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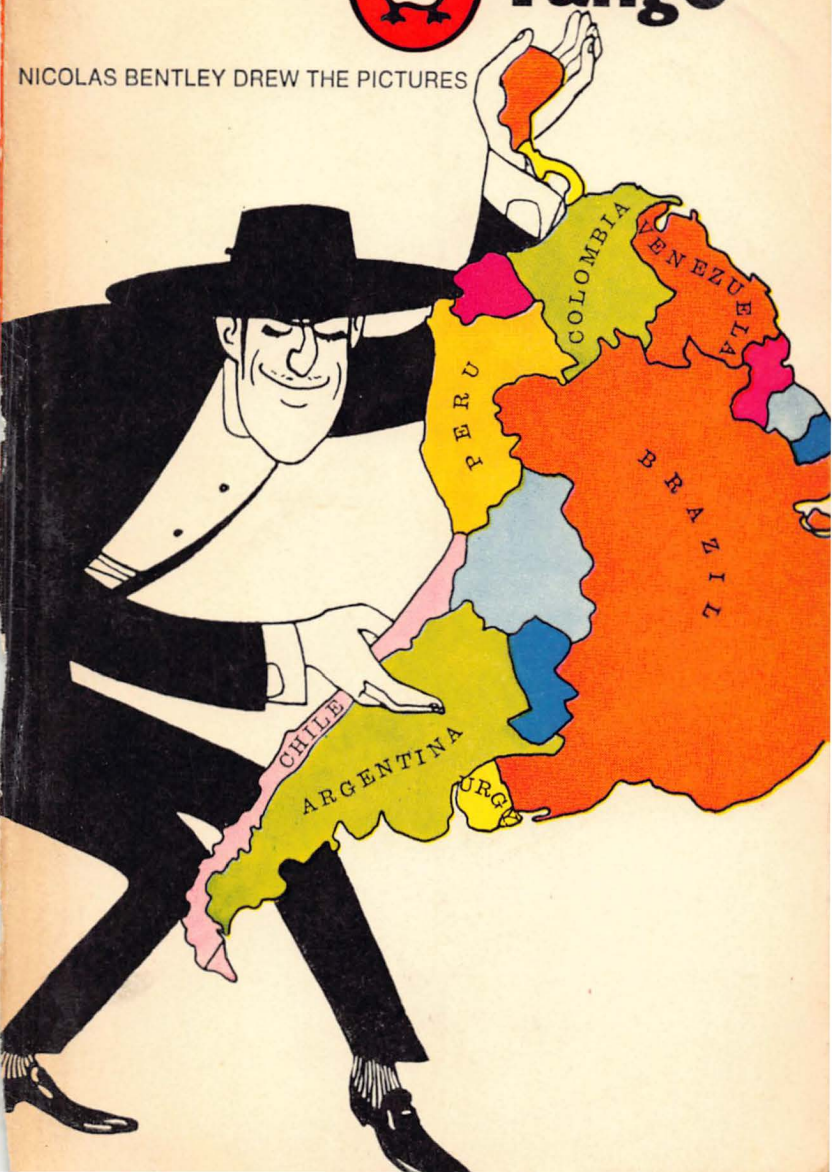
GEORGE MIKES

How To Tango

NICOLAS BENTLEY DREW THE PICTURES



PENGUIN BOOKS

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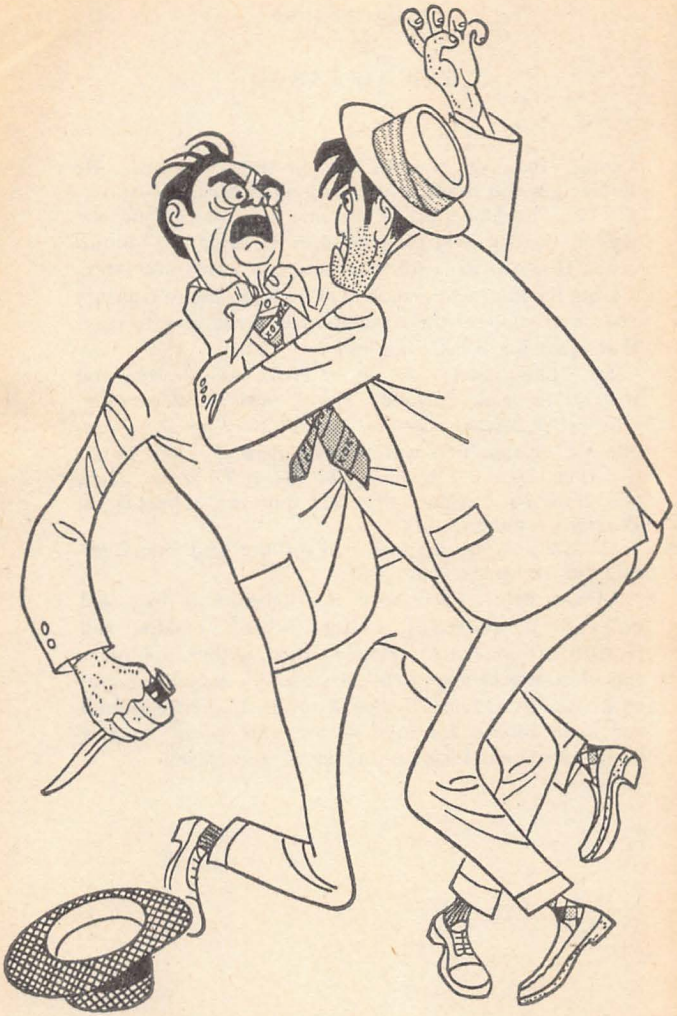
HOW TO TANGO

George Mikes was born in 1912 in Siklos, Hungary. He studied law and received his doctorate at Budapest University. At the same time he became a journalist and was sent to London as a correspondent to cover the Munich crisis. He came for a fortnight and has stayed ever since. During the war he was engaged in broadcasting to Hungary and at the time of the Revolution he went back to cover that event for B.B.C. television.

Mr Mikes now works as a critic, broadcaster and writer. His books include: *The Hungarian Revolution, Über Alles, Shakespeare and Myself, Italy for Beginners,* and (in collaboration with Nicolas Bentley) *How To Be An Alien, How To Be Inimitable, How To Scrape Skies,* and *How To Tango.* These last four are appearing in Penguins simultaneously.

Mr Mikes is married with two children and enjoys getting away from the countryside.

Nicolas Bentley was born in Highgate in 1907 and educated at University College School, London and Heatherley School of Art. He is an artist, author, publisher, and illustrator of more than sixty books – including works by Belloc, T. S. Eliot, Damon Runyon, Lawrence Durrell and many others. His interests are wide-spread, ranging from history and Victoriana to music and travel.



A matter of no importance

GEORGE MIKES

How To Tango

A SOLO ACROSS SOUTH AMERICA

Nicolas Bentley drew the pictures

PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books Pty Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

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First published as *Tango* by André Deutsch 1961
Published in Penguin Books 1966

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Made and printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd
Aylesbury, Bucks
Set in Linotype Baskerville

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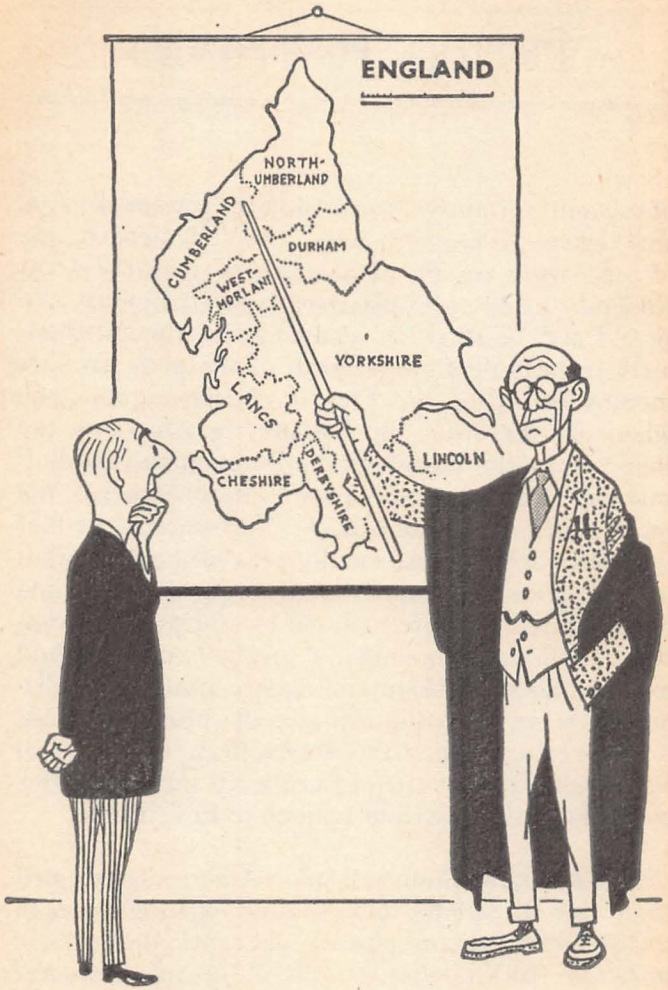
We should certainly deem it slightly curious if someone talked of *England* and, when challenged, explained with an air of abstraction that the term obviously includes no place south of Derbyshire. We should also be surprised to find the term *European* used as meaning Europe north of the 50th parallel, thereby excluding the French, the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Swiss, the Italians, the Austrians, the Hungarians, the Yugoslavs, the Roumanians, the Bulgars, the Greeks, and the Turks – in other words, the whole southern part of Europe. Nevertheless, we find it quite natural that we should speak of the *Americans* and yet discard everyone living south of the United States. 'Surely', we are inclined to murmur on reflection, 'civilization does not end south of Arizona? And even if it does, one should not ignore, quite so nonchalantly, twenty-one countries and 180 million people.' This forgotten slice of the American continent is two and a half times the size of Europe; its total length far exceeds the distance from London to Los Angeles.

Ever since my childhood, South America has seemed to me one of the most romantic and exciting places in the world. Words and phrases, like: 'Rio de la Plata', '*Mestizo*,' 'Inca civilization,' 'Red Indian', '*estancia*', and 'beefsteak' always held a wild fascination for me. Yet, when I started out on my South American journey, I knew very little of that sub-continent.



Everyman his own England

What did I know?

I knew – as I have already mentioned – that more than half of the inhabitants of the American continent were not regarded as Americans; I also knew that this was no coincidence: because whatever happens to the 180 milion people (and their number is fast increasing) of the southern half of the Americas, it is of little consequence to the world at large. The political struggles of South America are of no more importance to the world than the internal strife of Nevada or the dissensions of the Nottingham Watch Committee. If there is a revolution in Laos the whole world follows developments with keen interest; if there is a revolution somewhere in South America, the world nods contentedly: they are true to form once again. In the last hundred years there have been sixty revolutions in Bolivia and ten civil wars in Columbia.

Then Fidel Castro came along and led a revolution in Cuba which put Latin America fairly and squarely on the map. The world pricked up its ears. South America went on discussing Castro in astonished and excited whispers. 'So it is possible' – people nodded in hope or fear. 'A revolution may bring Change after all – surprising as it sounds.' *Fidelismo* became a creed. People loved Castro, or hated him – or both; but they could not ignore him.

Also, people were still trying hard to ignore the subcontinent. Why is it, I wondered, that the whole world, from Moscow to Delhi, and from Peking to Washington, falls over backwards when the word *Afro-Asian* is uttered (although there is no such person as an Afro-Asian, just as there aren't any *Euro-Africans* or *Americo-Australians*) but yawns with ill-concealed boredom whenever South America is mentioned? A

country inhabited mostly by not over-civilized tribes – like the Congo – seems to become an inspiring and uplifting place the instant its independence is thrust upon it, but ex-colonial countries, struggling along more or less successfully for a century and a half and forming a constituent part of the civilized world, are not worth a glance.

And it is precisely here that Castro's influence is decisive. As long as South America was simply a subcontinent with 180 million people striving for a better life, the place was of very little interest. They had received before the Cuban revolution only about two per cent of the total amount of direct American aid since the war. As long as the Monroe doctrine could safely be interpreted by the United States as meaning, 'We won't tolerate any interference with our interference,' all was well. But as soon as South America became a pawn in the struggle between East and West; as soon as Mr Krushchev managed to hang up his hat and overcoat (with two large revolvers in the pocket) in America's ante-chamber, the picture changed. South America gained the limelight and its 'growing importance' and 'great part in world affairs' were grasped with amazing rapidity and sudden clarity. In short, South America was discovered, about four hundred and sixty-seven years after Columbus. And South America, in turn, discovered the ancient truth that while you cannot always rely on your friends, you can always rely on your friends' enemies. Or else: 'Misbehave and your virtues will suddenly become apparent.'

I also wondered why the north of the continent had succeeded in forming two great powers while Latin

America was carved up into dozens of countries – some enormous, some diminutive.

I looked forward to seeing a part of the world which skipped the Railway Age. The people of South America jumped from the ox-cart into the jet plane – those, I mean, who jumped out of the ox-cart at all. What sort of man does the baby become – I asked myself – who crawls today and runs like a champion sprinter tomorrow without ever trying just to walk?

And why were these people, whom I knew to be intelligent and quick-witted, termed 'under-developed', a term which is diplomatic slang for 'backward'? It is true, I reflected, that they failed *even* to exterminate their Indians, as their more advanced and progressive northern neighbours did. But was this due to lack of good will? Or lack of bad will? Or simply laziness and inefficiency?

I also knew, of course, – who doesn't? – that South America is the Land of the Future.

I was just a boy when I saw a dashing, young lieutenant of the Hungarian army kiss my cousin and heard him declare in amorous tones: 'You are my darling little fiancée and you will remain my fiancée forever.' The thought of that young lieutenant and his ardent vow kept running through my head in South America. Oh yes, this is the Land of the Future, all right. The Land of Tomorrow. But will it remain the Land of the Future forever? Is that famous Future postponed *sine die*? Or is it softly – or perhaps even loudly and impatiently – knocking at the door?

So I set out on my journey with some trepidation. Could I possibly find the answers to so many problems?

How could I even try to understand such a vast and complex sub-continent in a short time? I felt discouraged but then, a few days before my departure, I came across some remarks in a reference book, describing the Andes mountains: 'The *eastern* ridge is generally called Los Andes, and the *western* La Cordillera, but in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, the *eastern* chain is known as the Cordillera Real de Los Andes. In Chile and Argentina the *western* chain is known as the Cordillera de Los Andes while in . . .' I stopped reading. I felt cheered up and fortified. Drilled in ancient and impenetrable British muddle, I was sure that South America held no secrets for me.

BRAZIL

MALICE IN WONDERLAND

'We are going to land at Rio de Janeiro airport in four hours and thirty-one minutes' – a melodious male voice informed us over the plane's intercom.

Few people would have resisted the temptation to say simply: 'In four and a half hours'; or, if determined to sound a shade more formal: 'Four hours and thirty minutes'. But not the Brazilians! If the result of their calculation *was* four hours and thirty-one minutes, they were not prepared to disregard a whole minute as though it hardly mattered. The announcement made us all feel that we were in the hands of serious, matter-of-fact and infallible people. This impression of infallibility was not in the least weakened by the fact that we were already – for no ascertainable reason – eight hours behind schedule and that, in the end, we were to land in Rio not four hours and thirty-one minutes but six hours and twenty-three minutes after that stirring announcement.

I liked this very much indeed. (A devotion to meticulous detail, coupled with a princely contempt for it, has always been one of the basic tenets of my own personal philosophy.) Soon I found something else to increase my delight in, and admiration for, the Brazilians. It all happened during the very first taxi-ride I took in Rio. The brakes screeched, the taxi stopped with a jerk and I was certain that the young man whom

I had seen a second before was under the wheels. But he was not. In fact, he was grinning in the friendliest manner at the taxi-driver, who grinned back with obvious affection for his would-be victim.

They grinned, they waved to each other and on we drove. In France, the man would have made a spirited attempt to murder the driver; in Italy, he would have raised a shindy reverberating from Milan to Sicily; and even in cool, detached and over-disciplined Britain, a few remarks of decidedly uncomplimentary character might have been exchanged. But here, in hot-blooded, passionate Brazil, neither the all-but-slain pedestrian, nor the offending driver thought much of the incident. I did not appreciate the meaning of all this right then and there; but soon afterwards I realized that I was in a country – perhaps the only country in the whole world – where malice is completely unknown.

In fact, you keep meeting unexpected and charming courtesy everywhere. You board a bus or tram and, maybe, when you try to buy your ticket, the conductor will inform you that it has already been paid for. You look around and discover the genially grinning face of your barber, or butcher; spotting you first he has paid your fare.

A publisher I visited took me round to meet his staff. I shook hands with everyone, including the office boy, a charming and happily grinning Negro lad of eleven or twelve. Afterwards the two of us had a cup of black coffee in a near-by espresso bar, and when my friend asked for the bill, the waiter informed him that it had already been settled. We soon spotted the friendly, grinning face of the little Negro office boy who, apparently, had been our host.

'It's very nice of him,' I said to my friend, 'but surely

we cannot accept this from him? He must be poor. He simply can't afford it.'

'He's a nice little chap,' my friend replied thoughtfully, 'and he is generous like all the Cariocas – who are the natives of Rio, as you ought to know by now. He is also very poor. I pay his wages, so I know. All the same, I'd better accept his hospitality.'

He knocked the ash off his cigarette.

'Because if I refuse, that nice, generous little boy will stick a knife between my ribs in the dark.'

He paused for a second, then added in a meditative voice: 'And much more likely tonight than tomorrow.'

'I thought they lacked malice,' I murmured.

'But they do. They lack it completely. It wouldn't be malice to stab me. It would be etiquette.'

Should a Brazilian have occasion to reprimand one of his employees the man will walk out on him in the middle of whatever he may be doing. He may or may not knife his late employer afterwards; but whatever he decides to do, he will certainly bear no malice.

A friend of mine, another visitor from London, walked into a shoe shop and asked for a pair of shoelaces. The assistant knelt down in front of him, took his shoes off, exchanged the laces and put his shoes on again, while still on his knees. When my friend inquired how much he owed, the assistant waved his hand in lordly fashion as if to say: 'What is a pair of shoelaces between friends?' My friend thanked him and asked him which was the shortest way back to his hotel, whereupon the assistant called his boss, who drove my friend home in his car. All this for a pair of shoelaces, unpaid for. But try to order the same assistant or his boss about, try to bully them, or offend their sensibilities in any way and they will ignore you, even

No hard feelings

if you have come in to buy shoes for the whole Brazilian army.

The thieves of Brazil are not simple craftsmen but minor artists. I was present in a café when a lady's handbag was pinched from her lap in a matter of seconds by a little shoeshine boy, and before the lady could say Jack Robinson – or whatever else she was inclined to say on the spur of the moment – the little boy was nowhere. Put anything down – a bag, a camera, an umbrella – in any public place for a moment and your chances of finding it again are remote; but milk, groceries, or other parcels, delivered at someone's front door, will be left untouched: to steal those would be utterly unsportsmanlike. It is not long since the wanted leader of a political plot evaded the police for seven years. Had he gone into hiding in the depths of the Interior, the police might have tracked him down at great risk. But as he took a luxury flat in the Avenida Atlantica, the main thoroughfare of Copacabana, and moved about freely and with unconcern, he was left alone until amnestied. A criminal must make a proper effort to escape if he wants to be arrested.

At lunch one day, I heard a peculiar and rather alarming noise on the terrace of the restaurant. As no one took any notice, I tried to ignore it, too, but it went on and on, till finally I asked the proprietor – an Austrian – whom I knew fairly well:

'Is that someone sobbing?'

'Yes,' he nodded. 'It's my cook.'

'It's awful to hear a grown-up man sob like that.'

'He's in utter despair,' the owner explained. 'He lost his wife last night. He loved her very much.'

'Sudden death?' I asked.

'Very sudden,' he agreed grimly.

'An accident?'

'Well, I suppose you might call it an accident. He killed her.'

I was a little surprised; but having already spent a fortnight in Brazil, not very much.

'Tell me the whole story.'

'There is no story to tell. Last night he got very angry with her about some silly remark or other she had made about another man, so he killed her; but as he loved her very deeply, he is now terribly upset. That's all there is to it.'

'And the police?'

My friend shrugged his shoulders:

'The police do not approve of murder. It would be utterly unfair to say they encourage it. In fact, they frown upon it. But murder is not regarded as one of the major crimes in Rio. Besides, the police have no idea who did it. He has not told them; I won't tell them; you won't either. How can they find out?'

The sobbing redoubled in intensity.

'Poor chap,' he said sympathetically. 'A great blow. A dreadful loss. He is not at all angry with her any more, but his cooking, I am afraid, is not up to his usual standard today.'

'That's noble of him,' said I. 'I mean, not to be angry with her any more. He is most forgiving. They are not a malicious people, I know. Do they hate anyone at all?'

'Oh no . . . They don't hate anyone. They do have a lively temperament, but they don't know the meaning of hatred. They are not even anti-anything. They are loving and lovable.'

'What about the poor?' I asked. 'Don't the poor hate the rich?'

'Good heavens, no! They pity them. Why, even the rich don't hate the poor.'

He was right. And that was, in fact, one of the other marvels of the Brazilian character.

FAVELA

Rio De Janeiro fully lives up to its reputation of being one of the most beautiful cities of the world. The enchanting bays and the saucy elegance of Copacabana beach capture your heart at first sight. On the top of Corcovado, a gigantic statue of Jesus, with outstretched arms, dominates the picture. ('Never has Christ blessed a happier and more lovable brothel,' as the local saying has it.) In shape, Corcovado resembles the slag-heaps of County Durham, yet it is one of the most renowned beauty spots on earth, while the slag-heaps (perhaps a little unfairly to County Durham) are not. The business section of Rio is supermodern, with huge steel structures, match-box-shaped office blocks and impressive skyscrapers. But in the streets people do not rush about breathless with excitement, as in North America; they walk at a leisurely pace, or bask in the sun. This is slow-motion-America; it is New York enjoying an Iberian siesta.

And in the midst of all this beauty and elegance, you discover the *favelas*. You cannot help noticing the *favelas* before spending half an hour in Rio. The *favela* is a wretched, ramshackle, filthy hut run up out of sticks, rotting planks, dirty rags, and cardboard, as a rule in less than twenty-four hours because, according

to the regulations, if 'accommodation' is built within that period of time, it must not be pulled down, nor may the inmates be ejected. The *favelas* have no electricity (unless, as frequently happens, an enterprising *favelado* manages to tap an electric cable), no sanitation, and water has to be carried up the hills in large jugs on women's heads. Bedroom, living room, washroom, kitchen and lavatory are all in one small kennel, accommodating–if that be the proper word for it–a number of grown-ups of various generations, and innumerable children. These shanty-towns are terrible eye-sores. Poverty is rarely pretty; it never smells particularly good; nor do people, driving about in large cars like to be reminded of the fact that some of their fellows are not consumers. On top of it all – and this is where these *favelas* differ from all the slums and shanty-towns of the world – they are not discreetly hidden in distant suburbs or behind tall brick walls: they are built on the most expensive, most beautiful, and most fashionable sites in Rio. Imagine Mayfair or the Avenue Foch or Park Avenue invaded by beggars and turned into a shanty-town – but in such a way that these thoroughfares lose nothing of their former character. This happy co-existence of elegance and filth, riches and poverty, penthouse and hovel, is a typically Brazilian phenomenon and reflects the happy co-existence of the black and white races in that country.

I was shown a new Syrian Club (the Syrians – or 'Turks', as they are incorrectly called in some parts – are among the most prosperous people in South America) and less than a yard away from the brand new Club's well-kept lawn was the first *favela*. And so it is everywhere. The *favelados* quite literally look into the rich man's mouth while he is eating; observe all the de-

tails of his life; supervise his parties; watch his children play. Doesn't that lead to envy, hatred, and exasperation? It certainly would everywhere else in the world; but not in Brazil. The *favelado* (who is more often than not a Negro) rather pities his rich neighbour and looks down on him. The rich has to pay rent – he does not; the rich has all those ridiculous responsibilities – he has none. I know that the miserable plutocrat, compared with the happy and carefree pauper, is an age-old image created by idiocy and a feeling of guilt. All the same, poverty in a semi-tropical land where no one is ever cold, and where there are plenty of bananas on the trees, so that no one has to go about actually starving, is very different from the Siberian type of misery. We may have our own ideas how these wretched hut-dwellers *ought* to feel; but, in fact, the squatter and his millionaire neighbour get on splendidly with each other. They chat across the fence, discuss next Sunday's football prospects, and make small bets on them. If the *favelado* loses, he will pay up, and his rich friend would not dream of refusing his money. (See Knifing as a Rule of Etiquette in the previous chapter.) 'How is Senhora Maria? Is her tummyache any better?' the *favelado* will inquire, referring to the rich man's wife or mother. They wish each other 'Happy Christmas', congratulate each other on their daughter's weddings and occasionally go out in the rich man's car to the near-by pub to have a drink together. Afterwards each returns to his respective world: one, perhaps, to a real-estate deal involving millions of pounds, the other to a life where ten *cruzeiros* (a halfpenny) is certainly not a sum to scoff at.

The *favelado* works as a handy-man, kitchen-hand, shoeshine, potato-peeler, carrier, porter, etc. He has no

Co-existence

ambitions; he can hardly be called a 'status-seeker'. Rank and riches would not mean much to him even if these things were within his grasp. He does not wish to possess a large house with a patio and a number of guest-rooms; nor does he wish to be addressed as 'Senhor councillor'. He wants to have women, football-games, a little gambling, and a good time in the sun. He does not wish to be particularly well-dressed; but personally he is as clean as any rich man; bodily cleanliness is a native Indian inheritance and almost a mania. Yes, personal cleanliness is important, but he is not concerned with prestige and it is easy enough for him to keep up (or rather down) with the Joneses. The *favela* is a warm and friendly place – a friendly place where even the police dare not tread after nightfall.

The more sensitive kind of Archbishop might not be perfectly satisfied with the moral climate of these *favelas*. ('Morality' in modern Christendom, and especially in Britain, always means sexual morality; no one seems to be interested in anything else.) I talked to one little *favelado* boy who informed me that he had no mother.

'Poor little chap,' said I.

'Oh, no, I'm not a poor little chap,' he replied. 'I've never had a mother at all.'

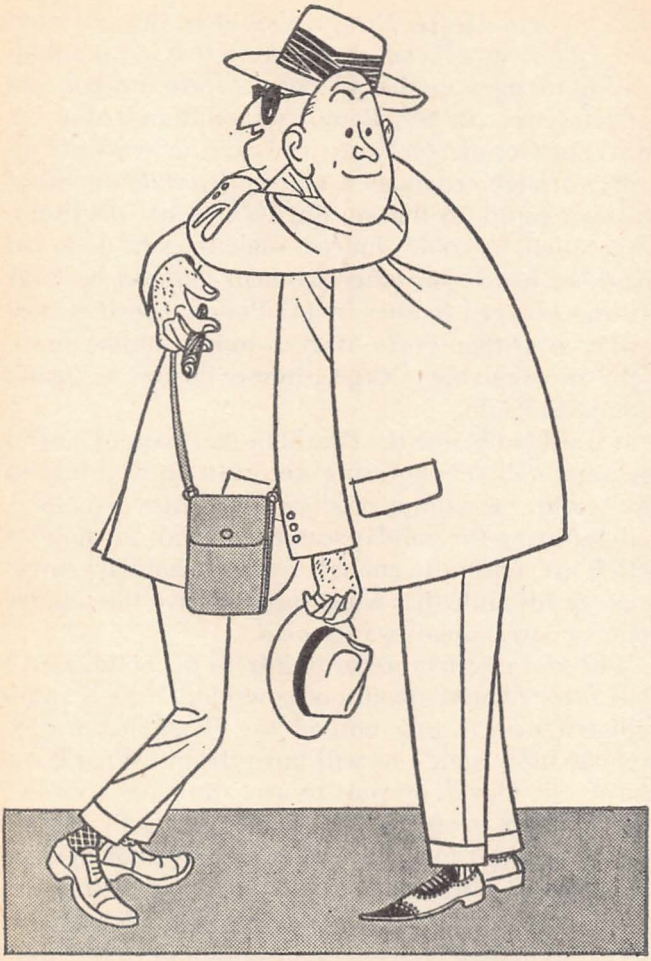
This perplexed me a little but before I could ask any further questions, he explained willingly:

'You see, I'm the son of my father and my aunt.'

