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THE AMAZING
ARGENTINE: A NEW LAND
OF ENTERPRISE

John Fraser

**The Amazing Argentine:
A New Land of Enterprise**

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John Foster Fraser

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CHAPTER I THE INVADERS

It was on a boat which was laden with bananas and running from Colon, on the Isthmus of Panama, to New York.

The steward called me at dawn. He thought I was mad because I stood in pyjamas without apparent heed of the mirky drizzle. Beyond the sad waters there was little to see but a low-lying and dreary island with a melancholy lighthouse. No vegetation brightened the scene. There was no gorgeous sunrise. There was nothing but a lump of barrenness heaving out of the sea. But this was the island of San Salvador, the western land which Columbus first touched when he sailed to find the Indies.

There are now near one hundred and fifty millions of people of European descent in the Americas. And a little glow came into my imagination that rain-swept morning when I felt I was the only traveller on the boat who had crawled forth to gaze at San Salvador. I tried to picture what thoughts must have crowded the mind of Columbus when he sighted this shore. He never knew what he had discovered for Spain. He could never have dreamt he was the first in the greatest invasion the world has ever witnessed.

A year later I was on an Atlantic liner. The fo'c'sle was thronged with poor Spaniards from Vigo and poor Portuguese from Lisbon. In the voyage across the Atlantic I had watched them in the steerage – tawny-visaged, easygoing men, and broad-set, figureless women, sprawling, gossiping, drowsing. To the accompaniment of an accordion they lifted their voices in song on the balmy, starlit evenings whilst the ship churned through the tropical seas.

Another misty morning and I climbed on deck. Saloon passengers were tucked in their bunks. But all the steerage had turned out and were crowding the foredecks, and were gazing at a dim strip of land and watching a blinking light. The land was the coast of Brazil, and the light was the harbour of Pernambuco, which means "the Door of Hell."

The immigrants raised a long-drawn shout of joy. They hailed Latin America. There was the country of which they had heard so much. They had broken with the Old World. Four hundred years ago their ancestors came across these seas with eyes greedy for gold. Now they came, not to snatch gold from temples or to terrorise the natives into showing where the metal could be found, but to work on sugar plantations, to nurture the coffee plant, to rear bananas, to do the humble work in the building of towns and the construction of railways, to toil in the jungles, to sit in the saddle and round up cattle on the prairies. They had come to the New World to get gold by industry.

How much we talk and write about the enterprise and colonising power of the Teutonic races, and how prone we are to dismiss the Latin races as effete and played out! But our generalisations will not bear examination. The spirit of adventure cannot have left Italy and Spain and Portugal. Every year hundreds of thousands of people sail from those countries across the Atlantic.

We speak of North America as Teutonic – made prosperous by the stock of northern Europe – and South America as Spanish. Latin America, however, does not all lie south of the Panama Canal. We must begin to reckon it from the territory line which separates the United States from Mexico. Southwards from the banks of the Rio Grande the Latin tongue is spoken, chiefly Spanish, but with

much Portuguese in Brazil, and Italian in places right down, through the Torrid Zone, the heavy tropics, reeking with luxuriant vegetation, to the bleak and rocky, inhospitable Tierra del Fuego.

There are millions of Latins. They have set up half a score of Republican governments. The wealthy world slowly and then impetuously realised the possibilities of this strangely diversified region. Untold gold has been poured forth to develop it and get quick return.

It is not stories of treasure which bring a glint into the eye of modern men. It is enterprise and development which appeal. There are cattle to be reared on the ranches of Mexico; there is rubber in Peru; there are nitrates and fabulous mineral wealth in Chili and the neighbouring lands; there are cotton and sugar and coffee in the mighty sweep of Brazil; there are the illimitable wheat areas of Argentina, and cattle rearing and the giant possibilities in supplying Europe with frozen meat; there is the opening up of immense areas by networks of railroads.

"The stuff is there; it has only to be got," says the man who knows and talks with the fire of enthusiasm.

South America is not the land of the future. It is the land of to-day. Nowhere in the world is the speculator, the investor, more busy than in Latin America. The tales told by the first Spaniards are baby talk to the stories told to-day by those who have been and seen and are fascinated. Of course it is overdone. Of course there is exaggeration. Of course some of the jewels in El Dorado are useless stones. Of course some of the caves of Aladdin are found empty. But what the modern world ranks as precious is in abundance.

I like to conjure a contrast between the little barques of a few hundred tonnage bobbing on unknown seas with the big fifteen-thousand tonners which make their ports of call according to timetable. The early invaders went into the unknown, crept along unmapped coasts, battled with savages, and died like flies before the scourge of fever. The whole story of the conquest and settlement of the Americas is one of slow victory through a mist of tragedy. The invaders of other days left their native lands with little hope to return. The invaders of to-day set forth waving an *au revoir* to their friends on the dock side.

The man with the flimsiest imagination can think of the tiny craft, ill-lit, ill-furnished, with scurvy-providing food, running before the trade winds, lolling with idle sails in the doldrums, and with uncertainty as constant companion. To-day the huge vessels scorn the tides. Aflame with electric light they press through the dusk, and the ship's orchestra plays ragtime music. You cross the Equator to the tune of a Gaiety light opera. Sultry afternoons are relieved with exhilarating deck sports. The warmth of the dinner hour is softened by the whirl of electric fans. In the evening a space on deck is enclosed and hung with the flags of all the nations, and dancers in fancy dress whirl blithely on the powdered floor. These are the circumstances of the modern invasion. The journey is a holiday with nothing of grim adventure about it.

What Latin America means to-day is told in the personalities of the passengers. There are the rich Argentines, after six months in Europe, returning to Buenos Aires, occupying the cabins de luxe. They offer you the information how much they are paying, contribute largely to the sports fund, and their ladies dress with frank display. Whether Spanish or English they are proud of the name of Argentine, and never weary telling of the progress of their country. They have open contempt for their Portuguese neighbours in Brazil. The wealthy Brazilian men, swarthy and fat and bejewelled, do not join the deck games, but, with cigar between lips, saunter the decks, leering at every woman with a passable countenance. The Argentines thank God there is no nigger blood in their veins. The Brazilians retaliate they could buy the Argentines up. Care must be taken not to mix the two nationalities at the ship's tables. Each nation sports its own flag. Sometimes rivalry threatens tragedy.

There is the Englishman "with interests in Argentina" going out to look after his property, frequently an *estancia*, or ranch, purchased when land was cheap, and before the boom came. Now a railway cuts through his property, and it has increased seventy-fold in value. Sometimes he mentions drought; occasionally he shudders at the mention of locusts. But he recalls the state of things when

he went out thirty or forty years ago "with not much more than a bob," and now he has a fortune made out of meat shipped to Europe, and his only regret seems to be the iniquitous amount of death duties which will have to be paid by his heirs.

"Argentina is not what it was," he tells you. That means the winning of a fortune is going to be increasingly harder to this and subsequent generations. But he is a fine type of Englishman, for he went forth before South America had grown beyond its monthly revolution, when the continent chiefly bred restlessness amongst the Spanish settlers, and when life and prosperity was a gamble. He has come through the fire. Foresight, daring, and good luck have swung him, as they have swung thousands of others, into affluence. He has "retired." He lives at home in Belgravia, and gives fine dinner parties. But he keeps an eye on Argentine stock, and when you encounter him in the club he repeats that "Argentina is not what it was, but still – " and then he makes you wish you could place your hand on some of the plums that remain.

There is the rich Argentine who shows what he is made of by insisting upon everybody in the smoking-room drinking champagne at his expense – and he is uncomplimentary if anybody deliberately refuses his hospitality. There is the man who hires a band to play to him during the voyage. There is the delicate lady who has a special cow on board so that she may be sure of fresh milk. The boat carries a cow so that the children may have milk. The charge per pint for the milk is high. "Why," said one passenger when he heard what the price was, "I think I will give my children champagne; it will be cheaper."

British gold has flowed like water into South America to make the dormant region fruitful. British interests are colossal. The United States has not taken much of a hand in development, partly because the Latins do not love their northern neighbours, and partly because the financiers of the States have been sufficiently occupied in their own country. Three hundred million British pounds sterling has been invested in Argentine railway and tramway companies, and there are on board men who manage the lines – tall, stalwart, clear-skinned Englishmen, with cool nerve and steady eye.

There are the big *estancia* men, proud and ambitious, who pay enormous prices for famous race-horses and get the best breeding stock from home in cattle and sheep, no matter what competition forces the price up to. There are shrewd men going out on behalf of syndicates to throw their eyes round the country and scent out possibilities for money-making on the grand scale. In the free talk of the smoking-room they speak with vagueness of what their special mission is. There are the men who have been charged to take control of city development schemes – for all ports, towns, and cities in South America are crazy for development, and are piling their backs with debt to achieve their desires. There are the men who represent English firms who are intent on extending their connections or in establishing branches. There are engineers, with jobs in the far interior, proceeding to fill five-year contracts. There are young bank clerks, flushed with increased salary, exchanging London for a pampa town and scarcely realising they will find living three times as expensive as at Bromley. There are the men who laughingly acknowledge they have no direct mission except that they intend to see what they can pick up. But they are mostly a good brand of Briton, well set, and with courage in the veins. And when one remembers the growing Latin population, and listens to captivating explanations about potentialities and hears what has been accomplished – more wonderful in the making of cities than a tale out of the Thousand and One Nights – there is the fact in the background that all this continent must long have continued to lie undeveloped if it had not been for the constant and confident inflow of British money.

