

MEDITERRANEAN FLEET CRUISER PULLING REGATTA

AT ALEXANDRIA.

Wednesday, 28th, and Thursday, 29th July 1936.

GRIPPO

No. of Race	Time	Race	Miles	Finnish Points											
				Reuver	Australia	Spinn	Swiss	Woolwich	London	Alps	Kaiser	Dreamtime	Staghorn	Galata	Break
1	0900	Seamen's Cutters . . .	1½	2	1	3	10	4	—	6	8	—	9	7	5
2	0930	Racing Gigs	1½	7	1	8	10	9	3	6	5	2	12	4	11
3	1000	Racing Whalers	1	2	4	12	3	11	1	6	9	8	7	10	5
4	1030	Marines' Cutters	1½	5	5	5	9	5	4	8	7	3	1	6	2
5	1100	Wardroom Gigs	1	4	7	9	10	11	1	5	3	2	6	12	8
6	1145	Boys' Cutters	1	5	5	5	9	6	1	2	10	4	7	3	8
7	1330	Young Seamen's Cutters	1	6	7	5	11	6	1	9	10	4	3	2	8
8	1400	Artisans' and Daymen's Whalers	1	6	1	12	9	4	5	2	10	3	8	11	7

PORT SAID, SECOND VISIT

9	1430	Artificers' Gigs	1	9	1	7	12	2	4	11	3	5	10	6	8
10	1500	Stokers' Cutters	1½	8	1	10	12	7	4	6	11	3	2	5	9
11	1530	Young Seamen's Whalers	1	11	4	7	3	6	1	8	6	5	9	10	2
Points at end of first day				196½	259½	158½	110	185½	252	185	147	220	184	179	176
1	0900	Ch. and P.O.'s Gig	1	5	—	9	10	8	4	11	3	6	1	7	2
2	0930	Communications' Whaler	1	1	6	10	7	3	4	5	—	2	9	8	4
3	1000	Seamen's Gigs	1	10	1	5	9	8	2	7	5	6	12	4	11
4	1030	Stokers' Whalers	1	8	9	12	1	3	7	4	10	2	5	11	6
5	1100	E.R.A.'s Gigs	1	6	1	4	10	2	11	8	3	5	7	3	9
6	1130	W.O.'s Skiffs	1	5	3	6	10	7	1	11	2	8	9	7	4
7	1330	Marines' Whalers	1	5	5	5	9	5	1	3	8	6	4	7	2
8	1400	Racing Cutters	1½	3	2	8	12	7	9	11	10	5	1	6	4
9	1430	Seamen's Whalers	1	2	4	10	12	6	1	9	11	3	7	8	5
Total Points				340½	404½	248½	177	321	395	276	246	363	311	288½	313
Final Order				4	1	10	12	5	2	9	11	3	7	8	6

Wednesday ended with *Ajax* holding sixth place, half a point behind the *Woolwich*. The *Australia* was leading.

THE SECOND DAY—THURSDAY, 9TH JULY

The second day we did not do so well. The gig let us down again, and the only successes were achieved by the marine's whaler, which came in third, and the stoker's whaler, which came in fourth. Both very fine efforts. We ended the day ninth, beating the *Sydney* and *Exeter*.

The final results were as follows:

1st, <i>Australia</i>	404½	7th, <i>Shropshire</i>	311
2nd, <i>London</i>	395	8th, <i>Galatea</i>	288½
3rd, <i>Devonshire</i>	368	9th, <i>Ajax</i>	276
4th, <i>Resource</i>	340½	10th, <i>Sydney</i>	248½
5th, <i>Woolwich</i>	321	11th, <i>Exeter</i>	246
6th, <i>Berwick</i>	313		

The *Australia* thoroughly deserved her victory. Great spirit and sheer physical fitness got her through more than style. The *London* certainly had hard luck not to reverse the previous year's decision. Of the twenty races in the regatta the *Australia* won seven and the *London* eight. So we others really did not have much of a look in. It is probable that the standard of the whole regatta was considerably higher than any since the war.

THE TOTE

A factor that greatly added to the enjoyment of the regatta was the excellent totes run by the Paymaster-Commander and his minions. They sacrificed seeing the regatta for our benefit and that of the Ship's Funds. Ratings from all ships came over to place their bets in the *Ajax*.

