House of Fourteen."

Michinga's grandfather was a "*Veinticuatro de Sevilla*," of which they were very proud. This was a title enjoyed by the Municipal Councillors of Sevilla and Cordoba. At the time when the old city of Panama became the most important town on the New Continent, from which all expeditions started in search of new countries to conquer, for the proud monarch who boasted that in his dominions the sun never set, the valuable services of the Municipal Councillors of Panama merited that these noblemen should be allowed the singular distinction of being *Veinticuatros*, so that Michinga's father became a *Veinti-*



*cuatro* of Panama, just as his father was a *Veinticuatro* of Sevilla. Together with this distinction, the King invested the town of Panama with the title of "Very noble and very loyal," which news was received with great rejoicings and celebrated with much ringing of all the church bells, with bull fights and cock fights. These Municipal Councillors were very strict disciplinarians and seemed to have considered no detail in life too trivial for their interference. In 1572 we find them ordering for runaway slaves, who made the royal road a terror to travellers, all manner of punishments: chains, flogging, dislocation, mutilation, hanging, and, horror of horrors, the worst culprits were to be publicly quartered! In another order, they enumerated the punishments to be suffered by slave women who might dare to use a silk dress or a silk shawl, or gold jewelry or pearls.

They granted to colored women who married Spaniards the right to wear round their skirt a velvet hem, plain gold earrings and a gold chain round their neck, also a mantilla over the head.

So domineering did the Municipalities become that Viceroys, Captain-Generals and others declared against them and overruled many of their laws.

The votes for Municipal Councillors were cast on the first of January each year. The ceremony began by a high Mass at which the ex-Councillors and all who were going to vote received the Sacrament in order that their votes might be given with a clean conscience, and they were supposed to vote only for men of irreproachable conduct, mature age and married!

By royal decree, the oldest Councillor living enjoyed the right of carrying the royal standard in the Procession of Corpus

Christi with the images of Our Lady and St. Peter on either side. After the procession the standard would remain in the Town Hall until the Feast of Santiago, when bull fights and other festivities took place and free drink was distributed at the expense of the Councillor who had carried the standard.

It is noted that their consequence was such that when Count de Castellar passed through Panama on his way to take charge of the Viceroyalty of Peru, and permitted the Councillors to stand in his presence when they went to greet him, the King issued special orders to oblige future Viceroy's passing through Panama to be scrupulously polite when greeted by these dignitaries.

The *Veinticuatro*s were granted a special insignia, a gold branch of olive interlaced with a palm, and in the centre a bust of

King Ferdinand VII and the inscription, "Constancia de Panama."

Another of their singular privileges was that the seat and back of their chairs might be covered in crimson.

But with all these privileges, in 1821 we find them proclaiming their independence from Spain, making a solemn oath by the cross and the gospels to maintain the Catholic religion and defend the purity of the Blessed Virgin.

What an extraordinary mixture of petulance and fanaticism!

Pomposity was the order of the day. Michinga's grandfather, during one of the revolutions, sent his clerk to get a passage for himself and his valet on a ship bound for Peru. The clerk went on board to ask the captain for a ticket, giving all the gentlemen's names and titles, as well as the name of the valet, which was also a very

long one. The captain, who was Scotch, answered with many apologies that he was sorry, he had no room on board for so many people!

The month of May was dreaded. It brought rain, flies, mosquitoes and illness. During March, at the end of the dry season, all the savannas were burnt. With the April showers the new grass began to grow, the cattle ate this and got ill, and consequently everybody who ate meat or drank milk suffered in some way. The flies were a great annoyance, and the mosquito bites on children would get inflamed and become regular tumors sometimes. This was also the worst month for fever. So everyone prepared for May. The slaves who knew the medicinal properties of the different plants were sent out to gather them in all directions. Weeks would be spent by them sometimes in the

forests, and on their return, leaves and barks were classified, and then powdered or boiled or kept in their natural condition in sealed bottles, as also a plentiful supply of leeches. Bleeding and blood sucking were very much in vogue.

Doña Pepilla was very artistic, and her silver dishes, plates, covers for water jars, etc., and also her jewelry, were all designed by herself. It was the custom to have the silversmith and the goldsmith come and live in the house when any work was ordered, and so they went from home to home executing the designs of the ladies and gentlemen. Every article for the washstand, the dinner tables and writing desks was made of solid silver. It lasted forever, there was no risk of breakage, while crockery or glass ordered from Europe, after travelling for six months or a year, usually arrived in pieces.



*Photo by Endara.*

Colonial washstand with hammered silver utensils. Elaborate face towel on wall rack. Small table with red earthenware water cup on silver plate and with silver cover. Silver bell. Coconut and silver wine cup. Silver drinking cup hanging on the wall.





The Señora was also very fastidious about her surroundings; her house was spotless and very justly reputed as the cleanest in the town, and she never tolerated the habit of smoking acquired by some of the gentlemen. One day a Spanish General, who was an inveterate smoker, came to pay his respects to Doña Pepilla. All went well at first. He knew the polite forms of salutation, "*A los pies de usia, su humilde servidor*" ("At your feet your humble servant, Madame"), bowing very low to kiss the tips of the Señora's fingers, she acknowledging the compliment with a courtesy and a word of welcome. Conversation progressed, the General had just arrived. Their Majesties in Spain were very pleased with the services of the Colonel her father-in-law, Don Bernardo, the military decoration of San Hermenegildo had been bestowed by the King, and he had

been received as a Chevalier of the Order of Santiago. In recognition of his services—but spit! And the Señora's spotless floor was stained.

Dionisio, coming in with a tray of wine and cakes, arrived at the critical moment, and could have murdered the old General, if possible. The Señora called out for Benancia: "Quick, a cup of Tisana of orange leaves, *Su Excelencia el Capitan General está sufriendo de indigestion de saliva!*" (His Excellency the Captain General is suffering from an indigestion of saliva.) And the tisane was made, and the General drank it instead of the famous Moscatel wine of the Señora's house. But he never called on the Señora again.

