

THE GAUCHO AT HOME (1894).¹
Text by John Randolph Spears

South American Cowboys as Seen in Patagonia.

WILD LIFE IN THE PAMPAS.

Wonderful Horsemen Who Have Got the Name of Desperadoes.

They Place a Low Value on Human Life and Their Honor Is Easily Offended—Guns They Despise, but They Are Quick to Use Their Silver-handled Knives—The Rough Life in the Desert to Which They Cling—Panthers and Ostriches Supply Variety to Their Diet of Meat.

"We would rather hear the bird sing than the mouse squeak," is a common saying of that most interesting class of men in South America known to the world as gauchos, and it is the saying which, better than all others originating with them, gives an insight into their character as a class. To this may be added the book definition of their name. Gaucho, in the Spanish-English lexicon, is a term in architecture "applied to uneven superficies." The gaucho is the cowboy, the shepherd, and the plainsman of the prairies and deserts that extend from the Río Grande do Sul in Brazil to the Andes and from the Grand Chaco forests of the Argentine to the Strait of Magellan. He is an out-of-doors citizen of somewhat "uneven superficies."

My first view of a gaucho was had on Floret Island, the quarantine station of Uruguay, a place where nearly all passengers bound on the English steamers for the River Plate during the yellow fever season are obliged to stop for disinfection and observation. We had been on the Island a little over a day when a steer was butchered to renew the fresh meat supply. Nearly all the passengers went to see the beast suffer, among the rest a Brazilian naval officer *en route* to a station on the Misiones. After a little time, he came to my room, asked why I had not been at the killing, and added:

"It is now time to go. The killing was nothing—a gaucho put his knife into its throat and it bled to death—but now the gauchos will have an asado. Did you see

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an asado ever in your life? It is the finest of meat. They will roast the ribs of the cow by the fire."

Near the buildings set aside for the use of the third-class passengers from Brazil, we found a number of gauchos preparing to roast the ribs of beef over a small open fire—a fire so small that the coals and ashes occupied no more space on the ground than the ribs would have covered. The rib piece was threaded, so to speak, on a slender but stiff bar of steel five feet long. The bar was thrust into the ground so that the beef was inclined like a shelter tent above the blazing fire, and there it remained for about two hours, being turned occasionally by the gauchos.

Although this was the first time I had seen beef roasted in just that fashion, I was much more interested in the gauchos and certain other things they did than in their roast of beef. Had the officer not told me the men were gauchos, I should very likely have mistaken them for sailors. The Nantucket whaler, fresh from a three years' cruise in the Pacific, never showed a sweeter roll in his gait than did these South American cowboys as they fetched to alongside the fire or veered off in search of fuel to keep it burning. Nor was the resemblance in the gait alone, for every man of them wore a belt with a knife, the handle of which was just where the man's hand would find it in the shortest time. Then, too, the hats of the gauchos were of the nondescript sort, and all worn easily on what a sailor would call the northwest corner or some other corner of the head. The leg gear, however, was by no means nautical. Jack always loved flowing trousers, but not flowing as these were. At first glance the gauchos seemed to have brown zouave trousers, with white leggings at the ankles, but a closer inspection showed that they wore rather close-fitting cotton drawers in place of trousers, and that, in addition, their legs were clothed from the ankles up with a length—say three yards—of wide brown cotton goods. One end of this piece of goods was tucked up through the belt and spread out across the small of the back. Then the other end was brought up between the legs, tucked up under the belt and spread out across the belly until its edges touched the edges of the rear end. That is all there was of it. The stuff bagged down between the legs in a fashion that made the wearer the most ridiculous looking man, in my judgment, on the continent. The nearest approach to it in North America can be found in the trousers with flaps in front which the good farm wife used to make for her husband in the old days. It is true that the Yuma Indian of the Colorado desert wears a short length of cloth in something after the same fashion, but he draws the ends through the belt until they hang down before and behind, leaving the

middle to fit close to the body, in which fashion he appears to be wearing a sbort skirt.

"What do they wear that cloth bagging between the legs for?" said I to the Brazilian.

