SIX MONTHS IN VENEZUELA

THE writer of this article, ROBIN OLIVER, is a young Wellington geologist who has spent the last three years working for the Shell Oil Company. It is an account of his life in Venezuela between November, 1947, and March, 1948.

VENEZUELA is a land of contrasts. Imagine a primitive Indian civilisation, modified, mixed with and more or less replaced for 300 years by a Spanish civilisation, and then strongly modified by the civilisation of present-day America. That is the country to-day.

And as you will at once realise, the "man in the street" of this country without many streets has remained undeveloped, socially, and illiterate, to the extent of 50 per cent. The discovery of oil in Venezuela early this century, accompanied by the rapid increase of American (mostly) money and methods, brought thousands into the larger towns and to the oil camps, depleted the supply of agricultural labour, made produce scarce, and prices high. In the large towns the high prices for the modern American cars and piles of imported goods are maintained because where oil flows like water there is plenty of money. But not everyone has it. While the oil camp workers band together in unions and fight for higher wages and better working conditions, business profits are not considered worthwhile below 100 per cent.

But get away from the larger towns and the scene changes dramatically. I have worked on the edge of flat coastal mangrove swamps where malaria and humid heat, snakes and crocodiles, impenetrable bush and foul mud make life difficult if interesting. I have also spent a few months in the agreeable climate of the northern coastal ranges (up to 3000 metres high) where extensive cultivation of sugar cane, maize, yucca, coffee (in parts), cocoa (in parts), tobacco, coconuts, and a variety of fresh fruits are seen in combination with a mixture of savannah grassland and pleasant bush and delightful mountain streams and scenery generally. Between these ranges and the sea there is a narrow coastal plain which in the dry season at least is as hot as hell, supporting (in the more hummocky parts) only a scanty vegetation of cactuses and other spiny and thorny trees, and in the brick-hard mud flats producing nothing at all. Water in these places may have to be carried for miles; but I spent part of the rainy season under canvas in bush-covered low hill country, and there it was a case of sloshing through mud and muddy water all day and every day and trying to prevent one's motor transport from becoming bogged, and the bulk of one's equipment dry. Then there was not much time for geology.

In all these places the typical "native" is living under mud and stick thatched roofs and on earthen floors. His huts, sometimes isolated and sometimes grouped into villages, vary in upkeep and cleanliness, but their open doors permit the entry of domestic goats, pigs, dogs, and hens, and outside the naked pot-bellied children play in the dirt and dust watched by expectorating watery-eyed ancients sitting by the door and smoking or chewing their locally-grown tobacco. The larger villages are cleaner than the smaller ones —white-wash covers both the inside and outside of most of the huts and many indeed have wooden floors. A petrol-driven motor generator may even provide electric light for those who are progressive enough to replace the candle or kerosene or Coleman lamp.

A fortnight's vacation was spent in the far south of Venezuela, south of the great Orinoco river which in places is as wide as Wellington harbour. Here the country rises to 6000ft. and becomes a high plateau, dissected by precipitous canyons 1000ft. deep into which tumble 1000ft. waterfalls—a region which contains no oil, and which therefore is largely unexplored, and where Indians live as they lived several hundred years ago. And yet it is not completely unexplored, because diamonds and gold and iron and other minerals have attracted not a few Venezuelans, British-Guayanans, Trinidadians, Frenchmen, Americans, and indeed a whole agglomeration of humanity, gold and diamond hungry just as they were once in Otago and Westland, in Australia, in California and Alaska. Near a little village away down on the Brazilian border, which once had 200 people and now has 4,000, and which can be reached only by air, I spent four days living like the dogs around me and panning (unsuccessfully) for diamonds. At other points on the air route to this place I dropped off for odd days to look at company-owned reef-gold and iron mines.

But on top of the native Venezuela, parts of which I have pictured to you, are planted the oil camps—oases of U.S.A. life separated by barbed wire from virgin jungle. Inside are swimming pool, tennis courts, golf course, bowling alley, cinema and bar, grass lawns, gardens, roads, houses, schools, offices and laboratories. These are the nerve centres for the surrounding oil field, where perhaps a forest of 300 derricks is testimony to the thousands of barrels of black gold which are pouring from the earth into the pipe lines and thence into the tankers—the life-blood of Venezuela.

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require more than a brief glance or the "I don't like it" or "I like it" definitive attitude.