Don Ramon was a silent man and a strict disciplinarian. The only sorrow he ever caused his wife was in becoming a Freemason (in those days disapproved of by

pious ladies) and the head of the Order in Panama. Otherwise he was perfection. He always rested after meals alone in his room, where Benancia would take to him a fragrant cigar made by her and the little silver basin with burning charcoal to light it, and one of the children went to keep him company. Michinga owed her name to this, because when she was old enough to be a companion to her father she soon became the favorite, and this austere man, who never smiled, would do what he had never done in his life, he would play, and this was the game:

With his large linen lawn handkerchief, rolled up, he would make a small mouse with ears and long tail and throw it in the air tied with a long string, Michinga trying to catch it. So he called the child "Michinga," or "Little Kitten."

## CHAPTER IV

### A DINNER IN PANAMA IN 1842

**W**HEN the Colombian General Mosquera, who was a cousin of the Empress Eugenie, came to Panama, after his victories in Peru, his compatriots, justly proud of him, feasted him in every possible way. An address of welcome was written by the Governor of Panama, and Michinga, the ten-year-old little beauty, accompanied by a number of other little girls, was chosen to say the word of welcome. Attired in finest white linen lawn and exquisite old Mechlin lace, at which Benancia had worked for months, white silk stockings and satin slippers, with her hair dressed very high in a mass of curls



*Photo by Endara.*

Old French and English cut glass from Michinga's home.



and puffs, held with gold and pearl ornaments, the little damsel, with her retinue of small friends, was taken at 2 P. M. to the Governor's reception room, which is the same yellow drawing-room of to-day's Presidential Palace. Here "All Panama" had assembled, and General Mosquera, after hearing little Michinga's speech, knelt before her to allow a wreath of flowers, made of down feathers, to be placed on his forehead, kissed her hand and then rose to express his thanks for the welcome Panama had given him. A reception immediately followed, and at 4 P. M. dinner was announced.

We have listened to Michinga's speech, which she still remembers, word for word, though seventy-five years have passed since she said it to General Mosquera :

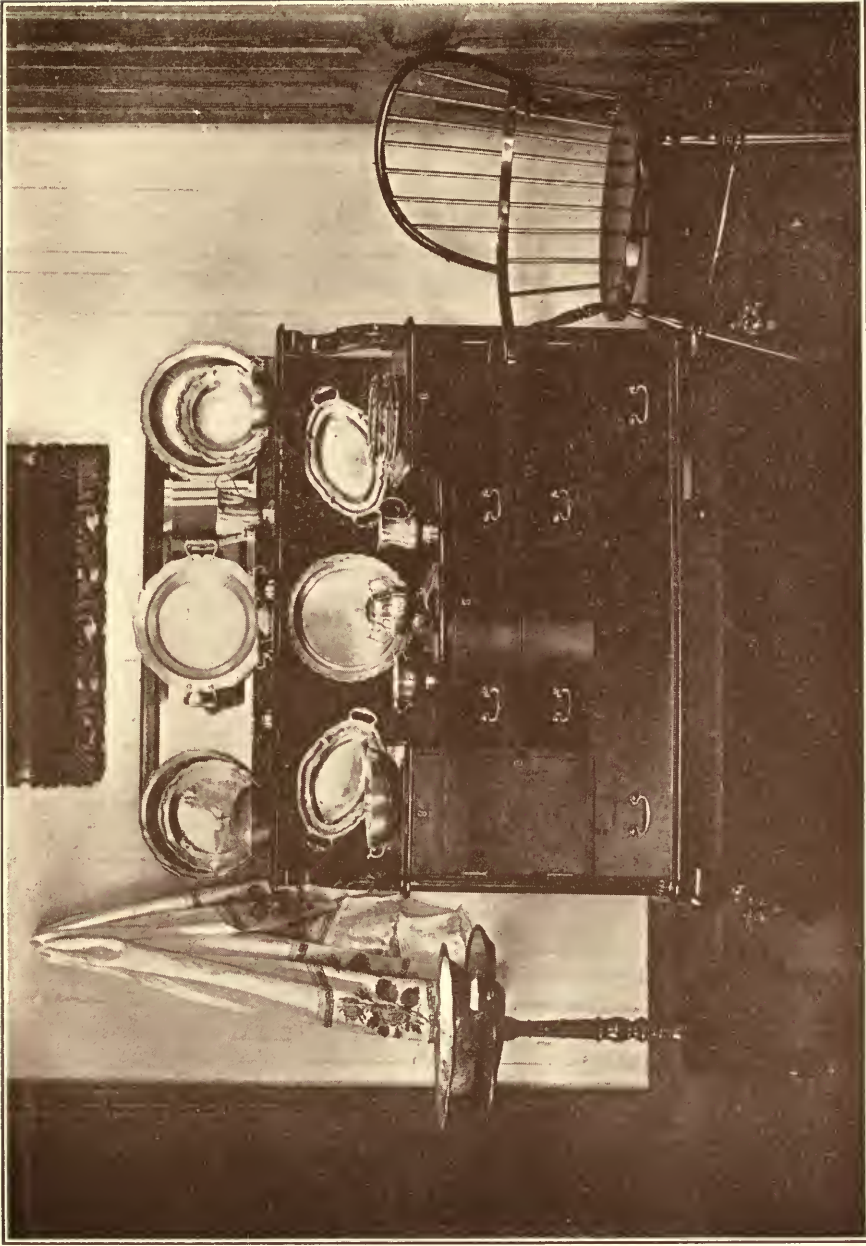
*"Señor General: La sien de un valiente cual voz lo sois debe ser orlada con la corona del tri-*

*unfo por la mano de la inocencia. Aceptad, pues, esta guirnalda que os consagro á nombre del pueblo Panameño acojiendo benigno mis votos reducidos a desearos prosperidad en vutestras empresas en defensa de la santa y hermosa causa que habeis tan lucidamente sostenido con ese espada que después de haber brillado en el dia de Tescua contra los enemigos del orden será, no lo dudo, para mis paisanos la oliva de la paz."*

"Mr. General: The forehead of the brave man that you are is about to be adorned with the wreath of triumph by the hand of innocence. Accept this crown that I offer you, in the name of the Panama people, and listen kindly to my wishes, summed up in a desire for your success in all your enterprises in defense of the holy and beautiful cause which you have so brilliantly sustained with that sword, which, after shining in the fields of Tescua against the enemies of public order, will, I have no doubt, become the emblem of peace among my countrymen."

