

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

THE PURPLE LAND

THE ADVENTURES OF RICHARD LAMB

William Henry Hudson

The Purple Land: The Adventures of Richard Lamb

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PREFACE

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This work was first issued in 1885, by Messrs. Sampson Low, in two slim volumes, with the longer, and to most persons, enigmatical title of *The Purple Land That England Lost*. A purple land may be found in almost any region of the globe, and 'tis of our gains, not our losses, we keep count. A few notices of the book appeared in the papers, one or two of the more serious literary journals reviewing it (not favourably) under the heading of "Travels and Geography"; but the reading public cared not to buy, and it very shortly fell into oblivion. There it might have remained for a further period of nineteen years, or for ever, since the sleep of a book is apt to be of the unawakening kind, had not certain men of letters, who found it on a forgotten heap and liked it in spite of its faults, or because of them, concerned themselves to revive it.

We are often told that an author never wholly loses his affection for a first book, and the feeling has been likened (more than once) to that of a parent towards a first-born. I have not said it, but in consenting to this reprint I considered that a writer's early or unregarded work is apt to be raked up when he is not standing by to make remarks. He may be absent on a journey from which he is not expected to return. It accordingly seemed better that I should myself supervise a new edition, since this would enable me to remove a few of the numerous spots and

pimples which decorate the ingenious countenance of the work before handing it on to posterity.

Besides many small verbal corrections and changes, the deletion of some paragraphs and the insertion of a few new ones, I have omitted one entire chapter containing the Story of a Piebald Horse, recently reprinted in another book entitled *El Ombù*. I have also dropped the tedious introduction to the former edition, only preserving, as an appendix, the historical part, for the sake of such of my readers as may like to have a few facts about the land that England lost.

W. H. H.

September, 1904.

CHAPTER I

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Three chapters in the story of my life—three periods, distinct and well defined, yet consecutive—beginning when I had not completed twenty-five years and finishing before thirty, will probably prove the most eventful of all. To the very end they will come back oftenest to memory and seem more vivid than all the other years of existence—the four-and-twenty I had already lived, and the, say, forty or forty-five—I hope it may be fifty or even sixty—which are to follow. For what soul in this wonderful, various world would wish to depart before ninety! The dark as well as the light, its sweet and its bitter, make me love it.

Of the first of these three a word only need be written. This was the period of courtship and matrimony; and though the experience seemed to me then something altogether new and strange in the world, it must nevertheless have resembled that of other men, since all men marry. And the last period, which was the longest of the three, occupying fully three years, could not be told. It was all black disaster. Three years of enforced separation and the extremest suffering which the cruel law of the land allowed an enraged father to inflict on his child and the man who had ventured to wed her against his will. Even the wise may be driven mad by oppression, and I that was never wise, but lived in and was led by the passions and illusions and the unbounded self-confidence of youth, what must it have been for me when we were cruelly torn asunder; when I was cast

into prison to lie for long months in the company of felons, ever thinking of her who was also desolate and breaking her heart! But it is ended—the abhorrent restraint, the anxiety, the breedings over a thousand possible and impossible schemes of revenge. If it is any consolation to know that in breaking her heart he, at the same time, broke his own, and made haste to join her in that silent place, I have it. Ah no! it is no comfort to me, since I cannot but reflect that before he shattered my life I had shattered his by taking her from him, who was his idol. We are quits then, and I can even say, “Peace to his ashes!” But I could not say it then in my frenzy and grief, nor could it be said in that fatal country which I had inhabited from boyhood and had learned to love like my own, and had hoped never to leave. It was grown hateful to me, and, flying from it, I found myself once more in that Purple Land where we had formerly taken refuge together, and which now seemed to my distracted mind a place of pleasant and peaceful memories.

During the months of quietude after the storm, mostly spent in lonely rambles by the shore, these memories were more and more with me. Sometimes sitting on the summit of that great solitary hill, which gives the town its name, I would gaze by the hour on the wide prospect towards the interior, as if I could see, and never weary of seeing, all that lay beyond—plains and rivers and woods and hills, and cabins where I had rested, and many a kindly human face. Even the faces of those who had ill-treated or regarded me with evil eyes now appeared to have a friendly look. Most of all did I think of that dear river, the unforgettable Yí, the shaded white house at the end of the little town, and the

sad and beautiful image of one whom I, alas! had made unhappy.

