

**BENJAMIN
BOURNE**

THE CAPTIVE
IN PATAGONIA

Benjamin Bourne
The Captive in Patagonia

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24179516

The Captive in Patagonia:

Содержание

PREFACE	4
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	29
CHAPTER III	46
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	58

The Captive in Patagonia

PREFACE

Book-making is so much of a trade, that it may be thought quite unnecessary to be at the trouble to assign reasons for embarking in it; but, as it is not my own vocation, it will be allowed me to say, that the deep interest which many, not only of my personal friends, but others whom I never saw, have taken in my fortunes, and the desires expressed, both verbally and by letter, to know more of my adventures than was communicated through the newspapers, overcame the reluctance I felt to undertake such a task. The interest of personal adventure, however, great as it might be in immediate view of the events while they were fresh, would not alone have been presumed upon as a sufficient attraction for this volume. But the strangeness of the country observed, and the deficiency of exact information concerning its people, it was thought, would make welcome any contribution, however slight, to the knowledge of this section of our world and race. After the contradictory statements of voyagers as to the “giants” of South America, there may be some curiosity to hear the testimony of one who has “seen the elephant” under circumstances that enabled him to measure its

proboscis.

My story is a plain one, – a simple record of facts, but not, I would hope, tedious. It offers no feats of literary agility for the critic's inspection, but a recital of human experiences and observations, sufficiently aside from the beaten track of life to have attracted a degree of attention which flatters me with the belief that they will repay a nearer and more minute survey.

CHAPTER I

For California – Pernambuco – Straits of Magellan – Trading with Patagonians – Their treachery – Four men made prisoners by them – Three escape; the author detained, with promises of release on paying ransom – Indian village – The chief and his household – Eating, sleeping, and adventure in a Patagonian wigwam – Find myself booked for an indefinite residence in Patagonia, and some natural reflections thereupon.

Among the early subjects of the “gold fever” that became epidemic in the autumn and winter of 1848-9, a company of twenty-five men left the port of New Bedford in the schooner John Allyne, A. Brownell, master, and B. F. Bourne, mate, for California. The vessel had been selected for her good sailing qualities, light draught of water, and general fitness for river navigation. In the haste and excitement of the time, California-bound craft carried out some rather motley companies; but we considered ourselves fortunate in the character of the men associated in this enterprise, and were organized on such principles of equality as seemed to promise entire harmony and good fellowship. Of course we had high and golden hopes, and our great object was to reach the new Ophir in the easiest and most expeditious manner. On account of the delays and dangers incident to the doubling of Cape Horn, it was determined to

attempt the passage of the Straits of Magellan.

We left port on the 13th of February, and for many days our time passed pleasantly, but rather monotonously, with nothing greatly to exhilarate or to depress our spirits. It was discovered, at length, that our vessel needed some running rigging. The more impatient were for going on, and making such headway as we could without it; but a majority of the company decided to run for the nearest convenient port, and replenish. We accordingly ran for Pernambuco, and anchored in the outer harbor on the 25th of March. The beauty and security of this harbor are remarkable. It is defended from the sea by a nearly perpendicular reef, extending three-fourths of the way across its entrance, with an opening of ample width for the passage of vessels to a safe anchorage. Being but eight degrees south of the equator, the town lies continually under the burning rays of a tropical sun. Its appearance is like that of most Spanish and Portuguese cities, abounding in high and massive buildings, with more of the castle than of the counting-house or dwelling in their outward expression, built upon narrow, irregular streets, that are constantly alive with men and beasts of divers colors and forms. Men from the country, driving their mustangs, mules and asses, laden with produce; wealthy and noble citizens borne by servants in palanquins; women bearing water in buckets, tubs and urns, which they balance on their heads without the aid of their hands, and walk off under as erect as so many midshipmen; – all the sights and sounds have a pleasant strangeness, that made our

visits on shore highly agreeable. The churches, which are quite numerous, have nothing admirable or attractive outside, but the richness of their interior decoration testifies to the prevailing orthodoxy and fervor of devotion to the Church of Rome. The church is, indeed, the grand receptacle of the wealth of the country. Every *bueno católico* of them, rich, or poor, will sooner stint himself and his family in their daily comforts, or even necessities of life, than omit his due contribution to mother church.

Our stay at Pernambuco was short, which must excuse a more particular description of its notabilities. Having obtained the articles we needed, we stood out to sea. Nothing occurred on our passage to the straits worthy of particular record. We spoke one or two vessels, and spent some time “gaming” with them, — the nautical phrase for visiting. On the 30th of April we made Cape Virgin, and stood in for the Straits of Magellan. In company with us, and bound for the same golden country, by the same course as ourselves, were bark Hebe, of Baltimore, and schooner J. B. Gager, of New York. We were becalmed off the mouth of the straits for several hours, and Captain Brownell visited the Hebe. He returned just before night. A fair wind setting in from the eastward, we all stood in, the J. B. Gager, as being best acquainted with the navigation, taking the lead. The three vessels anchored about midnight, within twelve miles of the first narrows.

The next morning, it being calm, some of our men went on

shore in the small boat, for a gunning excursion. They returned early in the forenoon, with a large number of sea-fowl. Not long after, Captain Brownell announced his intention to go ashore, and commenced making preparations. He soon changed his mind, however, and asked me to go, in his stead, to procure some fresh provisions, if they were to be had. Knowing, from the reports of whalers and others, something of the savage character of the natives, I felt reluctant to venture; but afterwards, to oblige the captain, I complied.

Taking our guns, a bag of bread, and some tobacco, four of us started for the shore. As we approached the beach, a crowd of black-looking giants came to the water's edge to gaze at us. We did not particularly fancy their looks, and lay on our oars for a considerable length of time. A recollection of the many ugly stories current about the Patagonians, their barbarous and cruel character, did not greatly fortify our confidence, or make us especially anxious for a personal acquaintance with them. We accordingly lay off in our boat, and, hailing them in Spanish, asked them if they had eggs, fowls, and beef. They replied, in broken Spanish, that they had plenty at their houses. I told them to produce their stores, and they should have plenty of bread in exchange. We parleyed with them for some time, till our boat at length touched the shore. I stood in the boat's stern, gun in hand, endeavoring to keep the natives from stealing, and warned the men not to leave the boat. They jumped ashore, promising not to stray from the spot. The Indians offered some skins for

sale, which I paid for in bread. While my attention was diverted from them by this barter, the Indians were coaxing my men away. I looked about, and found only one man near me. He was despatched in pursuit of the others, and directed to bring them without delay. The tide at this point rises and falls forty-two feet. It was now ebb tide, the boat was fast grounding, and, it being large and heavily loaded, I was unable to get it off. The old chief and several other Indians crowded into it, and once in could not be got out. Persuasion was useless, and they were too many to be driven. In short, I was in their hands, and became immediately conscious of the difficulty and peril of my situation; – my men gone, I knew not where, the boat fast aground and crowded with the savages, while nearly a thousand of the tribe congregated upon the beach. What was before me, at the worst, I could only conjecture from report; and nothing but evil was reported of the creatures that surrounded me. What could I do? A question easier asked than answered.

After a long time, or what seemed such under circumstances that made minutes seem ages, one of my men came down, and asked permission to go to the Indian village, “a little way back from the shore,” as they had been promised meat, eggs, and fowls. I ordered him to come immediately back to the boat. He persisted in urging his request, but it was so dangerously absurd that I absolutely refused. He then said he would inform his comrades of my refusal, and return immediately to the boat; but, for some cause, they seemed in no hurry to obey orders. Weary

of waiting for them, and not without apprehension, I asked an Indian for the use of his horse, and rode with all speed after the fugitives. In the hurry of pursuit I inadvertently passed them, and tried to turn back my steed; but his inclinations were decidedly against a retreat. While our opposing impulses kept us stationary for a moment, I descried my men approaching on horseback, behind the Indians. When they came up I urged them to return to the boat. They persisted in going with the savages. I remonstrated with them on the impropriety and danger of their course, but in vain. Their mouths watered for the meat and eggs they were told of. Their cunning guides had completely allayed suspicion, and even laid to sleep their common prudence. The Indians kept on their course, – the men followed, and I felt at my wits' end. I rode from one to another, talking as industriously and as urgently as I could. At last I gave them peremptory orders to return. The Indians had plainly lied to us. Their village, they said, was only a little way off; and yet we were three-fourths of a mile from the boat, and not a house was yet in sight. Determined to go back, if I had to go alone, I turned my horse's head.