"You owe to remember," he replied, *"the gaucho lives on the plains where no tailors find themselves in order to make clothes a la mode, eh? And the gaucho cannot himself to make trousers and he cannot himself to put what you call them—the patches over the holes in the trousers where he sits in the saddle. But he can to buy cloth and to wear one end between him and the saddle today and the other end tomorrow and another part tomorrow—past tomorrow. Caramba! The cloth never can to wear out in much time, but it can to cover the holes behind in his trousers. Is it not true?"*

Caramba is a Spanish word, meaning in the American language, "Gosh." It is in common use among South Americans of all classes, a fact worth mentioning perhaps, for the reason that the gauchos have no more forcible word for use, even under circumstances that would lead an American cowboy into the most sulfurous depths of profanity.

Ridiculous as the gaucho appeared when seen on Flores Island, surrounded by houses and people dressed suitably for a summer stroll on Broadway, he seemed a very different being when I came to meet him in Patagonia. A hawk mounted on a smooth walnut perch in a city museum does not seem quite the same bird that it does when it snatches a partridge from under the jaws of a snarling fox on the edge of a thicket in the Adirondack wilderness. To see the gaucho at his best, that is, where he will be found most interesting, one must go where he lives utterly free from all restraint, even the restraint of association. Such a place is Patagonia. This great southern desert gives perfect freedom to its roving sons. It is a wondrous solitude. One rides away from the valley of the stream in which he has left his ship, until the crest of a hill shuts out the view of the water, and then finds himself alone utterly. Pebbles red and brown, that have been rounded by the waves, with the gray and yellowish sand of attrition[?], are under his feet. On every side are scattered clumps of stiff, gaunt gray bushes. Further away the land rises in knolls and ridges. Seeking for a change in the landscape, one rides to the top of the highest crest in view, only to find that the ridges he saw before have apparently moved on. At any rate, before him stand ridges and knolls of precisely the shape he had looked at on first

scaling the mesa. Turning around and looking back, the ridges and knolls just seen in front are found duplicated. One may ride for hours with never a change in the landscape which the ordinary eye can detect. It is an unvarying gray wilderness. It is as silent as it is desolate. The wind blows strong in the face, but it does not whistle, neither does it make a rustle in the bushes, unless it be a gale. The brush does not even bend or sway under its impulse. It is, save to the most observant, usually a lifeless desert. The faint chirp of a desert sparrow, as it dodged behind a bush at the strange sight of a human being, would not be heard by the ordinary traveler. The flitting of the desert hare would not be seen, and unless the ostrich or the guanaco were stumbled upon by accident, no sign of life would come to cheer the ear or the eye.

Nevertheless, when once a man has learned the secrets of the desert and its savage joys, he returns to it as to the arms of some fierce sweetheart, finding there a spell, an elation that makes all other kinds of life seem insipid. Nature has in store undescribed pleasures for those who can return to live a natural life in the wilderness.

It is in curious fashion that many of the gauchos of Patagonia have gone to the wilderness to live on the bounties of nature and it is a curious life they lead there. A ship is driven ashore on the Patagonian coast either by real accident or purposely, that her owners may collect the insurance. Of her crew, should they escape, at least one will become a gaucho. They will all reach one of the settlements, where a chance to take service as sheep herders will be offered them. Several will enter this service and so learn the simple arts of the plainsman—to ride a mustang, to roast meat on the steel rod that leans above a fire of small brush, to throw the lasso and the bolas, to hold the fur robe called a *quillango* about the shoulders while galloping across the desert in the teeth of a gale. The shepherd life seems good for a time, in spite of the steady diet of mutton, with only an occasional change to guanaco meat, the ribs of a panther, or the wings of an ostrich. By and by, however, this life palls. Why should one be tied down to one spot when the whole wilderness lies before him and nature will there supply every want? Why should one take orders when he can follow his own free will? Why mix in the quarrels and envyings and strifes of the head station when silence and safety and peace may be found beyond the range? The shepherd becomes a wild gaucho.

And then there is the soldier stationed on the frontier. In the old days he was like a breakwater to stop the Indians, who in waves came to whelm the scattered settlements. Now there is peace but the old forts are still manned.

“So many officers are martinets,” the soldiers will say, *“and at best it is a dog’s life in the barracks. Let us be wolves instead.”* The soldier turns gaucho, sometimes without waiting for the formality of a discharge.