A dinner in those days was a most elaborate affair, always entrusted to a "Master





*Photo by Endara.*

Corner of Colonial dining room. Silver dishes, plates, mug for chicha, milk jug, sugar basin, etc., on sideboard. On small table is silver basin for washing hands after meals, and the elaborately worked hand towel hangs on the wall above it.



of Ceremonies." General Mosquera took Michinga to table, and she sat on his right. Soups of various kinds, fish and entrees were served, and this constituted the "first service," and when it was ended the guests rose from the table, and amused themselves until the table was made ready for the "second service." Roasts, tamales, salads and vegetables were now brought in lavish profusion, and when they had been partaken of, the table was again left vacant for redecoration. At the "third service" even the table cloth was changed, fresh flowers were used, and candles were lit. This was dessert time, and coffee and liqueurs followed. When dinner was over and the ball began, the clock had struck ten.

A formal quadrille opened the ball, and then followed the *contredance*, *rigodon*,

and other formal dances of the period.

The Master of Ceremonies on this occasion was Mr. Jované, a wealthy gentleman of Panama, considered an authority on etiquette. The magnificent old Spanish silver dinner service used for the occasion was his. The cut glass for wines and the Worcester porcelain dessert service had come from England.

In those days there were no street lights, so after a ball a servant always walked in front of his master, carrying a candle in a glass shade. These shades were called *fanales*, and another kind, still in use, *faroles*.

The Panamanian desserts, of which there is a great variety, are delicious in taste and very elaborate to make. The guava jelly, jam and paste are generally known to foreigners, but others equally delicious are less well known. The *huevo-*

*chimbo* is a solid pudding made of the yolks of eggs, eighty yolks being required for a dish sufficient for 18 persons. After it is cooked, it is soaked in a specially prepared syrup. The *queso de pina* is an exquisite custard in which pineapple juice takes the place of milk. *Manjarblanco* is made of milk, sugar and spices, boiled until they become of the consistency of cheese. *Arroz con cacao* is rice cooked in cocoanut milk and chocolate, served with cocoanut cream and grated native cheese. *Mazamorra de maiz nuevo* is a blanc mange made of very new corn passed through a sieve and cooked in cocoanut milk until it becomes hard. This is a most delicate and delicious dessert. *Cocada nevada* is a thick, velvety cream of cow's milk and cocoanut cream. The inevitable "wedding pudding" which takes the place of the northern "wedding cake" is made of

sponge cake soaked and baked in sherry wine, syrup and spices, and is called *sopa borracha*. The *sopa de gloria* accompanies the former, and differs from it because milk is used instead of wine.

The list of jams is legion, and there are small cakes in great variety,—*Biscotelas*, *Suspiros*, *Cajetitas de coco*, *Papillas*, *Huebo mejio*, *Cabellitos de angel*, *Bol-loria*, *Pio V*, *Cabanga*, etc. As desserts I might also mention the *bollos*. The *bollo chango* (the best is to be had in Taboga) is made of pure new corn. *Bollo de coco*, of corn and cocoanut; *Bollo Chiricano*, of corn and cheese; *bollo blanco*, of pure full grown corn; and *bollo de aji*, which is the same, colored with a sauce made of hot peppers. All of these are made in the shape of a plantain, more or less, and wrapped in corn or palm leaves.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SLAVE JUANILLO EL GACHO AND HIS STONE THRONE

**D**ON JOSE MANUEL DE ARCE Y MAONO, a Spanish nobleman from the city of Santander, Seigneur of Puente de Arce, was the son of Don Juan Manuel, a descendant of the famous Don Diego de Arze Reinoso, "Grand Inquisitor" of Spain. He came to this capital of the Kingdom of Tierra Firme, in the year 1773, and owned many slaves, some of whom had cost him large sums of money and been brought from distant lands. Among these slaves, who served their master in the farms, in the plantations and in the household, one hideous black man was

the great favorite. Respected and loved by all the other slaves he also enjoyed various privileges from the kindness of his master, who, in the evenings when the family was united, would allow the slave to relate the history of his early life.

Juan Godoy the slave was called, lame, grey haired, with enormous flat nose and thick-lipped mouth, his grotesque appearance completed by the total absence of both ears, for which he became known as Juanillo el Gacho, which means "Johnnie without ears."

Johnnie had not been a very saintly youth, the loss of his ears testified to this. The Spanish monarch had issued a royal decree ordering all runaway slaves to be mutilated in this cruel manner as a punishment for their fault. Some of these runaways had formed into organized bands known as *cimarrones* and had become the



terror of the country. Travellers and convoys were assaulted, robbed and sometimes murdered, and all kinds of outrages were committed by them on the highroads.

