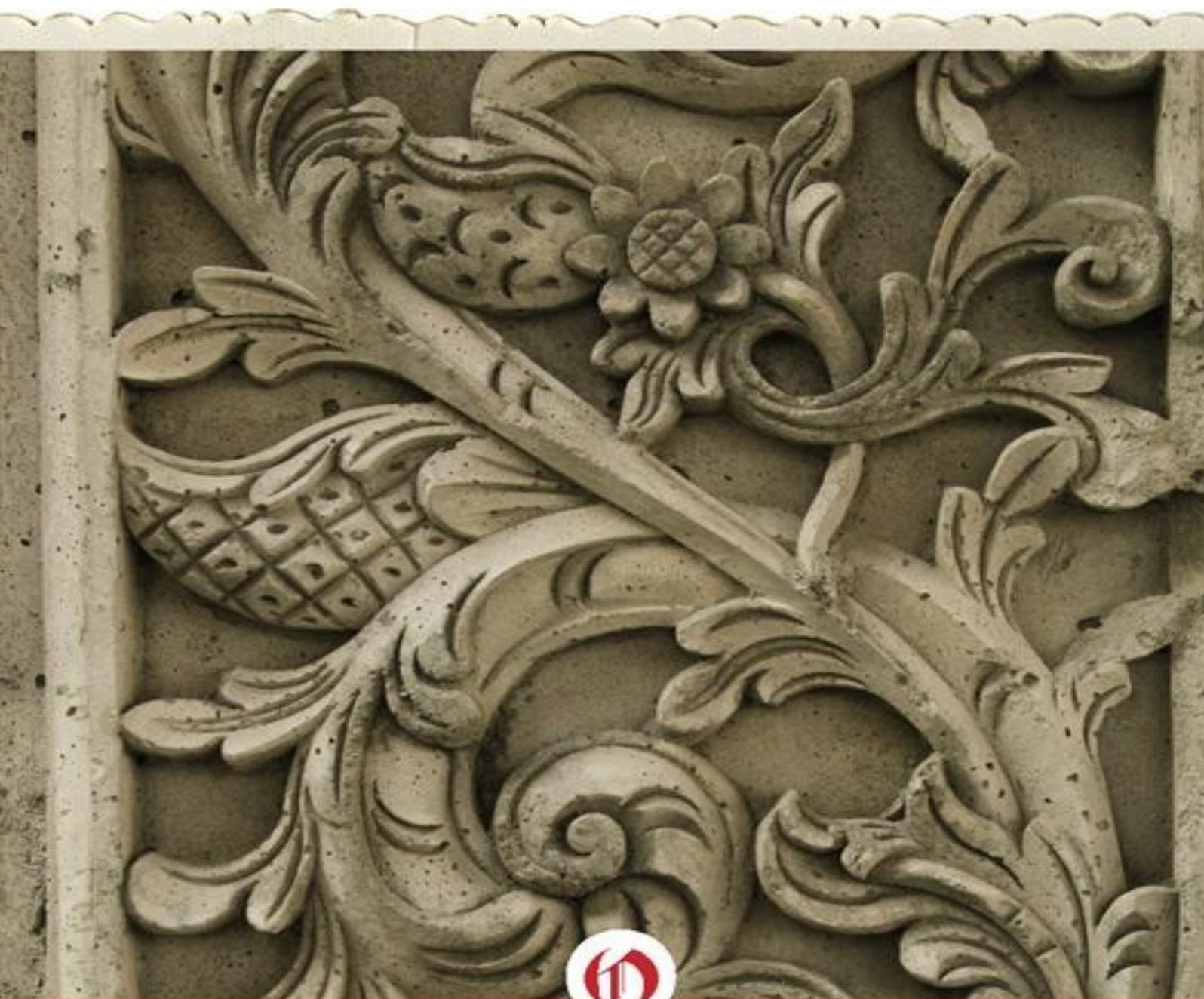


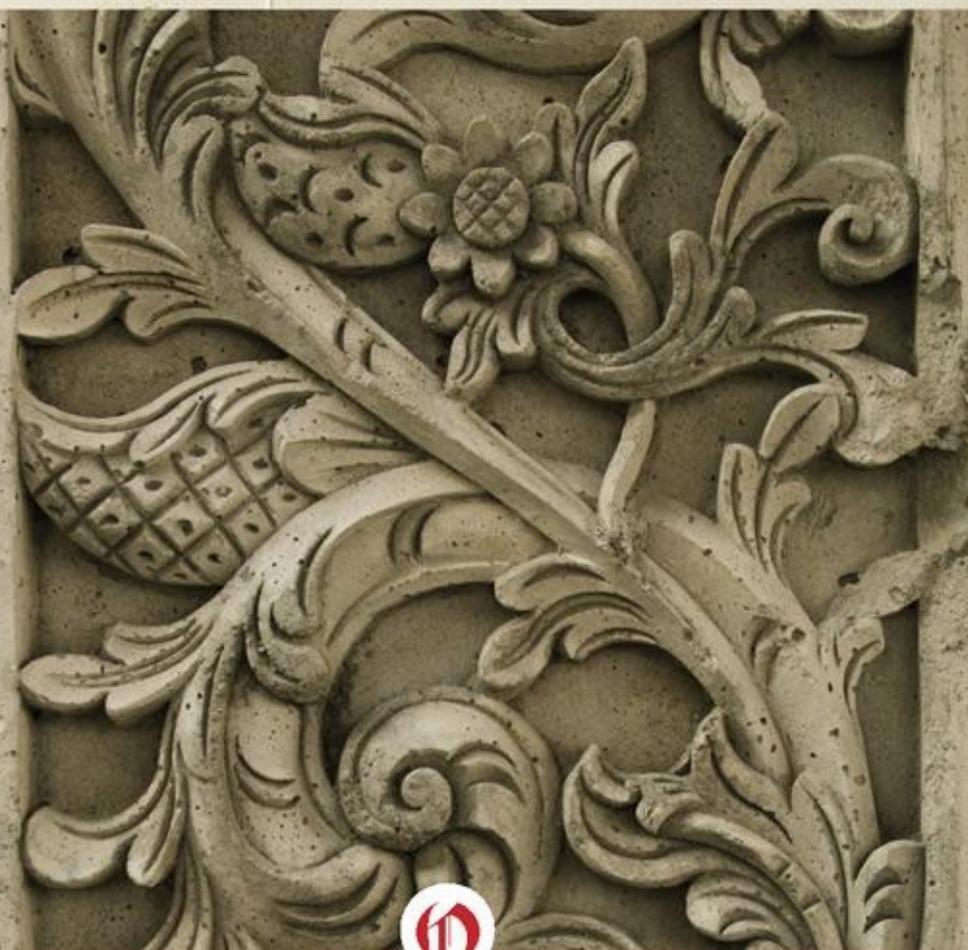
Rebecca West

SURVIVORS IN MEXICO



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Survivors in Mexico

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To
Lori Curtis and the
McFarlin Special Collections Library at the University of Tulsa

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Mexico City I

THIRTY YEARS AGO, in the Macedonian province of Yugoslavia, I knew one of the last pashas who were stranded there after the Turkish Empire had been driven out of the Balkans. Such Turks were in sad straits. Five hundred years before, their ancestors had been settled there by the sultans to colonise the territories their armies had conquered, and now the Christians had turned on them, and they were amazed, as exploiters always are when the exploited turn and bite the hand which has not fed them. There was nowhere for these obsolete pro-consuls to retreat from this revenge, for they were strict Moslems, the women wore the veil and the men the fez, and they knew that if they went back to Turkey they would find that by order of the Atatürk the Turkish females' faces were naked and the Turkish males had adopted infidel bowlers.

Therefore the old pasha, like several of his kind, lingered on in Macedonia, living in the crumbling villa-palace of his ancestors, with only the few acres round it that he had been allowed to keep while the rest was cut up into peasant holdings under the land reforms of King Alexander. The one place in his home where his poverty did not show, where there were no cracked tiles on the floor and no plaster dust fallen from the wedding-cake vaults above, was a second-storey balcony, which the old lilac tree in the garden had long overtopped. Sitting there, one could stretch out an arm into the branches and stir up the purple flowers and set the scent rising in clouds. There we used to pass the summer evenings, up among the lilacs, drinking a mixture of coffee and chocolate, not thick Turkish coffee but the thin Western brew, laced with sweet chocolate beaten to a foam. "This," the pasha told me every time we drank it, "is how they serve coffee in Mexico." That was the only thing about Mexico I was sure I knew when I went there.