Last of all, there is the lad who is growing to man’s size in the officers’ quarters of a frontier post or in the general store of the frontier settlement. The desert calls to such boys every day as the sea calls to the children on Nantucket beach. They have lassos and bolas as the Yankee boys have skates and baseballs. They are riding mustangs before the New York boy is trusted on a tricycle. Meantime the gaucho is ever before them with his swagger and dash, his hearty laugh, and his quick anger. Mothers may frighten their children when babes in arms by saying *“The gaucho will carry you off,”* and may tell the older boys that the gaucho is the personification of all that is ribald—the desperado of the plains—but, as the leaders of the *courriers du bois* of Canada were the sons of French gentlemen, so the chief men of the gauchos are of what is called good family. I saw one of that kind—an Englishman by birth. He wore on his shoulders a poncho, a small squaw-made blanket with a hole in the middle through which he could thrust his head. On his feet were *potro* boots, a sort of footgear made of the skin of the legs of a colt. About his waist was a belt that carried a knife, of which the handle was silver and the blood-stained blade a foot long. He was unshaved, unwashed and ungroomed. But he had on a fine silk underwear, *“because, don’t you know, I can’t get used to the beastly scratching of furs and flannels.”*

The outfit of the Patagonian gaucho is simple and not expensive. With one good horse and three dogs he can start, but a swell gaucho may have a score of horses and a dozen dogs. To these he must add a good saddle, with numerous saddle-cloths, which are usually nothing but blankets woven by the Tehuelche squaws from guanaco hair and wool, purchased or stolen at the ranches. Equally necessary are the *quillangos*, the great fur robes made by sewing together the skins of young guanacos. With two or three of these the gaucho can pass the night comfortably in the lee of a bit of brush, even when a blizzard is raging. The water-proof canvas bag lined with fur would be warmer and lighter, but the gaucho will have none of it because his *quillangos* serve as overcoats by day.

The weapons of the gaucho are simple and, with one exception, inexpensive. They are the lasso, the bolas, and the knife. The last, having a carved silver handle, may cost as much as \$25 gold. The lasso is a horsehair rope. The bolas have been described by every writer who has visited the River Plate, but it may be worth telling here that the reader can make them for himself by taking either two or three round balls of iron an inch and a quarter in diameter, or two or three round stones of two and a quarter inches in diameter, and securing one to each end of a stout cord, three feet long. Then tie together the other ends of the cords, making a good big knot in doing so. To use the bolas, grasp this big knot and one of the bolas and then, after whirling the free bola or bolas about the head to give them speed, hurl the entire outfit at any target handy. If the novice does not crack his skull in his earlier efforts to master the bolas, they quickly become an effective weapon with a range of twenty yards. After considerable practice a healthy man can achieve a range of thirty yards, while fifty or sixty yards may be covered by the man of exceptional skill. The gauchos tell of ranges up to 100 yards, with a two-ball outfit made of iron. It may be so.

Having these weapons, the gaucho commonly scorns all others. The Winchester and the revolver, indispensable to the plainsman of the States, would rarely be accepted us a gift.

"I am astonished to learn that you do not carry a good revolver," said I to a gaucho who talked English fluently.

"And I am astonished to hear people like yourself think one of any use to us," he replied.

"But, I have heard that you gentlemen of the plains have misunderstandings with each other, and that you then fight to kill."

"It is true."

"Would not a good revolver be a handy thing to use in self-defense at such a time?"

"It would indeed. To defend oneself—why, I suppose nothing could be better for that. But we do not fight so. To think of shooting a man when—Bah! Pardon me, my friend, but I can see you have never felt a man's flesh give as you drove your steel home."

The story of the life of the gaucho on the desert is full of adventure. The gaucho's day begins with the capture of a horse from his herd. It is literally a capture, for the plains horse, no matter how well trained, hates the draw of the cinch. Where a man travels alone, one of his herd must be securely staked out overnight, that he may be able to round up and load the rest, if there be loads. Sometimes the precaution of staking is of no avail, for there are wild horses all over Patagonia, and the joy of their lives is to stampede a tame herd, especially a herd with mares in it. For this reason, mares will sell for a dollar or two each, where stallions or geldings of less strength and poorer training are sold for ten or more.

When the horses are packed and attended to, breakfast of coffee, possibly, and cold meat left from the last repast, will serve, but the usual bill of fare is a cup of *maté*, the tea herb of Paraguay, and a pipe of tobacco. The morning appetite of everybody in Spanish America seems to be that of a man who has been on a spree the night before. Some bitter bracing drink is all that is wanted. Then the *maté* pot is slung to the saddle, a last look is cast over the campground to see that nothing is left, the finger tips touch the cinch to see that it is tight, and then the gaucho swings into the saddle.