Beyond the rails are the second-class passengers, folk of humbler aim, but going to play their part in the land of adventure. But, above all, are the third class, the steerage – few British here – travelling to South America with little but hope and muscle to do the labourer's part. It is labour the country needs to-day more than capital. In the spring of the southern hemisphere the Atlantic is trailed with ships packed with Italians, Spaniards, and Portuguese. The continent swallows them. They are men of courage, or they would never have gone forth. They take with them their fiery Latin

temperament and fierce political, frequently anarchist views. The native Indians are mostly too cow-like to be of much use in industry. The millions of negroes in tropical Brazil are too lazy to be relied upon. Labour is the need, the ever-pressing need. Emissaries are busy in southern Europe booming South America and filling the boats which sail from Lisbon and Vigo and Genoa – chiefly from Genoa, for the Italian is the ideal immigrant for a warm clime. He is industrious, sober, frugal.

All the towns along the South American coastline have futures. They talk about the future, always the future, and are preparing for it. Swung in a basket from the deck of the liner, I boarded a tug and went ashore at Pernambuco. The buildings which stood were decrepit, as though erected by the original Portuguese, like their ramshackle homes on the other side of the ocean, and they had done nothing to them since except an occasional smear of pink, blue or yellow colour-wash. Most of the place was in ruins; whole streets were literally choked with débris, suggesting there had been a frightful earthquake, or that a revolutionary episode had perpetrated dire havoc. In fact, Pernambuco was in the throes of improvement. The first necessity of all these South American towns is not a system of drainage but an Avenida – a wide main thoroughfare with bedizened buildings on either side, and cafés and bands and electric lights and motor-cars and a theatre. They have begun with a theatre. But the ways of Western civilisation have travelled so far because, instead of drama and opera being presented, the theatre is devoted to kinema entertainments.

As though cleared with a hundred cannon, there is a way right through the town; this is where the Avenida is to be. Open matchbox tramcars, drawn by weedy mules, rumble over uneven metals. The next time, however, I visit Pernambuco electric cars will whiz along the roads. There are no cabs or carriages, even of ancient pattern, to be hired; but there are plenty of motor-cars. There is a breakwater built on a coral reef; yet huge harbour works are in progress, and before long liners instead of lying outside will be fastened to the dock side. There are big shops where you can buy most things, including the inevitable picture post cards, though you pay twopence each for post cards of a kind which you can buy for two a penny at home. I paid 1s. 8d. for a drink for which no hotel at home would have charged me more than 6d. The neighbourhood is rich in vegetation, but potatoes and fruits are imported from Portugal. The people are town proud. They are proud of Brazil. The Brazilian flag, with its yellow ground and star-spangled blue globe in the centre, waves everywhere.

The next day we were at Bahia, picturesquely reclining on a wooded hill. It used to be the great port in the slave trade, and most of the inhabitants are negroes. Indeed, it must not be forgotten that most of the population are negroes, or negro Indians, or negro Portuguese, or a mixture of all three. However, it is only the Portuguese, a mere handful in the total, who exercise political influence in the country. On the boat came many Bahians. All down the coast, whilst we were losing the European invaders, we were taking on board and losing Brazilians. Most of them were podgy, and an inky tinge on their skins indicated there was mixture in their blood.

The healthy sports which had entertained the English travellers on the Equator were things of the past. There was a new sport, and it was played in the smoking-room all day long and far into the night, when most of us had gone to bed. The rattle of the dice-box never ceased. Gambling was in the veins, and the English sovereign was constantly shuffled from hand to hand on the green baize tables. There was baccarat, first for low stakes and then for high. There were two glib Yankee-Negro-Spaniards who had such luck that spectators shrugged shoulders and exchanged glances. In a single game they netted £150, and one young Englishman was a loser by £80.

From gambling at the tables one turned to talking about gambling in the country. The enormous liabilities to foreign countries are all incurred in a great gamble that the hinterlands will yield produce which will pay for all and leave massive surpluses. The coffee trade of Brazil is immense. But all merchants do not make their incomes by watching and nursing the market. That is too slow. Transactions are decided quite as often by the throw of the dice as by negotiation and bargaining. Reckless, far removed from business principles, all this is; but it bespeaks a buoyancy of belief that, notwithstanding the lapse of luck, there is a bottomless well of prosperity to be dipped into in

the natural productions of the country. It is scarcity which breeds timidity; it is the confidence of affluence which occasions waste.

Of course there was much talk about Rio de Janeiro, the city with the most gorgeous setting in the southern hemisphere.

"Rio harbour is the most beautiful in the world," said the Brazilian.

"It cannot be a patch on Sydney harbour," said the Australian, who had never seen Rio.

"Tut!" said the Brazilian, who had never seen Sydney.

It was in the fall of an exquisite Sunday afternoon that our glasses caught sight of the hills around Rio. As we approached and ran past picturesque islands a wonderful panorama was unfolded. The scenery was unlike any other scenery in the world. The hills, radiant with equatorial vegetation, rose like strange humps out of the sea. In the background giant mountains reared their heads in the crimson-grey clouds of approaching evening. The picture was not like real scenery. It was like the realisation of a disordered imagination. I would say it was like an imitation of Turner, were the illustration not so trite. Then I thought there was something Chinese about the outretness of the landscape. Then the sun went down in a hurry, and the background was a weird purple. The ship dropped anchor, and the front part of Rio town, a tumble of fantastic red and yellow washed houses, was for all the world like a drop curtain to a stage. I felt we had slipped into another world – and I am not given to rhapsody.

A thousand lamps began to blink along the esplanade which curves to the bend of the bay. A thousand lights pricked the hill sides. There were two big black Brazilian warships, and somebody had to tell the old story how two battleships were sent out to visit the Brazilian convict island in the Atlantic, and how one returned with the awful story that the island had disappeared, for they sailed straight for it and it had gone, whilst later on it was learnt that the other vessel had certainly found the island, for it got piled up on the rocks. Gaily illuminated launches scurried about whilst our liner was slowly being berthed alongside the quay.

"Ah!" cried the Brazilian to me, whilst his eyes glowed brightly, "say that Rio is the most lovely harbour in the world!"

"There's nothing to shout about," interrupted the Australian, "alongside Sydney harbour; and you've seen Sydney harbour," he added, turning to me.

As a sort of amateur Solomon, I was turned to for judgment. My first comment was to laugh. I had seen the two harbours which are each claimed by their champions to be the grandest thing Nature has ever accomplished. It was amusing to witness the fervour of the two men, as though they had a hand in the making of these famous harbours. They were both of the stuff which leads men to believe that for any other country to have pretensions to beauty is just dull-witted boastfulness.

"Well," I remarked, "I think Vigo harbour is charming."

"Oh, Vigo!" they both exclaimed in disgust.

"And there is something to be said for the Golden Gate leading to San Francisco," I added.

"But the Golden Gate and any other place is not in the same street with Sydney harbour," blurted the Australian rather angrily, though he had never seen the Golden Gate. "It cannot be," he said decisively.

"But what do you really think of Rio compared with Sydney?" asked the Brazilian, who saw I was attempting to be funny at the expense of them both.

"I'll tell you," I said, actually throwing half a cigar overboard, for I was called upon to give a verdict on one of the most debatable subjects in the world. "It is like passing judgment on two lovely women. For grand, impressive spectacular effect, being hit right between the eyes with stupendous gorgeousness, seeing Rio harbour at the hour of sunset is the most wonderful sight in the world."

The Brazilian smiled, and the Australian made a contemptuous noise with his lips.

"But hold," I added. "You see all the beauty of Rio harbour at one view. It is like suddenly coming face to face with an imperial lady of dazzling attractions. When you have seen her you have

seen everything. Sydney harbour does not knock you over with bewilderment of beauty like Rio does. It is more calm, less turbulent; it impresses you. The more you know it the more it impresses you. And it has lovely arms, stretching up between soft woodlands, as peaceful as the best bits of the Thames. Rio has nothing like that. No, no; I'm not competent to pass judgment. You two gentlemen can go on fighting over the matter, as I dare say the people of your two countries will continue to do, till the crack of doom. I admit the unrivalled grandeur of Rio, but personally I have more affection for the grace and the delights of Sydney."

The Brazilian bowed politely. The Australian wanted to argue I had ceded too much to Rio. Happily, just then a group of friends came on board to rush me off to a dinner party on shore.

Rio will always remind me of Imre Kiralfy, the White City, and Earl's Court. There are some narrow, old European-like streets that recall places on the other side of the Atlantic: the houses high and sombre and with a little mystery behind the shutters. But most of Rio is rampantly new and garish. The people have driven a magnificent Avenida right through the heart of the city, and hang the expense! The piles of buildings, hotels, public offices, great stores along this Avenida are generally eccentric in architecture – and there comes the feeling that here these transplanted Latins, with a strain of negro in their veins, are struggling to express themselves as a new people. The wonderful thing is that five years ago this Avenida was not.

Nothing that the Riviera has can outvie the esplanade, broad, well made, with miles of bright gardens and statues – and the motor-cars whiz along at the maddest, breakneck pace. There is one exquisite avenue lined with nothing but palm trees. Many of the houses, designed surely by someone who has built palaces for pantomimes, are half buried behind splashes of prodigal tropical vegetation. Everything is ornate, showy. From the standpoint of British comfort the buildings are gaudy palaces, lacking real ease. But always one has to remember one is in the tropics.

