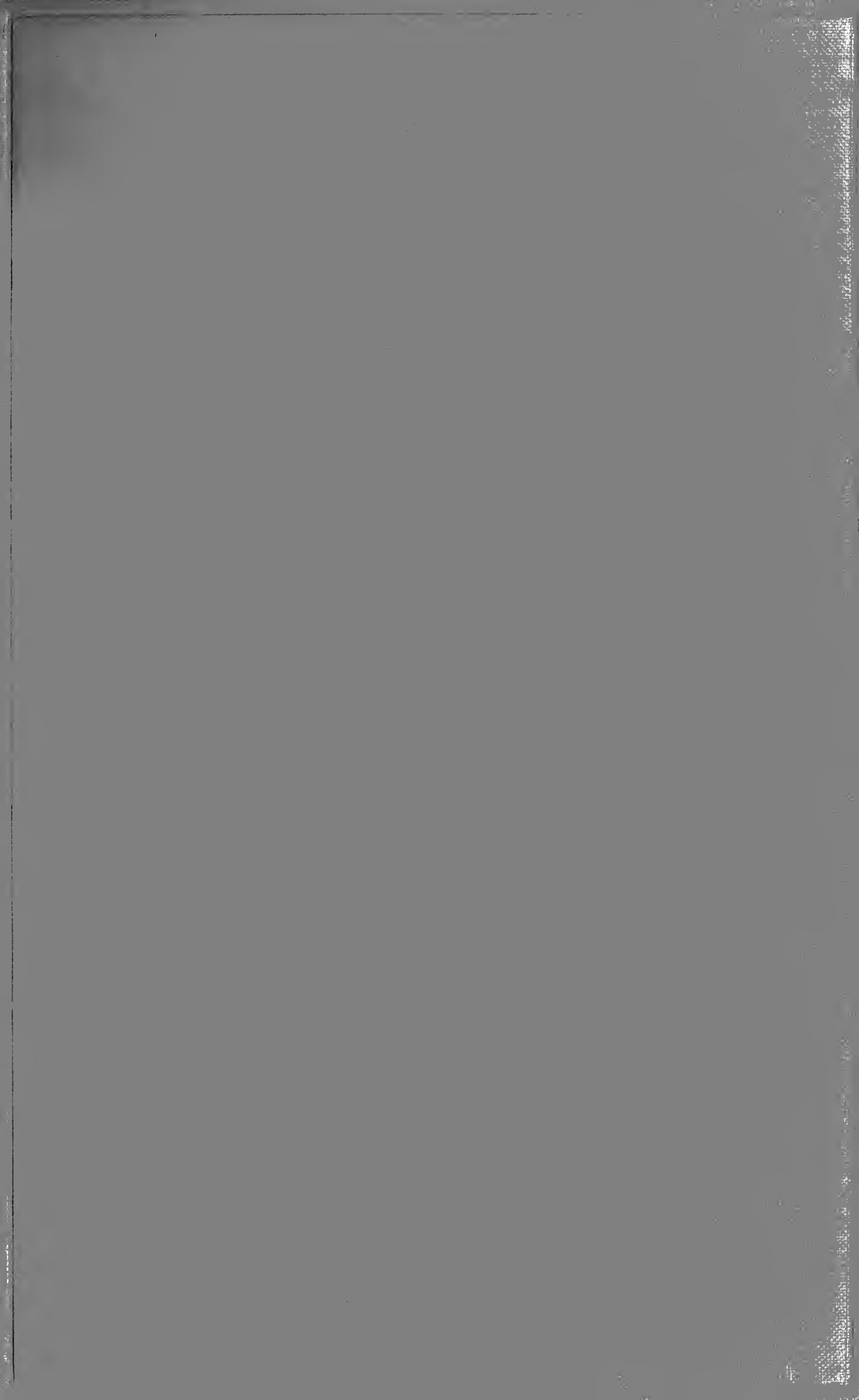

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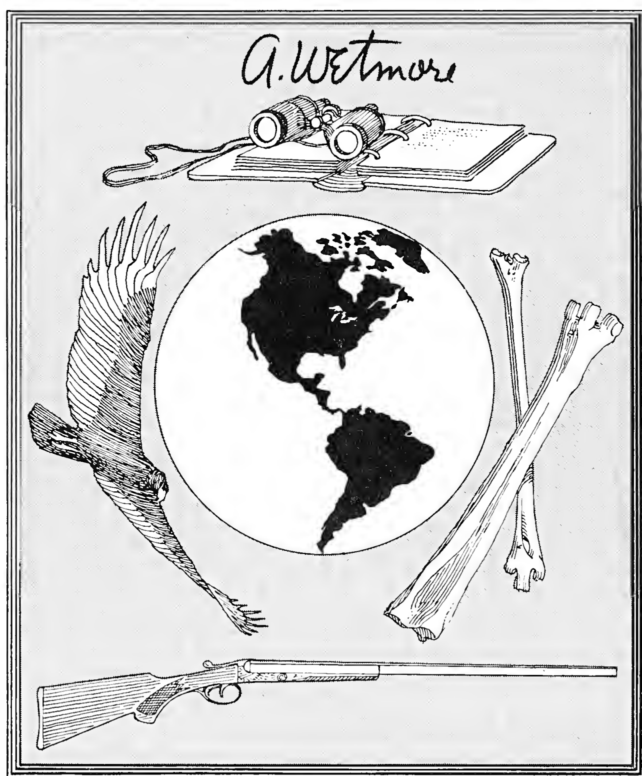

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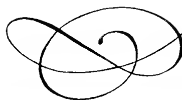

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THE FALLS OF IGUAZÚ.

(Frontispiece.)

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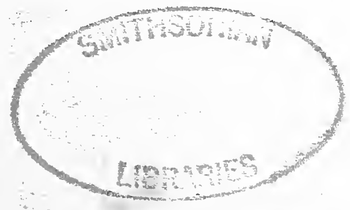
THE GOLDEN RIVER

SPORT AND TRAVEL IN PARAGUAY

BY

J. W. HILLS AND IANTHE DUNBAR

LONDON:
PHILIP ALLAN & CO.
QUALITY COURT



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CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL AT POSADAS.

For a day and a half we had made our way to Posadas, our railway carriage hitched to a fruit train, with its empty waggons which were to come back laden with oranges. Rain had come on soon after our start, and drove across the bare stretches of country. We were travelling north, getting further and further from the larger towns and their neighbourhood. Durham and Hereford cattle had given place to long-horned criollo stock, which stood knee deep in the swampy grass. The country stretched in a rolling line to the horizon, with bunches of trees at far intervals, which marked the whereabouts of small estancias. Birds became scarce, houses few and far between; and behind us the two shining rails ran to so fine a point that they became one.

Sometimes we passed muddy rivers where the undergrowth along the banks was almost submerged, and the branches were littered with weeds and drift wood, and the *débris* brought by the yellow flood. A solitary heron fished

disconsolately amongst the reeds, by a dug-out canoe moored to a tree.

A mournful country it seemed, seen through a blur of rain: with now and again a small one-roomed mud rancho, with a few draggled hens trying to shelter in the doorway. The country showed no undulations. In the grey driving rain it stretched away in sombre tones to a grey horizon. The remains of dead cattle and horses lay here and there, and occasionally a peon, huddled in his poncho, sat motionless on his horse, to watch the train go by.

Where were 'the tropical scenes' to which we had looked forward? No blossoms were to be seen in the fields, except patches of the brilliant little scarlet verbena; though tobacco plants flowered along the railway track, and tiny blue irises grew between the sleepers.

We reached Posadas in sheets of relentless rain, with a sky so overcast that it seemed it could never be blue again. But after tea the rain slackened, and we set forth to explore the town. The road from the station led up hill, and was fissured with huge cracks and channels, down which the water ran turbid and red. For the soil is red, as deep in colour as Devon earth. A jagged line of clearing sky showed in the west; the trees hung their dripping heads; and from the scattered houses people peered out to watch us pass. Bushes of datura, drenched with rain, stood in the untidy

gardens, each heavy-headed creamy flower pouring a runnel of water from its throat to the ground.

As we reached the town, suddenly it cleared. The setting sun turned the sky crimson, and made the ragged little place a city of romance. The pool of sunset sky was rose-red, and rose-red the glistening streets. The telegraph wires became threads of silver, on which the rain-drops hung, translucent as pink tourmalines. And with the rapid dusk, lights began to show in the houses. An open doorway gave a glimpse of a shadowy inner garden, and the thin sound of a guitar came down the street. The little plaza was deserted and silent, the figure of its central statue reflecting a gleam here and there from the lighted shops. Dark foliaged trees surrounded it, and the ground beneath them was slippery with bruised and fallen flowers. It was fast growing dark, and, with the warmer air, the hidden orange trees gave out gusts of fragrance.

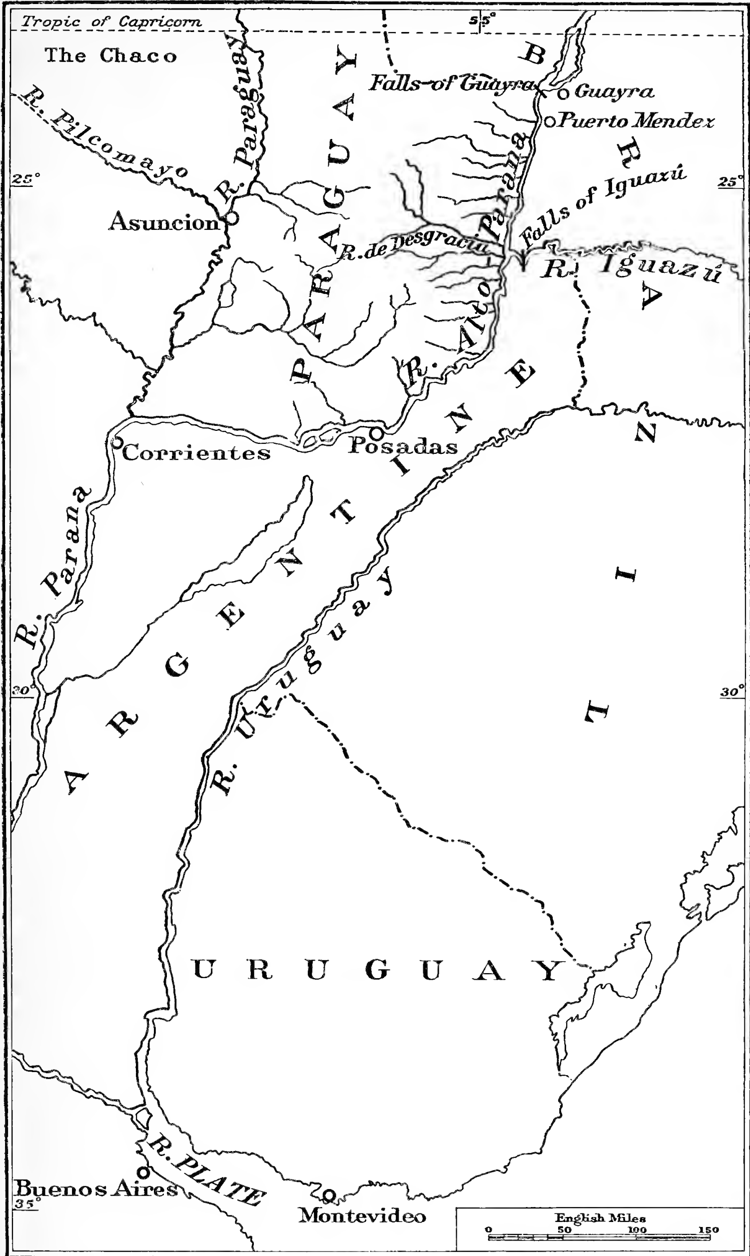
The hiss of the rain was over, and the wet earth stirred and breathed. We had come upon the poor little town in a happy moment: daylight would have shown us its tawdriness and poverty. But now it was mysterious and strange, touched with sudden poetry. The houses stood shadowly along the raised pavements, and were nothing more than washes of flat tone, broken by vague hollows that were

doors and windows; except where some gleam of light fell across the road, quivering in the puddles, and making an archway or building leap suddenly out of the darkness. Knots of men stood talking in liquid Spanish.

Exultantly we felt we were in a strange land, on the eve of adventure. And perhaps the rain, at which we had grumbled, had helped to heighten this mood. Only the walls of our railway compartment stood between us and a new world. Our lit compartment, strewn with fishing rods, guns, ammunition and stores of every kind.

On the morrow we were to start. Somewhere out in the darkness lay the great river we were to explore. And Posadas, poor, meretricious Posadas, had decked herself in beauty to greet us.

. . . . . .



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By day, Posadas became a very different place. It was a crude little town, with straggling streets that branched out in every direction from the nucleus formed by the plaza and the few better shops, and that dwindled away into the frayed edges of the country.

The civic life of the place centred in the plaza, with a full-blown statue of Liberty in its midst, a small bandstand, and seats under trees covered with purple or yellow flowers. Here the inhabitants crowded in the evening, whilst the band played airs from light operas, and the girls of the place walked in parties of five or six, with linked arms. So, too, did the young men, and for the most part these groups passed and repassed each other, with feigned indifference. If

a youth wanted to talk to the girl he admired, he walked on the outside of the line of girls, and made himself agreeable to them all; but it seemed an unwritten law that he must not break their ranks. Elderly couples sat peacefully on the benches, watching the young people pass: and parents herded along small children, who lingered to stare at the band and the electric

globes that shone like strange fruit in the branches. In the daytime there were few women of the better class about. They kept to their shaded houses till the heat of the day was over, and then emerged, very fresh and spotless, to walk in the square and see their friends.

We wandered about during the day, up the uneven streets, and leaving the few better houses with walled gardens behind we made our way down to the river. It is very wide here, and forms the boundary between Argentina and the low wooded

Woman in the Market

A PARAGUAYAN WORKING MAN.

THE MATÉ DRINKER.

(To face p. 6.)

shores of Paraguay. In the docks were the river steamers, that run from Buenos Aires to Posadas, and the smaller boats that ply between the latter town and Puerto Mendez. Barges and lighters were crowded in the harbour, being loaded with oranges, from carts heaped with golden fruit, standing axle-deep in the water.

Across the brimming river, which is about two miles wide at this point, lay the little Paraguayan town of Encarnacion: a tiny ferry steamer plied backwards and forwards, and brought the Paraguayan women to market in the early mornings. The market was held on a small hill above the river, under the shade of some trees, where a breath of fresh air came from the water. Each booth was sheltered with a rough thatched cover or a piece of matting. Oranges were sold, mandioca, eggs, Indian corn, fried cakes and vegetables. The women were not uncomely. The poorer classes in Posadas wear a loose garment, like a bedgown, coloured or white; and a handkerchief bound tightly round the head. Their feet are bare, and they carry themselves well, with heavy baskets balanced on their heads. They are chiefly a mixed race, partly Indian, and partly of the province of Misiones, and talk a mongrel Guarani.

The Paraguayans are a very marked type. They are olive-skinned, and have small fine features as a rule, set in a face curiously wide

across the high cheekbones and jaw, and narrowing down suddenly to a tiny pointed chin. Their hair is fine and dark, and the brows pencilled and arched. The men are slender limbed, with small hands and feet; and are dressed in shirt and trousers, with soft felt hats, and a knotted handkerchief round their necks. The women are of sturdier build, and wear bright cotton dresses, with a handkerchief, often poppy red, tied over their heads. Both men and women have sad faces. And the story of their country is a sad one.

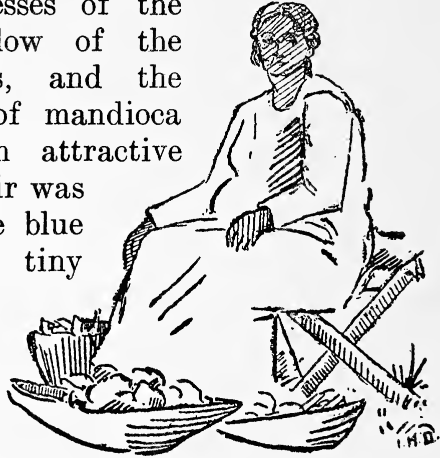
Paraguayan woman.

Under the benevolent autocracy of the Jesuits, they reached a certain status of civilisation, and the country was prosperous; though doubtless with a prosperity that benefited their masters more than themselves. Still, they were protected from aggression.

When the Spanish rule was overthrown in 1814, they were as helpless as sheep, under the domination of their own rulers. The reign of the ruthless Dictator, Lopez, left the country drained of men and money. In a mad ambition to become the Napoleon of South America, he waged war on Brazil and the Argentine, and dreamt of ruling a vast kingdom carved from conquered lands. Every man was pressed into the Army, and even boys of fourteen and fifteen were forced to fight. He built a church in Asuncion, in which he intended to be crowned Emperor; but his death in 1870 took place before it was finished. It took place, however, too late to save the country. A whole male generation had been sacrificed to his ambition, and Paraguay was left a nation of women and small children. By now the second generation has grown up, but it seems stamped with the sorrow of its race. Exploited by foreigners, ringed about by hostile neighbours, the lovely country has little strength left.

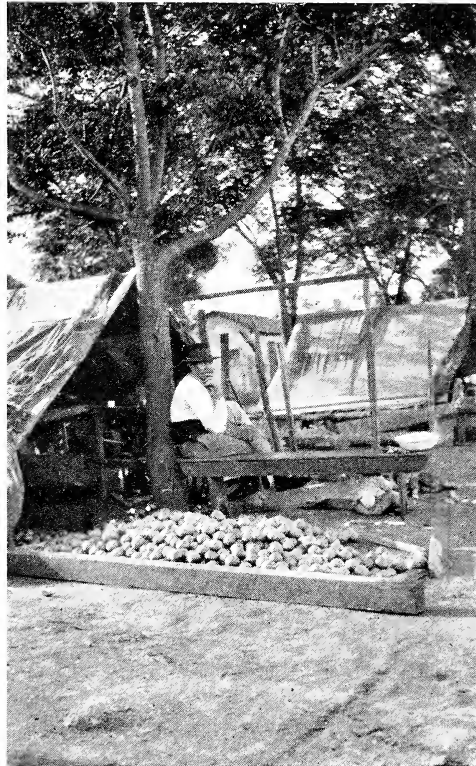
The Paraguayans we saw in the market brought their fruit and poultry across the river by the ferryboat every morning, and returned at night. Both men and women smoked, or chewed, huge cigars; and every woman sorted her oranges or arranged her vegetables with a large cigar hanging out of the corner of her mouth. Tobacco is one of the industries of the country, and is very cheap.

The line of booths looked gay and picturesque, fretted with the sunlight that filtered through the branches. The bright dresses of the women, the glow of the heaped oranges, and the warm madder of mandioca roots, made an attractive picture. The air was so still that the blue smoke of the tiny wood fires, on which the maté kettles were kept hot, never wavered:



and, outside the small oasis of shade, the atmosphere danced and shimmered with heat.

On our way back we passed the ramshackle little huts on the outskirts of the town. Perched on wooden legs they looked like dilapidated bathing machines, and quite unfit for human habitation, even in a country of blazing sunshine and few wants. The doors stood wide open, so that the poor interiors could be clearly seen. A bed with mosquito curtains, a gramophone, a chair or two, and a few pots and pans, comprised the furniture. The more wealthy boasted a sewing machine as well as a gramophone. Here dwell the sirens on whom the



IN THE PARAGUAYAN MARKET AT POSADAS.

(To face p. 10.)

up-country workers spend their hard-earned money when they come to Posadas to 'see life.' Many of the roofs are in holes, and, after a day of rain, bedding and furniture have to be hung out in the sun to dry. Of gardens in the usual sense of the word there are none, but each hut is surrounded with huge bushes of datura, scarlet flowered pomegranates, white jasmine and orange trees. Even the telegraph wires have orchids growing on them.

The railway ends at Posadas, and the train is run on to a ferry and taken bodily across the river to Paraguay, where it starts afresh on another line.

Walking along the railway track by which we had come, we found a tangle of vegetation on either side the line. Butterflies crossed and recrossed our path, and, with a sudden whirr, a humming bird darted into sight, to hover over a bed of scarlet cannas. Even their brilliant colour was dimmed by his burnished radiance. He was barely three and a half inches long, his breast emerald green where the light caught it, grey in the shade. He hovered over the flowers, darting his long bill into first one then another: then preened himself on a twig close by, showing no fear of us. Then away he darted again and disappeared. The flight is so direct and swift that it is impossible to follow with the eye, and in a moment he blends with the brilliant background and is gone. But can any

traveller ever forget the little shock of pleasure with which a first humming bird flashed upon his sight?

CHAPTER II.

THE LELIA.

Had it been possible to quench our spirit of adventure, surely the rain would have done it.

Hour after hour it poured without ceasing; and our railway carriage stood forlornly in a siding, with the water spouting from its roof. Disconsolate figures, huddled in wet cloaks, splashed past occasionally, on bare brown legs. The red earth grew more and more porridge-like in consistency; the station yard more and more like a lake. And still it poured. But the little motor launch Lelia was to be ready some time during the day, and we longed to board her, and feel we were really off. We were told we should be miserably uncomfortable, our quarters would be cramped, the rain might go on for weeks, our crew would give us trouble. But we paid heed to none of these things.

At last, at five o'clock in the evening, it still raining hard, the launch was sighted coming round the point. And, in the pouring rain, we got our baggage across to her, slithering and slipping on the wet gangway.

Mackintoshed, and with their backs to the driving storm, our new acquaintances waved us goodbye; and in half an hour the mist and rain had swallowed us up.

Meanwhile, in some dismay, we looked round upon our new domain, whilst the engines rattled and snorted along, and the whole boat shook and trembled with the vibration.

She was about seventy feet long and the saloon took up twenty feet of this space. A leather covered seat ran all round it, and a door at the further end opened on to the crew's quarters, the engine room, minute kitchen, and washing place. At the other side of the saloon two sliding doors led to the tiny deck at the bows, and the captain's look out. The luggage had all been brought in, and stood about, dripping moisture: packing-cases of tinned foods were mixed up with suit cases, rugs, sacks of biscuits and ammunition boxes. The steel floor was glistening with mud, brought in on the porters' feet. It was cold, it was wet. Everything danced and rattled with the vibration of the motor engines. But at last we were really off, and that was all that mattered.

The boxes were stored away under the seats, things hung up on pegs, wherever things could hang, tins were opened, and hot coffee made. Gazing at the old leather stuffing of the seats and the shabby appearance of the boat, we felt some apprehension: and our fears proved

justified, alas! But with sundry subsequent scrubbings with kerosene and boiling water, and a wholesale ripping away of the leather seats, the boat became trim and clean.

We spent three most happy weeks on the Lelia. A curtain, hung at night across the saloon, made two bedrooms of it, and our mattresses were laid upon the floor. That first night we did not sleep well. The captain had brought us to in the shelter of a large island, and there we anchored. But the rush of the flood-water past us, the rattling of the chain, and the unfamiliar surroundings and sounds, meant a wakeful night.

We woke in the first flush of dawn, to a gleam of sunshine and a clearing sky. Little by little the grey skirts of the rain trailed slowly away; and as the day brightened we found ourselves in the middle of an immense river from which the mists were rising, with low wooded banks on either side. Already we had left the town far behind and our way now stretched before us, up this expanse of tawny flooded water, flecked with foam, and darkening almost to black below the trees which overhung its distant banks.

At noon we tied up again. The sun had come out, and the sodden earth steamed in its warmth. A mud hut or two stood on the bank, in a little clearing, and a thousand scents rose from the dense undergrowth. Butterflies quivered on broad-leafed plants, drinking in

the sun. The torn leaves of plantains showed emerald green against the sky, and scurrying white galleons of clouds were all that remained of yesterday's storm.

After lunch two of the party went ashore with their guns, but saw no game, the undergrowth being too dense; and in a short time the launch started again. In this fashion, day after day slipped peacefully past. At night, we tied up at the nearest good anchorage : and at dawn we woke. After an early breakfast the engines were again started; and seated in the bows, we watched the river as it raced past, the dense foliage of strange trees, with a gleam of wild oranges in the tangle, the lonely white-sanded bays, the changing green walls of the forest.

We were following the same route by which Sebastian Cabot, in the early part of the XVIth century, sought the Eldorado which was rumoured to lie far up the great tropical rivers. He had sailed a certain distance up the Paraná, then turned, and went up the river Paraguay, which joins the former a little above the town of Corrientes. These two great waters, with those of the Uruguay, eventually form the immense estuary of the Rio de la Plata, the River of Silver, so named by the early Spaniards, from the legends of untold wealth to be found at its source.

These mysterious great rivers, hurrying from

the unknown, bearing on their flood-water scraps torn from distant banks, branches of strange and aromatic trees, bundles of water plants, blue flowered and myriad-leaved, the glowing shards of unknown fruits and nuts—all this torn treasure-trove, brought on the dark water, lured these early adventurers with their promise of rich reward to the bold. On floating islands of reeds came sometimes huge pythons, or even a fierce tigré, swept down on some such frail raft; and these served to keep alive the stories of marvellous beasts and birds to be found in the pathless forests.

And the siren song of the Unknown did not fall on deaf ears. Small bands of adventurers set forth, dazzled with dreams of gold and of silver, and ever their quarry ran before them. Some returned to speak of the strange things they had seen, to tell of the fabled golden cities of which the Indians spoke. Some never returned. And men did not know whether these last had died, miserably, in the forests: or whether, perhaps, they had stumbled by chance on some secret pathway to Eldorado itself; and, like the folk of ancient legends, had forgotten their long toil and wandering, the voices of their wives and children, the call of comrades, in the enchanted atmosphere of some Golden Land.

. . . . . .

The daylight dies fast, and the edges of the forest grow dim against the opal sky. The river holds the gleam longest, till slowly the moon comes up, and rests her bare silver feet for a moment on the forest edge, before she slips into the dark pool of the sky. The hum of insect life has died down with the day, and from the water's edge comes the chirring of innumerable frogs. A fish jumps in the darkness, and startles the quiet of the night.

Silently the white mists trail across the water, and wrap the tiny launch in shroud after shroud. They lay a deadening hand, too, upon the river, and the rush of the water becomes flattened in tone. A rustle on the bank, caused by some small wandering animal, breaks the silence sharply for a moment; but it closes down again. For a time an orange ray of light shows from the launch, then that too is extinguished. Gently the boat swings to the current, felt even in the sheltered bay.

The quiet hours of the night go by : till, with a little chill wind, the dawn begins.

There is a sigh as it reaches the tall reeds that fringe the monté, and a drowsy bird calls in the distance. Little by little, the line of forest begins to detach itself from the blur of grey, a faint pulse of colour steals into the sky. It deepens : and a pale shaft of sunlight catches the top of a distant height. Still the river is in shadow, but already the smoking mists are

beginning to roll away. Birds move in the thicket, the earth stirs in her sleep.

It is light enough now to distinguish the sandy bay, the tangle of green, the jutting black rocks. The murmur of the river seems to become louder, and more golden the fingers of the sun. A flock of emerald parroquets fly screaming to the further bank, and of a sudden, the day is here.

CHAPTER III.

THE DARK HIGHWAY.

All morning the shabby little motor launch had chugged her way up the river. A tropical river, with a dense wall of almost impenetrable jungle on either bank, except where some small clearing had laboriously been made, or a shoot for timber made a brown scar in the green tangle. Mile after mile it had pursued its way, dodging from side to side to avoid the rapids or the sinister eddy of a whirlpool. The water was agate coloured, foaming to furious amber round the black rocks that pricked its surface. Scuds of yellow foam raced past, and a few shining logs of wood. No other boats were to be seen, only an occasional raft of timber with a few brown skinned men sheltering from the sun under a flimsy makeshift awning. They waved a greeting as they whirled past, but their thin voices were swept away in the roar of the river and they passed like ghosts.

More and more the solitude of the forest seemed to press on the mind. Civilisation became faint and far away. It was difficult

even to recall the crowded bustle of a London terminus, the stir of Southampton, the arrival and departures at various ports of call—all the long chain of movement and action that had ended here. The dark green jungle stretched for miles on either bank, only broken here and there by the brilliant flame of some flowering tree. Men had penetrated but a little way into the interior; had only brushed, as it were, the fringe of the unknown. Beyond that lay an impenetrable and secret land.

