

"Must I be strapped in?" I asked.

"Why, no. That's only for rough weather. You know, we had an old lady of 76 once who wouldn't be anchored—not for 100 dollars. Well, we hit an air-pocket and she bounced up to the roof, fell out of her chair and cut her face."

"I suppose that finished her for flying?"

"Not a bit. She did the return trip and liked it."

We were over the Andes now, flying at a height of nearly three miles above the sea and travelling over 160 miles an hour. On the left, high above them all, stood Aconcagua, the fourth highest mountain in the world. There was something dramatic in its utter loneliness, something breath-taking in its silent, motionless beauty, something theatrical in the way its sharp edges accentuated the daring blue of the sky. I could have gazed at it for hours.

Far below in the valley we were following was a thin black line etched into the mountain. Presently it came to an abrupt end.

"That's the railway," said the Purser, following my gaze, "and that's where it got washed away in a flood we had in 1934. Nowadays you go over the Hump in a car."

He went along into the control cabin. The steady hum of the motors relaxed a little. The right wing dipped.

"Look! down there . . ." the Purser exclaimed. "See that red house in the snow?"

"Yes."

"Well, now look right." We looked and saw something like a black statuette sticking out of the snow. I stared more closely. Then I realized. That tiny figure was the world-famous "Christ of the Andes"—the monument that marks a victory of reason over force. I turned over the leaves of a pamphlet I had and read quickly through its history—read how Chile and Argentine had been at loggerheads in 1900, how the trouble had been eventually settled in 1902, how Mateo Alonso, the Argentine artist, had completed this enormous statue of Christ the Redeemer, how it was unveiled in 1904, and how it now stands, 12,000 feet above sea-level, as

an international symbol of peace and goodwill between the two nations.

The last paragraph of the pamphlet, however, contained an anticlimax that could only come from America. I reproduce it in full:

"By one of those happy coincidences, the serene Christ of the Andean heights, symbol of brotherhood between nations, stands but a few metres from and seems also to protect with his uplifted hand the Meteorological Observatory, whose trained staff guard with painstaking care the safe passage of the great transport liners, keeping a daily vigil on the changes in weather in order that the peaceful and fruitful communication between the peoples of both countries be easy, comfortable and without perils."

Gradually snow gave way to copper-coloured rock. Imperceptibly the machine began losing height. We were nearing Mendoza, outpost of the prosperous Republic of Argentine, centre of the wine-producing industry—where you can get champagne to equal any in the world. We were gliding down to Mendoza, the town from which, only a short hundred years ago, the army, raised in Argentina, marched across the Andes and uprooted Spanish Government in Chile—to liberate yet another nation from the yoke of the old world.

We landed at Mendoza airport with less fuss than a train arriving in a station. It was hotter. Mendoza lies spread-eagled over the edge of the vast Argentine pampa—600 miles from the Atlantic and about 300 miles across the Andes to the Pacific. I was in the land of the "gauchos," of huge "frigorificos," of wine companies with an output of 40 million litres a year. I was in a land of prosperity, a land where no colour problem exists and a country which is gradually evolving standards of government ahead of other South American states.

I met Mr. Reid, the courteous ground manager of the airport, and I met Señor Alurralde, the local Panagra agent and owner of a ranch an hour and a half away. He was genial and hospitable. "Too bad we won't have time to get out there," he said. "However, I'll show you around Mendoza."

We drove into the town. I was surprised at the size. Here were trams, new shops and well-kept streets.

"You know, wine always pays," said Alurralde in explanation, "and all the wine produced here is consumed in the Argentine."

I was shown round the Arizu Wine Corporation's works. Never before have I seen huge vats hundreds of feet long filled to brimming with red wine, never before have I seen the fizz being put into cheap champagne and the sediment being separated out of the expensive variety, and never before have I signed my name in a visitors' book and been forthwith presented with a bottle of champagne.

Señor Alurralde, the entente between Argentina and England being decidedly firm by that time, then took me on to lunch, where I had the tenderest steak since leaving England. After lunch we took a quick ride in his antique automobile to look at the famous statue of San Martín, the General who led his army across the Andes to Chile and triumph. The monument is a work of art and unequalled by any I have seen in the old world.

We arrived back at the airport at 3 p.m. I climbed on board the *Santa Elena* just flown up from Buenos Aires. I took my last ground look at the Argentine Andes, rising abruptly like cliffs seen from the sea. The *Santa Elena* took off, spiralled and quickly made height. This was an "International" trip and most of the passengers were going to New York via Chile, Peru, the Panama Canal and Miami . . . it takes a mere four days from Buenos Aires and you stay overnight in hotels.

I said good-bye to the Argentine and for one brief hour feasted my eyes on white snow against an azure sky and the unbroken peace of high mountains.

Santiago seemed hot and dusty . . . far away through the light haze I could see the peaks I had flown across. The ageless Andes had cast their spell on me—and as night swept them out of sight I found myself wondering how long it would be before I could return. . . .

We all felt genuinely sorry when the time drew near for us

to leave. The concert party gave a successful show in an outsize theatre and the harmonica band went on the air and also played at the Viña Casino for the Carnival Fancy Dress Ball.

Though we still had over a month to spend in Chilean waters, we could not help feeling that we were leaving the civilized and agreeable centre for outposts, that to say the least, were dubious. Before closing a chapter on Valparaíso and Viña, therefore, a few impressions of Santiago, modern capital of Chile, might appropriately blossom out here.

