

from Europe did the same thing and happened to arrive just ahead of us, so had a prior claim on the customs and immigration officials while we were kept waiting. By the time we were ashore all the good hotels were chock full and the best we could find was a 2nd or 3rd rate one in a rather dreary part of the city, minus air-conditioning.

Our first call was at the office of the American Automobile Association, which we had joined as "Members at Large" before leaving Barbados. The staff were very pleasant and helpful indeed but had some bad news for us.

We had planned to buy a station wagon and load our 800 pounds or so of assorted duffel into it and drive to Mexico, to spend six months exploring the country in order to decide whether we wanted to live there, and if so, where. We did this in the end but getting started was not so simple as one would think it should be.

We found that our Barbados driving licences were not valid in the State of New York nor probably anywhere in the United States, and owing to congestion of applicants it would take at least three weeks for us to obtain New York licences. To make matters worse there was an acute shortage of station wagons and none of the dealers had one in stock that suited us.

Finally one of the girls in the AAA office suggested that we might do better in the State of Connecticut, with reference to both licences and a station wagon. So we loaded our duffel on a train to Stamford and put up at a hotel there, only to find that the situation was not much better in Connecticut than in New York.

One of the car dealers who hoped to sell us a station wagon offered to use his political influence to hasten the licence formalities for me, but not for Ruth. I dislike that sort of thing on principle but waived my objection in the circumstances, took my test and was given a driving licence for Connecticut, which would of course be valid anywhere in the United States or Canada or Mexico, so long as I was a tourist there.

WE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED to go to Mexico by ship direct from Barbados or Trinidad which is only 200 miles away and more of a centre for shipping. However, it seemed impossible and we finally settled on going by an American cruise ship that normally plied between New York and South America as far as Buenos Ayres.

It was Ruth's first visit to New York since she had arrived there in the *Olympic* to find them celebrating the Armistice on November 11th, 1918, 37 years before. But her second visit did not cause her to revise the rather poor opinion of New York she had formed the first time.

No city is very pleasant in a heat wave and I think that applies with exceptional force to New York, perhaps owing to the relatively humid climate, the airlessness caused by so many very high buildings, to say nothing of the polyglot nature of much of the population, which has of course no connection with the state of the weather; it is always the same.

Our visit in 1955 was marred by additional drawbacks, one of which was the result of our ship arriving in the harbour on the morning of July 5th, doubtless because she had been slowed down to avoid arriving on the great national holiday, July 4th.

The trouble was that 3 or 4 of the large transatlantic liners

When it came to the point the dealer could not produce a vehicle that met our ideas of what we wanted to buy, and we appealed to the AAA again for help in the dilemma. They telephoned to their office in Memphis, Tennessee and were assured that there would be no delay or difficulty about licences or station wagon there.

So off to the railway station we went again and arrived in Memphis after a pleasant and comfortable train ride of 24 hours.

This time we landed on our feet so to speak and everything went smoothly for us. Within three days we had bought a new station wagon with automatic transmission, tubeless tires and V-8 engine, all of which proved very satisfactory; we also obtained Tennessee driving licences with what seemed a minimum of formality.

When we commented that it seemed curious that our Barbados licences were not recognized in the United States we were told that the only foreign licences that were valid were Mexican and Canadian and that the international licence was not recognized in any of the states of the Union.

Later on when we both obtained Mexican licences this seemed even more odd, as there was no driving test at all, only forms to be filled in with information about one's grandmother, plus of course a fee to be paid. It was not even necessary to declare that one knew how to drive a car!

Officials in the United States did not seem to have heard of Barbados, so I explained it was an island in the West Indies, "Where the rum comes from." This roused a spark of interest which flickered out quickly when I apologized for having no samples left.

We set out in good spirits from Memphis, enjoying the quiet running and quick, smooth flow of power from our first V-8 engine, and looking forward to six months of carefree exploring in Mexico. We had obtained tourist visas good for 6 months from the Mexican government tourist office in New York.