So much was I occupied towards the end of that vacant period with these recollections that I remembered how, before quitting these shores, the thought had come to me that during some quiet interval in my life I would go over it all again, and write the history of my rambles for others to read in the future. But I did not attempt it then, nor until long years afterwards. For I had no sooner begun to play with the idea than something came to rouse me from the state I was in, during which I had been like one that has outlived his activities, and is no longer capable of a new emotion, but feeds wholly on the past. And this something new, affecting me so that I was all at once myself again, eager to be up and doing, was nothing more than a casual word from a distance, the cry of a lonely heart, which came by chance to my ear; and, hearing it, I was like one who, opening his eyes from a troubled doze, unexpectedly sees the morning star in its unearthly lustre above the wide, dark plain where night overtook him—the star of day and everlasting hope, and of passion and strife and toil and rest and happiness.

I need not linger on the events which took us to the Banda—our nocturnal flight from Paquíta's summer home on the pampas; the hiding and clandestine marriage in the capital and subsequent escape northwards into the province of Santa Fé; the seven to eight months of somewhat troubled happiness we had there; and, finally, the secret return to Buenos Ayres in search of a ship to take us out of the country. Troubled happiness! Ah, yes, and my greatest

trouble was when I looked on her, my partner for life, when she seemed loveliest, so small, so exquisite in her dark blue eyes that were like violets, and silky black hair and tender pink and olive complexion—so frail in appearance! And I had taken her—stolen her—from her natural protectors, from the home where she had been worshipped—I of an alien race and another religion, without means, and, because I had stolen her, an offender against the law. But of this no more. I begin my itinerary where, safe on our little ship, with the towers of Buenos Ayres fast fading away in the west, we began to feel free from apprehension and to give ourselves up to the contemplation of the delights before us. Winds and waves presently interfered with our raptures, Paquíta proving a very indifferent sailor, so that for some hours we had a very trying time of it. Next day a favourable north-west breeze sprang up to send us flying like a bird over those unlovely red billows, and in the evening we disembarked in Montevideo, the city of refuge. We proceeded to an hotel, where for several days we lived very happily, enchanted with each other's society; and when we strolled along the beach to watch the setting sun, kindling with mystic fire heaven, water, and the great hill that gives the city its name, and remembered that we were looking towards the shores of Buenos Ayres, it was pleasant to reflect that the widest river in the world rolled between us and those who probably felt offended at what we had done.

This charming state of things came to an end at length in a somewhat curious manner. One night, before we had been a month in the hotel, I was lying wide awake in bed. It was late; I had already heard the mournful, long-drawn voice of

the watchman under my window calling out, "Half-past one and cloudy."

Gil Blas relates in his biography that one night while lying awake he fell into practising a little introspection, an unusual thing for him to do, and the conclusion he came to was that he was not a very good young man. I was having a somewhat similar experience that night when in the midst of my unflattering thoughts about myself, a profound sigh from Paquíta made me aware that she too was lying wide awake and also, in all probability, chewing the cud of reflection. When I questioned her concerning that sigh, she endeavoured in vain to conceal from me that she was beginning to feel unhappy. What a rude shock the discovery gave me! And we so lately married! It is only just to Paquíta, however, to say that had I not married her she would have been still more unhappy. Only the poor child could not help thinking of father and mother; she yearned for reconciliation, and her present sorrow rose from her belief that they would never, never, never forgive her. I endeavoured, with all the eloquence I was capable of, to dispel these gloomy ideas, but she was firm in her conviction that precisely because they had loved her so much they would never pardon this first great offence. My poor darling might have been reading *Christabel*, I thought, when she said that it is toward those who have been most deeply loved the wounded heart cherishes the greatest bitterness. Then, by way of illustration, she told me of a quarrel between her mother and a till then dearly loved sister. It had happened many years ago, when she, Paquíta,

was a mere child; yet the sisters had never forgiven each other.

