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COUSIN ***



Francisco

Our Little Argentine Cousin

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THE Little Cousin Series

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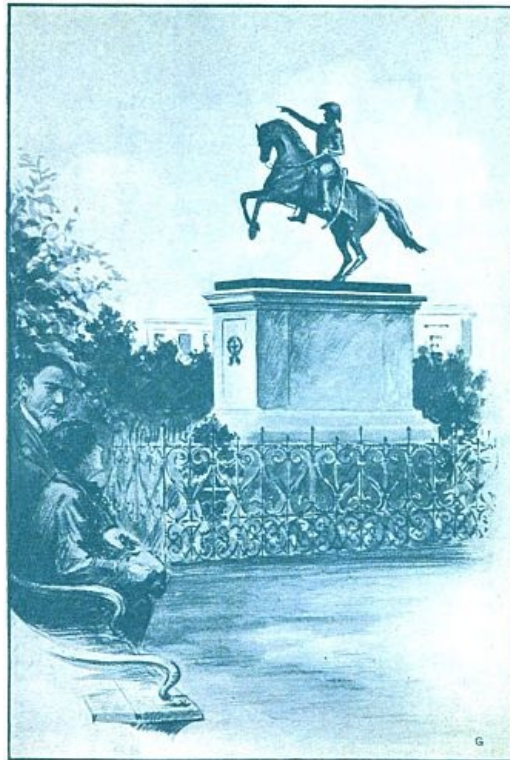
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"THEY SAT DOWN ALMOST UNDER THE
SHADOW OF THE HIGH STATUE OF SAN
MARTIN."

(See [page 33.](#))

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FRANCISCO
Our Little
Argentine Cousin

By
Eva Cannon Brooks
*Author of "God, the King, My Brother," "Our
Little Spanish Cousin," "Our Little Alaskan
Cousin," "Our Little Grecian Cousin,"
"Our Little Brazilian Cousin," etc.*

Illustrated by
John Goss



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First Impression, June, 1910

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TO
Katharine and Elizabeth Brooks

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Preface

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IF you take a steamer in New York whose destination is the eastern coast of South America, and remain on it a little over four weeks, you will reach the great metropolis of our twin continent, Buenos Aires.

In all probability they will be weeks of infinite content and delight, for the southern half of the Atlantic Ocean is milder in her moods than the northern half, and there will be a sufficient number of stops *en route* to relieve the journey of monotony.

First comes the Barbadoes, then Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio-de-Janeiro, and Santos in Brazil, and then Montevideo, the capital of the Republic of Uruguay.

At Montevideo the steamer leaves the ocean and enters the mouth of the River Plata, which is several hundred miles wide at this point, and in ten hours the beautiful city of Buenos Aires, the gate-way to the Pampas, is spread out before the eye.

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It is more like a city of North America than any of the South American metropolises, both in its appearance and its remarkable spirit of modernization.

Beyond, and about this attractive port, lie great tracts of level country known as the *campo*, and here you will find conditions not unlike those existing in some parts of our own western territory. Large ranches predominate, although the industries are varied.

The people are of mixed nationalities, but the greater proportion is of Spanish extraction and a new race, or type, is being welded with a sufficient infusion of Anglo-Saxon blood to counteract

the inherent tendency of all Latin races towards procrastination. Because of this, and aided by an unequalled climate, a fertile soil, and definite aims, they are already achieving a part of their manifest destiny.

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This, the year of 1910, the publication date of this small volume, marks the one hundredth anniversary of Argentina's independence; may it mark also the beginning of an era of even greater harmony and more splendid achievement.

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Francisco Our Little Argentine Cousin

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CHAPTER I

FRANCISCO'S HOME

FRANCISCO sat crosslegged in one corner of the *patio* under the shade of a small pomegranate tree which grew in a tub. He had moved halfway around the *patio* since morning, trying to keep out of the sun. Just after *café* he had started out under the shade of the east wall, where wistaria vines and jasmine grew in a dense mass of purple, yellow and green; then he had gone from one tubbed shelter to another as the sun mounted higher, until now only the heavy foliage of the pomegranate offered protection from the hot rays. All of the long varnished blinds at the doors of the rooms opening upon this central, stone-paved courtyard, had long since been closed securely, for it was middle December and the house must be sealed early against the noon heat of midsummer.

[2]

Francisco might have gone inside, where the darkened rooms furnished some relief, but he chose to sit crosslegged on the red and white square stones of the *patio*, with his back to the main part of the house, so that the mother and sisters could not see what occupied his busy hands.

Francisco's father was dead, and he, with his mother, La Señora Anita Maria Lacevera de Gonzalez, and his two sisters, Elena Maria, who was six, and Guillerma Maria, who was eighteen and very beautiful, lived in the Calle^[1] Cerrito, in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentine Republic, South America.

Francisco, himself, was nine, and his uncle who was a colonel in the army and who supported

[3]

his widowed sister and her family, expected him to be a soldier also. His great-grandfather had been a general, and because of his services during the revolution that had brought Argentina her liberty nearly one hundred years ago, his family was one of the most distinguished in the Republic. Francisco's own grandfather had given his life for his *patria* during the ten years' blockade of Buenos Aires, when the French and English forces combined to overcome General Rosas, who then commanded the city. His mother and his uncle, the Colonel Juan Carlos Lacevera, were then little children, but they were fired with a patriotism that comes only to those who have given of their own flesh and blood for native land.

"El Coronel Lacevera" was now retired, and with his wife and six daughters lived in a spacious, palatial home in the Calle San Martin facing the beautiful plaza, or park, where the statue of General San Martin on his rearing charger stands, a constant reminder to the hundreds of little Argentine boys and girls who daily play in the pebbled space around it, of the wonderful man, who, like George Washington, was first in war, first in peace, and is still first in the hearts of his countrymen. [4]

The monthly allowance bestowed by Colonel Lacevera upon his sister was enough to keep them in comfort, but not sufficient to allow them to live in luxury, and to-day, because Francisco had not enough money to buy his Christmas *pesebre* at the toyshop, he was doing what many little boys of that country do,—he was making his own.

Now, you must know right here, that Christmas in these South American countries is not the greatest festival of the entire year, as it is with us; it is simply one of the many that are celebrated at frequent intervals, for Argentina is a land of *fiestas*; there is scarcely a month that does not allow three or four holidays from school because of some *fiesta*, either of church or state. Although they do not celebrate this great holiday as we do with Christmas trees and visits from Santa Claus, they have something in their places, and it is the "Coming of the Three Kings." In anticipation of this, all over the Republic, children erect *pesebres* or mangers. [5]

A *pesebre* consists of a miniature open shed, or merely a roof of straw or bark, underneath which, in a tiny box, lies a porcelain baby doll to represent the infant Christ. Bending in adoration at the head of the wee box that holds this image kneels the mother, Mary, and at the foot, with folded hands, stands Joseph, the father. About them, placed in sand or moss, that forms the floor of the stable or yard, are figures to represent the worshipful neighbours, also the farm-yard fowls and animals; cows and donkeys predominating. They look like Noah's Ark people, stiff-legged and prim. Now all of this remains unmoved, a spot of reverent adoration, throughout Christmas week, New Year's day, and until "twelfth night," or the fifth of January. It is awaiting the great event for which it was erected, the "Coming of the Three Kings." [6]

On that auspicious night, through the same magical means that aid Santa Claus to enter the homes of North American children while their eyes are closed in sleep, come the three richly decorated and delicately carved kings on miniature camels with costly trappings and bags of spices on their little brown backs.

On the morning of the sixth of January the children awake, all eagerness to see the arrivals of the night. Rushing to the *pesebre* they find the three little wooden kings kneeling beside the manger, the faithful camels standing in the grass without, and all about on the floor are the wonderful gifts that the kings have brought to their *pesebre*. Indeed, as you can see, it was erected for just this purpose, exactly as the fir tree with its glittering ornaments forms the nucleus in other lands for Christmas gifts. [7]

It was these wooden people and animals that Francisco's small fingers were fashioning. He had cut himself several times, and one finger was bound up in an old handkerchief, but his enthusiasm was not lessened because of it. He knew exactly how they should be carved, and how many there should be, for in the toyshop windows there had been sets of them on display for weeks, and Francisco had studied each necessary bit carefully.

In a box beside him were the finished product of his penknife. Joseph and Mary were completed even to the paint; Mary's red and blue gown and Joseph's yellow robe were not quite dry, and the cows were too vividly red, but that would not matter; Elena was no severe critic, and it was mainly for her that he was carving them. Elena had been ill and this was to be her "getting well" gift. The flashing light in her great brown eyes when she should see them would be sufficient reward for cut fingers and weary back. Besides, this was the summer vacation and there was nothing else to do. [8]

In all countries on the other side of the Equator the seasons are the reverse of those on this side. In Argentina the children are having their summer holidays in December, January, and February, when the children of the Northern hemisphere are busy in school, or skating and sleighing; and they are having their winter when the Northern children are dressed in their thinnest clothing and are going away to the seashore or mountains.

Francisco had just completed a wonderful set of bent pin horns for one of the red cows when he was called to breakfast, and it was *half-past eleven*. But you see their meal hours, like their seasons, are different from ours. At eight o'clock he had had his *café con leche*, or coffee with hot milk, and a roll; at half-past eleven he was accustomed to having his breakfast; at four he would have *máte* or tea; and at seven dinner would be served. [9]

Francisco gathered his treasures into the tin box, and hurried to the bath-room to make himself ready for *almuerzo*. When he entered the dining-room his mother and Guillerma, the

elder sister, were seated, and the little Indian serving-maid was arranging a tray to carry to Elena in the bed-room.

The meal consisted of beef broth and rice, called *caldo* and the usual beginning to every hearty meal in that country; then came fried fish with garlic, followed by a stew of mutton, carrots, cabbage, potatoes, and large pieces of yellow pumpkin, this being the native dish of the Argentines and commonly known as *puchero*. After that came fruit and coffee. [10]

Guillerma chatted continuously of the wonderful new gowns which she had seen being packed at the great house in Calle San Martin, where she had been the day before, to bid her aunt and six cousins good-bye, before their departure for Mar-de-la-Plata, the fashionable watering place on the Atlantic Ocean, a day's ride by rail from Buenos Aires.

Meanwhile, as they sat thus, eating and talking, over in the great house of the *Coronel*^[2] the master sat at his massive library table playing *solitaire*. He always ended his meals thus with his after-dinner coffee-cup beside him. The walls were lined with well-filled bookcases, for the Colonel was a scholar.

Indeed, he cared little for the gay life that ebbed and flowed about him because of his high social position, and because of the six comely daughters, ranging from fourteen to twenty-four; the eldest ones of whom were favourites in exclusive Buenos Aires society. He suffered it because of his love for them, but his natural fondness for quiet and study led him to think longingly of the large estate in the Province of Santa Fé, where he could spend the remaining years of his life in the free open air, enjoying the quiet and solitude he so loved. But the daughters must be educated and their mother did not like the country, so the Colonel was forced to live through the winter months in the noise and roar of the great city; contenting himself with a few months each summer at the estate, when he rode at will over the wide prairies on his swift Argentine horse, or read for hours under the shade of the wide spreading *ombú* trees which surrounded the country house. This *estancia*, as they term a very large farm or ranch, was really his wife's; in fact, so was the city house, for no retired colonel's pay, nor general's pay, for that matter, could have met the expenses of his large family, accustomed to every luxury; indeed, it was just enough to cover his own personal expenses, and provide a living for his widowed sister, who had been left penniless, but dared not earn her own living, since the custom of the country forbids women of class to do work of any kind. [11] [12]

His matronly wife with her six daughters (large families are the rule among these Latin Americans) had left the evening before, with several French maids, for Mar-de-la-Plata to spend the entire summer; he would be detained in the city for two weeks, and then—for freedom and the life he loved.

But he was strangely lonely; the house echoed his and the servants' footfalls with an intensity that made him nervous; the pillared corridors rang with no merry girlish laughter, and the luxuriantly furnished *patio* with its marble floors, and softly pattering fountains, seemed to mock him of his loneliness. Always before, he had left for the *estancia* before his family had gone to Europe or the seashore for their summer outing, and he never would have believed that he—an old soldier—could be so overcome by sentiment. [13]

He was minded to take up his abode for the next two weeks, previous to his leaving for the country, in his widowed sister's humble home, when the splendid thought came to him;—he would bring Francisco, his nephew, there with him to the lonely house.

For some time he had been drawn towards the little fellow, partly because his heart was desolate that he had no son of his own, partly because the boy was developing so many manly traits, and reminded him frequently, when he turned his round brown eyes towards him, of his own long since fallen soldier father.

He desired to know him better, to get closer to the lad—and now this was his opportunity; he would ask Anita to let him have Francisco for the summer, and the boy would keep the empty house lively for the few days until they should both leave for his Tres Arroyas ranch. He clapped his hands sharply, and a servant appeared. [14]

"Have Enrique bring the motor car at four, when the afternoon is cooler," he ordered, and turned to his bed-room for the *siesta*, or rest, that all tropical and semitropical climates demand of their residents.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Street.

[2] Colonel.

CHAPTER II

A WONDERFUL DAY

PROMPTLY at four, the huge red machine puffed up to the front curbing. The Colonel was walking up and down in the Plaza opposite, smoking a cigarette; for when not eating or asleep, an Argentine gentleman is seldom seen without the thin, white *cigarrillo* between his lips. He looked most distinguished in his scarlet and green uniform.

It took but a few moments to reach his sister's *casa*,^[3] and the maid who answered his ring in the narrow vestibule that opened directly onto the street told him the family were having *máte* in the *patio*, which was partly shaded in the late afternoon. He was welcomed heartily, and was kissed by each one twice, after the foreign fashion, once on either cheek. [16]

The *máte* cup, an egg-shaped gourd, was passed from hand to hand as they sat talking, each one in turn sucking the fragrant tea through the same silver tube; the little Indian maid refilling the gourd again and again with hot water.

This is the universal custom in South American countries below the Equator, and aside from the benefits derived from the drinking of the pungent herb itself, it has a significance akin to the "loving cup" idea, and is a symbolization of family love and domestic ties.