I know no place so dazzling as Rio. Behind all the glitter, however, there is gold. There is commerce, abounding speculation, the devil-may-care assurance of the gambler. Broad ways, electric car services, hundreds of expensive motor-cars, extravagant restaurants, ladies laden with jewels, the men eager, all tell the opening chapter in the story of Brazil's future. In the cool Strangers' Club I met men of the Saxon breed, quiet Englishmen, quiet Americans, representatives of syndicates with millions of money at their backs, negotiating, wire-pulling, securing concessions for railroads, for developing stretches of that great back country of Brazil, as little explored as Central Africa, but the possibilities of which the world is realising and will scramble hungrily to turn into profit. What Brazil has accomplished so far is but the turning of the key in the door.

The morning comes with a gasp, and a flavour of old oil is in the air. The heavy stillness makes one recite the agony of the Ancient Mariner. We are leaving the ocean, and the steamer is churning a way up an ochreish river, banked on one side, but with a stretch of malarious jungle on the other. We are making for Santos, and an old German who rests his elbows on the rail tells how he has known this coast for thirty years, and how, in the old days, it reeked with yellow fever; how whole ships' crews went down before the scourge, and how no passenger boats dared lie at Santos for the night, but always slipped down to the mouth of the river in the evening so that fresh air could be obtained.

Now drainage has done wonders, and Santos, a great export town for Brazilian coffee, is improving itself. I get into conversation with the man who has been engaged to settle in Santos and see that the place is improved. The river is deep, serviceable, and runs far inland. Casting my eye over the flat lands, matted with vegetation, and dotted with many a wretched nigger shanty, I have a vision of the time when docks will be delved and many of the riches of Brazil will find their outlet to the world by this gateway. Great wharves are on the river front at Santos.

The town, however, is in a higger-mugger of change. The Brazilians seem to lounge round, but they are forging for the future. Men who have been with us for a fortnight hasten ashore. They have eagerness. They are off by the quaint hill-climbing railway to San Paulo, high perched, healthy, throbbing with trade. Others are bent for the interior, away from their kind, to seek their fortunes.

"And that's the end of my six months' leave," says a red-faced Englishman with a sorrowful smile. "I lived away back there for three years, and never saw or talked to another Englishman. I've been home for my holiday, and now it will be another three years before I come back from the plantations. Good-bye. I'll hunt you up when I'm in London again." Off he goes – one of the brave men of the world.

A peep at Monte Video, the neat capital of the miniature Republic of Uruguay, and then the black-green of the ocean we have been travelling for three weeks is left behind, and we are forcing a way up the yellow waters of the River Plate. A river; but for hours there is no land in sight, so wide is the mouth of this great stream. And shallow, for at intervals the steamer shivers as she bumps on the bottom.

"That is all right," says the captain, "for we do not mind a couple of feet of mud."

The journey of the new adventurers is nearing its end. Shipboard friendships are sworn to be eternal. The ship's sports are long over, and the prizes have been distributed. The fancy dress ball on deck is a memory. There is the distribution of largesse amongst those who have made things pleasant. Cabin passengers are light-hearted. The throng of Spaniards and Italians in the steerage are silent and strangely impressed. They were sad when they left the old lands; they were happy during the voyage; now the mystery of the unknown is laying hold of them. We pass a crowded emigrant ship from Italy, and cheers are exchanged.

Out of the haze of the hot day rises the low land, Argentina. We see the buildings of La Plata, once intended to be the capital of the country. The ship makes strange zigzags, for it is following a channel known only to the pilot. There rises a bank of smoke. As we get nearer we run into shipping. From the background emerge tall buildings, white mostly, and recalling the skyscrapers of the United States. So slowly, laboriously, the good ship *Avon*, which has behaved so well, is brought to rest in front of Buenos Aires. It is night, but the wharves are all commotion. There is the shrieking of tugs. There is the shout of excited Argentines, but their garb is south European. Beyond the Custom House can be seen hastening motor-cars and whizzing electric tramcars. And here is a newspaper man, wanting an interview. We are entering "the amazing Argentine."

CHAPTER II

SOME ASPECTS OF BUENOS AIRES

The Argentines call their city of Buenos Aires the Paris of the southern hemisphere. It has a population nearing a million and a half, which is greater than that of any other town below the line of the Equator. The people promise that in time it will overtake London.

You insult an Argentine if you mix him up with Chilians, Brazilians, and other South Americans. He does not thank you for being reminded his father sailed from Italy, or his grandfather from Spain. He has no affection for any old land from which his sires came. The beginning of the world for Argentina was in May, 1810, when the Republic was set up.

He has no pride of historic race. When he makes money and visits Europe it is not to find the ancestral home in Spain or Italy. It is to have a good time in Paris. When he takes his family to Paris it is not to spend three, five, or six months. It is to spend three, five, or six hundred thousand pesos – and the value of a peso is one shilling and eightpence. When the pesos have flown he returns to Argentina and makes more.

The Argentines are a dignified people. They accept the English because in round figures five hundred millions of British capital in gold have aided in developing the country. They dislike the citizen of the United States because the big brother Republic of the north patronises them, and they need nobody's help. They have a contempt for all other Latins beneath the Isthmus of Panama, particularly the Brazilians. They are conscious of their own qualities.

And the visitor blinks, and rubs his eyes, and admits the wonders of Argentina. If his acquaintance with geography is casual he has shrugged his shoulders at South American Republics, where they have revolutions every six weeks, and where tawny Spaniards in quaint costumes drive mules and die from difference of opinion with other Spaniards.

Then he goes to "B.A." – the familiar description of Buenos Aires – and he finds he has landed in a rampantly modern American-cum-European city. There is none of the sloth of the Southern, no checking of business between noon and three to pass in siestas.

It is a busy city. The port is thronged with shipping, mostly British. High-shouldered elevators stick out long tongues, and streams of wheat, grown on the plains of the interior, pour food for Europe into the holds. Trucks of cattle grunt through the noisy railway yards. There are huge killing establishments, and animals go to their death by the many thousand every day with a celerity which would awaken a Chicagoan. There are mighty avenues of chilled and frozen meat. Labour-saving machinery carries it on board the steamers which hasten across the Atlantic, carrying cheap beef to the London and Liverpool markets. Commerce is conducted on the latest scientific lines. The North Americans have nobbled the meat trade, and the Jews have control of the wheat market.

Buenos Aires is the mart where the produce of the rich back-lands is bartered. It levies a heavy toll. The most imposing business buildings are the banks – national banks, British, German, French, Spanish, and Italian banks. In and about Reconquista are these banks, ever busy. Near by are the rival shipping offices, a glut of them. The offices of the great railway companies are enormous. Wide-spreading premises exhibit the latest and best agricultural machinery that Lincolnshire and Illinois can produce. There is the hustle of commerce. The streets are as narrow and as crowded and as vital as within the City of London. There is earnestness about the men.

The Argentine is sombre in manner. He dresses in conventional black. A light waistcoat, a gay tie or fancy socks, is bad form. You cannot tell the difference between a millionaire and one of his clerks, except that the former has an expensive motor-car and the latter hires a taxi or a victoria, or travels by electric tramcar. At every corner you see evidence of prosperity, of successful money-making. And money speaks in "B.A." as loudly as it does in New York.

Folk of the Saxon breed tend to scoff at the decadence of the Latin race. But there is something revivifying in the transplanting of a people. We have evidence in our own colonies. The man of Spanish descent in the Argentine is not always the spry fellow he thinks himself; but he has dropped the cloak of sluggishness which enwraps Spain. He is often rich; he lives in a gorgeous residence; his extravagances are beyond those of a Russian archduke. He is polite and hospitable.

But the wealthy Spanish Argentine is not the creator of his own wealth. I heard of only one case of a Spanish Argentine owing his great fortune to commercial enterprise. The fortunes of most of these Argentines come from land. Their grandfathers got immense areas by the easiest means. Properties were so enormous that extent was not reckoned in acres, or even square miles, but by leagues. But a hundred leagues, however good for cattle or sheep, or wheat growing – what was its value a couple of hundred miles from a port? Then came British railways. They pierced the prairies. The land bounded in value, tenfold, a thousandfold. Other people came in; first shrewd Scotsmen; then industrious Italians; then Englishmen bent on becoming *estancieros*. Their children are Argentines. But the mighty fortunes are mostly in the possession of the early Argentines – those who were settled fifty and more years ago. They have sat still and seen their land blossom in value. They pay no income tax; there is no tax on unearned increment. Mr. Lloyd George was once in the Argentine, associated with a land development company. That, however, is another story.

Hundreds of thousands of immigrants pour into the Republic every year. They come from every land on earth. Mostly do they come from Spain and Italy. Italy provides the greatest number, and splendid colonists they are. Though the language will always be Spanish, the race is rapidly becoming Italianised. There is a commingling of the sterner stuff from Europe. So in this rich land – rivalling Canada and Australia in productiveness – there is being blended a new people, keen, alert, successful, ostentatious, pagan – a people that has a destiny and knows it.

The Argentines are town proud. You are not in Buenos Aires a couple of days before you are bombarded with the inquiry, "Don't you think this is a beautiful city?" It is not that; but it is an interesting city.