“And where,” I asked, “is this aunt of yours, of whom I have never heard you speak until this minute?”

“Oh,” answered Paquíta, with the greatest simplicity imaginable, “she left this country long, long ago, and you never heard of her because we were not even allowed to mention her name in the house. She went to live in Montevideo, and I believe she is there still, for several years ago I heard some person say that she had bought herself a house in that city.”

“Soul of my life,” said I, “you have never left Buenos Ayres in heart, even to keep your poor husband company! Yet I know, Paquíta, that corporeally you are here in Montevideo, conversing with me at this very moment.”

“True,” said Paquíta; “I had somehow forgotten that we were in Montevideo. My thoughts were wandering—perhaps it is sleepiness.”

“I swear to you, Paquíta,” I replied, “that you shall see this aunt of yours to-morrow before set of sun; and I am positive, sweetest, that she will be delighted to receive so near and lovely a relation. How glad she will be of an opportunity of relating that ancient quarrel with her sister and ventilating her mouldy grievances! I know these old dames—they are all alike.”

Paquíta did not like the idea at first, but when I assured her that we were getting to the end of our money, and that her aunt might be able to put me in the way of obtaining employment, she consented, like the dutiful little wife she was.

Next day I discovered her relation without very much trouble, Montevideo not being a large city. We found Doña Isidora—for that was the lady's name—living in a somewhat mean-looking house at the eastern extremity of the town, farthest away from the water. There was an air of poverty about the place, for the good dame, though well provided with means to live comfortably, made a pet of her gold. Nevertheless, she received us very kindly when we introduced ourselves and related our mournful and romantic story; a room was prepared for our immediate reception, and she even made me some vague promises of assistance. On a more intimate acquaintance with our hostess we found that I had not been very far out in guessing her character. For several days she could talk of nothing except her immemorial quarrel with her sister and her sister's husband, and we were bound to listen attentively and to sympathise with her, for that was the only return we could make for her hospitality. Paquíta had more than her share of it, but was made no wiser as to the cause of this feud of long standing; for, though Doña Isidora had evidently been nursing her wrath all those years to keep it warm, she could not, for the life of her, remember how the quarrel originated.

After breakfast each morning I would kiss her and hand her over to the tender mercies of her Isidora, then go forth on my fruitless perambulations about the town. At first I only acted the intelligent foreigner, going about staring at the public buildings, and collecting curios—strangely marked pebbles, and a few military brass buttons, long shed by the garments they once made brave; rusty, misshapen bullets, mementoes of the immortal nine or ten years' siege

which had won for Montevideo the mournful appellation of modern Troy. When I had fully examined from the outside the scene of my future triumphs—for I had now resolved to settle down and make my fortune in Montevideo—I began seriously to look out for employment. I visited in turn every large mercantile establishment in the place, and, in fact, every house where I thought there might be a chance of lighting on something to do. It was necessary to make a beginning, and I would not have turned up my nose at anything, however small, I was so heartily sick of being poor, idle, and dependent. Nothing could I find. In one house I was told that the city had not yet recovered from the effects of the late revolution, and that business was, in consequence, in a complete state of paralysis; in another that the city was on the eve of a revolution, and that business was, in consequence, in a complete state of paralysis. And everywhere it was the same story—the political state of the country made it impossible for me to win an honest dollar.

Feeling very much dispirited, and with the soles nearly worn off my boots, I sat down on a bench beside the sea, or river—for some call it one thing, some the other, and the muddied hue and freshness of the water, and the uncertain words of geographers, leave one in doubt as to whether Montevideo is situated on the shores of the Atlantic, or only near the Atlantic and on the shores of a river one hundred and fifty miles wide at its mouth. I did not trouble my head about it; I had other things that concerned me more nearly to think of. I had a quarrel with this Oriental nation, and that was more to me than the greenness or the saltness of the