Johnnie had deserted his master after leaving a poisoned dagger in the heart of the overseer who used to flog him mercilessly for any insignificant misdeed. He became famous with a band of outlaws who in admiration of his strength and daring named him chief. What this band lacked in numbers it made up for in ferocity and audacity and became the terror of not only the Panamanians, but of all the neighboring country. The radius of their operations was quite large, but they established their headquarters in the most inaccessible hills, overlooking the lovely valley of Pacora, in the vicinity of the settlements of Bermejil and Cabra. Here the chief dispensed justice to his men, and to

the Indians of the tribe as well, undisturbed monarch of all that surrounded him; distributing the treasure taken from defenseless travellers; condemning to heartless flogging any man showing fear or hesitation to obey his orders; rewarding the brave, and, when the treasure was large enough to satisfy him, becoming magnanimous and setting the captives free after they had been carefully robbed even of their clothes. His large house made of bamboo and thatched, was also the meeting house of the band. Here they would gather to deliberate their plans of assault and of escape, Johnnie, the chief, always sitting on his stone throne with a wreath of macaw feathers circling his forehead. All his possessions were lawlessly acquired, even the stone throne which belonged to the Cacique Bermejál, the rightful chief of that region.



*Photo by Endara.*

Stone throne of Juanillo el Gacho.



One day luck deserted this band of evil-doers and they were caught in an ambush carefully prepared for them by the Spanish soldiers. A fierce battle they fought, both sides determined to win. Johnnie was shot in the leg and his followers on seeing him fall lost their courage and fled. Few saved their lives, the Spaniards pursuing them with great persistence in the hope of exterminating them altogether. Johnnie was carried to Panama where he narrowly escaped being lynched; the people begged to be allowed to tear the monster to pieces, but the authorities protected him and he received the punishment ordered by law.

On the appointed day he was conducted to the Cathedral Plaza, and there, amid the curses and jeers of a populace, so many of whom had suffered endless moral and physical torture at his hands, Johnnie's

ears were cut off and he was then sent to the dungeons of the Chiriqui prison for life.

Years passed in the solitude of his damp dark cell transformed Johnnie into a better man, he repented of his past crimes, his hair became snowy white and instead of the ferocious expression he had cultivated to inspire his criminal followers, a placid, resigned look greeted his gaoler every morning. Johnnie's conduct in jail was exemplary and he became the delight of the other prisoners and their gaolers, who would, against the usual custom, allow him to sit in a central hall out of his cell, to relate the thrilling adventures of his past life.

When King Charles IV ascended the throne of Spain, in 1788, to commemorate the event, Don José Domas y Valle, Governor and Commander General of the



A "look out" tower on the city walls looking on the Pacific.





Kingdom and Brigadier of the Royal Army, he allowed the worst hundred criminals of the prison to draw lots for release, and our Johnnie was one of the fortunates. Old in years, and lame from a wound neglected in a damp prison cell, Johnnie had no strength and no inclination to seek new adventures, so he made his way to the home of Don José Manuel de Arce, to offer his services and his life on condition of being granted a favor he would ask. He had but one ambition in life, he said, to sit once again upon his stone throne, the emblem of his former power. Johnnie had great veneration for Don Manuel and with good reason. In 1876, Don Manuel had been Alcalde and had visited the prison. Johnnie interested him, his clever talk and bizarre appearance fascinated the old gentleman, and Johnnie became his protégé and was henceforth regularly supplied by him

with tobacco and new clothes. It was not surprising, therefore, to see the ex-convict find his way to the home of his benefactor, and Don Manuel in turn was moved by this mark of devotion and by the strange request, which he promised to grant.

The next morning Johnnie was very early astride an excellent mule, with a score of Don Manuel's slaves, bound for Bermejil in search of his old stone throne which they brought back to Panama upon their shoulders, enduring many hardships with their heavy load over the hills, across the rivers and in the dense forests, sleeping where night overtook them with the trees and skies as their only shelter, thirty miles there and thirty back, tramping along for many days. The arrival of this strange procession with its wonderful burden, was greeted at Don Manuel's home with acclamations from the children of the

household, and from the slaves who looked upon the owner of this extraordinary seat as a superior being. Johnnie was clever enough not to allow this impression to fade. On Sundays when the children did not go to school, he would make a crown from the feathers of the chickens boiling in the Sunday *sancocho*, and with this emblem of power pressing round his temples he would sit upon the famous ancient throne and play king, to the great delight of the children and to the edification of the other slaves.

Johnnie ended his days as doorkeeper to the Arce family. He was to be seen always on his throne, sitting by the door with all the children of the neighborhood, Michinga among them, surrounding him to listen to his endless stories. After his death the throne remained in the Arce family. Don Bernardo Arce Mata left it to his

children with the tradition of Johnnie's doings, just as they had been related to him by his father Don Bernardo Arce y Oriñon, a son of Don José Manuel, Johnnie's master.

The throne was given to me by Don Eduardo Icaza who married the heiress of the Arce family, and he was moved to make me this priceless gift with its authentic history in recognition of a service I was once able and very pleased to render him. When his wife came into her inheritance, two red velvet bound volumes, with handsome silver clasps, containing the genealogy of the Arces, exquisitely illustrated on parchment, were found among the family papers, and Don Eduardo, knowing how I would like to see them, brought them to me one day. Strangely enough, some years previously, two identical volumes had been entrusted to me, belonging to the

Icazas, Don Eduardo's family, and I remarked how nice it would be if he could own them, but they had passed to another member of the family. I had, however, taken a copy of the Icaza genealogy because it contained a great deal of Spanish history which interested me, so I offered to make a handwritten copy on official paper signed by me in the presence of witnesses declaring it a faithful copy of the original, and this I did.

I give a photograph of Johnnie's throne at the beginning of this chapter. It is in a very good state of preservation and is a typical specimen of the thrones of stone made in Cuzco and used by the Incas and caciques. It represents the figure of a crouching Indian with a seat resting flat upon his back.



II  
THE NATIONAL COSTUME







A Panama girl wearing the national costume, called "Pollera."



