

HUNTING WITH THE PATAGONIAN WELSHMEN

BY "THE MASTER MARINER."



ANY years ago there lived a Welsh divine who dreamed of a Welsh Utopia in a foreign land. His dreams so far materialized that, in 1864, one hundred and eighty immigrants left Wales to found a colony in Patagonia. They landed in the Golfo

Nuevo and finally

settled on the banks of the Chubut River, which mingles its waters with those of the South Atlantic Ocean twenty miles below the forty-third parallel of south latitude. Here they have multiplied for upwards of a quarter of a century, and have been further increased by immigration.

Many of them speak only their native Welsh. They are so excessively healthy that, at the period of my visit, a population of eighteen hundred did not produce enough illness to support either druggist or physician. Such names as Jones, Hughes, Mathews, Edwards, Williams and Evans abound, and the owners of them are as Welsh as their people at home. They are poor but thoroughly independent. The generation born in the country was brought up on horseback and can vie with the Patagonian Indian in horsemanship.

Though the country swarms with ducks, geese and partridges few of the Welshmen indulge in shooting, because many do not own even so much as an old musket, and the majority of those who have firearms have not the wherewithal to purchase ammunition. But hunting they may and do enjoy, and whoever desires hard riding and rare sport may find both with the Patagonian Welsh boys. A meet may be prearranged, or a few hunt enthusiasts may happen together on a cloudy afternoon in the harvest season when they have nothing else to do. The quarry is foxes and a large species of hare, and half a dozen of each for an

afternoon's run is only a fair bag. Once a fox or hare is raised it takes only a few minutes for the dogs to run him down—but they are lively minutes!

One day the meet was at the farm of Hugh Hughes, distant about sixteen miles from the sea. The house was a representative dwelling, built of poor, home-made, half-baked brick, held together nominally by a little mud and mortar, in reality by virtue of being laid in the gravity line. The house contained two rooms, and mother earth formed the only floor. About twenty riders collected at the door of this modest mansion, in front of which half a dozen hungry-looking dogs of no particular breed wandered aimlessly to and fro. Two or three of the party possessed delapidated saddles. The remainder had but sheepskins or pieces of bagging to interpose between themselves and their horses' backbones. Stirrups were not in vogue to any extent; some of the men rode barefooted, and the bridles were mostly spot-made with a bit of cord doing service as reins. Many of the horses showed an ear split in two. These animals had been trained by the Pehuelches, a tribe of Patagonian Indians, who were excellent hunters. My steed wore a luxuriant growth of white hair which curled and snarled at will, untroubled by comb or brush. Her left ear was split almost down to her head and she had but one good eye. I hunted on many horses during my sojourn in this far land, but never on a better than my shaggy, split-eared, one-eyed Whitey.

The country over which we hunted contained no hills, trees or water; no fences, ditches or walls, but was irregularly cut up by gullies and steep-sided ravines. The only vegetation was clumps of thorny bushes and a little grass. The extremely loose soil was composed of sand, loam and countless oyster shells. Its general appearance certainly sustained the opinion of the immortal Darwin that this part of the world has been *terra firma* for little more than two thousand years.

It was but a short ride through a few ravines and over a hillock or two till we started a fox, and then away we sped.

I am a fair rough rider, but unfortunately was not accustomed to Patagonian methods. I tried to run straight after the game and to jump the one-eyed mare over the bushes, but she only crashed through them, and soon her white legs were red with her own blood, while my clothing was sadly torn, and my cuticle showed many a scratch and scrape. Presently the bit of cord which composed my reins broke, and my white steed proceeded to initiate me into her native mode of hunting. These Indian horses need but to see the object of the chase, and they rush after it with the impetuosity of so many dogs, apparently as much interested in the race as their riders.