A guest is always asked to partake of *máte* with the family, and if he is unaccustomed to the manner of its usage, the fact that he is expected to obtain his share by means of the one, universal tube, is at first disconcerting, but he dare not refuse under penalty of offending his host.

This herb is called "Paraguayan tea," or "Jesuits' tea," as it was used extensively by the early Jesuit Fathers, who were one of the most important factors in the civilization of the lower half of South America. It is grown mostly in Brazil and Paraguay and its cultivation has become quite an industry. [17]

The dried leaves are placed in a small gourd, hot water is poured into it, and it is then sucked into the mouth through the long silver tube, which has a bulbous end, perforated with small holes so that the tea is strained. At the first taste it is exceedingly bitter, but one soon grows very fond of it. It is very stimulating and a *gaucho*, or cowboy, will sometimes, under stress of circumstances, ride all day with only his morning gourd of *máte* to sustain him, and then eat his first meal of the day at sundown.

The Colonel soon made known his errand, and Francisco was beside himself with joy. He danced about the *patio* clapping his hands, and then ran indoors to sick Elena to smother her with kisses, and to tell her of his good fortune. [18]

"Oh, Elena, just think of it! Two whole weeks in the big *casa* with servants, horses and automobiles—and then two whole months in the *campo*^[4] with uncle to ride with me, and teach me something new every day!"

"But Elena mia, you will miss me," and a note of sadness crept into his voice.

"Yes, Francisco, I shall miss you, but I shall enjoy myself every day thinking of what you are doing, and you will write to me; Mamá will read me your letters, and then there will be so much to talk about when you return,"—and Francisco embraced her another time.

Half an hour later, clean and shining in his best suit of clothes, exchanged for the long linen duster that all Argentine schoolboys wear to play in, he was spinning along the asphalt streets, sitting beside the man who stood, to his young mind, for every virtue assigned to his patron saint. [19]

At first he was slightly shy, for this wonderful soldier uncle had never paid any particular attention to him, so engrossed was he always with his books and his family; but as they threaded their way in and out the traffic-crowded streets, among the heavy carts, the noisily clanging electric tram-cars, and low, open victorias filled with elaborately dressed women, and fleet wheeled automobiles of every size and class, Francisco began to ask questions, and forgot his timidity. They were soon chatting interestedly.

"How would you like a spin out to Palermo?" his uncle asked, as they reached the central part of the city.

"Better than I could say," replied the happy lad; his heart meanwhile bounding, for he seldom saw the trees and flowers of the vast park that is one of the city's most picturesque attractions. [20]

"Then, Enrique—to the park, via the *Avenida*^[5] *Alvear*," said Colonel Lacerera to the chauffeur.

It was late afternoon now, and being Thursday, the broad avenues were filled with hundreds of vehicles; since Thursday and Sunday are the afternoons chosen by fashionable Buenos Aires for the diversion of riding or driving to the great Prado to hear the military band, and to mingle in the long lines of carriages and motor cars.

The *Avenida Alvear*, broad and smoothly paved, with its magnificent residences on either side, makes a desirable avenue from which to approach the park. As they rode along, the odour of jasmine and roses hung heavy about them, coming from the beautiful gardens surrounding the palatial homes. Long arbours of American Beauty roses, looking like crimson lined tunnels; majestic palm trees, over which trailed Marechal Niel roses and cypress vines; bulky shrubs, with sweet scents; all these lent their charm to the scene, and Francisco, ever alive to the beauties of nature, felt this to be a foretaste of Paradise. [21]

Soon they were in the palm bordered drives of the park; but they crept along at a snail's pace, as the speed on crowded afternoons is limited to a funeral pace, in order that the lines of carriages both coming and going may avoid confusion.

Through the trees and shrubbery Francisco caught glimpses of cool running streams, crossed by rustic bridges; clear, limpid lakes with swans and boats, and here and there, pavilions where ices and *refrescos* were being enjoyed by the gay crowd. At intervals, on splendid black horses, were stationed picturesque looking mounted policemen, their long horsehair plumes trailing over their shoulders, from which hung scarlet lined capes. It was their duty to keep the half dozen columns of vehicles in proper line. [22]

The Colonel's car had entered the wide area of the Avenue Sarmiento when he leaned towards the chauffeur and said, "Turn towards the Zoological Gardens, Enrique." And then, to the boy beside him, he said, "How could you stand half an hour in the Zoological Gardens, Niño?" [6]

"I would try to bear up under it, Uncle," replied Francisco, as his eyes twinkled an answer to the merriment in the older man's. They alighted at the curbing, and entered the immense iron gates into that Mecca of all Argentine boyish hearts.

All of this seemed as a dream to Francisco for although his mother had frequently brought him here, she knew little of the animals and birds; and now with Uncle Juan he could ask questions innumerable without getting the reply: *Yo no se.* [7] [23]

They paused first at the great cage, fifty feet in height and covering an area of half a city block, built over a small artificial mountain where hundreds of eagles and condors wheeled, fought and chattered.

"See the pavilion that looks like a Hindoo temple, Francisco; let us see what animal makes that its home."

"Elephants, Uncle Juan, and perhaps we can see the baby elephant that was born here a few weeks ago." Sure enough, in a park all their own, surrounding the Hindoo temple house, was a family of elephants and the baby elephant stood beside its mother, who was rubbing it affectionately with her long trunk.

The alpacas, llamas, deer, bison, guanacos and vicuñas came next, and Uncle Juan could answer every question that the eager boy put to him, for, during his active service in the army, he had spent much time on the frontier, and on the Cordilleras of the Andes, where these animals are found. [24]

He permitted Francisco to take a ride on the tame llama, who rivalled the Lilliputian steam engine in its popularity as a mode of progression around the garden. As it did not trot, but walked sleepily along with Francisco, having served all day, no doubt, as a vehicle for children visiting the "Zoo," Uncle Juan walked beside him, and, as they proceeded, he told him much about the small camel-like animal upon whose back he rode.

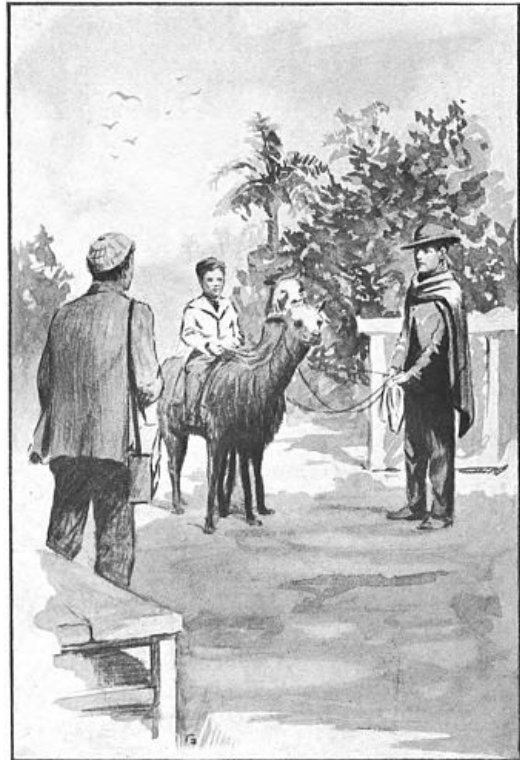
"You see, Niño, a llama is almost like a camel, but its size and strength are inferior. It has no hump on its back, but as you saw when you mounted it, it kneels like one. They thrive best at a high elevation where they browse on reeds, lichens, mosses and grass. If the grass is succulent they can go without water for a long time. When they are domesticated it is for their fine fleece. Their flesh when young is deliciously tender, and it is then that they can be caught with dogs and a lasso, but the old ones can only be shot at a distance, and their flesh is fit only to be dried and salted. I have seen them in Perú used as beasts of burden, and the Indians make a very beautiful and valuable cloth from the soft fleece. But come, lad, the sun sinks, and we may come here another time."

As they walked towards the gate where the car was awaiting them, they passed lakes where waded and swam many birds of brilliant plumage. Herons and flamingoes, red and gray and pink, stood on one leg, lazily, watching for minnows.

"Why are some of the flamingoes scarlet and some pink?" asked Francisco.

"Those with red plumage are the old ones and the delicate rose coloured ones are not yet in their second year. At old Roman feasts their tongues were considered the greatest delicacy; I have eaten their flesh roasted, and it is wonderfully palatable." [26]

"Oh, Uncle, we haven't seen the lions, nor the bears, nor the monkeys, nor the bo-



"HE PERMITTED FRANCISCO TO TAKE A RIDE ON THE TAME LLAMA"

constrictors," coaxed Francisco, as they came in sight of the gates.

"But we shall see them another time, Niño. We cannot see the half of these great gardens in a day, for they cover many acres, and contain the finest specimens of any garden on the continent." As they passed out the bugles at the military post opposite were sounding for the soldiers' dinner and the avenues were no longer crowded.

"With haste now, to the *casa*," ordered the Colonel, and the enormous car plunged ahead, along the deserted boulevards where the electric lights were beginning to appear one by one. Francisco had never flown so fast and he cuddled close into his uncle's arm; the strong man held him tenderly, lovingly, and they entered the electric lighted *patio* of the *casa* arm in arm. [27]

Now the Colonel's home was not unlike many others of its class, but to the little lad's eyes it seemed a palace. The main part of it was perfectly square, and built around an inner court from which many of the rooms were lighted and all were entered. The windows facing the street were heavily barred, and small balconies of wrought iron projected from each window, over-hanging the pavement a few feet below. The house was flat and of but one story; into this first court opened luxuriously furnished parlours, drawing-rooms, smoking-rooms and library. Behind all of this was another court with smaller rooms opening into it, exactly like a smaller house. Into this opened all the bed-rooms, the bath-rooms and the long elegantly furnished dining-room. [28]

Quite separate, and reached by a rear street entrance, was yet another, a third court or *patio*, and into this opened the pantries, kitchen and servants' quarters. The walls of the high spacious parlours were richly decorated, and the chandeliers were of silver and crystal; while ornaments and valuable souvenirs from all parts of the world were displayed throughout the entire house.

Although only Francisco and the Colonel sat at dinner that night, the table was lavishly decorated, and the cut glass, silver and dinner of many courses, including fish, game, meats, vegetables and fruits, were a source of constant bewilderment and admiration to the boy accustomed to humbler fare and less luxurious surroundings.

FOOTNOTES:

[3] House.

[4] Country.

[5] Avenue.

[6] The affectionate name for all small boys.

[7] I do not know.

CHAPTER III

 [29]

A LESSON IN HISTORY

FRANCISCO awoke very early the next morning, for he was unaccustomed to sleeping away from home. He lay quite still listening to the unwonted sounds. He heard the servants scrubbing the marble floors of the *patio* and corridors; he heard the call of the *panadero*^[8] and the hurrying feet to answer; for no private family ever bakes its own bread in Argentina, and the bakers have it all their own way, which isn't a very bad way since their bread is light and deliciously crisp; he heard the chattering of the parrots and paroquets in the servants' *patio*; then the clatter of a squad of mounted policemen on their way to the day's duty, the hoofs of their horses beating a tattoo of haste on the smooth asphalt still wet with the daybreak bath of the sprinkling carts. [30]

Then he became interested in his room. Such luxury as surrounded him! He sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes, for he had never viewed these bed-rooms except from the corridor, on his infrequent visits to the house. His bed was heavily carved and overhung with a canopy of pale blue plush and silk; the walls were panelled and painted in delicate colours, with angels and cherubs everywhere; huge mirrors reflected each other as they hung in their frames of Florentine gold, and after he had viewed it all for a few moments, he buried his head in his pillow and wished for his own bare room and his mother. Then he longed for Elena that she might enjoy the beauties about him; and this reminded him of the *pesebre*, which was still unfinished, but which he had brought with him.

He wondered how he could get it to her without her finding out—and—he must have fallen into a doze, for soon he heard an imitation *reveille* blown through human hands, outside the closed blinds that shaded his door into the corridor, and his uncle called good-naturedly: "A pretty time for a soldier of the Republic to get up!" [31]

Francisco hurried into his clothes and found the Colonel taking his coffee and rolls in a shaded corner of the *patio*.

"I am going to give you all of my time to-day, Niño, as I feel lazy, and I find there are many

things here in your own native city that you know nothing about, and that a boy of nine should see and learn. Your mother could not be expected to do it, so it falls to me. We must start immediately, before the heat of the day drives us indoors. Get your cap, lad, and we will start over in the Plaza San Martín opposite, and have a lesson in history."

They donned their hats, and Francisco felt very proud to walk beside his uncle, who, if not a very large man in stature, loomed up big before the boy's worshipful eyes. [32]

"What do you know of Buenos Aires, Niño?" he asked as they sauntered towards the centre of the park.

"Not much, Uncle Juan. I know it is the largest city on the South American continent, and that it has over one million inhabitants. My teacher said once that it is one of the largest produce markets in the world."

"Yes, and there is much more. It is the largest Spanish speaking city in the world, as it is twice as large as Madrid, the capital of Spain. But it is also very cosmopolitan."

"I don't think I know just what that means, Uncle Juan."

"Cosmopolitan? Why that, in this case, means that there are many nationalities represented in Buenos Aires. There are thousands of Italians, Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen and Russians; and one can hear half a dozen different languages in an hour's time walking along the streets. But, to-day, I want to start with a little history of our country. So let us sit here on this bench and begin. At this early hour we will not be disturbed." [33]

They sat down almost under the shadow of the high statue of San Martín and the Colonel reverently uncovered his head. Without being told, Francisco took off his cap, and his uncle patted him affectionately on the back. "Good, good, my boy! He deserves it, for no greater soldier ever fought; but we will have to go back several centuries to get the run of things," and as he leaned back he paused and puffed thin clouds of smoke from his cigarette.