At this point the mask was thrown off. The Indians seized my bridle, and arrested my progress. We all dismounted, with a view to retreat on foot, but before I could reach the man nearest to me the Indians had robbed him of his gun. With a mutual agreement to stand by each other in case of pursuit, we hastened our retrograde march, but had made no great distance when we saw the Indians coming after us. They rode in advance of us,

halted in our front, and manœuvred to cut off our retreat; but by various zigzag movements, or boldly turning their horses' heads, we made considerable progress. Our foes, however, knew what they were at; it was only a question of time with them. A sudden and decided movement indicated a crisis. I drew my pistols (a pair of single-barrelled ones), but before I had time to cock one I was jumped upon from behind by some half-dozen of these monsters. One of them grasping a pistol by the barrel, I pointed it to his head and pulled the trigger. It missed fire, and I thank God that it did! Its discharge would have certainly killed him, and would as certainly have been revenged upon my life, probably upon the lives of my comrades. This is easily felt and said now; but at the moment, when excited by the struggle for liberty, and, as I feared, for life, with such dreaded enemies and at such formidable odds, it was quite another matter.

The old chief now came up, took me firmly by the wrist, and said, "Usted no bono! usted habla varmano por me casa, mucho, mala hombre currarhae! mucho montaro hombre!" – by which specimen of choice Spanish he desired to inform me that we promised to go to their houses, and now would not go; that we were bad men and liars. His peculiarly thick and guttural pronunciation did not make the dialect more intelligible; but I was in a situation where criticism would have been rather out of place, and my ears were quickened by the revelations made to sight. I therefore promptly replied, that if he would restrain his men from violence, we would go where he pleased. They,

meanwhile, grasped their knives, and looked as if they wanted to use them on our persons; but the chief told them, No, *not then*; he would get rum and tobacco for us first, and kill us afterwards. Whilst I was thus engaged, my nearest companion discovered his gun in the hands of an Indian who stood not far from where I was struggling. Rushing suddenly upon him, he succeeded in recovering his piece, – more by tact than force, for his antagonist, like all the Patagonians, was very large and muscular. Then nimbly jumping aside, he told me to look out for myself. That was rather more than I felt able to do just at the moment. One Indian seized me by my arms and legs, some of them grasped my body, and others were busy investigating the contents of my pockets, and appropriating the same to their own use. And if he supposed himself able to show as much independence as he recommended me to, he was evidently mistaken. He had not elevated his gun to his face when the Indians were upon him, and wrenched it from his grasp. The old chief, all this time, held me tightly by the wrist, menacing his followers with his half-drawn cutlass, while I endeavored to bid for life and liberty. I told him he should have plenty of rum, tobacco, bread, flour, brass and beads, if he would carry us to the boat. At length he beat off my plunderers, and seemed on the point of yielding to my terms. He mounted his horse, and ordered me to get up behind him. I obeyed with alacrity, and fancied myself in a fair way to get out of trouble.

But, whatever may have been the chief's original intention, I

had not gone far before his policy was diverted. One of the most audacious of the troop rode up, and insisted that I should not be allowed to return. I was the captain of the ship, he affirmed, and if I were restored they would get none of the promised rum and tobacco. The old savage seemed struck by this new suggestion, and halted. We then dismounted, and he led the horse up the hill, ordering me to follow. I was next directed to sit on the ground and wait further action. There I sat, looking alternately, with longing eyes, at the boat, and at our vessel riding at anchor in plain view. My three companions were soon brought to the spot, and dismounted. And now began a more earnest negotiation. We offered large ransom, and after some higgling they agreed that three of our number might be released, but one must remain as a hostage; and I was pointed out as the one. I endeavored to have one of the others stay, and one actually agreed to; but his heart soon failed him, and I could see that he was using all his powers of persuasion to provide for himself. I assured him that I would use every effort in his behalf, if he would consent to remain for the present; but he evidently thought of the maxim, "A bird in the hand," &c., and was bent on making sure of his own safety first of all. Poor fellow! I cannot blame him for loving his own life, though, at the moment, it did seem rather hard that, after getting into the scrape by their own headstrong folly, against my entreaties and peremptory commands, they should extricate themselves from it at my expense, and leave me to bear the hardest of it! Very likely I might have done the same, if our

cases had been reversed. And, even if one of them had offered to remain, it is very doubtful whether the substitution would have been permitted. The Indians too evidently regarded me as the chief prize, and were bent on retaining me as such. They insisted that I must stay while the other three should go for ransom, and I had nothing to do but to submit.

Three Indians each took a man with him on a horse, and started for the boat. I watched them as they went, with feelings that I will not attempt to describe. It seemed but too probable we should never meet again. A sense of desolation came over me, at the thought of being left alone in the power of these savages, of whose treachery and cunning I had already had such ample experience, and of whose cruelty I had heard so much. I felt that I was beyond the aid, if not cut off from the sympathy, of my associates. The falseness of the Indians to all their engagements, as I afterwards learned, was signally displayed towards my more fortunate comrades. They evidently had no intention of releasing any of us. Before reaching the boat, they halted, and refused to go any further, or allow our men to leave them. The prisoners, however, struggled desperately, and at length got clear of their captors. One rushed up to his neck in water, the others sprang into the boat, pushed off, and rescued him as he was struggling with the waves. They reached the schooner, told their tale, and represented my desperate situation. All hands commenced breaking up cargo, to get at the rum and tobacco for my ransom. Two boats were forthwith manned, provided with the required

articles, and with plenty of arms and ammunition, and started for the shore. They got to the land a little before dark, and pulled into a cove, or slight indentation of the beach.

On catching sight of them, I desired the Indians to conduct me to the shore, and receive the ransom. But this they declined. They ordered me to the summit of an eminence near by, there to beckon the men to come ashore. An old skin was given me to wave as a signal. Perceiving that I was to be used as a decoy to lure the others into their treacherous snare, and secure them all as prisoners, I protested against this new breach of faith, and assured them that our men would not leave their boat, but that, if they wanted any rum and tobacco, they must take me to the shore. To this, after a long palaver, and with visible reluctance, they assented. The old chief ordered me to mount his horse, – this time reversing our relative positions; he made me sit on the rude apology for a saddle and guide the horse, while he took his seat behind, clasping both arms tightly around my body, and spurring his old nag forward. Thus mounted, and wondering what would be the next trick of the savages, I was conveyed to the shore, near the spot where the boats lay off on their oars. Driving as near them as possible, I hailed the men, – told them by no means to fire on the Indians, but to give them all they had promised. They asked what they should do with the articles. I turned to the chief, told him what the boats had brought, and once more asked if it was a satisfactory ransom. He said, Yes; if those articles were laid down, I should be released. But he was plainly resolved to

have his pay in advance; he distrusted us too much to let me go first; and I need not say that my confidence in him was far from implicit. But, "Nothing venture, nothing have," – I directed the men to put the things ashore, which they did. The Indians greedily picked them up, and I claimed my release. The old rascal said, "he had not got *plenty* of rum yet, he must have a barrel." I insisted and struggled, but to no purpose. He kept a tight hold of my body, and when I begged that at least he would not squeeze me quite so painfully, he only redoubled his clasp. He obviously suspected, and I more than suspected, that it would not require a very great relaxation of his embrace to prompt a pretty decided movement on my part, for the effectual resisting of which the vicinity of the water was not altogether favorable. He now began spurring his old horse from the scene of action; I drew upon the bridle with my whole available force and weight; but the disparity between human strength and horse power, stimulated to its utmost by the spur, was too great. I begged the men in the boats to come again the next morning, and on no account to leave me, which they solemnly promised.

