

The entrance to the mountain pass, a narrow valley through which the river dashes. Is quite close to the town of Los Andes. The roar of the muddy, coffee colored water, together with the thunder produced by the continual crashing together of the big round stones it hurks along its bed, were enough to prevent all connected conversation. At first, for several miles, the road is skirted by small farms, the dwelling-houses of which are set close to the path, and my guide annoyed me considerably by stopping to talk to every one he saw, keeping me waiting, and then generally coming up with some piece of bad news about the pass. As we were just leaving the last farm, a woman told us that very morning a black portmanteau had come floating down the river, and she feared its owner had met with a serious accident.

A little later we overtook the post-boy on his way back over the mountains, after arriving only that morning at Los Andes from the Argentine Republic. On his way he had found the mountain streams next to impassable, and his journey from Mendoza to Los Andes had taken seven days instead of the usual five. He rode a mule, and led another carrying the mails. We resolved to go on with him, as he had just crossed and could give us the latest tips as to the best way over the dangerous places.

After riding in the hot sun for more than two hours along the river, we came to a small roadside inn with the promising sign-board, "Hotel Bismarck; proprietor, Herr von Kuesebuck." That nobleman was not at home, but his wife gave us some beer, and told us that she had heard of two Germans or Englishmen being drowned while attempting to cross the river the day before. She also gave us a clue to the floating portmanteau; for a mule, bearing two, had made a rush into the river close to her house, and had been speedily capsized and carried off by the current, all efforts to save it being in vain.

Such discouraging reports made us a little nervous, but I was determined not to delay my journey, and I hurried on my little caravan, for it was growing dark, and we were to put up for the night at a small inn near the Chilean custom-house, a few miles higher up the valley. We duly reached the place, unloaded our animals, and sent them into a small field. I was provided with a room, and a bed which looked anything but inviting. I disinfected it and changed the dirty blankets for my own rugs. My men slept on the verandah. The night was very warm, and, after cooking myself a little supper on my spirit lamp, I turned in, but could not sleep, for, in spite of leaving the two doors open—windows there were none—the air was stifling.

At break of day we were all in motion; the mules were caught and packed; I made a cup of cocoa, and at 5 a. m. we were again under way. But shortly afterwards we were delayed at the custom house till one of the officials could be induced to come out to receive a small sum for

bridge-money, for at that point we had to cross the river.

We passed through a lovely valley bounded by bold high mountains on either side, with a rushing stream brawling below. We climbed up and up; sometimes on a good broad path, but more often creeping up the hillside on a rough sheep path full of loose stones. The vegetation was very luxuriant; flowers that would have graced any highly cultivated garden bloomed on all sides. Towards 10 a. m. we reached a place where the mountains closed in, leaving only a chasm about thirty feet wide for the river to pass through, and we were obliged to creep along high above it. This chasm goes by the name of the Soldier's Leap, and the legend runs that during the War of Independence a soldier, being pursued, leaped across the river at that spot—a feat which seems highly improbable.

Each turn of the valley brought to view a lovely scene—a new picture; the surrounding mountains, bare and rocky near their summits, clothed with grass and shrubs lower down, presenting the greatest variety of fantastic forms.

Towards noon I called a halt, and we cooked our breakfast near a clear mountain brook. On the opposite side of the river the engineers of the new Trans-Andean Railway, which is to cross the Cordillera at this point and join the Atlantic with the Pacific, had erected a camp of tents, and were occupied in taking measurements. The postboy had dropped behind, and we left him to his fate, not wishing to lose time by waiting for him.

We continued our route along the river, and presently the surrounding mountains became tipped with snow, each ravine adding its little stream to feed the river. Towards afternoon we reached the Old Guard-House, where many travelers halt for the night; but, as it is wise to get as near as possible to the summit of the Cordillera, so as to cross it early in the morning, before the sunshine softens the snow, or the wind begins to blow, we pushed steadily forward. The vegetation now became more scanty; the reams, increased in volume, issuing from glaciers on either side of the valley, and we saw some beautiful waterfalls several hundred feet high. At about 3 p. m. we reached the first snow-field, from under which ran a stream of muddy water. The path grew more and more rugged and stony, greatly fatiguing our animals. At a turn in the path we fell in with two rather ragged young men, who told us they were crossing the Cordillera on foot, but could not pass the next stream, it being both broad and rapid. One of them was an Italian sailor, the other a Chilean; so, as we had so many spare animals, we offered them a lift across the stream, at which we presently arrived. It was our first serious obstacle—a broad glacier-stream rushing over big boulders. At first sight it seemed impassable; but Ismael ventured in, and with some difficulty got his mule across. Then Zacharias insisted on putting a lasso around my

waist and another around my mule's neck, so as to pull us out should my animal be carried away. The lasso attached to the mule was pulled by Ismael at the opposite side of the stream, whilst his father kept hold of the one around my waist, and I was soon safely across. The same operation was gone through with the pack-mule, the guide and our friends the two tramps, who lent a helping hand. Very soon after another stream made its appearance, but we crossed it without assistance. Then we came to the largest and most rapid glacier-stream; we had yet met with. Across it was a kind of bridge, consisting of two poles laid side by side. We fastened a lasso to a tree, making it serve as a railing, and crossed on foot over the wild torrent. The men carried the saddles and baggage over, and when all were safely landed, the mules were fastened one by one to a long lasso and, entering the stream, managed to maintain their footing by our keeping a steady pull on the rope from the other side. Two were nearly drifted away, and it needed our combined strength to get them through. Shortly before we had reached it, when the melting snow had not yet increased the bulk of this stream, a young man had fallen in; but luckily he had a rope around him and was saved, though his mule was carried away and drowned. Our mules were resaddled, and all hands received a good stiff glass of brandy in reward for their exertions and to keep out the cold, for the wind was now blowing keenly. We then proceeded and presently arrived at the last turn of the valley, and beheld the entrance to the highest pass in the Cordillera and the glacier from which spouted forth the principal river, which we had been following up all day. On its opposite side we perceived a flat-roofed hut and an enclosure for the animals well grown with grass. Here we were to spend the night.

We safely crossed the river, which, so near its birth, is not very broad, and turned our animals loose. I then engaged a room and cooked my dinner. Near by were encamped some people who had crossed from the Argentine side; among them a poor woman, half dead with fatigue and fright, having endured great hardships in crossing the summit. Later on a carload of about ten passengers arrived, including a Spanish lady and a sickly boy, to whom I yielded my room, the only one I had, for they needed rest and shelter far more than I did. It was bitterly cold, and I took possession of a wooden bench with nothing but a roof of branches overhead. The men encamped around log-fires, but the smoke was so hurtful to my eyes that I could not avail myself of the warmth; still I managed to get a few snatches of sleep. At midnight the moon just rose over the peak of the mountain, and at 1 a. m. I left my hard couch and called my men to prepare for starting. All was ready by 2:30. I drank a cup of yerba-mate, a kind of tea, which one sucks through a metal tube quite hot, and which has a very invigorating effect on the nerves.