vast estuary that washes the dirty feet of its queen—for this modern Troy, this city of battle, murder, and sudden death, also calls itself Queen of the Plata. That it was a very just quarrel on my part I felt well assured. Now, to be even with every human being who despitefully uses me has ever been a principle of action with me. Nor let it be said that it is an unchristian principle; for when I have been smitten on the right or left cheek (the pain is just the same in either case), before I am prepared to deliver the return blow so long a time has often elapsed that all wrathful or revengeful thoughts are over. I strike in such a case more for the public good than for my own satisfaction, and am therefore right in calling my motive a principle of action, not an impulse. It is a very valuable one too, infinitely more effective than the fantastical code of the duellist, which favours the person who inflicts the injury, affording him facilities for murdering or maiming the person injured. It is a weapon invented for us by Nature before Colonel Colt ever lived, and it has this advantage, that one is permitted to wear it in the most law-abiding communities as well as amongst miners and backwoodsmen. If inoffensive people were ever to cast it aside, then wicked men would have everything their own way and make life intolerable. Fortunately the evil-doers always have the fear of this intangible six-shooter before them; a wholesome feeling, which restrains them more than reasonableness or the law courts, and to which we owe it that the meek are permitted to inherit the earth. But now this quarrel was with a whole nation, though certainly not with a very great one, since the population of the Banda Oriental numbers only about a quarter of a million. Yet in

this sparsely settled country, with its bountiful soil and genial climate, there was apparently no place for me, a muscular and fairly intelligent young man, who only asked to be allowed to work to live! But how was I to make them smart for this injustice? I could not take the scorpion they gave me when I asked them for an egg, and make it sting every individual composing the nation. I was powerless, utterly powerless, to punish them, and therefore the only thing that remained for me to do was to curse them.

Looking around me, my eyes rested on the famous hill across the bay, and I all at once resolved to go up to its summit, and, looking down on the Banda Oriental, pronounce my imprecation in the most solemn and impressive manner.

The expedition to the *cerro*, as it is called, proved agreeable enough. Notwithstanding the excessive heats we were just then having, many wild flowers were blooming on its slopes, which made it a perfect garden. When I reached the old ruined fort which crowns the summit, I got upon a wall and rested for half an hour, fanned by a fresh breeze from the river and greatly enjoying the prospect before me. I had not left out of sight the serious object of my visit to that commanding spot, and only wished that the malediction I was about to utter could be rolled down in the shape of a stupendous rock, loosed from its hold, which would go bounding down the mountain, and, leaping clear over the bay, crash through the iniquitous city beyond, filling it with ruin and amazement.

“Whichever way I turn,” I said, “I see before me one of the fairest habitations God has made for man: great plains

smiling with everlasting spring; ancient woods; swift, beautiful rivers; ranges of blue hills stretching away to the dim horizon. And beyond those fair slopes, how many leagues of pleasant wilderness are sleeping in the sunshine, where the wild flowers waste their sweetness and no plough turns the fruitful soil, where deer and ostrich roam fearless of the hunter, while over all bends a blue sky without a cloud to stain its exquisite beauty? And the people dwelling in yon city—the key to a continent—they are the possessors of it all. It is theirs, since the world, out of which the old spirit is fast dying, has suffered them to keep it. What have they done with this their heritage? What are they doing even now? They are sitting dejected in their houses, or standing in their doorways with folded arms and anxious, expectant faces. For a change is coming: they are on the eve of a tempest. Not an atmospheric change; no blighting simoom will sweep over their fields, nor will any volcanic eruption darken their crystal heavens. The earthquakes that shake the Andean cities to their foundations they have never known and can never know. The expected change and tempest is a political one. The plot is ripe, the daggers sharpened, the contingent of assassins hired, the throne of human skulls, styled in their ghastly facetiousness a Presidential Chair, is about to be assaulted. It is long, weeks or even months, perhaps, since the last wave, crested with bloody froth, rolled its desolating flood over the country; it is high time, therefore, for all men to prepare themselves for the shock of the succeeding wave. And we consider it right to root up thorns and thistles, to drain malarious marshes, to extirpate rats and vipers; but it would be immoral, I

suppose, to stamp out these people because their vicious natures are disguised in human shape; this people that in crimes have surpassed all others, ancient or modern, until because of them the name of a whole continent has grown to be a byword of scorn and reproach throughout the earth, and to stink in the nostrils of all men!