We dodged in an amazing fashion around all obstacles, the mare turning short, now to the right and now to the left with lightning rapidity, and sometimes pivoting on her hind legs through an arc of almost sixty degrees. Though I was totally unused to such work I had no choice! for my reins were gone. As I was without stirrups, it required a tight grip, careful poise and instant response to unexpected twists to avoid being thrown headlong. The mad race continued for perhaps five minutes, when finally the mare, bridleless, and with the alleged saddle turned under her belly, carried me to the dogs just as they ran up to their fox. The last few rods of the ride I covered with only one leg over her back and with my hand fast gripping her tangled mane.

When she stopped I landed in a sitting posture among dogs and fox, and had barely time to get clear of a crowd of wild Welsh lads who came charging down in a confused mass upon me, yelling like demons and pulling and tearing at each other and each others' horses. I am alive to tell the tale, but I have had a six-minute lesson in riding I never forgot. From that day hunting *a la Pehuelche* Indian offered not the slightest difficulty.

After I had made a new bridle we continued the hunt and captured five hares and three foxes that afternoon. There is no difference in the manner of running down these two creatures, and one affords just as much sport as the other. The flesh of the hare is dry.

Two or three miles beyond the river the country, which is more open and level and less cut up, forms favorite haunts for ostriches and guanacos. These are either stalked or run down with horses and dogs. Of course any good rider will agree with me that the latter method is far preferable. A gaucho is an invaluable companion, for a party may be out for several days and only the experienced plainsman can find a drop of water in that desolate region.

The gaucho will find a mud puddle which has stood since the last rain in some remote corner where no one else would think of looking. Should he come to one which is dried up there is nothing to do but ride on to the next, trusting to find water there. This necessitates tremendous rides to escape a terrible death, and renders it imperative to have several horses in order to change mounts from time to time. There are sections of the waterless country where even the most experienced camp men hesitate to venture. Not infrequently, when the risk is taken, a skeleton bears silent witness to the hardihood of the adventurer.

The immense quantity of vapor brought from the boundless expanse of the South Pacific by the prevailing winds of these latitudes is stopped by the cordilleras, which run parallel to the west coast of Patagonia, and flows back whence it came. This makes the west coast so moist as to be scarcely habitable, and leaves the eastern shores so dry that one must keep close by the rivers. From the Negro to the Santa Cruz rivers on the eastern side of Patagonia, a distance of six hundred miles or thereabout, there is not an average yearly rainfall of seven inches, and parts of this tract have much less. The reservoirs, accordingly, cannot be relied upon, and at best they are literally mud puddles where horses, dogs and men are on an equal footing. At a few well-known points between rivers there are wells and even tiny streams—as, for instance, in the Gulf of San Matias, where are the remains of a Spanish settlement abandoned long since, and on the Valdez Peninsula, where a small colony of Spaniards was destroyed by the Indians in the last century. Again, not far from Ninfas Point, on the south side of New Bay between the Rio Negro

and the Chubut, are wells where the whalers and sealers of these parts were used to water ship in days gone by. To the westward, on the same shore of New Bay, the Argentine Government once tried to strike water by driving, but gave it up at the depth of one hundred metres. South of the Chubut, at Atlas Point, there are also wells, but along the coast there are not many more watering spots except at the rivers. Inland are a few lakes. The mud puddles give the main supply.

We slept one night on a bed of sand, loam and calcareous matter, with innumerable fleas springing over us. I have sojourned on the coast of the Brazilian province of Rio Grande do Sul, where the soil is composed of nought but fine, white, dry sand, and yet even there the fleas, thick as they are, cannot approach in numbers those of the eastern side of middle Patagonia.

Early in the morning we were ready for the chase. It is interesting to contrast the gaucho's saddle gear with the slender outfits of the Welshmen. He first puts on the horse's back two pieces of wood, about twenty inches long, that fit into the hollows by the horse's backbone. They are held together by thongs and bound down by a surcingle. Over these he puts blankets and skins to a number seemingly limited only by his wealth. There may be as many as eight or ten, and over this mass he passes another broad surcingle. On top of the whole he sits, rather than straddles, not altogether unlike the manner in which one sits on a camel's back. At night his saddle is unstrapped and becomes his bed.

