

# To Rio, and Beyond

*DISCOVERING SOUTH AMERICA.* By Lewis R. Freeman. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1937. \$3.

*LAND OF TOMORROW.* By R. W. Thompson. New York: Appleton-Century Co. 1937. \$4.

*RIO.* By Hugh Gibson. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HASSOLDT DAVIS

IT is probable that Lewis R. Freeman knows more about South America than any native resident, more, unquestionably, than any foreign writer today. Since his first visit in 1905 he has returned four times; he has seen it grow during those thirty years, and written of it always with affection and the knowledge bred of comparative experience. Thus the groundwork was laid for his "Discovering South America" by flight around and across the country.

Most of the trip was by plane, a summary visioning of the land as nearly entire as is possible to man. The scenes beneath him, the jungles, cities, and pampas, he was able to examine, like Le Sage's devil on two sticks, with the eye of memory, but he descended at every scene of interest, with the exception of the Chaco, to note progress and change. He went by boat through the straits of Magellan, and by "switchback" railway, with the aid of oxygen tanks, 15,000 feet up into the Andes. And wherever he stopped he studied the history, politics, economy, and promise of the place.

The list of South America's industrial assets is as immense and various as the country itself, but Mr. Freeman has considered them thoroughly, nitrate of soda, guano, coffee, ore, oil, beef, a dozen

others, with the history of their development and sometimes, as in the case of rubber, their tragic decline. The growth of jungle provinces into republics, the exploitation of every resource, and the new facilities for transportation, both achieved largely with North American assistance, concern him deeply. What does not concern him, it seems (and this is the book's greatest lack), is individual men. There are few faces here; there is too much topography and too little humanity for such otherwise well-rounded research. But Mr. Freeman is not a literary man; and as a scholar he would have more wisely spared the purple passages of scenic description, for those fine phrases, those filliped metaphors, usually land butter-side down. However, this is a book of infinite value to all who are seriously interested in South America, and with the addition of a detailed map and index it would be incomparable in its class.

For those who are not serious at all, but who want to travel pleasantly and see accurately the only part of the same vast country that Mr. Freeman has slighted, there must be recommended R. W. Thompson's "Land of Tomorrow." Mr. and Mrs. Thompson left England for a trip of ten thousand miles through South America with only five pounds in hand; twenty were to be paid them on arrival and, in two installments later, eighty pounds more. They were off for adventure, if they had to starve for it, and the amazing thing is that even in the depths of Bolivia and Paraguay, when their money was long delayed, they lived happily and well.

"If ever I have appeared sophisticated it has been a pose," the author writes. There is no pose here. The many adven-

tures he had he describes with a refreshing joy in them, and that is rare among travel writers today. He visited the English and German colonies in the heart of the jungle, and the great ruins of the Jesuit missions. He played "Truco" with the natives everywhere, and was frankly frightened by the midnight dance of the Lengua Indians, a race which still kills superfluous grandparents and children.

But the Chaco war between Paraguay and Bolivia was the goal of Mr. Thompson's journey. Standard Oil was financing it, the Paraguayans said, and the United States was backing Standard Oil, as evidenced by the U. S. Army uniforms on the Bolivian troops. To discover the truth of these wild assertions Mr. Thompson left his wife in Buenos Aires and set off by train for the scene of battle, travelling up to La Paz and down again, up to the Alti-Plano desert at the top of the world and down to the hidden Yungas "valley of perpetual spring." Paraguay was already winning, with untrained Guarani Indians depending entirely upon arms captured from the German-trained Bolivians to replace their poor machetes. The author's conclusions as to the cause, maintenance, and strategy of the war are squarely presented at the end of the book.

Mr. Hugh Gibson, as United States ambassador to Brazil, has written, in "Rio," a most diplomatic guide to the city of his legation. It is hard to believe that Rio is quite the enchanting place he makes it seem, where even taxi drivers are courteous to one another, and diplomats laugh sweetly when for the dozenth time in a day of carnival some wit squirts perfume and ether into their eyes. But Mr. Gibson is well-nigh convincing, so simply and charmingly does he write. Very wisely, too, he has substituted splendid photographs for the gaudy description usual to books on Rio.

It has sufficed him to tell of drives and excursions, of markets and cathedrals, of exquisite insects, of means to pleasant living which the tourist might ignore. Dourado fishing appealed to him, and stag hunting with hounds in the jungle. His book is filled with seasoned counsel, of how, for example, to deal best with sleepy Brazilian business men, or shoot tigers cheaply. His history of the city must interest any visitor, enlivened as it is with such tales as that of St. Anthony's statue which was created a captain in the Portuguese army and gradually promoted to lieutenant colonel, receiving full pay the while. The author's pleasure in salvaging a home from the tropical bush, and gardening in that urgent earth, is spontaneously communicated. It was a sort of negative gardening, a struggle to weed out beauty rather than to pamper it.

Even though we may never roll down to Rio, and must fend a sterner climate with cod liver oil (prepared from the viscera of Rio sharks), we shall be thankful for the grace and intelligence of Mr. Gibson's book.



RIO BAY FROM THE SUMMIT OF SUGAR LOAF  
From "Discovering South America."

Pan American Airways

## The Saturday Review

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### Proposal to Contributors

THE editors of this magazine have no difficulty in getting articles on the place of Matthew Arnold in the modern world, but they cannot find anyone who is able and willing to write on the place in the modern world of Edgar Rice Burroughs. We—and our subscribers—define literature more leniently than the people who send us manuscripts, and our brows seem to have a more obtuse angle. Not one adequate unsolicited article on popular literature has come to this office since last September.

