

the benefit of the three languages. But the general talk runs almost entirely upon food. The Germans are disgusting. They stuff themselves. This is especially so with Fraulein Liebenthal, the woman of 35 who has now made her appearance. (They all seem to run to picturesque names). This morning she launched a panegyric of French bread in German so simple and joyous that even I could understand it. Its great merit, she said, was that you could eat and eat and eat it and never feel any fuller. She and her compatriots load their dishes with food and scarcely wait till they are served to begin eating. When they are at last satt, they naturally feel ill - but then they assure myself and one another that the only remedy is to keep up the strength by more eating. Frau Wohlgemuth affects great concern for her "streamline", though she does little to conserve it; but indeed her contours are rather those of the whale than the mackerel.

MARCH 5, 1938.

I'm afraid that this entry will be extra dull, for I have a bit of a temperature and feeling miserable. But I must get things down before they slip out of my mind. Moreover, Mme. Caro has promised to give me some rum this evening, and perhaps I will drink some of the brandy Dinah gave me. In case the drinks don't mix (I know so little about these things) I shall have to write quickly lest I slide under the table.

Two days ago we encountered the Azores<sup>(2)</sup>. Such remote islands had seemed quite outside my ken, and so I feel that this marks an event in my life. "That time when I passed the Azores." But that was the trouble - I just passed them. Indeed the first, Graciosa, I never saw at all, because I was dressing and it was on the other side of the boat. The second occurred after breakfast and was rugged and morose. The third, Saint-George, was only

a little less disagreeable in appearance, while the fourth, Poyal, was very much more inviting. From Saint George rose a number of columns of smoke, one of them visible many miles away, and these I took to be small volcanoes for I knew that the islands were of volcanic origin. It was true that as we got nearer it became apparent that the smoke rose from the surface and not from the summit of the hills - but the example of Solfatara, the ground volcano near Naples, came to my mind and easily explained the apparent contradiction. At dinner, however, the captain poured scorn on this theory and said that the smoke arose from the fires in which the natives were accustomed to burn their superfluous crops of grass. While admitting to you the uninteresting truth, I see in this incident the beginning of a traveller's tale. "It was in the winter of '37-'38 that I made the passage of the Azores in a small tramp steamer. From many miles away a plume of smoke, obviously volcanic, towered above Saint George, one of the most barren and desolate of these islands; and as we drew nearer lesser columns of smoke could be seen rising from the smaller summits. As you may know, the Azores are of volcanic origin though for many years no sign of activity had been seen in them. This was, therefore, a remarkable event. With the aid of powerful field glasses it was now possible to see in detail what was going on. The inhabitants, a swarthy negroid race, were evidently gathering in their grass crop when the eruption overtook them, for they could be seen running in all directions, many of them abandoning their precious burdens so as to escape the flames and showers of stones which were being poured out on every side. Some of those on board wished to land and give what help they could to the luckless islanders - but it was soon apparent -----" And after that anything can happen, according to whether an audience still remains.

Yesterday the engine stopped for five hours. In my simplicity I had

supposed that ships of any size were equipped with reserve engines, with which they could proceed in case of emergency. But that is not so with the San Antonio. It has only one engine, and if anything goes wrong with that, the ship just stops. Moreover, it makes no effort to regain lost time which would cost the company extra in fuel, whereas time within reason costs them nothing. I had an appointment with the Chief Engineer to see over the engine room, but was forced to postpone my visit until to-day. With me went Mr. Auld, who turns out to be a retired <sup>marine</sup>/engineer who started his career long ago in the shops of Harland and Wolff. As I know almost nothing about how a steam engine works, I was quite content to look on the whole thing as a piece of pure motion, of which its size and complexity made it an impressive example. But the Chief Engineer, in a strange mixture of French and English, explained everything in the utmost detail, while Mr. Auld drew unintelligible diagrams on scraps of paper. Considering the fact that hardly any item of the ship's equipment works properly, the engine room seemed to me very well kept; but I was not specially anxious to creep between the enormous boilers where I expected every moment to be consumed by flying cinders or sparks. After that the Chief Engineer and I descended into the very entrails of the ship - the tunnel in which the tailshaft lies. This huge and glistening shaft revolves naked only just on the other side of a small handrail - and you walk a remarkable distance bent double before arriving at the bulkhead behind which the screw lies.

MARCH 16, 1938.

You will see that a long interval elapsed at this point. For several days after the last entry I ran rather a high temperature which rose to about 102 and died away leaving me feeling weak and lazy. So now I must catch up

with the news at the risk of boring you with the recollection. On March 5 I finished Thais. It is indeed a masterly work, describing in a pure and lucid style the torments which drove an early Christian saint to take refuge on a pillar in the desert - torments arising from his love for Thais, the courtesan whose soul he had saved. But though the superb phrase with which Gibbon designates the ~~St~~ Stylite is scarcely more barbed than the imperturbable irony of Thais, the historian is content to sneer at saintly weaknesses which the novelist anatomizes with profound understanding. The monastic asceticism of the desert is painted with so perfect an appreciation that the reader might think the author subscribed to it until he found that the philosophic banquets of Alexandria were treated with an equal comprehension.

