

**LADY FLORENCE DIXIE**



**ACROSS  
PATAGONIA**

**TRAVEL MEMOIR**

**Lady Florence Dixie**

# **Across Patagonia: Travel Memoir**

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[musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info](mailto:musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info)  
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# CHAPTER I.

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WHY PATAGONIA?—GOOD-BYE—THE START—DIRTY WEATHER—LISBON—THE ISLAND OF PALMA—PERNAMBUCO.

"Patagonia! who would ever think of going to such a place?" "Why, you will be eaten up by cannibals!" "What on earth makes you choose such an outlandish part of the world to go to?" "What can be the attraction?" "Why, it is thousands of miles away, and no one has ever been there before, except Captain Musters, and one or two other adventurous madmen!"

These, and similar questions and exclamations I heard from the lips of my friends and acquaintances, when I told them of my intended trip to Patagonia, the land of the Giants, the land of the fabled Golden City of Manoa. What was the attraction in going to an outlandish place so many miles away? The answer to the question was contained in its own words. Precisely because it was an outlandish place and so far away, I chose it. Palled for the moment with civilisation and its surroundings, I wanted to escape somewhere, where I might be as far removed from them as possible. Many of my readers have doubtless felt the dissatisfaction with oneself, and everybody else, that comes over one at times in the midst of the pleasures of life; when one wearies of the shallow artificiality of modern existence; when what was once excitement has become so no longer, and a longing grows up within one to taste a more vigorous emotion than that afforded by the monotonous round of society's so-called "pleasures."

Well, it was in this state of mind that I cast round for some country which should possess the qualities necessary to

satisfy my requirements, and finally I decided upon Patagonia as the most suitable. Without doubt there are wild countries more favoured by Nature in many ways. But nowhere else are you so completely alone. Nowhere else is there an area of 100,000 square miles which you may gallop over, and where, whilst enjoying a healthy, bracing climate, you are safe from the persecutions of fevers, friends, savage tribes, obnoxious animals, telegrams, letters, and every other nuisance you are elsewhere liable to be exposed to. To these attractions was added the thought, always alluring to an active mind, that there too I should be able to penetrate into vast wilds, virgin as yet to the foot of man. Scenes of infinite beauty and grandeur might be lying hidden in the silent solitude of the mountains which bound the barren plains of the Pampas, into whose mysterious recesses no one as yet had ever ventured. And I was to be the first to behold them!—an egotistical pleasure, it is true; but the idea had a great charm for me, as it has had for many others. Thus, under the combined influence of the above considerations, it was decided that Patagonia was to be the chosen field of my new experiences.

My party consisted of Lord Queensberry and Lord James Douglas, my two brothers, my husband, and myself, and a friend, Mr. J. Beerbohm, whose book, *Wanderings in Patagonia*, had just been published when we left England. We only took one servant with us, knowing that English servants inevitably prove a nuisance and hindrance in expeditions of the kind, when a great deal of "roughing it" has to be gone through, as they have an unpleasant knack of falling ill at inopportune moments.

Our outfit was soon completed, and shipped, together with our other luggage, on board the good ship "Britannia," which sailed from Liverpool on the 11th December 1878. We ourselves were going overland to join her at Bordeaux, as

we thereby had a day longer in England. Then came an unpleasant duty, taking leave of our friends. I hate saying good-bye. On the eve of a long journey one cannot help thinking of the uncertainty of everything in this world. The voice that bids you God-speed may, before you return, perhaps be silent for ever. The face of each friend who grasps your hand vividly recalls some scene of pleasant memory. Now it reminds you of some hot August day among the purple hills of Scotland, when a good bag, before an excellent lunch, had been followed by some more than usually exciting sport. The Highlands had never looked so beautiful, so merry a party had never clambered down the moors homeward, so successful a day had never been followed by so jolly an evening; and then, with a sigh, as your friend leaves you, you ask yourself, "Shall I ever climb the moors again?" Now it is to Leicestershire that your memory reverts. The merry blast of the huntsman's horn resounds, the view-halloa rings out cheerily on the bright crisp air of a fine hunting morning; the fox is "gone away," you have got a good start, and your friend has too. "Come on," he shouts, "let us see this run together!" Side by side you fly the first fence, take your horse in hand, and settle down to ride over the broad grass country. How distinctly you remember that run, how easily you recall each fence you flew together, each timber-rail you topped, and that untempting bottom you both got so luckily and safely over, and above all, the old farm-yard, where the gallant fox yielded up his life. Meanwhile, with a forced smile and a common-place remark, you part; and together, perhaps, you may never hear the huntsman's horn, never charge the ox-fence, never strive to be foremost in the chase again!