Santiago streets by night were as gaily lit as Regent Street. Neon signs made splashes of brilliant reds, purples and greens. It suggested cabarets, dance-halls and a dangerous night-life. In point of fact there was nothing at all. At Valparaíso there had at least been the Viña Casino—at Santiago there was no place at all with the possible exception of the "Africa," a dance-hall the size of a match-box with cardboard trees and an uninspiring band. What did Santiago do at night? And where were all those lovely evening dresses worn—that you saw in Santiago shops? At home? If Santiago amused itself at night, outside its cinemas, then none of us discovered where—and it wasn't for want of looking.

But there are other things besides night-life in a city. One of them is clubs. Few of the officers who paid Santiago a visit will forget the Union Club, with its magnificent bar (is it the longest in the world?) and its baronial decoration. One officer thought it rather like a cathedral and is believed to have murmured "Amen" instead of "Cheerio."

The other club of note is the Club Hipico, where racing takes place in probably the finest surroundings in the world. The building itself is solid and well equipped, and at the back, like some Hollywood Christmas cake, lie the majestic Andes, their snowbound peaks white against the palest of blue skies.

Undoubtedly the best way to see Santiago, as the guide-book suggests, is to take the funicular up the Cerro San Cristóbal and look down on Santiago's eight square miles spread out below you. One detail is most noticeable. Smoke is almost

entirely absent. Remembering that Santiago by night is a blaze of light, you jump to the conclusion that Santiago runs on electricity and that electricity is made by hydro-electric power up in the Cordilleras.

There is little else of note. A new hotel is being built next door to the President's palace, new shops and new houses are being run up and Santiago is growing, without individuality, much as any other modern and highly evolved city . . . it is a worthy capital of Chile.

CHAPTER XXI

DUMPS

ROBINSON CRUSOE'S ISLAND

PLAGUE at Talcahuano proved to be a blessing in disguise. In addition to lengthening our stay at Valparaiso, we were sent to the lonely island of Juan Fernandez for three days. This, as an antidote to our hectic life in Valparaiso, was in itself valuable and the island with its crags and its wildness was new and refreshing to our somewhat jaded eyes.

Juan Fernandez to-day is the same as it was over 200 years ago when the Cinque Ports Galley marooned Alexander Selkirk. The same, that is, except for the village of San Juan Bautista (St. John Baptist), which now numbers some 550 souls, a radio station manned by the Chilean Navy, a police station with four carabineros, one pavement and one street-lamp. And what would Alexander Selkirk have said had he heard the strains of "Top Hat" churned out by a tin-can of a gramophone?

We anchored near the sunken German cruiser *Dresden*, lying since March 1915 at 60 fathoms in Cumberland Bay. One of her survivors still lives in Juan Fernandez. He is believed to have been a Warrant Telegraphist, and now holds the post of Warden of the Forests from the Chilean Government. As Juan Fernandez is a Chilean National Park—this is not, perhaps, such a sinecure as it might seem. Moreover, it is on Juan Fernandez that the valuable chonta wood grows, while one or two of us were given chips of sandalwood which is even more precious.

The more energetic among officers and ship's company scaled the surrounding mountains and were rewarded by air that was a tonic and by views of the island and of the immense

Pacific that stretched away like a deep blue and slightly crumpled cloth as far as the eye could see. Comparatively few got lost in the virgin bush. . . .

The most popular expedition was up to the saddle of a mountain called "El Yunque," or the anvil. This knife-edge pass was at one time Selkirk's lookout, and near it is perhaps the strangest surprise on the island. It is a rusty iron plaque cemented into the cliff-face and it reads as follows:

IN MEMORY OF
ALEXANDER SELKIRK
MARINER,

A Native of Largo, in the county of Fife, Scotland.

Who lived on this island in complete solitude for four years and four months.

He was landed from the Cinque Ports Galley, 96 tons, 16 guns, A.D. 1704, and was taken off in the Duke, Privateer, 12 February 1709.

He died Lieutenant of H.M.S. Weymouth, A.D. 1723, aged 47 years.

This tablet is erected near Selkirk's lookout, by Commodore Powell and the officers of H.M.S. Topaze, A.D. 1868.

John Child & Son, Valparaiso.

It is indeed odd to discover such a memorial written in English and placed high up near the peak of a Chilean island in the far Pacific.

While talking about Robinson Crusoe it might be said that Defoe, being a clever journalist, considerably elaborated Selkirk's story. The setting of *Robinson Crusoe* is more likely to be the tropical island of Tobago than Juan Fernandez, where there are neither palm trees, boa-constrictors nor sufficient sand for Man Friday to go planting his feet in. Indeed a short survey of Juan Fernandez reveals that Selkirk must have had a most monotonous diet, consisting mainly of fish.

The day before leaving, the wardroom organized a shooting-cum-sailing picnic—which, in the way of these things, ended as a pulling-cum-swearing benefit. To many of us it seemed the oddest party we had ever attended—a mixture of Ascot, Bisley and the Jubilee.

We took away the cutter and, on sailing towards the beach, were boarded, from a cockle of a rowboat, by the Foreign Legion. This shore detachment was reputed to know the lie of the land and the whereabouts of the mountain goats we were so intent on slaughtering. From now on a babel of tongues was heard. English, Spanish, French and Breton disturbed the island's calm as we sailed past tall cliffs and pebbly-looking coves.

