

GLOBE-TROTTING, WITH A DIFFERENCE

The Embassy in Argentina is not so fortunate as some regarding the number of Canadian visitors it has the opportunity to welcome and assist. A small number of business men, some missionaries and a handful of tourists for whom Buenos Aires is a brief port of call, make up the substance of our yearly allotment. The odd student, hitch-hiking through these regions, occasionally drops in to sign the book or to pick up mail, but they are few and far between. Argentina is off the beaten track; yet we have our moments.

Once in a long while we come across singular people, knights of the road who follow the call of adventure to far-off places. Thus we met Conrad Dubé, who hails from Quebec City, in March 1963. He arrived on a bicycle, his camping gear neatly stacked behind the saddle and surmounted by a staff from which drooped a medium-size Canadian flag. His bike was adorned also with printed posters giving his name, country of origin, and other pertinent details such as the number of countries he had visited (46) and the total distance he had travelled (243,000 miles), roughly the equivalent of ten times around the earth.

Appearances to the contrary, these signs were not displayed in a boastful spirit. The fact is that Conrad, a polio victim from infancy, made it the hard way from cradle to bicycle. The wheel and the open road were, indeed, the final rewarding form of therapy he encountered in his search for rehabilitation. While apparently working wonders for his health, they did less for his speech which remains very impaired. Hence the posters wisely printed in Spanish, an idiom he is not too familiar with. Not surprisingly, Conrad visited the office of the Buenos Aires Herald where he was interviewed at some length...

One thing the article of the Herald does not reveal, although the posters supply a hint, is Conrad's unusual ability to take care of himself. On the eve of his departure, after a ten day sojourn, he was able to mail four hundred dollars' worth of pesos to his family, which left him with a mere 6,000 pesos in pocket money. One assumes that a good part of this windfall was collected in the cinema district of Buenos Aires where he could be observed astride his bicycle on an evening, neither soliciting nor refusing the cash offerings that fell into a big cigar box attached to his handle bars. To our Second Secretary who accompanied him to the bank at his request, Conrad said that he regularly sent money home. A dutiful son evidently, if a wandering one.

It is perhaps only by coincidence that we had the visit, at the end of last March, of one Bill Smith who also came to us after many weary miles from "La

douce province" (if they are still calling it that!). A man of 71, Bill hails from Montreal and travels on foot, like the Apostles. He took up globe-trotting after being retired from his job at Henry Birks in Montreal. It all began innocently with a trip back to the Old Country in 1960, to visit relatives; then the wanderlust took hold. Bill has a limited vocabulary and appears to be wearing the clothes he started out with four years ago. He travels light.

Inevitably, Bill found the Buenos Aires Herald which published a sketch of his life and wanderings. According to the story he lives on a \$65 a month pension, which he considers ample usually. We found him inexpensive lodging at the Seamen's Union but... he complains that life in Buenos Aires is costly as compared to Chile where he got by handsomely on a dollar a day. I hope, for the sake of our colleagues in that country, that word of this does not reach the D.B.S. or T.B. officials.

Although Bill Smith is not in a class with Conrad Dubé as an operator, being handicapped perhaps by age and experience, he is nevertheless not to be pitied. It is true he has less cash, but then he is blessed with a wealth of memories and a less clever brain. His strong suit is friendliness, inspired by honest and forthright look. He generates this easily, and presumably to some advantage in hitch-hiking.

Thus, each pedalling along in his own fashion, Bill and Conrad drifted in and out of our official life: an innocent pair from Quebec, one English-speaking and the other, French. There is a nice balance in this which, to be really perfect, may call for extension. It would seem appropriate for us to encounter next some knight errant from Ontario, the Prairies or even British Columbia, in March, 1965. Needless to add, we look forward calmly to this visitation.

E.R. Bellemare

Buenos Aires, April 1964