

Paraguay, Land of the Tea With a "Kick": Yerba Mate May Yet Become a ...

By HENRY HULME SEVIER.

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Paraguay, Land of the Tea With a "Kick"

Yerba Mate May Yet Become a Favorite Dry Beverage Here—Inland South American Republic. With Ten Women to Each Man, Seeks Commercial Advancement

By HENRY HULME SEVIER.

ACELBRATED and valuable product of the little inland South American Republic of Paraguay is "yerba mate," made from the leaf of a very tall, bulky tree. The leaves are cut from the branches, placed on brushwood and roasted slowly in holes sunk in the ground and lined with skins. From the product is brewed a tea with an effect so stimulating that drinking it may become a habit some day in the United States.

The tea is imbibed through a "bombilla," or tube, which is placed in the "mate," or gourd, containing the infusion. An alcoholic "kick" is not claimed for yerba mate, but that it is refreshing to a degree—that it will certainly buck one up—is attested by the fact that a large proportion of the people of Central South America are irrevocably addicted to it. Its popularity extends to all classes. One explanation for its extensive use is that it offsets the injurious effects of too much meat eating, a dissipation to which the natives of South America are prone.

For many years an increasing demand for yerba mate has come from foreign countries. In Buenos Aires and other big cities of the south there are drinking places where nothing else is served. A quantity of yerba is shipped annually to Europe and Asia, a small amount to the United States. Under less primitive methods of preparing and handling, the output could be increased manifold, and yerba mate may yet to some extent take the place of another stimulant whose day seems to be done.

If that happens, the United States may become well acquainted with a portion of the globe about which it seems now to be woefully ignorant; but even if it does not happen, we are likely to have an introduction through the less stimulating medium of foreign exchange. Men of finance are interested in encouraging something more than a howling acquaintance, as the following item will testify:

"For the purpose of stabilizing exchange with Paraguay," announced a brief news cable under an Asuncion date line the other day, "a convention by which Paraguay will establish a gold fund has been signed by the Paraguayan Minister of Foreign Affairs and Daniel F. Mooney, the United States Minister, acting for the International High Commission which was created some time ago to obtain uniformity of exchange between the Americas."

This obscure little paragraph, sandwiched between the advertisements of oil stock jobbers, chronicled an important event, not only to the people of an isolated nation, but to forward-looking North American capitalists, who have within the last several years planted some millions of money in Paraguayan prospects.

The convention signed by their Excellencies, the Foreign Minister of Paraguay and the Minister of the United States, had to do, in a strictly literal sense, only with the accumulation of a gold fund derived from Paraguayan revenues, as the news cable stated, the said gold fund to be sequestered in New York to meet certain obligations. It really meant, however, that Paraguay had finally taken a step, long overdue, that is expected to lead to the establishment of its financial system upon a substantial basis.

Paraguay's struggle for commercial existence began something less than two generations ago, when it was compelled to abandon its favorite national pastime of waging war because of exhaustion of human material necessary to carry it on.

From the start its great handicap has guayan money. It is but one of the Latin

guayan money. It is but one of the Latin American countries whose finances are on a basis of inconvertible paper of fluctuating value, but it has suffered by reason of financial instability more than any of the others. It has no coinage of gold or silver, and all the internal commerce of the country is conducted in depreciated paper currency issued in denominations of 50 centavos and upward. The rates of exchange are based on the price of Argentine paper currency, and change from day to day according to the demand. Merchandise which costs today, we will say, 3,500 pesos, may be purchased in a month for 3,000 pesos, or, on the other hand, may cost 4,000 pesos. This uncertainty has always kept business on a highly speculative basis.

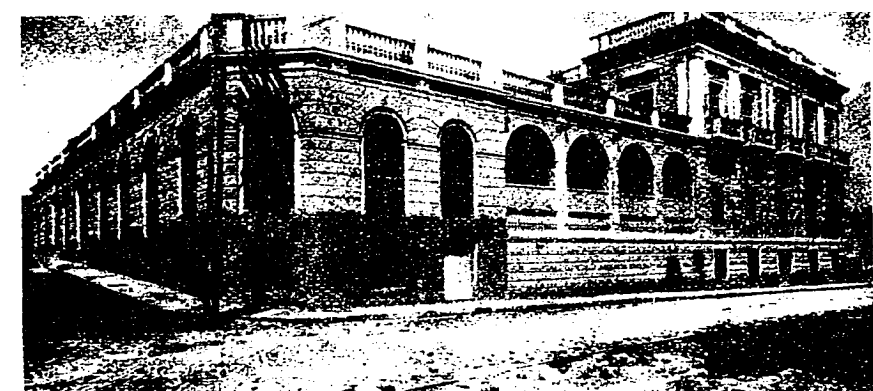
Paraguay, with its 171,814 square miles, is considerably larger than the State of California. Its population is something less than 800,000. Of the latter 100,000 are wild Indians and an overwhelming majority of the remaining 700,000 are still classed as illiterate. The women outnumber the men ten to one, which really indicates a considerable gain for the male sex, because fifty years ago the score was said to be twenty-five to one in favor of the women.