At 9 a.m. on March 8 we entered the Tropic of Cancer, and some of the passengers were given a kind of jocular baptism in honour of the event. From that day on the sea became marvellously beautiful. As the ship advanced through it, shoals of flying fish were driven from its sides and skimmed far out over the water just touching the crest of a single wave in a flight of two or three hundred yards. In shape and size they are something like a mackerel, but with large triangular fins spread laterally on either side of the body. Since they do not flap these fins, but only use them for sustaining them in the air, it is difficult to see how they reach a sufficient speed to rise into it, still more to see how they can fly for such extraordinary distances. Their bodies flash silver in the sunlight and can easily be followed with field glasses gliding among the waves a foot or so above the surface of the water.

During that week the sea itself was of the most wonderful blue, changing from the darkest to the lightest tones as the bows clove it and churned it

up. Even when we were far from land, seabirds would sometimes follow in our wake; and for a long distance two albatross circled about the ship. Mr. Auld came with the San Antonio to Europe, and told me that the captain (not the present one) would wait until seabirds settled on the deck exhausted from their long flight across the sea, and would then shoot them from the bridge - whereupon he would order a sailor to pick them up and carry them as a present to the Second Officer or the Chief Engineer. Le sport, as understood by the French. (By the way, when I write "Second Officer" it is a mistake, the result of crossing Deuxième Capitaine with First Officer - equivalent persons on French and English ships).

On March 10 we passed through the Lesser Antilles. First came a barren island called La Desirade which mocked its name for it was a leper colony for the negroes of these parts; then Guadeloupe, a rich French possession. This was a most lovely island (3), with a profile something like that of Capri, though much larger - and on that day it was surmounted by a wonderful island of cloud. The countryside was green and varied, almost English in appearance. The First Officer (right at last!) told me that he had been stationed there for a year and had much enjoyed it, save for the overpowering heat in the flat parts and the inaccessibility of the mountains. The colour of the Caribbean Sea was quite different from that of the open Atlantic, a green almost as intense as that was blue. Neither was ever perfectly calm; on the very smoothest days there would be white horses everywhere, though they caused no agitation of the ship.

On March 11 news of the occupation of Austria began to come through hour by hour on the wireless. As we heard of the advance of the German troops, and knew nothing of the attitude which France, England and Italy would take up, there was a good deal of natural alarm but it was the alarm

of emigres who were frightened lest they should be stopped short of their destination, and cared nothing for the welfare of a Europe they were glad to be leaving for ever. M. Caro was in a state of ludicrous panic. His pose has throughout been that of the man of affairs. He snatches the news bulletin which comes through every day at lunch-time, and reads it with avidity. But always when he has finished he hands it to me with the one word "Nothing", which is clearly intended to imply that he has access to other and secret sources of information. But in fact his news, especially about England, is wildly unreliable and it is only with great difficulty that I have disabused him of some of his most ridiculous stories. On the 11th he was in terror, convinced that every oil-tanker which passed across the horizon from Venezuela was a German warship which would open fire on us at sight and probably arrest him and his family and take them back to Europe. The mystery of his Honduran nationality was cleared up at about this time. It seems that this queer status resulted from the recent lapse of his German citizenship. As he intended to visit the United States, he sought about for an American <sup>country</sup> which would accept him as a citizen without asking inconvenient questions. Brazil rejected his advances, but he found in Honduras a state sufficiently venal to waive all obstacles of residence. Now that he has admitted this, M. Caro is ready to make jokes about Honduras and we rag him unmercifully about his country's corrupt obscurity.

During this period the temperature increased daily, until it grew so hot that the sunlight could barely be tolerated on the sea at 8 in the morning. The sun leapt up with unaccustomed speed and the areas of shade dwindled until at mid-day they were only just comprised by the shelter of awnings. At 6 in the evening the sun was still high, but sank so rapidly that by 6.30 it was gone. The captain told us to look out for a "green flash" which app-

arently is sometimes seen in the Tropics at the moment when the sun goes down in a clear sky; but so far we have seen nothing of it. The presence of two portholes in my cabin is a great help in keeping it cool, but lately there has been a following wind much stronger than that produced by the movement of the ship. The result of this has been that the smoke was blown straight forward, while my stern porthole (which is masked by a ventilator) has proved useless in letting in the breeze. The younger passengers, apart from myself, have recently disported themselves in a swimming bath constructed on the upper deck amidships. This bath was promised us about a week ago, but owing to the dilatory and inefficient work of the French crew, it has only just been finished. The bathing suits worn, especially by Frau Wohlgemuth, are of the most fearful and hideous colours, but scarcely excel in horror the clothes which are worn at other times. M. Caro clings, & indeed, to the aged striped trousers in which he left Havre, but Herr Wohlgemuth is garbed in a green check suit of some uncouth material which is apparently native to Palestine. Even I myself have fallen, having bought a pair of blue worsted trousers just before I left England, in emulation of those which Roger wore so successfully last year in Capri. Only two of you have seen them. Dinah, after a slight shock at the colour, expressed her warm approval; but John was extremely chilly. I tried feebly to explain that clothes could be worn in the Tropics which would be impossible in London, but he replied by asking what the Tropics had done to deserve this terrible infliction. So saying, he wrapped himself up in the unrelenting respectability of his profession, and turned away. And it may be the case that I have been harried behind my back by that unnameable remark which Anne and Catherine heard on the road to Tiberio, and which Roger and I have never succeeded in extorting from them - but in view of the other passen-

gers' clothes, I do not think this likely.

