

**PERU**  
**A LAND OF**  
**CONTRASTS**

**BY**  
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IN THE MONASTERY OF SAN FRANCISCO, LIMA.

# INTRODUCTION

“Qui peut dire où réside le charme  
d’un pays? Qui trouvera ce quelque  
chose d’intime et d’insaisissable que rien  
n’exprime dans les langues humaines?”

PIERRE LOTI

# **Peru, A Land of Contrasts**

# INTRODUCTION

ANY statement regarding Peru implies a contrary statement equally valid. Contrast is its characteristic quality, true as to the general aspects of the country and ramifying through remote details. It is the obvious point of view from which to study Peru.

The three parts of this book—the desert, the mountains, the jungle—are the three natural divisions of the country. The shore is a long, narrow desert, much diversified. In a fertile valley intersecting it lies Lima, The City of the Kings. The river has come from the Andes, on whose lofty tablelands, called *jalca* in the north and *puna* in the south, flourished remote civilizations filled with mystery. Beyond the mountain barrier lies the jungle, geographically the largest portion of Peru, and like all other jungles a region of dread and fascination.

Peru is a low country lying under a mild sky; but above are the mighty Andes freezing under arctic blizzards. The desert is barren for lack of rain; beyond the mountains, the over-productive jungle is saturated with tropical downpours. Along the shore thunderstorms are unknown; up on the icy tablelands of the cordillera, whose volcanoes are sealed with snow, lightning rips open the mountainsides. Fire splits, and water smooths. Mists are strong enough to magnify and the sky is clear enough to do so. The *puna* is a land of brutal elements, yet there is found the little chinchilla, protected with softest fur.

On the coast, overhead calm is counterbalanced by subterranean fury. “All geological phenomena are still in active

operation,” the shore rising, earthquakes changing the face of the earth, and underground rivers dodging beneath a desert sterile for want of the water which they are hurrying off. The people who live in this country of volcanoes and earthquakes feed on red peppers.

If lack of water prevents the heat of the sun from making the desert productive, so cold prevents water upon the mountain plains from encouraging vegetation. In the jungle luxuriance of all growth conceals any single benefit. Nature erects barriers everywhere. She has surrounded her richest gifts with almost insurmountable difficulties. Fertilizers come from the desert, a realm of death. Mines of the Andes coldly hoard their riches under a life-sucking atmosphere. Agassiz said: “An empire might esteem itself rich in any one of the sources of industry which abound in the Amazon valley.” But these are inaccessible from their very quantity, and they shut in beneath them a fever-laden air. Where there is most fertilizer, the land is most barren; where there are most precious metals, it is most incapable of supporting human life; where richest, it is most difficult to cultivate.

Such is Peru. Elements and forces contrast; each combats each, and all attack man. Nature wars against herself: tropic heat, arctic cold; heavy, poisonous jungle mists, thin air of the mountain-tops; scorching dryness, reeking wet. Even obstacles contrast in Peru. Man is threatened everywhere by elements, by insects. He drowns here or dies of thirst there. He can even be overcome by cold or sunstroke in the same place.

Peru is a land of violent extremes. It has a range of mountains as great as any in the world. The towering peaks are too high to climb. Far above circles the condor, the largest bird in the world. Peru is the source of the world’s greatest river system, whose

luxuriant forests are too thick to penetrate. The only representatives of a lost geological age inhabit them, as well as the biggest snakes and the smallest birds. Peru has great mineral deposits in the mountains; it also has rubber in the forests. Wool is produced on the frozen plains, and chocolate in the deep gorges lost among them. And from the valleys intersecting the desert come cotton and sugar-cane.

All kinds of obscure substances are found in this versatile country, ipecac and cochineal, cocaine and vanadium. Not unlike the rest of the world, chill here produces fever, but quinine, the best remedy for the disease of contrast, comes also from the forests of Peru.

Although nature is a supreme fact, its natural history is not the whole of Peru. And contrast as a method of interpretation does not fail for its other aspects. Though man seems to play so small a part, he has lived here since antediluvian animals wandered among coal forests on the Andes. To the charm of limitless nature is added the mystery of great peoples destroyed before they were known. The riches of the Incas and of the glittering, vice-regal Spanish days, when continents were found, taken, and explored, contrast with present poverty. Consistently throughout, the riches of Peru have impoverished it. Its gifts have caused its ruin over and over again.