With a spinner out astern (which must have caught some gigantic monster of the deep, for it broke) and with a dangerous assortment of rifles, shot-guns and blunderbusses—mainly distinguished by their lack of safety-catches—we eventually anchored the boat in a moody-looking cove and scrambled ashore. There followed a long, long climb up a slippery mountain with the object of reaching an eminence commanding the valley wherein mountain goats grazed. We reached the position all right, but any chance of a surprise attack vanished when one of the Counts of the Foreign Legion let off his shot-gun by mistake. Even then we missed the handful of goats we did see. Empty-handed we determined to bring machine-guns on our next shooting affray. A four-mile pull back to the ship brought a day's sport to its weary close. Next day we sailed.

The simplest sport at Juan Fernandez was to sit on the quarter-deck with a line and a fish-hook. Large and succulent fish were found to be queuing up to get a bite at our hooks—especially at night when the blaze of a yard-arm group acted as a fish magnet.

Juan Fernandez was where we got rid of old suits, coats, etc., in exchange for sticks and trinkets of chonta wood. This wood is found nowhere else in the world and is hard in texture and attractively grained. In Valparaiso "chonta" sticks fetched 20 or 30 shillings, but the inhabitants of Juan Fernandez were only too pleased to exchange their products for an old line in coats. In various parts of the island sandalwood is also found, but this, owing to its great value and the length of time needed to grow it, was carefully guarded.

Juan Fernandez is the source of Chilean lobsters. At least

they are really crayfish lacking the claws of a lobster and slightly coarser eating. As, however, they only cost 1s. 6d. each, the ship had more than one meal of them.

Apart from a little uncertain riding on mountain ponies—looking top-heavy with their thick Chilean saddles and up to 15 stone of seaman on top of that—there were no other activities of any note. An early morning expedition, headed by the Commander, took the pinnace and a local guide to view Selkirk's cave. Whether they expected to see the ruins of some Arabian Nights' palace is unknown, but they certainly seemed disappointed when all they saw was just . . . a cave.

CORRAL VIA VALPARAISO

Light travels at 186,000 feet per second, but the speed of a "buzz" is incalculable. The common buzz or rumour is a direct descendant of the jungle telegram passed from tribe to tribe by tom-tom. Yet a buzz starts by being seen and not heard. A fragment of pink paper, for instance, fires off a dozen rumours to skeddadle helter-skelter round the ship (what made their Lordships choose a modest pink for their lurid cypher messages?). How many times in the Mediterranean were we returning to our station via Aden and the Cape of Good Hope? At Alexandria, rumour, assisted by Jim Irish Bey, would have sent us to Cyprus, Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said and Pompey . . . anywhere, that is, except Haifa, where we went.

Thus, when speed was increased to some 20 knots on clearing Cumberland Bay, rumour got busy. Everyone knew we were going to Valparaiso—Mechanician Smith had a serious case of pneumonia and we were taking him to the nearest hospital. But no one could more than guess how long we should spend there. The majority hoped for a night—basing their assumptions on our calculated time of arrival at Corral.

The majority were disappointed. We flashed into Valparaiso, transferred Smith to a waiting ambulance and, breathless with haste, lost no time in ploughing out of harbour and south to Corral. Needless to say, we arrived about 10 o'clock

at night and were forced to roll at anchor outside the harbour till daylight the next day.

Such was our somewhat undistinguished entry into Corral—a port not visited by a British warship for seven years.

PUERTO CORRAL—VALDIVIA

First on board was the British Consul from Valdivia, Mr. Harry Allen. Looking rather like a character from Dickens, Mr. Allen's boundless enthusiasm, willing co-operation and real hard work made our stay at Corral and Puerto Montt considerably pleasanter than it might have been.

Corral is a small seaside village. It lies in a wide bay, the mouth of the Valdivia River, and commands the entrance. In the 1820's Corral had seen battles between the strong Spanish fortress on the hill-side and the newly formed Chilean Fleet under Lord Cochrane. The townsfolk, who were all Chilean, seemed genuinely honoured by the ship's visit, and, though there was little money in the place, managed to hold a reception for some forty of us in the ruins of the old fortress. Sandwiches, cakes and beer at 4 in the afternoon was followed by a parade of the Boy Scouts, dancing on the village green—not an unqualified success—and a long speech in Spanish.

Valdivia, on the other hand, was an old riverside town and an important centre in the Department of Osorno. It had a plaza, buses, cinemas, hotels and yet never pretended to be more than what it was—namely, a sleepy country town. Here were a very different people from those we had met in the north. Here were farmers—and German farmers at that—for Valdivia is the headquarters of the German element in Chile. In Valdivia the Deutsches Verein—or German Club—was a replica of a South German inn, you heard German spoken and you ordered, not *cerveza*, but *schop*. At a guess I would say it was here that Chile would find the most stubborn resistance to her eager Chileanization of all immigrants.

Valdivia is the head of the richest agricultural district in Chile. Nowadays farming in Chile pays as it never has before.