With these thoughts passing through my mind I began to wonder why I wanted to leave England. I remembered for the moment only the pleasant features of the past, and remembering them, forgot the feelings and circumstances

which had prompted me to embark on my present enterprise. The stern sex will possibly reprehend this exhibition of female fickleness of purpose. May I urge in its palliation that my weakness scarcely lasted longer than it has taken me to write this?

*14th December.*—On a cold, rainy afternoon we steamed down from Bordeaux in a little tender to join the "Britannia," which was anchored off Pauillac. We were soon alongside, and were welcomed on board by Captain Brough, under whose guidance we inspected, with a good deal of interest, the fine ship which was to be our home for some time. It would be superfluous for me to describe the excellent internal arrangements on board; few of my readers, I imagine, but are acquainted, either from experience or description, with the sumptuous and comfortable fittings-up of an Ocean passenger-steamer.

Soon the anchor was up—the propeller was in motion, and our nerves had hardly recovered from the shock inflicted by the report of the gun which fired the parting salute, ere Pauillac was scarcely distinguishable in the mist and rain astern. By the time dinner was over we were altogether out of sight of land, the rain was still falling heavily, and prognostications of dirty weather were being indulged in by the sailors. Giving a last look at the night, I turned into the captain's cosy deck-house, where I found my companions deep in the intricacies and wranglings of a rubber at whist, in which I, too, presently took a hand. As time went on, indications that it was getting rather rough were not wanting, in the swaying of the ship and the noise of the wind; but so comfortable were we in our little cabin, with the curtains drawn and lamps lit, that we were quite astonished when the captain paid us a visit at about nine o'clock, and told us that it was blowing a regular gale.



The words were hardly out of his mouth when the ship heeled suddenly over under a tremendous shock, which was followed by a mighty rush of water along the decks. We ran out, thinking we must have struck a rock. The night was as black as pitch, and the roaring of the wind, the shouts of the sailors, and the wash of the water along the decks, heightened with their deafening noise, the anxiety of the moment. Fortunately the shock we had experienced had no worse cause than an enormous sea, which had struck the ship forward, and swept right aft, smashing whatever opposed its destructive course, and bending thick iron stanchions as if they had been mere wires.

As soon as the hubbub attendant on this incident had somewhat subsided, thankful that it had been no worse, we returned to our game at whist, which occupied us till eleven o'clock, at which hour, "all lights out" being the order of the ship, we turned into our cabins to sleep the first night of many on board the "Britannia."

The next day was fine and sunny, and so the weather continued till we reached Lisbon, three days after leaving Bordeaux, when it grew rather rough again. At Lisbon we remained a day, taking in coal and fresh provisions—and then once more weighed anchor, not to drop it again till the shores of the New World should have been reached.

Just as it was beginning to dawn on the morning of the second day after leaving Lisbon, I was awakened by the speed of the vessel being reduced to half its usual ratio, for so accustomed does one become in a short time to the vibration of the screw, that any change from its ordinary force immediately disturbs one's sleep. Looking out of my cabin-window I could see that we were close to land, so, dressing hurriedly, I went on deck. We seemed to be but a stone's-throw from an island, whose bold rugged heights rose up darkly against the pale light that shone in the

morning sky. At one point of the shore the revolving light of a beacon flashed redly at intervals, growing fainter and fainter each time, as day slowly broke, and a golden haze began to flood the eastern horizon. In the darkness the island looked like a huge bare rock, but daylight showed it clothed in tolerably luxuriant vegetation. The presence of man was indicated by the little white houses, which could be distinguished nestling in crannies of its apparently steep green slopes. This was the island of Palma, one of the Canary group, and small though it looked, it numbers a good many inhabitants, and furnishes a fair contingent of emigrants to the River Plate, where "Canarios," as they are called, are favourably looked upon, being a skilful, industrious race.