"You see, when Buenos Aires was really founded, it was in 1580, sixty-four years after the River Plate was discovered by Solís, who called it the River of Silver, because he believed silver could be found on its banks. They called the city 'Good Airs,' because of the fresh, invigorating quality of the air that blew over from the vast prairies. This first settlement grew, and others farther into the interior sprang from it; all of them Spanish settlements; and in 1661 the King of Spain recognized them as a colony and appointed a governor. Thus it continued until in 1806, when England was at war with Spain, and they sent Lord Beresford, with several thousand men, down to this colony to take possession of it. [34]

"Buenos Aires then, as now, was the key to the entire country, and as it had but forty thousand inhabitants, and was without any military defence, he took it without trouble. But the Spaniards, at last, overcame him; and he was obliged to give up his prize and leave. England then sent another army, but this time the natives were prepared, and their victory was complete. General Whitelock, in command, capitulated, and his flag, the flag of the famous Seventy-First Regiment of the British army, hangs in the Cathedral over yonder, where you see the double spires beyond the house-tops. We are justly proud of that flag, for that Seventy-First Regiment is the one that caused Napoleon no end of trouble in Egypt. [35]

"After this victory our people began to feel the stirrings of independence from Spain itself, and a spirit of revolution took hold of the officials and people. At last, an open revolt took place in the Plaza Mayo, on the twenty-fifth day of May, 1810, and under the leadership of splendid men—patriots all of them—our independence was declared.

"But this was only the first step, just as it was with the great republic of the United States when on the fourth of July they declared their independence from England. So our twenty-fifth of May was but the beginning of a long struggle. A *Junta* was formed to govern, but it was no easy task. To the north were Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia; to the west Chile and Perú; all Spanish colonies. The *Junta* sent troops to these countries to endeavour to arouse the people to throw off the yoke. They sent General Belgrano to—" [36]

"Oh! Belgrano! I know about him, Uncle. His tomb is in the little square in front of the church in Calle Defensa, and it was he who originated our flag. He said the long blue bars were to represent our faithfulness, as true as the beautiful blue of our skies; and the white bar was to symbolize our honour, spotless and fair."

"Yes. Well, he went first to Paraguay; but the Spaniards had so intermarried with the Paraguayan Indians, whom they had found in that wild country, that they did not respond to the stirring appeal of General Belgrano. He, however, succeeded in some of the northern provinces, and thus encouraged, they organized a small navy. Do you know who was our first admiral? No? Well, it was an Englishman and his name was William Brown. [37]

"With this navy, Montivideo, the capital of Uruguay, was taken. Enthusiasm ran high, and it was just here that Don José de San Martín came into the light of publicity, as commander-in-chief of the army. Now let us take the automobile, awaiting us over in front of the house, and ride to the Cathedral where the remains of our hero rest, and I will tell you more about him there."

They rode along the clean streets, the fresh morning air blowing straight into their faces, the curious, sing-song cries of the street venders following them as they sped along Calle Florida.

"Uncle Juan, why is it that most of these street peddlers are Italians? See, there goes an onion-man with his long strings of onions, their stalks knit together into yard lengths; there is a vegetable cart; there is a vender of fruit, and all of them speaking broken Spanish with an Italian accent."

[38]

"Yes, Niño, most of the peddlers are Italian. I do not know why, unless it is that each nationality turns to a special kind of work in this world. The Italians are naturally merchants, they like to bargain. They are also very fine mechanics. Did you ever notice that our plasterers, or masons, who plaster the outside and inside of all our houses, speak Italian?"

"And that group of men on the corner, see, Uncle, they are all dressed alike, and must be of the same nationality; what are they?"

"Those"—indicating half a dozen men wearing full trousers held up by red sashes, adorned with dozens of coins, their heads covered with round full caps also red. "Those are Basques or Vascongados. There are many here, and they come from a small piece of country to the west end of the Pyrenees, in Spain, bordering the Bay of Biscay. Like the Italians, they, too, follow the work best suited to them, and they are mostly porters, because of their physical strength and powers of endurance."

[39]

"I have noticed, too, that the majority of our milk men are Basques, and I account for that because in their native home they are a pastoral people and such pursuits attract them. Listen as we pass: their language is unintelligible to us although they come from Spain. It is unlike any other European language."

They were now entering the great square called Plaza Mayo. It is the heart of the city, although it is not in the centre. It covers about ten acres, and is two blocks back from the muddy La Plata River; and scores of masts and smoke-belching funnels of great ocean vessels can be seen from its benches.

[40]

"That is our Government House. That much I know," said Francisco, pointing to the rose-tinted building, modelled after the Tuileries, and facing the plaza. From its rear to the river intervened grass plots and groves of sturdy palmettoes.

"Yes, that is where our Senate convenes and where all the business of the Republic is done. The President has his offices there, and all the public receptions are held there. You see, our government does not provide a home for our President; that, he must look after himself. Why, we are just in time to see His Excellency now."

There was a clatter of hoofs under the wide *porte-cochere* and a smart closed coupe drew up before the side entrance. The liveried footman with a cockade of blue and white (the Argentine colours) in his high hat sprang to the ground and opened the door. A man, slightly above the usual Argentine height, quite handsome, with pure Castilian features, and dressed in afternoon garb of tall silk hat and frock coat, got out, and walked spryly up the wide stone steps, past the sentries in scarlet and green, into the vestibule.

[41]

"Do you know him, Uncle Juan?" asked Francisco, with awe in his voice.

"Señor Alcorta, El Presidente, is a warm friend of mine," replied the Colonel, and as he said it he grew fully half a foot in his nephew's estimation.

"A warm friend? Do tell me about him."

"Another time, Niño, we must hasten to yonder Cathedral; but he is a good man and a good President."

They turned towards the enormous building, shaped like the Pantheon with its blue tile-covered cupola, and its long portico supported by huge Corinthian columns.

It was built by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century and hundreds of Indians were employed by these pioneer fathers, in its construction. Like all houses in Buenos Aires, it is of masonry untinted except by years. With the Bishop's palace next to it, it covers an acre of ground.

[42]

Francisco and his uncle entered it and crossing themselves, knelt on the bare stone floor, for like most Argentines, they were Catholics, and this was their greatest cathedral. After a few minutes spent in devotion, the Colonel led the way to one of the naves, where the tomb of the great liberator, San Martín, stands, a huge sarcophagus upon a high pedestal of marble. The Colonel stood in meditation a moment, then drew the boy beside him on a bench. In a low voice he said:

"Francisco, San Martín, the father of our country, was not only a great general, but he was also a remarkable organizer, for his troops were composed mainly of *gauchos* of the wild uncivilized kind, who were not easily trained or drilled. It was he who originated the plan of crossing the Andes and liberating Chile and Perú from the Spanish yoke."

[43]

"With his army of five thousand men, and in the face of public derision, for the undertaking seemed impossible, he crossed the rugged Cordilleras in twenty-five days; met the Spanish general in charge of Chile and defeated him. He was thus the liberator of the Chilean people, for that battle on the twelfth of February, 1817, gave them their independence from Spain. In Santiago, Chile, there is a statue to General San Martín, and one to the city of Buenos Aires. After his wonderful achievement in crushing the power of Spain, in Argentina, Chile and Perú, he

retired to private life, refusing to serve in any civil capacity.

"Following this revolutionary triumph, Brazil waged war with the Argentine Republic over the disposition of Uruguay. After three years, they agreed on its independence. This was followed by a dictatorship lasting twenty years, that was a period of the greatest tyranny in our history. Don Juan Manuel Ortiz de Rosas, at the head of a powerful troop of half savage *gauchos*, appeared on the political stage, and literally wrested the reins of government from Dorrego, who held them. [44]

"Some time you will read in history of his twenty years of despotism. It was during this reign that my father, your maternal grandfather, lost his life in the blockade of Argentine ports, by French and English forces. Rosas was at last overthrown by General Urquiza, who organized the government upon its first solid basis, with a constitution modelled closely after that of the United States of North America. Since then, although we have had a few revolutions and several financial crises, we have maintained our freedom; and our wonderful natural resources and our rapid commercial development are giving us a stable place in the world's congress of nations." [45]

Francisco listened attentively, and when his uncle concluded, followed him out a side entrance into the street, like one in a dream. They stepped into the Calle Bartolomé Mitre, which seemed congested with a torrent of vehicles pouring down its narrow channel like a noisy stream and discharging itself into the great Plaza in front of the Cathedral.

"What if San Martín could see this now?" ventured Francisco, still under the spell of the hero's achievements. "Wouldn't he open his eyes?"

"Yes, lad, the growth of this city has been phenomenal, and this afternoon I will show you more of it. Why, you're not homesick, are you?" he asked, noticing the far away look in the boy's eyes as they sped along the *Avenida*.

"Not exactly, but I would like to see Elena, and find out how she is to-day."

"Why, bless my heart! I had forgotten the sick sister. We will go past thy mother's house and if the little rose is well enough this afternoon, we shall include her in our ride in the city." [46]

FOOTNOTE:

[8] Baker.

CHAPTER IV

[47]

CURIOUS SIGHTS

ELENA was propped up with pillows in a deep chair by the window which opened out upon the street. She looked lonely, but when she saw the car sweep along the street and stop at their door, her face beamed happily. There was no jealousy in Elena's heart because her brother was being thus favoured by their uncle.

"Oh, Elena, mia," cried Francisco, throwing his arms about her, and kissing her on each pale cheek. "Do you feel able to take a ride with us this afternoon?"

"I think she is," answered his mother, entering the room, and taking her son into a close embrace. "But how I have missed my Niño, Juan," turning to her brother, the Colonel. [48]

"Perhaps I have been selfish in taking him from you, Anita. Shall I leave him here?"

"Ah, no! The lad needs you, Juan. He has no father to teach him as he should be taught. It is the very opportunity for him; and I am most pleased. Only, let me see him often, and I shall be content."

"That you shall, and this afternoon just after *máte*, we will come to take you and Elena with us for a ride. It may bring roses to her cheeks," and he pinched the pale cheeks as he passed her on his way out.

True to their promise, at five o'clock the automobile drew up in front of Francisco's home and the Colonel, himself, carried Elena out to it, and placed her in the nest of pillows on the broad leather seat. Her mother followed and before Elena realized it, they were speeding toward the central part of the city.

"Where does the little White Rose wish to go?" inquired her uncle. [49]

"Oh, anywhere—away from this horrid street. I am so tired of it. If I may, I should love to see the water."

"To the river, Enrique," laughingly ordered her uncle. "Only, the river isn't a very pretty sheet of water. It is so murky, and I think should be called the River of Bronze rather than the River of Silver."

"I know, Uncle Juan; but when I had the fever it was water, water, water I dreamt of, and now I want to see my fill of it."

"That you shall, White Rose, for right here at Buenos Aires the river is over twenty-five miles wide and the city has a frontage of four miles along the waterfront."

They passed through the Plaza Mayo, and Francisco had to tell Elena of having seen el Presidente that morning. Then they turned into the Paseo-de-Julio, a one-sided boulevard facing the river two blocks away. The intervening space was a maze of small plazas where palms, flowers, shrubs and statuary edge the waterfront like a band of solid green. Beyond, before Elena could see the water, were the busy docks, huge masonry basins, where over two thousand ocean-going vessels come and go during the span of a year. [50]

Electric cranes were swinging the great cargoes of wheat and cattle into the yawning holds of the vessels, and on and on the sea of funnels and masts stretched until the muddy line of water at last broke on the sight. Francisco was alert, his brown eyes taking in every detail of the stirring busy scene; but Elena's hungry eyes looked past this to the water beyond.

"Some day, I hope to go away in one of those big vessels," she announced.

"Indeed, and which one will you choose, little White Rose? Here is a wide choice. That large one with the enormous smokestacks and the British flag flying above her, is a Royal Mail Steamship from England. One of these leaves every Friday for England, and besides the mail, carries about fifteen hundred passengers. On one of them you would travel in great luxury; electric fans, electric elevators, an orchestra with dances every evening, and dressing for dinner at night. Oh! it's gay enough, the life on those magnificent steamers! [51]

"Then, alongside of it you see a smaller boat, a French liner from Marseilles. They go weekly also, and they bring us our champagne and our opera companies; why, this very automobile came on one of them. There's an Italian liner and just beyond are some German boats. In the South Dock is a river boat that goes up country to Paraguay; our oranges come on those. And all about are smaller boats, some sailing vessels that carry coffee from Brazil, and yellow pine from New Orleans in the United States."

"Why, that one just over yonder flies the Stars and Stripes of North America," cried Francisco, pointing to a small vessel. [52]

"Not exactly, Niño. It is from *Los Estados Unidos*.^[9] You must not confound them, for the United States are but a part of North America, although many of our people do not seem to think so. But you do not see many of their flags in our docks. The commercial relations between our two countries are as yet in their infancy. The most of our export and import business is done with Europe."

"Do they not send anything at all down here, but yellow pine, Uncle?" this from Francisco.

"Yes, oh! yes. They are sending us machinery, especially agricultural machinery. When you go with me to the country you will see their wind-mills, steam threshers and binders in great quantities. They send us other machinery, of many kinds, but in comparison with our trade with Germany and England it is very little." [53]

"And do these big ships go back empty to Europe?" inquired Elena, pointing to the long wharves.

"By no means, little girl. See those heavy carts going towards the docks? Well, I don't suppose your young mind can take in the figures, but Francisco will understand, when I tell you, those carts carried one hundred and fifty million bushels of wheat last year to those returning ships, to say nothing of millions of sheep, frozen quarters of beef, wool, cheese and even butter and eggs. Anita," turning to his sister, "I doubt if you, yourself, have ever been to the Barracas, have you?"

"No, Juan. It is so far from the residence district and I never happened to drive that way."

"Then we will ride over there now and let you all see the largest wholesale produce market under one roof that you can find in all the world." [54]

For two miles they sped through narrow streets; past crowded tenements, in front of which scores of dirty children quarrelled and played, and where the *peons* or working classes huddle, sometimes families of fourteen in one room; past *tambos*, where the cows and goats stand in sheds, open to the street, awaiting to be milked while the customer waits; past gray spired churches, their wide doors always open, inviting the pious passer-by to enter for prayer; passed *fideos* factories, where curious shaped macaroni hangs drying in the sun in the open courtyards; on and on they bumped, for the streets here were cobble-stones, until, at last, they reached the vast building covering many acres, where wheat, wool, corn and produce are bought and sold to the foreign trade.

