

Hard times

This is an extract from the journal of Jane Robson, a Scottish immigrant who settled in Cañuelas and then in the Chascomús area, in the province of Buenos Aires, in 1825.

.. One day my mother and Mr. W. went to town... to bring my eldest sister home from school (the only means of getting from place to place was on horseback). Well, on the return journey they had a most alarming and exciting experience. All went well until within two or three leagues from home. They were cantering along, my mother with my sister on behind her, when suddenly three horrible rough looking men came towards them threatening and muttering 'Let us kill them first', evidently intending to rob them. It occurred to my mother that it would be best not to appear at all alarmed, not an easy thing to do, for she felt very frightened and with reason too. Mother turned and looked round as though she was expecting some companions, and spoke as if one was coming along. The men evidently thought that probably this one might have money, so they would get what they could from him and then settle with Mother and her companion, for they galloped off. Mother said, 'Now, Mr. W., our only chance is to hide in the *cardos*, but he said, 'My horse will never face them'. Mother said, 'Then I will go first'. She was on a very fiery animal, so turning the horse and facing him towards the thistles she gave him some hard cuts with her whip. The horse made a tremendous jump and sprang right into the midst of the thistles. In her excitement, mother had forgotten my sister, who was seated behind her, and the poor little girl fell off. As the way was somewhat cleared now and Mother's horse had given the lead, Mr. W.'s animal, after some persuasion, followed and they pushed their way a little distance, the horses and riders getting terribly scratched and torn. Very soon they heard the galloping of horses. It was their would-be murderer returning. At this moment, Mother remembered my sister and exclaimed, 'Of, My God, my child.' Finding her gone she knew she must have fallen where her horse made this big jump, and not hearing her call she imagined she must have been severely hurt or killed. Her feelings were indescribable, that her poor little child was left to the tender mercy of those ruffians. Her first impulse was to rush back, never mind the consequences to herself, when she heard Mr.W. say in a low tone, 'I have the child'. He had picked her up. She was unconscious for a time, as much from fright as the fall, but she soon recovered. Well, they remained scarcely breathing for fear they might be found, when they knew their lives would not be worth a moment's purchase. They could hear the men as they galloped past, vowing vengeance, and no doubt having been baulked and deceived into thinking there was someone they could have stolen money from, and finding their other pray also gone, they were in a fearful fury and rushed ob full speed hoping to overtake them. Mother waited for some time, and then they went on through the *cardos*, picking places as best they could, hoping to find a way out, and knowing they dared not go back into the road or 'track' again. Then the sun set... and darkness came on.

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1. How do you think the story goes on? Write two more paragraphs.
2. Argentina was a dangerous place for these settlers. Why? Are things different now?

- 3. What advice would you give to foreigners who wanted to settle in your neighbourhood today? What are the attractions? What are the disadvantages? Are there any dangers?**