

IN THE ARGENTINE
THE ARMY; SPORT
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IN THE SERIES ON SOUTH AMERICA

MY military aide in the Argentine was Colonel Reibaud, an Argentine of French and Irish descent. He was a capital man, every inch a soldier. He was exceedingly anxious that I should see the army. Accordingly, I spent one morning with the Secretary of War and a couple of other Cabinet Ministers out at a practice camp where a body of troops were being drilled and maneuvered. They included an infantry regiment, a cavalry regiment, and batteries of heavy siege guns, mortars, field guns, and machine guns carried on horseback. They have now in the Argentine a system which realizes in practical fashion the old democratic ideal of the founders of the United States about the National militia. The founders of our Republic had a theory that all the male inhabitants should be embodied as the

militia of the country, and would afford an adequate protection to it. In practice this theory resulted in humiliating and ludicrous failure, merely because not the slightest serious effort was made to train the militia. But the theory itself was admirable, if only it had been supplemented by the practical determination to give the militia—that is, the male population of the country—some practically efficient training, so as to make them soldiers in fact and not merely in name. The Argentine Republic is with wisdom realizing this ideal. All the male members of the population are required to serve for one year in the army, excepting a certain proportion who serve for two years in the navy.

I was in the company of about a hundred officers; and what I saw afforded the clear-

est possible proof of the unflagging industry, the painstaking care, and the intelligence of the officers of the Argentine army. The troops whom I witnessed maneuvering had been trained for less than five months. They had attained to a really astonishing degree of proficiency—a proficiency which showed both bodily vigor and alert mental aptitude. An ex-French officer who was present-remarked to me that only a very intelligent nation could furnish recruits able to learn so much in so short a time. I was informed that there was very little difficulty in disciplining them, because, as one officer expressed it to me, the men obeyed from conviction and devotion, so that there was scant occasion for harshness.

I examined a number of the men in the infantry regiment. It was a regiment drawn from various districts outside of the city of Buenos Aires. The men followed different occupations: they were machinists, carpenters, millers, ranchmen, and hired farm hands. Some of them were of Italian parentage, more of them of the old Spanish-Argentine stock, while two or three were of German parentage, and several showed that they had a strong touch of Indian blood. There was a percentage of blond-haired men among them, but, of course, smaller than would be the case among United States troops, and somewhat smaller than was the case among the officers. They were well set up, stout, active-looking fellows, with resolute and intelligent faces.

The proficiency of the artillerymen and cavalrymen was noteworthy. All the cavalry were armed with the lance, and, as this is much the most difficult weapon to master, it was really astounding to see how proficient the troopers had become in its use after only some four months' work. It was a rainy day, and the water-soaked ground was a slippery bog, in which the horses continually fell. But the men were excellent riders, and did not in the least mind their horses falling. One interesting thing they did was to sing patriotic and military songs as the regiment marched past. As for the officers, they were as soldierly and workmanlike a set as any one could wish to see. We saw a couple of biplanes and one monoplane in action under military aviators. These men, and the cavalry and artillery officers, were all a credit to their profession. The Argentines have a right to feel pride, satisfaction, and trust in their army.

Among the officer: I met sons of Frenchmen, Englishmen, Irishmen, Italians, and Germans, mixed with the officers of either pure Spanish or part Spanish and part Indian descent. But they were all Argentines and nothing else.

In this respect, as in so many other respects, they resembled our own people. I visited the Military Club at Buenos Aires to present a bronze replica of Borglum's statue of General Sheridan. In speaking to the officers I alluded to the fact that so many of them were of foreign parentage, and pointed out that the same thing was true in our own country; that, for instance, our greatest admiral, Farragut, was the son of a Spanish father; that among the officers who served under him and rose afterwards to be admirals, in addition to the many men of old Revolutionary or native American stock, there were the sons of German, English, and Italian fathers; that some of the most typical Americans we ever had were descendants of Frenchmen; that the great general who was commemorated by the bronze I presented to them was of Irish parentage, and the sculptor of the bronze was of Scandinavian parentage. I added that these men and those like them were Americans and nothing else; and that the Argentine nationality was a new nationality, different from all others, and absorbing into it all immigrants who came to the country, precisely as in the United States the American nationality was a new nationality, into which all immigrants became merged, and where the national type was already fixed.