I was now hurried back into the country five or six miles, and at last reached an Indian village, and was set down by the old chief at his wigwam. He gave me in charge to one of his squaws, who ordered me into the hut and bade me sit down on the ground. While sitting there, and casting an inquisitive glance around the rude habitation, my attention was suddenly attracted to what appeared to be several pairs of eyes in a dark corner,

shining with a strange brilliancy. I speculated silently on the sight, much doubting whether they belonged to human beings or to wild beasts; but, on carefully reconnoitring, I discovered that they belonged to three huge women. Further investigations disclosed a number of dark-skinned boys and girls, of divers ages and sizes, playing and capering about the premises, in a state of perfect nudity. It took a considerable time to make out these, or any other objects, distinctly, owing to the darkness of the hut. Presently the chief, the patriarch of the tribe, entered his habitation, and began a conversation, in his peculiar dialect, with his wives. He spoke in a low, guttural tone, in words the purport of which I could not gather. I was in no mood for conversation, but would have been much gratified by learning his version of the day's "stroke of business."

And now a few dry sticks and a bunch of dry grass were brought, mine host drew from a convenient repository a brass tinder-box, with a stone and a piece of steel, and soon produced a blaze that brilliantly illuminated the scene. By its light I was enabled to survey the first specimen of Patagonian architecture that had blessed my vision. It was constructed in a *pointed* style, though not very aspiring, consisting of a row of stakes about eight feet high, each terminating at top in a crotch, or fork, with a pole laid across them; two parallel rows of stakes on either side, about two feet high, with similar terminations, and a similar horizontal fixture; and a covering composed of skins of the guanaco, sewed together with the sinews of the ostrich,

the only thread used by the people. This covering is drawn over the frame-work, and fastened by stakes driven through it into the ground. For purposes of ventilation some interstices are left, but these again are half closed by skins attached to the outside; so that the air from without, and the smoke from within (in default of a chimney), must insinuate themselves through these apertures in great moderation. In truth, my first survey was rather hurried; the first cheerful gleam had scarcely set my eyes on the look-out when I was fain to shut them against an intolerable smoke. In no long time I felt as bacon, if conscious, might be supposed to feel in the process of curing. No lapse of time was sufficient to reconcile my eyes, nostrils and lungs, to the nuisance; often have I been more than half strangled by it, and compelled to lie with my face to the ground, as the only endurable position. Talk that is “worse than a smoky house” must be something out of date, or Shakspeare’s imagination never comprehended anything so detestable as a Patagonian hut. The chief and his numerous household, however, seemed to enjoy immense satisfaction; and jabbered and grunted, and played their antics, and exchanged grimaces, as complacently as if they breathed a highly exhilarating atmosphere.

My meditations and observations were shortly interrupted by preparations for a meal. The chief’s better half – or rather fifth part, for he had four wives – superintended the culinary operations, which were as rude and simple as the hut where they were carried on. And now my fancy began to conjure up visions

of the beef, fowls and eggs, the promise of which had lured my men from the boat, – had proved stronger than the suggestions of prudence, and had made me a prisoner. But these dainties, if they existed anywhere within the chief's jurisdiction, were just at present reserved. The old hag threw down from the top of one of the stakes that supported the tent the quarter of some animal; whether dog, guanaco, or whatever, was past imagining. She slashed right and left, with might and main, an old copper knife, till it was divided into several pieces. Then taking a number of crotched sticks, about two feet long, and sharpened at all their points, she inserted the forked ends into pieces of the meat, and drove the opposite points into the ground near the fire; which, though sufficient to smoke and comfortably *warm* the mess, was too feeble to roast it. At all events, time was too precious, or their unsophisticated appetites were too craving, to wait for such an operation; and the raw morsels were quickly snatched from the smoke, torn into bits by her dirty hands, and thrown upon the ground before us. The Indians seized them with avidity, and tossed a bit to me; but what could I do with it? I should have had no appetite for the dinner of an alderman at such a time and place; but as for tasting meat that came in such a questionable shape, there was no bringing my teeth or resolution to it. While eyeing it with ill-suppressed disgust, I observed the savages, like a horde of half-starved dogs, devouring their portions with the greatest relish; seizing the fragments with their fine white teeth, at the same time clenching them with their hands, and giving

every sign of enjoyment *except* what one is accustomed to see in human beings. The old chief remarked the slight I was putting upon his hospitality, and broke in upon me with a fierce *Por que usted, no munge usted, usted carna? Esta carna mucho bueno hombre por munge, se hombre, munge!* “Why don’t you eat your meat? This meat very good to eat, – very good to eat. Eat, man! eat!” I may here observe that my knowledge of Spanish, like the chief’s, was colloquial; picked up here and there in voyages to South American ports, which may account for my orthography being so plainly determined by the ear rather than by any rules of Castilian grammar. Seeing him so much excited, and not knowing what deeds might follow his words if I refused, I thought it expedient to *try* to “eat what was set before me, asking no questions;” thinking, moreover, that if there were any evil spirit in it that the fire had failed to expel, it could not possibly have resisted the smoke. So, being sorely divided between aversion to the “strange flesh” and fear of showing it, I forced a morsel into my mouth. Its taste was by no means as offensive as its appearance had been unpromising, and I managed to save appearances with less disgust than I had feared. This was my first meal with the savages, and a sample of many others; though better viands afterwards varied their monotony, now and then.

The eating being over, a large horn, that had once adorned the head of a Spanish bullock, was dipped into a leathern bucket and passed from one to another. Between the bucket and the

horn, the fluid had gained a flavor not found by Adam in his first brewing, and, indeed, not far from nauseating. However, it seemed expedient to “conquer my prejudices” so far as to drink with the other guests, and the ceremonies of dinner were over; for which, “with all other mercies,” I felt thankful, and turned to my corner near the expiring fire, to chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, in which the latter ingredient decidedly predominated. The strange and sudden desolateness of my condition, the doubtful chances of escape, the possible sufferings before me, the uncertainty that rested on the designs of my savage captors, all rushed upon my mind, and suggested to my heated imagination a host of terrors.

These painful thoughts were interrupted by an order to prepare for the night’s repose. An old skin, about two and a half feet square, was thrown upon the cold ground in the back part of our rookery, and assigned for my couch; I took possession accordingly, and the whole family bestowed themselves in a row near me. The stifling atmosphere was soon vocal with their snoring. My brain was too busy for sleep. Feverish fancies kept me wakeful. I revolved a variety of plans for escape. Could I steal out of the hut unperceived? Could I find my way to the shore? I doubted the first, and more than doubted the second; and even if so far successful, there was no boat to take me from the accursed land. And how could I conceal myself from the Indians till a boat should arrive? They would miss me; and, long before any possible communication with my vessel, would be hunting me down with

horses and dogs. Not a wood or thicket had met my eye on the dreary waste I traversed the day before. I tried to devise some other plan, but none offered itself. It was this or nothing, – and this was next to nothing. Grown desperate, at last, I determined to make an effort.

After lying some time, listening to the heavy breathing of the sleepers, and satisfying myself that none of the company were awake, I raised myself as noiselessly as possible, and stole towards the front of the wigwam. Casting a furtive glance backward, I could see that the old chief was restless; either he had feigned sleep, or some evil spirit had waked him just at the wrong time. To go immediately back would too plainly betray my purpose; so I walked very calmly and deliberately into the open air, and stood as if star-gazing; the old fellow, as I plainly perceived, all the time watching me from the lodge. In a short time I walked quietly back to my dark retreat, and found him where I had left him, lying very coseyly, as if nothing had happened to disturb his slumbers. Once more stretching myself on my uneasy couch, I lay two hours or more, still revolving the same unsolved problem in my mind. At length, all appearing to be sound asleep, I decided to venture a second attempt; and, in the event of failure, to make the best of it for the present. Stealthily as possible I crawled from among them, slid out of doors, and crouched upon the grass. Could I be mistaken? No – those infernal eyes were fastened on me as before! There was no eluding their vigilance. At this moment a howling as of a

hundred wolves was heard approaching, and about that number of dogs came rushing, pell-mell, towards me. I scampered for the wigwam as fast as my feet could carry me, and in my flight stumbled over a stick nearly eight feet long. I seized the weapon thus kindly lent me, and, swinging it furiously about me, gave all intruders that came within my reach a sufficient touch of its quality. Thus defending myself from the brutes, I backed towards the lodge, glad to shelter myself among its detested inmates. The cunning old Parosilver, as before, had bestowed himself on the ground among his squaws and dirty children, and was, apparently, fast asleep.

