

BUSY BUENOS AYRES (1895).<sup>1</sup>  
Text by John Randolph Spears

The South American Metropolis and Her People.

A SPLENDID DOCK SYSTEM.

Varied Misinformation Supplied by English Writers.

Riding in Horse Cars Somewhat Exciting—The Tough Quarter Not Really Tough—Truth About the Alleged Propensities of the People for Gambling and Drinking—The Cafes and Places of Amusement—Prejudice Against Englishmen and the Causes—The Argentine Capital's Ambition to be the Athens of South America.

The series of sketches made in Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia being finished, some space must now be devoted to a city which all travelers to the end of the continent are likely to visit, and one which they ought to visit, even at the expense of much time and trouble—the city of Buenos Ayres. And I can recommend to each traveler going there that he first buy as many of the books in print relating to the town as he can conveniently carry, and that he take special pains to select those written by Englishmen. I have seven different bound volumes and some magazine articles, all treating of Buenos Ayres, more or less, and of the lot only two are from American pens. I therefore know what I am writing about when I say that nothing will add so much to the amusement of a traveler visiting Buenos Ayres as these English criticisms of this South American metropolis. And then, too, by comparing what the books say with the real facts as the traveler may learn them, the condition of affairs in the city and its advantages and disadvantages as a home site or a place of business, will be all the better understood and remembered.

I arrived in Buenos Ayres early one morning in April on a small but well-found steamer that had come during the night from Montevideo. The noise and bustle incident to entering a great stone dock, or basin fit to hold a score of ocean steamers, awakened me and I made haste to dress myself and look after my baggage, in order to be ready for any emergency that might arise at the landing and the Custom House. With his English books in mind, the traveler is prepared for such anxiety and weariness at the Custom House as may be found in no

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other South American port. For instance, Mr. Thomas A. Turner says that "*owing to the capricious favoritism of the customs officials, some three or four hours were tediously consumed in this simple operation, during which interval I was too dispirited to take notice of our novel surroundings. Indeed, when at last we escaped from the Custom House and made our way to the nearest refreshment bar, I was in that state of mind in which the predominant feeling is a miserable doubt as to whether, after all, life were worth living.*"

My steamer was commanded by an Argentine Captain and worked by an Argentine crew, who brought her quickly and comfortably to her berth beside a long, stone quay. There were hydraulic cranes in a row for discharging cargo on the quay, and just back of the cranes a line of railroad ran parallel with a stone wall. Between this railroad and the ship, a policeman, in a white naval uniform and wearing a short sword instead of a club, was marching up and down, while just beyond the railroad, with one eye on the ship and another on the policeman, were a host of porters, who kept waving their hands at the passengers and crying "*Peon, señor.*" These were men who earn a poor living carrying baggage from the ships to the Custom House. They were not allowed to go to the ship until a passenger called for help, but some porters in uniform in charge of a uniformed foreman came on board at once, having made some such contract with the steamboat company and the customs officials as that made by the baggage transfer companies of New York, who are allowed to enter steamer piers and railroad trains.

For twenty-five cents, a stout fellow carried my bundles to the Custom House. This was simply a great pier-shed-like structure of iron. It had a low iron bench, three feet wide, running around three sides, about twenty feet from the wall. The baggage was placed on this bench, while each passenger stood on the outside, opposite his own stuff, and opened it up for inspection. The first-class passengers were placed at one end of the bench and the steerage at the other. Within the bench were the customs examiners—half a dozen men in their shirt sleeves and every one either smoking a cigarette or drinking *maté*. Walking along the bench, they stopped before each passenger as the baggage was opened and looked it over. In every case but one, the things were examined in turn, so far as I could see. In the one case the Captain of the ship conducted a gentleman to an officer and introduced him. Thereat, the officer chalked the luggage he was at without further ado and went bowing and smiling to that of the man presented to him, and chalked it without any examination. But I saw a man narrowly escape being the last of the 100 passengers. He was dressed in a

shooting jacket and leggings and wore a single eyeglass. When he had opened his "luggage" he straightened up and said in a loud voice toward one of the customs examiners:

*"Aw, I say Johnnie—"*

Just then a friend who had come to the dock to meet him headed him off, saying that any such way of addressing an officer would produce complications, and so it would.

As a correspondent of THE SUN, I have been obliged to pass through the Custom Houses of seven different Latin-American nations, and I am bound to say that, wherever passengers conducted themselves without bluster or obsequiousness, they were invariably treated with the utmost courtesy. Even during a revolution in Honduras, when the importation of arms was prohibited, I saw two Americans enter the country with firearms, and they were not required to pay any duty on them, either. I have never seen an occasion at a Custom House that should wilt an Englishman until he could barely stagger to the nearest refreshment bar.

After passing the customs, the traveler naturally comes in contact with the transportation systems of the city, and these are found to be in some respects remarkable. In no country have I seen carts with wheels so high or smaller horses used for dray purposes. The hub of the wheel is almost as high above the ground as the backbone of the animal, and the top of the wheel is invariably much higher than the head of an ordinary man. The wheels are by measure from 6 to 7½ feet in diameter, while the thickness of the spokes and felloes<sup>2</sup> and shafts is as astonishing as the diameter of the wheels.