THE FLEET REGATTA

The Fleet Regatta came off on the Saturday. We had no ship interest except for the boys' cutter, which came in sixth,

and the gunroom gig. The *London* and *Australia* carried off several trophies between them for the squadron. We must congratulate the boys in being our only representative from the eliminating races.

DISPERSAL

Amazing scenes were witnessed on Thursday night after the Cruiser Regatta. Boatloads of cheering sailors moved slowly round the fleet yelling themselves hoarse with joy. We shall not forget the *Sydney's* borrowed steamboat, which did not see the wire between two destroyers, and were in consequence called upon to expend their voices on these two ships until such time as they were released. The Foreign Legion as a whole were, I think, the more enthusiastic—they had more reason to be. During the last few days many farewell parties were arranged. The Fleet Flagship gave a very good theatrical show on Saturday night, while ships' "At Homes" were held at all hours of the day and night. We were sent to sea on Monday morning for exercises, and returned p.m. for the last farewells. We sailed for Malta next day, but were required to do a full calibre shoot before we left the practice area. It was a wonderful feeling, leaving that harbour for the last time and seeing old Great Pass Beacon dip over the horizon. May many moons pass before we go there again.

Before leaving Alexandria we had seen the cruise programme which Rear-Admiral Evans, as Commodore South America Division, had suggested for us. This took us East about, going round South America in a clockwise direction and including a very fine selection of ports. However, this was not to be, and on passage to Malta we received the amended programme ordered by the Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies Station. This sent us the other way round, with a fearful concentration of small places of which we had scarcely heard. This took us to Magallanes for Christmas, and was followed by the foreboding remark, "I intend cruising in company with *Exeter* and *Ajax* on the East coast during the spring 1937." However, we were not in the mood to grumble. We were only too glad to be going to South America at all.

MALTA, LAST VISIT—SPANISH STRIFE

WE were naturally in much better humour for our last visit to this now familiar dockyard. Even so for the ten days we were there we found things very uncomfortable. The sun turned that dock into an oven and the ship was most unbearable. We were able to give general leave to each watch in turn again, so that most people got a chance to get out of the ship for a bit. There was, however, a lot of work to be done. The dockyard was no longer working their full war routine with all hands engaged at all times. We had to do most of it in working hours. There were many months' stores and provisions to be embarked, while as we were to be away from a dockyard for ten months, all defects had to be attended to.

The first contingent of the Mediterranean Fleet came in on the 21st, but not too many to crowd the place out. Things had got very hot and the water was the only place to be. In the meantime we were hearing disturbing news from Spain. General Franco's military revolution looked like becoming a really big affair. British ships were being sent to protect British citizens at each port. Two flotillas of destroyers were there, whilst our "oppo"—the *Exeter*—was delayed on her way home to pay off at Gibraltar. Our pessimists tore up their copies of the cruise programme.

As the days drew on we heard of many more ships being diverted to Spain—*London*, *Devonshire*, *Repulse* and the First Destroyer Flotilla, and our hearts began to sink. However, when the Commander-in-Chief came on board on Monday, 27th, to bid us good-bye and good luck, he promised that we should be asked to do one last service—to take the mails for

the Fleet to Malaga. Later in the day this also was cancelled as the *Reliant* was making a trip down there.

Accordingly, on the morning of the 28th we slipped out of Malta Harbour for the last time. Hearts were light as we turned towards the West.

For the first day of the passage to Gibraltar all was peace. On the 30th, however, the weather deteriorated badly and soon after noon two strange ships were observed in the distance proceeding in the opposite way. They were hopefully reported as Spanish battleships. Further inspection, however, revealed them to be *Coventry* and *Curlew*—the former flying the flag of Vice-Admiral Aircraft Carriers. We had thought that they were on their way home some two days ahead. A curt message to alter course 180° and take station 5 miles abeam cut short any surmising. Good old *Ajax*—we were not to get away with it after all. However, it turned out that we were merely looking for a small steamer which a Belgian air-liner had reported in difficulties, but by 1900 nothing had been seen and we were allowed to proceed on our way. We arrived at Gibraltar at 0900 the next morning and set to work to get in all necessary stores. All being well we should be out of the Mediterranean in twelve hours.