The AAA had told us that the ordinary car insurance carried by most motorists in the United States and Canada was not valid in Mexico, and insurance with a Mexican company would be necessary. This we obtained from the AAA office in Laredo, along with maps and booklets all of which proved useful. The Mexican insurance seemed rather expensive but it may have been a special rate for tourists, who are regarded as fair game in many countries. The rate may of course have been based on actual experience of claims for accidents, theft or other hazards.

We planned to drive in a leisurely way so as to see as much as possible of the country, before making the important decision about living in it or not. We made three overnight stops in the 760 miles from the border to Mexico City. We found the hotels and motels on the main highways to be clean and well run with good food in the dining rooms, all at rates that seemed reasonable to us. The Mexican government keeps a watchful eye on everything connected with the tourist business, recognizing that the hundreds of millions of American dollars it takes in yearly are a mainstay of the national economy.

It is possible to travel by the main routes without knowing any Spanish. It is necessary, however, to count the change carefully when paying for gasoline and not simply accept what is offered and pocket it without making sure it is correct.

The main roads are well paved and maintained and the mountain scenery striking. Few of the roads are fenced, however, and there is a distinct hazard of domestic animals suddenly appearing in the road just in front of a car; these include horses, cows, donkeys, goats, dogs, pigs and poultry. It may be even more dangerous at night when the animals are dazzled by headlights and less able to evade an oncoming car.

Arriving at the outskirts of Mexico City it is well to engage the services of a courier to act as chauffeur to one's hotel or wherever one is going. Traffic in the city streets is in a class by itself as to density and what seems to a stranger as dangerously

high speed and reckless behaviour. To cope with this condition when one does not know the way or the local rules and customs is not amusing to put it mildly.

Friends in Barbados had given us introductions to two families in Cuernavaca which is 50 miles south of Mexico City on the main road to Acapulco. By paying a small toll charge motorists may use the new boulevard highway through magnificent mountain scenery. Mexico City is about 7,300 feet above sea-level and Cuernavaca about 5,000 feet. The high point of the highway between is 10,000 feet and is known as The Pass. Some people and some car engines feel the effect of the relatively thin air at high altitudes, though this is seldom serious up to about 10,000 or 12,000 feet. The carburetor of our V-8 engine must have been adjusted for high altitude for some reason, and when going over the pass the car seemed to want to go faster than I wanted to drive, and tended to romp up the mountain grades at 80 m.p.h. if left to its own devices, whereas the legal limit is 100 kilometers or just about 70 m.p.h.

In Mexico one hears much about an intestinal ailment that the natives pretend afflicts only tourists, so they call it "Turista," though they have been known to have it themselves. It is the same trouble that Barbadians call "Barbados tummy," and that was nearly fatal to me when I contracted it in Burma many years before. The usual cause is infected food or drink but in Mexico very high altitudes may make it worse. It is wise to carry medication to give immunity and to give relief if one happens to be caught. The pills may be bought at any good drug store and are not expensive. I do not remember being bothered by this trouble in Mexico but Ruth nearly always felt the altitude when going over the 10,000-foot pass, though normally she seemed less susceptible to ailments of the digestive tract than I am.

The friends of friends we looked up in Cuernavaca were very helpful in giving us information that would have taken

time and trouble to obtain otherwise. After a brief pause there we went on to Acapulco, about another 200 miles or so. We stayed there for about 6 weeks, long enough to decide we did not want to live there. Later on we found that there is no place on either coast of Mexico that has a climate that is pleasant the year round. From Acapulco we retraced our steps to Mexico City and from there went west to Guadalajara in the State of Jalisco, not far from the Pacific coast and about 5,000 feet above sea-level. It seemed a pleasant enough place and we used it as a base from which to explore the district of Lake Chapala, which has been boomed from time to time as an ideal spot to which Norteamericanos may retire to live in the sun, with plenty of domestic help at very reasonable wages, and other advantages too numerous to mention.

The town and lake of Chapala are about 30 miles from Guadalajara on a good paved road, and at first sight may seem almost as good as the Siren Song of the Boomster makes them sound. It takes a period of actual living there to discover the drawbacks.