"Were it not so late, we would alight and see it closer. However, Elena could not walk, anyhow. Already, I fear she has had too long a ride for her strength, and we hope not to tire her on this, her first outing; eh, White Rose?" But Elena was fast asleep, her head on her mother's shoulder. [55]

The chauffeur turned the car towards the city, where here and there, in the gathering dusk, an electric light could be seen as if notifying the day, by these advance signals, that its duty was over.

Elena slept on and did not see the wonderful *Avenida* as they flew along its smooth surface, so like Paris as to seem a bit of that gay city picked up and transferred to American soil; the plane trees bordering it, with here and there a small newspaper *kiosk* like a miniature temple; the splendid building of "La Prensa," the richest newspaper in the world, where the Buenos Aires public can obtain the services of the best doctors, lawyers, or dentists free of charge; invitingly odorous confectioneries or restaurants with small tables on the sidewalks at which handsomely dressed men and women sit eating and drinking and watching the gay multitude; bewildering shop windows full of the latest Parisian novelties; fruit and flower boys, with their trays of luscious fruits and delicately scented blossoms balanced unaided on their heads; hotels just beginning to glitter with their myriads of electric lights; all of these passed by them as Elena slept the sleep of exhaustion.

[56]

Francisco, however, missed none of it, for his was the Latin spirit full of love of pleasure and display, bright lights and gay crowds. His uncle watched him intently from under his heavy brows.

Suddenly a weird, unearthly wail arose above the hum of the traffic all around. Elena started up, frightened and trembling, but, as she had heard it before, she recognized it, and fell back asleep again. Francisco had heard it also, but never so close, it seemed right beside him.

[57]

"Uncle, may we not go back by the Prensa building and see what has happened?" he cried excitedly.

The Colonel agreed and Enrique crossed to the other side of the street, entering the long line of vehicles going west, for the "rule of the road" in Argentina is "keep to the left." The hoarse, wailing steam whistle had drawn the crowds towards the handsome building from whose tower it was issuing, and they could not reach it within half a block. Mounted policemen were everywhere trying to disperse the crowd. It was good-natured as any Latin crowd, but refused to be moved; like a hot water bag, it bulged out in one spot when pressed down in another. And all of this—because the bulletin methods of this mighty newspaper are so unusual.

[58]

Whenever any unexpected occurrence takes place in Europe or any part of the world this enterprising "daily" apprises the public of it by blowing this stridently piercing steam whistle. It was blown when Queen Victoria passed away; its howl distressed the nervous citizens when San Francisco was almost in ashes, and its present message was that a son and heir had been born to the King and Queen of Spain. This was made known from the front steps of the building and very soon the crowd was a cheering, hat-waving mob. It was momentarily growing more excited and Enrique turned into a side street and sped towards the house in Calle Cerrito, where Elena, now thoroughly aroused by the boisterous tumult about them, could be tucked away into bed.

As Francisco and el Coronel Lacevera sat at dinner that evening discussing the event of the afternoon, while softly gliding servants in quiet livery served them, the Colonel said:—

[59]

"Did you know, Niño, that every time La Prensa blows that whistle as they did to-day, it costs them three hundred dollars?"

"Why, Uncle Juan, does it use up as much steam as that?" earnestly inquired Francisco.

"Scarcely," laughed the Colonel, as he lifted up an enormous bunch of muscatel grapes, weighing several pounds, from the platter of fruit before him, "scarcely that, Niño, but our city government fines them that amount every time they blow it, as they term it a public nuisance. Now, when they want to indulge in this sensational advertising, they send a messenger on to the *Commissaria* post haste to deposit the fine, timing his arrival just as the last howl of the whistle sounds across the city."

FOOTNOTE:

[9] The United States.

CHAPTER V

[60]

GREAT SURPRISES

ON the Colonel's desk the little revolving calendar was set at "December 25th," and the letters were in red ink, showing by this that it was a feast day. The Colonel was writing, and evidently did not notice a little figure clad in a long linen coat standing behind his chair waiting a chance to speak. He wrote on and on, until Francisco's patience was exhausted and he coughed warningly.

"Not much of a soldier, Niño! A soldier must have patience if it is to wait all day."

But Francisco was used by now to his uncle's chaffing; indeed, they were close friends and Francisco went right to the heart of his errand.

"Uncle, it's *El dia de Navidad*."

"Why, so it is," looking at the calendar. "I had forgotten it was Christmas. We've so many feast days one cannot keep the run of all, and I can scarcely remember my own patron saint's day. If it wasn't such a well known and widely observed one, it would often pass before I knew it."

[61]

Francisco laughed. "Why, Uncle Juan, you couldn't miss St. John's day unless you were deaf and blind. They make such a noise and have such huge bonfires always. For weeks before it comes the children save every piece of wood and paper, and last St. John's night I stood on our roof and looked over the city. My! how pretty it looked; the whole city seemed on fire; for nearly every street had half a dozen bonfires. I wish *my* saint was as popular. But to-day, I want to ask if I may go home just for a little while."

"Indeed you may, lad, whenever you choose."

"Well, you see, to-day, I've a special errand, Uncle; I've been making a *pesebre* for Elena and it's finished now just in time. I would like to go and set it up."

[62]

"Let me see it," said the Colonel.

"Oh, it's fine, Uncle. I've got twenty-eight figures and the paint is dry on every one of them. I worked all day yesterday in the back *patio*, and José, the *portero*, helped me cut out the camels. He said mine looked like giraffes." And the boy began to lay them out on the desk, tenderly lifting each one as though they were alive and breathing.

As each little representation took its place in the long row the Colonel's face grew tender. He dared not smile at their crudity for behind the rough, unskilful carving, he saw the ideal that had been in the carver's mind. He was seeing some new thing each day in the little fellow's character that made him love him more; and when they were all placed formally together, he drew the little linen coated figure into the circle of his arm and together they discussed the merits of each wee wooden figure.

[63]

"Niño, we will go together! That's what we'll do," he exclaimed almost boyishly. "I am tired of these long army statistics, so let us go *inmediatamente*."

A span of Argentine thoroughbreds took them this time, for the Colonel was a genuine lover of horse flesh, and he owned several of the finest in the country. It is said that an Argentine will lavish as much care on his favourite horse as a mother will upon her child; and these two, Saturnino and Val-d'Or, were the pride of his heart.

"This pair, Francisco," he began, as they took their seats in the open victoria, and the silver studded harness tinkled as the splendid horses started off; "this pair are to be taken abroad next month with my two trotters, Benita and Malacaro. Our horses are attracting more and more attention in Europe as they see the fine specimens our stables are sending there."

[64]

"I shall enter them on the English turf, and I am ready to hazard their price that they will come back, at least one of them, with a blue riband. At any rate, I am sure there are no finer appearing horses anywhere than these; but all of our horses are good to look at. Of course, I except those miserable cab horses; they are a disgrace to their name, and should be called sheep."

Thus he chatted on, full of his subject, until they reached Francisco's home. They found Guillerma and her mother away. They had gone to celebrate mass and Elena, with the one *servienta*, was alone in the house.

"You entertain her, Uncle Juan, while I erect the *pesebre*," whispered Francisco.

So the gray haired soldier took Elena on his knee and told her the story of a little girl who was lost in a forest and of the convention of animals that met to discuss her fate. He put most eloquent speeches into the jaws and beaks of the different birds and animals, such as the deer, the puma, the ostrich, the jaguar, and many others. Elena's eyes were wide as the big bear growled out his belief that she should be cut up into half *kilo* bits, and divided among them; but just then Francisco entered the room and asked them to come into the dining-room where Estrella, the servant, was preparing *máte*.

[65]

As they entered the *comedor*^[10] Elena spied the manger with its surrounding images in the corner, on the floor.

"*Que hermosa! Que linda!*"^[11] she cried, clasping her hands in ecstasy. "Only yesterday did I tell Encarnación, when she came to bring me Christmas cakes full of almonds and raisins, that we should have no *pesebre*. She is to have one of ivory that cost a small fortune, but I had rather have this. Oh! it is so beautiful! Who could have brought it? Who could have put it here?" and she looked up inquiringly, first at her uncle and then at her brother. Uncle Juan's face pleaded "not guilty" but Francisco's was so beamingly tell-tale that she flew to him and embraced him and kissed him over and over again.

[66]

When each figure had been carefully inspected and discussed Uncle Juan proposed a ride, this time behind his favourite horses. As they entered the house on their return he was pleased to see a faint colour on Elena's face and a brighter look in her eyes.

Thus the days passed, swiftly enough; New Year's with its fireworks and noisy crowds of celebrating *peons*, and at last came twelfth night.

Elena awoke on the sixth of January feverishly



"DID YOU EVER SEE SUCH GLORIOUS BLUE EYES!"

expectant. Surely, after having set up such a lovely *pesebre*, the Three Kings would not forget her. An excursion into the dining-room proved their faithfulness, for there they stood—three smartly covered camels, and three wee kings, bowing before the tiny babe in the manger. [67]

Around the room were the gifts they had brought to her. A toy piano, a wonderful French doll with a trunk full of clothes, a few picture-books and a china tea set. She was still admiring them when Francisco arrived; he was dressed for travelling and was quite excited, but Elena could not notice that, so absorbed was she in her toys and doll.

"See this *muñeca*,^[12] Francisco, mio! Did you ever see such glorious blue eyes, just like the English Señora's on the corner. Why, you act as though you had seen them before, Francisco, are you not surprised to see so many?" exclaimed Elena, impatient that he would not kneel with her among her gifts.

"They are beautiful, Elena, every one of them. But I am in a great haste for Uncle Juan and I are leaving from the Retiro Station in half an hour. The servant, José, has taken our trunks and large bags ahead, and I stopped here to bid you all goodbye, as Uncle Juan had another errand to do on his way down. We go a day earlier than we had planned in order that we may stop over for a day and night in Rosario. I am glad, Elena, that your gifts are so lovely, and if I were not in such a [68]

hurry, we would have a long play together. But I shall write to you, all of you;" and he embraced them, each one, mother and two sisters, hastily, not trusting himself to prolong the goodbye.

The Estación Retiro was full of a holiday crowd, for it was early morning. José was awaiting him, and they stood watching the long trains of cars coming and going, discharging their loads into the long sheds, and swallowing up another one and puffing out again. Francisco's knowledge of railroads was limited. He had never taken a long journey on one; his mother and Guillerma had taken him with them on one of their yearly pilgrimages to the shrine of Our Lady of Lujan, some forty miles distant, for being devout Catholics, this was never omitted. He began to grow nervous, fearing his uncle would be too late, as the train for Rosario was puffing and blowing just outside the iron gate and the guard was preparing to ring a huge bell, which announced the departure of all trains. Just before its first peal broke from its brass throat his uncle strode in, and, motioning the servant to follow with the bags, he hurried Francisco through the gate. [69]

José, the *portero* accompanying them, was an Araucanian Indian by birth, but he spoke Spanish fluently. When a mere boy, the Colonel's father had brought him from Chile, when returning from a military expedition into that country; and he had been a faithful servant of the family ever since. As slavery is prohibited in Argentina he had been paid wages since he became of age, over forty years ago, but no power on earth could have induced José to leave the service of Colonel Lacevera. [70]

He was but slightly bent and possessed the broad face and high cheek bones of the South American Indian. His skin was like parchment, and his eyes slanted peculiarly like the eyes of the Chinese. When Francisco had spoken of that last characteristic to his uncle he had been told that many people believed these Indians to be a tangent of the Oriental races, and upheld their theory mainly because of the peculiar similarity of the eyes.

José and Francisco were great friends and Francisco was much pleased that José was to be with them at the *estancia*, since his knowledge of animals, birds, herbs, in fact all out door life, was unlimited.

The car they occupied was a compartment car of the English type, although the ponderous engine was North American. As the railroads of Argentina are mainly under English control the English railway customs and equipments are largely in evidence. [71]

The pretty stations at each suburb are surrounded by grass plots with beds of flowers, and the English system of overhead bridges across the tracks at all stations reduces the number of accidents.

Francisco found out all of this by a series of continuous questions as their train sped through the pretty suburbs with their numbers of summer homes, surrounded by well kept gardens. The villages began to grow fewer and fewer and Colonel Lacevera said:

"Now it's my turn, Niño! Can you bound the Argentine Republic?"

Francisco began in the sing-song manner of the Spanish schools:—"On the north by Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil, on the west and south by Chile; on the east by Brazil, Uruguay and the Atlantic Ocean. Its area is one million, one hundred and eighteen thousand square miles and its [72]

population is over six million. It is—"

"There! There!" exclaimed his uncle, laughingly. "You may stop. No telling how long you could sing the praises of your native land. I want to tell you a few things that you may not have learned. Do you know what alluvial soil is?"

"It sounds like some metal," ventured the boy.

"But it isn't. You see, Argentina was once part of the ocean bed; for under the soil, way back in the interior of the country, I, myself, have found shells and gravel. This long level stretch of land between the Atlantic Ocean and the foothills of the Andes, that was once covered with water, is now called the Pampas; and you are now in that region.

"See that long, coarse grass stretching as far as the eye can reach; it is the finest pasture land in the world and explains why we produce such quantities of cattle, sheep and horses. You see, having this excellent pasture-land, so well watered, and a climate that insures grazing the whole year through, our expenses for raising and rearing cattle are very low. We are a larger country than we appear on the map, my boy. Why! we are twelve times as large as Great Britain."

[73]

"Uncle, as we have so many things that are the largest and best in the world, tell me, is this the longest railroad on the earth?"

"No, Niño, not quite that. Our railroads are developing our country at a rapid rate and we have some of the finest road beds in the world, but that is because our country is so level. Now that I think of it, we have got something connected with railroads that is interesting. We have the longest straight stretch of railway in the world, it is said. On the Argentine Pacific Railway from Buenos Aires to the Andes it runs like a surveyor's line two hundred and eleven miles without deviating a foot. But come, let us go into the dining car for breakfast; it is already half-past eleven."

[74]

This was Francisco's greatest surprise of all in a long list of the day's surprises. To eat in a railway car, speeding fifty miles an hour, with delicate china and napery, shining silver and food like he had been having daily at his uncle's table, seemed too wonderful to be true.

FOOTNOTES:

[10] Dining-room.

[11] How beautiful! How lovely!

[12] Doll.