“I swear that I, too, will become a conspirator if I remain long on this soil. Oh, for a thousand young men of Devon and Somerset here with me, every one of them with a brain on fire with thoughts like mine! What a glorious deed would be done for humanity! What a mighty cheer we would raise for the glory of the old England that is passing away! Blood would flow in yon streets as it never flowed before, or, I should say, as it only flowed in them once, and that was when they were swept clean by British bayonets. And afterwards there would be peace, and the grass would be greener and the flowers brighter for that crimson shower.

“Is it not then bitter as wormwood and gall to think that over these domes and towers beneath my feet, no longer than half a century ago, fluttered the holy cross of St. George! For never was there a holier crusade undertaken, never a nobler conquest planned, than that which had for its object the wresting this fair country from unworthy hands, to make it for all time part of the mighty English kingdom. What would it have been now—this bright, winterless land, and this city commanding the entrance to the greatest river in the world? And to think that it was won for England, not treacherously, or bought with gold, but in the old Saxon fashion with hard blows, and climbing over heaps of slain defenders; and after it was thus won, to think that it was

lost—will it be believed?—not fighting, but yielded up without a stroke by craven wretches unworthy of the name of Britons! Here, sitting alone on this mountain, my face burns like fire when I think of it—this glorious opportunity lost for ever! 'We offer you your laws, your religion, and property under the protection of the British Government,' loftily proclaimed the invaders—Generals Beresford, Achmuty, Whitelocke, and their companions; and presently, after suffering one reverse, they (or one of them) lost heart and exchanged the country they had drenched in blood, and had conquered, for a couple of thousand British soldiers made prisoners in Buenos Ayres across the water; then, getting into their ships once more, they sailed away from the Plata for ever! This transaction, which must have made the bones of our Viking ancestors rattle with indignation in their graves, was forgotten later on when we seized the rich Falklands. A splendid conquest and a glorious compensation for our loss! When yon queen city was in our grasp, and the regeneration, possibly even the ultimate possession, of this green world before us, our hearts failed us and the prize dropped from our trembling hands. We left the sunny mainland to capture the desolate haunt of seals and penguins; and now let all those who in this quarter of the globe aspire to live under that 'British Protection' of which Achmuty preached so loudly at the gates of yon capital, transport themselves to those lonely antarctic islands to listen to the thunder of the waves on the grey shores and shiver in the bleak winds that blow from the frozen south!"

After delivering this comminatory address I felt greatly relieved, and went home in a cheerful frame of mind to

supper, which consisted that evening of mutton scrag, boiled with pumpkin, sweet potatoes, and milky maize—not at all a bad dish for a hungry man.

CHAPTER II

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Several days passed, and my second pair of boots had been twice resoled before Doña Isidora's schemes for advancing my fortunes began to take form. Perhaps she was beginning to think us a burden on her somewhat niggardly establishment; anyway, hearing that my preference was for a country life, she gave me a letter containing half a dozen lines of commendation addressed to the Mayordomo of a distant cattle-breeding establishment, asking him to serve the writer by giving her *nephew*—as she called me—employment of some kind on the *estancia*. Probably she knew that this letter would really lead to nothing, and gave it merely to get me away into the interior of the country, so as to keep Paquíta for an indefinite time to herself, for she had become extremely attached to her beautiful niece. The *estancia* was on the borders of the Paysandù department, and not less than two hundred miles from Montevideo. It was a long journey, and I was advised not to attempt it without a *tropilla*, or troop of horses. But when a native tells you that you cannot travel two hundred miles without a dozen horses, he only means that you cannot do the distance in two days; for it is hard for him to believe that one may be satisfied with less than one hundred miles a day. I travelled on one horse, and it therefore took me several days to accomplish my journey. Before I reached my destination, called Estancia de la Virgin de los Desamparados, I met with some adventures worth relating,

and began to feel as much at home with the *Orientáles* as I had long been with the *Argentinos*.