At 6 a.m. on March 13 we reached the entrance to the harbour of Cartagena in Colombia, and there taking a pilot on board, steamed slowly up an immense expanse of water bordered by low-lying areas of vegetation. The pilot was accompanied by a smiling young man dressed in Colombian naval uniform, who had nothing to do, and M. Caro bravely addressed him in his few words of Spanish, remarking what a fine country Honduras was. We did not reach Cartagena itself until 7, and there made fast without delay. The wharves were excellently built but quite deserted, save for a few dock labourers and loafers. One of these was carrying what appeared to be a snake which coiled and uncoiled about his neck; but he admitted before long that it was an "artificial snake", thus disappointing me again of seeing some natural wonder.

The sun was swelteringly hot and over the port swooped a great flock of vultures, or perhaps condors, which flew so near that I could see their outstretched beaks and every detail of their jagged, uncouth wings. Every now and then they would pounce from the sky on some piece of carrion and rise into the air with a rapid and horrible flapping of their wings which were almost as broad as their bodies were long, giving them the appearance of large pieces of paper floating in the sky. After breakfast, the Wohlgenuths, Fraulein Liebenthal and I started to walk to the town which is about two miles away; after a few yards I outdistanced the others and did not see them again. I had of course never been in a Tropical town before. All about the dusty roads played naked negro children who looked very happy and absorbed while their mothers did the housework in their wooden houses. All the architecture on the outskirts was similar, consisting of a covered loggia which ran the full width of the house, giving direct onto the main



living room. Most of the roads were made only of white dust with no attempt at a footpath; but here and there was an outcrop of concrete seemingly placed at random and allowed to fall into rapid disrepair. Areas of marsh and pond stretched right into the heart of the city, and must have been the breeding ground for innumerable malarial mosquitoes. In the baking sun the natives, mostly negroes, lagged purposelessly along while overhead the scavenging vultures wheeled in silence and noisy tropical birds laughed in the palm trees. The dust which covered the roads ankle-deep was agitated by scuttling lizards, much bigger than the European kinds and mottled with brilliant red against the green.

Contrasted with all this natural life and colour were numbers of new American cars which the local "bloods" drove furiously back and forth along the roads so that you might see the same car several times in the space of half a mile. The ~~town~~<sup>town</sup> itself was Spanish in original build and the later additions were an insipid imitation of that style; in the public gardens, deserted and ruinously ill-kept, stood tasteless marble monuments to the liberators of South America. Religion seemed to be dead, the churches being very sparse for a Spanish town and the cathedral falling into decay and its entrances boarded up. The people were a mixed product of Spanish, negro and Indian blood, the last no doubt including Incas, Aztecs and other races which I could not distinguish. The girls and young women of this mixed race were of an extraordinary beauty, and I noticed that even in age they kept their strong features and dignity of bearing. The men were mostly of the kind we should call "dagoes" in England, arrogant in manner and flashy in dress.

After I had walked round the town I decided that, having no hat, I ought to return early to the boat; the others, I heard later, went by bus of which there were nearly as many as in a London street. The boat was late in

starting, and in my last view of the port the vultures still wheeled and pounced on their prey.

After steaming for 23 hours we reached Cristobal. The entrance to the port and the Canal consists in a couple of breakwaters which stretch towards one another from the flat coast of Panama. In the outer harbour we halted and took some customs officials and a pilot on board, then steamed slowly to the left towards Cristobal which we reached at 2 p.m. Beyond could be seen the roofs of Colon and in the hinterland large low oil tanks painted green and set in belts of green trees, apparently for protection. Colon is an American base for submarines and aircraft. The port was of great size and was seemingly managed with the utmost efficiency. Concrete wharf buildings stretched the full length of the dock sides and contained innumerable bales and sacks which were being quickly transported from place to place by electric trucks loaded by an ingenious mechanism. As at Cartagena, all the dock labour was negro, only the supervision being done by whites. An agent of the company came on board with the long-awaited mail, and I was surprised to see that Dinah's letter had only taken 8 days from England.

I finished off the large batch of letters I was sending home and started towards the town. Cristobal only comprises the group of docks and Colon is reached after less than five minutes walk along a concrete road. American policemen were everywhere, dressed something like our senior Boy Scouts, but of a toughness and virility far surpassing that inoffensive band of men. One of them directed me to the post office where my request for stamps was dealt with almost before it was out of my mouth - the building was sensibly open to the air, the grilles giving direct onto the verandah which formed its front. From here I walked across a railway straight into the city of