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by

OSSIE CHEESMAN
BOX 2083 11 AUCKLAND

Mistaken Journey



[I.]

IT was a relief when the boat train pulled out from Waterloo on that drab November morning. Saying "good-bye" is an uncomfortable business at the best of times, and one at which the average Englishman does not shine.

They do these things much better on the Continent. There I remember once seeing a whole family assembled in full force on the platform; mother and father, grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins galore; none, surely, were missing. The departing relative, stiffly clad in his best Sunday clothes and loaded with suit-cases, wicker baskets and paper parcels was not a bit embarrassed by all the fuss and by the interest his fellow-passengers were frankly displaying. Not he! Starting with the least important members of the gathering, he kissed them all soundly on both cheeks, their tears commingling with his own to the detriment of his freshly laundered shirt front. As it approached the turn of the old people emotional stress reached its height, and the air resounded to the quick-fire smack of fervent embraces. But suddenly, disaster nearly overtook the whole function, for, quite unexpectedly, the train began to move, and amid the screams and yells of the frightened family, the poor fellow was obliged to make a wild scamper for his compartment. His sobs continued in the train until he found something tasty in his basket, the slow and complete mastication of which successfully diverted his attention from the harrowing events of the previous few minutes.

I was spared any such painful scene. There were neither embraces, tears, nor any other emotional show of grief, and the last remark to reach my ears as the train steamed away was, "Hi! Don't forget my parrot!"

At Southampton, with all my possessions contained in a sailor's kit-bag and a haversack, I felt immeasurably superior to those lesser mortals who wallowed in a sea of luggage. Bestowing myself comfortably in a strategic position in the first-class lounge, I sat back to study types, and returned haughty glances to the suspicious stares from the stewards who looked askance at my shabby old kit-bag.

THE days soon slipped past. The mornings were spent doing exercises and the afternoons in sunbathing, much to the surprise of the emigrants who, apparently, previously had never

seen a human body exposed to sun air. In time, however, they recovered from their sickness and general depression sufficiently to play deck games. The most popular of these was one in which a person bent down, while the others formed a group round him. He would then be smacked resoundingly on the behind, to the hilarious amusement of everybody else, and, unless he guessed correctly the identity of his assailant, the procedure was repeated until he did so, when the aggressor had to bend down and become the recipient of the next smack.

After calling at the first South American ports, Pernambuco and Bahia, we reached Rio de Janeiro one blazing

OUR NEW SERIAL BEGINS TO-DAY



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afternoon. Better pens than mine have described that beautiful natural harbour and its striking features. The Sugar Loaf Rock guarding the entrance; the encircling mountains; the colossal statue of Christ overlooking all; the cable railways, that test for strong nerves. But I was glad when two mornings later we landed at Santos. I felt that the trip had really begun.

[II.]

THAT Santos should ever become a fashionable resort would have been blasphemously ridiculed by seamen of earlier days. Then, appropriately enough, it was called "White Man's Grave," and as many as 20 ships have lain there at a time, their crews ill or dead with the fever, waiting despairingly for fresh men to arrive to take them home. The story is told of one German steamer which had no less than seven crews sent out before finally she could be got away. Nowadays, the pestilential, mosquito-infested swamps along the mouth of the river are drained and reclaimed, and the greater part of the world's coffee is exported from Santos without its former dreadful toll of human life.

The Brazilian emigration authorities are very strict, and a certificate proving

recent vaccination is essential before a person is allowed to land. Even this is not sufficient, at any rate for a steerage passenger, unless the marks are inflamed and plainly visible, and while awaiting my turn for medical examination before leaving the ship I saw several people summarily vaccinated for this reason. I had been vaccinated several times, the last occasion being a few days prior to sailing, but big scars and swellings do not result in my case, and I was practically unmarked. A judicious pinching and squeezing, however, gave me a very red and sore-looking arm to show the doctor, and I was spared the possible inconvenience of a further operation.

Santos beach looked very attractive, and the taxi-man having driven me to a most imposing looking hotel, I decided to stay there and to treat myself to a few days' holiday. This, incidentally, was the first of my many fortunate chances, and one which made possible all subsequent developments.

AFTER five pleasant days spent in bathing and looking around, I arranged to leave for Sao Paulo early on the sixth morning. The last evening I spent at a cinema where an English film was being shown, and something we laughed at together gave me the impression that my immediate neighbour was a fellow-countryman. So it proved; or, at least, nearly so, because he was a Scotsman. It was a truly remarkable encounter, since we were the only two British in the place, and after the show we became better acquainted in the lounge of the hotel. When I told him my plans and explained that I proposed making for Puerto Esperanca on the River Paraguay, and then canoeing down-stream through Brazil, Paraguay and the Argentine in the hope of reaching Buenos Aires, he thought he was either talking to a raving lunatic or else was having his leg pulled.

On the other hand, I discovered that out of all the people in the whole of South America, he, in particular, was just about the most helpful one I could have met. Not only had he, himself, travelled extensively by launch along my projected route down the River Paraguay, but he was also the manager of a large land and estate company which had concessions in that part of Brazil. En route to Buenos Aires, he was staying just that one night in Santos, which made the coincidence of our meeting even more amazing. Briefly and lucidly he gave several reasons for condemning my trip as utterly impossible.

First and foremost, Paraguay was at war with Bolivia, a fact which I already

(continued on next page)