

Nicaragua

NOT UNTIL one has lost something does he miss it. When one has it, one does not realize its greatness. This happened to me when I left my home country, Nicaragua. I have not lost it, but now that I have been away from home for three years I have found out how grand and dear it is.

There is nothing quite like the enchantment of Nicaragua's tropics. In the middle of March, the hottest time of the year, comes the haze of the late dry season that we improperly call "verano," meaning summer. The wind that sporadically sweeps up from the Pacific is hot like city asphalt. The valley has been waterless since November and lies slowly drying up beneath the fierce sun. The temperature has been between 80 and 100°F for five long months and one is beginning to get sick of the "verano" and its chronic thirst; but we have to wait for the refreshing rain of June. How about the eight-thousand foot peak of the Mombacho that rises at the edge of the valley? It means a hard long climb, but the reward is great and the climb itself is interesting.

From the mid-way, that can be reached by jeep, to the top of the extinguished volcano, one must climb for six hours through a tropical paradise of giant leaves and purple-flowered plants that glow in the shadows. Here the flora shows its versatility in a complete series of forms and changes in the various altitudes of the climbing. Each transitional area is the equivalent of many miles of latitude because of the faunal and floral changes it brings.

The border of the volcano is planted with coffee trees where the breeze is moist and the air cooler than in the valley, and the smell of wet vegetation is in the air. As one climbs the daylight changes abruptly to owl's-light. The taller trees meet above in a continuous leaf roof that opens here and there to let the sun pass through. The smaller plants grow either in the ground or in the older trees where they form grotesque figures. After about the fourth hour the volcano climbers find a natural tunnel that leads to one of the two craters of the Mombacho. Here is where one meets with the most surprising experiences that turn into wonders which in turn are delightful. The crater itself is full of many kinds of tropical plants and rare flowers. Orchids are the most abund-

ant and are of several colors and as big as three or four inches across. The begonias, algae and other plants are of endless variety and in great abundance. There one finds crystalline water that drips through filtering rocks. The air temperature is as cold as 40°F.

It takes about two more hours to get to the top where the thrill of the adventure reaches its peak. If it is not cloudy up there at the top, the low land can be seen as far as the ocean, some fifty miles away, or if cloudy, one will not be able to see farther than ten feet in front of him. On a windy day, the clouds move so fast that it is cloudy and clear at intervals. If one looks in the crater of this extinguished volcano one can only see a hodgepodge of wild vegetation. There is no distinction of roots, limbs or leaves. All is a whole mass of green. The temperature at the top is most pleasant; about 60°F.

Most people in the United States imagine volcanoes as active cones spitting lava all the time. The fact is that in Nicaragua there are only five volcanoes that are in activity now. There are about twenty dead ones. At the northern part of Lake Managua rises the majestic volcano Momotombo that has been a subject of poetry and song. It was called the "bald and nude colossus" by Victor Hugo, and is known as the "father of fire and stone" by the Nicaraguans. The easiest way to reach the Momotombo is by boat. It can be seen from the southern border of the lake where the capital of Nicaragua is located. At night, if one approaches it by boat, one is thrilled to watch the flames that escape from its cone. The fire is vivid red and yellow that reflects in the darkness with magnificent splendor, and one can not help but think of how almighty the Creator must be.

Forty-five hundred of Nicaragua's forty-nine thousand square miles are covered by two beautiful lakes: the "Managua" and the "Gran Lago." Lake Managua is forty-five miles long and twenty wide. It is connected to the Gran Lago by the "Tipitapa" River. The Gran Lago is a hundred miles long and forty wide. The water of both lakes is fresh. The Gran Lago is set with islands of all sizes and of volcanic origin, being either volcanic cones or fragments of volcanoes formed by past eruptions.

The most curious thing in this lake is the presence in its water of sawfishes and sharks. They are the only ones of their kind that live in fresh water. Nicaraguans are immen-

sely proud of their fresh water sharks. At least one person is killed each year by this ferocious fish, but that does not matter; it renders admiration rather than resentment.

The waters of these lakes have quite a varied fauna; there are as many as thirty-five species with different environmental habits. The southern part of the Gran Lago, where the shore is lost in the rainy forest, is one of the rainiest places in the world with an annual average of two hundred and fifty inches. Here alligators, sea snakes and heavy turtles make their nests and breed their young.

The mountains spread north and west of the lake where spider monkeys practice their flying among the bending twigs and where the great "guanacastes," each with a trunk large enough to make a dugout to float a hundred men, rise to the blue sky for brighter sun, and where the jaguars come down to the open beach and dig up the turtles' eggs and eat them peacefully. From the islands of the Lake the volcanoes roar, and the tropic lives its life.

—William Pfaeffle, *Sci. So.*



Some catoidoid breed

JESS GARVEY made out that he thought lightly of me, calling me no more than a cosmic crap shooter, a blind gambler in the infinite casino of space, a feather blown by the lips of those old, old sisters, the fates. He mocked me now as I stood in my control room, before my digamma lever, saying that I was for all the worlds like an idiot before a dekadred slot machine, and that I had traveled a long way for the simple sake of putting my hand to a lever and taking a chance. Himself, he maintained, being in charge of the Dosfando's nuclear jets, and being concerned with such things as the setting and following of courses, leaving nothing to chance and depending altogether on his cleverness, was to be compared to a chess player, the very antithesis of the gambler.

Jess Garvey was right, and he was not right. For in those flashing instants when I pulled down my digamma lever the Dosfando changed position, but she followed no course. She simply dropped out of the continuum that we call space-time and re-entered with absolutely equal probability at any point where the gravity field was the same as what we had left.