Every capable farmer can enrich himself with ease, for his interests are carefully watched in Santiago, the capital. And yet there were few visible signs of prosperity. In Valdivia, it is true, you saw no beggars, and the streets, or the majority of them, were tarred. But buses were remarkable only for the way they held together and for the triumphant crash which accompanied all changes of gear. The river steamer took $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours to do the 10 miles between Corral and Valdivia, and besides being slow, was unsafe, as it had been known to overturn on two previous occasions.

A few of us went up to Valdivia on ordinary leave, but most of us saw the place for an hour or two during the two river trips organized by Mr. Allen. A river steamer was put at our disposal; we were given an outdoor lunch at a farm called Angochilla, with heavy Chilean dishes and unlimited wine, and, after a suitable pause for slumber, buses took us on to Valdivia for tea and individual exploration of the town, and then at the end of the day swept us down-river and home again.

During our stay at Corral, the Captain and six officers were invited by the Committee to visit the Agricultural Show at Osorno, some three hours away in the country. It is the largest exhibition in Chile and is held once a year.

Corral was the scene of yet another musical comedy act—namely, the unveiling of a memorial to Lord Cochrane. This was a ceremony of some importance and the Intendente came down from Valdivia for the occasion. *Ajax* landed a seaman guard and the band, but the Chileans were not to be outdone and themselves turned out a guard (consisting of the Captain and the Port's boat's crew) and the band which had provided such stirring music at the reception in the fortress.

The startling effect of this turnout and its disastrous results for the dignity of the ceremony must be imagined "in the flesh." You must picture the Royal Marine Band and twenty-four stalwart English sailors yoked somewhat unwillingly to six unfortunate Chilean mariners and the Town Band, whose music was full of the best intentions but had the bad luck to lack one or two vital notes.

The memorial was reached and with due solemnity unveiled.

It was then discovered that someone had stolen the bronze plaque during the preceding night, and not even the stirring oratory which followed could quite allay an inescapable feeling that the ceremony had not proceeded as smoothly as it might have. . . .

Disaster again occurred in the March Past. The Intendente and the Captain stood expectantly at the base end of the pier. They were not kept waiting long and soon the *Ajax* guard came thundering down the road, scattering dogs and small children out of its path, and followed by the Chilean six in a variety of steps and in complete ignorance of what was going to happen. Decapitating several scrubby-looking urchins with his sword, the Gunnery Officer saluted and the *Ajax* guard followed suit. Hot in pursuit, the Chileans did likewise and the March Past might be said to have ended, except that the road was suddenly discovered to be a cul-de-sac. Something had to be done and with great presence of mind the Gunnery Officer decided in a flash that course must immediately be altered if the Guard was not to march into a cliff. Forgetful of the Chilean Guard of Honour which had by now caught up and was panting at the rear, the Gunnery Officer gave the order "About Turn." This was smartly obeyed and the Chilean six were suddenly faced with twenty-four armed sailors bearing down on them. Petrified for a moment, they quickly discovered discretion to be the better part of valour and scattered out of our path like rabbits.

We sailed south for Puerto Montt on 1st December feeling that, during the week at Corral, we had at any rate done our duty.

PUERTO MUD

Goody! goody! Here's Puerto Montt—that sapphire of South Chile—only one hour away from the famed Chilean Lakes—and the harbour where we were to spend twelve dubious days.

The guide-book says 9,500 souls inhabit this town, but the Mayor, Don Carlos Wulf, puts the number at 22,000, as Puerto Montt is growing day by day. Well, it needs to . . .

and if visitors to the Chilean Lakes are not to be prematurely disillusioned, then something had better be done to improve the look of this Dump among Dumps. Muddy, untarred streets, rusty tin shacks and a scruffy-looking plaza ill befit the capital of a province. But the South American has the highest ideas so long as this entails no effort or work of any kind, and it is this, more than anything else, which arrests development in south Chile.

But the people in this "distressed area" were hospitable. Army and Carabineros vied with each other to lend the officers horses; Consul Harry Allen, who had come down in the ship, organized trips up to the Lakes with great energy—that these trips palled after an hour or so in a lake steamer was none of his fault—and the Air Force put their aerodrome at the disposal of the ship for football matches. The aeronauts even suggested that we might care to use the Station bus for transport, if we had no objection to paying for the petrol. We hadn't—till the bill arrived, just ten times the cost of any petrol we could possibly have used.

Entertainment, too, was a double-edged weapon . . . and frequently followed by requests such as "The Colonel hardly likes to ask . . . but do you think you could spare a case of whisky? We know it costs you nothing and here in Chile we have to pay 30s. a bottle."

But only to stress the bad side of our visit would be most unfair. There *were* people glad to see us, who entertained us because we were strangers, paying them a courtesy visit, and who enjoyed having us about the town just for the sake of it. These people—and they seem to grow yearly less numerous—alone make a ship's stay memorable and enjoyable. But they were to be found, even in Puerto Montt.

More than one person remarked on our excellent behaviour and compared it with the "smash-and-grab" visit of American ships. Not that there was much either to smash or grab in Puerto Montt. Most of it had obviously been dealt with before.

A good number ventured on the trip to Lake Llanquihue (pronounced yankiway), and the day started and ended in

argument. On arrival ashore we were reproached (and by a Chilean) for being late—not only that, but he refused to put his vehicle into motion and only a machine-gun battery of Spanish by Mr. Allen eventually persuaded him to be a decent fellow and fulfil his contract. Even then he had difficulty with his gears.