THE DILEMMA OF THE SUPERFICIAL OBSERVER

That poor fellow, the Superficial Observer, is nowhere in greater danger of being misled than in Brazil. He – the so – will meet a Brazilian acquaintance whom he hardly knows and will immediately find the fellow's arms flung round him in a warm, tight embrace, accompanied by energetic, and occasionally painful slaps on the back. 'How friendly these people are,' the so will exclaim in raptures, and in so doing will jump to the wrong conclusion. The original meaning of the traditional embrace – the *abraco* – is a keen desire to find out if the warmly-greeted acquaintance has a gun concealed about his person. Consequently, the more suspicious a character is, the warmer the embrace; if you really trust him, a nod will do.

Similarly, the so might be inclined to judge certain manifestations of wisdom – or simply differences in outlook or approach – unfavourably. Imagine, for example, a German businessman newly settled in São Paulo. He may notice in January or February (in other words, during the summer holiday season) that the delivery of letters has become rather slack – so slack, in fact, that not a single letter, newspaper, or any other kind of printed matter, bill or charity-appeal, has been delivered for a month or so. The German so will be inclined to jump to conclusions once again and he may utter a few critical remarks about the Brazilian postal services. All that has happened, however, is that the postman has gone on holiday to visit his aged mother



Meu caro amigo!

in, say, Porto Alegre. Now, it should be obvious even to the most superficial of observers that no postman visiting his aged mother in Porto Alegre can possibly deliver letters in São Paulo, several hundred miles away. The German (or North American, or Swiss, or Finnish, so might envisage a scheme by which another postman could do the job during the first man's absence. Well, he could; indeed, sometimes he does. On the other hand, this other postman too may be away visiting *his* aged mother in Joa Pessoa, which is even farther away than Porto Alegre – so it would be downright unreasonable to expect him to do another man's job in São Paulo.

It is silly to blame the Brazilian Postmaster-General for a natural, yet confusing, constitution of things in this world: he cannot produce substitutes or holiday reliefs during the holiday season, when all the holiday reliefs are, naturally enough, away on holiday; surely it is not his fault that when he does have the holiday reliefs galore, nobody wants them.

The said postman, returning from his holiday, will find a tremendous amount of postal-log. If he is an intelligent man – and most of the Brazilians are extremely intelligent – he will burn the lot. What is the use of a holiday if, on your return, you have to do two months' work in one month? The Superficial Observer will be annoyed and agitated at the thought of all those burnt letters, not because of his conception of duty and public service is as superior as he would like us to believe, but because of a lack of erudition in Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy. The letters were either important or unimportant. If they were important, the sender will certainly write again; if they were unimportant the addressee, instead of making a most objec-

tionable fuss, should be grateful to the Post Office for ridding him of a nuisance.

It will take some time for the SO to get his bearings. Europeans will be inclined to use uncomplimentary, if not downright offensive, expressions to describe what is, in fact, simply the phenomenon of *dá-se um geito* ('We'll fix it somehow').

People know, for example, that no new telephones are available in some business areas of certain large cities where, nevertheless, huge new office blocks are being erected in large numbers. And that means: Absolutely No Telephones At All. It is no good sending in applications, pleading special needs. No telephone means no telephone. After all that, the SO will be surprised to find that, in spite of these difficulties, every office will be let in no time; and even more surprised to find that all offices do, in fact, have telephones – some as many as six or eight lines. In his ignorance, the puzzled SO might think that telephones have, after all, become available. Nothing of the sort. There are no telephones and that's final.

The historic masterpiece of *dá-se um geito* occurred some years ago in the Parliament of Rio Province. The session was to be concluded at midnight and Parliament was to be adjourned for three months – yet, it had not passed (owing to the obstructionists, or as the Americans put it, filibustering, tactics of a few MPS) the most important bill of all: the raising of members' salaries. The clock of the Chamber – the authoritative timepiece in this case – ticked away remorselessly and at eleven fifty-five p.m. it became obvious that the last chance and last hope had disappeared. At that moment, however, one of the more resourceful members climbed

up to the clock and put it back one hour, thus saving the situation and contributing to the welfare of his fellow-members.

The word that would most readily jump to the lips of Superficial Observers in connexion with some of the prevalent practices, might be *corruption.*

Brazilian (and, with a few exceptions, all South American) opinion is divided on this issue. Some people find nothing wrong in corruption, either economically or morally. Corruption has a certain tradition, they say, and it is wrong not to honour one's traditions. By means of corruption (mostly monies paid by millionaire industrialists and corporations to poor officials) wealth passes from the rich to the poor; thus corruption helps to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth, consequently it is only a sort of Socialism. Besides, money obtained by corruption remains in circulation and benefits many other people. Nor is there anything morally wrong in corruption – so this school maintains. A nationally-known politician used this slogan quite openly and not unsuccessfully: 'I steal, but I create.'

Another school of ethics, however, is unable to accept this teaching in its totality. Whether corruption is right or wrong – they hold – depends on the merit of each individual case and all generalization is odious. There is nothing wrong in selling smuggled goods in a shop, below the market price, as long as it is openly and honestly admitted by the shopkeeper that he is dealing in contraband. The part of the professional smuggler – the *contrabandista* – going from door to door, offering his goods and services, is accepted and held in respect. It is both wrong and disgraceful for one *contra-*

bandista to encroach upon another's territory or try to poach the other's clients. It is not criminal, of course, but it is a grave violation of professional etiquette.

'When the *concierge* of the house where I live shot his wife,' a Brazilian friend told me, 'I expected him to be acquitted. That part of the story is all right. I also expected – having seen what happened – to be taken to the police station to make a statement. I had to tell my story over and over again and was kept there till two in the morning. When I finally reached home, the *concierge*, who had got home at ten thirty, opened the door to me and began to laugh. You see my point? I do object to murderers being let home *before* witnesses.'

My friend had another grievance:

'The *concierge* told me he had taken a taxi home. When he was about to pay his fare, he told the taximan quite casually that he had just been released by the police, after killing his wife earlier in the evening. The taxi-driver refused to accept any payment from him. He said he would not dream of accepting one single *cruzeiro* from a man who had killed his wife. I, on the other hand, had to pay my fare. I have killed no one at all lately. Nor can I do much to raise my social status. You see, I am a bachelor.'

There are two other morsels of information which may throw some further light on the problem:

(1) If warned by a policeman about a minor traffic offence, you may offer him twenty *cruzeiros*. Often, he will refuse; in some cases he will deem it a sufficient fine for your misdemeanour and will be ready to regard the matter as closed. Should you, however, offer the policeman more than twenty *cruzeiros*, you are sure to land in trouble. He will suspect you of trying to

bribe him, and that is one thing he will not stand for.

This system, however, cannot expand indefinitely: it has its own limitations. A shopkeeper told me that a minor official of the Ministry of Commerce, on discovering some small apparent irregularity, had told him he would be reported to the authorities. The shopkeeper shrugged his shoulders, and instead of offering him a small sum, told the official to go ahead. The official was taken aback. Reporting someone is a tiresome business; it means a lot of paperwork in triplicate, additional reports and explanations, oral evidence, etc. So, on reflection, he did not report the shopkeeper; but he nursed a strong feeling of grievance against him; he had been shabbily treated; the shopkeeper had not played the game.

(2) Once a poor but honest dentist bought a complicated printing machine at one of the largest stores in the country. He took the machine home and started printing bank-notes with it. The machine, however, in spite of the praise lavished on it, was far from perfect and made a mess of the job. So the old dentist took the machine back to the stores and made a complaint to the manager of the department, telling him what had happened.

The manager was a little surprised.

'But don't you know, sir,' he asked, 'that it is not permitted to print bank-notes at home?'

The dentist, outraged by this impertinence, retorted with flashing eyes:

'And to sell faulty machinery to the public *is* permitted?'

BLACK COFFEE

One afternoon I was just about to go out to take photographs in São Paulo. Among other subjects, I had in mind the guard in front of Army headquarters. I had seen so many American and other tourists snapping our own poor, defenceless Guardsmen, stamping up and down in front of Buckingham Palace, or Life Guards sitting – somewhat helplessly and even more pointlessly – on black chargers in Whitehall, that, in retaliation, I had started building up a collection of picturesque sentries from all over the world. I was stopped in the hall of my hotel by an English Member of Parliament who had come for a few days to take part in some conference.

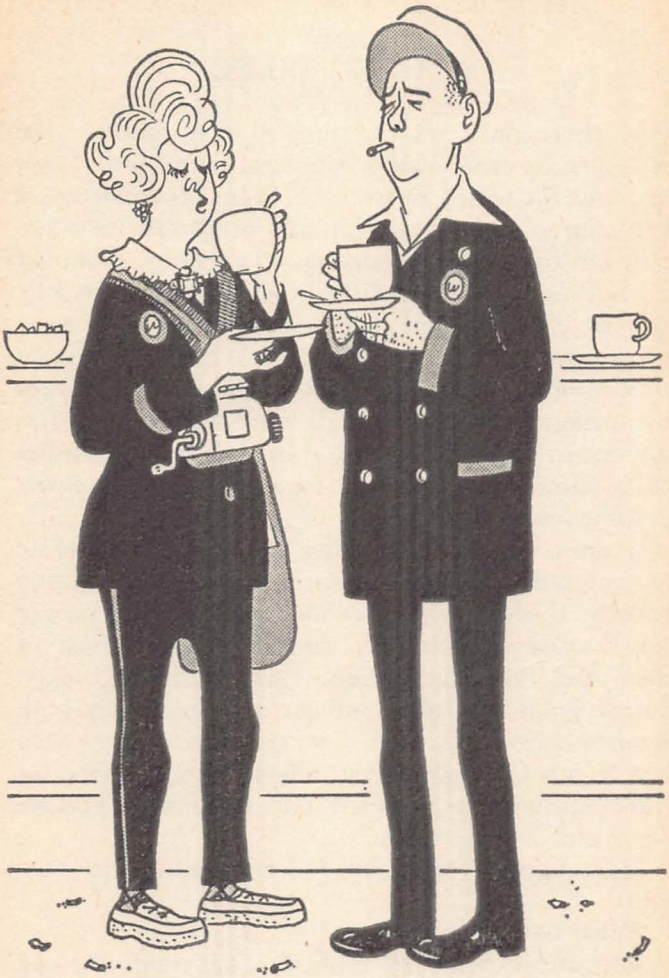
'I must tell you something,' said he. He tried to look amused but he was quite angry. 'I was coming here by tram today and it stopped. Not at a proper stop – just between two corners, in the thick of the traffic. The driver got out. I thought it had broken down. Then the conductor got out, too. They both went into an espresso bar. I watched them. They each had a cup of black coffee. They were in there for three minutes or so, then out they came and we drove on.'

He stopped for effect, but as I said nothing he asked me:

'What do you say to that?'

'Inconsiderate men,' I replied. 'That conductor and his driver. They usually invite their passengers to join them.'

He reflected. 'There were far too many of us for



One for the road

that,' he said. 'But just imagine it. It could only happen here.'

'Or in England,' I said.

He bristled indignantly. 'Look here, I know you're fond of saying things like that, but try to be fair, just for once. In England no tram or bus crew would ever start out without having several cups of refreshment beforehand. So why should they stop *en route*?'

After a second's pause, he added, triumphantly: 'Besides, they drink tea, not black coffee.'

Well, I know when I am beaten, so I did not carry on with the interesting subject. What sort of activities would an ordinary true Briton be ready to interrupt for the sake of a cup of tea? Instead, I walked towards Army headquarters. I had heard many times before that the love of *cafesinho* – a sip of black coffee – was one of the supreme passions of all Brazilians. It is a heritage of the days of the coffee boom. Brazil's economy is no longer based on coffee but a quick cup of *cafesinho* has remained one of the sacred rituals of Brazilian life. Trams and buses are stopped for its sake; clerks and officials keep running down to neighbouring coffee bars; executives are served coffee in their offices; and during the last insurrection – a minor civil war, years ago – all firing always stopped between two and three p.m.: it was time for *cafesinho*. Soldiers were prepared to sacrifice their lives, but not their black coffee.

In the meantime, I reached my destination but I seeemed to have come in vain. There was no sentry to be seen anywhere. Then suddenly I noticed a gun. It was a modern, rather murderous-looking sub-machine-gun casually propped against the wall of the building. The passers-by took no notice of it, nor of me

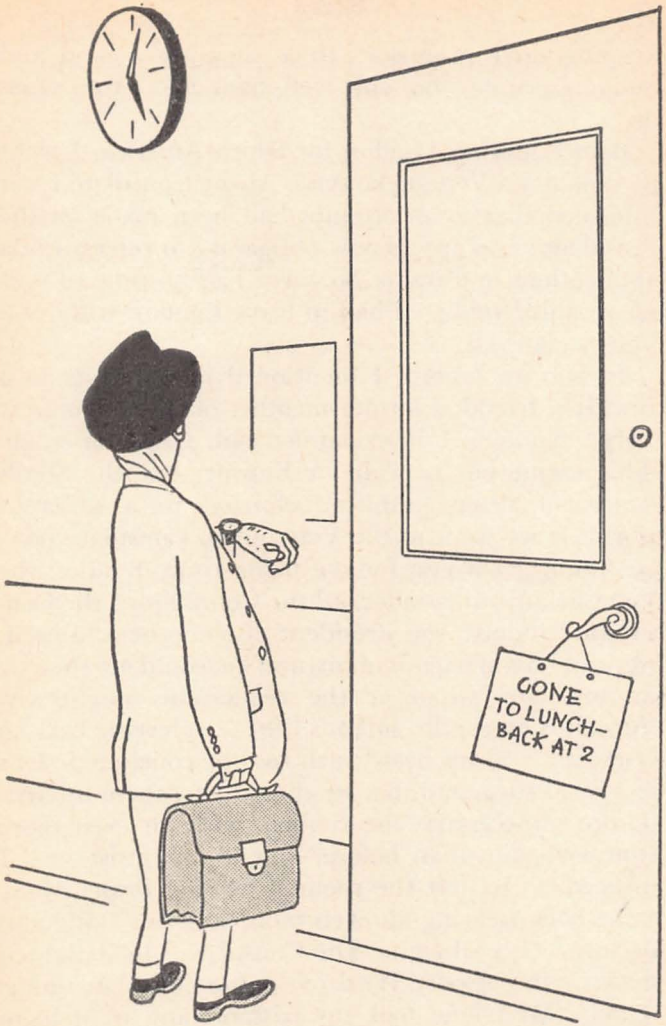
photographing it. A few minutes later the sentry – a tin-helmeted warrior – appeared from an espresso bar opposite, smiling and apparently well satisfied with life. He crossed the road, reached for his gun, swung it across his shoulders, and then, remembering his own importance, wiped the smile off his face, and assuming a stern and indomitable expression, went on guarding the headquarters with courage, determination, and unabated vigilance.

THE ART OF SAYING 'NO'

My knowledge of the Portuguese language is nothing to write home about, nevertheless, I could not help noticing soon after my arrival in Brazil that the little – and in our part of the world, rather common – word 'No' does not exist in Portuguese. (Nor, as I was to find out, in South-American Spanish, for that matter.)

If you ask anyone whether it is convenient for him to see you at five p.m. in his office, he will say, without a moment's hesitation, 'Most certainly, delighted, please do come along,' quite irrespective of whether he will be in his office or, say, in Chicago at the appointed hour. And this is regarded as elementary politeness. To say, 'No, I can't see you because I'll be in Chicago' would be a sign of churlishness and ill-breeding.

Or ask someone to do you a favour. If he has decent manners, he will promise to, and then not do it. Ask anyone anything, in fact, the answer will always be a friendly, reassuring, and warm 'Yes, most certainly'. The trouble is that you cannot rely even on their not


GONE
TO LUNCH-
BACK AT 2

?

keeping their promises: since they are a kind and obliging people – not only well-mannered – they often do.

Before leaving London for South America, I went to apply for a Venezuelan visa. At the Consulate I was informed that as an attempt had been made on the President's life, it was now obligatory to refer all visa applications to Caracas. So – as I had no time to wait for a cabled reply – I had to leave London without a Venezuelan visa.

In Rio de Janeiro I mentioned my troubles to a Brazilian friend, a former member of the Diplomatic Corps. 'Nonsense!' he exclaimed with a superior laugh. This might be the rule in Europe, but the South American sister-republics belonged to a different world. If we went to the Venezuelan Consulate now, he would get a visa for me in no time. Besides, the Venezuelan Ambassador, all the Counsellors, the Consul and, indeed, the President of Venezuela himself, were all bosom friends of his, and he would get the visa in any case, whatever the regulations might say. 'Attempts on the President's life . . . referring back to Caracas . . . never heard such rot,' he concluded, 'let's go.' But I suggested that we should ring them up first. 'Quite unnecessary,' he replied, with an even more superior smile than before, 'but if you insist . . .' I insisted, so he left the room to phone. Presently he came back wearing an even more superior smile and declared, 'It's all right. The Consul will be delighted to visa your passport. We drove to the Consulate immediately. My friend took my passport and went in to greet his old pal, the Consul. I was to wait until asked to follow him. A few minutes later he came out of the room with a rather puzzled expression on his face. He

said that he could not get the visa. There seemed to be a new regulation, that all applications were to be referred to Caracas.

'Oh,' said I in blank surprise, 'is that so?'

'Yes,' he replied. 'It seems,' he went on in an informative tone, 'that there has recently been an attempt on the President's life. That's why they've brought in these new regulations.'

'You don't say!' said I. 'Well, that's a reasonable enough precaution. But unexpected though.'

'It certainly is for me,' he nodded. 'A bit of a surprise. First time I heard of it.'

For some time I failed to understand this mentality. Why did he and why did the Venezuelans (I do not know, of course, to whom he spoke on the telephone) say that they would give me the visa when a quarter of an hour later they had to refuse, however unwillingly?

I know, of course, that I am a bit of an honorary Brazilian myself. I hate to say 'No' and I have had to school myself ruthlessly into doing it where necessary. Even so, I still do it better in writing than on the telephone.

After a short while in Brazil, I think I have begun to understand it all. It seems to me that this mystery – like most mysteries – is no mystery at all. It is a simple speech convention which the English, of all people, should be the first to comprehend. In England if you say, 'I shouldn't think so' it means, 'That is utterly out of the question.' When told, 'It might take a little time', you understand that you need not bother to call again for another eight months. 'No doubt' means 'although it is extremely doubtful', and an astonished 'Oh, *is* that so?' means, 'You are a liar', etc., etc.

Similarly, in Brazil (and in fact all over South America) you simply have to remember that the word *yes* has a double meaning. Occasionally, it means *yes*; usually, it means *no*. 'I will study it' means 'quite out of the question'; 'this might prove difficult' means 'go to hell!'

No, itself, on the other hand, is the rudest possible two-letter word in the language, which will never be uttered until and unless *Lady Chatterley's Lover* appears in Portuguese.

BLACK AND WHITE

My first deep impression of Brazil – dating back to 1942 – was made by a book by Stefan Zweig.* 'Whereas our old world,' Zweig wrote, 'is more than ever ruled by the insane attempt to breed people racially pure, like race-horses and dogs, the Brazilian nation for centuries has been built upon the principle of a free and unsurpassed miscegenation, the complete equalization of black and white, brown and yellow. What in other countries is only theoretically stated on paper and parchment – an absolute civil equality in public as well as in private life – shows itself here in reality in the schools, offices, churches, in business, in the army and the universities. It is moving to see children of all colours – chocolate, milk, and coffee – come out of their schools arm-in-arm.'

This – while it raised my interest – sounded to me

* Stefan Zweig: *Brazil, Land of Future*, Cassell, 1942.

like a touching, sentimental fairy tale; and, of course, it is.

' . . . The real Brazilian himself is certain to have some drops of Indian blood in his veins,' Zweig goes on. 'And – wonder of wonders – he is not ashamed of it.'

Thus Stefan Zweig, and a number of other authors. Many other people, however, informed me in strict privacy and, usually, in whispers:

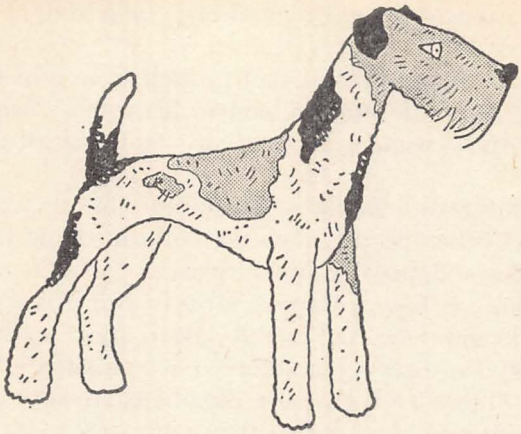
'Don't believe a word of all this. Brazil is like most other countries. Racial discrimination exists; the blacks are oppressed and forced to do menial jobs. The only difference is that the Brazilians are such a hopeless mixture of races that they can't very well call one another nasty names, or they would soon find that they are, in fact, insulting themselves. Admittedly, they cannot afford the worst excesses of racialism, because that would cause the whole country to disintegrate.'

I scratched my head – and read Zweig again:

'Free and unsurpassed miscegenation . . . the complete equalization of black and white . . . ' Nonsense. And those children, coming out of school arm-in-arm. No children ever do that – whatever their colour. And Indian blood? 'Wonder of wonders – he is not ashamed of it.' No, he is not. But many Brazilians have Negro blood, too, and they are ashamed of *that*.

Zweig arrived in Brazil as an anti-Nazi refugee and had every reason to be biased, impressionable, and emotional, on the question of racial tolerance. His book was motivated by gratitude towards Brazil – a noble sentiment, no doubt – but, as a rule, the fountain-head of dull books. My other informers, on the other hand, so it seemed, were ill-informed or malicious.

Wire-haired fox terrier



Brazilian all-purpose hound

Where does the truth lie then? Alas, not 'half-way'. It is hardly ever situated quite as conveniently as that. You can never find the truth with dividers.

I was so intrigued by this problem that I began my investigations a few hours after my arrival in Brazil – in a Rio night club. Although I am not an eminent academician, I rarely begin my more serious researches in night clubs. But, judging from my newly gained experience, that is a grave mistake. I shall do so more often.

The place in question was one of the most exclusive in Rio de Janeiro. There was not one single coloured person to be seen at any of the tables.

'No Negroes?' I asked the proprietor.

'None,' he said, without looking around.

'Would you let them in?'

'I'd be delighted to let them in,' he replied and I knew he meant it. 'Nor would my other guests object, I'm sure, as long as the Negroes were properly dressed and clean. But even if my other guests did object, I should be helpless: racial discrimination is a serious crime in Brazil.'

'All that sounds very impressive. But there are no Negroes here.'

'No, there aren't.'

'Why not?'

'Simply because they cannot afford it. Black men may come in; poor men can't. And the black are poor.'

'Have you ever had a Negro in here?' I asked.

'Never. Not one.'

'You mean to say that there is not one Negro in Rio de Janeiro who could afford to come here once? Only once?'

'That is precisely what I mean,' he nodded. 'There is not one.'

This, needless to say, sounded to me like a new and hypocritical variation on the old theme of racial discrimination.

But it wasn't.

The early settlers and landlords picked out the beautiful Negro and Indian girls and slept with them – a sinful but fairly widespread habit of the past, present and future. These Portuguese settlers, whatever their other shortcomings may have been, were nice, tolerant family men and did not hesitate to recognize, and even to love, their mulatto offspring. The little coffee-coloured boys and girls were allowed to play with the master's white children and his legitimate and somewhat puzzled wife. When they grew up, their father tried to get them minor government jobs. Often he permitted his children to bear his name, and consequently some coloured people are the proud possessors of the most ancient and aristocratic names in the land. To put it in another way: the equivalents of the Churchill, Salisbury, Cecil, Fitzalan-Howard, or Russell families all have their black branches and the two groups keep up amicable relations with each other.

But you do not need to look hard to find colour-prejudice, or something very similar. A few white sections of the population would not marry outside their own narrow clan. But that again, it may be objected, is more ancestral pride and simple, old-fashioned snobbishness, than colour prejudice. They would not marry Negroes or Indians, it is true; but they would not marry European immigrants either, or

even upper-class Brazilians. They marry their own first and second cousins, or other close relations and, indeed, uncle-and-niece marriages had to be forbidden about fifty years ago. These semi-incestuous unions go on until the clans in question become sufficiently exclusive and degenerate; then the half-idiots become sterile, too, and they die out. This is a happy ending for all – including Brazil and humanity. They themselves are also pleased beyond measure. They die out – but they die with their blood pure.

A number of other families boast the slogan: 'Four hundred years a Paulista,' which means that their families have been inhabitants of São Paulo for four hundred years. This seems to be a major achievement to be very proud of. There are some correspondingly haughty clans in Pernambuco, too, all very jealous of their pure blood which, of course, is no purer than the blood of other Brazilians. Forefathers had an eye for pretty coloured girls; and foremothers had their occasional revenge.

The Brazilian Navy, too, used to be a centre of race-prejudice. It was kept white by various devices (black and mulatto recruits were always rejected on grounds of health). In the end it was found that while the Army – always a mixed organization – had produced many outstanding people, the lily-white Navy mostly produced mediocrities, so the practice was abandoned.

The Brazilian civil service, too, reflects certain reservations and curious practices in this field, as we are told by Senhor de Sá: *

'In my work,' – he is quoting a friend of his, a lawyer

* Hernane Taveres de Sá: *The Brazilians, People of Tomorrow,* John Day Co., New York, 1947.

– 'I have many contacts with government offices, and when I go into a ministry to see that an important paper is rushed through, I run the whole gamut of colours. The doorman is usually jet black, the receptionist a little lighter, the clerk half-way between black and white. As I advance through progressively more important employees, their colour becomes lighter. When I finally manage to talk to an official who is completely white, I know that I am getting near people important enough . . .'

A racialist or an anti-semite never chooses his prejudices rationally. His is the Philosophy of Hatred and he, himself, is a Hater, not a Lover. Sartre says that no external factor can instil the Philosophy of Hatred into anyone.* 'Anti-semitism (and racialism) is something adopted of one's own free will, involving the whole of one's outlook, a philosophy of life to bear not only on Jews (or Negroes and other coloured people) but on all men in general, on history and society.'

The joy of Hatred is the great joy of the joyless. It helps, by shifting the blame, to compensate for one's failure in the world and to convince the Hater that he belongs to the élite. Any Hater ultimately hates himself; and in this he is quite right. He is hateful enough.

The age-old Americo-European pattern *vis-à-vis* the Negro is basically a simple one. Deprive the Negro of education and then blame him for his ignorance; encage him in ghettoes and slums and then blame him for poverty and over-crowding; tie him to the lowest menial jobs and then blame him for not doing anything better.

* Jean-Paul Sartre: *Portrait of the Anti-Semite,* Secker & Warburg, 1948.

These practices are utterly alien to the Brazilians. They are Lovers not Haters; Lovers – in every sense of the word. To begin with, as Lovers they started producing little coffee-coloured offspring, and – again as Lovers – they never thought of repudiating them. In the next phase, the Negro blood of the nation engendered even more tolerance and warmth because these long-suffering, lovable people are tolerant, gay, and sad at the same time; then this added dose of tolerance produced more miscegenation and more miscegenation produced again more tolerance.

I wonder what happens to a nation when tolerance and understanding reach saturation point. But there is no danger of that yet. Nevertheless it is wrong to say – as has been suggested – that Brazilians are not racialists *because* a racialist policy would spell disintegration and national suicide. Surely it all happened the other way round. The Brazilians were tolerant and all-embracing (if this be the right expression) in the first place, and it was as *a result of this* that the population became a mixture of all races. Tolerance preceded miscegenation and was not a consequence of it.

The Brazilians' whole approach to racial problems is different from everybody else's.

