

Nomad

BY T. R. YBARRA

Fifteen Countries in Fifteen Months

I HAVE always been a Nomad. When I was less than five years old I began to travel and I have kept it up ever since. The fact that, more than twenty years ago, I became involved in the newspaper business and showed a marked predilection for the foreign field, has made me more of a wanderer than ever. There has scarcely been a year for me during the last couple of decades which has not been plentifully besprinkled with railway tickets, steamship tickets, baggage labels, passports, letters of credit and hotel bills, made out in a baker's dozen of languages.

But never in all that twenty-year period — nor before it, for that matter — have I dashed from one land to another quite so much and at such breathless speed as during a certain year and a quarter which terminated recently.

Fifteen countries in fifteen months! That is my proud record. And I have counted only countries where I actually spent at least one night, rigorously excluding from the list those merely traversed on the way to somewhere else. Had I counted such lands my total would not have been fifteen but eighteen.

Here — in alphabetical order —

are the fifteen countries visited by me in the aforesaid fifteen-month period: Austria, Denmark, Egypt, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Rumania, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

There were also the following; but I did not spend a night in any of them, so they can not go on the list: Belgium, Esthonia and Holland.

And one evening, on a steamboat plying over the moonlit Baltic Sea, between Finland and Germany via Esthonia, I sighted the coast of Latvia — but why bring that up?

As I think back over those months I am glad that it is impossible for a human being to look actually into his mind. Mine must resemble a chessboard painted in fifteen colors. It amuses me to let my thoughts roam haphazard over what happened to me during that period of variegated wandering. For instance, as I muse idly, I see in fancy:

The Nile, opposite Luxor, in the early light of dawn. The first rays of the sun are touching the huge ruins of the Luxor Temple, tinting the lazy waters of the great river. I am being ferried across in a flat-bottomed boat

by two brown-faced boatmen. Nothing else is stirring.

* * *

A Rumanian railway station on the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. In front a fringe of nice little trees — an attractive feature of Rumanian stations. Peasants drinking at tables, idly gazing at the train. They wear tall sheepskin headgear and rough gaiters.

* * *

Ahead, suddenly rising above the waters of the Bosphorus, sparkling in the sunlight — Constantinople! My first glimpse of it — the glimpse everybody dreams about. And it surpasses dreams. Domes flashing in glorious light, tall minarets piercing upward, marble palaces, massive walls. And then — bustling and scuffling around the custom-house, eager individuals — alas, clad like any New Yorker! — pushing forward, shouting: "Hotel, sir? Want a hotel?"

* * *

GRAND religious procession through the streets of the native quarter of Cairo. Hundreds of strange beings carrying huge red, green, yellow and white banners, covered with fantastic designs. Bands of musicians extracting grunts and squeaks and squeals from strange wind instruments, pounding primitive drums, clashing diminutive cymbals together with tremendous energy. Standard-bearers and hangers-on of the procession getting so excited when it is held up — which occurs about every two minutes — that they jump up and down like marionettes. Whole traffic dislocated, but nobody minds.

Donkeys and omnibuses; vendors of cool drinks; vendors of horrid-looking meat patties and nuts and fruit and God-knows-what! Egyptian soldiers in khaki and *tarboosk*; natty policemen; beggars in villainous rags, many of them blind — others horribly deformed; artisans plying their trade in plain sight; individuals enjoying siestas almost under the feet of passersby.

* * *

DOWN deep in a cellar in the old part of Stockholm. It used to be rendezvous for Stockholm's Bohemians of the Eighteenth Century. Bellman — Sweden's most popular poet — used to sing his songs here, to tunes composed by himself — songs and tunes now sung from childhood to old age by every patriotic Swede. The cellar is now a restaurant. Anders Zorn discovered it, and collected funds for throwing it open to the public. Full of smoke and the smell of tobacco and the murmur of Swedish talk. Now and then there are Swedish songs, too — Bellman's.