The gaucho born to the life is of the very best class of riders. Drunk or sober, asleep or awake, over the smooth mesa or across the broken ground of a gully, the gaucho sits in his saddle as easily, as securely, and as comfortably as a New Yorker sits in a cross seat of an elevated train car that has no other passengers. And yet the gaucho's seat is apparently insecure, for his legs dangle about in a way that would be simply shocking to a Central Park riding master, and one has to see the gaucho's mustang jump sideways and land stiff-legged, while the gaucho's legs are still dangling, and to see the look of absolute unconcern on the gaucho's face when the mustang jumps so again and again, to thoroughly appreciate him as a horseman.

The gaucho, once mounted, where will he go and how will he pass the day? One may as well ask the first question of an Indian as of a guanaco feeding in a gully. He will go where the whim takes him and stop where night finds him. He has absolutely no reason for taking thought for the morrow, and he takes none. He will pass the day galloping easily across the desert, in the main, with mad dashes this way and that as the dogs start an ostrich. He will dismount to break the neck and disembowel the bird when overtaken or when tangled up by the bolas. He will chase a young guanaco, as well, and when an ostrich has started

from under his horse's feet, so to speak, as often happens at a certain period of the season, he goes back on its track after killing it, because he knows it was on a nest when started, and that in finding the eggs he will find a delicacy of the desert.

The Patagonia ostrich egg is a huge affair, equal in weight to more than half a dozen hen's eggs. The gaucho breaks a hole in one end to let the steam escape, and then stands it in the ashes at the edge of the fire and lets it roast. Of course, it must be turned occasionally. Because these eggs are a hearty kind of food, they are usually eaten at the gaucho's evening dinner. And the gaucho dinner is a tremendous affair, so far as quantity is concerned.

Having galloped over the plains all day with, perhaps, a atop for luncheon, a cup of *maté*, and a smoke at midday, the gaucho is hungry when night comes. But, although he may have more meat than any three men may eat, he will not have enough to satisfy his appetite. This is not because the gaucho is a glutton, but because a meat diet does not fully satisfy the demands of the human system. The Indians eat fungus of various kinds, grass roots and seeds, and berries in the season. The gaucho will gather the berries because they are everywhere abundant. He will pick up a handy bit of fungus, but will not go out of his way to find it. The bunch-grass seed is too small a matter for his happy-go-lucky soul. So, he is always hungry at night, and never satisfied entirely unless, indeed, he chances to kill a good fat panther. The fat of the young panther is the most satisfying food of the desert. To tell just how many pounds of young panther meat a gaucho will eat would be to throw a doubt over this whole narrative in the minds of readers not posted on such matters.

However, with his guanaco, his ostrich, and his panther meat, with his *maté* cup after, and his pipe after that, the gaucho is contented, if not entirely satisfied. For variety he may have an occasional skunk, which he kills by breaking its back with a bola, and so prevents its using its natural weapon of offence. He may also strike a Patagonian hare as it scampers along, and occasionally he comes suddenly on a flock of partridges, around which he gallops until he gets them confused, when he dashes in and strikes some down with a blow of his lasso.

Out of the day's captures he will keep the skins of the ostrich, for the feathers are worth 30 cents gold a pound in the settlements, and he sells them that he may buy more *maté*, some more silver for decorating his saddle, and some

ribbons and candy to carry to a more or less attractive squaw. The money left after the purchase of these necessities of life is used in buying a jug of the largest size obtainable with the resources at command. That is to say, the gaucho gets drunk whenever he goes to a settlement. Getting drunk is the one civilized habit to which he clings to the end of life. In all other respects the Patagonia gaucho is a picturesque savage, the Arab of the Southern desert, who passes his days in wandering from oasis to oasis.

These gauchos of Patagonia are only one species of a class. There are gauchos, as has been intimated, on the cattle and sheep ranches. They are much more frequently seen by travelers than are the Patagonians, because they gather at the pampa railroad stations, and may even be found in certain quarters of Buenos Ayres. They wear their distinguishing dress everywhere, and so may be recognized readily. As seen from a railroad train they look like slouching loafers, but every traveler who has seen them thus has recorded that, no matter how drunk they were, they could ride their horses when once lifted to the saddle, and that the effect of the ride was to clear away the fumes of their favorite drink—rum. The ordinary travelers see the gaucho at his worst. In fact, the gaucho has seemed to be such a worthless dog to so many travelers, and so many travelers have written and printed their impressions of the gaucho that he has in these later years learned that all foreigners regard him as a pretty hard citizen. Now, the gaucho is above all things a man of pride, and even of vanity. He wants to appear well, especially before strangers, and so it has come to pass that to call a gaucho a gaucho is to insult him.

