

Henty George Alfred

Out on the Pampas: or, The Young Settlers



George Henty

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G. A. Henty

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CHAPTER I.

MRS. HARDY'S RESOLUTION

WHAT are you thinking of, Frank?' Mrs. Hardy asked her husband one evening, after an unusually long silence on his part.

'Well, my dear, I was thinking of a good many things. In the first place, I think, I began with wondering what I should make of the boys; and that led to such a train of thoughts about ourselves and our circumstances, that I hardly knew where I was when you spoke to me.'

Mr. Hardy spoke cheerfully, but his wife saw at once that it was with an effort that he did so. She put down the work upon which she was engaged, and moved her chair nearer to his by the fire. 'It is a serious question, Frank, about the boys. Charley is fifteen now, and Hubert fourteen. I wonder myself sometimes what we shall do with them.'

'There seems no opening here in England for young fellows. The professions are crowded, even if they were not altogether beyond our means; and as to a clerkship, they had better have a trade, and stick to it: they would be far happier, and nearly as well paid. The fact is, Clara,' and here Mr. Hardy paused a little, as if to gain courage to say what he feared would be very disagreeable to his wife, — 'the fact is, we are altogether too crowded here. The best thing for the children, by far, and I think the best thing for ourselves, would be to emigrate.'

Mrs. Hardy gave a little sigh, but said nothing, and sat looking quietly into the fire, as her husband went on: 'You see, my dear, I am just, and only just earning enough for us to live upon. Nor is there any strong probability of an increase of business. The boys, as you say, are growing up, and I see no prospect of giving them a fair start in life. Abroad it is altogether different: we can buy land and stock it for next to nothing. We should live roughly, certainly; but at least there is no fear for the future, and we should start our boys in life with a fair certainty of success. Still, Clara, I do not of course mean that I have made up my mind upon the subject. It is far too serious a matter to decide upon hastily. I only threw out the suggestion; and if you, after thinking it over, are against it, there is an end of the matter.'

Mrs. Hardy was silent for a little, and a tear sparkled on her cheek in the fire-light; then she said, 'I am not surprised, Frank, at what you have said. In fact I have expected it for some time. I have observed you looking over books upon foreign countries, and have seen that you often sat thoughtful and quiet. I guessed, therefore, what you had in your mind. Of course, dear, as a woman, I shrink from the thought of leaving all our friends and going to quite a strange country, but I don't think that I am afraid of the hardships or discomfort. Thousands of other women have gone through them, and there is no reason why I should not do the same. I do think with you that it would be a good thing for the boys, perhaps for the girls too; and that, when we have got over the first hardships, we too should be happier and more free from care than we are now. So you see, Frank, you will meet with no opposition from me; and if, after deliberation, you really determine that it is the best thing to do, I shall be ready to agree with you. But it is a hard thought just at first, so please do not say any more about it to-night.'

Mr. Hardy was an architect, as his father had been before him. He had not, however, entered the office at the usual age, but when eighteen had gone out to the United States, to visit an uncle who had settled there. After spending some time with him, the love of adventure had taken him to the far west, and there he had hunted and shot for nearly three years, till a letter, long delayed on the way,

entreated him to return to England, as his father's health was failing. He at once started for England, and found that his father was in a feeble state of health, but was still able to carry on the business. Frank saw, however, that he was unequal to the work, and so entered the office, working hard to make up for lost time. He was a good draughtsman, and was shortly able to take a great burden off his father's shoulders.

He had not been long at home, however, before he fell in love with Clara Aintree, the daughter of a clergyman; and his father making over to him a share in the business, they were married just as Frank attained his twenty-fourth year, his wife being about nineteen. Two years after the marriage Mr. Hardy sen. died, and from that time Frank had carried on the business alone.

B – was a large provincial town, but it scarcely afforded remunerative employment for an architect; and although Mr. Hardy had no competitor in his business, the income which he derived from it was by no means a large one, and the increasing expenses of his family rendered the struggle, to make ends meet, yearly more severe. His father had been possessed of a small private fortune, but had rashly entered into the mania of railway speculation, and at his death had left about £3000 to his son. This sum Frank Hardy had carefully preserved intact, as he had foreseen that the time might come when it would, for his children's sake, be advisable to emigrate. He had long looked forward to this, but had abstained from taking any step until his sons were of an age to be able to make themselves useful in a life in the bush or upon the prairies.

Frank Hardy, at the time our story begins, was about forty. He was a tall, active man, and the life he had led in America when young had hardened his muscles, and given him the full use of every faculty.

Mrs. Hardy was five years younger than her husband, and scarcely looked thirty years old. She was a high-spirited woman, well fitted to be her husband's companion in the dangers and hardships of a settler's life.

The subject of emigration once started, was frequently continued, and presently books and maps began to be consulted, and the advantages and disadvantages of the various countries and colonies to be debated. Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Hardy agreed that the Argentine Republic, in its magnificent rivers, its boundless extent of fertile land, in its splendid climate, its cheap labour, and its probable prospects, offered the greatest advantages.

The decision once arrived at, it was determined to announce it to the children, who had up to this time no idea of the great change decided upon. Breakfast was over, and the boys, whose holidays had just begun, were about to leave the table, when their father said: 'Wait a moment, boys; there is something we want to talk to you about.'

The boys resumed their seats. 'Your mamma and I have been wondering what you boys are to become, and we do not see any openings likely to occur here. Now, what should you say to us all emigrating?'

'What, going abroad, papa!' they both exclaimed joyously.

'Yes, boys, settling in the back woods or in the prairies.'

'Oh that would be jolly,' Charley said, 'I know, papa, having fights with Indians, and all that sort of thing. Oh it would be glorious!'

'Well, Charley,' his father said, smiling, 'I do not know that we shall have fights with Indians, nor do I think it would be very jolly if we did. But we should have to rough it, you know; you boys would have to work hard, to help me in everything, and to look after the cattle and sheep.'

'What fun! what fun!' the boys both shouted; 'we should like it of all things in the world.'

'And what do you think of it, Maud and Ethel?' their mamma asked the two little girls, who were looking very surprised, but rather doubtful as to the pleasure of the fights with Indians which their brothers had spoken so delightedly about. 'You will have to be two very useful little women, and will have to help me just as the boys will have to help your papa. Very likely we may not be able to get a servant there, and then we shall have to do everything.'

‘That will be fine, mamma,’ said Maud, who was rather over twelve, while her sister was just eleven. ‘I don’t think I could cook, but you should cook, and I could scrub and do all the hard work, and Ethel could wash up, and lay the table, and that sort of thing. That would be fine, mamma.’

Ethel, who almost always agreed with her elder sister, did so now, and the four young ones became quite uproarious in their plans for making themselves useful. At last Mr. Hardy called for order.

‘Now silence all, and listen to me. This affair is a serious business; and although I hope and believe that we shall all enjoy our life very much, still we must prepare for it, and look upon it in earnest, and not as a sort of game. I have business here which I cannot finish before another eight or nine months. Let us all make the most of our time before we start. In the first place, the language of the people among whom we are going is Spanish, and we must all learn to speak it well before we leave. For the next three months we will work together at grammar and exercises, and then I will try and get some Spanish teacher to live in the house, and speak the language with us until we go. In the next place, it will be well that you should all four learn to ride. I have hired the paddock next to our garden, and have bought a pony, which will be here to-day, for the girls. You boys have already ridden a little, and I shall now have you taught in the riding school. I went yesterday to Mr. Sarls, and asked him if he would allow me to make an arrangement with his head gardener for you to go there to learn gardening. He at once agreed; and I have arranged with the gardener that you are both to be there every morning at six o’clock, and are to work until nine. At nine you will come in to breakfast. From breakfast to dinner you will have to yourselves, except upon the days you take riding lessons; and I should wish you to spend this time at your usual studies, except Latin, which will be of no use to you. From two till half-past four you are to learn carpentering. I have made an agreement with Mr. Jones to pay him so much to take you as a sort of apprentices for the next nine months. In the evening we will all work together at Spanish. It will be hard work; but if you want to be of any real use to me, it is absolutely necessary that you should be able to use a spade and to do rough carpentering. As the time draws on, too, I shall ask one of the farmers near to let you go out with his men and get some notion of ploughing. Well, what do you say to all that?’

Hubert looked a little downcast at this recital of the preparatory work to be gone through, but Charley said at once, ‘It sounds rather hard, papa, but, as you say, we shall have to work hard out there, and it is much better to accustom one’s self to it at once; besides, of course, we should be of no use at all to you unless we knew something about work.’

‘And what are we to learn, mamma?’ Maud asked.

‘Not a very great deal, my dear,’ Mrs. Hardy said. ‘Spanish to begin with, then cooking. I shall teach you, at any rate, to make simple dishes and puddings, and to boil vegetables properly. I shall myself practise until I am perfect, and then I shall teach you. Besides that, it will be as well for you to learn to attend to poultry; and that is all I know of at present, except that you must both take pains to improve yourselves at sewing. We shall have to make everything for ourselves out there.’

‘I suppose we shan’t do any more regular lessons, mamma?’

‘Indeed you will, Maud. You do not imagine that your education is finished, do you? and you cannot wish to grow almost as ignorant as the poor Indians of the country. You will give up the piano, and learn Spanish instead of French, but that will be all the difference; and I shall expect you both to make as much progress as possible, because, although I shall take you both out there, and shall teach you whenever I find time, your lessons must of necessity be short and irregular. And now you can all go out into the garden and talk the matter over.’

‘But you have not told us yet where we are going to, papa,’ Charley said.

‘We are going to farm upon the banks of one of the great South American rivers, – probably the Parana, in the Argentine Republic.’

Mr. and Mrs. Hardy watched their children from the window. They went out in a group to the summer-house in the corner of the garden, all talking excitedly. Then Maud ran back again to the

house, and in a minute or two returned with the schoolroom atlas, and opening it upon the table, they all clustered over it in eager consultation.

Mrs. Hardy turned to her husband with a smile. 'You will have to get up the subject, Frank, so as to be able to answer the innumerable questions you will be asked.'

'I shall always refer them to you.'

There was quite a talk in B – when it was known that Mr. Hardy was going to emigrate with his wife and family. He, and his father before him, had been so long established in the town, that there were few people who did not know him, more or less.

Emigration in the year 1851 was far less common than it is now, and the interest was proportionately greater. Charley and Hubert became quite popular characters among their late schoolfellows, who, whenever they met them, would always stop to have a talk about the distant country to which they were going. The boys, however, had now but little time for talking; for upon the week after their father had first told them of his intention, they had set-to regularly at the work he had laid down for them. They rose every morning at five, had a slice of bread and a cup of milk, and were off to the gardener's, where they worked hard until half-past eight. Mr. Hardy had requested that they should be specially instructed in the raising of vegetables, and in the planting and pruning of fruit-trees. The culture of flowers could be of no utility. The digging made the boys' backs ache at first, and blistered their hands, but they stuck to it manfully, and soon became accustomed to the work, returning to breakfast with glowing cheeks and tremendous appetites.

In the afternoon they might be seen in the carpenter's shop with their coats and waistcoats off, working away with saw or plane.

Although both made good progress in both pursuits, yet their tastes differed; Charley preferring the carpentering, while Hubert was the gardener's most promising pupil. The former was therefore christened the head carpenter by his sisters, while the latter was promoted to the post of chief gardener.

