

On Our Way to Mt. Roraima

(The following letter, received at the Inter-American Division Office, relates the experiences of missionaries Cott and Christian on their way to the "Davis Indians.")

After a long delay we were able to start on our journey from Georgetown, British Guiana, March 10, 1927. It gave us a queer feeling to think that we were now leaving civilization for many a long day. We arrived at Wismar the same day after a sixty-mile journey up the Demerara River. Here we waited several hours while our stores were checked over as they were carried from the boat.

At about six o'clock in the evening we started off in a small train which accommodated only ten persons, first class. I remember saying, "This train looks very much like the toy train at Ocean Park, California," only it was illuminated with oil lanterns, and the engine burned wood which made the sparks fly in all directions. If our windows had not been closed our clothes would have been burnt. It was so hot and close that we were glad when we reached the Rockstone hotel where we hoped to obtain a good night's rest; however, we found some big holes in the mosquito nets provided for us so we were obliged to fight mosquitoes nearly all night.

OVER THE RAPIDS

At seven o'clock the next morning we were all packed into a small launch in which we must continue our journey up the Essequibo River. We were close to the engine which furnished us with all the music that we needed for the rest of the day. The scenery along the river banks was very pretty, there being a dense fringe of jungle growth all along each bank.

In the afternoon we experienced quite an excitement when we reached the Tigri Rapids, a tortuous race between rocks where the water fell several feet. We left most of the passengers and one of our two boats below the rapids. The launch, with its noisy engine, towing the other boat which was filled with freight, attempted to surmount the rapids three times without success. Then, after transferring most of the cargo from the boat to the launch, six more desperate efforts were made, the last of which just carried us over.

We reached Tumatumari late the same evening as tired as dinnerless folks could be; but the beautiful fresh air and the roaring of the Crobbu Falls had quite a soothing effect upon us. We had a good night's rest; and after a short journey in another launch which was waiting for us above the falls, we arrived at Potaro Landing early in the afternoon of March 13.

JIGGERS AND HOWLING BABOONS

Here we were met by Mr. Allen in his Dodge car. With many bumps and jerks, he conveyed us over the uneven forest road to Kangaruma, six miles away. We enjoyed this rather uncomfortable ride, however, as we expected it was our last one in an auto for a long, long time. On our arrival at Kangaruma, Mr. Allen had a meal prepared for us and allotted us quarters in a disused store house. Brother and Sister

Christian slung their hammocks inside, and we slept under the overhanging roof of the building. It did not take us long to discover that the sandy ground immediately beneath us was the happy breeding place of numerous jiggers.

These, as you know, are small insects which burrow under the skin of one's feet, and under the toe nails in particular, causing much inflammation and tenderness and necessitating an ultimate painful operation with a needle for their removal. I can well remember that on March 27—my birthday—my husband removed my twenty-seventh jigger.

It was at this place that we were first entertained by the howling baboons which we could hear very plainly in the forest. To any one who has never heard one of these creatures it is impossible to convey any idea of the volume of the noise they make. The South American baboons have howling bones in their throats, and at a distance their howl sounds like a tremendous storm wind souging through distant treetops, but when close at hand the whole air is alive with vibrations so that it is impossible to tell from which direction the sound proceeds.

A SABBATH IN THE FOREST

On Sabbath, March 19, the two families held Sabbath school in God's great out-of-doors under the tall trees and beautiful creeping vines. The air here seemed cool and refreshing, and the Lord blessed us richly. How delightful it is to feel that at last we are in the very heart of the woods! And after we have accustomed ourselves to the restful silence of the unchanging peace of the dreamy forest, it makes the Sabbath day seem so much more sacred and reminds us of the wonderful Sabbath days that we, if faithful, shall spend on the earth made new. Oh, it just seems so wonderful to go out in the forest to some sacred spot and there seek communion with the great Creator of the universe! It is here that we remember our loved ones and friends before the throne of grace.

STRANDED ON A ROCK IN THE RIVER

On March 20 we reached Amatuk where Captain Johnson, who is assisting us from this point onward, met us. He is well acquainted with the various Indian languages, and will be a help to us during our journey. It was here that we met some of our Indian carriers for the first time. These conveyed our personal effects about half a mile to our camp under some tall trees where we would have been comfortable had it not been for almost continual rains.

We left on March 23 for Waratuk, a pleasant river trip. There are numerous submerged rocks which must be passed in these rivers, and on this occasion we happened to run our boat upon one of them with the result that Captain Johnson and one of the Indians had to jump into the river in order to haul us off. We reached Waratuk at about five in the evening where another portage around the falls is necessary;

and as soon as our stores had been carried to our next boat we were off again.

