



An Englishman in Patagonia

John Pilkington

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Today Patagonia is made up of the southern parts of Chile and Argentina, but it's still a land of lonely plains, craggy peaks and wild weather. Someone once said that Patagonia without wind would be like Hell without the Devil. When John Pilkington, one of England's greatest tellers of traveller's tales, spent eight months journeying through Patagonia, he found that being a Patagonian is more a matter of how you feel than where you live. Patagonians are resolute dreamers - immigrants who've thrown their fate to the wind. They hate towns with their petty jealousies and rivalries; given an opportunity, they always go for the unknown. Picking his way through Patagonia's half a million square miles, he unearthed stories of explorers and pioneers, of rustlers and outlaws, such as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, and of earlier travelers, such as Charles Darwin and Bruce Chatwin. Still more revealing were his own encounters: for instance with Welsh villagers singing hymns around the harmonium; refugees from Nazi Germany; Scottish evangelists awaiting Armageddon; hippy exiles; prosperous young supporters of ex-president Pinochet; and an Argentine lynch-mob who have him in mind as their victim! He examines what it is that attracts people to such a desolate land - and reflects, too, on the ethics of travel writing.

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