* * *

On the way from steamer to hotel in a modern town — quite modern. Broad avenues, dusty, alive with motor traffic. People in ordinary sack suits, busy about everyday affairs. Policemen controlling traffic at crowded cross roads. Modern public buildings, modern parks, modern shops. Can this be . . . ?

Suddenly, bursting into view above the sheer, bare crag that is its pedestal . . . the Parthenon!

Yes, this is Athens.

* * *

Of all my variegated assignments none surpassed for interest and

amusement the Ibsen Centenary Celebration held at Oslo, the Norwegian capital, and Bergen, the well-known Norwegian seaport, in March, 1928. Some twenty nations sent representatives. All of them were presented to King Haakon.

FOR the ceremony, the guests were ushered into King Haakon's sanctum according to the alphabetical order of their respective countries. Our country was not listed as United States, but as America, so the American delegation came first of all. Dr. Robert Underwood Johnson, being an ex-Ambassador and otherwise also a most distinguished personage, was Number One in the list of those presented. I went in accompanied by a Norwegian-American professor from the University of Minnesota. After us, the guests were introduced in batches, according to nationality. King Haakon conversed with each batch about five minutes. Most of us were impressively arrayed in morning coats and high hats. Which reminds me:

When I got the assignment to go to Norway I was in Berlin, without a morning coat. I went to a tailor patronized, in the old Hohenzollern days, by the German Crown Prince and other tremendous swells, and proclaimed:

"I want a *Gebrock*."

(*Gebrock*, I had been informed by a man whom I trusted, was the German equivalent of "morning coat.")

The tailor seemed a bit surprised. He proceeded, nevertheless, to measure me. I told him it must be a hurry job. He promised a degree of sartorial speed which would more than satisfy me. When he had finished his measur-

ing and I was going away, he pointed to a picture hanging on one of the walls of a man clad in a strange-looking garment.

"You will look like that," he said.

I must have turned pale. I took a good look at the garment in the picture. It was something which I had never seen on land or sea; something which would have been called a Prince Albert had Prince Albert been born when it was in vogue.

"Never!" I told the tailor.

"But you said you wanted a *Gebrock*."

"Doesn't that mean morning coat?"

"Certainly not."

"What is the German for morning coat?"

"Morning coat!"

HE PROMPTLY measured me all over again and the dreadful danger was averted. I afterwards learned that I had been threatened with the possession of a coat of antediluvian character, worn only by superannuated German savants who don't know that the calendar has moved beyond 1876.

As it was, however, I acquired a truly beautiful and up-to-date morning coat, which made me swell with pride when, on emerging from the palace of King Haakon, I was photographed by a squad of camera men, along with the rest of the Ibsen Centenary guests.

The only trouble is that I paid one hundred dollars for that coat and have never worn it since!

* * *

Dr. Johnson was so impressed by the Ibsen festivities that he wrote an

Ibsen sonnet, which he read, on the culminating day of the centenary celebration, before King Haakon, Crown Prince Olaf and a crowd of other notables. He was kind enough to give me a copy of the sonnet in advance and I promptly cabled it to my paper in New York. Which reminds me of what befell a newspaper colleague of mine, who also, once upon a time, got hold of the text of a sonnet possessing considerable news value. As sonnets were not in the regular line of cable dispatches, he decided to query his editor as follows:

"Have full text of So-and-So's sonnet. Shall I cable it?"

And the editor answered: "Cable text of sonnet *if short*, otherwise merely extract!"

* * *

WHILE on the subject of Scandinavia, I must not forget that renowned and redoubtable phenomenon, the *smörgåsbord*. It flourishes luxuriantly all over the Scandinavian countries, especially in Sweden. It is something like the mixed *bors d'œuvres* you get in French restaurants; but, whereas *bors d'œuvres* are merely a lot of trifles calculated to give an appetite for the main courses of a meal, *smörgåsbord* is of such copiousness and variety that, when the *pièces de resistance* of a Scandinavian meal are brought on, a foreigner is sure to be gasping feebly for breath.