The days slipped quickly by, and soon, as we neared the equator, it began to grow intensely hot. Christmas Day spent in the tropics did not rightly appear as such, though we kept it in the orthodox manner, the head-steward preparing quite a banquet, at which much merriment reigned, and many speeches were spoken.

We arrived at Pernambuco on the 28th December, but did not go on shore, as we were only stopping in the port a couple of hours, and were told, moreover, that there is nothing to be seen when one is there. We amused ourselves watching the arrival of some fresh Brazilian passengers, who were going with us to Rio. The extensiveness of their get-up might have vied with that of Solomon "in all his glory"—but tall hats, white trousers, and frock-coats seemed ludicrously out of place on board ship. Not less funny was the effusiveness of their affectionate leave-takings. At parting they clasped their friends to their breasts, interchanging kisses in the most pathetic manner, and evincing an absence of *mauvaise honte* in the presence of us

bystanders, which was at once edifying and refreshing.  
*Autres pays, autres mœurs.*

Some boatmen came alongside, bringing baskets of the celebrated Pernambuco white pineapples. We bought some of this fruit, which we thought delicious: it is the only tropical fruit which, in my opinion, can vie with European kinds. "Luscious tropical fruit" sounds very well, as does "the flashing Southern Cross;" but nearer acquaintance with both proves very disappointing, and dispels any of the illusions one may have acquired respecting them, from the over-enthusiastic descriptions of imaginative travellers. Very soon the captain came off shore again, with the mails, etc. A bell was rung, the fruit-vendors were bundled over the side of the ship, chattering and vociferating—last kisses were interchanged by the Brazilian passengers and their friends, up went the anchor, round went the screw, bang! went our parting salute, and, thank God, we are off again, with a slight breeze stealing coolingly over us, doubly grateful after the stifling heat which oppressed us while at anchor.

## CHAPTER II.

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BAHIA—RIO DE JANEIRO—RIO HARBOUR—THE TOWN—AN UPSET—TIJUCA—A TROPICAL NIGHT—MORE UPSETS—SAFETY AT LAST.

A day after leaving Pernambuco we dropped anchor again; this time in the magnificent "Bahia de todos los Santos," the ample dimensions of which make its name a not inapposite one. Bahia itself is built on a high ridge of land, which runs out into the sea, and forms a point at the entrance of the harbour. The town is half hidden among huge banana trees and cocoanut palms, and seen from on board looks picturesque enough. After breakfast our party went on shore, accompanied by the captain, and for an hour or so we walked about the streets and markets of the lower town, which stands at the base of the ridge above mentioned. We found it as dirty and ugly as could well be, and our sense of smell had no little violence done to it by the disagreeable odours which pervaded the air. There was a great deal of movement going on everywhere, and the streets swarmed with black slaves, male and female, carrying heavy loads of salt meat, sacks of rice, and other merchandise to and from the warehouses which lined the quays. They all seemed to be very happy, to judge by their incessant chatter and laughter, and not overworked either, I should think, for they were most of them plump enough, the women especially being many of them almost inconveniently fat. Finding little to detain us in the lower town, we had ourselves

transported to the upper in an hydraulic lift, which makes journeys up and down every five minutes.

Then we got into a mule-tramway, which bowled us along the narrow streets at a famous pace. Soon getting clear of the dirty town, we drove along a pleasant high-road, on either side of which stood pretty little villas, shaded by palms and banana-trees, and encircled by trim well-kept gardens, bright with a profusion of tropical flowers. Now and then we could catch a glimpse of the sea too, and as we went along we found the tram was taking us out to the extreme point of the ridge mentioned above. Before we reached it we had to change our conveyance once or twice, as occasionally we came to a descent so steep that carriages worked up and down by hydraulic machinery had been established to ply in conjunction with the ordinary mule-trams. At last we were set down close to the seashore, near a lighthouse which stands in a commanding position on the point. The view which was now before us was a splendid one; the immense bay lay at our feet, and beyond spread the ocean, dotted with the tiny white sails of numberless catamarans, as the queer native fishing-boats are called, which looked like white gulls resting on its blue waters. But the heat in the open was so overpowering that we soon had to take refuge in a little *café* close by, where we had some luncheon, after which we went back to Bahia the way we had come, by no means sorry to get on board the cool, clean ship again. Half an hour after our arrival the anchor was weighed, and we steamed off, *en route* for Rio de Janeiro.

