

**WANDERINGS IN  
PATAGONIA OR  
LIFE AMONG THE  
OSTRICH-HUNTERS**

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Wanderings in Patagonia or Life among the ostrich-hunters by Julius Beerbohm

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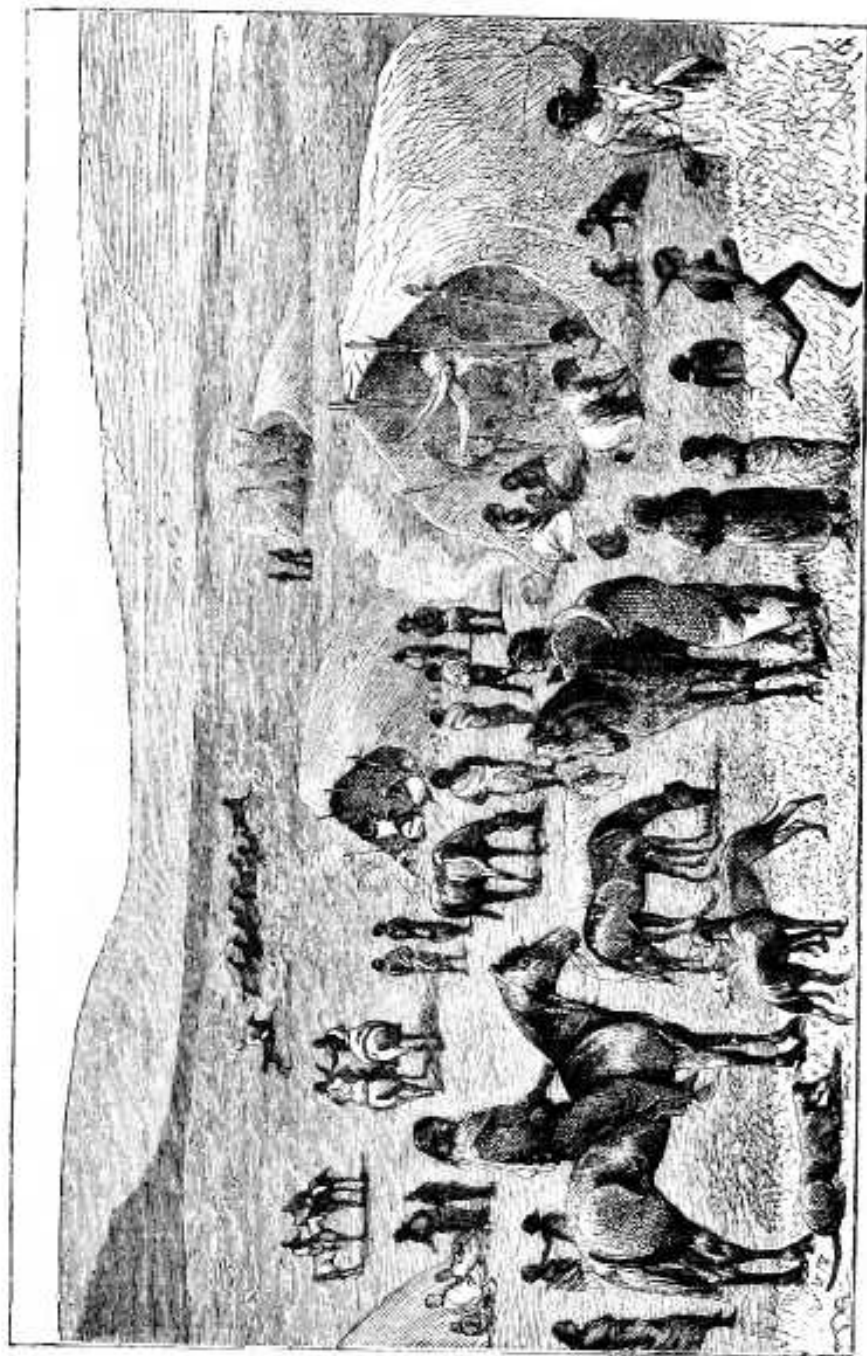
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**JULIUS BEERBOHM**

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AN INDIAN CARAVAN.