Strangers should always avoid insulting a gaucho until after they have got the drop on him with right good guns. The gaucho is the handiest man with a knife in the world, and his estimate of the value of human life is as low as that held by any class of men in the world.

“What does it matter? Many beautiful horses die,” he will say when he hears of the death of a friend.

“I was in a gaucho saloon up the river one day last summer,” said a Buenos Ayres man to me, *“when a Frenchman looking for a ranch to buy came in. He wanted to smoke and had cigarettes, but no matches. And what was very much worse for him, he did not know the etiquette of the occasion. With cigarettes in hand, he placed one in his mouth and then in politest terms asked the favor of a light from*

a gaucho who was puffing a cigarette stub, possibly a little more than a quarter-inch long. So far, he had done well. The gaucho said, 'with pleasure' and the Frenchman was soon puffing his cigarette. Then he made a well-nigh fatal error. Instead of returning the worthless stub with thanks he dropped it on the floor, intending, as he said afterwards, to ask the gaucho to do him the favor of taking a fresh one. But he didn't have time enough to even open his mouth. Dropping the stub was an insult. It implied that the gaucho had been smoking a too short stub. Caramba! That Frenchman was impaled on a twelve-inch blade before he knew what was to happen."

Not only is the gaucho written down as a desperado: he is called the laziest of men, and in proof of this charge is cited the fact that he will saddle a horse and ride half a mile rather than walk forty rods. But the truth is that in his peculiar field he will work down any other kind of man. Give him horses and set him to branding cattle. He will begin his day's work by saddling the horse before the peep of the longest day of the year and then will drink a cup of coffee, mount, and go to work. For seven hours he will gallop about the excited herd, whirling and throwing the heavy rope, downing the cattle with marvelous precision, and then, out of the exuberance of his spirits, gallop against the stronger bulls as they flee from the hands of the marker to send them rolling over and over in a cloud of dust. At the end of seven hours or so he will want what he calls breakfast—a few pounds of boiled and roasted meat will suffice, and if he have a couple of bullet-like loaves of bread the size of his fist, known there as *galletas*, he counts it a feast. This eaten, and a cigarette rolled, he mounts and continues the work for seven hours more. And that is not an extraordinary day, either. A ride of 100 miles in a day is not counted great by a gaucho, while seventy-five miles a day for a week during which three camps will be made without food or water, is a matter of frequent occurrence. In short, the gaucho does any work that anybody can do on a horse, and he does it in a quantity and with a good humor that are astonishing. Attending to cattle is not hard work, in the sense that ditch digging is hard, but a cowboy's life is not one of ease in either North or South America.

It is an interesting fact that the inflation of Argentine currency, which reduced the value of a paper dollar to 30 cents gold, did not increase the number of dollars paid per month to the gaucho. In other words, the gaucho now gets the same number of dollars (20 to 50) per month that he used to get, but when he goes to the store to buy fancy saddle gear, silver-handled knives and bright goods for his sweetheart, he finds the prices just four times as high as they used

to be. So, in these days the gaucho thinks the world has gone wrong, and he longs for a revolution and new legislators who will pass laws to make money more plentiful.

The home life of the gaucho of the pampas can be duplicated on the plains of New Mexico. The walls of his house are almost invariably sun-dried blocks of mud and the roof is a flat layer of mud over brush, supported on the crooked trunks of willow trees usually found in the valleys of streams. For the roof, a thatch of the long pampa grass is common. This is much better, because it is tight until it rots. The mud roof leaks in time of rain so badly that the family moves out of doors. Fact! The floor is the earth, as the builder found it. There may be two or three rooms, but one usually suffices. Here the gaucho and his family, and his mother or his wife's mother, and a sister or two pass their lives. A few skins of cattle and panthers and deer will serve for a bed when a blanket has been thrown over them. A brazier may sometimes be found, and on this water is boiled to make *maté*. The food—meat of various kinds only—will be boiled and roasted over the open fire, built without or under a simple shelter in the wet season. There is often no table, and chairs are scarce. The food, if served on a table, is simply heaped up on a platter or dish of some kind, and each one makes a grab at the heap. As often as otherwise, each helps himself from the pot or the roast as it hangs over the fire. One jabs his fork into a convenient spot of the roast —forks are common on the pampas—and with a clever stroke of his big sheath knife cuts off a slab of meat. One end of the slab is flipped into the mouth when an upward stroke of the knife divides the slab, leaving a fairly convenient piece in the mouth. Watching a family of eight or ten, men, women, and children, squatting around a fire, simultaneously flipping the ends of slabs of meat into their mouths and with upward strokes of keen-edged knives cutting away the slab and leaving the mouth full of the steaming roast, the whole group talking and laughing continually meantime—that is one of the most interesting, if not the most pleasing, experiences of a journey in the Argentine Republic. The traveler who visits a gaucho family must needs join in the feast, following the fashion of his host, and it is a fact that more than one tenderfoot has sliced off the tip of his nose in an effort to cut off his mouthful of meat only.