Wars and rebellions have riddled the country, and bull-fights have filled leisure hours. Though audacity of action has fascinated historians of Peru, its periods of peace have in them even more of romance: a nation of slaves ruled by a monarch-god; oriental splendor of Lima shining because of forced labor in the dark, suffocating mines; Arab blood in the conquerors' veins penetrating the quiet Indian people, adding a keener edge to their sufferings.

The poverty of the present-day Indians contrasts with lavish nature, “beggars sitting on a pile of gold.” Contrasts of nature, of people to country, of antiquity to the present—these diverse elements are insistent wherever one turns.

The charm of contrasting facts is puissant. Almost any one of them might be the text for an allegory. To guard against rhapsody, I have documented every statement made. Conservative authority can be given for every fact, however fantastic, however trivial. The few legends are in a sense also facts: “*Une légende ment parfois moins qu’un document.*”

The tellers of Peru’s story deserve a history themselves. First came the falcon-eyed missionaries of Spain, sword and rosary clattering beneath priestly robes, to subject the Indians to salvation, or mercifully to condemn them to death by torture. Had they been less conscientious in describing all those quaint beliefs and idolatrous practices which they came to stamp out, we should perhaps have missed the chief source of information in regard to the Children of the Sun and their dependent peoples. Military writers and official chroniclers followed in close order. It took them some time to recover from their amazement at this land of “gold, silver and pleasant monkeys.” They wrote with convincing emphasis, “Wee that live now at Peru ... finde not ourselves to bee hanging in the aire, our heades downward and our feete on high.” On the contrary, they discovered that they were even “as near unto heaven at Peru as in Spain.”

Explorers and adventurers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were in the forefront of writers of romance. Such authors have always found inspiration here. From Marmontel to the *Peruvian Tales* of Guenelette, from Frank Stockton to José-Maria

de Heredia, chiseler of faultless cameos, who himself came from a dramatic land of Spanish conquest, Peru has been a word to conjure with. But invention has added no glamour to history. It cannot keep pace with fact.

Accounts by various travelers of past centuries, voyages of discovery and reports of treasure fleets are followed by the students of to-day. Scientists write of Peru, each authority finding his specialty accented. The geologist sees cosmic forces in active operation still. The anthropologist studies untouched savages in the morasses of the Amazon, the naturalist's wonderland. Archeology now has an exciting preëminence. Cool authorities admit the amazing antiquity of Peruvian ruins. The historian finds a great barbaric civilization; the economist ancient systems of state policy; the prospector an extensive system of navigable waterways. The mining engineer discovers inexhaustible mines, and the agriculturist unique opportunity, where the uplands of a farm lie among snows, its lowlands under rubber groves and orange trees. All write of Peru, and an increasing bibliography affords easy access to every sort of statistics. I have referred to a wide range of authorities, many of them cited in an appendix, to supplement my own observations, made as member of an astronomical expedition, during a stay of several months in Peru.

A painstaking person while in Peru wrote a journal containing all he saw. Not an event or an observation escaped chronicle. But on reaching home he discovered that his really poignant memories were not in his journal. His entries, though conscientious, "were but the ingredients. They were not the secret of the philtre."

Facts make their own appeal. But direct assault is not the only means of approach. Sometimes subtleties are best observed by

looking at something else. It is often easier to see the beauty, the full glitter and glance of a thing in another object, as the play of colors in the aurora borealis is better perceived by turning the eyes aside. Sometimes one or two minor points chosen from an embarrassment of interesting details are all the imagination needs, as a plant selects only those elements from air and soil which can be used in perfecting its tissue of stem and leaf and flower.

It can only be hoped that this book about Peru may succeed in even suggesting its unique appeal.

# PART I IN THE DESERT

“I love all waste  
And solitary places; where we taste  
The pleasure of believing what we see  
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be;  
And such was this wide ocean, and this shore  
More barren than its billows.”