Four or five months of this work made a visible difference in the boys' appearance. They both widened out across the shoulders, their arms became strong and muscular, and they looked altogether more healthy and robust. Nor did their appearance belie them; for once when spending a holiday in the cricket-field with their former schoolfellows, wrestling matches being proposed after the game was over, they found that they were able to overcome with ease boys whom they had formerly considered their superiors in strength.

In the meantime Mr. Hardy had succeeded in obtaining the services of a young Spanish lady, who had come to England to learn the language, as governess; and of an evening the whole family worked at Spanish, and made such progress that they were soon able to establish the rule that no other language should be spoken at meal-times. The girls here soon surpassed their brothers, as they had the advantage of morning lessons in the language, besides which young children can always pick up a language sooner than their elders; and they had many a hearty laugh at the ridiculous mistakes Charley and Hubert made in their efforts to get through a long sentence. In six months, however, all could speak with tolerable fluency.

Maud and Ethel were as amused and as diligent at learning household work as their brothers were in their departments, and might have been seen every afternoon in the kitchen, in their little white pinafores, engaged in learning the mysteries of cooking.

One day, after they had been so engaged for about four months, Mrs. Hardy said at breakfast: 'I am going to try an experiment. I have given the cook leave to go out for the day. Mr. and Mrs. Partridge are coming to dinner, and I intend handing over the kitchen to the girls, and letting them make their first essay. We are going to have soup, a leg of mutton with potatoes and spinach, a dish of fried cutlets, and a cabinet pudding. I shall tell Sarah to lift any saucepan you may want on or off the fire, but all the rest I shall leave in your hands. The boys will dine with us. The hour will be half-past five, punctually.'

The little girls' eyes flashed with pleasure, and they quite coloured up at the thought of the importance and difficulty of the task before them. At lunch the boys pretended to eat an extra quantity, saying that they felt very doubtful about their dinner. In the afternoon Mrs. Hardy felt strongly tempted to go into the kitchen to see how things were getting on; but she restrained herself, resolving to let Maud and Ethel have entirely their own way.

The dinner was a great success, although the soup was rather hot, from Ethel, in her anxiety, having let too much pepper slip in; and the cabinet pudding came up all over the dish, instead of preserving its shape, it having stuck to the mould, and Maud having shaken it so violently that it had come out with a burst and broken up into pieces, which had caused a flood of tears on the part of the little cook. It did not taste any the worse, however. And when the little girls came in to dessert in their white frocks, looking rather shy, and very scorched in the face, from their anxious peeping into pots to see that all was going on well, they were received with a cheer by the boys; and their friends were not a little astonished to hear that the dinner they had partaken of had been entirely prepared and cooked by these little women.

After four months' gardening, Mr. Hardy placed the boys with a farmer who lived a mile distant, and made an arrangement for them to breakfast there, so that they now remained at work from six in the morning until twelve. Here they obtained some idea of harnessing and driving horses, of ploughing, and of the other farming operations.

They now only went four days a week to the carpenter's, for their papa had one day said to them when they were alone with him before dinner: 'Do not put on your working clothes this afternoon, boys; I am going to take you out with me, but do not say anything about it at dinner. I will tell you why afterwards.'

Rather surprised, they did as he told them, wondering where they could be going. Their father said nothing on the subject until they reached the town, which was a quarter of a mile distant from their house. Then he said: 'Now, boys, you know we are going out to a country of which a great portion is still unsettled; and as land is a good deal cheaper at a short distance from the inhabited parts, we shall perhaps have no one within many miles of us. Now it is just possible that at first the Indians may be disposed to be troublesome. I do not suppose that they will, but it is just as well to be prepared for everything. There is no reason why you boys should not be able to shoot as straightly as a man, and I have therefore bought two carbines. They are the invention of an American named Colt, and have a revolving breach, so that they fire six shots each. There is a spare chamber to each, which is very quickly shifted in place of the one discharged; so that each of you could fire twelve shots in a very short time. They will carry up to five hundred yards. They are a new invention, but all accounts agree that they are an excellent one. I have obtained leave from Mr. Harcourt, who lives three miles from here, to put up a target at the foot of some bare hills on his property, and we will walk over there twice a week to practise. I used to be considered a first-rate shot with a rifle when I was a young man in America, and I have got down a rifle for my own use. I do not want you to speak about what we are doing to your mamma, or indeed to any one. We shall keep our rifles at a cottage near where we shoot, and no one need know anything about it. It is not likely that we shall have any trouble with the Indians, and it is of no use making your mamma uncomfortable by the thought of the probability of such a thing.'

As Mr. Hardy spoke, the boys were ready to dance with delight, and this was increased when they turned into the gunsmith's shop, and were shown the arms which their father had bought for this expedition.

Mr. Hardy had already an excellent double-barrelled gun, and he had now purchased a long and heavy rifle carrying a conical ball. In addition to the boys' carbines, he had bought them each a light double-barrelled gun. Besides these were two brace of Colt's revolving pistols. These were all new; but there were in addition two or three second-hand double-barrelled guns for the use of his servants, in case of necessity, and three light rifles of the sort used for rook-shooting. Altogether,

it was quite an armoury. The carbines were in neat cases; and the boys carried these and a box of cartridges, while Mr. Hardy took his rifle; and so they started off to their shooting ground.

Here their father instructed them in the use of their revolving carbines, and then, after some practice with caps only, allowed them to fire a few shots each. The firing was certainly rather wild, owing to the difficulty they felt at first of firing without shutting their eyes; but after a few weeks' practice they became very steady, and in three or four months could make pretty certain of a bull's-eye at three hundred yards. Of all this Mrs. Hardy and the girls knew nothing; but there was not the same secrecy observed with reference to their shot-guns. These they took home with them, and Mr. Hardy said that he understood that the plains of South America swarmed with game, and that, therefore, it was well that the boys should learn how to shoot. He insisted, however, that only one gun should be taken out at a time, to diminish the danger of accidents. After that the boys took out their guns by turns when they went to work of a morning, and many a dead blackbird soon attested to their improving skill.

CHAPTER II. THE START

IT was nearly a year after he had made up his mind to emigrate, before Mr. Hardy was able to conclude all his arrangements. Then came the great business of packing up. This is no trifling matter when a family of six persons are going to make a move to a new country. Mr. Hardy had at first thought of taking portable furniture with him, but had been told by a friend who knew the country that every requisite could be obtained at Buenos Ayres, the capital of the Argentine Republic, at a far less price than he could convey such heavy articles from England. Still the bulk of luggage was very large; and the boys, who had now left off their farming and carpentering lessons, worked at home at packing-cases, and had the satisfaction of turning their new acquirements to a useful purpose. In addition to the personal baggage, Mr. Hardy was taking with him ploughs and agricultural implements of English make, besides a good stock of seeds of various kinds. These had been sent on direct by a sailing ship, starting a fortnight before themselves. When their heavy baggage was packed up, it too was sent off, so as to be put on board the steamer by which they were to sail; and then came a long round of visits to bid farewell to all their friends. This was a sad business; for although the boys and their sisters were alike excited and delighted at the thought of the life before them, still they could not but feel sorrowful when the time came to leave all the friends they had known so long, and the house they had lived in ever since they could remember.

This over, Mrs. Hardy and the children went to Liverpool, where they were to embark; while Mr. Hardy remained behind for a day or two, to see to the sale of the furniture of the house. The day after he joined the family they embarked on board the *Barbadoes*, for Rio and Buenos Ayres. Greatly were the girls amused at the tiny little cabin allotted to them and their mother, – a similar little den being taken possession of by Mr. Hardy and the boys. The smartness of the vessel, and the style of her fittings, alike impressed and delighted them. It has not been mentioned that Sarah, their housemaid, accompanied the party. She had been left early an orphan, and had been taken as a nursemaid by Mrs. Hardy. As time went on, and the little girls no longer required a nurse, she had remained as housemaid, and having no friends, now willingly accompanied them. Mr. Hardy had, to her great amusement, insisted upon her signing a paper, agreeing, upon her master's paying her passage, to remain with him for a year; at the end of which time she was to be at liberty to marry or to leave them, should she choose.

Knowing the scarcity of young Englishwomen in the country that they were going to, and the number of Englishmen doing well in the towns or as farmers, Mr. Hardy had considered this precaution to be absolutely necessary; as otherwise Sarah might have married and left them within a month of her arrival. At the end of a year her so doing would not matter so much, as by that time the party would be comfortably settled in their new home; whereas during the necessary hardship at first, it would be a great comfort having a faithful and reliable servant.

The last looks which the party cast toward England, as the Welsh coast sank in the distance, were less melancholy than those of most emigrants. The young people were all full of hope and excitement; while even Mrs. Hardy felt but little disposed to give way to sorrow, as it had been arranged that in three or four years, if all went well, she should bring her daughters over to England to finish their education.

Very lovely was that first evening, and as they sat in a group together upon deck, the little girls remarked that they did not think that the sea was anything like as terrible as they had expected, and that they did not feel the least sea-sick. Their father smiled: 'Wait a little, my dears; there is an old proverb, "Don't halloo until you are out of the wood."'

The next day was still perfectly calm; and when, towards evening, the children were told that they were now fairly getting into the Bay of Biscay, they could scarcely believe the intelligence.

‘Why, one would think, Maud,’ her father said, ‘that you were disappointed at its being calm, and that you really wanted a storm.’

‘Oh, papa, I do think it would be great fun; it would be so curious not to be able to walk about, and to see everything rolling and tumbling. Don’t you think so, boys?’

‘Yes, I think so, Maud; great fun,’ Charley said.

‘Well, young people,’ the captain, who had been standing by watching the sun, now fast nearing the horizon, and who had overheard their remarks, said, ‘if it is any satisfaction to you, I can tell you that you are very likely to have your wish gratified. But I question if you will like it as much as you expect.’

‘Ah, you expect wind, Captain Trevor?’ Mr. Hardy said. ‘I have been thinking myself that the almost oppressive stillness of to-day, and the look of the sunset, and these black clouds banking up in the south-west, meant a change. What does the glass say?’

‘It is falling very rapidly,’ the captain answered. ‘We are in for a sou’-wester, and a stiff one too, or I am mistaken.’

Now that it appeared likely that their wishes were about to be gratified, the young Hardys did not seem so pleased as they had expected, although Charley still declared manfully that he was quite in earnest, and that he did wish to see a real storm at sea.

As the sun set, the party still leaned against the bulwarks watching it, and the great bank of clouds, which seemed every moment to be rising higher and higher. There was still nearly a dead calm around them, and the heavy beat of the paddles, as they lashed the water into foam, and the dull thud of the engine, were the only sounds that broke the stillness. Now and then, however, a short puff of wind ruffled the water, and then died away again.

‘Look at that great cloud, papa,’ Hubert said; ‘it almost looks as if it were alive.’

‘Yes, Hubert, it is very grand; and there is no doubt about there being wind there.’

The great cloud bank appeared to be in constant motion. Its shape was incessantly shifting and changing; now a great mass would roll upwards, now sink down again; now the whole body would seem to roll over and over upon itself; then small portions would break off from the mass, and sail off by themselves, getting thinner and thinner, and disappearing at last in the shape of fine streamers. Momentarily the whole of the heaving, swelling mass rose higher and higher. It was very grand, but it was a terrible grandeur; and the others were quite inclined to agree with Ethel, who shrank close to her father, and put her hand in his, saying, ‘I don’t like that cloud, papa; it frightens me.’