Mexico is a land of vanishing lakes. At the time of the Spanish conquest Mexico City resembled Venice which is certainly not the case now. Lake Chapala had done a partial vanishing act shortly before we arrived there, and was in process of returning to its former shoreline when we first set eyes on the locality.

Houses that had been built almost at the waters edge were some distance from it and the peons had cheerfully moved on to what had been the lake bed and planted crops between the houses and the new shoreline. Then the lake began to rise to its former level and we saw the peons working from dawn to dusk to gather the crops in before they were submerged.

We put up in a hotel on the lakeshore in Chapala and were in a room on the second floor. The door had a bad habit of locking itself when we were in the room and refusing to unlock as it should do when we wanted to go out. We had visions of

the hotel being on fire at night with us trapped in the room. When we asked the desk clerk what we were supposed to do he said the accepted procedure was to lean out of the window and shout, "Socorro" as loudly as possible. This seemed out of keeping with our normal, English attitude which is to live quietly and avoid attracting attention to ourselves, and as for dramatizing the simple fact of a malfunction in the lock of the door of our hotel room, that simply isn't done!

So we moved on to a newly opened motel in the village of Ajijic, (pronounced A-hee-hic) about four miles away on the lakeshore, where we stayed for about a month while we explored the neighbourhood, the houses available for rent, the amenities of life and density of insect population, especially the aggressive ones such as mosquitoes, centipedes, scorpions and so on, also reptiles like snakes, all of which are found in Mexico in varying numbers in different localities, but about which the boomsters are usually mute.

By the time our tourist visas were getting ready to expire we had decided we should like to live in Mexico and that Cuernavaca seemed most likely to suit our ideas and needs. So then we had to set matters in train for the elaborate routine necessary for us to become "Inmigrantes," corresponding to the American status of resident alien, both requiring extensive documentation and the paying of fees and so on.

The documents were all in Spanish of course and our knowledge of the language was not yet equal to coping with the paper work or interviews with government officials, so we thought it better to engage the services of an English-speaking lawyer to handle the formalities for us.

We asked the Canadian embassy if they would put us in touch with a good lawyer and their first reaction was to pour cold water on any idea of living in Mexico, though without giving any reason. When we refused to be easily discouraged they did put us in touch with a legal firm that seemed to consist of an American with Mexican associates.

The American was very friendly and helpful and the business proceeded smoothly. Among other things it involved paying customs duty on the car we had bought in Memphis six months before, at the rate of 100% of the purchase price. We had expected a blow but not quite such a hard one; it is amazingly difficult to obtain reliable information about such things before they hit one.

The documents we had to produce included our birth certificates, marriage certificate, police certificates from every place in which we had lived since we were 16, to say we had no criminal record, evidence of financial responsibility, and for anyone who had been in the armed services of another country, proof of honourable discharge. We had to take our marriage certificate to the British embassy to have a certificate typed on the back in Spanish, to the effect that it was a valid legal document. This seemed odd in a country where divorce may be obtained in a manner that seems to us to be extremely free and easy.

When the red tape was fully complied with it was necessary for us to make a trip back across the United States border so that we could re-enter Mexico with our new status as immigrants, after having surrendered our visas as turistas in the usual way on leaving the country. We spent a few days in San Antonio, Texas, where we looked up some American friends we had made when we were all held up in a hotel near Manzanillo, when a bridge had been washed out by a bad storm that the papers described as a "ciclón," meaning cyclone or hurricane.

After we returned to Cuernavaca we settled down seriously to the business of house-hunting, just as we had in Barbados after deciding we would like to live there some ten years before; the end result was the same too. After looking at a number of houses for sale or rent we decided we would have to build in order to have one we really liked.

We were fortunate in finding a plot of land about half an

acre with a good stone wall about six feet high around it, with steel gates and a flourishing crop of noxious weeds inhabited by an equally noxious collection of the local reptiles such as snakes, scorpions, skunks and centipedes. It did, however, have a wonderful view which could not be obscured as it was on the brink of a large "barranca" or ravine, with a clear outlook to the east over a sea of mountains including the two famous volcanoes, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, both well over 17,000 feet high.

