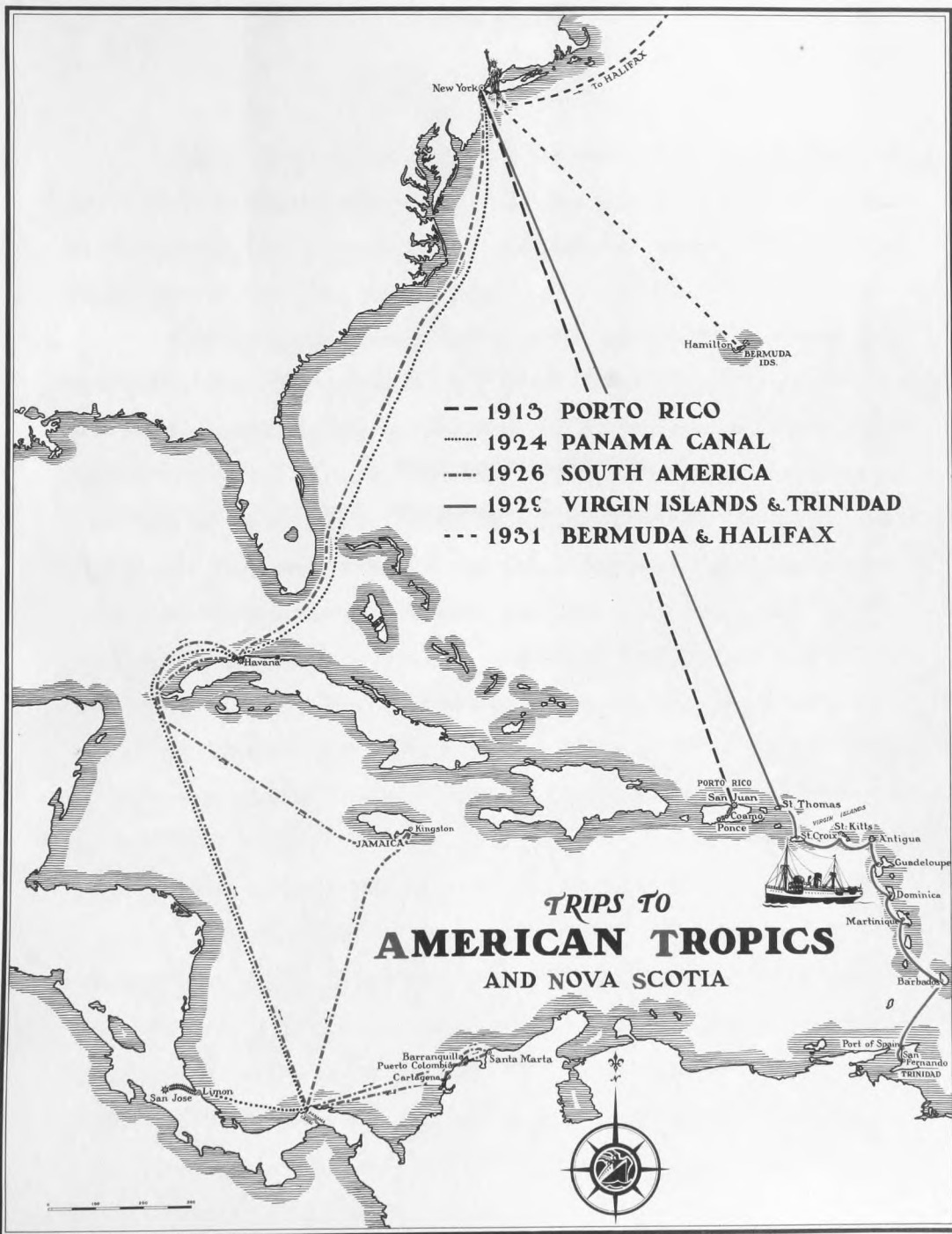




CHAPTER XXIX

TWO TRIPS TO THE TROPICS

Family vacations for some time had been spent in the automobile, but practically all the interesting roads from Quebec to the Natural Bridge in Virginia had been covered, some of them several times. "Why not," thought Grandfather, "vary the program?"