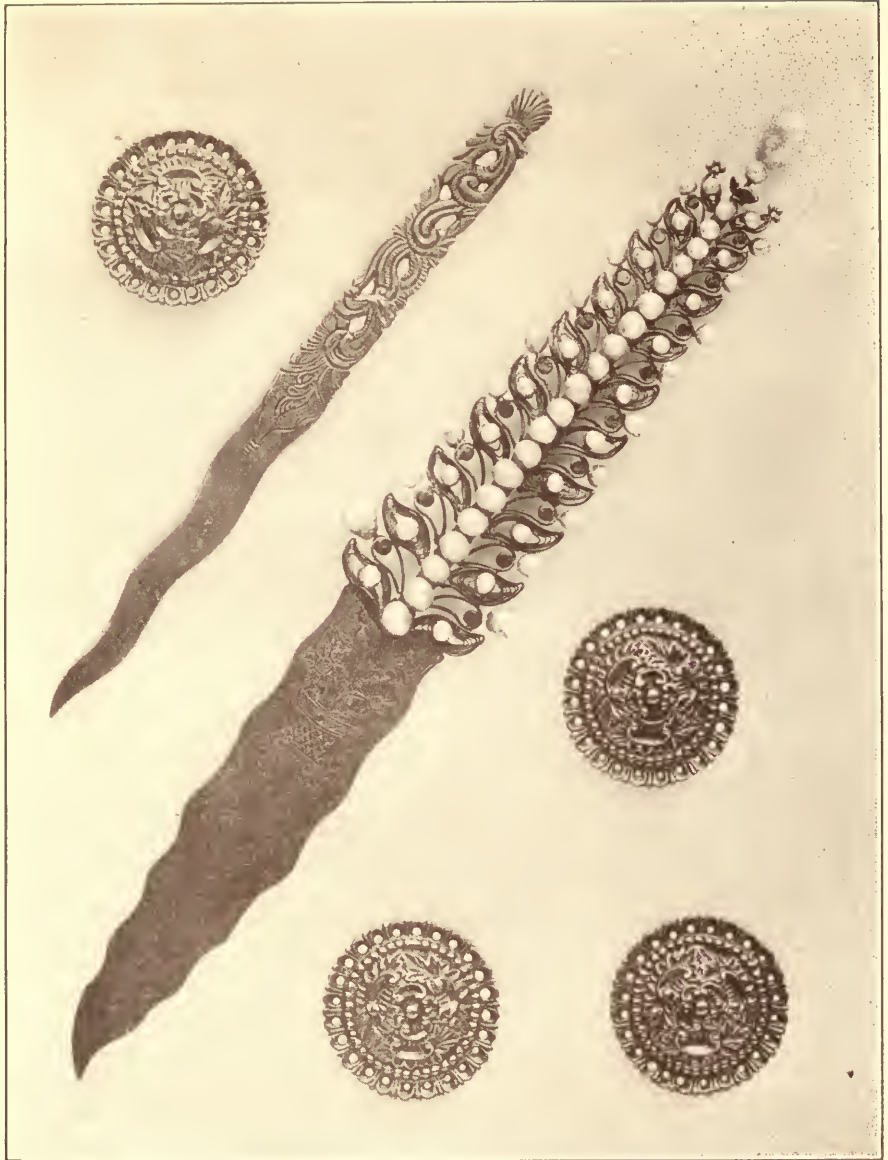
## II

### THE NATIONAL COSTUME

**T**HE national costume of Panama is believed to have been originally a gypsy dress altered to suit the times. It was in the Spanish Colonial days the usual attire of the women servants of the early settlers in Panama. It was particularly worn by the children's nurses, and the dress is so pretty and so appropriate in a hot climate that even the ladies of the nobility would sometimes wear it in the privacy of the home, during the hot hours of the day. There are, even to-day, in the Spanish families of Panama, old servants who never wear any other dress. These old women, relics of a past age, are delightful to talk

to, their Old World respect to their masters, their wonderful memory of past events and their devotion to the family in whose house some of them were born of slaves that had been set free, make them rare treasures that with true sadness we see disappearing, for they will never be replaced.

A careful study of the national dress detects a gypsy origin. The rosary which a gypsy wears of carved wood beads, and the scapular of cloth, were copied in solid gold by the Spanish Don who wished to attire his servants in a manner befitting his wealth and position. The *cabestrillo*, a chain from which hang all sizes of gold coins, is also a gypsy idea. The huge half moon earrings are copied in gold and pearls, and a fascinating hair ornament known as the *pajuela*, is a copy of the dagger that some gypsies are wont to carry in



Buttons worn to hold the skirts of the Panama national costume and two kinds of *pajuellas*, worn as hair ornaments; the smaller of these is a toothpick and ear cleaner.



their hair. The one in my collection, which is illustrated in these pages, has a blade of solid gold, exquisitely carved, while the handle is a work of art in filigree and pearls; on the back of the blade is a long hook to fasten it to the hair. Another kind of *pajuela*, also in the shape of a small dagger, served a singular purpose,—one end was a sharp tooth pick, the other end was shaped like a tiny shell, with which to clean the ears.