Altogether, I was not only pleased with but impressed by what I saw of the Argentine army. It is a well-trained and gallant body of men, and I have no doubt that on the field it would do first-class work. The officers, by the way, played polo. This year an Argentine rifle team came to the United States and won the world's championship. Some day I hope we shall see an Argentine officers' team come to the United States and play polo against some of our army teams.

The Argentine shares one piece of good fortune with the United States. Its great military hero was a man who to his military reputation added the indispensable virtue of civic disinterestedness. San Martín was the Argentine general who in the war for independence not only liberated the Argentine, but marched across the Andes to the rescue of Chile and Peru. Unfortunately, too many Latin-American military leaders of the past

have made their military service on behalf of freedom the means of gratifying their own civil ambition at the expense of freedom. San Martín was a sincere and disinterested friend—almost too disinterested a friend—of what he esteemed to be the new spirits of liberty and of South American nationality. He showed Washington's ability in the field, and Washington's disinterestedness, although he did not have that power of impressing himself upon his countrymen which enabled Washington, after having given his countrymen liberty, to gather them behind him in securing the unity and the order without which the liberty would have been of so little worth.

A marked feature in the modern Argentine character is the love of healthy outdoor sport. This takes many forms. There is a beautiful race-course, and at the great race-meetings the lookers-on afford the same brilliant spectacle that is afforded by the people of fashion in London and Paris at similar meetings. Unquestionably, those connected with racing in the Argentine have done much to develop the breeding of first-rate horses. I was rather amused to find that not a few of my hosts both already knew and sympathized with the fact that I disliked and disapproved the gambling that seems to be an inseparable feature of horse-racing on a great scale.

There is, however, in the neighborhood of Buenos Aires a space where sport in a most attractive form is carried on without any such attendant drawback. Some twenty miles from Buenos Aires, in a flat covered with trees and dotted with pleasant cottages, there are some sluggish streams, part of the delta of the Plate. On these there has gradually been built up a boating center with which there is nothing in the United States, or, as far as I know, on the continent of Europe, to be compared. It comes second only to Henley. At New London and at Poughkeepsie, and now and then at other places in our country, on some one day of the year there will be a great spectacle, when on yachts, steamers, and observation trains tens of thousands of observers gather to see the college eights compete for mastery. But in each case the spectacle is for a day only. At the Tigre, so called from the name of the stream on which the racing occurs, there are half a dozen important boat-houses and club-houses of as many different rowing clubs. There are very attractive cottages and villas, there are all kinds of less important buildings—

inns, public boat-houses, small private boat-houses—so that every one, according to the size of his or her purse, can get enjoyment out of the place all the time, and out of the sports whenever the sports occur. I was taken out to see one of the regattas, and steamed down one of the side streams, and then down the race-course, afterwards witnessing from a big, picturesquely built club-house the finish of one of the races, in which a Buenos Aires pair-oar beat a Montevideo pair-oar. On each side the entire length of the course was lined with boats of every description: steam-launches; trim lapstreaks in which two or three men in flannels were rowing two or three girls and a chaperon; big, battered craft rowed by professionals, and crammed full of holiday seekers enjoying themselves at so much a head; outrigger boats with crews of strongly built, clean-cut-looking young fellows, themselves possible competitors in some future race. The women were in costumes both pretty and appropriate. The men were in boating flannels. All made a most attractive spectacle, and gave one an idea of how rapidly the pleasant side of life is being developed in this great city of the south. As always in Buenos Aires, the mixture of races was evident. The president of the sports on that particular day was by birth a German and a representative of the Teutonia Rowing Club. Another club was composed chiefly of Italians, and another of Scandinavians. In yet another the English predominated. Nevertheless, the whole tone of the sports has already become Argentine, and will become entirely such in a very short while. I saw Argentine crews, just as I saw Argentine boxers and football teams, rifle teams and polo teams, and all were doing first-rate work in a thoroughly sporting spirit.

Moreover, in the different schools all kinds of calisthenics and gymnastic exercises are followed. I was taken out to a lunch at the Sociedad Sportiva Argentina especially to see exercises and sports participated in by several thousands of school-children, many of whom had come from the city of Rosario, two or three hundred miles away. It reminded me of what I had seen the previous spring in Central Park at the big meeting of the Athletic League of the New York schools. It was all merely another evidence of the way in which the people of the Argentine and we ourselves are trying to solve the same problems along similar lines.