But not a Swede! The *smörgåsbord*, no matter how freely he may have partaken of it, only makes him hungrier. I copy the following from my diary — it relates to Swedish meal-time prowess, as observed

aboard a steamboat plying from Stockholm to Helsingfors:

"Coffee at 8:30 A.M. or thereabouts, followed by what I supposed would be a light repast but turned out to be a whale of a meal. It included:

"(1) *Smörgåsbord*, made up of some twenty items, among them bread, butter, three kinds of herring, cucumbers, tomatoes, beets, smoked salmon, boiled potatoes, cold tongue, cold veal, cold pigs' feet, sardines, radishes, cheese — capped, (as a sort of *super-smörgåsbord*) by:

"(2) *Hot fish*, liver, omelet and sausages, large quantities of each, passed from person to person *ad lib.*, and severely punished by each diner — then:

"(3) *Roast veal (bot)* with peas, carrots and potatoes! All this taken in vast quantities — some of the Swedes, I verily believe, missed *not one item* — and repeated often. They are gastronomic marvels!"

Which calls to mind a comedy (unproduced) written by a friend of mine, in whose family many Swedish servants had been employed, which contained this bit of dialogue:

"But she's human, isn't she?"

"No; she's a Swede!"

* * *

ACCUSTOMED as a newspaper correspondent gets to sudden orders rushing him from place to place, I really got quite a shock while I was in Bergen, Norway — not so very far from the northermost part of Europe — when I received this cable:

"How about Egypt after Ibsen?"

When I recovered my breath, I cabled back: "Okay Egypt."

A few days later, I was dashing through Paris en route for Trieste and Alexandria.

In Paris, it was a case of speeding from one station to another, as otherwise I should have missed the Simplon Express, the only train which could get me to Trieste in time for my steamer to Egypt. I had wired to my brother, who lives in Paris, to meet me at the station — there was barely time for us to shake hands and exchange a few words.

"Anything new?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "I have just become the proud father of a son!"

"When?"

"At noon today."

It was then about seven P.M.

"Just time enough to drink the young man's health in champagne!" I said. We rushed to the nearest bar. I ordered a bottle of champagne.

"To my new nephew!" I said, lifting my glass.

We tossed off the wine. Then I made a mad dash for the Simplon Express. I caught it, with hardly five minutes to spare.

Four days later I was in Egypt, surrounded by palm trees and tropical heat. And yet, a week or so before, I had been gazing at frozen fields of snow and ice, on the railway line between Bergen and Oslo! Foreign correspondents of American newspapers rarely suffer from ennui.

* * *

IN EGYPT I found a Crisis. The Egyptian Nationalists were very angry at the British occupying their land. The British remained very calm about it. All the British correspondents refused to get the least bit

excited. They treated that Crisis most cavalierly.

One of them, an extremely saturnine Briton, who always wore a monocle, invited me to motor with him and his wife to the Pyramids. It was my first sight of the Pyramids. I was much impressed. But the man with the monocle, having lived some fifteen years in Egypt, had doubtless seen them scores of times. So they were less to him even than the Crisis. Therefore, after lunch, he subsided into a particularly comfortable arm-chair, and said to me, with immense solemnity:

"At the risk of being rude I shall not ride with you on a camel around the Pyramids. If my wife wishes to ride with you on a camel around the Pyramids, she may. I shall go to sleep."

He did. His wife obligingly procured me a camel and, together, we rode around the Pyramids. My camel-driver was most loquacious. He pointed to the beast that was loping along under me —

"He is a good camel," said the driver. "He is a very good camel. Would you like to know his name?"

"What is his name?" I inquired.

"Cleopatra!"

AFTER riding around the Pyramids and getting joggled to numbness and scorched by the sun and covered with sand, we returned to the hotel. The Briton with the monocle awoke from a luxuriant sleep and motored us back to Cairo, solemn as ever, but looking much rested and refreshed. He helped me to realize why the British, who take life evenly and sedately, are so successful at running tropical lands.