All, however, was not well. The inevitable bucket of cold water arrived about noon—"Remain at Gibraltar until further orders. My flag will be hoisted in *Ajax* at 2000 to-day. You will be detained at Gibraltar for a few days." This from the Commander-in-Chief, who appeared to be steaming at full speed in our tracks in the *Galatea*. He arrived just before eight and immediately came aboard accompanied by nine Staff Officers. Cabins were vacated, spare bunks were rigged and before long everyone was settled in. We received the comforting intelligence that the old *Queen Elizabeth* was hurrying along after her master as fast as she could, and when she arrived we would be free once more. By this time, however, the utmost gloom had settled on the ship and we thought that there was not a chance of ever getting out of the "Great Lake." However, things turned out quite well, and during the three days' wait we saw something and heard

something of the troubles that were tearing Spain. The town of Gibraltar was an amazing sight, with refugees sleeping in the streets and fabulous sums being paid for lodgings. Unfortunately the capacity of the colony is small, and, faced with the possibility of the outbreak of disease, the Governor was later forced to close his gates.

On the morning of Monday, 3rd, we were told that the Commander-in-Chief would leave the ship, and wait for the arrival of his flagship that afternoon. Just as we were preparing for sea, however, the *Jaime I*, battleship, the cruiser *La Libertad*, and a destroyer, appeared off the coast near Tarifa Point and started to bombard the shore batteries. The latter was making some efforts at retaliation without much success. The warships were loyalists, officered completely by petty officers who had taken over the ships. Their shooting was accurate but the material faulty, as several shells were seen to hit their mark but fail to explode. Things, however, were made quite uncomfortable for the local gunners, some of whom were seen running away from their damaged positions. The bombardment was a slow and tedious business, as it took the *Jaime I* some time to load her ponderous pieces, and that done she had to manoeuvre in order to bring them to bear on her target. She slowly plodded up and down, pouring forth black smoke. *La Libertad*, it appears, was to have had a go at Cueta on the other side, but the German pocket battleship, *Admiral Scheer*, was hovering over there and she decided not to take the risk and later moved off to Malaga.

At 11 sharp we sailed and set our course in the normal way down towards Tarifa Point. This took us between the *Jaime I* and her target, but the time taken was only about a quarter of an hour and may have synchronized with one of her loading periods. At any rate, we had none of Floyd Gibbons's red-hot metal screaming over our heads and soon we had left the scene of conflict behind and were once more upon the broad bosom of the Atlantic.

PART IV

THE AUTUMN CRUISE 1936

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEW WORLD

THE ISLE OF IMPOSSIBLE WEALTH

CONTRAST in travel can give the keenest of pleasure and the saddest of disillusionment. It sharpens appreciation and renews your freshness of outlook. Contrast, in short, is a tonic.

We had had our share of disillusionment. With half the commission spent away from our station, with ten months squandered in Egypt and Palestine, and with the memory of Spain festering in civil war . . . we were more than eager to cross the Atlantic and begin our cruise in the New World.

The four days at Bermuda, from 11th to 15th August, served to whet our appetite. Bermuda had everything the Mediterranean lacked. It smelt good. Coming up the Narrows in the early morning, we got the fresh clean smell of rich grass and country-side ; this compared favourably with the despondent stench of bad goat and decayed Arab, which had welcomed us into Mediterranean ports for the last ten months. It looked good. White cottages gleamed out of green hills and dark woods. It might have been England. A fat cow chewed lazily in the morning sunlight. Contrast this with the taste of sandy dryness and the dust storm from the desert which usually signalized our entry into Alexandria. Finally, Bermuda was quiet.

Bermuda Dockyard is surely the sleepest and most leisurely in the world. Although there is at least one lorry (which went through the war), it is rarely seen or heard. The bicycle spirit dominates everything. Rush and bustle simply do not exist and you realize that any attempt to hurry a negro is doomed to failure.

Here again was a contrast. With Malta Dockyard working full speed, with temporary bases established at Haifa and Alexandria, with war fever permeating all our activities, it was more than pleasant to find Malabar sleeping in the midday sun. It was something like heaven. Thankfully we relaxed and got out our bicycles and bathing-dresses.

Bermuda is a world on its own. The navy goes unnoticed and the tourist is fawned on. The prosperity of the island (or to be exact the 365 islands of the group) depends on America. In Prohibition days the New Yorker regarded a good long drink as only 36 hours away. Bermuda became the millionaires' week-end resort. But when America went wet again, Bermuda lost little of its custom. The peace and quiet charm of the place had evidently been the big attraction. Rich Americans bought or rented their seashore cottages, tourists still paid a minimum of £70 a month in the big hotels (and up to £20 a day at the Castle Harbour), and the Bermuda Development Company arranged monopolies and facilities in such a way that the island still maintained its average of 4,000 tourists throughout the season. Beauty, in fact, not booze.

