THE CAPITAL OF PARAGUAY.

Strange Features of Life and Business in One of the Queerest Cities of South America.

How Paraguay Looks—Its Cities, Villages and Towns—Its Telephone Company, Which Pays 24 Per Cent Dividends and Charges $2 a Month—A Look at the "Belle Gitts"—Banks Which Pay Well—A Financial Institution Run by Farmers—The Government Colonies—A Naughty Settlement Named After President Hayes and Some Wicked "Golden Boiers" From Australia.

(Copyrighted, 1898, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

ASUNCION, Paraguay, Jan. 4, 1899.—Come with me this morning and have a look at the capital of Paraguay. We are in the very heart of the South American continent. It is hot summer. Every one is going about in cotton clothes, and at dinner there seems to be only a sheet of brown paper between us and hades. The children go to school very early and every one is resting or dozing at noon. The mornings and evenings, however, are pleasant and there are some fine street cars which will take us to all parts of the city.

ASUNCION IS A DAISY.

But first let me say a few words about this town of Asuncion. She is the queerest municipal maiden on the South American continent. She is the social, political and industrial mistress of the land of Paraguayan. The government buildings, the cottages, the banks and chief business houses, and still she is so small that she might be hypothetically injected into the check of Chicago and she would hardly raise a pimple on that rich lady's face.

Asuncion has only about 30,000 people. Her buildings are almost all small. They are chiefly one-story houses, and outside the government structures there are not two hundred more than thirty feet high. The Paraguayan who lives in a two-story house strutts about like a King, and the owner of a three-story block is a nabob.

Still this maiden Asuncion is wonderfully beautiful. Mother Nature has clothed her in the brightest of dresses, in her carmine bougas and orange groves. Great palm trees throw their shadows upon her and the azurean waters of her mighty rivers are always lapping her feet. She is seated on the high east bank of the Paraguay river, just opposite the mouth of the whirling Pilcomayo, which has flowed down from the Bolivian Andes 1,500 miles to reach her. She is just in the center of the west border of Paraguay proper, and is a good position in command of the whole country of which she is the capital.

A BIRDS-EYE VIEW OF PARAGUAY.

I get my best idea of Paraguay by thinking of Illinois. It lies on the South American continent in much the same place that Illinois does in North America, and it is in the forks of two rivers, just like Illinois. Along its west side is the great Paraguay river, which corresponds to the Mississippi, and on its south and southeast the Paraná, corresponding to the Ohio. Both the Paraguay and the Paraná are navigable for large river steamers, giving a trend whereby its trade goes down the Atlantic similar to that of the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

Paraguay is just about as big as Illinois. It is 375 miles long and about 200 miles wide, and it includes all the land lying east of the Paraguay river. There is a vast wilderness to the west of the stream called the Chaco. This is the wild west of Paraguay. It is inhabited by Indians and wild animals and has good forests and pastures, but as yet is not much occupied.

Paraguay proper is not unlike Illinois in character. It has excellent soil and great pastures. The face of the country is rolling. In some places there are low mountains which furnish numerous streams, so that you can hardly force off a farm without including good water.

THE PEOPLE OF PARAGUAY.

It is in Paraguay proper that the greater part of the people of Paraguay live. The country has not more than ten hundred thousand souls, and as I have said, a large majority of these people are women. The Paraguayans are the offsprings of the Indian nations united to some of the best Spanish element that settled South America. The city of Asuncion established on the continent was the town Asuncion. It was built twenty years before John Smith landed at Jamestown and the Spanish-Indian babies born then were gray haired before Boston sprang into being.

Paraguay was for years the leader of wealth, civilization and culture of this part of the world, and it was not until the close of our civil war that it fell out of the race. It then had a fight with its neighboring countries which lasted five years and killed off almost all the men. This ruined the country. A Spanish saying goes that it was double-ended and the bulk of European immigration since then has gone to the Argentine Uruguay and Brazil. There are far fewer foreigners in Paraguay. I have an estimate from the census of South America that there are now here 5,000 Argentines, 1,000 Italians, 600 Brazilians and 500 Germans, not counting the French, Swiss, Americans and English.

