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FROZEN SHEEP.

A Visit to the Biggest Frozen Meat Factory of the World at Buenos Ayres.

How the Animals Are Killed and Prepared for Europe—The Sheep of the Argentine—The Country Has Over One Hundred Millions of Them and Produces a Hundred Pounds of Wool for Each Person in It—A Visit to the Biggest Produce Market on the Globe—How the Wool is Handled—Live Stock Shipments and How the Argentine is Improving Its Cattle and Sheep—A Ram Which Cost $5,000 and Bulls at $3,000 Apiece.

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BUENOS AYRES, Dec. 2, 1898.—How would you like a mutton chop two feet long? Hundreds of tons of such meat is sold in the markets of Europe every month. Some of it comes from Australia, and a little from New Zealand, but a great deal from the Argentine Republic. It is shipped in a frozen state, and if properly cared for, will keep for a year, and taste as fresh and juicy at the end of that time as when cut from the living sheep.

We ship vast quantities of beef to Europe every year, but the passage across the Atlantic is so swift and the space so small that the meat is merely cooled and kept in cold storage. In going from the Argentine to Europe the ship must steam over the southern ocean. It requires from twenty to twenty-five for the voyage, and all meat must be either alive or frozen. Living animals are expensive freight, and the trade in the Argentine is now freezing mutton for shipment. It has million-dollar frozen meat factories, and it has one establishment which is said to be the largest frozen meat factory of the world.

Before describing my visit to this place, let me tell you something of the Argentine as a sheep raiser. We know a little as to their great output. There are those who think a fair crop, such as we have had in the markets of Europe, kill the wheat farms are a menace to the consideration of the sheep of the Argentine. There are those who think farmers rather than plain farms. When a locust invasion comes it is a considerable distance, but should it become a plague the country would have a potato. At present not one per cent of the Argentine is agricultural, but it is in many sections like unto the Sahara. The producing areas are the edges of the pampas, however, are the larger of the world. No such city of grazing lands exists anywhere else. The area of the south forms a conservatory year. The character of grasses improves by pasturing them to sheep, and cattle, and the flocks and herds steadily grow. It is estimated that one-half of the republic is adapted to sheep raising. The market area of 1,000,000 square miles, a territory greater than ten states the size of New York.

The more sheep the tariff will compel us to know, but the number will not only be hundreds of millions. Some parts of the pampas in Buenos Ayres, a state four-fifths of the sheep of the Argentine now are, will feed two or three sheep to the acre, and other parts require each pasture from two to four acres for a single sheep. The average is thirty. Ayres is 192 sheep to the square mile, or less than one sheep to the acre of land. The total number of sheep in the Argentine is now 105,000,000, or more than twice that of the United States. It is enough to give every man, woman and child in country a flock of 100 sheep. The sheep, however, are not divided up in this way. They are in the hands of comparatively few. I know of men who own 100,000, and there are one or two who, who have, I am told, as much as a million.

The usual size of a flock of sheep ranges from 1,200 to 2,000. This many are kept in charge of one shepherd, who returns from six hundred to twelve days at a time, as he pleases. The sheep are never fed. They live out of doors year in year out, and the shepherd has only to see that they need by grazing. For them is no such thing as a barn or stalk of hay on an Argentine stock farm. The sheep wander off grazing in the direction where the wind blows in the morning, and they return in the evening to sleep about the hut of their shepherd. In some cases there are flocks mixed with wire, but the greater part of the sheep farms are the pampas as the land created them. It is the herders are there to keep the sheep from mixing with those of other flocks, and to see that they are free from diseases. Many scrape off the dings, and has the general care of the flocks. For this and the work at shearing time he is paid $8 a month, or he may work on the shares for one-fourth of the profits. The Argentine shepherd has a life which is dreary in the extreme. He lives in a mud hut away out on the pampas. He has no friends, but he is a near thing, he is too busy to make one, and his chief food is mutton. He supposes allowing him to kill enough sheep to supply him with meat.

Raising sheep for mutton has until lately been done by the Argentines. In the past their profits have been from the wool, hides and tallow. Sheep and cattle were and are still killed for their skins and tallow, the meat being thrown away. Where the flocks have multiplied too rapidly thousands of the older sheep have been driven over the rocks and left to die. They have at times been used for fuel, and in the days when the Spanish ruled this country an edict was promulgated making it a crime to drive living sheep into the River of the Silver Eels. At present it is estimated that the Argentine republic raises one and one-half billion pounds more meat every year than she can consume, or enough more meat to give every man, woman and child in the world a full pound and five a hundred million pounds or so to spare.