SHELLEY

# CHAPTER I

## ALONG SHORE

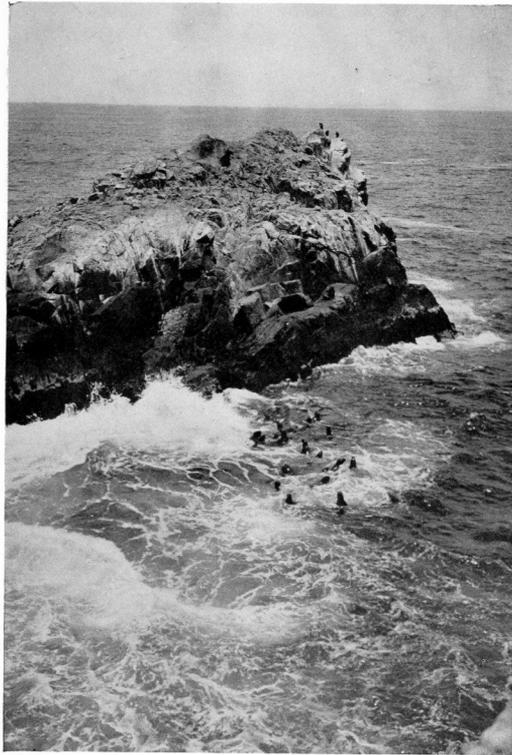
THE surface of the ocean is unruffled. Only the heaving of its great body suggests the power beneath. But when it confronts the desert cliffs, backed by the world-weight of the Andes, the force which has been gathering all the way from Australia, so mighty that it can be compared to nothing but itself, snarls into uncontrolled fury, rebellious, but acknowledging the limit of its power.

The “Peaceful Ocean” lies next to a land of geological unrest; the coast rising, subterranean torment breaking out in earthquakes, hurling cliffs into the sea. Even the busy modern port of Callao partakes of the mystery of this elemental land. The white ships anchored in the clear water of its harbor gradually turn dull brown. Might it be the crater of an extinct volcano?

No wonder the people on such a shore build bamboo cages plastered with refuse and mud to live in, temporary for them as the present stage is transient in the history of the land on which they live. Their object-lessons are warring natural forces. No wonder they are brutal, slinging cattle on board steamers by the horns, casting a stone between the eyes of a bullock to make him turn around. Even their little children play at bull-fights with horns of defunct cattle. The soil of this “sea-gnawn” shore affords not one necessity for human existence, not even a drop of water. There are no real harbors, only niches in the jagged coast. But few

lighthouses indicate danger, and the desert is chilled by winds from the Antarctic pole.

Far out, a low cloud is skimming the surface of the gray water, advancing in waves of blackness. From one end a shower falls; at the other, a column rises from the water to meet the on-rushing mass, “a great oval, rolling forwards over the sea.” It comes nearer and nearer, till the shore shimmers as through heat waves. The quiet is complete except for the noise of millions of laboring wings.



## SEALS OF THE PALOMINOS ISLANDS.

A cloud of birds! Now they fall to the water with close-clapped wings, hundreds at a time, each a tiny splashing fountain. Their hunger is insatiable, but not because food is lacking, for the swarms of pilchards beneath the waves are vaster than the armies of birds which pursue them. Ancient Indian races enriched their irrigated fields with these little fish. A curious, tawny jewel is found upon this shore, known as "fishes' eyes." Might they be fossilized eyes of those fertilizer-fishes?

The appearance of this coast could not have been different in antediluvian days, with the screeching birds and the mammoth terrapin off-shore, those associates of the dodo.

The birds fly out at sunrise and spend the day in fishing, resting upon the waves when they are tired, and at sunset return to their giant stone islands for the night. Alone, the call of a sea-bird would be lost in the fury of the meeting of cliff and sea. But as a mass of white gulls can assume blackness by mere quantity, so their mingled voices can take on an overwhelming poignancy of sound. Louder than the crash of breakers, louder than the barking and snorting of the bald, fat seals loping over them in droves, surges the great cry of the birds, as, in a shower of wild calls diverse as themselves, they settle upon the rocks: pelicans, cormorants, mollyhawks, gannets, sea-mews, gulls, osprey, occasional tropical flamingoes lost among ice-birds and stormy petrels, wild ducks, Inca terns, and the weird, amphibious "bird-child," which tries to stand erect, fluttering its cartilaginous wings, braced by its indistinguishable tail. All the birds of the ocean gather here, from sandpeeps to albatrosses, a surfeit of life to accentuate the barrenness of the shore. They are multiplying every

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