It took an hour to reach Puerto Varas, the lakeside town, which has a Captain of the Port and where the Government is erecting an immense new hotel at the cost of a million pesos. As the building, when finished, will not be worth more than a quarter of that sum, perhaps some kind of racket is detectable?

Lake Llanquihue has an area of over 600 square miles, and the only way of crossing it is by means of a small river boat with the slow but steady speed of a tortoise. The scenery, of course, is unforgettable, but variety does add a spice to appreciation, and most of us were cold and only too glad when we were once again on land and within reasonable distance of lunch. Once in Ensenada life moved more quickly and vividly. New and comfortable buses took us along the road by the swift-racing river Petrohué with dynamic-looking crags and dark green trees on the far side. The clear emerald green of the water and the size and stillness of the surrounding scenery made a deep impression on at least one member of the party. In fact, I fancy the only real regret was that there was so little sun. On reaching Lake Todos Santos, we turned back, and after stopping at the German-owned and German-run hotel at Ensenada began the long journey back to the ship. On arrival at Puerto Varas only one bus was discovered for the last lap back to the ship and arguments began all over again. If the Chilean Lakes do not gain in the popularity they deserve, it might be said that God strove but Chilean temperament won the day.

Horses were plentiful at Puerto Montt and the huasos were more than willing to let us ride their mounts in consideration of a few pesos. The Chilean horse rarely trots, it either walks fast—very fast—or gallops. The first spells disaster to one's end, the second ends in disaster. In Puerto Montt you could

have it either way or both. Still, it was better than the switch-back on Southsea front, and many of us might be seen stirring up the dust in Puerto Montt streets.

The only night-life in Puerto Montt while we were there consisted of a circus. Although all the cracks were in Spanish, it was well worth a visit, got a full tent and made everyone laugh. The only other circus to be seen round South America was one of Carlos Hagenbeck's at Montevideo. For spontaneity and applause Puerto Montt had Montevideo beaten hands down—but the latter was a much larger and more professional affair.

On 14th December we left Puerto Montt and sailed south for the Straits of Magellan.

MONTT TO MAGALLANES

The Commander-in-Chief allowed us plenty of time for what is one of the bleakest yet most fascinating trips in the world—namely, through the Straits of Magellan. We left Montt on 14th December and were not due to arrive at Magallanes till four days before Christmas.

Our chief memory is of dull, cold skies, of metallic-looking water, and of land whose bareness was occasionally varied by thick, unkempt forest. Once we were in the "channels" we anchored at night and saw little of human life except on one occasion. But we were not to miss "the lowest form of humanity."

We had anchored in Otter Ridge at about 5 p.m. when a crazy-looking canoe put out from the shore and drifted down on the ship. This canoe contained a family. An old man squatting over an oar was scarcely distinguishable from an old woman sitting opposite. Two or three children made up the family. All had hair uncut and straggling like a moth-eaten rug. All were blue with cold. Scarcely dressed, their pitiful rags did little to keep out the bitter wind. Their teeth chattered and their limbs moved as though under local control—as though each muscle had decided what it would do on its own. They were scarcely alive and horrible to look

at. They must have been crawling with lice, if vermin could live in such a temperature and on such scrawny material.

These people, who are rapidly dying out, are descendants of the canoe-livers, observed by Darwin on his voyage in H.M.S. *Beagle*. They rarely leave their boats and scarcely exist, their principal diet consisting of shellfish. They had brown shapeless faces of a Mongol type and had no language, being only able to utter an occasional Spanish word as their heads and bodies shivered in the cold. "Enfermo," said the old man, pointing at his legs, which could not be seen, and "Café," cried his wife, struggling miserably into an old sweater one of us threw down. . . .

Loaves of bread and tins of coffee and sugar were dropped down into the boat, as well as toys for the kids, who by now were also arrayed in old duck caps. But when some gift missed its mark and fell overboard—they were so dumb that they made no effort to retrieve it and allowed it to drift away with the stream.

I have never before seen such gaunt abject misery and I don't want to again. As far as a well-fed, uniformed member of the twentieth century could tell, here was a family who would be much better off dead. Here was no evolution but decay, and no one could suggest that these people would ever produce children who were not successively more wretched than themselves. They may have been the descendants of a once-proud, highly civilized race, but their course was set downhill and their eventual doom is only a matter of time.

One of the more remarkable phenomena in the Straits of Magellan was the speed with which weather conditions changed. Sun we never saw, but on a fine day a cloud would suddenly chase along behind the ship, envelop us in fog and drench us with drizzle almost before you could light a cigarette. These mists and fogs were eerie. We were so far from civilization, in such lonely channels and with nothing but ourselves for hundreds of miles all round. To sit in a hot bath in a room ventilated by a noisy fan and lit by electricity was a comforting recall to the present day, but to go up on deck and watch a grey-white glacier vanish in a swirl of cold

mist was to forget modernity, to lose sight of civilization and to find oneself a primitive organism surrounded by giant forces over which one had no control and which one made little pretence of understanding.

Such were the Straits of Magellan, and looking back over seven days of what passed for summer in those regions, one can scarcely imagine how a schedule of air-trips is to be maintained between Montt and Magallanes, nor can one help admiring the spirit which will eventually make such a service possible.