The model of these carts originated in Buenos Ayres long ago, and it grew out of the necessities of the longshoremen. Although the commerce of the city was something remarkable, Buenos Ayres did not have a harbor of any kind for shipping until within three years, when the first of the present line of stone docks was opened. Even schooners and brigs had to anchor offshore, while the big steamers did not come within less than ten miles of the city. Freight and passengers were transferred to barges and lighters. These were towed as near as possible to the landing, and then everything went into the carts or onto the

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<sup>2</sup> Felloes — Outer rim of a wheel, to which the spokes are fixed.

backs of men. The sandy bottom of the river was a fairly good roadbed, and so it happened that the carts could be taken out to barges lying in water, say four feet deep and more, and then brought back loaded. The high-wheeled cart was a necessity. They say that one could see then, on any day, carts were moving about the barges where the water was so deep that only the head of the horse was visible above the water's surface.

Most travelers take carriages and drive from the docks to their hotels, and it is altogether the most convenient thing to do. The driver will demand \$3 for the service, but will be well contented with \$2, while the legal price is about \$1; and this, too, in paper money worth about one-fourth its face in gold. The carriages are not remarkable, for they are, as a rule, old and the horses are not admirable.

The traveler with but one valise can go to his hotel for ten cents, paper, on a streetcar. The city of Buenos Ayres is traversed by streetcars to its uttermost limits, and one who knows the town can reach all other parts of it by horse car from any one part. Moreover, all lines run to and from a common center—the immediate vicinity of the Plaza Victoria, or, as it is coming to be called, the Plaza of the 25th of May, the 25th of May being the Argentine Fourth of July. The cars are, for the most part, of Yankee build and are of our summer style with reversible seats. There are no bobtailed cars. The conductors and drivers are as courteous as those to be found in cities like New York or Brooklyn—just about that. But there is one feature of the street-car system that well-nigh drives a nervous stranger crazy. The streets are narrow in the old part of the city, and so the curves of the tracks are short when rounding corners, while the distance which the driver can see up a side street, as he approaches it, is also very short. To prevent the collisions likely to happen in such narrow streets, the drivers are obliged to blow loud blasts on horns whenever they approach either a turn around a corner or the crossing of another track. In the business center of the city these turns or crossings are found on every corner, and so the horns are kept shrieking continually. The din is precisely that which the New Yorker hears when he goes down to Trinity churchyard with the street arabs<sup>3</sup> who gather there to welcome the new year. A cow's horn, with a reed inserted, is the favorite with the Buenos Ayres streetcar drivers, and this is bad enough; but a few of the more stylish drivers carry double-barreled, nickel-plated sirens that are even more terrifying to pedestrians than the death knell clang of a trolley

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<sup>3</sup> Street arab — A raggedly dressed homeless child wandering the streets

gong. Everybody anathematizes<sup>4</sup> the noise, but no one has yet suggested a substitute that will prevent collisions, and so the noise goes on.

There is one thing to be said in favor of the interminable din. It is the result of the interminable activity of the people. One is almost inclined to declare that it is the cause of the activity. There is nothing like it on the hemisphere, south of Uncle Sam's domain. People do certainly have to hurry, when crossing streets and rounding corners, to avoid the cars. Furthermore, in crosstown streets the cars must sometimes run right to the curb—one rail lies fairly in the gutter. Passengers are forever getting on or off with the car in motion and, at certain times of the day, are always standing on the side step, hanging to the hand rails, because all the seats are full. Their bodies are therefore directly above the edge of the pavement and careless pedestrians are frequently thumped in the back by passengers who hang on the steps. The collision occasionally sweeps the passenger from the car and knocks the pedestrian headlong. Everybody knows this, and there is in consequence a nervousness and haste on the part of pedestrians in these streets that the traveler quickly notices. Mr. William Eleroy Curtis, in his book on the capitals of Spanish America, calls Buenos Ayres "*a regular Chicago*." Mr. Curtis was otherwise kind to the Argentine capital, but I must say that from the streetcars' standpoint and that of the bustle and din they create in the busy part of the city, the comparison was well deserved.

Of course, the traveler notices the police. They are seen at every corner—swarthy little fellows, in a blue army uniform, with white collars and gloves, a plume in their caps, and a two-foot sword in place of a club. They usually carry cigarettes in their mouths, also, but I did not see one chewing a toothpick. The English writers (and especially Mr. Turner, who lived five years in the Argentine) all tell many tales of the evil deeds of the police—tales of bribes accepted and blackmail levied, and of theft from the dead. They infer from these instances that the Argentines are about all blackmailers and thieves. The spirit of these writers, however, is shown when Mr. Turner tells with glee how he saw four English sailors, who were drunk and disorderly on the street, turn to and whip, barehanded, ten of the policemen armed with swords, who were trying to arrest them. His sympathies were with the lawbreakers, of course. I talked with a number of Englishmen in the city, and all of them spoke bitterly of the police, and the force as a whole was denounced as thoroughly inefficient and knavish. Now, if every instance of evildoing alleged against the force were true,

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<sup>4</sup> Anathematize — To curse

it would behoove a citizen of New York, after the exposures made about "*the finest in the world*" in 1894, to keep silent. But I have every reason to believe that Buenos Ayres is as well protected by its police as any Spanish-American city, to say the least. For instance, I asked the man who most of all denounced the police, where I could find the toughest and most dangerous part of the city for a stranger to enter. He replied instantly:

