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THE WHEAT FIELDS OF THE ARGENTINE.

Rosario, October, 20, 1898.—Rosario is the Chicago of South America. It is the chief wheat market of the Argentine Republic. It ships thousands of tons of wheat, corn and linseed every week, and within a short time after this letter is published hundreds of ocean steamers will be anchored under its bluffs loading this year's crops for Europe. Rosario is situated on the Parana river about 200 miles by land from Buenos Ayres. It is three hundred miles by water from that city, and about as far inland from the Atlantic ocean as Pittsburg. Ocean steamers sail for two hundred miles up the Rio de la Plata past Buenos Ayres into the mouth of the Parana, and then for about three hundred miles up the river to Rosario. The Parana at this point is a mighty stream. It has many islands, and it is very wide. Its channel is so deep that steamers drawing sixteen feet can reach Rosario at any time of the year, and they come here from all parts of the world for grain.

Rosario itself is one of the thriving towns of the Argentine. It was founded about 175 years ago, but wheat raising in the Argentine gave it a great boom, and within the last ten years it has almost trebled its population. It has now about 150,000 people. It is well built, the streets crossing one another at right angles. It has good hotels, daily newspapers, electric lights, telephones and banks. It does a big wholesale and retail business, but the most of its money comes from wheat.

The warehouses are along the river and the wheat is, I venture, taken from the cars to the steamers more cheaply at Rosario than at any other point in the world. The land about here is a deep alluvial soil which has been carried down from the mountains by the streams of the Rio de la Plata system. Through this soil the Parana has cut its channel to such a depth that the bluffs upon which the city stands are at least seventy feet high. They are precipitous, and Rosario is built clear to their edges, so that the warehouses are higher than the masts of the steamers floating on the river. All along the banks of the river warehouses have been built. They are made of gray galvanized iron. They have railroad tracks running between them and the edge of the bluff, and much of the wheat which is carried in on the cars is transferred to the ships without going into the warehouses. The transfer is made by gravity. Each shipping company has a long chute running from the edge of the bluff, and often from the warehouse itself, down into the river. These chutes are made in sections, and are so arranged that they form a trough running from the bluff right into the holds of the steamers. Some of the chutes are sections of iron which can be hung on wire cables, making an iron chute from the hold to the warehouse, so arranged that it can be lengthened or shortened at will.

The wheat is bagged on the farm. The cars carry it to the edge of the bluff, and Italian laborers take the bags and pitch them into the chutes. As soon as a bag touches the chute it begins to descend, and it fairly gallops down the inclined trough into the steamer. The bags fly down one after the other at the rate of several to the minute, and as you look at them they make you think of an army of galloping mice and you remember the horde which attacked the cruel Archbishop Hatto in his island in the Rhine.

At harvest time the wheat becomes congested at Rosario. The railroads have more than they can do to carry the crop, and almost all other traffic has to be suspended. There are not enough cars for the business. There is here no such system of interchange of cars as we have in the United States. One company's cars cannot go over the tracks of other companies. The result is that the wheat is piled up in bags at the stations and left there until it can be shipped. I saw such piles in different parts in the Argentine. As yet there are comparatively few elevators and the caring for the wheat is after the most wasteful methods. There are no barns in the Argentine. The weather is such that the stock feeds out of doors the year around, and only the finest of blooded animals are kept under cover. Many of the work animals are not fed, but have to rely upon what they can eat in the pasture fields. The result is that there is no chance for the farmer to store wheat in barns and he has to rely upon the railroads for getting it to the markets. The land is level. There are no grades to speak of and the freight rates should be low.

I believe that Argentine wheat raising is in its infancy. Twenty years ago the wise men said that grain could never be grown to any extent. The Argentines were then importing millions of dollars' worth of wheat every year, and the farmers who were pasturing stock on what are now the principal wheat fields were eating flour shipped from the United States and Chile. Today the Argentine has to a large extent the wheat trade of South America. It plants millions of acres every year and it produces from thirty to eighty million bushels a season according to the weather and to the invasions of the locusts. For the last seven or eight years it has produced from three-fifths to four-fifths of the wheat crop of this continent, and today it is shipping wheat to the different parts of South America and to Europe. When the Argentine has a good crop the prices of wheat in the European markets are affected and our farmers often get less for their wheat in consequence. In the past year or so flour mills have been springing up and the Argentine has now more than 500 flour mills, many of which use machinery imported from the United States. I had as fine bread for my breakfasts at Buenos Ayres as you can get at any hotel in New York, and as a rule the

flour used in the Argentine is as good as any we produce. A great deal of Argentine flour is shipped to Brazil and Uruguay, and some is being sent to Europe.

The grain producing area of the Argentine increases every year. For a long time it was confined to the valleys of the Parana and Uruguay rivers, and it was supposed that wheat could only be grown near these rivers. Year by year, however, the farms have been pushed farther back, and the wheat area at present is as large as that of England and France. It is said that if all the lands which are known to be wheat lands were used and these should produce a crop of ten bushels per acre the Argentine could now produce one-half the wheat crop of the world.

A new wheat region is that of the south. The Argentine from north to south is longer than the United States. During the past few months I have been away down in Patagonia. I have traveled thousands of miles through tillable grounds which have never been touched by the plow. Three hundred miles south of Buenos Ayres there is a thriving seaport called Bahía Blanca. There are big wheat warehouses there, and the railroad men tell me that they have more wheat than they can handle. This wheat comes from the southern province of Buenos Ayres, a province which is enormous in its extent and which is almost altogether composed of good land. Just south of this region there are vast pampas having scanty pasturage and usually looked upon as deserts. Through these pampas run the two great rivers, Colorado and Negro, or, in other words, Red and Black rivers. I traveled for days along these rivers in company with a party of railroad surveyors. The rivers have a quantity of water the year round, and their fall is such as to make irrigation possible for a wide distance along them from the Andes to the sea. In the future there will be irrigated wheat farms throughout that region. The land is as rich as any part of Colorado or Utah or California, and its settlement and use is only a question of time. The Welsh, who have a colony much further south, are growing wheat by irrigation. They are now exporting about 5,000 tons a year, and this has all been grown on what until now was the desert sands of Patagonia. About Rosario and elsewhere in this valley of the Parana the soil is a rich, black loam from six inches to three feet deep lying on a bed of clay. All the country for hundreds of miles above and below Rosario and comprising large parts of the provinces of Buenos Ayres, Santa Fe and Entre Rios, are composed of this soil, which is very good for wheat.

I have never seen such poor farming anywhere as is going on in the Argentine. Our own farmers are bad enough, but these people are infinitely worse. In the United States the average yield of wheat per acre, taking the whole country, is from twelve to thirteen bushels. That of the Argentine is not