It is in line with life as I know it that when I got to Mexico nobody had ever heard of mixing coffee and chocolate. But my misapprehension worked out well, for Mexican waiters always took an interest in my husband and myself after we had ordered this bizarre beverage, saying, "Chk, chk, do they drink that in England?" and when we said, to save ourselves trouble, "Yes, all the time, all the time," they nodded tolerantly, feeling that as foreigners we had to be wrong about something, and this was error on an innocent field. So they bore with us every afternoon, round about six, when we went up to the balcony on the top floor, though that was the hour they liked to doze; and while they stretched themselves on the plush benches round the walls, we sat undisturbed by the huge west window and watched the sunset make a cavalry charge on the sky and beat the daylights out of it and then itself get beaten by the night.

The conflict might go this way: above Mexico City the November skies were pearl grey, not so luminous as might be expected at the height of seven thousand feet, not trembling brightly as they do over Johannesburg and Saint Moritz, for the reason that here they are thickened and sobered by industrial pollution contained within the walls of the wide basin in which the city spreads. The pearl-grey skies became a honey-coloured vagueness, a primrose glow, an amber fire, orange flames, and it is no use objecting that this process happens everywhere at that hour. Only here does it seem that the skies go on fire as solid objects do, as if their ashes might rain down on the spectators. Then the mountains were black against crimson, and the crimson marched on and on until it was overhead and then purple clouds rushed from horizon to horizon, fusing with the crimson and dissolving to roiling veils floating on a mulberry firmament, which then was bleached, but brightly, into a greenish crystal arch traversed by white phantoms of mist through which shone stars larger than they had been last week in New York. Lights twinkled up at them from the city below, and it was full night. The operation had taken twenty-five minutes.

The lights that twinkle back from Mexico City are sparse. Over Washington and New York and

other urban complexes in the States there stand in the night other shining, immaterial cities, created by profligate use of electricity: a lovely form of waste. But Mexico is huge and poor and profligate only in fields indicated by its political soul, which acts (like even the best of governments) half out of a genuine desire to promote the happiness of the people and half to catch votes.

The Federal District of Mexico contains 6 million people who have to be kept happy, not including the half-million provincials camping in the dust-flats outside the city limits, waiting for jobs they have imagined—which is not so hopeless a state as might appear. Mexicans have a creative imagination. They might imagine prosperity into being. They have imagined themselves into the present United States of Mexico against all probability; they have imagined the huge solidities stretching for miles below the glass window where we sat, a solidity which at that hour was dense not only where there were houses, but in between. A seventh of the national population lives within the Federal District; to take a larger unit, nearly half that population is to be found in the 14 percent of the national territory contained in the wide basin of the Valley of Mexico. As my husband and I sat looking at the sunset, most of that half were trying to get home. Below us was a traffic congestion startling even to those who know New York and London and Paris.

There has only just been built the beginnings of a subway in Mexico City, and the reason for this—like the reason for everything that happens in these parts—is historical. In 1521 the Spanish conqueror Cortés destroyed the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, which was another Venice, poised on silt in a lake, and he built Mexico City on the ravaged site. In the process he rashly drained channels which should have been left alone, and the water table shifted and has never been quite itself again, so solid earth around here is not so solid. Many old buildings have a heavy list, often with ironic effect. Surely the offices of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith ought not, with its influential connections, to be sinking into the ground at an angle of twenty degrees. So it happens that no engineer was eager to build a subway anywhere near Mexico City, and till now there has been no public transport except buses and two kinds of taxis, one the kind for hire by a single passenger or acquainted group of passengers, the others who take a mixed bag and drop them in turn. The drivers of this latter sort show what they are by putting one hand out of the window when they have room for another passenger, and it becomes a folk gesture peculiarly appropriate to the town.

They are Mexican hands, more often beautiful than not. (It is only we Europeans who have ugly hands, with thick fingers, broad palms, heavy wrists, and an alarming liability to go uglier still in age. No wonder we have had to excuse ourselves by technological activity.) Mexican taxi drivers' hands like everything else Mexican, are involved in history. By day they are asking for more passengers, and avidly, for there is poverty here, but they are also pointing out the scenes on which their national drama has played itself. Listen to one of the drivers who can speak a foreign language and ferries tourists to whom that language is native: he will not be difficult to hear, he will be giving forth the open-mouthed shout which in all countries is the voice of nationalism: "That marble colonnade is a memorial to OUR GREAT STATESMAN JUÁREZ—he was NOT A SPANIARD—he was an INDIAN—an INDIAN—PURE INDIAN—a ZAPOTEC INDIAN—he came from OAXACA—are you listening, Ma'am? THE PARK BEHIND US IS ONE OF OUR MANY BEAUTIFUL PARKS—it is called the Alameda—the Poplar Park. HERE THE AZTECS HAD A GREAT MARKET—where they sold everything, Neiman-Marcus nothing—they sold GOLD AND JADE AND CLOTH MADE OF FEATHERS—and CHOCOLATE AND VANILLA—but when the Spaniards came they STOLE it all—and the merchants they KILLED—and when the Dominicans came they turned it into the CREMATORIUM Square—there they BURNED ALL THE VICTIMS OF THE INQUISITION—human sacrifices they said the Indians made—but human sacrifices they were few, they were nearly nothing—BUT THE INQUISITION IT BURNED AND BURNED AND BURNED." The substance of the polemic is slightly surprising to the foreigner, because the speaker is unlikely to be a pure Indian. Of the 40 million Mexicans alive today only 29 percent are Indian, and most of them live in the country. Of the remainder 15 percent

are white, 1 percent negro, and no less than 55 percent mestizos, of mixed blood. The man is not denouncing some monstrous invader of his people's lands, as Poles might denounce the Nazis or Germans; he is denouncing some of his ancestors for maltreating other of his ancestors, which, as he is both, must lead to schizophrenia. Yet he glows with health. He is a strong swimmer swimming with the tide which is gathering momentum. Never did the Indians, during their centuries of subjection to the Spanish, lose their pride of race; but probably these taxi drivers' grandfathers could not have delivered these crowded and coherent impromptu lectures, for lack of substance. That was delivered to their sons and grandsons in superbly assimilable form by, they think, just one person. "But you will read ALL OUR GLORIOUS HISTORY in the murals of DIEGO RIVERA. You have seen them? IN OUR NATIONAL PALACE. IN CUERNAVACA. IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION . He was OUR GREAT MAN, Diego RIVERA." There is an enchanting paradox here. Because Rivera was a member of the Internationalist Communist Party, he became the most persuasive nationalist propagandist ever known. If Hitler had had such a painter on his side I and millions of others would not be alive today.

Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo

NOBODY EVER WORKED HARDER than Diego Rivera to give the Mexican people a seed bed for their pride by reconstituting the Indian past, and he succeeded because his patriotism was a real passion. All his life he collected works of art produced by the pre-Columbian peoples of Mexico, and he set a large part of his personal fortune aside to found a museum in which these could be exhibited after his death. To this museum we were taken by our driver one Sunday morning, and it was for him a religious experience. "Did you ever hear," he asked me, "that President de Gaulle is the Joan of Arc of today?" I did not wish to discuss the comparison, which always reminds me of how much I dislike female impersonators, but I admitted that I had heard it made. "Well," said the driver, "that is wrong. The French have no right to say that President de Gaulle is like Joan of Arc. But we have a right to call Diego Rivera our Joan of Arc. De Gaulle is a tyrant, but Joan of Arc was a great revolutionary who loved her country, and Diego Rivera was a great revolutionary who loved Mexico." These remarks betrayed no ignorance at all. Our driver had been well taught at school and he was widely read. He was simply using the word "revolutionary" in its Mexican sense, which denotes any person who initiates against opposition any action or course of actions beneficial to his people. It must be added to the definition that the initiation must be performed with a certain fervour. A revolutionary must have overthrown the stoney idols of the heart.