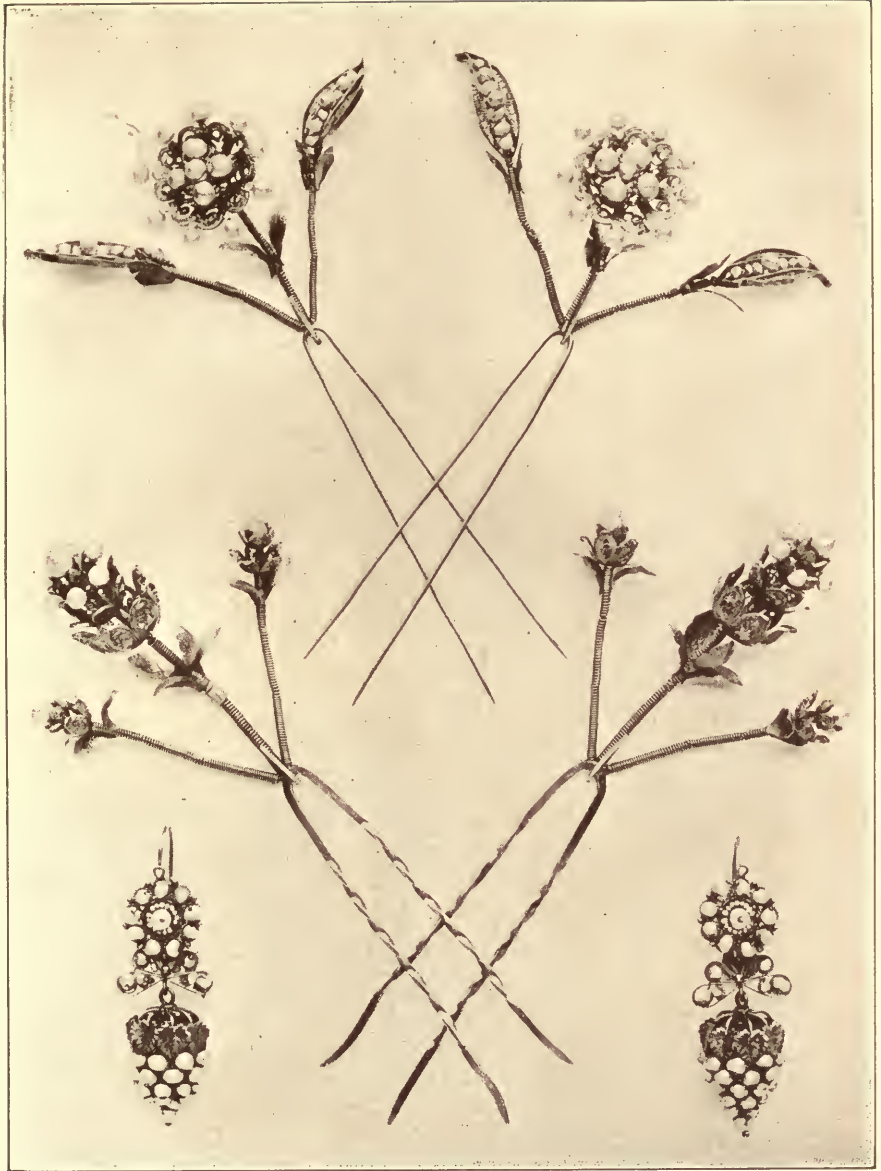
Two kinds of hair combs are worn, one with a band of elaborate gold work, called *de balcon*, because of the resemblance of the work to a balcony railing. These are placed towards the back of the head on either side, the others called *de perlas*, because the gold work is surmounted with pearls, are worn a little more to the front. Corals were sometimes used instead of pearls. There are sprays of flowers made

of gold and pearls. The set is usually of four sprays. They are worked in such a manner that the stems are flexible and "tremble" as one moves, hence their name, *tembleques*. The *tembleques* are worn on either side of the head behind the ears, with any amount of jasmine, carnations and small rosebuds. On the temples, on a level with the eyes, small gold coins were glued. This custom does not prevail now.

Eight carved very solid gold buttons are used to hold the skirts with ribbons. The skirts are two and very full, made of graduated frills with yards and yards of lace. They open at the sides, each end has a loop to put the ribbons through, and these are tied back and front, also a gypsy custom.

Rings are used *galore* on all the fingers of the hand, but no bracelets. We are told the reason for this is that the bracelet has been thought an emblem of slavery, and