And yet to look round Hamilton at night-time made you realize that alcohol certainly played its part. A large amount of drinking was done by visitors from the States. It is, of course, unusual to find so many wealthy people in so small a place, and everything was done on a scale such as few of us had ever before experienced. When Miss Evans from New York, for instance, had a few friends across to stay at the Princess Hotel, the list totalled something like 70, and this was in no way unusual. Another notable point was that the mammoth hotels were closed down for roughly seven months of the year, in the remaining five they made fantastic profits. In Bermuda the migration of tourists is watched with greater care than the ornithologist gives to the migration of swallows.

Some five or six luxury hotels, beautifully kept gardens and a carless quiet are, perhaps, your first impressions of Hamilton. A vacuum in the exchequer is probably your next (in some places you pay a dollar a drink), and a 16-mile bike

ride back to Ireland Island your last before sinking gratefully into unconsciousness.

In August those with more modest tastes were satisfied with a show at the Dockyard Cinema and a visit to the Canteen on Boaz Island. In any case, during the dog watches there was good bathing to be had.

Four days passed all too quickly while we got ready for our seven months' cruise round South America.

When we returned at the end of March 1937 Bermuda had been many times in the news through its position on the transatlantic air route. The *Cavalier*, one of the 29 new Empire flying-boats, was ready for trials during the summer months. Bermuda is only 700 miles from New York, so that soon the millionaire, instead of spending 36 hours in a luxury liner, will be able to leave New York after breakfast and take lunch in the British Empire. Bermuda is an island with a future. It is one of the few places in the world which is quiet and at the same time highly evolved. Perhaps, who knows? a benign government may even forbid aeroplanes in the cause of peacefulness and those who wish to drop on Bermuda out of the sky be forced to glide or parachute.

CRISTOBAL-COLON

Our six-day passage through the Caribbean was eventless but enjoyable. Clear blue water, silver flying-fish and cotton-wool clouds made up the scenery. Anticipation of Colon, of crossing the Line and of South America generally were our chief topics of conversation.

On the morning of 18th August Haiti, the Black Republic, was sighted, and shortly afterwards Cuba, which we were to visit the following summer. It got appreciably hotter, but the ship was not stopped at 1700 each night for ocean bathing—as had been done on the Atlantic crossing. The sea, we felt, was sufficiently populated with sharks, barracuda and other deep-sea prize-fighters without further overcrowding by us.

Thus to Colon. Few of us had any previous idea of what

Colon would be like—either in looks or in experience. Any conjecture, I suppose, associated Colon with Port Said. What Port Said was to the Eastern world, Colon was to the Western, etc. etc. . . . and in a way this was right. But . . .

But the Panama Canal was run by Americans; the Suez Canal by the French—and Americans entertained us as we had never before been treated. The fleet Air boys at Coco Solo, the Army at France Field and the Submarine Base, also at Coco Solo, almost fought to adopt us. This was, indeed, a long step from the Mediterranean Fleet.

Apart from the dense jungle which was splashed over all visible hills from the water's edge like a dark green carpet, the first thing you notice about Cristobal-Colon is the break-water which is made up of casually dumped concrete blocks looking like a rampart of coco-nut ice.

The docks next attract your attention. These are modern, well equipped and especially designed to deal with Colon's large transit trade. We berthed at No. 9 wharf shortly after 0900. The British Vice-Consul stepped on board and the most strenuous four days in the ship's commission had begun.

Cristobal and Colon are two sections of one town. Cristobal is American; Colon Panamanian. The casual visitor finds it impossible to tell where he is. Even residents are uncertain now that prohibition in the States has gone. There used to be one street which had the Cristobal-Colon boundary running down its middle. One side was "wet" and the other "dry." Even that distinction has vanished. Cristobal, too, has gone wet.

The town itself is ill-kempt and rotting. The Republic of Panama has an annual deficit of about 15 million dollars on her trade. This is made up entirely by the money which Panama Canal employees, United States Army and Navy, and the large number of tourists pour into the zone. The pouring is mainly done through cabarets such as the "Atlantic" and clubs such as the Strangers' Club. We have most of us got individual memories of these night-clubs and description is better left alone.

Of the Americans, too, who entertained us so well little

can be said except that in no other place during the Commission did we meet more charming and friendly people. It was one of the highest of high spots—and for many it was the port with the happiest memories of any in the South American continent.