Fortunately, after I left the town, a west wind continued blowing all day, bringing with it many light, flying clouds to mitigate the sun, so that I was able to cover a good number of leagues before the evening. I took the road northwards through Camelones department, and was well on into the Florida department when I put up for the night at the solitary mud *rancho* of an old herdsman, who lived with his wife and children in a very primitive fashion. When I rode up to the house, several huge dogs rushed out to attack me: one seized my horse by the tail, dragging the poor beast about this way and that, so that he staggered and could scarcely keep his legs; another caught the bridle-reins in his mouth; while a third fixed his fangs in the heel of my boot. After eyeing me for some moments, the grizzled old herdsman, who wore a knife a yard long at his waist, advanced to the rescue. He shouted at the dogs, and finding that they would not obey, sprang forward and with a few dexterous blows, dealt with his heavy whip-handle, sent them away howling with rage and pain. Then he welcomed me with great courtesy, and very soon, when my horse had been unsaddled and turned loose to feed, we were sitting together enjoying the cool evening air and imbibing the bitter and refreshing *maté* his wife served to us. While we conversed I noticed numberless fireflies flitting about; I had never seen them so numerous before, and they made a very lovely show. Presently one of the children, a bright little fellow of seven or eight, came running to us with one of the sparkling insects in his hand, and cried:

“Look, *tatita*, I have caught a *linterna*. See how bright it is!”

“The Saints forgive you, my child,” said the father. “Go, little son, and put it back on the grass, for if you should hurt it, the spirits would be angry with you, for they go about by night, and love the *linterna* that keeps them company.”

What a pretty superstition, I thought; and what a mild, merciful heart this old Oriental herdsman must possess to show so much tenderness towards one of God's tiny creatures. I congratulated myself on my good fortune in having fallen in with such a person in this lonely place.

The dogs, after their rude behaviour to me and the sharp punishment they had suffered in consequence, had returned, and were now gathered around us, lying on the ground. Here I noticed, not for the first time, that the dogs belonging to these lonely places are not nearly so fond of being noticed and caressed as are those of more populous and civilised districts. On attempting to stroke one of these surly brutes on the head, he displayed his teeth and growled savagely at me. Yet this animal, though so truculent in temper, and asking for no kindness from his master, is just as faithful to man as his better-mannered brother in the more settled country. I spoke on that subject to my gentle herdsman.

“What you say is true,” he replied. “I remember once during the siege of Montevideo, when I was with a small detachment sent to watch the movements of General Rivera's army, we one day overtook a man on a tired horse. Our officer, suspecting him to be a spy, ordered him to be killed, and, after cutting his throat, we left his body lying on

the open ground at a distance of about two hundred and fifty yards from a small stream of water. A dog was with him, and when we rode off we called it to follow us, but it would not stir from its dead master's side.

“Three days later we returned to the same spot, to find the corpse lying just where we had left it. The foxes and birds had not touched it, for the dog was still there to defend it. Many vultures were near, waiting for a chance to begin their feast. We alighted to refresh ourselves at the stream, then stood there for half an hour watching the dog. He seemed to be half-famished with thirst, and came towards the stream to drink; but before he got half-way to it the vultures, by twos and threes, began to advance, when back he flew and chased them away, barking. After resting a few minutes beside the corpse, he came again towards the stream, till, seeing the hungry birds advance once more, he again flew back at them, barking furiously and foaming at the mouth. This we saw repeated many times, and at last, when we left, we tried once more to entice the dog to follow us, but he would not. Two days after that we had occasion to pass by that spot again, and there we saw the dog lying dead beside his dead master.”

“Good God,” I exclaimed, “how horrible must have been the feelings you and your companions experienced at such a sight!”

“No, señor, not at all,” replied the old man. “Why, señor, I myself put the knife into that man's throat. For if a man did not grow accustomed to shed blood in this world, his life would be a burden to him.”