In the oldest quarters the streets are narrow, after the Spanish style. So narrow are they that, with electric cars jingling along them, vehicles are allowed to journey only one way. To reach a shop by carriage it is sometimes necessary to drive along three and a half sides of a block of buildings. Funny little policemen, brown faced, blue clad, and with white gaiters and white wands, direct the traffic. In the Florida – the Bond Street of "B.A." – all wheeled traffic is prohibited between the hours of four and seven in the afternoon, so that shoppers may have an easier way.

Most of the streets are called after Argentine provinces, or neighbouring republics, or national heroes, or some politician or rich man who can influence the authorities. When a popular man has lost his popularity the remnant of his fame is obliterated by the street called after him being named after someone else. It is as though the Government at home decided to change Victoria Street, Westminster, into the Avenida Asquith, with the prospect of its being altered later on to the Calle Bonar Law.

Wide plazas decorate the city. Vegetation is luxuriant, and statues are numerous. The Plaza Mayo is not called after an Irish peer, but after the month of May, 1810. The shops are as big as those in London. Argentina manufactures practically nothing, and all the lovely things have to be imported from Europe. The hotels are imitations of those in Paris. The restaurants are on a par with the best we have in London. A Viennese band plays whilst you have Russian caviare and the waiter is asking your choice in champagne. But everything is expensive. A man needs three times the salary in Buenos Aires to live the same way he would live in London. If you calculate exchange rates you go mad. It is best to count the peso (1s. 8d.) as a shilling, and then remember that you are spending your shilling in South America, where things are dear. You can get a modest luncheon for 10s.; but you will pay 2s. for a bottle of beer, and 3s. 6d. for a cigar worth smoking.

Yet nobody minds. Immense sums are being spent on improving the city. It is built on the American T-square plan. But it is to be subjected to the plan of Haussmann, with great tree-girt

avenues radiating diagonally from the Plaza Mayo. An underground railway, honeycombing beneath the town, is in rapid construction. The railways have a great suburban traffic, and are being electrified. There are British colonies at Belgrano and Hurlingham, and you have a choice of three golf courses. In the summer months – December, January, and February – there is river life on the Tigre, the Thames of the Argentine. A charming spot is Palermo, a combination of Hyde Park and the Bois de Boulogne – open sweeps and charming trees, a double boulevard with statues and commemorative marbles in the middle, well-cared-for gardens, radiant flowers and the band playing.

A drive through Palermo at the fashionable hour causes one to gasp at the thought that one is six thousand miles from Europe. Nowhere in the world have I seen such a display of expensive motor-cars, thousands of them. Ostentation is one of the stars of life in the Argentine. Appearances count for everything. You must have a motor-car, even though you have not the money to pay for it, and you owe the landlord of your flat a year's rent. The ladies are exquisitely gowned, but they have not the vivacity of the French women nor their daring in dress. There is a demureness, a restraint which reminds one that the atmosphere of far-away Castile is still upon them.

On Sundays and Thursdays there are races at Palermo. The price Argentines pay for horseflesh has become a proverb. It is a good race-course. We have nothing in England, neither at Epsom, Ascot, nor Goodwood, so magnificent as the grand stand. It is a glorified royal box. The restaurant is like the Ritz dining-room. Everybody dresses as they would at Ascot. There are no bookmakers. The totalisator is used. Betting is officially conducted by the Jockey Club, and there is constant announcement of the amount of money put on the horses. Those who have backed the winners share the spoil, less ten per cent. As this ten per cent. is deducted from the total amount put on each race, the income of the Jockey Club runs into hundreds of thousands of pounds. So the Club maintains a good race-course, offers capital prizes, has a house in "B.A." – undoubtedly the most palatial clubhouse in the southern world – and distributes the remainder amongst the hospitals. The income of the Jockey Club is so large it is really embarrassing. The members are proceeding to build an Aladdin's palace of super-gorgeousness.

But at the races at Palermo I noticed that no ladies attended, except in the members' enclosure. Even there they did not mingle with the men-folk. There was no mirth, such as we are used to in Europe. They kept themselves to little groups. Moving from wonder to wonder, I was present at a gala performance at the Colon Theatre. I have seen all the great theatres in the world, and this is the loveliest – a harmony of rose and gold. The audience was as fashionably dressed as at the opera in London, though I missed the dazzling display of diamonds which had been promised. Most of the audience were ladies; there were boxes of them, and most of the men were in the stalls. There was one gallery reserved for women.

I began to discern a strange Orientalism in the relations between the sexes. The Argentine women are amongst the best mothers in the world. But there is practically none of the good fellowship between young fellows and young girls which is so happy a feature of our English life. For a man and a woman to take a walk together would shock the proprieties. There are brilliant receptions, but dinner parties, as we know them, are rare. An Argentine seldom introduces a friend to his wife. Except amongst the poorest a woman scarcely ever goes into the streets alone. If she does she runs risk of being insulted. There are Argentines, who would be offended if refused the name of gentlemen, who think it excellent sport to walk in the Florida in the evening and mutter obscenities to every unprotected woman who passes. Buenos Aires is the most immoral city in the world. So the Argentine guards his women-folk from contact with other men. His attitude is a relic of the days when the Moors had possession of Spain.

I have called Buenos Aires a pagan city. So it is. The men are frankly irreligious. In conversation I have been told of the tolerance to all religions. What is really meant is indifference to any religion.

Money-making and flamboyant display – these are the gods which are worshipped. The houses in the wealthier districts are exotic in architecture. I remember driving along the Avenida Alvear, a

street of palaces, reminiscent of the Grand Canal at Venice if it were a roadway. But the fine stone blocks are nothing but stucco. The ornamentation, the floral decorations, are not carved stone; they are stucco. Imitation, pretence, showiness, the flaunting of wealth, are everywhere.

Yet this city, which has grown in a generation on the muddy flats by the side of the muddy Parana River, has something that is weird in its fascination.

CHAPTER III

ROUND AND ABOUT THE CAPITAL

The way not to see a city is to be trotted round and shown all the "sights." I have an idea I may have missed some of the "sights" of Buenos Aires. I did not "do" the churches. Acquaintances who knew I went to South America to pursue my trade of writer sometimes asked me what I was going to write about, and the reply was, "I do not know." But I was not believed.

Anyway, I may say that I drifted about "B.A." I presented my letters of introduction, made friends, lunched out and dined out, had motor trips, went here and there as suggestion provided the inclination; maybe to a theatre, or to smoke a cigar in one of the clubs with men who are of account in Argentina or no account at all, or to spend a Sunday with an Argentine family; maybe to idle an hour in one of the cafés; maybe to have a serious talk with a Minister; maybe do nothing but idle round. That is no scientific way to study a city. But it just happens to be my way.

The conclusions I draw may be wrong, for I may have met the wrong people and seen the wrong things, especially as I had no system. Yet out of the confused jumble of impressions and experiences something coherent evolves, and that is the substance of my remarks when I am asked, "Well, what do you think about Buenos Aires?"

It is not my wish to accentuate the point, but open-handed extravagance is one of the traits of the people. It is a fault of democratic countries that, having no aristocracy of birth, they proceed to create one of wealth. Argentina has fine old Spanish families; but, though esteemed, they are in the background. In the wrangle-jangle of frenzied progress they are not to be counted amongst the moderns. So garish is the display of money that the idea left is that you have had your attention called to it by the constant blaring of a bugle.

But I would shrink from saying the display is vulgar. Keeping in mind that the people are Latins, and are fonder of colour than we of the cold and moral north, I would write there is a sort of ostentatious restraint. Argentines glory in spending money, but amongst the older settled people other things besides money have their place. They are fond of music, and pride themselves that they discovered Tetrassini and Kubelik long before London. Here, as in Paris, London, and New York, there is the mob which goes to the opera because it is "the thing" to have an expensive box, and to wear lovely gowns and loads of diamonds. The prices paid make the charges for a gala night at Covent Garden seem like those of a twopenny show. It may be said that a well-known artiste is sure of a kindly reception. Yet Buenos Aires has its moods; it has its vagaries, and is petulant. For some undefinable reason it will take a dislike to some performer who arrives with a European reputation. Perhaps half a dozen ladies who lead the fashionable world will say the artiste is overrated. "She may be all right for Paris, but she does not come up to Buenos Aires standard" – that is the attitude. For anybody to praise the poor singer after that is to advertise their inartistic taste. There is a boycott. So a European singer or instrumentalist who goes to the Argentine aglow with the prospect of a dazzling success sometimes returns with the saddest of experiences – neglect.

With such a people, Latin in race and living in the sunshine, life is something of a holiday. One hears stories of the looseness of life amongst the men – on the boats running between France and Argentina can be seen the girls going out to meet the requirements of the hundreds of houses of ill-fame – but the Argentine women themselves are beyond reproach. Indeed, their regard for correctness is often amusingly prudish. Public opinion is so strong that no lady, if she wants the esteem of her neighbours, dare show the slightest originality in costume or conduct. Plays with the faintest hint of suggestiveness about them are barred. Performances which would pass muster in a London West-end theatre are shunned; plays to which the most innocent of girls cannot go are taboo. The consequence of this is that there are other places of amusement especially catering for men, which no respectable

woman can enter. Just outside the boundaries there are cinematograph shows "for men only," which for indecency cannot be outdone in Port Said or Havana.