At this moment Mrs. Hardy, who had been down below arranging her cabin, came up to the group. ‘What a dark cloud, Frank; and how it moves! Are we going to have a storm, do you think?’

‘Well, Clara, I think that we are in for a gale; and if you will take my advice, you will go down at once while it is calm, and see that the trunks, and everything that can roll about, are securely fastened up. I will come down and help you. Boys, you had better go down and see that everything is snug in our cabin.’

In a quarter of an hour the necessary arrangements were completed, but even in that short time they could feel that a change was taking place. There was now a steady but decided rolling motion, and the young ones laughed as they found it difficult to walk steadily along the cabin.

Upon reaching the deck they saw that the smooth surface of the sea was broken up by a long swell, that the wind now came in short but sharp puffs, that the bank of clouds covered nearly half the sky, and that the detached scud was now flying overhead. The previous stillness was gone; and between the sudden gusts, the roar of the wind in the upper region could be heard. The sun had set now, and a pall of deep blackness seemed to hang from the cloud down to the sea; but at the line where cloud and water touched, a gleam of dim white light appeared.

In preparation for the coming storm, the sailors had put on thick waterproof coats. Many of the passengers had gone below, and those who remained had followed the sailors' example, and had wrapped themselves up in mackintoshes.

Every moment the gusts increased in frequency and power, and the regular line of swell became broken up into confused white-headed waves. The white gleam under the dark cloud grew wider and broader, and at last, with a roar like that of a thousand wild beasts, the gale broke upon them. Just before this, Mr. Hardy had taken Mrs. Hardy and the girls below, promising the latter that they should come up later for a peep out, if they still wished it. Charley and Hubert were leaning against the bulwark when the gale struck them.

For a moment they were blinded and half choked by the force and fury of the spray and wind, and crouched down behind their shelter to recover themselves. Then, with a hearty laugh at their drenched appearance, they made their way to the mainmast, and then, holding on by the belaying pins, they were able to look fairly out on the gale. It was dark – so dark that they could scarcely see as far as the foremast. Around, the sea was white with foam; the wind blew so fiercely that they could scarcely hear each other's voices, even when they shouted, and the steamer laboured heavily against the fast rising sea. Here Mr. Hardy joined them, and for some little time clung there, watching the increasing fury of the gale; then, drenched and almost confused by the strife of winds and water that they had been watching, they made their way, with great difficulty, down into the cabin.

Here the feeling of sea-sickness, which the excitement of the scene had kept off, increased rapidly; and they were glad to slip off their upper clothes, and to throw themselves upon their berths before the paroxysm of sickness came on.

When questioned afterwards as to the events of the next thirty-six hours, the young Hardys were all obliged to confess that that time was a sort of blank in their memory, – a sort of horrible nightmare, when one moment they seemed to be on their heads, and the next upon their feet, but never lying down in a comfortable position, when sometimes the top of the cabin seemed under their feet, sometimes the floor over their head. Then, for a change, everything would go round and round; the noise, too, the groaning and the thumping and the cracking, the thud of the waves and the thump of the paddles, and the general quivering, and shaking, and creaking, and bewilderment; – altogether it was a most unpleasant nightmare. They had all dim visions of Mr. Hardy coming in several times to see after them, and to give them a cup of tea, and to say something cheering to them; and all four had a distinct idea that they had many times wished themselves dead.

Upon the second morning after the storm began, it showed some signs of abating, and Mr. Hardy said to his sons, 'Now, boys, make an effort and come upon deck; it's no use lying there; the fresh air will do you good.' Two dismal groans were the only response to this appeal.

'Yes, I know that you both feel very bad, and that it is difficult to turn out; still it is worth making the effort, and you will be very glad of it afterwards. Come, jump up, else I shall empty the water-jug over you. There, you need not take much trouble with your dressing,' he went on, as the boys, seeing that he was in earnest, turned out of their berths with a grievous moan. 'Just hold on by something, and get your heads over the basin; I will empty the jugs on them. There, now you will feel better; slip on your clothes and come up.'

It was hard work for Charley and Hubert to obey orders, for the ship rolled so tremendously that they could only proceed with their dressing by fits and starts, and were more than once interrupted by attacks of their weary sea-sickness. However, their father stayed with them, helping and joking with them until they were ready to go up. Then, taking them by the arm, he assisted them up the stairs to the deck.

Miserable as the boys felt, they could not suppress an exclamation of admiration at the magnificent scene before them. The sea was tossed up in great masses of water, which, as they neared the ship, threatened to overwhelm them, but which, as she rose on their summits, passed harmlessly under her, hurling, however, tons of water upon her deck. The wind was still blowing fiercely, but

a rift in the clouds above, through which the sun threw down a bright ray of light upon the tossing water, showed that the gale was breaking.

The excitement of the scene, the difficulty of keeping their feet, and the influence of the rushing wind, soon had the effect which their father predicted. The boys' looks brightened, their courage returned; and although they still had an occasional relapse of sickness, they felt quite different beings, and would not have returned to the blank misery of their cabins upon any consideration. They were soon able to eat a piece of dry toast, which Mr. Hardy brought them up with a cup of tea at breakfast-time, and to enjoy a basin of soup at twelve o'clock, after which they pronounced themselves as cured.

By the afternoon the force of the wind had greatly abated, and although a heavy sea still ran, the motion of the vessel was perceptibly easier. The sun, too, shone out brightly and cheerily, and Mr. Hardy was able to bring the little girls, who had not suffered so severely as their brothers, upon deck. Two more days of fine weather quite recruited all the party; and great was their enjoyment as the *Barbadoes* entered the Tagus, and, steaming between its picturesque banks and past Cintra, dropped her anchor off Lisbon.

As our object, however, is to relate the adventures of our young settlers upon the Pampas of La Plate, we must not delay to describe the pleasure they enjoyed in this their first experience in foreign lands, nor to give an account of their subsequent voyage across the Atlantic, or their admiration at the superb harbour of Rio. A few days' further steaming and they arrived at the harbour of Buenos Ayres, where the two great rivers, the Uruguay and the Parana, unite to form the wide sheet of water called the River La Plate. It was night when the *Barbadoes* dropped her anchor, and it was not until the morning that they obtained their first view of their future home.

Very early were they astir, and as soon as it was broad daylight, all four of the young ones were up on deck. Their first exclamation was one of disappointment. The shores were perfectly flat, and, seen from the distance at which they were anchored, little except the spires of the churches and the roofs of a few of the more lofty houses could be seen. After the magnificent harbour of Rio, this flat, uninteresting coast was most disappointing.

'What a distance we are anchored from the shore!' Hubert said, when they had recovered a little from their first feeling. 'It must be three or four miles off.'

'Not so much as that, Hubert,' Maud, who was just a little fond of contradicting, said; 'not more than two miles, I should think.'

Hubert stuck to his opinion; and as the captain came on deck they referred the matter to him.

'The distance of objects across water is very deceiving,' he said. 'It is from eight to nine miles to those buildings you see.'

Maud looked rather crestfallen, and Charley asked, 'Why do we anchor such a long way off, captain?'

'Because the shore is so flat that there is no water for us to get in any closer. In a couple of hours you will see boats coming out to fetch you in; and unless it happens to be high tide, even these cannot get to the beach, and you will have to land in carts.'

'In carts, Captain Trevor?' they all repeated; 'that will be a strange way of landing.'

'Yes, it is,' the captain answered. 'I think that we can safely say that the Argentine Republic is the only country in the world where the only way to land at its chief city is in a cart.'

The captain's boat was by this time lowered, and he at once started for shore with his papers. Soon after ten o'clock he returned, followed by a number of boats. He brought also a letter to Mr. Hardy from an old friend who had been settled for some years near Buenos Ayres, and whose advice had decided him to fix upon that country as the scene of his labours. It contained a warm welcome, and a hearty congratulation upon their safe arrival. This letter had been written two or three days previously, and had been left at the office of the steamship company. It said, however, that the writer would hear of the arrival of the steamer, and would have everything in readiness to take them out to his place upon their landing.

Mr. Hardy had been in frequent communication with his friend from the time that he had determined to emigrate, and Mr. Thompson's letters had contained the warmest assurance of a welcome, and an invitation to make his house their home until they had one of their own to go into; and now this kind letter, coming off so instantly after their arrival, cheered them all much, and made them feel less strange and to some extent at home in the new country at once.

CHAPTER III. A NEW LIFE

TIDE was fortunately high, and the boat containing the Hardys and the lighter portion of their luggage was able to get up to the landing place without the carts being called into use. As they approached the land they were hailed in a hearty voice, and greetings were exchanged between Mr. Hardy and his friend Mr. Thompson – a sunburnt-looking man with a great beard – in a Panama hat and in a suit of spotless white.

‘Why, Mrs. Hardy,’ he said as they landed, ‘you hardly look a day older than you did when I last saw you – let me see – fourteen years ago, just as this big fellow was beginning to walk. And now, if you please, we will be off as soon as we can, for my estancia is fifteen miles away. I have made the best arrangements I could for getting out; but roads are not a strong point in this country, and we seldom trust ourselves in wheeled vehicles far out of the town. You told me in your letters, Hardy, that the young people could all ride. I have horses in any number, and have got in two very quiet ones, with side-saddles, which I borrowed from some neighbours for your girls; but if they prefer it, they can ride in the trap with Mrs. Hardy.’

‘Oh no, please,’ Maud said; ‘I had much rather ride.’

Ethel said nothing, and her mamma saw that she would rather go with her. Accordingly, Mrs. Hardy, Ethel, Sarah, and some of the lighter bags were packed into a light carriage, Mr. Thompson himself taking the reins, as he said he could not trust them to any one but himself. Mr. Hardy, the boys, and Maud mounted the horses prepared for them, and two of Mr. Thompson’s men stowed the heavier trunks into a bullock-cart, which was to start at once, but which would not reach the estancia until late at night.

As the party rode through the town, they were struck with the narrowness and straightness of the streets, and at the generally European look of everything; and Mr. Thompson told them that nearly half the population of Buenos Ayres are European. The number of people upon horseback also surprised our young travellers; but horses cost only thirty shillings or two pounds, and grass is so abundant that the expense of their food is next to nothing; consequently every one rides, – even shepherds look after their sheep on horseback. The horses seemed very quiet, for in front of most of the offices the horses of the merchants could be seen fastened by a head rope to a ring, grooms not being considered a necessity.

Once out the town, the riding horses broke into a canter; for the road was so good that the horses in the light carriage were able to go along at full speed. As they proceeded, they passed many houses of the rich merchants of the place, and all were charmed with the luxuriance and beauty of the gardens. Orange and lemon trees scented the air with their delicious perfumes; bananas, tree ferns, and palms towered above them; lovely butterflies of immense size, and bright little humming-birds, flitted about among a countless variety of flowers. The delight of the young ones was unbounded.

Presently they left the mansions and gardens behind, and drove out fairly into the country.

Upon either side the plains stretched away as far as the eye could reach, in some parts under the plough, but far more generally carpeted with bright green grass and many-coloured wild-flowers. Everywhere could be seen droves of horses and cattle, while dotted here and there over the plain were the estancias of the proprietors.

It was a most delightful ride. The horses went very quietly, but the boys found, to their surprise, that they would not trot, their pace being a loose, easy canter. The last five miles of the distance were not so enjoyable to the party in the carriage, for the road had now become a mere track, broken in many places into ruts, into which the most careful driving of Mr. Thompson could not prevent the

wheels going with jolts that threatened to shake its occupants from their places, and they felt as if every bone in their bodies were broken by the time they drew up at their host's estancia.