Our last anchorage before reaching Magallanes was Port Famine, where Captain Pringle Stokes of the *Beagle* lies buried. During the recent visit of a Chilean gunboat his grave was repaired and the cross repainted. This we were told about on our arrival at Magallanes, but when we were anchored the night before few, if any, of us knew that ashore lay buried the man who in the 1830's was mainly responsible for surveying this inhospitable part of the world and who died of anxiety while carrying out his second commission of four years. Captain Stokes of the *Beagle* is still mentioned with reverence by those who live in or near the Straits of Magellan and know the conditions under which he worked and lived.

At 0900 on 21st December of 1936 we anchored at Magallanes, where, 10,000 miles from England, we were to spend Christmas.

MAGALLANES AND FAREWELL TO CHILE

Magellan first discovered the site of the present town in 1520, and as a large statue is erected to his memory in the main square, the Government have evidently grounds for their decision to change "Punta Arenas" into "Magallanes."

Lying as it does on the southernmost extreme of the South American continent, Magallanes claims the distinction of being the southernmost town in the world, although, even so, its latitude is only equivalent to that of Hull in the Northern Hemisphere. There, however, the comparison ends. The proximity of the Humboldt current from the Arctic, the com-

plete lack of shelter from the prevailing southerly winds, and the absence on land of anything in the nature of big shrubs or trees to form a "windbreak," all combine to add another superlative in describing the town—bleakest in the world.

A few more disparaging remarks before continuing the description. The town has no railway; its only road connects with Argentine territory at Rio Gallegos and is often impassable in winter; connections with the rest of Chile are, at the moment, confined to sea transport, which necessitates sea passages through a stretch of sea acknowledged to be the stormiest in the world—an air-line from Puerto Montt (1,200 miles north) is contemplated, but even by Chilean standards this form of transport will be so hazardous that mails only will be flown until more experience is gained.

Due to its isolation, the town is theoretically a "duty-free port," but local taxation renders this concession abortive.

Despite all this the local people are cheerful, very hospitable, and much more prosperous than their confrères farther north. This is mainly due to the continued prosperity of the sheep-farming industry, to which the whole of Patagonia is devoted. The majority of the farms are English owned and can boast wonderful farmhouses, luxuriously furnished. It is a unique experience to drive 100 miles from a Chilean town over an elementary road and arrive at a solidly built house in the English style, surrounded by a beautifully kept garden tended by a native of Berkshire. The difference lay in the fact that the farm manager's nearest neighbour was a lighthouse-keeper some 30 miles away, one of the manager's diversions being to drive over to the lighthouse "just for a talk." Many of the shepherds are Scotsmen, or descendants of Scotsmen, particularly natives of the Orkneys, whom one can understand feeling quite at home in the bleak surroundings of Patagonia.

The town itself is unlovely, but clean. It rises in a gradual slope from the anchorage, which is completely exposed to the south-westerly gales and "williwaws" to which the Straits are so prone. Its biggest annual event is the visit of the big P.S.N. Liner *Reina del Pacifico*, which arrives on a "pleasure

cruise" early each year *en route* for Valparaiso, the North and home. During *Ajax's* visit, however, the town was roused by an "extra" in the form of a ceremonial re-burial of the remains of some members of the crew of H.M.S. *Dotterell*.

H.M.S. *Dotterell* was a small gunboat, one of the many little vessels who, during the Victorian era, did unobtrusive service in odd corners of the world. In March 1881 she was lying in the anchorage off Magallanes, probably in much the same position as that allotted to *Ajax* in 1936, when a magazine explosion blew her to pieces and, of her complement of 150, few if any were saved and only a handful of bodies recovered. H.M.S. *Turquoise* interred the remains of 14 of the crew in a cemetery, which became the property of the Admiralty in perpetuity.

With the town rapidly expanding, the local authorities wished to transform the cemetery into a "Plaza" and requested Admiralty permission to re-inter the remains in a new cemetery. At this stage the Chileans had to be made aware of an axiom probably not previously brought to their notice—that however much the British Admiralty maltreat the living, they certainly do the dead proud. Its effect as far as this particular instance was concerned was an Admiralty decision that the remains could not be moved to a new position unless and until they could be given proper naval re-burial. Thus things stood when *Ajax* arrived.

On 28th December 1936 an imposing procession set off from the town pier. Two bands (Chilean Army and *Ajax*), representative officers and "mourners," and rounded off by a file of local boy scouts. Arriving at the Old Cemetery, the 55-year-old remains of 14 seamen were found to have been equally distributed amongst three caskets, which were each placed on a gaudily decorated gun-carriage, guards "presenting arms." The procession then moved off to the strains of the "Dead March" and commenced a wearing trail right through the town, accompanied from on high by a Chilean aeroplane which persisted in zooming down to perilously low altitudes even in the middle of the town, rendering the giving of orders impossible and destroying the solemnity of the

occasion—apparently this plane was acting under orders to do so; a curious method of expressing respects. On arrival at the New Cemetery, full of hideous prosperous-looking vaults and tombs, the escorts were left outside and officers, "mourners" and guards followed the gun-carriages to the new grave, over which had been erected the original monument raised by the *Turquoise*. The Mayor made a short pertinent speech, in Spanish, ending with a flowery touch about the Navy which had for many years been the visible link between Chile and England, wreaths were laid, including one from the Chilean Air Force (a curious touch of homage to people who had never know aircraft), and from an old lady, a descendant of one of the *Dotterell* men. The Guard "presented arms," three volleys were fired, and the re-interment of the relics of a 55-year-old tragedy was completed.

