

BRAZILIAN ADVENTURE

By
PETER FLEMING

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1935

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To C.

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FOREWORD

MOST expeditions have serious, scientific, non-committal books written about them. But ours was not that sort of expedition, and mine is not that sort of book. Only an alienist could have chronicled our activities either seriously or scientifically. I have, however, been as non-committal as I could.

Differing as it does from most books about expeditions, this book differs also from most books about the interior of Brazil. It differs in being throughout strictly truthful. I had meant, when I started, to pile on the agony a good deal; I felt it would be expected of me. In treating of the Great Unknown one has a free hand, and my few predecessors in this particular field had made great play with the Terrors of the Jungle. The alligators, the snakes, the man-eating fish, the lurking savages, those dreadful insects — all the paraphernalia of tropical mumbo jumbo lay ready to my hand. But when the time came I found that I had not the face to make the most of them. So the reader must forgive me if my picture of Matto Grosso does not tally with his lurid preconceptions.

The hardships and privations which we were called on to endure were of a very minor order, the dangers which we ran were considerably less than those to be encountered on any arterial road during a heat wave; and if, in any part of this book, I have given a contrary impression, I have done so unwittingly.

The expedition may claim to have thrown a little (but not much) light, of a confirmatory nature, on the mystery surrounding Colonel Fawcett's disappearance. Otherwise, beyond the completion of a 3000 mile journey, mostly under amusing conditions, through a little-known part

FOREWORD

of the world, and the discovery of one new tributary to a tributary to a tributary of the Amazon, nothing of importance was achieved. But I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my profound appreciation of the parts played in the incidents herein narrated by all members of the expedition, and our gratitude to Capt. J. G. Holman, of Saõ Paulo, for the invaluable services rendered by him to the expedition in Brazil; and in particular I should like to thank Mr. Roger Pettiward, who always saw the joke.

PETER FLEMING

Nettlebed,
Oxfordshire

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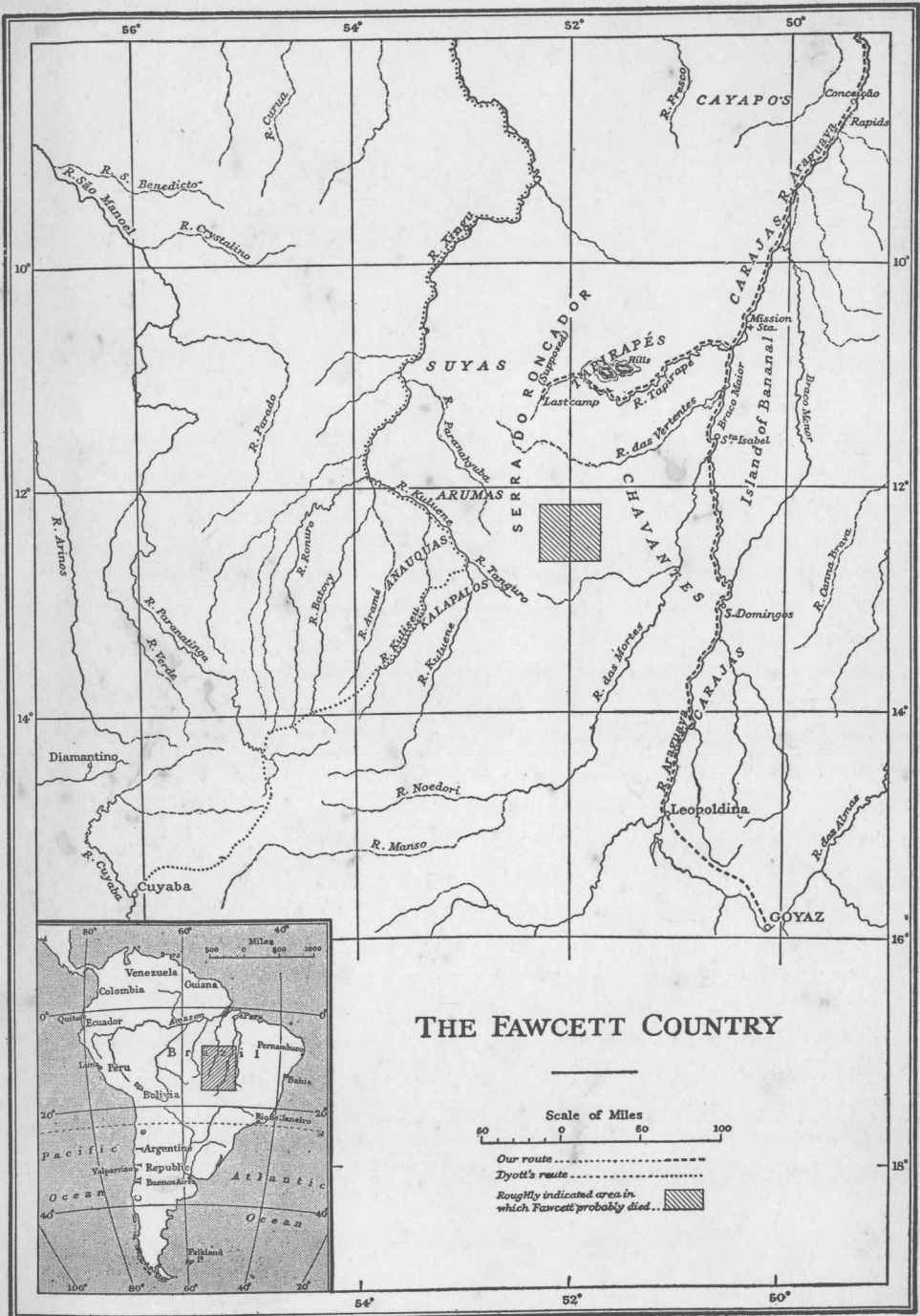
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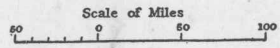
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PART ONE

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS



THE FAWCETT COUNTRY



- Our route (dotted line)
- Dyott's route (dashed line)
- Roughly indicated area in which Fawcett probably died... (hatched box)



CHAPTER I

SIGNING ON

It began with an advertisement in the Agony Column of *The Times*.