*"The Boca—at the mouth of the old creek. It's worse than any place you've seen anywhere, and if you go there at night take a good revolver and keep your hand on it."*

There are parts of Spanish America where a good revolver must be carried in plain view, if one would not be wholly out of style, but the region of sailor boarding houses in Buenos Ayres is not one of them. I left the hotel at 9 o'clock at night and went to this region—the Boca. The streetcar that carries one there runs along what was once the old waterfront—a front that has been carried four blocks out into the river by the building of docks and the grading up of streets to them. And so, there is a row of old rookeries on the one hand and a wide stretch of sunken ill-lighted meadows on the other—meadows that are walled in by the dike-like streets, and are covered with water, and furnish breeding places for mud hens and frogs without number. It is a gloomy ride from the start, and when at last the car runs on and across these meadows toward the houses gathered at the mouth of the shallow creek which serves as a harbor for vessels of shoal draft, the prospect is anything but cheerful. Reaching the built-up section at the creek one finds the car following the old stream bed, almost under the jibbooms and yards of the sailing vessels moored there. Here and there is a sailor, leaning on a ship's rail smoking and idly watching the car. Above another rail appears the head and paws of a dog that barks ferociously. Over all, in ghostly outline, may be seen every form of rig known to river and coast navigation.

Leaving the car as the shipping was reached, I walked across the wide street (it is twice as wide as South Street, New York) to the houses that fronted the harbor. They were about all of wood; some were two stories high, and included all business places of the kind to be expected on a waterfront—saloons, restaurants, tobacco stores, sailor outfitting stores, ship chandler stores, groceries, meat markets, and so on. The ship chandlers and the meat dealers had closed their doors, and so had most of the grocers. The rest were wide open. At the door of about every restaurant was a big brazier with a bright charcoal fire,

over which a fat Italian held a pan of fish fresh from the river. The fish looked like overgrown smelts, and they were fried in lard. The smell was not too inviting, but the consumption of those fish was something enormous in that region. Nearly every restaurant was full of customers. Everybody was eating and talking at once, and about everybody was drinking red wine from big goblets. There were very few women in the restaurants and the men were of the longshore class. In the saloons there were tables and at about every table as many men as it would hold. Women carried the drinks from the bars to the tables. In one saloon was an Italian band playing jig music. I stopped to examine this one more carefully, because the crowd was larger than in the others and noisier. But I found that the women wore dresses that were high in the neck and long in the skirt, and girls, boys, and children of the proprietor were playing about the room, while the proprietor's wife helped the other women to serve. I had never known a place to be really tough where the front was wide open and the proprietor's children played about the floor, so I went on. For more than an hour I strolled along the front and up every side street that seemed to have any life in it, but found nothing worse than what is found in South Street, New York.

Then I stumbled on the street that was really tough. Every house was closed tight, but every window showed unusually bright lights behind the curtains. Here and there a door opened, and two or three men came out. Elsewhere men stopped at a door and knocked. At that, the door was opened by an invisible force. Looking down a rather dimly lighted hallway, a strong iron gate that was higher than any man could reach was seen, standing square across the hall. Behind the gate stood a well-built, short-haired man, peering through the gate bars at those who had knocked. If they pleased him, he bade them enter. If not, he told them to go, and they went. I guess, judging by the groups I saw, that those who were fairly sober and seemed to have a dollar and a half or so in cash were admitted.

The gate opened noiselessly, and as soon as they had passed it swung to and was locked automatically and effectually. When the door was shut, the men disappeared behind a wooden slat screen still further down the hall. I do not know what was behind the screen, but, judging by the sounds that came through the dimly lighted hallways, I guess that Jack finds there wine, women, and song. Judging by the published police reports, he occasionally gets a thrashing as well. The well-built, short-haired man behind the iron gate would be called a bouncer in New York.

Now, as a matter of fact, the streets in the so-called tough quarters of Buenos Ayres are at all times perfectly safe for a sober man who minds his own business. Houses are robbed, pockets are picked, and murders are committed in other parts of town much more frequently than in the tough parts. And that is not all. A man can walk through any street at any hour of the day or night without ever being addressed by any vile woman, or even noticed in any way by any woman not of his acquaintance. The sporting women<sup>5</sup> of Buenos Ayres never parade the streets as they do in London and New York. The reformers of New York, who believe they can legislate people into the kingdom of heaven, would not approve the Buenos Ayres method of controlling the social evil, because the women are licensed and subject to medical supervision, but the reformers will have a long way to travel to find a more efficient system for the conservation of public morals. The sinful must seek vice of this kind, if they would find it in Buenos Ayres. It is not thrust at them anywhere.

Buenos Ayres has a-plenty of theatres and music halls. The best patronized are the most expensive, like the opera, and those like Harry Hill's old variety show. The largest was in a business street about three blocks from our Consulate. I went there one night. The lobby was as large as the theater proper and it had a very wide gallery. There were nine bars in the gallery, with plenty of little tables. Decorously dressed barmaids sold the liquors, whiskey being 12½ cents gold per drink and beer six at the current rate of exchange.

The stage curtain rose on Señorita Valtini, who sang a pathetic song in a voice that had seen better days. Señorita Rose Yvel followed in like form. Then Señorita Blanche was announced to sing also. This seemed like crowding the mourners<sup>6</sup> with young women vocalists, but Blanche got a welcome. She could not sing so well as the others, but she was rotund and she wriggled after the fashion of women dancing a Spanish waltz. When she wriggled, the faces of the chappies<sup>7</sup> lightened noticeably, and she was encored, and she wriggled again.