After a few days in Cairo, waiting for the Crisis to mature and explode, I got impatient and decided to take the train to Luxor, some five hundred miles up the Nile, and see the great temples there and the Tombs of the Kings. My British friend with the monocle urged me to do so, by all means.

"There will be no Crisis!" he said. So I went to Luxor, and saw the temples there, and descended into several royal tombs, and looked up my friend Herbert Winlock, who excavates for the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and surprised him so by suddenly appearing before him that he almost collapsed into the sand — and then I returned to Cairo, and still that Crisis hadn't exploded!

In fact, it hasn't even yet!

* * *

THERE was also a Crisis in Berlin while I was there. At least I thought there was. News out of Berlin, while I had been acting temporarily as correspondent, had been rather dull for some days. So when a thing looking like a Crisis came along I coddled it and nursed it and cabled to New York about it, I really got quite fond of it. But a cynical friend of mine, the Berlin representative of a big American news agency, who has seen so many crises that he doesn't even get out of their way on the street, heaped ridicule upon my head. He dubbed the thing that I was so fondly coddling and nursing "Tommy's Spoon-fed Crisis" and got me quite sensitive about it.

Finally the Crisis actually did swell up and burst. Delighted, I sent

the office boy out to get a cheap pewter spoon. This I had wrapped up in several thicknesses of paper, as if it were something extremely valuable, and sent it around to my friend of the news agency with a note reading as follows:

"For use in feeding the next near-Crisis."

Then I sat back, trembling, waiting for the inevitable repartee from my friend. For he is one of the cleverest wits in Berlin and never fails to get the last word.

It didn't take him long to get even with me. Meeting me in a famous Berlin restaurant, the day after I had sent him my little token, he said:

"By the way, the head waiter here has just told me there is a spoon missing. They're making inquiries about it. Hadn't you better lunch somewhere else?"

* * *

IN VIENNA there was an amusing instance of the extraordinarily varied life led by American newspaper writers abroad. I was in an automobile with another American newspaperman, being shown by a Viennese the ravages caused by several days of street rioting. But it happened that we two Americans had something else on our minds.

I had been in Mexico three months before. He had been there two months before. And this is what he said to me, as we motored past the blackened ruins of the Vienna Law Courts, almost burned to the ground by the mob:

"I tell you Calles could never have done that unless Obregón. . . . Etc., etc."

And this is what I said to him, as the driver of the car sought vainly to interest us in the bullet-holes with which the façade of one of Vienna's stateliest buildings was pock-marked:

"If Obregón hadn't told Calles. . . . Etc., etc."

The next time the two of us met was in Berlin. He was on his way from the Balkans to the Riviera. I was en route from Athens to Denmark.

* * *

There is no denying that sometimes this mad jumping from one country to another gets a bit on the nerves. Even one (like me) suffering

from the acutest known form of *wanderlust* has moments when he envies statues because they never stir from their pedestals; when he wishes he were one of those marble figures, whose job it is to lie flat on their backs across sarcophagi, for an indeterminate number of sweetly somnolent centuries.

Yes, there were times during that hectic year and a quarter of my life when I thought I would willingly exchange "fifteen countries in fifteen months" for "fifteen months in one country."

Nevertheless — I have booked passage on another transatlantic steamer!

Egypt

BY MARY BRENT WHITESIDE

HERE night is a magician, careless with his tricks,
 For eye and ear are too entwined with mysteries,
 When sound and odor, past and present, mix.
 Beside the unforgetting Nile,
 And down somnolent mile on mile,
 That knew Osiris and old hymns of his,
 Men chant together, young and old,
 Under Egyptian stars of smoldering gold,
 "There is no god but Allah, and his prophet is . . ."

In Cheops' very shadow, one may sip
 Pale brew of China, from an Austrian cup,
 And watch dusk drink the tinted shadows up,
 That cross the desert's edge, on stealthy feet, and slip
 Into the outer dark. Beneath a lemon tree,
 Embowered in geraniums pink and white,
 An English poet sips his tea,
 And through the subtleties of changing light,
 Punctures the bubble Time, to seek Eternity.