To see these silhouetted against the multi-hued dawn sky was a memorable sight we never tired of observing from our house after it was built. The Spanish name for Ixtaccihuatl is "La Mujer Dormida" — the Sleeping Woman, much easier to pronounce as well as having a striking resemblance to the outline of the female form recumbent as in bed, even wearing "falsies" to the eye of the experienced beholder. I never heard a Spanish equivalent for the name of the other volcano, which never looked like anything but just a volcano so was not given a romantic pseudonym by the Conquistadores; it was always known as "Popo" for short, very few being able to pronounce the Aztec name with confidence.

The plot of land was relatively expensive at \$8,000 United States but it was on a paved road with water, electricity and telephone available, and very convenient for getting to "El Centro" as Mexicans call "downtown," where the plaza and post office and banks and shops are to be found.

We were also fortunate in finding a white Mexican contractor who spoke English fluently. In collaboration with him we devised a scheme to baffle the wood termites by having practically no wood in the building, which worked out very well.

We had been warned of the danger of having building materials purloined but did not expect it to start quite so soon. Before work on the house had actually begun I noticed an apparent discrepancy in the number of bricks delivered to the site. On checking up it was obvious that a whole truckload of

1,500 bricks was missing, having vanished overnight. I explained to the contractor that I would not mind 100 bricks or so at a time but a truckload seemed to be overdoing a good thing, especially at such an early stage of the operation. He agreed in principle and made no demur about replacing the truckload, though I could not help feeling he thought it was not quite gentlemanly of me to count the bricks.

If larceny took place after this incident it was on a minor scale and not enough to be worth notice. I think it is always well to recognize the customs of the country one is in, so long as one can feel one is not the subject of flagrant discrimination as a foreigner.

The stone masons of Mexico are good, hence (I suppose) the pyramids. The walls, roof and floors were of masonry with no lumber at all, and the masons extended themselves to do a good job. The walls were over a foot thick of solid brick with columns of reinforced concrete at all corners, about a dozen of them. On top of the foundations there was a "cadena" or chain of reinforced concrete tied in with the columns, and on top of the walls another cadena, so that the finished job looked and felt rather like a fortress. The roof was carried on reinforced concrete beams that were cast on the ground and lifted into place with a hand winch. The roof itself was composed of layers of large clay tiles called "petatillos," with mortar between the layers, and waterproofed by layers of tar paper and a top layer of gravel. The floors were of concrete with a surface layer of ceramic tiles, which are made in Mexico and relatively inexpensive. The frames of doors and windows were of steel. There was no lumber in the structure of the house at all, the only wood being in secondary items such as cupboards and shelves and filling in the steel door frames. Thus if the termites did infest the wood it could be ripped out and replaced with a minimum of trouble and expense. The termites are a very great plague in Mexico and a booby trap for the northerner who is not accustomed to them, and thinks

of buying or building a house with any important part of the structure made of wood. Real estate salesmen are like their counterparts elsewhere, they don't go out of their way to mention small things; if they have a slogan it might be the old Latin tag *Caveat Emptor* — termites and all; they are only small in the literally physical sense.

One feature we were glad not to have in the house was central heating, than which one thing worse is not to have it when it is really needed. The southern half of Mexico is within the Tropic Zone but the wide range of altitude means that many places are high enough to be quite cool at times in the winter months. In Cuernavaca at 5,000 feet we did not need more than a good fireplace in the livingroom, for use occasionally in the evenings.

Altogether we were very pleased with the house when we moved in, even more so when we had been there about a year and there was quite a bad earthquake that gave us a good shaking in the middle of the night. Very serious damage was done to buildings in Mexico City about 50 miles to the north, and less serious damage in Acapulco some 200 miles to the south. Cuernavaca had relatively slight damage and our house none at all, not even a small crack anywhere.