I always read the Agony Column first, and the news (if there is time) afterwards. This is a practice which most people will deplore, saying that it argues, not only disrespect to a great journal, but an almost impudent lack of curiosity with regard to what are called World Events.

I suppose they are right. But this is a dull life, and the only excuse for the existence of newspapers is that they should make it less dull. It is popularly supposed to be a good thing to know what happened in the world yesterday; but for my part I find it at least equally important to know what may be happening in the world to-day. I fail to see how anyone who has the industry to acquire, and the fortitude to assimilate without panic, a working knowledge of the morning's news can find life any easier to face for the assurance that there is deadlock at Geneva, vacillation at Westminster, foot-and-mouth in Leicestershire, sabotage in Poland, and a slump in Kaffirs. I, on the other hand, without burdening my memory with a lot of facts of uncertain value and ephemeral validity — without even opening the paper — can start the day equipped with several agreeable and stimulating subjects for speculation. What strange kind of a creature can it be whose wolf-hound — now lost in Battersea Park — answers to the name of Effie? How will the Jolly Winter Sports Party ('only sahibs need apply') be

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

finally constituted? Why is Bingo heart-broken? And what possible use can Box A have for a horned toad?

It will be objected that these are frivolous and unprofitable topics for thought: that in these distressful times one ought to be concentrating on graver matters — on War Debts, and on finding fresh excuses for Japan. Theoretically, I know, there is a great deal in this. But at heart I am impenitent. At heart I prefer — and I am afraid I always shall prefer — the world of the Agony Column to that great stage of fools to which the editorial pages of *The Times* so faithfully hold up a mirror. The world of the Agony Column is a world of romance, across which sundered lovers are for ever hurrying to familiar rendezvous ('same time, same place'): a world in which jewellery is constantly being left in taxi-cabs with destinations which must surely be compromising: a world of faded and rather desperate gentility, peopled largely by Old Etonians and ladies of title: a world of the most tremendous enterprise, in which Oxford B.A.s, though equipped only with five European languages, medium height and the ability to drive a car, are ready to 'go anywhere, do anything': a world of sudden and heroic sacrifices ('owner going abroad'): a world in which every object has a sentimental value, every young man a good appearance, and only the highest references are exchanged: an anxious, urgent, cryptic world: a world in which anything may happen. . . .

'Exploring and sporting expedition, under experienced guidance, leaving England June, to explore rivers Central Brazil, if possible ascertain fate Colonel Fawcett; abundance game, big and small; exceptional fishing; ROOM TWO MORE GUNS; highest references expected and given.— Write Box X, *The Times*, E.C.4.'

This is my favourite sort of advertisement. It had the

SIGNING ON

right improbable ring to it. As I gazed, with all possible detachment, at a map of South America, I seemed to hear the glib and rapid voice of Munchausen, the clink of gold bricks. I had a curiously distinct vision (I don't know why) of two men with red faces deciding, in the bar of the Royal Automobile Club, that what they wanted was a couple of suckers to put up a thou. So wisdom prevailed; and for ten days, though I thought quite often about the interior of Brazil, I did nothing to increase my chances of exploring it.

But on the tenth day, or thereabouts, I found myself reading a long article on the middle page of *The Times* which was clearly about this expedition. Its plans were outlined, its itinerary indicated, and the latest theories about Colonel Fawcett's fate were discussed with that almost medieval disregard for the geographical facts involved of which I was shortly to become a leading exponent. So the thing really existed. The project was genuine. There was an expedition leaving England in June. And *The Times* took it seriously.

This was altogether too much for me. I was still careful to pretend to myself that it would be out of the question for me to go to Brazil. It would cost too much and take too long; and it would be the act of a madman to throw up the literary editorship of the most august of weekly journals in favour of a wild goose chase. All the same, I argued, it will do no harm to find out a little more about it. . . .

So I wrote to Box X asking for particulars, and presently got an answer from which it appeared that neither the time nor the money involved were as far beyond my means as I had expected. From that moment I gave up struggling with the inevitable. I wrote back and applied for an option on one of the vacancies in the expedition, which, I explained, I would not be in a position to take up definitely for another

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

fortnight or so. In this letter I had meant to rehearse at considerable length my qualifications to take part in an enterprise of this sort, but when the time came these proved curiously indefinable. So I only put down my age (which was 24) and where I had been educated. As a regular reader of the Agony Column, I knew that this latter piece of information, though seemingly irrelevant, might well prove of the first importance; for by Agony Column standards an Old Boy is worth two young men.

This verbal economy I have always believed was good policy. Surfeited with the self-portraiture of applicants who appeared, almost to a man, to be as strong as a horse, as brave as a lion, and to have some knowledge of commercial Spanish, Box X was instantly attracted by my laconic method of approach. More letters were exchanged, a meeting took place, and before long I found myself committed — in the capacity of special correspondent to *The Times* — to a venture for which Rider Haggard might have written the plot and Conrad designed the scenery.