

¶Stolen rubber seeds ruined a city.

## GHOST CITY OF THE AMAZON

A THOUSAND miles up the Amazon river lies the cheerless city of Manaos, pale, grey and desolate, like an aged woman sustained only by the memory of past triumphs. Once Manaos was the flourishing capital of the Brazilian rubber kingdom when that country had the monopoly of the rubber trade of the world. At that time, in the last years of the nineteenth century, she had her hectic fling. She was gay, brilliant and rich beyond all imagining.

Money flowed in Manaos like the waters of the great river on which she was built. The cost of living was so high that matches and writing-paper cost shillings and even pounds, but no one begrudged paying it. Money meant nothing to the rubber millionaires who made up the bulk of her population.

Manaos boasted a tram line before Manchester had one. Her paved main streets were wide and gleamed white in the sun. She had a great domed theatre which could compare with the best in the world for sheer architectural beauty as well as the quality of its entertainment. Her marble Palace of Justice was a dream come true. Pri-

vate homes were like palaces, and as sumptuously furnished; private citizens owned carriages and stables that would have aroused the envy of the crowned monarchs of Europe. The women of Manaos dressed in the latest fashions from Paris; they sent their children to the most expensive schools of Europe and America to be educated. And the jewels they wore at the opera would have dazzled the eyes of an Indian potentate.

The inhabitants of this fabulous town on the edge of the jungle spent fabulous sums to bring culture in the hinterlands of Brazil. The most celebrated singers, actors and authors appeared before the citizens of Manaos, gathered there from the four corners of the world. Nothing but the best would do for Manaos—but her days were numbered. Even then two Englishmen were preparing her doom.

The directors of the Botanical Gardens at Kew, England, commissioned a man named Farris to go to Brazil and return with some rubber seedlings for experimental purposes. This, of course, was against the law, and the Brazilian customs inspectors were eternally vigilant

to prevent any smuggling. However, Farris eluded them by stuffing two crocodile skins with the precious plants. He brought them back to England in triumph, but they died shortly after their arrival in Kew.

Almost immediately afterwards another Englishman, Henry Wickham, was sent out on the same assignment. For months before the actual *coup* he engaged in the wool-exporting industry, in order to avoid suspicion. Then one day he placed a few specimens of the plant in the moist interior of some bales of wool and sent them off to England.

The rest is history. The seedlings, thanks to infinite care and patience, were grown to maturity in the botanical gardens. And in an amazingly short time rubber plantations sprang up in the Malay States and Ceylon. Great Britain had completely broken the Brazilian rubber monopoly.

Almost overnight Manaos was deprived of the main source of her existence—her tremendous rubber export trade. Her incredibly wealthy rubber barons lost their fortunes; poverty and gloom entered where before they had feared to show themselves.

The palatial homes of the formerly wealthy citizens are still standing—deserted ghost-castles surrounded by weeds instead of gardens. Cafés and pleasure haunts are shabby, neglected, badly-patronized. When their once-gorgeous decorations crumble from the walls, no one bothers to repair them.

The opera house and theatre are closed; no famous personages ever visit Manaos now. And all that her citizens have left is the memory of their departed grandeur, the knowledge that once—not so very long ago—they knew what it was to live life to the full, a thousand miles up the Amazon!—*Condensed from Parade.*

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### *Dash After Bill*

TEACHER: "How would you punctuate this sentence—"The wind blew a ten-dollar bill around the corner.'"

JOHNNY: "I would make a dash after the bill."—*National Postal Clerk.*