In his social and home life the gaucho is, as one would expect from what has been said, an affectionate husband and father for the most of the time, with occasional outbursts of temper when he treats those dependent on him with great cruelty. Dancing is the favorite amusement of the sexes when together, and the

gaucho is then—and at every opportunity, in fact—a most persistent gallant, and a successful one too.

Next to an intrigue, the gaucho loves to gamble with cards and play billiards. He is altogether too excitable to make a gambler fit to compete with a cold-blooded professional from the Rocky Mountain mining camps, but he nevertheless acquires great skill in the manipulation of a deck of cards, and he educates his eyes until he can detect the slightest marks on the back of a card and so recognize the hand of an opponent. Indeed, cheating is counted as a mark of superior skill in playing any game of cards. The gaucho would be greatly astonished as well as angered if called a rascal for cheating.

At convenient distances across the pampas and at every railway station will be found the gaucho saloons. They are mud-walled huts, of course, but larger than the homes of the gauchos. The walls will be found occupied with various Government ordinances relating to affairs in the district, and especially to the sale of liquors. With these will be great, crude lithographs, representing events in the last revolution or some other fighting scenes. Mingled with both ordinances and lithographs are the tiny pictures that come with the packages of cigarettes on sale everywhere. These cigarette pictures are of a sort to make a North American, or even a North American manufacturer of cigarettes, gasp. The pampa saloons sell but two kinds of drinks that are reasonably pure—rum and beer. The beer is made in the suburb of Buenos Ayres—Quilmes—and Quilmes beer is good. The native rum is consumed in vast quantities by the gauchos, but it is not popular with ranch owners, simply because it is cheap. One would as soon expect to find Stock Exchange brokers working the growler after a day's business as to see a pampa ranch owner bring out a bottle of rum.

The liquor glasses of the pampa saloon are peculiar. They are water tumblers in shape and outer dimensions, while the capacity is that of New York whiskey glasses. The amount of glass in one will make it weigh nearly half a pound. A more compact or better-shaped missile for a saloon fight would be hard to find. Gaucho etiquette, as already intimated, is a matter demanding the closest study of the stranger. That the gaucho is hospitable, and in his way generous, need not be said. The stranger who enters a pampa saloon will be asked to drink, without fail. If he wishes to drink he should say so, and when he has swallowed his potion, should ask the other fellow to have something. But if he does not wish to drink, he need not do so, provided he knows how to refuse. The correct form of refusal is to say:

"Many thanks, sir; many thanks. I have had all that I wish to drink, but will you not give me the pleasure of paying for the drinks for yourself and the gentlemen, your friends?"

To this the gaucho wilt reply by declining with thanks and the matter is ended comfortably. It is an offence to decline bluntly to drink, because in the gaucho's mind such a refusal could only come from one who felt himself very much above the company assembled.

There is one kind of a drink, however, which no one should refuse without first, as said in another case, getting the drop with a good gun on the other fellow, and that drink is *maté*. The drinking of *maté* among the gauchos, and among Argentines for that matter, is like the smoking of the calumet² among North American Indians. A small gourd is nearly filled with the powdered herb, and then boiling water is poured in to fill the cup. This done, a silver tube with a strainer at the bottom is poked into the decoction, and the drinker sucks the liquid up through the tube. Now, as soon as the tea has been sucked out, the tea maker fills the gourd once more with hot water and passes it to the next person in the group, and so on. The one gourd and the one tube must serve for all the company. It will try the stomach of the inexperienced traveler to take the tube into his mouth, wet from the lips of a drunken gaucho, but he had better do it with thanks and look happy. It is better to put a vile tube in the mouth than to receive a keen knife blade in the belly. And those are the horns of the dilemma often presented to the man who interviews gauchos in their native haunts. And of all things, it is the worst insult possible to wipe off a mouthpiece before taking it into the mouth.