Palms and feathery bamboos and huge forest trees were caught and tangled in a smother of undergrowth, and of lianas that hung in festoons, or roped themselves in huge folds round the trunks. A man who sought to make a path for himself must hew and slash his way with a long knife. The forest was very silent except for the muted call of some hidden bird, or the rustling fall of a seed pod from the trees. Small birds flew in the tree tops, but it was

difficult to catch their tiny twitterings. The white sand of an occasional bay carried prints of tapir, wild cat, deer, pig and jaguar. The fastnesses of the jungle must have been full of eyes that watched, and of lithe bodies that crept stealthily amongst the undergrowth; but not a leaf stirred to show their whereabouts. Graceful fork-tailed hawks, black and white, wheeled and turned. Sometimes a flock of green parrots, with their curious wavering flight, flew screaming from bank to bank, or a couple of toucans with huge red-gold beaks showed for a moment in a tree.

Brilliant patches of orange and gold on the edge of the water rose fluttering as the launch neared them, and proved to be swarms of large butterflies, bright yellow above and pale green or lemon-coloured underneath. Amongst them a few coloured nasturtium-red, or orange as a tiger lily. In the clearings there were glimpses of giant peacock-blue ones, spreading their painted wings on some orchid or flowering tree. These clearings were few and far between, made for the growing of yerba, with a rough shed or two, and a wooden slide for the loading of the bags, perhaps a few orange trees and a patch of plantains.

A figure ran out sometimes to watch with shaded eyes the passing of the launch, wondering whence it came and whither it was bound: and all round the clearing the monté pressed

hungrily. If man slackens his labour for a moment, the green tide of the jungle swallows his work in the twinkling of an eye. It is as relentless and intractable as the sea.

The boatmen, down-country men, spoke of the river land with awe. It is a land of mystery, they said. Strange doings happen: men once persuaded to go there for work find it impossible to escape. The dark river with its swift and treacherous current turns jailer, and the silent forest sentinel. Human life is cheap—and the dividends of the companies are large.

We listened, half incredulous, half impressed by their earnestness. Some such rumours had reached us already, before setting forth. The launch had been many days on the river and was at least two hundred miles from the nearest town. Two hundred miles from civilisation and the restraining influence of public opinion. Nature had become savage and ruthless. Men might well have become so too.

The sun blazed down upon the river, upon the black shining rocks that edged it, basking places for numerous crocodiles, and upon the plumed edge of the monté, that shimmered and wavered in the heat. Against the sky a few dark specks wheeled in circles, or hung motionless. Vultures that watched for prey.

Ahead of the boat, the shining loops of the river unwound themselves between the wide

green walls. With startling suddenness, rounding one of these loops, the launch came on a strange scene. A group of huts and a small landing stage stood in a clearing, backed by the jungle. And close to the landing stage was a knot of people, unconcernedly watching the stripping of a dead man. He lay on his back, with bent knees, his dank hair making a black patch in the brilliant sunlight, his naked limbs a yellowish colour like old wax. Two of the men were engaged in pulling a stained pink vest over his head, but they stopped their work to watch us pass, and the body at their feet fell back in a huddle. An official, in some sort of uniform, lounged idly by, and a woman and child coming down the path hardly stopped to look at the dead man. The launch was a rarer and more interesting sight, and the whole group turned to stare. The captain shouted to ask if medical help was needed, but the indifferent answer came back, 'Es muerto ya' (He is already dead).

The Lelia passed on her way, and soon a turn of the river swallowed up the group, still staring in the sunlight, with the tumbled heap at their feet.

'Yes, he is doubtless another,' said Pedroso, the boatman, as he busied himself with his work. 'He is one of those of whom I have told you, Señor,' and he went on talking as we sat in the bows, watching the green banks

slide past.

He told us of how men found themselves prisoners up the river. Lured there by the promise of high wages, they soon found themselves entangled in a web of debt. Goods were supplied by the companies, in the companies' stores: wages were paid in metal tokens that were useless elsewhere. And how could a man escape? Were he to find his way through the pathless jungle to the edge of the river, what hope was there of finding a boat? Some, more desperate perhaps than others, tried to swim across the river—but it was desperation indeed that would brave its dangers. And yet the attempt had been made again and again.

A few years ago the weekly river steamer so often met floating corpses coming down stream that it proved upsetting to the comfort of the passengers. Then police had been sent up to 'enquire into things'—but the police had been

conveniently blind. True, there were not so many drowned bodies now-a-days. A revolver shot in the depth of the jungle was a quieter way of getting rid of a troublesome man, perhaps. 'And there are always the vultures,' finished Pedroso, as he went aft.

The sinister picture we had seen remained etched in our memories. Was it the last scene of some such tragedy as the boatman had spoken of? We pictured the hopelessness of a man finding himself prisoned in this distant land, shut in by the impenetrable jungle, watched by armed guards. Where could he go for help? Whither could he fly? The river might be several days' journey away, the way unknown. And so, perhaps, he waited till anything seemed better than inaction. He chose to brave the dangers of the jungle, fighting his way desperately to the river.

And then?

His hope had proved his destruction. Either he had tried to swim across, or perhaps had made some sort of raft on which to escape. And it had ended as we had seen——

More than ever there seemed to us something terrible and pitiless about the river, about the secret jungle and the enamelled brilliance of the sky. What scenes they must have watched, what tragedies they must have known!

A few hours later came the sudden dark, the rising of mists along the water, and the chirr-

ing of countless frogs. The restless beat of the engines had stopped, and the only sound was the gentle tapping of the water against the bows, and the shiver of the launch sometimes, as she knocked against the bank to which she was moored.

A little wandering wind brought the fragrance of some night flower across the river —faint and exotic. The jungle turned soft grey and then a velvety black, and from out the shadows came the sudden banshee cry of the 'wailing bird' that stirs the heart with terror. Four times repeated, its falling desolate cadences tore the quiet of the night, then died away to silence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALLS OF IGUAZÚ.

Where the river of this name joins the Paraná lies a small settlement, and turning to the right we entered the Iguazú, and steamed past the stone pillar on the hill which marks the boundary between the Argentine and Brazil.

A few scattered buildings lay on the slope, and an official or two in white uniforms watched our arrival, as we lay rocking gently on the green water, clearer and not so turbid as that of the Paraná.

Having secured our permits to enter Brazil, we steamed away again back to the larger river, and went a short way up stream. We meant to see the Falls from Brazilian territory. The Falls, it should be said, are on the Iguazú River itself, some twenty miles up from its junction with the Paraná.

It was very hot, and the little bay with its spit of white sand lay scorching in the sun. Some boys on a small tug fished languidly, and the water glittered like splintered glass. We hung mosquito curtains across the open doors

TREE FERNS ON THE WAY TO IGUAZÚ.

THROUGH THE MONTÉ.

(To face p. 28.)

and windows to keep out the sand flies, and it was a relief when the sun sank lower and lower, showed a flaming rim over the edge of the world, and then disappeared. A sigh of thankfulness seemed to run through the air, and with the sun disappeared the mosquitos and sand flies.

We were to start next morning early for the Falls, and a dilapidated car appeared to take us. The road was sandy, and very red in colour, and the small township stood amongst orange trees covered with fruit. A sackful could be bought for the equivalent of a shilling, fresh picked from the trees. There were only a handful of houses on the hill, cattle were sheltering from the sun in the open Assembly Hall, and the whole place seemed asleep.

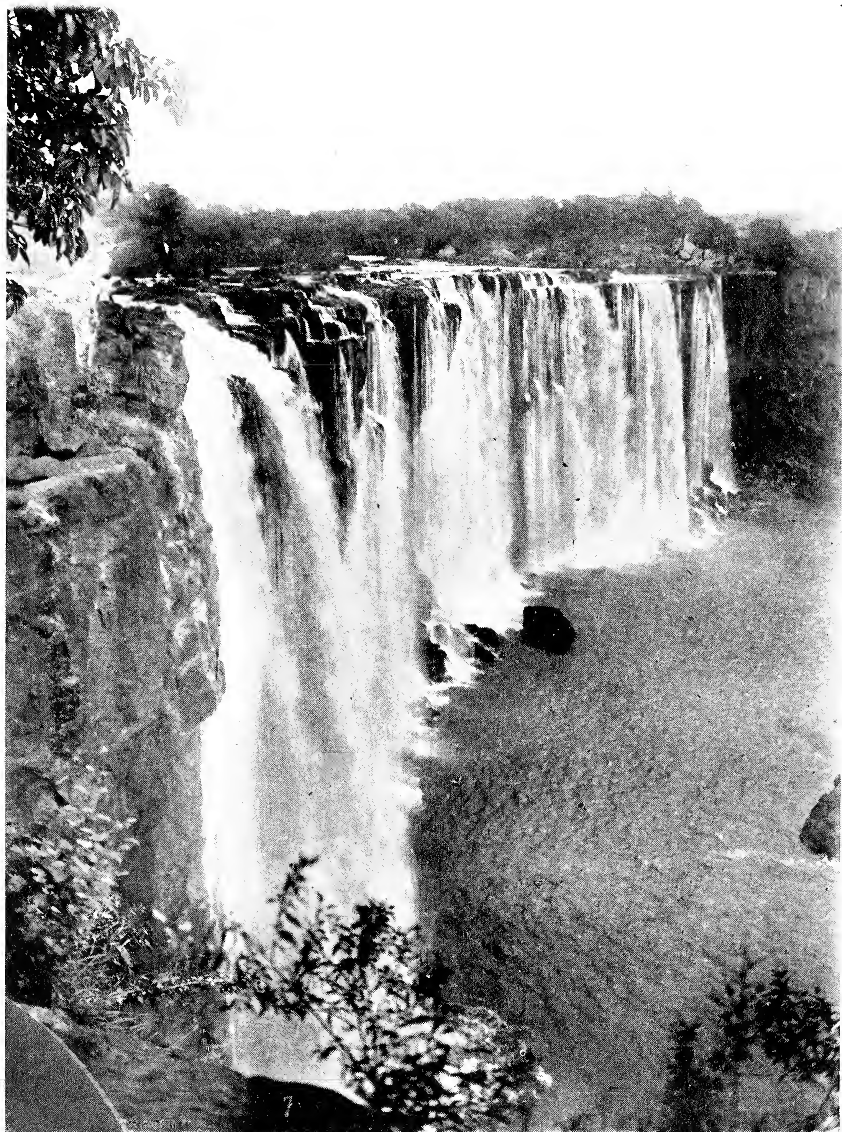
Our road lay away from the settlement, and we passed a few scattered plantations and gardens before we reached the forest. Little by little we penetrated into its silence. Palms grew here and there, and tall trees to whose stems clung orchids pouring forth their cascades of white or golden flowers. Butterflies passed and repassed. The air was heavy with fragrance, and on both sides of the road tree-ferns spread their feathery fronds to the sun.

It became an avenue of tree-ferns, with their red-brown mossy boles, from which the delicate greenery sprang. Some were a few feet high, others towered eighteen feet or more, making

a fairy tracery on either side of the track. A tiny scarlet flycatcher flew across the shadowy background, like a blown poppy-petal, and we sped silently through an enchanted forest, while the wheels of the car fell softly on the rose-red earth.

The sky was blue, with sailing silvery clouds. It had been new washed with a shower of rain, and the air was crystal clear. The forest was not so dense as those we had seen before, and we could catch glimpses now and again of a vista roofed with the green spray of tree-ferns. These were easy to cut through, and we cut down one and tried to carry it on the car, with its stem along the body of the motor and its nodding green head beyond. But the hot air quickly faded it. Butterflies were everywhere, but few birds. The forest thinned, and we saw open space beyond, and running down a narrow track we came right on the Falls.

From where we stood we saw a curved stretch of waterfalls, all leaping from the same height, and so accurately placed that their loveliness was almost artificial. Wooded slopes came down to the edge of the water, and through the silver-dusted spray we saw the soft outlines of forests stretching away into the distance. It was a sight to catch the breath. The highest of the Falls, I believe, out-tops Niagara, and the chain of them we saw from this little bluff was only part of the whole. A wooden hotel, half



" A CURVED STRETCH OF WATERFALLS."

(To face p. 30.)

finished, and a rough guest-house, were the only buildings on the Brazilian side. There seemed to be hardly a soul about. The day was overcast, with a gleam of sunshine now and again that set rainbows dancing in the spray.

We were told the river was too much in flood to get the best effect of the Falls, but they can never look more beautiful than they did then. The owner of the guest-house took us along a forest track to show us the different points of view. Palms nodded above the undergrowth, great crimson and dark splotched leaves, vaguely reminiscent of greenhouses at home, spread their broad fans to the air, bamboos and bushes of all sorts filled up the gaps, and a little orange-flowered creeper wove its nets about their feet.

We scrambled down the side of the cliff by a zigzag path, edged with pale pink begonias, and came out on a tiny platform that jutted out close to one of the Falls. The water glided over an edge of black rock in a column of tangled foam. From the pool below, the spray rose in such clouds that it was impossible to say where one ended and the other began. Looking across this part of the river, we saw a wooded island in the midst of the group of Falls. The river, a little way beyond it, suddenly reaches the drop, and is combed into a multitude of cataracts. Wherever we looked we saw them.

The cascade by which we stood fell in a swift

sheet over the lip of the cliff, leaving a shadowy space behind the water. A rock pigeon flew out from here and darted back again, unperturbed by the roar of the water. A yellow butterfly fluttered across through the spray to the further side, and took no harm. Countless ferns clustered round the edge, and a red lily grew in the crevice of the rock, holding its wet face to the warm mist.

Everything was lush and scented and green. We made our way to another point of view, slipping and sliding on the red soil, catching at maidenhair fern and flowers to keep our balance. It was difficult to imagine anything more beautiful than the feathery loveliness of these waterfalls, set in their background of tropical forest.

At Guayra we were stunned by the savage strength of water: here we were entranced by its delicate beauty. Below us the columns of water fell in smooth sheets of white and pale amber, and through the gold and green of the trees we could see the distant silver gleam of further Falls. The air was tremulous with the sound of them, and, except for that sound, the woods were very still. They seemed almost, in their unfamiliar beauty, a painted scene.

It was the magic forest of fairy tales. Stepping softly under the tree-ferns, and through the waist-high tangle of vegetation, might one not part the wide leaves and come

"SMOOTH SHEETS OF WHITE AND PALE AMBER."

(To face p. 32.)

suddenly upon a Sleeping Princess and her sleeping court, guarded by yellow butterflies, and strewn with fallen petals, doomed through some spell to slumber in the depths of the forest, till the water should cease to flow over the Falls of Iguazú? In this strange and lovely wood anything seemed possible.

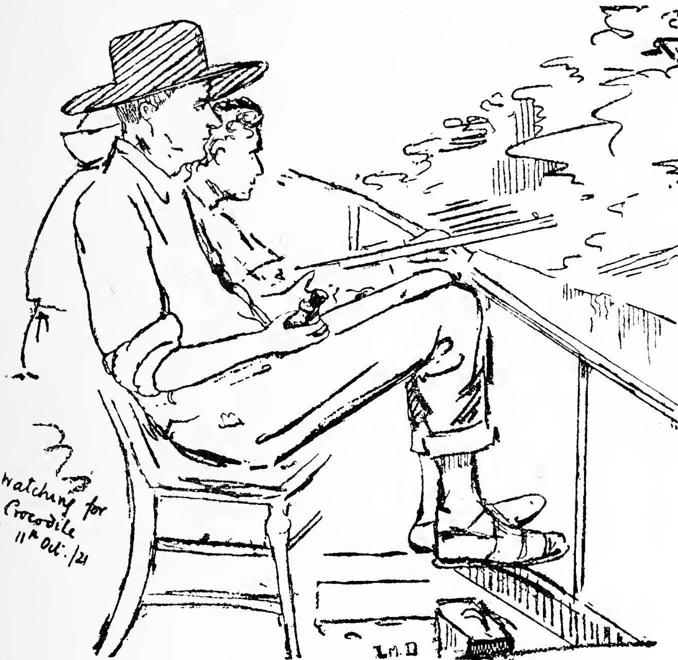
CHAPTER V.

AN INDIAN HUNTER.

The shooting on the Paraná was more than disappointing. There was none. The jungle was so thick that no game could be seen; and indeed the snorting of our little launch must have sent any game flying before us, in the same way that it sent the basking crocodiles along the bank, into the water in a flash. All that was left to us was to examine the spoor of wild animals on the sand of the few small bays, and to get what thrill we could out of the fact that deer, tapir, pig, wild cat, and ant-eaters abounded. At the Brazilian headquarters, near the mouth of the Iguazú, we sent for an Indian hunter.

He arrived with his lurcher dog : a lean, small man, very dark, and with quick roving eyes. He was like a small wild animal himself. He told us of the long weeks he spent in the forest, tracking game; carrying a little yerba with him, and living on what he shot. He spoke of the tigré (the South American jaguar) that men hunted down like vermin and poisoned.

We had become rather sceptical about tigré. At every place we were told of their exploits,



and now, at Iguazú, they told stories of one, which, when hunted on the Brazilian side, forthwith swam the Paraná into Paraguay. When worried in the latter country, he swam back to Brazil. This international tigré was still alive: he deserved to be.

The little hunter knew all the places on the river where the wild animals came down to drink, and it was his suggestion that we should

tie up at such a place, on the chance of sport. He came on board late one evening, and stood talking in the lamplight, fingering his soft hat, his shock of dark hair falling across his forehead, and the light catching on his sharp cheekbones and grooving deep lines on his brown face.

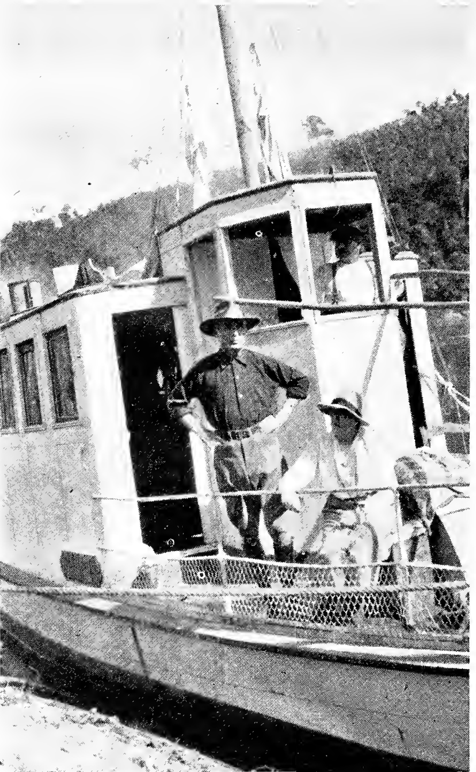
He was a free man, he said, not like some. He worked for a master who treated him fairly, he was not beaten, and he got his wages regularly. His work took him into the forest for weeks at a time, and it was plain to see that he was not happy with a roof over his head, though he held himself with dignity.

At dawn, a small expedition set out, looking ghost-like in the curling mists, making its way through the wall of reeds that came more than shoulder high: but it had no luck, and came back hungry and disappointed. And the only tigré we ever saw was a magnificent one in the zoo at Montevideo.

The lives of these lonely hunters and woodsmen must be strange ones, working as they do in the forests, dependent on their own resource and courage for life itself, finding their way almost by an animal's instinct; more akin themselves to the wild creatures of the jungle than to other men.

We had come across another forest dweller in our travels, but a very different one, when we tied up one night in a little bay, close to which a woodcutter's clearing stretched like a

THE LITTLE HUNTER
AND HIS DOG.



ON THE LELIA.

(To face p. 36.)

brown streak through the green. A few huts stood on a little knoll, rough shelters with a palm leaf thatch: and some brown children played about, whilst a thin spiral of blue smoke rose unwavering on the still air. We passed the huts as we went for an evening stroll up the clearing, and a pretty native girl smiled up at us as she bent over a cooking pot on the open fire.

We had seen the figure of a man, evidently in charge of the woodcutters, watching our arrival, and something in his upright carriage and easy air had aroused our curiosity. As we got back to the little launch, which lay silently on the dark water of the bay, her restless heart-beat stilled for the night, he moved nearer. The one member of our party who could speak Spanish fluently, an Irishman who had been in Uruguay since he was a boy, overheard him say: 'Look at those foreign greenhorns: I shall go and make fools of them.'' On that he sauntered down the sandy slope to greet us, his hands in his pockets, his slouch hat well on one side. He was dressed poorly, in dungaree trousers and a loose shirt open at the throat, and was a grizzled man of about sixty.

The conversation began, and we were amused to see interest and friendliness creep into his face, and soon he and the Irishman were deep in talk. He spoke in an educated voice, and it was strange to hear it in this corner of the

forest, to the undertone of the hurrying river, and with the huddle of poor huts behind him. He asked what we were doing, and what our plans were, and feared we should find it difficult to find game. He saw plenty, but then it was his job to go into the depths of the forest, marking good timber in the unexplored monté, a gang of woodsmen under him. He got paid so much for every square foot of wood sent down the river by raft. He had not always lived this life, he had been a colonel in the Uruguayan army, amongst other things.

At that, our friend interrupted that he knew Uruguay well, and the two fell to discussing various mutual acquaintances with great delight. The last traces of suspicion and reserve cleared away from the other's face, his features lit up with a smile, and his dark eyes under their grey penthouse were keen and alive. 'And you came by Buenos Aires, señor?' he asked. 'When I have made money, I, too, go to Buenos Aires.' 'Alone,' he added, with a gesture of his hand that swept the little group round the huts into insignificance.

He told us he had married an Indian girl and had thirty-three children. My Spanish was not good enough to catch if 'The Indian girl' was in the singular or plural. In any case, he did not appear to be weighed down with the responsibilities of paternity. He explained that he worked for months in the forest, then

slipped away to Buenos Aires and spent his earnings. When they were all gone, he came back and plunged once more into the silence of the wilderness. No, he did not want anything, unless, perhaps, we had good tobacco to spare? In a flash the Irishman was into the launch, there were sounds of a hasty turning over of things, and back he came with a tin of tobacco. Then the two shook hands, and the woodsman turned away up the sandy slope that glimmered whitely in the fading light, and the parting call of 'hasta luego' came musically back to us out of the dusk.

Early next morning we were astir, and soon after dawn the sound of our engines awoke the sleepy birds. As we turned the corner of the bay and slid into the racing current of the river, we looked back, and saw his tall figure standing motionless on the shore to watch our departure, whilst the brown children waved to us from the tiny huts that were already scarcely distinguishable in the dense vegetation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST DAY'S FISHING.

Now began our first day's fishing, and our fisherman shall tell it in his own words.

It was ten o'clock when we left the launch, Pedroso and I, and dropped downstream to fish for dorado. The little puerto where the launch was moored slept in the still heat. It was no more than a landing place, from which a track, orange red, made a slanting line up the steep cliff, and at the top was a small clearing with one or two houses. All round, and on both sides of the river, the tropical forest fell like a curtain. Tall trees, different tones of a sombre green, and delicate bamboos like immense feathery asparagus, were roped together by lianas, making impenetrable walls through which no man could walk a yard without cutting his way. Between them ran the river, five hundred yards wide, deep and turbulent, a long way still above its summer level, coloured with a mixture of amber and jade, but clear and translucent.

A few hours earlier, as we were steaming

laboriously up, my companion, leaning over the side, had pointed and said, 'That looks a good stream, you had better try there.' I looked. The current, swinging across from the Paraguay bank, met, on the Brazil shore, a long reef of submerged rock, which deflected and compressed it. The result was a stretch of tumbled water, shallow where it ran over the reef, deep and swirling beyond, with a broad quiet backwater between it and the Brazilian bank. I looked carefully. I knew next to nothing of dorado fishing, but had been told that they lived in strong rapid water. The experiment had to be made somewhere : why not make it there?

As we dropped down to it, carried more by the sweeping current than by the occasional touches of Pedroso's paddle, I tried a cast or two before arriving : not that I expected to catch anything; but the rod was new, and so was the Silex reel, and it was as well to learn their kick before reaching the fish. We were not long doing so. Pedroso with a few strokes of his paddle shot the canoe into the easy water, and I made a short cast. I had not the slightest idea what to expect. I had never seen a dorado. Whether there were any there or not, whether they would take and how, and when : all this was hidden. Pedroso was hardly less ignorant, and such experience as he possessed was confined to hand-lining with a blindcord and a chunk of fish. In this state of glorious

uncertainty I made a first cast into the unknown.

I was not kept long in doubt. The spoon was swinging round with the stream when the rod point was dragged down by something heavy and invisible, which tore a few yards off the reel, and then kicked itself off. Next cast I was into another at once, and the first dorado I had ever seen leapt into the air, short and thick, glowing with a pure deep gold, his tail splashed with a crimson bar. There he was, a dorado; a dorado, kicking and bucking and glittering in the sun like molten metal. I am certain we both yelled. Off he rushed, ripping fifty or sixty yards off the reel, jumping and swirling and splashing, more in the air than in the water. It was a moment of pure delight: all doubts were at an end, dorado were there and I had hooked one. Then suddenly in one of his jumps the spoon came back. He had broken the ring which held the hook, a steel ring. This was the special wriggly jump of the dorado against which I had been warned, that jump which has saved the life of many a one, when he springs three foot clear, and shakes his body madly from head to tail, smashing split rings like gingerbread. Perhaps I had not got my point down in time: very likely not. But I was too excited to mind his loss: and anyhow, dorado were there, that was the great thing. So a fresh spoon was rigged

up, and after three casts a third fish was hooked.

He was much bigger : how big cannot be said for he was never weighed. If the last was between fifteen and twenty pounds weight, as it probably was, this one was between twenty and twenty-five, perhaps more. He behaved like a fish of his size. He jumped, but not so often, just enough to show his length and depth, and then before I knew anything he had a hundred yards of line out in the first rush, and was all over the strong water, playing ferociously. Downstream he went, then rushed across, rolling up to the top, shaking his head and lashing his tail. Suddenly, in one of his runs, a fast one but nothing exceptional, I felt he was off. I reeled in. He had broken the reel line.

Here was a tragedy, deep and far-reaching. Pedroso paddled the boat into the shore and we sat down to think it over. The accident meant far more than the loss of the fish, though that was bad enough. My line was the only one I had. It was new. It had been bought specially for dorado. And it had broken when it ought not to have broken. It was broken, not cut. I was holding the fish hard, no doubt, but not unduly so. The rod was well up and reel running. The break was not at a knot or loop, but fair in the middle of the line, some way apparently from the trace. If it had

failed once, it would fail again. I tested it. It could be broken easily between the hands.

My thoughts were not pleasant, as I sat in the hot sunlight, whilst parrots screamed overhead and vultures swung at all distances in the speckless sky. I was seven thousand miles from England and some thousands from the nearest tackle shop. The river was falling by feet every night and rapidly coming into order. It was the beginning of October, the spring of the southern hemisphere, and the best of the fishing was just starting. Here was I, far up the Alto-Paraná, between where the Iguazú river, after cascading over falls of incomparable beauty, pours her broad waters into the broader and darker wave of the Paraná; and that remote and savage spot where the Paraná herself is hurled and shattered through the wild gorge of Guayra. It was a place where few fishermen had penetrated. I had looked forward to a fortnight of such fishing as not many have had before, when the glory of the pursuit of that splendid fish is enhanced by the magic of the tropics, and the mystery of the unknown. There was the opportunity in my hand; was it all to be wasted because of a wretched rotten line? I cursed myself for coming out with only one line. But after all who expects a line to break? Or, if it breaks, who expects to find it all rotten? This one seemed weak all through. As more and more

of it broke off, the future seemed gloomier and gloomier. At last, however, a stronger part was reached. Something had to be done, so a new trace and spoon were knotted on. Pedroso, who was lying back in the canoe smoking one of those terrible cigars in which he delighted, roused himself, and half paddled and half punted up the lake-like edge of the river until we got back to the head of the stream where we had begun.

I forget how many more casts were made, certainly not six, before another great fish was tearing across the river. He might have been brother to the one who had just broken the line, except that he jumped oftener. The first rush of a big dorado is like nothing on earth. Something will be said later about his fighting qualities, and how he compares with the salmon. But about the first rush there can be no doubt. He goes straight off full pace at once. However hard you hold (and you have to forget all your salmon fishing and hold thirty pound dorado as though they were half pound trout), you will be lucky if you stop him under one hundred yards, and I once had one hundred and eighty yards ripped off without a pause. His first rush is usually down; but he will suddenly turn and go across and up, and then perhaps straight down again. So you have to be hard and skilful if you are to avoid a bagged line, and a bagged line is fatal, for there is no river in which the

rocks are better adapted for hanging you up. I say this with bitterness. My fish had rushed like a mad elephant all over the strong water; but I was just beginning to take charge and hoped to haul him into the backwater, when suddenly he got me round a submerged rock.