Here Mrs. Thompson came out to greet them. She had been a great friend of Mrs. Hardy in their young days, and great was their pleasure at their again meeting after so long a separation. Mr. Thompson had already explained that his wife would have come over to meet them, but that at the time he had left home it was not known that the *Barbadoes* had arrived. She was due, and, as a measure of precaution, the horses and cart had for the last two days been in readiness, but the exact date of her arrival was of course uncertain.

Mr. Thompson's estancia was a large and picturesque building. It was entirely surrounded by a wide verandah, so that at all hours of the day relief could be obtained from the glare of the sun. In front was an extensive garden; and as Mr. Thompson had made it one of his first objects when he built his house to plant a large number of tropical trees and shrubs, these had now attained a considerable size, and afforded a delicious shade. At a short distance behind the house were the houses of the men, and the corrals, or enclosures, for the cattle.

The interior was handsomely furnished in the European style, except that the floors were uncarpeted, and were composed of polished boards. Everywhere were signs that the proprietor was a prosperous and wealthy man. Mr. Thompson had only one son, a lad of about the same age as Charles Hardy. To his care Mrs. Thompson now assigned the boys, while she conducted Mrs. Hardy and her daughters to their rooms.

In half an hour the party re-assembled at dinner, to which they all did ample justice, for their long row and ride had given them the keenest of appetites. They were waited upon by an Italian manservant; and Mrs. Thompson said that there were a good many of this nation in Buenos Ayres, and that, although they were not considered good hands for rough work, they made excellent servants, many of them having been waiters in hotels or stewards on board ship before coming out.

During dinner the conversation turned chiefly upon English friends and affairs, and upon the events of the voyage. After it was over, George Thompson proposed to the boys to take a stroll round the place before it became dark. The gentlemen lit their cigars and took their seats under the verandah; and the two ladies, with Maud and Ethel, went out into the garden. The conversation of Mr. Hardy and his friend turned, of course, upon the country, its position and prospects, and upon the advantage which the various districts offered to new-comers. Presently the dusk came on, followed rapidly by darkness, and in half an hour Ethel came to summon them to tea. The boys had already come in, and were full of delight at the immense herds of cattle they had seen. As they sat down to the tea-table, covered with delicate English china, with a kettle over a spirit-lamp in the centre, and lit with the subdued light of two shaded moderator lamps, Maud said, 'It is not one bit like what I expected, papa, after all you have told us about hardships and working; it seems just like England, except the trees and flowers and butterflies.'

'Do not be afraid, Maud,' her father said, laughing, – for her voice had a tinge of disappointment in it, – 'you won't be cheated out of your hardship and your work, I promise you. Mrs. Thompson will tell you that it was a very different sort of place when she first came here.'

'Yes, indeed,' Mrs. Thompson said, smiling; 'this was considered a very lonely place when we first settled here. We had a little hut with two rooms, and it was more than six months before I could get a woman servant to come out, and then it was only one of our shepherds' wives, who knew nothing of cooking, and who was only useful in drawing the water and sweeping the floors. In time the country became more settled, and there are stations now sixty or seventy miles beyond us.'

The next week was spent in riding over the estate, which consisted of four square leagues, – that is to say, was six miles each way, – and in examining the arrangements of the enclosures for the cattle. At the end of that time Mr. Hardy started on a tour of inspection through the provinces most likely to suit, provided with numerous letters of introduction from his host. While he was away the boys were to assist upon the estate, and to accustom themselves to the work and duties of the life they were to lead.

Into this they entered with the greatest zest, and were in the saddle from morning till night, getting more and more sunburnt from constant exposure, until, as Mr. Thompson told them, they looked like two young guachos. The guachos are the natives of the country. They are fine-looking men, with Spanish faces. Their dress is very picturesque. They wear loose calzoncillas or drawers, worked and fringed round the bottom. Above this is a sort of shawl, so arranged that it has the effect of very loose trousers. These shawls are generally of bright colours, woven in stripes, and sometimes of black cloth edged with scarlet. The white calzoncillas show below this garment, and above a coloured flannel shirt is worn. The boots are long and are made of undressed leather. They wear a broad leathern belt, with pockets in it; in this a knife, too, is always stuck. Upon fête days they come out with gay silver ornaments upon themselves and their horse-trappings. Their saddles are very clumsy and heavy, and are seldom used by Europeans, who, as Mr. Hardy had done, generally bring English saddles from home. After an absence of a month, Mr. Hardy returned with the welcome news that he had made his choice, and had bought at the public auction a tract of four square leagues, upon a river some twenty miles to the south of the town of Rosario, and consequently only a few days' journey from Buenos Ayres. Mr. Thompson looked a little grave when he heard the location of the property, but he only said that he was very glad that his friend had fixed upon a spot which would make it easy for the families to see something of each other. After the first greetings were over, Mr. Hardy proceeded to satisfy the curiosity of his hearers as to the new property.

'It is six miles square,' he said, 'that is, about 25,000 acres, and I bought it for about sixpence an acre. There is a good-sized stream runs through it; there are a good many trees, considering that it is out on the Pampas; there are several elevations which give a fine view over the plain, and upon one of these our future home will stand. A small stream falls into the larger one, and will, I think, be useful. There is an abundance of game; ducks, geese, and swans swarm upon the river. I saw a good many ostriches out on the plains. And, lastly, the soil appears to be excellent. A great point is, that it is only distant twenty miles from Rosario, a most rising town; so that the value of the land is sure to increase yearly, as new settlers come around us.'

'That is a most important point,' Mr. Thompson said. 'Rosario is the most rising town in the country, and the land around it is certain to be very much sought after in a few years.'

'Are there any settlements near, Frank?' Mrs. Hardy asked.

'The next plot to ours belongs to three young Englishmen, and the ground between us and Rosario is also principally occupied by English; so that we shall have neighbours near, and I do not suppose that it will be long before we have them all round us.'

'If the advantages of the place are so great, Frank, how is it that you have got it so very cheaply? I understood from Mr. Thompson that land in a rising neighbourhood, and that was likely to increase in value, was worth two or three shillings, or even more, an acre.'

Mr. Hardy hesitated. 'Well, Clara, the land is at present upon the extreme verge of the settlements, and the Indians are apt sometimes to be a little troublesome, and to drive off a few horses or cattle. No doubt the thing has been exaggerated; still there is something in it, and the consequence is, people are rather afraid to bid, and I have got this splendid tract of land for about £500; and, not improbably, in ten years it may be worth ten times as much.'

'A great proportion of these Indian tales are built up upon very small foundations,' Mr. Thompson said cheerily; and Mrs. Hardy's face, which had been a little serious, cleared up again, and in listening to her husband's account of his travels, she forgot all about the Indians. The boys, however, by no means did so; and as they were going to bed, Charley said: 'I think there is some chance of a row with the Indians, Hubert, for I noticed that Mr. Thompson looked grave when papa first said where he had bought the land. Depend upon it, we shall have some fun with them after all.' They would have thought it still more likely had they heard the conversation between their father and Mr. Thompson after the ladies had gone to bed.

‘Why, my dear Hardy, how came you, with a wife and family, to think of buying land so exposed to the Indian attacks? Every season, when they come down, they sweep off the horses and cattle from the outlying settlements, and murder the people if they get a chance. I look upon it as madness.’

‘There is a good deal in what you say, Thompson, and I thought the whole matter over before I bought it. There is a risk – a great risk, if you like; but I hear the Indians seldom attack the houses of the settlers if they are well prepared and armed. They do occasionally, but very seldom. I shall be well prepared and well armed, and have therefore no fear at all for our personal safety. As to our animals, we must protect them as well as we can, and take our chance. It is only for two or three years at most. After that, we shall have settlements beyond and around us; and if emigration keeps on, as I anticipate, and if, as I believe, Rosario is to become a very large and important place, our land will eventually be worth £1 an acre, at the very lowest. I shall take care not to invest my whole capital in animals, so that I cannot be ruined in one blow. I think that, at the end of five years, you will agree with me that I have done wisely.’

‘I have no doubt that your property will increase very much in value, as you say, Hardy, and that, in the long run, your speculation will be a very successful one; but it is a terrible risk, I think.’

‘I do not think so, Thompson. We shall be a pretty strong party: we shall have certainly two men besides ourselves. The boys could bring down their man at three hundred yards, and I should do considerable execution among a body of Indians at six or seven; so I have no fear – not the least – in the world.’

In another two days Mr. Hardy and the boys, accompanied by Mr. Thompson, went down to Buenos Ayres, and took up their quarters at the hotel for a night. At parting, Mr. Thompson presented them with a couple of fine dogs, which he had bred from English mastiffs: Mr. Hardy had brought a brace of fine retrievers with him. Then, with a hearty adieu and much hand-shaking, they said ‘Good-bye’ as the steamer moved off from the shore. The heavy luggage was to follow in a sailing vessel upon the following day.

CHAPTER IV. THE PAMPAS

THE voyage up the river Parana was marked by no particular incident. The distance to Rosario from Buenos Ayres is about two hundred and fifty miles, which was performed by the steamer in about a day and a half. The river is nearly twenty miles in breadth, and is completely studded by islands. The scenery is flat and uninteresting, and the banks but poorly wooded. Our travellers were therefore glad when they arrived at Rosario. The boys were disappointed at the aspect of the town, which, although a rising place, contained under a thousand inhabitants, and looked miserably poor and squalid after Buenos Ayres. Here they were met by a gentleman to whom Mr. Thompson had introduced Mr. Hardy, and with whom he had stayed on his first visit to Rosario. He had brought horses for themselves, and bullock-carts for their luggage.

‘What! are these your boys, Mr. Hardy? I had not expected to have seen such big fellows. Why, they will be men in no time.’

Charley and Hubert deserved Mr. Percy’s commendation. They were now sixteen and fifteen years old respectively, and were remarkably strong, well-grown lads, looking at least a year older than they really were. In a few minutes the luggage was packed in two bullock-carts, and they were on their way out to Mr. Percy’s station, which was about half-way to the camp of Mr. Hardy. The word camp in the Pampas means station or property; it is a corruption of the Spanish word *campos*, literally plains or meadows.

Here they found that Mr. Percy had most satisfactorily performed the commission with which Mr. Hardy had entrusted him. He had bought a couple of the rough country bullock-carts, three pair of oxen accustomed to the yoke, half a dozen riding horses, two milch cows, and a score of sheep and cattle to supply the larder. He had hired four men, – a stock-keeper named Lopez, who was called the capitaz or head man, a tall, swarthy fellow, whose father was a Spaniard, and whose mother a native woman; two labourers, the one a German, called Hans, who had been some time in the colony, the other an Irishman, Terence Kelly, whose face the boys remembered at once, as having come out in the same ship with themselves. The last man was an American, one of those wandering fellows who are never contented to remain anywhere, but are always pushing on, as if they thought that the farther they went, the better they should fare. He was engaged as carpenter and useful man, and there were few things to which he could not turn his hand. Mr. Hardy was pleased with their appearance; they were all powerful men, accustomed to work. Their clothes were of the roughest and most miscellaneous kind, a mixture of European and Indian garb, with the exception of Terence, who still clung to the long blue-tailed coat and brass buttons of the ‘ould country.’