Christmas swallowed up most of our other activities and individual memories will serve as reminders more vividly than any attempt at generalization in these pages. One *asado* for the officers, however, must be mentioned.

This was arranged by the local Colonel and was meant to be a young men's party. It was to take place some miles out in the country and we might either ride on horseback or go in a bus. Most of us rode. It was a watery day with occasional glimpses of sun and a nip in the air. When we arrived we found that arrangements were already under way—a tent had been erected and whole sheep were being roasted on spits over a wood fire. A few minutes later another lorry clattered to a standstill and a band tumbled out. Barrels of Chilean wine stood expectantly full and in a very short space of time the *asado* was in full swing. A surprising number of our hosts spoke English, and after one or two Pisco cocktails most of us found ourselves conversing in equally fluent Spanish.

Proceedings were enlivened by the arrival of "Mas que leones" (more strength than lions)—a midget of a man with enormous strength and great reputed wit. He was dressed as a huaso with cog-wheel spurs that are peculiar, I think, to Chile. Having once been an Army officer, he was now a

wealthy sheep-farmer and the *asado* was taking place on his land.

The meal went lumpily but with much gusto. Most of the sheep proved to be nearly raw and very tough, so we concentrated largely on the salad and the *vino*. Half-way through the Mayor arrived and contrived in a very short time to get remarkably drunk. (Slight obscurity of vision on the return journey caused him to drive his car into a fence.)

After the meal the Chilean Army played their drinking song, "La bomba va, la bomba va" (the pump is working) with graphic illustrations—the object being, apart from making us all tipsy, to sing it till everyone in turn had drained their glasses *al seco* and reversed them upside down on the table. This completed, the Mayor, not to be out-moded, polished off a jug of wine and upended that . . .

The party ended in slight disorder at about 4 o'clock, an attempt having been made to put "mas que leones" in the wine-barrel.

Such is a Christmas *asado*.

Nothing else of much interest occurred. The concert party gave a Christmas show in the Politeama Theatre, which was well patronized. One or two dances took place, and on the 28th December we bade farewell after a stay of nearly three months in Chilean waters.

PART V

SPRING CRUISE 1937

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CHAPTER XXII

FALKLAND ISLANDS

PORT STANLEY, F.I.

THE Falkland Islands are connected by an undersea archipelago to Patagonia—which is no doubt why Argentina lays claim to them every year. It is believed that this country also appoints a Governor each year, who through the temporary occupation of the British is compelled to reside in Buenos Aires. What a misfortune! After a few days in the remote and barren Falkland Islands we felt bitterly how he must have suffered . . . and how deeply it must have hurt, living in the warmth of Buenos Aires, to get paid not for F.I. but for F.A.

The argument about ownership seems interminable. Both sides have "right" on their side but the islands stay British because on our side we not only have might but possession . . . which, as Mussolini demonstrated in Ethiopia, is nine-tenths of the law. However, so intense is the feeling in the land of gauchos about the Islas Malvinas that any letter mailed to Argentina from the Falklands has its stamps effaced, Argentine ones affixed and postage due charged. . . .

And before 1592 no one knew they existed. In that year John Davis first sighted the islands while sailing in the *Desire*. In 1594 Sir Henry Hawkins, as a compliment to the Queen, named them Hawkins Maidenland. Later a Dutchman, Sebald de Wert, visited them and named them Sebaldines. Some hundred years afterwards Captain Strong, an Englishman, sailed between the two principal islands and called the Channel Falkland Sound in honour, perhaps, of Lord Falkland, who fell at the Battle of Newbury, but more likely in honour of the Lord Falkland who was then Treasurer of the Navy.

The Falkland Islands first acquired their second name in 1764 when de Bougainville, a Frenchman from St. Malo, founded a small fishing colony on the islands and named them Îles Malouines. Later the Spaniards forced the French to relinquish their claim in consideration of £25,000 and the name, translated into the Spanish tongue, became *Islas Malvinas*.

Meanwhile Commodore Byron had established a British Colony at Port Egmont and claimed the islands for England on the grounds of prior discovery. For years the English and Spanish colonies existed in the same islands, only some hundred miles from each other, without the settlers in either being aware of the existence of the others—a state of affairs well imaginable when even to-day experienced guides are necessary for journeying over the islands on roads only passable on horseback.

In 1770 the superior forces of the Spaniards forced the English to leave, an incident which almost brought the two countries to war. This was avoided by the restoration to England of Port Egmont, but by 1810 both the English and Spanish settlers had come to the conclusion that the islands were impossible for colonization and both departed.

In 1825 an endeavour was made by the Republic of Buenos Aires to revive the Spanish Colony and Louis Vernet was sent to establish himself as Governor of the Group in Port Louis. This eventually led the British Government to reassert its claim to ownership and Captain Onslow, in command of H.M.S. *Clio*, was despatched to deal with the situation. In January 1833 Louis Vernet was forced to leave the islands in favour of England, who stopped any further argument by converting them into a convict settlement, a most suitable use. The Argentine Republic, however, remains unconvinced and each year puts in its claim, which is, each year, ignored.

Port Stanley was established in 1844, at the instigation of Captain Ross, the Antarctic explorer, as a suitable base for ships of His Majesty's Navy.