This was more than I could compass. Vexation at my fruitless attempts to escape, – dread, inspired by the relentless vigilance and quiet assurance of the chief, – tormenting apprehensions as to the issue of any effort on the morrow to effect my ransom, – all kept my brain upon the rack, and effectually drove sleep from my eyes, till near daylight, when I fell into a disturbed slumber. In my dreams I was at once transported from the savage hut, on board my vessel. Methought she was driving before the wind, all sails set, at full speed, upon a dangerous reef. All on board seemed insensible of the danger; I alone perceived it, but a nightmare spell was on me, and my lips refused to speak, my limbs to move. Rooted to my place on the deck, I stood in dumb agony, while our vessel rushed upon her fate. There came a sudden shock, – our bark had struck, and her total destruction was inevitable. Some of the men were dashed violently upon the deck, others

precipitated into the boiling surf, where they clung desperately to spars, and fragments of the wreck. While the confusion was wildest, and the dream of effort for escape was subsiding into the calmness of despair, I suddenly awoke, and for some time was unable to comprehend where I was, or how I came there. If I were indeed shipwrecked, I was also, like Jonah, vomited upon dry land. I drew my hand across my eyes to assure myself that vision was unobstructed, cast my eyes right and left; – the lodge, the ashes of the last night’s fire, the chief and his motley family, the door through which the “lubber fiend” had followed me with his restless eyes, and into which the fierce dogs had driven me, recalled my distracted senses, and restored consciousness of a reality which, at the moment, I would almost have exchanged for the wildest terrors of my dream.

With the light calmer thoughts succeeded, and I once more addressed myself to the task of effecting my escape. The first thing was to get the chief with me to the shore, in readiness to meet a boat, and to renew negotiations for my liberty. Observing that he was awake, I began to promise him an abundant supply of the articles most tempting to his fancy, on condition of my release. He carelessly replied that he would go with me to the beach by and by. I tried to urge his departure, being anxious to go without the rabble at his heels the day before, but for whose violence he would now hardly be master of me; but there was no hurrying his movements. He took down his little cutlass, drew it from its brazen scabbard, and commenced sharpening

it with a rusty file, trying its edge with his fingers as the work went on, and casting side glances at me the while. Whether this ceremony was the preface to some act of violence he meditated, or a scene for effect, to fill me with a wholesome dread of his power, I could not guess; but, determined to show no foolish fears, I thought it best to put a bold face upon the matter, and make an equally striking demonstration of courage and presence of mind, qualities which savages generally appreciate. I therefore approached him, tried the edge with my own fingers, praised the beauty of the instrument, and interested myself in the process of sharpening it. Following up my assault on his vanity, I extolled him as one of the best of men, and assured him that when we got to the shore I would amply reward him for his kindness to me; taking occasion, however, to throw in a hint on the vast importance of starting early. This I enforced by the suggestion that, when he got his good things, the fewer there were present, the fewer claimants there would be to divide the spoils.

After much coaxing, he started after his old horse; I mounted behind him, and we moved slowly off. When we arrived at the shore it was blowing a perfect gale. A boat could not live in the billows. All three vessels had dragged their anchors, and lay at some distance from their anchorage of yesterday. Bark Hebe appeared to be dragging towards the Orange Bank, a dangerous shoal. I afterwards learned that the Hebe, after getting into water as shoal as would barely float her, slipped her cables, put up a little sail, and finally succeeded in weathering the shoal and

getting safely out to sea. The J. B. Gager was dragging in the same direction. My own vessel was holding on better than the others, and I hoped she would ride out the gale in safety.

I made my captors understand the reason why no boat had come, as promised; with which they appeared to be satisfied, and we returned as we came. By means of their broken Spanish, which they had picked up from sailors, and in visits to the Chilian or other Spanish American settlements, and by signs, amounting at times pretty nearly to a pantomime, I found myself able to understand inquiries or commands, and to make known my wishes.

Early on the following morning we again visited the shore, and I looked eagerly toward the anchorage, where all my hopes of deliverance centred. Not a vessel was in sight! Whether they had foundered, or were driven upon the shoal and wrecked, or had dragged out to sea in a disabled condition, – or whether my shipmates, the gale having subsided, had deliberately proceeded on their voyage, and left me a prey to cruel savages and all the ills of this inhospitable shore, – I was unable to conjecture. I only knew that they were gone, and that I was left alone to the tender mercies of the Patagonians. No present means of escape appeared. The future, wisely hidden from my view, suggested none to my imagination. I told my captors the worst; that the high winds had probably sunk the ships, and all that were in them. At this intelligence they seemed delighted, and laughed immoderately, as if such a calamity were a consolation for the

loss of their expected ransom. Their cruel glee could add nothing to the weight of my desolation. My past life was sealed up as if by an entrance on a new state of being. I looked round on a bleak and cheerless region, and forward on a life as barren of human joy, made up of every species of suffering, – hunger, cold, fatigue, insult, torture, – liable to be cut short at any moment by the caprice of my tormentors, and so wretched that death itself, with all the enormities of cannibalism, lost its terrors by comparison. Life, for any good or great purposes to be achieved, was over. And then my thoughts turned to far different scenes, – to happy faces, and pleasant voices, and familiar sights; – to hearts that beat with no dread of this day's calamities, felt no consciousness kindred to my despair, but would, in due time, be rudely awakened from their security. God help me, for I am helpless now!

CHAPTER II

A proposal to go to Port Famine negatived – “Holland” – Discovery of vessels in the straits – Double disappointment – A crisis – Survey of Patagonia – Scanty vegetation – Animals and birds – Climate – The people – Their habits and character – Domestic relations – Weapons – Government – Superstition – Cannibalism – Their reputation abroad.

Returning to the encampment, it remained to devise some new way of escape. Some four or five days' ride to the westward would bring us to Port Famine, on the straits, a penal settlement of Chili, and the only settlement in the vicinity by which I could hope to reënter the civilized world. A journey thither was suggested to the Indians, as the most likely way of turning my captivity to profitable account; but they refused with a promptness and decisiveness which was rather unaccountable, till I afterwards learned that they had lately visited that part of the country on a horse-stealing expedition, in which their success had been too good to make them desirous of showing their faces there at present. Money, guns, pistols, cutlasses, brass, beads, and everything else that could be thought of to tempt their cupidity, were offered. I was not disposed to be niggard of promises; but in vain. To Port Famine they were determined *not* to go; but old Parosilver assured me, by way of compensation,

that he would take me to “Holland,” which was a “much better place.” Whereabout on terra firma this South American Holland was situated, – if, indeed, there was any such place, and the chief was not indulging in a little extra lying, – was past all conjecture. I inquired the distance. He could not tell exactly. Was it inhabited by Americans or English? There were “twenty or thirty white men there, and plenty of rum and tobacco.” They promised to start with me towards Holland the next day. In what direction? They pointed towards the Atlantic. Well, I cared little where it was, or who lived there, provided only they were not Patagonians, and I could once get free of these rascals. But on the following morning the migration was postponed, in consequence of unexpected tidings.

One of the tribe, who had been down to the shore, reported that my vessel had come back. This welcome, though rather improbable information, started me, with about a dozen of them, on the track of his story. On gaining a view of the straits, a vessel was plainly in sight, but it was a strange sail. Yet, if I could succeed in boarding her, my purposes would be answered. She came into the bight of the bay, and anchored about fifteen miles below us. I endeavored to make my smutty companions comprehend that as the tide was then running out they would not make the shore till it turned, which would not be till night. They waited till near night, when hunger and thirst wore out their patience, and they ordered me off with them. Against this untimely mandate I warmly remonstrated, and after some dispute

it was arranged that the chief should stay with me for the night. The rest returned to their encampment, and we made a good fire, which was kept up till nearly morning. Old Parosilver lay down under the lee of a clump of bushes, while I was busy in active exercise to keep warm, and replenishing the fire with dry bushes. At dusk I had observed the vessel hoisting sail, and beating up the bay. On this I began brandishing firebrands to attract notice, and walked to and fro on the beach for hours. The craft gradually approached, till her white canvas became distinguishable through the surrounding gloom. Fresh fuel was heaped on the fire, a bright blaze ascended; I took my station directly in front of it, holding out my coat, and frequently turning round, that my form and features might be more distinctly revealed. And now a thrill of joy electrified me, as I saw a light set on deck, which appeared to be stationary. There could be no doubt that the vessel had come to anchor directly opposite to us. Though hungry and weary with long watching, I hurried about, and gathered sticks and leaves in abundance to kindle a still brighter beacon-fire, in whose light and warmth anxiety began to expand into hope. At dawn of day, as the horizon lighted up, I could distinguish the vessel lying about a mile off, quiet as a sea-fowl on the calm surface. Presently there was a movement on deck, the anchor was hove up, the fore and main sails were hoisted, and the object on which my hopes and ardent prayers had centred through the cold night receded from view through the straits, bound, doubtless, for California. I watched the fast-vanishing sail with tearful eyes;

and the old chief, who had been on the look-out, started for his horse, that had been hampered and turned out to crop among the scanty vegetation.

