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A COUNTRY LIKE HOME

Iced Coffee in Several Languages

THE other day I was considering the long line of retired South American Presidents, and particularly Sr. Joao Café Filho, who recently retired in Brazil, and comparing their plenitude with the sparse flowering of the same species in North America. Mr. Hoover and Mr. Truman survive in the United States, a greater number than usual, admittedly. In Canada there are no surviving ex-Prime Ministers, which may or may not be a tribute to the length of rule of the Liberal Party there. It must be a hard life in the North, in spite of the rule of law.

In the South, where they flourish in spite of a marked lack of habeas corpus, my favourite is undoubtedly Sr. Joao Café Filho, of Brazil. He is keyed perfectly to harmonious existence in a country as dependent on the coffee bean as New Zealand on the sheep and the cow. In translation his name is Mr. John Coffee junior. He is said to be, on good authority, a friendly, outgoing man, with no particular lust for power. He did not seek his office, rising unexpectedly from Vice-President when Getulio Vargas suddenly found he was surrounded by problems too weighty to be borne. Well, Mr. John Coffee jr., I thought, you are now peacefully out going, may you have many years of warmth and friendship on your shade patio, sipping freshly brewed, well-iced glasses of your country's finest product. . .

I suppose I thought of iced coffee, rather than the hot breakfast brew, because it was the first passably warm day of spring in Christchurch. The thermometer was about 75 deg. and the natives were talking of a heat wave, the funny warm-hearted descendants of frozenly respectable English ancestors.

Until I visited the American Continent I knew about as much of coffee as the average New Zealander, but I was (and still am) also indifferent towards tea, a failing which almost put me in the same category as those citizens who are indifferent towards the memory of Phar Lap.

The coffee I drank in the wardroom of the Canadian cruiser on which I took passage to British Columbia was like nothing I had drunk before. It was strong. After three days I was a knotted mass of nerves. Enough was enough. I switched to ice water.

"You can get iced carfee in Canada," the R.C.N. boys told me, noting my preference for a cold drink. It wasn't quite so straightforward as that, but most of that summer round Vancouver I found iced coffee when I wanted it. If they didn't have a supply chilled, they were very willing to fill a tall glass with ice and simply pour coffee over the ice, leaving me to

add cream or sugar if I wanted them. No trick at all.

Later, one warm afternoon in San Francisco, I went into a small, scrupulously clean place on a steep street between a bar and a book shop and asked for iced coffee. The counterman was a whizz. He was smooth, alert, clean, and groomed to the last unobtrusively cut little fingernail. "Australian?" he asked, flicking a tall glass from somewhere behind his head.

"New Zealand," I told him.

"Down under they mostly drink tea," he remarked, shedding ice cubes into the glass from a rubber tray.

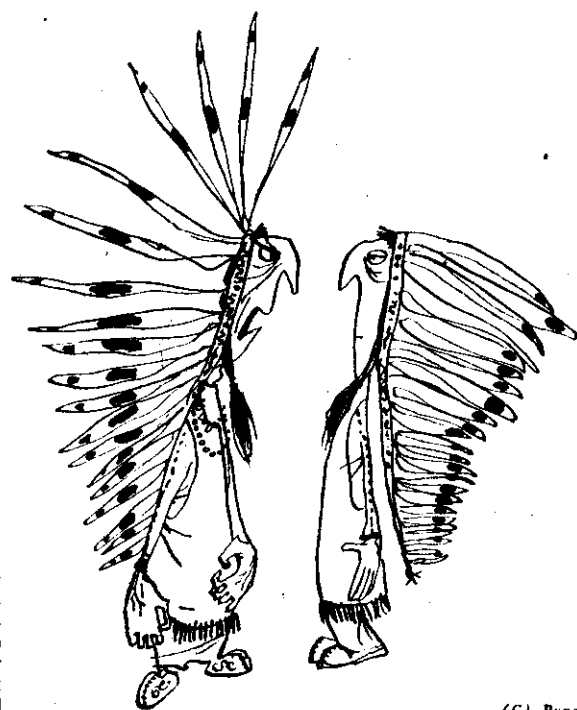
I smiled, content to watch his technique.

"Now this is good coffee," he said. "It's ground fresh each time I brew, and I brew the iced coffee twice a day." (Very few Californians speak of "brewing" coffee.) "It's the best from Brazil," he went on, "I brew in a glass and I store in glass in the refrigerator. You don't see any grounds in that, huh?" He held up the tall glass for me to look. I couldn't see any grounds. It was wonderful coffee.

Another summer, when I had been in Mexico long enough to acquire a little Spanish, I ordered iced coffee in a café in a small border town. The girl thought I was crazy, but wanted to be helpful. So we had a long friendly talk: No, señorita, not coffee with ice cream (neive), but, for a favour, coffee with ice (hielo). First the glass, then the ice in the glass. It is obvious that a superior restaurant like El Patio will have sufficient ice. Then the coffee poured over the ice. For why not? It is thus immediately cold. A thousand thanks, señorita. I drink with much gusto.

I went on drinking with much gusto that summer, when in town, until I dropped in at the ice factory for a 3-

(continued on next page)



(C) Punch

"What do you mean I tend to be excitable?"

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 13, 1956.