

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)**T R A V E L S,***&c. &c. &c.***CHAPTER I.**

*Voyage to Cadiz and thence to the Rio de la Plata.
Adventures at Monte Video.—Character of the
Inhabitants. — Trade. — Climate. — Geological
Remarks.—Recent Changes.—Monte Video un-
der the Portuguese.—Agriculture and Trade at
the Rio de la Plata.*

IN the year 1804, I was induced to undertake a voyage of commercial experiment, on a limited scale, to the Rio de la Plata. On my arrival at Monte Video, the ship and cargo were seized; I was thrown into prison, and afterwards sent into the interior, where I was detained until the taking of that place by the British troops under Sir Samuel Auchmuty. I afterwards obtained leave to accompany the army under General White-locke, which was sent against Buenos Ayres, and I rendered such services to the expedition, as my two years' residence in the country enabled me to perform. At the termination of that expedition, I went to Rio de Janeiro. A letter of in-

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate, Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

Introduction to the Viceroy of Brazil, which was given me by the Portuguese Minister at London, gained me the notice and protection of his brother, the Condé de Linhares, who had then just arrived with the rest of the Court, and who recommended me to the Prince Regent, as a person devoted to mineralogical pursuits, and desirous of exploring the ample field for investigation which his rich and extensive territories presented. His Royal Highness was graciously pleased to further my views, not only by granting me letters to the public functionaries of the various places I wished to visit, but by ordering an escort of soldiers, and every other necessary provision for performing the journey. I had the more reason to be grateful for this munificent patronage, because I knew that a decree existed, prohibiting all foreigners from travelling in the interior of Brazil, and that no other Englishman had ever begun such an undertaking with those indispensable requisites to its success, the permission and sanction of the Government.

Observations, made, in the course of these Travels, on the country and its inhabitants, constitute the main part of the volume now offered to the public. Whatever be their faults or their merits, they relate to a subject at present extremely interesting, both in a political and a commercial point of view; they profess to develop the physical resources of a colony, which, through recent changes, is likely to become an empire; and in

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

3

part, to portray the character of a nation which is now the most ancient, and has ever been the most faithful, ally of Great Britain.

As the recital of a voyage is proverbially tedious and superfluous, I shall forbear to trouble the reader with any detail of mine, and shall merely state, that, after encountering many difficulties at Cadiz, in consequence of the rupture with Spain, I sailed for the Plata, and having narrowly escaped shipwreck from a tremendous storm near the mouth of that river, entered the harbour of Monte Video.

The hardships I experienced in reaching this ill-fated port, were a fit prelude to the misfortunes that awaited me there. We were bound for Buenos Ayres, but my captain, who in London and at Cadiz had assured me that he had the experience of a pilot in the Rio de la Plata, proved totally ignorant of its navigation, and urged this circumstance as his reason for putting into Monte Video. Happy should I have been, if this had been the only instance of his ignorance; he gave an ill-judged and blundering report of me to the governor, and the sailors affirmed that I was an Englishman, declaring at the same time that we had passed an English squadron under Spanish colors. This statement was enough to whet the avarice of the governor, who, notwithstanding I had served the colony, in bringing a cargo which was then much wanted, and every article of which had paid legal duty in Cadiz, ordered me to be thrown

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

into prison. I was placed in close confinement on board a wretched sloop of war; and though my health was much impaired in consequence of exertion during the voyage, I was denied every comfort, except such indulgences, as the officers, who lived on shore, could at times clandestinely allow. Unprovided with letters of recommendation to any person in the town, and destitute of the means of making myself known, I had the mortification to see the property I had brought with me seized, and my papers taken away to be searched and examined. I was enjoined to make declarations, and to give evidence against myself, to men whose sole wish was to find a pretext for criminating me. After three or four examinations, it was found that I had sailed from Cadiz with a cargo of goods, marked, manifested, and duly registered, as Spanish; nor could any circumstance be discovered as a ground of accusation against me, but the strong suspicion that I was an Englishman, and on that account could not be too harshly treated. I had no lenity to expect from the governor, nor indeed from any of his advisers, who were, for the most part, men of the lowest order, refugees from Old Spain in consequence of criminal prosecutions. The rest of his associates were the captains and officers of two Spanish privateers, all Frenchmen, whose natural prejudices, no doubt, contributed to foment his antipathy against me. My sole reliance was on the consignee of the cargo, who at length arrived

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate, Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

5

from Buenos Ayres ; but, instead of clearing up the affair, he joined my persecutors, knowing that if he gave security he should have the cargo delivered to him. This favorable opportunity he failed not to embrace ; he sold the property, and withheld the proceeds, under the pretext, that he could not pay them over to me while I remained a prisoner. This conduct to one who had depended on him for support, and who relied on his continually delusive promises of assistance, proved him to be one of those mean and spiritless beings whose station in society is mid-way between the simpleton and the knave.

My confinement would probably have been long, but for the good services of a Limenian, who attended me during my illness in Cadiz, and who had come over in the vessel with me. He was the only person I was permitted to see ; and he interested himself so much in my behalf, that an old gentlewoman, with whom he had formed an acquaintance, determined, on hearing my story, to procure my liberation, and never rested until she had procured two bondsmen to answer for my appearance when called for.