Consulting the general railway guide which every Pullman carries, Grandfather found that the S. S. Ulua of the United Fruit Company left the very day his vacation began and returned the day his vacation ended! What a coincidence! But the S. S. Ulua went to Havana, the Panama Canal and Costa Rica and this would be August and the rainy season. Would a trip at that time be uncomfortable and unhealthy? He would consult the head of the Chicago Weather Bureau. "Weather in Panama in August? Better than at home," says the cheerful but busy meteorologist. "Kidding me," thought Grandfather, "but I'll wire Grandmother to find out what she thinks." "George and I accept" came back, it seemed, before the wire was sent. (Ruth and Grace were at camp and Grandfather didn't think they would wish to leave) but Grandfather understands that as a matter of fact they "nearly had a fit" when they found their parents were going off without them.

As a matter of fact, the weather, while warm, was delightful. Before we reached Havana we encountered the trade wind and the further south we went the cooler it got. At Panama the thermometer seldom reaches 90° in the shade. Day after day it was about 70° at night and 85° in the middle of the day. Rainy season there does not mean all day drizzles as in the Pacific Northwest, but a succession of brief torrential downpours, after a few minutes of which the sun shines brightly.

"How could you make a better day?" Grandfather asked a woman who was grumbling about the weather. "I don't know," says the woman. "But I have had ten years of this kind and would make it different for a change." On the boat the temperature was what you wished. Headed southward, would you like it warmer? Go to the starboard side. Would you like it cooler? Go to port side and enjoy the trade wind.

On the Ulua were Dr. and Mrs. Hennesy and Mr. and Mrs. Oard of Council Bluffs, Iowa. The Hennesey's had a little boy four years old, very pretty and very precocious. Grandfather is sure you would have loved him. Also on the boat was another group not so attractive - a group of about twenty girls who styled themselves the New York Riding Academy. They were noisy and didn't act as young ladies should.

Grandfather perhaps earlier should have related that Master Hennesey was allowed to remain up for half an hour after dinner, and when his half hour was up, it was his custom without a murmur to go along the row of people sitting near his parents in deck chairs, gravely shake hands with each in turn and bid each good night. Now one night Grandmother was sort of sprawled out in her deck chair when Master Hennesey came along to bid her good night. This night he crowded in between the chairs to get closer and whispered in her ear, "Mrs. Parlin, you better pull your skirt down or people will think you belong to the Riding Club." Was that not thoughtful of him?

Havana was too warm for comfort in the city streets, but who wants to visit the cigar factories - let's ride in an open car and take a swim in the ocean. These sports proved enjoyable.

The canal and the tropical jungle entertained us and then we went to Port Limon - a hot and dismal port. While endless bunches of bananas were loaded on the ship, we went up a cog railway to San Jose, the capital

of Costa Rica. On the way up we passed through a pineapple field. We thought we would rather peel our own pineapples. Say! the first time you ever peel a field ripened pineapple, you will have a good time. Pineapple juice ran off the observation platform in rivulets. But the pineapple is good - only on its native heath can one enjoy pineapple at its best.

We were surprised to find San Jose to be a little Paris - perhaps a little Madrid would be better, proud of its elegant theater and its pretty parks. It is high enough up to have temperate zone climate and temperate zone vegetation. Probably the most perfect climate in the world is at these places in the tropical zone which have enough elevation to have cool nights and a temperate zone feel to the air. Here they never know the cold of winter or the heat of midsummer, but throughout the year the people enjoy eternal springtime.

We went out to see the "Botanical Gardens" - really a large outdoor greenhouse conducted by an ex-Iowa farmer - a wild profusion of roses, a hedge of gardenias, but "why these lemon trees?" "Oh, those are to raise orange blossoms for weddings." "Does the bride like to carry lemon blossoms on her wedding day?" "Oh, she does not know the difference and lemon trees raise blossoms the year round." "Where are the weddings at which brides carry these lemon blossoms?" "Oh, we send most of them to New York. Orange blossoms are much in demand there."