In Colon and the Canal Zone they drive on the left. The reason, said the British Vice-Consul, was that the population contained a large percentage of negroes from British West Indian islands and all efforts to make them keep to the right had failed. It was their way of expressing patriotism.

While this answer seems far-fetched, there is no doubt that the Barbadian negroes in the Canal Zone, who had come there to build the canal, were intensely pro-British. *Ajax* maintained the tradition set up by every visiting British warship and played them at cricket. The ground was some distance out of the town and within shadow of the Gatun locks. The usual tropical downpour (which in Colon is like some gigantic hosing-down) had turned turf into liquid mud. This in no way disconcerted the home team, neither, for that matter, did the numerous hens, dogs and cattle who wandered in complete freedom all over the field, asserting their independence and natural interest in the Great British Game. But perhaps they thought the game baseball—since the ground did part time as a baseball pitch—and considered themselves to be mobile bases. Previous experience with the latter, however, led us to doubt this suggestion.

But what of the spectators?

The entire population had left their homes, which straggled all round the field and had condensed themselves into a stand covered with wire-netting. *Din, plenty din*, is the result of compressing a negro, and continuous pandemonium shattered every effort at serious play throughout the match.

The antics of both batsmen and fielders delighted our watchers. Either you sank in the mud till you found bottom and then stuck—or you risked running, slipped, skidded and in a tornado of mud made your "base," usually flattening the wicket in your headlong toboggan and ending up over the boundary. Or so it seemed.

The West Indians won—and deserved it, but the match cannot be left without mention of the Master of the Ceremonies. This gentleman was an antique negro with a “Paul Robeson” voice. He assisted with the scoring in the pavilion (consisting of four posts supporting a sheet of corrugated iron). “One ball. No run,” he intoned with great solemnity . . . an awesomeness tripled when he discovered the Chaplain to be batting. On one occasion the latter narrowly escaped being out and the remark boomed forth: “Toll de bell; it mus’ be a miracle. De holy man’s still in.”

Thus to the Panama Canal. As with the Suez Canal, employees are well paid. Pilots make well over £1,000 a year, get food, clothes, lodging and amusements cheap, are given three months’ leave a year and can buy passages to the United States at nominal rates. Even so the Canal makes so much money that the authorities hardly dare publish figures.

On the morning of 25th August we sailed from Colon, and about 10 o’clock passed into the Gatun locks. On the lock-side a large gathering of American girls—our hostesses for the previous four days—had collected to cheer us good-bye, and on the right, going through the other way, was the liner *California*, whose American tourists cheered our band.

As we slipped our “electric mules” and started across the Gatun Lake, we went below for lunch, feeling that it would be a long time before we experienced such a spontaneous outburst of friendliness as had greeted us in the Canal Zone. With reluctance we began to think of Buenaventura and our coming west-coast cruise.

BONNY BUENAVENTURA

No name could possibly be more of a misfit than Buenaventura. “Good Luck” suits the collection of shacks, corrugated iron and mud about as much as Portsmouth, Mass., resembles Portsmouth, Hants.

Buenaventura is Colombia’s most important Pacific port. It is the outlet for the rich inland province of Cali. There is



THE PANAMA CANAL

an air base with at least one machine in service. There is a public square with one of South America's finest weed exhibitions. There is a Mayor, a Town Council and a Port Administrator, whose one eye balefully guards over the railway. Buenaventura, in fact, is one of Colombia's more noble cities—and only one thing has been forgotten—namely, to build the place.

About five years ago Buenaventura had a Great Fire. Most of the town was burned and much property was destroyed. This suited the Colombians—they'd always meant to rebuild the dump, anyway, and here was Fate stepping in and making everything so much easier. So easy, in fact, that it could well be left till to-morrow. And this is what has happened. Someone should erect a statue to the great God "Mañana"—patron of South American enterprise—for in Buenaventura things now are just as they were five years ago. Except that woodwork has long ago died crying for paint and that streets with their caverns of mud now seem more like Spanish battlegrounds than A.1 city roads.

The British Community of Buenaventura consisted of eight. This included the Vice-Gonsul's wife and two sons and "Jock," the manager of the cable station, which, he said, was watched day and night by an aged alligator possessing only three teeth in its head. The *Caldas*, a battle-destroyer of the Marina Columbiana, was also in harbour. This had English officers and a sprinkling of English ratings, and was Colombia's contribution to the armaments race.