Before I had time to recover from the first revulsion of disappointment and grief, *another* vessel, a topsail schooner, came in by Point Dungeness. "Cheer up," I said to myself; "the sun will be shining, the darkness have given place to the clear day, before this vessel can be up and opposite to us." Confident of being noticed, I began active preparations for the approaching visitor. No rod of sufficient length was to be found; but, after some search, a number of short crooked sticks were collected. To lash them together, I tore up my drawers, which I could ill afford, and appropriated my shoe-strings. My flannel shirt was hoisted as a flag; and having replenished the fire, I paced the beach with colors flying, but, as the vessel approached, with increasing faintness of heart; for the wind gradually shifted, so that she could only take advantage of it by heading towards Terra del Fuego. At last she came opposite, but so near the further shore that the chances of success diminished every moment. Dark objects moved on the deck, – fancy painted them as men; – would they not discover me through their glasses, and be drawn by my signal of distress? No; onward she floated away, – the narrows were soon passed, and my vision of deliverance was dissipated.

With this final death-blow to all present hopes of relief, I turned away in despair. Exhausted by hunger, cold and fatigue, and worn out by hours of anxiety, I fell helpless upon the ground,

and wept like a child. For the first time I felt *utterly* forsaken, and repined at my lot as one of unmitigated evil. Effort seemed useless; I had neither resolution nor strength to make further exertion. There was nothing for me but listless endurance. I even reproached myself that I had not cast myself into the sea, and staked my life on the chance of swimming to the schooner. There was no possibility of doing this; but failure would have been *only* death, and what was life worth to me here? This tempest of self-reproach soon spent itself. My temperament is too buoyant to be long depressed, and calm and stout thoughts took the place of despairing weakness. It was unmanly, something whispered within me, thus to give way before difficulties. It would be time enough to do this when all possible effort had failed. The weak and imbecile might take refuge in despair, but the strength of youth should serve me better. I called to mind examples of courage in greater emergencies, when obstacles that seemed insurmountable had been conquered by fortitude and perseverance. "Heaven helps those who help themselves." The more I reflected on the matter, the stronger grew the impulses of faith and courage, by whose force it seemed possible to win a triumph against the greatest odds. Before rising from the earth, my resolution was fully taken to throw discouragement to the winds; by the help of God to meet whatever impended with the courage of a man; to bear my calamities with patient endurance; and to give up hope and energy only when nothing was left to be attempted, or the power to do and suffer was exhausted.

I rose a new man, – my strength invigorated, my soul fortified by a strong purpose. Though the cold night air had thoroughly chilled my frame, it now felt a warmth kindled by the fires within, and an unaccustomed flush suffused my countenance. The resolve fixed in this memorable crisis of my captivity, though severely tested, was never wholly overborne. Henceforth, the events and scenes through which I passed were viewed with a calmness that had been before unattainable, and which is now scarcely credible, on recollection. So true is it that our strength is unknown to ourselves till it is thoroughly tested.

The hope of immediate release, however, was at an end; my savage captors, it seemed, must be looked upon as for an indefinite period my masters and companions; and I had nothing at present to do but to divert myself by a study of their manners and habits; to consult my safety by a close study of their character, and of the ways and means by which so to adapt my deportment to it as to win their confidence, to disarm hostility, and to seize opportunities.

Patagonia, as it offered itself to my observation, more than answered the descriptions of geographers, – bleak, barren, desolate, beyond description or conception, – only to be appreciated by being seen. Viewed from the Straits of Magellan, it rises in gentle undulations or terraces. Far as the eye can reach, in a westerly direction, it assumes a more broken and hilly appearance, and long ranges of mountains, extending from north to south, divide the eastern from the western shore. The soil is of

a light, sandy character, and bears nothing worthy the name of a tree. Low bushes, or underwood, are tolerably abundant, and in the valleys a coarse, wiry grass grows luxuriantly. Streams of water are rare. The natives draw their supplies principally from springs or pools in the valleys, the water of which is generally brackish and disagreeable.

The variety of animal is nearly as limited as that of vegetable productions. The guanaco, a quadruped allied to the lama, and with some resemblance to the camelopard, is found in considerable numbers. It is larger than the red deer, fleet on the foot, usually found in large herds, frequenting not only the plains, but found along the course of the Andes. Its flesh is a principal article of food; its skin is dried with the hair on, in such a manner that, when wet, it retains its pliability and softness. This process of preserving skins seems to be peculiar to the Indian tribes, and is not unlike that by which buffalo-ropes, bear-skins, buckskins, and other articles of luxury, and even necessity, among us, are prepared by the North American Indians. Guanaco-skins are cut into pieces of all sizes, and sewed into a thousand fanciful patterns, every workman originating a style to suit himself. The hoofs are sometimes turned to account by the natives as soles for shoes, when they indulge in such a luxury, which is not often.

The enemy of the guanaco is the cougar, or "American lion," smaller than its African namesake, and more resembling the tiger in his character and habits, having a smooth, sleek coat, of a brownish yellow color, – altogether a very beautiful but ferocious

creature. His chase is a favorite, though rare and dangerous, sport of the natives. Patagonia likewise boasts of the skunk, whose flesh is used for food. There are also foxes, and innumerable mice. Of birds, the only noticeable varieties are the condor, in the Andes, and the cassowary, a species of ostrich, smaller than that of Africa, on the plains; its plumage is not abundant, generally of a gray or dun color. Its flesh is tender and sweet, and with the fat much prized by the Indians. Like the African ostrich, it is exceedingly swift, only to be captured on horseback, and often fleet enough to outrun the fastest racer.

The climate is severe. The Rio Negro forms the northern boundary, and nearly the whole country is south of the parallel of 40° south latitude. At the time of my capture, which was in the month of May, the weather corresponded to that of November in the New England States. Its chilliness, however, was greatly increased by the bleak winds of that exposed locality. Along the Straits of Magellan the weather is also exceedingly changeable. Sudden and severe squalls, often amounting almost to a hurricane, vex the navigation of the straits, and sweep over the coast with fearful fury.

The habits of the Patagonians, or at least of the tribe among whom I was cast, are migratory, wandering over the country in quest of game, or as their caprice may prompt them. They subsist altogether on the flesh of animals and birds. The guanaco furnishes most of their food, and all their clothing. A mantle of skins, sewed with the sinews of the ostrich, fitting closely about

the neck and extending below the knee, is their only article of dress, except in the coldest weather, when a kind of shoe, made of the hind hoof and a portion of the skin above it, serves to protect their inferior extremities.

