

THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM BULLETIN

Research in Venezuela

MR. VINCENZO PETRULLO, the Museum's field director for South American Research, was sent to Venezuela in July, 1933 to survey and study the ethnological and archaeological problems and opportunities offered by the country, and to carry out field research if the conditions permitted. Mr. Petruzzo returned from Venezuela in April, after an absence of nine months.

Scientific research in Venezuela, Mr. Petruzzo reports, is receiving the enthusiastic support of the government and the people at large at the present time. Favored with the kindest cooperation of the Venezuelan authorities, scientists, and the people as a whole, Mr. Petruzzo was able to carry out his program successfully. At the end of the rainy season, following the suggestion of Dr. Alfredo Jahn, he made a field study of a tribe of Indians called the Yaruros, a tribe known by name but never before studied.

We present below Mr. Petruzzo's personal account of his experiences and discoveries while living with these people who are nomads, roaming over the extensive open plains of Apure in search of roots, seeds, and game; wandering up and down the rivers in search of fish, crocodiles, turtles, and their eggs. A series of extraordinary events led to his acceptance by these people as one of themselves but in some way related to their Gods. The breaking down of the suspicious reserve generally existing toward strangers and all civilized peoples made it possible to observe and study intimately their religion and social organization. They addressed him as 'elder brother,' placing him in the same category as one of their Gods who appears in their legends as a culture hero and their Prometheus.

Mr. Petrullo brought back a representative collection of objects made and used by the Yaruros in their daily life and ceremonial occasions. Some of these objects are now on exhibition on the lower floor of the Museum.

*Mr. Petrullo's
Report*

THE region lying between the Apure and the Meta rivers (both of which are western tributaries of the Orinoco) is inhabited today by the Yaruro and Guahibo Indians. Other peoples have disappeared. Over a considerable portion of the area cattle raising has been carried on successfully, and as a consequence there are scattered about pioneers, most of whom are descendants of old Spanish and Indian stock. The Indians naturally resent the gradual occupation of their country, and, particularly with the Guahibos, friendly contact is very difficult.

At one place called El Buron I met the first band of Yaruros. I stayed with them a few days, but since most of the men were away I moved on to the river, where I was informed there were several larger groups. From this point on I traveled only with Indians, and soon afterwards settled with a group of them on a vast sand beach exposed by the withdrawal of the waters of the Capanaparo, living with them intimately, eating their food, and because of illness, completely in their care. The small quantity of food that I had brought with me was given to them, and after that was exhausted we shared the products of the hunt.

The Yaruros call me 'elder brother' now, but not so at first. When I met the first group, no friendliness was shown towards me, and I found a resistance on their part to any attempt that I made to break down their reserve. Strangers that have come among them apparently have not treated them well, and, as mentioned above, there is a certain amount of resentment that their lands are being occupied by the pioneers. However, one night this resistance disappeared, and from then on they accepted me as a relative.