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Frankie H. Gray, Clerk

# TIME

Monday, Apr. 11, 1949

## The White Goddess

The lead in the case turned up during a police raid on a Havana den. Among the evidence was a coded letter which indicated that a Cuban government official was mixed up in the big-time drug traffic. Last week after he stepped off the plane from Lima, waiting detectives nabbed Rafael Menacho Vicente, 55, Cuban consul to Peru. In his diplomatic pouch was a package containing two pounds of cocaine, worth around \$10,000 in the underworld.

Cuba was not alone in the scandal. In Washington, Narcotics Commissioner Harry J. Anslinger reported that the U.S. was swamped with the biggest influx of cocaine in 20 years. In New York, police in the past six months have seized almost 400 ounces of the stuff, more than in the previous four years. Where it came from was no big problem; the source, said Anslinger, was unquestionably Peru.

Food for Thought. Peruvians are the world's No. 1 producers of crude cocaine, and also among its foremost users. Their country has an overabundance of coca leaves, from which the white-crystalline-powdered drug is refined. In the highland valleys of the Peruvian Andes, the green coca plants stretch out for miles in cultivated fields, like wheat in Kansas. Use of the drug got its start after the Spanish conquest, when Peruvian Indians began chewing coca to offset the hunger and fatigue they suffered under their new masters. Later, miners took to chewing it to last out their long day, andinos to counteract high-altitude sickness. Last year 8,200 tons of the leaf were chewed up in Peru.

In the port of Callao, the "coke" capital of Peru, the vice is out in the open. Hundreds of peddlers, many of whom are their own best customers, offer a variety of items ranging from the plain leaves to pichicato or la diosa blanca (the white goddess), the drug in its refined form. Snuffing up a pinch of the powder in full view of passers-by last week, one old peddler brazenly solicited customers: "The only danger is that the wind will blow the pichicato away, that's all."

Sure Cure. Since the military junta of General Manuel Odria took over Peru last fall, the government has been worried about the public effects of coca-chewing. In desperation, it finally renewed an old plea to the U.N. Economic and Social Council to send a commission to work on the problem. Callao's international operators speeded up their shipments to clear out big inventories. But domestic dealers were unworried. Said one: "If you're poor, you're hungry. Pichicato fixes that. If you're rich, you want an aphrodisiac. Pichicato fixes that, too. It's a sure cure for everything."

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\*A plant, indigenous to the west coast of South America, which resembles a blackthorn bush, grows to a height of eight feet.

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