Senhor de Sá * tells us a well-known and oft-repeated story about an eminent mulatto engineer, André Reboucas, who was a favourite of Emperor Dom Pedro II. 'During a gala ball,' we read, 'Reboucas asked a lady-in-waiting to the Empress to dance with him and was curtly refused, because of his colour. Thereupon the Empress, who was sitting at the other end of the ball room and had observed the little scene, got up, crossed

* *Op. cit.*

the big room, and asked the mulatto if he would dance with her.'

The Brazilians' basic attitude to racial problems was even more vigorously demonstrated about a hundred years later. In 1940, after the fall of Paris, when many people felt sure that the Germans would win the war, the Casa Lohner – a German-owned optical firm in Rio – advertised for office boys – 'Aryans only'. No such advertisement had ever appeared in a Brazilian newspaper before. Senhor de Sá continues:

'The following morning more than one thousand students from the university were gathered in front of the Casa Lohner. When the firm opened its doors, they sent in a twelve-year-old Negro boy to ask for the job. The coloured boy was summarily ejected, whereupon the students moved in and proceeded to smash the place to a shambles. When the police arrived the students were ready with a committee to explain to the policemen the crime the German had committed. The police detachment stood aside and let the students proceed.'

To these two examples one ought to add a third. In 1951 an American lady, a famous Negro dancer, was refused a room in a São Paulo hotel because of her colour. Next day, a Member of Parliament introduced a bill, making racial discrimination a criminal offence. The bill was not only passed unanimously but also in record time in Brazilian legislative history.

The language of Brazil also lacks all those repulsive little smear-words for races in which the American is specially rich, and in which others abound, too: words like Wop, Kike, Yid, Dago, Kraut, Chink, etc., etc. There is no race of Kikes and Krauts, of course; but

there is a race of people who call others Kikes and Krauts.

The Brazilians are not this race. Nevertheless, Paradise is not just round the corner yet. When, in the course of a survey, teenage girls were asked if they would marry Negroes, almost all of them said they would not. For this they gave various explanations. None of them said: because Negroes are black; most of them said: because Negroes are poor.

And that brings me back to an important, indeed in a way unique, point of this problem. The girls' remarks tally, of course, with the theory advanced by the night-club proprietor which rather worried me. I thought it all amounted simply to this: black people are sentenced to poverty and then segregated on the ground of their poverty, while nobody mentions their blackness.

But it is not quite so simple. The Brazilians, while treating their black people decently, openly maintain that to be white is a Good Thing. This most progressive and most tolerant of all lands is the only place where *branqueamento* – the policy of gradually 'whitening' the whole nation – is openly advocated; indeed, it is only in this land of racial peace and understanding that an annual *Dia de Raça* – Race Day – is celebrated to propagate the idea of *branqueamento.*

Yes, they teach their children the Importance of Being Light; they teach them How to be White. It is fairly easy. The poor black man may be an underdog; he has to overcome tremendous difficulties if he wants to rise; but once he has risen a miracle occurs: as soon as he ceases to be poor he also ceases to be black. In the United States of America, a drop of Negro blood

relegates you to Negro status; in Brazil, it is up to you to define your own colour. Here, if you say you are white, you are white. After all, you should know. It would ill befit a very poor and pitch-black Negro to call himself white; but if he did call himself white, white he would be. When I was there I met white men much darker than the average Negro is in other, less happy lands. In other words: Brazil washes whitest.

Whiteness, then, is not so much a colour as an economic status. Poverty makes you morally black in Europe; in Brazil it makes, or keeps, you racially black, too. A lot of people keep changing their colour. I saw a white man go into the office of the Registrar of Bankruptcy in Rio; he was pitch-black when he came out, an hour later.

To sum up: racial discrimination is not utterly unknown in Brazil but the mixture – to their great credit – is much brighter than anywhere else in the world. The United States has its first Roman Catholic President now; Brazil had her first *mulatto* President half a century ago. A man's colour is no obstacle to his advancement. A black man is not tied to his lowly status any more than he is tied to his own blackness. No man suffers because of his colour; schools and all other institutions are open to all; all races mix freely – and how!

Nevertheless, take a last word of advice from me. Even in Brazil if it is open to you to choose what to be: be a rich white and not a poor Negro.

TRAFFIC

NOBODY hurries in Brazil. It does not really matter whether you reach your destination an hour too soon, a day late, or not at all. The grey pavements in the streets of Copacabana are often decorated with beautiful black mosaics – a unique type of decoration. Only a people alive to beauty in their surroundings and who have plenty of time for contemplation during their meditative, ambulatory exercises would take the trouble to decorate the pavements they walk on.

However, as soon as these easy-going, leisurely characters get a steering wheel in their hands no speed is fast enough for them. You would then be inclined to believe that gaining a tenth of a second is a matter of grave importance for all of them all the time.

Motor cars are extremely expensive in Brazil, import duties being crippling and murderous. Only a few other, poorer, South American states are in a worse position in this respect. Complaints are universal: hardly anyone can afford a car. Anyone? No one. Absolutely no one. But, in that mysterious Brazilian way, this only means that the number of motor vehicles is growing by leaps and bounds, almost as if cars were distributed free of charge to all and sundry. Thus the pedestrian's life is becoming more hazardous every day.

It is not that drivers do not care about pedestrians. The trouble is that they do care about them; they are, in fact, on the look-out for them. As soon as a driver notices a pedestrian step off the pavement, he regards him as fair game: he takes aim and accelerates. The

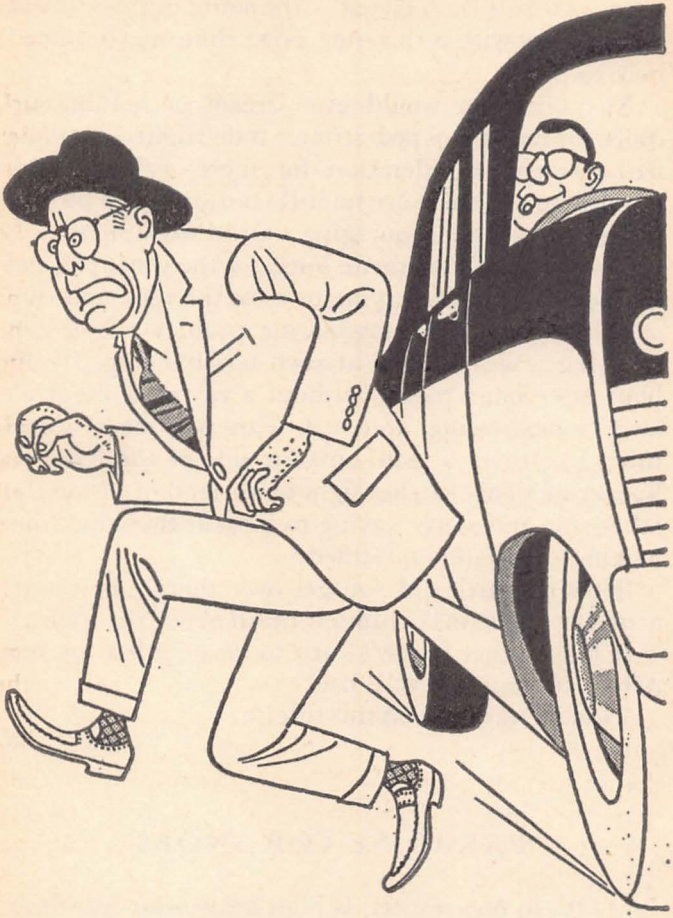
pedestrian has to jump, leap, and run for dear life. He does not resent this in the least: driver and pedestrian – hunter and prey – smile amicably at each other. I win today – you'll win tomorrow. Fair enough.

It is rather like a fox-hunt or a tiger-hunt, only much fairer. There are no beaters to chase pedestrians under one particular car: he can get under any car he likes. Unlike the Duke of Edinburgh's tiger in India, the pedestrian in Rio can choose freely whether to be bagged by an exalted or a humble personage. The din, the excitement, the hullabaloo may be greater than at a British fox-hunt but, unlike fox-hunts, once the pedestrian reaches safety he is left alone; he is not dug out of his hole.

The relationship between drivers and pedestrians is not only a hunt; it is also a gamble. The Brazilians are born gamblers and this particular game is not only full of thrills; it is also very cheap. No expensive lottery tickets are needed; no large sums are staked. You stake your life, that's all: surely that is cheap enough.

The scene around Rio's Central Station during the rush-hour has to be seen to be believed. But even there a pedestrian has a fair 1 to 6 chance of reaching the other side. If the pedestrian – there or anywhere else – does reach the pavemnt unscathed, he enjoys a healthy, happy, sarcastic laugh at the driver's expense – his skill has been gloriously demonstrated. If he is knocked down, the laugh is on him and he loses face. Sometimes he loses more than that.

The war between drivers themselves is murderous but good-tempered. They cut in, they overtake on both sides, they force you to brake violently and commit all the most heinous crimes of the road and twenty times every hour. But they smile at you at the same time –



A miss is as good as a mile

there is no anger, no hostility, no mad hooting. 'I've tried, as we all keep trying' – the smile implies. 'I did not get away with it this time. Next time, maybe. Good luck to you.'

No policeman would ever dream of holding up traffic for the sake of pedestrians; traffic lights are timed without any consideration for mere walkers; and, needless to say, there are no little buttons to be pushed to light up those encouraging CROSS NOW signs.

The Avenida Presidente Vargas is the worst place of all. You stand there, trying to cross the road and contemplating the truly fascinating problem: how can crawling traffic proceed at such terrifying speed? As hour after hour passes, without a ray of hope of an auspicious crossing, you may witness a scene, something like this: a man, on your side of the Avenida Vargas suddenly catches sight of a friend of his on the other side and starts waving to him, at the same time looking completely mystified:

'How on earth did you get over there?' he shouts across, trying to make himself heard above the traffic.

It is the other fellow's turn to be surprised by this naïve question. He yells back:

'How? I was *born* on this side!'

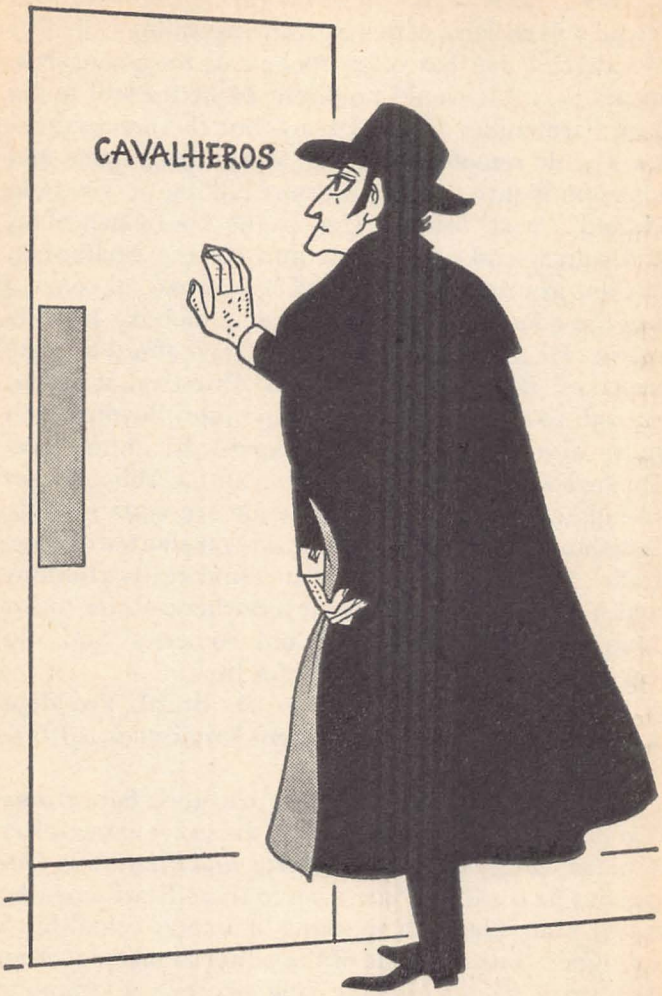
PARADISE FOR SNOBS

BRAZIL, in one respect, is high heaven for European snobs: here, not only in social life but also in politics and the arts, you refer to people by their Christian names only. The European snob-technique, as practised in Britain, is much too tiresome. You quote, let us

say Bertrand Russell's views on Parmenides and your friend will exclaim with a patronizing smile: 'Ah, dear old Bertie! He has often spoken to me about Parmenides . . .' It would no doubt be better still to say Jack Parmenides or just Parmy, but the pre-Socratics *are* a trifle remote. Utter Mr Macmillan's name and someone is sure to nod and start talking of 'good old Harold'. 'Dave' usually refers to the Lord Chancellor, and your friend quoting 'Arthur' has the Archbishop of Canterbury in mind. (Geoff has retired, of course.) But the poor British Christian-name snob has his difficulties. He must be up to date and can't afford to make mistakes. If you speak of J. B. Priestley, it is not enough to know that JB stands for John Boynton, you must also know that his friends call him Jack. Duchesses, too, tend to cause difficulties. What do her friends call Loelia for short? Nor are certain countesses any less of a poser. How do you shorten 'Wenefryde', for instance, to make it sound really chummy and intimate? Dangers lurk everywhere. Refer to Mr Maugham casually as 'dear old Somerset' and you have made yourself ridiculous for life.

No such complications arise in Brazil. President Quadros is *Janio* and ex-president Kubitschek is *Juscelino.*

This Brazilian licence applies to historic figures also. Vargas has been dead since 1954; the street named after him (as already mentioned) is *Avenida Presidente Vargas* but he is still *Getulio* even to those Brazilians who hated him. The man speaking of *Vargas* is audibly a foreigner. Sitting in one of the editorial offices in Rio, I heard a friend of mine ring up several complete strangers and announce himself: 'This is José from *O Globo* . . .' Rather wistfully, I imagined the editor of



Gents

our Top Daily ringing up a stranger and announcing himself: 'Hallo, this is Bill from *The Times.*'

In Brazil, then, you call the ex-president *Juscelino,* and no matter how intimate you may eventually become with him, you never call him Kubitschek. Castro of Cuba is the founder not of *Castrismo,* but of *Fidelismo*; and *Marxismo,* I presume, is called with an air of intimacy, simply *Karlismo.* And, as if this were not magnificent enough, you often have the chance of calling people *Gladstone, Archimedes,* or *Orestes,* because these are ordinary, almost vulgar, Christian names in Brazil. It is uplifting – although some of us may feel a trifle self-conscious in so doing – to call someone – quite casually – *Dionysus,* or *Oedipus,* and not simply *Jack* or *Herb.*

I must confess that my own sense of snobbery was also flattered in Brazil. This happened mostly when I entered establishments with the wonderful word CAVALHEROS written over the door. Passing underneath the sign MEN gives you no such sensation: indeed, it is so curt as to be almost humiliating. But to feel a *Cavalhero* gives you uplift. Whenever I visited the CAVALHEROS, I visualized myself as a romantic figure, a lady-killer, a gallant suitor in a black cloak with noble, if somewhat haughty features. Oh, I loved going to the CAVALHEROS.

But one is never really content. I hoped against hope to find at least one establishment with the even more uplifting and gratifying legend: ROSEN-CAVALHEROS. But that, alas, was not given to me.

'I AM SO LOVELY . . .'

In the study of nationalism the year of vintage is just as important as in the study of wine. *When* did a nation become independent and *how* independent has it been ever since? At one end of the scale we have the British: sedate, almost wise: as unwilling to show their moods of self-content as those of doubt; still more unwilling to beat their chests, utter patriotic slogans and state, in so many words, who the most admirable people in the world really are. At the other end of the scale we have not only the new and rising nations of Asia and Africa but also the semi-cannibalistic tribes striving for nationhood. But these half-savage tribes cannot really be blamed.

Modern nationalism is an eighteenth, perhaps seventeenth-century notion. 'Nationalism', according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is 'a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation state.' I personally should not call nationalism a 'state of mind'; it has very little to do with the mind. It is a state of emotion. Indeed, modern nationalism is just a neurosis. A man's supreme loyalty is not due to the nation state; it is, alas, always due to himself. We all love ourselves with a love which seems worthy of a better cause; we all fervently admire ourselves, even if we are not all that admirable. And even if, in some exceptional cases, we do not admire ourselves, we wish we could do so and we project our admiration to the group to which we belong. We can hardly say: 'I am the most wonderful, the cleverest, the most intelligent, able, handsome, charming, honest,

brave, just, likeable fellow I have ever come across: an excellent sportsman, a defender of the weak, a scourge of petty tyrants – and even my handwriting is something to marvel at.' Such a statement, most people would agree, sounds somewhat conceited; but it is perfectly all right if you say exactly the same in the first person plural. To declare that 'we are the most wonderful, admirable, intelligent, etc.' people is just patriotism and quite in order, although the speaker making this declaration of love has really himself and not his compatriots in mind.

In 1953, when the Hungarian football players came to England, I hesitated, before the match, which side to support. My loyalties belonged to England, I said to myself, but football patriotism was a different matter. I knew that the Hungarian Communists would take political advantage of a football victory and I did not want to see them gratified. On the other hand, I argued, the players have nothing to do with Rákosi. In any case, after that great Hungarian victory my stand became crystal-clear: I boasted with my ex-compatriots and basked in their reflected glory, but never missed a chance of deriding their political system. All of which simply amounted to this: I took credit both for the excellence of Hungarian football and for the virtues of British democracy. It was all my own personal merit. That is nationalism in a nutshell.

What then is the brand of Brazilian nationalism? An ex-colonial power, a country once ruled by a European Emperor but independent for nearly a century and a half? Obviously, it is not so bored or, let us say, sophisticated, as British nationalism, nor is it so raw and green as that of the United Arab Republic. The

Paragon Britannicus

chest-beating, jingoist and racial type of nationalism is unknown in Brazil; it would be a little difficult in a country where every other person is an immigrant. But if nationalism is simply the projection of self-love, then it is obvious that it shows various aspects of itself *vis-à-vis* other nations, just as an individual will show differing profiles to his boss, his colleagues, his girl friend, and his rivals.

Let us have a closer look at Brazil's relationship to (1) Portugal; (2) The United States; and (3) Other South-American countries.

(1) If we try to understand nationalism with the help of individual psychology, it is logical to regard the ex-colonial power's love-hate relationship to the mother-country as an enlarged Oedipus-complex. The patterns are manifold: at one end of the spectrum we have Holland and Indonesia, France and Algeria, Belgium and the Congo, and at the other, Britain and India, indeed, Britain and the United States. The relationship between Portugal and Brazil seems to me both peculiar and endearing.

The picture in this case of the former mother-country is certainly not that of a giant and tyrant on whom one has to keep a suspicious eye. If Portugal is a mother, she is a wizened, dear old thing who needs (and receives) her grown-up daughter's support; she is also a touchy and rather proud old girl. While Brazil – like all children – may permit herself an affectionate chuckle at her parents' expense and behind her back, and indeed she has little love for Portugal's dictatorship, face to face she must be most respectful. She can afford all this, it coincides with Brazil's favourite image of herself: Portugal is the past, she is the future; Brazil is vast, rich and growing and can well

afford to be generous to her somewhat decrepit, noble ancestor.

There are seven times more people speaking Portuguese in Brazil than in Portugal, and Brazil's territory is ninety-five times as large as that of the mother-country. Brazil is convinced that she is the true inheritor of Portuguese culture; Portugal is convinced that but for her Brazil would have no culture at all. Brazil laughs at the old-fashioned, harsh, and pedantic language spoken in Portugal; and Portugal turns her nose up at the vulgar, mellow, and over-lively language of Brazil. Brazil is the only country in South America where Portuguese is spoken. Nothing annoys the Brazilians more than the tactless remarks heard from certain North-Americans: 'Why can't you speak Spanish, like the rest?' They point out that if we remember the non-Spanish speaking Indian populations of some countries and ignore the tiny Guianas – where neither Spanish nor Portuguese is spoken – then more people speak Portuguese than Spanish in South America.

So Brazil loves Portugal, with certain mental reservations. Portuguese immigration is free and unfettered and the poor Portuguese come over in large numbers. (The poor love Brazil, too; snootiness is mostly an upper-class Portuguese attitude). The Portuguese are welcomed as honest, hard-working people, who find their livelihood, as a rule, as shopkeepers and other small traders. Brazil cherishes the link with Portugal because, among other reasons, she likes the idea of European antecedents: a few portraits of noble ancestors in the corridors and halls increase the self-esteem of every up-and-coming family. Besides, Portuguese immigration is welcomed for yet another reason: the

Portuguese are white people, so they act as human detergents.

It is, then, one of the favourite snobberies of the Portuguese to look down upon the Brazilians as rustic boors; it is also one of the most cherished snobberies of the Brazilians to look down upon the Portuguese as donkeys and to be patronizing about them. As there is no safer and closer human tie than mutual contempt and disrespect, mingled with love but completely free of spite, the Brazilian-Portuguese relationship might be deemed ideal.

(2) The United States looms large on the horizon of all Latin-American states. Brazil, however, refuses to play the part of the small neighbour, queuing up for help, cap in hand. (Until Alaska was admitted to statehood, Brazil was, in fact, larger than the United States.) But the fact that there was never a Marshall Plan for Latin-America is deeply resented. It is noble to help former enemies; but to neglect old friends is no special virtue.

The first official contact between the two peoples goes back to 1786, when Brazil was still a Portuguese colony. At a secret meeting – at which the United States was represented by Thomas Jefferson – the northern neighbours refused open help to a planned revolt but promised sympathy and recognition as soon as Brazil had achieved independence by her own efforts. In later years, Brazil became a good, dependable friend of the United States and she was big and important enough to be free of the anti-Yankee complexes of some other South American states. Brazil was the only South American state to fight in the last war and she joined the allies in 1942, when their fortune was at its lowest ebb. Vargas, the dictator, was most

reluctant to take this step but public opinion forced him to do so. (Which proves, once again, the extreme good nature of the Brazilians. Brazil was a dictatorship, but public opinion was stronger than the dictator. Vargas's rule was not attractive, but it had an operetta undertone: in Argentina, under Peron, there was real terror and no one dared to utter a critical remark; in Brazil, under Vargas, you could chat to any policeman and deride the dictator in gay complicity.)

The United States is not a major preoccupation of the Brazilians. In Cuba it is a mania; in Brazil she is a big rich neighbour. Brazilian nationalism manifests itself in such matters as the refusal of oil concessions to foreigners. Oil-colonialism stinks, they feel, so they go without the revenue rather than rely on others. Americans may work at the oilfields as employees, but concessions are refused. Oil, as it is, is refined and exploited in Bahia, and the Brazilian oil industry is far from being insignificant; but there are huge untapped resources in the Amazon basin. The difficulties of exploiting the oil there are not purely emotional; they have a great deal to do with transport, too. All the same, oil-nationalism is a living issue and it is second only to football-nationalism. Brazilians are now the best in that hemisphere of Great Football and that allays any lingering, sub-conscious doubts they may have about their own greatness. Maria Bueno, the tennis champion, is another great national asset – almost as great as oil.

(3) Finally, I must admit, I found the relationship between the various Latin-American states most disappointing from my own point of view. I had hoped to find there a heritage of nineteenth century – i.e., pre-1914 – European politics of alliances, intrigues,

dynastic marriages, inter-state flirtations and quarrels. Politics is not what it used to be. In the old days the whole world used to go on guessing with morbid excitement: would Austria remain neutral? Would the mutual mistrust of the Great Powers save the Porte again? Would the Archduke marry the Princess – and what if he did? What if he didn't? Which side would Italy join this time? And so on. In those days politics was still *clever*; it was a game of chess and not simply a game of brinksmanship. Moves could be foreseen, devilish plans could be forestalled. It was a game of combinations and gambits. I hoped to find something similar in the political backwaters of the world where, I thought, the hegemony of the hemisphere still counted for something. Would Paraguay join in? Would the Bolivian princess marry the Peruvian archduke? And whose side would Colombia take?

But there are no such politics in South America. Frontier questions are more or less settled. The game of power-politics is not played at all. Castro is watched with fascination, enthusiasm, or bewilderment, but he made a smaller impact on Brazil than on other Latin-American countries. As far as the hegemony of the hemisphere is concerned, Brazil feels that she can afford to sit back and watch developments. That is also based on her Complex of Greatness. Until recently, there was only one important state in South America: Argentina. There was only one city: Buenos Aires. But this has changed now. How often did I hear it said in Rio:

'We can wait. There is no real race between us. We are bound to win. We are so much stronger than Argentina. Larger. Richer. We are Great Danes; they are little fox-terriers. The future is ours.'

That good old future again. That future which is a little late in arriving – but a slight delay and unpunctuality will not worry anyone in those parts of the world. Brazil is, of course, a giant – but somehow an underdeveloped giant. She is like that American gentleman of five-foot six inches, who sought employment in a circus as a dwarf. 'But you are not small enough,' he was told. 'You aren't a dwarf.' 'Oh, yes, I am,' the man retorted. 'You can advertise me as the largest dwarf in the world.' Maybe, Brazil is the world's smallest giant.

THE POVERTY OF THE RICH

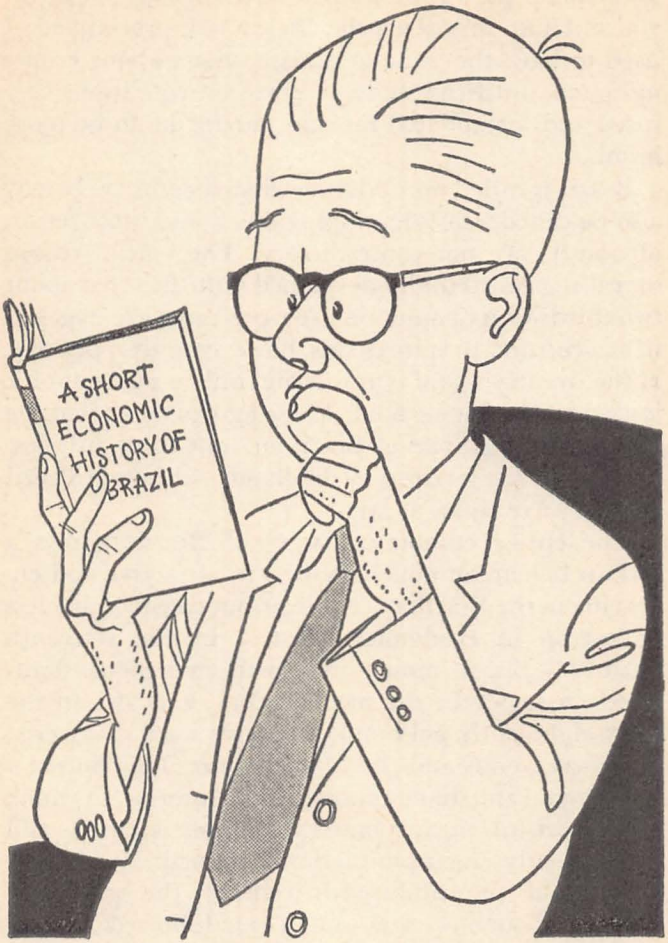
Let me admit straightaway in manly fashion that I am no economist. Should anyone doubt this admission, the following pages will convince him of its truth. Nevertheless, I do not stand in awe and trepidation before the science of economics; it holds no terrors for me. I do not like it; I am not even interested in it – but I fear it not. I firmly believe, as a matter of fact, that a great deal of our achievement and attainment is a matter of courage, not of ability. Learning to speak foreign languages, for example, is more often a question of boldness and of a certain lack of inhibitions than an aptitude or thirst for grammar.

Following this line of reasoning I used to hold that should a man of average intelligence and courage (or with an overdose of self-confidence?) apply his mind to higher mathematics, astro-physics, etymology, or psychology, or anything else, he could pick up the basic principles and gain more than an inkling of what it

is all about. Blow the trumpet, wave the flag and throw yourself into any scientific theory – I proclaimed. I used to have the same optimistic views about economics, too, until the study of Brazilian conditions confused and intimidated me and taught me to be more humble.