More popular still was Camila Moccia, the leading lady of the house, a very pretty Italian young woman. She wore rose lake ribbons in her black hair, a diamond at her throat, a white satin waist trimmed and belted with black velvet, a short maroon skirt, red stockings, and very bright red shoes. The chappies went wild when she smiled on them, and applauded vociferously when she sang

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<sup>5</sup> Sporting woman — Prostitute

<sup>6</sup> Crowd the mourners — To pressure, or try to influence

<sup>7</sup> Chappie — Chap, fellow, bloke



a comic song. The most remarkable thing about the whole performance was the entire absence of jigs. Camila was formed divinely for a jig or a sailor's hornpipe, but she never kicked once; nor was there a dance of any kind until 1 o'clock in the morning, when the company danced a can-can, an exhibition that tore the chappies wide open in the mouth, but had no merit as a dance.

The only other feature of the night worth mention was the exhibition of a Yankee bicyclist, "*Theodore Morris, el único e incomparable unicyclista*," as the program called him. Buenos Ayres is a bicycle town, and the whole nation in the dry season is simply a bicycle field. The Buenos Ayres young men appreciated the skill of Mr. Morris very much.

In the theatre were a dozen policemen wearing swords. They said nothing to anyone and were ignored by the crowd. There were sporting young women sitting at about all the tables in the lobby gallery after 10 o'clock, but they did not speak to any stranger unless he first addressed them.

The Café Argentine is said to be the largest billiard saloon in the world. It is a great hall, with a gallery around it. There are tables on the main floor, and in the gallery also—in all, thirty-six billiard tables, besides pool tables. At 10 o'clock at night I found every table occupied. There were more than 100 small tables in the room, occupied by men drinking and playing various games—chess, dominoes, and cards. There was no gambling machine there, and no gambling beyond such stakes as the drinks. Many of the players were boys, apparently less than 16 years old. Brandy and beer were the favorite drinks, and the youths took as much of the brandy as the old ones did. It is an all-night house, and there are several like it in town, though smaller.

All the British writers assert that the Argentines are, to a man, gamblers, but Mr. C. E. Akers, in his "*Argentine, Patagonia, and Chilian Sketches*," proves it to his satisfaction from what he saw. He says: "*The same spirit (gambling) animates the street arabs and the newsboys. Their game is delightfully simple. It consists in spinning coins in the air and letting them fall upon the flagged pavement. The coin that settles down nearest to the joint in the stones wins. Such ingenious methods of creating games of chance show how deeply rooted the speculative spirit must be, and how impossible it seems to entertain any hope that it may be eradicated from the ordinary routine of everyday life.*"

Without noticing the logic of the writer, who draws such a conclusion from seeing newsboys pitching pennies, the traveler will learn on inquiry that all of the Buenos Ayres newsboys and bootblacks are Italians or Basques, or Argentines who never do such work.

Of course, the Argentines gamble. Betting is a natural characteristic of vivacious, hot-blooded, enthusiastic people, and betting is bad. They even own fast horses, and, sad to relate, play cards for money. They are rather manly about it, too—after the manner of the Prince of Wales, who owned up when asked about it on a certain occasion, and explained that, considering all things and the company he was accustomed to meet, he preferred his own counters and a fresh deck. The Argentines do not deny that they enjoy betting. But the favorite game of Buenos Ayres is said to be *fronton*.<sup>8</sup> This is a game something like handball, only it is not played with the hand. The player lashes to the forearm an implement made of basketwork that looks precisely like a two-foot long and palm-wide fingernail. The arm seems to extend into a hollow talon of that length. Into this the ball is dropped, and with it the ball is hurled against a wall so when it bounds back it may strike within certain prescribed limits. Some limits count more than others, and the biggest count wins. The spectators very enthusiastically back favorite players to win, and so gain or lose according as the game runs. The players are all foreigners. This is also the favorite game in Rio Janeiro.

One of the most remarkable features of the Argentine life is found in the drinking places. All the writers, and especially the English bookmakers, lay great stress on the drinking habits of the people of Buenos Ayres. The English writers are particularly shocked by it. "*The precocity of Argentine boys almost passes belief,*" says one. "*Among the first things that the stranger notices are children of tender years smoking cigarettes. Again, and again have we seen in the confiterías<sup>9</sup> boys of eight or ten, whose feet, as they sat on the chairs swung a long way off the floor, drinking spirits, smoking cigarettes, chaffing their elders, discussing the points of the favorite and his chances in the forthcoming races, retailing the gossip of the betting shops,*" and so on. Now this is strictly true, but the remarkable fact is that after such training in their youth these people are not drunkards. As this same writer admits, "*with all their fondness for confiterías, billiard saloons, &c., and despite the enormous consumption of wine and intoxicants, they are remarkably free from the vice of drunkenness. During the whole time of our residence in*

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<sup>8</sup> Frontón — Ball-game of Basque origin (aka *pelota*)

<sup>9</sup> Confitería — Coffee-shop or bar

*the country (five years) I never saw a dozen Argentines the worse for drink."* That is, the city Argentines do not get drunk. The gauchos are excepted properly. That the Argentines, men and women, should drink brandy freely every day from early youth to old age, and yet very rarely become drunkards, is one of the marvels of this country.