They waited the next day at Mr. Percy’s station, and started the next morning before daylight, as they had still ten miles to travel, and were desirous of getting as early to the ground as possible.

The boys were in the highest spirits at being at last really out upon the Pampas, and as day fairly broke, they had a hearty laugh at the appearance of their cavalcade. There was no road or track of any kind, and consequently, instead of following in a file, as they would have done in any other country, the party straggled along in a confused body. First came the animals – the sheep, bullocks, and cows. Behind these rode Lopez, in his guacho dress, and a long whip in his hand, which he cracked from time to time, with a report like that of a pistol – not that there was any difficulty in driving the animals at a pace sufficient to keep well ahead of the bullock-carts, for the sheep of the Pampas are very much more active beasts than their English relations. Accustomed to feed on the open plains, they travel over a large extent of ground, and their ordinary pace is four miles an hour. When frightened, they can go for many miles at a speed which will tax a good horse to keep up with. The first bullock-cart was driven by Hans, who sat upon the top of a heap of baggage, his head covered with a very

old and battered Panama hat, through several broad holes in which his red hair bristled out in a most comic fashion, and over his blue flannel shirt a large red beard flowed almost to his waist. Terence was walking by the side of the second cart in corduroy breeches and gaiters and blue coat, with a high black hat, battered and bruised out of all shape, on his head. In his hand he held a favourite shillelah, which he had brought with him from his native land, and with the end of which he occasionally poked the ribs of the oxen, with many Irish ejaculations, which no doubt alarmed the animals not a little. The Yankee rode sometimes near one, sometimes by another, seldom exchanging a word with any one. He wore a fur cap made of fox's skin; a faded blanket, with a hole cut in the middle for the head to go through, fell from his shoulders to his knees. He and Lopez each led a couple of spare horses. The mastiffs trotted along by the horses, and the two fine retrievers, Dash and Flirt, galloped about over the plains. The plain across which they were travelling was a flat, broken only by slight swells, and a tree here and there; and the young Hardys wondered not a little how Lopez, who acted as guide, knew the direction he was to take.

After three hours' riding, Lopez pointed to a rather larger clump of trees than usual in the distance, and said, 'That is the camp.'

'Hurrah,' shouted the boys. 'May we ride on, papa?'

'Yes, boys, I will ride on with you.' And off they set, leaving their party to follow quietly.

'Mind how you gallop, boys: the ground is honeycombed with armadillo holes; and if your horse treads in one, you will go over his head.'

'I don't think that I should do that,' Charley, who had a more than sufficiently good opinion of himself, said; 'I can stick on pretty tightly, and –' he had not time to finish his sentence, for his horse suddenly seemed to go down on his head, and Charley was sent flying two or three yards through the air, descending with a heavy thud upon the soft ground.

He was up in a moment, unhurt, except for a knock on the eye against his gun, which he was carrying before him; and after a minute's rueful look, he joined heartily in the shouts of laughter of his father and brother at his expense. 'Ah, Charley, brag is a good dog, but holdfast is a better. I never saw a more literal proof of the saying. There, jump up again, and I need not say look out for holes.'

They were soon off again, but this time at a more moderate pace. This fall was not, by a very long way, the only one which they had before they had been six months upon the plains; for the armadillos were most abundant, and in the long grass it was impossible to see their holes. In addition to the armadillos, the ground is in many places honeycombed by the bischachas, which somewhat in size and appearance resemble rabbits, and by a little burrowing owl.

The Hardys soon crossed a little stream, running east to fall into the main stream, which formed the boundary of the property upon that side; and Mr. Hardy told the boys that they were now upon their own land. There was another hurrah, and then, regardless of the risk of falls, they dashed up to the little clump of trees, which stood upon slightly rising ground. Here they drew rein, and looked round upon the country which was to be their home. As far as the eye could reach, a flat plain, with a few slight elevations and some half dozen trees, extended. The grass was a brilliant green, for it was now the month of September. Winter was over, and the plain, refreshed by the rains, wore a bright sheet of green, spangled with innumerable flowers. Objects could be seen moving in the distance, and a short examination enabled Mr. Hardy to decide that they were ostriches, to the delight of the boys, who promised themselves an early hunt.

'Where have you fixed for the house, papa?' Hubert asked.

'There, where those three trees are growing upon the highest swell you can see, about a mile and a half farther. We will go on at once; the others will see us.'

Another ten minutes took them to the place Mr. Hardy had pointed out, and the boys both agreed that nothing could be better.

At the foot of the slope, the river which formed the eastern boundary flowed, distant a quarter of a mile or so from the top of the rise. To the right another stream came down between the slope and

another less elevated rise beyond. This stream had here rather a rapid fall, and was distant about three hundred yards from the intended site of the house. The main river was thirty or forty yards across, and was now full of water; and upon its surface the boys could see flocks of ducks, geese, and other birds. In some places the bank was bare, but in others thick clumps of bushes and brushwood grew beside it.

They now took off the saddles and bridles from their horses, and allowed them to range as they pleased, knowing that the native horses were accustomed to be let free, and that there was no fear of their straying away. 'Now, boys,' Mr. Hardy said, 'let us begin by getting our first dinner. You go straight down to the water; I will keep to the right. You take Dash, I will take Flirt.'

In another ten minutes the reports of the guns followed close upon each other, and the boys had the satisfaction of knocking down two geese and eight ducks, which Dash brought ashore, besides others which escaped. In five minutes more they heard a shout from their father, who had bagged two more geese and three ducks. 'That will do, boys; we have got plenty for the next day or two, and we must not alarm them by too much slaughter.'

'Four geese and eleven ducks, papa, in five minutes,' the boys said, when they joined Mr. Hardy; 'that is not bad shooting to begin with.'

'Not at all, boys. What with wild fowl and armadillos, I think that, at a pinch, we could live for some time upon the produce of the estate.'

'You don't mean to say, papa, that they eat the armadillos?' Hubert said with a look of suspicion.

'They do indeed, Hubert, and I am told that they are not at all bad eating. Now let us go up to the rise again; our carts must be nearly up.'

By the time they reached the three trees, they found that the rest of the cavalcade was within a quarter of a mile, and in a few minutes they came up.

The cattle and sheep required no attending. Immediately they found that they were not required to go any farther, they scattered, and began to graze. The oxen were unyoked from the carts, and all hands set-to to unload the miscellaneous collection of goods which had been brought up. Only the things which Mr. Hardy had considered as most indispensable for present use had been brought on, for the steamer from Buenos Ayres did not carry heavy goods, and the agricultural implements and other baggage were to come up in a sailing vessel, and were not expected to arrive for another week.

The carts contained three small portmanteaus with the clothes of Mr. Hardy and the boys, and a large case containing the carbines, rifles, and ammunition. There was a number of canisters with tea, coffee, sugar, salt, and pepper; a sack of flour; some cooking pots and frying pans, tin plates, dishes, and mugs; two sacks of coal and a quantity of firewood; shovels, carpenter's tools, a sickle, the framework of a hut with two doors and windows, three rolls of felt, a couple of dozen wooden posts, and two large coils of iron wire. While the others were busy unloading, the German had cut some turf and built a rough fireplace, and had soon a bright fire blazing.

'Shall we pluck the ducks?' Charley asked.

'I reckon we can manage quicker than that,' the Yankee said; and taking up one of the ducks, he cut off its head and pinions; in another minute he had roughly skinned it, and threw it to the German, who cut it up and put the pieces into the frying pan. A similar process was performed with the other ducks, a little pepper and salt shaken over them, and in a wonderfully short time the first batch was ready. All drew round and sat down on the grass; the tin plates were distributed, but were only used by Mr. Hardy and his sons, the others simply taking the joints into their hands and cutting off pieces with their knives. The operation of skinning the fowls had not been pleasant to look at, and would at any other time have taken away the boys' appetites; but their long ride had made them too hungry to be particular. The result of this primitive cooking was pronounced to be excellent; and after drinking a mug of tea, all felt ready for work.

'What is to be done first, papa?'

'The first thing is to get these posts into the ground, and to get up a wire fence, so as to make an enclosure for the animals at night. We will put in five posts each side, at ten yards apart; that will

take eighteen posts. With the others we can make a division to separate the sheep from the cattle. Unless we do this, some of them may take it into their heads to start off in the night and return to their old home.'

A spot was soon chosen between the house and the stream on the right. The distance was soon measured and marked; and while Hans carried down the heavy posts one by one on his shoulder, the others went to work. The soil was soft and rich, and the holes were dug to the required depth in a shorter time than would have been considered possible. The wire was stretched and fastened, and before sunset everything was in readiness. The animals were driven in, and the entrance, which was narrow, was blocked up with brushwood from the river. Then followed another half-hour's work in getting up a small shelter with the cases and some of the felting, for Mr. Hardy and his sons. By this time all were really tired, and were glad when Hans summoned them to another meal, this time of one of the sheep. Then Mr. Hardy and the boys, taking their mugs of tea, retired into the shelter prepared for them, and sat and talked over the events of the day, and as to the work for to-morrow; and then, wrapping themselves up in their blankets, laid down to sleep, listening for some time dreamily to the hum of conversation of the men, who were sitting smoking round the fire, and to the hoarse roar of the innumerable frogs in the stream below.

In the morning they were up and abroad with daylight, and a cup of hot coffee and a piece of bread prepared them for work. Mr. Hardy, his boys, and the Yankee set-to upon the framework of the two huts; while the others went down to the stream and cut a quantity of long, coarse rushes, which they made into bundles, and brought up to the place of the house in a bullock-cart. The framework for the huts, which were each about fifteen feet square, was all ready fitted and numbered: it took, therefore, a very short time to erect; and when one was done, Mr. Hardy and the Yankee set-to to erect the other at a distance of from forty to fifty yards, while Charley and Hubert drove in the nails and secured the work already done.

By dinner-time the work was complete, and a perfect stack of rushes had been raised in readiness. A great number of long rods had been cut from the bushes, and as the most of them were as flexible and tough as willows, they were well suited for the purpose.

After dinner the whole party united their labour to get one of the huts finished. The rods were split in two, and were nailed at intervals across the rafters of the roof. Upon them the long rushes were laid, and over all the felt was nailed. The sides were treated in the same way, except that the rushes were woven in and out between the wattles, so as to make quite a close, compact wall, no felt being nailed on it. The other house was treated in the same way; and it was not until the third night that both huts were finished and ready for occupancy.

Mr. Hardy and his sons then took possession of the one near the brow of the hill. This was to be merely a temporary abode, to be removed when the house was built. The men had that lower down, and rather nearer to the cattle. Beds of rushes were piled up in three corners, and the boys thought that they had never passed such a delicious night as their first in their new house. The next day Mr. Hardy told his boys that they should take a holiday and ride over the place.

The press of work was over, and things would now settle down in a regular way. Hans and Terence had taken a contract to dig the holes for the posts of the strong fence which was to surround the house, including a space of a hundred yards square. This precaution was considered to be indispensable as a defence against the Indians. Seth, the Yankee, had similarly engaged to dig a well close to the house. No supervision of them was therefore necessary. Lopez was to accompany them. Each took a double-barrelled gun and a revolver. The day was very fine – about as hot as upon a warm day in June in England. Mr. Hardy proposed that they should first ride westerly as far as the property extended, six miles from the river; that they should then go to the south until they reached that boundary, and should follow that to the river, by whose banks they should return, and bring back a bag of wild fowl for the larder. Quite a pack of dogs accompanied them, – the two mastiffs, the setters, and four dogs, two of which belonged to Lopez, and the others to Hans and Seth: these last,

seeing that their masters had no intention of going out, determined to join the party upon their own account.