CHAPTER VI

[75]

NEW EXPERIENCES

"LEVANTESE! Levantese!" came José's voice to Francisco's ear, just as the latter was lassoing a llama he had been pursuing on the back of an ostrich.

Francisco rubbed his eyes and woke from his dream to a babel of voices, and the train was not in motion. Where could he be?

As he rubbed his sleepy eyes again his uncle took him gently by the shoulder.

"Wake yourself, Niño. We are in Rosario; come, follow me."

Francisco followed him through the long hall of the compartment car out into the big station where insistent porters and shouting cab-men made frantic grabs at them and their baggage, only to be beaten off by José, whose language as he scolded and berated them was not what is known as "polite Spanish."

[76]

Selecting a victoria from the long line of waiting ones, they entered, José sitting with the driver, and were soon before the lighted portals of a large hotel.

The building was two stories in height and perfectly square; the second story bed-rooms all opened on to a porch or corridor, which ran completely around and overlooked the central court on the first floor. The entrance was very imposing with marble staircases and marble pillars; and Francisco's sleepy eyes opened wide in astonishment. They were just in time for dinner; already the marble tables in the *patio* were filling with men and women sipping their afterdinner coffee in the cool open air.

As this was Francisco's first dinner in a hotel it might be interesting to know what he ate. Being an Argentine, he always ate several different kinds of meat, and began this meal with a platter of cold meats: tongue, pressed chicken and jellied veal. Second, a vermicelli soup with grated cheese; third, fried *pejerrey*, the most popular fish of the country; fourth, partridge fried in oil; fifth, asparagus with melted butter; sixth, macaroni with tomato and garlic sauce; seventh,

[77]

roast mutton; eighth, a salad of lettuce and tomatoes; ninth, a sweet jelly in wine sauce; tenth, fruits; and then they adjourned to the *patio* for coffee.

While his uncle smoked and talked with friends, whom he had chanced to meet, Francisco slipped away and José helped him undress for bed, as he was very tired.

He remembered no more after José turned off the electric light until he opened his eyes into the full glare of the sun, the next morning. It was nine o'clock and José was laying out clean linen for him. After a refreshing shower bath, he returned to his room to find his rolls and coffee on a table beside his bed.

[78]

"Why, José, I'm not a lady that I must have my *café* in bed!" exclaimed the lad. "Mother and the girls always do that, but I'm a man and I want to have mine in the dining-room with Uncle Juan."

José explained that in hotels one must always take one's morning coffee in one's rooms; and he talked on while Francisco ate and dressed.

"*El Coronel* will be busy all of the day and he has placed you in my hands. Rosario, I know like a book, and together we will see it."

"Oh! that will be great fun, José. Where shall we go first?"

"Would you like to see them load the vessels? This city is where much of the wheat of our country is brought to be loaded into the vessels for Europe. The river is so deep here that the largest ocean-going vessels can come up to the docks."

They walked through crowded, busy streets until they came to a high bluff, and from the edge of this they could look down on the very tops of the long rows of steamships below, all being loaded with wheat.

[79]

This was just the beginning of the busy season, for the harvest was scarcely under way. In January and February the whole city of Rosario would seem nothing but wheat, wheat, wheat.

Francisco saw all of this with deepest interest; he was beginning to comprehend the resources of his own country.

They sat watching the course of the wheat bags as they shot down the long chutes from the high bluffs to the vessels below, until Francisco's eyes grew tired and even when he closed them he could see long lines of bobbing bags, like yellow mice, chasing one another into the water.

So they walked along the bluff, counting the flags of the different nations displayed on the boats beneath them; English, French, Italian, Dutch, German and a few that Francisco had never seen before.

[80]

For a while they watched the *lavaderas* or washer-women pounding the clothes of the city on the rocks at the edge of the water; and spreading them on the higher rocks behind them to bleach and dry.

Steam laundries are uncommon in South America and all of the washing is done in this manner. The *lavaderas* carry the soiled linen from the houses to the river on their heads, balancing huge bundles as easily as though they were trifles, their arms folded across their breasts.

As they stood watching this cleansing process Francisco spied a raft-like boat piled high with small logs tied on securely.

"It looks out of place here, José, among all these enormous freight steamers. What does it carry?"

"Willow, Señorito, and see, there are others coming down the river. It goes to Buenos Aires to be made into charcoal, the principal fuel of that city. Great quantities of it are raised above here; it is quick of growth and needs only to be planted so," and José demonstrated by taking a short twig and sticking it into the earth.

[81]

"Behold! and in seven years, it is as you see it there on the rafts ready for market. They use the twigs for making Osier baskets. But *hace calor*^[13] let us go to the cool shady *patio* of the hotel and there I will tell you a story of some charcoal burners until the Uncle comes."

But the Colonel reached the hotel before they did, for Francisco must stop to see this thing and that as they sauntered along. The mid-day heat meant little to him while so much of novelty challenged his attention. José was always ready to answer his questions, and he frequently drew the boy's notice to something that would escape any one but a keen observer, and this the Indian was.

[82]

The sun was almost in midheaven, and the daily *siesta* was beginning in some parts of the city. Workshops were being closed, and under every tree some cart driver had drawn up his horse and stretched himself on the grass under its shade; even the beggars were curled up on the church steps fast asleep.

"Why do some of those ragged beggars wear metal badges, José?"

"They are licensed beggars, Señorito. The city has authorized them to beg, and when you help them you may know you are helping no rogues."

Francisco drew his nose up into a prolonged sniff. "I believe I'm hungry, José. What smells so good?"

"Step here on to this side street and I'll show you."

[83]

The street was being torn up to be repaved, and the *peon* workingmen at this noon interval of rest were eating their *almuerzo*. Gathered in little groups, they sat around something that was cooking and emitting odours of stewing meat, potatoes and onions.

"But how are they cooking here in the street?"

"Go closer and you can see," replied José.

Francisco walked to the curb, and looking over their backs into the middle of one circle he saw—the stew cooking in a shovel.

"They buy these things at the market and use their street shovels for stewpans, as you see."

"Ugh! I hope they wash them first," laughed Francisco.

They were now passing the market, an enormous affair covering the best of a large block. But the scene was no longer animated for the chattering and bargaining were beginning to cease; and the merchants, themselves, were nodding over their wares.

[84]

Along the curbing were piles of merchandise; here, a stack of peaches, pears, apricots, figs, nectarines, grapes, and plums; there, an array of earthen ware, in curious shapes; here, a stock of readymade clothing, aprons, trousers, *ponchos*^[14] and shoes. The vegetables were heaped high in piles; tomatoes, beans, lettuce, cardon, celery, potatoes, cucumbers, and onions in long ropes, their stems so plaited together with straw that they can be sold by the yard; or, in that country's measure, a *metro*.^[15]

Many of the stalls offered cooked foods; roasted partridges and chickens; pâtes of jellied meats; cleaned and cooked armadillo, whose meat tastes like tender roast pork. The Argentines are very fond of them and they consume thousands every month.

Around the curbing, at one end of the market, stood great carts, with wheels fully eight feet high. These, José told Francisco, were the market carts that brought the produce into the city. They look rude and cumbersome, but carry several tons and often as many as a dozen oxen are hitched to them.

[85]

These interested Francisco but José bid him hurry as no doubt his uncle would have breakfasted. Which, indeed, he was doing, for as they entered the hotel Francisco caught sight of him, seated in the long dining-room with several gentlemen; all of them, including the Colonel, in cool looking white linen suits. Francisco joined them and was introduced to the strangers.

They were wealthy *estancieros* but not Spaniards. One was an Englishman and the other a North American, owning ranches near Rosario, and they were negotiating with Colonel Lincevera for some pedigreed horses which he owned.

[86]

They talked partly in Spanish and partly in English; for like most educated Argentines, the Colonel spoke some English and understood more. Francisco had studied English at school just as he did French, and he was delighted to be able to understand some of their conversation.

Before they parted, the Englishman urged Colonel Lincevera to attend a large sale of cattle and horses which was to take place at his *estancia* the next day, Sunday. Patting Francisco on the head he added:

"Bring the Niño also, he may enjoy it."

So early the following morning José had their horses at the curb of the hotel, saddled and ready for the three league gallop.

Francisco had not ridden often, but his enthusiasm knew no bounds when he saw the Argentine pony that was to be his mount.

The Colonel looked at José meaningly, for he knew that this eagerness would not outlast the long gallop.

[87]

At first they rode briskly in the cool morning air. Francisco held on bravely, but the Colonel noticed the firm set of his lips, and that he talked less and less as they rode on.

They were riding through beautiful country. The turf was fresh and green in spots where the old coarse grass had been burned off and the tender young sprouts were coming up through the rich soil. They passed droves of several thousand sheep nibbling peacefully on this succulent new growth. There were shepherds, with here and there a hut made of poles covered with mud; the roof thatched with asparta grass.

Francisco was so tired and his bones began to ache so desperately that he ceased to show any interest in the things they passed. Colonel Lincevera and José exchanged knowing looks, but dared not permit Francisco to see them. When they came to one of these rude huts his uncle said:

[88]

"Niño, would you not like to see the inside of one of these *prairie palaces*?"

He admired the boy's pluck, but he feared to tax his physical endurance more.

Francisco willingly assented, and they rode up to the door around which a swarm of dirty, half naked children sat on the ground.

José called: "Ola!" and a copper-coloured woman appeared at the door, dressed only in one garment, a dun-coloured chemise.

She was an Indian, and when José spoke to her in her own tongue, asking for a drink, she pointed to the square kerosene tin filled with water, beside which hung a gourd.

She said her husband was out with the sheep; and she had no chairs to offer them, but they might alight and rest.

They stepped into the hut, the door of which was a horse's hide; the floor was the hard earth; a box stood in the middle and served as a table, while bundles of straw in the corners served as beds. Instead of chairs there were dried skulls of oxen; their wide, spreading horns serving as arms to these unique seats. Francisco was glad, however, to rest his weary body within their grewsome embrace and he sat thus for half an hour, while José watered the horses and the Colonel talked to the children. [89]

Francisco himself proposed that they start on, but José was obliged to lift him into his saddle. One more league and they were in sight of the *estancia*, where the sale was to be held.

The house was of the usual Spanish style of architecture, and the many buildings grouped around it gave the place a resemblance to a village.

Señor Stanley met them and "gave" them his house, after the manner of all Spanish hosts, and they entered to wash and rest.

As the Señor Stanley was an Englishman, his house interested Francisco in spite of his weariness. It was fitted with every luxury of a high class English home; the baths being supplied with cool spring water which flowed through them constantly. There were handsomely furnished parlours, a well-filled library and a billiard room. The stables were commodious and sanitary; and the tennis courts and golf links, gardens and *patios* were numerous. [90]

In the corrals they found several hundred men gathered and there was much confusion and noise.

It was Sunday and therefore a holiday spirit pervaded everything, for Sunday is not observed in Argentina as a day of quiet and reverence; it is the day for sports, games and excursions. This sale had been set for Sunday to insure a large attendance.

First, breakfast was served. Under a long arbour, formed by tall eucalyptus trees, the table, fully a hundred feet in length, had been set. At each place was a bunch of flowers and a bottle of native wine. [91]

Despite his aching body, Francisco did full justice to the soup, barbecued meats and fowls, vegetables and fruits that were served. But after he had eaten he crept under the shade of one of the trees to rest.

He fell asleep and slept until his uncle wakened him at *máte* time.

"Hello, my boy! Slept through all of this noise? You were certainly exhausted, for such a clatter as there has been. One hundred thousand dollars and many pedigreed animals have changed hands, and it wasn't done quietly either. We will have our *máte* and then ride home in the cool of the evening. Come." And the Colonel helped the stiff jointed, weary boy to his feet.

FOOTNOTES:

[13] It makes hot, literally.

[14] Blankets.

[15] A little over a yard.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE RANCH

"WHAT is that you have, Manuel?" cried Francisco, to one of the *peons*, five days later, as he sat under an ombú tree in the garden on his uncle's *estancia*, playing with some tame *tierra* birds, that kept the garden clean of worms.

Manuel was one of the house *peons* and he had a queer looking machine with a long snout under his arm. [92]

"Why, this is an ant destroyer, Señorito; would you care to watch me kill ants?"

For answer, Francisco ran eagerly to his side and the two walked toward the peach orchard. Francisco had had five days of rest from his tiresome ride the day of the sale, and he was now ready for any new adventure. [93]

They had arrived at the Tres Arroyas ranch three days before and he had made friends with every one connected with the house and gardens. The heat had been too great to allow of any wider acquaintance, which would have included the gauchos, or cowboys; at least the nearer ones, for the Tres Arroyas ranch was very large, and Francisco never could have known them all. José had told him that one could ride all day from the centre and not reach its boundaries.

"Why do you use that to kill ants?" he asked of Manuel. "Our *servienta* at home uses hot water when they get into the *patio*."

"Ah, yes, Señorito, but these country ants come in such armies it would take a geyser of boiling water to kill them. Now, we are here in the orchard; you can see how they destroy things."

Curious rivulets of tawny brown ran here and there as far as the eye could reach. [94]

"Last spring these ants fairly cleaned our peach trees of their tender young leaves, and it was only by continuous labour that we exterminated them. Now, look at them! Thick as ever."

"But how can you kill millions of ants with so small a machine?"

"Well, I can't this afternoon. I brought the machine here to place it and get it ready; then early in the morning I will tap on the iron bars of your window and you must follow me."

It was scarcely more than dawn the next morning when Francisco heard the gentle tapping on the *rejas* at his window. He had forgotten his engagement with Manuel, and started up in bewilderment. The sight of the *peon* reminded him and he hurried into his garments and was soon with Manuel in the crisp morning air.

"A little more of the sun above the horizon and we would have been too late for to-day," said the swarthy Spaniard, as he busied himself lighting the machine. [95]

"Ants are early risers, and it's only by getting up before they have made their morning toilets that we can manage to make war on them."

Francisco laughed at the idea of an ant bathing and dressing, and bent over on his knees beside Manuel who was scratching a match to light the dry rubbish in the cylindrical can, in one end of which was a small amount of sulphur. He screwed a lid on the other end, inserted the snout into an ant hole and with a pair of bellows he sent the volumes of sulphurous smoke into the labyrinthine passages of the ant houses.