One of the first things that an American will notice on visiting Buenos Ayres is the coolness and indifference with which he will be received when he enters an Argentine store or the market place, or, in short, whenever he comes in contact with the natives. He may see goods sold to natives at one price, and when his turn comes to be served will very likely find the price one-half more—sometimes three times as much. He may ask why or protest, but everything he says will be received with utter indifference. I once went into a second-hand bookstore in search of the work of a native author. The proprietor was reading a book. He glanced at me and went on reading. I asked if he had the book. He said he had, but neither offered to get it nor ceased looking at his book.

*"Do you wish to make me the favor to bring it?"* I said.

He did not answer, but got the book and then went on reading.

*"The price, if you please,"* said I.

No answer.

*"My friend, I wish to buy the book. What is the price?"*

A partly suppressed yawn followed, and then, *"Thirty dollars"*—three prices, at least.

I did not buy the book. Such experiences were the rule when I first reached town, but one day I fell in with a Yankee cheesemaker doing business at Rosario to whom I related my trouble. He laughed.

*"The Argentines are not able to tell an American from an Englishman. You talk their language as badly as any Englishman could do, and their mistake is perfectly natural. Try explaining, first of all, that you are a Yankee who has just arrived, and has had no time to perfect himself in the most beautiful language and customs of the country."*

I took the advice and with the greatest success. It is a fact that the reserve manifested when I entered a place instantly vanished when I told my nationality and bewailed my inability to talk Spanish fluently. More than that, my knowledge of the language was pronounced extraordinary considering my stay in the country. I was urged to come in often and practice on them, and all goods were sold as cheap to me as to natives. In a dozen places of business, the Argentines said to me:

*"We are all Americans—we are brothers. 'America for the Americans.'"*

When I came to seek for the cause of the manifest prejudice against the English I found it readily enough. But, lest my own observations be thought colored by any tinge of prejudice, I will quote a few paragraphs from the best of the English writers on the subject. Thus:

*"While among the Argentines themselves intemperance is comparatively rare, the Italians, the Irish, and the English have achieved an unenviable distinction for hard tipping. The temptations to drinking are so numerous and irresistible that the wonder is, not that so many British subjects are addicted to the vice, but that any are free from it. You can transact no business without the inseparable accompaniments of smoking and tipping. You can travel no journey, take part in no sport, without the ever-present adjunct of the bottle. It is melancholy to see the numbers of British deadbeats loafing about the quays and docks and riverside resorts among a vagabond crowd of beachcombers of all nationalities. Room companions do not desert, it is true, until the last vestiges of respectability have disappeared from a man; but then he is suffered to go his headlong pace to ruin and degradation and finally end his career, as so many have done, in the unsympathetic wards of the British Hospital."*

Under the head of "*British Society in the Plate*" a writer says: "*By comparison with the genial colonies, the English colony in Argentina suffers sadly. There is no fellowship, no amenity. In the capital, British society is composed for the most part of well-dressed, indifferently educated, unsociable people, to whom introductions are unwelcome unless backed by wealth or rank or interest, who regard every newcomer as a sort of interloper; who are divided into more cliques and sets than there are clans in Scotland; who are obsequious to an honorable, who truckle to a lord, and are positively rude to a plain mister—gossiping, unlovable people, who*

*go to church to hatch scandal, and slander everybody, from the pastor to the Consul."*

As I said, carrying British-written guide books when visiting the Plate will add greatly to the amusement of the traveler. The description of the English in Buenos Ayres, just quoted from Mr. Turner, may seem a severe denunciation of the gentleman's countrymen, but when one reads the context it is found that all he says is said only to show how greatly the impressionable British citizen deteriorates through living among the wicked Argentinians!

Then, of his countrymen who own ranches he says, under the head of "*Camp Folk*": "*One finds them always taciturn, unintellectual, unimaginative folk, whose ideas, if they ever had any, have long grown rusty—people who have got left in the race of life, and whose minds have sunk into a dead level of commonplace.*"

And at last he comes to make a full confession of the facts: "*The Britisher is not regarded with any high degree of favor by the natives. His narrow and insular prejudices, his exclusiveness, his eccentricities, his inadaptability to the native's ways of life, his ill-concealed contempt for the customs, habits, manners, and even language of the natives, all contribute to keep him estranged from the latter.*"

In my judgment, no man has ever so well described the ordinary Britisher whom the traveler sees in Spanish-American countries as has Mr. Thomas A. Turner. And yet, one must see the bearing of these Englishmen in a Spanish-American country to fully appreciate the aversion which all natives feel for them. In New York, we are so accustomed to seeing them that we have forgotten even to laugh at them, but these countries are younger in development.