When we were all in the saddle—or its substitute—we spread out somewhat and moved obliquely in the direction of the river where, we conjectured, our game had been to drink. Before long we sighted two guanacos on their way back to the camp to graze. The dogs and horses saw them too, and we were off. It was a straight-away gallop, our horses straining every nerve and muscle to the utmost. We lost sight of the fleet creatures, but descried them again from a slight elevation running in another direction. We were thus able to ride over a shorter leg of the triangle than the one they traversed. Presently we succeeded in coming well up on the fleeing animals. But again they drew

away, and again we headed them off by going down the steep side of a ravine. Here the horses had little foothold. The loose soil slid from under their feet so rapidly that they were compelled to abandon locomotion of their own. With legs spread out and the riders leaning well toward the hillside to assist in maintaining an upright position they reached the bottom as part of a small avalanche. By maneuvers of this character we gained ground on the much fatigued game, and, though our horses were blown, we at last overhauled the pair. A moment later first one and then another native swung the fatal bolas. The animals fell with their legs bound fast, and the long, exhausting chase ended.

The bolas is a peculiar weapon. Heavy balls, half as large as one's fists, are fastened one to either end of a leather thong. Sometimes the bolas has three balls—two lighter ones attached one to either end of a short thong and a heavier ball to one end of a longer thong, the other end of which joins the middle of the shorter thong. When sufficient impetus has been gained by whirling these balls about the head they are let go to twine about the legs of whatever they may have been properly directed at.

Whoever desires to experiment with these weapons would do well to ride a horse that will keep his head down and out of the way. For his own sake he would act wisely in practising on foot for a time, since his first attempts are apt to involve him very much.

The speed and wind of the guanaco give him a fair chance to escape the horses and dogs. This lends great zest and spirit to the sport.

Guanacos are easily domesticated, and grow so tame as to become nuisances. They persist in following you about, treading right on your heels and nosing in your pockets. If repulsed they get angry and spit at you. Their saliva is strongly acid, and if not washed off will bum the skin. If it should chance to lodge on a scratch or in an eye it may cause great irritation and soreness. The skins of the kids make beautiful and soft rugs, but as they are very small many of them are required. The Indians dye the under sides of the skins with dull colors, which they obtain from certain kinds of earths, and an expert

can tell by the style of the dyeing from what tribe the rug came. The skins of the grown animals are not desirable in rugs, but from the fleece or fur the natives weave a rough mat, very similar in workmanship to what sailors call a sword mat.

The hunting of the ostrich—a bird by no means as large as the African species—is conducted much in the same manner as the guanaco hunting, and is equally exciting. An ostrich, when thrown by the bolas, exhausted or wounded, will often struggle onward, endeavoring to work its head into a bush, a sand heap or whatever offers apparent protection. It is an instinctive action, which may be observed in a barnyard fowl if chased about an enclosure until incapable of running further. Birds, almost without exception, become light-headed and foolish if heated, frightened and excited.

The feathers of the ostrich, though fair, are by no means as valuable as those of the African bird. The skin of his neck is very tough, and is much affected for tobacco pouches.

While returning one day from a hunting excursion we captured a fox before the dogs had done more than bite through one of his flanks. I carried him for a time holding him firmly by the nape of the neck and then turned him over to a Welsh lad who handled the little beast less cautiously. The fox rewarded the trust thus reposed in him by biting the end of the Welshman's nose off. I had great trouble in dressing the creature's wound, but succeeded in accomplishing this each day until it healed. Subsequently he was allowed to run about my schooner at will, but his propensities were always mischievous and destructive. I found it necessary to keep a few missiles convenient to my bed and when he entered my room at night his attention was forcibly directed to their presence. If I failed to hear him he would cut up my clothing and on one occasion chewed up a Panama hat, a pair of cuffs, a shirt and a collar. I kept the little animal until one wild night in the Parana River about seven months later he disappeared, how, I never knew.

