

IN THE ARGENTINE

THE RANCH COUNTRY; A TRADING CITY; SUB-TROPICAL ARGENTINE

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IN THE SERIES ON SOUTH AMERICA

AFTER leaving Buenos Aires we went for a short trip to the north through the Argentine country. The first day's journey northward on the left bank of the Plata and the Paraná was through a rich, fertile country, not unlike eastern Kansas, northern Missouri, and Iowa. We entered the province of Santa Fé. It is a country, like most of the Argentine, of open land, of great ranches. The wealthy ranchmen have built big, handsome houses on their enormous ranches—"enormous" is the right word from a double standpoint. These ranches are large beyond what we of the United States have any conception of, and are also too large to be healthy. Many of these houses are delightful in every way, stocked with books and pictures, with all the conveniences of the highest modern civilization, and in the stables are motor cars and blooded animals of every type. The horses, the cattle, the sheep, are all being bred up to a high standard. It is impossible not to like and admire the life on these ranches; certain of them—I have in mind particularly one which has a frontage for ten miles on the Atlantic Ocean—offer to the owners the chance of leading a singularly happy existence.

But, after all, they are essentially like the

latifundia, which, if they did not cause Rome to perish, at least by their existence marked the passing of that class of Roman farmers who had made the backbone of Rome when she was at her strongest. It would be far better for the country if these ranches were split up into small farms of actual home-makers, tillers of the soil—farms of the kind which have been mainly responsible for the healthy growth of the United States, and which our homestead legislation has helped to perpetuate. All the far-sighted men in the Argentine with whom I spoke cordially agreed with the view I expressed in this matter, and told me that they were doing what they could to bring about the gradual break-up of the big estates. In most of the ranch country (not in the sugar-cane country) there is a good immigrant population of permanent settlers; it was fine to see the Spaniards, the Basques, the Italians, the Slavs, who were taking up agricultural land; and the Government ought to take whatever steps are necessary to see that in this new, vast country these potential home-makers are given the chance to get small holdings on which to make their homes and to live as tillers of the soil.

The first city we stopped at outside of

Buenos Aires was Rosario. It is a brisk, energetic commercial city of a quarter of a million people, several of whose citizens told me that they regarded it as the Chicago of South America. It certainly has much of the spirit and energy which already marked Chicago's population when Chicago's was only the size that Rosario's now is. It is a shipping port for wheat, corn, and linseed, these being the three products with which its enterprising Chamber of Commerce especially deals. In the old days it had a small river frontage of wooden docks. It now has six miles of stone quays, with grain elevators, places for the storage of petroleum, and the like; and its plans are for the construction of twenty-one miles of these quays, all told. In the Chamber of Commerce, which included the leading merchants and business men of the city, eleven hundred all told, there were native Argentines, Italians, Germans, Englishmen—all of them, as elsewhere, being merged into the Argentine nation, all contributing not only to the growth of the nation but to the formation of an energetic and powerful national character.

I wish our people would cease to group all of the countries south of us as "South America." They speak of Mexico, Honduras, and Haiti as "South America," and lump them in with such stable and prosperous nations as Brazil, the Argentine, and Chile. They forget that Brazil is bigger than the United States; that Argentina is bigger than France, the British Isles, Germany, and Italy taken together; that Chile, while not so large, has an extraordinary stretch of sea-coast and a remarkably virile population. They all stand on a par with us or with any of the European nations.

The following day we reached Tucuman. In the early morning the dry country through which we traveled was like western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming. Gradually the ground grew more fertile, the climate more humid.

The landscape began to have in it a hint of Louisiana. We were in the sub-tropical region where the sugar-cane is grown. The city of Tucuman itself contains about a hundred thousand inhabitants, and we found it delightful, with a quaint, old-time picturesqueness, but without the drawbacks that render most "quaint and picturesque" Old World cities undesirable to all tourists save those in whom sentimentality overcomes distaste for noisome abominations. Tucuman is clean.

It is administered on sound modern principles of hygiene. It is well lighted and well policed. There is a good hotel. As with all these South American cities, the officials and the leaders in the industrial life of the community form a polished and courteous society to which it is a pleasure to be admitted.