However, the story is not complete. The Argentine merchant is the soul of honor in meeting his bills. Every man to whom I talked on the subject said so, and the books agree to the statement. It is the English house that becomes bankrupt in order to get rich. Let me not be thought guilty of race prejudice when I say by way of illustration that the Argentine gentleman regards the Britisher exactly as Jews are regarded by a large number of people in New York. The English in Buenos Ayres are, it is asserted, guilty of all the mean tricks for gain that in New York are said to be done by the Jews. The Argentine gentleman has a hearty contempt for the English, and refuses even to trade with them, just as some American hotels refuse to admit Hebrews as guests, and American clubs, like the Union League of New York, blackball Hebrew applicants for membership. It

is a fact that "*British influence in the Argentine has been much overstated,*" as one British writer says, and what he adds is also true; that is to say, "*socially and morally, the tendency of what influence there is has been not to elevate, but to demoralize the native character by the introduction of a pernicious system of bribery.*"

I have given considerable space to the English of Buenos Ayres, but there is a reason for doing so. The Yankee traveler who goes there will find himself associating with them from the day of his arrival because of the similarity of languages. He should therefore be warned so that their constant tirade of abuse of the natives may not prejudice him. Moreover, the English form, it is said, about one-fifth part of the population of the city—rather, it should be said that the people of British blood number so many. A large part of them were born in the country, and so are counted as Argentine citizens, though their "*insular prejudices*" prevents their exercising any of the functions of citizenship not compelled by law.

After speaking of the Britisher, one word must be said of the Irish in Buenos Ayres. A good many people in New York do not like the prominence of the Irish in municipal politics, but I guess that every New Yorker would feel a healthy glow on hearing the brogue in Buenos Ayres. There are enough Irishmen in the Argentine to support a newspaper, the *Southern Cross*, and a right good paper it is, while the one daily that every English-speaking man in the city reads every morning, the *Standard*, is owned and edited by Irishmen. Mr. Turner, in speaking of the Britisher, did not, I am sure, mean to include the Irish.

To one at all familiar with other Latin-American cities, the most remarkable feature in the trade of Buenos Ayres is the sale of books and periodicals. All the important and some unimportant American and European periodicals are always on sale. One of the British writers says that Buenos Ayres is "*a place where there is neither art, nor science, nor amusement, nor intellectual emulation of any kind.*" I will not burden the reader with figures from the census, but it is a fact that Buenos Ayres has more stores where new books and periodicals are sold and more second-hand bookstores, as well, than Brooklyn or any city of 500,000 inhabitants with which I am acquainted in the United States. It has twenty times as many as Rio Janeiro, a city of nearly the same population. More than that, the largest bookstores are publishing houses as well, and the Argentine literature is not only voluminous but well worth the study of American critics. The writer just quoted says on one page that the town has no "*intellectual*

*emulation of any kind,"* but further on stultifies himself by a sneer at the fact that Argentines speak of their city as "*the Athens of South America.*" Don Mariano Pelliza, the historian; Don Francisco Moreno, the naturalist; and Don Ramón Lista, an explorer, have a reputation as writers that is more than local.

There are a number of novelists and poets, too. My knowledge of the language was so limited that I was unable to appreciate the poetry. The native novels that I read were what would be called "Frenchy" in New York. The one that was having the run of the city when I was there was called "*The Loves of an Indian Girl.*" The title sufficiently describes the book, but I may add that the story was a good enough work of art to be put on sale in every bookstore in town and to find its way into the houses of people of taste and judgment.

The newspapers have a circulation, too, that is large, considering the diversified interests of the population. Thus, although the city has more than half a million people, a third of them are of Italian blood, and, as said, nearly a third are British. There are Frenchmen and Germans in great numbers, too. There are newspapers for all nationalities—plenty of them. *La Prensa*, a morning journal, sells more than 30,000 copies on weekdays, although the price is 8 cents per copy, while the evening *Diario* sells only a few thousand less. We New Yorkers pride ourselves on the number of words of news we get by cable from Europe; but when one considers the difference in cost (the price to Buenos Ayres papers per word is 47 cents) and the difference in circulation, the display which the Buenos Ayres papers make it the greater though there be fewer words by count. The "intellectual emulation" among Buenos Ayres newspapers every American must admire.

If one were disposed to find fault with the city's taste for periodicals and literature, room exists for it. A curious custom regarding the kind of books referred to is that of pasting a strip of paper from cover to cover so that the contents cannot be examined until the book is purchased. The custom helps the sale of books. One's curiosity is excited to learn what manner of book it is. I can save my reader the expense of buying one to satisfy his curiosity. They are harmless and not wicked in any respect, save as the cover and the name are meant to deceive. They are merely a mass of utter rot. It must be said, however, that such books are on sale only at newsstands in the sailor quarter and like parts of the town.

Of all the writers describing the physical aspects of Buenos Ayres, I do not find one who speaks well of the place as a whole, and in fact many of them find plenty of fault with it. Mr. Frank Vincent, in his "*Around and About South America*," says "*the streets and sidewalks are all narrow, badly paved, and dirty.*" Here are the facts now: The streets in the old part of the city—downtown—are forty feet wide. In the new part they are eighty and more. The main shopping street, Calle Florida, is paved with asphalt that is kept in perfect order. The ship brokers' street, Twenty-fifth of May, is also paved with asphalt, and so are half a dozen other streets of similar importance. They are all kept in repair. Other streets are paved with wood and some of them with stone. Most of the stone streets are almost as bad as the boulder-paved streets of Brooklyn. As a whole the city was, when I was there, as clean as New York—just about. It was therefore cleaner than Chicago or St. Louis, but not nearly so clean as San Francisco. Comparison with other cities of Latin America—Rio, for instance—is out of the question. Buenos Ayres is infinitely ahead of them.