I have mentioned how the visitor to Argentina soon begins to be aware of the low position of women in the minds of men, the way in which there is no real friendship between the sexes outside the family circle, and how no Argentine will trust another Argentine in regard to his ladies. With all their finery and jewellery and expensive motor-cars and boxes at the Colon Theatre, you are prone to remark, "How un-European!" when you see the segregation of the women.

Yet with all their frivolity, dress, bridge, amusements, you make a mistake if you fancy the Argentine lady a guarded, slothful doll – though the description applies in thousands of cases. I had the opportunity of seeing the other side of the picture. On two days, under the guidance of ladies themselves, I visited the establishments of Las Damas da Beneficencia and several Government hospitals. A noble work is being done. I saw how the poor are cared for. There was the nurturing of the old. There was tending the sick in buildings worthy of any city in the world. There were the homes where the wives of poor folk could come to bring their babies into the world. There is much illegitimacy, and formerly there was much infanticide. So there was a kind of casement where, at dusk, mothers could bring their unwanted offspring and deliver them. No questions were asked, but the infant, because it was a helpless little child, was cared for. The same work is done to-day, but without the mystery of the casement. Foster-mothers are engaged to nurse the children. As one went through the rooms, and saw the tiny morsels of humanity, many of them feeble, with a shape of head which roused wonder as to the future, it was hard to keep the tears away.

Poverty, as we understand it in Europe, does not exist in Argentina. But there are men who are stricken down in early manhood, unable to earn anything, and who need help. There are widows and the fatherless to be cared for. There are poor folk, but their trouble is due to misfortune and not to economic causes. Charity, however, is great, and funds are numerous and the Government provides handsomely, and there is no distress such as we know it. But all this good work, hospitals, looking after the aged, providing for the fatherless, is carried on by the women of Argentina. Except to serve as doctors, no men have any voice in the control or management. Ladies, with their presidents and boards of management and committees, have the work placed entirely in their hands. It is set apart for them, and no man interferes. Yet the suffrage question has not extended to Argentina.

Life is taken lightly and showily by this new nation. But when anybody dies all the relatives go into mourning, to the fourteenth cousin. And in death the display is just as rampant as in life. The Recoleta is a strange cemetery, bizarre, ghoulish, tawdry. To own a tomb in Recoleta is one of the necessities if a family wants to be in the swim. These tombs are like chalets, occasionally of Italian marble, generally of the Buenos Aires stucco – the capital surpasses all other cities in the world in the amount of stucco – and they are ornate. There are streets upon streets of them, and you take a walk through a town of the dead. The doors are open, and you can step in and see half a dozen coffins ranged round the shelves. Occasionally there are photographs of the dear departed. On All Saints' Day it is usual for the living family to gather in the tomb, have tea, and munch cakes. After a number of years the coffins have to be removed, or a heavy sum paid, and the tomb is "to let." The whole thing is repulsive to the Englishman, but the Argentine loves it.

The capital of Buenos Aires province is La Plata, about fifty miles away. I went down one day by the luncheon train, which runs out of the Plaza Constitution just after midday and does the journey in an hour. It was a fine train, and the luncheon car was bigger, and the food better than we have on English lines. The car was crowded with a sallow-skinned, black-moustached, black-garbed lot of gentlemen, and I gathered they were all Government officials. Nobody in Government employ thinks of doing any work in the morning. The men go to the office late and leave early. It was almost like home.

La Plata is a town that has missed its way. Full of grandiose ideas, and taking the United States as a model, it was decided to build La Plata as the federal capital on the Washington plan. Gorgeous

buildings were erected; magnificent avenues were constructed; the loveliest of public gardens were laid out; a fine museum was founded; a great municipal theatre was piled up. In the public square bandstands were provided and statues to national heroes hoisted. It was to be the flower of Argentine towns. And every Argentine town, when it sets out to beautify itself, must have an avenida and a plaza and an equestrian statue of San Martin; the matters of water supply and drainage come later.

But the federal capital absolutely refused to settle at La Plata. It was too near Buenos Aires, where society lived, and where there was a whirl of excitement. So, perforce, the capital had to be at Buenos Aires, and a Government House for the residence of the President of the Republic was built, and is known as the "Palace o Gold," because of the money consumed in its construction.

Argentina is ever willing to vote vast sums for town adornment; but the money has a habit of evaporating before half the work is done, and then more is needed.

However, La Plata is the capital of the province of Buenos Aires; but the majority of officials refuse to live there. They prefer to come down from Buenos Aires at a quarter past one, and catch the quarter to five train back. The Governor has made appeals; he has even threatened what he will do if the officials do not live in La Plata. They take no notice. The consequence is that this beautiful city – and without doubt it is majestic in its spaciousness – is deserted, and a saunter through it is like a walk through an old cathedral town on a drowsy afternoon.

As a companion and a host no one could be more charming than the Argentine. He loves his country, but is willing to hear praise about other countries without thinking you wish to depreciate Argentina. He will go to infinite trouble to secure some particular information you are anxious to possess. Men on whom I had no personal claim whatever laid aside their work and devoted a couple of days in my behalf. As the men are courteous so the women are graceful, until lack of exercise and over-eating makes them stout. The girls are modest, but, I am afraid, centre their thoughts on dress. It rather shocked one to see that it is a habit for quite young girls of thirteen or fourteen years to daub their faces with powder. As for the young gentleman, he begins when twelve years of age to smoke and to tell lewd stories. He is impudent to the servants and to his parents, and I have known fathers smile when told their sons of fifteen have taken to visiting houses of ill-fame. Some Argentines are taking to healthy sport; but it would be better if all of them took to outdoor exercises, cricket, football, baseball, tennis, and golf. The Argentine young gentleman is bright but superficial, and is too fond of the clothes of the dandy and jewellery and perfumes to excite any admiration amongst men who dislike effeminacy in their own sex.

It was my good fortune to receive nothing but kindness from every class of Argentine that I met. But I am not going to hide I met Englishmen, who knew more about the Argentines and who had few generous things to say. "There is no morality, unless the young women are guarded; the Argentine is egotistic beyond words; domestic habits are dirty, and taking a bath is rare; the men chatter, and, whilst voluble with friendship, are suspicious; they are bombastic about patriotism, but are not above receiving bribes; all the advantages the Argentine has he owes to foreigners; he produces nothing himself; he is shallow and shiftless; the only business instinct he has is cunning, and the old Spanish *mañana* spirit – always putting off till to-morrow the performance of a business duty – is deep seated." All of which shows how impossible it is to draw a composite picture of an individual to represent a nation. Just as there are nice Englishmen and vulgar fellows, cultured Americans and bounders, delightful Germans and hoggish sots, so in Argentina it takes all sorts to make a people. The growing practice of well-to-do Argentines of sending their children to be educated in Europe has its advantages, though there is another side of the picture. They certainly acquire better manners than they pick up at home; they learn that Argentina is not the centre of the world. When they return to Argentina and display the consequences of foreign travel they are not popular.

As far as I could discern the Argentine, though still infused with Latin traits, still showy and talkative, more inclined to gamble than to do hard work, is breaking through and away from the old Spanish habits. European business men told me they were keen witted, but incompetent in practical

affairs. But there is too much business now going on in Argentina, too much development of industries in which foreigners have little hand, too thorough a grasp of some of the problems which face all new lands, for the Argentines to be dismissed with a phrase.

I could see they were inexact, that they were fond of showing off, that knowledge of the world was thin; but I did understand their genuine ambition to lift Argentina into the first rank among nations; that where they lacked technical and mechanical knowledge themselves they were willing to let others come in; that they were quite alive to what progress means in the modern sense. The conservatism of the old Spaniard has completely disappeared. The Argentine wants the latest and the best. If one goes forth to gather faults it is easy enough to get a basketful. What drew me, however, was not so much listening to a catalogue of things he is not, but to mark down what he is, what he has done and is doing, and what he intends to do. As a small instance, in Buenos Aires the habit of the Spanish siesta is abandoned. There is no pulling down of business shutters between noon and three o'clock. The climate is enervating, but be the day never so steamy, with hot gusts panting from the north, the city is early alive with commerce, the suburban trains are packed, the Stock Exchange is a babble of excitement – and there never seems to be any drawing of rein till five or six in the afternoon. There is hustle.

The way the population jumps up is phenomenal. It signifies much that an eighth of a million is added to the population of a capital in a single year. Skyscrapers now tower over the buildings which were thought enormous a dozen years ago. Notwithstanding the services of the policemen directing the traffic, there is often a tangle of motor-cars, electric tramcars, private carriages and carts. New broadways are being driven through the city, and up go palatial stores. Most English newspapers are modest in *locale*. But the Argentine newspapers keep in the sun. *La Prensa* is one of the best-informed journals in the world. It has a noble exterior to its offices. Inside are luxurious suites of rooms, lecture halls, libraries, and the public are invited to enter. Every public building, all the clubs, even the churches, seem to be tied up with long ropes of different coloured electric lamps, so that on nights of festival the switch is jerked and the whole place is radiantly illuminated.

It is all very wonderful. The confusion, the barbarism, the love of beauty and the display of dollars, the inflow of invested gold, the coming of the immigrant, the whirl of business, the big deals, the gambling, the making of fortunes and the losing of fortunes, dazzle the mind. But you feel the fascination of Buenos Aires. It has grown so astonishingly in so short a time that you gasp when you contemplate how much more it is likely to grow.

