

SHEEP FARMING IN BUENOS AYRES.

Of all the countries lately opened up to the enterprise of the farmer and the merchant, Buenos Ayres, perhaps, offers greater attractions than any. During the past fifteen or twenty years, though there have been dull and sometimes bad seasons, the country has gone on steadily increasing in agricultural and commercial prosperity. Its vast natural resources, and the gradually increasing liberal tendencies of the Government and best men in the Republic, are good security that this prosperity is not of any transitory character.

The outrage at Taudil, on last New Year's Day, has thrown some odium on Buenos Ayres, causing some who would turn to it as a field for settling in to pause before they emigrate to such a country. It is a great pity for enterprising, active men to be prejudiced to their own disadvantage, for I believe that Buenos Ayres offers to all classes of English people going abroad as good a field as any on which to expend their energy and capital. And, besides, the massacre at Taudil was nothing more than what may happen in any country where a number of men get excited by the representations of a ferocious fanatic. It was no Indian invasion: Taudil is a long way from the frontier where these raids are possible. On New Year's Day some of the natives of Taudil had been keeping it, as they keep all their other feast days—drinking cana extensively, and getting highly excited upon it. On such occasions they usually manage to kill a few of their own number, for, falling out in their cups, they ultimately try to settle their quarrel with their knives. Unfortunately, this time it happened that these drunken wretches were easily got in hand by a priest whose hostility to foreigners was well known. Inflamed by the cana, and roused to senseless fury by the address of this priest, instead of stabbing each other, they attacked the English and French settlers round the town, and took their lives. Outbreaks of this kind are possible in all countries; in India there have been plenty of them; wherever a thorough-going fanatic is found, he can always in some way or other find a following.

The Indians hanging on the outskirts of the country are its greatest annoyance, but they are never able to venture very far over the frontier. They make their raids something in the style of the old Border forays—dash suddenly down upon the outlying settlers' flocks and crops, sweep off everything that they can lift or drive, and then are over the frontier, back to their deserts, before the somewhat tardy National Guard can be called out to arrest them. But anyone who has either watched the progress of the Buenos Ayrean province, or has read the history of it, will see that increasing civilisation is gradually pressing back the Indian; every year he is retreating further and further into the central deserts of the country. Not so very many years ago, Indians were quite common in the neighbourhood of Buenos Ayres, were sometimes seen stalking about in their blankets in the town itself. Now Buenos Ayres would open its eyes as wide as Edinburgh or London if any such phenomena were visible in its streets or squares. Follow the boundary line of the province of Buenos Ayres, and just where it rests on the map you may fix pretty nearly the area of Indian incursion, except that district which extends from the Parana for about one hundred miles. The extreme west is the worst district, because the most thinly populated by settlers, and also because the retreat is open. But in time the present limit of their raids will be thrown back further into the centre of the country, and so the war will go on till the last Indian tribe is beaten either into submission or to death, for they belong to those sinking races which are bound to go down as soon as the country they infest rises above the veriest barbarism.

Sheep farming is the great source of agricultural wealth, and is most followed by foreign settlers. Some have tried agriculture, but in great measure that has, up till now, been unsuccessful. The districts where the experiment has been made do not, upon the whole, seem to be well fitted for wheat-growing; the temperature is, perhaps, too high; then the dry season is often too severe, and destructive hail-storms are not unfrequent. Cattle-farming is sometimes combined to a certain extent with sheep, but at the present time the cattle trade is almost entirely in the hands of the native Spaniards.

Thirty years ago sheep were of no value whatever; their wool was not worth carriage to town; the fleece was either allowed to drop bit by bit from the animal's back, or if it was carelessly clipped, it was only to be thrown into the corrals to make a better footing for the stock. They were reared only for food; no care was taken of them in any way. As for trying to improve the breed, that never seems to have occurred to the Spaniards of the country. But about

that time some foreign settlers began, at great expense to themselves, to import fine sheep from Europe, principally at first those of the breed. Those who were able established flocks on their estancias, and almost every one to expend more care and attention on the breeding of the small native sheep. With the improvement of the stock, along with better modes of flock-keeping off scab, it was not long before Buenos Ayres attracted some attention in the market; that time constant importations of large sheep every year going into the country; nor estancieros confining themselves to the market they now in many cases have flocks of the long Leicester and Cotswold.