These dogs were all mongrels of no particular breed, but were useful in hunting, and were ready to attack a fox, an animal which swarms upon the Pampas, and does great damage among the young lambs.

For the first three or four miles nothing was seen save the boundless green plain, extending in all directions; and then, upon ascending a slight rise, they saw in the dip before them two ostriches. Almost simultaneously the creatures caught sight of their enemies, and went off at a prodigious rate, followed by the dogs and horsemen. For a time their pace was so fast that their pursuers gained but little upon them. Presently, however, the dogs gained upon one of them, and, by their barking and snapping at it, impeded its movements. The horsemen were close together, and the boys had drawn out their revolvers to fire, when their father cried, 'Don't fire, boys! Watch Lopez.'

At this moment the guacho took from the pommel of his saddle two balls like large bullets, connected with a long cord. These he whirled round his head, and launched them at the ostrich. They struck his legs, and twined themselves round and round, and in another moment the bird was down in the dust. Before Lopez could leap to the ground the dogs had killed it, and the guacho pulled out the tail feathers and handed them to Mr. Hardy. 'Is the flesh good?' Mr. Hardy asked.

'No, Senor; we can eat it when there is nothing else to be had, but it is not good.'

'I am rather glad the other got away,' Hubert said. 'It seems cruel to kill them merely for the sake of the feathers.'

'Yes, Hubert; but the feathers are really worth money,' Mr. Hardy said. 'I should be the last person to countenance the killing of anything merely for the sake of killing; but one kills an ostrich as one would an animal with valuable fur. But what is that?'

As he spoke the dogs halted in front of a patch of bush, barking loudly. The retrievers and the native dogs kept at a prudent distance, making the most furious uproar; but the mastiffs approached slowly, with their coats bristling up, and evidently prepared for a contest with a formidable antagonist. 'It must be a lion!' Lopez exclaimed. 'Get ready your revolvers, or he may injure the dogs.'

The warning came too late. In another instant an animal leaped from the thicket, alighting immediately in front of Prince and Flora. It was as nearly as possible the same colour as the mastiffs, and perhaps hardly stood so high; but he was a much heavier animal, and longer in the back. The dogs sprang upon it. Prince, who was first, received a blow with its paw, which struck him down; but Flora had caught hold. Prince in an instant joined her, and the three were immediately rolling over and over on the ground in a confused mass. Mr. Hardy and Lopez at once leapt from their horses and rushed to the spot; and the former, seizing his opportunity, placed his pistol close to the lion's ear, and terminated the contest in an instant. The animal killed was a puma, called in South America a lion; which animal, however, he resembles more in his colour than in other respects. He has no mane, and is much inferior in power to the African lion. They seldom attack men; but if assailed, are very formidable antagonists. The present one was, Lopez asserted, a remarkably large one.

Mr. Hardy's first care was to examine the dogs. Prince's shoulder was laid open by the stroke of the claws, and both dogs had numerous scratches. Flora had fortunately seized him by the neck, and he had thus been unable to use his teeth.

Mr. Hardy determined to return home at once, in order to dress Prince's shoulder; and leaving Lopez to skin the puma, the rest took their way back. When they arrived the wounds of the dogs were carefully washed, and a wet bandage was fastened with some difficulty upon Prince's wound. Leaving all the dogs behind, with the exception of the retrievers, Mr. Hardy and the boys started for a walk along the river, leading with them a horse to bring back the game, as their former experience had taught them that carrying half a dozen ducks and geese under a broiling sun was no joke. They were longer this time than before in making a good bag; and after-experience taught them that early in the morning or late in the evening was the time to go down to the stream, for at these times flights

of birds were constantly approaching, and they could always rely upon coming home laden after an hour's shooting. Upon the present occasion, however, they did not do badly, but returned with a swan, three geese, and twelve ducks, just in time to find the men preparing for dinner.

The next morning the two bullock-carts were sent off with Hans and Terence to Rosario, to fetch the posts for the fence, together with two more coils of wire, which had been left there from want of room in the carts when they came up. Charley was sent with them, in order that he might find out if the sailing vessel had arrived with the ploughs and heavy baggage. While he was away, Mr. Hardy and Hubert were occupied in making a complete exploration of the property, and in erecting a storehouse for the goods.

In five days Charley returned with the carts he had taken, and with four others which he had hired at Rosario, bringing the heavy baggage, which had come in the day after he had arrived there. The goods were placed for the present in the new store, and then all hands set to work at the fence. Hans and Terence had already dug the holes; and the putting in the posts, ramming the earth tightly round them, and stretching the wires, took them two days.

The usual defence in the outlying settlements against Indians is a ditch six feet wide and as much deep; but a ditch of this width can be easily leapt, both by men on horseback and on foot. The ditch, too, would itself serve as a shelter, as active men could have no difficulty in getting out of it, and could surround the house by creeping along the bottom of the ditch, and then openly attack all round at once, or crawl up unperceived by those who were upon the watch on the other side.

The fence had none of these disadvantages. It was six feet high. The wires were placed at six inches apart for four feet from the bottom, and at nine inches above that. Then the upper wires were not stretched quite so tightly as the lower ones, rendering it extremely difficult to climb over. In this way an attacking party would have no protection whatever, and would, while endeavouring to climb the fence, be helplessly exposed to the fire of those in the house. Those who got over, too, could receive no assistance from their comrades without, while their retreat would be completely cut off.

The gateway to the fence was an ordinary strong iron gate which Mr. Hardy had bought at Rosario, and to which strong pointed palings, six feet long, were lashed side by side, with intervals of six inches between them. This was the finishing touch to the fortification; and all felt when it was done that they could withstand the attack of a whole tribe of Indians.

The carts were again sent off to Rosario to bring back some more wood, from which to make the framework of the house. Hubert this time accompanied them, as Mr. Hardy wished the boys to become as self-reliant as possible. He was also to hire three peons, or native labourers.

Before he started, the plan of the future house was discussed and agreed upon. In the middle was to be the general sitting-room, fifteen feet square; upon one side was the kitchen, fifteen by ten and a half; upon the other, the servants' bedroom, of the same size; behind were three bedrooms, twelve feet by fifteen each, all opening from the sitting-room. The house, therefore, was to form a block thirty-six feet by thirty.

Upon the side next to the kitchen, and opening from it, a small square tower with two storeys in it was to stand. It was to be ten feet square; the lower room to be a laundry and scullery, and the one above, approached by straight wooden steps, to be the storehouse. The roof was to be flat, with a parapet three feet high. From this a clear view could be had over the country for miles, and the whole circuit of the fence commanded in case of attack. The walls of the house were to be of adobé or mud, the internal partitions of sun-baked bricks.

CHAPTER V. THE SETTLER'S HOME

JUST before commencing the house, Mr. Hardy heard that a sale of stock was to take place at an estancia about twenty miles to the west of Rosario, in consequence of the death of its owner. He therefore took Lopez and the newly hired peons, and started. He was likely to be away five days. The boys were to do what work they judged best in his absence. They determined to set about brickmaking. Fortunately, Hans was accustomed to the work, and knew the way that the natives of the country set about it; the American Seth knew nothing about it, but he was always willing to turn his hand to anything. First, a piece of ground was cleared of grass, and was levelled for the reception of the bricks when made; then some planks were knocked together so as to form a rough table. Two brick moulds were made, these being larger than those used in England. A piece of ground was chosen near. The turf was taken off, the soil was dug up, and the peons drove the bullocks round and round upon it, trampling it into a thick mud, some water being thrown in when necessary.

As it was sufficiently trampled, Terence carried it in a trough and emptied it on to the table close by, where Hans and Seth fashioned it in the moulds, turning the bricks out on to a plank a foot wide and six feet long. When this was full, the boys took each an end and carried it off to the prepared ground, where they carefully removed the bricks with two little slabs of wood, and placed them on the ground to dry, returning with the empty plank to find another one filled for them. It was hard work for all, and from eleven until three the heat was too great to allow them to work at it; but they began with daylight, and taking a nap during the heat of the day, were ready to work on again as long as it was light.

The bricks were, of course, to be dried by the sun, as fuel was too scarce for them to think of burning them; but this was of little consequence, especially as they were to be used indoors, the heat of the sun being quite sufficient to make very fair bricks without the use of fire.

By the afternoon of the fifth day they had made a quantity of bricks which would, they calculated, be ample for the construction of the partition walls of their house.

The boys had just deposited the last brick upon the drying ground, and were moving away, when Hubert cried, 'Stop, Charley, don't move a step.'

Started by the suddenness and sharpness of the cry, Charley stood without moving, and was surprised to see his brother pick up one of the wet bricks in both hands, and dash it upon the ground immediately in front of where they were walking.

'I've killed him!' Hubert cried triumphantly; and Charley, looking down, saw a snake of about three feet long writhing in the grass, his head being completely driven into the ground under the force of the lump of wet clay. Two or three stamps of their heavy boots completed the work. And the men coming up to see what was the matter, Hans said that Charley, who would have trodden upon the reptile in another instant had not his brother called out, had had a very narrow escape, for that the snake was the *vivora de la cruz*, so called from a mark like a cross upon his head, and that his bite was almost always mortal.

It was a pretty snake, with bands of red, white, and black upon his body. Charley grew very pale at the thought of the narrow escape he had had, and wrung his brother very hard by the hand; while Hubert was half inclined to cry at the thoughts of what might have happened.

The sun was just setting when they saw a crowd of objects in the distance; and the boys at once saddled their horses and rode off, to meet their father and to assist to drive in the animals. They found, upon reaching him, that he had bought a thousand sheep, fifty cattle, and twenty horses; three of these last being remarkably well bred, and fast, and bought specially for their own riding. Upon their arrival at the house, the sheep were turned into the enclosure, the horses were picketed, and the

cattle left to roam at their will, as it was not thought probable that they would attempt to return to their distant homes, especially after two days' fatiguing march.

Mr. Hardy was very much pleased at the sight of the long rows of bricks lying in front of the house, and gave great credit to all for the amount of work which had been done during his few days' absence. The next morning he assigned to every one their share of the future work. Lopez and one of the peons went out with the horses, cattle, and sheep. After a time it would not be necessary to have two men employed for this work, as the cattle and horses, when they once became accustomed to their new home, would never wander very far. Charley, Hubert, and Terence were to take three yoke of oxen and the three ploughs, and to commence to get the land in order for cultivation; the ground selected as a beginning, being that lying below the house near the river. Mr. Hardy, Hans, and the two peons were to work at the house, and Seth was to finish the well, which, although begun, had been stopped during the press of more urgent work, and the water required had been fetched from the stream in a barrel placed in a bullock-cart. The way in which adobé or mud houses are constructed is as follows: – The mud is prepared as for brick-making; but instead of being made into bricks, it is made at once into the wall. The foundation having been dug out and levelled, two boards are placed on edge eighteen inches or two feet apart. These are kept in their places by two pieces of wood nailed across them. The space between these boards is filled with mud, in which chopped hay and rushes have been mixed to bind it together. The boards are left for a day or two, while the builders proceed with the other part of the wall. They are then taken off, and the heat of the sun soon dries the wall into a mass almost as hard as a brick. The boards are then put on again higher up, and the process repeated until the walls have gained the desired height.