There then ensued twenty minutes of experience such as we have in nightmares. The line was fast, far over the river, and above us. The stream was too strong to allow us to paddle up, get above and clear. Pedroso tried heroically, tried till he nearly dropped, and I took the paddle and did no better. We could just hang on in the stream, now making a few yards, now losing them; but get within fifty yards of that rock we could not. Oh, for a pair of oars : even a pair of sculls might have done it, but a paddle was useless. No man could force the boat against that torrent. Finally we tried to go inshore out of the stream, get above, and then put out into the stream again. But here too we were beaten. There were two hundred yards of line on the reel. But that was not enough to reach from the rock into the still water. I had to break, and the maddening thing was that the fish was still on. He was on all the time. He kept swirling up and splashing, rolling over on his broad golden side, securely anchored forty yards below where the line pointed. Some days after, as we came back and the water had fallen so much that the reef over which we had

struggled and sweated was dry land, Pedroso pointed out the exact spot where we had been caught. From the excitement with which he approached it, he clearly expected the fish to be still there.

We pushed the nose of the boat on to the sand and sat down and smoked. We were tired and disheartened, and we saw the launch coming down to pick us up. But Pedroso signed to me to have one more cast. I did so, with the premonition of tragedy heavy on me. I cast, and hooked the biggest dorado of the day.

He played differently from the others. He went off with a heavy run and surged up to the top more than once. But he went neither as fast nor as far as the others, nor did he jump. I got him out of the stream into a swirly hole, very deep. There he sounded, sailing round and round, hanging all his great weight on the line, head downwards. When pulled out of the hole he bored downstream sullenly, occasionally dragging off a few yards of line, and then letting himself be reeled in. So we went on for half an hour down a mile of water. I had him hard by the head the whole time; but, since he had left the stream, he had not shown on the top. Finally he gave one or two of those wobbles which every fisherman knows mean that the end is near, rolled up to the top, lashed his tail, opened an immense mouth, and—the spoon came away.

. . . . . .

Late that afternoon, when the sun had got behind the Paraguayan forest and the swift tropic night was near, I killed a dorado of twenty pounds and a quarter. How heavy the big one was, I do not know. But I do know that the twenty pounder felt like a trout compared to him. And, as though the tragedy of the day were not complete, another fish, hooked just before dark, again broke my cursed line; broke it right in the middle of the backing and carried away all that remained of the reel line. Perhaps it was as well that it should go to the bottom of the Paraná. It was rotten from end to end : and the reader, who must be as sick of it as I was, shall hear no more of it.

CHAPTER VII.

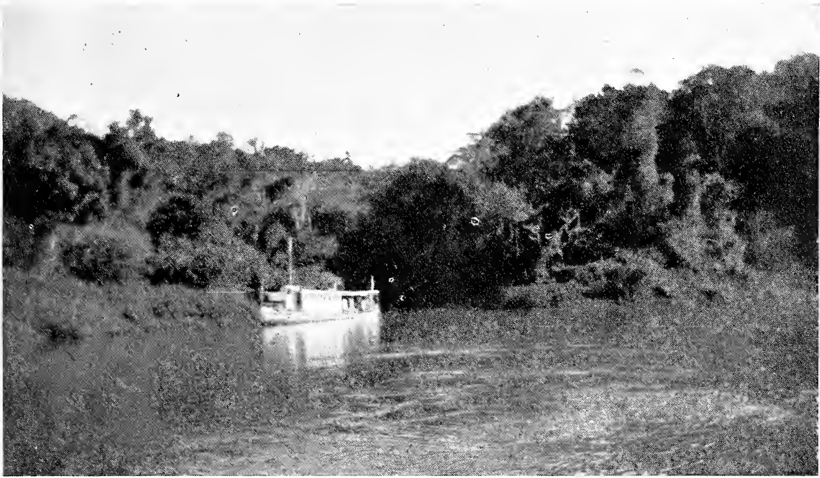
AT PUERTO MENDEZ.

At Puerto Mendez the river had become unnavigable. It boiled in furious whirlpools, that caught the stern of the little launch as she threaded her way amongst them, and shook her as a leaf in the wind. The wall of the forest had first given place to banks of plumed reeds, and then to higher ground. The river narrowed, and cleft its way with sudden turns and twists through a ravine which shut out the daylight. At one of them a large tree hung over the water, its branches weighed down with blue and red macaws feeding upon the fruit, and tearing off leaves and branches with their powerful beaks. At the sound of a shot they rose screaming, and disappeared heavily into the green.

A few miles on we reached the furthest point to which the launch could venture; and she crept, panting, to a small landing stage under the shelter of the cliff. Round the next bend, only ten days before, a tug, with a raft in tow, had gone down alive into the whirlpools with

her crew of twelve, and had never been seen again. Higher up the river were the great Falls of Guayra, which we had journeyed all these miles to see. So few have seen them that they have almost achieved a legendary fame. To reach them one must travel through the forest, then go by boat for some hours, and then again cross some miles of monté. We stood at the water's edge and looked back on the winding way we had come; then above our heads, to the tiny settlement of Puerto Mendez, perched on the edge of the cliff and looking across to Paraguay. The Paraná forms the boundary between that country and Brazil, and sometimes we had anchored by one bank, and sometimes by another.

A kind of funicular for the loading of yerba climbed the steep cliff, and already a small platform was creeping down, like a spider on a thread, to fetch us. On to this, with our scanty luggage, we climbed; and slowly the river fell away below us, and the launch dwindled to a scrap of a thing out of a toyshop. It was very hot. The sun poured down upon us, and great yellow butterflies sailed past on outspread wings. We were so dazzled by the light that when we reached the shed at the top we could see nothing at first in the sudden gloom. It was a wooden shed, and was filled with sacks ready to be sent down the river. Men were at work unloading them from an open truck, passing



THE LELIA.

THE FUNICULAR AT PUERTO MENDEZ.

(To face p. 50.)

from the glare outside the doorway into the dusty shadowed interior. Many of them were naked to the waist, and the warm terra cotta of their bodies was powdered with yellowish dust from the sacks of yerba.

Crouched on the ground was a little group of new arrivals, a man and woman, Paraguayans, with two or three children; a few bundles by their side. They waited patiently for orders, staring impassively at the scene around them. The woman had a sleeping child on her lap, and a ray of sunlight fell across its bare brown limbs and the faded blue of its frock. Across its dark head she gazed quietly into space, thinking of nothing, it seemed. Not fearful of the future, nor regretting the past; but dumbly patient, like some gentle animal.

From the built-out verandah of the superintendent's house, which hung like a swallow's nest over the cliff, we looked down upon the river far below: so far that its roar could not reach us. Between the dark high banks it gleamed like an eye through half-closed lids.

It was the middle of the day, and the little collection of buildings stood full in the blinding glare of the sun. The red uneven road that straggled past the sheds and yards forming the station was ankle-deep in dust. A bullock cart or two were drawn up at the side of it, the bullocks unyoked and feeding, whilst the drivers lay in the square of grateful shade made by the

carts, sleeping or taking maté. Far overhead the vultures kept their tireless watch, sailing with motionless wings in widening spirals. The heat seemed to have sucked the intense colour from the sky, and even from the brilliant foliage of the distant monté, now blurred to a dull green. The silence of mid-day was so deep that one could hear the tiny gurgle of the maté in the gourds from which the bullock drivers sucked it, or the sharp crack of a corrugated iron roof in the heat. Straining the ears, the distant murmur of the Paraná was just audible. from below the cliffs on which the small settlement was perched. As far as the eye could reach, wooded spurs ran down to the water's edge, and the steely gleam of the river shone in distant loops amongst the trees. The air was so still that the vine trained on the verandah seemed as if its leaves were cut out of thin metal. Nothing moved, save where a butterfly fluttered languidly amongst the drooping flowers.

The little train that wound its way into the interior was not to start for another hour, and it was pleasant to follow the superintendent into the shade of his cool house. He was a Dane, and had married a native wife; and as we stepped into the living room, built out on the edge of the cliff, it seemed full of people, who rose at our entrance. His wife was a dark skinned woman, dressed in a faded print

wrapper. She had rather a sweet face, and received us with anxious courtesy. One by one the other occupants of the room were brought up and introduced, and shook hands. The eldest daughter took after her father, and was a pretty refined girl about fifteen, with fair rippling hair, very blue eyes, and a pink and white complexion. She was dressed in a blue muslin frock, her hair in a thick plait down her back. There was another girl of about the same age, who appeared to be spending the day with her : a thin faced sallow slip of a thing, just back from a trip down the river, with a paste slide fastening her hair. The two girls stood with their arms round each other, in an affectionate attitude, but one felt a touch of rivalry between them. In that hot climate women mature early. Two young men were making themselves agreeable to them : one, a flashy looking clerk, or store-keeper, with oiled hair and a small curled moustache, dressed in a linen suit. The other, a half-caste, tall and lithe, in riding breeches and a loose shirt, with spurs on his long soft boots, a knife in his broad leather belt, and a silver-handled whip dangling from his wrist. He looked as if he might be a dangerous rival, and a black eye did not add to his charms; but the other man had the more assurance.

The Indian wife was rather overwhelmed by our arrival, and as her Spanish vocabulary was

almost as limited as mine, conversation presented some difficulties. She brought up her second daughter to shake hands with us, a plump brown tomboy of about seven, in a very short frock, with a tangled head of dark hair, who stoutly refused to have anything to do with us. But she was a useful addition to the party, as each member of it, when anxious to air their society manners, would try to pull down her abbreviated pink skirt over her dimpled bare legs, murmuring, in Spanish, injunctions to behave like a lady: injunctions which were serenely disregarded. A small boy, staring at us with his finger in his mouth, belonged to the family too, and there was a sleeping baby, of indeterminate sex, in a cradle in a corner of the room. Various people drifted in to gaze at us, and drifted aimlessly out again. The young store-keeper, with the air of a man of the world, spoke of the difficulties of travel, and enquired if we found Buenos Aires larger than London, whilst he flicked a speck of dust off his narrow patent leather shoes. The fair-haired girl was obviously impressed by his aplomb, and I caught an admiring expression in her blue eyes. He caught it too, and twirled his moustache complacently. 'It must be interesting to see the world,' she murmured, her eyes on the ground, and was a little vexed when her mother remarked that they had meant her to go to Posadas to be educated, but that she refused

to leave home. They had another daughter at school there, and it was wonderful how clever she was becoming, and how elegant, and what a lady! Here the sallow girl mentioned that she too had seen Posadas, a beautiful town, and full of wonderful shops. The half-caste remarked casually that he believed it was necessary to carry a revolver in those places, though the down-country men were poor shots.

Most of the people in the room having thus asserted their superiority, there fell a little silence. We had enquired the name and age of the baby, of the little boy, and of the tomboy, and still there were no signs of any train. My mind was desperately framing Spanish sentences to fling into the void. The native woman's eyes were fixed on me, and I knew she was making a careful inventory of my clothes. Then her eyes fell on a crystal charm I was wearing, hung on a black ribbon, and she asked what it was. Here indeed was a heaven-sent topic. I explained it came from India. 'India?' they echoed vaguely, whilst the young storekeeper remarked importantly that he had read of that country. I explained that some people

said it was a magic stone, and that they could see pictures of the future in it. This caused great excitement, and the whole group drew nearer, and even the tomboy ceased to wave her brown legs in the air. I asked if anyone would like to look at it, and handed it to our hostess, who took it as one might a snake of doubtful family. I explained it was best to put it on some dark material, and the fair girl ran to get a black scarf. The crystal was a large pear-shaped drop, quite clear and colourless. The woman sat staring at it, whilst the girls watched anxiously, and even the young men seemed a little nervous. But no pictures came, though one by one each of the spectators asked to try.

At this moment an old Indian woman who had been sitting huddled in the verandah smoking a cigar and listening, came in, and asked permission to hold it. I put it into her wrinkled brown hand, and she gazed intently at it, whilst we watched her silently. Suddenly she cried out that there was something moving in the crystal, then that she saw the figure of a white woman swathed in white draperies, kneeling in a crouching position, as if in supplication. She imitated the attitude, whilst her audience shivered in delightful horror. 'And now the figure is altering its position,' she cried, and imitated it straightening up, the head thrown back and the arms

extended as if in adoration. The people in the room drew in their breath sharply, and I too was startled. For the Indian woman was describing, word for word, the same figure that a psychic London friend of mine always saw when she picked up my crystal. I had seen the same gestures made by her, in imitating it, as those the old woman had just made, and it seemed, at the least, an extraordinary coincidence. I questioned her as to whether she too saw a bright light above the adoring figure, but she did not. Then she said that the crystal was becoming blurred and milky again, and she was afraid to look any more. By now it had vindicated its character as a magic stone, and the two girls shuddered away from it when I held it out to them.

I felt it would be better to bring in a more ordinary atmosphere, so when they asked me to look in it myself, I hoped they had forgotten my earlier remark that I never saw any pictures in it. After a few moments' gazing I declared I saw a big ship, which evidently meant one of the party was presently going for a long voyage. This was a lucky hit, for the smart store-keeper eagerly explained that he meant soon to go for a trip to Europe, and there was a murmur of admiration round the room: 'Yes, the Señora even sees the very ship in which Don Antonio is to sail. It is indeed wonderful.' From the verandah outside came voices saying the train

was ready and we must come, but I felt there was just time for another success. 'Ah,' I said, 'now it is a bride I see, very young, very slim, all in white.' There was an immense sensation. Laughter from the older women, blushes and protestations from the girls. 'Who is the bridegroom? Who is the bridegroom?' 'I cannot see his face, but he too is young, and dark, and now the crystal has blurred again. I can see no more.' But the success of my crystal-gazing was instantaneous. The whole group followed us into the verandah, chattering and laughing. There was no doubt of the popularity of the entertainment.

The air was a little cooler, but men were still busy fixing up an improvised awning of canvas over the open truck in which we were to travel. Chairs were handed up from the verandah for us to sit on; the old Indian woman climbed in with a basket on her arm and a large cigar in her mouth; the sallow girl sat on the floor, dangling her feet over the edge, and, after a moment's hesitation, the young half-caste joined her. Half a dozen other people got in too, amongst them a sad faced Paraguayan with his wife, and two subdued little children. The amazing little engine, shaped as no engine ever was before, gave a wild shriek, and, with a lurch and stagger, the train moved off along the wobbly rails that headed for the monté.

CHAPTER VIII.

GUAYRA.

For four hours we jerked clumsily through the forest. The train is only used for the bringing of yerba to the little port, and the workers on the property travel by it. That property stretches for a hundred miles along the river, and we were crossing a corner of it. We skirted a few clearings, with the blackened stumps of dead trees sticking up through the vivid green of young maize, and tiny thatched huts with mud walls, from which a figure or two would watch us pass. More often there were only shelters, made of a thatched cover set on bamboo poles, with floors of beaten earth. But all scrupulously clean, and the few possessions tidily arranged. Close by there was generally a pool, in which the women washed clothes, the pool sometimes roughly roofed in with boughs, to keep off the sun. These little clearings stand in the midst of the jungle, and are made by burning down the forest trees, then roughly breaking up the ground, and planting maize. After three

years' crops the ground becomes exhausted, and the settler moves on to a fresh piece, where the same operation is repeated.

Now and again we glimpsed the ghost of some such little clearing in the woods, a few rotting posts showing where the hut had been. Already the tide of vegetation had almost obliterated the traces of human occupation. The rank undergrowth had smothered the clearing; bamboos, and the shining dark leaves of wild orange trees, made a tangle over the stumps of the felled trees, and the wild animals quenched their thirst at the tiny pool. A small wooden cross stood sometimes on the edge of the track, marking a grave. No name was carved on it, but an old hat or the fluttering remains of a shirt were hung upon it. At one place a little group of natives got off the train, and collected silently, with bent heads, round such a grave: but the moving train soon hid them from our sight.

We were very weary by the time the train drew out of the forest and we reached the small township that stood in the open. It seemed very far away from the outside world, and this remoteness was intensified by the silence that seemed to brood over the place. The one road was wide, and on either side were raised foot-paths bordered by trees. The soil was very red, and the vegetation a brilliant green. Buildings stood along the footpaths, either stores or living

AT GUAYRA.

A PARAGUAYAN COUNTRY HOUSE.

(To face p. 60.)

houses, and orderly figures moved about: the men in white trousers and shirts, with a knotted scarlet handkerchief round their waists, and sometimes a scarlet poncho thrown across their shoulders. The whole place gave a curious impression of being a set scene in a theatre, and

Boys fishing

over it all there hung a subdued atmosphere that made itself felt like something tangible.

The hotel was built on two sides of a courtyard, and through the barred windows we looked at night on to a large ombu tree that

stood on a plot of grass, making an inky blackness in the white flood of moonlight. As we lay in bed we could feel, at intervals, a faint vibration of the ground, but whether this was due to the thud of the great Falls in the distance, or to some seismic disturbance, it was impossible to say. The dining room was in a large separate building, with lofty walls, the few tables standing like islands in an uncharted sea.

After dinner we strolled out to see a peons' dance.

The night had come down quickly, and each building was brilliantly lit by electricity, the doors and windows standing wide open. The thrumming of guitars guided our footsteps down the dusty red road, and we passed little knots of people, making their way in the dusk to the open space where the dance was to be held. A few chairs had been set for spectators, and the electric lights at the gateway flared on the women's light print dresses, and showed up the poppy red of the men's scarves.

The air was motionless and warm, and the velvety black of the sky was riddled with stars. The trees beyond the enclosure showed as heavy masses of deep shadow, and along the fences there lounged a crowd of idlers, watching the dancing. The light fell on them and on the groups of seated women, catching a gleam from an earring or a silver spur, showing up an olive

face now and then, and carving black shadows amongst the groups.

The musicians plucked at the strings of their guitars, and a horse tied to a fence stamped in the darkness, with a jingle of bit and bridle. The music started, and one by one the couples moved into the open space and circled in and out of the barred shadows. They danced silently, whilst their feet made a rustling sound on the earthen floor. And always they wore that same look of wistful intentness which we had already noticed. The men rested their cheek on their partner's forehead, or, if of the same height, laid cheek to cheek, but there was no abandonment in their attitude. Restrained and mute, they went through their intricate steps, whilst the music rose and fell in the silence of the tropical night.

What was behind those unfathomable faces? We could not tell. We watched one woman, as she came past again and again. As soon as one partner took her back to her seat at the end of a dance another stepped forward to claim her. She was taller than the other women, and slight, dressed in a purplish stuff that showed the colour of ripe grapes in the chequered light. Her face was wide across the brows and high cheekbones, her hair simply parted, her mouth firm and sad. Being tall, she bent her head slightly to rest it against her partner, and this lent her an air of gracious dignity that gave her

distinction. The light fell on her smooth olive skin, and picked out points of brightness in the hooped earrings she wore. Some of the men with whom she danced were young and good-looking, but she rarely smiled, and always her dark eyes, mournful and steady, gazed into space. She seemed remote and withheld, and moved like a figure touched by fate, through the intricacies of the dance.

In her was summed up that baffling sense of mystery which enwrapped the whole place. We watched her come and go, amongst the other couples that swung to the lilt of the music. They danced twosteps and a kind of Tango, very dignified and stately: and then the clapping of hands heralded the forming up for the national dance.

It was something like a country dance, and, by degrees, a little vivacity crept into the proceedings. The dance was rather like Sir Roger de Coverly, and as the man and girl in the centre bowed and turned each other, the onlookers clapped their hands in time to the tune. It was graceful and pretty, and there was some laughter and fun over a young boy, who had to be coached through his part and who burlesqued his mistakes to win applause. But after that dance was over they went back to the Tangos and slow waltzes, and again that wistful depression settled upon the dancers.

We were tired, and slipped away in the dark-

ness, whilst the plaint of the guitars followed us up the silent road. And, later, that same music stole into our dreams, and wove itself in scenes, through which the woman touched by fate moved too, with her proud and wistful face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIG FISH.

Though it was only seven in the morning, the air was already hot, for the sky was cloudless and the north wind blew straight from the Equator. We were to drift downstream, and the launch was to follow and pick us up. We were then still in the middle stage of our career, searching the water, sometimes finding fish, sometimes not, painfully building up experience. The river was wide, over five hundred yards, and swift: we kept the canoe inshore, and fished the streams which looked likely. From my present knowledge, I know that we wasted much time over unprofitable places. True, we confined ourselves to the fast streams, which was right; you can leave the slow flowing water alone at this time of year: but we did not yet know how to select. The water for dorado is not deep, and it is lively; look out always for a current compressed between two rocks; for water tumbling over a submerged reef; and above all for a fast smooth racing glide.

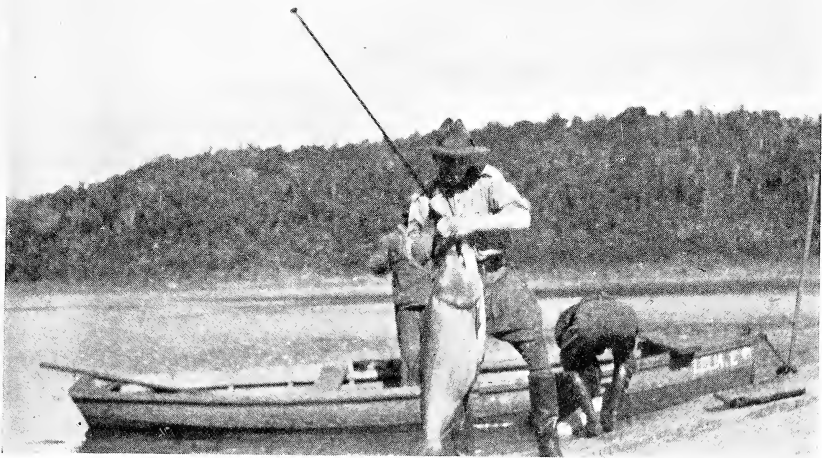
For an hour nothing happened. We fished

steadily, taking it in turns. We had on a spoon which subsequently became our lucky spoon, which still survives, scored all over by the teeth of many a dorado. It was heavy, of copper, two and three-quarter inches long, and with one large single hook, of such a size that, fastened to the head of the spoon, it hung just clear of the tail. This is far the best arming. The trace was two and a-half feet of piano wire, with many large swivels; and just above the trace was a small bullet, half an ounce in weight, attached by weak string, so that if it gets caught the string breaks and you do not lose your trace. The rod was an extremely powerful greenheart spinning rod, ten and a-half feet long : the line was one hundred yards of green cuttyhunk followed by one hundred yards of backing : and the reel was a Silex. Such was our tackle; everything was tried and tested, and a better outfit cannot be imagined.

We had fished for an hour, before I hooked and landed a good fish. He was lying in rapid water, where two streams met, and he took us down some way before he was gaffed. He weighed over thirty-three pounds and a half, and he was as lovely as a piece of old jewellery, and as thick as a carp. After that, my companion fished on, but without a touch; and, as I did not much fancy the water round us and could see no likely places near, I suggested that Pedroso should paddle back to where my fish

had been hooked. He did so; my companion made a cast, and, exactly in the same place, there was a heavy pull, and something went off downstream deep and hard. When about fifty yards off he swirled up to the top, and I had a good look at him, and from him I looked at my thirty-three pounder lying in the canoe, and taking a line from that, I said to myself, that is a fish of between forty and fifty pounds.

The fight that followed is not worth describing in detail. It was exceedingly dull. At first all went well and we thought we were going to have an easy time. The fish made one long run and then, hard and skilfully handled, was forced out of the stream into the slow water; but once there nothing could bring him to the top. He bored deep down in that deep river, hanging on to the line, sailing sullenly round and round, sometimes nearly straight below us, the rod hooped to breaking point and the line humming like a harp string. He was dragged down the river, at one moment allowing himself to be reeled in, then tearing the line savagely off the reel. He had been on for forty minutes, and we must have gone down a mile of water, before he swirled up to the top, fifteen yards off, shaking his great head, and lashing the agate water into ivory foam. My companion reeled in as fast as he could, and I very nearly got a chance with the gaff, when down he went again into the invisible depths, and the fight



A REAL BIG ONE.

BY BREAKFAST TIME.

(To face p. 68.)

was renewed as though it would never end. Finally, after a struggle of one hour and forty minutes, fought out down two miles of water, he had to give in and I gaffed him. The fisherman was nearly as exhausted as the fish. He weighed twenty-one kilos, honest weight; or forty-six pounds.

The fight had no particular incident. It was the longest of any we had, and the only wearisome one. But there are some points about it interesting to the fisherman, for it raises the question of the strength of dorado compared to salmon. I have never killed a salmon of over forty pounds, though I have over thirty; so it is hard to compare: and dorado are fished for on very much stronger tackle, and on a larger and wilder river. All these facts complicate a judgment. But no one who has fished for both will dispute that the first rush of a dorado is far stronger than that of a salmon of the same size. It is faster, longer and heavier. It is like nothing else in the world. Before you have time to think, one hundred yards have whizzed off your reel and a great fish is rushing first in one direction and then another, hurling himself out of the water, crashing back into it with a bang, and shaking himself in mad fury at his restraint. That is true and it is all in favour of the dorado. But a salmon has the advantage in one point. He has more resource; for he can fight in still water as strongly as in swift. A

dorado cannot : if pulled out of the stream, he loses something of his high courage, for he is a creature of swift water, and his fine mettle deserts him in the sluggish. He fights heavily no doubt; but his fight is of one kind : he swims deep, bores and jags; and he does not suddenly change his tactics and make an irresistible rush for the stream, as a salmon will. A heavy salmon will do all the boring and jagging just as well as a dorado, and in addition he has a shot or two in his locker which a dorado has not. To sum up, however, I consider the dorado the gamer fish. The first few minutes of a big one give you more than you get in salmon fishing; and, pound for pound, he is stronger and more muscular. But a salmon has more resource.

We never got a bigger fish. No doubt there are such; report talks dimly of monsters weighing one hundred pounds or more. They may exist. In some remote water, above the Falls of Guayra, little known even now, traversed only by the collector, the explorer or the hunter, the haunt of the jaguar, the boa constrictor and the tapir, a prize may await some fortunate fisherman. I can imagine no experience more glorious than a contest fought out in the unknown recesses of the tropical forest. May someone who reads this book be the lucky individual.

CHAPTER X.

THE FALLS OF GUAYRA.

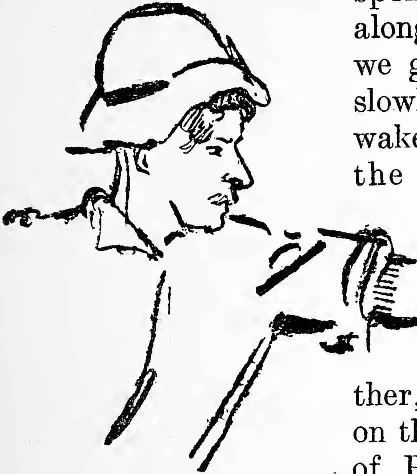
The morning sun shone gaily upon the little town, and a tame parrot on a tree was talking cheerfully to himself, as we crossed the court-yard in search of breakfast. The place looked new washed in the early light. We had heard a bell at six o'clock that called the peons to work, and by the time we were up nearly all of them had disappeared into the forest, with their armed overseers; some to collect yerba leaves, others to work at the clearings or on the small railway. Looking down the sloping road we could see a wide river dotted with islands, long sheds and wooden buildings at its edge, and the outlines of small craft tied to the river bank. Beyond that the distance melted into a haze that betokened fine weather.

The Paraná River above the Falls is three miles wide. At the Falls it is compressed into a narrow gorge, and the greater part of the water thunders in mighty rapids through the head of this gorge. The rest of the broad river flows past the head, and, turning, tumbles over

the steep cliffs which form its two sides. The whole system of falls therefore is an immense half-loop, at the head of which are the great rapids, and along the sides a series of waterfalls. There are eighteen known and identified falls; but it is certain that there are many more unknown. Hidden as they are in the thick tropical forest, with impassable rapids below, it is impossible to get a view of more than a part. It was only a part, and indeed a small part, which we saw: but it is doubtful whether the world holds a more stupendous sight.