From this point to Tukeit was about two hours' traveling. The shiny, lazy river lying between verdant hillsides made the journey a cool and refreshing one. Here we caught a glimpse for the first time of the great Kaieteur cliff, and even saw one corner of the falls though we were several miles away and the valley was shrouded in mist. During the latter stage of our journey we noticed heavy rain clouds overhead, and as we had no tarpaulin available, we felt sure that we would all be drenched before we reached Tukeit, but the Lord intervened and it did not pour down until we were safe under shelter in a little rest house where we stayed two days.

During the night we were visited by bats and two of our number were bitten. I can assure you that after this experience we took good care to have our toes well covered while asleep, even though it was hot. These bats will attack an exposed part of the body and remove a piece of skin, leaving an open wound which bleeds freely.

WHERE THE RIVER DROPS 742 FEET

The next stage of our journey was made on foot and consisted of a climb up the Kaieteur mountain which was indeed a strenuous one. There were showers all day, but we continued with our march along the trail. After crossing tumbling cataracts, which reminded me of Wordsworth's words, "The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep," we commenced the strenuous climb which can be likened to a ladder, as one has mossy stepping stones and the roots of trees for a foothold.

Two or three miles farther brought us to our camping ground within a few hundred yards of the Kaieteur Falls themselves. We could plainly hear the roaring of the water, but it was very misty, and it was not until the next day that we were able to see these wonderful falls.

As we stood there watching the amber colored water falling a sheer 742 feet and during its descent turning into a creamy spray, the glorious rainbow shining from the gorge below, beautifully colored butterflies and numerous birds bathing themselves in the spray in their flight across the falls, we felt as though we were on holy ground and thought of the words found in Psalms 92:5: "O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep."

SICKNESS OF INDIAN CARRIERS

We had to wait longer at Kaieteur than we expected on account of the sickness of some of our Indian carriers who had to return to their homes. We now know one reason which has been the cause of our long delay in starting from Georgetown,—the impossibility of obtaining Indian carriers on account of the serious drought during 1926 and the consequent shortage of food, followed by malaria fever of a malignant nature which carried the Indians off in great

numbers, with the result that it was impossible to persuade them to venture down from their homes to the lower rivers where the epidemic was most serious. Of the few that have come down from Mt. Roraima, all have had fever and two have died.

OVERCOMING ENGINE TROUBLES

On April 14 we moved to Kaieteur Landing where our stores had been waiting for us for some time under a roof of palm leaves. On April 19 we had our last boat ride of thirty-eight miles up the Potaro river to Chinapowu.

Before we reached our destination the water pump ceased to function and one of the Indians had to pour water through a funnel continuously in order to keep the motor cool. Finally at nine o'clock we reached Chinapowu wet and tired, but soon had our tarpaulins up and passed a comfortable night. It was very muddy in this camp and the flies and mosquitoes were excessive.

It was here at Chinapowu that twelve of our Indians from Mt. Roraima came down to meet us and to make sure that we were here, for they said that they could not get any more to come unless they could actually see us, after which some of them would return to Mt. Roraima and bring more carriers with them. They seemed to be very happy to see us, and would come and pat us on our shoulders and say in an earnest tone, "All Mt. Roraima," pointing in that direction and naming each member of our party.

Two of the above mentioned Indians have been sent back to Mt. Roraima to bring more down, and the last words that they said were, "Many, many Indians," which meant that they would bring back a large number of Indians. It is, however, about three weeks since they left, and it may be that they are unable to return on account of additional heavy rains which are now pouring down and have cut us entirely off from Mt. Roraima for the present. There are two or more rivers, of which one is the Ireng, which become torrents during the rainy season and which it is impossible to cross.

The Arekunas say that they have built us a house and that they will get us two cows when we require them.

DELIVERED FROM VENEMOUS SNAKES AND SCORPIONS

From here we moved through the forest to Wong and along a trail over big rocks and trees. We had to cross several muddy swamps, but the forest is so pretty that one could not help enjoying the walk. One can see ferns of all kinds, and flowers of beautiful colors. I felt that I must stop and pick some of them.

Some of the animals found in these forests are as follows: wild cows, wild pigs, which the Indians shoot in large numbers and then smoke for their food; howling baboons, leopards, monkeys, wild cats, pumas, and bears, besides birds of all kinds, lizards and fishes, and last but not least, snakes. These are the things that I prefer to avoid.