In the process of settling in we went through the usual gamut of troubles before we acquired a satisfactory domestic staff. The people who extol the virtues of Mexico as a place to relax and lead a carefree life in the sun, always omit to mention that the golden handshake is part of the law of the land. If it is not embedded in the constitution it might as well be, for practical purposes.

Any employee who is fired after only 30 days is legally entitled to 3 months severance pay, and some of them in domestic service make a career of behaving like angels for 29 days and then try to be fired. By dint of much experience they have developed a technique that is fiendish in its ingenuity and ruthless in lack of regard for results of their conduct, so the

inexperienced "Norteamericano" employer is at a disadvantage in dealing with them.

Some dislike being "taken for a ride" in such a crude fashion, and try to outdo them in what the Germans call "Schrecklichkeit" or frightfulness so that they will quit and forfeit severance. This condition of domestic hot war can continue indefinitely but is not relaxing. We usually made with the golden handshake as gracefully as possible though not pretending to like the idea.

In due course we arrived at what seemed like an ideal solution of the help problem, in the form of a married couple who were old enough to be mature in their behaviour while young enough to be good workers. They lived and did their own housekeeping in the servants quarters which were separate from the house, as customary in Mexico. The woman worked as housemaid and did the rough work in the kitchen, though not experienced in cooking the kind of food to which we were accustomed. The man made himself useful outdoors as gardener, washing the car and acting as gatekeeper, watchman and general factotum. They were very good people and congenial in every way, and seemed especially wonderful after the tribulations we had been through with their predecessors. Our experience with them helped somewhat to restore our faith in human nature, which had taken quite a battering before they came. Domestic workers are like human beings in other walks of life in that it is seldom that both husband and wife are good, but these people were in a class by themselves in that respect. Their whole attitude toward us was like that of faithful retainers left over from the feudal times.

After the house was completed we had to go through the established routine to have it assessed for taxation, which began with making application at a government office in El Centro and paying a fee that was prescribed in the regulations. Like so many things in Mexico there was a catch in this in the form of an extra, unofficial fee of the same amount as the

official one, to ensure that the property would not be over-assessed. This is known as "mordido" or "bite" and is part of the way of life that one meets at every turn and is taken for granted by the Mexicans. I paid it by a cheque made out to "Bearer."

This formality having been complied with they sent a surveying team with instruments to make a detailed plan of our property with all buildings on it, the house, servants quarters, carport and the bodega or shed that was my workshop. The final result was a tax bill that was certainly not nominal but did seem reasonable enough to us by our standards. I do not know just what would happen if someone balked at the "bite" but was given to understand that the tax bill would be much higher, possibly double or treble the correct sum. Our contractor told me this and he should know. The tax bill was of course an annual affair and the bite only once, unless for some reason a re-assessment became necessary.

We found our life in Guernavaca quite pleasant with as much social amenity as we wanted with English-speaking people, British, American and Canadian, many of whom had been in Mexico for many years and were fluent in Spanish. There was comparatively little social mixing with Mexican families except with some couples of mixed nationality, one being a Mexican.

After a time I began to have doubts on the subject of taxation. Before we decided to live in Mexico I had taken the precaution to ask legal advice about income taxes, and was told that we would not be liable for tax on money we brought into the country. As this was the only kind of income we had it seemed fair enough, and we were still being taxed by Canada as non-residents, which came to slightly more than if we were still domiciled in Canada. This would not apply to all non-residents but happened to work like that for us. It varies with the kind of income one has, but it always seems difficult to get reliable information on the subject until one has made a

mistake, when there is no lack of people ready to point out where one went wrong.

As time went by I picked up a scrap of information on the subject here and another there, and then found I could obtain complete English translations of the law about income tax for a small sum, from the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico City; so I did that and started doing my homework. It was quite clear that we were liable for tax on our entire income wherever it came from. While I was about it I studied the law about estate or inheritance taxes too, and the first thing I found was that the Mexican courts would not recognize any will that had not been drawn up in Spanish and recorded with the proper authority, according to the regulations which seemed very clear, definite and detailed.