New Year's Day, like Christmas Day, was passed at sea, and we celebrated it with much festivity. Altogether our life on board was a most agreeable one, thanks to the kindness and attentions of the captain and his officers, and the days flew by with surprising rapidity. Four days after leaving

Bahia we sighted land off Rio, at an early hour of the morning. Anxious to lose nothing of the scenery, I had risen at about four o'clock, and certainly I had no reason to repent of my eagerness. We had passed Cape Frio, and were steaming along a line of coast which runs from the cape up to the opening of the bay. Thick mists hung over the high peaks and hills, shrouding their outlines, and along the shore the surf broke with a sullen roar against the base of the cliffs which fell abruptly down to the sea. As yet all was grey and indistinct. But presently the sun, which for a long time had been struggling with the mists, shone victoriously forth; the fog disappeared as if by magic, disclosing, bathed in the glow of sunrise, a grand scene of palm-covered cliffs and mountains, which rose, range beyond range, as far as the eye could reach. In front of us lay Rio Harbour, with the huge Paõ de Agucar, or Sugar Loaf Mountain, standing like a gigantic sentry at its entrance. In shape it is exactly like the article of grocery from which it takes its name, and rises abruptly, a solid mass of smooth rock, to a height of 1270 feet. Its summit, long considered inaccessible, was reached by some English middies a few years ago. Much to the anger and disgust of the inhabitants of Rio, these adventurous youngsters planted the Union Jack on the highest point of the Loaf, and there it floated, no one daring to go up to take it down, till a patriotic breeze swept it away. Directly opposite is the Fort Santa Cruz, which, with its 120 guns, forms the principal defence of the harbour. Soon we were gliding past it, and threading our way through the numerous craft which studded the bay, we presently dropped anchor in front of Rio, and found ourselves at leisure to examine the harbour, one of the finest and largest in the world. Covering a space of sixteen miles in a north and south direction, it gradually widens from about three-quarters of a mile at its entrance to fifteen miles at its head. The town stands on the western side of the bay, at about two miles from its entrance. It is backed by a high range of mountains, and, as

seen from the bay, nestling amidst oceans of green, presents a most pleasing appearance. The harbour is dotted with little islands, and all along its shores are scattered villages, country seats, and plantations.

As soon as the captain had got through his duties we took our places in his boat, and started off for the shore. On landing at a slippery, dirty, stone causeway, we were surrounded by a crowd of negroes, who jabbered and grinned and gesticulated like so many monkeys. Making our way through their midst, we passed by the market-place, and then, threading a number of hot, dirty, little streets, we at last got into the main street of the town, which was rather broad, and shaded on either side by a row of trees.

The public buildings at Rio are all distinguished by their peculiar ugliness. They are mostly painted yellow, a hue which seems to prevail everywhere here, possibly in order to harmonise with the complexion of the inhabitants. The cathedral forms no exception to the general rule. We entered it for a moment, thinking that we might possibly see some good pictures from the time of the Portuguese dominion. But we found everything covered up in brown holland. Nossa Senhora da Francisca, or whatever virgin saint the church is dedicated to, was evidently in curl-papers, and we could see nothing, though we could smell a great deal more than was agreeable. Truly I did not envy the saints their odour of sanctity. To my mundane nostrils this same odour smacked strongly of garlic and other abominations. We soon got tired of wandering aimlessly about, and feeling little desire to stop in the town any longer, we hired a carriage and started off for a little place called Tijuca, which lies high up among the hills behind Rio.

Our coach was drawn by four fine mules, who galloped along the streets at a rattling and—inasmuch as the driver was evidently an unskilful one—an undesirable pace. We

remonstrated with him, but were told that it was the custom of the country to drive at that rate. So, in deference to the "custom of the country," on we went at full gallop, shaving lamp-posts, twisting round sharp corners, frightening foot-passengers, and narrowly missing upsetting, or being upset by, other vehicles which came in the way.