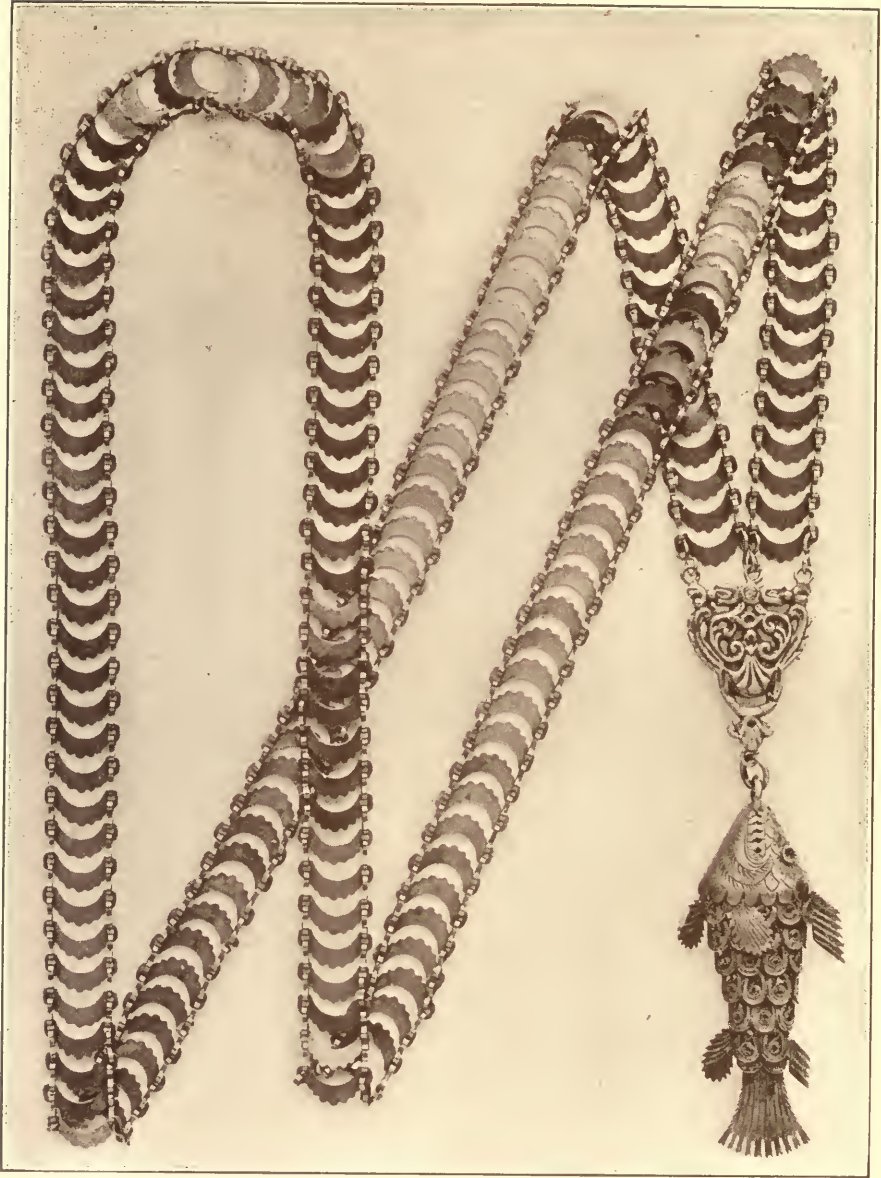




*Tembleques* are the hair ornaments of filigree gold work and pearls, worn with the Panama national costume. The earrings representing bunches of grapes are worn with ordinary costume, and are made in Bogota.







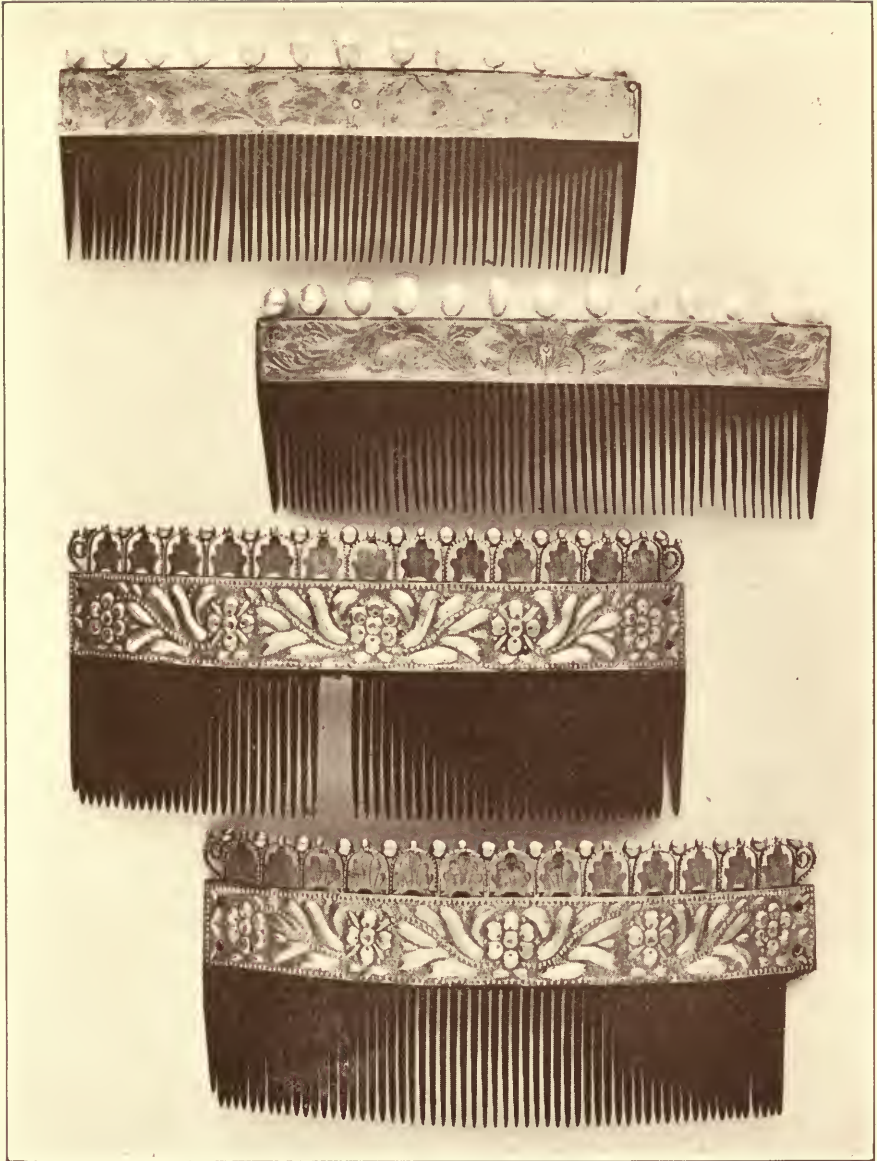
The *cadena chata*, or flat chain emblematical of Panama, worn with the national costume of Panama. See description on page 77.

such emblem would find no favor with a gypsy.

The *cadena chata*, or flat chain, is the only part of the costume which is absolutely Panamanian in its significance. The word Panama is Indian, means variety or abundance of fish; it was given to the coast along the bay because of the quantities of fish to be found in its waters. Pedrarias, the founder of old Panama, and Fernandez de Cordoba the founder of the second town of this name, cannot be said to have "given" it. They simply "continued" to use the name by which this region was known to its original inhabitants. The links of the *cadena chata* represent fish scales, and suspended from the end is usually a gold fish. Some women seem to have preferred to wear a sacred image or cross, instead of a fish, so both kinds of emblems are used. The camisole which does

duty as bodice in this costume is composed of circular frills which are divided at the back and front and are clasped together by two sets of gold links formed of small gold shells, like the delicate little pink shells to be found on the shores of Panama Bay. No stockings are worn, but there were two shoes. The dainty satin or panne slipper, very similar to those of a modern ballet dancer, is the only kind in use at present, but formerly it was worn indoors, while a kid slipper, called *babucha*, which has wooden heels and no back, was worn over the satin shoe for walking in the street and was slipped off at the door on entering a church or house.