Brazil is called an under-developed country. It may also be called a fast developing one – and these terms, obviously, are not contradictory. The official reason for calling Brazil under-developed is the fact that about two-thirds of its population (63 per cent) are engaged in agriculture. In spite of this, however, only 5 per cent of the country's land is arable and only 2 per cent of it is used for producing food. These figures mean that the food-producing areas of Brazil amount to slightly less than twice the territory of Holland – although Brazil is ninety-five times as large.

The entire economic history of Brazil betrays a certain bohemian nonchalance – so attractive and endearing in the Brazilian character but considerably less endearing in economics. First – in the sixteenth century – Brazil, mostly the northern regions, flourished on sugar. In the next century, and also in the early eighteenth, gold and diamonds were discovered in Minas Gerais and the Mato Grosso. This caused a terrific gold and diamond rush to the interior, in which the successful sugar planters also participated, and consequently sugar-production declined. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the gold and diamond boom petered out. Then followed the notorious coffee boom, punctuated by coffee slumps, when huge quantities of coffee had to be burnt while millions were starving all over the world. Rubber, too, had its heyday, but the rubber boom was wiped out



Boom-slump-boom

by foreign competition after 1912, and today rubber is of secondary importance only – production rises whenever world prices are exceptionally high. Cotton, oranges, cocoa, and even maté tea had their boom periods and their declines, followed by further booms and further declines. Each boom was the glory, decline, and fall of the speculator; in each case intensive methods of production were used; in each case the boom caused internal migration, upheaval, and suffering.

The history of Brazil reminds me of a distant, vaguely-avuncular relative of mine, named Jasper. He followed about tweny-three professions which I can recall without straining my memory; he owned yachts and scrubbed floors, ruled minor industrial empires, and worked as a dish-washer at alternative periods of his career, and I am glad to report that today, although he is very old, he is just about to change his vocation once again: he is selling his factory for ladies' underwear and is about to plunge into real estate deals. It seems likely, however, that whatever he may undertake in the future, he will remain a rich man for the rest of his life. I hope Brazil, having followed Uncle Jasper's example in almost everything else, will follow him on the path of continued prosperity.

The boom tradition still holds in Brazil. At the moment it is the growing industries of the south-east that attract people, money, and investment.

The three main exports of the country are coffee, cotton, and cocoa (in that order) followed by timber, waxes, rubber, and nuts. Brazil is also a highly industrialized state, in fact, the most highly industrialized in South America. Her industrial production has more than trebled since 1939. A variety of motor-cars are

assembled in Brazil, and her 100,000 factories are working at full speed. Prosperity and expansion are in the air, nevertheless, the average annual income is £5. And that means, of course, that many have to live on much less.

The government in these enlightened days does its best to ensure that the latest boom should last. A somewhat enforced building boom (due partly to ex-president Kubitschek's ardent desire to go down in history as the Pyramid Builder or Great Pharaoh of Brazil) created a runaway inflation. All the laws of economics pointed to disaster as prices went rocketing up and were more than quadrupled within a few years, rising by a further 40 per cent in 1960. The credit position in these days has become somewhat peculiar, in that paying one's debts is definitely a silly thing to do. People often let themselves be sued because – as money keeps losing its value – time gained is money gained and even the addition of legal costs and interest on the original sum borrowed or owed, makes such tactics worth while. I feel that the City of London would not be keen on operating under such conditions; but in Brazil this vogue has created only minor inconveniences.

The new President, Janio Quadros – who took office in February, 1961 – was not amused by this happy-go-lucky management of economic affairs. He found Brazil bankrupt and made no secret of it; it was no pleasant surprise to find that President Kubitschek, whenever there was need of money, just had some printed and that, in fact, the circulation of paper money had trebled during his presidency. Quadros' – or rather Janio's – own election campaign symbol was the broom, and his avowed enemy corruption. He

seems to be trying to bring Brazil back to economic reality – by no means an easy task. Yet, Kubitschek's 'Fifty Years' Progress in Five' was a dynamic era; it created great long-term assets (industrial capital, roads, power stations, etc.). Brazil, in one sense is bankrupt; in another sense she has money in the bank and she has, of course, the greatest untapped supply of human energy in the whole world, except for China.

Under the old régime, good intentions created some odd results. The government, for example, was genuinely anxious to protect workers' rights and the most commendable labour legislation was introduced. The result of this was two-fold. In the outlying *fazendas* – and which estates are not 'outlying' in such a vast country? – these noble laws are almost completely disregarded. A large number of workers, the *candangos,* are still brought down in lorries from the poverty-stricken north-east, and while such migration in many cases means improvement in their lot, too often they are sold to employers in the south in conditions strongly reminiscent of slavery. The men are not only ignorant but also intimidated; and although the authorities are doing their best to stamp out such practices, there is not much a penniless agricultural labourer can do for himself on a *fazenda,* with the nearest country policeman three days' walk away through sub-tropical jungle.

In towns, however, the labour laws are more easily enforceable and this again is a source of further, quite unintended and unforeseen trouble. After a year's service, a worker gains special rights and his dismissal becomes an extremely costly business; after ten years he cannot be dismissed at all and becomes almost a partner. The result of these nobly planned laws is a

chaotic battle of wits: the worker is dismissed before his one year is up. He, on his part, tries to behave like an angel for a year to make himself indispensable and if he is kept on, he often changes his tune as soon as the year is up, and does his best to make himself unbearable. He tries to be kicked out. Being kicked out after your year is up is excellent business. If a few exceptional people do stay on or are kept on for several years, they are almost certain to be sacked before the critical ten-year period is up. Thus, the law, instead of securing steady employment and a happy old age for all, is responsible for spreading insecurity and unemployment. Good intentions have once again paved the way to Hell – although quite a pleasant, amusing and not very wicked Brazilian hell.

'What we need is a few robber barons,' a leading economist told me. I looked at him with some surprise.

'There comes a time in the development of every country,' he explained, 'and particularly in a fast-developing country, when it needs the industrial robber barons, like the first Rockefellers, Carnegies, and Vanderbilts. These people think, of course, first of all of themselves; but at certain stages of development they are of tremendous service to the community. We need them right now. The trouble with Brazil is a pressing shortage of robber barons.'

One day I met a gentleman near São Paulo, a general dealer by trade, who informed me that he had just bought a church.

'You mean a disused church?' I suggested. 'The building, I presume.'

He shook his head.

'Very much a going concern. In fact, I bought every-

thing but the building. Pictures, tapestries, silver crucifixes, salvers, beakers, and candelabra; also a lot of miniatures and some beautiful statues. It is a superb collection.'

'Who sold it?' I asked.

'The parish priest, of course.' He was a bit hurt by this question. 'I wouldn't have bought it from anybody else. What d'you take me for? A receiver?'

'But how can a priest sell his church? Did he go bankrupt – or what?'

He grew impatient.

'Listen,' he said, 'it is like this. The priest needed money. He wanted a car – he needs it in that large parish – and he needed a few other things, too. So he sold his church. Or the contents of his church, to be more precise. He is going to refurnish it with the help of the public. There will be a collection and most people will be very generous, I'm sure. He has already launched an appeal: "Does the sight of an empty church not put you to shame? Can you bear to see God's House unadorned?" '

'Good luck to him,' said I.

My friend, the general dealer, reflected a while in silence. Then he remarked:

'I reckon in three years' time he'll have another church for sale.' Then, as an afterthought: 'By the way, you don't want to buy it? It's good stuff. You can have the lot dirt cheap.'

I shook my head.

'No, thanks. I have made it an absolute rule never to buy churches when I am travelling by air.'

A TALE OF THREE CITIES

In April, 1960, Rio de Janeiro, after a hundred and twenty-five years, ceased to be the capital city of Brazil. 'And now, at last, Rio is what it always ought to have been: a pleasant seaside resort, and that's all,' a rich São Paulo businessman told me with obvious relish.

His remark contained a great deal of truth; it also reflected the Paulistas' jealousy and unrequited love for Rio.

This is the story of the prodigal son all over again. The world may be totally unjust; it may grudgingly admire virtue, praise – if it must – hard work, nod acknowledgement on encountering a sense of duty, diligence, and self-denial, or even the ardent energy of the Acquisitive Manufacturer; but its only love will always be the beautiful, bohemian, easy-going, happy-go-lucky young courtesan. The virtuous young man's hatred for his prodigal brother is just the reverse side of this self-same love. The respectable fellow would be ready to compromise on mutual respect; but he knows that his prodigal brother, while paying lip-service to his excellent, solid qualities (more often than not with an eye to what he can get out of him) really regards him as an ass, and laughs at him behind his back. So on he goes, the Virtuous One, blowing his own trumpet, praising his stuffy virtues with complacent pomposity, with every justification no doubt, looking and sounding more of an ass than ever. In this world of ants and grasshoppers, we all know that we would perish without the ants; but it is the life of the grasshopper we envy.

Cupido, dues do amor

'Rio de Janeiro is the world's most beautiful city and the worst thing that has ever happened to Brazilians,' writes Senhor de Sá.* He is not so much concerned with the fact Rio is a playground but he resents the fact that the *cariocas* – the natives of Rio – are not even ashamed of this. Rio is a magnet for all Brazil – be it São Paulo, about four hundred miles away, or Manaos, more than two thousand miles away. People save up money to be able to come and 'enjoy life for a week, a month, a year'. Such visits are the undoing of many; they come for a week and never leave again.

Rio is not a sexy town: it is a copulating town. Thousands of business executives have little hide-outs in town whither they retire during the long lunch-breaks with pretty secretaries; thousands of young but poor married women make a little extra money in an easy and not unpleasant way, without arousing the faintest suspicion in their husbands. All this is healthy, natural, animal love, having little to do with 'soul' and still less with the puritanic, nordic guilt-anxiety of the English. Love-making is a Good Thing and Guilt is a Bad Thing: the two belong to different compartments of life and have nothing to do with each other. Going to bed with women is almost a national hobby with Brazilians; it is rather like cricket in England.

'It is difficult to get into Brazilian society,' some immigrants complained to me. 'Mostly because the Brazilians don't have much social life.'

I could hardly believe this of these amiable, sociable, extrovert people. But it is true. So many of them are kept so busy with their clandestine love affairs that

* *Op. cit.*

lying down to kiss leaves little time for sitting down to talk.

I should not like to give the impression that Brazilians are lax in their moral attitude. Every paterfamilias would insist on his daughter being properly chaperoned while out with a young man; lack of strict and proper arrangements would worry him so much that he would not be able to sleep in peace with his mistress.

There is utter relaxation in the air of Rio. Life is there to be enjoyed. You may be too old or too poor: but you ought to try – and in Rio you *will* try. How low can a human being sink yet remain happy and retain some scrap of dignity? The Mangue, Rio's cheap brothel district, really ought to be one of the most sordid places in the world. Houses, blocks, and streets form endless rows of brothels – uniform workshops of a prosperous light industry. The girls stand on the stairs in packed rows – two or three of them on a step; they are young and old, fat and scrawny, teenagers and toothless hags. They wait for the soldiers, sailors, and civilians, who come and survey them with an expert eye. Some of the girls withstand their gaze with majestic indifference, others wink at the prospective clients with coquettish cheekiness. Some of them are whisked off for a few short minutes to a tiny room which is divided into four minute compartments with makeshift partitions: space is scarce and business is brisk. At first I was rendered speechless with the degradation of the scene, but later I could not help noticing some redeeming features. According to Victorian novels these girls ought to be desperately unhappy; but they do not read Victorian novels and they are quite content. They occupy positions in their own world as we occupy

positions in ours; and always find enough people to look down upon (first of all their clients) – and this is an essential factor in human happiness. Besides the whole scene, the whole atmosphere is so natural and so completely shameless that after a time you have the feeling that you are simply visiting a self-service store.

From the Mangue we drove back to Copacabana and were captivated all over again with its elegance, gaiety, its poverty and riches, its night clubs and shanty towns, its blue sea and blue sky. I looked at the mighty Christ on the top of the Corcovado and thought I discerned a twinkle in his eye as with outstretched hand, he blessed Rio – so near to his feet and, I am sure, his heart.

São Paulo is said to be the fastest growing city in the world. It is today what United States boom towns were sixty or eighty years ago. You look around and you almost *see* the hideous but impressive and often imaginative skyscrapers shooting up around you. People are hurrying, scurrying, selling and buying and making money all the time. If they must stop for a *cafesinho* – a small espresso – they drink it standing up at the bar because every minute lost is money lost. (And bearing the constant inflation in mind, the loss is still heavier.) Everybody boasts of the city and everyone is immensely proud of São Paulo's achievements. You are inundated with statistics. Do you know that sixty per cent of Brazil's industry is in São Paulo State? Do you know that only eighty years ago São Paulo was a sleepy, shabby, miserable little town of 25,000 people and today it has outgrown Rio with its more than three million inhabitants? Do you know

that it is now the biggest city in Brazil and the second largest in South America? Do you know that São Paulo is the centre of the coffee business, and do you know that the state's 233,000 factories and 510,000 workers . . . No, you don't know, and you are not quite sure that you want to learn it. But there is no getting away from it; you inhale the air of Acquisitive Prosperity. You must meet Mr X (formerly from Bratislava) who came here penniless three years ago and now has a chain of stores; and Mr Y (formerly from Bucharest) who arrived two years ago penniless and now has eight laundries and two bicycle-shops; and the architect, Mr Z (formerly from Belgrade) who arrived in a borrowed pair of trousers eight months ago and now people are queueing up to get him to build new villas for them. Everyone must be better dressed than the next man; everyone must have a larger swimming pool in his garden; everyone must possess larger and larger cars with more and more chromium; everybody must make more money next year than he did last. You are so relieved to meet Miss V and Mr U who are clerks in an office, underpaid and over-exploited and haven't a chance of doing anything else for the rest of their lives because they just do not know how to buy things cheap and sell them dear. I was so delighted to meet my old friend, S. (formerly from Budapest) who came here eight years ago, is still very poor and has a good chance of becoming even poorer in the near future. (But he spoiled my pleasure a little bit: he was as boastful and ostentatious about his poverty as the others were about their money.)

Brasilia, the new capital, at the geographical and geometrical centre of the country is six hundred miles

away from Rio and the seashore. It is on a plateau in the uplands of impoverished Goias state, three thousand feet above sea-level. It had long been a dream of the Brazilians to have a capital in the interior but it was only President Kubitschek – elected in 1955 for five years – who took serious and irrevocable steps to realize this old and ruinously expensive dream. The cost was truly staggering – although few people are aware of the real price paid. Brasilia is also largely responsible for the inflation and has made the country practically bankrupt. But it has also fired people's imagination and – quite justifiably – swelled their self-confidence. Brazil may have her troubles; but it is an expanding go-ahead country. The land of the future. (Or have I said that before?)

Brasilia is based on a grandiose plan. The city will have a total area of a hundred square miles between the arms of a large, v-shaped, artificial lake, to be created by the construction of a dam on the Parano river. A number of impressive, ultra-modern, and exciting new buildings are ready and in use – Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa, Brazil's celebrated architects, had a chance here given to few. The Presidential palace is called 'The Palace of Dawn'. Brazilians know that they have created something new, something grand; that they created modern life in the desert, and they are proud of it. Brasilia has a population of about 100,000 and will eventually grow to half a million. There are a few thousand civil servants there now, whose number will grow enormously. The ugly, overcrowded, miserable, and gay Free City – where the building workers and other auxiliaries are living – will disappear and the diplomatic corps will move in. But I heard more than one ambassador declare with un-

disguised malice: 'The pleasure of moving to Brasilia will be left to my successor.'

And that is the snag. Because *everyone* is proud of Brasilia, *everyone* is delighted with Brasilia, except those people who have to live and work there. It is at the back of beyond and whatever it may become in two generations, it is a pretty dreary and out-of-the world place just now. Distances inside this city of vast buildings and wide thoroughfares are enormous, communications are poor – nevertheless, they have already managed to create a parking problem. Everybody and everything is covered with red dust, blown into Brasilia by the desert winds, and malicious manufacturers in São Paulo have produced a material, the colour of which is described as *Brasilia-red*. People who cannot help visiting Brasilia regularly (members of Parliament, civil servants, diplomats, etc.) dash back to Rio as soon as possible. They feel that the choice, at the moment, is like that between living in Paris and living in the Sahara. It often happens that two high officials – or a foreign ministry official and a member of a diplomatic mission – feel they must make an appointment with each other in Brasilia, so both travel up from Rio and return there as soon as their business is concluded. As a result of all this travelling, everyone concerned is constantly on the move and no one can ever be found. If an urgent matter is raised with the President, he might reply: 'I'll discuss it with my Foreign Minister as soon as I catch him.' But they might not run into each other for weeks: it is not so easy to catch a foreign minister these days.

Brasilia, like Brazil herself, is the dream of the future. It will be great; it will be glorious; it will be the pride of the land. But a short while ago, I was told,

a Rio newspaper had held a competition among its readers and offered these prizes: First prize, one week in Brasilia; Second prize, two weeks in Brasilia; Third prize, three weeks in Brasilia.

URUGUAY

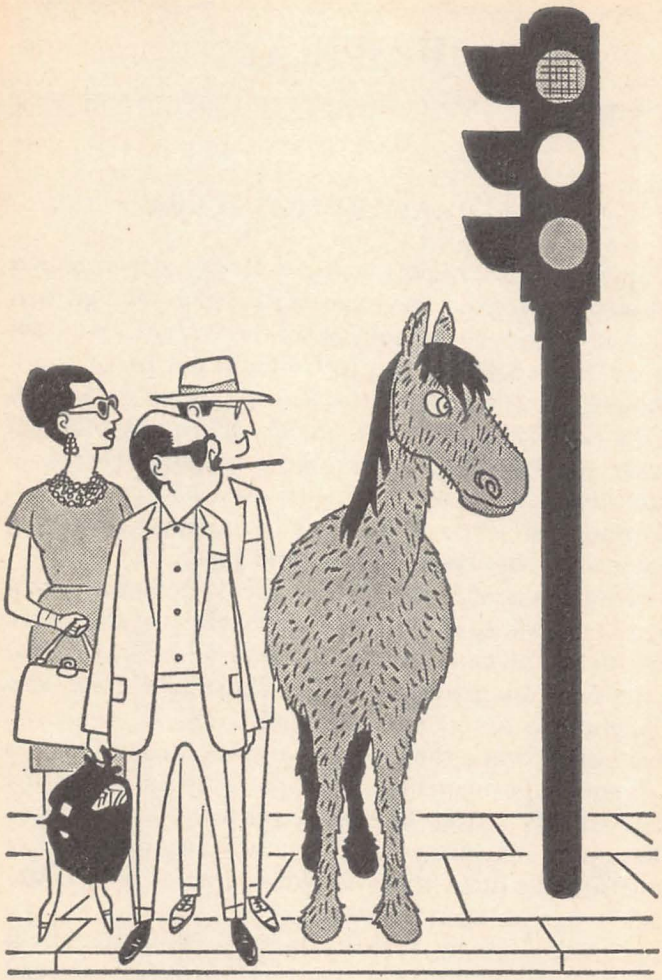
DISPLACED COUNTRY

ARRIVING in Uruguay, you get the vague feeling that you have lost your way; you realize soon enough that it is not you who should not be there at all, but Uruguay. This country, you feel, should not be in South America, but somewhere in Europe. What to do with DPs (Displaced Persons) was an enormous problem after the last war; the problem of DCs (Displaced Countries) if not so pressing, is even harder to solve. Uruguay, it seems to me, should emigrate and settle somewhere between Belgium and Holland.

Belgium is, of course, the parallel which jumps most readily to mind. The British, determined as they were not to let the mouth of the River Scheldt fall into the hands of rival great powers, helped to establish modern Belgium as an independent state; and at about the same time, when the mouth of the Rio de la Plata was a bone of permanent contention between Argentina and Brazil – the British stepped in and created Uruguay. It is not at all easy to give up the habit of establishing little, independent countries at the estuaries of great rivers. It grows on you.

(I call Uruguay a 'little country'. Even Britain is twelve per cent larger in area, and that is infinitesimal by South American standard.)

In what, then, is Uruguay so un-South American? Stability of government is not one of the conspicuous



Wait for it . . .

virtues of South American states, but in Uruguay it was in 1958 that they had the first change of government for ninety-three years. Which is slightly overdoing things; even stability should not be carried quite so far. (The *Blancos* were returned to power in 1958, having spent nearly a century in opposition. That should be a sobering thought for Mr Gaitskell.)

It is many a year since the country had a dictator; indeed, it does not even have a president – it has nine presidents, which is considerably less than one. According to the constitution of 1952, presidential functions are executed by a National Council (elected by direct vote) and even the presidency of that body is taken in rotation by its members. The Uruguayan Army (there is no conscription) has no political power and aims at none. When revolution finally came, it had to be carried out with the help of the Montevideo Fire Brigade, which is a shade undignified.

Even geographically, Uruguay, lying as a buffer state between Argentina and Brazil, is neither here nor there. Topographically Uruguay belongs to the Brazilian landscape; the country is really a part of the Brazilian coastline and it is very different from the pampas of Argentina. But Spanish-speaking Uruguay has very little in common with Portuguese-speaking Brazil; and not much more with Spanish-speaking Argentina. For Uruguay, Argentina is by far the most important export-market and also a gigantic neighbour whom – to satisfy their ego – the Uruguayans like calling arrogant, as well as many other things; for Argentina, Uruguay is a tiny place of no importance, a charming holiday-resort (the beaches of Montevideo, elegant Punta del Este and also Colonia del Sacramento teem with noisy Argentinos during the summer

months of January and February). Occasionally, as was the case under Peron, Uruguay was also the favourite sanctuary for Argentine refugees, but the truth remains that there is not much love lost between the two republics. A Uruguayan journalist told me: 'We don't like them; they don't like us. There is a tin curtain between Uruguay and Argentina.'

Uruguay is isolated from the rest of South America by its climate, too, which is temperate. There are no 'rainy seasons'; it is never colder than 40° Fahrenheit and never hotter than 90°, which, however, seemed hot enough for me.

But far the greatest contrast of all which hits the eye of the visitor arriving from Brazil is the complete absence of black and coloured faces. The Spanish explorer, Juan Diaz de Solis, sailed up the River Plate in 1515, landed east of Montevideo and was killed by Charrua Indians. In eventual retaliation, the Charrua – and all the other – Indians were exterminated and the colour problem of Uruguay was thereby solved. About ten per cent of the population are *mestizos* – the 'mixed ones' – the rest are white.

So we find ourselves, suddenly and almost without warning, in a small, democratic, welfare state, with a temperate climate, inhabited by a white population. A few lonely and melancholy horses – unaccompanied and seemingly unattached – roam the streets of Montevideo, poor things, giving a slightly exotic flavour to the city landscape. But they are not the wild proud beasts of the pampas; they are so tame and so well behaved that they refuse to cross the road until the traffic lights turn green.

'PLEASE CONQUER US . . .'

But the most European trait, or, if you prefer to put it that way, the least South-American, is the general attitude of the people. Montevideo is full of charming, cultured, cynical intellectuals who, instead of beating their chests and trying to overwhelm you with statistics and spurious facts, take a special and sophisticated pleasure in deriding their charming, tiny, and slightly provincial country.

'The British tried to invade us twice,' one of them told me, 'first in 1806, and then in 1807. Hence, a little resentment towards Britain.'

I apologized and assured him we would never do it again.

'You don't get it,' he shook his head. 'We resent the fact that the British failed to conquer us. I personally – and I am not alone in this – would not mind at all belonging to the British Commonwealth. You see, the Uruguayan Commonwealth is so small. Don't you think you could still conquer us?'

I promised to do whatever I could when I got back, warning him, however, that the auspices were not too good. Britain is working on a completely new line nowadays.

Another man, a writer, said this:

'Our great strength is that we have no oil, no minerals, nothing. We are so pleased. They are searching for oil now. I hope they won't find any.'

And quite a few people warned me:

'I hope you won't be taken in by all this talk of

Uruguay being a real democracy or a welfare state. That's nonsense.'

They explained that Montevideo was not Uruguay. (But as one third of Uruguay's three million people live in Montevideo and the other two-thirds are trying to get in, Montevideo, to a large extent *is* Uruguay.) They told me that the poverty was terrible; but the truth is that, while poverty is far from unknown, the Uruguayan standard of living is the highest in South America. They protested that Uruguay was not even a literate country; but as nearly ninety per cent of the population can read and write, their claim to illiteracy cannot be accepted either. My Uruguayan friends were eager to deride and disparage their country; they made noble efforts but they failed.

'Be sure to write something nasty about us,' they said hopefully.

I wish I could oblige them. But alas, I cannot. Uruguayan democracy, as I have already pointed out, is a reality. Elections are fair and there is complete freedom of speech and press. In fact, every now and then democracy goes a little too far. Uruguay is the only country of the world where smugglers were able to stage a strike for better conditions. Uruguay is not exactly a smugglers' paradise but smuggling is a flourishing light industry, just as it is in many European lands or in the United States. The smugglers were in league with a few customs officials who took a part of the rake-off – too much, the smugglers felt.

'Fair is fair,' they said, and tried to open negotiations, but their claims were flatly rejected. So they organized a strike; an official strike. A large and devoted *clientèle* soon noticed with alarm that their regular smugglers, who had been in the habit of

Refusal of Great Britain to impose the yoke of subjection on Uruguay

calling on them twice a week, were failing to turn up. Cigarettes and spirits became scarce and some other goods excessively dear, i.e., were available at official prices only; while the customs officials, of course, earned not a single peso. The smugglers held out and won their strike. Justice prevailed.

Indeed, on one occasion, even the Uruguayan pick-pockets staged a demonstration to safeguard their rights as citizens. One of their colleagues, they alleged, had been beaten up by the police and they sent a deputation to the President of the Supreme Court to make it clear that they would not stand for such police-state methods. The President listened to their complaints agreed with the sentiments expressed (although he knew nothing of the facts alleged) and told them that it would help to clear matters up if they handed in a written complaint, with their signatures and addresses affixed. This written complaint, however, never arrived; professional etiquette prevented the pick-pockets from giving their addresses to the police.

No, there is nothing wrong with Uruguayan democracy; nor are my friends' complaints against the welfare state justified. It was the election of Jose Batlle y Ordinez as President (1903-1907 and re-elected in 1911) which gave the present, beneficial turn to the country's development. Batlle initiated great reforms and Uruguay, as a consequence, has, by now, nationalized electricity, railways, tramways, and waterworks; the state controls the manufacture or distribution of petrol, alcohol, and chemicals and controls insurance and broadcasting; it runs its own bank, theatres, hotels, and casinos, and it also subsidizes music. Uruguay has a workers' charter which provides for a six-day week

of forty-four hours, a minimum wage, holidays with pay, liability insurance, free medical service, old-age pensions, and unemployment pay.* On top of all this, women have the vote and are more than emancipated: they can divorce their husbands without giving any reasons. A Masculinist Movement (Equal Rights for Men) started campaigning to achieve the same privilege for males, but was angrily crushed.

This welfare state costs a great deal of money and the reader may wonder how Uruguay can afford it. Uruguay often wonders herself. And there are additional perplexities. First of all, there is stagnation, laziness, and indifference in the air, which is a strange contrast after the bustling exuberance of Brazil. Then, though Uruguay has a preponderantly agricultural, in fact, pastoral, economy, even firewood is imported. Their main industry is tourism; certain light industries (chemicals, clothing, and electrical appliances, as well as some agricultural industries) flourish on a modest scale but the smallness of the home market is a limiting, almost maiming, factor. Prices keep going up and more and more products soar beyond the reach of an increasing number of people. Even shoes are becoming extremely expensive – in a country where the cattle-population far exceeds the human. 'The trouble is,' someone remarked, 'that we are very advanced as consumers but rather backward as producers.'

Another difficulty of Uruguay is the existence of vast estates in a small country. The recently elected *Blanco* (white, i.e., conservative) government is, on the whole, a supporter of the landowners; the *Colorados*

* Summarized from *The South American Yearbook,* London, 1960.

(liberals) support industry versus agriculture. Industrial output is small, yet wages are high. How can Uruguay do it?