We did not dare offer our genial guide, the proprietor, a tip, but might we buy a bouquet? "Certainly! Would you like a one dollar or a two dollar bouquet?" We would take a two dollar bouquet. A couple who had ridden out with us would also take a two dollar bouquet. These were to be sent to the train by messenger, but did not arrive. Just as the train was about to start, Grandfather noticed on the depot platform a boy balancing

two huge bundles wrapped in banana leaves - each as big around as a barrel and as tall as his head. These were our two bouquets. We had roses enough to supply all the tables on the boat with huge bouquets and plenty besides. In addition each lady had a corsage of gardenias.

Incidentally it may be mentioned that two-thirds of all the varieties of orchids are said to have been found in Costa Rica. When Grandfather found that the girls had been disappointed at being left behind, it was no hardship to offer to go again some other summer just to show them the sights.

So a couple of summers later we went again to the Tropics, this time to Havana, Jamaica, the north coast of South America and the Canal. Again the temperature was within reason - the highest we saw was 40 miles inland in South America in a banana plantation, where we saw a thermometer at noontime which registered 90°.

A couple of incidents seem worth recording. In riding on a primitive railroad from Porto Columbia to Baranquillia, we encountered a torrential rain which quickly sent the streams up over the tracks. By the time we reached Baranquillia the rain was over, but our return was delayed for an hour until men could shovel the debris off the tracks. Even when we did start we carried a crew of shovellers and stopped every mile or so for them to go ahead and shovel sand off the tracks.

As we finally got past the bad place and gained speed, Ruth suddenly shouted, "Oh, I've lost my hat." "No matter," says the gallant conductor. He stopped the train and sent the brakeman for it.

On a previous trip to the Canal Zone we had not had time to find a boat which would allow us to ride through the Canal. This time we applied to the officer of the Port. He would try to be helpful. About 11 p.m. he telephoned there would be no passenger boat through next day, but the

captain of an oil freighter, one of the largest in the world, said he would be glad to take us as his guests. There was one difficulty - we would have to go out with the pilot early in the morning as the boat would not dock until it reached the other end of the Canal.

We were on hand about dawn. "You can't go," said the pilot, "the boat has no stairs, only a rope ladder, and the ladies cannot climb the rope ladder." Grandmother was sure she could. Very reluctantly he yielded to our assurances and importunities and took us out. None of us had ever realized how tall a giant ocean liner is until in a little launch we were at the side of that huge boat and looked up the tiny rope ladder which like Jacob's ladder seemed to reach the sky.

You would have thought it sport to run up that ladder. Grandfather made it, but didn't call it overly funny. Then Grandmother went up with the pilot just one step behind to try to hold her on if necessary, but she reached the top okeh. The girls went up like a couple of monkeys and we were off for a grand trip. The captain had never had visitors before - he turned his cabin and both over to the ladies for the trip.

It was interesting to ride on the bridge, listen to the pilot's decisive orders to the engineer and to the man at the helm, while the captain pointed out sleeping alligators and told us tales of the Canal. At one point millions upon millions of bright hued butterflies flew across the boat, all headed for some place one could not guess where, across the Canal.

The trip was a lot of fun and the girls felt they had been recompensed for the summer they were left at home.

As a matter of fact, there is less danger to health in a trip to the tropics in summer than in winter, for the temperature of the tropical zone remains about the same throughout the year. At the Equator every

twenty-four hours is divided into twelve hours of sunshine and twelve hours of darkness, hence there is no accumulation of heat at one season or loss of heat at another.

If one goes into the tropics on a winter cruise, it is difficult to adjust one's self to the abrupt change from winter to summer and harder yet to adjust one's self on the trip back from summer into winter. Hence one is likely upon return to have a severe cold.

On the other hand, one goes in the summer time from heat into another kind of heat, registering less degrees than our hottest month at home - more balmy - humid, to be sure, but relieved by the ever-blowing trade wind.

A trip to the tropics is never a trip into an invigorating atmosphere. On the other hand, if you have a stateroom high enough up so the porthole would not be closed and so situated that you can catch the trade wind in your window, you can enjoy the trip and suffer no serious discomfiture.