CHAPTER IV

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC

The place Argentina holds in the world is due to the meat and wheat it sends to other lands. But having recognised its fecundity as a good food-producing area, it is well to start at the beginning. Argentina may have had fine grazing tracks capable of rearing untold millions of cattle and arable land that had only to be scratched to yield excellent crops of cereals; but without transport values are at a minimum. Accordingly, the development and prosperity of the Argentine is mainly due to railways. The sum of £300,000,000 British capital is invested in Argentine railways and electric tramways.

I travelled a good deal in the Republic, from Buenos Aires to Inca in the Andes, and from Tucuman in the north to Bahia Blanca in the south. I journeyed over hundreds of miles of flat, featureless, dreary country that grew nothing but wild grasses until a few years ago. And there are plenty of sandy, bush-studded, alkali-stricken acres – just as you find barren patches in the United States, Canada, Siberia, and Australia – but there are thousands of leagues awakened into life, *estancias* with great herds of cattle munching at the alfalfa, stretches of wheat and maize, on and on, as though without end, the only break on the horizon being the colonist's mud hut, a clump of trees – and it always seems the same clump of trees – which indicates a ranch, and the ever-whirring American water-wheel. As you travel through England it is the spires of churches that pierce the sky. The only thing that ever pierces the sky on the Argentine pampas is the zinc American water-wheel. The Argentine *estanciero* thinks a water-wheel is of more use to him than a church.

All over this land, zigzagging, curving, intersecting, sometimes running in an absolutely straight line for a hundred and fifty miles, is the greatest length of railway lines in the world for a population of seven millions. The towns are far apart; villages are few. You journey half a day, and, except at the little wayside stations, do not see more than half a dozen folk on the land. Yet it is a smiling land, and greets the sunshine with abundance. The railways in the Argentine are to garner this wealth. Freight trains, with cars of the colossal American pattern, trundle their long length across the plains.

I recall one night when, at a forgotten siding, the engine drew out to get water, taking a saunter along the train side. It was brilliantly lit with electricity, and the restaurant car, with the usual little red-shaded lamps on the tables, was busy; crowds of passengers were dining, and the usual waiters were scurrying, and there was the usual Continental fare, and champagne and Moselle wines, and the usual mineral waters you get on the Nord express. That gleaming train in central South America was the symbol of what railway enterprise has done in Argentina.

There are 20,000 miles of railroads in the Republic. The British showed the way in the initial building, and their lines pass through some of the fattest territory. The French have been tardy followers, but have constructed useful minor lines. The Argentine Government has built State lines through country that was suitable for colonisation, but which did not appeal to the outside investor. These State railways are financially a failure. One reason is that the territory through which they run is not of the best. The principal reason is that they are the prey of the politicians. Constituencies have to be considered, and innumerable jobs found for the hangers-on of political parties. Business conditions are the last to be thought of, and, though the Government has done well in throwing these lines into distant regions needing development, they are not likely to succeed until placed under different control.

Not only have the Argentines themselves not started railway companies, but they have no money invested in the foreign companies. One cause is that, though the Government insists on a local board of directors, the real board of directors is abroad, chiefly in London. Another cause is that dividends are limited by law to 7 per cent., and that is not a sufficient return for the Argentine. He does not

care to touch investments that do not yield 12 per cent., and when he gets 30 per cent. he thinks that about fair – and the country is so prosperous it can afford it.

Although within the last fifteen years millions of British money have poured into Argentina for railway construction, the investor in the old days cast a hesitating eye on South America as a place to sink his capital. In the 'fifties a railway a few miles long was all that Argentina could boast, and ten years later, when 7 per cent. was guaranteed, money was not forthcoming. As an inducement to construct a line between Rosario and Cordoba the absolute ownership of three miles on either side of the line was offered. Even with such an attraction the British investor was shy.

Gradually, however, money was forthcoming, and lines were laid. In the 'eighties there came a spurt. It was not till the years following 1900 that money could be had for the asking. Lines cobwebbed the profitable country; distant points were linked up; land which previously had little beyond prairie value bounced up in price.

Though to-day there is a thought in the public mind that a little too much money has been thrown into Argentina, that land prices are too inflated – which they are – I have traversed districts which three years ago were wilderness; but a spur of railway has been driven into them, and instantly farming has been started. I saw hundreds of freshly-built homesteads – crude, and the life harsh, but it was the beginning of great things – and alfalfa had been laid down, and cattle were feeding, and wide spaces which previously were sandy and apparently inhospitable were carpeted with the bright green of new wheat. Just as in Canada there is a belief that the breaking up of the land had decreased the severity of the frost, so there is a belief in Argentina that rains follow the plough. Places which formerly had little rainfall, and which had a doubtful agricultural future, are proving successful. Yet without the advance of railways the country would have been as forlorn as when the Indians roved the pampas.

Railway companies in England have had to fight landowners to make headway. In Argentina landowners welcome the coming of a railway, for obvious reasons. Most of the wealthy Argentines owe their fortunes to their land being benefited by the railways. As a rule, out in the far districts, a railway company can get the necessary land for nothing. Owners are willing to make financial contributions. The general managers of the big British railways in Argentina get large salaries – £7,000 a year. This is partly to remove them from the range of temptation of being bribed by owners, syndicates, or land companies to authorise the making of railways where they would not be economically advisable. Of course, extensions near the big towns cost the railways as much as they would in England. I know a man who thirty years ago bought a piece of land for £1,600. He sold it to a railway company for over £200,000.

Though foreign capital is having so extensive a run in networking the country with railways, the Argentine Government has a much closer grip on the working of the lines than the Board of Trade has on English companies. It is therefore no misrepresentation to say that, whilst private owners are glad to have their property enhanced in value by the juxtaposition of a railway, the Government puts obstacles in the way for what are ostensibly public reasons. Accordingly, expensive "diplomacy" has sometimes to be used. The Government is sufficiently aware of the return the foreign investor gets – and when fresh extensions are sought it invariably withholds its consent until some concession has been wrung out of the company, such as an undertaking to construct a line through a district that cannot, for some time at any rate, be a success. There is never any guarantee that another company will not be formed to work the same district. The Government smiles at the fight between the two lines for traffic – to the public benefit. When companies propose to amalgamate the Government either makes such demands in regard to uneconomic lines that the thing falls through or a veto is put upon the amalgamation altogether.

Perhaps it is due to the excellence of the railways that the Argentine high roads are so bad. And frankly, though I know most of the new lands of the world, I know of no region where the country roads are so villainous as in this Republic. Rarely are they anything beyond mother earth. In wet

weather they are quagmires, and I have seen vehicles stranded, unable to be hauled by a team of five horses. In summer, when rain is absent, they are foot-deep furrows of dust. I shall never forget a motor excursion through the sugar plantations round about Tucuman. The way was like a magnified ploughed field, and all the ridges were of dust. We drove through it as an engine drives through snow.

All railway material comes in duty free, but one of the conditions is that 3 per cent. of the profits shall be used for the making of roads leading to railway stations. The companies do not object, because the call is not large, and it is to their interest that agriculturists should be able to get their produce to the railway station to be transported over the lines.

The Direccion-General de Ferrocarriles is the authority over the railways in Argentina. It decides the number of trains which shall be run, and it insists on the number of coaches. There must be a certain number of dormitory cars on all-night trains, and restaurant cars are obligatory over certain distances. Every train carries a letter-box, and recently the companies have been squeezed into carrying the mails for nothing. A medicine chest, a stretcher, a bicycle – so that quick communication can be made with the nearest station in case of accident – and all sorts of necessities in case of a breakdown are compulsory. Every carriage is thoroughly disinfected every month, and there is always a card to be initialled by an inspector. All bedding and mattresses are subject to scientific disinfection such as I have seen nowhere in Europe.

No time-tables can be altered without the sanction of the National Railway Board at least two months before coming into operation. If trains stop at stations for which they are not scheduled a heavy fine is imposed; and all late trains, and the reason, have to be reported to the Government authority. No alteration, however small, to a station building or to the design of rolling stock is permissible without the sanction of the Government representatives. A complaint book is at every station, open to anyone to complain on any subject. Guards also keep a book. Many of the complaints are amusing. I heard of one man who insisted on writing in the complaint book that "everything was in perfect order and the staff faultless." Occasionally passengers will have a dispute, and whilst one will find fault in the complaint book with the manners of the train attendants, another will write beneath that the attendants are all right, and it is the complainant's manners which are at fault.

There are the usual buffers in front of an engine; but they are all hinged, and have to be hoisted backwards when a train is travelling, because if an animal were run into, the cow-catcher might not be able to throw the beast aside, for it could be caught between the catcher and the protruding buffer. Though, on the face of it, the Government subjects the companies to innumerable restrictions, and frequently imposes vexatious regulations, it must be recognised that public safety is the thought behind them all.

The Republic lives by its exports of meat and agricultural produce. Ninety-five per cent. of this trade is carried to the ports by the railways. From the railroad cars one beholds productiveness; yet fifteen or twenty miles away lies land just as productive but as yet untouched by the plough, because there is neither sufficient population to cultivate nor railways to carry. Within the next dozen years there must inevitably be a further spurt in the making of feeding or auxiliary lines. Something like £20,000,000 a year is crossing the ocean for fresh railway enterprises in Argentina. Nearly 40,000,000 tons of goods are carried over the lines each year, and the receipts are something like £25,000,000 annually. And yet but a fragment of the harvest of this new land is being garnered. Its untrodden millions of acres await new railways to open up the country.