The scarfs woven by natives are of cotton, or of silk, and called *macanas* or *rebosos*. The white linen scarfs with ends of drawn thread work cross-stitch or embroidery are known as *pañó de pollera*.



Gold and pearl combs worn with the Panama national costume.





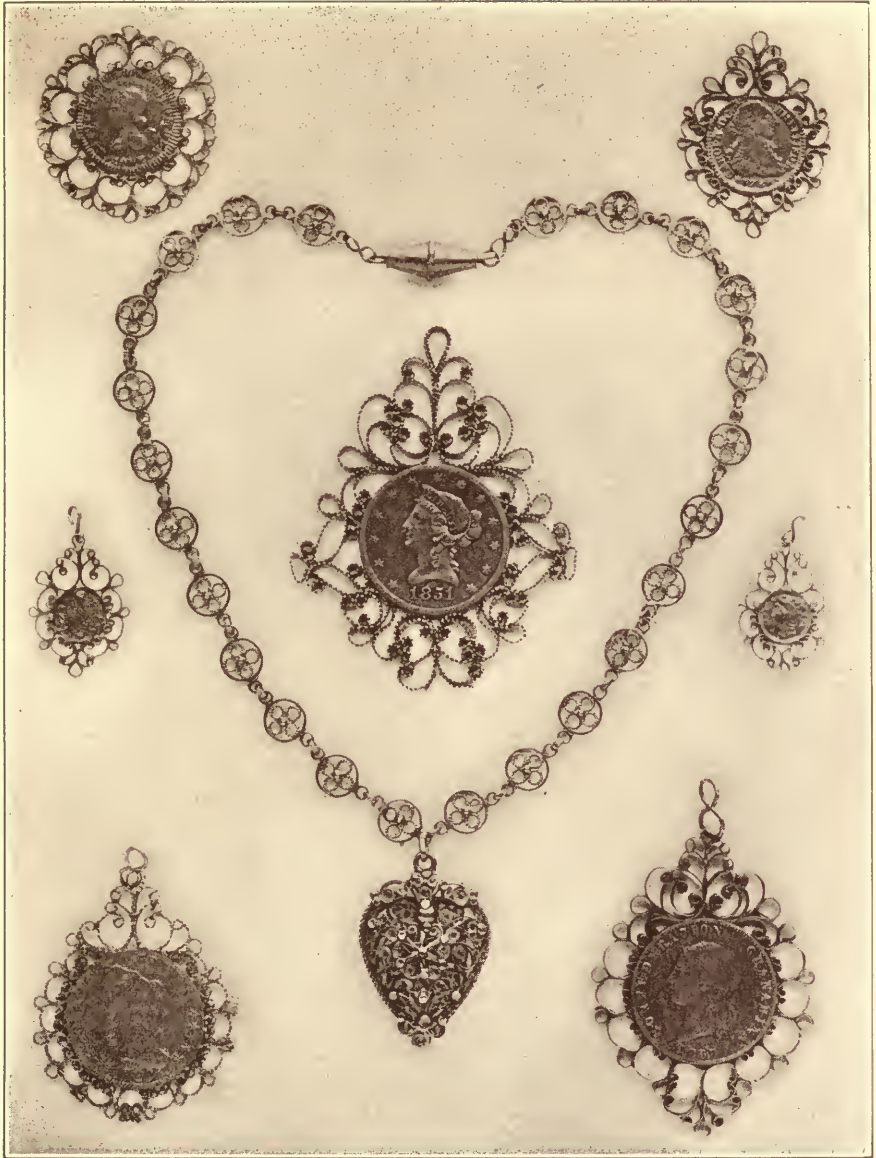
Nurses used to throw them open over the left shoulder so that the baby and its clothes would rest against the cool white linen. I may here mention a typical custom. When a nurse ended her task of *successfully* weaning a baby the mother presented the nurse with a *cadena chata* as a reward.

The so-called "Panama hats," worn with the national dress, have never been made in Panama. The greatest number are manufactured in Ecuador, and are known to all South Americans as Jipijapa or Monte Cristi hats because the first ones came from there. The finest hats to-day, for which five hundred *pesos* and more are paid, are made near Jipijapa in a place called Monte Cristi.

A silk knitted purse with two divisions is suspended from the waist, two rings holding the openings. At one end is

placed the gold and at the other the *plata menuda* (small change).

The material mostly used for this *pollera* is a linen crash called *coquito*. In many instances it is ornamented with exquisite designs made in cross-stitch. One of the prettiest of these is called the Vallarino design, and as others are known by the names of other distinguished old hidalgo families, it would seem that the Spanish ladies vied with each other in inventing pretty designs for the dresses of their maid servants. Needlework was the chief occupation of these ladies. Numbers of these *polleras* were hand embroidered in Bogota, but there is a very beautiful kind of needlework peculiar to Panama and always used for the underskirt of the national dress, which is called *talcos*. It is made of two materials sewn together. A design is drawn on one material which is always



Gold coins ornamented with gold scroll designs, and worn suspended from a plain chain with the national costume of Panama. The small necklet and heart pendant of gold filigree work is worn with ordinary costume.



thicker than the other, the design is then gradually cut out and hemmed with tiny invisible stitches, and the effect of this sort of shadow work is very unique. The waistband of the underskirt sometimes is made with a stomacher of most elaborate and peculiar needlework.

For ordinary working days less lace and less frills are used, and the material usually selected is calico. The full dress is worn a great deal at present on feast days, especially during Carnival, and is most becoming and picturesque.

THE END

















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