

## T R A N S L A T I O N .

" O N S L A N D "

20. 10. 1903.

NOT TO ARGENTINA.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

To the Editor:-

Sir,

May I trouble you again, in order through the medium of your valuable paper, to further open the eyes of my fellow-countrymen in regard to the Boer emigration to the Argentine Republic. I have just lately arrived here from there in the company of my parents and their family, after having travelled 18 months in Argentina, having made a careful study of affairs while we were there.

Permit me to thank you for the publication of my letter of May last from Buenos Aires wherein I warned my fellow-countrymen not to cut their own throats. An extract of "Ons Land" was sent to the Argentine Government, upon which I had an interview with the Argentine agent who was appointed to recruit Boer emigrants, and I proved to the latter that everything I had written in my letter was correct. This agent, who called himself Richarridi, has, with the approval of the Argentine Government, written a book titled: "The history of Argentina", which he had translated into Dutch and freely distributed in South Africa. In the preface he writes as follows: "Come, brothers, come! Argentina opens its paternal arms to welcome

you

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"you and to give you the richest and the most fertile lands. Here are already hundreds of burghers, some of whom possess more than £10,000 and who live happy and contented in their new adopted country."

This book was published in April of this year. I was then in the Chubut territory and I can assure you that there did not live more than 7 families, young unmarried men included, and none of them possessed cattle excepting a few horses.

This book further contains some of the most barefaced untruths that were ever published. I will point them out to anyone who brings me such a book. When I threw those untruths into Richarridi's face and demanded of him to withdraw those books from the market or that otherwise I would expose him, which I did before I left Buenos Aires, he tried to frighten me: but when he saw that it did not succeed he changed his mind.

This Richarridi is in the employ of the Argentine Government to entice Boers to immigrate to Argentina at a salary of 200 dollars per month and a commission of a good round sum for every 100 Boers whom he entices over; it is therefore immaterial to him whether they are ruined or starve so long as he can only fill his pockets.

In my opinion it is the object of the Argentine Government to populate worthless regions which they cannot dispose of at any price.

In an interview with the Director of Agriculture the latter told me that the Argentine Government had made an agreement with a certain Mr. Vlotman of Lady Brand O.R.C., to fetch over Boers as emigrants at a certain sum per 100 (he did not mention the price).

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He further told me that it was a secret and did not wish that it reached South Africa as it would make the Boers suspicious.

When I left there was a report that Richarridi would in a short time through his Government send another agent hither, called Antonie Brands, a Hollander, in order to encourage emigration. I desire to warn my countrymen against that man, as I know him personally and consider that he is not to be trusted.

My letter which appeared in "Ons Land" had to be produced to the Government on the day before we sailed and there was a rumour that the Government was going to prevent me by some means or other from leaving the country, and only because the steamer left some hours earlier than was expected I came away undisturbed.

May I now please request you for some space in order to give you some idea of the country as described by Mr. Henry Green, the agent whom the Government sent out here the previous year.

The Province of Chubut is one of the richest and most fertile provinces in the Argentine Republic. It has a good harbour consisting of 80 houses and a factory for cold storage, where sheep and cattle are frozen for export. Along the coast the country is somewhat sandy, but 18 miles inland we find the most fertile ground covered with soft and sweet grass and also extensive plantations or woods of a great variety of trees, including fruit trees. The ground is for miles covered with wild strawberries and apples of enormous size. A broad river flows to the harbour on which produce, for which a ready market can be found, can be transported by means of rafts. The

rafts



The rafts are made from the timber growing along the river. The land can carry from 5,000 to 10,000 sheep per mile, besides horses and cattle. Sheep cost one dollar<sup>s d</sup>(1/8) each and horses and cattle from 10 dollars (17/6) each. The cattle and sheep can be sold at a good price to the Cold Storage Company at the port. The Argentine Government will give us our own constitutional Government, we can appoint our own magistrates, police, etc. We will receive free transport from Cape Town and free board in an hotel upon arrival at Buenos Aires and a good many other little things, and above all there are already 40 families (Boers) settled here in Chubut and they live happy."

Now I will give you an idea as to how I found matters.

We had to pay our own passages: £15 for first and £5 for second class.

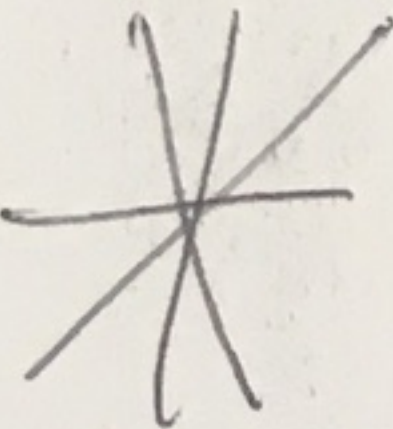
Upon our arrival at Buenos Aires we were brought to a large iron building called the Immigration Hotel, where there were already 3,000 Italians of the lowest caste; a place wherein no respectable man could exist, still less a woman. The result was that we all went to the various hotels where we paid our own expenses until I had made an agreement with the Government that they would grant us free board and lodging on one of their transport ships where we remained about 6 weeks.

On arriving in the port of Chubut, Comodoro Rividavia, we found that it consisted of about 10 small iron houses or rooms and no cold storage Factory within a thousand miles.