An entente was held between the two ships, but entertainment in Buenaventura was otherwise dead—apart from a cocktail party given by the local residents. As few officers spoke or understood Spanish and as the Buenaventurans' knowledge of English extended only as far as the words "Greta Garbo" and "beeyutifull women," conversation was conducted mainly by signs and a certain misunderstanding was inevitable.

The only people who enjoyed Buenaventura were the officers and men who left it for Cali. This, though Irish, is accurate. Here apparently was a British community eager to meet fresh faces and to entertain the Navy.

On 31st August we sailed for "Equatoria" and Guayaquil. We were none of us really sorry. If Colon had been a high spot, Buenaventura was at the bottom of a bottomless pit, and with all honesty I doubt whether any one of us could find the shade of a wish to return there.

CROSSING THE LINE

On Friday, 7th July, the morning Press News had reported an intercepted message—"Equatoria calling all patrols. Mid-Atlantic Porpoise Patrol reports British warship *Ajax* steaming westwards. Believed to be heading towards our domain. Movements to be observed and reported at frequent intervals. Neptune Rex."

Such a message from the deep was a timely warning of the inevitable ceremony of initiation demanded of those bold enough to enter the regions situated in latitude nought. Few of the Ship's Company had ever ventured there previously, consequently there was general consternation, mixed with not a little high-spirited preparation for the coming event. Secretly the instruments of torture were made, created and assembled by the initiated.

On our putting to sea on the 31st August we felt "the great day 'as arrived." At 2100 the look-out reported to the Captain, "Line right ahead, sir," and immediately the ship was challenged by a voice which proved to be that of His Majesty's Herald. Through a hissing wall of spray and a noise suggesting that all the demons of the deep were gathered about us, the voice spoke with regal authority.

The complete dialogue of these solemn proceedings is reproduced at the end of the book. On the following day the lower deck was cleared at 0845 and the gruesome ritual was carried out.

The conclusion of the court was the signal for bigger and better events. Their Majesties, with sundry attendant officials, proceed to the royal dais before the sea of initiation—a canvas bath. The Chief of Police lets loose his minions to persuade the fearful from their places of hiding. The bears take to the

water with growls of anticipated enjoyment. Tonsorial artists wave and hone their razors, and in large pails whip to a lather their soap of many colours. Physicians and surgeons meanwhile brandish with many a quip and gesture the instruments of their profession. The stage is set. The actors wait their cue, not a few praying for the Deus ex Machina, coming events have cast their shadow, and as Sam would say, "Let battle commence."

With the court installed on the dais by the bath, the trembling novices queued up for their ordeal. Neptune gives the order to commence. In an incredibly short time the hapless victims are dealt with—first filled with soap-pills by the doctors, then lathered with fine soaps by the barbers, shaved, and then abruptly tipped to the mercy of the bears. Once and again the stream is stayed whilst a warrant is read out over an offender, who is then subjected to still harsher treatment. The bears warm to their work and the job is soon done. A small delay is caused when the dignity of the court receives a slight relapse when their dais collapses, but the halt is of but short duration. Finally, exhausted by their labours, barbers, doctors, royalty and all are thrown into the bath by revengeful victims, each now entitled to his passport to Equatorial domains.

ECUADOR—LAND OF THE EQUATOR

At the entrance to the Hardanger Fiord in Norway it is forbidden to fire salutes. This rule arose because one of H.M. ships, in an effort to salute the country, broke all the lighthouse windows and blew the lighthouse-keeper down his own steps and into his oil tank. All of which has nothing whatever to do with Ecuador—except that we were told "the inhabitants of Guayaquil like to hear the cannon roar."

Well, they got it. Although no statistics are available, it is felt that several windows were accounted for—maybe even a house fell down when, amidst the reverberations of our saluting guns, we anchored in the fast-running Guayas River only a few yards from the riverside town of Guayaquil. Local inhabitants, we soon discovered, were immoderately proud of their

waterside *malecón*. *Malecón* is the Spanish for mole or jetty. At Guayaquil the jetty ran for a mile and a half down the waterfront. It was, I suppose, quite a good jetty, but the Guayaquilians' boasting was our first clear example of the South American delight in exaggeration and misplaced enthusiasm.