It was in 1870 that the nation gave up fighting as an exclusive occupation. It lacked the man power to carry it on. Through several sanguinary campaigns Paraguay had devotedly followed the fortunes of the bloodthirsty Lopez—a brilliant soldier but a merciless tyrant—fighting Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina, in turn and in combination. Admittedly the best soldiers in South America, they could not stand up indefinitely against the overwhelming odds presented by the alliance of her three powerful neighbors. After a succession of defeats, in which the Brazilian navy, operating a thousand miles from the open sea, played a part; with their ancient capital, Asuncion, in possession of the enemy, the remnant of General Lopez's army fell back into the forests of the hinterland and scattered through its jungles.

Historians tell us that five-sixths of Paraguay's population perished in her wars. Of the surviving one-sixth a small fraction returned from the wilderness after the departure of the invaders, to once more set up a Government of their own and to maintain in the land a semblance of law and order. They were mostly ranking officers of Lopez's vanquished army, and their fortitude, perseverance and industry proved equal, in a measure, to the task before them. Paraguay is today a free and independent nation, admittedly far behind in de-

velopment and enterprise, but it is to the everlasting credit of those soldiers and their sons that no serious effort has ever been made by more powerful and ambitious neighbors to invade and subject their country.

But more than three-fourths of Paraguay's population is still in the woods. Less than 10 per cent. of it is urban. Asuncion, with 80,000 inhabitants, is the only city of importance. It is the capital and the centre of the commercial, financial, and political interests of the country. The last twenty-five years or more have mingled much of the modern and utilitarian with the quaint but unpractical picturesqueness of this ancient out-



Government Building with Lace-Like Iron Grilles, Asuncion.

post of the Spanish conquistadores. Asuncion was founded in 1536, and is thus the oldest surviving city of any importance founded by Europeans on the South American continent.

Asuncion's evolution from a stockaded outpost to a modern national capital has occupied the better part of four centuries, and it is yet far from being complete. In some sections of the city the surroundings are so wretched, the manner of living is so unsanitary and primitive, that an impression of retrogression rather than progress in the human condition is unavoidable. The enormous municipal market, where something of everything that is made or grown in Paraguay is offered for sale, and where three-fourths of the city's inhabitants purchase their every day requirements, is a malodorous and noisome spectacle. The produce is dumped out upon none too clean floors and displayed with little discrimination and less attractiveness.

Asuncion has an electric light plant and an electric street railway, privately owned and operated, but as yet no telephone system. Main Street is no Great White Way, but in general appearance it is not unlike Main Street in some of our own growing and thriving cities of 80,

000. Several of the big stores have commodious, well-ordered salesrooms with surprisingly complete stocks. The smaller shops are rather provincial, claiming the interest of the stranger chiefly because of the articles of native workmanship and the curios they offer. The hand-manufacture of silver ornaments, crudely original, and lace making are among the active industries of the country.

Asuncion's nearest approach to a skyscraper is an office building four stories high. The President's Palace, a long, stately edifice with two wings forming a semi-court, so arranged that every cool Summer breeze that blows is circulated through its spacious corridors, is an ex-

cellent example of architectural adaptation. A number of other Government buildings, including the general Post Office, the National Library, the museum and the arsenal, possess architectural merit. The railroad station, although its only important arrival and departure is the weekly International Express from and to Buenos Aires, is a tremendous and ornate affair. Its driveway has a much wider clearance than has the Pennsylvania Station in New York, and its gateway is certainly more elaborate. It faces, with a massive, dignified colonnade, the city's main plaza, the scene of numerous stirring combats and historical incidents of a violent past.

The residence section of the wealthy class of Asuncion is clean and attractive. Its buildings give evidence of good taste and refinement, if not of luxury. Architecturally, the Spanish influence dominates, but there is a flavor of the South American which makes for picturesque effectiveness. Very little lumber is used in the construction of buildings in this part of the world. The material is mostly concrete or adobe. The exteriors of the residences are usually white, but occasionally they are tinted to a shade of delicate pink. The white houses have roofs of red tiling; the pink ones are generally crowned with roofs of a pale blue. Slightly, substantial iron grilles, a heritage of old Spain, ornament the windows and doorways; the floors are laid with tiling of many colors and fantastic designs. Every home, of any pretension at all, has its quaint patio, studded with luxuriant tropical plants. Tall palms droop their branches languidly over high garden walls of pink or light blue stucco, meeting the boughs of fruit-laden orange trees that border the sidewalks.