When we landed we had to buy our drinking water at 1½d. per bottle, which was quite salt and we had to

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take our horses about 18 miles from the harbour before we could find water enough for them (20 in number). Instead of finding 40 families as we expected, we met two, namely, a certain Mr. Louis Baumann of the O.R.C. and a certain Mr. Coulter from Australia.

We travelled inland more than 100 miles to the Sarmiento Colony where we camped in the neighbourhood of the two lakes. The whole region between the harbour and Sarmiento is worthless and desert, consisting mostly of elevated table-lands with not a drop of water. In Sarmiento we found about 4 miles of good ground, the greater portion of which is quite under water during the winter. About 5 years ago this land was bought by about 50 colonists from Wales and Argentina, situate on about 15 miles of good and bad land mixed; only a very few of them possess some sheep and cattle, and the remainder are transport riders to earn a livelihood.

Here I hired a few horses and a guide who knows the country well. We travelled inland for more than 200 miles to the Blanco lake at the foot of the Andes Mountains, near the Chili border, without finding even a mile of land where a farm could be started.

After having travelled more than 300 miles from the coast, I was unable to discover a single bush from which I could cut a fencing pole; the region, in general barren and waterless, is intersected at Lago Blanco by three valleys, each having a rapid stream of good water; but those valleys are only about 200 yards wide. They are covered with good grass. All that is wanting is fuel. On all sides of these valleys there are high table lands of 20 to 40 miles wide, quite worthless, without water. People who

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have sheep or cattle in these valleys must move to the coast, a distance of 300 miles, for about 5 months every year, as snow falls during the winter to the depth of 6 feet, covering everything for about 2 months. Then the snow melts at the foot of the mountains and the valleys overflow and remain flooded and marshy for about 3 months. Here the large number of sheep and cattle mentioned in my previous letter were lost. I concluded by saying: It was a risk to come and settle here and I therefore returned to the Sarmiento Colony.

Here we again hired a guide and horses and traversed the country north and south and back to the coast with the result mentioned in my previous letter, without finding a bush or a strawberry. We found that sheep cost  $3\frac{1}{2}$  dollars (5/10), horses 70 dollars (£6.2.0), and cattle 55 dollars (£4.15.0).

Here we decided to return to Buenos Aires where aid was promised us by private persons who had told and advised us under no circumstances to go to Chubut, as they knew the country. In an interview with those persons we found that their promises were of no value, just like those of the Argentine Government, that will promise you everything but fulfil nothing.

After trying for about 2 months I obtained a situation as a day labourer on one of the best farms in the Buenos Aires district, at a salary of about £2.5. per month and the most unfavourable treatment after having been in service for about 3 months. I was manager of the whole place at a salary of somewhat less than £4 per month, while the farm was more than 10,000 morgen in extent, with 20,000 head of cattle, 4,000 sheep and 2,000 horses, mostly of the best breed

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and with almost 150 labourers in service. This can show you that some one who works for an employer can only find a poor existence, and would then have to live like a nigger.

After enquiring carefully into everything I have come to the conclusion that poor man had better remain out of Argentina. If some one can come to Argentina and buy a farm in the Buenos Aires district that will cost him some £40,000 or in the Cordoba, San Louis, Santa Fe or Mendoza districts, where a farm will cost from £5,000 to £10,000 he would be able to do well.

There are only two classes of people in Argentina the rich and the poor. The whites are the rich and the poor are niggers. The Government consists of about 50 Governors or Presidents with the usual number of congress men for every Governor, and with about 20,000 clerks in their service in the Congress buildings, who all receive high salaries, while it must be taken into consideration that the whole population numbers about 4 million. Just before I left Buenos Aires I heard from two Afrikanders, Erasmus and Raft by name, who had just returned from Chubut and were on their way to return to South Africa for good, that the Boers in Chubut were in a deplorable condition, having to shoot wild ducks and buck for food, as their sheep are so lean and scabby that they are unfit for food. These Boers had 1,500 sheep, of which they had already lost 200 and will probably lose another 200. For these sheep and a few horses they have at their disposal 40 square miles of ground. This can give you a conception of what Chubut is worth.

I also learned that some Boers were working as labourers at the port, and some as cooks, trying to

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earn sufficient wherewith to return to Africa.

Of the 14 families who during the past year went with me to Argentina, there are still 3 or 4 in Chubut; some of them have not the means to return with. About 80 Boers, women and children, arrived in Buenos Aires by the steamer "Cornwall" a few days before I left, one of whom, Mr. William McGregor, lost his youngest child during the voyage. I had a talk with him and gave him my opinion of the country, with the result that some are busy selling horses in order to return to S. Africa, while others have given me good reasons to believe that they will also soon return.

I wish to impress this upon my countrymen - and I speak from experience - that everyone who takes wife and children with him to Chubut would always repent it, as they would have to live a dog life, like every one else there at present. I would gladly give all further information in so far as it is in my power.

If only the influential men would use their influence there, they would certainly save some of their countrymen from undertaking a risk. For a short time my address will be, 94, Dorp Street, Stellenbosch, C.C.

With the request that you will not take it amiss that I take up so much space in your paper,

I am,

With esteem,

Your servant,

H. J. VISSER.