It is this great surplus that has brought about the establishment of the meat-packing factories which carry on millions of dollars' worth of business every year, and factories for freezing meat so that it will not melt when thawed out for sale in the retail shops of Europe.

The chief branch of the industry now is fresh mutton. Frozen beef is also shipped, but not so much so as sheep, and when thawed as when from blood. The mutton tastes as juicy and as sweet as a fresh fresh from the fields, and I am assured that the frozen article could not be distinguished from that of old England.

How fast the business is growing can be seen by the comparative shipments of the last five years. In 1893 only 817,000 pounds of sheep carcasses were sent across the ocean. In nine months of that year the sales amounted to 11,000,000, and the number of frozen carcasses shipped to Europe last year was 40,000,000. At present about 200,000 sheep are being slaughtered every month. There are four companies in Buenos Ayres engaged in freezing, and their capital is $5,000,000.

The factory which I visited was killing and freezing about 1,000 sheep a day. It is known as the Sansinena factory. It is at Barracas, at the south end of the city, near the wharves, so that the frozen meat can be taken almost directly from it to the steamer.

The Sansinena factory was one of the first to be established, and I is said that already more than $500,000 had been spent upon it. It covers many acres. Behind it are cattle yards and sheep pens. The slaughter house has 1 lodge, more than an acre of floor space. It is of but one story, having the roof held up by a complicated iron work. The floor when I crossed it was covered with flowing blood. A thousand sheep were in the killing pens, and hundreds more were skinned and cleaned and hung up to cool before being put in the freezing room.

I stopped a minute and watched the killing. It is so quickly done that in four minutes and a half by my watch I saw a sheep pass from active breathing life to the condition of a carcass skinned and cleaned. It was rather by the meat alone and it did not look like food to me. Frozen and then over-cooked in Boston, Chicago and New York. The process of water is kept in it. If sheep can understand and feel for their fellows the killing is rather cruel. Scores of them look on awaiting their turn while their companions and sisters are butchered. In each pen there were at least fifty sheep. Along the front it is as a bench about as high as a man's knee, and the sheep have a fair view of what is going on. They see the knife with one great round knife in its white throat, out of which the red blood ran down into the stream of water which flows through the floor of the pen. Some of the sheep were kicking, others groaned loudly, but I could see that their deaths came almost instantly. The killing is done with a long, sharp, two-edged knife. Two men catch a sheep in the pen and throw it upon its back on the bench. The butcher outside they will stick the knife, holding it in both hands, and with one thrust drives the steel through its throat, cutting the jugular vein. He then goes on to the next sheep, and by the time he is ready for him, killing sheep after sheep at the rate of one or more per minute.

As soon as the sheep has been killed, it is seized and carefully skinned. The carcass is thrown into one place to be cleaned and shipped to Germany for sausage. The kidneys and livers are put in another, for the kidneys to be used for making a sort of stew, and the livers for a sort of liver sausage, which is sent largely sold for cooking, and the kidneys go to the markets of Buenos Ayres. The fat and heads are rendered, and the tongues and hearts are saved. The carcass which is left is so nearly cleaned as any you will see on our best dressed sheep, and it is so dressed after the fashion of the English markets, a matter so important that the factory has a skilled London butcher here to superintend this feature of the work.

The freezing is done in great chambers, each of which will hold 40,000 carcasses at one time. The chambers have walls of wood and sawdust a foot thick. The ceiling of each is covered with coils of pipe, through which ammonia and brine are arranged chemically cool the air in the room with air which is 20 degrees below zero. It takes three days and nights to keep the pipes filled and these work on both day and night. The men, when I saw them, were covered with frost, as were the walls, and the place was intensely cold. In it, hanging down from racks with their headless necks covered the floor, were something like a thousand freezing carcasses of sheep. They were almost ready for shipment, and when the chief engineer, who acted as my guide, took one down to show it to me I found that it was as hard as stone. Within forty-eight hours after being put in the freezing room the carcass will be perfectly frozen. After that are frozen they are packed up in fine white muslin sacks and laid away in cold storage to await the next steamer. I saw the sacks of wool wrapped, when shipped, from thirty to seventy pounds, according as it is a sheep or a lamb. The sheep coat about 12 a piece, so that the wool used for this purpose, sheep, as they run in the flock, can be bought. I am told, for from 60 to seventy-five cents apiece. The freight is 1 cent a pound, and the mutton there sells for ten cents and upward per pound. As much of the work as possible is done by machinery, but the men are paid so much less than at home. The average for slaughterers, skinners and general workmen is less than $1.25 a day, and I understand that the chief butchers would like such wages.