The success which has followed these improvements is very decided. Before the introduction from Europe, a sheep was not worth fourpence in 1852 their number in the whole province estimated at 4,500,000; in 1860, there were 60,000,000. Sheep farmers having been then for a period very successful, and wool high, and still rising year after year a sort of mania came on many, and almost one who could afford the price possessed him at least one flock of sheep. All sorts of suit unsuitable persons flew to this work, prices rose considerably, and sheep easily brought 10s. Up till the close of the Civil War in the States there seemed to be everything to justify sheep-farming fever, but when the last Confederate army was hopelessly beaten in the lines round Vicksburg, then wool began steadily to fall. Close came the war in Paraguay; disaster on disaster followed; many of those who had taken large flocks in 1859 and 1860 were utterly ruined, and were thankful if the returns paid the outgoings. Since then, however, there has again been considerable improvement in the prospects of Buenos Ayrean farmer. Not merely has wool advanced considerably in price, but there has been great and increasing trade with Europe in hides and grease. If we take the trouble to go to the figures for evidence, we find that the wool which in 1860-61 was 60,734 bales, was in 1869, 200,000 bales. Since then there has been a rise in wool. Various local reports declare to have been good, and it certainly is a fact that the estancieros are loudly rejoicing in their profits.

With a few exceptions, those who go to Buenos Ayres are either young men, with three or four hundred pounds in their pockets, or not unfrequently land in the country with not a fraction of a pound. The opportunities offered to these of settlers are very great. In Australia, it is possible for any but a very wealthy man to run, and the arrangements common there do not prevent the sheep farmer to offer beginners any of the advantages which they can easily obtain in Buenos Ayres. Suppose, then, a young man with perhaps £300 out there to push his way in the world. He may go a year or two in the country learning his trade, gaining experience as to the modes of managing sheep, and getting a general insight into the habits and customs of the country. Suppose that after that he holds sheep of his own, he will set about it in the following manner: He will agree with a large estanciero to buy half a flock of sheep. The young man will purchase 1000 sheep, the estanciero giving the other half of the land, or at least a portion of it, free of rent. The 1000 sheep will cost something over £1000; just now even more than that. Then the estanciero shares equally the expenses of erecting the corrals. The young man does all the work, and at the end of the year the profits are divided in two parts. This system is called medianero (mesa halves), and it usually lasts for three years or more, which time, and in ordinary circumstances, the value of the sheep will have doubled, and the young man will be about for some land to rent for himself. Now the largest sheep-farmers have begun in this way. It compels one to be thoroughly acquainted with everything relating to sheep management, and to be a theorist alone but in practice also. As in extensive wool-growing countries, scab is a great evil to be overcome, but it is a disease which a great extent be avoided, or at any rate checked by using tobacco sheep-dip. One medianero of sheep with preparation of that kind, another not, and the result is, that while the first has a strong flock of his own in three years, the other has a lesser number, and during the time of his sheep his clip has been considerably lighter than that of his more active and careful neighbour.

Those who land in Buenos Ayres with no other capital than their industry and intelligence will find a field for both. Their plan is to begin as a shepherd, hiring with some estanciero at about a year. They are provided with everything necessary for expense, food, horses, and quarters being kept by the master. Their life is lonely enough some-

if they should be sent to some outlying rancho (shepherd's hut), with no companions but dogs, sheep, and one or two horses; and to some natures the mechanical sameness must be very trying. These are its drawbacks; but, in spite of the comparative solitude of such a life, many have taken very kindly to it, and one is often surprised at this, when you learn that some of them were at home the most untiring dancers, and the boldest leaders in the hunting field. These men have few expenses, so can easily save something every year; and if they have been steady and active, it is probable the estanciero will help them to a flock, by giving them a third share in return for their labour. This is quite common; it is called "being on thirds;" the estanciero bears all the expenses of hut and folds, and at the end of the year the profits are divided into three equal parts, two of which go to the estanciero, and the third to the man who has kept the flock. In perhaps three or four years the man who has been "on thirds" may probably be able to go on halves, and after that his rise will be the same as the medianero.