Tucuman is far in the interior, in the north of the Argentine, in a region to which fewer immigrants have come than to other parts of Argentina. The indigenous population has shown a marked industrial development, turning from the old-time gaucho existence of mounted cattle-herders into industrious and competent workers both in the cane-fields and in the sugar factories. The natives work, and work hard. Of this the people are justly proud. As the Governor remarked to me, here is a city on the edge of the tropics where the white man does not live on the labor of the colored man, but himself does his own manual labor, just as in the United States. It is a fine showing.

Tucuman is a place of note in Argentine history, for it was here that in 1816 the Declaration of Independence of the country was adopted. The little house in which the momentous step was taken is carefully preserved and shielded from the weather by a new and high house which is built over it, and really capital bronze plaques commemorate the scenes of the signing and of the issuance of the Declaration. The bronzes are the work of an Argentine lady.

The bold and lofty mountains rise from the green cane-fields a few miles from the city; in the city itself there is a wealth of semi-tropical verdure, and its low, thick-walled houses, with their inner *patios*, or courtyards, surrounded by galleries, are cool and pleasant. In these South American cities it is always a pleasure to see the old colonial architecture retained, for, like ourselves, when they grow prosperous they have a little too much of a tendency to introduce all kinds of architecture, some of it much over-ornamented, and none of it with any special relation to local history or local needs.

I was shown one of the two public libraries of the city. It was a good library. Of course, as with all public libraries, the books most in demand were novels. But there were plenty of histories, of philosophies, of volumes of essays and criticism—Guizot, Emerson, Spinoza, Sainte-Beuve, and many others. In addition to the Spanish there were some English and German and many French books,

and it was interesting to see how many English and French books appeared in translation, these translations for the most part being issued by publishers at Buenos Aires, although sometimes by those at Madrid or Barcelona.

In Tucuman there is a strong Indian base to the population, and among some of the individuals highest up Indian blood is evident. In one church we met a very intelligent priest, with a keen, strong face, who was of almost pure Indian blood. Besides being a priest he was also a Deputy to the provincial legislature—an unusual thing, although both priests and army officers are sometimes members of the various national and state legislative bodies.

In this church, by the way, there was an interesting figure of the Virgin. Not only was Tucuman the city of the Argentine Declaration of Independence, but four years before this date, in 1812, it was the scene of one of the earliest important fights against the Spaniards. The Argentines were not regular troops, but volunteers; it was a kind of Bunker Hill. The victorious Argentine general, as an acknowledgment of his victory, went to this church, and with all due formality declared that the Virgin, to whom the church is dedicated, had herself led the patriots to victory, nominated her as generalissima of the army, and also deposited in the church in her honor his baton of command. She keeps her title to this day; the baton is held in her hand; and on either side of the altar is a Spanish flag captured in the battle. Once a year, partly as a religious and partly as a civic and patriotic ceremony, the Virgin is carried through the streets. In another church we were shown the cross planted when Tucuman was founded, in 1635. The people of Tucuman seemed to be very religious, but entirely tolerant of other faiths than their own.

We went to the battlefield, now one of the parks in Tucuman. There are several monuments to the generals, and one to the unknown privates, the men who fell in the fight. The latter was raised by the boys, largely by the Boy Scouts, under the lead of one of our companions, Dr. Francisco P. Moreno, who, having for years been a noted scientist and explorer, is now a member of the National Board of Education, and is spending the end of his life in doing all he can for the Argentine children. He was spoken of to me as "the Jacob Riis of the Argentine!" and surely no praise could be higher.

As everywhere in the Argentine, great attention is being paid to education. There are in this city of 97,000 people no less than 17,000 children at school. The school year was finished, but a thousand of the children voluntarily came together on one of the capital playgrounds in the city, and, under the direction of certain of their teachers, gave a first-class drill for our benefit. Nearly half of them were girls. They drilled on the football field, for football is played with much enthusiasm.

The playground included, by the way, a large swimming-pool. The Governor, who was seated with me during the drill, told me that they were now making ready to build a provincial university, modeled after our American colleges and universities, in which technical training of the most practical type will be given. This is the type of United States university attended by the large majority of Argentine students who come to the United States, and it is the one which, very wisely, they are using as the model for their own institutions. Technical training for a large number rather than cultural education for the few should be the goal of *state* educators. I also went out to the very beautiful grounds of the Agricultural College, in which special training is being given to the boys who are engaged in the planting of sugar-cane.