The treatment I experienced, while in prison, was one of the many instances of oppression which disgraced the administration of the governor, Pasqual Ruiz Huidobro. It is well known that his political conduct was entirely subservient to the interests of the French, and that he lost no opportunity of evincing his attachment to their cause.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

As a further proof of this, I may state, that he caused all the captured English seamen to be confined in the prison, and, although its spacious court was doubly grated and guarded, he debarred them the use of it, and ordered them to be shut up, night and day, in a small room, the door of which was never opened except when victuals were given them. Aware of his severity, and knowing that I was the only prisoner at large, I was very circumspect, and strove to guard my conduct and discourse against artful misconstruction; but I had the misfortune to incur his displeasure at a moment when I least suspected it, by a very trivial, and certainly unintentional offence. Some written papers had been stuck up in various parts of the town, by order of Government, inviting foreign seamen to enter the service. Returning home at midnight from a visit, I observed one of these placards; the rain, which was pouring very fast, had partly detached it from the wall, and it was blown to and fro by the wind. Curious to examine the contents of a paper that had attracted the attention of many persons in the course of the day, I took it down and carried it home with me; this was observed by an old Spaniard of the name of Dias, who gloried much in having it in his power to injure me, though a perfect stranger to him, and unconscious of having done any thing to excite his malice. At the instance of this man an order was issued by the governor for my

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

7

arrest ; I was roused from my bed by the officers, and again hurried to prison. What charges were brought against me I could learn only by report ; they were vague and indefinite, and no opportunity of answering them was allowed me. After a close confinement of six weeks, during which period my case was laid before the Viceroy of Buenos Ayres, I was again suffered to be at large, on payment of a fee of three hundred dollars. It was to the humane exertions of my advocate, seconded by those of the Limenian and the lady before-mentioned, that I owed this mitigation of my captivity, and I gratefully acknowledge that they made every provision in their power to render my situation comfortable.

During my stay at Monte Video another adventure befel me, which had well nigh cost me my life ; I am induced to relate it, by reason of the insight it gives into the character of a certain class of the people. I had gone on a shooting excursion to the promontory opposite Monte Video, with my much-valued friend Captain Collet, owner of two or three large American ships, and M. Godefroy, a merchant, resident in the town. After some hours' sport we met a party of four Spaniards, among whom were Mr. Ortiga, the consignee of Captain Collet, and a person called Manuel d'Iago. Our friend M. Godefroy had some conversation with them at a short distance from us, and on his return gave us to understand, that D'Iago had said it would not cost him above five

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

hundred dollars to send a pair of bullets through me, and that had I been alone he would not have scrupled to do it. For this blood-thirsty insinuation I was at a loss to conjecture any motive, nor knew I the man, except by report, which designated him as a captain of militia, extremely rigorous in his treatment of the unfortunate English, whenever his turn to mount guard at the prison subjected them to his authority.

We pursued our diversion; he and his party meanwhile arrived at the Signal-house, about three miles above us, where they took refreshment. Some space of time afterward we observed a horse-soldier ride down towards us, who on approaching eyed us with a look of great suspicion. I had some little talk with him, having frequently seen him there before. He returned directly to the Guard-house, and an hour afterwards five *blandengues*, or horse-soldiers, sallied from the place at full speed, and, surrounding us, demanded our arms at the peril of our lives. Each of us obeyed, by surrendering his fowling-piece, M Godfroy at the same time enquiring the cause of this extraordinary treatment; but they ordered him to be silent, and to march on along with us, or they would tie him on horse-back. We were conducted to the Guard-house, and delivered (the officer being absent) to the corporal on guard, a fiery old Spaniard, who ordered us into an inner room, and placed two centinels at the door. The fellow was so stifled by passion,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

9

that we could not get an answer from him; at every moment he was drawing a long sabre which hung at his side, and venting his fury in the most abusive language. After a full half-hour of expostulation on our part, and menace on his, M. Godefroy obtained a hearing from him, and, declaring he was a merchant, married and actually settled in Monte Video, begged to know by what authority and under what pretext he was imprisoned. The corporal, on learning this, sent a soldier to the officer on guard, and while waiting his return, related that D'Iago had described us as Englishmen belonging to a privateer, who had landed with an intention to blow up the powder-magazines, kill bullocks, and plunder the natives. It was evident from his manner that he was very willing to believe this account, and that by treating us with severity he hoped to display his zeal for the service, and obtain promotion. M. Godefroy's testimony being at length attended to, another soldier was dispatched to D'Iago's party, who were not yet embarked, with notice that one of us affirmed himself to be a resident in Monte Video. This they did not contradict, but persisted in their accusations of the rest of our party; Mr. Ortiga denied any knowledge of Captain Collet, probably imagining that, in case of our conviction, he should benefit by the cargoes which the latter had consigned to him; and for me, whom they denounced as a spy, no punishment in their opinion could be too ignominious. On the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05278-8 - Travels in the Interior of Brazil with Notices on its Climate,
Agriculture, Commerce, Population, Mines, Manners, and Customs

John Mawe

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 ADVENTURES AT MONTE VIDEO.

return of the soldier, the corporal thought proper to release M. Godefroy, who took our boat to cross the port to Monte Video, with the intention of procuring an order for our liberation; but they had scarcely sailed, when a gust of wind arose, and as he and two boys he had with him could not manage the sails, they were nearly overset, and after considerable danger were picked up by a ship in the road. Meanwhile Captain Collet and I remained in strict custody, and at every syllable of complaint we uttered, the corporal brandished his sabre over our heads, roared out for the guard, and vociferated the most opprobrious language against the English. Thus threatened at every moment with assassination, we withdrew into a corner of the room, and quietly waited until the officer on guard arrived, when we were conducted in great form, between two men with drawn swords, into the room where he sat to receive us. Nothing could exceed my joyful surprise at recognizing in the officer an excellent and worthy friend, whom I had often visited at his farm, and who had given me repeated proofs of his liberal disposition and intelligent mind. His surprise exceeded mine; for instead of plunderers or spies, such as report had described us, he found an American merchant and a prisoner at large under bail. He was deeply grieved and ashamed at the treatment we had met with, liberated us immediately, mounted us on his own horses, and appointed a trusty person to attend