"Look, look," excitedly cried Francisco, as quantities of smoke were seen issuing from many holes, here and there, within a radius of several hundred yards; showing how intricate and many winding are the underground passages of these industrious pests. [96]

"Yes, there won't be many ants getting out to work this morning. But in a short while they will be just as bad as ever."

They went from one part of the orchard to another until the sun was too high, and they were obliged to stop until another morning. Francisco learned, as they walked toward the house, that these ants are the worst pest, excepting the locust, that the farmer has to combat. They particularly delight in carrying away whole beds of strawberries and they often come in armies that swarm over every obstacle in their path.

As they entered the house, Francisco noticed that his uncle had had *café* and was in his riding breeches ready for a morning gallop.

"May I go with you, Uncle Juan?" cried Francisco.

"Hey! That's spirit for you! Rode yourself to fragments a few days ago and ready for another trial to-day. *Che*," clapping his hands as a *peon* appeared. [97]

"Saddle Barboza for the Señorito, *inmediatamente*."

Francisco gulped his *café* and nibbled at a biscuit, but he was too excited to eat more.

When the horses were brought to the door, his eyes gleamed, for he saw that the smaller horse, that was to be his to ride while he was on the *estancia*, was resplendent in a new saddle, bridle and bit. The servant brought a set of solid silver spurs and smart leather riding boots which he assisted Francisco to put on, and which he told him his uncle had had sent with the saddle and outfit from the city.

The stirrups were of silver, beautifully chased, and the head stall, ornaments for the brow band which covers most of the horse's face, and the *pretel* bangles that jingled across the horse's breast, were all of the same valuable metal. It was indeed the outfit of a gentleman, and on Barboza, the sleek bay horse, with the neat, light hoof of the prairie steed, it seemed an equipment fit for a prince. His uncle appeared at the mounting block and Francisco kissed him again and again as he thanked him for the lovely gifts. [98]

"Hey! Hey! We can't waste time thus, my boy. I am going over to the west of the *estancia* to inspect some horse branding that is to take place to-day. The *mayor domo*^[16] will follow me later."

They cantered off across the corral and were soon on the open plains. On and on, over the pastures, some of them red, like battle grounds with the scarlet *margarita* or verbena; when again they would reach a huge patch of white ones that looked at a distance like snow.

"What was that, Uncle?" exclaimed Francisco, startled, as a large bird with yellow breast and gray wings screeched across their path, emitting a harsh cry of several syllables. [99]

"That is the *bicho-feo*."^[17]

"Why do they call it ugly bug? It is a bird."

"Because its cry is not unlike those words. Listen again and you will hear how plainly he says it. It is a bird of prey and lives on smaller birds. That bird just fluttering up out of the grass at your left is a scissors bird."

"Oh, I know why. See how its two long tail feathers clip the air like scissors as it flies."

They passed numbers of small gray owls; and once Francisco spied a flock of flamingoes across the water of a small lake. Occasionally they passed a shepherd's hut; but now they were getting on beyond the sheep grazing pastures and great herds of cattle came in sight.

Francisco leaped in his saddle with joy. "Oh! Uncle, are we coming to the cowboys?" [100]

His boyish enthusiasm had pictured them on their native heath so often, and now he was really to see them! He had watched them when they came to the city on holidays and walked along the Paseo de Julio, where the pawn shops, with their tempting offers of silver sheathed knives, gaily striped *ponchos*, and silver mounted *rebenques*^[18] draw them as honey draws bees; but to see them on the plains,—that was what he wanted!

He did not have to call on his reserve of patience; indeed, soon after his eager question they passed a group of them, crouched on the ground around a fire of dry thistles, over which hung a can, suspended by wire from a tripod, and which held the water for their morning *máte*. They arose to their feet as the Colonel galloped past and greeted him with *vivas*.

"Do they often use those murderous looking knives on each other, Uncle?" asked Francisco; the sight of their weapons having subdued his zeal somewhat. They were rougher looking men in their working clothes than when they came to the city dressed for a lark.

"Seldom, Niño; unless they are intoxicated. They are not very civilized and they have no education whatever. They fairly live on their horses' backs and cannot be persuaded to do any work that must be done outside their saddles."

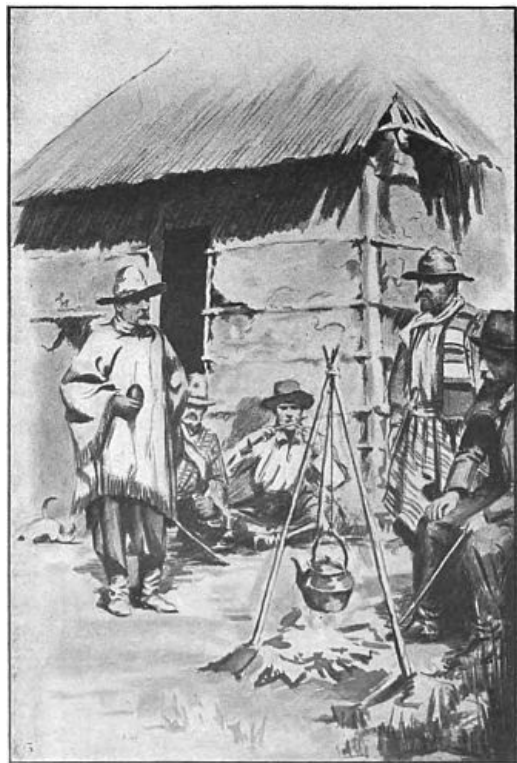
They were, indeed, fierce in appearance. Their knee-high boots were made of rawhide; they wore no trousers, but a striped blanket held around the waist with a belt, then brought between the legs and fastened again to the belt in front, formed the covering of the lower part of the body. This is called the *chirapa* and when walking it gives the wearer a bulky appearance, not unlike a Turk.

As these were *peon gauchos*, or low-class cowboys, they were not so picturesque as the gentleman *gaucho*, who is entirely different in appearance and character.

The *mayor domo* rode up to them within the first hour, and his costume was that of the *caballero* class or gentleman *gaucho*.

He also wore the *chirapa*, but it was over long white cotton trousers, the edges of which were embroidered and finished with hand-made lace. Instead of the rawhide belt of the *peon gaucho*, his was a strip of hogskin doubled, the inside forming a pocket, which was stitched into compartments, these being made secure with clasps made of silver coins; from all of this hung a festoon of coins encircling the entire waist. The large clasp in the front was of solid silver, carved to represent the crest of Argentina. Several knives were thrust through his elaborate belt, and his riding whip was of closely braided rawhide, with a heavy silver handle.

Francisco eyed him curiously, but with evident admiration. This was more to his liking, and he rode between this gentleman of the Pampas and his soldier uncle with great pride. Almost, he was persuaded to be a *gaucho*, but a side glance at his idolized uncle brought quick repentance [103]



"SOON AFTER HIS EAGER QUESTION THEY PASSED A GROUP OF THEM."

[101]

[102]

to his heart.

How could he be so disloyal to his family traditions! A *soldado*,^[19] of course, that was his destiny.

FOOTNOTES:

[16] Superintendent.

[17] Beech-o fay'-o.

[18] Riding whips.

[19] Soldier.

CHAPTER VIII

[104]

CATTLE BRANDING

THEY reached the western corral about ten o'clock, and found the branding already under way. Several dozen *peon gauchos* had assembled and they had driven the horses to be branded into an enclosure.

"See, Niño, these are all young animals; they have never had the iron on them."

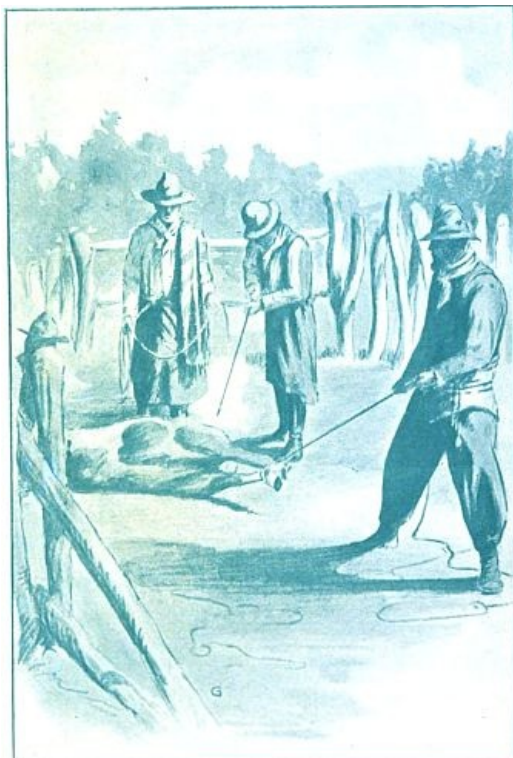
"Why do you brand them, Uncle Juan? Your *estancia* is so large surely they could not stray on to a neighbour's ranch; and then the *gauchos* watch them carefully?"

"Yes, but there are so many thousands that, despite the best of care, our horses stray away occasionally. Before every yearly round-up, we send *peons* to all the neighbouring ranches to gather in the strayed ones; and if our brand is on them there is never any question as to their owner. I am gradually having the outskirts of the *estancia* enclosed in barbed wire fencing, but it is so many leagues around that it is no easy matter. But look, see how they catch them!"

[105]

They were using the *bolas*, and although Francisco had often seen them in the shop windows, he had never seen them in use. They are an aboriginal device for lassoing cattle and horses. They consist each of three stone balls covered with leather and all attached to long thongs, two of which are longer than the third. The ends of these thongs are attached together and when the *gaucho* uses them he raises his hand holding these ends above his head and whirls them around and around to gather momentum, then opening his hand the weapon flies away to coil itself about the feet of the animal that he wishes to lasso. These *gauchos* are so skilful in the use of the *bolas* that their aim is unerring, and although it sometimes bruises the captive's legs, it is a most convenient method for catching a fleet-footed horse or cow.

[106]



"BLAZED THE LINES OF THE TRES ARROYAS ON ITS HIP"

When the *gaucho* in the enclosure had caught a horse by this means, he immediately pulled it to the ground. A *peon* sat on its neck while another held it by a rope around its fore-legs, and a third blazed the lines of the Tres Arroyas brand on its hip. The mark was in the shape of a horseshoe, inside of which was a cross; and at least ten of these groups were busy all of the time, burning it on the young animals.

"What do you raise these wild horses for, Uncle Juan?" inquired Francisco, who had not missed one single detail of the performance. "They are not fine horses like Barboza here," and he patted his steed's neck affectionately.

"No, they are not, by any means. These wild horses are raised for their hides mainly, although very little of them goes to waste when they are skinned. Look over yonder, near that cluster of mud huts, where the hides are drying in the air and sun."

[107]

Francisco's eyes followed the end of the silver riding whip that his uncle used to point with, and saw tier after tier of poles, from which were stretched horsehides to stakes in the ground below.

Turning to Don Carlos, the *mayor domo*, who was near-by, the Colonel inquired the worth of the horses being branded.

"Not less than ten or twelve dollars each,"

answered the superintendent. "These are very good ones. Does the Señor care to have his breakfast now?"

For some time, Francisco had been feeling pangs of hunger. His hurried *café* had not been sufficient nourishment for the long hot ride, and now his hunger was aroused by odours that came to his nostrils like pleasant messengers; yet, he could not see anything cooking. [108]

"Uncle, shall we eat out here with the *gauchos*?" he asked, wild-eyed.

"Very near them anyhow, but not exactly *with* them. Manuel came ahead of us to prepare our *almuerzo*, which is in process of cooking over yonder behind that clump of willows. Before we eat you shall see the *gauchos* eat, but I warn you it is not a prepossessing sight.

"Here, Don Carlos, have the men go to their breakfast now, the lad wants to see their table manners."

Don Carlos rode into the corral, spoke a few words and the branding ceased. Each man mounted his own pony, for an Argentine cowboy never walks, be his journey ever so short. With cheers and shouts they galloped toward the mud huts near-by.

Francisco and the Colonel followed at a more dignified pace. They found the men gathered about in groups, squatting on the ground or sitting on ox skulls. [109]

The beef had been quartered and roasted on a spit over a charcoal fire, outside one of the huts. Each man, without ceremony, had "fallen to" and helped himself, by cutting great chunks of the meat from the large piece on the fire.

Holding one end with his teeth and the other with his hand, each man would sever the bite about two inches from his mouth with one of his silver-handled belt knives.

"You see how superfluous are knives, forks and plates," said the Colonel in an undertone to Francisco as they watched this primitive process.

"And now for our own breakfast. I am as hollow as is the wild pumpkin at the end of summer," and he gave a sharp blow to his horse, another to Barboza, and they were off towards their own waiting meal in the shadow of the willows. [110]

Manuel had killed a small kid soon after reaching the corral, and had roasted it on a spit in its skin over a fire of dry thistles and charcoal. He was basting it with salt water, which he had brought in a bottle. In the coals below were sweet potatoes roasting in their jackets. So tempting were the combined odours of lamb and sweet potatoes that Francisco ran to the little stream to wash himself, in order that he might begin to appease his appetite at once.

"I *never* was so hungry," said he, as he took the tin plate offered him by Manuel. "I think I could eat with my hands like the cowboys! Do they ever eat anything but meat?"

"Seldom. They care but little for vegetables; not enough to take the trouble of raising a few. Meat and *galletas*, the hard biscuit of the Pampas, often three or four months old, is all they have besides their *máte*, that they *must* have always. [111]

"Que esperanza! lad, this lamb is good! It takes me back to other days. Many times on our expeditions into the provinces have I eaten thus."

"Tell me, do tell me of one while we eat and rest," coaxed Francisco.

"There were many, lad," said the Colonel, as he passed his plate back to Manuel for another piece of the smoking, savoury lamb. "I've never told you of the expedition of General Roca into Patagonia. I was commanding a regiment at that time, one of the regiments that became famous because of that remarkable undertaking.