After breakfast we walked down to the quay, a small motor launch having been lent us for the expedition to the Falls. Guayra, where we were, is in Brazil and above the Falls. We were to cross the Paraná to the Paraguay side, land, walk down to the Falls, and view them from that side. Indian guides were provided, and men to carry our things. The launch went at great speed, trailing a wake of lacy bubbles behind her. Some of the men clustered in the bows, others on the edge of the boat, or in a small barge lashed to her side. A heap of red embers in the bottom of the barge kept the maté kettle hot, and the gourd and pipe were passed round at intervals. The men were young and slightly made, no darker than an Italian or Spaniard: one in charge of the party, more swarthy, with a knife in his belt and a revolver at his side. Making a great circle, we rounded

a large island, and steering our way amongst several others, at last we got into a more narrow waterway. The water was deep green and clear, weeds and spiked reeds grew along the edge, and we glided along more slowly, the V of our wake widening out till the points reached either bank. After about two hours' steaming, the launch could go no further, and we landed on the low reedy shore of Paraguay. Crossing a swampy piece of ground, we plunged into the monté, where it was necessary to go in single file.



We followed a narrow pathway that led through the forest. Thorny bushes caught at us as we passed, the gloom became thicker, llianas trailed from tree to tree and threatened to trip us up. Huge spikey orchids, red and yellow, grew on the trees, and the vegetation was so luxurious that every plant had to fight desperately for life. Stems shot up thin and blanched to reach the light, and creepers as thick as cables wound themselves in every

direction. Ferns, and small delicate yellow flowers, grew here and there, but wilted as soon as picked.

Silently we made our way along, every sense alert, and by degrees a faint hum began to make itself heard, a hum that strengthened as we went further. It was the distant sound of the Falls. Legend has it that the roar can be heard twenty miles off, that people become deaf from living within reach of them, that no animal life can exist within a radius of some miles. Fables all. The noise is stupendous when standing just above the Falls, but there is no truth in these wild exaggerations.

To see them properly it is necessary to wade right out into the river, and we had brought bathing dresses to put on. Rope shoes and poles had been provided, and we stepped into the cold water, following our guides. The current was terrific in some places, and the stones and rocks were slippery. From where we started you looked across about fifty yards of fast shallow water to a flat wooded island, which shut out the view. We waded across to this; the bottom was tricky and uneven, with shelves of rock, such as you get on many salmon rivers. We walked across the narrow island, entered the river again, and waded across and down about one hundred yards to the top of the Falls, and then got to a rock half-way down one of the subsidiary falls at the side of the gorge.

It sounds an unbelievable thing to do, and indeed looked it. It can only be compared to the feat of putting on a bathing dress and wading across to Goat Island above Niagara. It would have been madness without Indian guides. They led us zigzag, keeping to the high shelves of rock where the water was comparatively shallow, always ready to lend a hand at the dangerous spots. Even so we were often above the waist, and of course there were always the Falls below, their pull was on us, and it was quite easy to slip. Finally we got down and through the top of one of the falls and reached a rock half-day down, overlooking the main chasm of the gorge.

Below were the great rapids. The river poured in thunder through the opening, lumps of shattered water foam and spray, amber and ivory. You cannot compare it to water at all. It was a substance compacted of air and liquid and froth, and yet there was nothing light or foamy or airy about it. The rush and the stress and the drive of it had hammered it into a solidity; and yet it had not that sameness of outline, that moving solidity, which is given you by the unchanging movement of a great waterfall: for it was always changing, never the same, tossed and twisted and tortured now into this shape and now into that.

At the head of the rapids stands a high rocky island, the safe fortress of many a macaw.

Below the island the waters unite, and rush down the widening gorge, with waterfalls on either side. As far as you can see are these waterfalls, thundering down, clouded with spray at the base. The air is full of their noise and their foam. It is impossible to convey any idea of the remoteness of the scene. It was a spectacle of savage wildness, set in the tropical forest. You felt confronted not with a piece of scenery, but with a great event of nature. Except for the little group of yourself and your companions, huddled precariously in the midst of those roaring waters, there was no trace of man or man's handiwork. You looked at something prior to man and untouched through time.

Suddenly one of the guides shouted something, but his words were swept away in the clamour. He gesticulated and pointed to the sky, and there, high overhead, flew a chain of brilliant macaws, making for their island, their long tails streaming behind them. We were almost too dazed with the roar of the Falls to take them in. Retracing our steps with care, for a stumble might bring disaster, we reached the forest again and dressed in our usual clothes. Then another mile or so through the jungle, and we came to a tiny clearing where we were to lunch. From here we could make our way, through a small tunnelled opening in the undergrowth, to the edge of the cliff, and look down

on racing water and still more falls, for the Paraná takes a series of them on its way down country. The crash of the water was in our ears as we made our way back to the clearing.

Old nigger Peon watching the "Asado"

The peons had made a table with trestles and boards, and the meal was being cooked over a wood fire, the blue smoke thin and transparent

in the brilliant sunlight which dappled the grass. The men moved backwards and forwards, serving us with meat and bread and water, their picturesque figures blending well with the background of tropical vegetation. Except for the roar of the Falls, the forest was very silent: no birds called, and there was no stir amongst the undergrowth. On our way back, threading our way by the tiny pathway, we saw a flight of large parrots coming across the sky. They pitched, screaming and chattering, in the top branches of a tree, then wheeled away again screaming, their emerald plumage hard to distinguish in the leafage.

Once more in the boat, we re-traced our way till we reached the wide river, where we caught sight of a dug-out manned by two Indian men and a boy. They belonged to a wandering tribe, and were out fishing. Our boat swept past so quickly on the swift current that we could hardly make them out. They were dressed in European clothes, and wore pieces of wood through their nostrils. They paid little attention to us, and we passed them so soon that there was only time to glance at them, and to feel a pang of disappointment that real Indians should look so ordinary. They were not at all the Indians of romance.

The river at Guayra spreads out into an immense expanse, and from here it again becomes navigable for small craft, and can be

followed up many leagues into the interior of Brazil. But the savage and intractable Falls bar the door to all but a handful. The Jesuit Father, Montoya, sought to navigate them in 1631 when he led his huge flock of Indian converts from the settlement at Guayra. The fierce half-breed Paulistas from Brazil, called 'Mamelucos,' had harried and plundered the town time and time again, carrying off the Indians to slavery in San Paulo. And at last Montoya decided to leave the settlement, and lead his flock to a place of safety further down the river. He had hoped to escape by river, and had a fleet of rafts sent over the falls to test them. Not one escaped. And so he made his wonderful pilgrimage five hundred miles through the trackless forest, and settled his Indians at Iguazú and at Loreto and at San Ignacio.

The only traces that now remain of the Jesuits' occupation are a few ruins fast crumbling to decay, whilst the melodious names of the towns they founded still wake memories of those far off days.

Such are the Falls, untouched by man. Untouched, however, they will not long remain. We heard talk of an engineer prospecting for the Brazilian Government, and of other schemes also. The railway too from San Paulo is creeping down the Paraná : year by year it gets nearer the Falls, and before long Messrs. Cook

will advertise excursions from Rio, express trains with sleeping cars, hotel expenses and guides included. Nor from Rio alone: they will run you out from London, three days at the Falls, at an inclusive charge there and back, English spoken all the way, and first-class accommodation in steamer, train and hotel. You shall see what we saw, but it shall be tamed, that savage wild thing, and behave prettily for you. No need to wade. A neat girder bridge of constructional steel shall carry you out to the macaws' island. True, the macaws will either have been all sold to maiden ladies, or have fled with indignant shrieks to safe solitudes; but what does that matter compared with the marvels which you shall witness of progress and civilisation? On the second day of your three (the first you will devote to the Falls, as per schedule) you shall be taken over the new Power House, and you shall mark with approval how all this force has been harnessed for the service of man, and no longer allowed to run to waste, in Nature's foolish fashion; and you shall swell with satisfaction at noting how science is continually making the world an easier place to live in.

Well, the world must move of course, and to repine at change is a silly and futile attitude of mind. It is not that, nor is it distress at the destruction of an object of wild beauty, which makes one question whether progress will bring

happiness. Often it does not. No one can doubt that there was infinitely more happiness under the rule of the old Jesuit Fathers than at the present time. With all the mistakes and limitations of their time and their creed, the Jesuits fought for human liberty, whether against the open raids of the Paulistas or the more insidious attacks of the Spanish governors at Asuncion, who regarded slavery as the proper destiny for the Indian, and looked on anyone who tried to rescue him with an amazed disgust. The Jesuits fought and they were beaten, and it was this which caused their downfall. The fight still goes on, but there are no Jesuits to help. Slavery formerly, contract labour to-day, it is one and the same thing, glossed over though it be with the forms of democracy and liberty. No one can regard without a sinking of heart any extension of this kind of modern industrialism.

CHAPTER XI.

A GOOD DAY AT DORADO.

It was five o'clock in the morning. The mist was twisting and wreathing and smoking on the polished surface of the water, and only the tops of the trees of the Paraguay forest were visible, like shrubs looking over a wall. Such a dawn, misty and still, gave certainty of heat, and we ought to start without delay. Neither dressing nor breakfast takes long for fortunate dwellers in a hot country; at sunrise everyone is naturally awake, and the kettle was soon boiled, coffee and maté made, and shirt and trousers pulled on. The line, uncoiled the night before to dry, had of course taken occasion to snarl itself into a hundred tangles, but it was reeled on the drum at last, and rod and gaff handed into the canoe. We paddled up through the curling mists, and reached our fishing ground long before the red rim of the sun showed over the monté.

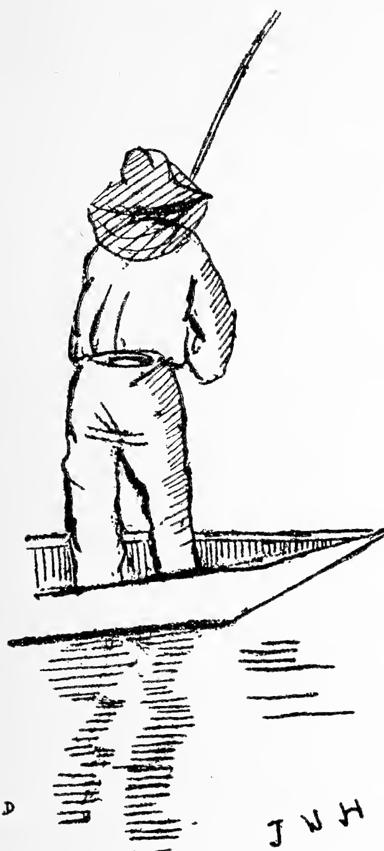
It was my turn to start. We had fished the stream the night before, but fared unluckily. I had lost three fish running, all apparently

well hooked, and we had had to work hard to avoid a blank. But hope rises with the sun, and it was a glorious morning. The air was caressingly hot, but fresh as new milk in an underground dairy, and body and mind were both composed and alert, exhilarated and steadied at the same time. Oh, you who talk as though healthy breezes and nimble airs were confined to temperate regions, and as though it were only there that the wind came pure and sweet, whilst tropic airs are heavy and languorous, charged with beauty no doubt, but with a beauty which is unwholesome and unnatural, like some heavy-smelling hothouse flower, or some over-scented woman, I wish you could have been with me that morning. You would have revised your opinions. You would have found that heat does not destroy freshness. You would have realised that a wind blowing over hundreds of miles of untrodden forest, even if the forest be tropical, can come as clean and life-giving as any that blows over peat or bog-myrtle or sphagnum moss. You would have felt a lightness of heart which a lightly-clad body induces, and that harmony of body and spirit, that rush of vitality and that security of happy enjoyment which comes from the warm, delicate and sparkling atmosphere of a hot country, which laps you round and soothes every nerve, and at the same time freshens and exhilarates you.

This is a long way from fishing; but perhaps not so far as it seems. The mystery of dorado fishing can never be understood if description is confined to mere catching of fish. He is a part of his surroundings, and his pursuit is coloured by them. It is impossible to think of it without recalling hot still dawns with the last strands of mist quitting the water, or blazing afternoons when the surface of the river was as metal fusing with heat, and the sun's track could not be looked into. And over it and round it are the strange birds, and the tropic sky, and the banks of white sand and the dark rocks, and at the edge is the sombre forest.

The first stream tried was too low. In October the Paraná may fall feet in the night, and what was a rushing water in the evening be only a languid current at morning. At the swirl, right at the head, a dorado did hook himself for a few seconds, but soon kicked off. So up we went, to a stream near the top of the stream-system we were fishing. It was rather too high, rough and heavy, and shot away almost straight across the river. It began very swift, compressed between submerged rocks, then widened and steadied, with broken water on the far side, and beyond that a racing glide. It took two to paddle the canoe across to the head, but once there we got into a quiet eddy. I had for bait a thin metal strip, five and a-half inches long and an inch wide, with a large

single hook at the top and a half-ounce bullet. There was nothing at the beginning of the stream, and I fished down steadily, lengthening my line and pitching the spoon well into the tumbled water on the far side. It was shallow, rocky and swirly. In such a stream, shallow and also uncertain, where the spoon is caught by violent back-washes and eddies, you must cast more down than across, and start reeling in fast at once to keep clear of the bottom.



When the spoon was about twenty yards down, and being reeled at full speed into the quick current, a fish took with a mighty bang, and shot down-

stream like a hydroplane on the top of the waves. No fear of his not being well hooked: with a spoon moving at that pace through that tearing water he either missed or jammed the hook home; and he felt solid as a rock. Down he went, the line slicing the water into spray, then up into the air four feet, down with a smash, then up in the air again, twisting and shaking until his head nearly knocked his tail. Then, evidently thinking he has done enough fireworks, he settles to business. He whizzes downstream deep and hard, stripping off more than half the reel in spite of heavy braking with a wet glove, and on and on till I get nervous. Has he turned upstream? I believe he has, though I cannot stop line running out. Yes, my goodness, he has. There he is right opposite, showing like a gentleman, a hundred yards off, far above where the line points. I must have sixty yards of bagged line. I reel in, reel for dear life, reel, reel, till fingers ache so that I fumble with the handle. I must get it in, I must, the river is full of boulders whose tops are like hooks. Thank heaven, it is in, I am clear, and get a direct pull again, that lovely feeling all fishermen know. The fish celebrates the fact by careering all over the stream, now up, now down, now across, rolling up to the top occasionally and shaking his great head. Then suddenly he sounds like a whale, flukes in air, and starts off downstream again,

deep and heavy.

Now is your time. You must stop him now. He is still full of fight, and it seems unthinkable that you can hold him. But this is the crisis: you must risk everything to get him out of the stream now, unless you mean to lose him.

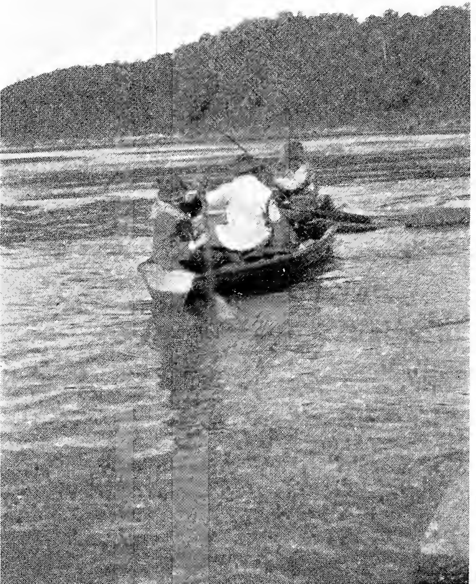
Whilst the fish has been tearing about, Pedroso has not been idle. I have been dimly conscious of being whirled downstream a hundred yards or so, and now we are lying still, gently rocking. We are in a big remanso, a lake-like backwater, with no stream; Pedroso, in answer to my look of enquiry, nods encouragingly. Yes, it is muy profondo, very deep, and the shore is far off. A good place to kill a fish. And now I have to get him into the remanso. He has no intention of coming. He is far out in the current, slogging downstream, neither fast nor continuously, but tearing off an uncomfortable amount of line, and feeling as uncontrollable as the trunk of a tree. I must haul him in, before he gets too far down; so I pull at him hard. The rod groans protestingly, the line tautens and jumps, jerking off rainbow spray, but still he does not stop. Well, I must hang on even if I smash, so I take a turn of the line round my gloved hand, and pull harder than ever. Still he bores on, pulling the canoe half round. At last, with unexpected suddenness, just when it is certain that something must go, I feel that his head is round. I reel

in, pull and reel, pull and reel again, until, looking at the filling drum, it is clear he must be in a backwater. The first part of the fight is over. My companion reaches for the gaff.

Down the fish goes, and cannot be got up to the top, down, until he must be forty feet straight under water. Pedroso just works the canoe so as to prevent him getting under it, but otherwise we do not move. The fish sails round, boring and hanging on the line, deep in the water. But not for long; he lunges up, hammers the surface with his tail, goes down, is pulled up nearer the canoe, and my companion leans out with the gaff. The fish, however, surges under the boat, which Pedroso instantly spins round on its own axis to clear the line, and then rolls up to the top ahead of it, churning the water. Now is my chance. I have him on a short line, and he is on the top. Better take risks than allow him to go down again. He has got his head down for another dive, but I haul it up by main force, and then pull him suddenly, quick and hard, parallel to the boat; there is a flash of the gaff over his back, and the next instant he is in the canoe. He weighed twenty-six pounds and three-quarters.

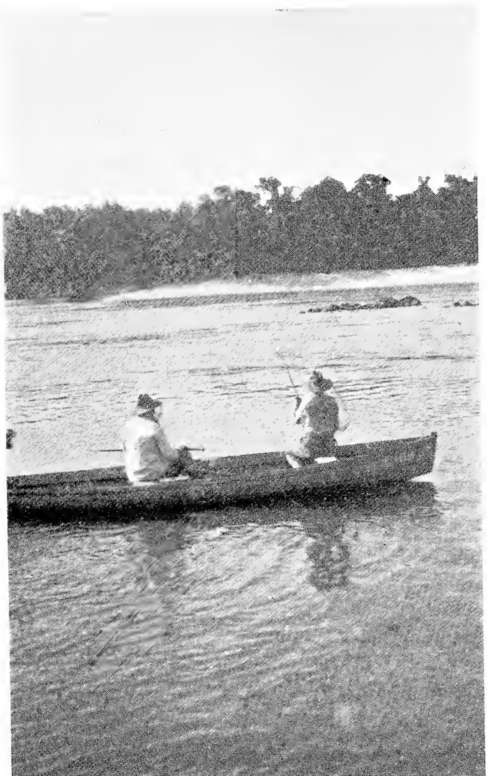
We wasted no time, but got back at once to the stream. It was my companion's turn. He got hold of a fish exactly where I had hooked mine, but it got off before it had hooked itself properly. Then, not liking the spoon, he

A LIKELY SPOT.



HOOKED.

(To face p. 88.)



THE FIRST RUSH.

DOWNSTREAM.

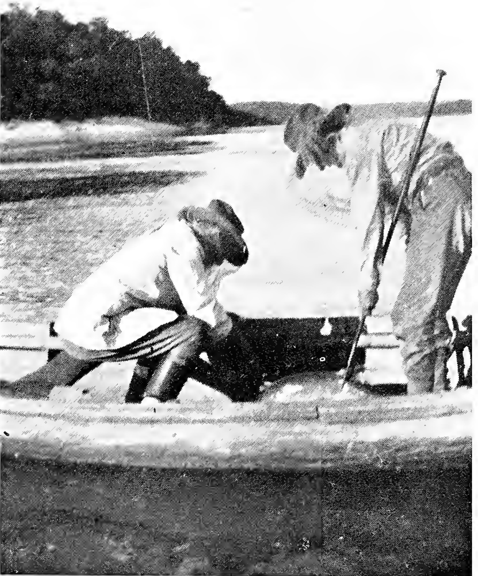
STOPPING HIM.

HE'S COMING UP!

NEARLY IN.

NOW THE GAFF.

SAFELY ABOARD.



UNHOOKING HIM.

(To face p. 88.)

changes it for our old lucky spoon, the copper one of two inches and three-quarters, and tries a cast straight across at right-angles, reeling like lightning as soon as the spoon alights. This is immediately successful, for there is a mighty swirl, a gleam of gold and bronze, and the reel is shrieking. Down the fish goes without a jump, not as fast as the one just landed, but with the solid irresistibility of a really heavy fish. He goes across and down, chiefly down, without coming up to the top; we are able to drift with the current and keep opposite him without difficulty, and we reach the big remanso with the fish fighting sullenly far across the river, unbeaten and unexhausted. My companion pulls hard to get him out of the stream, but this only wakes him up, and causes him to make a long run across, rolling up to the surface at the end of it, lashing his tail, and opening a cavernous mouth. He is slowly reeled back, now coming in reluctantly, now pulling the rod point down to the surface and dragging off line, but on the whole being brought back, until he must be nearly in the remanso. But he does not mean to come yet, he is immensely strong, and he has a strong water to help him. At length, however, patience and skill prevail, the reel is steadily filling with line, and almost before we realise it there he is, within twenty yards of the canoe.

My word, he is a big one! I get the first

good look, and see how deep and thick he is; he must be half as heavy again as mine. That fish must be caught. He is full of fight; but as usual he does not try to get back to the stream. He goes down and down, pulling irresistibly, but conserving his strength. No rod ever made could bring him up yet. My companion pulls and levers, and occasionally gets him so near that we see his golden side gleaming through the glancing water as he turns in his struggles, but in an instant he has straightened and disappeared. These fights with big dorado in still water are long and difficult; for a heavy fish will allow himself to be dragged out of the current whilst his vigour is undiminished, and his might unimpaired. He then goes deep down, to the bottom if he can get there: and as the bottom of the Paraná is mostly jagged rocks you had better get him away as soon as possible. You may be certain of a prolonged battle: until you have experienced it, you cannot believe how strong he is. We had a powerful rod, cuttyhunk line and piano-wire trace, tackle which would have taken the steam out of any salmon: my companion held the fish to the limit of the rod's breaking strain: pressure which would have brought a salmon up to the top had no effect whatever: and the fish bored and circled unconcernedly, occasionally seen as a wavering shadow, hanging on the line head downwards. But I know it cannot last

for ever, and I feel confident that this immense creature will be ours. So it happens. At last he is forced up to the top, and then, quite suddenly, he yields. My companion pulls him in and I have an easy shot with the gaff. He weighed forty-two pounds and a-half.

It is nine o'clock now, and the sun is high over the monté; it is very hot, and Pedroso paddles back to the launch. On the Alto Paraná in October you can if necessary be in the sun all through the hot time of the day. If you wear proper clothes you can do it without distress: but since no man wants to fish for twelve hours on end, and early morning and evening are best, you are better in the shade during the great heat of the day. So back we drift, well content, lying lazily in the canoe, idly recalling the incidents of our mimic war, wrapped in the pleasant languor which follows successful activity. After we had lunched the sun beat so fiercely that it took the life out of everything except mosquitoes and sandflies, which indeed were vitalised to a new malignity. There is only one thing to do in such a situation, and that is to block doors and windows with mosquito nets, and sleep till it gets cooler.

We were back at the stream by four o'clock. The sun was blazing its path towards the tree-tops of Paraguay, there was a glare off the water like a flash from a burning-glass, and the torrid air swarmed with sandflies. Life was

unbearable without veils, and disagreeable in them. But in spite of the glitter and the heat, two more great fish were captured out of the same stream before the sun sank in a glory of gold and flame, and instantaneously the quick night was drawn like a curtain across the heavens. We paddled back in the sweet sudden coolness, the air musical with the merry orchestra of the frogs, the surface of the river gleaming opal and blue-black; whilst our eye constantly sought our two prizes lying in the canoe, and lingered lovingly over their breadth and colour. They weighed thirty-three and a half and thirty-nine and a quarter pounds. The total for the day was four fish, which averaged thirty-five and a half pounds each.

Old dorado fishers will smile at the idea of four fish being called a good day. Much larger numbers are caught, twenty fish a day for two rods being nothing unusual. Most of these big bags, however, are made below falls, where the fish are collected. There are some well-known places of this kind on the Uruguay: I believe there are similar spots on the Iguazú, below the Falls, though I never fished there: there must be places at the foot of the Guayra rapids, though probably no one has ever penetrated to them: and doubtless there are many others. But on the stretch of the Alto-Paraná which we fished, whether it was that we did not hap on the right places, or that the fish are scattered,

we never had one of these mighty captures. Oddly enough, my first day, packed full of disaster, might have been the best, had all gone well. On other occasions we had to work for fish, often to work hard, and we considered we had done well if we got a fish or two apiece. But as compensation for numbers, we had size. Our smallest fish weighed eighteen pounds, and we got three of forty pounds and over, quite exceptional good fortune. And after all, four fish averaging thirty-five pounds should satisfy anyone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RIVER OF MISFORTUNE.

The Alto-Paraná runs in its upper course through a deep valley, and here it is joined by many tributaries. Nearly all of these, flowing as they do from a high plateau, have falls not far from their junction. Fish run up and lie at the foot of these falls, and such rivers afford good fishing. Such a tributary is the Iguazú, with its famous falls: and not far below its mouth, but on the Paraguay bank, another lesser river flows into the Paraná. It is seventy or eighty yards wide, small by South American standards, though big by ours. Its falls are some way inland; we never saw them, though their thunder got louder and louder. The river is slow and sluggish at its mouth, but as you progress it becomes faster, until, two or three miles up, you can get the canoe no further. Here there is typical dorado water, racing rapids, rocks and tumbled streams.

It was on the 17th of October that we anchored off its mouth. It was a steamy evening after rain, the air full of intolerable

sandflies. We got into the canoe, a large boat-load, to explore its fishing. We started in the usual humour in which you engage on an agreeable adventure, and we paddled up the first reach talking and laughing and naming the birds. Our mood appeared to be that of those expecting a pleasant enterprise. True, a feeling of undefined apprehension lay heavy on me, but I put it down to the weather, and apparently my companions did not share it. When we got round the bend, however, and shut out the launch with its homely and comforting everyday life, it became clear that they did : for talk gradually died down, until silence fell on all, even on Pedroso the light-hearted. The air was hot and heavy. A sense of oppression lay on everything. There was not a sound except the growing roar of the falls, the scoop of the paddles, and the patter of the water under the bow. We seemed cut off from the world we knew. We had stepped suddenly from the familiar into the strange. The river was sinister. It had clearly fallen several yards in the last few days and had laid bare twenty or thirty feet of steep, glistening mud, scored here and there by the clumsy trail of the tapir, and thinly covered with an unwholesome looking water plant about a foot high, sickly green in colour. It thus ran through an immense mud trough, at the edges of which rose the forest, sombre and impenetrable.

As we uncovered reach after reach the stream got faster. Rocks began to appear and rapids, and we had to pick our way. Pedroso steered inshore, and punted with his paddle along the steep bank. Soon he could get no further; he stepped out, rammed the paddle into the sticky mud, and tied the painter to it. We had arrived at our fishing ground.

As may be imagined, apprehension and oppression vanished as soon as there was occasion for action. I took up the rod and looked round. We were at the tail of a racing stream which reached as far up as you could see. Just below us, some distance out, a rock projected, with the water packed like a bolster above it, and a long eddy below. Beyond it, the river ran strong and deep. We were, at this time, in the middle state of our knowledge of dorado fishing. We knew what sort of water they were not in: we knew also, in a sense, what sort of water they were in: but our knowledge was too general and not sharply defined. It is not enough to know that fish are in the strong streams; you must get an eye for country, which comes only from experience. Then you will be able to tell exactly which streams they will inhabit and what part. Knowing what I know now, I should not have expected much where we were, with faster water close above. So it proved. The current and eddy, carefully fished, produced only one pull from one small

dorado, which did not hook itself. I reeled in, and, pointing up the river, said that I should get out and try higher up.