In a fortnight's time the walls were finished, and the bullock-carts were despatched to Rosario to fetch lime, as Mr. Hardy had determined to plaster the inside walls to keep in the dust, which is otherwise continually coming off mud walls. By this time a considerable extent of land was ploughed up, and this was now planted with maize, yam or sweet potato, and pumpkins: a small portion, as an experiment, was also planted with potato seeds, but the climate is almost too warm for the potato to thrive.

Upon the return of the carts with the lime, the partition walls were built with the bricks. The walls finished, all hands went to work at the roof. This Mr. Hardy had intended to have had regularly thatched; but during his last visit to Rosario he had heard that the Indians frequently endeavoured in their attacks to set fire to the roofs, and he therefore determined to use tiles. The carts had to make two journeys to Rosario to get sufficient tiles and lath. But at last all was finished; the walls were plastered inside and whitewashed out; the floor was levelled, beaten down hard, and covered with a mixture of clay and lime, which hardened into a firm, level floor.

It was exactly two months from the date of their arrival at the farm that the doors were hung and the finishing touch put to the house, and very pleased were they all as they gave three cheers for their new abode. The tower, they all agreed, was an especial feature. It was built of adobé up to the height of the other walls, but the upper storey had been built of bricks two-thick and laid in mortar. The top had been embattled; and the boys laughed, and said the house looked exactly like a little dissenting chapel at home.

It was a joyful day when a fire was first lighted in the kitchen chimney, which, with that in the sitting-room, was lined with bricks; and the whole party sat down to a dinner of mutton and wild fowl of three or four sorts.

The same evening Mr. Hardy told the boys that he should start the next day to bring up their mamma and the girls, who were all getting very impatient indeed to be out upon the Pampas. He explained to them that he should bring up iron bedsteads with bedding, but that he relied upon them to increase their stock of tables and benches, and to put up shelves, which would do until regular cupboards and closets could be made. Mr. Hardy thought that he should not be away much more than a week, as, by making a long ride to Rosario, the next day he should catch the boat, which left the

following morning for Buenos Ayres; and as he had already written to Mr. Thompson saying when he should probably arrive, there would be no time lost. The next morning he started before daylight, the last words of the boys being: 'Be sure, papa, to bring the mosquito curtains for us all; they are getting worse and worse. We hardly closed an eye all last night.'

Hot as the weather now was, the boys worked incessantly at their carpentering for the next week, and at the end had the satisfaction of seeing a large table for dining at in the sitting-room, and a small one to act as a sideboard, two long benches, and two short ones. In their mother and sisters' rooms there were a table and two benches, and a table and a long flap to serve as a dresser in the kitchen. They had also put up two long shelves in each of the bedrooms, and some nails on the doors for dresses. They were very tired at the end of the week, but they looked round with a satisfied look, for they knew they had done their best. The next morning they were to ride to Rosario to meet the party. The carts had gone off under the charge of Terence that day.

It was indeed a joyful meeting when Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and the girls stepped off the steamer; but the first embrace was scarcely over when the boys exclaimed simultaneously, 'Why, girls, what is the matter with your faces? I should not have known you.'

'Oh, it's those dreadful mosquitoes; there were millions on board the steamer last night I really thought we should have been eaten up. Didn't you, mamma?'

'Well, my dear, I thought that they would perhaps leave something of us till morning, but I felt almost inclined to go mad and jump overboard. It was a dreadful night I do hope they are not so bad here, Frank?'

'No, Clara, they are nothing like so bad as they were last night; but still, as we are so close to the river, they will, no doubt, be troublesome, and I question whether the beds at the hotel have mosquito curtains; but if you take my advice, and all sleep with the sheet over your heads, you will manage to do pretty well. It is better to be hot than to be bitten all over.'

In spite, however, of the expedient of the sheets, all the party passed a bad night, and were quite ready to get up before daylight to start for their ride to Mr. Percy's estancia. They were all to ride, with the exception of Sarah, who took her place in one of the bullock-carts; and they would therefore reach the estancia before the heat of the day fairly set in. Terence having been told that Sarah was going to ride, had cut some boughs, with which he made a sort of arbour over the cart to shade her from the sun – a general method of the country, and at which Sarah was much gratified. She had at first felt rather anxious at the thought of going without her mistress; but Terence assured her: 'Sure, miss, and it's meself, Terence Kelly, that will take care of ye; and no danger shall come near your pretty face at all, at all; ye'll be quite as safe as if ye were in the ould country. And as for the bastes, sure and it's the quietest bastes they are, and niver thought of running away since the day they were born.'

So Sarah took her place without uneasiness, and the others started at a hand canter for Mr. Percy's estancia.

While at Mr. Thompson's, both Mrs. Hardy and the girls had ridden regularly every day, so that all were quite at their ease on their horses, and were able to talk away without ceasing of all that had happened since they parted. The only caution Mr. Hardy had to give, with a side-look at Charley, was, 'Look out for armadillo holes; because I have known fellows who were wonderful at sticking on their horses, come to grief at them.'

At which Hubert laughed; and Charley said, 'Oh papa!' and coloured up and laughed, as was his way when his father joked him about his little weaknesses.

They had not gone more than half way before they met Mr. Percy, who had ridden thus far to welcome his guests, for English ladies are very scarce out on the Pampas, and are honoured accordingly. One of the first questions the girls asked after the first greetings were over, was, 'Have you many mosquitoes at your estancia, Mr. Percy?'

'Not many,' Mr. Percy said; 'I have no stream near, and it is only near water that they are so very bad.'

After waiting during the heat of the day at Mr. Percy's, the boys rode on home, as six guests were altogether beyond Mr. Percy's power of accommodating.

The next morning the boys were up long before daylight, and went down to the stream, where, as day broke, they managed to shoot a swan and five wild ducks, and with these they returned to the house. Then they swept the place with the greatest care, spread the table, arranged the benches, set everything off to the best advantage, and then devoted their whole energies to cooking a very excellent breakfast, which they were sure the travellers would be ready for upon their arrival. This was just ready, when, from the lookout on the tower, they saw the party approaching. The breakfast was too important to be left, and they were therefore unable to ride out to meet them. They were at the gate, however, as they rode up.

'Hurrah, hurrah!' they shouted, and the girls set up a cheer in return.

The men ran up to take the horses, and in another minute the whole party were in their new home. The girls raced everywhere wild with delight, ascended to the lookout, clapped their hands at the sight of the sheep and cattle, and could hardly be persuaded to take their things off and sit down to breakfast.

Mrs. Hardy was less loud in her commendation of everything, but she was greatly pleased with her new home, which was very much more finished and comfortable than she had expected.

'This is fun, mamma, isn't it?' Maud said. 'It is just like a picnic. How we shall enjoy it, to be sure! May we set-to at once after breakfast, and wash up?'

'Certainly, Maud; Sarah will not be here for another two hours, and it is as well that you should begin to make yourselves useful at once. We shall all have to be upon our mettle, too. See how nicely the boys have cooked the breakfast. These spatch-cock ducks are excellent, and the mutton chops done to a turn. They will have a great laugh at us, if we, the professed cooks, do not do at least as well.'

'Ah, but look at the practice they have been having, mamma.'

'Yes, Maud,' Hubert said; 'and I can tell you it is only two or three things we can do well. Ducks and geese done like this, and chops and steaks, are about the limits. If we tried anything else, we made an awful mess of it: as to puddings, we never attempted them; and shall be very glad of something in the way of bread, for we are heartily sick of these flat, flabby cakes.'

'Why have you only whitewashed this high middle wall half-way up, Frank?'

'In the first place, my dear, we fell short of whitewash; and, in the next place, we are going to set to work at once to put a few light rafters across, and to nail felt below them, and whitewash it so as to make a ceiling. It will make the rooms look less bare, and, what is much more important, it will make them a great deal cooler.'

'You get milk, I hope?'

'Yes,' Charley said; 'two of the cows of the last lot papa bought are accustomed to be milked, and Hubert and I have done it up till now; but we shall hand them over to you, and you girls will have to learn.'

Maud and Ethel looked at each other triumphantly. 'Perhaps we know more than you think,' Ethel said.

'Yes,' Mrs. Hardy said; 'the girls are going to be two very useful little women. I will tell you a secret. While you boys were at work of a morning, the girls, as you know, often walked over to Mr. Williams the farmer's, to learn as much as they could about poultry, of which he kept a great many. Mrs. Williams saw how anxious they were to learn to be useful, so she offered to teach them to milk, and to manage a dairy, and make butter and cheese. And they worked regularly, till Mrs. Williams told me she thought that they could make butter as well as she could. It has been a great secret, for the girls did not wish even their papa to know, so that it might be a surprise.'

'Very well done, little girls,' Mr. Hardy said; 'it is a surprise indeed, and a most pleasant one. Mamma kept your secret capitally, and never as much as whispered a word to me about it.'

The boys too were delighted, for they had not tasted butter since they arrived, and they promised readily enough to make a rough churn with the least possible delay.

By ten o'clock the carts arrived with Sarah and the luggage, and then there was work for the afternoon, putting up the bedsteads, and getting everything into order. The mosquito curtains were fitted to the beds, and all felt gratified at the thought that they should be able to set the little bloodsuckers at defiance. The next day was Sunday, upon which, as usual, no work was to be done. After breakfast the benches were brought in from the bedrooms, and the men assembling, Mr. Hardy read prayers, offering up a special prayer for the blessing and protection of God upon their household. Afterwards Mrs. Hardy and the girls were taken over the place, and shown the storehouse, and the men's tent, and the river, and the newly planted field.

'The ground is getting very much burnt up, papa,' Charley said. 'It was damp enough when we put in the crops, and they are getting on capitally; but I fear that they were sown too late, and will be burnt up.'

'Ah, but I have a plan to prevent that,' Mr. Hardy said. 'See if you can think what it is.'

Neither of the boys could imagine.

'When I first described the place to you, I told you that there was a main stream with a smaller one running into it, and that I thought that this last would be very useful. I examined the ground very carefully, and I found that the small stream runs for some distance between two slight swells, which narrow in sharply to each other just below the house. Now I find that a dam of not more than fifty feet wide and eight feet high will make a sort of lake a quarter of a mile long, and averaging fifty yards wide. From this the water will flow over the whole flat by the river in front of the house and away to the left, and we shall be able to irrigate at least three or four hundred acres of land. Upon these we shall be able to raise four or five crops a year; and one crop in particular, the alfalfa, a sort of lucern for fattening the cattle in time of drought, when the grass is all parched up. At that time cattle ordinarily worth only £3 can be sold, if fat, for £9 or £10. So you see, boys, there is a grand prospect before us.'

The boys entered enthusiastically into the scheme, and the party went at once to inspect the spot which Mr. Hardy had fixed upon for the dam. This, it was agreed, should be commenced the very next day; and Mr. Hardy said that he had no doubt, if the earth was properly puddled, or stamped when wet, that it would keep the water from coming through.

In the afternoon Mrs. Hardy, Maud, and Ethel were taken a ride round the property, and were fortunate enough to see some ostriches, to the great delight of the girls.

At tea Mr. Hardy said: 'There is one very important point connected with our place which has hitherto been unaccountably neglected. Do any of you know what it is?'

The boys and their sisters looked at each other in great perplexity, and in vain endeavoured to think of any important omission.