"Patagonia is all of the southern-most part of this continent lying between the Rio^[20] Negro and the Straits of Magellan, excepting the narrow strip between the Andes and the Pacific Ocean, which belongs to Chile. This country is not the barren, unproductive country now that it was before our expedition carried civilization to its wild wastes and reclaimed those vast prairies from the Indians." [112]

"But, Uncle Juan, what right had Argentina to take the land from the Indians of Patagonia? They had lived there for centuries and it was theirs."

"It is a long story, Niño, and I shall give you only the bare outline. You see, Patagonia is a series of vast terraces from the Atlantic Ocean to the foot of the Andes. On these well watered steppes, Patagonian Indians, mainly the Chennas, raised their cattle, allowing them to rove at will. But the winters there are most severe, especially when a *pampero* blows; so, during the winter months, they drove their immense droves of cattle to the northward into the foothills of the Andes, where it was warmer. During these winter sojourns close to the frontier of our Republic, they lived by murdering and stealing from our settlements, and the development of our lands was being retarded because these pioneers were obliged to flee to the cities and leave their fields of grain and maize, their vineyards and their cattle to the mercy of the marauders. [113]

"Gradually the outposts of our civilization were creeping closer to Buenos Aires, instead of extending and growing as they should. Do you now see why we were justified in fighting them?"

"Yes, but I didn't know they had made any trouble. I supposed they were peaceful."

"Far from it. At last when Don Nicolas Avellaneda became President, he sent General Roca, who was my general, and the Minister of War, into Patagonia to exterminate these Chennas.

"It was not an easy task, for these Indians are a fierce race, giants in size and strength. Do you know how they came by their name, Patagonians?" [114]

"I have never heard, it must have something to do with their feet as 'patagon' means 'large foot.'"

"That's it exactly. Magellan, the discoverer, saw their footprints in the sand and because of their magnitude, he believed them to be giants, and called them that before he had ever seen them.

"Well, General Roca never knew discouragement, and he set about their defeat by digging great trenches, twenty feet deep and twenty feet wide, while the Indians were up in the mountains with their herds of cattle.

"These trenches he covered with boughs, over which earth was scattered, and when all was ready he sent us back to drive the Chennas toward the ditches.

"It was a terrible price to pay for their cruelty, and I shudder now as I recall that awful day; but nearly all civilization is bought with blood, and it certainly ran in torrents then. The Indians, unsuspecting, fell headlong, thousands of them, into the trenches, and the few that were unhurt by the fall or by being crushed in the trenches were made prisoners and distributed among the victorious regiments as servants or soldiers. The women and children were captured and sent to the cities to work." [115]

"Ah! But those ditches! The birds, foxes, and armadillos must have grown fat on the thousands of bodies we left on that plain."

Francisco begged for more, his eyes were ablaze and his cheeks flushed, but the Colonel said:

"No more of fighting, anyhow; but come here by the stream, now that we have finished our meal, and I will tell you of some of the animals I saw in Patagonia."

"Did you ever chase ostriches?" eagerly inquired the boy. [116]

"Yes, yes, several times and it is great sport; and once, for three days, I had only ostrich eggs to eat. You see, we were digging those same trenches and could not spare many of the men for hunting. I was ill and could not eat the army rations, so José brought me ostrich eggs and cooked them as the Indians do—in the red-hot coals."

"And was José with you on that expedition?" exclaimed Francisco.

"Yes, through all my campaigns he has been my body servant. It was José who told us how the Indians catch ostriches; he had heard it when a boy among his tribe of Araucanians."

Francisco clapped his hands in anticipation.

"A circle of fire around a great area was built and the huntsmen remained within this circle. The ostriches and guanacos that were thus imprisoned in the circle of fire were easy prey for they fear fire and ran almost into our arms. Why, what's the matter, Niño?" [117]

The interest had died out of Francisco's eyes and he sat with his hands clasped over his knees.

"Well, Uncle Juan, I'll tell you. I'm disappointed!"

"Disappointed! How?"

"Uncle Juan, I don't think that's fair play or good sport."

"*Que esperanza!*" exclaimed his uncle, secretly proud of the boy's loyalty to his conviction, but determined to draw him out on the subject.

"And who are you that you may sit in judgment on generals and captains?"

"Oh! I don't think one's rank has anything to do with one's opinions. Uncle, if a *peon* thinks a thing is not right he must not do that even though the President, himself, commands him; and I don't think hunting animals in that fashion is fair. The little English boy I play with at school is always saying that we Spaniards are not—well, he calls it 'sporty.' That's their English word for it. He says that the Englishmen are the truest sports on earth and that they would never hunt as we do." [118]

"To a certain extent he is right, Francisco. We don't care for the excitement of the chase merely for the excitement as they do; we are less active in our temperament, and prefer to gain our ends with the least expenditure of energy. I want you, above all things, my lad, to be broad-minded, and able to see your own shortcomings, so think this matter out and if you are convinced that we are not right as a people, in our attitude towards sports, or anything else for that matter, formulate your own opinions and then stick to them.

"It is through such men that all nations grow; and the men that are able to see their national deficiencies are the great men, the reformers, and the leaders." [119]

"But in regard to the ostriches. How would you catch them if you had the opportunity?"

"I should do it as the English lad tells me he saw them do it in Chubut Territory; that's part of Patagonia, isn't it, Uncle?"

The Colonel nodded, smoking industriously.

"Well, he says the real way to catch ostriches is with the *bolas*. He saw his father chase them there and he says they hunt them in an open plain, not in a circle of fire. They give the birds an equal chance with them for their lives, and if the ostrich can't outrun them, then, when they are within throwing distance, they whirl the *bolas* around their legs and trip them. He says it is fun to see an ostrich run; it stretches out its long neck and with its awkward long legs kicks up a great cloud of dust behind it. He also told me about seeing guanacos and pumas. Did you ever hunt them, Uncle?"

"Yes, but guanacos are hard to shoot because of their keen sense of smell, they can scent a human being over a mile away; but their flesh is delicious, tasting much like venison. [120]

"Have you ever seen the puma skin in the library of my city house?"

"Yes, I have often seen it and one day I measured it; it was over two metros in length. Are those guanaco skins in the dining-room at the *estancia*—the tawny yellow ones with white spots and such deep soft fur?"

"Yes, and the ostrich robe that your aunt uses in her carriage is made of the breasts of young ostriches; it is as soft as down and marked brown and white. The Patagonian Indian women often wear them for capes, although they are very expensive.

"You know, the ostriches we have here are not the kind that produce the long plumes worn in ladies' hats; these are called the 'rhea' and are an allied species. Speaking of skins, Francisco, I will tell you of one that will interest you. It is a vicuña, and one of the finest I have ever seen. It was presented to your great-grandfather, General Lincevera, by a chief of the Incas, as a vicuña robe is worn only by one of royal blood among the Indians. It saw service as your great-grandfather's *poncho* during his remarkable career, and is now over one hundred years old, yet it is as soft as velvet. Being one of our family heirlooms, it shall be yours, as I have no son." [121]

"That pleases me and I shall be very proud of it."

"As you well may be. Whatever fortunes come to you in life, Niño, remember you are a Lincevera."

Sleep was sweet that night, and Francisco's head was scarcely on his pillow when guanacos, vicuñas and even *gauchos* were forgotten in dreamless slumber.

FOOTNOTE:

[20] River.

CHAPTER IX [122]

A SUCCESSFUL SEARCH

THERE was not a dull moment for Francisco during the weeks that followed. Don Carlos, the superintendent, lived in the great house the year through. He was a bachelor and a man of education, so that when the Colonel came each summer he insisted that he keep his usual quarters; for the house was very extensive and the Colonel enjoyed his company at meals and during the long evenings.

Francisco had accompanied Don Carlos on several excursions and once, with a *tropilla* of horses (eight or ten riding horses driven loose by a *peon* for fresh mounts on a long journey), they had gone on a journey of five days to a neighbouring *estancia* to purchase algarroba posts for the extensive fencing that was taking place on the Tres Arroyos ranch. This algarroba wood is like iron and under water is almost imperishable. [123]

They had passed by one small *estancia* devoted almost exclusively to peanut culture; there were leagues and leagues of them being raised to be shipped to the Mediterranean ports to be made into *olive oil*. They had their dinner at this *estancia* and Francisco ate bread made from powdered peanuts mixed with wheat flour and he found it very delicious.

José had taken him on several fishing excursions, and once they had hunted *armadillos* with small dogs. Francisco had laughed heartily at the antics of one dog, who had almost caught the horny-plated little animal when it suddenly rolled up into a ball, its back of movable, bony bands enveloping it like an armour, and rolled off a bluff over the river bank, falling fully fifty feet; while the puzzled dog peeped cautiously over the brink to see it unroll itself and with its short legs hastily dig a retreat under the earth. [124]

On Francisco's birthday his uncle had given a *fiesta* in his honour. There were fireworks and races, and cowboys from all parts of the *estancia* came in their full cowboy regalia on their best horses to participate. It was very interesting, and then there was a dinner for everybody and after that a dance. Francisco, himself, presented the prizes, and his uncle made a speech.

After so much excitement Francisco overslept the next morning, and awoke to find that his uncle had ridden to a far corner of the *estancia* to inspect some of the new fencing; he had left word that he would not return until late that night.

Francisco sat under his favourite ombú tree, watching a *mangangá*, or carpenter bee, that was humming loudly in the foliage above his head and looking like a shining ball of gold among the green leaves. He had received a letter from his mother that morning, and he was a bit homesick. [125]

"El Señorito is *triste*. No?" It was José's voice behind him.

Francisco brushed away a tear that had stolen down his cheek, and turned to greet the Indian with a smile. "I was wishing to see Elena, but it won't be long now; and I shall hate to leave this lovely place, too. But one can't have everything one wants, all at the same time, can one, José?"

"No, Señorito, but we always have *one* happiness; have you noticed it? There never comes a time when we haven't one, at least. Now I've one just now, and I am going to share it with you. It will take away your sadness."

"Is it—is it another fishing trip?"

"No, but it's better. Now listen, and I will tell you about it.

"While the *gauchos* were dancing and making merry over your birthday, last night, some miserable robbers got into the horse corrals and stole all the horses' tails." [126]

"The horses' tails!" gasped Francisco.

"Yes, you see that's partly what we raise wild horses for; their skins and their tails. South American horsehair for mattresses is famous all over the world, and it brings good prices. Now, these thieves make their living by visiting the different *estancias* and helping themselves to the horses' tails.

"Word came to your uncle, just before he left, that when one hundred of his horses were driven out of the Corral De Oeste this morning, they hadn't a single tail among them. So he has offered one hundred *pesos* to the one, or ones, who can catch these thieves. Would you like to try?"

Had José asked him if he would like to swing on to the new moon by his toes Francisco could not have been more startled. [127]

"Try—! Why José, you can't be in earnest!"

"*Como no?*" grinned the Indian cheerfully.

"But José, wouldn't they shoot us, and, anyhow, I know you are jesting when you ask *if I* would care to try. You,—you are a strong man, even if you are getting old, and I heard the *peon* children down by the huts say that there was no man for leagues and leagues around that could wrestle as you do; that you learned how from a Japanese soldier years ago in Chile. And I know you can shoot; but I would just be in the way."

"No, Señorito, you wouldn't be in the way. Manuel and I want you to go with us because we need you."

"Need *me!* Oh, José!" and Francisco's eyes gleamed brightly. "Do you think Uncle would allow me to go with you?"

"He is not here to say, and we must leave before he returns. But he left you in my care and if I feel sure no harm can befall you, I see no reason why you should not go." [128]

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" shouted the happy boy, dancing around José and clapping his hands.

"This is the greatest adventure I ever had. To hunt brigands! Why, it's too good to be true. Won't Ricardo grow green with envy when I tell him about it, and won't the little English boy sit with his eyes wide open, while I recount the story to him. He will hush up about his ostriches and guanacos after this," and Francisco sat on the ground hugging his knees, and rocking to and fro gleefully.

"Well, don't clean your turtles till you've tied them, Señorito. We may not get them. It's only because I have a clue and a scheme that I am willing to try; for they are pretty clever fellows and they won't be easy to catch. We want to take you for a decoy, and besides, I think you would enjoy it. A Lincevera, even at nine years of age, is no coward." [129]

"A coward, I should say not. Why, José, I am *never* afraid. But what is a decoy?"

"A decoy? Well, that's what we used when we caught flamingoes the other night. Do you remember how we put young frogs on the end of a string and then lay low in the grass and waited?"

"But, you can't tie a string to me, José—and—and—besides I don't be—believe I want to be a

decoy. It isn't that I'm not brave; no, indeed, José—but I think I would rather you would decoy them with something else."

"Leave that to me, Señorito, and I promise they won't hurt you. You must have forgotten you are a Lacevera. They shall not gobble you up as the flamingoes did the frogs. Just what would you buy, anyhow, if you got your share of the reward?"

"Buy!—Let me see. There are so many things to buy. But now that I have my lovely saddle and silver stirrups I don't need much for myself. I think I would buy a beautiful parasol, all lace and chiffon, for Guillerma, for young ladies don't care for anything much but clothes. Then I should buy a jewelled fan for Mamá, and then—well, I believe Elena and I would spend the balance for Carnival as it comes next month. But José, what did you say about not cleaning your turtles till you had tied them?" [130]

José laughed and patted him on the back. "True, Don Francisco. But let me tell you our plan, or part of it. I have reason to believe that these two horsetail thieves are taking shelter with some charcoal burners over near the river. These charcoal burners are rough men, who live almost like savages. They injure no one, however, and it is only when they quarrel among themselves that they do any harm. They may not know who these men are, and are allowing them to tarry with them, believing them to be beggars, or *gauchos* hunting employment. [131]

"I feel sure they are too loyal to the *estancia* to harbour them if they knew who they were. Now be ready immediately after breakfast, for we must start in time to reach the charcoal kilns before dusk."

It was twelve o'clock, when José, Manuel and Francisco galloped off in the direction of the river, and it was just *mate* time when they came in sight of the charcoal kilns and adobe huts near the river's bank.