Though ignorant of books, the gaucho is a keen observer of nature. He is a thinker, bright, too, if not a deep one. His terms and sayings ought to be gathered into a book for the instruction as well as the amusement of his fellow man. He calls the chase of the ostrich the wild mirth of the desert. The panther is "*the friend of man*," because it has been known to defend men from the attack of the more vicious jaguar, and because it often comes to purr about solitary travelers on the pampas, as a tame cat might do. The rattlesnake, a species not known in Patagonia, however, is the bell snake. The dragonfly is "*the son of the southwest gale*," because that wind, known as the *pampero*, often brings clouds of these

² Calumet — Peace pipe

insects. There is a huge and fierce spider on the hotter pampas that does not hesitate to attack man—a most repulsive and fearsome being. The gauchos have a weird song in which they tell of an army of these that came to attack a city, and although the men of the town fought bravely, all were routed and whelmed by the terrible foe.

The stranger in the region finds it difficult to get within shooting range of the beautiful black swan, but the gauchos, two or three together, get to the lee of a flock and then, charging on them with wild shouts and screams, scare the birds so that they are taken alive.

They say that horses know an Indian camp by its smell when many leagues down the wind from it, and are stampeded by the odor because in the old days the Indians were predatory. They say that pampa deer kill a venomous snake by running around it and exhaling an odor from the leg glands that eventually suffocates the reptile. Many people affect not to believe any of this class of gaucho stories. But ever since there were gauchos, they have been drying the stomachs of ostriches, and after powdering the stuff have been taking it for disorders of the stomach, while it is only within late years that pepsin has been on sale among civilized people as a remedy for dyspepsia.

The worst feature, all things considered, of the character of the gaucho is his cruelty to animals. Cattle herding or growing on the range is naturally and inevitably blunting to the finer feelings of the herders. In the States, as in the Argentine, it is made a cruel business by law. The law provides that range cattle must be branded, and branding is infamously cruel. From branding cattle to deliberately torturing them for the pleasure of seeing their sufferings is but a step. I have known an Oxford graduate to skin a fox alive—so great is the degrading influence of cowboy life. But the gaucho does not become degraded in this respect: he is born so. Of the gaucho's religion, a sentence will suffice. He would be insulted if one were to tell him he was not a Christian—meaning a Catholic—but he has never heard of the Sermon on the Mount, and is as incapable of appreciating its doctrines as a Yankee person who believes in the foreordained damnation of human souls.

Compared with North American cowboys, we find that there are more, a great percentage of rough riders among the gauchos. The gaucho's seat is more careless in appearance, but it is perfectly secure. They do not practice so many fancy

tricks, such as riding in quadrilles, but they can hang over the side of a horse to escape a bullet, or still hang on to the horse when dead. They know not the glories of a Stetson hat, with its band of gold braid, but solid silver saddle horns and stirrups and plaitings on saddle flaps are their delight. They have not that provident ambition which turns cowboys into bankers and statesmen, but they have a hearty contempt for a shallow pate, they hate a horse thief and lynch him with fierce glee, and they despise the man who kills with a bullet as one who is a coward and who misses the most ecstatic thrill of delight that comes to a man hunter—the delight of feeling the thrust of the knife that cleaves the victim's heart. They may be savages, but they are not animals. They laugh and sing, dance and flirt, gamble and drink, race and fight, work and endure, and so long as they do not lose their horse—so long, to use their own figurative expression, as they do not lose their feet, they never see a dull day and rarely feel a sorrow worth the mention.

Among the great variety of books in South America now accessible to readers of English, the majority refer in one way or another to the Argentine Republic, partly because it is a leading nation there, but chiefly because Buenos Ayres is, as its people say, "*the Athens of South America.*" Nearly all these books have been written by Englishmen, and it is to English writers that Americans commonly look with confidence for information about many other things, and in many other matters, than those of geography. Because of this tendency and trustfulness of American readers, I think I cannot do better, in concluding this sketch of Argentine gauchos, than to quote a sentence from a work entitled "Argentine, Patagonian and Chilian Sketches," by Mr. C. E. Akers. He says (page 115):

"The native gaucho, too, is not a very highly interesting individual."

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