Certainly, Rivera's museum was the work of a sincere revolutionary. He sought to restore in it the Mexican's pride in his Indian past, as he had restored it in his murals. But it is built to a plan that has no real relationship with the Aztec Empire. To the eye of a Londoner it suggests a section cut out of Wandsworth Jail, and a New Yorker would see it as the offspring of Grant's Tomb and one of the Arsenals. Grey blocks of stone have been piled up by an architect who had the Aztec pyramids in his mind, but not as they were in the days of what was probably the most highly coloured (to use the word in its literal sense) civilisation the world has ever seen, but as they are in their ruined state, after having been stripped of the gorgeousness they were designed to display by the Spaniards and roughly housed by four hundred and fifty years of neglect and weather and a century of archaeological research. Around this bleak edifice is a garden laid out with an austere air of serving a high purpose which need not necessarily be enjoyable, and it was the one public place where we saw no balloon sellers and no hawkers of "pig's crackling." As we approached it, there issued from its funereal portals a party of people whose faces were stiff with a sense that the visit was not yet over, but only slightly stiff, for it was nearly over. They were members of a provincial branch of the Communist Party, who had come by bus which was even then starting up its engine to take them on to places where the sellers of balloons and pig's crackling were of good heart, and they could enjoy the Indian heritage of laughter and colour that had given Rivera his joy and his genius, but which was strangely absent from his museum.

For within were grey stone steps and corridors which certainly reproduced the interior of the pyramids, but those which would have been visited by Aztec plumbers and engineers, rather than by their priests or artists, for they led to no painted shrine. Against this monotone background the beautiful sculptures and pottery, which were also grey and black, went for nothing because they had been designed to stand in bright light or against bright colours; and since the intention of many of them was comic, they were as disconcerting as Rowlandson drawings would be hanging in a crematorium. Only in the centre was a room, free of melancholy, large and light; and the most conspicuous object was Rivera's last picture, an unfinished portrait of a pretty Mexican woman of an insipidity not at all distressing, because it showed such good will, it simply put forward the proposition that it would have been agreeable if women were roses, people precious objects, the world

a candy. Its insensibility was balanced by another sort of sensibility, which recalled the statue of the Prince of the Flowers in the museum, smiling indifferently but urgently up at the sun, or it might have been the rain. From hooks high up on the wall dangled two giants made of stuffed basketwork, the figures of Judases as are burned at the fiesta of Gloria every year; and it came home to one that the huge, rip-roaring man who was responsible for all these murals, for this exquisite collection of sculptures, the massive and generous error of this museum, was now nowhere, not as much of him was left as these two straw men. An Aztec poem quoted by Soustelle had something to say about that:

Does one take flowers along to the land of the dead?
Flowers are only lent to us, the truth is that we go.
We leave flowers and songs and the earth.
The truth is that we go.

The Aztec poet went on to say that this being so, we should get all the enjoyment out of flowers and singing while we can, but though every literature does the best it can with that sensible consideration, it does not drown the wail of the wind down the chimney.

In further rooms were objects of popular art which were also related to mortality, the sugar skulls and painted plaster fruits and loaves used in the Celebration of the Feast of the Day of the Dead, looking shy as such objects do when they are abstracted from the peasant world which made them for temporary use and preserved in places in which they would never have appeared spontaneously; and it was only a day or so after the Day of the Dead, some marigolds had been set here and there as a message to Rivera. By now they were faded, and they made him seem more dead than ever and the grey museum a reminder that he had been only lent to us. The atmosphere was the unhappier because the custodians were evidently proud (and such pride was justified) in guarding this monument to Mexico and a great Mexican, and they held themselves as if the museum might at any moment be attacked, and the visitors were light-minded if they had not grasped this danger and resolved to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. One found oneself showing sympathy for this likeable attitude by scowling at the Aztec exhibits, even at the jolly little dogs.

“Now you have done this,” said the driver, “we must go to the other museum given us by Rivera who gave and gave and gave without stint. It is in the house of Frida Kahlo, who was his wife, who also was a painter, who also was a great, great revolutionary.” I could remember nothing about Frida Kahlo except that she was either Rivera’s second or third wife; that she was the conventional, beautiful woman, with raven hair and regular features, who appears in several of Rivera’s murals, once at least with a sister; and that, like Rivera, she was of mixed origin, being the child of a Spanish Mexican lady and a Hungarian Jew who had emigrated from Germany to Mexico and there made a name for himself as a pioneer of modern photography; and beyond that a vague recollection that their marriage had had its ups and downs, even to the hole in the road of divorce and remarriage, but had lasted many years and had ended only with Frida’s death in the middle fifties. I also had seen one of her pictures in the Museum of Modern Art in Chapultepec Park. She was a surrealist, and therefore it was only to be expected that it treated a subject extreme in its fantasy by a glossy and matter-of-fact and strictly academic technique, though there are signs that she had learned from Matisse. The woman recalls his odalisques. It is called *The Two Fridas*, and it represents the artist as two women sitting side by side with hands clasped, while a nightmare version of blood transfusion joins their two hearts by tubes. It has been described as a confession of her own schizophrenia and her resentment at her psychiatrist’s attempt to abolish it. I have also heard the subject identified as the Yin and Yang, but this description which can be applied to at least two-thirds of all works of art in which there are two objects ceases to be a description at all. It has also been alleged that Frida Kahlo showed a neurotic

narcissism in this self-portrait, because she represents the two women as very beautiful; but the testimony of photographs and of those who knew her testifies that she was in fact very beautiful, and it is difficult to see how a beautiful woman who was also an honest artist could paint herself as other than a beauty. I had formed the impression that she must have been a rather silly woman, to have cluttered up her artistic life by joining a school, which meant that her work invited discussion of a psychological nature, usually bogus; for the picture is a good solid piece of painting.

We then drove across the suburbs of Mexico, but I have no idea for how long. It is odd that the evolution of our species never implanted a clock in our brains which would have been most serviceable; but perhaps Teilhard de Chardin could have proved that this omission showed a divine care for the populations of Switzerland and Waterbury, Connecticut. As it is, we become incapable of judging the passage of time when we are very much interested or greatly bored. But it cannot have been long before we found ourselves in a grid of pleasant tree-lined streets, where the broader ones are cut at right angles by side streets narrower, but not mean. The district had evidently been developed during one generation, for the main avenues were called by the names of European capitals, London and Berlin and Brussels and Vienna, and it could be assumed that only the man who had first conceived the joke would care to carry it on so long; and the properties had originally all been of one type. It was not quite easy to see this at first, for the district had become a victim to the congestion which is the incurable disease of Mexico City. Here and there a house, or even two or three, were crammed into what had evidently been the garden of the older house next door, and there were some small apartment houses, and a garage or two. There is a curious atmosphere as if the district itself were trying to make up its books and balance the satisfactions that the old houses and the new houses gave their occupants, in fear that the whole business is coming to an end, at least in any recognisable form. Forty years ago, a corner of Staten Island gave just such an impression of anxious accountancy, rather more elegiac than hopeful, on the part of timber yards and pavements and trees and gardens; and today it can be found in many parts of North and South London.

Suddenly we were looking at a blaze of blue slashed with scarlet. The houses on the corners of the streets were built to abut on the pavement of the side streets, and the walls of this one had been encrusted with paint so bright that the weather had not denatured the colours, they were still blue and magentians, red as poppies, though perhaps as these look at the first moment of twilight, when there seems a sudden liquefaction of all things growing low on the earth, while against the sky the leaves of the trees become hard as metal. "This is the Frida Kahlo Museum," said the driver, "and how horrible it is closed for repairs. But please get out, we can look through this window, it is not curtained, you will see something." I was not greatly concerned that we could not get in, for it seemed to me that nothing about this house could be as remarkable as the red and blue outer walls. "Did Rivera paint the walls these colours?" I asked, getting out of the car. "No, no, Frida Kahlo painted them, this was her house, it was her family house, all in it was hers, and it is very strange inside, but it has all to do with the revolution, it has all to do with the Mexican people." I thought the red and blue paint on the walls might probably also have something to do with the Russian ballet and the designs of Bakst and Benois for *The Two Fridas* had shown signs of several European influences. But when I put my hands on the iron bars which protected this as every Mexican window and peered through the reflections on the glass, I saw nothing any ballet had ever known. I looked into a room, which seemed a bedroom with furniture set about it and through an open door through another window beyond it. The interior walls of the garden beyond were also painted this deep, singing blue, slightly keyed down by distance and perhaps not so recently renewed; and in this blue world stood trees, with down-stretched branches and upstretched creepers, in a profusion that gardeners would normally have cut away, not just because it was unhealthy but simply because it was too much, much too much. "And in the garden are many of our people's gods," said the driver. "Let me shade the glass, so that you can see what is hanging on the

wall. Look, it is one of our people's dresses, it would be one of the dresses Frida Kahlo used to wear. ~~she wore the peasant dresses because she had to hide her leg.~~

"Why did she have to hide her leg?" I asked. I had assumed that every part of Frida Kahlo would be as perfect as her face.