Gathered about the fires, over which hung boiling water for making the *máte*, were several clusters of these uncouth appearing men. Dirty looking women sat in groups apart, with dozens of dirtier children rolling about on the hard earth at their feet. A pack of dogs ran out to greet them, yelping in front of their horses, until they were called off by their respective owners. [132]

José and Manuel approached one group, and after greeting and being greeted, asked for boiling water with which to make *mate*. This was given willingly, and with Francisco they sat down on the ground among the men and began leisurely to sip *mate* from the gourd that Manuel always carried in his saddle bags.

They talked in friendly fashion with the dirty *carboneros*, who were as black as the fuel they made. Francisco noticed two men, who were less grimy in appearance and who sat quietly side by side, taking no part in the conversation.

They glanced occasionally at José and Manuel in a hostile manner, and suspicion seemed to lurk in their attitude towards them. Francisco felt sure these were the thieves, but José and Manuel took no notice whatever of them and Francisco feared his friends had not seen them.

After *mate* Francisco asked to see the kilns and José and Manuel took him over to examine them and explain to him how the willow was made into charcoal. It was quite dark when they returned to the huts and proposed that they return to the *casa*. [133]

"Can the boy take another long ride in the same day?" asked one of the *carboneros*, more kindly in manner than the rest. "Is he not exhausted? We have no shelter here, but you are welcome to roll up in your blankets by the fires, for the night wind from the Pampas is cool."

"No, it is moonlight. A thousand 'gracias'^[21] for your offer, but the lad is a good rider and we shall be home before midnight;" and bidding them *adios*, José and Manuel with Francisco, wondering at their behaviour, started towards the enclosure where the horses had been staked together with several other animals.

And then José did a thing that made Francisco's eyes fairly start from his head. He deliberately lifted up the stake to which a piebald mare, belonging to one of the thieves, was tethered, and throwing the knotted end of the long bridle across the pommel of his own saddle, rode out at the far end of the enclosure. [134]

As he galloped off, Manuel and Francisco followed and soon they were all abreast, their horses' swift feet brushing the evening dew from the pampas grass as they flew along the level prairie. They rode so fast that the little fellow could not venture a question, it required all of his wits to keep his seat.

They had gone thus for fifteen or twenty minutes when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs away off in the distance.

"Carramba! They are after us," cried Manuel. "Good! Now for the chase. Let your heart be glad, Señorito, they have taken the bait."

Still Francisco wondered, he could not yet see through their plans, but excitement made his blood run hot through his veins; and he held on to Barboza's neck and spurred her on to keep the pace. [135]

When a glimpse of water ahead of them, sparkling in the moonlight, told them they were near

the river Salinas, a small tributary to the great river they had just left, the men slackened their speed and Francisco was able to get a full breath.

He could hear the soft thud of the pursuing horses' feet on the pampas grass plainer and plainer, and when their own horses were within a few hundred feet of the stream he could hear the men's shouts.

"Are there more than two?" asked José.

"No, just the two thieves, themselves. Those *carboneros* would never give us pursuit. It is none of their affair and they seldom meddle. They probably loaned one a horse in place of this one you are leading."

[136]

"Or they helped themselves as we did," chuckled the Indian.

They were close to the ford now; in the bright moonlight the middle of the river gleamed and danced; but the two banks were in deep shadow because of the heavy clumps of willows and low growing trees.

The thieves were but a short distance behind them when their horses plunged into the water.

"Heaven be praised! So far—so good," whispered José to Francisco. "Now do just as I bid you; our time is come."

They crossed the ford and were leaving the water, enveloped in the dense shadows, when José dropped from his horse and threw the reins into Francisco's hand; Manuel did the same, as José's voice said in a whisper,

"Ride half a league and wait for us."

And now the boy saw their plan; he was to ride ahead, the hoof beats of the four horses indicating to the pursuers that they were all still fleeing, and José and Manuel in ambush would have it all their own way.

[137]

He spurred his horse to its highest speed; but it seemed to him that his heart-beats would drown the hoof beats, so vigorously was it pounding against his side. It was an anxious interval and to the fleeing boy seemed an eternity; but it was really but half a minute when he heard a sharp cry, and then—a shot. But he rode on, fearing to stop until the half league was covered. He knew the fight was over and that either José and Manuel were being carried back to the huts beside the big river, or that they would soon overtake him with their prisoners.

Soon a shout came to his ears. It was José's voice and his mind was relieved. He reined in the horses, which was an easy matter for they were panting, and waited beside a shrine, whose white cross stood like a ghost beside the trail; and soon he saw four figures toiling along, two in front and two behind. The two in the rear were José and Manuel, and they were holding their pistols close to the heads of the two in front, who walked with the shambling gait of men whose feet were hobbled, as they were, with stout *bola* thongs; their hands were tied behind them, and as they shuffled unevenly along they were bawling out curses, the like of which Francisco's ears had never heard.

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But the boy was so eager to hear about their capture that he paid no attention to the vile language, that at any other time would have made him cringe and tremble.

"Oh! José—Manuel—Do tell me all about it! How did you get them?"

"Well, you see, we grappled with them so unexpectedly that they had no time to defend themselves; thanks to the little frog on the end of the string," and José patted the boy on the shoulders encouragingly.

[139]

"One of them tried to shoot as he was regaining his feet, just after we dragged them from their horses, and Manuel has a scratch on his thigh, but otherwise, we are all well and doing finely. Manuel will ride on to the *casa* for help and you and I will remain here to keep these gentlemen company. They are great on talking, just listen to them now. Maybe they will tell us the price of horsehair per kilo—eh, gentlemen?" and the Indian grinned derisively at the cursing men.

"But José, Manuel is not fit for the saddle; let me go to the house. Please, I beg of you—"

"What! Alone—and at night. Why, the Colonel *would* say I had risked much should he see you ride in at midnight—alone."

"Uncle? Why uncle Juan is always pleased when I show any bravery; and besides there is nothing else to do. Manuel can't stay with just me here—he is suffering, and he can't ride—so it's the only thing to be done."

[140]

"Well, but you will have to ride pretty fast, Señorito, and tell them to send the *peons* immediately. Here, ride the piebald mare. It's yours anyhow, I dare say, or will be. It has been all day in the corral and is fresh, while Barboza is tired."

José changed the saddle, and Francisco was off towards the *casa*.

It was nearly two o'clock when Don Carlos awoke the Colonel, who had returned about midnight from his journey.

"Who calls, Colonel? It sounds like the Niño's voice."

They were out by the edge of the house corral, as Francisco rode up, and with almost the last breath he seemed to have left in his little body, he shouted,

"We've caught them! We've caught them! They are over by the 'Last Tribute' shrine near the Rio Salinas, and José and Manuel are waiting for help to bring them here; José could not bring them alone, and Manuel has a wound."

[141]

His uncle was lifting the tired Niño from the saddle, but he did not place him on the ground; he carried him close to his heart into the house and laid him on his soft bed. He left him saying he would go with Don Carlos to help rouse the *peons*, and Francisco heard him blow his nose vigorously as he crossed the *patio*, and knowing that his Uncle Juan had no cold, he accepted the tribute to his bravery with a proud smile, and was asleep before he knew it.

FOOTNOTE:

[21] Thanks.

CHAPTER X

[142]

THE CARNIVAL

FRANCISCO had been at home now for a week. He had returned to find Elena rosy and well and the house in a turmoil of preparation, for Guillerma was to be married. Her fiancé was a wealthy *estanciero* from the province of Mendoza, which lies almost at the foot of the Andes, and he had made a fortune from raising grapes for wine. His *estancia*, also, produced great quantities of figs, dates and sugar cane.

Guillerma was very happy, for although El Señor Conquero was older than she by fifteen years, theirs was a genuine love match. He had seen her at mass, one morning, and the following day, he had presented himself to her mother and her Uncle Juan with irreproachable credentials, and their engagement of six months was to culminate in the celebration of their marriage during the early part of March.

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It would be a very quiet wedding, for Señor Conquero was in mourning for his father, who had died over a year before; and the custom of mourning in Argentina demands two years of seclusion from all social events after the loss of a parent.

Her Uncle Juan had been most generous in his allowance for her trousseau, and she, with her mother, was busy all of each day visiting the dressmakers and shops.

Francisco, at first, was very much distressed because Guillerma was to live in Mendoza, as that fertile province is the seat of numerous earthquake disturbances. Scarcely a month passes that the inhabitants are not startled by one, and as a rule they sleep with open doors to insure a quick exit in case one occurs during the night.

But Guillerma assured him she did not fear them, as there had been no serious ones since 1861, and when she began telling him of the beautiful home she would have, surrounded by wide vineyards and orchards of olives and figs, where he could come to visit her, and with Elena play just as they pleased, he became better reconciled to her marriage.

[144]

He was very busy, himself, for Carnival, the great festival, came early this year, and never before had he had so much money to spend in its celebration.

He and José and Manuel had divided the reward money they had received for capturing the horsetail thieves, and Francisco felt very proud of his share of it. He and Elena had counted it over and over, and planned how each *peso* should be spent. Each one of the family, including the servant, should have a gift, and the balance would be their own to use as they chose for the celebration of the greatest *fiesta* of the whole year.

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As in many Roman Catholic countries, Carnival comes during the week preceding Lent; and although it is really a church festival, it is the least religious of any celebration, whether of church or state.

In Buenos Aires everything dates from it and everything stops for it; even business is suspended. It is a festival of merriment and revelry, and every house and every street is decorated before its arrival in flags, banners, streamers and lanterns. There are processions and continuous parades, with crowds of people in masks and dominoes, blowing horns, dancing and singing.

This year, Francisco and Elena were to be allowed to enter the *corso* or Carnival parade, and Uncle Juan had offered his motor car, which was to be decorated with garlands of paper flowers; José was to be their chaperon and Enrique would drive the car.

Elena and Francisco owned their little costumes, which they had used on previous occasions, but as they had their own money this year, they had decided to buy new ones to wear in the parade.

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Elena was to be dressed as a shepherdess, and Francisco as a Spanish king. Their mother had neglected Guillerma and her trousseau one entire day, in order to go with the children to help them select their costumes and masks; for no one enters into the streets in costume without a mask or domino.

The morning of the day on which the great parade was to take place the children spent, dressed in their old costumes, playing with the neighbours' children in the streets.

Although the law had forbidden the custom of throwing water at pedestrians, the number of people who were drenched by unexpected pails of water thrown from upper balconies was not lessened, and the children broke dozens of *pomos*, or rubber balls filled with perfumed water, on each other and strangers, as well, who chanced to pass.

After *siesta* that afternoon, Elena and Francisco began their preparations for the parade; and when the gayly decorated car drove up about six o'clock with a fiery red representation of His Majesty, the devil, on the front seat and a *pierrot* or harlequin with one half of his costume a vivid green and the other half yellow, Elena and Francisco were dressed and ready.



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"ELENA AND FRANCISCO WERE DRESSED AND READY."

The harlequin jumped out and bowed low to the ground, and Elena ran back into the house, for she was sure this comical looking fellow could never be José. But she was reassured when he lifted his mask, and soon the huge car was puffing along the street with the red driver in front and a dainty little shepherdess, a small king in velvet, gold lace and a crown, and a harlequin in green and yellow, all sitting on the back seat, throwing confetti and waving banners and shouting at the people gathered on the corners or on the balconies of the houses.

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Enrique took them up one street and down another, among the crowds of the other carriages and automobiles, all full of gayly dressed maskers bent on making as much noise as possible.

As it grew darker the streets began to blaze with arches of electric lights, many of the bulbs being swung inside Chinese lanterns. The crowd grew denser and many times they were caught in a mass of carriages, that could move neither one way nor the other. Mounted police were everywhere, trying to disperse the people where the crowds were too thick, and even they were treated to the contents of hundreds of *pomos* until their horsetail plumes and scarlet lined capes dripped perfume like water.

At eight Enrique stopped the car in a side street opening on to the great Plaza, where the procession was to form; his plan being to allow the children a view of part of the parade from this vantage point, and then to slip out the side street and enter the *corso* from the rear.

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It was nine o'clock when the bands of music took their places at the head of the procession and they were followed by large fancifully decorated wagons, filled with young ladies dressed to represent well known allegories.

Then came floats with papier-mache figures caricaturing political events in the history of the Republic. These were followed by companies of horsemen dressed in every sort of fantastic costume; victorias filled with merry maskers, floats with goddesses, and burlesqued well-known public characters. King Carnival was seated on a high throne, very handsomely draped, and drawn by sixteen pure white horses. When the children grew tired of looking, Enrique joined the procession itself, and the hearts of Elena and Francisco were beating high with excitement, for their ambition was realized—to be a *part* of the great Carnival *corso*.

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It was quite one o'clock before José could persuade them to leave it and be taken home; and it was many days before they ceased to talk of their wonderful experience.

But school would open immediately after Carnival and Francisco was anxious to reenter, as he was fond of books and made good progress in his studies.

His Aunt Sarita with her six daughters had returned from their summer outing and Uncle Juan was preparing for a trip abroad immediately after Guillerma's wedding should take place. Francisco saw him often, for they had grown very fond of each other during their summer together, and even Aunt Sarita began to love him more as she saw him oftener.

The first day of school had arrived, and Francisco, in his clean linen duster, had proudly led

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Elena to the school, for this was to be her first year. He was very proud of his pretty sister, who was shy, and held on tightly to her protector's sunburned hand.

He introduced her to her teacher, kissed her, and then hurried out into the large *patio* to greet his old school friends.

They were all there, like a flock of tan coloured butterflies in their linen coats, their hair brushed sleekly into place and their faces and hands smelling of recent cleansing with perfumed soaps.

Francisco was a favourite. Soon he was in the middle of a group of interested listeners, recounting to them his experiences on the *estancia*.

He was only human, and you must forgive him if he told of his adventure with the horsetail thieves. Even the little English boy grew excited and plied him with questions that seriously retarded Francisco in his account of their capture. The bell rang just as he finished, and they all fell into line in the *patio*, where the beautiful Argentine national hymn was sung, and the Argentine flag of blue and white was saluted by each pupil as they passed it on their way into the school-rooms.

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THE END.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

Varied use of accents mate/máte, estancia/estância, and Martin/Martín were retained.

Page xi, Table of Contents, "v" changed to "vii" to reflect actual first page of Preface.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANCISCO, OUR LITTLE ARGENTINE COUSIN ***

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