At that time we issued an editorial call for articles describing the reading habits of different parts of the country and the particular problems, if any, of the writers and magazines in the various sections. We received enough letters to convince us that there is plenty of interesting material and plenty of people capable of writing about it, but not a single essay has come in uninvited. Meanwhile enough articles on Poe's sources, the reputation of Charles Lamb, and influences in the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti have come in to enable us to compete with PMLA if we wanted to. We should have been willing to publish these if they had said anything new or had said anything old in an interesting way, but what we have been yearning for is something on the sources of *True Confessions*, the reputation of Horatio Alger, Jr., and the influences at work on Ursula Parrott.

Proposal: postpone your critical revaluation of T. S. Eliot for a while and dig into some humbler subjects. Boys' Books? Then and Now, for instance—Oliver Optic and James Henty as opposed to the Tom Swift series (or whatever has taken the place of the Tom Swift series—the fact that the editor doesn't know shows how ripe this subject is). A lot of Then and Now articles are crying to be written: light fiction in 1910 and 1937,

the American historical novel in 1910 and 1937, *Snappy Stories* when Mencken and Nathan were developing the type and *Silk Stocking Stories* now, literary fetiches and superstitions and clichés compared and contrasted, critical absolutes since 1920, the wave motion of little magazines or of esoteric poetry. Or look round you. What is the digest type of magazine doing to literature, if anything? What shall the Writers' Project do now? Why aren't American nature handbooks as good as English ones? Do you perceive any correlation between popular science and popular fiction, or what is the time-lag between the advance of science and serious fiction? What do doctors read, and why? And lawyers, traveling salesmen, the unemployed, the Engineers' Club, small town reading circles?

We can easily get all we want about Propertius, Gabriel Harvey, Whitman, and Stephen Spender. We can't satisfy our hunger for information about syndicated poetry, how the styles in magazine stories change, or what people are reading in the observation car. Send the job on Matthew Arnold to *Speculum* and try us out with James T. Trowbridge or Tiffany Thayer.

### Proposal to Publishers

There are three reasons for the annual trip to Europe: precedent, the charm of traveling on the *Queen Mary* with the firm paying the bill, and the need to watch over the three or four English novelists who make money for the firm lest the ethics of moneymaking English novelists lead them crosslots to some other publisher. All of these cost money but there is an indirect expense that outweighs all three: the sixth-rate English novels which a publisher on tour picks up because he feels that he ought to have something to show for his money and time. Bad English novels can be worse than any other kind of reading matter and usually are, and they cost American publishers a sizable loss every year. Every publisher realizes this, but he picks up three or four every time he goes abroad, just to save his conscience about the expense account. He wastes money to justify wasting money.

Proposal: save some of it. Send a bright young man over tourist class to flatter and cozen the English moneymakers and have him come back on the next boat. Let an agent send the sixth-rate novels over here and then read them in your own office, within reach of the ledgers. And set up a new precedent: get out into the American hinterland for a month and see what is being written there and who is writing it.

You could do it by car and still feel magnificent if the car was expensive enough, but probably no publisher could bring himself to stay in overnight cabins and it will be better to travel by de luxe trains, when possible, and to stay at the

best hotels (they're pretty good—ask your salesmen). When you get to a town, stay there till you have found out about it. Talk to the librarian, to the newspaper editor and his literary editor if he has one, to the bookseller, to the people who buy books. Find out who is trying to write books in that town. Get the young men and women in for cocktails in your suite. Find out what they are interested in, what they are writing. Look at their manuscripts. You will read an enormous amount of terrible stuff, but before you come home you will also find some good stuff that you would otherwise never have heard about. Much better stuff than those novels about how the vicar caused a perfectly understandable misunderstanding and how Daphne and Pamela, growing beyond the Girl Guides, met Pan or avoided him by going for a bath. And you will find some young writers who can be developed into some very nice entries in your fall catalogue and some splendid figures in your ledgers. We hear you talk a lot about nursing young talent along. Maybe you would find more to nurse if, instead of hopefully running prize contests, you went out looking for it. The place to look for it is west of the Hudson, south of the Battery, and on the wrong side of the tracks. The time to look for it is now. Trade your B-deck stateroom for a Pullman ticket and see life.

### Proposal to a Pulitzer Committee

To the committee on history: it is pleasant to have the prize go to a study of Yankee culture but, bearing in mind what your job is, you might look back over a career that includes "The Life of Harrison Gray Otis," "The Maritime History of Massachusetts," "The Oxford History of the United States," "Builders of the Bay Colony," "The Development of Harvard University," "The Founding of Harvard College," "Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century," "Three Centuries of Harvard," and "The Puritan Pronaos." Or, if you do not care to consider careers but want to hold rigidly to the books of the year, be informed that the last three named were all published in 1936. Mr. Brooks's beautifully written adventuring among the journals and letters of New England literary men goes only superficially into the real energies of New England, it is history only in the most formal and distant sense, and so far as it is history at all it is history in a vacuum, with no forces from the world outside playing on Dr. Holmes.

If you are convinced that the history of New England culture can be important, if you would like to take official notice of the most penetrating, most exhaustive, most learned, and most brilliant study of its origins and adaptations and transformations, its relation to other cultures and its place in our own, investigate the work of Samuel Eliot Morison.