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Whittemore**

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THE HISTORY OF ARGENTINE INDEPENDENCE ***

Notes on the History of Argentine Independence



Notes on the History of Argentine Independence

—A PAPER READ BY—

**MR. C. W.
WHITTEMORE**

February 6th, 1920

Before the
American Club
Buenos Aires

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF ARGENTINE INDEPENDENCE.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE AMERICAN CLUB
OF BUENOS AIRES
BY MR. C. W. WHITTEMORE.

IN a former paper read before this Club, effort was made to show how settlements in the Argentine came east and south from Perú, step by step, until Buenos Aires was eventually founded by Juan de Garay in 1580. In Argentine history this is known as the "Refoundation" of the city, a sentimental fiction of obscure origin for there was no connection between the permanent work of Garay and the ephemeral passing of Pedro de Mendoza forty-four years previously. In the present paper, we will trace the history of Argentine Independence as it extended west and north, step by step, reversing the march of early settlement, until the final battles were fought and won in Perú, the stronghold of Spanish power in South America.

The Fathers of Argentine Independence took it for granted that the new nation would embrace all the territory included in the Viceroyship of the River Plate, which was created in 1776 (note the year:) as an afterthought of the Spanish Government and intended to quiet the discontent of the Argentine people over trade restrictions and to provide a bulwark against Portuguese aggressions, at that time a serious menace. It included the present Republics of Argentine, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, then called Upper Perú, this last having a considerable frontage on the Pacific Ocean. The population in 1776, including slaves and tame Indians, was probably less than five hundred thousand people, of which fully one-half lived in Upper Perú.

A noteworthy feature, the only one in all Spanish America, of the primary Argentine colonization was that it absorbed the Indian population. In Perú as in Mexico and elsewhere, the conquerors implanted a feudalism which had as its principal basis the distribution of the natives as laborers among the mine and ranch owners. The Indian races crossed with the Spaniards but were not assimilated. In the Argentine, on the contrary, the Indians *were* assimilated, there was a minimum of oppression, a limitation to human exploitation, a rudimentary recognition of equality, with the result that at an early day the native sons were the backbone of the settlements, assumed positions of authority, led exploring expeditions and founded other colonies. Seeds of eventual freedom were planted from the very beginning.

Spain settled America for the benefit of Spain, the welfare of the colonies was never considered, and one of the fundamental manifestations of this erroneous policy was the creation of arbitrary trade routes in opposition to natural laws. Buenos Aires was located at the junction of a system of rivers and was readily accessible from Transatlantic ports, yet all legitimate commerce had to come via Panamá and Perú, pay heavy sea and land freight charges, multiplied internal customs dues and much unnecessary handling, to the extent that by the time merchandise reached Buenos Aires, its cost had been increased 500 to 600 percent. Contraband flourished, ably and actively assisted by the British and Portuguese from the headquarters at Colonia, just across the river. The trade-route policy of Spain provoked in the Argentine a spirit of steadily growing hostility which smouldered for many years before the outbreak came.

As an item of passing interest, Buenos Aires because of geographical position became a port of relative importance in spite of the restrictions. During the five years from 1748 to 1753, some 150,000 native hides, and gold, silver, copper, tin, cacao, vicuña wool and quinine from Perú and Chile to the value of 6,000,000 "pesos fuertes" were exported, while in the following ten years from 1754 to 1763 these same countries sent out through Buenos

Aires 36,000,000 "pesos" worth of gold and silver.

The establishment of the Viceroyship in 1776 and the consequent formation in Buenos Aires of a locally semi-autonomous Government, facilitated and stimulated commercial activity. Wine came from Mendoza, rum and dried fruits from San Juan, textiles and laces from Tucumán and Salta where the Inca arts and industries persisted and flourished, hides and skins from the plains, "yerba", tobacco and fine woods from Paraguay. This internal commerce varied in value from 10,000,000 to 20,000,000 "pesos" annually. Paraguay sold 60,000 mules to Perú every year, and sent 2000 tons of "yerba" to Chile. Argentine exportation to Spain included crude and tanned bull and horse-hides; sheep-wool, jerked beef, wax, feathers and skins. Freedom of trade with Africa was obtained and other fields of activity were developed. Mexico and Lima were Colonial Courts, but Buenos Aires had become a market-place.