I was quite thankful when we at last got safely clear of the town. The road lay amongst the most beautiful scenery, and the heat, though considerable, was not oppressive enough to interfere with my enjoyment of it. After a couple of hours' driving we halted to give the mules a rest near a little brook, which came rippling out from the shady mass of vegetation which lined the road. I sat down under a banana tree, letting my eyes wander in lazy admiration over the scene at our feet. We had gradually got to a good height above Rio, and through a frame of leaves and flowers I could see the town, the blue bay studded with tiny green islands, and beyond, the rugged mountains, with a light mist hanging like a silver veil over their purple slopes.

When the mules were sufficiently rested we got into the carriage, and starting at a brisk trot, it was not long before we got to the summit of a hill, at the foot of which, in a little valley, lies Tijuca. Before reaching it a rather stiff incline had to be descended, and one of the wheelers, either blown or obstinate, refused to hold the carriage back. The driver insisted that the animal was only showing temper, and commenced to flog it. Foreseeing the result, we all got out of the carriage, and left the man to his own devices. He persisted in whipping the recalcitrant mule, and, as might have been expected, he presently started the other animals off at full gallop, leaving their comrade the option of following suit or falling. It chose the latter course, and after a good deal of slipping and sliding, went down with a tremendous crash. The other three, taking fright,



immediately bolted, and we soon lost sight of carriage and driver in a cloud of dust. We followed on down the hill as fast as we could, rather anxious for the safety of the driver. Here and there, as we hurried along, we came across a piece of broken harness, and presently, on turning a sharp corner, we suddenly came upon the overturned carriage, the mules struggling and kicking in a confused heap, and the driver, unhurt but frightened, sitting in the grass by the side of the road. Assistance having been procured from Tijuca, which was close at hand, the mules were freed, and the carriage raised off the dragged mule, which we expected to find killed. To our surprise, however, no sooner were its limbs at liberty than it sprang up and began to crop the grass in utter unconcern as to the numerous wounds all over its body. A horse in such a state would have been completely cowed, and would probably never have been of any use again.

Leaving the driver to make the best of his position, we walked down to the Hotel Whyte, which lies snugly ensconced among palms and orange-groves at Tijuca. The building, with its clean cool rooms, shaded by verandahs, looked particularly inviting after the establishments we had been in at Rio, and it was pleasant too, to be waited on by Englishmen—the proprietor and his staff being of that nationality. A little stream runs past the hotel, feeding a basin which has been hewn out of the rock, where visitors can refresh themselves with a plunge, a privilege of which the gentlemen of our party were not slow to profit.

After I had rested a little I strolled away among the woods, feasting my eyes on the beauty and novelty of the vegetation, and on the delightful glimpses of scenery I occasionally stumbled across, to attempt to describe which would only be doing them an injustice. But that even this paradise had its drawbacks I was not long in discovering. I

was about to throw myself on a soft green bank, fringed with gold and silver ferns and scarlet begonias, that stretched along a sparkling rivulet, when suddenly my little terrier darted at something that was lying on the bank, and pursued it for a second, till my call brought her back. The "something" was a snake of the Cross, whose bite is almost instantaneously fatal, and as I quickly retraced my steps to safer ground I thanked my stars that I had been spared a closer acquaintance with this deadly reptile. When I got back I had a swim in the rocky basin above mentioned, which refreshed me wonderfully. Soon afterwards we sat down to dinner, winding up the day by a cheery musical evening.

Before going to bed, enticed by the beauty of the night, I strolled for an hour or more among the woods at the back of the hotel, and gradually, attracted by the noise of falling waters, I made my way to a little cataract, which, coming from some rocky heights above, dashed foaming into a broad basin, and swirling and bubbling over a stony bed, disappeared below in the shadows of a lonely glen. The moon, which was now shining brightly, cast a pale gleam over its waters, and myriads of fireflies flashed around like showers of sparks. Not a sound was heard save the roar of the water, and hardly a breath of wind stirred the giant foliage of the sleeping forests. For a long time I sat giving myself up to the softening influences of my surroundings, and thinking, amidst the splendour of that warm tropical night, of the dear old country far away, now, no doubt, covered with ice and snow.

As we had to be on board the steamer by twelve o'clock the next morning, the carriages were ordered for eight o'clock, by which time we were up and had breakfasted. The captain, my husband, brother, and myself, took our seats in a carriage drawn by two mules, Queensberry and Mr. B.