

Apparatus: Cipriano's Fence

THERE was a time when caballeros really were gentlemen on horseback riding the parched trails of Baja California with their wives several yards behind on burros, if they were lucky. Now about the only place you see the word is in the night spots in Tijuana: caballeros this way, damas this way. The change has perhaps been brought about by the development of motor roads: no man is a caballero in a car, simply hombre. In this time past (not too far off—even in 1940 roads in Baja California were something fierce) a large area of land in the La Rosa region was owned by the Federico family. The first two Federicos, father and son, were said to have been caballeros, but the ones who came after believed that vino was better than water, and that *much* vino was better still. The family Federico disintegrated and the property Federico diminished. By the time I came to know them there were two small, separate ranches owned by two brothers, Ignacio and Cipriano. Ignacio had married, late in life, a remarkable English woman a few years older than he was. She didn't drink, which left more for Ignacio, but put him in a position of inferiority, he felt. A couple of times a month he'd get muy muy borracho and order her round before the kitchen girl and the rouse-

about, which briefly improved his position of inferiority.

Cipriano had married at a more conventional age and had a large family. He and his four boys drank much more than the ranch produced, which left an awkward gap in the balance of payments. A great mistake in estate management had contributed to this unfortunate state of affairs. As the Federico property diminished, Cipriano realised, too late, that the only grapes left were on Ignacio's ranch. It is much cheaper to make your own vino than to buy it, and Cipriano, whose bodega was full of empty casks, relics of more prosperous days, spent his time alternately hatching schemes to chisel Ignacio out of his vineyard, and trying to buy a barrel of vino cheap from the same source. He had more chance of achieving the latter aim (the former never seemed to go further than an occasional visit to a lawyer's office) if he could catch Ignacio when he was broke and when his English wife was in San Diego calling on her bank manager. She had a very small income which she handled in an unfathomably complicated manner. At intervals her bank manager would write to tell her she was overdrawn, and that, of course, meant that Ignacio was broke, too. She would hurry off to San Diego to un-



"Cipriano and his boys drank more than the ranch produced"

tangle her affairs, leaving the way clear for Cipriano. It was not that she disapproved of Ignacio selling wine to his brother. She would have been happy to see him give the whole lot away, and Ignacio knew it. This set up a terrible conflict in his emotions. He did not want to sell wine to Cipriano because he would rather keep it to drink himself, and he did not want to sell wine to Cipriano because that would be doing what his wife wished, but if he was broke, and the rouseabout howling for his wages, there was strong pressure on him to sell a barrel of wine. Cipriano, usually broke as well, would come over to discuss the purchase of

a barrel. Over a friendly glass or two, he would put out preliminary feelers. Over further, more friendly glasses, he would demonstrate his willingness to pay by putting down a small, a very small deposit. Later in the day a couple of his sons would arrive, tell Ignacio what a wonderful deal he'd made by getting their father drunk, and remove Cipriano and a full barrel, leaving Ignacio in a highly exalted state assuring the rouseabout that he would soon receive his wages and that deals like that could only be made when his wife was out of the way.

But Cipriano could contrive this apparatus only rarely. His other device, when he had sold his car and failed to persuade his sons to go out to work, was to knock on El Profesor's door and sell him a slice of property. El Profesor, nothing loth, would draw up a deed of sale, and next day Cipriano and El Profesor's smiling Majordomo would be out with a measuring tape, while Cipriano's sons uprooted the fence and dug new post holes further back. The fence was moved three times while I was at La Rosa, and Cipriano's ranch was becoming more like a cramped back garden.

"He talks about his fence and his apparatus," Lucie ~~22a~~ remarked, watching her husband Felipe and Cipriano measuring the extent of the third sale. "But the apparatus is really El Profesor's, and it won't be long before even the fence is his, too."

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