"Why did she have to hide her leg?" the driver repeated, his voice rising, "because the poor woman had it not. She was in an accident, and her foot was crushed and she had to have her leg amputated from the ankle."

I felt ashamed and embarrassed as one does when a woman comes to one's house and one treats her on the level of one's usual relationship with her, and afterwards one finds out she had suffered a tragic loss of which nobody has told one. I had known that Frida Kahlo had died in early middle age, but I am old enough to know that that is as likely to be an escape from misfortune as a misfortune. In fact the driver's version of her misery was incomplete. When she was seventeen, and was a first-year medical student, she sustained injuries in an automobile accident, which were infected by an organism causing gangrene to spread gradually through her body. It was true her foot had been amputated, but this was only one of a number of operations to which she had to submit, and it caused the death of the birth of her only child. As time went on, her continued agony made her fantastically minded, and it is said that a visit to the museum is more disquieting than enjoyable, for the inner side of the house, which was originally as traditional as the outside, was recast in the same Puritan neo-Aztec mould as the Rivera Museum, and all over the grimness of its grey stone and all over the garden, where the vegetation seemed not so much growing as reeling, a superb collection of sculpture was disposed with such a troubled inconsequence that the curator might have been Ophelia. It testifies to the greatness of Frida Kahlo that all her life long not only Diego Rivera but many friends, both men and women, loved her as usually only the lucky are loved.

"Look, now I hold my hand, so you can see the dress better," said the driver. "It is sure to be a China Poblana dress, that was what she wore nearly all the time." Of this preference I knew already for it is mentioned in the memoirs of General Salazar, a former chief of the Mexican Secret Service, but I had then not known how curious a choice it was. The China Poblana who invented this dress was one of the ingredients that make the glory of the city of Puebla, which served God but would not have it that there should be no more cakes and ale. Her name was Mirra, and she is said to have been a Chinese princess, who for some reason was involved with the Great Mogul; in any case she was an Asiatic of high rank who was sent on a sea voyage and was captured by pirates, who brought her to Mexico and sold her in the slave market in the year 1650. An army officer living in Puebla bought her, and when he took her home, his wife and he found themselves abashed by the sweet and patient quality of her grief. In everything she was gentle, and since they had had a right to buy her, she did not try to punish them by proud disobedience. She was converted to Christianity and was baptised under the name of Catalina of St. John. None of this was done to win an easy life in captivity. She did not marry, which she could easily have done in that multiracial society, but devoted herself to the service of the sick and the poor. One can imagine her, treading the streets of Puebla, her wimple white against her jasmin skin, her strong feet so comically narrow under her trailing black habit, lowering her eyelids like the petals of a flower closing at evening when she passed any plumed young men in velvet, since she had taken her vows and such imagination would be wholly wrong. Such were her works of charity that it is today the firm belief of many inhabitants of Puebla that she is a canonised saint. But she did not become a nun, and she devised for herself one of the most alluring and gaudy dresses ever worn by woman: a wide red skirt with a green hem embroidered with flowers, a cream lawn blouse, also embroidered with flowers, and necklaces and bracelets of coral and pearls, a translation of Oriental and European Renaissance luxury into the materials which were accessible to her. When she died, the women of the district took her dress as a uniform. This was to express the

grief they felt at losing her, but they cannot have been wholly unmoved by the consideration that it was one of the most becoming dresses ever devised. The Chinese princess would not have been disturbed by this, or she would have been unable to design the dress.

Yet there is an odd passage in the memoirs of Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the clever Scottish girl who married a Spanish diplomat and accompanied him when he went to represent his country in Mexico in 1839, three years after Spain had made its long delayed admission of Mexican independence. She was invited to a fancy dress ball held for charity in the middle of January 1840 and as a compliment to Mexico chose to go in the China Poblana costume. On January 4, which was a Sunday day for paying calls after mass, it being the first Sunday after the New Year, the house of the Spanish minister was thronged with visitors, all of whom, to Fanny's surprise, seemed intensely anxious to know whether she was really going to wear the China Poblana costume. Among them appeared two people whom she described as "young ladies or women of Puebla," who came to offer their help in getting her costume correct and even dressed the hair of one of her servants in the Pueblan manner. When they left they expressed such pleasure at her having chosen this dress that Fanny was bewildered.

At twelve o'clock the president of the Mexican Republic paid a curiously formal visit. Wearing full uniform and accompanied by his aide-de-camp, he stayed for half an hour. A couple of hours later when the Calderón family were going in to dinner, they were informed that the secretary of state, the ministers of war and of the interior, and other important persons were in the drawing-room. Though inopportune guests had come, they informed the Calderóns, to beg Fanny to abandon her intention of attending the charity ball in the China Poblana costume.

For what reason? Because, it was feebly suggested, the Poblana dress was often worn by women with so little consequence that they wore no stockings. Fanny had her costume brought in to demonstrate its propriety, but it was of no avail. As a diplomat's wife, Fanny surrendered, and they left. As soon as the door had closed on them, a Mexican gentleman arrived charged with a message from several ladies prominent in the society of the town, whom the Calderóns had not even met but who felt compelled to urge the same mysterious prohibition. Even then the ministerial family was not allowed to sit down to dinner, for there was delivered at their house a letter from an old gentleman, a local social dictator, declaring that Fanny's intention was unthinkable, because "the lady of the Spanish minister is a lady in every sense of the word." What is remarkable is that he too was a stranger to them.

Possibly the solution of the riddle is to be found in Fanny's description of the gorgeous crowd that walked in the Zócalo at Easter. "Above all," Fanny wrote, there was "here and there a flashing China Poblana, with a dress of real value and much taste, and often with a face and figure of extraordinary beauty, especially the figure; large and yet *élancée*, with a bold coquettish eye, and a beautiful brow, a foot, shown off by the white satin shoe; the petticoat of her dress frequently fringed and embroidered in real massive gold, and a rebozo either shot with gold, or a bright-coloured China crepe shawl coquettishly thrown over her head." The whole thing costing, Fanny guessed, not less than five hundred dollars. The combination of a bold coquettish eye, the sum of five hundred dollars, and the strong reaction of Fanny's well-wishers suggests that perhaps the China Poblana had been adopted as the uniform by successful prostitutes. That would be extraordinary. The year was 1840 and the China Poblana had died not a century and a quarter before; and today, in 1966, she is still being revered as a saint.

In Puebla, the Company of Jesuits built a church joined to a seminary, which is now a state university, eighteenth-century baroque and very fierce and businesslike, with towers that might be computers designed to be used by large, angry angels calculating rewards and punishments as vast as their own power: it would be natural to find on the tracery of the façade the initials ADMG and IBM. The interior is competently ornate but nothing more, and the only strong attraction is in the sacrists

where an austere tablet marks the tomb of the China Poblana. Before it, when we went there, stood a old Indian couple, who presented a heartrending sight peculiar to Mexico. Their clothes were falling rags and were ritually clean. The man's grey shirt and blue trousers were several sorts of grey and blue, because of the many patches, but they had all faded to much the same phantasmic colour, and his feet showed brown through the holes in his white canvas shoes; and all were luminous with years of scrubbing. The shawl about the woman's head had the pleasant surface of newly washed wool, but was strange in texture, because it was a complex of darns. Both man and woman smelt of some herb or spice they had been eating but not of dirt. They were worshipping. The man bent his head, she bent her knees, almost to the floor, they crossed themselves and mumbled. This was not a golden altar with supernaturally beaming or agonised holy people, all that was before them was a white tablet with black letters on it. They must have known of the China Poblana to seek her out and find her.

So, Frida Kahlo wore the dress of an alien saint, which was perhaps all the uniform of successful prostitutes; which was in either case a boast of beauty, and an insistent demand that, though beauty is only lent to us, the loan should be laid out to the best advantage before the merciless lender takes it back. Afterwards, a friend showed me a photograph of Frida and Rivera standing near one of the most idiosyncratic features of her frenzied garden, a thatched pyramid protecting a four-tiered altar on which idols are staked in a congestion which, granted the fiery nature of Aztec gods, should have led to seismic disturbances. Rivera and Frida are looking at each other with that look of slow pneumatic expansion always displayed by lovers in opera, which suggests that, like balloons, they have to be subjected to a certain degree of inflation before they can get off the ground. It is an unbecoming convention; indeed Rivera is so plain that it seems certain they are together only because they make contact. But nothing can blunt Frida Kahlo's beauty, and it is enhanced by the dress she is wearing in which, a magnifying glass discloses, is the China Poblana costume with the wide hem. But even though the beauty which had been lent to her was being withdrawn, inch by inch, and diminished not by the normal technique of aging or death, but by a creeping corruption. Yet her brows were smooth.