What an inhuman old murderer! I thought. Then I asked him whether he had ever in his life felt remorse for shedding blood.

“Yes,” he answered; “when I was a very young man, and had never before dipped weapon in human blood; that was when the siege began. I was sent with half a dozen men in pursuit of a clever spy, who had passed the lines with letters from the besieged. We came to a house where, our officer had been informed, he had been lying concealed. The master of the house was a young man about twenty-two years old. He would confess nothing. Finding him so stubborn, our officer became enraged, and bade him step out, and then ordered us to lance him. We galloped forty yards off, then wheeled back. He stood silent, his arms folded on his breast, a smile on his lips. Without a cry, without a groan, with that smile still on his lips, he fell pierced through with our lances. For days afterwards his face was ever present to me. I could not eat, for my food choked me. When I raised a jug of water to my lips I could, señor, distinctly see his eyes looking at me from the water. When I lay down to sleep, his face was again before me, always with that smile that seemed to mock me on the lips. I could not understand it. They told me it was remorse, and that it would soon leave me, for there is no ill that time will not cure. They spoke truth, and when that feeling left me I was able to do all things.”

The old man's story so sickened me that I had little appetite for supper, and passed a bad night thinking, waking or sleeping, of that young man in this obscure corner of the world who folded his arms and smiled on his slayers

when they were slaying him. Very early next morning I bade my host good-bye, thanking him for his hospitality, and devoutly hoping that I should never look upon his abhorred face again.

I made little progress that day, the weather proving hot, and my horse lazier than ever. After riding about five leagues, I rested for a couple of hours, then proceeded again at a gentle trot till about the middle of the afternoon, when I dismounted at a wayside *pulpería* or store and public-house all in one, where several natives were sipping rum and conversing. Standing before them was a brisk-looking old man—old, I say, because he had a dark, dry skin, though his hair and moustache were black as jet—who paused in the discourse he appeared to be delivering, to salute me; then, after bestowing a searching glance on me out of his dark, hawk-like eyes, he resumed his talk. After calling for rum and water, to be in the fashion, I sat down on a bench, and, lighting a cigarette, prepared to listen. He was dressed in shabby gaucho habiliments—cotton shirt, short jacket, wide cotton drawers, and *chiripa*, a shawl-like garment fastened at the waist with a sash, and reaching down half-way between the knees and ankles. In place of a hat he wore a cotton handkerchief tied carelessly about his head; his left foot was bare, while the right one was cased in a colt's-skin stocking, called *bota-de-potro*, and on this distinguished foot was buckled a huge iron spur, with spikes two inches long. One spur of the kind would be quite sufficient, I should imagine, to get out of a horse all the energy of which he was capable. When I entered he was holding forth on the pretty well-worn theme of fate *versus*

free will; his arguments were not, however, the usual dry philosophical ones, but took the form of illustration, chiefly personal reminiscences and strange incidents in the lives of people he had known, while so vivid and minute were his descriptions—sparkling with passion, satire, humour, pathos, and so dramatic his action, while wonderful story followed story—that I was fairly astonished, and pronounced this old *pulpería* orator a born genius.

His argument over, he fixed his keen eyes on me and said:

“My friend, I perceive you are a traveller from Montevideo: may I ask what news there is from that city?”

“What news do you expect to hear?” said I; then it came into my thought that it was scarcely proper to confine myself to more commonplace phrases in replying to this curious old Oriental bird, with such ragged plumage, but whose native woodnotes wild had such a charm in them. “It is only the old story over again!” I continued. “They say there will be a revolution some day. Some of the people have already retired into their houses, after chalking in very big letters on their front doors, 'Please come into this house and cut the owner's throat for him, so that he may rest at peace, and have no fear of what may happen.' Others have climbed on to their roofs, and occupy themselves there looking at the moon through spy-glasses, thinking that the conspirators are concealed in that luminary, and only waiting for a cloud to obscure it, in order to descend upon the city unobserved.”

“Hear!” cried the old man, rapping delighted applause on the counter with his empty glass.

“What do you drink, friend?” I asked, thinking his keen appreciation of my grotesque speech deserved a treat, and wishing to draw him out a little more.