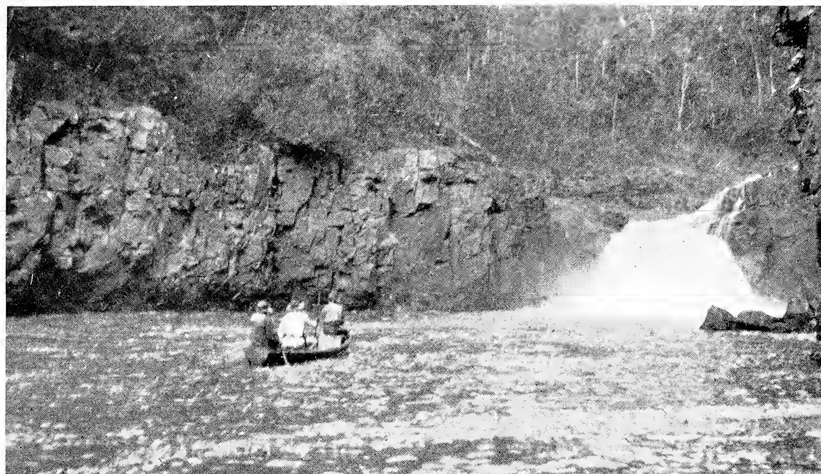
My companion vigorously dissuaded me. He had no reasons: the only difficulty to be encountered was an extremely muddy and sticky walk of fifty or a hundred yards. A hooked fish would certainly make down stream, and there was the canoe handy. There was thus no reason in the world against my proposal; but my companion grew more and more vehement. He obviously did not want me to go, and Pedroso backed him up. They had no explanation, beyond the apprehension which lay heavy on all of us. Their urgency appealed to the same hidden feeling in me also; and I knew, from some indefinable cause, that it was a silly thing to do. But I would not admit it. What possible objection could there be? I laughed at them and landed.

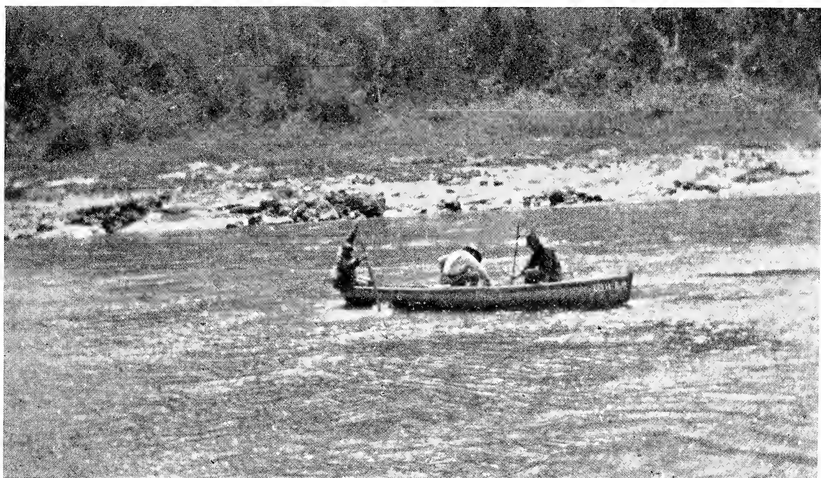
I can see before me now the place I chose. The river, full seventy yards wide, not deep, was broken by boulders and reefs, visible or submerged. Looking across the restless water, you saw on the far side dark rocks, which had taken the place of the mud bank, and above them the silent, moveless forest. And, over all, pervading all, dominating every sense, and filling the hollow air with sound, the roar of the falls had grown louder, and had taken on a more menacing and insistent note. It was a

strange scene, remote and exotic, and I seemed out of place, with my civilised clothes and my modern reel and rod. However, there was splendid water before me, and fishing to be done.

He who has not made a cast into an absolutely untried river has missed a pure ecstasy of life. It was glorious to see the spoon sail through the air and disappear into the unknown. Glorious too was it to feel it immediately caught and swept by that rushing water, and to experience that jolly tug on the finger given by a cleanly spinning spoon. Soon, however, came a tug of a very different sort. There was a heavy pull, and that impression of quivering solidity only given by a very big fish; and the next second I was yoked to something unseen but mighty which tore irresistibly down stream. There was plenty to do. The canoe had to be reached as soon as possible, and yet the fish must be held hard so that he did not get out too much line. So along that steep and sticky bank I shambled and squelched, breathing a sigh of relief on reaching the boat. We pushed off and drifted down, and it was possible to take stock of things.

The first mad rush was safely over. The rod had taken control. It appeared to be a question only of time and fortune. My companion reached out and put the gaff handy. All seemed going well. Suddenly, however, there came





IN THE RIO DE DESGRACIA.

(To face p. 98.)

that jarring feeling which has turned so many hearts to lead, and I saw that the line pointed up stream when it was quite obvious that the fish was below. Hoping against certainty, I said to myself that it might be drowned line, but a hard pull proved it was not. I was hung up. We got the canoe easily out to the place, and tried all round on every side. But it was no use. I had to break.

It was a gloomy party which returned. It was more than hinted that the disaster was my own fault, and that the line had been allowed to get bagged—a suggestion which my jangled nerves repelled with unnecessary asperity. We were silent and morose. Night fell quickly, and everyone was glad to see the yellow lights of the launch reflected in the dark water.

We discussed the matter that evening and decided to try again; and at five o'clock next morning we paddled up once more. The water was much lower; the projecting boulder stood a long way further out, and we could get the canoe up to where I had hooked the fish. My companion cast; and hooked another in the same place which behaved in the same way. We got into the boat and drifted down; and—his line suddenly stopped where mine had stopped the night before. The canoe was got out. Pulling at the line and working at it with the long-handled gaff I could recover several yards, and could feel that the obstruction was something

flexible. At length a bit of rotten bough and a few water-soaked leaves came up, and it was clear that we were caught in a tree, jammed in the bed of the river. We had to break again and lose fifteen yards of line and another of our best spoons, of which we were running alarmingly short.

We both agreed that it was useless to continue fishing there. The tree was right in the fairway, and only a miracle could keep a hooked fish out of it. It was exasperating to have to leave a place presumably full of big dorado well on the feed; but it was mad to venture any more of our scarce spoons on so risky an enterprise. Accordingly we tried below, with little hope and no success. Then Pedroso, looking keenly at the water, said that if we dropped down and crossed to the other side, he thought he could get the canoe up to a spot opposite to where the fish lay. If one were hooked there, we could, holding him hard, get him down clear of the obstacle. It was worth trying, and we went over, but without enthusiasm. We fished with a dull energy all the morning, but never got a touch.

As we paddled home, Pedroso told us the story of the river. We were not the first who had come to grief there, nor the first to regard it as sinister. Its repute was as evil as its appearance, and all up and down the Paraná it was well known that no one prospered on it.

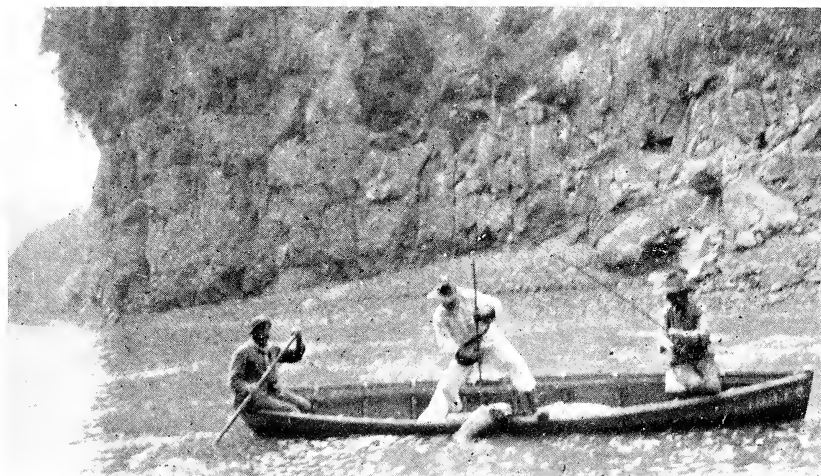
Pedroso himself had particular occasion to fear it; for in his wandering life he had worked on it years ago, logging; his canoe had struck a rock and upset, his two companions had been drowned, and he had saved his own life with the greatest difficulty. He had disliked our coming up it, and he wanted to get off as soon as possible. An unlucky river, señores; its name is the Rio de Desgracia, the River of Misfortune, and it is rightly so-called.

When we got back to the launch some Indians who were cutting timber sent word that they could lead us through the monté to the falls, which were six hours' journey off, upon a good track; and that fish lay below them in quantities. We declined to go. The reason which we gave to each other were that Indian stories were unreliable: that it would certainly take a day to go and a day to come back: that we should probably find nothing when we got there: and that anyhow we could not spare the time. Those were the reasons we gave: but neither of us had the slightest intention of going back to that river.

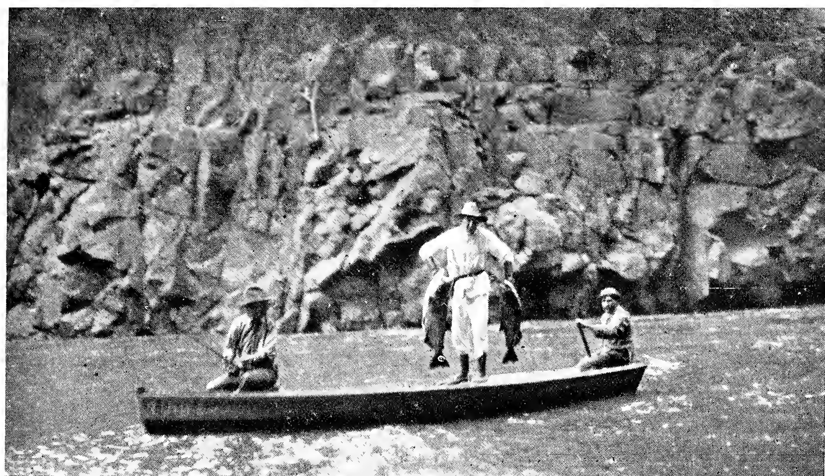
CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST DAY'S FISHING.

It was three weeks, almost to a day, after catching my first dorado that I fished for them for the last time. Much had happened in the interval. We had had hard work, failure and bitter disappointment; but we had also had glorious successes, long battles fought out over that immense and perilous river, which ended in the capture of some mighty and untameable fish. So varied had been our fortune that it would be difficult to find a time when the balance had swung more wildly and unexpectedly between prosperity and disaster. But above all, we were tried and our tackle was tried. No more broken lines; no more steel rings which snapped like rotten twigs. We were reduced, it is true, my companion and I, to a single outfit. His reel turned out unsuitable, and my line was at the bottom of the Paraná. But the outfit which we had was tested in many fights. We could trust it. And moreover it was no disadvantage that we could only fish one at a time. For myself, who have



AT AGUA DORADO.



A BRACE OF BEAUTIES.

(To face p. 102.)

long passed out of the divine fretfulness of youth, when every second not spent in actual fishing is an agony, it was very pleasant to rest after killing a fish, and to admire the easy and long casting of my companion, and to watch the river, with its abundant and exotic bird life. And indeed you want three in the canoe if you are out for big dorado: one to fish, one to gaff and one to paddle. I can assure you that it is one man's job gaffing a forty pound dorado and then getting him into a cranky canoe: if you had to manage the rod as well it would be a longer and much riskier performance; whilst if the paddler is to gaff, he must either run you ashore or drop his paddle, the first of which may be excessively dangerous for the fish, and the second for you. No, we suffered no disadvantage; we worked admirably together; and we never lost a fish at which we had a chance with the gaff.

It was five in the morning when we left the launch and paddled up to our destination. If anyone who reads this ever goes to the Alto-Paraná—and any fisherman who gets the chance of going and does not go will regret it all his life—let him on no account miss La Cueva del Toro, the Cave of the Bull. How is he to find it? Why, easily: there is no one who navigates the Alto-Paraná in all the three hundred miles which lie between Posadas and Puerto Mendez who does not know it. Ask

anyone : ask the pilot who steers the lumbering Iberá, as she slowly noses her way up the rushing river, with a great barge or two lashed to her already portly side : ask the captain of any of the busy and dirty little tugs which tow down a string of lighters laden with yerba grown in Paraguay or Matto Grosso : ask the men who float down the rafts of cedar or lapacho, carrying perhaps great squared logs of that strange wood, quebracho, which is so heavy that it sinks in water : ask any of them. Know it? Why, of course they know it, just as they know a hundred other points of difficulty and danger : just as they know the dread remolinos of Santa Catarina : his career would be short on the Alto-Paraná who did not. You will have no difficulty in finding it. So go there. But do not go when the river is high. Go when the water is low enough, and this shall be to you for a sign :—the long reef of dark rock, jutting out on the Misiones shore, should be bare to its base; and mark this, the water should be so low that you should just be able to get your boat so far across that, if you open your shoulders and cast your longest, your spoon pitches fair into the smooth racing water which makes an immense V between the two tumbling streams. That is all I shall tell you. I shall not deprive you of the joy of discovery. And when you have cast, look out : he may take directly the spoon hits the water. But this is going too fast.

When we reached the Cave of the Bull it was apparent that the river had fallen several feet. The evening before we had killed two great fish, my companion one of forty-two pounds and a half, and I one of thirty-three and a half, in the stream which forms the arm of the V on the Misiones side: not, be it noted, in the smooth water itself, which we could barely reach. To-day this stream was altered out of all knowledge. Not a touch did we get. So, after consulting Pedroso, we decided to get across to the head of a rough stream on the Paraguay side, where some black shining rocks, just emerging, showed that an island would soon be formed.

Pedroso paddled energetically across. We wedged the canoe firmly between two flat stones, and I stood up to cast. It was not long before a fish seized the spoon and tore across and down, heaving and jumping and smashing the water into spray. Do what I would, he would not stop. Down stream he went, leaping and swirling, and then turned across, springing four feet into the air right away on the far side of the stream, a hundred and eighty yards off, looking so distant and disconnected that it was difficult to believe that anything linked us. To follow him was out of the question. He must be brought back, brought back with all that line out and all that weight of water behind him. I had held him hard all through

his rush. I now held him harder still. He was not really big; slowly, fighting every yard, he allowed himself to be dragged into the deeper water, where after the usual boring he was hauled by main force up to the gaff. We never moved the boat. He weighed twenty-three pounds and a half.

There was nothing else in that stream. My companion, who is a long caster, fished it for some distance. In streams of this sort, strong and turbulent, dorado do not lie all over. They are near, but not at, the very top: they lie usually on the edge, but still in the fast water: you may begin to expect them ten or fifteen yards from the actual head, and from there onwards, for about the same distance, you are certain of a pull if they are feeding. They lie very close together. The rest of the stream is, in my small experience, unlikely, and the tail most unlikely of all. They like shallow water running over rocks, but best of all do they love the smooth racing water above where the stream breaks.

Back we went, across to the stream at which we started. I advised my companion to let Pedroso get the boat as far over as he could, so that the spoon could reach the glassy water between the streams. He did so, and we jammed the canoe up against a rock, out of the current. It was a long throw even from there; but the spoon soared out on a fine parabola and

lit a good fifteen yards into the smooth water. It had hardly sunk when the rod was doubled up and the reel screaming. It was clearly a big fish. Downstream he went, deep down, not jumping, and he must have been a hundred yards off before he showed himself, swirling up to the top, rolling over, and showing all his great depth. You are apt to underestimate the weight of dorado, for your eye, judging instinctively by length as in the case of salmon, allows too little for depth and thickness. A well fed dorado is wonderfully deep. But by now I had got cunning, and knew he was in the neighbourhood of forty pounds. He came up twice, and then was firmly and skilfully pulled into the backwater.

Now, while this great fish is sullenly boring and jagging in that backwater, something must be said, at the risk of wearying the reader, about La Cueva del Toro. As has been mentioned, two streams meet there. The united current swings sharply over towards the Paraguay bank and then, turning, rolls back towards the Misiones shore, almost completing a semi-circle, and leaving a big, deep still backwater on that side, about one hundred yards wide and rather more in length. Now the rod, being on that same side, is always working on inner lines. Wherever the fish is, however far he runs, you can at all points of his run pull him across stream into the still water.

And this, with a dorado, is nine-tenths of the battle.

And so it happened. Pedroso shot the canoe into the backwater, and then lay on his paddle, watching the struggle with his bright eyes. Slowly line was recovered. The varnished splice, plainly visible in the bright sunlight, appeared at the top of the water, wavered, was dragged under, reappeared again, journeyed towards the rod top, was torn back under water again, and finally emerged and was wound up on the reel. Who does not know the joy of feeling the rough splice run through his fingers, and get reeled on to the drum? Yard by yard the line came back. The fish was now not far off. When about fifty yards away he jumped: a very dangerous and not uncommon jump. You must always look out for it; your line is so short that, unless you drop your point right down, a smash is certain. Then he sailed and bored about, hard held, every effort being made to force him up to the top. It is not easy with a big one to bring him up: he goes down deep and hangs all his weight on the line. But at last even his great strength tired, and there he was, not fifteen yards off, a prize indeed, with his deep pure gold, his black spots and his crimson splashes. Down he plunged again, but it was not far this time: up he came a last time, I got the gaff into his solid side, and, with both hands, lifted him over the edge of the canoe.

THE BAG AT LA CUEVA DEL TORO.

WEIGHING A PACÚ.

(To face p. 108.)

He weighed seventeen and a half kilos, or over thirty-eight and a half pounds.

Now, while we are resting under a rock, I want to say something purely practical about playing dorado. Whether his first rush be upstream or down, you must hold him hard, harder than you believed it possible to hold fish. Remember that your trace is piano wire and your line is or ought to be cuttyhunk, with a breaking strain of about fifty pounds. The only uncertain factors are the hold and the rod. You will never kill a big fish lightly hooked, so the sooner he kicks off the better. As to the rod, use a strong one and hold him as hard as the rod allows. If you do not you are asking for trouble, for he will get right away where you cannot follow. The ordinary check on your reel is not heavy enough. You must have some brake. I hate all mechanical brakes, and you cannot use your fingers as in salmon fishing, or you would be cut and burnt. Far the best plan is to wear strong dogskin gloves, the thickest you can buy, and keep your finger and thumb on the line, and incidentally if your gloves have gauntlets you will bless your foresight a hundred times a day in protecting your wrists from mosquitoes and sandflies.

Therefore during those first wild minutes you must dominate him, or he will dominate you: you must give it him, hot and strong, or the fight will be infinitely prolonged and your

chance of success much lessened. At all costs get him out of the stream.

When that is done, the first stage of the battle is over. Once out of the stream, a dorado usually does not try to get back, or, if he does, you can stop him. He tries other tactics. Of course there are exceptions. I remember one fish which beat me. I was fishing from the bank alone, with no boat near. I hooked a big one, and the only place to land him was a small patch of slow water, not fifteen yards across, right below the rock where I was standing. I got him into this, and I swore to myself that he should break me before he got out. But I could not hold him : he literally tore the line through my fingers, whizzed into the stream and got off, leaving the spoon jammed in a rock. But that was an exception. Usually they try other methods. They bore and sail about, swimming deep, refusing to show. They are unbelievably strong. This stage is much more difficult and nerve-racking than the first. You have a great fish, forty pounds weight, quite close to you. You can see him, not ten yards off, a bronze shadow through the agate water, your first forty pounder perhaps; and nothing you can do brings him any nearer. This may go on for a long time. I have known it last over an hour, through no fault of the fisher, who indeed held that particular fish so hard that the rod never recovered. But, long or short, the same rule

applies. Hold him hard. At all cost get him up to the top, big or little. Once on the top the end is not far off.

We did not linger under that rock. The warning sun was already showing over the monté and it would not be long before the dorado went off the feed. We paddled back: and exactly where the last fish had been hooked I got one of eighteen and a half kilos, or just under forty-one pounds. My companion got another of thirty-seven pounds, and I ended up with one of twenty-four and a half. Two more were hooked and lost. All these were lying within a few yards of each other. We were back at the launch at half-past nine in the morning with the truly wonderful bag of five fish which averaged over thirty-three pounds each. No fisherman could want more.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT THE DORADO IS.

Though his English name is the Golden Salmon, the dorado is no salmon at all: nor, though his Latin name is *Salminus Maxillosus*, is he even a relation of that noble house. He belongs to a numerous but rather bourgeois family, the *Characinidæ*, whose members inhabit fresh waters in Africa and, more particularly, tropical and sub-tropical South America. Here they are represented by so many individuals and of such diversified characteristics that they have to be divided into many groups, and they are a plentiful and powerful race. The particular genus to which the dorado belongs, that of *Salminus*, contains by the latest classification four species altogether. But very little is known of any of them, including the dorado, as will be shown in a moment.

The *Characinidæ* are a family of fishes not found in Europe and typical of South America; and they occupy in this part of the New World very much the same place as the Cyprinoid

fishes, or Carps, take in the Old. In the Carps are included most of those British fresh water fish which are rather insultingly known as 'coarse.' Not only the Carp itself, but the Barbel, the Roach, the Dace, the Tench, the Bream and the Gudgeon, are all Cyprinoids. There are no carps in South America. Therefore, to put it shortly and quite unscientifically, the Dorado family occupy in South America the place which the Carp family occupy in Europe. There is little structural affinity between them; but, speaking again quite unscientifically, the dorado with his great depth bears some outward likeness to the carp.

But the likeness is superficial. The dorado, built on strong, clean lines, could be none other than a lover of fast streams. There is nothing of the pond fish about him. He is formed to take his pleasure in racing water. He is a beautiful fish. His main colour is what is known as old gold : a deep and yet glowing hue. He has small black spots on his broad sides, and down the middle of his strong square tail runs a crimson bar.

I must apologise for this slight and amateurish description. Finding the dorado common in South American rivers, seeing that it had been known for years, if not for centuries, and that it was valued highly for sport and food, it never occurred to me that it had not been fully described. I therefore kept no

accurate account of the fish at the time, and intended in anything I wrote to make use of the work of some man of science, which would be of much more value than anything by an amateur; and I made no doubt that such could be found in a book of reference. This, however, is not the case. None can be discovered, nor can the authorities in the Fish Department of the South Kensington Museum help. All that appears to be recorded is his classification. It is true that there is a stuffed specimen in the Museum, but this darkens counsel rather than otherwise. The colouring is different from that of those we caught. It is the colour of butter, whereas the dorado when we caught them were deep old gold : there are no black spots; and no red bar on the tail. However, this may be due to the fact that it had to be stuffed by someone who had never seen one alive. But also the shape and make appear to my uninstructed eye to be different : it is too long for its breadth, and the head looks too short. Possibly two or more species of the genus *Salminus* resemble each other, and are popularly called dorado, and the stuffed specimen is one kind and we caught another. Or I may be mistaken in the lack of resemblance, for I speak from memory, and have no dorado fresh from the Alto-Paraná to lay alongside the stuffed one. Or the stuffed fish may be out of condition. It is impossible to be certain.

Since so little is known of the fish, it may be interesting to give measurements of two; the first was a long fish, not deep; the second a thick one.

I.

Female.—Caught 18 Oct., 1921.
Weight, 21 kilos, or 46.28 pounds.

Length, snout to end of tail -	42½	inches.
Length, snout to centre of tail -	41¼	,,
Greatest girth -	28½	,,
Greatest depth -	12	,,
Length of head -	12	,,

Full of roe, grey in colour, the size of rape seed.

II.

Male.—Caught 18 Oct., 1921.
Weight, 15 kilos, or 33.06 pounds.

Length, snout to end of tail - -	39	inches.
[Length, snout to centre of tail, not taken, would be about - -	38	,,]
Greatest girth -	27	,,
Greatest depth -	11¼	,,

It is interesting to compare these weights and measurements with those of salmon. Take shape first of all. A dorado is broader than a salmon. Mr. J. Arthur Hutton gives measurements of large Wye salmon from 1908 to 1920, fish averaging over twenty-one pounds in weight, and the proportion of their girth to their length is .513[1] : that is to say, a salmon's girth is very little more than half his length. Now the girth of the two dorado given above is .70, or nearly three-quarters their length : this shows how much thicker is a dorado than a salmon.

The comparative weights are puzzling. A good formula for salmon is :

$$\frac{\text{Length} + \frac{1}{3}\,\text{length} \times \text{girth}^2}{1000} = \text{weight.}$$

Now on that scale the first dorado works out at very nearly his actual weight of forty-six pounds. But the other fish ought to have weighed four pounds more. I do not know the reason of the discrepancy.

It only remains to add that the dorado is very good to eat. Its flesh is firm, and pale pink in colour. Be sure also that you taste the very

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1 See *Salmon and Trout Magazine*, No. 29, April, 1922.

2 See *Angler's Diary*, 1922.

excellent salad which is made out of the head.

From what has been said, it will easily be understood that little is known of this gallant fish's habits. It is probable that his original home is the tropics. Dr. Gunther in his *Study of Fishes* says that many tropical fishes have followed the river system of the Plate far down into the Temperate Region, and if anyone looks at the map he will see that this was bound to happen. The Plate itself, the Rio de la Plata, the Silver River of the old conquistadores, is really an estuary, like our Humber on a larger scale: and just as the Humber is formed by the Trent and the Ouse, so the Plate is formed by the Paraná and Uruguay. The Paraná, with its great sister the Paraguay, and many other tributaries, rises far north in the tropic, and between them they drain a large part of South America below the Line. The dorado, therefore, that bold, free-swimming and masterful fish, finds himself placed in a waterway system measuring over fifteen hundred miles from north to south, and rather more at its greatest breadth, and it is only natural that he should travel up and down at his pleasure, driven by search of food, or by temperature, or by mating instinct.[1] But whether his movements are

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1 In order to migrate up and down the Paraná he would have to pass the Falls of Guayra. Having seen them in low water, I judge this to be not quite impossible during the long periods of high water caused by the rainy season in the tropics.

seasonal and periodic, that is, whether he truly migrates or not, is an interesting question. He does not go down into the sea; and whether he migrates in fresh water is conjecture. There is nothing recorded in any book of reference, nor can the authorities at the South Kensington Museum say anything on this point. One has therefore to fall back on the opinion of fishermen, always an unreliable source, and, in this case, contradictory. Some fishermen believe that he does migrate, some that he does not. Some think that he goes far into the tropic during the winter of the southern hemisphere and returns to cooler waters for spring and summer. And certainly the season of fishing for him bears this out. He is fished for during the summer months, from September to January. I am speaking, be it noted, of fishing south of the Tropic of Capricorn, which includes the whole of the Uruguay, the Paraná up to the Falls of Guayra, and the Paraguay up to near Concepçion. Of what happens north, on the distant Paranahyba, or in the wilds of Matto Grosso, I know nothing. But confining myself to the southern area, the *Fishing Guide* of the Dorado Club in Buenos Aires gives September to January, our March to July, as the season for the Uruguay, and says that October and November, our April and May, are the best months on the Alto-Paraná. But that of itself proves nothing : in the other

UNHOOKING.

A FORTY AND A THIRTY.

(To face p. 118.)

months the water may be too high, indeed usually is, and you must have low water for dorado: or the fish may be out of condition. So little in fact is known of the fish that it is not recorded either when or where he spawns.

In this state of general uncertainty, nothing can be said which has any approach to accuracy. One would like to think that he did migrate. One would like to imagine this bold traveller passing the winter, if winter it can be called, far north in the tropic, and returning in summer to renew his vigour in cooler waters. It would please the imagination to believe this. But that is a matter for the imagination, and is no concern of the fisherman. Let him know that the fishing season is from September to January, autumn and winter in our land, but spring and summer over there: that October and November are the best months: and that he should not go to the Alto-Paraná before the middle of October. Then, when his canoe is almost pulled over by the first mad rush of a dorado, he will not find himself speculating very deeply on the problem of where that forty pounder passed the winter.

CHAPTER XV.

TACKLE AND OUTFIT.

This chapter is entirely practical. It is written only for the fisherman who means to fish for dorado, and it is to be skipped by all other readers. Let me say also that it is written from small, though perhaps intense, experience, and that it is confined to the Alto-Paraná, at a point near the southern tropic. Many of its directions, however, were obtained from sportsmen whose knowledge is much longer and wider than mine, and will I believe be found generally useful. I know how much I should have been saved by information such as follows.

Dorado are caught by spinning. True, I have heard of their taking the fly, and no doubt a large fly, gold or silver bodied, would attract them. But remember that the fly must be attached to something they cannot bite through, and this must be piano wire, and I am not sure that a heavy wire trace mates effectively with the delicacy of a fly rod. You had better go in for spinning at once; and indeed spinning is the obvious and practical method of taking them.