In person they are large; on first sight, they appear absolutely gigantic. They are taller than any other race I have seen, though it is impossible to give any accurate description. The only standard of measurement I had was my own height, which is about five feet ten inches. I could stand very easily under the arms of many of them, and all the men were at least a head taller than myself. Their average height, I should think, is nearly six and a half feet, and there were specimens that could have been little less than seven feet high. They have broad shoulders, full and well-developed chests, frames muscular and finely proportioned, the whole figure and air making an impression like that which the first view of the sons of Anak is recorded to have made on the children of Israel. They exhibit enormous strength, whenever they are sufficiently aroused to shake off their constitutional laziness and exert it. They have large heads, high cheek-bones, like the North American Indians, whom they also resemble in their complexion, though it is a shade or two darker. Their foreheads are broad, but low, the hair covering them nearly to the eyes; eyes full, generally black, or of a dark brown, and brilliant, though expressive of but little intelligence. Thick, coarse, and stiff hair protects the head, its abundance making any artificial covering superfluous. It is worn

long, generally divided at the neck, so as to hang in two folds over the shoulders and back, but is sometimes bound above the temples, by a fillet, over which it flows in ample luxuriance. Like more civilized people, the Patagonians take great pride in the proper disposition and effective display of their hair. Their teeth are really beautiful, sound and white, – about the only attractive and enviable feature of their persons. Feet and hands are large, but not disproportionate to their total bulk. They have deep, heavy voices, and speak in guttural tones, – the worst guttural I ever heard, – with a muttering, indistinct articulation, much as if their mouths were filled with hot pudding. Their countenances are generally stupid, but, on closer inspection, there is a gleam of low cunning that flashes through this dull mask, and is increasingly discernible on acquaintance with them; when excited, or engaged in any earnest business that calls their faculties into full exercise, their features light up with unexpected intelligence and animation. In fact, as one becomes familiar with them, he will not fail to detect an habitual expression of “secretiveness” and duplicity, which he will wonder he did not observe sooner. They are almost as imitative as monkeys, and are all great liars; falsehood is universal and inveterate with men, women and children. The youngest seem to inherit the taint, and vie with the oldest in displaying it. The detection of a falsehood gives them no shame or uneasiness. To these traits should be added a thorough-paced treachery, and, what might seem rather inconsistent with their other qualities, a large share

of vanity, and an immoderate love of praise. They are excessively filthy in their personal habits. Hydrophobia, so to speak, is a prevailing distemper; they never wash themselves. Hands and faces are covered with dirt, so thick, and of such ancient deposit, that their natural color only appears in spots, laid bare by the mechanical loosening and displacement of some of the strata, which curiously variegates the surface. It is hardly necessary to remark that such a condition of the skin is highly favorable to the increase and multiplication of “the moving creature that hath life,” wherewith their persons are abundantly peopled.

The women are proportionally smaller than the men, and rather inclined to embonpoint. The old chief had four wives, though he had probably never heard of Mahomet or his domestic laws. The rest of the tribe had only one wife apiece. The women erect the wigwams, provide fuel and cook, – if the operation should be dignified with that name, – in short, all the drudgery falls to their lot. They are treated as slaves, but made, in most respects, as comfortable in their servitude as the condition of their rude masters will admit. When, however, their lords are excited by gambling, or enraged for any or no cause, the fury of passion is visited upon their defenceless heads, which they bear uncomplainingly, with a meek submissiveness worthy of better treatment. They are passionately fond of trinkets and clumsy ornaments, such as bits of brass and copper, beads, and the like, which they wear suspended from their necks. A few of them had their ears pierced, and wore brass or copper ear-rings;

and many of them decked out their children with similar rude finery, which is valued more than anything else, except rum, tobacco and bread. The men paint or bedaub their faces and breasts with a kind of red earth. Charcoal is also used as a cosmetic. A broad line of red alternating with a stripe of black, in various fantastic figures, is a favorite style of decoration. The women make themselves, if possible, still more hideous, by the application of a pigment made of clay, blood and grease. Some of them would be very comely, if only cleanly, and content to leave nature less strenuously adorned.

The people are as deficient in the morals as in the refinements and courtesies of domestic life; their licentiousness is equal to their cruelty, – the filth of their persons only too faithfully represents the degree in which “their mind and conscience is defiled.” I saw no person, of either sex, that appeared to have attained advanced age, though it was difficult to judge of this. The oldest Indian I remember to have seen did not seem to be above sixty.

Their only wealth, aside from their huts, consists of horses, the stock of which is frequently replenished by stealing from the Spanish and Chilian settlements. These animals are, for the most part, of small size and inferior quality, half wild, coated with coarse, shaggy hair – lean and woe-begone enough, just “fit for the crows.” A few valuable specimens of a superior breed are found among them, doubtless “conveyed” there. The rude saddles in use among them are mostly of Spanish origin, obtained at the

settlements. They consist each of two boards, an inch thick, six inches wide, and two feet long, rounded at the corners so as to fit the horse's back, and united by two strips of board passing across the back-bone, the several pieces lashed together with leather strings. A piece of guanaco-skin often serves in default of a saddle. The steed is guided by a single rein, tied round the lower jaw; some of them sport a bit of iron or wood, secured by a string round the jaw, attaching the rein to this. Spurs, like the rest of their riding apparatus, are more efficient than elegant. They are indeed rude and cruel things, – straight sticks, six inches long, with a long, sharp iron inserted into the end, secured by a string or strap around the hollow of the foot, and tied at the top, a second strap nearer the heel, and a third passing round the heel. They are all agile and excellent horsemen.

For weapons, the chief, and a few of the principal men, had cutlasses or swords. They had no fire-arms, nor could I learn that they understood their use; bows and arrows, spears and war-clubs, appeared to be equally unknown. All the men carried knives; and the *bolos*, a missile weapon used in the capture of all kinds of game. This consists of two round stones, or lead balls, if they can be procured weighing each about a pound, connected by a strap or thong of leather, ten or twelve feet long. When engaged in the chase, his horse at his highest speed, the rider holds one ball in his hand, and whirls the other rapidly above his head; when it has acquired sufficient momentum it is hurled with unerring aim at the object of pursuit, and either strikes the victim dead, or

coils inextricably about him and roots him to the spot, a helpless mark for the hunter's knife.

This tribe numbered about one thousand; the chief is the acknowledged head of the people. Whether his power was hereditary or elective, I could not learn; but incline to the belief that it was hereditary, as it appeared to be, in his theory at least, absolute. In all questions of importance his decision is final; yet his subjects take considerable liberty with his opinions, sometimes oppose his counsels, and even question his authority. On the appearance of such democratic symptoms, he sometimes finds it necessary to assert his sovereignty with spirit, and brandishes his cutlass smartly before their eyes.

The habits of the people are not only filthy, but indolent to the last degree; exertion of body or mind is their greatest dread. They never go on a hunting expedition till there is nothing more to eat, nor even then till they feel the spur of extreme hunger. It sometimes happens that at such a crisis a storm comes on, which shuts them in; and it is no unfrequent occurrence for them, under such circumstances, to pass two or three days without tasting food. They learn nothing by experience; the same childish indolence and recklessness, followed by the same painful consequences, are continually recurring.

Though their great size at first sight was fitted to inspire terror, it required no very long observation to discover that they were deficient in natural courage. This, in fact, might be inferred at once, from their habitual deceit, treachery and artifice, which are

the defences of the weak and timorous, rather than the weapons of strong and daring natures. They always select the night to inflict injuries; never meet an enemy in open combat whom they can stab from behind, or despatch in the dark; and, when obliged to attack by day, always do so in large numbers. This defect of courage is increased by their superstition; they have great faith in charms, signs and omens, a weakness which I anticipated might exert great influence on my destiny in important conjunctures. Could I by any means so master their secret as to possess myself of its mystic power, it might prove an effective aid to my plans of self-defence, or of escape. Should it, on the other hand, be turned by any accidental causes against me, its impulse might prove irresistible by power or contrivance. There was no appearance of idolatrous worship among them, nor could I observe any allusion to a Supreme Being, or to any superior powers having personal attributes; and, except a single ceremony, of which more hereafter, the nature of which was and is still inexplicable, there was nothing that suggested to my mind the idea of religious worship. Whether they are cannibals or not, has been a matter of some dispute. So far as I know, they have been, heretofore, only casually observed on the beach by voyagers, or vaguely reported of by the people of adjoining countries and neighboring settlements; neither of which is a sufficiently reliable source of information. My own personal advantages on this head were greater; but I am obliged, after all, to leave the question about where I found it, so far as *certain* conclusions are

concerned. Yet some circumstances occurred, or were related to me, that incline my mind strongly to the belief that such horrible practices are not unjustly ascribed to them. Of the soundness of my conclusions those who follow the course of the narrative will have the opportunity of judging for themselves; if such had been my persuasion at the beginning, it may be readily imagined what effect this last hazard would have had upon my feelings, in contemplating the possibilities of the future. Happily a convenient scepticism on this point preserved me from this dark apprehension.

