



BACTERIAL INFECTIONS OF

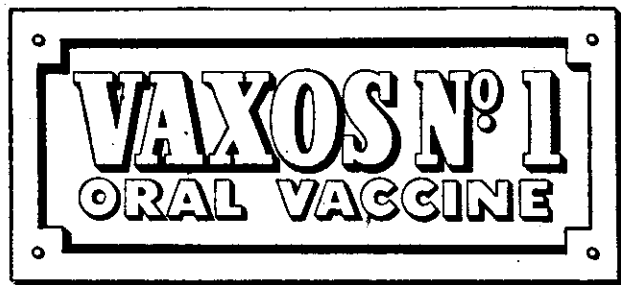
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alone would have occasioned serious misgivings in the minds of the Paraguayans, and undoubtedly would have led to detention until the circumstances were investigated. But, coming as they did, one after another, the sequence was more than sufficient to free their minds from any misgivings whatsoever. Instead, doubt became a cast-iron certainty, and to most of them my back was already against a wall and the firing squad pressing its triggers.

Paraguay was engaged in a bloody war and all foreigners, whatever their nationality, were regarded with mistrust, a feeling which after all is only a very natural one in times of national strife. Moreover, the river passenger boat was a Paraguayan vessel manned by a Paraguayan crew, who, no doubt, in their journeys to Corumba (so close to the Bolivian border) were constantly on the alert against unpleasant surprises in any shape or form. Thus, bearing in mind all the circumstances, I think the crew behaved themselves with marked restraint and although I was under constant supervision they allowed me a singularly peaceful and unmolested journey all the way to Asuncion.

We left Corumba at 1 p.m. on a Sunday, and I was pleased to discover that my fellow passengers in the third-class numbered only two. This number, however, was increased at every place we stopped at, until by the time we reached Asuncion three days later, we carried about two-thirds of our full complement.

Conditions were not too uncomfortable by any manner of means, and in fact were considerably better than I had anticipated. There were two dormitories for the steerage passengers, one for each sex, and though the bunks were rather close together, our accommodation boasted a shower-bath, which helped us to rid ourselves of unwelcome visitors. But I more than held my own in this respect, for the tiger skin I carried smelt stronger than any two passengers put together, and earned me disapproving sniffs from my immediate neighbours. Deck space was strictly limited, but the boat was clean, and we travelled along at a speed which, after my previous experiences of river transport, seemed positively terrific.

About a hundred miles below Puerto Esperanca the Rio Paraguay marks the boundary between Brazil on the east bank, and Paraguay on the west bank; it serves as a natural border line for some hundred and fifty miles, after which it continues its course through the heart of Paraguay down to Asuncion, the capital. Being aware of this I knew that on the second day, Monday, any place we stopped at on the port side, or left-hand bank of the river, was in Brazil, and that all ports of call on the starboard side, or right-hand bank, were in Paraguay. We made one or two brief halts at tiny towns where the inhabitants invariably assembled in full force to watch the proceedings.

Then on Monday morning the first compromising incident occurred. We drew in to the landing stage of a more pretentious town, the name of which I think was Puerto Pinasco, and tied up

on the port side. Here, on the wharf, hundreds of sacks of charqui, or dried meat, were stacked ready for loading, an operation which obviously would take at least an hour. Accordingly, feeling safe on Brazilian territory, I took my camera and went ashore to have a look round.

A short way from the wharf was a long shed which served as a general store, and here several people were making purchases. I watched them for a little while, and felt tempted to buy some toffee which seemed to have a generous coating of currants. But a closer investigation showed that the currants had wings and were able to fly. Losing interest in the store I came outside and passed behind it to where a squad of men in uniform were drilling. The men were soldiers, and their parade ground was a flat expanse of baked mud, but before I could form any further impressions there was a tap on my shoulder, and an official in a peaked cap and brass buttons was signalling to me to follow him. He led me back to the boat, and pointing to my camera, demanded to know whether I had taken any pictures. I shook my head, thinking that films were too expensive to waste on his bare-footed soldiery, and he intimated that I was to return on board, and to remain there.

Naturally I did so, although at the same time I was surprised that the Brazilian authorities should be so strict.

* * *

THE piles of sacks on the wharf steadily diminished, and at length we were ready to go. Then came a surprise, for circling round in midstream we departed in the opposite direction to which we had been facing. For a moment I thought we were returning up-river, but then it suddenly became clear and with an unpleasant shock, I realised what had happened. When we had tied-up at the landing stage, the boat had turned to face the current, and my previous calculations had been upset. A port side landing, in this case, no longer meant that it was on Brazilian soil, and in my ignorance I had gone ashore at a town in Paraguay. Not only that, but apparently it was a centre of military importance and I had taken a camera and had been caught in the act of observing martial exercises. I remembered the warnings of the missionaries, and how they had told me that two of their colleagues had been detained on suspicion a few months previously on a similar journey. They, too, had been travelling third-class and although I did not anticipate anything of the sort happening to me, I determined to lie low and to run no more risks of getting into trouble.

During the afternoon one of the crew showed an unusual fondness for my company, and with many explanatory gestures asked me a host of questions about myself. I could understand only about one word in fifty of what he said, but having nothing to hide and not wishing to earn any more black marks, I endeavoured to satisfy his curiosity to the best of my ability.

First, he wanted to know if I were a German, and I remembered that a German officer had assumed control of the Bolivian forces. That query was

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