Now you can spin either by trolling your bait behind a boat, or by casting it. You will not get much by trolling, for the reason that you cannot take a boat over the best water. Therefore you must cast: and, since you are fishing on mighty rivers, the further you can throw the better.

Choose, therefore, a rod which suits you; but it must be very strong. If cost is no objection, probably split cane is best, but greenheart is nearly as good. As to length, ten feet, or ten and a half, is enough: and a short rod has great advantages in travelling. A three jointed rod of ten feet and a half has each joint three and a half feet long[1]: and this you will find if you measure it exactly, and providentially, the length of your old uniform case. You can find nothing better than that old battered tin box to hold your sporting outfit. It will take your rods, and save the intolerable nuisance of a rod box: it will hold the few clothes you want: ants and other animals cannot get through it: and it will take also a rifle and shot gun. (It is often a good thing to have a rifle with you in the boat when fishing.) As to the number

1 That is without measuring stoppers or the indiarubber knob on the butt. Therefore get your rod with stoppers countersunk on the American plan, and see that the knob is measured in to the length of the butt. Otherwise the rod will be just too long for the uniform case, unless you take out the stoppers and unscrew the knob, when you will probably lose them.

of rods, I regard three as the minimum. Remember that you are thousands of miles from tackle shops, and that repairs are impossible except those which you can do yourself. Remember too that a break in a split cane rod is usually unrepairable, so that unless the break is in the top and you have a spare top, the rod will be out of action. Remember, lastly, that your rods have to run all the dangers of travel, and of carriage through wild country by inexperienced hands, as well as ordinary sporting risks. So you will do well to take three, and the same number of reels. Please yourself as to the make of reel : choose the one with which you can cast best. The only essential requisite is that it should be able easily to hold two hundred to two hundred and fifty yards of line.

No line is so good as that called cuttyhunk, made in America, but to be bought in good London tackle shops. At all costs avoid a dressed line; the heat of the tropics melts the dressing and casting is a misery. Have two hundred or two hundred and fifty yards of cuttyhunk on each reel, and no backing. This means that your reels must be large. Take three spare lines. Cut one of them into fifty yard lengths, with a large loop spliced at each end. Tie the splices yourself with well waxed silk and varnish them with shellac varnish. Then when the end of one of your lines gets worn by casting, as it will, cut off the last forty

or fifty yards, splice a loop on the line, and loop on one of your spare lengths. By this method you will be able in a minute to change line which shows signs of wear. Always avoid knots: the loop at the end of your line to which the trace is fastened should be spliced not knotted.

The trace should be of steel piano wire, and you must twist it up yourself; at least I know no one who will do it for you. It should consist of three lengths of wire and four large swivels, an inch and a quarter long. Each length of wire should be about eight inches when twisted. The whole, therefore, is about thirty inches long, with a swivel at each end and between each length. The reason for so many swivels and such short lengths of wire is the extraordinary wriggling power of the dorado.

Twisting the wire is important and difficult. The point to remember is that you must not merely twist the short end round the long, as you will find, owing to the malignity of inanimate things, it always wants to do, but you must twist each end in turn round the other, forming an even spiral, like a twisted roll of bread. Otherwise, if the short end is merely twisted round the long, the twist may draw. The secret lies in this: as you twist, see that the two ends, the short and the long, *stand out at equal angles from the twisted part*. If they do not, if, for instance, the long length stands

straight up in the air, and the short end sticks out almost at right-angles to it, as each always tries to do in maddening fashion, nothing you can do will prevent the short end twisting itself round the long. You may think you are twisting the long length in its turn round the short, and yet when you look at it you see you have not. You will find it much easier if as you are twisting you keep the two ends well apart: that is, keep the angle between them a wide one, considerably more than a right-angle. When you have twisted five or six tight spirals this way, then indeed you can finish off by twisting the short end round the long, a few close turns, and then cut off short with your nippers. Nothing on earth can cause such a twist to draw: it will break first.

If your fingers are very strong, you may be able to twist piano wire unaided; but most people want pliers. Get two pair: get the sort of which the lower part is a wire cutter and the upper has a roughened grip for holding. When you start twisting, pass the short end through the eye of the swivel and bend it short across the long end. Grip the crossing place tight with the edge of your pliers and hold them hard in your left hand. See that each end stands out at an equal angle from the crossing place, as has been said before, and bend and coax them till they do. Then take hold of both ends just above the junction and begin twisting. You can

THE EVENING AND THE MORNING.

FISHING NEAR COLONIA, BRAZIL.

(To face p. 124.)

probably do it with your right thumb and forefinger unaided, if you get a firm grip with the pliers in your left hand; but, if you cannot, you must twist with your other pair of pliers. You will get into it after a little practice.

It has been necessary to deal at length with twisting. It is all-important; and steel piano wire is such hard, jerky, unaccommodating stuff to handle that it is not easy to do well.

Now your trace is made: three sections of wire with a swivel at each end, and you have to fasten it to the line at the top and to a bait at the bottom. The top fastening is easy enough, for you loop the loop of the line through the eye of the top swivel. Be sure to remember to make this loop so large that the heaviest spoon can pass through it freely. The fastening to your bait is more complicated. Suppose it is a spoon: you will see that there is a hole bored in the top or small end of the spoon through which is threaded a split ring and to this are fastened both the hooks and the trace. (There are, of course, many ways of arming spoons, but this is typical of all.) Split rings will not do: they are too highly tempered and fragile. The wild shakings of dorado will snap them. Do not use them. Throw them away, lest you be tempted. Make instead a ring of doubled piano wire. Nip off eight inches of wire: you do not want so much, but shorter lengths of such springy stuff are hard

to handle. Thread the swivel of the trace, the spoon, and the hook, on to it. Pass each end through all three again, take hold of each end with a separate pair of pliers and pull slowly till the double ring is formed. See that the hook lies on the hollow side of the spoon, with its back towards it. Now all three are threaded on a ring of doubled wire, but that ring has loose ends, and would fly apart if you let go. Bring these ends together, still holding them in the pliers, and cross them. Then with your fingers spiral each end in turn round the doubled ring, exactly in the way you fasten off your gut cast when you take it off your line and coil it up to put away: except that here you spiral each end in turn round the coil, not one only. The two spirals go, of course, reverse ways, and meet at the opposite side of the circle: here you can finish them off by taking both ends in the pliers and twisting them together in the manner described before: or, if you want to be doubly strong, you can spiral each end round the whole circle, first one and then the other on the top of it, when they will meet at their starting point and are twisted off there. For convenience of forming the spirals, cut off the spare ends so that you have a shorter piece to pass and repass through the ring: but do not do this till the ring is, so to speak, set, and will not fly open.

I hope that is clear. It is not easy at first

to make these rings, but you will soon find you can.

The usual bait for dorado is the spoon. I have read of their being taken by spinning with a natural bait, and possibly a natural bait is best, as it is in most other cases : but I cannot describe it as I know nothing about it. My only advice would be to use a spinning flight composed of large single hooks, not triangles. But everyone must have spoons in his outfit, for not only is natural bait much more troublesome, but you are dependent on being able to catch the small fish required, which you cannot always do when you want.

Of the many spoon baits we tried, three were best, in the following order. First of all a copper spoon, two and three-quarter inches long. It weighs, plain and unmounted, exactly one ounce. Next, a thin strip of metal, either all silver or silver one side and copper the other, five inches long, and one and a half inches wide at the broadest part. Thirdly, a heavy spoon, copper and silver, in shape almost an equilateral triangle, two and a half inches long. These sizes are not final, but you should not diverge too widely. Do not use very big spoons. For the ordinary spoon, apart from the metal strip, three and a half inches is an outside length.

I consider that there are two ways of arming spoons for dorado, each of which has advan-

tages; but whatever you do, avoid triangles, unless you want to get smashed. Use large single hooks. The old-fashioned blue coloured ones are best by far, not those modern smart looking bronze creatures, which are much too highly tempered. Let them be eyed with a strong eye. You can either have one single hook at the head, or two at the tail. If at the head it should be of such a size that the bend hangs well clear of the tail of the spoon : for a two and three-quarter inch spoon, this means a hook about 8/0. For the metal strip use a hook about 10/0, and as this will not reach the tail, it should be fastened to the top ring by an inch or so of double twisted piano wire.

The other method of arming is by two single hooks fastened to a ring at the tail, the ring, of course, being made of doubled wire. Thread the hooks on back to back. They can be smaller, about 7/0 for the copper spoon, and 8/0 for the metal strip. You will find this bait looks attractive in the water, for as it spins the two hooks fan out and give you a copper fish with a blue tail. On the whole, however, I prefer the single hook at the head. Always carry a file or whetstone and keep your hooks as sharp as needles.

There are, of course, many other ways of arming, and after a bit you will find your own and believe in no other. If I am dogmatic, it is only from desire to be short.

Lastly, for leads get round bullets of different sizes from half an ounce up to two ounces, with large holes bored through them. Tie them to to the loop of your line just above the trace with weak string, so that the bullet breaks off if you are caught up. A trace such as the one described, with a half-ounce bullet and a copper spoon armed at the head, weighs just over two ounces.

That concludes tackle, and it will be unreadable to all but the fisherman. I sincerely hope it will be some use to him.

Enough has been said already about playing a dorado. Gaffing presents no special features: he is certainly no harder to gaff than a salmon, and if anything easier. But there are one or two points worth knowing after you have got him into the boat. Do not let him loose before he is dead, for a forty pound dorado kicking about in a cranky canoe would be an awkward companion. Hold him on the gaff, a few inches off the floor, and then let your companion or boatman kill him with a knife, at the base of the head, in a little depression you will notice there. Finally, do not put your fingers into his mouth to get the hook out, for I verily believe a big one would have them off. When he is dead, prize his mouth open with the butt of the gaff, and extract the hook with your knife or with a slip of wood. Your gaff must be a strong one, with a six foot handle.

Take all your fishing tackle out with you. There are good shops in Buenos Aires; but London gives a wider choice; and, as you must cast long distances, you ought to be absolutely suited with rod and reel. Steel piano wire you can buy out there.

For the Alto-Paraná you must have a launch. True, there are passenger steamers which run from Posadas, and they will land you at any puerto on the river; but once there you would not be much further on. Most of these so-called ports are only landing stages for shipping timber or yerba, and you might well find no accommodation, and indeed it would be difficult to get a canoe or boatman. Even if you overcame these troubles, you would find your range restricted. The Alto-Paraná is not exactly a boating river. It is extremely dangerous. The radius of a canoe is limited. You cannot get up and down the river as if it were the Thames. No doubt if you went there determined to get fishing you could get it without a launch, for if a man means to get fishing nothing can stop him. If two young men were to take their luck in their hands, and to get themselves put on shore at one of the puertos and to chance it, they might have a most amusing time if they travelled light and could look after themselves and speak Spanish. But if they want to do this sort of thing, I should recommend them to go to the Uruguay River.

ON THE ALTO-PARANÁ.

(To face p. 130.)

From Concordia upwards they will get splendid fishing, and plenty of roughing it also. They would do far better there than on the Alto-Paraná without a launch.

Posadas in the Argentine is the port for the Alto-Paraná, and you can reach it in comfortable trains from Buenos Aires or Montevideo. Launches are rather scarce; for the reason that not many people go there. Remember that in South America nothing gets done until you go there yourself. You may think that your launch is engaged and provisioned and waiting patiently and politely for you with crew complete when you step out of your sleeping car; but you will find it is not. Everything has to be done over again. You would get annoyed were it not that everyone you meet is so pleasant. All the fitting out and provisioning of the launch you can do at Posadas. There are admirable stores there, where you can buy everything from rifles to raspberry jam. You had better provision your launch for the whole journey, and not rely on getting anything on the way.

In October and November it is hot, but the nights are cold, and sometimes the days also. Take thin clothes, of course, but on no account be without thick ones. Often have I been roasted at three o'clock in a shirt and drill trousers, and glad to put on a woolly jersey and tweed shooting coat at six. Your ordinary

wear for the day should be the same as for any hot country, and there is nothing particular to be said : but remember that in a hot sun a thick flannel shirt is cooler than a thin one. You do not need a pith helmet : get a thick felt sombrero with a broad brim, which you can buy out there. For trousers or breeches khaki drill is as good as anything. Take a pair of field boots, but make sure that they really do keep out the water or they will be a curse. You do not need them for fishing, but for wet ground or for the monté, where there may be snakes. Take several pair of the native rope-soled slippers, alpargatas; they are admirable for slippery rocks or wading. It need hardly be said that waders would be impossible and dangerous : the water is warm and you can wade without. You want gloves with gauntlets, and a veil if sandflies are bad.

Finally, there is a Dorado Club in Buenos Aires, where you will, I am sure, get any help you may require.

CHAPTER XVI.

OTHER FISH.

The Paraná swarms with fish, many of which grow to an immense size. Any fisherman going there would do well to devote some time to them; for, though the dorado is king of all, there are others worth catching, and their strange shapes add to their interest. In the still nights as we lay at anchor huge fish would roll up to the top; and when you asked the captain or crew what they were, the answer was always manguruzú. Now the manguruzú is an abominable looking catfish. It is said to run up to two hundred pounds in weight, and I quite believe it: certainly some of those which splashed up at night were very big. Indeed some kinds of catfish grow much bigger. President Roosevelt's expedition caught one in Brazil, three and a half feet long, which contained a monkey, and he was told on good authority of one more gigantic still, called the piraiba, which lives on the lower reaches of the Madeira and Amazon, is nine feet long, and can make

prey of man.* These are big game with a vengeance, and hardly to be recommended to any but the stalwart. And luckily they do not live in the Paraná. Even the manguruzú, big as he is, does not feed on human beings. But in spite of his size he possesses no sporting value.

There is another fish called the surubí, of which better accounts are given. He is reputed to reach sixty kilos, or one hundred and thirty-four pounds. I cannot speak from experience: but a friend of mine, a great fisherman, had one on for five hours and was then broken. He could do nothing with it: it just swam about when it liked, and stopped when it liked. It was hooked on ledger tackle with a good-sized dead fish as bait.

The salmón, so-called, is a pretty roach-like creature, very common, and would give good sport on a trout rod. I believe it grows to a considerable size, but I never saw one over two pounds or so. They go about in shoals. And there are others we caught, such as the delicate silvery boga, and a sort of pike called the tararira, and many more. The small streams which eventually find their way into the Uruguay swarm with fish, and no doubt the same is true of the tributaries of the Paraná.

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* *Through the Brazilian Wilderness.* By Theodore Roosevelt. 1914.

In fact there is a book to be written about South American fishing. There must be few rivers in which a greater variety of heavy fish can be killed than on the Paraná. I can do no more than mention casually the names of some. There is the pacú, excellent to eat, shaped like a turbot. It is a curious fish, said to be vegetarian and to be caught with melon, potato or peach; but the only ones we captured succumbed ignominously to raw meat on a hand-line. It runs up to forty or forty-five pounds. We caught nothing so big; I think six or seven pounds was the largest. But once, when spinning for dorado, I hooked something great and sluggish, which certainly was not a dorado. It sagged downstream, for all the world as does a big kelt in April, and then sailed about until the hold gave. We never saw it; but Pedroso was sure that it was a big pacú.

The last fish to be described is so remarkable that, were not the facts well known, one would be thought guilty of a traveller's tale. This is the man-eating fish, found all over tropical and sub-tropical South America from the Argentine to the Guianas. It is called by many names. On the Paraná it is known as the palometer; in Paraguay and Brazil as the piranha; and in British Guiana as the piräi; but, whatever it is called, it is the child of the devil. It is a malign looking brute, short and broad, with bulgy eyes, a projecting lower jaw and razor-

like teeth. Though quite small, rarely reaching two pounds, 'their voracity, fearlessness and number,' Dr. Gunther says, 'render them a perfect pest in many rivers of tropical America.' They attack man or any animal that goes into the water. Their jaws are so strong that these little fiends can bite off a finger or toe, or take out a solid piece of flesh at one mouthful. The smell of blood maddens them, and they collect round their victim in thousands, and tear him to bits. Many men have been killed: some torn to pieces in sight of their comrades, powerless to save them. Many more have been mutilated in a horrible way. President Roosevelt says that in every river town on the Paraguay were to be found men who had been thus mutilated, and some of his party were badly bitten. Where they abound it is madness to go into the water. They can tear a wounded alligator to pieces.

So much for what is recorded: my own experience, perhaps fortunately, is limited. We caught one on the Paraná on a hand-line. But they were not common there, and bathing is quite safe. In the Paraguayan Chaco, in a tributory of the Pilcomayo, one of the many called Rio Negro, they abounded: my companion landed seventeen when hand-lining: and yet here too they were not dangerous, for not only our mule swam the river unharmed, but two of our party. Still, I do not think any

A BRACE OF PACU.

THE PIRANHA.

(To face p. 136.)

of us would have gone in, after seeing those seventeen.

The piranha belongs to the *Characinidæ*, the same family as the dorado; and to the group *Serrasalmonina;* though I do not know why such a horrible beast has been given a name which argues kinship to the salmon. There are some forty different species, and apparently several have the same unpleasant habits.

I have said that bathing on the Paraná is safe. So it is, if you keep to the rock or sand. But do not on any account go near the mud, for in the mud lives a ray, fetid brown and sickly yellow in colour, with a sting in his tail like an immense thorn. They tell you he can kill a horse; and I should be sorry for the man who stepped on one. Our captain speared one to show us, and he looked the embodiment of evil, as though he had been spewed up from some loathsome under-world. When brought on deck he drove his sting into a board.

But these two, the piranha and the ray, are but slight drawbacks to that wonderful river with its wonderful fish. When there you feel that any adventure might come out of it. You would be surprised at nothing. Perhaps someone who reads this book will go there. Let him spend some time, say six weeks from the middle of October, and try for all its fish. Let him take tackle of every sort: for dorado, as has been told; a trout rod, even flies for small fish;

hooks and bait of all sizes and sorts; and strong rods and bottom tackle for some of these monsters. He should have something to tell when he comes back.

CHAPTER XVII.

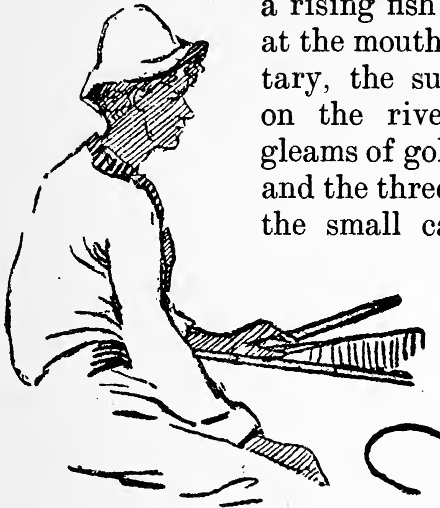
LIFE ON THE LAUNCH.

The first slender rays of the sun were piercing the thick skeins of mist which hung about the river, and birds were beginning to call in the monté. The sun's rays shone in through the small windows of the saloon, and one by one we, too, like the birds, awoke. It was 5.30 a.m., our usual time for getting up. In the wilds one quickly falls into a habit of daylight saving. Besides which, the dorado fishing is at its best in the very early morning. Our beds were on the floor, we two women on one side of the impromptu curtain that made our saloon into two bedrooms at night, the men on the other. A mosquito net, hung from a nail, was well tucked in round each pair of mattresses, and each of us was careful to have a watch, an electric torch, and a small bottle of citronella under the pillow. Let no one start for a journey up a tropical river without citronella: sooner let him go without sufficient food or clothing. It is the only thing that keeps sandflies and mosquitoes off, and unlike some other concoc-

tions, it does not also keep one's fellow-men at bay. It has a fresh, lemony scent, not unpleasant; and a few drops put on the face and hands keep one free from the torment of biting and stinging insects. But it was still too early in the day for these pests, and the mosquito curtain could be rolled up. We put on dressing gowns and boudoir caps, ready for early coffee, whilst the fishers went off to wash and dress, shouting to Jerman to bring the coffee.

We had evolved a set of rules for the peaceful ordering of our small community, and the first of them was that each person must fold up his or her bedding neatly, on getting up. So the men's 'bedroom' was quite tidy by the time the coffee came. My sister and I sat up in bed for our early breakfast, since there was nowhere else to sit. And we all talked hard, discussing the catch of the previous day and the chances of to-day, whilst we drank coffee sweetened with tinned milk, and ate slices of bread and jam. As soon as we had finished, there was the usual important bustle of the fishermen's departure: rods, tackle, and the gaff fetched, Pedroso's dark face beaming from the canoe, and the whole crew collecting to watch: the Capitan with the benevolent expression of a fellow-sportsman; the young engineer laughing and rubbing his oily hands on a piece of cotton waste; Jerman, the cook, housemaid and

butler in one, shouting chaff to Pedroso.
The mists had rolled away, and the individual feathery trees of the monté had materialised from a vague wash of foliage: there was the sudden plop of a rising fish in the dark pool at the mouth of a small tributary, the sun was sparkling on the river, bringing out gleams of gold here and there, and the three intent figures in the small canoe made their slow way against the fierce strength of the current.



They were gone. Jerman, still twiddling his moustache and gazing at the retreating canoe, was galvanised to fresh activities by our shouts for hot water, and for the next quarter of an hour he shambled backwards and forwards with the docility of an elephant, bringing kettlefuls of hot water to the door of the tiny washing place: so tiny a place that it was fortunate none of us was very fat. As soon as we were dressed he was wanted again, this time to carry up the heaps of bedding to the roof of the launch, where they baked all day in the sun. Then he

had to sweep and dust the saloon, after which came the important discussion as to what we were to have for lunch. We had laid in a stock of tinned provisions before starting : bully beef, tongues, sardines, tinned asparagus and fruit, also flour, cheese, rice, eggs, tea and coffee, potatoes and green vegetables, a sack of ship's biscuits and a supply of red wine, soda water, and whiskey. The fresh meat we had brought had had to be cut into strips and hung in the sun to dry, where by degrees it achieved the colour and consistency of an Egyptian mummy of an early dynasty. The loaves of bread we had taken with us had been finished long ago.

It had been a matter of importance, the laying in of our stores, for we had been warned that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to supplement them once we had started. And so it proved. Posadas has excellent stores, and we had remembered everything, fortunately, and never ran short in our three weeks' trip. The crew provided their own food : and there were dorado for all. Whilst the eggs lasted we had begun our lunch with an omelet, but such halcyon days were over. 'And what will the señores eat to-day?' would enquire Jerman cheerfully, with the air of a chef behind whom loomed vast larders and store-cupboards. Grilled steaks of dorado, at any rate, and let Jerman be sure they were served very hot, with chipped potatoes. And how excellent is grilled

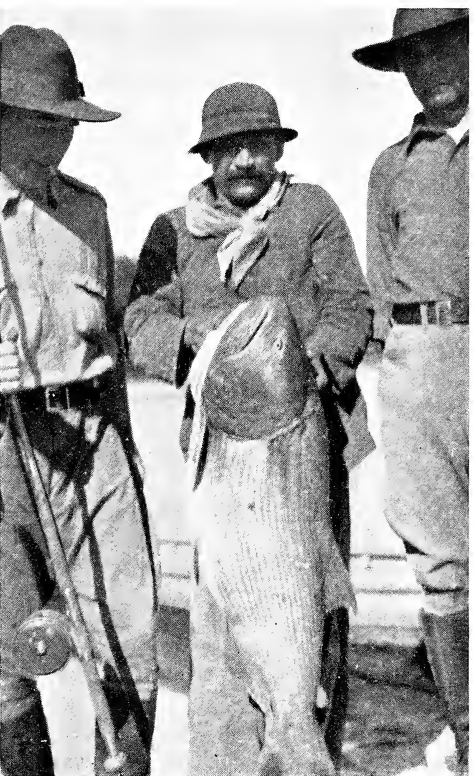
dorado! It has the consistency of salmon, but is of a paler pink colour and not quite so rich. An epicure who has not tasted grilled steak from a dorado fresh caught in the clear water below the fall of some small river into the Paraná, cannot claim to have sounded the whole gamut of gustatory joys. The next question was whether to have bully beef or tongue, and the latter was chosen unanimously, to be served with asparagus. 'And a dorado salad?' enquired Jerman persuasively, who prided himself on this dish, made of the flesh from the head of the dorado, mixed with plentiful supplies of onion and garlic. 'And then peaches,' we pronounced firmly, having given in over the salad.

The ordering of luncheon over, the next thing was to get some washing done, whilst we had the saloon to ourselves. We borrowed two buckets from Jerman, who again provided an inexhaustible supply of hot water from his tiny cubby-hole of a kitchen. He did the washing of sheets and pillow-cases and the men's clothes, but we did our own, and had brought plenty of Sunlight soap with us. As the things were washed we hung them up to dry along the rails of the launch, and in an hour's time they were ready to iron. We had brought a small iron with us, heated by methylated spirit, and it was one of our happiest inspirations. I settled down to the ironing, whilst my companion went

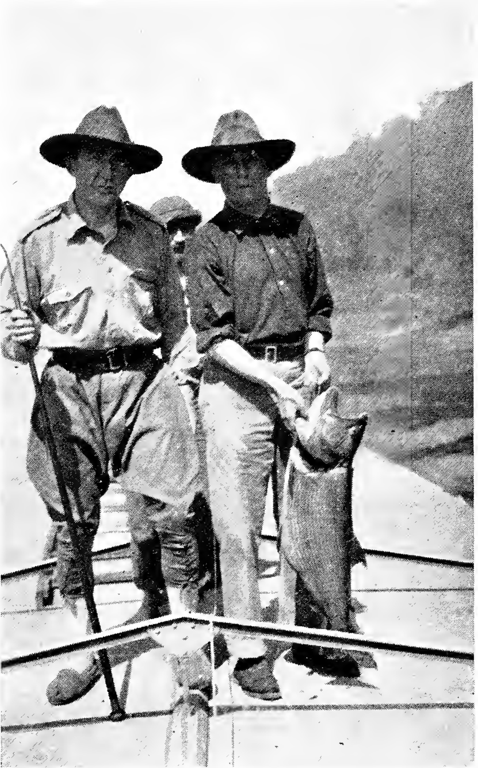
off to bake some bread, with frequent shouts to me of 'What do you call baking powder in Spanish?' or 'How can I explain to Jerman that he must on no account open the oven door?' A tiny breeze got up, and flapped the linen hanging out to air, and now and again we went out on deck to see if the fishermen were in sight. Sometimes we had been able, with our glasses, to watch the playing and landing of a dorado, and even to catch something of the tense strain and excitement of the tiny doll figures in their chip of a boat, whilst the Capitan and Jerman hung breathlessly on our exclamations and groaned as heavily as the fishermen themselves when the leaping surging dot we knew to be a dorado broke and got away.

Ten o'clock, and they might be back at any moment, just time to finish before the Capitan called that they were coming. There was the little canoe, like a dark straw on the river, and we watched its approach, and could see a gleam of gold at the bottom of it. The sun was getting high, the hot air already shimmered and danced above the water, and a flock of parrots screamed in the treetops. Already the engineer was trying his engines, and the launch was shivering like a highly-bred fox-terrier, keen to start.

It was exciting, when the canoe was within hail, to hear how many fish had been caught, and to see the splendid red gold of the huge dorado as they were hoisted on deck, to a chorus



FORTY POUNDS.



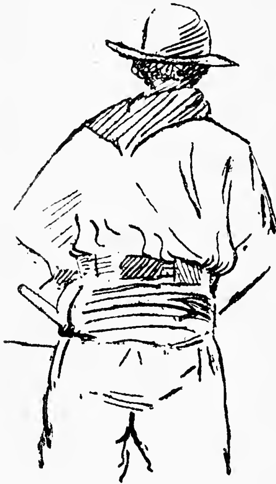
A SMALLER ONE.

(To face p. 144.)

of admiring exclamations. The first thing was to weigh them, and to hear the whole story of their being caught. Then, perhaps, to photograph them. Then drinks in the saloon, and 'Have I the permission of the señores to start, now?' came the voice of the Capitan, and he strode across to settle himself at the wheel. The engines would begin to throb and vibrate, the floor to jig under our feet, and there was a hasty snatch at tumblers standing near the edge of the table. The Lelia backed out of the little bay where she had spent the night, snorting and puffing, the parrots flew shrieking away, we churned the water in a foaming circle, then got under way, and quickly the white sand and the dark green ring of monté that edged it slid out of sight. We had but ruffled its quiet for a moment, like a wandering bird that settles with folded wings for the night, leaving as little trace as some such bird when we spread our wings and passed on.