I heard two explanations put forward. The first is that she cannot, that she is in deep debt and the peso keeps losing its value. (In 1950 the US dollar was worth 2 pesos; ten years later it was equivalent to 11.50 – an almost six-fold deterioration.) The second theory is that in order to help the people, Uruguay's paternalistic government simply gives them jobs. The government employs an enormous number of civil servants (about 100,000 of them) which means that Uruguay has proportionately three times as many civil servants as Britain, and Britain has more than enough. To restore the balance, every Uruguayan civil servant regards it as his patriotic duty and elementary solidarity with his colleagues, to do no more than a third of one man's work. The Uruguayan government, however, is fairly strict towards its civil servants, who have to sign a register twice a day: once when they come in in the morning, and once before leaving in the afternoon. The result is that many civil servants do in fact come into the office twice a day, just to sign the register, after which they depart to pursue more important and more profitable occupations. Someone told me that he was working in a government office where they had 160 fewer chairs than employees, though there had never been, as yet, any actual shortage of sitting accommodation: the occupants are just not there. Even if they do put in an appearance, they do not stay long enough to sit down.

'It's shameful,' he commented. 'Disgusting, I call it.'

'But I understand,' I told him, 'that you yourself have two part-time jobs.'

'How could I live on two *part-time* jobs?' he retorted angrily. 'I have three *full-time* jobs.'

Having said this, he poured out another drink for himself, lit a huge cigar and put his feet up on a chair. It was three-thirty in the afternoon.

ONE MAN'S POISON . . .

But I still failed to grasp the idea behind Uruguay's economic policy. I may be slow, I said, but how can this policy of simply giving people jobs help the country? Or help the people? I posed this question to a friend in a restaurant and he replied:

'Look at those plates.'

I looked and I saw steaks of almost incredible dimensions.

'How can they eat all this?'

'They can't,' my friend replied. He was right: I saw waiters removing other plates with large pieces of meat left on them.

'This is an expensive restaurant,' my friend told me. 'But you can see the same waste of meat in the cheap eating houses too; and in fact everywhere, all over the country. Even poor people waste meat. It is *done*. A man may not be able to afford meat at all for weeks; but when he does buy, he buys enough to eat and enough to waste.'

Then he added:

'And that, precisely, is the idea behind the employment of civil servants, too.'

'I see . . . ' I muttered vaguely.

Enough is enough

'You don't. But it is quite simple, really. It is an old Uruguayan custom. A man has to waste about half of what he could not afford in the first place.'

'Now it is clear. And that's how your country *lives*?'

'And quite well, too. It is well known that the standard of living in Uruguay is the highest in South America.'

That little scene in the restaurant reminded me that I had come to the most famous meat-producing and meat-consuming area of the world. Argentina is, of course, the most renowned country of all for beef and I shall have more to say on beef-patriotism. All the same, you cannot spend too long a time in Uruguay either, before learning to pronounce with awe and reverence the words *churrasco* – steak, *Parilla* – grill, and, the grandest of all: *asado* – a huge piece of beef, sometimes a whole animal, roasted on a spit. I spent one night at a friend's *estancia* not far from Montevideo. In the early morning we walked around his estate and saw an aged gaucho, at least seventy-five, devouring an enormous juicy steak for breakfast. My friend, at my request, asked this veteran a few questions and then translated his answers:

'Oh yes, he says, he likes coffee. He likes it very much.'

'Well, did you ask him why doesn't he have a decent cup of coffee for breakfast?'

'Yes, I did,' my friend nodded. 'He says he wishes he could have coffee. He's very fond of it. But he is too old now and too delicate: coffee gives him terrible indigestion.'

ARGENTINA

GASTRONOMIC DAY

I WAS delighted to hear on my arrival in Buenos Aires that next day was going to be Gastronomic Day. I licked my lips in anticipation. I was less enthusiastic when I found out that Gastronomic Day meant that every restaurant in the city was closed.

Ever since, when I hear the word 'gastronomic', I feel a sharp pang of hunger.

Why, I wondered, did they not find a more appropriate term for this waiters' holiday? I know only too well that words are rapidly losing their meaning in our age. When the Communists talk about *'freedom of the press', they* mean that censorship is exercised by their own Party and by no one else; *'people's democracy'* is the designation for a special kind of tyranny; *'peace movement'* is the name of an endeavour to subjugate half the world. But it is not only the Communists who are guilty of this raping of words; advertising, salesmanship, and bureaucracy have all injected their nonsensical jargon into our society. Insurance agents call a man of ninety-four *elderly*, and death is defined as the remote chance that *something might happen to you*; backward countries, even if sunk in hopeless stagnation, are always described as *developing*; aeroplanes are *flagships* and pilots *captains*. A good old English dustman has been promoted – or demoted – to a *collector*: a refuse collector.

Yes, I knew all that, but Gastronomic Day still surprised me. If in Britain not all, but, let us say, three-quarters of the restaurants were closed, that would indeed be a gastronomic holiday; but Argentine food (especially their steaks – of which more anon) is very good. Then the Argentinos are not the type of people who would call something exacly the opposite of what it really is. They are not so definite in anything. This is par excellence *mas o menos* country. *Mas o menos* means 'more or less'. It is a favourite Spanish phrase and originally a very Spanish notion, too, but it could be the slogan of the whole South American continent. This is *mas o menos*-land indeed. You agree on seven-thirty p.m. and that may mean any time after eight-fifteen; all promises given are *mas o menos*; all statements and declarations, however sincerely uttered, on the spur of the moment, are to be taken very much *mas o menos*; 'I love you forever, darling' means, 'I more or less love you, *mas o menos* forever, and that means that tomorrow I may have a distinct recollection of you.'

A message for you in your hotel is what a friend told the porter –*mas o menos* – and a local telegram is certain, i.e., *mas o menos* certain – to be delivered in three days. Say four.

Walking about the streets of Buenos Aires, it struck me what a good thing it was that I had been reminded by Gastronomic Day that I was in South America, otherwise I might have forgotten it. These elegant European streets, European shops with French grace and English quality – why, there is even a Harrods in Florida, the main shopping street – and all those European faces and European voices everywhere, greeting one another with a loud Italian *'Ciao'* are all more

Land of plenty

European than Europe itself. Soon you realize that all this is deliberate and carefully planned: the city wears its European character proudly in its buttonhole; yet, you feel, there is something subdued and sad in the air. Buenos Aires is not a beautiful city. It is something of an Esperanto town, a strange and characterless mixture. There are no Negroes or Indians to be seen anywhere; you might as well be in Birmingham or Frankfurt. 'Second-hand Europe', someone remarked contemptuously, but there is nothing second-hand about Buenos Aires: it is the largest and most famous city in the whole of the southern hemisphere.

Argentina is the eighth largest country in the world, one third the size of Europe. Her northernmost point is 2,150 miles from her southernmost tip and that is, roughly, the same distance as between Hammerfest in northern Norway and Syracuse in Sicily. The country has every variety of terrain, living conditions and climates: there is tropical heat on the Chaco, a pleasant temperate climate in the central pampas, and subantarctic cold in the Patagonian south. But about one third of Argentina's twenty and a half million people live in or around the capital. BA, as all Englishmen living there always refer to it, is the seventh largest city in the world, larger than Chicago, Berlin, Paris, or Leningrad. That is something; but not enough. BA, you soon realize, is not content with being the largest city in *South America*: it wants to make it abundantly clear that while it happens to be situated in those parts, it really does not belong to South America at all.

Wherever you go, you see gentlemen wearing an odd sort of garment – a woollen scarf with a hole in the middle. Through this hole you stick your head and the

scarf will not fall off, even if you ride a wild horse across the limitless pampas, which you are extremely unlikely to do, and that goes for all the other gentlemen wearing it too. All the same, this garment, the *poncho,* was originally worn by the gauchos of the pampas and not by the insurance clerks of Calle Maipu. Its popularity among refrigerator agents, lawyers, doctors, government officials, landowners, artificial manure dealers, and glass manufacturers – in other words, the middle classes – proves two things. First, that the gaucho-tradition (more in the next chapter) is practically the only South-American heritage which the Argentinos proudly accept. Second, that the Argentinos are rather keen on proving to the world that they are something they really are not. They are keen on being Europeans, which they are not; and at the same time all those sons of Düsseldorf accountants, Neapolitan taxi-drivers, Seville grocers, and Warsaw musicians are immensely proud of their Criollo past and gaucho ancestors. (Perhaps all this has also something to do with the Argentine genius for showmanship, which less kind souls than myself sometimes call a tendency to show off. An arrest is often carried out by an imposing squad of a dozen policemen, even when the culprit or suspect is a meek and frightened little tax-evader.)

If these tamed *poncho*-wearing middle-class gauchos, who are armed not with the traditional *boleadoras* and lassos of the gaucho but with the equally traditional briefcase of the high-pressure salesman, find it difficult to ride a stallion through the streets of Buenos Aires, they find it equally difficult to ride in a taxi. BA could usefully employ more than thirty thousand taxis but has only twelve thousand. The result is that whenever you hail a taxi and it miraculously stops, five or six

people rush at it, singly or in groups, and pinch it before your very eyes. They appear from various directions, emerging from doorways and braving a thousand deaths as they dive across the road. Who would not lose his life rather than his taxi? I often thought that a lasso – so useful to hunt taxis with – would, after all, be a more helpful weapon in BA than a briefcase.

You do not have to loiter over-long in Buenos Aires, nor do you have to be a *mezzofanti* to find that the worst Spanish in the world is spoken in Argentina. (It is almost equalled in Paraguay, Uruguay being a close runner-up.) The three dozen Spanish words I know were all learnt in Spain proper, so my pure Castilian Spanish surrounded me with an aura of glory and almost entitled me to wear a *poncho* – perhaps only with a very small hole in the middle. The people of BA used to be called Porteños, 'the port people', and a special lingo of the poorer classes, the *Lumfardo,* is vaguely reminiscent of our Cockney rhyming slang. To give one example: green is *verde* in Spanish, but its anagram, *dever* is used in *Lumfardo* slang; ink is *tinta* but in *Lumfardo* it is *tatin.* So green ink, *tinta verde,* becomes *tatin dever.* I do not find this uproariously funny or even mildly entertaining; but then I am not an admirer of Cockney rhyming slang either.

There is something elegant, grand, and grand-seigneurial in the air of Argentina. Nonchalance, verging on impertinent indifference one moment, and the exaggerated, old-world Spanish bow and semi-circular wave of the hand at the next. You enter a restaurant at one o'clock (that is, if it is not Gastronomic Day) and at 1.35 the waiter may ask what you want; at 1.55 he may inform you that he has forgotten all about you but

now he won't be a *momentino*. (*Momentino* is as ominous and sinister a word as *mas o menos*. It may mean anything between five minutes and five weeks.) At 2.30 he may look you up again, to tell you that the thing you ordered is off but he has brought you something else; you may take it or leave it. You take it. Later you may ask for mustard; you repeat your request eight times. When you have given up all hope, the waiter comes to inform you that he has not forgotten it; he can assure you that they do have mustard on the premises; that's one thing they always have. Unfortunately he cannot find it just now.

This is one attitude of the Argentino. The other was reflected by the customs official who, having examined my luggage, invited me to go and stay in his house and be his honoured guest. As he had made a mess of my suitcase, for a fleeting moment I toyed with the idea of accepting his kind hospitality and moving in.

If anyone mentions his home, the wide, gallant, and semi-circular Iberian gesture follows, accompanied by the words: *'Su casa'* – 'your house' – meaning that his house is yours; just come along and make yourself at home. This noble habit was slightly overdone, I felt, by a Syrian gentleman in my hotel. He was obviously determined to out-Argentino the Argentinos and when the clerk, filling out his registration form, asked for his address, he gave it:

'112 Calle Liberdad, Cordoba.'

There followed the gesture of largesse and he informed the clerk, with a slight bow: *'Su casa, Señor.'*

As the days pass, the sadness of the place is borne in upon you more and more. Many people complain about the Argentinos' arrogance: the Uruguayans do

'Su casa'

not like their neighbours and the Chileans are even less complimentary about them. But I do not think the Argentinos are arrogant at all. They may lack the easy-going charm of the Brazilians or the sophisticated cynicism of the Uruguayan intelligentsia, but they are likeable and more sad and subdued than arrogant.

This sadness intrigued me a great deal. It took me some time to solve the riddle (this solution, by the way, is a sensational and significant discovery, to which I shall return in another chapter); here I should like to describe two of the complementary factors. It may have something to do with the vastness and emptiness of the pampas. An Argentine statesman, D. F. Sarmiento, remarked: 'I wonder what impression must be left on the Argentino by the simple act of fixing his eye on the horizon and seeing . . . and not seeing anything.' He added: 'Argentina's tragedy is vastness. The solitude, the desolation without a single human dwelling, divide province from province.' * This may be part of the explanation. Another part, surely, is nostalgia – a nostalgic longing for past greatness which came suddenly, and brought dazzling glory in its wake and now – well, if not entirely gone, it is slowly receding.

The rise of Buenos Aires was indeed sudden. For two hundred and seventy years after its foundation, Buenos Aires was a place of little importance. Lima was the vice-regal city and the Spaniards sent the treasures of the New World home through Panama and the West Indies, not through Buenos Aires. The city was not even allowed to trade directly with overseas territories until the end of the eighteenth century: all trade had to go through Lima which, in those days of

* Quoted by George Pendle: *Argentina,* Adam & Charles Black, London, 1957.

slow and cumbersome communications, meant commercial strangulation. The city's twenty-four thousand inhabitants lived mainly on smuggling. Even the formation of the Vice-royalty of the Rio de la Plata, with Buenos Aires as its capital, made little difference: the city remained an obscure port. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, Spanish policy changed and this change, in turn, dramatically altered the fortunes of Buenos Aires. Spain decided to strengthen Buenos Aires as her outpost in the South Atlantic and therefore empowered the city to engage in direct trade overseas. Buenos Aires started to shoot up. European immigration and a boom in the cattle trade helped, too, and the city never looked back.

After Argentina gained her independence, Buenos Aires became (and still is) the largest, gayest, most modern, most elegant metropolitan city, not only in South America but in the southern hemisphere. For European businessmen, first of all, for the investors in the city of London, South American investment long meant investment in Argentina, usually in Buenos Aires. Even politically, Argentina always led the way, both for good and for bad. Rosas was the first dictator of the sub-continent to open up new vistas in both efficiency and in cruelty. Peron, at a later date, also opened a new chapter. He was not the customary *caudillo* on horseback who, vexed by inefficiency and corruptness in high places, rides to the capital, ousts the government and forms a new régime which, thanks to the *caudillo*'s bungling and inexperience, promptly becomes even more corrupt and more inefficient than its predecessor. Peron was not that type at all: he was a master organizer and a modern fascist ruler, a virtuoso of the new art of propaganda, the first of his kind in

those parts. Buenos Aires' struggle against her lowly birth was a thing of the past; the Argentinos of the twentieth century looked down upon all their South American neighbours. *They* just did not count.

Now, after the Second World War, everything has changed again. Brazil has grown faster and shown more vigour and energy; Venezuela is richer; politically, even Cuba has had more of the limelight. Argentina has become just one of the South American States; and Buenos Aires, while still the largest and most worldly of all, is just one of many South American cities.

How do the Argentinos take this? Badly. They are not at all happy about it. Some try to maintain their superior attitude, but this is a pose that lacks conviction. Others will tell you that Buenos Aires has the best baroque buildings and the finest painters of the subcontinent. It is no good explaining to them that it is not a question of good baroque building and outstanding painters, important though these may be. Quite a few of the Argentinos face the situation realistically, discuss the country's position calmly and objectively and are well aware that even if they are not the only country in South America today they have no reason whatsoever to cast down their eyes in shame. Others find excuses. Argentina used to have the best football teams in South America and that means the world, they say, but this is no longer the case. And why not? Italy defeated her, for example, they go on, simply because Italy could afford to buy the two best *Argentine players* – the top stars in her national team. Others again shrug their shoulders. And still others acknowledge the fact that they have lost their hegemony, but declare with patriotic fervour that one day they will regain it.

Perhaps they will. There is national nostalgia in the air; you can hear the whole nation sigh.

It is all, one is driven to conclude, a great national Gastronomic Day – with all the restaurants closed.

GAUCHOS

I approached the problem of the famous Argentine *gauchos* with some trepidation. The reason for this was my sobering and disillusioning experience a few months before with his even more famous cousin, the Texan cowboy. Having something to do in Los Angeles, I made a detour, visiting Texas, just in order to see whether cowboys were fact or fiction; and in fact, how near to fiction.

I was bitterly disappointed by the Wild Western face of Texas. I saw one gentleman arrayed in orthodox cowboy fashion in the breakfast room of my motel in Dallas. He fired at no one, he was not after outlaws: he was, in fact, after a cup of coffee, for which he was obediently taking his place in the queue. My Texan companion – a journalist I had met the day before – eyed him and remarked acidly:

'Drug-store cowboy.'

This is, of course, the local name for the species. To the questions with which I plied my friend, and quite a few other people in Fort Worth, where 'the Wild West begins', I received the most shattering answers.

Cowboys still exist today. In fact, they are flourishing in great numbers. But they do not ride. To be pre-

cise, they do not ride outside office hours. They still ride the range to watch cattle and round them up, but the horse is no longer used as a means of locomotion. The cowboy drives to his job in a 200 h.p. over-chromiumed motor-car on a super-highway. More often than not, he is a commuter: he drives to his place of work every morning and drives home afterwards, perhaps after clocking out.

'He doesn't ride?' I asked pensively.

'He doesn't. What could he do with a horse? It's hard enough to park a car. Parking a horse is impossible.'

'But, surely,' said I imploringly, 'surely they still ride out on the remote ranches. In the more inaccessible places?'

'Sure they would,' my friend nodded, 'if we had inaccessible places. But we haven't. The cowboy just sits in his automobile and goes any place he likes.'

There were more cruel blows to fall:

'Come to that, even the horses don't ride any more.'

I looked at him inquiringly.

'If they have to move horses,' he explained, 'as they often do, the cowboy goes by lorry. So does the horse. Most cowboys and ranchers have trucks especially built for horses. Horses travel in comfort today. They often fly. In special freighter planes.'

Later I had a talk with a cowboy on an immense ranch about a hundred miles from Fort Worth. He was dressed much more soberly than the drug-store cowboy in Dallas, but he did have the large leather revolver holsters and a ten-gallon hat.

'Personally, I don't ride much,' said he. 'First of all, our ranch is fenced up, so the cattle can't go far. Then,

you see, I have a helicopter. I watch for strays from the helicopter and just use the radio-telephone.'

'The radio-telephone?!' I muttered bleakly. 'Tell me, though,' I said more hopefully, looking at his holsters, 'is there a lot of shooting going on?'

'Shooting? Shoot what? I don't follow you.'

'Don't you have a gun?'

'Oh, no. I did once apply for a licence but was refused. Besides, there's nothing to shoot at. I drive home at six o'clock and listen to my LPs. I love Brahms, don't you?'

'I hate Brahms,' I shouted.

He went on:

'I spend a lot of time with my prints. I collect Impressionists. Matisse is my favourite, although really he belongs to a later school.' After a slight pause, he added: 'You see, I'm a college graduate. I took my BA at Our Lady of the Lake College, San Antonio, Texas.'

On that I broke off contact. I could not look him in the eye. This had been one of the most disheartening experiences of my life – the cowboy who commutes between town and office, listens to Brahms on long-playing records, rides a helicopter, and has no gun because he was refused a licence.

Little wonder then, that I approached the Argentine *gaucho* with deep foreboding. I found his story somewhat upsetting, too, but it is an entirely different one.

Gaucho is another word that has undergone a regrettable change of meaning; a change that reflects the decline of our age. First of all, of course, *gaucho* is the name of the fierce, proud cattleman of the Argentine pampas; he is a distant spiritual (if that is the right word) cousin of the Texan cowboy and the less well-

known but, in his own world, equally legendary *csikós* of Hungary. The original meaning of the word *quichua* was orphan. And an orphan, a lonely creature he really was, a solitary figure in that vastness of *alfalfa,* th famous long grass. Even the graceful dances of the gaucho are the dances of lonely people; even at the height of gaiety and happiness each person dances alone. Many *couples* may dance together; but the individual remains a lonely and companionless figure in that ocean of merriment.

But worlds and words have changed and the *gaucho* has become – at least for the urban population – simply a peg for advertisement. You can buy not only *gaucho* belts, *gaucho* hats, *gaucho saltenas* – boots – and urbanized *gaucho ponchos,* but also *gaucho* chairs, *gaucho* tables, *gaucho* refrigerators, and *gaucho* transistor radios. The word *gaucho* has come to mean *'of good, enduring quality'*. The proud, indomitable, lonely rider of the pampas has become the durable orphan.

In the old days, the *gaucho* looked after the cattle, just as the cowboys did. He had his own horse, which belonged to him; and he belonged to his horse. A *gaucho* never walked and he despised all townsfolk who did. If a *gaucho* met misfortune in life and was too old or too squeamish to become a highway robber, he became a beggar in town; but he begged on horseback. (And still despised his pedestrian benefactors; but as all pedestrian beggars despise their motorized benefactors in the same way, this last point is of minor importance.) People still remember a dentist specializing in *gaucho* teeth (in itself a disheartening signal of civilization's inroads in the pampas) who never

dismounted; nor did his patients. (It is not known whether these restless dental chairs occasionally caused any minor complications; but it is unlikely that either the dentist or his patients paid undue attention to a perforated tongue.)

Some of the *gauchos* of by-gone days, especially Martin Fierro, became legendary heroes of courage and nobility of heart – the Robin Hoods of a different world. Others, led by their *caudillos,* occasionally held the neighbourhood to ransom. Every now and then they invaded the capital and their *caudillo* kicked out the government and replaced corruption by anarchy and inefficiency by chaos.

What has happened to the *gaucho* of today? If the Texan cowboy has become too rich, the *gaucho* and the landowners have become too poor. The landowners could not keep them; besides, the fence, this devilish new invention of a mechanical civilization, does most of their work. The *gaucho* had to find some steady employment. He still has the *boleadoras,* the three-fold whip with a round stone attached to the end of each thong, which he throws round the legs of wild horses to bring them down in a hopeless tangle; he still has his lasso, and handles it with amazing skill; but the sad truth is that the *gaucho* has become a *peon,* a peasant poor and simple. An unromantic, overworked, peasant, more of a serf than the King of the Pampas; at best, a peasant with a decent job and – horror of horrors? – a permanent address.

The fork is primarily responsible for this tragedy – the ordinary table fork.

The knife – the *facón* – used to be the *gaucho's* weapon and companion, almost as faithful as his horse.

A symbol of degeneracy

He fought with his *facón* – the revolver was regarded as unmanly and degenerate – and he also ate with it and nothing else. When the *asado* – the Argentine barbecue, a whole sheep, sometimes a whole ox, roasted on a spit – is ready 'each member of the (*gaucho*) company cuts off a portion of meat with his knife. He then holds the portion of meat in his left hand, seizes a mouthful with his teeth, and cuts upwards with a sweep of the knife, deftly severing the mouthful from the meat that he is holding in his hand, but almost grazing his lips.'*

The *gaucho* instinctively and rightly rejected the fork. When he succumbed to its tyranny, he threw away a way of life. A fork requires a plate; a plate requires a table; a table requires a chair; table and chair require a house.

One does not always realize where danger lurks. The knife preserves your independence and dignity; the fork is your undoing.

THE PAMPA

I was immune to the Lure of the Pampa, but I definitely succumbed to the Lure of *Asado;* in other words, the Lure of Roast Beef, so when I learned that that distinguished novelist and most charming of men, Alec Waugh, had been invited to visit an *estancia* where a whole ox was to be killed and roasted in his honour, I immediately butted in and inquired if I could join in the feast. Peter Allnut, the Assistant Representative of the British Council, who had or-

* George Pendle, *op. cit.*

ganized the whole affair, told me to be at the City Airport at nine o'clock next morning.

Duly at nine a.m. I was there, as told, and so were Alec Waugh and Peter Allnut. The pilot turned up at ten-fifteen – by Argentinian standards, an amazing exhibition of punctuality. He had flown in with the private plane of the *estancia* to pick us up. We walked to the plane, and it was clear from Alec's face that he was not deeply impressed with it. In our cities we have come to know the bubble-car; I do not know if such a thing as a bubble-plane exists, but if it does, this was it. It was a tiny, yellow, and red, single-engined, four-seater contraption, quite pretty to look at as toys go. Its pilot was a courteous and pleasant young man who spoke fluent English.

Alec examined the plane carefully and then declared:

'I don't like this at all.'

I made a few nonchalant and somewhat superior remarks with the air of a man who has travelled thousands of miles in single-engined, four-seater planes over Argentina.

'Besides,' I added, 'you must see the pampas.'

'I don't quite see why,' he replied.

He told us that he and his brother, Evelyn, when both were young and budding writers, had decided to divide the world between them and each had agreed never to encroach upon, or write about, the other's allotted territory. So now one half of the world belongs to Alec Waugh, the other to Evelyn Waugh. I do not quite remember on what principles the frontiers were drawn, but I believe Evelyn claimed and received most of the Catholic regions, which meant that the American continent was ruthlessly cut in two: the

Protestant north belongs to Alec, the Catholic south went to Evelyn.

'So I don't really see,' said Alec, 'why I should inspect Evelyn's pampas.'

Peter Allnut and I reassured him once again that such a little plane was not only absolutely safe but, for a number of reasons which now escape my memory, considerably safer than the ordinary airliner flown by commercial companies. Having uttered these famous last words, we boarded the plane and after a run of no more than sixty yards found ourselves airborne.

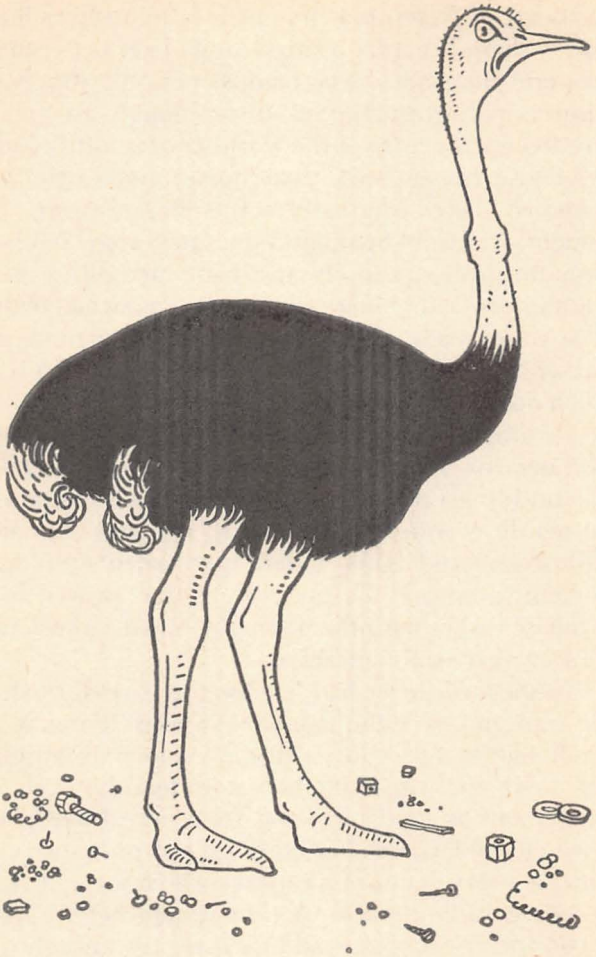
The pampa starts outside Buenos Aires and stretches fanwise for four hundred miles. I knew from many poetic and enthusiastic accounts that the first sight of this boundless ocean of land gives one a strange and unaccountable feeling. It certainly gave me a strange feeling, although I could account for it. I felt sick. Looking cautiously around, I saw that my companions, with the exception of the pilot, looked rather quiet and pensive too; also rather green.

The reason for this was the strange aerobatics performed by our little plane. Its slightest movement shook us up terribly. When the pilot changed direction, one wing shot high up, while the other dipped down sharply and I felt as if we had been simply dropped into bottomless depths and the next minute thrown skywards. I felt as if a giant were playing dice with this little toy plane: now he takes it in his hand . . . he shakes it, shakes it, shakes it . . . and he is just about to cast . . . now . . .

