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Francis Bond Head
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Rough Notes Taken During Some Rapid Journeys Across the Pampas and Among the Andes

Sir Francis Bond Head (1793–1875) known as 'Galloping Head', was a soldier who later served as lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, but who was dismissed from his post when rebellion broke out there in 1837. Before this, he had tried unsuccessfully to set up a mining company in Argentina. It is from this period of his life that the characteristically entitled Rough Notes Taken During Some Rapid Journeys Across the Pampas and Among the Andes (published in 1826) were written, in a headlong and jocular style which belies the actual hardships of his journey. Part of the interest of the account today lies in the fact that Charles Darwin had read it and refers to it frequently and admiringly in his letters home as he traversed the same country six years later: 'Do you know Head's book? it gives an excellent account of the manners of this country.'

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ROUGH NOTES

TAKEN DURING

SOME RAPID JOURNEYS

ACROSS

THE PAMPAS

AND AMONG

THE ANDES.

BY CAPTAIN F. B. HEAD.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

MDCCCXXVI.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE sudden rise and fall, the unexpected appearance and disappearance, of so many Mining Companies, is a subject which must necessarily occupy a few lines in the future history of our country; and when the exultation of those who have gained, and the disappointment of those who have lost, are alike forgotten, the Historian who calmly relates the momentary existence of these Companies, will only inquire into the general causes of their formation, and the general causes of their failure.

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That a commercial error has been committed, no one can deny; and it must also be admitted, that this error was not confined to a few individuals, or to any association of individuals, but like a contagious disease it pervaded all classes of society; and that among the lists of Shareholders in these speculations, were to be found the names of people of the first rank, character, and education in the country.

Experience has at last been purchased at a very great loss, and by it we now learn, that both the formation of these Companies, and their failure, have proceeded from one cause—our Ignorance of the country which was to be the field of the speculation. But although this must be confessed, yet let it also be remembered, that the error was accompanied by all the noble characteristics which distinguish our country.

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Had we known the nature of the different countries, it would have been deemed imprudent to have forwarded to them expensive machinery, to have given liberal salaries to every individual connected with the speculation, to have invited the Natives to share the profits, to have intrusted the Capital to solitary individuals, &c. Still had the Foundation been good, the Building was nobly planned, and it was undeniably the act and the invention of a country teeming with energy, enterprise, liberality, unsuspecting confidence, and capital.

Without lamenting over losses which are now irrecoverable, it is only necessary to keep in mind that the *Cause* which produced them still exists, and that we are still in ignorance of the countries in which our money lies buried. Many of the individuals who had charge of the different Com-

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panies, had undoubtedly opportunities of making important observations, and from them valuable data will probably be obtained.

I myself had the sole management of one of these Companies; but, from particular circumstances, it will be proper to show that, excepting for my Reports, I had little time or opportunity to make any memoranda beyond those of the most trifling description of personal narrative.

I was on duty at Edinburgh, in the corps of Engineers, when it was proposed to me to take charge of an Association, the object of which was to work the Gold and Silver Mines of the Provinces of Rio de la Plata; and, accordingly, at a very few days' notice, I sailed from Falmouth, and landed at Buenos Aires about a week after the Cornish Miners had arrived there.

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Accompanied by two highly respectable Captains of the Cornish Mines, a French Assayer, who had been brought up by the celebrated Vauquelin, a Surveyor, and three miners, I proceeded across the great plains of the Pampas to the Gold Mines of San Luis, and from thence to the Silver Mines of Uspallata which are beyond Mendoza, about a thousand miles from Buenos Aires.

I then left my party at Mendoza, and from the Mines I rode back again to Buenos Aires by myself, performing the distance in eight days. I there unexpectedly received letters which made it necessary for me to go immediately to Chili, and I accordingly again crossed the Pampas, and, joining my party at Mendoza, we went over the Andes to Santiago, and from thence, without any de-

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lay, we went together in different directions about twelve hundred miles, to inspect gold and silver mines; and on the night that I concluded my report on the last mine, we again set off to recross the Cordillera, and leaving my party in the plains, I rode across the Pampas to Buenos Aires, and as soon as I arrived there I dismissed a proportion of the miners, and returned with the rest to England.

The sole object of my journeys was to inspect certain mines. We went to the bottom of them all, and, assisted by the individuals who accompanied me, I made, to the best of my ability, a circumstantial report on each. As the miners were remaining idle and without employment at Buenos Aires, it was highly desirable that I should go from place to place as rapidly as possible,

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and for upwards of six thousand miles I can truly declare that I was riding against Time.

The fatigue of such long journeys, exposed to the burning sun of summer, was very great, and particularly in Chili, because, in visiting mines in the Andes, we were subjected to such sudden changes of climate, that we were occasionally overpowered by the sun in the morning, while at night we had to sleep upon one hundred and twenty feet of snow; for almost the whole time we slept out on the ground, chiefly subsisting upon beef and water.

The reports which I collected, and the result of the communications which I officially had with the Ministers, Governors, and other individuals concerning the mines, I do not feel inclined to publish; because as the mines which I visited almost all belong to

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private individuals, and are now for sale, it might be considered a violation of the attentions which I often received, to state unnecessarily the dimensions, contents, or the assay of their lodes, although the climate and the general features of the country are, of course, public property.

During my journeys I kept no regular journal, for the country I visited was either a boundless plain, or desert mountains; but I occasionally made a few rough notes, describing anything which interested or amused me.

These notes were written under great variety of circumstances, sometimes when I was tired, sometimes when I was refreshed, sometimes with a bottle of wine before me, and sometimes with a cow's-horn filled with dirty brackish water, and a few were written on board the packet.

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They were only made to amuse my mind under a weight of responsibility to which it had never been accustomed, and therefore they are necessarily in that incoherent, unconnected state which makes them, I am fully aware, but little suited to meet the critical eye of the public; still as it has been my misfortune to see the failure of an English Association—to witness the loss it has sustained—and for a few moments at Buenos Aires and Monte Video to stand upon spots where we have lost what no money can repay us; as I feel persuaded that these failures have proceeded from our ignorance of the country, I have resolved upon throwing before the public the few memoranda I possess, and although I am conscious that they are of too trifling a nature to throw much light upon the subject, yet they may, perhaps, assist in making the "darkness

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visible," and I trust that the rough, unpolished state in which they appear will at least be a proof that I have no other object.

LOWER GROSVENOR-STREET,
September 1, 1826.

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