# WANDERINGS IN PATAGONIA

OR

*LIFE AMONG THE OSTRICH-HUNTERS*

BY JULIUS BEERBOHM



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# WANDERINGS IN PATAGONIA.

## CHAPTER I.

IN the month of August, 1877, I found myself on board ship, bound from Buenos Ayres for the coast of Patagonia, in company with a party of engineers, who were going to survey that portion of the country which lies between Port Desire and Santa Cruz.

After leaving the River Plate we encountered adverse winds and heavy weather, which kept us tossing about for three weeks, without making any material progress on our course. At last we got a fair wind, however, which soon brought us close to our destination, the port of St. Julian (lat.  $49^{\circ} 20' S.$ ); and one morning, together with my five o'clock coffee, the cabin-boy brought me the welcome news that land was in sight. I jumped out of bed and ran on deck, careless of the hail and rain which were falling in blinding showers, and of the wind which blew off the land, far colder and sharper than we had hitherto experienced. On looking to leeward, I



could at first see nothing but a thick bank of clouds ; but presently the horizon got clearer, and I descried a dark, lowering line of coast, of fierce and inhospitable aspect, rising abruptly from the sea to a considerable height.

I had not long to examine it, for a sudden shift of the wind shrouded the whole coast in mist, and it did not become visible again till the afternoon, when the weather cleared up, and the sun shone out brightly. The wind, however, slowly increased in violence ; by the time St. Julian came in sight we were plunging along under reefed topsails, and the captain began to think that we should have to stand off the port till the force of the storm had abated—a prospect which threw us all into dismay, as we had already been looking forward with vivid expectations to the pleasure of stretching our legs on *terra firma* the next morning—a luxury which those who have made a long sea voyage can fully appreciate.

While the captain was yet doubtful what course to take, the matter was summarily decided by the weather itself. The wind, which had hitherto been blowing from the north-east, shifted to the south-east, and redoubled its fury ; and rather than run the risk of standing off the port for the night, under a lee shore and with a strong current setting in to the land, the captain elected to face the lesser danger, and enter the port.

The necessary orders were accordingly given; a man was sent aloft to look out for banks or rocks, and all preparations were made for any emergency. An anxious time ensued for all on board, as we steered slowly in under the northern headland of St. Julian, menaced on either side by steep and rugged cliffs, falling vertically down to the water's edge; the sea dashing at their base with an angry roar, and hurling the white spray almost to their very summits. The gale howled through the rigging, and a thousand sea-birds, startled at such an unusual apparition, circled round the ship, white and silent, seeming to eye us with an unpleasant curiosity.

Suddenly we heard a shout, "Breakers ahead!" and everyone turned pale and looked anxiously forward. Right in front of us, and forming a belt across the entrance of the port, stretched a line of breakers, boiling and foaming like a cauldron; while to the left a long ledge of black, jagged rocks pierced through the waters, promising certain destruction, should we drift upon them. For a moment the captain was irresolute; but it was too late to go back; in any attempt to put the ship round we should have gone on the rocks, and there was, therefore, no alternative but to continue our course and dash through the breakers, leaving the rest to fate. On we went, with beating hearts and strained nerves, as the threatening roar of the foaming rollers became louder and louder. In another second we were in their

midst, and everyone held his breath in suspense. Suddenly there was a shock; the ship quivered, and I was thrown violently on my face. By the time I got to my feet again, all danger was over. We had crossed the harbour bar, and were now sailing slowly up the bay, in comparatively smooth water, and congratulating ourselves on our escape from what had looked a most serious peril. The wind, too, had lulled, and by the time we let go the anchor all was still and calm. The sun was just setting; one by one the gulls, albatrosses, and other sea-birds, which had hitherto been continuously sweeping round the ship, disappeared; and not a sound was heard from either side of the broad bay.

On arriving in port, after a long sea voyage, the sudden change of scene and associations, the bustle and the noise of commercial activity—the steamers, lighters, and other small craft, plying from shore to shore; the ships moored alongside the wharves, taking in or discharging cargo, the busy hum arising from the distant town, the sight of new faces, and the sound of strange voices—all combine to excite and bewilder one, contrasting forcibly with the dull, quiet, and drowsy sameness of the life one has just been leading during several weeks of dreary navigation.

But none of these accustomed sights and sounds gladdened our hearts in the desert harbour where we had