To our great surprise, however, we soon grew accustomed even to these gyrations and started to enjoy our flight. I made an effort to recall what I had recently read about the pampa. It is, as we all know, the econo-

mic heart of Argentina. Its soil is fabulously rich and black: there is hardly a single stone in it between the coast and the Andes. The pampas not only supply the country with grain but produce enough for export; here too is the centre of the world-famous cattle industry. I also remembered that horses and cattle were unknown here originally: the horses were first brought over from Spain and the cattle from Scotland. They multiplied happily and with incredible speed; vast hordes of wild horses soon became a normal feature of the countryside, and cattle, too, became so numerous that whenever a *gaucho* wanted to give himself a treat, which occurred fairly frequently, he killed a calf, tore out its tongue and left the carcass to the vultures and the buzzards. I also remembered from various books that building railways was very easy here, because of the gentle evenness of the plain, but also very difficult; screws and bolts, if left unguarded even for a moment, promptly disappeared, as they proved to be favourite dishes with the ostriches. Small screwdrivers counted as special delicacies.

In a short while we had left Buenos Aires far behind and were out over the pampa. We were flying at 140 m.p.h. and at a very low altitude – about six hundred feet – so our view differed considerably from the scenery one is used to seeing from a real aeroplane. The land underneath looked like a vast ordnance map, showing every detail in a country which was not really abundant in landmarks. A thin stream here, a house or two there; every now and then we saw an ugly grey village or a lonely ombú tree – justly called the lighthouse of the pampa. The cows turned their faces upward to us and we could discern their brown eyes and the melancholy, slightly puzzled expression on



Pièce de résistance

their faces; a few youthful and inexperienced calves frightened by the noise of our plane, scampered nervously to their mothers. Flying over some houses, we saw the *peons* eating in their courtyards, sitting at tables whose legs were sunk into the soft ground; indeed, we could clearly see if their steaks were well done or *au point*. About twelve o'clock or soon after, the cows lay down to ruminate in a state of euphoria; now they were too lazy even to look up; they lay there motionless, giving the impression of being toy animals, left behind by a child on a huge flat table.

The pilot tossed a map to me and asked:

'Are we on course?'

I am not a great hand at map-reading. I keep losing my way in cities I know fairly well; nor am I much better with landmarks: flying over London, I do not find it easy to pick out St Paul's. So the pilot's query sounded utterly silly and pointless when addressed to me.

'Yes,' I answered curtly.

'You're sure?'

'Positive.'

A minute or two later, he asked again:

'That water below . . . that we've just crossed: was it the river or the canal?'

'What should it have been?' I asked prudently.

'The canal, of course.'

'It was the canal,' I informed him.

Suddenly the engine stopped. Then it picked up again.

'Did the engine cut out?' someone inquired.

We all denied it heartily to reassure ourselves.

Ten minutes later the engine cut out once more; only this time it failed to pick up again.

'Hold tight,' shouted the pilot. 'I'm putting her down.'

We were so low that it was only a few seconds before we hit the ground and slowed to a jerky halt.

'Not too bad,' said the pilot. 'Last time I came down in a lot of thorn bushes.'

'Roughly speaking,' I asked him, 'how often do you do this sort of thing?'

'That was twelve years ago,' he replied coolly.

We found ourselves in the middle of nowhere. Alec Waugh, like the good trooper he is, was only worried about the lecture he was to give at six-thirty that afternoon at the British Council in BA. We tramped over miles of ploughed fields and, in the end, we reached an *estancia*. It turned out that, possibly due to my gifts as navigator, we were much closer to Mar de Plata, the famous holiday resort where the Argentine film festivals take place, than we ought to have been. The proprietor – a tall gentleman, proud, erect, and aloof, yet courteous, like a Spanish grandee, interrupted his lunch and drove three of us (the pilot stayed with his plane) to Mar del Plata airport. Emissaries from the *estancia* we were to visit arrived soon (Peter Allnut had telephoned to them) and tried to persuade us to continue our journey by car as our own, personal ox was almost ready on its huge spit. But that poor ox had died in vain. We had to take the next plane and fly back to BA, where Alec Waugh started his lecture on the stroke of six-thirty.

'Mr Chairman, ladies, and gentlemen,' he said 'I am very happy to be here tonight.'

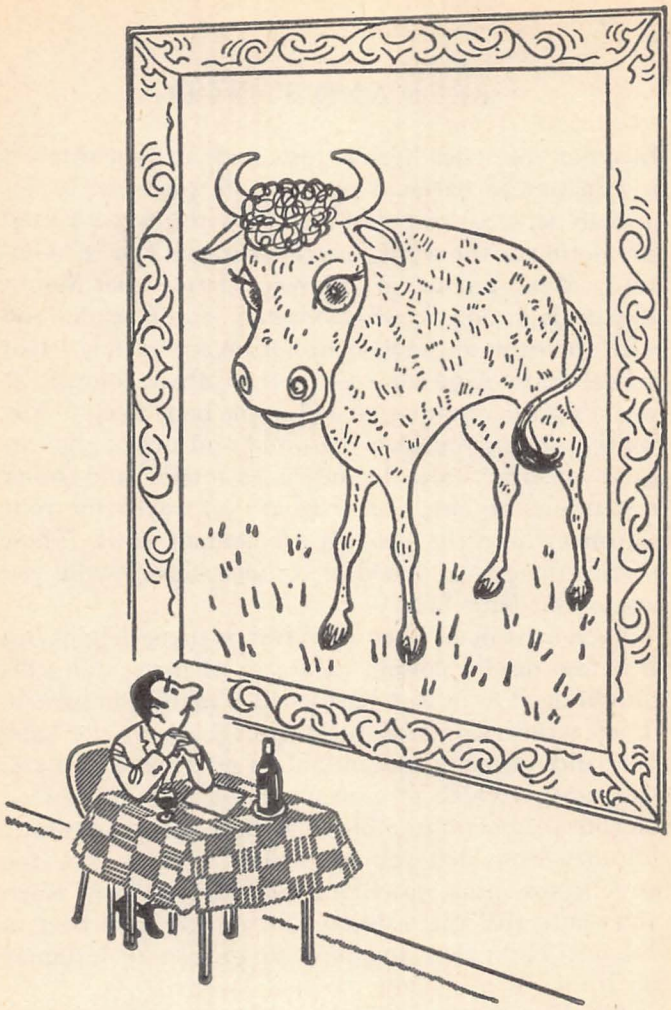
Which was a shining example of a good writer giving new meaning to an old cliché.

BEEF AND TANGO

In other countries beef is just food; in Argentina it is a matter of national pride. The word *beef* is (or used to be, until recently) uttered with the same kind of emotion as the word *Vaterland* in the Kaiser's Germany. What watches are to Switzerland; what Mount Everest is to Nepal; what Niagara is to Canada; and what the ruins of the Roman Forum are to Italy – that is beef to the Argentine. Go to the Cabaña, one of the world's great restaurants, and order baby beef. While waiting for it, you glance around and notice the pictures on the wall. In other countries and other restaurants famous film stars are portrayed for your pleasure; here the pin-ups are famous cows. These induce the proper mood of contemplation while you await your baby beef.

Your baby beef, when it arrives, is sheer delight but it is also deadly poison – the sort of thing that kills middle-aged American businessmen in their hundreds. They serve wonderful little sausages with the baby beef and, however indomitable a gourmand you are, you must tremble to gaze upon the amount of food on your plate; you tremble even more to realize twenty minutes later that you have eaten the lot. Yet, the Argentinos speak nostalgically of the old days when you could still get a decent portion of baby beef in Buenos Aires; now you have to go over to Uruguay for it.

All the same, you will be told several times a day that Argentina has the highest *per capita* meat-consumption in the world. Even if it has dropped in the



Baby beef

last decade or so, an Argentine beggar still eats more meat than the average millionaire in other lands. It used to be beef that made their patriotic hearts beat with pride; it was meat once again that brought them their Moment of Truth. It was a mortal blow to their pride when Peron had to introduce meatless days. A meatless day in Argentina meat a beefless day: you could still get poultry, and pork and mutton galore. But poultry, pork, and mutton are not meat: they are for vegetarians. (Of course, it is just as silly to say that fish is not meat; but we are used to *that*.) Historians may disagree with me, but I am convinced that if Peron had not damaged the reputation of Argentine meat and had not suffered a humiliating defeat on the beef front, his downfall could have been postponed.

'As baby beef shrank on our plates,' someone told me, 'so did our national pride shrink with it.'

I, personally, found few traces of that notorious, arrogant Argentine nationalism we heard so much about in earlier years. The word *gringo* – meaning 'bloody foreigner' – is still much in use, but all the South American nations use it, not only the Argentinos, and all nations all over the world have plenty of similar disparaging expressions for foreigners, Negroes, Jews, etc. The word *gringo* refers first of all to the British; and the word is said to derive from a song, sung by the invading British soldiers early in the nineteenth century, which ran: 'Green Grow the Rushes-O . . .'

In spite of these early memories, or, indeed, as we shall soon see, partly because of them, the British are fairly popular in Argentina. In Buenos Aires, there are statues of George Canning, and of Admiral Brown,

an Englishman who helped to build up the Argentine Navy and became a national hero; there are many terribly English shops (including some 'Olde Tea-Shoppes') in the elegant Calle Florida; and there is still a large Welsh colony in Patagonia. The Welsh went there to preserve their freedom, their religion and their pure Welshness which were, I understand, threatened by the wicked English. 'It was in May 1865 that a hundred and fifty-three Welshmen – men, women, and seventy-eight children–set sail from Liverpool. As the ship left the quay they stood on deck and sang *God Save the Queen* – but, of course, they sang in Welsh.'* A life of great hardship began, but the colony survived and even prospered in a modest fashion. They did not quite manage to save their pure Welshness as the colony is today an integral part of Argentina. Evans, Owen, Jones, and Lloyd are still commoner names there, in the Chubut Valley of Patagonia, than Martinez or Fernandez.

The English are specially popular for two of their deeds; and unpopular for two others. They are loved for the invasions of 1806 and 1807. They were badly beaten on both occasions by the *criollos* (a subsequent court martial in London found that General Whitlocke, the English Commander, was 'totally unfit to serve His Majesty in any military capacity whatever'). Whitlocke surrendered to the *crillos* and so the two British invasions, *Las Invasiones Inglesas,* supplied some of the most glorious chapters in Argentine history. For this they're most grateful.

If they are grateful for the harm we did to them, they are somewhat resentful because of the harm they

* George Pendle, *op. cit.*

did us. They nationalized the British-owned railways, a disastrous step. While the railways used to earn large profits in the past, they are today the largest single deficit item in the national budget. They will never forgive us for that. I tried to apologize but it was no good.

The other painful subject – in fact, the only serious bone of contention between the two countries – is the Falkland Islands, or, to give them their Argentine name, the *Islas Malvinas*. These islands proved extremely useful to Britain in two world wars but why they should be so important for Argentina is not quite clear. They have a population of 2,200, mostly of English origin. Only potatoes and a few other vegetables are grown locally; everything else has to be imported. Life is a hard and bitter struggle in this land of ice, penguins, and sea-lions. Mutton is called '365' – because it is eaten every day of the year. Nevertheless, the Argentinos have set their heart on possession of these islands. All their maps show the Malvinas as their own territory. They include the 2,200 in Argentina's population and regard British occupation as an act of aggression; every year they deliver a note of protest to the British Embassy. There is no direct communication between the Malvinas and Argentina. If a Falkland Islander wishes to visit a friend or relation in Tierra del Fuego, he has to travel a thousand miles north to Montevideo, obtain an Argentine visa there and then travel another thousand miles southwards to reach his destination. He must, of course, return the same way, and thus travel four thousand miles instead of some five hundred.

Under Peron the Malvinas were a burning issue; but it is certainly no laughing matter today either.

Casual English lightheartedness about the subject is not appreciated. Still, the Argentinos have mellowed in this respect too, while the issue is still important, it is not urgent or crucial. The 2,200 Britons and their sheep will be left in peace for the time being.

'All this mellowing of Argentine nationalism started with that blow to our pride over baby beef. Mind you, we are still proud of our beef; we are still very patriotic about it; we still know that it has no rival in the world. But today we are able to speak about beef without tears in our eyes.'

Tears in their eyes . . . Well, whatever my friend said, they often do have tears in their eyes. They are, as I have said before, a subdued and sad people. And I found the ultimate reason – here we come to my great discovery; the Argentinos are sad because their celebrated tangos leave them no option. I love Argentine tangos, their rhythm and their melodies, but listening to them for more than half an hour makes me want to commit suicide.

I have two booklets here in front of me giving the words of many of these popular tangos. A horror story which I read in my youth and which terrified me out of my wits, *The Massacre of the Armenians,* would pass as light, almost cheerful reading compared with these tangos. All the tangos are about unrequited love; about your faithless sweetheart; about false friends who stole your beloved; about your mother who does not love you; about your uncles and nieces who do not love you; about your aunts who do not love you; about your father who loved you so little that he deserted you, your mother and your eleven brothers and sisters

(who hated the sight of you) when you were eighteen months old.

Any nation that makes merry on such unalleviated gloom, on such an ocean of domestic tragedy, must become a trifle despondent.

CHILE

MacLOPEZ & CO.

I REMEMBER a distant relation who used to visit us occasionally in my childhood and who had one single joke in his repertoire. He was very fond of repeating this story and as a rule we heard it twice on each visit: soon after his arrival, and when he was about to leave. The joke was this: there was a man who was extremely fond of bragging, a habit which annoyed his wife no end. Once the couple visited an ancient castle where the guide described the immense size of the ballroom, giving all the impressive measurements, as guides are wont to do. 'Oh, but that's nothing,' the man butted in. 'At home we have a reception room which is three hundred feet long . . . ' At this point, his wife gave him a discreet but energetic warning by stamping on his toe. The man, taken aback and trying to sound more modest, added quickly: ' . . . but only six inches wide'.

This is not one of the great jokes of the century and for over two decades I never gave a thought either to the story or its teller. But in Chile this simple little yarn began to haunt me. At last, in the course of my wanderings, I had now reached that fabulous room, three hundred feet long and only six inches wide. Chile was that room.

The country is more than 2,800 miles long. That is comparable both in length and equivalent variety of climatic change with the distance from St Louis, on

A gentle hint

the Senegal river in French West Africa, to Glasgow.* The average width of the country, however, is about a hundred miles. We have all read descriptions of Chile, likening her to a ribbon or, less kindly, to a worm, but whatever the simile, there is no doubt that Chile is the most peculiarly shaped country in the world. For Britain to be of comparable shape, keeping her present width, she would have to stretch in length down to Cape Town; or, conversely, keeping her present length, her width would be twenty-one miles, about the width of London.

Chile, with her length of over 2,800 miles, seems an enormous country to us; in fact she is one of the little countries of South America, only Uruguay, Paraguay, and Ecuador being smaller.

Chile is also a poor country and she is short of a great many things. However, whatever she may be short of, it is certainly not buttons. I went out for a stroll in Santiago, soon after my arrival, and in the central shopping area I discovered a button shop. It sold nothing else; just buttons: buttons small and buttons big; buttons of every description, shape, size, and race; buttons made of metal, plastic, bone; buttons pressed, hand-knitted, and crocheted. I stood there fascinated; I had never realized the immense importance of buttons in our civilization. In fact, I had never given much thought to buttons at all. Imagine my surprise when I moved on, still dazed by so many buttons, and found that the very next shop was another button establishment, even richer in wares and of greater splendour than the first. It did not take me long to realize that Santiago was simply teeming with button shops –

* Gilbert J. Butland, *Chile,* Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1951.

wherever I looked, there was a button emporium . . . The *Chilenos* must be mad about buttons, I thought gloomily.

This phenomenon, naturally enough, puzzled me and made me think. After long and exhaustive cogitation, I hit upon an ethnographical law of great importance, a revolutionary discovery, I daresay. The law is this: *the narrower a country is in proportion to its length, the more it is addicted to buttons.*

Apart from this single refreshing phenomenon of buttons, Santiago is as un-South American as only a South American city can be. I knew that the overwhelming majority of the country's population consisted of *mestizos,* but in Santiago one sees white faces only; I knew that parts of Chile were desert, semi-desert, and antarctic, but this was the balmiest Mediterranean climate; I knew that many of the people were poor but here almost everybody was well-dressed and looked reasonably well off. I also knew, of course, that this was evidence of one of Latin America's most pressing problems: the yawning gap between the rural and the urban population, the chasm between agricultural and industrial incomes. Nevertheless, the fact remains that everyone is more European here than in Europe; even corruption is not worth talking about; elections are not crooked; and the police go so far as actually to apprehend criminals instead of letting them go free, however large a tip they are offered. This is a land where you do not tip taxi-drivers but you do tip postmen – and for every letter they deliver.

This is the pleasantest country in South America and one of the pleasantest in the world. Men are cultured and sophisticated; women are beautiful, *chic,* and famous for their progressive and liberal principles.

Chile is so hopelessly un-South American that she even has something of a middle class, a true rarity in those parts. Universities are stormed by would-be students and practically everybody in Chile is a lawyer. To have a law degree is almost a *sine qua non* of middle-class status, and I heard one Chilean lady say this of her son: 'He is at the university now, studying law. Luckily we don't have to decide on his future career until he becomes a lawyer.' All this is too civilized, and also a little disappointing. Too much like Europe, too much like the British Isles. When I heard that the first President of the country was called O'Higgins, I nearly wept.

This is perhaps also the only country in the world where they actually like and approve of British imperialism. Here you do not have to apologize for British imperialism, so-called or real; you have to apologize for its dereliction. I tried to reassure my friends that we still had a fair number of colonialists, white sahibs and blimps, but the answer was a sad and nostalgic smile, which meant: all these good people – all the imperialists and blimps – are fighting a hopeless rearguard action against the wind of change. The Chileans know that good, old-fashioned imperialism is dead, and watching Africa from a distance, they are far from certain that they admire the new Congo so much more than the old.

The *Chilenos* are called the French of South America because they have the reputation of being not only witty but also rather cynical and sceptical.

They are also called the Germans of South America because the country has large German colonies, and the internal pressure of Chilean Nazis was so strong

during the last war that Chile (with Argentina) was the last country of the hemisphere to break with the Axis.

They are also the Scots of South America. There are plenty of Scots at Tierra del Fuego because in the last century a rather enterprising Scottish gentleman drove two thousand sheep two thousand miles to the south and started sheep farming there. This explains the abundance of such names as Patricio Macdonald, Rodriguez McKenna and, to my delight, I came across the clan of MacLopez.

The Chileans are called, finally, the English of South America. It was English pirates who once upon a time infested the Straits of Magellan; much later, the Royal Navy helped to build up the Chilean Navy. To put the final touches on their Englishness they are enthusiastic tea-drinkers, and Chile has the worst coffee on the continent.

Geographically, Chile is not an island, but the Andes Mountains isolate it from the rest of the Continent and turn the country into a virtual island. In addition to the Scottish *Chilenos,* there are plenty of English *Chilenos,* that is, old Chilean families of many generations' standing with such names as Edwards, Brown Torrington, and Green. Their mother-tongue is Spanish and they are about as English as, say, the Roosevelt family of the United States is Dutch.

English names, however, occasionally give rise to certain misunderstandings. A normal Chilean name consists of three parts. The Martinez baby will be christened Pablo and after his name will be affixed his mother's surname which is, let us say, Cerda. So his full name will be Pablo Martinez Cerda, but all Chilenos know that it is the midle name that counts and he will be called, when he grows up. Señor Martinez.

Clan MacLopez

This local habit proved to be disastrous for an English gentleman called Streatfield. On one occasion, when he was very much a new settler in those parts, he went to Santiago airport intending to fly to New York. He was informed that a storm over the Andes had held up his plane in Buenos Aires and it would be two or three hours late. He was asked to take a meal at the company's expense and wait to be called in due course. He did as he was told and enjoyed his meal, unaware of the fact that the plane had turned up much sooner than expected. One of the airline clerks opened his passport, saw that his full name was Laurence John Streatfield and, obeying the Chilean rule that the middle name is the one that counts, started paging 'Mr John'. As the summons grew noisier and more peremptory, Streatfield remarked to himself, 'Stupid fellow – why can't he be here when he is wanted so badly. Serve him right if he misses his plane.' He was still watching the plane disappearing in the distance when it became clear that he himself was Mr John.

Two facets of life in Chile distinguish its inhabitants from the other peoples of the hemisphere.

I have already mentioned their isolation. To fly over the Andes is surely one of the most thrilling experiences left to man. Actually, you do not fly *over* the Andes; you fly through the valleys and passes and everywhere you look there are peaks towering up higher than the plane. Not the type of journey one would really fancy in fog. Looking down on the grey and brown rocks and, later, at these immense snow-capped peaks, you feel that you are approaching a different world down there on the Pacific coast. Chile is farther from Europe than any other South American state and it is sometimes called *el último rincón de la*

tierra, the last corner of the earth: the ocean on one side, a wild mountain chain on the other, and noisy, boisterous Argentina behind those snowy peaks. Why, Chile has not even a common frontier with Brazil, a rare distinction in South America (shared, actually, only with Ecuador). Such a predicament is bound to give its people a feeling of loneliness, detachment, and slight superiority. And also a keen urge to travel on any excuse.

The other distinguishing phenomenon has an even more complicated effect. I mean the earthquakes from which Chile has suffered from time immemorial and which, four hundred years ago, destroyed Santiago. Earthquakes make life not only hazardous but also unpredictable in many ways: blessings prove to be misfortunes and disasters blessings in disguise.

Seismic calamities have trained Chileans to accept those other symbolic earthquakes without flinching. The opening of the Panama Canal was one of these blows; this feat of American engineering made the Straits of Magellan one of the minor shipping routes of the world and reduced Valparaiso to the status of an unimportant, provincial port.

Another blow, which first looked like one of the happiest and most glorious events in Chilean history, was the victorious conclusion of the Pacific War against Peru and Bolivia. Chile claims never to have lost a war, but today quite a few Chileans wish they had lost that one. This victory gave Chile her nitrate fields in the north, near the Peruvian frontier. For a long time, Chile was the only nitrate-producing country in the world and consequently she could lean back and dictate prices (particularly during the First World War). The northern town of Arica became a smugglers'

paradise and it was believed that in Iquique – another small town in that region – more champagne was consumed per head than in any other town in the world, not excluding Paris. Chile was, not unnaturally, relying too much on her nitrate monopoly when another of those symbolic earthquakes occurred. A certain Dr Fritz Haber found a method of producing synthetic nitrates and Chile's boom was over. (Today, nitrate and copper are once again of great importance in Chilean economy. But the days of monopoly are over and the shock is not forgotten.)

Nor can the shocks of the real earthquakes be forgotten. The whole world remembers the horrors of 1960; but the Chilenos remember vividly many other horrors too. Indeed, in some regions minor tremors give no more cause for comment than drizzle in England. No one knows the number of last year's victims. Chile's entire population is estimated at seven and a half million; the death-roll of the earthquakes is put at . . . well, the figures given to me differ so widely that there is no sense in quoting them. The truth remains, that in 1960 about half the country lay in ruins, from Concepción to the deep south. Mountains cracked, wide gaps opened up in the roads; huge rocks crashed down or were lifted thirty or fifty feet; houses collapsed; villages disappeared; pastures were flooded; Valdivia, a town in one of the most fertile regions of Chile, was threatened with starvation. And then the Chileans learned something else; that even in this supposedly nasty world of ours help was near, and people, after all, seemed to have kind hearts. Globemaster planes swarmed in the sky, ships queued up at the ports. Soon enough, there was a glut of food in some of the hungry districts; in places, the survivors stopped

burying their dead and clearing up the ruins and had the time of their lives. In a few small ports ships were not even unloaded: their cargoes were no longer needed; if there is enough to eat today, who cares about tomorrow? 'I've never been so happy in my life,' remarked a peasant, whose entire family had been wiped out, to a journalist friend of mine. But it was not only the poor who benefited. Earthquake insurance, always big business, received a new impetus; rebuilding, using powerful steel frames which withstand shocks admirably, is going ahead at full speed. It turns out that while some of the victories of the past proved to be disasters, the earthquakes, with all their horrors, were a blessing in disguise. First, they had a great unifying effect on the country; second, they started frantic building activities and turned an economic slump into a minor boom.

The *Chilenos* do not speak much about their earthquakes. But although they have preserved a happy disposition, they have suffered much too much not to have this problem constantly at the back of their minds. They also know that it is not quite so easy to tell a Good Thing from a Bad Thing, as most of us facilely presume. They have learnt, more than once, that we have to beware of our blessings and, occasionally, welcome our disasters. Whole worlds may crumble and change into something unrecognizable in minutes; ways of life may disappear from one moment to another. This is true of our world just as it is of theirs. The only difference is that they know it and we don't – yet.

PERU

'LOVELY DAY, ISN'T IT?'

OUR car stopped at the traffic lights. A young Indian boy darted over to us and held out some ancient Inca silver for sale. At the next street corner, another Indian youth tried to sell me an abstract painting. We drove on and I wondered – who could those mysterious and admirably enterprising people be who were in the habit of buying Inca silver and abstract paintings at traffic lights, between two changes of colour? There and then I decided to write a novel, in order to describe my hero thus: 'Stephen had bought all his ancient Inca treasures and abstract paintings at traffic lights.'

At the next set of lights we were offered a tiny black puppy. I asked the young Indian if many people bought puppies on drawing up there for thirty seconds. 'A fair number,' said he. He could make a living.

One only had to buy a puppy or two at the traffic lights, or just walk about for five minutes in the streets of Lima, to realize that the traveller from Chile and Argentina had arrived in a new, strange world.

When I got out of the plane, I found that there was a slight drizzle. It lasted all day and all next day. Yet at least a dozen people explained to me in those two days that it never rained in Lima. I decided that *never* simply meant 'hardly ever', and that I ought to consider myself lucky to have picked on one of those few occasions. But that, it transpired, was not at all

what they meant: it *never* – absolutely never – rained in Lima. They had no seasons here; winter or summer made no difference; the temperature never changed; it was always rather warm and always cloudy; the sun never shone and it never rained. At the end of the second day I timidly asked one of my friends if there was not some slight contradiction between the proud claim that it never rained in Lima and the demonstrable fact that it had never stopped since my arrival. He was puzzled:

'Rain? What do you mean? Where?'

It was quite clear that one of us was mad. I fondly hoped it was he. I went into meteorological detail in the hope that he, too, had noticed the phenomenon. It slowly dawned on him what I meant and he began to laugh:

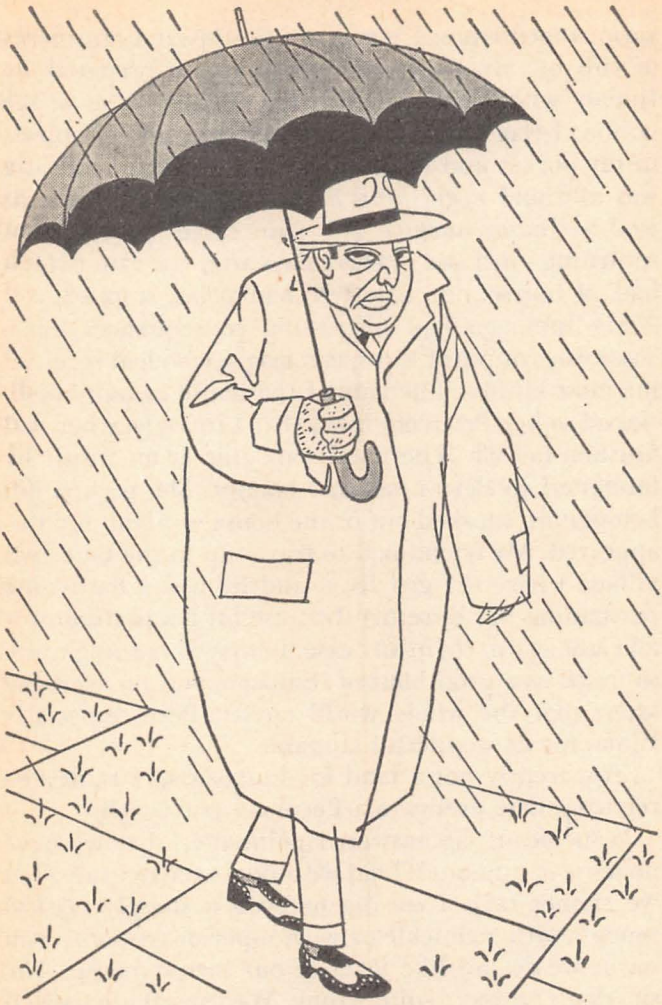
'But that's not rain . . . '

'It's amazing, though,' I replied, 'how closely it resembles rain. It soaks you through in no time. But I'll take your word for it. It's not rain.'