Yet Guayaquil was not a failure. Thirty miles up-river, it is Ecuador's largest city. It has buses equipped with radio and pretentious buildings (mainly of rotting wood). It has a first-rate plaza with well-kept palm trees and flowers, and although the greater part of the town is poor and not up to the standard of the centre, it must be remembered that living is cheap and the people unambitious. Most of the coast Indians get along very well with a few bananas and a bowl of pulse as their daily food.

This was very different from the malaria-stricken swamp we had been led to expect. Even the climate was pleasant. The midday heat was apt to be a little trying, but the rest of the day was merely warm and the nights were cool. The river rushed past us at a good 5 knots, and floating clumps of flotsam, trees, etc., could always be seen. None, however, caused the ship any damage—indeed the only shock sustained was the arrival on board, within 20 minutes of the ship being open to visitors, of 1,200 eager Ecuadoreans of all sorts and sizes. So impetuous, indeed, was their advance on the ship that fire-hoses were quickly rigged and Britain's marine superiority was thus upheld—the Fire Brigade at Bay or the Icy Douche in the Friendly Warning.

The Captain and a party of officers went up to Quito, while the ship was at Guayaquil. The following is their report of proceedings.

VISIT TO QUITO

The heading of this article might well be "Visit to Another World," for that was what Quito, in fact, turned out to be. A greater contrast can hardly be imagined than that which lies between Guayaquil, on the tropical Guayas River, and Quito, the mysterious mountain city—10,000 feet up in the Andes and one of the four corners of the ancient Inca empire.

The 14-hour journey up to Quito gives the traveller a wide variety of scenery. The first two hours are spent running through tropical lowland. On either side of the railway grow sugar, bananas, etc. Brilliant black and yellow birds dart across the track, an army of flamingoes will scatter out of your way like a sheaf of papers in a gust of wind. It is still very hot even when the blue mountains are beginning to lose their distance and, through a fringe of palm trees, the Andes are taking shape.

This is really the most exciting way to approach the Andes. You have been clattering through tropical vegetation since your journey began. Suddenly you run into the depot town of Bucay. That is to say you are conscious of a large number of rails, steaming locomotives and goods trucks . . . the word "station," as the English know it, has no existence in Ecuador. Bucay lives for two reasons—it is a fruit depot for the United Fruit Co., and a train depot for Ecuador's only railway. It is here that you fuel while the drivers put in a useful ten minutes flirting with Indian girls. There is a slight delay as a heavy goods train is shunted off the line, and then, with an unhappy crash of gears, you are away, and before you can catch a breath you are in and among the foothills of the Andes.

You climb steadily. The track follows the tortuous bed of a river. There is a blind corner every few yards which gives the driver his longed-for chance for self-expression on the horn. Apart from this, conditions are ideal for seeing scenery that has few, if any, equals in the world.

Tropical growth fades before this cool breeze. You pass trees with whitish branches tipped with scarlet. The mountains begin to be bare and copper-coloured. You think of slipping on your coat. All this time you are climbing. Guayaquil, with its noonday heat, is nothing but a memory. The Andes are vast, abrupt and savage. The railway seems a very narrow strip lying like a ribbon over a giant. It will take many, many years before humanity makes an impression on the wildness of Ecuador.

At one stretch the American Minister pointed down at the river-bed. There traces could be seen of the landslide which

had, only two years previously, swept away the track and a full train—thus cutting off Quito from all communication with the outside world (except by radio and horseback) for several months.

The showpiece of the railway is the Devil's Nose. Here you negotiate a stretch of track like a vertical "Z"—the car alternately going forwards and backwards, as there is no room to turn. By this means you rise 500 feet or so—an achievement which looks impossible from down below.

Shortly after this you reach the summit of the railway. This is at a height of 11,841 feet. It is across a plateau that the car now runs. A plateau of dark grey lava dust—barren and ominous-looking. There is one village where life is at its most primitive. The Indians who stare dumbly at the coach seem sub-human, they rarely smile and the majority have running colds. The only touch of colour in a landscape which seems designed especially for dust-storms is the brightly coloured poncho which nearly every Indian wears.

From here onwards the railway drops gradually. Quito, itself, stands at 9,500 feet. But we were not to reach the capital by railway.

The British Minister at Quito, who had expected us to leave Guayaquil much earlier than we did, had ordered cars to meet us. We detrained at Cajabamba, and completed the journey in four new American cars. We said good-bye to the railway at 6 p.m.—there was still 6 hours' travelling to be done.