CHAPTER V

SETTLEMENT ON THE LAND

Prolific though Argentina is, and though its agricultural wealth has only been scratched, it cannot be described as an ideal country for the poor immigrant. The eyes of the land have been well picked, and there are rich personal estates covering one hundred and fifty square miles.

There is little disposition to voluntary splitting up of estates, but rather to hold whilst annually the value increases with the coming of people and the advancement of railways. The Government is doing something to assist the small man with limited capital to settle on distant Government lands. But the poor immigrant, with nothing but his muscle and his industry, has a long and rough road to travel before he reaches independence as a landed proprietor. It is a hard land in which to start making a fortune; but the man of money who can step into the Republic, say, with £25,000 to play with, and who invests judiciously, can double his capital in three years.

Whilst the old Argentines, those of Spanish descent, have waxed wealthy simply by sitting still and letting the foreigner develop their property, there are British Argentine families whose estates, if realised, would produce double-figured millions, and whose proprietors landed as labourers less than fifty years ago. Money has come to lots of these people, shrewd and lucky, as though they held the key to a cave of jewels. Some have remained modest in spite of possessions; others look upon gold as the only god, and their blatant display at Mar del Plata, and on the steamers of the Royal Mail Company, is something which would make the conduct of the new rich of Chicago Quakerish by comparison.

The cry of Argentina, like that of all new lands, is for population. Over 300,000 fresh arrivals land annually from all corners of the earth, Russia, Syria, France, Germany, and England, but mainly from Spain and Italy. Whilst the Spaniard comes to stay, there is a considerable ebb and flow amongst the Italians, thousands coming out for the harvest when wages are high, and making sufficient to return for the rest of the year; then they return for the next harvest. Allowing for the ebb, Argentina gets a solid increase in population by immigration of over 250,000 persons a year, and there are no assisted passages and no offers of free land.

At each of the ports are Government hotels for immigrants. That at Buenos Aires accommodates a thousand people. The new arrival, instead of being distraught at landing in a strange country, or possibly falling a prey to its sharks, is housed and fed for five days as the guest of his new country. Careful inquiry is made as to capabilities, and, as there is a never-satisfied demand from the interior for labourers, work is certain, and officials see him and his baggage on the train, and an official meets him at his destination and sees him firmly settled in his fresh life. As work is assured, Argentina is a land where there are no unemployed – except amongst the dissolute, who are to be found in all countries. I saw these immigrants on the *Avon* gathered at Vigo, and I saw them in distant provinces, and I was struck with their sturdiness and health. I place on record that I never saw a drunken man during all my wanderings in the Republic. Blessed with a fine climate, and the winter so temperate that fires are not necessary, life is easy, and there is no crushing into towns for work, as is usual in Canada during the frozen months.

Owing to such immense tracts being held by individual owners – many of whom prefer the pleasures of Paris and Buenos Aires to living on the land where the cereals are grown – most of the cultivation is done by "colonists." The system varies in different parts of the country, but the general procedure is much on these lines. In a little centre of population, maybe a village, but important because those who live many miles round are dependent upon it for supplies, is to be found a store where most things can be bought, from a plough to a tin kettle. The storekeeper enters into a contract with the owner of vast lands to cultivate it, either on rent or on shares of the value of the produce. This storekeeper is a middleman, often a sweater. Though I have no doubt there are honourable exceptions,

he is often a thief into the bargain. He gets a "colonist" to take over a certain area and to cultivate it on shares. The "colonist" has to build a mud house, and sink a well, and he has to buy his plough and hire his horses, and obtain all necessaries from the middleman, who can fix his own price. When the wheat or the maize is gathered the only man to whom the "colonist" can sell is the middleman, who has it very much in his own hands to say what the price shall be, and he frequently furnishes the ignorant "colonist" with false returns as to quantity. But even then he keeps back what is owing on agricultural implements and loaned horses, with the consequence that the poor fellow has very little – if any – margin. It is not too much to say that the "colonists" are in the grip of the middlemen, and it is with difficulty they are ever able to break free.

Of course, the middleman runs risk of little return if there is drought and a bad harvest, and, on the other hand, when he proceeds to sell the wheat he finds himself encompassed by a ring of four Jewish firms, who control the wheat market of the Argentine. The whole practice is vicious, and I cannot but think that before long the Government will have to take the matter in hand.

Admitting the exquisite climate, and the fertility of the soil, and Nature's quick response to light work, the lives of these "colonists" in the distant camp is sad. Men of the Basque country, the north of Spain, the north of Italy, they come from the homeland, where means of livelihood were sparse, to this new land, where, although the chances are rather against them to secure independence, their material well-being is certainly better than in the Old Country. But they are ignorant people; they know nothing of, and so care nothing for, the refinements of life; their houses are not much better than kraals. They are removed by long distances from neighbours; they live on a featureless plain, and have no communication with the outer world; they cannot read, and books and newspapers are foreign to them. Their world is fringed by the horizon. A visit to the wayside station, where, maybe, one train a day passes, is their excitement. There are no schools and no religious instruction. Their moral standard is low.

Many of these "colonists" take to farming with a minimum of practical knowledge. Yet, though I have just drawn a rueful picture, I would not have it thought there are no illuminating spots. A valuable work is being carried on in agricultural instruction. On several occasions I came across specially-built railway cars in which lecturers travel all over the Republic and freely give advice to the peons how to get most out of the soil. During the last seven years (since 1907) the Government has zealously appreciated the need for organising the agricultural and live-stock instruction. The work is not to be compared with the splendid agricultural colleges to be found all over the United States. The significant thing, however, is that the people of the Argentine – perfectly conscious of all the advantages of science, and with most of its best sons educated in Europe – have taken hold of this problem of how to train its population to get the best out of the soil. So schools are being formed over the country where information can be obtained about the special productivity of particular districts, about the growing of grasses, the feeding and care of beasts, milk production, sugar-growing, cheese-making, market-gardening, fruit-rearing, and in far western Mendoza I came across a college that is making instructive experiments in viticulture.

Besides agricultural courses at the Universities, there is much done by way of University extension lectures; but instead of lectures about sea-power in the sixteenth century, or the relationship of Henry VIII. to Rome, the lectures are on the breeding of cattle, the raising of maize, the sowing of alfalfa.

It was my fortune to meet many cultured and travelled Argentines, but, summing the people in a lump, and excluding the viciousness which trails behind the wealth of Buenos Aires, and also making allowance for the lack of that virility and perseverance of those strong men who are fighting the big battle in Canada, the thing which constantly confronted me was the fact that here in South America was a nation, born yesterday, thoroughly alive to the worth of its possessions, brusquely modern, content with nothing but the latest appliances and machinery and thoroughly determined that, in the

contest amongst the widespread agricultural lands to supply food to the millions in crowded Europe, Argentina will not be satisfied with an inferior position.

In a subsequent chapter I will deal with what has already been accomplished in this field. Here, however, I limit myself to pointing out that Argentina is increasing her capabilities with a purely practical education. Men who can neither read nor write, but have come under the influence of these itinerant schools, can talk with scientific knowledge about their trade of food producing, be it meat or cereals.

Now another step is being made, and I trust with happy results in view of the unfortunate position of the "colonists." So successful has been the agricultural instruction during the past half dozen years, that the next thing is to develop the commercial spirit so that the farmer may have some chance of getting a fair return for his labour. Free lectures are given on the business side of agriculture. Then, attached to the schools are special buildings for experiments; and boarded pupils, the sons of men who understand the money value of knowledge, are given a thorough training. So that all may benefit there are free scholarships, and I found that preference is given to competitors who come from districts, suitable for a special industry, where schools have not yet been established.

Anyone who visits the school for viticulture in Mendoza, for agriculture and live stock in Cordoba, and for arboriculture and sugar-making in Tucuman – and I saw all three – comes away nothing less than amazed at the way these transplanted Latins, away south of the Equator and across six thousand miles of ocean, are making headway – and the start only begun a few years ago. There is the real spirit of enthusiasm combined with an optimism which to a man from a staid old country seems exaggerated until, seeing what has been done, imagination is allowed to jump freely into the future. At Mendoza, nestling at the foot of the Andes and reminiscent of a town in Tuscany, where the whole countryside is covered with vineyards and wine is being made to supply millions of wine drinkers in the country – for the Argentine peasant takes wine with his breakfast – experiments are made with the best known vines from Europe on a farm of sixty-seven acres, so that grapes suitable to the soil may be matured. At Cordoba the school has 445 acres, and investigation is made to secure earlier and higher yields, and with special attention to obtaining varieties which have powers of resisting drought. The same sort of thing goes on at Tucuman. The sugar industry is increasing at astonishing speed. Many men with scant practical knowledge are attracted to it. The school gives them instruction and will send members of the technical staff to the sugar factories and distilleries to give assistance. Facts like these argue that Argentina is a country really to be reckoned with, and is not to be dismissed – as I have heard it dismissed in England, even amongst those who consider themselves educated – as a rubbishy South American Republic, whose only crop is revolutions.

All over the Republic "regional schools" are being set up to provide instruction, not in general agricultural subjects, but in regard to the special requirements of the locality – for Argentina varies in climate from tropical in the north to stern cold in the south; dairying, with a model dairy, at Belle Ville; fruit culture at San Juan; forestry in the Benitz colony. A scheme has been devised to equip Argentina with agricultural knowledge by means of courses for children and adults, travelling lecturers, information bureaus, co-operative experiments, regional shows, encouragement of agricultural societies, organisation of regional agricultural experts and military farms. Further, the National Government have done an enormous service in providing irrigation works in regions where the rainfall is uncertain.