The driver was saying, "She was so good, so kind. Think of what she and her husband did for Trotsky. They were artists, they were quite different from people like us. Therefore they lived in different houses, though they loved each other very much. She lived here in the Blue House, Rivera lived in his studio over at San Angel. But when Trotsky came to Mexico, Frida Kahlo moved out of this house and went to live with Rivera, so that Trotsky and his wife came here."

"But this wasn't the house where Trotsky was murdered, it doesn't look like the photographs."

"No, this is the first house he lived in when he got here. He was murdered in the house he went to when he left here, it is just a few blocks away."

"But I thought he died in Coyoacán."

"We are in Coyoacán."

I looked about me in astonishment. I had made a picture of Coyoacán which had entirely convinced me. When Cortés's administrators had shifted for good and all to Mexico City, the town had become the centre of the sugar-cane industry, which is a proof of the damage involuntarily inflicted on Mexico by the Spanish exploitation of its resources. Nobody could grow sugar-cane in this area now, it is not hot enough in the season when the plant needs heat, nor rainy enough when it needs moisture. Since the seventeenth century, Lake Texcoco and many waters in the Valley of Mexico had been drained, and huge tracts of woodland had been felled, so that climate had changed. I had imagined that the place had remained static for at least the last hundred and fifty years. I knew the beautiful square with Cortés's palace on one side and the cathedral on the other, and I had been to Dolores del Rio's old house beyond the square, which is the only possible frame that could be appropriate for her, where the sober, restrained house was magically so proportioned that the effect was extravagant, and in the pattern the trees drop great flowers which in the night did not disclose their colour, but were big as a clenched

fist and smelt more like honey than a honeycomb. I had considered it as a core of glorious old houses used by the rich as summer or suburban houses, surrounded by a desert. This was perhaps because Isaac Deutscher, in his biography of Trotsky, describes him as finding his last home in a street which was "empty, stony, and dusty, with only a few *campesino* hovels scattered on either side," which I used to penetrate in order "to find out how people lived there and what they thought of the land reform." The recollection astounded me, though I did not regard as typical the blue and red house in front of us, which recalled not only what an imaginative child will do with its paint-box on a warm afternoon, but also the more extravagant works of Matisse, Maeterlinck, and Edgar Allan Poe, as he interpreted by the Latin races; though indeed it was not so much an isolated phenomenon as I supposed at that moment, for Coyoacán has been the home of a group of avant-garde painters after the First World War. But the neighbourhood was so happily bourgeois, such an armchair, such a mattress, so well protected from the draughts.

Leon Trotsky

I WAS GLAD THAT Frida Kahlo had been so kind to Trotsky, leading him to this haven in the tenth year of his exile. Anybody who had been kind to Trotsky is surely agreeable, though he belonged to a class which is surely not often attractive. The men who excite adoration, who are what is called natural leaders (which means really that people feel an unnatural readiness to follow them) are usually empty. Human beings need hollow containers in which they can place their fantasies and admire them, just as they need flower vases if they are to decorate their homes with flowers. Almost everything that Napoleon did was interesting, but he gave no outward signs of having any private thoughts or feelings that would give the slightest pleasure to any stranger who became aware of it. One can imagine that the most interesting aspects of Napoleon, say the geographical genius he shows in his political and military plans, and the nose for abstract aspects of political science manifest in the constitution he gave to Switzerland, could be reproduced by a computer; his decisive error, the invasion of Russia, was the sort of thing one might expect from a computer which had been improperly programmed. But Trotsky was one of the great men within whom there was something resembling the inner vexation suffered by us lesser animals; who could say to us, "I am a great man. Hath not a great man eyes? Hath not a great man hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, is fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd by the same sun and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a little man is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?" It has been given to only a few that they should utter this plea with conviction, but certainly Trotsky was one of them.

Think of what he did that made us all know his name, not only during his glory and during his disgrace, but now, when he has been dead a quarter of a century. All his adult life he had been telling one thing to every human being whom he could persuade to read his articles or come to listen to him in a lecture hall: that the people who were exercising power did not know their job, and he and his friends could do it better. Intellectuals had been doing this same thing ever since the first scratching beneath the surface of appearances by Greek philosophers, but most of them had been lucky. They had been told to drink hemlock, or they got burned at the stake, or were hanged, or had their heads cut off with a simple ax or by the guillotine; or nobody noticed them, and they lived out their lives like the less articulate brethren. There was one unfortunate episode in 1789 when the escape hatch, the French Revolution, made it appear as if intellectuals who had said they discovered the secret art of government would find themselves compelled to exercise it, and they were only able to get themselves out of this embarrassing situation by guillotining each other. Thus they left a power vacuum, which was filled by Napoleon. Until his destruction by faulty programming, he saw to it that the embarrassment did not recur, and though it raised its head again later, it never had made a very long stay. For the greater part of the nineteenth century, the intellectuals limited themselves to their proper and glorious business of working out principles of political science which contemporary legislators and administrators could apply to the problems of the age, only occasionally becoming themselves involved in the application. But when the Russian Revolution broke out, the intellectuals who belonged to the Russian revolutionary parties were compelled to provide both theory and practice for the government it set up.

Thus they were offered the opportunity of governing their country in circumstances which made refusal impossible. The offer was made publicly and in foreign countries. Not to accept it would have meant abandoning their professions and even to lose their identities. When the call came, Trotsky was earning his living in New York as a writer and lecturer within the circle of the faithful, and Lenin ran a Bolshevik paper in Switzerland. In both cases their friends and supporters would have withheld the

support and their money had they known that their leaders could have gone back to Russia and have abstained. Trotsky had to board the *Christianiafford* in New York harbour, Lenin had to get into the train that took him across Europe. Once they arrived in Russia, they either had to seize power or relinquish it to other parties or, again, lose their identities, become nobodies; and very few professional revolutionaries could turn to another trade. They could not turn round and go back, for by this time many countries would not receive them, and there would have been the question of earning a living after they had forfeited their prestige.

How magnificent it was, Trotsky's handling of this predicament! Plainly he never let the risk of ruin affect him for one instant. Simply he grasped the opportunity that had been offered him with both hands and ran away with it never minding that he thereby became a comic figure, like the man in the old funny films, who had a baby dumped on him, has nowhere to take it, cannot ask anybody to help him, and has an obligation to hold on to it and prevent it being snatched from him by the Keystone Kops who were chasing him, their moustaches wagging as fiercely as his own. With his Jack-in-a-box figure and his tousled macaw head, he could have been as funny as Harold Lloyd. But the baby in his arms was power. It was natural enough that the Keystone Kops should be pursuing him as a kidnapper for he had absolutely no title to power except his genius, which he had not yet proved to any but a small group, themselves unproved. But as he scuttled along, the baby grew into a child, it dropped from his arms, it ran beside him, a man with invincible weapons. Trotsky became the chosen companion of power wherever he went, taking on himself the guilt of power and knowing it was guilt, but seeing no way of casting off the burden. He felt no shame. The guilt had been imposed on him by necessity.

Nevertheless, he felt he had done things which must logically bring down on him punishment of one sort or another, though his admissions are tortuous. There is a unique passage in his diary which shows us his mind as it twists and turns in the indigestion caused by this sin-eating. When Lenin was dead and Stalin showed his strength and ruin descended on Trotsky, he was falling into a state of apprehension about the safety of his own family. He had two daughters by a marriage of his youth who were consumptive, but they had husbands who were healthy enough for deportation, a fate which befell them both in 1928. Some time later, when Trotsky had been thrown out of Russia and had found a temporary lodgment in France, when Kirov, the head of the Politburo, was assassinated and Stalin started a purge, Trotsky began to fear for the younger son of his second and enduring marriage, Sergei or Serinzha, to give him his little name. This was a charmer who had won Trotsky's affection the cruellest way, by refusing to down his natural weapons because of the ties of blood. He had always avowed that he found politics boring and that his mother was more to him than his father. As an adolescent he had run away to join a circus, had earned his living as an acrobat and had had a love affair with a trapeze artist, then come home and suddenly changed his ways and took a science degree, working so well that he became a lecturer at the Higher Technological Institute in Moscow. But the alienation had been maintained to a degree when it must have been acutely painful to Trotsky. For the past five years, though Trotsky had been suffering disgrace and exile, Serinzha had written only to his mother, and it appeared possible that his attitude to his family was not a manifestation of the general rebellion of youth against age, but that he was stung by a particular grievance. It might be that he saw his father's career simply as a wildly imprudent persistence in associating with a group of mercenary men who were dragging his whole family into hardship and danger. This view may be justly considered as limited, but not as inaccurate. For, after Serinzha had written to his mother stating that his situation was very grave, he disappeared and was never seen or heard of again.