'Really, it isn't,' my friend expostulated. 'It's humidity.'

The humidity, it was explained to me, is usually around 95 per cent in Lima, and is often higher. But before I had time to pursue the subject and find out when rain is not rain, I was laid low by the most terrible lumbago of my life. I had lived twenty-two years in Britain, the *locus classicus* of rheumatism, without once feeling even a twinge, but now I was out of action for days. Sitting down or standing up became a complicated, prolonged, and most painful operation; turning over in bed required the skill of a circus acrobat – although I definitely lacked his speed.

My sympathetic friends gave me advice and offered



95% humidity

various medicines. I was given liquids and ointments to rub on my back; curious mixtures prepared by Indian witch-doctors, allegedly brewed from snake poison; I was advised to carry strange feathery objects in my pocket and murmur Indian prayers. I did as I was told and *everything helped*: modern science as well as Indian magic. The pain eased: but it kept returning until two or three days after the rain (which had, of course, never started) had at last stopped.

My lumbago had distressing consequences for a charming couple of European origin who had received me most kindly. The lady of the house casually mentioned to her Peruvian maid that Lima's weather had finished me off. The maid took this as an insult by foreigners to Peru's national honour. She packed her belongings, sneaked out of the house at night and disappeared. My friend had to travel up to the Quechua village where the girl lived and he had a hard time persuading her to return because (*a*) I was absolutely all right again, (*b*) in any case, I enjoyed nothing quite so much as a good bout of lumbago, and (*c*) everyone knew that the whole world envied Peru, especially Lima, for its wonderful climate.

'Apparently not a land for humorists,' I remarked relating these events to a Peruvian playwright.

'You mean,' he answered pointedly, 'that we have no sense of humour? That we object to criticism? That we cannot take a teasing or even a sharply critical remark with a chuckle or with superior wisdom? You mean we do not like jokes at our own expense? No, sir, that's wrong. Quite wrong. We can take it as well as the next fellow. In fact, we like having our leg pulled.'

He banged his fist on the table, rose and walked out.

SITTING BULL

You stop to look around at the corner of the Plaza San Martin or the famous Plaza de Armas and you notice that Lima, although a small modest place compared with bustling and beautiful Rio, or magnificent Buenos Aires, is a city of great originality and old-fashioned Spanish charm. It is the City of Kings – or the City of Viceroys – which was long supreme in South America, just as, once upon a time, Winchester was the capital of England or Vienna was one of the great centres of power in Europe.

You stand there at the street corner in front of the Cathedral, watching and contemplating; you look at the workmen in a road gang and you start: you have the feeling that you know one of these men. You know that this is impossible, yet you are quite sure: you do know this man. You look at his five companions and you recognize two more of them. There is no doubt: you have seen these faces before. But where? Then you look around, and gasp with surprise: you know every other person in Lima.

Presently you understand. This is an Indian country and the faces you see around you are the brown faces of the so-called Red Indians. Long, horsey faces, with ugly, large bent noses, straight mouths, sad eyes, and black hair. These are the faces of Sitting Bull, the Indian hero of your childhood. Sitting Bull was called Winnetou in *my* childhood. Winnetou was a Red Indian chief of Central European origin, a fine specimen of a man, a great warrior, and a terrifying enemy,

'Lager, sir? Coming, Sir!'

but the noblest and most loyal of friends. He was created by a provincial German, named Karl May, who never set foot outside Germany and rarely outside his native village. We central European children loved Karl May, but he had the misfortune to become Adolf Hitler's favourite author. Poor May could not help this and he was not really responsible. There is nothing an author can do in such a case, particularly if he is dead. I am sure Winnetou was one of Hitler's heroes and ideals, but he misread the character.

I went to have lunch in a pseudo-Swiss chalet and found six more of these Sitting Bulls and Winnetous serving as waiters. They were dressed in red, green, blue, and yellow Swiss national costumes: breeches and white stockings, and short jackets, cut off above the waist. Their names were embroidered in gold on their backs: Fritz, Max, Franzli, and Hansli. Strange, I thought, that Red Indian chiefs should call their sons Franzli and Max, instead of Hawk Eye and Deer Slayer; but perhaps with their famous foresight they had foreseen that they would become waiters in a Swiss restaurant. My companions made fun of these men, but I could not laugh: in fact, I dropped a few real tears on my sham *schüblig* and imitation *Wienerschnitzel*. This is white civilization for you. To exterminate the Red Indians (in other lands) was certainly unforgivable but that, at least, was done by cruel, lustful, and greedy men in search of land and gold; but surely, to deprive these very dignified people of the last shreds of their natural dignity, to dress them in green breeches and call them Fritz, is an equally degrading and depressing testimony to our schizophrenic society. The scene, I felt, was as undignified as it would be to find a posse of Red Indian waiters in Lucerne or Winterthur, with painted faces

and feather headgear, ordering your pint of beer for you with a bloodcurdling battle cry.

I took a stroll to collect my thoughts, but I did not succeed: I could not take my eyes off the hats of the Indian women. Many of them were wearing the traditional bowler-like hats; but many more had peaked caps, others golfing caps, and one a black top hat. At first I thought it was some kind of April Fool's Day, but it did not take me long to realize that I was wrong. The women's faces were as solemn and inscrutable as they themselves were shabby and dirty. Their hats were simply the fashion in these parts: women are fond of the cast-off hats of European males. The whole place looked like a crazy, Kafkaesque Easter Parade of bonnets, or a grotesque and cruel caricature of the Wimbledon or Ascot hat-parades, except that the Indian hats looked more sober and credible than the latest fantasies of Dior and his fellows; and the Indian women wore their cast-offs with more dignity than our ladies wear their curious creations.

What have we done to these people, I asked myself again and again. As a rule I do not suffer from a guilt-complex; I do not feel that I am personally responsible for the follies of humanity; I simply have my own share in them and I can carry my own burden with equanimity. But here I had to cast my eyes down in shame whenever I saw an Indian lady flaunting the cap of a French lieutenant-colonel of the gendarmerie.

The main trouble with the Indians, I mused, is not that they are oppressed and exploited but that they have very bad publicity agents. There are long periods every year when the front pages of the world's newspapers are dominated by Afro-Asians. Laudable progress has been so swift in this field that if a cannibal-

istic tribe has to wait a month or two before becoming a full member of the United Nations and gaining equal voting rights with the United States, cries of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' rend the air. But who ever hears a word about the plight of the South American Indians? They are forgotten people.

Part of the explanation for this is that they are not oppressed as *Indians* but simply as poor, helpless masses. As soon as they get somewhere they cease to be Indians. They become *Peruvians*, and their racial problem is solved.

Peru's Indians belong to three major groups: there are the *costerños* (the coastal tribes), the *serranos* (the mountain tribes) and the *montañeses* (the jungle tribes). Coastal Peru – Lima and other modern cities – is the twentieth century; perhaps early twentieth century, but twentieth century nevertheless; the Sierra with all its Indians is early eighteenth century, and the jungle itself takes you back into almost prehistoric times. The jungle Indians are near-savages whose way of life has hardly changed in the last ten or twelve centuries. They are not cannibals; missionaries consumed and people slain by poisoned arrows are few and far between. They live in mud huts on the rivers or in swamps, eat *yuca* (sweet potatoes) and wear next to nothing; and Peruvians from our own century have considerable difficulty in establishing sound commercial relations with them, mostly in the rubber and sugar-cane trades.

It is with the two other varieties, and mostly with the *serranos*, that we are concerned. There are about five thousand Indian communities in the country, few of which are densely populated. Altogether there are some ten million Indians in Peru. They rarely own

land where the soil is good; they grow as much as they need or, indeed, rather less; they are entirely self-supporting but for their supplies of *coca*, a favourite drug, of which cocaine is made and which is a government monopoly. 'The only pastoral product exported is wool, and wheat is the only product which enters the internal market in any quantity. The Indians live a marginal economic, sociological, and cultural existence. Half of them cannot speak Spanish.' * They are referred to as *chunchos* and the *mestizos* as *cholos*, two derogatory names freely used even by those who, quite rightly, are deeply hurt when called Dagos.

What can the Indians do? An Indian labour force of about 63,000 is engaged in mining, often at heights of up to 17,000 feet. Or they lead a pastoral life, living on their flocks, and are growers of alpaca and llama and sheep wool which they sell at the market in Arequipa. Or they trickle into the various towns where they are turned from a pastoral proletariat into an urban proletariat but where, as a rule, they can find work. Peru's economy, as it is not based on one single product, is healthier and more balanced than the economy of several other South American States, and unemployment is rare. (I should like to remark here in brackets that this attractive and fascinating country is almost completely neglected by the British and the Americans. South America – if it means anything at all to our industrialists – means the land east of the Andes. Peru is just nowhere. People there would like to buy British – anything from books to motor cars – but they are unable to. British goods are not there; German goods are.) Coming back to the Indian, if, in spite of all good aus-

* *The South American Handbook*, 1960. Trade and Travel Publications.

pices, he finds himself out of work, he can always return to his village where he can live or, shall we say, exist.

Employment for the Indian, however, is not always a rosy state of affairs. The minimum daily wage required by law is thirty-four *soles* (under three shillings) but hardly anyone pays an Indian that princely sum. In Lima they get two shillings or one and sixpence a day, and in the country sixpence only. In fact, believe it or not, wages of one penny are not unheard of. Nor are they the lowest. The habit is still fairly widespread of not paying the Indian anything at all but giving him a small slice of poor land and allowing him one day of the week to work on it. In other words, on Sunday he is allowed to work for himself and his family and that counts as his wages.

If he is lucky he gets a more or less decent job in town; if he is lucky, the *chuncho*'s children become *cholos*; if he is luckier still, he is dressed in yellow breeches and other Alpine folk costumes and called Hansli; if he is luckiest of all, in a year or two he will be able to afford a top hat, with only two large holes in it, for his wife.

CHARITY

A few families in Peru own estates larger than Belgium. Some other landowners have to put up with estates only half, or even less than half, the size of Belgium; but the rich in Peru still live, not in the nineteenth century, but in the age of the Conquistadores. In addition to the land, the forty ruling families own

and run the whole of industry, commerce, and banking; they have yachts, enjoy themselves water-skiing, giving fabulous balls and have built a club for themselves near Lima costing £600,000. (The maximum daily wage in Peru is three shillings, seldom actually paid.) Even the Pacific Ocean beaches are fenced off for their benefit; the 'freedom of the seas' does not include the poor man's right to have a dip.

One lady, a staunch and faithful member of Peru's Forty Families, heard that I had made certain inquiries about social conditions in the country. At a party, she approached me armed with a glass of champagne – I had a glass in my hand, too – and set out to put my ideas right.

'You must have heard the assertion that Peru is ruled by Forty Families. That is not true. But it *is* true that the members of these forty families run all the charity work. The same people are always in the vanguard of all our splendid efforts to help the poor. Charity is our main preoccupation – giving worn-out clothing, soup, and so on to the poor.'

Instead of being so prodigiously charitable, would they not do better, I inquired, to persuade their menfolk to pay the Indians proper wages?

'That's exactly what the Communists say,' she replied triumphantly, with the air of someone delivering final and incontrovertible judgement.

'And what is your answer to the Communists?' I asked her.

'We are not in the habit of arguing with Communists,' said she with great dignity.

'But if you did sink so low, what would you say to them?'

'Well, you know perfectly well,' she exclaimed

'We are not in the habit of arguing with Communists.'

angrily, 'that the minimum wage is thirty-four soles a day.'

'But I am told that only twenty soles are paid in Lima if that, and much less in the country.'

'Well, that's fair, isn't it? Life is so much cheaper in the country.'

She had regained her composure. She sighed now to show me and the others who were listening in, what she had to suffer from all these foreigners who fail to grasp elementary truths and yet intend to write about Peru.

'What about roads?' I went on to ask. 'All expert opinion agrees that roads are a primary requirement.'

'That's true enough. But the country is enormous. It all takes time. We can't work miracles.'

'And what about education?' I pressed her.

'Oh, we try to teach those ignorant Indians as much as possible. But what's the use of building schools if the children can't get to them? Distances are vast and, as there are no roads, children couldn't get to school even if we had schools. Roads must come first.'

'I see,' I murmured. 'First you have to build roads, which you don't do because the country is too big. As soon as these roads which you aren't going to build are ready, you start building schools? Do I understand you correctly?'

'Certainly not. That's not what I said. Besides, you see what happens if we do educate them. University students are the worst rabble-rousers. Better keep them ignorant.'

Other people butted in now. One gentleman, the proud owner of vast estates and a handlebar moustache, informed me with more pain that anger in his voice:

'You don't know these people. They really are no good. They don't like working. If they have had enough to eat for two or three days, they just walk out on you. You didn't know *that*, did you?'

I did not. But I failed to find strong words to express my indignation at the thought of those lazy Indians who do not cherish the idea of sweating in the fields for a penny a day, just for the hell of it. My original informant sighed again:

'The trouble is that the gap between rich and poor has grown too wide in this country. There is nothing one can do about it.'

Then, after a moment's pause:

'Except charity.'

As a further afterthought:

'Educated Indians are even worse than the uneducated ones. Where is their gratitude if we have them educated? They become Fidelists. Or Communists. They wouldn't listen to their teachers or even to their priests any more.'

The landowner with the handlebar moustache drew me aside and told me confidentially that the Indian was really a good-for-nothing, a liar, a thief; and, on top of it all, dirty.

It is true, of course, that on sixpence a day, if that, some Indians cannot afford a bathroom or even a cake of soap, and it is also true that some of them are tempted to steal a banana or a hammer. (Each layer of society has its own crime; the Indians are never guilty of income-tax evasion.)

On the whole, the Peruvian Indians are intelligent, and the world's gentlest and most submissive people. Some of them become 'rich'. No one knows what a 'rich' Indian really has in the way of money because he

never goes near a bank and, as a rule, never buys anything to show off his riches. Some Indians become doctors; this happens when a number of villages pool their miserable resources and send a bright lad to the university. When he is qualified and has seen something of the world, he has to return to his native village and spend the rest of his life in a small Quechua community. Some of them, but very few indeed, stand up for themselves and make some progress: they may become foremen and be paid a little better than their fellows. I heard of one Indian – the owner of an establishment which might be described, with some slight overstatement, as a café – who got hold of a discarded book of Spanish children's stories. Whenever he found a literate customer in his café – in other words not very often – he asked him to read aloud a tale or two. Gradually he learned the stories by heart, and eventually managed to recognize the words and decipher the letters. He became an avid reader and a self-educated person. Such perseverance and intelligence, however, are as rare as they are remarkable. Most Indians are born, work for a penny (plus or minus) a day, chew *coca*, multiply and die – and when discussed at champagne parties by their employers are summarily dismissed as 'no good' because they do not really *like* their work.

This state of affairs creates tension in Peru. Progressive intellectuals – these curses of all societies – are embittered, and even the anti-Communists speak louder and louder of revolution as the only solution. The rich, when talking to a visitor like myself, shrug their shoulders and tell us that the gap between rich and poor has grown too wide; in this, by the way, everyone agrees with them. Rich ladies recount their tremendous work of charity and blame the Indians. But among them-

selves, they are afraid. I have never seen a society quite so frightened. Behind and above the clinking of glasses you can hear the chattering of teeth.

But they have no real reason for being so deeply afraid, unless it is their conscience which frightens them. The Indians are not only the most miserable but, as I have already said, also the most submissive of all peoples. Early massacres taught them a few memorable lessons; two tyrannies – the benevolent tyranny of the Incas and the malevolent tyranny of the Spaniards – broke their spirit; and the constant chewing of *coca* saps their remaining energy. These people are very much unlike the Mexicans: they are not revolutionaries; their strength is exhausted, their stamina gone. The Peruvian Indian has learnt that life is nothing but suffering –what else could it be? *Coca* is its only blessing. He knows that sixpence a day is, after all, twice as much as threepence, and also that some of those good ladies are wonderfully charitable.

DECLINE AND FALL

Driving towards Pachacamac, the ancient ruined city of the Incas, I was fully prepared to see miracles. They were not long delayed. I saw what appeared to be men skiing. And these men on closer examination appeared to be *Japanese*. There was, of course, no snow anywhere. I rubbed my eyes, but the Japanese gentlemen, definitely and unmistakably, went on skiing. I turned to my companion, a Norwegian lady:

'Do you . . .' I asked her timidly, '. . . well, do you see some men skiing, or am I dreaming?'

'Yes,' she nodded. 'Over there.'

She was not surprised at all.

'Are they Japanese?'

'They seem to be,' she replied, still quite casually.

'But there is no snow, is there?' I asked, with noticeable anxiety in my voice.

'Snow? Here? She looked at me anxiously. 'No. There's no snow here. They're skiing on sand.'

I made an entry in my notebook: 'The Japanese are a people who go to Peru and ski on the sand in summertime.'

'It's mostly Germans who do it,' the Norwegian lady told me. So I opened my notebook and added:

'They learned this habit from the Germans.'

Having completed my ethnographical research for the moment, I could give my full attention to history. To the Incas, to be precise. In those parts you take a spade and start digging, at random, almost anywhere; and you may be sure of unearthing some minor Inca treasure or at least some curious junk which may pass as such. The brownish-yellow walls and crumbling stairs in Pachacamac – or Cuzco or Machupichu – take you back five or six hundred years, if not to one of the great civilizations, certainly to one of the most splendid barbarisms that ever graced this earth. You recall as much as you know of their history and your heart goes out to the Incas. Theirs is the most shattering, most heart-breaking, hard-luck story. And if history ever produced a fable with a moral – in fact, with several morals – surely, Inca history is it.

Theirs was an organized society, a vast empire under a benevolent tyrant, the Inca. This empire lasted from the eleventh century to the sixteenth. Its structure was based on the *ayllu*, the village community. The indi-

Pizarro

vidual was nothing; the *ayllu* was everything and the individual's submission to it was absolute. The Incas conquered enormous territories and introduced their system everywhere. Families were grouped in units of 10, 100, 1000, and 40,000. Each unit had its leader, responsible to the group above, and on the top of the political pyramid stood the Inca, or Sapa Inca. The Incas achieved great skill in weaving textiles, in building, in producing metal and ceramics; they built magnificent roads, which is more than can be said of the British Empire of the twentieth century; they had domesticated the llama, the alpaca, and the dog; they grew maize and potatoes and made Quechua the universal language of the Empire. Their religion turned on worship of the Sun; and the Sun's regent on Earth was – Need I say it? – the Sapa Inca. When Pachacutec, the greatest of their rulers, died in 1448, the Inca Empire comprised Peru, northern Argentina, half of Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador, yet it was administered with great skill and firmness from the centre. People were not allowed to move from one community to another or change their jobs; they could keep only one-third of their earnings (which is more than modern surtax-payers can do in Britain). One-third of an Inca subject's earnings had to be saved and one-third went to the Sapa Inca. In return for this loss of personal liberty, the subject of the Empire enjoyed well-being and a great deal of personal security, a rare blessing in those days.

And now I come to the lessons and morals of the Inca story. Timing and good luck play a greater part in our lives than we care to admit or even realize; and the vastest of empires are no exceptions to this rule. For half a millennium, the Inca Empire lasted strong and united; for only a very brief period – five minutes of

history – was it rent by dissension and strife: and it was in precisely those historical five minutes that Pizarro swooped upon it. He conquered and destroyed the Inca Empire with a force of three ships, a hundred and eighty men and twenty-seven horses. Had he come six months earlier or six months later, his derisory band of adventurers would have been pushed back into the sea. (*What*? and *why*? are important questions in our lives; but it is the question *when*? which decides our destiny.)

The second moral is this: if you want to become a national hero, there is no need for you to be an attractive and virtuous character, rather a tiresome requirement for many. You may, if you choose, be a rotter. Pizarro, to my mind, is one of the most repulsive characters in the whole of human history. He arrived on the scene at a unique period, in 1532, when the Inca Empire was ruled by two rival Incas: by Huascar in Quito and by his half-brother, Atahualpa, in the traditional and ancient capital, Cuzco. Pizarro managed to get hold of Atahualpa and promised him his freedom if he filled a room with gold. Atahaulpa did fill the room with gold, whereupon Pizarro butchered him – hardly a gentlemanly thing to do. Then the conqueror moved on to Cuzco where he was hailed by Huascar as a liberator and the stern and just judge of the traitor, Atahualpa. Before long, Huascar came to know better, but it was too late: he, too, was destroyed and his capital sacked. Pizarro's subsequent activities were worthy of these beginnings: the destruction of the Inca Empire is one of the most gruesome chapters in history, ranking with the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the massacre of the Jews.

Yet – and this is another puzzle – Pizarro is remem-

bered with pride and devotion; revered as a hero and a conqueror and not reviled, even if we make all due allowance for the times he lived in, as the double-crossing butcher and adventurer he really was. His body is buried in the Cathedral of Lima. And, of course, the adulation of the Spaniards in Peru, is a similar riddle. They did not behave too well; they were cruel oppressors for centuries and had to be kicked out of the country after a war of liberation. Yet they are revered, respected, and imitated. Peru is proud of her Spanish past and Spanish ancestors are in great demand and cost a great deal of money.

The Spaniards arrived in South America without their women and consequently their contact with the population was close and intimate from the outset. They may have been cruel and rapacious, but they were human. They were boastful and proud but they were not aloof. Human nature being what it is, a friendly kick is always preferred to cool and humane fairness. This is a truth which makes such an ass of Karl Marx in this field. People are governed by considerations of prestige, pride, self-expression, power, social status, snobbery, conceit, and personal superiority first and a cool, rational appraisal of economic interests last. Oppressive and predatory Spain is still revered in South America because the Spaniards married native women, acknowledged their offspring and forced their religion on the conquered – thus implying that they, too, had souls. The prestige of Spain still stands high in Peru, while the Prestige of the Americans was never so low in Europe as during the generous era of Marshall aid. Goodness doesn't pay; and crime always reaps its reward.

Peru is also proud of her Inca history. Exploitation

of the Inca past is perhaps not as popular as exploitation of the Indian present, but it is certainly a fruitful line of business. Inca rugs manufactured in Manchester are not hard to find; Inca pottery made in Frankfurt is quite common; some factories, owned by Central Europeans, work two shifts a day producing Ancient Inca treasures for export only.

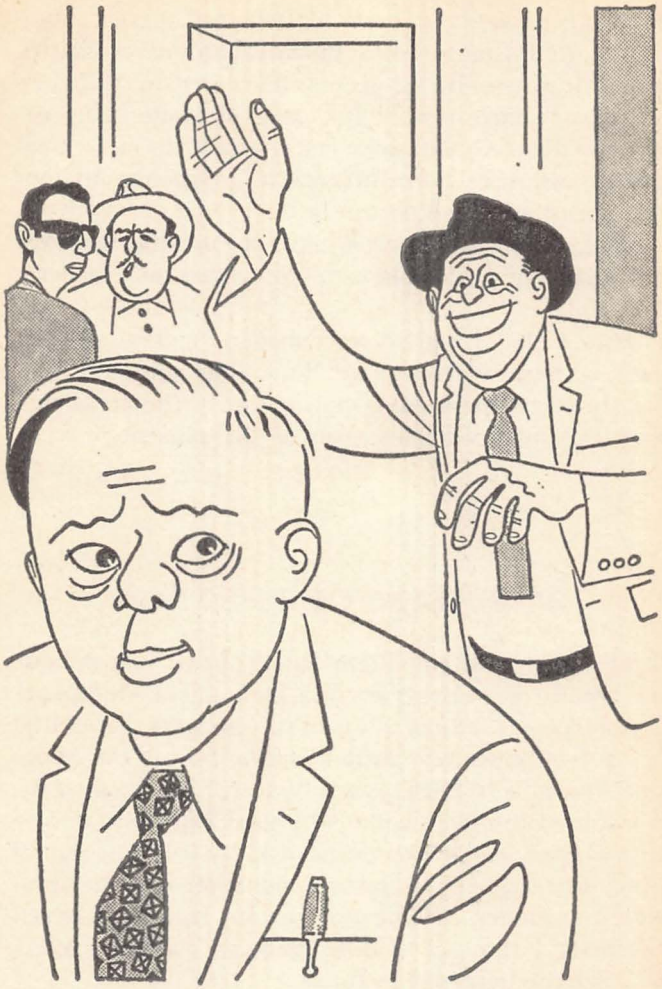
My heart sank deepest when I found that the local competitor of Coca Cola is called, in this land of Peru, *Inca Cola.*

'Inca Cola,' I sighed and shed a symbolical tear. And, at last, I understood how that splendid barbarism of the past shook hands, across the centuries, with the splendid barbarism of the present.

THE HEIRS OF THE INCA

Strolling around the Plaza San Martin, just outside my hotel, I kept thinking of a book of my childhood, *The Heirs of the Inca.* I was in the mistaken belief that it was by Cooper, the author of *The Last of the Mohicans,* but it isn't. Perhaps it is by Karl May; in any case, it is one of the most famous Central European adventure stories, and I was enthralled by it at the age of nine. The title kept haunting me; whenever the Incas were mentioned, whenever I saw an Inca Cola advertisement, I thought of *The Heirs of the Inca.* Well, who are the heirs of the Inca?

I was contemplating this utterly futile but very poetic question when a voice from behind me asked in Hungarian:



A voice from the past

'What are the girls like in this town?'

'Fair,' I replied without turning and, indeed, without turning a hair.

I have no memory for faces. As some people are colour-blind, I am face-blind. I can scarcely recognize anybody at all, even the heroine of a film, should she reappear wearing a different hat from the one she was wearing before. But I – a very unmusical person – have an almost incredible memory for voices. As soon as people open their mouths, I am saved. Had the speaker met me face to face, I should have had no idea who he was; but hearing his voice from behind me, I recognized him at once as a Hungarian politician, one of the promising men of the post-war era who had, however, to escape from the country in 1947. Still without turning, I asked him as casually as I could manage:

'When did you get here?'

We greeted each other with pleasure, and he introduced me to a gentleman who stood by his side. Like almost everybody else, he, too, was a Hungarian.* We chatted there for a few minutes. I asked my new acquaintance what he was doing for a living. Before he could answer, the whole impressive Plaza was suddenly lit up by a huge neon sign that glared into our eyes, advertising in red, green, and yellow: FLOTTA MERCANTILE GRANCOLOMBIANA.

'That's me,' said the man modestly.

'What?' I asked. 'Flotta Mercantile Grancolombiana?'

'Yes,' he nodded even more modestly. 'That's me.'

He added:

* For a thorough scientific analysis of this thesis see *How to be Inimitable* by George Mikes, (André Deutsch, 1960). Available in the Bodleian.

'I have a few ships, you see.'

I asked him why he advertised in this way. Surely, I thought, a shipping line did not need this type of advertising.

'You're wrong,' he replied. 'It does need it. But that's not the point. The neon king of Peru is a Hungarian. From my own village. Well, I must do something for the boys from my village, mustn't I?'

I nodded. It did not really surprise me. The Hungarians have conquered yet another Empire. 'Flotta Mercantile Grancolombiana,' I thought. Then I added silently: 'My foot.' The neon king of Peru. The heirs of the Inca, indeed . . .