On the morning of the last day of 1936 we entered Port Stanley. There seemed to be no sign of habitation nor even

the possibility of such on these bleak, windswept islands of tough grass, peat bog and barren rock. The first thing that caught our eye was the hulk of the *Great Britain*, the first and largest steamship of its day, which, like many other vessels of the last century, had been disabled on passage round the Horn and found its last haven in Stanley Bay. Then suddenly and without warning the well-painted and miniature township of Stanley jumped into view—looking like a clean and overgrown toy town, which was on loan from some model nursery. A cold, grey day and paint such as South America could never imagine underlined the cleanliness. Even the roads were tarred—and the red and green roofs straggling over the hill-side gave Stanley an accentuated air of Englishness. From Dumps, in fact, to Decency.

The Cathedral is almost the only stone building and is the seat of the Lord Bishop of the Falkland Islands, whose diocese stretches from the Panama Canal to the South Pole and who has the wisdom to live in Valparaiso. The other edifice which strikes the eye is the Town Hall—a fine large building with the Museum and Government Offices downstairs and the “social amenities” on the upper story. It was here that dances were held and here that the concert party gave a successful show, which is reported on elsewhere.

Commentators, more famed for their wit than for their accuracy, had warned us that we should have the greatest difficulty in distinguishing sheep from shepherds. In Stanley, they said, what had started as a ewe lamb might end up serving drinks behind a bar . . . sheep had the vote and might be seen in Parliament governing the island. I am happy to say this is untrue . . . an exaggeration.

Sheep-farming, however, is the island's main source of livelihood, and a small acquaintanceship with the terrain of the islands soon shows you why. The Falkland Islands should always be pictured against a leaden-grey sky. They are low-lying and undulate in large wave-like folds. The colour is a dirty flaxen-green varied by patches of deep, deep brown where someone has been digging for peat. It has been compared to Orkney scenery, and indeed there is much in the

Falkland Islands to remind you of Scapa . . . and always that dull metallic sky which, in itself, suggests remoteness. But here, unlike Scapa, is no daily air service to Inverness. The islanders count themselves lucky on one mail a month—and the arrival of the S.S. *Lafonia*—their only material link with the outside world—is such a big event that disappointment must have surely been felt when a “mammoth mail” turned out to be largely Christmas letters and parcels for the *Ajax*.

Ignoring the bleak, darkening landscape and the squalls of driving rain, which swept across the harbour between ship and shore, we grit our teeth and prepared to celebrate New Year's Eve. After all, we were at the Falkland Islands, a British possession, and no warship had been there for well over a year. We got down to it and fraternized. The Community at Stanley being equal, more or less, to the complement of a battleship, we reckoned that 1,200 English-speaking inhabitants gave us plenty of chances to pick out friends. There is no doubt we succeeded and the Governor's description of the ship as the ablest and most enthusiastic he had seen was genuine with sincerity. But once again individual memories will supplement this narrative more brilliantly than the remarks of a disinterested spectator. Here, then, is the place to lay down the book, pour out another half-pint and rake up your recollections of Stanley and the ship's stay—principal among which will probably be THE MOUNTING OF THE SIX-INCH GUN. Only capitals can adequately express our feelings in connection with this masterpiece of modern defence—only capitals and expletives. An article follows by ONE WHO WAS INTIMATELY CONCERNED with this manoeuvre:

“Our activities at Falkland Islands had been forecast before leaving the Mediterranean by way of a memo from the Commodore, suggesting that *Ajax* should embark certain timbers and ammunition before leaving the station for S. America to enable a 6-inch gun to be mounted and tested at Falkland Islands. This did not alarm us unduly for such has been the custom of ships visiting that port for the last few decades.

“Accompanying the memo was a large pack of correspondence, which after much sifting vouchsafed the following history of said operations:

“During the war H.M.S. *Lancaster* landed a couple of 6-inch guns and mounted them, one at Sapper Hill and the other at Mount Low for local defence purposes. However, after several years of deep and intense thought it was decided to move the gun from Mount Low to Sapper Hill, a distance of some 4 miles across broken ground of soft peat and rock and a passage of about 1 mile by water. This was done by *Durban* in two successive visits, 1931-2, by means of most primitive sleds and much man-power, and the gun was left lying unmounted at Sapper Hill.

“More thought was then brought to bear on the matter and in 1933 H.M.S. *Dauntless* by the same methods dragged the gun another 4 miles over equally rough ground to a position near Canopus Hut the other side of Port Stanley and there left it lying for the next ship to play with.

“H.M.S. *Exeter* arrived in 1935 but was not foolish enough to be browbeaten into moving it elsewhere and instead organized for the local authorities to prepare an emplacement to take it about 200 yards from where it was lying and left it to the next ship to carry on the good and important work.

“The next ship was H.M.S. *Ajax*.”

“On arrival in December 1936 *Ajax* found the gun and mounting lying in the open, well bedded in the grass and peat about 200 yards from the emplacement, which had just been completed. The gun was still mounted on *Durban's* primitive sled and *Lancaster's* original wooden baulk platforms, still in good condition, were close by. The gun and mounting were in surprisingly good condition after their somewhat unorthodox life of the last 5 years.

“Very luckily the R.M. Officer, who had joined the ship at Valparaiso straight from Alexandria where he had been employed on *Repository* with the R.M. Detachments ashore (not as you might think in furniture removals, but the Army