Ducks and geese abound on the river and along the sea-coast. Further back where there are lakes remote from the habitations of man they are almost

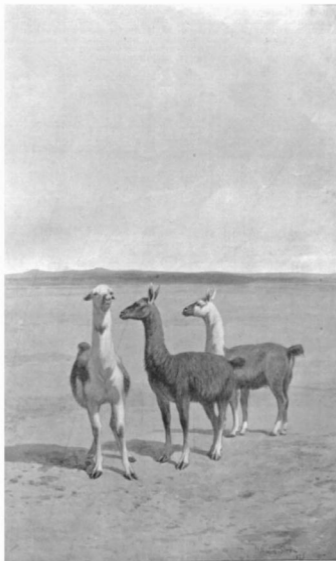
innumerable, and shooting them is tame sport. Here too that most beautiful of feathered fowls, the flaming flamingo, may be seen in all its glory. No more dazzlingly brilliant sight can be imagined than a flock of these birds rising from the dreary landscape and crossing the face of the setting sun, their crimson plumage glittering in the fire of its last rays.

Colonies of penguins flourish along the sea-shore, and there was at one time a French company on Lobos Island engaged in capturing the birds for their oil and also for their skins, which are thicker and tougher than the skins of our loons, and, being heavily feathered, form lovely cushion covers. He who hears for the first time by night the cry of a penguin as it floats on the bosom of the ocean cannot fail to be startled by its striking similarity to the cry of a human infant.

On the east coast of Patagonia are a number of seal rookeries, and though the Argentine Government has forbidden seal killing except by special permission, more or less poaching is carried on.

Numerous specimens of the armadillo family are to be encountered throughout the camp. They are tortoise-like in general appearance, but in their movements excessively untortoise-like. When pursued they dig holes in the ground so quickly that if they have but half a minute their escape is almost certain. I once came so suddenly upon one of the odd little things that he had no opportunity of burrowing. I tried to put my foot upon him, but he was not underneath. I essayed again and again to tread on him, with the same result. I jumped about like one possessed, scratched and bruised myself in the bushes, lost my hat and tore my shirt and coat off. I put my foot down hard at least seventy-five times just exactly where that little beast should have been, and finally captured him by falling full length on his jointed armor. He makes excellent eating, and in Brazil, where he is called the "tattoo," his flesh is much prized.

It is said that whoever drinks of the waters of the Mexican Rio Grande in youth will return to drink again ere the close of life. Be this as it may I know that he who tarries long under the southern cross, on those Patagonian shores washed by the South Atlantic, will never



Painted for OUTING by Hermann Simon.

GUANACOS AT HOME.

let its memories grow dim. There is a fascination that cannot be described or accounted for in that lonely and desolate region. Here are no Irish hunters to bestride, no dapper saddles, no five-barred gates to take nor planted ground

to ride over, no dress-coats and elaborate toilets at dinner when the chase is done; but for genuine and exhilarating sport give me Patagonian game, a Patagonian field and my shaggy, one-eyed, split-eared Whitey.



IN THE LAND OF THE BREAD-FRUIITS.

"In the afternoon they came unto a land,
In which it seemed always afternoon,
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream. —Byron.



COCOANUT SPATHE AND FLOWER.

HE island of Upolu, in the Samoan group, is considered by many travelers to rank next to the far famed Tahiti in point of beauty, and some claim that it fully equals it in every respect. Certainly it would be difficult to imagine a spot more beautiful in tropical scenery and vegetation, or one having a more delightful and equable climate. Throughout the year day and night are equally enjoyable, whether in or out of doors, with the exception of two or three months at the beginning of each year. The mornings and evenings are deliciously cool and clear, and there are no sweltering, suffocating nights, during which sleep is impossible.

There is a charm in the easy, careless, every day life of the Samoans, so free from all conventionalities. Day after day swiftly passes amid scenes that lull and soothe the senses, stifling all ambition. The very air and trees breathe and whisper seduction. People linger here contented, "Eating the Lotus day by day." No wonder that the Samoan is indolent; who would not be in a country

where Nature is so prodigal that it needs but the stretching forth of the hand to pluck all that is needful to sustain life and afford comfort? The fertile soil would support many times the present number of people with very little exertion.