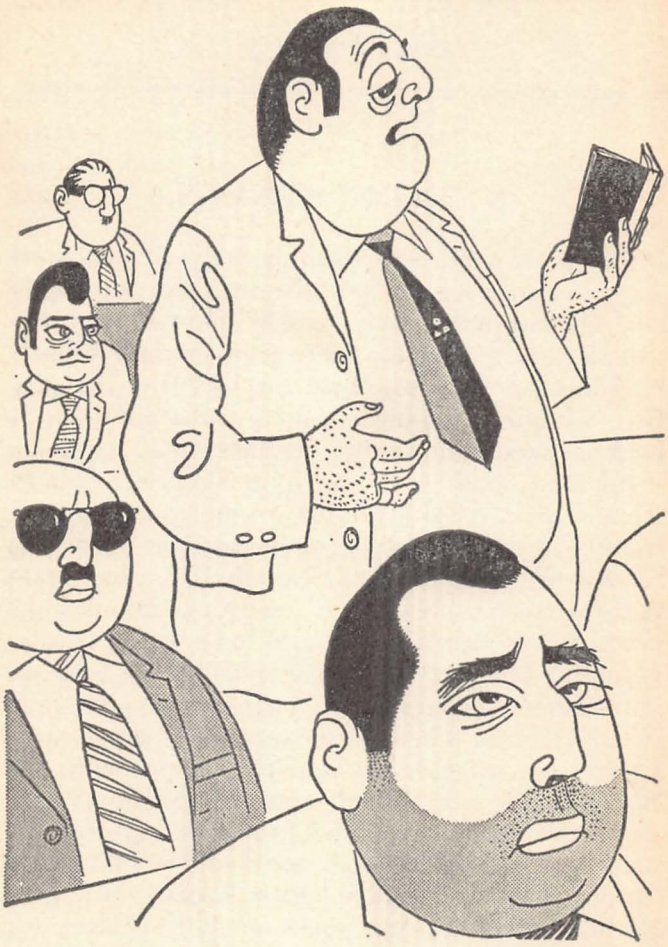
COLOMBIA

A SEAT IN HEAVEN

BOGOTA, the capital of Colombia, is the city where all the visitors gasp for air. Not because they are overcome by the beauty of the place – which is pleasant enough – or because they behold so many surprising and wonderful things, but simply because they badly need oxygen. Bogota is one of the highest cities in the world and it boasts of having the world's highest railway station.

All these South American countries are unique in *some respect.* Colombia, for example, is the only country in the hemisphere with coastlines upon both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. The two Oceans are separated by the Central American isthmus, more precisely by Panama, which used to be part of Greater Colombia but declared herself independent with the United States, to put it mildy, a benevolent spectator in the background. The United States always supports the smaller nations' glorious fight for independence and liberty; besides she wanted to build the Panama Canal.

The Colombians are one of the most cultured and artistic peoples of South America. I was told before reaching Bogota that Members of Parliament were in the habit of reading their poems aloud in open sessions; I was warned that it would be futile trying to discuss politics, revolutions, economics, and Indians because a true Colombian was only interested in Proust, Eliot, Ezra Pound, and abstract paintings. I re-read the *Waste*



'ail to dee bligh spireet . . .'

Land and the *Cantos* in the plane between Lima and Bogota, only to find that one can get on reasonably well without them. Colombia has, however, one rather rare commodity in those parts: a middle class. In fact, she has had several middle classes in succession, liquidated in turn by the Spaniards and certain changes in fortune. One man, a member of one of the richest and most distinguished families of the country, told me that his father had been a penniless shepherd and something of a highway robber. He was not ashamed of this; nor did he show the slightest sign of defiance or inverted snobbery. He was quite matter-of-fact about it. Dad was a shepherd and a thief, and that was that. The son is an important gentleman with exquisite manners and a vast fortune. And that is an important point. Peru (as we have seen) is ruled by a small, frightened and exclusive ruling class; Colombia, too, is ruled by a narrow class, but admission to the ruling set – the establishment, as modern English usage might put it – is open to, or at least, possible for the able, the fortunate, and the ruthless. All this gives the impression of a kind of democracy. After all, every country in the world (including the Soviet Union and China) is ruled by its rulers. The one important question is whether membership of that circle is determined by birth alone or is open to talent – talent in oratory, talent in certain scientific or artistic fields, talent in handling a gun.

You do not need to spend a long time in Colombia to notice a great difference between Peruvian and Colombian Indians. The Colombian Indian lacks the sadness and dignity of his Peruvian cousin, he is less subdued and quite able to kick back if he wants to. By the way, the word *Indian* or *Indio* is a term of grave

abuse here. An Indian mother, when angered beyond endurance by little Pablo's pranks will call him 'you bloody little Indian'. A Swede, six-foot tall, blue-eyed, and with straw-coloured hair, showed me his identity card. While every *mestizo* is called white he, lest he should regard himself better than the rest, was described as *brownish.*

Colombia is also a modern land, a true and worthy epitome of the Einstein age, in that space and time there stand in a most curious relationship to each other. There are no seasons in Colombia in the accepted sense of the word; the weather hardly changes throughout the year. Europeans staying in Bogota slowly lose their sense of time, or, rather, their sense of date as a result of this lack of seasons and live in a strange, timeless, dateless world. Nevertheless, you may encounter different seasons and climates, not by moving ahead in time but by moving downwards towards sea level. In Bogota, on top of the plateau, you live in a constant equivalent of our European spring, though it is perhaps a little too cloudy for most tastes; descend a few hundred feet and you reach coffee, cocoa, banana, and cotton plantations; descend beyond this and you soon reach tropical hell.

The Colombians, cultured and poetic as they are, are not exactly the incarnation of efficiency and thoroughness in the German sense. Take that railway station, for example, reputed to be the highest in the world. It, or any other railway station, is of limited importance only, because the South Americans stepped from the cart right into the aeroplane without the railway doing more than scratching the surface of their soil. And even the scratching was not always a simple matter. Here in Colombia they began on a railway

line between Bogota and Girardot, on the Upper Magdalena, starting from both termini and the two sections were to meet in the middle. Do not jump to the wrong conclusion that they never met. They did. The only trouble was that when they did meet, the two lines were found to be of different gauges, which caused a certain amount of difficulty.

'We Colombians are not very efficient,' a Colombian artist told me. 'On one occasion it took our Parliament thirty-eight days to elect a Paymaster-General. I know this is one of the most rewarding offices, yet thirty-eight days is overdoing it a bit. Or take the priest in my village. He was very poor and needed some money for his church no doubt – not for himself – so he started selling seats in Heaven. He wasn't a greedy man, and a good seat, quite close to God, cost only five *pesos* (about 5s.) which, you must agree, is dirt cheap for eternal bliss. A back seat costs only one *peso* and, for fifty *centavos* (about 6d.) you could get standing room.'

'A good idea,' I nodded appreciatively.

'The whole village bought seats,' my friend continued. 'Next Sunday, however, the Church was empty. Going to Mass had become quite superfluous. a sheer waste of time, as everyone's happiness in the next world was safely insured. They even had receipts to show St Peter.' He went on:

'What could the priest do? He had to give them their money back.'

'Poor man,' I remarked sympathetically.

'Poor indeed. Well, as you see, we have yet to master the methods of modern business and industry.' As an afterthought:

'Unlike our North American brethren. Look at them. Look at their advertisements, in all their glossy

magazines. They, too, promise you seats in Heaven, if you buy their products. But *they* never return your money.'

THE PRESIDENT'S CELL

Whatever their weaknesses, the Colombians certainly are accomplished masters of one South American industry: revolutions. Probably not more and not less so than their neighbours; but Colombia was as convenient a spot to study this fascinating and flourishing industry as any other. Why do the South Americans have more revolutions *per capita* than any other part of the world? What does revolution mean? What do revolutions achieve?

The pattern is simple. The Army gets bored by a system. The man on the top, in order to preserve his power, resorts to rough-and-ready methods and becomes a dictator. The Army gets even more fed up, officers conspire, form a junta, overthrow the dictator and replace him by the junta itself. One strong man will sooner or later emerge as predominant. The Army soon gets fed up with the new man who, to preserve his power, resorts to rough-and-ready methods and becomes a dictator. The army loses its last vestige of patience, officers conspire, form a junta . . . and so on and so on, almost indefiniteely, *da capo sin al fine.*

The pattern is universal, with slight variations. Sometimes, for example, the Army's traditional rival, the Navy, has its part to play.

The last dictator of Colombia, Rojis Pinilla, sat firmly in the saddle until, at the end of the fifties, the Army, the Church, the university students, and a

Towards a free democracy

coalition of political parties organized a general strike. People stopped working but went on receiving their wages. Whereupon Pinilla ordered the banks not to pay the workers. The banks heroically refused however and went on paying. It is rare to find banks in the vanguard of revolutionary movements, but odd things happen in these parts. On the third day of the strike, thousands of cars drove up to the presidential palace. They created a traffic jam to end all traffic jams and started to hoot. Not one machine-gun was fired, but hooters, after all, can make a more intolerable din. On they went, relentlessly; they hooted rhythmically for hours and hours on end. Pinilla sent his aide-de-camp to find out if the demonstration was for or against him. (In other words: was it a Good Thing or a Bad Thing.) The aide-de-camp returned presently:

'Sorry, sir,' he reported. *'Against.'*

Pinilla decided to call out his troops and order them to fire on the motorized crowds, but his wife told him:

'Chuck it, Rojas. Let's call it a day and get out.'

They chucked it, called it a day and got out. But – and this is an amazing trait in the psychology of all dictators – they always delude themselves into believing that they are loved and admired and that their rule is based on popular support as well as on bayonets. Pinilla was no exception and returned to Colombia, fondly expecting the population (which had kicked him out a short while before) to rise in his favour and put him back on his throne. He was quietly arrested and locked up; he has been kept under house arrest ever since and is, by now, almost forgotten.

Recent Colombian, and South American, history is full of such events. I think, however, the first prize for oddity goes to Señor Hernando Forero Gomez, Head

of the Military Police of Bogota: a tiny and insignificant organization which never played any part in politics. Señor Gomez decided that the time had come for the Military Police to play a part and, working completely on his own, without any fellow-conspirators apart from his own small group – he decided to kidnap all the members of the military junta in power.

A few generals were quietly and unostentatiously kidnapped in the street by military policemen. Others were arrested in there homes, mostly in bed and taken to prison in pyjamas and slippers. (Such a garb, of course, destroys a man's authority and dignity more decisively than does arrest itself.) One general's batman tried to prevent the intruders and a shot was fired. The general took this as a warning, got out of bed and started to dress hastily; hearing the approaching steps, he rushed out to the garden and tried to scale the wall: unfortunately he had forgotten his trousers. In this state he was caught and taken to prison. One or two others were tricked into captivity by very simple means: Gomez rang them up in the middle of the night and asked them to come immediately to help quell a revolt. One general, actually the last of the bunch, climbed into Gomez's truck in the belief that he was on his way to fight insurgents. He noticed, soon enough, that something was very wrong but it was too late; the truck started off at a great speed: at such a speed, in fact, that it was stopped by the ordinary police for speeding in a built-up area. There was some argument between the military and the civil police and in the ensuing confusion the general managed to escape. He reached the presidential palace and raised the alarm. (According to another version, an admiral raised the alarm, having been warned by a friend who had seen,

opposite his house, a general being arrested and taken away.) Be that as it may, Gomez very nearly got away with it and such a preposterous drama, a musical comedy act of such staggering aplomb, might have made him dictator of Colombia.

There was a time when revolutions were so frequent in Peru that special cells were reserved for deposed presidents.

All this, however, fails to answer the question: what does it all mean? It was a gentleman holding high office who explained it to me:

'In other countries revolution means change; in South America it means 'business as usual'. Revolution is the normal state of affairs. In other countries revolution means a new order; here it simply means a new disorder. People here want *change* – that's why all true radicals are against revolutions. A change of ruler does not mean real change. Maybe, the whole confusion, as is so often the case, is due to a misuse of words: what we call revolutions here ought to be called military putsches – and disgruntled generals are never true revolutionaries. Change in South America is always achieved, if at all, very slowly; you may say: *in spite* of revolutions and never as a result of them. The absence of revolution for a long time may bring some change; frequent periodical revolutions secure the *status quo*. That's why Castro's performance is so significant; his friends and foes have to realize that *change* and *revolution* are, after all, not mutually exclusive terms. There have been several hundred revolutions in South America in the last hundred years; nevertheless I don't hesitate to state: what South America needs is a revolution.'

Perhaps my friend spoke too soon. A few days later,

I was being driven to the airport by some English friends. As we approached the University, we ran into a large and uproarious mob of students, so we chose another route. It was only a fortnight later that I learnt by letter that what we had seen and heard was the beginning of a two-day demonstration which, in the end, ousted my distinguished Colombian informant from office.

The mood in Colombia, however, is getting less and less revolutionary. The new democracy seems to be working fairly well. And also, the wave of world prosperity has, however slowly, reached these parts, too. (Slowly, because while the price of industrial products is rising all over the world, the prices of raw materials often drop and still more often fluctuate, thus hitting these countries hard.) Nevertheless, Colombia, too, is more prosperous today than it was even a short while ago. Some people view this with regret:

'A bad American influence is spreading,' a Colombian acquaintance told me. 'As prosperity increases, people are becoming ostentatious. They buy refrigerators and, particularly in the provinces, keep them in the lounge. Or they go to the doctor. In some circles, getting an injection is rather like having a Cadillac in North America. Poor people, if they have any self-respect, save up to have an injection – it does not matter what kind. And when they can, at last, afford one, they are certain to have it at the open window, at rush hour.'

He shrugged his shoulders:

'It doesn't really matter. There are more and more people getting injections at more and more windows. Which shows, doesn't it, that we, too, are becoming an affluent society.'

VENEZUELA

NOUVEAU RICHE

THE early Spanish navigators looked at the stilts supporting the Indian dwellings at Maracaibo and were reminded, no doubt through an extremely free association of ideas, of Venice. So they called the land where they found themselves Venezuela – Little Venice. The name was most inappropriate then and has become of late even more so. I suggest that the country be renamed Yankuela, or whatever the right form may be for Little Yankee-land.

Even before passing through the hands of the immigration authorities, you will notice that you have left the lands of English influence and Hispano-British manners (a curious but endearing *mestizo* of behaviour) behind and reached another world. A number of shirt-sleeved officials sit at shining, brand-new typewriters, typing out visitors' identity slips, and asking dozens of silly and pointless questions with the pompous pseudo-superiority of the American petty official – a particularly unlikeable specimen of an otherwise quite likeable race. They are the underdogs who hate the luckier passengers and if they can inconvenience them or be a little rude to them – that is their finest hour; if they succeed in keeping them waiting any length of time, they enjoy their supper better and their digestion is improved.

At last, you drive in (or up, as the airport is at sea

'The maiden name of your grandmother, please?'

level) to Caracas. The super-highways, the road-toll system, the urban motorways, the few but proud sky-scrapers and the loud offensive but persuasive advertisements, all give you the impression that you have arrived in a provincial United States city. Why, they even have a large baseball arena. Venezuela is the only South American country where baseball is played and followed with general enthusiasm.

Many people have commented upon the similarity, not to say uniformity, of the charming young ladies of the United States. Someone has remarked that you say good-bye to a girl at New York airport, fly three thousand miles westward and the same girl – same hair style, same make-up, same smile – will greet you at Los Angeles airport. In Yankified South America it is exactly the same with hotels. In Bogota I stayed in the Tequendama, in Caracas in the Tamanaco – two hotels built and owned by the same company. The lay-out of the hotels is similar and their rooms absolutely identical, to such an extent that when I left a pair of pyjamas in a chest of drawers in Bogota and found them in the identical room and identical drawer of an identical chest of drawers in Caracas, I was not even surprised. Breakfast menus are absolutely identical and I found it quite natural when a somewhat outlandish breakfast, which I ordered but could not wait for in Bogota, was served to me in Caracas.

The Americans love Venezuela because they love oil. Both the Americans and the Venezuelans act as if they were not aware of this. The Americans try to show a genuine interest in Venezuela's welfare; and the Venezuelans naturally resent American oil-imperialism on the one hand and try to ignore it on the other. There are two, and only two industries which interest

the North Americans in connexion with South America: one is oil, the other is Russian penetration. Castro is the hero of Latin America, not because of his ideas or because of his attractive personality but because he has pushed Latin America right into the forefront of United States interest. Mr Krushchev is the new Colombus, responsible for the second discovery of the sub continent. (Castro's other great merit, in the eyes of the South Americans, is the flouting of the Monroe doctrine. For North Americans this doctrine may genuinely mean the defence of the Western Hemisphere; for South Americans it is just another name for North American imperialism.)

The story of Venezuela is the story of oil. Until 1917 (when one of the world's largest oilfields was discovered there) Maracaibo was a poor town in a poverty-stricken district, dependent on fishing and the carriage of coffee across the lake from the Sierra. It had 18,000 inhabitants; today it is a modern boom-town with a population rapidly approaching the half million mark. Twenty-five years ago, Caracas itself was the malaria-infested, backward capital of the least important state in South America where more people died of the dreaded disease than were born. Today Caracas is a bustling, impressive, super-modern and, to my mind, beautiful city of 1,200,000 people; malaria is as forgotten as are the narrow streets with their ugly colonial houses. For a long time Caracas was the fastest growing city in the world until its place was taken by Brazil's São Paulo.

Oil made Venezuela so prosperous that the government has never quite known how to spend its money. The average per capita annual income here is £280, the highest in Latin America. But *average* income

means little in these parts: four million of the country's six and a half million people (i.e. 61·5 per cent) still exist on a bare subsistence level and are not consumers at all. Near the Brazilian frontier, the Motilon Indians still shoot poisoned arrows at anyone who dares to approach them and it was in 1960 that human civilization for the first time succeeded in establishing some sort of contact with them. But at the other end of the financial and social spectrum, we find a capital city where – at least until recently – millionaires were as common as beggars are in some less fortunate lands; a capital where money was abundant and as easy to get at as oil: you had only to bend down for it if you knew where and how to bend.

Oil meant a boom in the building industry and a building boom means general prosperity. Vast fortunes were made literally overnight. People, without a penny in their pocket, 'bought up' large estates outside the capital and sold them twenty-fours hours later for double the price. All they had to do was to pocket the profits, which they did most efficiently. I met a man – an out-of-work insurance agent in the early days – who made one million *bolivars* (about £100,000) between noon and 3 pm. When I met him, he was an out-of-work insurance agent once again who tried to borrow ten *bolivars* from me and, alas, succeeded. (*Bolivar,* by the way, is not only the name of Caracas' most illustrious son, but also, with a small 'b', the name of the Venezuelan unit of currency. A good idea, I thought. Could we not introduce the *churchill* and with it the decimal currency? One *churchill* could be made equivalent to ten *macmillans.*)

Returning to Caracas: in those days, letterhead-companies flourished; credit was offered by the big

banks to all and sundry; penniless speculators found no difficulty in financing vast and complex building projects. Indeed, in those days, a certain type of person found it almost impossible not to become the head of a huge financial empire in Caracas.

In those golden days, some freak fortunes were made. There was the man who was appointed main Venezuelan representative of an American refrigerator factory. The appointment seemed meaningless be cause, at the time it was made, not one single American refrigerator was being sold in Venezuela. But the boom started and the American company concluded an agreement involving tremendous deals with Caracas; all this without the help, indeed, without the knowledge of the local agent. The agent was never properly informed; he was simply sent a cheque for £300,000. Little wonder he was deeply hurt.

This was regarded as a strange story fifteen years ago. Much stranger stories became commonplace a few years later. By that time, prosperity and speculation were running amok. New palaces, villas, whole new settlements grew out of the earth overnight. A square yard of land in the middle of Caracas cost more than in the heart of Manhattan. I heard of a man, who, on his fiftieth wedding anniversary, handed out million-pound cheques to his children – to all five of them.

Another man bought himself a jet plane for his private use. As it had to be the best furnished jet plane in the world, he insisted on installing a lavatory with a normal flushing system and a vast tank sufficient for a thousand flushes per journey. (Rather generous, I thought.) He had to remove the tank before the plane could be licensed. Apparently, no flushing lavatories

are tolerated above five thousand feet, let alone in outer space.

Another gentleman made a packet on real estate deals and bought three Cadillacs the next day. His daughter, who used to go to school by the school bus, was now driven by a uniformed chauffeur. But the little girl was rather unhappy and lonely without her friends and kept complaining to her father. In the end he relented. She did not have to use the Cadillacs any more: her father bought her a school bus which, driven by his liveried chauffeur, took his daughter and all the other children to school.

People bought everything, except libraries and pictures. In books they were not interested; and pictures they acquired in other ways. It is a revered Venezuelan tradition of long standing, that during revolutions the mob goes looting. The rich, in the meantime, assemble in their huge cars in front of the beleaguered palaces and buy up the loot from the enterprising poor. Picassos and Renoirs can be bought for £15–£20 on such occasions.

People go around one another's palaces admiring a Fra Angelica here and a Matisse there. Sometimes they are overheard murmuring to themselves:

'Well, at the next revolution . . . '

This was the state of affairs and the atmosphere in a city – the most fantastic boom-town, the most ludicrous *nouveau riche* capital of the world. People were heard to remark of one another, in all contemptuous seriousness:

'That man has no sense of shame. He drives around in a last year's Cadillac.'

THE END OF THE STORY

Oil production in Venezuela started in 1935. Today the country is the world's largest exporter of oil and its second largest producer.

The largest oil companies in Venezuela are daughter companies of American, British and other foreign firms and are on their best behaviour.

They do their utmost to be as inconspicuous as it is possible for multi-millionaire companies with thousands of employees to be. About fifty thousand people are directly employed by the oil companies and many more earn a living from them indirectly. The companies pay high salaries and wages, allow long holidays with pay and are, generally speaking, very good employers. They build houses, schools, hospitals, clinics, churches and social clubs – yet, at the same time, they often seem to be apologising for their very existence. 'Oil colonialism', however unjustly used, is as inflammable a word as is the product itself. So the government frowns upon the companies and merely tolerates them because nowadays no self-respecting, nationalist government can do otherwise. The government and the companies are engaged in a permanent but silent war about royalties and revenues. The government tries to represent these clashes as a fierce battle for the national interest; the oil companies as cosy chats between friends.

Oil was, of course, the foundation of Venezuelan prosperity. The boom produced two interesting phenomena.

(1) People have come to realize the value of time – a very unusual thing in South America. Many people start work at seven a.m. and if a client rings you up at seven-thirty in the morning, he will not dream of apologising.

(2) Prices have gone soaring and today Venezuela is the most expensive country in the world (the Philippine Islands being the runners-up).

A taxi in Bogota takes you a very long way – two or three miles – for a shilling. In Caracas, the minimum price – or once round the block – is six shillings; a sandwich costs five shillings; a mediocre dinner for two is £5; and a friend who met me at the airport told me that if I gave five shillings to the boy who carried my single light suitcase a distance of ten yards it might be just enough. Do not sneeze in Caracas: a sneeze will cost you three shillings and sixpence; and each cough is one shilling and ninepence. On the other hand, a shorthand typist will not think herself overpaid with a salary of £1,800 a year.

This curious state of affairs is due to the interplay of various factors. First, the usual cause of all inflations: as a result of the boom, too much money was chasing too few goods. Secondly, food has always been very expensive in Venezuela because agricultural production is, for a number of reasons, extremely difficult. A large number of the relatively few peasants left their fields and sought employment on the oilfields where they could get much more money for much less work. As a result of this constant decrease in the number of pro-agricultural workers, by the tenth year of the boom practically all food-stuffs – including potatoes – had to be imported. Thirdly, a sudden, completely unexpected and, to some extent, incredible boom always

creates insatiable greed in many. You are filled with panic seeing your neighbour – yesterday a down-at-heel pedlar – growing rich while you lag behind. People lose all sense of proportion and greed, too, helps to push prices up. In a shop window I saw excellent American shirts priced at thirty *bolivars* (about £3) side by side with much inferior home products at thirty-five *bolivars*.

In spite of all this, an English friend told me:

'Life is twice as expensive here as at home. But I make three times as much as I would in England – so I am still better off.'

The boom performed miracles; public and private building proceeded at breath-taking pace; the face of Caracas changed almost every year; in some circles, if a lady was seen wearing the same diamond tiara twice, her husband was called a 'Portuguese', a reference to the poorest layer of the population (which is also the most industrious and most decent layer, but that point was not intended to be made). Then two things happened which meant an end, at least a temporary end, of the story: prices went on rising but the boom was over.

Venezuela's dictator, Jimenez, fell and President Betancourt – a man of vision and one of the few real statesmen South America has produced – took over. He was more interested in education than in speculation and the poor were nearer to his heart than the real estate swindlers. Concurrently with Betancourt's rise to power, a world-wide slump in oil started, partly because of an American slump and partly because of over-production. The companies asked the government to accept a lower rate of oil royalties (implying that it was up to the government to help to end the recession);

but the government refused, implying that the oil companies were trying to take advantage of Venezuela's plight and deprive her of her due. None of this was ever put into words and negotiations were carried on with the utmost courtesy, each side sympathising with the other's point of view and neither yielding an inch.

The dictator's fall, coupled with the oil slump, put an end to the magnificent edifice of the boom-town: it did not collapse but it shook dreadfully.

Credit, or rather the lack of it, was the main trouble. Bank managers who had thrown money after you one day, became extremely cagey the day after. Companies with no capital – and few companies had any capital – and speculators were ruined; the average number of bankruptcies was fifty a day. People who had conducted complex building operations involving millions of pounds, were hard put to it to borrow twenty quid for a day or two. Luxurious villas stopped mushrooming on the hills around Caracas; a large number of people moved from palaces to modest flats or to even more modest cells. A painful fact was forcefully brought home to many: that they had been bankrupt even when they thought themselves millionaires. There was no panic; there was no general disaster in the air. But there was a strong brake on expansion and an admonishing finger warned people that everything that has a beginning must also have an end. And that went for booms, too.

Foreign, mostly American, capital loved Jimenez, the dictator, and regarded Betancourt as a dark horse, an unknown quantity, a dangerous liberal. Under Jimenez, the rich grew richer, speculators became millionaires and building became a national mania. As the slump, which was due, as I have already explained,

largely to external factors, came *after* Betancourt took over, it seemed obvious to many that it had been caused by him. The moral was easy to see for a large number of people: dictatorship is a blessing, democracy a curse. Jimenez, the little tyrant, was a benefactor while the thoughtful, decent and dedicated Betancourt, a true friend of the people, was a menace. The new President found that it is not easy to be an honest man. Luckily, many people realized that it is not easy to be a crook either.

Venezuela has always been uneasy because of her complete reliance on oil. Oil, after all, is an exhaustible product and a country, like an individual, has to think of old age. Various Venezuelan governments have tried to build up new industries. The present slump has, at last, created a very flourishing one: smuggling. Imports have been curtailed and the duty on such luxuries as whisky and perfumes has been substantially raised. As a result, smuggling has become a flourishing industry and no doubt gives much needed employment to some of yesterday's millionaires.

On the last evening of my stay in South America, I went out for a drive and a walk with a friend. We both felt sure that the country's natural riches and her strange acquired habit of working hard would help Venezuela to overcome her present difficulties. Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, I stopped and stared. Before me lay a sight which I had never expected to see.

'Ranchitos,' my friend remarked, noticing my surprise.

This is the Venezuelan name for what they call *favelados* in Brazil – the denizens of a miserable shanty town where the down-and-outs pay no rent at all.

These hovels have no sanitation, and often no windows. And they all stink.

I was about to move away quickly when I was brought up short at the sight of an electric bulb with a beautiful silk lampshade round it. I realized that these hovels were after all very unlike the *favelas* of Rio. Even misery and poverty are more streamlined and elegant in this boom-town of Caracas. Even if they cannot flush the lavatory or shave in running water, they can always switch on the light. Then music struck my ear. I went up to the door (there were no windows) and saw that the eleven people in the small room were watching television. My patriotic heart swelled with pride when I noticed that it was *Robin Hood* who held them thus enthralled. I looked more closely: I discovered a refrigerator, a washing machine and a cine-camera in the corner.

Outside the huts there was a serious parking problem. The large, American cars belonging to that miserable poverty-stricken lot reminded me of Wembley car park on Cup Final day.

Some of the cars, however, were – admittedly – last year's models.

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