'I mean,' their father said at last, 'the place has no name. I suggest that we fix upon one at once. It is only marked in the Government plan as Lot 473. Now, what name shall it be?'

Innumerable were the suggestions made, but none met with universal approbation. At last Mrs. Hardy said: 'I have heard in England of a place called Mount Pleasant, though I confess I do not know where it is. Now, what do you say to Mount Pleasant? It is a mount, and we mean it to be a very pleasant place before we have done with it.'

The approval of the suggestion was general, and amid great applause it was settled that the house and estate should hereafter go by the name of 'Mount Pleasant.'

In the morning the boys were at work at two wheelbarrows, for which Mr. Hardy had brought out wheels and iron-work; and Mr. Hardy and the men went down to the stream, and began to strip off the turf and to dig out a strip of land five-and-twenty feet wide along the line where the dam was to come. The earth was then wetted and puddled. When the barrows were completed they were brought into work; and in ten days a dam was raised eight feet high, three feet wide at the top, and

twenty-five feet wide at the bottom. In the middle a space of two feet wide was left, through which the little stream at present ran. Two posts, with grooves in them, were driven in, one upon either side of this; and thus the work was left for a few days, for the sun to bake its surface, while the men were cutting a trench for the water to run down to the ground to be irrigated.

A small sluice was put at the entrance to this, to regulate the quantity of water to be allowed to flow, and all was now in readiness to complete the final operation of closing up the dam. A quantity of earth was first collected and puddled, and piled on the top of the dam and on the slopes by its side, so as to be in readiness, and Mrs. Hardy and the girls came down to watch the operation.

First a number of boards two feet long, and cut to fit the grooves, were slipped down into them, forming a solid wall, and then upon the upper side of these the puddled earth was thrown down into the water, Terence standing below in the stream and pounding down the earth with a rammer. The success was complete: in a couple of hours' time the gap in the dam was filled up, and they had the satisfaction of seeing the little stream overflowing its banks and widening out above, while not a drop of water made its escape by the old channel.

While this work had been going on, the boys had been engaged up at the house. The first thing was to make a churn, then to put up some large closets and some more shelves, and the bullock-carts had to be sent to Rosario for a fresh supply of planks. This occupied them until the dam was finished. The girls had tried their first experiment at butter, and the result had been most satisfactory. The dinners, too, were pronounced to be an immense improvement upon the old state of things.

Soon after the dam was finished, Hans, who had been too long a rover to settle down, expressed his desire to leave; and as Mr. Hardy had determined to lessen his establishment, – as, now that the heavy work was over, it was no longer necessary to keep so many hands, – he offered no objection to his leaving without the notice he had agreed to give. Wages were high, and Mr. Hardy was desirous of keeping his remaining capital in hand, in case of his sheep and cattle being driven off by the Indians. One of the peons was also discharged, and there remained only Lopez, Seth, Terence, and two peons.

CHAPTER VI.

A TALE OF THE MEXICAN WAR

MR. HARDY was rather surprised at Seth Harper, the Yankee, having remained so long in his service, as the man had plainly stated, when first engaged, that he thought it likely that he should not fix himself, as he expressed it, for many weeks. However, he stayed on, and had evidently taken a fancy to the boys; and was still more interested in the girls, whose talk and ways must have been strange and very pleasant to him after so many years' wandering as a solitary man. He was generally a man of few words, using signs where signs would suffice, and making his answers, when obliged to speak, as brief as possible. This habit of taciturnity was no doubt acquired from a long life passed either alone, or amid dangers where an unnecessary sound might have cost him his life. To the young people, however, he would relax from his habitual rule of silence. Of an evening, when work was over, they would go down to the bench he had erected outside his hut, and would ask him to tell them tales of his Indian experiences. Upon one of these occasions Charley said to him: 'But of all the near escapes that you have had, which was the most hazardous you ever had? which do you consider was the narrowest touch you ever had of being killed?'

Seth considered for some time in silence, turned his plug of tobacco in his mouth, expectorated two or three times, as was his custom when thinking, and then said, 'That's not altogether an easy question to answer. I've been so near wiped out such scores of times, that it ain't no easy job to say which was the downright nearest. In thinking it over, I conclude sometimes that one go was the nearest, sometimes that another; it ain't no ways easy to say now. But I think that, at the time, I never so much felt that Seth Harper's time for going down had come, as I did in an affair near San Louis.'

'And how was that, Seth? Do tell us about it,' Maud said.

'It's rather a long story, that is,' the Yankee said.

'All the better, Seth,' Charley said; 'at least all the better as far as we are concerned, if you don't mind telling it.'

'No, I don't mind, no how,' Seth answered. 'I'll just think it over, and see where to begin.'

There was a silence for a few minutes, and the young Hardys composed themselves comfortably for a good long sitting, and then Seth Harper began his story.

'Better than five years back, in '47, I were fighting in Mexico. It wasn't much regular up and down fighting we had, though we had some toughish battles too, but it were skirmishing here, skirmishing there, keeping one eye always open, for man, woman, and child hated us like pison, and it was little mercy that a straggler might expect if he got caught away from his friends. Their partisan chiefs, half-soldier half-robber, did us more harm than the regulars, and mercy was never given or asked between them and us. Me and Rube Pearson worked mostly together. We had "fit" the Indians out on the prairies for years side by side, and when Uncle Sam wanted men to lick the Mexicans, we concluded to go in together. We 'listed as scouts to the "Rangers," that is, we agreed to fight as much as we were wanted to fight, and to go on in front as scouts, in which way we had many a little skirmmage on our own account; but we didn't wear any uniform, or do drill, which couldn't have been expected of us. We shouldn't have been no good as regulars, and every one knew that there were no better scouts in the army than Rube Pearson and Seth Harper. Lor', what a fellow Rube was, to be sure! I ain't a chicken,' and the Yankee looked down at his own bony limbs, 'but I was a baby by the side of Rube. He were six feet four if he were an inch, and so broad that he looked short unless you saw him by the side of another man. I do believe Rube Pearson were the strongest man in the world. I have heard,' Seth went on, meditating, 'of a chap called Samson: folks say he were a strong fellow. I never came across any one who had rightly met him, but a good many have heard speak of him. I should like to have seen him and Rube in the grips. I expect Rube would have astonished

him. Rube came from Missouri, – most of them very big chaps do. I shouldn't wonder if Samson did, though I never heard for certain.'

The young Hardys had great difficulty to prevent themselves from laughing aloud at Seth's idea on the subject of Samson. Charley, however, with a great effort, steadied himself to say, 'Samson died a great many years ago, Seth. His history is in the Bible.'

'Is it though?' Seth said, much interested. 'Well now, what did he do?'

'He carried away the gates of Gaza on his back, Seth.'

Seth remained thoughtful for some time. 'It all depends on how big the gates were,' he said at last. 'That gate down there is a pretty heavyish one, but Rube Pearson could have carried away two such as that, and me sitting on the top of them. What else did he do?'

'He was bound in new cords, and he broke them asunder, Seth.'

Seth did not appear to attach much importance to this, and inquired, 'Did he do anything else?'

'He killed three hundred men with the jawbone of an ass.'

'He killed –' Seth began, and then paused in sheer astonishment. Then he looked sharply round: 'You're making fun of me, lad.'

'No, indeed, Seth,' Charley said; 'it is quite true.'

'What! that a man killed three hundred men with the jawbone of an ass? It couldn't have been; it was sheer impossible, – unless they were all asleep, and even then it would be an awful job.'

'I don't know how it was, Seth, but the Bible tells us, and so it must be true. I think it was a sort of miracle.'

'Oh it was a miracle!' Seth said thoughtfully, and then remained silent, evidently pondering in his own mind as to what a miracle was, but not liking to ask.

'It was a very long time ago, Seth, and they were no doubt a different people then.'

'Was it a very, very long time back?' Seth asked.

'Yes, Seth; a very, very, very long time.'

'Ah!' Seth said in a thoughtful but more satisfied tone, 'I understand now. I expect it's that. It's the same thing among the Indians: they have got stories of chiefs who died ever so long ago, who used to be tremendous fellows, – traditions they call 'em. I don't expect they were any braver than they are now; but a thing grows, you see, like a tree, with age. Lor' bless 'em! if they tell such tales now about a Jew, what will they do some day about Rube Pearson?'

The young Hardys could stand it no longer, but went off into a scream of laughter, which even the surprised and offended looks of the ignorant and simple-minded, but shrewd, Yankee could not check. So offended was he, indeed, that no entreaties or explanations were sufficient to mollify him, and the story was abruptly broken off. It was not for two or three days that the boys' explanation and assurance sufficed; and then, when Charley had explained the whole history of Samson to him, he said:

'I have no doubt that it is all true, and I wish I could read it for myself. I can just remember that my mother put a great store on her Bible, and called it the good book. I can't read myself, and shouldn't have time to do it if I could; so it's all one as far as that goes. I am just a hunter and Indian fighter, and I don't know that for years I have ever stopped so long under a roof as I have here. My religion is the religion of most of us out on the prairies. Be honest and true to your word. Stick to a friend to death, and never kill a man except in fair fight. That's about all, and I hope it will do; at any rate, it's too late for me to try and learn a new one now. I listen on a Sunday to your father's reading, and I wish sometimes I had been taught; and yet it's better as it is. A man who acted like that wouldn't be much good for a rough life on the prairies, though I have no doubt it could be done in the settlements. Now I must go on with my work. If you and the others will come over to the hut this evening, I will go on with that yarn I was just beginning.'

After tea the young Hardys went down to the hut, outside which they found Seth awaiting their arrival. They were now comfortably seated, and Seth, without further introduction, went on.

‘One day our captain sent for Rube and me, and says, “I’ve got a job for you two scouts. It’s a dangerous one, but you won’t like it any the worse for that, I know.”

“Not a bit,” said Rube with a laugh. He was the lightest-hearted fellow, was Rube; always gay and jolly, and wouldn’t have hurt a squirrel, except in stand-up fight and as a matter of business.

“What is it, Cap?” said I; “you’ve only got to give us the word, and we’re off.”

“I’ve had a message,” he said, “from Colonel Cabra of their service, that he is ready to turn traitor, and hand us over some correspondence of Santa Anna, of which he has somehow got possessed. Being a traitor, he won’t trust any one, and the only plan we can hit upon is, that he shall make a journey to San Miguel, thirty miles north of this, as if on business. I am to make an expedition in that direction, and am to take him prisoner. He will then hand over the papers. We shall bring him here, and, after keeping him for a time, let him go on parole. No suspicion will therefore at any future time arise against him, which there might be if we met in any other way. The papers are very important, and the affair must not be suffered to slip through. The country between this and San Miguel is peaceful enough, but we hear that El Zeres’ band is out somewhere in that direction. He has something like two hundred cut-throats with him of his own, and there is a rumour that other bands have joined him. Now I want you to go on to-morrow to San Miguel. Go in there after dusk, and take up your quarters at this address: it is a small wine-shop in a street off the market. Get up as Mexicans; it only requires a big cloak and a sombrero. You can both speak Spanish well enough to pass muster. Stay all next day, and till daybreak on the morning afterwards, and then ride back on this road. You will find out in the first place whether Cabra has arrived, and in the next place whether El Zeres is in the neighbourhood. I shall only bring forty men, as I do not wish it to be supposed that I am going on more than a mere scouting expedition. You understand?”

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