

Douglas Dunn

Elegy for the Lost Parish

Dream, ploughman, of what agriculture brings,
Your eggs, your bacon to your greasy plate;
Then listen to the evening's thrush that sings
Exhilarated sadness and the intimate.

Your son's in Canada, growing his wheat
On fields the size of farms, and prosperous
On grain and granary. His world's replete
With life and love and house and happiness.

Dream, ploughman, of the lovely girl who died
So many summers gone, whose face will come
To you, call to you, and be deified
In sunlight on one cut chrysanthemum.

A nod of nettles flutters its green dust
Across small fields where you have mown the hay.
So wipe your brow, as on a scented gust
Your past flies in and will not go away.

Dream, ploughman, of old characters you've known
Who taught you things of scythe and horse and plough;
Of fields prepared, seed rhythmically sown,
Their ways of work that are forgotten now.

Remember, sir, and let them come to you
Out of your eye to mutter requiem,
Praising fidelities, the good of you.
Allow their consolations, cherish them

Into a privacy, as, with hand's slow shake,
You reach towards your glass, your hands reach to
Where no one is or can be. Heartbreak,
Heartbreak and loneliness of virtue!

POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Castro plus 20

Cuba's Martial Apotheosis—By HUGH THOMAS



THE CUBAN REVOLUTION will be twenty years old this winter, for it was on the last day of 1958 that Batista flew out of Havana to cultivate his well-prepared garden in exile and in January 1959 that Castro came into Havana surrounded by, as it seemed, a handsome group of bearded young idealists. Twenty years! Could it be so long? Yet all the men whom Castro challenged, or made up to, from Kennedy to Khrushchev, Nixon and Figueres of Costa Rica, are now dead or retired. Only ex-President Betancourt of Venezuela remains, an active friend of the victims of repression everywhere, and of those in Cuba particularly. Castro, however, continues president and commander-in-chief, still only in his early fifties, for two decades a caudillo.

Cuba in the 1950s was a nation in limbo, halfway between being a rich country and a poor one. It was rich in the sense that its sugar had made a major contribution to the world's commerce, and to its stomach, for well over a hundred years. Cuba had all the technology and the sophistication associated with a country which has the great industriousness needed to market an internationally sought-after crop. Those skills had enabled Cuba to enjoy a good rail and road network and excellent international communications. Cuba was, of course, known too for her cigars, made from a tobacco grown in a tiny stretch of Western Cuba which produces a crop as much respected internationally as that grown on the *côte d'or* in Burgundy. Numerous cattle ranches, a large number of small farms producing winter vegetables for sale to the US western seaboard, and some valuable reserves of minerals in the east of the island also helped Cuba to seem a country with considerable economic promise. In addition, the Cuban middle class was large for a Latin American country and many of

its members had been educated in the USA. The Cuban *peso* was a strong currency and was interchangeable with the US dollar. Relations with the US were close and of very long standing: indeed, the US had played a decisive part in assisting the Cubans to break away from Spain at the end of the 19th century. The natural consequence was that the Cuban standard of living, measured by all the normal indices (doctors, cars, refrigerators, income per head), was among the highest in Latin America. In some departments of life, such as, for example, in numbers of televisions *per capita*, the Cubans were even in advance of some European countries. A lovely climate, attractive islands off-shore (so well described in Hemingway's last novel), a divinely beautiful sea, great forests, cities with Spanish colonial architecture fairly well preserved, charming and attractive, easy-going people who appeared to have almost solved the problems of living in a multi-racial state, caused Cuba to seem in the 1950s a "paradise" . . . as a doctor once put it to me nostalgically in Havana in 1962.

A "PARADISE"? Surely that cannot be true? I mention these things since, though there were many serpents in this garden, the charms should not be forgotten and usually are. The continuing appeal of Cubans and the Cuban countryside still, also, exercise a spell upon some visitors who take for a revolutionary achievement an indigenous part of the Cuban scene. I recall myself passing in 1969 an avenue of royal palms leading to a coffee farm in the company of a well-known US liberal editor, who especially admired the achievement of the régime in planting such a successful row of trees. But I expect those palms had been there for at least a hundred years.

The serpents in the garden were these: the Cuban sugar economy was quota-controlled and organised so greatly that the nominally independent sugar companies, US or Cuban or Spanish as they might be, had virtually ceased to compete