The next few hours meant hard work for the Capitan. He had to watch with the eye of a hawk for a safe pathway up the river, amongst whirlpools and rapids. Sometimes we clung to one bank or the other, edging our way cautiously through the turmoil; sometimes we made a dash from one side to another, avoiding the black gaping mouths of the whirlpools as though by magic. Never did he take his eyes off the treacherous water for a moment. Pedroso

rigged up an awning over the tiny deck, and we sat eating fresh oranges, our field-glasses ready to watch any bird or beast that stirred along the bank. By 11.30 we were all hungry, and had lunch, whilst Jerman with arms akimbo stood with his head on one side, waiting for the expected applause when the salad was brought in. 'Never have I lunched better, Jerman,' remarked the perjured Bird-lover, serenely relegating Claridge's and the Ritz to oblivion. And Jerman, delighted, rolled off to fetch the coffee.



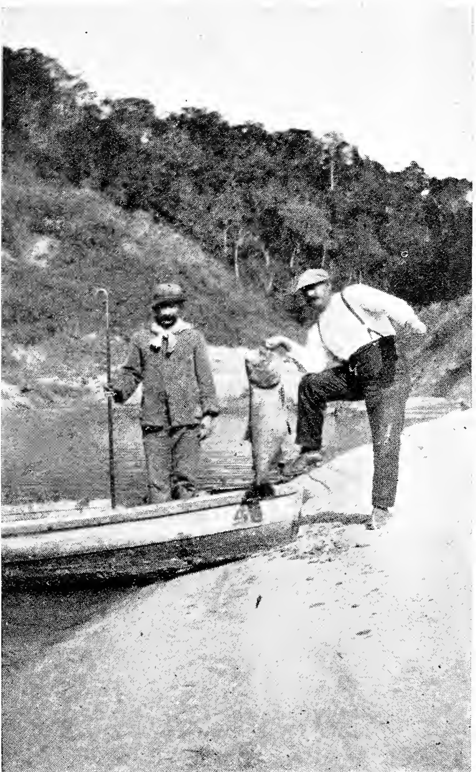
They were immensely fat men, Jerman and the Capitan, but where the latter was firm and solid, the former was soft and flabby. Neither of them was over fond of bathing, but the Capitan did at least shave regularly. Jerman contented himself with a shave when we were approaching a puerto, and then looked so startlingly unfamiliar that it gave us a feeling of bewilderment. Pedroso, I think, had possibly never had a bath in his life, except when he fell into the river years ago, and was

nearly drowned. Perhaps the shock had given him a terror of ablutions. The engineer looked like an Italian, was white-skinned, and had a mop of curly black hair and a falsetto laugh like a hyena. He carried a little bit of looking-glass about with him, considered himself vastly superior to his company, and only became sociable when groups were to be photographed. But all four men served us faithfully, and put up good-temperedly with our foreign ways. The Capitan had seen better days : he knew the river as a stage-coachman used to know the road. On him depended our lives, for a mistake in steering might run us on a hidden rock, or take us straight into one of the appalling remolinos. He had been captain of one of the river steamers, but drank, and so had come down to taking a job when he could get one. He was an Argentino, and looked like an operatic tenor, portly and thick necked, with a dark moustache and heavily lidded dark eyes. He and Jerman, by virtue of their superior standing, slept on the space above the engines, where their vast bulks blotted out the stars that otherwise could be seen through the glass-topped sliding door that shut off the crew's quarters from us. The Capitan, superior man, shrouded himself under a mosquito net, but I think, beyond this, preparations for bed did not go much further than the removal of boots. The engineer and Pedroso lowered themselves

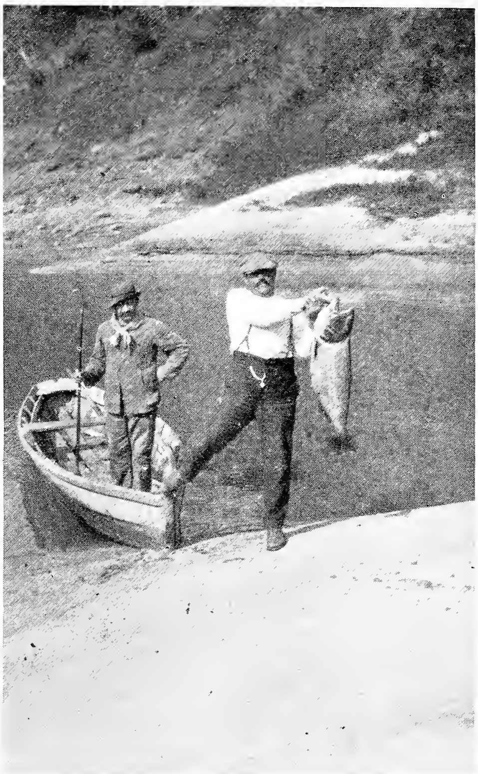
at night down a trap-door, and slept, mysteriously, in the bowels of the launch, from whence came a steady gutteral snoring.

The Capitan never left his post all the time we were steaming, and hour after hour he stayed there, whilst the Lelia picked her way daintily through the maze of the river. Sometimes we passed a tiny settlement perched in a clearing, and then she blew a note of greeting, but almost before the last sounds of the whistle had vibrated to silence she had chugged round the next bend of the river, and was lost to sight. We sat and gazed at the banks ahead, at the walls of forest that neared us, were swallowed up, and flung behind us. All was fresh and strange, it seemed as though we were turning, leaf by leaf, a new and wonderful picture book. The men had their rifles across their knees, ready for a shot at the wary crocodiles, who never awaited our coming, or at any game that should stir on the bank. Once they fired at a huge boar that showed a brown flank for a moment in the dense reeds, but he escaped. Books and work lay in our laps, but the fascination of watching the scenery slide past kept us enthralled.

When the sun got too hot we had a siesta in the saloon, and at 3 o'clock it was time for tea: freshly-made scone bread, cake of the same, sweetened with sugar and flavoured with shredded peel and orange juice, innumerable



THE CAPTAIN'S DORADO.



THE CAPTAIN POSES AGAIN.

(To face p. 148.)

cups of tea, with tinned milk that poured cheerfully out of its pierced tin into everything but the destined cup. Then a looking out of tackle and writing of diaries, till it was nearly five o'clock and time to think of making a halt. 'What about that bank there? or that little corner?' we asked, but the Capitan was inexorable. Steadily he kept the Lelia's head up stream. 'I know a good place just round the next bend,' he said, 'the anchorage there is safe.' And a quarter of an hour later he swung the boat round, out of the turmoil of the river, and after a little manœuvring brought her to, with her nose tied to the bank. The engines gave a convulsive snort or two, then stopped, and the quiet of the forest settled round us. The canoe was hastily got out for more fishing, and my sister and I either went with it to be landed further down, or wandered along the rocks with camera and sketch book. This was the time when the sandflies were at their worst, and we wore veils of close net that fitted round the crown of our hats and reached to our waist, leaving holes for the arms, and fastened down with an elastic belt. And even then the sandflies sometimes managed to get inside. Gauntlet gloves and long soft boots up to our knees were a great comfort.

We started our trip up the river on October 5th, and I believe it was a cooler season than most. We had taken dark linen skirts with us,

cut very short and buttoning down back and front, and found them most useful, worn over knickers of the same material. Long-sleeved shirts that can be fastened up to the throat are far the best: we found it impossible to wear elbow sleeves, on account of the sandflies and mosquitos. Washing crêpe de chine frocks. very simply made, also long-sleeved, are useful: and a jersey coat or jumper, to slip on, is essential, as well as a wrap of some sort. It is quite chilly, sometimes, sitting out on deck, and the evenings are nearly always cold. Soft felt hats keep off the sun much better than straw ones, and a sun-umbrella is also necessary. It is best to take very little luggage: there is small space on a tiny launch, and wants are few. Four or five washing shirts, two linen skirts, a golf jersey and a blanket coat for every-day use, and a soft felt hat. One thin cloth or serge coat and skirt, and a tidy hat. Perhaps a washing crêpe de chine or Shantung dress. Underlinen that is easily washed and ironed. That is an ample outfit for the river itself. It is necessary to take a good skin food and face cream, also a cooling lotion, as the hot air and sun burn and dry the skin. Personally, I liked a little face cream rubbed in, and powder dusted on afterwards. But every woman has her own fancies.

Whilst the men were fishing we watched them from the shore and took snapshots of them, or

wandered about looking for birds and butterflies. But the fringe of ground along the edge of the monté was very narrow, and behind that was a thorny wall it was impossible to get through, from which rose clouds of sandflies. Suddenly, about 6.30, the sun sank, and as suddenly the insects disappeared. The air freshened, and throwing back one's veil one breathed in the fragrance of unseen plants in the jungle. The frogs set up their evening concert, in bass and treble, from the pools amongst the tall reeds. Soon it was time to paddle back to the launch, and we reached the dim form of the Lelia in the dusk, our canoe low in the water with the weight of freshly-caught fish. By seven we were longing for dinner, and Jerman had made us a soup of jerked beef and macaroni, with grated cheese to add to it. Then dorado again, and bully beef and potatoes, and a doubtful kind of pancake of which he was inordinately proud.

It got dark so quickly that we dined by the dim light of a paraffin lamp, which flickered on the faces round the table, made mysterious caverns of shadow in the corners of the room, and strange crouching figures of the coats hanging on the walls, and which woke answering gleams from the rifle barrels slung on the pegs and from the slab of looking-glass above the improvised dressing table. After dinner we put on wraps and sat on deck, smoking and

watching the white mists gather, or fished with hand-lines baited with meat. Sometimes we sat by the lamp, writing or reading, or mending tackle. And by 9 o'clock we grew sleepy. The bedding had been brought in earlier, on account of the evening dew, and was stacked along the benches. Now the mattresses had to be put down and the beds made according to individual taste. One could only sleep if his bed lay east to west, another must be near enough to the open door to pull it shut if a storm came up in the night, a third demanded to have her bed as far as possible from the gangway, that her face should not be stepped upon by the unwary passer-by. Hot water bottles were filled and a can of hot water put in the tiny bathroom. And the curtain was stretched across the saloon. The first evening it had consisted of heaped folds of rose-coloured mosquito netting, till a male voice on the far side remarked meditatively that the curtain was most becoming, but quite transparent. It was then supplemented by rugs. Then each of us settled cautiously into bed, lest a mosquito should creep in too; the lamp was put out, and a low murmur of talk ran for a little while on either side of the room. It grew more spasmodic, then died away. The whisper of the river came softly through the open door, and the gentle slap of the water against the sides of the launch. From below came the sound of Pedroso's snores.

Through the window one could watch a section of starry sky swing to the movement of the boat, till one by one we slid over the edge of consciousness into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOWNSTREAM.

It was a sad moment when our journey downstream began, but time was getting short, and there was still a visit to Asuncion, and the shooting trip to fit in, as well as a few weeks at an estancia in Uruguay, before we sailed for England.

We had been fishing our way down the river, in leisurely fashion, but meant now to travel in real earnest. We had dropped down the river overnight, to a sheltered bay, where a spit of rocks and sand thrust itself out into the main rush of water. Behind that was calm water, with sloping banks of white sand, and at this place there was a wider margin than usual between the monté and the river. A small tributary, with tangled banks, wound through the thick undergrowth to flow into the bay : and very early that morning we pushed our way up it, hoping to get some shooting.

It was just dawn when we started. The Irishman, with a hunter and his dog, whom we had taken on board the night before, had been

landed on the right bank of the small river earlier still, and they meant to make a wide détour, hoping to drive any game there might be, down to the water. Meanwhile our canoe lay silently, waiting the chance of some animal breaking cover within range. It was worse than hunting for a needle in a haystack: for these particular needles were vigilant and swift-footed, and we knew our chances of success were small. The usual thick early mists hung about, and everything was filmed with moisture. A tree-turkey had been calling in the wood at the mouth of the river, but we could not see him. When he fell silent, there was not a sound to be heard. Occasionally Pedroso dipped a cautious paddle, to keep the canoe in place, and the drip of water from it seemed startlingly loud. The river flowed silently, brimmed to its muddy banks, and the ghostly trees huddled together in an indistinct mass, from which sometimes a branch, black and flattened-looking in the fog, thrust itself over the water.

We had taken up our position where a hollowed faint track in the undergrowth showed it to be a place where the wild animals came down to drink, and sat straining our ears to catch the faintest rustle. Maidenhair fern clustered under an overhanging bank, but there was no splash of colour anywhere, to break up the washes of grey. The bark of the dog came to us faintly from the distance, but nothing

stirred near us. Then Pedroso, in a low voice, said, 'Look, look!' and we saw the round head of an otter swimming downstream. Almost as he spoke it dived, and was gone. At last the crackling of the bushes showed the approach of the hunting-party and the dog. They had seen nothing, and had had great difficulty in forcing their way through the monté.

We went back to the launch and breakfasted, whilst the last shreds of mist cleared off and the sun blazed down from a cloudless sky. The water was quite deep, and the Lelia was moored with her bows to the shelving sand. The Bird-Lover and I went off along the shore, to make notes of different birds, and we came back a little too soon for the success of a hoax the others had arranged meanwhile. Soon after we left, they had seen, in the bay, the two points almost level with the water that meant a crocodile, and the Irishman had fired twice, and wounded it. Then he and Pedroso dashed off in the canoe to where it was trying to escape, threshing the water to foam in its struggles. Another bullet or two still did not finish it off, and so, manœuvring the canoe close alongside, they gaffed it, and with the greatest difficulty got a rope round it and hoisted it on board. Then they proceeded to arrange it beautifully, with open jaws, just where we should be stepping into the launch. But unfortunately we came round the corner too soon, whilst they were

washing it and fixing it up into position. It was not a very large one, eight feet in length, but a startling thing to come on, suddenly. The men began skinning it, but at the first cut the supposedly-dead beast began to wriggle and to lash its tail, though it had already had the contents of a revolver emptied into its head. At last it was really killed, and its skin was peeled off, like a glove from a hand. The sun was getting very hot, and the sand almost burnt one's feet. Innumerable yellow butterflies, attracted by the puddles of blood that had soaked into it, fluttered about, settling on the stains, till these were quite hidden by a quivering drift of orange and gold. The crocodile's skin was treated with disinfectants and put on the roof of the launch, the carcase rolled into the river for the fish to devour; and then we went on board and started down the river, leaving the yellow butterflies in possession.

We sped downstream at a great rate, turning unwilling backs on the far reaches we had longed to explore. We had seen the great Falls of Iguazú and of Guayra, but we ached to explore the river still further north, making Guayra our starting-point, and wandering far into the unknown, where hardly a traveller has ever been. Coming back is always rather a depressing thing: however successful the journey has been, the sense of elation and adventure is over. One more memory is added,

it is true, to one's 'scented hoard'; but the attained has moved out of that shimmering mirage of the places that are yet waiting to be seen. Fortunately, the Pied Piper of the wilderness holds enough magic in his music to last a lifetime; and the world is wide.

The river had fallen tremendously since our upstream journey, and a broad strip of glistening black rocks now showed, where the monté had previously come down right to the water's edge. One by one we passed the well-known landmarks, whilst we, with the river, hurried further and further from the strange, beautiful scenery upstream, to the wider stretches of water lower down : till at last the little town of Posadas showed low on the horizon, pricked with the pencil points of masts and shipping in the harbour.

The crocodile skin was brought to our hotel with the rest of our luggage, but stayed downstairs with the heavier baggage. And then it was that the crocodile avenged his death. The weather was hot, and little by little an unpleasant smell began to be noticed. Intending visitors arriving at the hotel sniffed critically in the hall : there was dark talk of defective drains. We, on the upper storey, were ignorant of the turn of events : till finally the worried proprietor tracked the smell to its source, and came to say we must at once remove the skin. The thought of losing his beloved crocodile was

IGUAZÚ.

(To face p. 158.)

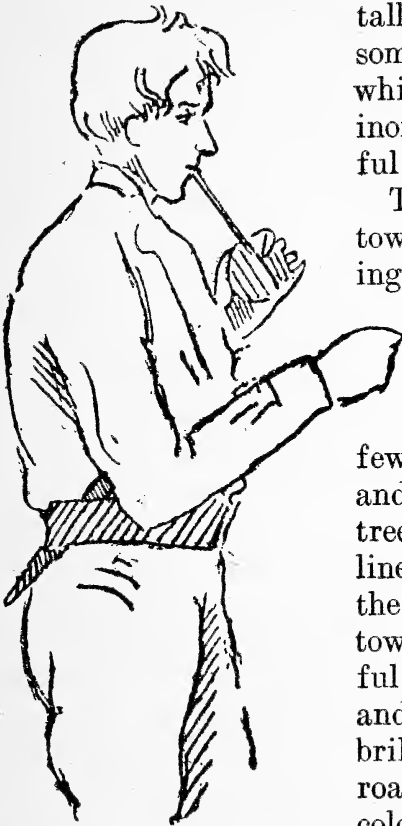
terrible to the Irishman, whose protests as to the lashings of disinfectants he had used were swept aside. It was now a question of where on earth to put it, till the shooting trip was over and it could be retrieved. Then it struck us that perhaps Jerman, whose home was in Posadas, might not object to giving it shelter. 'Why not?' he said cheerfully, when approached on the subject, and went off humming, with it over his shoulder, the skin cleaving a ready way for him down the street. More than likely, another smell or two made little difference in the atmosphere of Jerman's house.

It was from Posadas, a few days later, that we started by train for Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay. Our railway carriage was hitched on to the mail train, and we crossed the Paraná early in the morning by ferry, in two sections, and landed in Paraguay, where we started afresh on another line. It was warm and pleasant sitting out at the back of our carriage, watching everything we passed. It is a beautiful country of open grass spaces, and groups of trees, reminiscent of private parks in England. Oranges everywhere, each tiny rancho being surrounded by trees, and little patches of maize and tobacco. Wild flowers grew in profusion, and bushes of the scented Paraguayan jasmine, with its two coloured flowers of blue and mauve. For the most part

the country we passed through was a rolling plain, but now and again a sudden pointed hill or range stood up out of it. We came to a few small towns, but generally the stations were just dumped down at far intervals. The people always collected to watch the arrival of the train, the horses tied to a fence, with that air of quiet resignation typical of the Paraguayans themselves. Women went up and down the platforms, in fresh print dresses, selling cigars, eggs, and oranges: and when everyone had quite finished making his purchases the obliging train started again. Its arrival was something of an event, as the up train only ran three days a week, and the down train the other days, I believe.

On reaching Encarnacion we heard that a revolution had broken out in the capital, but we decided not to turn back. All day we wandered across the level country, watching its wide stretches, with a handful of poor long-horned cattle feeding on it, the tiny huts with their poultry pecking round the doors, and the barefooted, brown-skinned children. A poor and beautiful land, needing money to develop its possibilities. Late in the evening we reached Asuncion, and found the station guarded by police. The revolution was in full swing, we were told, but it seemed of a mild brand. We lived in our railway compartment in the station, and wandered about the little

town in the daytime, only taking care to be back at our quarters before dark. The town was in the hands of the barefooted police, and as many of them could only talk Guarani, one ran some risk of being shot whilst explaining one's inoffensiveness in careful Spanish.



The little straggling town is rather charming, built on a slope overlooking the wide stretches of the river Paraguay; there are few large buildings, and avenues of orange trees border the tram lines. The houses on the outskirts of the town stand in beautiful gardens of palms and trees covered with brilliant flowers. The roads are very red in colour, and are less like roads than the dry beds of mountain torrents. They are seamed with crevasses, and tilted at all angles. But it doesn't seem to matter much in Asuncion.

Why be in a hurry? The sun is hot, and fruit and tobacco are plentiful. Everyone, both men and women, smoke cigars and always have one in their mouths. I conclude the girls remove them before being kissed, but I had no opportunity of finding out. The market was full of fruit and vegetables, parrots and macaws, and many birds strange to us. We explored the cobbled streets of the town thoroughly, saw the unfinished red cathedral that Lopez built for his intended coronation; drove out into the country round, clinging precariously to our seats, and shuddering at the huge nets of spiders that clung to every telegraph post. The spiders seem to live in colonies, in great cocoons, moored to the posts with thick cables of web. At dusk they wake to a horrible activity, preying on the moths and insects attracted by the lamps.

We were sorry when the time came to leave this picturesque country: but the men of our party were going for a shooting expedition into the Chaco, and we had decided to go back to Montevideo and wait for them at the estancia, making our way back to Posadas and so to Concordia, where we should cross the river Uruguay to Salto, and thence a night's journey to Montevideo.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHACO.

If you look at the map you will see that the Paraguay River, flowing from north to south, cuts the Republic of the same name in two. All through the history of that beautiful country, one of the most tragic and poignant of human stories, that river has formed an untraversed boundary, dividing the territory on the west of it from that on the east. These two differ absolutely : in geography, in climate, in history and in race. The Jesuits, who ruled Paraguay under a marvellous theocracy for two hundred years, and with all their faults gave it a greater measure of human happiness than it has known before or since, never got over the Paraguay River, and the land to the west of it, the Chaco, remained uncivilised and unconverted. So, in effect, it remains to-day. Inhabited by savage tribes, subject to periodic floods, holding no minerals to lure the prospector and little game to tempt the hunter, the rush of civilisation has passed it by, and large portions of it are even

to-day totally unknown. It is a vast plain, El Gran Chaco, partly in the Argentine Republic, partly in Paraguay, partly in Bolivia. It has been formed through the centuries by the silt brought down by many great rivers which, rising on the eastern foot-hills of the Andes, flow east and fall into the Paraguay River. That part of it which lies in the State of Paraguay, the Paraguayan Chaco, is flat, open country with patches of wood and scrub, covered with coarse grass, marshy, studded with palm groves, haunted by every known stinging insect and by innumerable birds. It is wandered over by nomad tribes, some still living in the stone age, many of them fierce and almost unknown. They differ entirely, in race and disposition, from the pleasant and easy-going Guaranís, who form the bulk of the population of Paraguay proper: and it is only on the edges, along the River Paraguay and its tributaries, that the missionary or the trader have made any inroad.

This book recounts no heroic exploits, and it was only to a corner, more or less civilised, that our travels extended. We went there for game. Game was not there, though clearly it had been there not so very long before, for there were numberless tracks. So far, therefore, as game was concerned, the expedition was a failure; we shot enough to eat and that was all: but I would not have missed it for the world,

THE CHACO.

THE RIO NEGRO.

(To face p. 164.)

for I saw what must be one of the most interesting countries existing.

Our plan was as follows. We were to start from Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, and go in a petrol launch two days' journey up the Pilcomayo, one of the large rivers which rises in the Andes and flows into the Paraguay from the west. Here we should reach the little puerto of Galileo, from which a narrow gauge railway track, now disused, ran some forty kilometres north into the Chaco. At Galileo we were to get hold of a trolley—there was no other rolling stock—put our rifles and kit on it, and get a couple of peons to push us up to rail-head, where we would make our headquarters and starting point. Big game shooting in South America is notoriously bad, but this, in the opinion of those who knew, was the best place we could go to. It had never failed before. It failed through no fault of the kind friends who took so much trouble to send us there. It failed because, as we heard after we had been some time there, the roving Indians had been there a few months before and killed off everything. Consequently we, a party of three with two guides, only got three head of game in a fortnight, one stag, one peccary and one gato onza—the tiger cat or ocelot, that beautiful miniature of the jaguar. Indeed, except for birds, of which there were many and which we shot to eat, we never got a shot at

anything else. But I do not think any of us regards the expedition as a failure.

We made our journey as planned, with one exception. To pull the trolley, instead of peons we got a mule. You never saw a more amiable, industrious and adaptable animal. With the hunter on his back, and with one end of a raw-hide rope tied to his saddle and the other to the trolley, he pulled that trolley, containing our provisions, our kit, our rifles and very often ourselves, up those forty kilometres and back without a hesitation or a stumble, now swimming a river with the docility of a dog, now wading through marsh up to his hocks and now tripping delicately over the rotten remains of what once were sleepers. He was a remarkable animal.

It was a hot afternoon when we started in the launch. The Pilcomayo runs into the Paraguay just opposite Asuncion. It is a curious river: it must be not far from a thousand miles long and yet it is no bigger than the Thames at Oxford. Coming as we did from the broad, rocky, clear-flowing Paraná, the Pilcomayo was a strange contrast. It corresponded more nearly to my idea of a tropical river. It was slow and turgid, full of sunken trees, with mysterious swampy backwaters where the water stood several feet up the trunks, and unknown river plants grew. The banks were neither so high nor so thick as those of the

AN OCELOT.

A PECCARY.

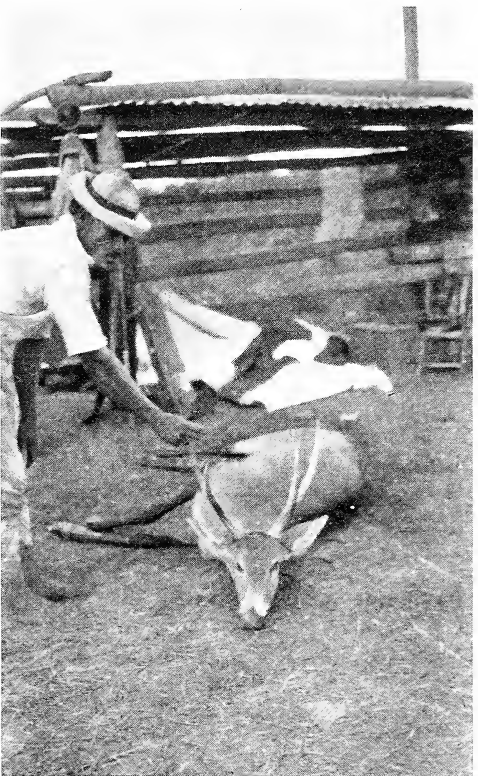
(To face p. 166.)

Paraná, and when you got through the trees which fringed them you found open park-like country.

The features which strike you in the Chaco are its flatness, and the wonderful way in which wood and plain are mixed together. The country looks as though it had been planted. You get woods of all sizes, from forests several miles long, down to little spinneys, not fifty yards across, from which you half expect to see a pheasant or a rabbit emerge. What adds to their artificial appearance is that the woods end abruptly, and do not merge gradually into the plain. On the edge of them and scattered over the plains, giving its distinct character to the district, are the palm groves. The tops of the palms are green, but the dead lower leaves do not fall off, and hang down, withered and yellow, giving the landscape a sun-dried tropical appearance. On the other hand, the plain, with its bright green grass, studded with innumerable flowers, with a brave south wind blowing over it, and with patches of water and reeds, seems to belong to the temperate regions. It is this contrast which sticks in the memory. You look across a couple of miles of what might be an English hayfield, covered with yellow flowers which might be English buttercups, with a light wind sweeping and shaking them, and at the far side are tropical palms, first a few standing out, then a regular grove, with their

unfamiliar green tops and parched lower leaves, and beyond them again the dark line of the forest.

There is an air of freshness and new growth, and yet you know you are in a hot country. That fact cannot escape you. It is hot: very hot indeed. You wear as little as possible; but your rifle weighs a ton, its sling burns your shoulder and you wish you had left your glasses behind. It is early noon, and the sun is straight overhead. You have been up since four, hunting the edges of the monté to try to find a deer feeding at dawn. You have not had a shot except a two hundred and fifty yards crack at a galloping ostrich (the South American ostrich, the rhea) on which you naturally made no impression whatever. You have worked hard; but the immense stock of enthusiasm with which you started has slowly evaporated. A short time before, as you were walking quietly in a lovely glade in the monté, your companion stopped, laid his hand on your arm, and looked intently. You look, but see nothing. There, there, he whispers, behind that myrtle. You can still see nothing. Then there is a patter of leaves, and the dogs, more intelligent than you, rush in, and your one chance vanishes. Your companion tells you that one of the pretty little deer of the country has stood looking at you full twenty seconds, not twenty yards off; and you curse yourself



A PARAGUAYAN DEER.

A YOUNG BOA.

(To face p. 168.)

for a maladroit fool who ought never to leave towns.

