

**THE GOLDEN RIVER;  
SPORT AND TRAVEL  
IN PARAGUAY**

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The Golden River; sport and travel in Paraguay by J. W. Hills & Ianthe Dunbar

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**J. W. HILLS & IANTHE DUNBAR**

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THE FALLS OF IGUAZU.

(Frontispiece.)

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

THE  
**GOLDEN RIVER**

SPORT AND TRAVEL  
IN PARAGUAY

BY

J. W. HILLS AND IANTHE DUNBAR



LONDON:  
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1922

## 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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