At Quito, which is almost plumb on the Equator, the climate remains steady all the year round and night falls daily soon after 6 p.m. Before the light failed, however, we were given a glimpse of unusual beauty. The peak of Cotopaxi Volcano—a giant of 19,535 feet—could be seen through the gathering clouds of night, its snow summit lit up brilliantly like an enormous jewel in the middle of the sky. Then night rang down the curtain on a day of unforgettable scenery. Dusty and tired, we arrived at the Hôtel Metropolitano at midnight, to find a warm welcome awaiting us.

Quito itself was full of surprises. Its cathedral has no parallel. Pillars painted with gold leaf and an immense wealth

of gold ornament has survived without repair for 400 years. This, we were told, is owing to the peculiar quality of the atmosphere.

In itself the town is as much an outpost of civilization as South Georgia. Inland from Quito there is nothing save unexplored jungle for thousands and thousands of miles until at length the Amazon is struck. Savagery surrounds the town. The mountain Indians are still warlike, and though head-hunting is claimed to have been stamped out, in actual practice it still exists. Some of us were woken from sleep about 4 in the morning to hear bells clanging for early Mass—clattering and banging with such a frantic haste that it needed little imagination to picture how many times those bells had startled a warning through the city, how many times their terrifying clamour had brought men to their feet, sword in hand, and ready to drive off the savage Indians.

The British Community at Quito is not extensive. It is believed to consist of four—the British Minister and his wife, Mr. Stagg, a wealthy landowner, and a Major Thomas, who exploits real estate.

Undoubtedly Ecuador is the country for anyone with energy and the inclination to work. It has possibilities which cannot be listed, as they have scarcely been explored. There is enormous potential wealth in a large number of forms. Ecuador's primary need to-day is enlightened development.

On the fifth day at 6 in the morning we left Quito by railcar and returned to the tropical heat of Guayaquil.

A little way ahead of us lay the *Presidente Alfaro*—ex-Vanderbilt yacht and flagship of the Eucadorean Navy. Not only flagship but fleet for the remaining unit of Ecuador's maritime forces was safely lodged up the Amazon, having successfully gone all the way round to the East coast and up the river. Few hopes were entertained that this ship would ever return. It is believed several years had elapsed since the hands had last been mustered for payment.

The *Presidente Alfaro*, however, was of a totally different type. Every cabin had its private bathroom and luxury was the motif. "Brighter Navies" must also have been the motto,

for when our officers called at 0930 in the morning champagne was provided and a rumba band established themselves in the wardroom to dispense indigenous music.

We left Guayaquil on 9th September and managed not to go aground before reaching the sea. This statement may seem a little less curious when it is realized that the tortuous Guayas River is no easy route to negotiate and that the German cruiser *Emden* went aground the previous year after leaving Guayaquil as we had done.

On sailing for Peru we were also in possession of a small cheetah—named Guayas—a present to the ship from the Club de la Union. He was a beautifully furred little cat and was universally popular on board—but unfortunately at Callao Guayas jumped from the arms of a midshipman on to the quarter-deck and the bruises thus sustained never really healed. As he was always in pain, it was decided to have him destroyed.



GUAYAS

CHAPTER XIX

ROYAL PERU

TALARA

THE biggest surprise on the west coast of South America is the climate. The Humboldt current may strike a vaguely familiar note. You heard something of it at school . . . and that's about all. You do not realize, until you go there, that this current of cold water travelling direct from the Antarctic to the Equator determines the climate for some 4,000 miles of coastline.

Even then you've only read about it—just as you've read about the Taj Mahal. The Humboldt current has to be felt to be believed. The day we crossed the Line, for instance, was the coldest for six months. We shivered . . . shivered on the Equator!

And so it was all the way down the coast. Down the long northern desert that stretches from Talara in the very north of Peru to Coquimbo in middle Chile, at Vina del Mar and Valparaiso, and right through Chile's agricultural zone in the south as far as the Straits of Magellan—this is the sphere of the Humboldt current. The South American traveller should therefore realize that there is a change of climate of only a few degrees down the whole length of the West Coast. This is very different from the coast which supports Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro on its shores.

At Talara, our first port in Peru, we struck desert. Flat, yellowish, dead desert. We wondered what could possibly induce anyone to live in such barren surroundings . . . and then we began to learn about Peru's desert gold, how, towards the end of the last century, oil was "smelt" in this sandy waste, how the first wells were drilled while Victoria still ruled Eng-