

is called fifteen leagues; but it is only guess-work, and is generally overstated. The road was uninteresting, over a dry grassy plain; and on our left hand at a greater or less distance there were some low hills; a continuation of which we crossed close to the *posta*. Before our arrival we met a large herd of cattle and horses, guarded by fifteen soldiers; but we were told many had been lost. It is very difficult to drive animals across the plains; for if in the night a puma, or even a fox, approaches, nothing can prevent the horses dispersing in every direction; and a storm will have the same effect. A short time since an officer left Buenos Ayres with five hundred horses, and when he arrived at the army he had under twenty.

Soon afterward we perceived by the cloud of dust that a party of horsemen were coming toward us; when far distant my companions knew them to be Indians, by their long hair streaming behind their backs. The Indians generally have a fillet round their heads, but never any covering; and their black hair blowing across their swarthy faces heightens to an uncommon degree the wildness of their appearance. They turned out to be a party of Bernantio's friendly tribe, going to a *salina* for salt. The Indians eat much salt, their children sucking it like sugar. This habit is very different from that of the Spanish Gauchos, who, leading the same kind of life, eat scarcely any: according to Mungo Park,¹ it is people who live on vegetable food who have an unconquerable desire for salt. The Indians gave us good-humored nods as they passed at full gallop, driving before them a troop of horses, and followed by a train of lanky dogs.

September 12th and 13th.—I stayed at this *posta* two days, waiting for a troop of soldiers, which General Rosas had the kindness to send to inform me would shortly travel to Buenos Ayres; and he advised me to take the opportunity of the escort. In the morning we rode to some neighboring hills to view the country, and to examine the geology. After

¹ Travels in Africa, p. 233.