Everything connected with the factory, with the exception of the blood, is used. The heads are used for making gelatine, the skin leaves for knife handles, bones are made into combs, some of the entrails from "cut-out" for the strings. The sheepskins are dried and sold to tailors, and the tongues and hearts are put into tins and sent to market factory partridges and pheasants, chickens, turkeys, fish and armadillos are frozen for shipment to Europe.

Leaving the frozen meat factory, I drove to the Mercado Central de Frutos. This is the great central market of Buenos Ayres, where wool, hides and grain are sold in wholesale lots. It is the largest produce market of the world under one roof. It covers many acres and millions of pounds of wool are handled in it every year. It is a brick building of three stories, lying near the docks on the Riachuelo River, just south of Buenos Ayres called Barracas. Barracas means warehouses, and Barracas is the port of Buenos Ayres where the commerce of the Argentine is done. The wool and hides are there sold in market houses in the warehouses and there are docks for shipping. At shearing time wool comes in in bales and ship loads. There are scarcely enough cars to haul the stuff, and the two market houses are so full that I was scarcely get through it. In these bales are packed with sacks of dirty, greasy wool. Carts and wagons loaded with wool, sacks and other traffic, block the streets and the wool is piled in the floor with great crates, and the cars are run right into the market itself. Each man's wool is put in a pile by itself. It is taken out of the bale and left loose to be stacked, so that the buyers can easily examine it. In going around these piles you must be careful to keep your clothes from coming down. The wool is wrapped in a fine filmy stuff which stays when I shook my hand into a pile of it it came out shining. In the dark I had dipped it in vaseline. The shippers tell me that the wool grows the coarser better in the uncultivated state, and that it thus brings a greater price. Wool loses from 50 to 70 per cent in its weight from shearing, and the Argentine farmers find it really cheaper to feed corn and allow the European buyers to do so.

Two-thirds of the Argentine wool goes to France, Germany and Belgium, though there is a big buyer, with a fine market in the United States. Our new tariff, as it was interpreted, has set heavy a duty upon it as to keep it out, although the Argentine would pay all duties, and more, if we would take it. I am told, compete with the cheap wool from Russia. It is known as the Cordova wool, and is largely used for making carpets.

The Argentine sheep are of no breeding in common. In 1893 the importation of sheep 45,000,000 pounds, in 1894 it was 21,000,000, and in 1895 it was 22,000,000 pounds, or more than one pound for each man, woman and child in the republic. The product are always sold to mixed breeds. They were almost ready for shipment, and when the chief engineer, who acted as my guide, took one down to show it to me I found that it was as hard as stone. Within forty-eight hours after being put in the freezing room the carcass will be perfectly frozen. After their are frozen they are packed up in fine white muslin sacks and laid away in cold storage to await the next steamer. I saw the sacks of wool wrapped, when shipped, from thirty to seventy pounds, according as it is a sheep or a lamb. The sheep coat about 12 a piece, so that the wool used for this purpose, sheep, as they run in the flock, can be bought, I am told, for from 60 to seventy-five cents apiece. The freight is 1 cent a pound, and the mutton there sells for ten cents and upward per pound. As much of the work as possible is done by machinery, but the men are paid so much less than at home. The average for slaughterers, skinners and general workmen is less than $1.25 a day, and I understand that the chief butchers would like such wages.

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ADIOS JAMAICA!

A Sixty-Mile Excursion from Kingston to Mandeville—Tid bits of Information Concerning the English Island—Life in the Highlands—Off Again for Cuba.

Special Correspondence.

PORT ROYAL, Jamaica, Nov. 30th.

We arrive Saturday afternoon, and proceeded under our feet about us, and then in Jamaica. We have made journeys interesting around the island, by railway, by carriage, in the cabin, in canoes and coaches, interested everywhere commendation and courtesy, to give every variety of information and to the whole experience delightful.

The Argentine republic is a rich country, with little boys between the lots of data, collecting which compared with our last trip of the island. We saw good horses, fat and well to ride to the telegraphic authorities—the confidential clerk, clerk, they said, board of Colonial Secretary Chamberlain, and a Boston businessman, who for years has been so familiar as A. B. C. with every road of the corner of the queen's dominions. It happened that both were going to Mandeville on the day of our excursion, and the clerk, stay-mate taken, was ride offered and accepted, and we for the ordinary fare.

Talk of scenery forward! Nothing equals a man's carriage! Nothing is flowing in steady stream, the long days, from the Spanish Main, which we to the frontier by the cities. As the train pulled along at an average rate of seven miles an hour, our carriage was the center of interest in the place to be seen, and we were hailed by the people in the stations, and invited to be introduced to the ladies, and invited to be introduced to the ladies, and invited to be introduced to the ladies