Then, in the business part, one finds many new iron, brick, and stone buildings of three and four stories that remind the American of home. They are just about what one finds in the States, considering cost and purpose. The British writers yield a grudging praise to some of them, but turn quickly to the dwellings that were erected at about the same time. These dwellings have many of the unpleasant features of New York's thin-walled apartment houses. Of the old-style Spanish-American house, a one-story structure built around a handsome little court, no description is necessary.

The business center of the town is the Plaza of the Twenty-fifth of May, formerly called the Plaza Victoria. The old cathedral and the Government palace front on this. From this plaza a wide avenue is laid out due west to form the backbone of the city, in place of a narrow street called Rivadavia that used to be the backbone. This work was begun during the flush times that came upon the city between 1880 and 1890, when it grew faster than any town in the United States. After the boom, there came a breakdown, during which, as the reader will remember, the great banking house of the Barings of London failed. The legislators of Argentina had devised a system of bonds based on land that would have delighted the Populists, and money was plenty in the republic. Naturally a greatly debased currency and financial panic followed, but the evil was not un-mixed. Because of the improvements made in the streets and buildings of Buenos Ayres during that period of inflation, the town is modern: it is the handsomest city south of the Rio Grande River, and that is saying a good deal. But when



the great avenue is completed, as it is sure to be some day, Buenos Ayres will be one of the most remarkable cities in the world.

Of course, the town has its peculiarities. In the main plaza is a bronze statue of Gen. San Martín, "*the illustrious colleague of Bolivar in the war of independence.*" It is the conventional statue—a very fierce warrior on such a steed as no stud book ever described, a horse of a form that no one ever saw, and none but a fool artist could dream of. We have things like it in the States. Alas, even Washington is found caricatured on such things! Then, in the same plaza is the monument that commemorates Argentine independence—the Argentine Fourth of July shaft, so to speak. It is a brick and white mortar pile got up to imitate stone, and has a stucco Liberty on top. That there should be any imitation or fraud in a statue of Liberty is shocking enough, but the Argentines, who dearly love festivals and night displays have covered this thing all over with gas-pipes and burners, so that they can illuminate it at night. Seen by day, these bristling brass burners and rusty iron pipes seem crawling things, like huge thousand-legged worms clinging from top to bottom on what should have been a monument to excite profound admiration in every respect.

However, it is not becoming in a New Yorker to find fault here. We, too, have a statue of Liberty, excruciatingly illuminated.

From this plaza the traveler should drive about the city and look upon the others. He will find a lot of little squares full of sod and flowers that are refreshing to the eye, while the larger ones are parks of considerable pretensions. Near the waterworks, for instance, is a park with rolling hills and artificial streams and tumbles of water over rocks that are partly hidden by trees and plants. It is simply charming. Then there is the Plaza Constitucion, on which one of the large railroad stations fronts. It is a cheerful grove as a whole, and it contains a structure, called the grotto, that will astonish the beholder. Mr. G. C. Morant, in his book called "*Chile and the River Plate,*" voices the sentiments of the English colony when he says it "*presents a hideous spectacle.*" But the grotto never had a fair trial. The contractor either failed of his duty or the design was structurally weak, for it had to be condemned and closed. When properly strengthened and covered with vines and flowers, one may expect the British to omit mentioning it when writing about Buenos Ayres. It will be very beautiful then.

Brief reference has already been made to the stone basins in which the steamer lands the traveler. Though naturally without a harbor, Buenos Ayres is now

getting facilities for the handling of cargoes from ships that are unsurpassed. The scheme includes the building of five long wet docks and great basins. Four of these basins are now fit to use and three are [en]tirely complete. Work on the rest is in hand, and that they will all be done in a reasonable time no one need doubt, because the sale of the reclaimed land more than pays the cost. The basins have ample water for the ocean steamer. The length of dockage is even more than will be required probably for ten years yet. There are hydraulic lifts along the walls, so that every hatchway of a vessel may be worked at once. There are ample and convenient warehouses for the storage of goods. The railway and cartage facilities are all that the merchants ask for. There are special docks and yards and elevators for handling the cattle and sheep that in increasing numbers are exported every month in the year. An inspection of this waterfront of Buenos Ayres will be found a delight to a traveler familiar with the waterfront of New York.

And then, if he be an artist as well as a man of affairs, he will find another pleasure in walking by day through the region already described as seen by night. There is one part of the Boca that will especially attract him, and that is the region where the market boats are moored. Here will be found hundreds of little schooners and sloops and all of remarkable models, among which the clinker-built<sup>10</sup> vessels, sixty feet long and upward, sharp at both ends and with a sheer like a lifeboat—these will catch his eye first of all, if he know boats from bathtubs. And then there are the crews—swarthy, brawny, and bearded, or young, slender, and willowy—with caps awry over a tumble of unkempt hair and with throats and chests exposed by buttonless shorts—crews that could stand as models for pirates can be found anywhere, and yet a more cheery, hearty host of sailormen is rarely seen.

Their cargoes are the produce of the river region. Fish in tubs and strung on sticks, fruits in crates and heaps, and hanging in huge bunches from the booms and rigging; potatoes, turnips, cauliflower, cabbage, squash—they say that once a foreigner learns to roll cigarettes and eat squash he never leaves the Argentine. Of this I am certain, that once a Remington<sup>11</sup> or a Frost<sup>12</sup> or any other artist

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<sup>10</sup> Clinker-built —Method of boat-building in which each external plank overlaps the upper edge of the one below it

<sup>11</sup> Frederic Sackrider Remington (1861-1909) — American painter specializing in themes of the Old West

<sup>12</sup> (perhaps) Arthur Burdett Frost (1851-1928) — American illustrator and painter

able to appreciate things of human interest got his eyes on this floating market, he would not leave until he had a sketch book full of studies.