I came among these people not, certainly, with the best preparation in my previous habits and associations to endure either the climate of the country or the hardships of captivity. I went on shore in my usual ship's dress; thick frock coat, trousers, and shoes, and glazed cap. My under-garments were woollen; though an important item, as before related, was made way with in fruitlessly signalling vessels in the straits. But to live without any change of dress, to sleep without any additional covering, protected from the cold ground only by a fragment of guanacohide, and the other discomforts and exposures of life among savages, made, altogether, a harsh contrast to the comforts of our good schooner. To these, however, I gradually became inured, till I was able to meet cold and wet and storm with as stoical indifference as my dark companions, who had known no other lot from infancy.

Of the character of the natives I had little previous knowledge;

and that little was not adapted to stimulate curiosity, or prompt the least anxiety for more intimate acquaintance. It was derived mainly from whalers, in whom it seemed to have produced much the same degree of contentment, – a feeling that ignorance is bliss. Indeed, the greatest caution has always been employed by voyagers in regard to landing on these shores; many experienced seamen cannot be persuaded to land at all; trade with the natives is always carried on in boats off shore, frequently with loaded fire-arms constantly levelled, in readiness for action in case of emergency. But here I was, put forcibly to the study of their character in the school of dame Experience, and can testify to the truth of the saying that she charges roundly for tuition. Let the reader give me credit for the cheapness with which I put him in possession of what knowledge was purchased at so exorbitant a price.

CHAPTER III

Hard journey – Encampment – Division of the tribe – My new guardian – Story of the capture of a British vessel – Reunion – Gambling – Culinary arts – Hunting – Symptoms of danger – Mutual deceptions – Tough yarns – The fatal ring – An effective oration – Indecision of the Indians.

The reader left me just rising from a half-stupor into which a double disappointment had thrown me, feverish with the excitement of new purposes and resolutions. The first aim was for some fresh water, to allay a burning thirst. After a long and unsuccessful search, I went deliberately to the beach and took a deep draught of the briny waves. Expecting that the chief would shortly return for me with a train of his followers, it occurred to me that I might secrete myself, though there was nothing certain to be gained by it, if I were successful, of which the probability was not great. With this object in view, I walked along close on the water's edge, that my footprints might be obliterated by the waves. After proceeding in this way for some distance, I left the shore, and started towards the interior, in quest of a place where I might dig a hole in the earth and cover myself with grass and bushes. I had gone but a little way inland, when, on ascending a slight eminence, whom should I meet, face to face, but the old chief and another of my tormentors! So the scheme came to nothing; but after others more feasible had so dolefully

miscarried, it was not in human nature to lay this disappointment very deeply to heart. I made as though I was glad to see the old fellow, though, could I then have had my will of the savages, they would have been safely anchored in the middle of the straits. I told him (Heaven forgive me!) I was looking for them. The chief responded to my greeting only by ordering me to mount his horse. I requested leave to stay a little longer, and was refused. I again requested to be taken to Port Famine; – no, I should be taken to “Holland.”

I mounted behind him, and we travelled all day in the direction of Cape Virgin. For two days and nights I had eaten nothing, and drunk nothing but sea-water, and, in fact, had taken very little food for three days. We arrived about dark at an eminence commanding a view of their new squatting ground. Here we halted to take a short survey of the encampment. To them, doubtless, the prospect was beautiful; to me it was heart-sickening, but I strove to keep up cheerful appearances. Down in a valley or deep marshy hollow, covered with tall grass or rushes, an almost innumerable drove of horses were seen grazing; and beyond, at a short distance, the surface was thickly dotted with huts, erected, or in process of erection, by female architects. Children, in swarms like summer flies, and with no more artificial covering than those insects, were capering and shouting in high glee. At length we descended to the rude village; after tacking about, first to the right and then to the left, like a ship against a head wind, we came gallantly into town, and

drew up at the chief's lodge. I was glad to dismount, sore with bestriding the skeleton of a horse.

Here I again took the liberty of proposing a trip to Port Famine, offering to go alone, if they would not go with me. The chief told me, with emphasis, to say no more about it. He would take me to "Holland," and there get rum and tobacco. "Only get me there," I said to myself, "and much good may your rum and tobacco do your old carcass!"

On the third day of our encampment here the tribe was divided, and I was sent off with one of the chief's lieutenants. A more blood-thirsty rascal could not be found in the tribe. This step was probably taken by the chief to get rid of my importunities to visit Port Famine, the frequent renewal of which had evidently worried him. My new guardian regaled my ears, from time to time, with stories of his murderous exploits, most likely in order to instil into me a wholesome dread of his power, and a submissive temper under his authority. The details of his bloody yarns are too shocking to repeat. One story, on which he seemed to dwell with peculiar satisfaction, as it was confirmed by more reliable authority afterwards, I will here relate, with such other particulars as I gained by subsequent information.

About two years before, the British brig Avon was in the Santa Cruz river. Captain Eaton, her commander, went on shore with his men, and bought some horses of the Indians, which he paid for in rum, tobacco and trinkets. After receiving their pay, they played the same trick as with me, – refused to deliver the

horses. The captain was about getting under weigh, when the Indians, perceiving his intention to leave them, went down to the shore opposite the vessel, and beckoned him to come on shore, signifying that they would give up the horses, as agreed. The boat was sent ashore, and six or eight Indians returned in it to the brig. They surrounded the captain on the quarter-deck, and told him the horses were coming. He stepped to the rail with his glass, to observe motions on shore; while thus engaged, the savages came up behind, drew out their long knives, and stabbed him to the heart. He sunk lifeless on the rail, and fell upon the deck. Seizing him by the hair, and raising him partly on their knees, they cut his throat, and stabbed him again and again, to make the work of death sure. They then rushed upon the mate and stabbed him, but not mortally; he threw himself exhausted down the hatchway, and had just strength enough to secrete himself among the cargo. The boy was dealt with in the same manner as the captain, and one or two sailors, being wounded, succeeded, like the mate, in getting below deck and secreting themselves. The remainder of the crew were fortunately off in a boat at this time, and escaped the massacre. The savages ate and drank on board, and then plundered the brig of such articles as suited their fancy. Mr. Douglass, of "Holland," being on board the brig, was not murdered, but carried on shore and detained. A gentleman named Simms afterwards endeavored to effect the release of Mr. Douglass. He gave them all that they demanded as ransom, and was then himself detained to keep his friend company. A third

embassy was undertaken by Mr. John Hall, of whom the reader will learn more hereafter. He paid a large ransom for his two friends, and was then served as they had been. He succeeded in effecting his escape the next day; but Douglass and Simms were carried off, murdered, and, it is supposed, – I believe with good reason, – that their bodies were eaten. The Avon, after being plundered, fell into the hands of the remainder of the crew, and sailed for Montevideo.

I travelled with this ruffian about ten days. He was a hard master, though I cannot charge him with personal ill-treatment that amounted to cruelty. Our life was monotonous enough. We slept a good share of the time when we rested, drank pure water when we could get it, and ate what fell in our way; though the reader may be assured that we saw some hungry days. At the expiration of ten days, the tribe was reunited at a place agreed upon. Here we continued several days, the natives occupied exclusively with gambling, which was alike their daily labor and recreation. When the demands of hunger became too imperative to be longer postponed, they would go out and hunt, after which they resumed their games.

Gambling is a vice to which they are greatly addicted, and they pursue it with a perseverance and ardor worthy of amateurs in more civilized communities. The implements used are bits of guanaco-skin, about the size of common playing-cards, on which are rudely depicted dogs and a variety of other beasts, with divers mystic marks and scrawls, done with a stick in a pigment

composed of clay, blood and grease. Unlike their compeers in more enlightened circles, they put down stakes on only one side, for which the opposite players contend. In this way they rid themselves of their saddles, bridles, knives, and whatever other portable articles they may have to hazard. Nay, I have seen them inflamed to such a passion as to take the mantles from their women's shoulders, telling them to protect themselves from the cold as they could.