Well, the day is over now till the evening; you had better get back to camp and get something to eat. So back you trudge in the blinding heat, and round you all these long miles are mosquitoes and horseflies and numberless other virulent insects in swarms, and every exposed part of you is bitten and bitten and bitten again, until the one thing you long for is to reach the camp fire, pile it with green boughs, and sit in the heavy spicy smoke which no mosquito can penetrate. All things end at last : and at last you do get back and do as you meant to do. And then when you have eaten and drunk and smoked, a great peace comes over you. The troubles of the morning recede : and whereas a couple of hours before you could have sworn that nothing would get you away from camp again that day, you already begin to debate where you will go in the evening Shall it be along the river, with its miles of reeds, where you saw the fresh tapir tracks? Or shall you go to that likely looking country to the east, and try to catch a deer at his evening feed? Or shall you merely take a shot gun, and Atto, the half-bred pointer who does not point, and shoot some duck, teal or partridges for the pot? Something at any rate you mean to do : you will not stay in camp : and you lie on your hammock, lazily watching the sun

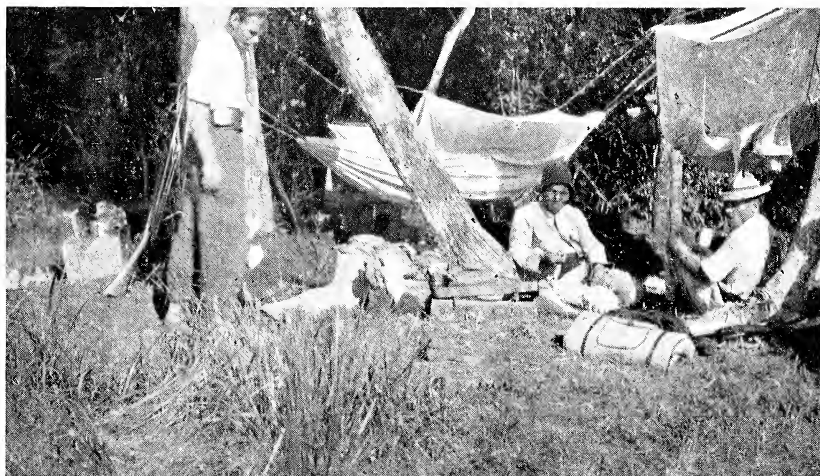
through the leaves, in pleasant expectation of his getting low enough to enable you to start.

And then, when you come back at sunset, how pleasant is the night. The gallant south wind which has blown all day has dropped. The air is still. At sundown day suddenly turns over to night, and a divine coolness spreads over everything: the fire becomes agreeable; and you, who sweltered through the day clad only in a shirt and trousers, will be glad of a second blanket to-night. You wake up, perhaps, to pull it on. One naturally wakes up between twelve and two, when sleeping in the open air. You get up, put a log or two on the fire, and look round. The moon makes everything as bright as day. The forest is full of mysterious noises. It has awakened: this is its day, its living time, its period of food and drink, of business and pleasure: not the hot, barren sunlight when sensible creatures sleep. There is movement and sound all round you: distant calls and cries, bodies moving through the boughs, little feet pattering over the dead leaves. Hot scents rise from the earth. The tired dogs have got into the ashes and are lying, heads in paws, trying to escape the merciless mosquitoes. And you, too, you had better get back under your mosquito net. And, let me warn you, do not leave a chink or crevice of it open, or you will be invaded by their triumphant hordes.

The impressions of the Chaco which remain are its bright beauty, its mixture of wood and plain, its palm trees, its birds, and its flatness. It is absolutely dead level. True, when you go into the patches of monté you see that they are a little, very little, higher than the campo. It is so little that it does nothing to break the general uniformity; but it is just this little which causes their existence, and makes such a sharp division between them and the campo. So flat is the Chaco, that most of it is a marsh in the wet season. When we got there the water was drying up, and large tracts, where when we first went the water and mud was nearly up to the knee, were hard and dry before we left. The walking is easy: the grass is long, but usually not tussocky, and the ground is firm and clean. Even in the wet parts you do not sink deep, and a good pair of field boots will see you through. But I am talking only of the dry season of a dry year. It must be very different in the wet. And, besides these changes of season, the Chaco is subject to periodic floodings, the causes of which are not distinctly known, which recur in cycles. Then all the year the water stands on the flat plain, and it becomes one great marsh, where the stork, the egret, the ibis, the heron, and every bird long of leg: the goose, the duck and all the tribe of swimmers: and those strange marsh birds which trip with immense feet lightly and

surely over the light water leaves: all these congregate in their thousands, and take their pleasure at their ease, careless of man.

IN THE CHACO.



CAMP IN THE CHACO.

(To face p. 172.)

CHAPTER XX.

THE BIRDS.

As this book is not written to instruct, it will not give ornithological information. There is here nothing new: my knowledge of birds is slight and empirical, and no doubt I missed much which would have been obvious to a skilled observer. But, loving birds dearly, having all my life looked at them, and having just come from one of the most remarkable bird districts of the world, I want to show what a vast amount of pleasure you can get out of birds without any deep scientific knowledge. You do not need Latin names, and you will find none here: you need not know technical terms: all that you require is a pair of glasses, a book of reference and love of your subject. Oddly enough a book of reference is hard to get. There is no book on the birds of Paraguay since one written by a Jesuit father in the eighteenth century. The best book to use is *Argentine Ornithology*, published in 1888 by Mr. W. H. Hudson in collaboration with that great ornithologist, the late Philip Lutley Sclater. But, unfortunately,

that book is long out of print and prohibitive in price: and its only successor is Mr. W. H. Hudson's *Birds of La Plata*, two volumes, 1920, which represents his own contribution to *Argentine Ornithology* revised and brought up to date, and is easy to get and not dear. But it has two drawbacks for the traveller to Paraguay and Southern Brazil. It only professes to give the birds of La Plata, a long way off to the south, and thus leaves out many Paraguay birds, and it is also limited to birds Mr. Hudson has seen himself; for, as he tells us in his Preface, he has 'thrown out' all Sclater's work, which comprised the descriptions of birds unknown to Mr. Hudson. This renders the book much less use than it might have been to the ignorant and perplexed student; for no doubt many of the birds I could not identify in Paraguay or Brazil were contained in the rejected chapters. For these chapters doubtless describe many tropical forms found in the northern Argentine but absent from La Plata: and these were the very birds I wanted. However, in spite of these drawbacks, the book was invaluable. I should have been lost without it. And, let me add, what every naturalist knows, that there is an immense amount of information in Mr. Hudson's earlier books. No one interested in nature should go to South America without reading *A Naturalist in La Plata*, the *Purple Land*, and *Far Away and Long Ago*. For

myself I am glad to have a chance of repaying part of the debt I have long owed to this fine observer and beautiful writer. The names of birds in what follows are taken from his *Birds of La Plata*, or they are the common names of the country.

As you go up the Alto-Paraná, certain birds are so common that you can hardly look out without seeing them. One is the Little Blue Heron. He is a miniature of our heron, less than half the size, and duller in colouring. He lives low down, sitting on a branch overhanging the water. As the launch comes up he flies off, his wings flapping in steady heron fashion, and goes perfectly straight away a foot above the water and three or four yards from the bank, not deviating an inch. When he has made a hundred yards or so, he will suddenly turn in to the bank, and sit looking at you, not moving a feather: and then when the noisy launch comes near, off he flies again. The process is repeated two or three times, until either he gets tired or comes to the conclusion that the launch is more unpleasant than dangerous; this time he sits quite motionless looking at you, and will let the launch pass within a few yards.

A very handsome cousin of his lives in Paraguay, the Little Red Heron, with his fashionable jacket of rusty orange, and his yellow beak He was chiefly seen perching in trees, where he looked as delightfully out of place as all the

heron family do. And there was another lovely bird of the same family of whom I know nothing but the Spanish name, Mirasól. I saw two, one, poor wretch, in a small cage in a bird shop at Asuncion, and the other wild in the Chaco. He is a good deal bigger, standing two foot high, very straight and stiff. His back is pearl grey, his underparts pure lemon, his eye is brown with a blue ring round it, and his bill is coral tipped with brown. The effect of the blue ring round the eye and the red bill is remarkable.

But to return to the Alto-Paraná. Another common and conspicuous bird is the White Kite. When I first saw him, I thought he was a tern. He looks like one in colour, his flight is the same, he has the same way of poising himself in the air, and he goes about in parties of four or five together. He is a pale grey above, black on the wings and pure white below. I have never seen a bird with such power of wing. I never saw one perching. They were always in the air, delighting in their skill, now soaring, now swooping suddenly with incredible speed and grace, now almost stationary and now again rising and falling in the wind. And all this is done not for catching their food, or getting from place to place, or any other object but that of beautiful movement. It is the pure joy of motion. The air is their playground, in all its breadth and height.

PATO REAL.

A RAILWAY (!) IN THE CHACO.

(To face p. 176.)

Among the mental pictures of the Alto-Paraná not the least permanent will be one of sitting in the bows of the launch, a hot sun beating on the old sail which serves as awning but a cool breeze flowing from the movement of the boat, eating the good oranges of Paraguay, and watching the agate water slip past; whilst there is a Little Blue Heron flapping unhurriedly in a bee-line up the bank; White Kites swinging in the air or sweeping in a mighty curve over the tree-tops; a kingfisher, bigger than our jay, with a blue-grey coat and orange waistcoat, sitting on a dead bough; and across the burnished surface of the river pass and repass the tireless swallows, with light bodies and a broad azure band round their shoulders, like a belt of turquoise.

It is always exciting to see wild those birds which you have only known in cages, and the first sight of parrots is thrilling. But the thrill is nothing compared with the first sight of a macaw. You have to go north to find them. When we had passed the mouth of the Iguazú, and were steaming up to Puerto Mendez, Brazil on the right hand and Paraguay on the left our captain told us that in the afternoon we should reach a certain tree where there would be macaws. The tree you see a long way off, standing out half-way up the cliff, thick and heavy, something like our sycamore. I got my glasses on to it, and there sure enough were two

red and blue macaws, conspicuous against the green leaves, looking for all the world like immense artificial flowers. Even there, on the edge of the tropic, they looked too brilliant to be natural. After that, as you went north, they were common, always in pairs. At the Falls of Guayra, surely one of the most stupendous sights of the world, where you have to wade out to one of the subsidiary falls to see the great Paraná river hurl itself through a narrow gorge, macaws kept flying overhead, back and forward, two and two, visiting a rocky island which stands in the middle of the falls, looking with their long tails not unlike pheasants.

Some part of our time on the Chaco had to be spent in getting birds for food. There were plenty. The birds had started laying, and naturally we shot no more than we required; but some we had to shoot. It may seem barbarous, but you have to do it in a wild country. Next to the bird called the pheasant, to be described later, our great stand-by was the partridge, big and small. The South American partridge is the tinamou, the common or small partridge being the Spotted Tinamou, and the big or red-winged partridge the Rufous Tinamou. The small partridge, on the wing, is exactly like ours, except that it is a fraction smaller and makes if possible more fuss and pother and clatter when it gets up. The big

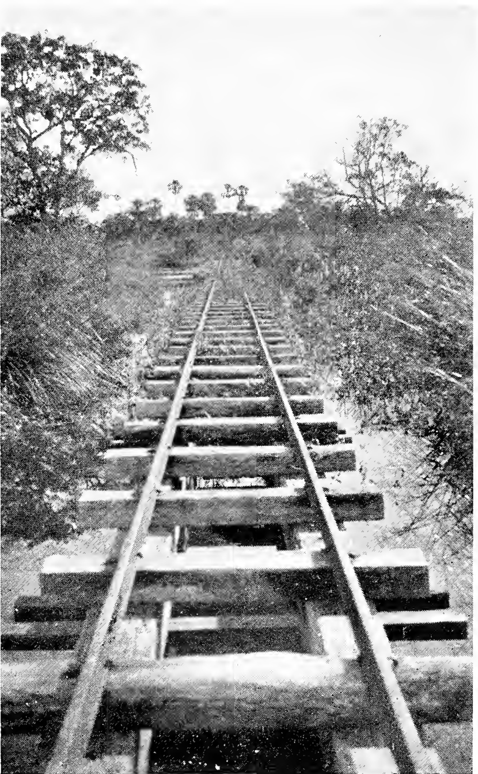
partridge gets up more slowly and flies higher. The big partridge abounded, and, with a dog, we could always get the four or five we wanted.

In Uruguay the small partridge has always been common, and now that grain growing is spreading the big partridge, formerly rare, is increasing. The small partridge is very numerous. In an estancia on which I stayed in that country three hundred brace have been shot by four guns in a short day. I was there in the nesting season, when of course they were protected, but you put them up in quantities as you rode over the campo. The eggs of the partridges are of a rare and lovely colour : they are quite plain, of the tint of old claret or of the darker ground of an Aubusson carpet. They fade, however, rapidly, and become dull brown in colour.

Next to the partridge come the duck. The 'pato reale,' the Royal Duck, dusky black and white, must be the biggest duck in the world; one we got measured thirty-two inches, which is nearly as big as our Bean Goose and considerably bigger than our Bernacle. He is really a splendid trophy, with his chocolate-black body and clear white wing patches. There were a lot about, but they were not easy to get : I saw them chiefly at flight, a long way off usually. The other duck we got were the White-Faced Tree-Duck, and the beautiful little Brazilian Teal, with his iridescent plumage and his

orange-red bill and feet. These teal had not, I think, begun to lay : at any rate the duck had not begun to sit, for she and the drake were always about all day together. We shot a good many; they were very easy to get.

The open part of the Chaco, the campo, swarms with small birds. Every reed-bed is full of them, chattering and twittering and flicking lightly from stem to stem. Very few was I able to identify. In the first place, I was desperately keen to get something with the rifle, and every available minute was spent at that. But also, if you are to identify small birds you must, unless they are conspicuous or brightly coloured, shoot them; and that, as I was not collecting, was a senseless slaughter. Big birds and middle-sized ones you can identify, with patience and a pair of glasses; but small ones you cannot, unless your time is unlimited. Accordingly my list is shockingly meagre. The common marsh birds were there. There was the well-known mottled yellow and black one, the size of our blackbird, the Yellow-Shouldered Marsh-Bird, with its nest attached to reeds growing in the water, and its brown spotted eggs, and the Red-Breasted Marsh-Bird also. More lovely and less common was the Yellow-Headed Marsh-Bird, like a Golden Oriole as Mr. Hudson truly says, with its jet black and clear gold. Then there was the Red-Billed Ground-Finch; and that beautiful nest builder.



A RAILWAY IN THE CHACO.

CROSSING THE RIO NEGRO.

(To face p. 180.)

the Hang-Nest (though this is a bird of the monté, not of the campo) who weaves together a long pocket, like a string bag, and hangs it from a bough.

This is a most meagre result. Let it be remembered that I had no one who knew the small birds well and could point them out and give one a start. It had been different in Uruguay, where in a day or two I had been taught the common birds. I knew the impudent Bienteveo, looking at you with his head cocked on one side, like our jay: the efficient, noisy Oven Bird, building his solid mud cupola: the Cardinál, with his grey soutane and brilliant crimson cap: the little Fire King, flicking on and off a bough like our flycatcher, his scarlet head glowing like a coal: the Widow Bird, her white wedding dress edged with narrow black mourning: the Scissor-Tail, on a windy day, wondering why nature gave him so inconvenient an appendage: the Pigmy Dove, no bigger than a thrush, building her little nest of twigs in an orange tree: the Leñatero, the Stick Bird, who tries to see how big a nest he can make, how conspicuous and in how small a tree: all these and many more I knew. But none of these were here. I was in foreign parts, where the appearance, the manners and the language of the inhabitants were all new to me.

The big birds were easier, particularly the birds of prey, for these are much the same all

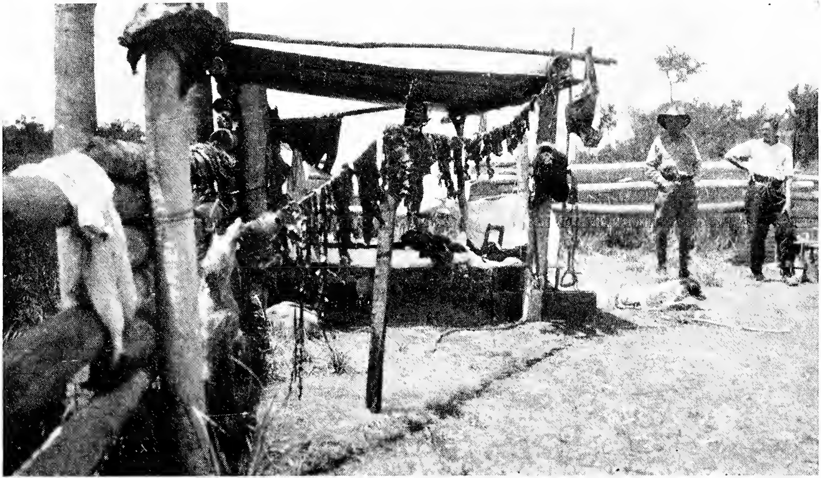
over the world: not the same birds, of course, but the same in type; and they keep closer to type than do other families. If you have once got into your head the flight of a falcon or a buzzard or a kite or a harrier you can tell them apart all the world over. There are some, of course, peculiar to South America, such as the well-known scavengers, half hawk, half vulture, the Carancho and the Chimango. You have only to kill an animal or throw down any offal to collect a crowd of these, together with their vile cousin, the Black Vulture.

What a bird lover misses in England is the big birds. Possibly our small birds were never so numerous as they are now, for their enemies such as weasels and hawks are extirpated, our immense game covers form ideal sanctuaries, and in many instances they and their eggs are protected by law. But with big birds it is different, especially birds of prey. How often do you see a buzzard or peregrine? Have you ever seen an English kite, except stuffed? Game preservers and egg-collectors make them rarer and rarer, except in the north and west. But in South America it is different. You can never look into the upper air without seeing it peopled by its rightful inhabitants, birds of prey. There they are, eagles and vultures, harriers and buzzards, soaring and swinging, heads moving from side to side, eyes fixed on the earth. I remember one occasion particu-

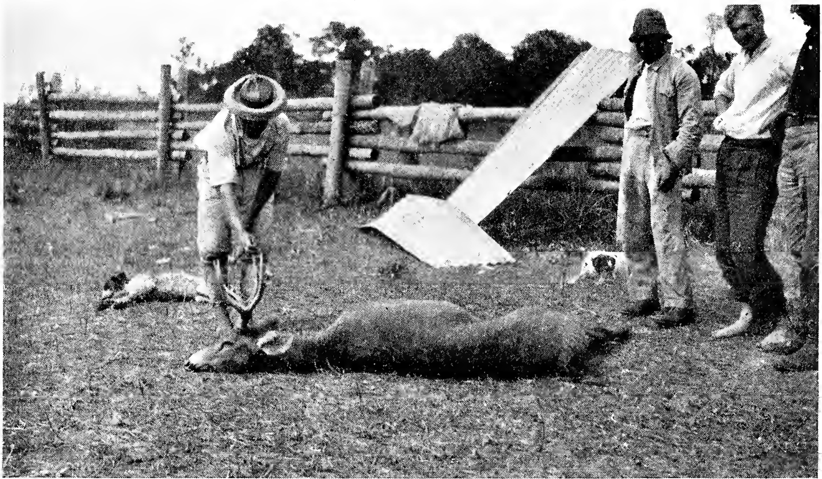
larly. It was the first day in the Chaco. Our mule was steadily pulling the trolley containing our kit along the narrow disused track. We had not made fast progress, for more than once the trolley had left the rails, and for many miles the grass was so high and thick over the track that we had to burn it before we got through. But by now we were some way inland and night was approaching. I took a rifle and started for a river a couple of miles ahead, where I might get a shot. I did not, but my time was not wasted. We were passing through a wide plain, perfectly flat, covered with coarse grass and rimmed on the far horizon by a line of dark forest. On the right, some way off, was a large marsh, to which ibis of different kinds were winging their way, and flocks of snowy egrets and tall black and white storks. But it was not they who interested me, it was the birds of prey. Low down, quartering the plain, swinging into the wind, came drove on drove of the hunters. On they came, the insolent lords of the air, passing away overhead, replaced by others as far as the eye could reach, searching the ground up and down and backwards and forwards, restlessly seeking their meat. They did not find much. All the time I watched I did not see a single one swoop or pitch, and most of them must have gone to bed supperless. But on and on they came, in untiring succession, of all sizes and shapes and of every different

make and flight. It was a wonderful sight, in that wild country, with the quick night falling. I watched until the trolley caught me up and we had to push on to get across the river and choose a camping ground before dark. The variety was endless. At the time it was impossible to identify more than a few; but then and later several were made out. There was a great kite with a white head, of which one shot subsequently measured four and a half feet across the wings. There were buzzards, of which at least one, the White-Tailed Buzzard, was clearly made out. There was the long narrow-winged harrier called the Cinereous or Argentine Harrier. And there was the most uncommon looking of the lot, the Sociable Marsh-Hawk, which has a body of clear grey-blue, black wings, a white bar on a black tail, ruby eyes and orange bill and feet. There were many more. It was not the particular identification which was interesting (though all true lovers long to identify) but the wild and free life in which for a moment I shared.

Every poison provides its own antidote, and Paraguay, which breeds more stinging insects to the acre than any other country, also produces a tobacco which the boldest of them cannot face. Let him who goes to the Paraguayan Chaco take with him a bundle of Paraguayan cigars. You want something to protect you when you are sitting in the shade of one of her



DRYING THE MEAT.



A PARAGUAYAN STAG.

(To face p. 184.)

lovely woods. These woods are far more varied and open than those which border the Paraná. There they are close and thick; if you would walk through them, your way must be cut with a machete: and, when you have penetrated some distance, you reach a land of silence. Not a sound is heard, not even the note of a bird: not a flower is to be seen: on all sides stretches the forest, impenetrable and sombre. It is different in the Chaco; there you can usually walk without cutting your way: and you always find open spots, either glades or patches, which let in air and sunlight. This has a powerful effect on their character. They are neither empty, nor silent: birds haunt them: and they are full of sound and colour.

There are several sounds which make up the impression the forest leaves on you, as you sit in the shade during the hot, still noon. Under all is the subdued hum of countless insects, inseparably connected with hot days everywhere, a musical and resonant note, born of the heat and the stillness. Then there is the peaceful sleepy call of the Spotted Dove. That also is an underlying and all-pervading sound, for you cannot tell whence it comes, and it seems to be part of the air itself. Quite different, harsh and distinct, there comes from a distance the unmistakeable scream of parrots. But you will not have been seated long before you will be conscious of movement as well as

sound. A woodpecker, yellow barred with brown, his crest golden, will fly on to the trunk of a tree, and begin tap tapping. A pretty little hawk, mottled brown with a black head, flicks across the open. A Humming Bird, the common one of South America, iridescent green with a red beak, suddenly appears feeding on the pale flesh-coloured trumpets of a creeper, whirring like a moving shadow from blossom to blossom, until he disappears at a pace which no eye can follow. A pair of delightful jays will begin to take an interest in you. Nature clearly has marked these birds out as comedians, for she has dressed them in black and white suits, and given them staring yellow eyes, with bright blue stripes over. But the most tame, the most confidential, and the most amusing of all is the bird called Urraca. Urraca is Spanish for magpie, and is I know applied to other South American birds; what this particular bird is I know not, but he is the same size as our jackdaw, and clearly his cousin. His colour is greyish purple, which becomes bluish purple on the wings and tail, and his beak and claws are black. The first thing you notice is their soft musical caw, constantly repeated and getting nearer and nearer, and then you will see the two birds hopping restlessly from twig to twig, and putting their heads on one side to get a better look at you. They are most inquisitive and tame, and delight in perching

over your head, nearer and nearer, looking at you now from one angle and now from another, and discussing you ceaselessly the whole time.

The last bird to be described is the stupidest and at the same time the most useful of the lot. This is the one called the pheasant: I do not know his proper name. He is rather smaller than a hen pheasant, has a beak like the domestic chicken and a square tail of reddish brown. He sits in the trees, and never flies except from bough to bough. You can walk up to him and shoot him sitting with a rifle or indeed a shot gun. At dawn and dusk he advertises his presence by a silly cackling, like a farmyard hen. He is always on the spot, always tells you where he is, and is delicious to eat. You need never go hungry where pheasants are.

That concludes the birds. There are many more which might be mentioned. I have seen the famous Crested Screamer, about which Mr. Hudson has told so much. I have seen, though perhaps too far off to be certain, the Jabirú, that great white stork which stands five feet high. As I sit here, thinking of that time, there are many more birds which come into the mind. I shall not describe them: for the reader will weary of the length of the list, and the ornithologist must long ago have given me up.

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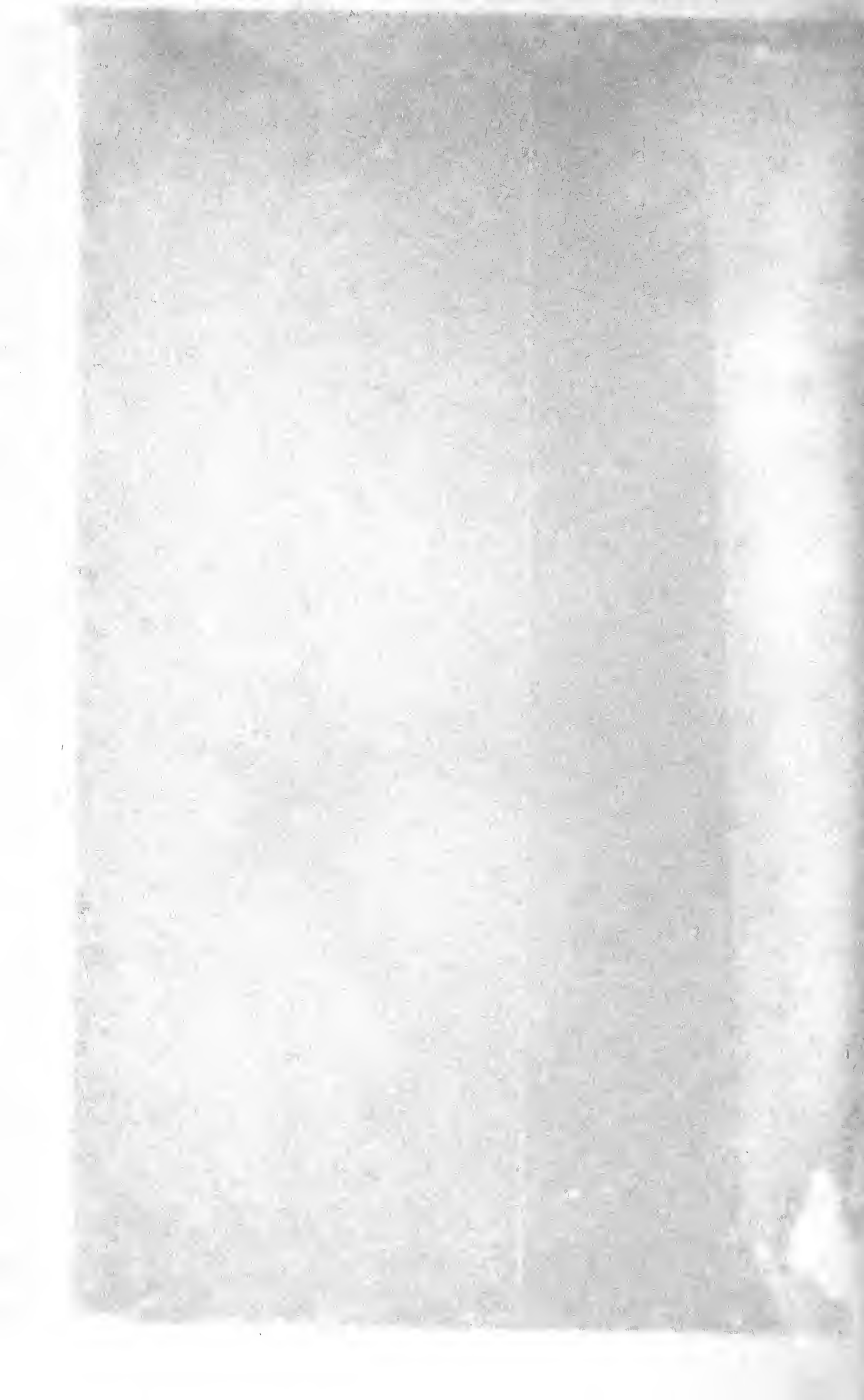

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