To describe all of the interesting features of the city would, of course, require a big guide book. In what I have written, I have touched on those points regarding the town and the people that are most likely to attract a traveler's attention or which have been most grievously misrepresented by the writers who have gone there before me. These writers devote much space in other features—the race course, the gas arches over the streets, the fashionable drives, the chappies who stand on the corners to make remarks about passing ladies, the cathedral. Every writer must describe with owl wisdom the architecture of the cathedral. I must confess I do not know anything about cathedral architecture. They all devote much space to the Argentine ladies, too. That is also a subject of which I know but very little and am altogether incapable of appreciating fully: nevertheless, I find it so attractive that, in connection with the ladies seen in other Latin-American countries, I propose to treat it in an article by itself another time.<sup>13</sup>

There are very few Americans in Buenos Ayres or the Argentine. I do not think it is a good region for Yankees. Of course, a Yankee can find employment after he has learned the language, but a knowledge of the language is absolutely necessary. The English have sneered at Argentine Spanish so much that the Argentines think that a foreigner who cannot talk their language has the English contempt for it. But when one has obtained employment he is not well off. I saw an advertisement for a bookkeeper, "*thoroughly acquainted with his work and having had not less than one year's experience in a bank.*" He was to take charge of a set of books in a house of first-class standing, and his salary was to be \$1,000, paper, a year. Think of a first-class bookkeeper working for less than a gold dollar a day! The hall porter in my hotel received \$20 paper, a month.

In a growing country like the Argentine, there are many chances for bright men with capital, but there are a plenty of bright men with capital already there, and looking for these chances—men from Europe, whose Latin blood enables them to adopt the Latin-American way of life without friction. For, of course, the Argentine way of life is not like that of the Yankee. Being, in many respects, totally different, the Yankee would probably get homesick after remaining there a while. I do not mean to say the Argentine's way is worse than the Yankee's. It is better for the Argentine, just as the Yankee's way is better for us. And here is

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://donduncan.org/spears/jrssenoritas.pdf>

the fault to be found with all writers on the Argentine. They start with a standard of measure created in their own homes. The only good things in the world, they think, are like those "*at home, don't you know?*" "*But where outside of England is real comfort understood?*" asks one. Of course, the Argentine is bad to him. "*They assert that their country is the United States of South America,*" says another, and he, being a Yankee, thinks "*the Argentine is all right.*" It is all right for the Latin immigrants from Europe, and they are going there by the shipload. For the Yankee, the fact that it is a military republic, that every male citizen must do military service—that the police examine all children born there to see that no male escapes the military register—makes the Argentine undesirable as a home. In many respects, the attitude of Uncle Sam with his Monroe doctrine is that of a dog in the manger. He will not do anything to develop the resources of the Latin-American republics, nor will he let any European nation do anything either. So far as the magnificent resources of these nations collectively is concerned, the Monroe doctrine is a doctrine of stagnation and retrogression. Incidentally, it is the doctrine of cowardice. We are willing that these southern resources should continue to stagnate lest the French, Germans, or English get a good foothold on the continent and then use it to thrash the life out of us. Nevertheless, America for the Americans is a right good doctrine in the eyes of the people of each one of these countries. They want to work out their own destiny, and the Argentine is doing it in a style to astonish the world.

It is worthwhile for Uncle Sam to keep in mind that the port of Rosario alone, in the State of Santa Fe, exported about a million tons of wheat in the year of 1894. Moreover, there are flour mills there and all the way down to Bahía Blanca, with capacities of from 160 to 200 barrels a day and more. Further than that, the acreage in wheat is increasing rapidly, and so is the number of mills. The cause of this increase is also worth considering. It is the depreciated state of the currency. The Argentine landowner sells his wheat for gold and pays his harvest hands in depreciated paper money. He has the cheapest labor in the world. The Argentine prairies have grasshoppers (locusts) and droughts and hailstorms, but, in spite of all, they produce, one year with another, about twelve bushels of wheat to the acre. They are learning there, too, to irrigate, and there are tremendous streams to tap yet. As a grain producer, the Argentine is going ahead with tremendous strides. As a wool producer, it is a marvel and the flocks at the south are just now increasing wonderfully; and they have much room for increase.

In short, in spite of panics, and because of a depreciated currency, the agricultural development of the Argentine is in a healthful condition and, because of this agricultural development, the country is getting rich rapidly. In view of the growing prosperity of the nation, one cannot believe that its Government is as bad as its monarchy-loving critics have said it is. It has bosses, and military bosses at that, but the doctrine of State's rights is held there, too, and in a form that would make Yankee republicans gasp. A gaucho has been President of the republic—caste does not stand in the way of political preferment; and, however much theorists may protest against the election and appointment of the "Johnnies" and the "Mikes" to office in the United States, the fact that Juancito may yet rule the nation is an assurance of the stability of republican institutions and of continued progress in the Argentine. On the whole, the Yankee traveler will find there so much that is good and interesting that, no matter what he may have read on the subject, he is sure to feel that he has been hitherto like the Britisher, insular and prejudiced in his consideration of this great republic.

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