On Sabbath, April 23, after we had had Sabbath school, four of us walked along the trail towards Anandabaru, for we could only keep to the trail on account of the dense forest. We had not

walked more than half a mile when Brother Christian said, "Step back, Brother Cott," for my husband had been standing right over a snake about five feet long, which we were told, was a "bush master" with a very poisonous bite. He had been standing close by for some time with head erect and tongue darting out as though he was looking for trouble.

It seemed as though the Lord was preventing it from harming us for it never moved. The other day Baby Christian was found lying over a large poisonous scorpion but was not touched by it. We certainly have much to be thankful for; we feel that the Lord is answering all of our prayers and is our Protector at all times.

BABIES AMUSE INDIAN CARRIERS

It may be a surprise to some of our friends to learn that we adopted a little English girl, three years old, while in Georgetown, and that she is now with us and enjoying the trip very much. She and Brother and Sister Christian's baby are doing well and enjoy playing in the beautiful jasper sand which we find around some of our camps.

They often amuse the Indians by showing them their toys. It is not strange to see twelve or fifteen full grown Indians playing with Joycie's doll. They look on in wonder when its eyes open and close. Joycie amuses them with her baby talk, though of course they do not understand what she wishes to tell them.

The Indians are very fond of both of the babies and we have some difficulty in preventing them from giving them food which would not be for their good. When we are on the march the babies are carried in slings or baskets and thus are quite comfortable when we are traveling.

INDIANS INSPECTING OUR BELONGINGS

On the 26th, a company of Patamonias arrived to assist us. These brought fruit and vegetables, such as eddoes, and yams, one of the former weighing forty to forty-five pounds; also a large Plymouth Rock rooster of which Sister Christian is now the owner. Between this big bird and our dog, called "Spot," we have plenty of entertainment in the camp. We were certainly grateful for this fresh fruit, as we had been without it for some time.

On their arrival, and after examining Brother Christian's camp, these twenty-two Indians filed in like soldiers under our tarpaulin with their painted faces and few clothes. They first proceeded to lay all their guns and other weapons on our camp bed,—all fully loaded,—saying that they would be safe in our camps, but if left in their own the "Kanaima" (spirits) would take them. Next they spied my saxophone and asked me to demonstrate same for them. As I played the instrument they all crowded round so close that my breathing was rendered difficult, owing to lack of fresh air.

After this they saw our umbrella tent which they seemed to think was a very strange affair, for they all felt the posts and canvas in order to find out of what material it was made. When once inside they picked up some of my dresses,

shoes, stockings, and hat, which were handed from the first to the last, all of whom in turn tried them on. This procedure did not improve the appearance of my belongings.

They next found my husband's box of tools such as screwdriver, wrenches, pliers, etc., and with these they operated on each other's teeth. Our emergency medical kit was also near at hand, which they opened in its turn, drawing corks from bottles and tasting the contents. To prevent any further action on their part, I allowed them to taste some very bitter fever mixture which satisfied their curiosity in short order. After once seeing all that they could find of interest in our camp, they started down the trail, led by an Indian with a drum, in order to bring up some of our goods from below.

GIVING FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

During this long wait it has been necessary for my husband to return to Georgetown. On May 8th I went down to Tukeit to meet him on his return in the place of Brother Christian who was not well at the time. This journey was undertaken in the company of some Indians who would be used in bringing our stores back.

The Indians were very good to me and helped me over the rough places during the journey. They made several attempts to dress me in their beads and to paint my face.

While on our trip on the river from Chinapowu which was a long and tedious one owing to much engine trouble and an all day rain, we were called by an Indian woman on the river bank whose husband had been badly injured and his back paralyzed by a falling tree. We found him lying on the wet ground reading a Bible, although he was in great agony. After learning that I was on the boat, he asked me for help; so we took him on board. On reaching the landing, I gave him some hydrotherapy treatments and had several seasons of prayer with him, which he especially requested. He seemed much improved, and said that had we not taken him along that day he would have had to die, and that it was only because the Lord had heard our prayers that he was feeling much better. He was later removed to a hospital where we hope he is making a rapid recovery.

ALL OF GOOD COURAGE

On May 14 I was much relieved to hear the sound of a motor in the river. This was at four o'clock in the morning. My husband arrived wet and tired from a day and a night spent on the river. He said that the journey had been a difficult one on account of the swollen state of the rivers, and that in some places they would fail to make headway in spite of vigorous paddling in the effort to help the small motor force the boat through the rapids.

Brother Christian has had a slight attack of fever but was feeling much better the morning I left. We are all of good courage and would ask an interest in your prayers that the Lord will use us to His honor and glory as we go on our way. This letter will be continued at a later date.

MRS. ELIZABETH B. COTT.