But where was "Holland," all this time? They told me at first that we should be only four days reaching it, and already more than ten had passed. On inquiry, they said that the journey would be completed in six days; on we went, for *sixteen* days more, with the same dull routine, the Indians assigning seven or eight days as the minimum time. The place seemed to be all the while receding. I had long since become aware that there was no truth in them; but persisted in questioning them, to call forth fresh lies, which they uttered with marvellous fluency, as if it were vastly easier than speaking the truth.

After the reünion of the tribe, I implored the old chief to take me back to his lodge, and to his especial care; to which he consented, much to my satisfaction. With him I felt a kind of security unknown elsewhere; under God, I relied alone on his protection. He alone of the tribe had the power to defend me, and I spared no pains to secure his good-will. To this end, I made him large promises of such things as I thought would arouse his cupidity, or stimulate his appetites, as well as an abundance of

ornaments for his wives and children, if he would only take me to some place inhabited by white people. This policy was extended to his household; disagreeable as the task was, I forced myself to caress his dirty children, and to tell them what pretty things I intended to give them. By these, and such-like demonstrations, I flattered myself it might be possible to keep on peaceable terms with old Parosilver, and enlist his authority for me, if circumstances should compel me to appeal to it.

The reunited tribe remained in camp three or four days, dividing their time between gambling and hunting. When I accompanied the hunters, as I sometimes did, I was sure to get something to eat towards night, as they invariably kindled a fire and cooked part of the game on the spot where it was killed. Their method of preparing all meats was essentially the same as has been described; tossing large pieces into the fire, or suspending them over it, till they were somewhat smoked and dried, and then devouring them, without salt, or any other condiment but the sauce of hunger. Cooking the ostrich, however, forms an exception: the feathers are plucked out, the bones dissected and removed; hot stones are placed within the body, the skin is tightly sewed together, and the whole is partially roasted on the embers. The lacings are then cut, and the meat is served up; it has an excellent flavor, far surpassing that of the domestic turkey. The bird is covered with a layer of fat, half an inch thick, which is melted, and collects in the body, forming a condiment which is relished as the greatest luxury of Patagonian

living. If any fragments of the repast remain, they are slung to the backs of the saddles, and so carried home, dangling at the horses' sides, till they are so begrimed with dust as to defy all conjecture as to their quality or origin. These choice morsels are proffered to the home department, are received with smiles of gratitude, and devoured with a gust sharpened by long abstinence. It was noticeable that the plumage of the ostrich, though beautiful, was not at all valued by the Indians; large quantities of the feathers are blown all over the country, without attracting the least regard, while men and women disfigure themselves with paint, and load their persons with the cheapest of all trumpery, brass and copper and beads, picked up from traders, or stolen.

The hunting of the guanaco is not only their chief reliance for food, but a spirited amusement, conducted after a fashion peculiar alike to hunters and hunted. Patagonia, as before mentioned, has no trees, but is covered here and there, in patches, with a kind of under-brush of scrub growth, and the plains extend back for hundreds of miles from the Atlantic shore, like a vast rolling prairie. This affords a clear and excellent hunting-ground, with nothing to conceal the game, or hinder the pursuer, except now and then a clump of low bushes, or the tall grass of the marshes. Two to four hundred Indians on horseback, bare-headed, and with their skin mantles about them, and each having the bolas and his long knife tucked beneath his belt, the whole followed by an innumerable pack of dogs of every kind, down to curs of low degree, make up a hunting party; as far as the eye

can reach, their gigantic forms, diminished by the distance, may be seen projected on the horizon, their long hair streaming in the wind. Presently a thickness is perceived in the air, and a cloud of dust arises, – a sure indication that a herd of guanacos has been beaten up, and is now approaching. All eyes are fixed intently on the cloud; it soon appears as if several acres of earth were alive, and in rapid motion. There is a herd of from five hundred to a thousand of these animals, infuriated, rushing forward at their utmost speed whatever direction they may chance to take, they follow in a straight line; and, as soon as their course is ascertained, the Indians may be seen running their horses at break-neck pace to plant themselves directly in the course of the living tide. As the game approach, the hunter puts spurs to his horse and rushes across their track. When within twenty or thirty yards, he jerks the bolas from his girdle, and, whirling it violently above his head, lets fly. The weapon usually strikes the head or neck of the animal, and winds itself about his fore-legs, bringing him to the ground. The hunter dismounts, cuts the victim's throat, remounts, and is again in pursuit. The whizzing missile, unerring in its aim, brings down another and another, till the party are satisfied with their chase and their prey. The dogs fall upon the poor animals, when helplessly entangled by the bolas, and often cruelly mangle them before the hunter has time to despatch them. Seldom does any one miss the game he marks. It is the height of manly ambition among them, the last result of their training, to excel in the chase.

The sport being over, then comes the dressing of the meat. The body is split open, the entrails removed, the heart and large veins opened, to permit the blood to flow into the cavity. The Indians scoop up with their hands and eagerly drink the blood. When their thirst is satisfied, the remainder is poured into certain of the intestines selected for the purpose, to become (to their accommodating tastes) a luxury as highly prized as any surnamed of Bologna. The ribs are disjoined from the back-bone, and, with the head, discarded as worthless. The body is quartered, cutting through the skin; the quarters, tied together in pairs, are thrown across the horses' backs, and conveyed to the camp. Arrived at their wigwams, the chivalrous hunters never unlade their beasts, but lean upon the horses' necks till their wives come out and relieve them of the spoil. They then dismount, unsaddle their horses, and turn them loose.

Whilst remaining at our present encampment, strong indications of dissatisfaction were apparent, which manifestly had reference to me. There was a large party that had always entertained hostile feelings towards me; and I now found it necessary to exert myself to the utmost to quell their discontent, by making large promises of presents to men, women and children, "due and payable" on arrival at some white settlement; also, by humoring their caprices, and flattering their vanity with the most honeyed words at my command. The reader, I hope, will not harshly judge of the deceptions which are here and elsewhere avowed in this narrative. I was placed in circumstances which,

it seemed to me, made this a legitimate and necessary mode of self-defence. It was plain that my only way of escape would be by some negotiation for ransom, and the Indians had conceived expectations of very large profit to be made out of me. They were told, when we landed, that I was the captain of the ship, – an unfortunate error, but one that I could not repair. I was naturally looked upon as so much the more valuable hostage. My only resource was to act in character: to magnify my own importance, to increase their expectations, whenever I found myself sinking in the scale of their favor, – to make them feel, in short, that they had an immense interest in preserving my life, and getting me to “Holland,” or some other white settlement, with the most convenient speed. And if some of the fictions appear gross, it is enough to say that they were such as seemed, at the time, to be adapted to the grossness of their apprehensions and desires, and to the most sure accomplishment of the purpose in view.

Yet, so false-hearted and treacherous were they, that one could never be for a moment certain what impression was made. Liars in grain themselves, it was only natural for them to distrust every one else. Whenever I spoke, and especially when making promises, the old chief would look me steadily in the eye, as though piercing my inmost thoughts. But, in process of time, I so schooled myself to the exercise, that I could return his look and tell the toughest stories without blinking. Some of them were to the full as credible as those of Munchausen. It was constantly necessary to put memory and imagination to the

rack, to call forth something new and astonishing wherewith to divert their fancy, and preöccupy their minds from meditating mischief against me, of which I had continual reason to be afraid. Secure against any detection of the plagiarism, I drew largely from the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor, the marvels of the Arabian Nights, and the cunning devices of Gil Blas, the materials of which served, when duly mixed with my own veritable experience, to excite their curiosity, if not to awaken awe and superstitious reverence. They would sit around me for hours, as eager as so many children, their eyes and ears all intent, while in broken Spanish, mixed with a few Indian phrases that had been grafted into my speech through the ear, aided by abundant gesticulations, that shadowed forth and illustrated whatever was obscure in expression, I spun yarns of no common length, strength and elasticity. Sometimes, in response to a general call from the company, the old chief at the end of some marvellous tale, would command me to tell it again. This was no easy task, considering the freaks which my imagination usually played, without restraint, in the progress of the narrative. In no long time, however, I learned to imitate the prudence of boys who turn down the leaves of their books, or of Indians who break down the shrubs and twigs along a new path, by taking special note of my deviations, – a sort of mental dog's-ear, or way-mark, interposed at the point of departure. It was not difficult to retrace the way at their bidding, and give them the whole journey, to its minutest turnings.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.