Cattle farming, being still mostly in the hands of the natives, does not naturally interest us so much. The estancias are much larger, and are not in the sheep districts, where land is too dear for such a purpose, but outside this the region of cattle farming begins, and runs right up to the frontier, where many natives hold large tracts from the Government on the condition of doing all they can to repress the Indians. It is believed that there are over 6,000,000 of horned cattle in the province, and the animals slaughtered at the saladeros—that is, for hides, jerked beef, and tallow—amount to half a million a year, exclusive of the number consumed in the city. The southern districts of the province are said to be the most favourable for cattle farming, as the western frontier is still too much disturbed to be very safe.

I said that many native Spaniards hold large tracts of land on the frontier on condition of helping to repel the Indians. These natives are usually very rich men, and seldom live on their estancias, but manage them by a major-domo, or steward, and a number of peons. It is their interest that Indian incursion should cease, and the only way to gain this end is to get these thinly peopled districts populated as fast as possible. So they are very anxious to attract foreign settlers to their land, offer them every encouragement and assistance, are quite willing to give them land and flocks on halves for nothing but their work. To those who have [but their own industry and activity, this has often been, and still is, a great temptation; for if they were sure of being left in peace, they would soon be independent. But there is always the risk; it may, through some lucky chance, never come, but it may, and the worst of it is that the better the flock the more likely it is to happen.

Those who go out to settle in Buenos Ayres should be able and willing to help themselves. Some have gone with money in their pockets, invested it in sheep, and then walked about idly expecting their purchase to pay them admirably. But unfortunately the heavens never do rain gold. At first the settler has to do without many of the comforts and all of the luxuries common in this country. At times he may have to cook his own dinner, bake his own bread, and keep house for himself; in a word, perform almost every one of the duties which in this country would be turned over to servants. All those who have had to work their way up to flocks of their own must have experienced something of this; but along with it they lead free, manly, independent lives—at first gaining little money, it is true, but if they are steady at work they are certain in the long run to make, not perhaps a fortune, but certainly a reasonable competency, which will either enable them to embark in an estancia of their own, or else allow them to come home and live among their own relations.

If the life of a Buenos Ayrean sheep-farmer is not cushioned about with comfort, he enjoys something which many in this country entirely want—an active, busy life—one, too, without many cares. There are many farmers in this country who would give much to exchange their cosy homesteads and regular enclosed fields for the life of a South American estanciero. Here they are too frequently rack-rented, they have hypothec and the game laws to oppress them, and at the end of a lease the vexation of being compelled to leave a place they have got to like, if the landlord happen to be either greedy or unreasonable.

The climate is excellent, being utterly unlike that of the East Indies, where, in islands like Ceylon and Luzon, the white man can only live safely for a short period. Europeans may live all their days in Buenos Ayres if they like, without ever requiring a voyage home to restore their health. Till very lately, any serious pestilence was unknown; and so accustomed have the town people been to its absence that they have been guilty of the gravest

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breaches of sanitary law. There never was a city which so thoroughly deserved disease, worked so persistently to bring it, and yet got clear so easily as Buenos Ayres. Being built on ground as flat as the floor of a room, with shallow water for miles outside the harbour, there really was some difficulty in draining. But here did that infatuated city go on from its foundation till last year calmly doing nothing at all in the matter. The saladeros (slaughter-houses) were within it, the sewage ran into pools at the back of the houses, to filter through and impregnate the whole soil; and yet till last year, when yellow fever broke out, there never was any very serious pestilence in either town or country. San Trinidad di Buenos Ayres was the name the Spaniards gave the place, and its fine air has indeed warded off disease wonderfully. There is a curious fact about that yellow fever visit, which bears out that it was the utter carelessness of the town people as to cleanliness and drainage which made its ravages so frightful. Wherever in tropical countries yellow fever breaks out, if it is bad in the towns, it is ten times worse in the shipping. Now, among the lighters and river craft of the Plate there was no fever at all, unless a few cases among people who had fled in terror from the city. However, that sore scourge, which swept away a sixth of the population, has taught the Buenos Ayreans a wholesome lesson. Spanish human nature is not the aptest in the world to learn, but they have begun to move in the right direction, and we may hope that when that great engineering triumph—the construction of the harbour—is finished, that the townspeople will have taken care to find a thorough system of city drainage.

S. A.