“Rum, friend, thank you. They say it warms you in winter, and cools you in summer—what can you have better?”

“Tell me,” said I, when his glass had been refilled by the storekeeper, “what I shall say when I return to Montevideo, and am asked what news there is in the country?”

The old fellow's eyes twinkled, while the other men ceased talking, and looked at him as if anticipating something good in reply to my question.

“Say to them,” he answered, “that you met an old man—a horse tamer named Lucero—and that he told you this fable for you to repeat to the townspeople: Once there was a great tree named Montevideo growing in this country, and in its branches lived a colony of monkeys. One day one of the monkeys came down from the tree and ran full of excitement across the plain, now scrambling along like a man on all fours, then erect like a dog running on its hind legs, while its tail, with nothing to catch hold of, wriggled about like a snake when its head is under foot. He came to a place where a number of oxen were grazing, and some horses, ostriches, deer, goats, and pigs. 'Friends all,' cried the monkey, grinning like a skull, and with staring eyes round as dollars, 'great news! great news! I come to tell you that there will shortly be a revolution.' 'Where?' said an ox. 'In the tree—where else?' said the monkey. 'That does not concern us,' said the ox. 'Oh, yes, it does!' cried the monkey, 'for it will presently spread about the country and you will all have your throats cut.' Then the ox replied, 'Go

back, monkey, and do not molest us with your news, lest we get angry and go to besiege you in your tree, as we have often had to do since the creation of the world; and then, if you and the other monkeys come down to us, we will toss you on our horns.'"

This apologue sounded very well, so admirably did the old man picture to us with voice and gesture the chattering excitement of the monkey and the majestic *aplomb* of the ox.

"Señor," he continued, after the laugh had subsided, "I do not wish any of my friends and neighbours here present to fly to the conclusion that I have spoken anything offensive. Had I seen in you a Montevidean I should not have spoken of monkeys. But, señor, though you speak as we do, there is yet in the pepper and salt on your tongue a certain foreign flavour."

"You are right," I said; "I am a foreigner."

"A foreigner in some things, friend, for you were doubtless born under other skies; but in that chief quality, which we think was given by the Creator to us and not to the people of other lands—the ability to be one in heart with the men you meet, whether they are clothed in velvet or in sheep-skins—in that you are one of us, a pure Oriental."

I smiled at his subtle flattery; possibly it was only meant in payment of the rum I had treated him to, but it pleased me none the less, and to his other mental traits I was now inclined to add a marvellous skill in reading character.

After a while he invited me to spend the night under his roof. "Your horse is fat and lazy," he said with truth, "and, unless you are a relation of the owl family, you cannot go

much farther before to-morrow. My house is a humble one, but the mutton is juicy, the fire warm, and the water cool there, the same as in another place.”

I readily accepted his invitation, wishing to see as much as I could of so original a character, and before starting I purchased a bottle of rum, which made his eyes sparkle so that I thought his name—Lucero—rather an appropriate one. His *rancho* was about two miles from the store, and our ride thither was about as strange a gallop as I ever took. Lucero was a *domador*, or horse-tamer, and the beast he rode was quite unbroken and vicious as it could be. Between horse and man a fierce struggle for mastery raged the whole time, the horse rearing, plunging, buck-jumping, and putting into practice every conceivable trick to rid itself of its burden; while Lucero plied whip and spur with tremendous energy and poured out torrents of strange adjectives. At one moment he would come into violent collision with my old sober beast, at another there would be fifty yards of ground between us; still Lucero would not stop talking, for he had begun a very interesting story at starting, and he stuck to his narrative through everything, resuming the thread after each tempest of execration vented on his horse, and raising his voice almost to a shout when we were far apart. The old fellow's staying powers were really extraordinary, and when we arrived at the house he jumped airily to the ground, and seemed fresh and calm as possible.

In the kitchen were several people sipping *maté*, Lucero's children and grandchildren, also his wife, a grey old dame with dim-looking eyes. But then my host was old in years himself, only, like Ulysses, he still possessed the