In the diary Trotsky kept at this time there are many entries expressing his anxiety about his son and suddenly there appears among them, "seemingly out of context," as Isaac Deutscher notes, a passage describing and discussing the murder of the tsar and his wife and children in the cellar

Ekaterinburg. Nobody can be at a loss to imagine why he should think of the murder of these children at that time. But most of us, if we had had the misfortune to be in his position and had to think the thought, would not give it more power over us by writing it down. He tries to weaken it by recording that he had not given the order for their murder. The responsibility for that lay on Lenin; the particulars he gives to establish that are interesting, for it was long pretended that the victims had been shot by their Hungarian guards, acting on their own initiative. But though Trotsky is careful to absolve himself, he brings no charge against Lenin, for the murder was necessary for the safety of the revolution. So long as the tsar or the tsarina or one of the daughters or their son were alive, the enemies of Communism had what Trotsky called "a living standard" to place upon the throne if ever the Bolshevik government weakened. He writes, "the Tsar's children fell victim to that principle which constitutes the axis of monarchy; dynastic succession." So it was right they should have been killed. But, of course, when he wrote that he meant much more. He meant that he knew that Serinzh had been killed. For when a revolution is successful, the revolutionaries who made it must suffer the defeat of themselves becoming effectively royal. Trotsky had founded a dynasty, and his children were falling the victims of the principle of dynastic succession, for it was not only Serinzh whose situation was grave. Trotsky's first wife and the husbands of both his daughters had been deported. And he could not say the precautionary murder was unjust. He had not said it was unjust when the murders were done at Ekaterinburg. The message is tortuously composed but its meaning cannot be misread: Trotsky said, "I am part of a system which is sacred and to protect it I have assented in crime. The crime was necessary. But it was a crime." He would not have been human had he not thought he should be punished and that through Serinzh he was now being punished. The next entry announces, quite crazily, that his anxiety about Serinzh is dying down. As an attempt to cancel the preceding entry, it is quite inadequate.

A man of such intense awareness, who chose to be aware of such terrible things, and who had so much less ability for self-deceit than most of us, he must be an object of compassion, no matter whether some of the terror was his own work. When Frida Kahlo opened the door for him, Trotsky was famished for kindness. He had been an exile for eight years, and an accident-prone exile. His house in Prinkipo was largely destroyed by fire and with it some of his manuscripts. When he arrived in France, ill with fever, and went to a hotel, it burst into flames within an hour. Then he was expelled from France and went to Norway, and natural catastrophe was replaced by the man-made article. The Norwegian government that had granted him a visa changed their minds and harried him to leave. Their attitude was reasonable enough. Stalin had long had his bayonets in Norway's back, and the Nazi movement had many adherents in their country under the leadership of a Major Quisling. The Norwegian Fascists actually broke into Trotsky's home in order to steal documents which should show that he was breaking his promise not to take part in political activities while he was in Norway, for the purpose of using it in a coming election. This was only two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, and the government would have been wildly imprudent had it not determined to rid itself of its dangerous guest. Trotsky should have understood their attitude, since it had been his creed that the sole criterion by which any action should be judged was its usefulness in preserving the sort of state of which one approved. But his fatigue made him want to rest a while in Norway. He would not accept that the Norwegians had a right to save the sort of state of which they approved. He brought into play his power of presenting and pointing up the events of his life so that they appeared as episodes in a work of art, and he made this seem as if it were a companion piece to Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*.

The Trotskys were put on a tanker, which was virtually a prison ship, and on January 9, 1936, they reached the oil harbour of Tampico, Mexico. It was ideologically splendid that this should be his landing place. The climax was being reached in the long war between Mexican nationalists and the

international petroleum interests, who had been doing too well. True, they had introduced modern technological methods, and they had brought oil production up from ten thousand barrels a year to 4 million in 1937. But Mexican economists drew up a balance sheet showing that in that time foreign investors had drawn in profits ten times greater than their investments. This is unlikely to be as true as the statement that two and two make four, since economists are like Aeolian harps, and the sounds that issue from them are determined by the winds that blow; but there was in the propaganda conducted by the great oil corporations and carried on for the next few years, with the object of scaring foreign capital away from Mexico, the particular indignation felt by people who have lost a very great deal of which they had no right to have in the first place. The crucial battle was still being fought, and it was more than a year before President Cárdenas was to sign the decree of expropriation. As a flourish President Cárdenas arranged for the great revolutionary to land in the great oil harbour and sent out a general with a group of officials to fetch him and his wife, Natalya, off the Norwegian tanker and bring them to a pier, which was crowded with waving and cheering Trotskyites, some specially invited from the United States. Among them was Frida Kahlo, to tell them that they were her guests. The train stopped at a station outside Mexico City, and there Diego Rivera was waiting. He and Frida took them to the Blue House, beside which my husband and I stood with our driver that Sunday morning.

The Trotskys stayed there for two years. It must have been an ambiguous experience. At first they were intoxicated by Mexico. The austere Mr. Deutscher records with surprise that Trotsky's letters expressed delight with his new country, "even with its fruit and vegetables." Why not, indeed? In no other place I have ever been are the peppers flashing green like emeralds, or the tomatoes red as coral but brighter. Impermanent jewels, and the impermanence does not matter, there are so many high piles of them on the tables before the Indian women sitting quietly in the markets. Also the taste is often new. But it was Trotsky's nature not to dwell on such pleasures, though he was capable of recognising them; he was like a camera which rejects colour films and insists on photographing in black and white. For that very reason, the new phase of his exile must soon have struck him as not at all the proper, classic thing.

It cannot be exaggerated how blue the Blue House is. It is a theatrical set, designed for the performance of some such play as Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* or a nineteenth-century ballet about a nymph who lives in the "Blue Grotto." The distinctive characteristic of this theatrical set is that it is littered with objects, organic and inorganic. It was as if the woman who had made this house, having been born perfect in form and lost that perfection by gross surgical assaults, tried to put back her lost perfection into her life by assembling as many beautiful works of art as possible around her. But Trotsky also had his chosen theatrical set, and its distinctive characteristic was that it was so far as possible destitute of objects. There he was following a European convention of long standing. It has to be remembered that Trotsky was not brought up in poverty. His father, though he was a farmer, was not a simple peasant but a member of an urban middle-class family, who was so successful that he could give his children a good education and was able to help his son by supporting his first wife and their two daughters. When members of the middle class formed a left-wing movement, they often felt an obligation to furnish their houses as sparsely as possible. This was in some cases due to a reaction against the taste of the Victorian bourgeoisie, which loved to lumber up its homes with sofas and ottomans, display cabinets, ormolu tables, heavy draperies, bronzes, and porcelain on pedestals. In the home of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, chairs and tables stood far apart with an air of having just managed to pass gruelling tests as to the fulfilment of utilitarian purposes and no other; and it is said that in the mansion owned by Beatrice Webb's father, a nineteenth-century railway magnate, there was an unparalleled density of furniture. But long after that Victorian fashion had passed, middle-class radicals obeyed this convention of the bare attack, and it seems to have been due to their belief that the homes of the proletariat are similarly deprived. So they are, if the proletariat is doing badly.

but if the proletariat is doing well, then the first things it goes for, after it has given itself enough food and clothing, is furniture. As the only members of the proletariat likely to join a radical movement are those who are doing well, this had led to many painful encounters. Even in England today many a trade unionist couple has accepted an invitation to Sunday supper with a middle-class co-religionist of superior social status and returned to their cheaply and competently furnished house in a state of bewilderment. Had their hosts been moving in or moving out? Or were they quite simply daft? Trotsky obeyed this convention to a degree which delighted those that followed it and disconcerted those to whom lowly birth had given the privilege of being as comfortable as if they had not been saved. His houses were always Saharas. His theatrical set was designed to serve a bleaker performance than had yet been seen. It could not even have sufficed a Beckett play. Three dustbins? Trotsky and his wife would have insisted there should be only one.