That was a bit of a shock and I found that our American acquaintances had apparently assumed that their wills drawn up in the United States would be valid in Mexico, but this was an unwarranted assumption, so that if they died in Mexico, they would be treated as intestate with reference to any property they owned in the country. In the case of wealthy people that could be regarded as a pretty kettle of fish for the lawyers of both countries to enjoy, and perhaps little left for the heirs when legal fees and "mordido" had been paid. On the basis of our own experience and that of others with whom we discussed the matter, it seemed probable that mordido would be a feature of any transaction in which public officials had power of decision. I had a feeling myself that "Norteamericanos" were regarded as fair game and were all assumed to be rich and probably malefactors.

The majority of Mexicans don't distinguish between Americans and Canadians unless the difference is pointed out to them in a particular case. Then it becomes apparent that they have no prejudice against Canadians. I once asked a well-educated Mexican the reason for this, to which he replied, "You have never invaded us."

Government officials with whom the turistas come into contact are under orders to be polite to them, and usually are, so long as they do not get into trouble of any sort, such as an accident with their car. Some Americans we met did have a slight accident for which they were not at fault in any way, but the police promptly impounded their car. Their insurance company paid the cost of repairing the car which was \$100 United States but did not pay the cost of retrieving the car from the clutches of the police which came to \$120 United States. It is virtually impossible to ascertain the reason for an impost like this and if it could be done at all, it would take so long that hotel expenses would far exceed the amount at risk, so it is wiser to pay up and try to look pleasant.

It is generally understood that the government services are so poorly paid that it is taken for granted that they must make their pay up to a living wage by seizing any opportunity that comes along. I do not think Mexico is any better or worse than other Latin American countries, and if that is the way they want it to be, after all it is their country. Perhaps the tourists should regard it as an occupational hazard of tourism.

One can understand those who staff our foreign embassies taking a dim view of Canadians who get into difficulties by their own sheer ignorance or naïveté, and expect to be rescued promptly and if necessary by all the resources of our foreign service. However, it is true that at the time our embassy in Mexico City did not have a good reputation among Canadians we met who were living in Mexico. The embassy folk were said to show little interest in Canadians living in Mexico, and from what we observed while sitting waiting for some attention ourselves we felt we understood what they meant. The treatment accorded to some wandering windbag from Ottawa was so very different and one could not help noticing the sudden switch from the casual and off-hand to the sycophantic.

While we were wondering if it would be wise for us to stay in Mexico the problem was solved for us by Ruth having one

of the most serious bouts of pulmonary trouble in her long medical record. After the doctor had sounded her chest his diagnosis was, pleurisy, bronchitis and double pneumonia. We pulled her through with a massive injection of penicillin and a tank of oxygen, and when she was well again the doctor advised a thorough check-up with chest x-rays and examination by a chest specialist. The final result was advice to live at sea-level instead of 5,000 feet above as in Cuernavaca.

In the course of our exploration before settling in Cuernavaca we had concluded that none of the possible places on the sea had a pleasant climate the year round and most had too many insects, tourists or other pests, or too few of the amenities of life to which we like to be accustomed.

My thoughts turned instinctively to Hawaii which I had visited briefly on the way to New Zealand and back in 1936, and after discussing it we decided to try living there at sea-level, "La que el Medico señala," which means "As the doctor ordered."

The termite-proof house we had built in Cuernavaca sold very readily for a good price, all cash in United States dollars and the buyers also bought our furniture and car. By the time one has paid the very high customs duty on a car in Mexico it is uneconomic to take it out of the country again, and most car buyers seem to prefer a car that has been made in the United States or anywhere but in Mexico.

We were sorry to part from the friends we had made in Mexico but needs must when the devil drives and doctors advice must be taken, to say nothing of the very unsatisfactory situation with reference to taxes both income and estate, which we were glad to leave behind. It felt like a potential menace hanging over us that might drop at any moment that the government decided to tighten up a somewhat loose bit of business.

We were also sorry to part with the very good domestic help we had finally acquired after running the gamut of