It has to be admitted that some areas are subject to drought, and this and other evils have to be taken into consideration when reviewing the agricultural growth of a country like Argentina, which lives by its produce, and which in 1912 exported £36,000,000 worth of live-stock products and £53,000,000 worth of agricultural products. Given good years, the *estanciero* in average country makes 30 per cent. on the year. He can afford to have one bad year in three and yet be prosperous. But although districts suffer, the area of the country is so vast that losses are swamped in general prosperity.

As the older countries of the world concern themselves with national defence, Argentina has established a Department of Agricultural Defence, chiefly to fight the plague of locusts, which can eat out a whole district in a single night. I recall in Cordoba Province seeing in the distance what looked like a cloud of smoke. It was a storm of locusts, so dense as it passed that midday was reduced to twilight. The locust blights the land – it is the enemy. The locust is the thing which makes the farmer shudder. When it comes it not only devours every blade of grass within miles, but it lays its eggs in untold millions. The pest has to be destroyed. The Government readily assists localities to destroy the ova. The route of the swarms from the tropical north is known. The telegraph tells of the progress. When they land, the countryside turns out and catches them by the cartload. Sometimes the district in which they have settled is fired. The whole zone where eggs have been planted is ploughed. Animals are driven forth to trample the pest. The Government has in its possession over 20,000,000 yards of metallic barriers to make a line of defence, and when a swarm is penned it is suffocated, burnt, or trampled. The Government not only has its inspectors out, is ever ready to meet and repel the locust invasion from Brazil and Bolivia with suitable appliances, but gives financial assistance to those who help in the extermination. The Argentines are determined to stop this pest. The way they are setting about the work is evidence of their earnestness.

The point I specially desire to make, however, is that farming in Argentina is not all casual, but is becoming a developed national industry. There are many things to criticise about the Government; there is maladministration and there is speculation. But that so much has been accomplished, notwithstanding these drawbacks, accentuates the wonders of progress.

CHAPTER VI

ARGENTINA'S PART IN FEEDING THE WORLD

It is well to mark that of the British food supply from overseas Argentina provides one quarter. Each person in the Republic, after providing enough food to supply himself, sends at least £8 worth of food to other countries.

Argentina covers 776 million acres. Eighty million acres are suitable for wheat, but only one-fourth of this area is cultivated. The population is growing rapidly; it is now over seven millions, and is being increased by about a quarter of a million immigrants every year; but still the cry is for more inhabitants.

At present there are six persons to the square mile; but when you remember that the province of Buenos Aires has a population of two and a half millions, you find the population for the outside areas is just under two per square mile.

Three-quarters of the population are Argentines; everyone born in the country, no matter from what land the parents come, is reckoned an Argentine. Of the new-comers half a million are Italian, a quarter million Spanish, a tenth of a million French; then come the British, numbering 25,000; Germans 18,000; Swiss 15,000; Austrians 13,000, and so on, decreasingly. North Americans are few, though within recent years much United States capital has quietly taken hold of certain industries. Argentina is capable of carrying a population of fifty millions, and it will secure them within the next half-century. In race, language, customs, religion, it is especially favourable to folk from the thronged Latin countries of Europe.

Every settler becomes a violent Argentine. The emphatic patriotism of the American is tepid alongside the hot-blooded nationality of Argentina. It is daily inculcated in the schools. The blue and white striped flag is honoured on every occasion. You are poetically reminded it is of the blue of the sky. When the Argentines were in revolution against Spain in 1810, and needed a banner to flaunt against the red and orange of the enemy, they got pieces of blue and white cloth (intended for garments) from an English warship lying at Montevideo, and made a flag of it. So the Argentine flag, like much of Argentine prosperity, is due to Britain.

In proportion to the population there are as many millionaires in Argentina as in the United States. There are sturdy old fellows, who can hardly write their names, who scarcely know the extent of their wealth. Fifty years ago an Irish labourer landed in the country. He died the other day worth over £4,000,000.

It is none of my business to boom land values in Argentina. Though the tendency of late has been a little too buoyant, I know of no land where there have been such enormous heaves in values, not fictitiously hoisted, but legitimate on development of commerce, as in this Republic. In 1885 you could buy land in the centre of Buenos Aires at 2s. 6d. a square yard. Now you must pay £200 a yard. A suburban plot of 60 by 20 yards, which you could have got twelve years ago for £5, will cost £150. Fine camp land – the "camp" is the Argentine name for farming districts – which could be got for a song a quarter of a century ago will now fetch £100,000 the square league (three miles). I know a plot of land at Rosario which has jumped in value from £2,000 to £40,000 in twenty years.

It is easy to understand how Argentine millionaires are made. In the wars with neighbouring Republics Argentine officers were given tracts of country in lieu of pay: of small value then, but their descendants are fabulously wealthy. The careful Briton who came out when railways were beginning to speed through the country, and acted shrewdly, got land for next to nothing which will bring a better price per acre than land in the home counties. I am writing this in mid-Atlantic on my way home, and each morning on deck I exchange a bow with an old lady who owns 180 square miles of the finest agricultural land in the province of Buenos Aires.

In a previous chapter my pen was somewhat free about the ostentation of the Argentine. But the display of wealth is frequently put to a good purpose. When a fabulous price is paid for a Derby winner it is an Argentine who has found the money. Argentina has a fine breed of horses. As the cattle industry is so important, the best stock is purchased at home. I went to the agricultural show in September, 1913. All the judges had been brought out from England, partly because good judging was needed, but chiefly, I fear, because the Argentines cannot trust each other to give unbiassed decisions. The show was finer housed than any royal show in England, and the quality of the exhibits was quite on a level with anything we can produce. The prize bull, Argentine bred, was sold by auction for over £7,000. Admitted this was a fancy price due to the rivalry of breeders to have the best and to boast about it. A thousand pounds has been paid by a meat company for a Hereford bull to kill; but this may be ascribed to advertisement.

The *estancias*— ranches or stations — are frequently enormous in extent, as wide as an English county, and are managed as well as any great estates in Australia, Canada, or New Zealand. There are the usual show places, maintained by Anglo-Argentines, where the immediate grounds are laid out like an English park, the farm buildings all on the model plan, and the animals of the best stock, whilst a successful endeavour is made toward converting the house into something palatial. Though some *estancias* are far inland, and distant from a railway line, life is far more enjoyable than might be thought. The rich *estanciero*, however, spends little of his time on his land. He is too often an absentee landlord. He has tasted the joys of Europe; besides, his wife and daughters are inclined to prefer Buenos Aires to life in the camp, however healthy. The place is usually run by a manager. Then there are sub-managers, often young Englishmen who have heard of the fortunes to be made; next there are the peons, Spaniards and Italians, who do the meaner work. Life in the camp is arduous. Men are out at dawn, rounding up cattle, giving an eye to the "colonists," attending to fencing, driving beasts to the railway station to be transferred to the "freezers," and it is sundown when the work is over and men go to their quarters. It is a strenuous life, and the employees have little of the pleasures of civilisation.

Within the last ten years the export value of live stock products has increased from £23,000,000 to £36,000,000, and agricultural products from £21,000,000 to £53,000,000. Since 1896 the area under cultivation has grown from 13 million acres to nearly 50 million acres. Of Argentine cereals the United Kingdom imported 1,654,000 tons. There are 30 million cattle in the Republic and 80 million sheep. The breeding of sheep is not what it was, because the Argentine finds he can get a better return from cattle and cereals. So, whilst the value of exported mutton remains very much what it was ten years ago (about £1,250,000), the value of the exported chilled and frozen beef has risen from £1,500,000 to over £6,000,000 a year.

At the ports are big slaughtering establishments, some belonging to Argentine companies, and others to American companies. A bitter feud is being waged to capture the chilled and frozen meat trade, especially in the English market. As England is only three weeks' distance, meat that is only chilled has an enormous advantage over meat from more distant countries which must be frozen. The fact is denied, but it may be taken as certain that there is a big combination of Chicago houses endeavouring to squeeze their competitors out of business — and they seem in a fair way to succeed. The Argentine public are showing fright, and there have been frantic appeals to Congress that steps be taken to check the creation of a trust. Also it is hoped that England may take action. But the authorities in both countries decline to do anything. The Chicago firms have a long purse and are damaging their rivals at both ends, first by paying Argentine cattle breeders unprecedented prices for beasts, and then by selling the meat below cost price in the Smithfield market. Of course, in reply to what is happening, one hears the statement, "Why grumble, when the Argentine cattle dealer gets a high price for his beasts, the London consumer gets cheap meat, and the Chicago firms pay the difference?" That is true. But it does not need much business foresight to understand that when the Anglo-Argentine companies are bankrupt the Chicago trust, having the game in their own hands, will pay their own price for cattle and lift the price of meat in London. Meanwhile, the Argentine

estanciero is quite happy, and is willing to let the future take care of itself. One thing, however, may safely be prophesied. The Argentine Government has a drastic way of doing things. If the expected happens, and the Chicago houses secure the meat industry and begin to force down prices for cattle, there will not be the slightest hesitation in passing a law which will make things uncomfortable for the trust.

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