In the wrong scenery, mimosa blossom drooping over him in uncontrollable and overscented luxury and tickling his neck, Indian ceramics and Aztec idols of terrible fragility hemming him in, Trotsky faced less material and more complicated hardships. The sword of his power rusted in his hand. President Cárdenas had given him the freedom of Mexico for several reasons. The first was that the Mexican people, in a very gentlemanly way, would automatically be hospitable towards a true revolutionary, a man who had pledged himself to overthrow a tyranny, particularly if he was out of luck. The second was that by receiving Trotsky, the enemy of Stalin, Cárdenas could send a message to Stalin that he did not appreciate Stalinist influence in the Confederation of Mexican Workers and was not going to surrender to it. But that message was for the Soviet Union. He had another one for internal consumption. He did not want to irritate the Stalinists in the Confederation of Mexican Workers to the point that they would refuse to cooperate with him when he was expropriating the American and European exploiters of industry. Thus it happened that Cárdenas and Trotsky never met. The president simply exacted from Trotsky a pledge not to interfere in Mexican politics and let him be. The Stalinists shook their fists at him, but it was all quite handsomely tolerant. The president sent police guards all around the Blue House. This, however, was very small beer for Trotsky. When he was at Prinkipo, the Turkish authorities also gave him full hospitality, but he had the Soviet Union breathing down the back of his neck over the frontier, and he was able to take a trip to Denmark and have difficulties when he got there and more at a Belgian port and more at Marseilles; and when he was in France, he and his wife were chased from refuge to refuge, until they left to avoid forcible deportation, and in Norway he had had a running fight, not only with the Norwegian Fascists, but with the government itself, in the distinguished person of Trygve Lie, and this had ended in his internment and expulsion. Now there was nothing but flat tolerance.

There was a temporary diversion in the countertrial of Trotsky, which Cárdenas very handsomely allowed to take place in Mexico. This was a curious enterprise, designed to meet the charges of conspiracy with Trotsky that had been levelled against Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Pyatakov, and other old Party men in the trials which had been going on at intervals since Stalin came to power. It was possible to disprove these charges, because they were specific and false. Pyatakov, for instance, gave evidence that he had flown from Berlin to Oslo in December 1935 and had seen Trotsky and taken instruction from him regarding sabotage to be committed within the Soviet Union. The Norwegian Government, anxious to prove that they had done no harm in giving asylum to Trotsky, readily provided proof that no plane had flown from Berlin to Oslo in December 1935 or for some weeks before or after. (It is odd to realise that only thirty years ago winter flights in cold climates were often not feasible.) Others of these charges did not even require to be disproved, for they were inherently impossible. Trotsky could not have entered into a conspiracy with Hitler to disrupt the Soviet Union, even if he had wanted to do so, for Hitler could not have accepted an ally so widely known to be Jewish. A tribunal could easily make mincemeat of these charges; and that is what was

done by the commission that sat in Coyoacán under the presidency of the aged philosopher, John Dewey, but it is to be doubted whether these proceedings were valuable according to Dewey's own belief that the outcome of the operations that are guided by a hypothesis is the only context in which the truth of the hypothesis can be decided or is of importance.

Trotsky had not then learned the bitter knowledge which comes to all people who are victims of a lying campaign: that all the world loves a liar. There is a sort of sanctity about a lie. If a man says of another that he is guilty of meanness, dishonesty, sexual depravity or cruelty, even of murder, it does not matter how worthless the accuser may be, the accusation will be joyfully believed by a large number of people, provided it be false. If the accusation should be true, they will be inclined to disbelieve it, and if belief is forced on them, they will not enjoy it. To take an example from recent English scandals: the British public took great pleasure in falsely believing that Mr. Galbraith had had homosexual relations with the spy Vassall and felt disappointment at having to admit in the face of overwhelming evidence that he was innocent. But they took almost no pleasure in believing the allegation that Mr. Profumo had been guilty of improper relations with Christine Keeler, which was perfectly true. They did get pleasure, however, in believing that the authorities had had discreditable reasons for prosecuting Stephen Ward, who was Christine Keeler's procurer, though this was not the case. So strong is this love of the lie that those who are falsely accused get little or no sympathy. They say to their friends, "So-and-so has accused me of doing this or that, of embezzling this or that, and I could not have done it, for no such sum exists," and their friends' eyes remain dead. The explanation is perhaps that the lie tampers with fact and produces an illusion that we live in a universe which is not rigid, which can be adjusted to suit our needs.

It was Trotsky's lot to afford the world this form of gratification, and it really did not matter how his innocence was established by Otto Rühle, Liebnecht's old colleague, and the rest of the assembled radicals, gathered so incongruously in the romantic scene of the Blue House. Trotsky's situation was summed up better by certain of the objects set down between the cacti under the lower branches of the trees and shrubs by the beautiful woman who wandered among them in the fancy dress of the China Poblana, which she wore partly because she was Ophelianish, partly to hide her surgical boot. Among them were the idols which the Aztecs had made to embody the forces which shape human destiny; many of them hideous, frenzied, unreasonable.

Trotsky had to bear another affliction not generally recognised. The air in the Blue House must have been as heavy as it used to be in Emma Goldman's little house in the South of France, or in her flat in London, when she had left the Soviet Union in a mood of disillusionment, had married a Welsh miner and thereby acquired a British passport and could come and go about Europe as she liked. All her life she had been harried by the police and in defying them had had constant opportunities to assert and reassert her value by demonstrating her courage and her resourcefulness. The kind of person who desires power and fails to achieve it can find a satisfactory substitute in challenging power; and he does not make himself ridiculous by using this alternative outlet, for very often power needs to be challenged. Now that Emma was deprived of this relief, to visit her was often a labour, warm and affectionate though she was, because her undischarged dynamic force was like a thundercloud before the storm breaks it. Trotsky had been exercising power or had been challenging it continuously through all his adult life. Now that he was so far from Europe, he could not exercise the faintest pressure on events, and it was not possible to challenge a power that amiably supplied a police guard and watch dogs. He must have been like a smouldering volcano.

Of course, he had his wife, for whom he felt the enduring love that clever men often feel for women who are devoted to them and whose conversation is of an incoherence which, though candid, serves the same purpose as lying, in that it suggests that reality is not rigid. Others she often startled particularly when she spoke of politics. Once, when Trotsky had been outlining to a visitor the crea-

of the Mensheviks, in order that he might realise its damnable inferiority to Bolshevism, Natalya Sedova nodded brightly and said smiling, "Yes, this is the faith that has inspired both Lenin and my husband." She herself describes a morning conversation with her husband, when he said that he was feeling very well, and that was perhaps because he had taken a double dose of sleeping-powder the night before; and she pointed out that it was not the sleeping-powder which did him good but the deep sleep which gave him complete rest. Trotsky remarked with the restraint of real love, "Evidently." He was loving wisely, for Natalya was magnificently courageous, had a passion for domestic cleanliness and never lost a certain delicate, fluttering prettiness. A letter quoted by Deutscher suggests that at some time during their life in Mexico Natalya suspected her husband of having fallen in love with another woman, and it was probably Frida Kahlo of whom she was jealous. But there she was almost certainly wrong. Trotsky arrived in Mexico in 1936. In 1939 Rivera went to the United States and he and Frida were divorced. Among the objects in the Blue House is a ceramic clock painted with the names "Diego" and "Frida," and Frida had added to them the date 1939 and the words "The hour stands still"; and there is another ceramic clock, also with the names "Diego" and "Frida" on it, and the date of their remarriage and the words, "The hour strikes again." Frida was sick in body and sick with love; and for Trotsky, too, it would have been too late. He was thinking a great deal about death.

Vehemently but without real vigour he formed the Fourth International, which was to replace the Second (a Socialist) and the Third (a Communist) International. It is still a force in the Miners and Metal Workers' Association and with a certain federation of students and teachers. He was on a vast, fine drawn web of correspondence. Wherever his followers were, his letters to them must have taken a long time to reach their destination, and he must have waited a long time to get their answers. The substance of these letters became more and more academic. He started a debate between himself and some American Trotskyites on the subject of the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union, which was in part a recognition of a serious difficulty in the establishment of a Marxist state, that it was hard to make it a worker's state, because modern industry called for a managerial class which were bound to seize privileges because their skill was so essential and who must become privileged to the point of tyranny if they were not only managers but state officials. But many of Trotsky's correspondents and visitors followed a mysterious pattern which recalled another, connected with Frida Kahlo, drifting about the congested garden which she had made, which she lent to her friends.

