The Argentine republic, its development and progress

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BRAZIL

Translated, and with an Historical Chapter by BERNARD MIALL.
With a Supplementary Chapter by DAWSON A. VINDIN,
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The Falls of the Yguassu.

Thirteen miles above the confluence with the Paraná. Like the Paraná at the Salto Guayra, the river cuts through a layer of basalt intercalated in the red sandstone. The forest of the province of Misiones has a tropical character near the river. The araucarias cover only the higher parts of the tableland.

Plate I.

Frontispiece,
THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC • ITS DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS

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T. FISHER UNWIN LTD
LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE
First published in English in 1922

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INTRODUCTION

In the following chapters I have endeavoured to indicate the essential aspects of colonization in modern Argentina: the conquest of the soil by man, the exploitation of its natural resources, the development of agriculture and cattle-breeding, and the growth of the population and enlargement of the urban centres.

For a new country like Argentina it is not convenient to adopt the strictly regional plan which seems to be the best means of giving a complete and methodical description of the historic countries of western Europe, where it is the only way to keep in close touch with the geographical facts. In western Europe each region is really an independent unity. It has for ages lived upon its own resources; each population-group has its horizon definitely limited; and the complex action of the environment upon man, and of man upon the country, has proceeded in each district rather on the lines of an isolated and impassioned dialogue between the two. It is quite different in Argentina. There, many of the facts which we have to record consist in an expansion of the population, a spread of methods of exploitation from zone to zone of the country, and the influence upon colonization of commerce and of the varying needs of the markets of the world.

It may be well to reply in advance to a criticism which my Argentine friends are sure to make. They will complain that I have paid no attention to the
people of Argentina, the creators of the greatness of the country. It is true that I have deliberately refrained from any reference to the political and moral life of the Republic, the national character and its evolution, the stoicism of the gaúcho, the industry of the colonist and the merchant, or the patriotism of the Argentinians generally. My work is not a study of the Argentine nation, but a geographical introduction to such a study.

I began the work during a stay in Argentina which lasted from April 1912 to August 1914. In the course of these two years I was able to visit most parts of the country; and, as the information I gathered during my travels is one of my chief sources, I give here a summary of my itineraries.


November–December 1912: Tucumán—Valley of Tapi—Santa María to the west of Aconcagua—Cafayate (Valley of Calchaquí).


January–February 1913: Region of the Pampas (Province of Buenos Aires, south of Córdoba and of S. Luis, district of the Central Pampa).

March 1913: Corrientes—Posadas—Asunción—Forest-industries of the Chaco of Santa Fé.

August 1913: Region of the Pampas (Province of Buenos Aires).


April 1914: Ríoja—Sierra de los Llanos—San Juan—Mendoza.

July 1914: Entre Ríos.

These journeys, by rail or on well-known roads, were not supposed to be for the purpose of exploration
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or discovery. Their one object was to enable me to make a provisional classification of the chief types of country and forms of colonization, and to draw up a methodical programme for more thorough research. The work which I trusted to do in a more leisurely way was, however, suspended in 1914, and, in spite of my very strong desire to do so, I was unable to resume it on the spot in 1919. I have therefore been compelled to publish my first observations, completing them, as well as I could, by a bibliographical study of the country. I have made use of some fragments of a popular work which I began, at the request of the Argentine Commission, for the International Exhibition at San Francisco, of which several chapters were published in my absence by the University of Tucumán (Pierre Denis, Modern Argentina: Chapters of Economic Geography. Publications of the University during the Centenary of the Congress of Tucumán of 1816. Buenos Aires, 1916).¹

My knowledge of the publications on Argentina has two conspicuous gaps. The first is deliberate. I declined to study at second hand the documents and chronicles which are our sources, to the end of the eighteenth century, for the history of the various provinces that were to form Argentina. Hence the historical data on colonization which will be found in the following chapters relate almost entirely to the nineteenth century.

The second gap I was, to my great disappointment, unable to fill up. A large part of the local publications —official or other—maps, statistics, etc., never reached Europe, and Buenos Aires is the only place where one can make a thorough study of them. These publications were available to me until 1914. Since then

¹ I take the opportunity to thank M. J. B. Teran, who undertook to edit these chapters, and to express, with him, my satisfaction that events have falsified his rather pessimistic predictions as regards the author.
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I have been restricted to the resources of the Paris and London libraries, which are very scanty; and less has been sent from Argentina since the war. I have not the complete statistics up to date.

I trust, however, that this picture of Argentina has much more than a retrospective character; that it is not out of date before it is published. I may add that no statistics would enable one to solve the problem which Argentina in 1920 presents to an observer. Has the European War merely retarded the economic evolution of the country, or has it given that evolution a new direction? Will or will not the relations which Argentina is now resuming with the rest of the world be of the same character as the pre-war relations?

The effects of the war upon the life of the country must not all be put on the same footing. That some of the exporters to Argentina have gained by the war and others lost—that the share of the United States, and even of Japan, has greatly increased—is a fact that may be regarded from the Argentinian point of view as of secondary importance. The war has, moreover, had the effect of disorganizing marine transport and bringing about a sort of relative isolation which is not yet quite over. The reduction in the imports of English coal has made the petroleum wells of Rivadavia of greater value to the country. It has compelled the Argentinians to make a hurried inventory of their natural resources in the way of fuel. Local industries have tried to meet the needs of the Argentinian market, where they had no longer to bear the competition of European goods. The grave disturbance of prices has enabled them to export certain products which had hitherto been confined to home markets. The war has, moreover, not interfered with the existing streams of export on a large scale from Argentina. The Republic continues to send its cereals, meat, hides and wool to Europe; and there is no reason to suppose that