The first 800 miles of the rail journey is through the Argentine provinces of Buenos Aires, Entre Rios, Corrientes, and Misiones, flat or gently rolling country—and it is not uninteresting. From the windows of the comfortable observation car the passenger from other lands is attracted by sights and objects that are amusing and entertaining. The broad, far-reaching pampas are reminiscent of the prairies of Texas and Kansas. Barbed-wire fences inclose the railroad's generous right of way, but the cattle that graze peacefully in the distance are not like the cattle one usually sees on

the open ranges of our Western States. These look as though they might all have been prize winners at some recent live stock show. They are sleek and fat and obviously highly bred. Offering variety to the pastoral landscape, at frequent intervals long-throated, solemn-looking ostriches, entirely naked save for an absurd bunch of bustle-feathers, are observed stalking majestically through the tall grass. Now and then a bunch of foolish-faced llamas—the pack-mules of the southern country, which are neither mule nor goat nor giraffe, but possess some of the bodily features of all three—startled by the rumble of the train, trot off toward the brush.

The herd-riders, who appear from out of the chaparral occasionally, or are seen galloping along the dusty roads behind bunches of steers, are reminiscent of our Western cowboys only in the graceful, negligent way they sit their horses. They are known as "gauchos" down in South America, and instead of the big white stetson, the short canvas jacket, leather "chaps" and high-heeled boots affected by the North American "puncher," the gaucho wears a low-crowned, flat-brimmed sombrero and an all-enveloping "poncho," or blanket, that hangs from his neck to the tips of his low-topped, fancy-colored boots. When not in the saddle, the gaucho throws one end of the poncho back across the left shoulder, in much the same manner that the Spanish señorita drapes her delicate lace mantilla. His trousers are tight-fitting and long-waisted, like the torador's. The saddle of this rough rider of the pampas is a dinky affair, as insignificant as the English country gentleman's, and apparently too light for strenuous struggles with the heavy Ar-



Principal Business Thoroughfare, Asuncion.

gentine steer. It is innocent of pommel and has no back support, but the gaucho prefers it to what he scornfully terms a Texas "rocking chair," and the Texas cowboy has nothing on him when it comes to expert roping and daring horsemanship.

The last lap of the up trip to Asuncion is reached when the International Express arrives at the Argentine frontier town of Posadas. Here the entire train, with the exception of the locomotive, is shunted on to a specially constructed ferryboat which carries it across the broad Rio Alto Parana and deposits it in the Paraguayan village of Embarcation. The journey thence to Asuncion, 232 miles, is over the first railroad constructed in South America.

The traveler usually goes back to

Buenos Aires by boat, especially if the up trip has been made by rail. Down stream the time is only three days, as against five days when bucking the current. The accommodations do not suffer by comparison with those of the river and lake boats of the United States, and there is much to be seen that is educational and enlightening.

The Rio Parana after it has been joined by the waters of the Alto Parana, about 200 miles below Asuncion. Then, after the confluence of the Rio Uruguay, a short distance above Buenos Aires, it is called the Rio de la Plata. Few rivers can match these three in majesty. At Rosario the Parana is twenty miles wide, and would give the impression of the broad

sea were it not for the cluster of poplar-lad islands that intercept the view. It is estimated that the Parana, during the floods, rolls down into the Rio de la Plata 1,650,000 cubic feet of water per second, a much greater volume than the Mississippi discharges at any time, and probably equal to the best efforts of the mighty Amazon itself.

Asuncion is 1,200 miles from the sea, but thanks to this magnificent system of waterways, it can claim to be a deep water port almost all the year. The Rio Paraguay broadens out to the proportions of a small bay in front of the city. Scores of all manner of floating craft are always at anchor in the harbor, and in appearance, at least, it is the "port" it claims to be. For 300 miles or more above Asuncion the river is navigable for sizable boats, and the traffic is considerable, due to the increasing number of quebracho logging camps, and the cattle ranches that are being opened up to feed the packing houses further down the stream.

With regard to the latter, it should be stated that one of the most extensive developments in Paraguay is being undertaken by a North American packing house corporation. This concern owns 470 square miles of splendid timber and grazing lands in the Grand Chaco (great wilderness), several hundred miles up the river from Asuncion. Its activities at the present time are centred in the raising of cattle to supply its "frigerifico" at San Antonio, fifteen miles below the capital city, but the production of tannin, or bracho extract, is a side line of no small importance. Quebracho is a liquid, squeezed from the pulp of a tree by that name, and used the world over in the process of tanning leather.



Group of Guarani Indians of the Paraguay "Grand Chaco."