When Fanny Calderón de la Barca had desired to wear the China Poblana dress at a fancy dress ball her house became thronged by visitors who gave her praise, which she found quite incomprehensible for the intention, and by others who begged her in a panic, which she found equally incomprehensible not to commit what was evidently to them a supreme solecism. The Trotskyites who argued with Trotsky that, because of this bureaucratic tendency in the Soviet Union, they could not in any way defend it a moment longer had a point, and so had Trotsky when he said, let us not despair, but see how this danger can be eliminated by an insistence on the part of the proletariat that the government be kept in the hands of workers' councils. But many of his correspondents were as cryptic as Fanny Calderón de la Barca's Mexican friends when they did her servant's hair to show how she must appear when she attended the fancy dress ball in her sacred costume, or told her that her intention to do so was unthinkable because in her position she should be a lady "in every sense of the word."

A certain number of Trotsky's visitors not only showed veneration for him, which indeed they were bound to feel for his gifts and his courage, but also treated him as if he knew the secret of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth, and that he did not. For one thing, he had insufficient information about the earth. Bolsheviks were so busy caring for their baby, the revolution, that they suffered the isolation from affairs which young mothers often deplore. He was an inveterate novel-reader, and his associates refer to his reading of English and French novels. He might have learned a great deal about life this way; Beatrice and Sidney Webb approved of fiction on the ground that it was "applied

sociology.” But from his diary of his exile it is obvious that he was quite out of touch with the European literature of his time. When he was living in France, where one is never far from a bookshop, at a time when bookshops were crammed with interesting French books and translations of English and American books, he had a secretary to do his shopping for him. The youngest writer he read was Jules Romains, who was then sixty, and he could not understand Romains’s dominant idea, which was unanimism, an attempt to give modern society by conscious effort the sense of unity which came naturally to smaller communities, to make an art of brotherhood, as the best of young people engaged in the civil rights wish to do. This means that he had no real sense of the psychological problem raised by the growth of population in the twentieth century. He only once mentions a writer who was to dominate the present and a good part of the future. He refers to François Mauriac as “a French novelist I do not know” and adds “an Academician, which is a poor recommendation.” This is quite untrue. The French tradition does not include rebellion, the British tradition does, but it is unique. We have Byron, Shelley, Blake. But within a very wide range of conformity the Academy had the best. There was not the slightest hope that Trotsky could present a solution to the problem which was 1939. Nor was there any fear that he would make that problem more difficult to solve. He was becoming more and more concentrated on private anxieties. He was obsessed by the fear of death. Not for himself. At four o’clock in the morning of May 24, 1940, the police were called to the house in Coyoacán because there had been an armed attack on the household. Twenty men in police and army uniforms had overcome the sentries without firing a shot, and the only gate had been opened by one of the secretary-bodyguards, a young man from New York called Robert Sheldon Harte. The intruders machine-gunned the Trotskys’ bedroom, keeping up a crossfire through the door and the windows. Seventy bullet holes were found in the walls. Meanwhile, Trotsky and Natalya lay silent under the bed. Then they heard a cry, “Grandpa!” from Seva, Trotsky’s orphaned grandson who had come to live with them the year before, followed by an explosion. The intruders had set his room on fire, and after firing another volley at the Trotskys’ empty bed, they left. If Seva’s elders did not go to his help, they cannot be blamed. They dared not. Had they shown they were alive, they would have been killed and taken from him. It was the child’s fate that he was surrounded by adults so troubled that it was beyond their power to protect him from his own troubles. “We felt the stillness of the night like the stillness of the grave, of death itself.” There was the noise of starting cars. The raiders got away in two cars that Trotsky always kept. Then they heard the child’s voice, but outside the house, out in the garden. “Alfred! Marguerite!” He was calling to the French Communists who had brought him to Mexico, but not in panic. He had been wounded in the foot and wanted to be bandaged.

The chief of the Mexican Secret Police was roused from his bed and came quickly enough to the house in the Calle Viena. When he went through the garden with one of the secretaries, he was halted by the sight of Seva sitting in the early morning light on a flight of steps that led up to his room, seriously engaged in whittling a piece of wood. His left foot was bandaged. The chief said to the secretary, “What has happened to him?” and the secretary answered, “Oh, he was grazed by a bullet. Happily, it’s nothing serious.” The child looked up for an instant and then went on whittling the wood. He was behaving according to the pattern of the household. Trotsky and his wife greeted the police so calmly that the police chief thought for some time that the whole incident had been a hoax that they had planned to bolster up their stories of persecution by Stalin. His suspicions were furthered by the conduct of the secretary-bodyguards, who were surprisingly reticent and answered all questions with “yes” or “no,” and who seemed to have behaved with remarkable pusillanimity during the raid. It was also remarked that Robert Sheldon Harte, who had certainly allowed the assailants to enter, had been taken away by them; and it was thought by some who had seen his departure that he was offering no resistance whatsoever, the conclusion being that he was a Stalinist traitor, though Trotsky himself would not believe this and thought he was a silly fellow, who had been gulled into opening the door.

Harte's body was later found buried under the kitchen floor in a farm outside Mexico City, covered with a chemical that made it resemble a bronze statue. He had been seen by neighbours moving round the farmhouse and going for walks about the countryside, and it had to be assumed that he had been a Stalinist agent killed by his comrades in case he was taken by the police and talked about the attack. This discovery was made a month and a day after the midnight attack.

Eight weeks after that, Trotsky was murdered by a man calling himself Jacson Mornard, whom the boy must have known as a visitor in the house. Trotsky had by now lost all sense of self-preservation and had admitted Jacson Mornard to his household without due care. He had been introduced to the house by a girl from New York, Sylvia Agelof, a graduate of Columbia who was a Trotskyite courier. She was a good-hearted girl but quite noticeably silly and gullible, and she had reason to be gulled by him, for though she was not very sexually attractive (and why should she have been? It is not a demand made of men; but in all accounts of the Trotsky murder the writers take time off to comment on her lack of obvious sensuous appeal) Jacson Mornard had been her lover, giving her the class pleasure of seducing her in Paris, not in spring, but at least in summer. But Trotsky and his friends had no reason for letting him into the house, for he was a curiously witless conspirator, whose chief qualification for the job seemed to have been that he had been educated in Belgium, so could speak Spanish perfectly in Mexico but pass himself off as a Frenchman. As it turned out afterwards, he never seems to have been primed with a satisfactory cover story, or if he had, he had forgotten it. He told a story of being the son of a Belgian diplomat whom the most superficial enquiry could have revealed to be a mythical character. Even Sylvia noticed that his account of himself had holes in it. By this time Trotsky should have been watching his household with the utmost care. His wife and his grandsons were now the only members of his family who had not either been subjected to penal deportation or died tragically or disappeared without trace; and no fewer than eight of his secretaries had died in mysterious circumstances, the corpse of one being found mutilated in the Seine. But it was a curious thing that the more he became intellectually convinced that Stalin was planning to murder him, and with resources which made it impossible he should escape, the more he became emotionally free of any such fear.

In the early part of 1940, he wrote a last testament in which he dwelt on the disquiet he felt at his failing health, which was a delusion. He was only sixty-one, and quite fit for that, with no symptoms to justify his conviction that he was nearing death by arteriosclerosis. He added a special postscript to explain that he and Natalya had agreed that they would commit suicide if they felt senility was creeping up on them. In this state of euphoria, they ignored the long-term reasons for feeling suspicious of Jacson Mornard and his peculiar behaviour on the seventeenth of August. In the afternoon of that day, he arrived at the house in Coyoacán green in the face, carrying a hat and a raincoat, though he never wore either, and in a peculiar way, which became explicable afterwards when it was realised that this was a dress rehearsal, and concealed under the coat he was carrying the ice axe with which he was going to kill Trotsky three days later. He went into Trotsky's study and showed him the draft of an article he had written against a figure who today plays a part in New York in the discussion of political theory, James Burnham, who was then heading a splinter movement of Trotskyites against Trotsky. Trotsky was disconcerted, most of all because of the crudity and confusion of the draft, and then by Jacson Mornard's odd behaviour. He did not take off his hat when he came into the house, and when Trotsky sat down at his writing table to read the manuscript, instead of drawing up a chair beside him, Jacson Mornard perched himself on the writing table looking down at his astonished host, still wearing his hat and clutching his raincoat. Trotsky mentioned this incident to Natalya, who had been out of the house at the time of the unwelcome visit, with uneasiness and distaste. But neither he nor she gave orders that the guards should refuse him entrance. The only explanation can be that the faithful included so many odd fish that they were used to them.

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