The majority of those interested in painting in this country to-day can take calmly, and in many cases have even acquired a genuine taste for, the smoother forms of impressionism. When confronted with a sample of Pointillism, or the more unbridled technique of Fauvism, everyone now knows that the painter is not concerned with photographically realistic representation; that his aim is a fresh, alive, and less laboured impression of the subject through mastery of texture, tone, and colour. These are the particular -isms that I think are for most of our gallery-goers synonymous with the term "Modern Art." This appears to be where we are up to in art appreciation. Actually Impressionism is far from modern, having had its hey-day in Europe before the turn of the century. Outside this country it is seldom met with except in museums and retrospective exhibitions.

I am not aware of any really new movement emanating from the Continent. French painting has now rather taken a back seat. Attention to-day is focussed on the emergence of the Neo-Romantic spirit in England. In the paintings of John Piper, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, and others like David Jones and John Craxton, we have a strong reaction against the emotional restraints of the purely plastic aims that have, since the end of the 19th Century, pervaded British (and no less New Zealand) painting. I would recommend those interested in this new movement to read Robin Ironside's little book, *Painting Since 1939*, published for the British Council last year.

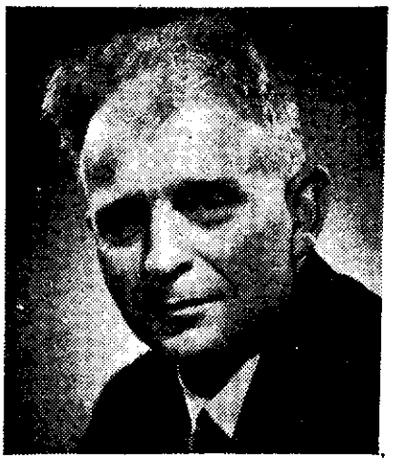
It is often asked whether these various -isms are passing phases. They are, in a way. But the discoveries made in these experiments all contribute to the sum total of aesthetical understanding and to the development of man's sensibilities.

THE VOICE OF RUTHERFORD

BECAUSE gramophone records are manufactured primarily for entertainment, it is not often that the voices of scientists are committed to discs, though speakers on scientific subjects are heard frequently from broadcasting studios. But there are in New Zealand some recordings of the voice of the New Zealand-born scientist, Lord Rutherford, one of the greatest names in the story of atomic physics, who died on October 19, 1937. Parts of them will be heard in a programme to be broadcast on Sunday, October 17, from 1ZB at 5.30 p.m., 2ZB and 4ZB at 4.30 p.m. and 2ZA at 5.30 p.m. (Station 3ZB presented the programme a few weeks ago.)

The records are introduced by Dr. G. T. P. Tarrant, Senior Lecturer in Physics at Canterbury University College, who worked with Lord Rutherford for eight years in the Cavendish Laboratory and who points out that when most other famous names have been forgotten, the work of Rutherford will still be affecting the daily life and thought of almost every inhabitant of the globe.

The recordings of Rutherford's voice were taken in the hall of Gottingen University, Germany, in 1931, at the time of Rutherford's receiving the honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and during one of his lectures to students of the University. It seems likely that he was unaware that the discs were being made, for there are gaps in the speech between the completion of one record and the setting up of another blank disc. When Lord Rutherford died, Professor Pohl, who made the recordings, looked out the matrices of the conferring of the degree and the lecture and eventually the records were issued privately by a gramophone company as a memorial for those who had worked with Rutherford.



DR. G. T. P. TARRANT, Senior Lecturer in Physics at Canterbury University College, who introduces the Rutherford programme

On its way to New Zealand the last record of the set was broken; and as this set is possibly the only one in New Zealand, the producer of the programme to be heard on October 17 (Brian Salkeld, of Station 3ZB) set about mending the break. By careful fitting, glueing and pressing he persuaded it to hold together long enough to make a re-recording.

Listeners will hear first Lord Rutherford's expression of thanks to the University of Gottingen for the honour paid to him and some comments which reflect his interest in the connection between the University and the achievements of British science. He says, addressing students and others in the hall: "I must apologise for speaking to you in English; but I have the excuse that I was born at the other end of the world. And if you heard me speaking German, you would be very grateful that I am speaking to you in English."

The second part of the programme contains a small part of one of Rutherford's lectures on the structure of the atom. He says: "If we knew more about it, we would find it more simple than we now suppose. I am a believer in simplicity, being a very simple person myself." Though the records were made as long ago as 1931, and obviously under some difficulty, they are remarkably clear.