Before leaving Tucuman we visited a couple of industrial schools for girls. Most of the teaching was in home science, as it is called—that is, in housekeeping. But there was a class for telegraphers, and another class for embroidery. The chief instruction was in the domestic arts, cooking, plain sewing, and also weaving, which is still habitual in the country. It is a fine thing to see the way in which the modern educational movement in the Argentine has been extended to include the women. Fifty years ago, in South America, almost nothing was done for women, and their position was one of utter inferiority to the men. Now every effort is being made to give the girl no less than the boy an education, and, as far as I could see, there is not only an intelligent following of what is wise in the methods of education for women in the United States and northern Europe, but also an intelligent avoidance of what is unwise.

In short, I felt that the showing from the educational standpoint was really remarkable. In this sub-tropical interior city of northern Argentina the devotion of the teachers and

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their intelligent appreciation of modern methods, the universality of education for the children, the type of higher education which is being held up as a realizable ideal, and also the types of physical training and sport—all are such as would reflect credit on the most progressive cities of our own country.

The following day we spent in visiting sugar plantations. It is an extremely fertile sub-tropical country. Sugar-cane is the staple industry, but much work is done with tomatoes, peas, and other garden vegetables. We went by automobile up a really beautiful tropical mountain, and at the top came on a little summer settlement of twenty-five or thirty attractive houses owned by as many of the prominent people of Tucuman. On the summit of this mountain the temperature was fresh and cool. It was a summer resort in hot weather—that is, during the months of our northern winter.

We visited three large sugar establishments. One was the property of the last ex-Governor of the province. His big, pleasant house stood in the middle of a beautiful garden, or park, in which the trees included among others a huge pine planted by the Jesuits nearly three centuries before. The workmen live in attractive little houses on the place. Most of them were native Argentines, but there were a few Germans, Swiss, and Frenchmen.

Another plantation and factory belonged to a company of Argentines, of which the present Governor was one. About five hundred men were employed in the factory and about eleven hundred in the cane-fields. In the cane-fields both native Argentines and Italians were employed. The Italians, however, were not settlers, as in so many parts of the Argentine, but migratory workmen, who did not stay in the land. One of the developments of modern industrialism is the creation of a great class of migratory international laborers. This is creating a situation with which we will soon have to deal. Such labor may at a given period be useful, but it is not a good element in the permanent growth of a nation.

In the factory of this plantation practically all the labor was native Argentine. Not only the ordinary workers, but the foremen, the machinists, and the like, were all Argentines. There was a really attractive village in which these workmen and their families lived, the streets broad and clean, the houses white-washed and clean, while there was a theater

and a school and also a band drawn from the ranks of the operatives. The great house in which the manager and part owner of the company lived was of the usual attractive type, with a park behind it. Every effort was unquestionably being made by the managers to see to the welfare of their employees, and they proudly told me that these employees were not foreigners, that they were the sons of the old gauchos, the old cattle-herding natives, who had thus been turned into agriculturists and factory hands. In most of these natives there was an evident and strong strain of Indian blood. Of course, as the people advance, it would not be possible or desirable to perpetuate this type of community, in which the property is exclusively in the hands of the employing class, even though these employers are awake to their duties. But with a population of the kind there must be gradual growth.

The last large factory we saw was owned by a French company, and the manager was a fine young Frenchman. Some five thousand men were employed, over two-thirds of them in the field, and the remainder in the factory itself. At this factory also I was told that the Italians were of use only in the field, because, being purely migratory labor, it was impossible to teach them to work in the factory, where the work was better paid and of higher grade, and needed both greater responsibility and greater skill in the worker. I was also told, however, contrary to what I had seen in the other factories, that almost all the foremen and men in other responsible positions in this factory were Frenchmen, Germans, and Englishmen; and there was a good deal of complaint about the native laborers not caring to rise and being given to spending all their money on drunken sprees. My informant said that it was not so much lack of energy as lack of ambition, because the workers had it in them to rise if they chose. In this semi-tropical province, rich and flourishing though it is, I was informed by some of the citizens—both natives of old stock and sons of strangers—that there was a certain average loss of initiative and energy. Two or three of my informants dwelt with satisfaction on the fact that Patagonia was now included in Argentina, so that in that cool, bracing climate a population would grow and thrive, from among which it would be possible to get men of the necessary energy to run whatever business was demanded in sub-tropical Argentina.