In addition to these and the 600,000 or so whites and of the mixed breed, there are about 120,000 pure Indians. There is much more Indian blood in the whites than it is hard to tell, where the red man's blood ends and that of the white man begins. You see a shade of gingerbread to the complexion of most of the people and the Mercedes Quintanas of the city of the Guarani Defiance. It is a beautiful language, more soft and melodious than even the Spanish style, and is used by everyone outside the office.

NO LARGE TOWNS.

I have said that Asuncion has 30,000 population. The average Paraguayan considers this a big town. In my travels I have gone through some of the best settled parts of Paraguay, and I am astonished at the extent of the people. There are a number of villages of some very small cities. The cities are much smaller than the people would lead you to think. The Statesman's Year Book mentions a number of towns too in the thousands, but I believe I have more not one-third the number claimed in the books. I count none than 10 Villa Rica. It is in the interior, be about 90 miles east of Asuncion. It is not about on having 12,000, but I assume that it cannot number 4,000 souls. Villa Concepcion, which is 250 miles north of Asuncion on the Paraguay river, has certainly not 10,000 people, and Villa Encarnacion, the biggest town of South Paraguay, is not nearly so large. The small towns are composed of thatched huts from 15 to 25 feet square, and the houses in Asuncion are of two streets of one-story brick dwellings, the walls of which are covered with stucco and which are roofed with tiles. Some have walls of stone and are roofed with zinc barks. There are often here parts or lots which are none outside of Asuncion have several streets or are modern improvements. Even the streets are lighted by coal oil, and but few of the people have ever heard of a sewer. The sanitary arrangements of many of its houses are filthy, those of the chief hotel, for instance, being dirty and unhealthy to an extreme.

CITY OF BRIGHT COLORS.

Although Asuncion is older than any city of North America, it appears decidedly young and fresh. Its streets run one another at right angles, and there no sleigh runners in the winter that every good rain washes the streets. We have sixty inches of rain here every month, and it does not rain. It pours. Only a few of the streets are paved. The most of them are of red sand, giving the city a pink foundation.

Let us walk the houses. They are built close to the sidewalks to solid blocks, and some of the stores walk with here or there a door or an iron-barred window in the side of the house. You can tell the different houses by the colors. Some are painted yellow, others sky blue, others pink, blanched and others of all the tints of yellow and green. We are now going towards the post-office. It is a fine building. On our way we pass a market house painted some pink, and a little further on there is a building of the color of rich Jersey cream. Even the public buildings are painted. The president's palace has a yellow color, and the house of congress are of a delicate blue, which the official newspaper is printed in a monstrous blue, which is of Indian red.

A TOWN OF NEWSPAPERS, TELEGRAPHS AND SCHOOLS.

It seems funny to think of newspapers in Paraguay. But there are newspapers everywhere making more dailies than we have. The papers are printed in English and they sell for five cents a copy, or about two cents of our money. They are folios of the old blanket sheet shape, containing little news, but big advertisements. Here is one that has telegraphic dispatches, including cables from Washington and Buenos Aires. The telegraph line connecting it with Buenos Aires, from which dispatches can be sent to all parts of the world. There are also one or two wires to the interior of the country, and there are patronized to such an extent that 8,000 messages were received last year.

Asuncion has telephones. They are owned by a stock company, which pays dividends of 24 per cent every year, notwithstanding that the telephone rates are lower than any in the United States. The company charges business houses $2 per month and for telephones in residences the monthly charge is only $1.50 in gold.

We can visit the central station. It is an interesting sight. The "belle girls" of Paraguay have even sweeter voices than our belle girls. The "belle girls" and some of them are quite pretty. Most of them are in their bare feet, and their bare arms shine out as white as the orange blossoms that some of the girls wear in their hair. The girls are strange to their hair. The girls are strange to their hair back of the office, so that the flowers are readily at hand. The girls are quick and bright, making the connections by putting pegs in and out of a wall of perforated holes, thereby keeping track of the various customers. I ask the manager some questions as to the salaries and am told that each girl receives about $6 gold a month, or $1.50 a week.

STREET CARS AND RAILROADS.

We can take a street car and go out. It is an interesting sight. The "belle girls" of Paraguay have even sweeter voices than our belle girls. The "belle girls" and some of them are quite pretty. Most of them are in their bare feet, and their bare arms shine out as white as the orange blossoms that some of the girls wear in