A Spanish traveller who visited Buenos Aires during the Viceroyship said:—"The Argentine creoles have a great idea of their equality with the Europeans"; adding, "There exists a sort of aversion of the creoles or sons of Spaniards born in America, towards the Europeans and especially toward the Spanish Government". Incoherent and crude though they were, handicapped by ignorance and superstition, especially in the rural regions, democratic tendencies accompanied the Argentine as it emerged from its two hundred years of isolation and prepared it for its mission of self-emancipation and for the salvation of South American independence.

Mitre, the most careful of Argentine historians, says:—"The embryonic body-politic with its democratic instincts contained, however, all the vices inherent to and proceeding from its Colonial origin and environment. The deserts, the solitude, the sloth, the sparse population, the lack of moral cohesion, the corrupt customs among the general mass, the absence of ideals, and above all, the profound ignorance of the people were causes and effects, which producing a semi-barbarity alongside of a weak and sickly civilization, concurred at an early age to viciate the organism". He goes on to say:—"The Colony and the Spanish Crown were not homogeneous. Thus during the long and ruinous wars waged by Spain in the XVII and XVIII centuries, Spanish America was neutral or indifferent, and was not moved by sentiments of patriotism, as happened among the British Colonies where the Mother-country was concerned". He further says:—"Unity of religious belief was the only factor which gave certain cohesion; but the clergy in the River Plate, with rare exceptions, was below the general average, without hierarchy, prestige, power or influence. Because of this, the Argentine clergy was revolutionary and republican when the Colony revolted, quite the reverse of what happened in the rest of Spanish America".

A brief reference to the history of printing in the Argentine will be illustrative of the intellectual development of the period. The first book printed in South America was finished in 1705 in the Guarany language on a press made in the Jesuit Missions of the Upper Paraná. As a matter of coincidence, one of the first books published in North America was the translation of the New Testament into the language of the Massachusetts Indians in 1661, or forty-four years earlier, by John Elliot. In 1767, under permission granted by the authorities in Perú, presses and type were brought from Spain at an expense of 2,000 "pesos" and were set up in Córdoba, the University city of the Argentine. The first book printed was also a Jesuit production, this time in Latin, and it was the only book there produced, for the Jesuits were soon after expelled. Vértiz, a native of Mexico and the most progressive of the Argentine Viceroys, wanted to introduce printing in Buenos Aires, and in 1780, after considerable correspondence, bought this Córdoba press at its estimated value of 1,000 "pesos", which, history says, was promptly paid. It was transported from Córdoba to Buenos Aires in one ox-cart, the charge being 40 "pesos". There were eight cases of type weighing 2785 pounds, one iron and one wooden press, all in bad order, so much so that the Viceroy subsequently reported that the repairs cost 1,812 "pesos". On November 21, 1780, Viceroy Vértiz published a decree establishing the "Royal Press of the Foundling Asylum" on the corner of Moreno and Perú streets. This was the only press in the Argentine until

1812 when two other small and incomplete outfits were acquired. The first publications were Governmental decrees, many of which can still be seen in the Historical Museum. A book was produced in 1781, called "Representation of the Corporation and Citizens of Montevideo", that city having no press of its own. The first newspaper appeared in 1802, also printed on this Córdoba press, being "The Agricultural, Industrial and Commercial Weekly". The backwardness of printing in the Argentine at the time of the Revolution is a clear indication of the illiteracy of the people. As a matter of incidental interest, a printing press was brought to Boston in 1630 and in 1724 a weekly called "The Boston News Letter" was founded.

The English invasions of 1806 and 1807 were not so much the causes of the Argentine revolution as they were vehicles for the expression of Argentine readiness for revolution. At that time, Spain was an ally of France; in 1805 the two countries had together fought and together had been defeated by the English under Nelson at Trafalgar. It is worth remembering that English attempts to take Buenos Aires were efforts to capture enemy territory. The first invasion, known as the "Conquista", was successful. General Berresford landed at Quilmes in June of 1806, marched against Buenos Aires with 1560 troops, overcame the disorganized opposition encountered enroute, and entered the city in triumphal procession. Buenos Aires with its environments then had some 70,000 inhabitants, and the intrepidity of the exploit has won the admiration of all reputable Argentine historians. Berresford made his headquarters in the Fortress, where Government House now stands, seized some 1,500,000 "pesos", and issued a proclamation saying in effect that he would act with unbounded magnanimity provided the city recognized his authority. He shipped 1,000,000 "pesos" to London; the money arrived safely and was conveyed from the wharf to the Bank of England under strong and impressive guard amid much popular enthusiasm. Before the date of this spectacular event, however, Berresford had been attacked and had surrendered on August 12, 1806, after a brave defense in which he lost about one-third of his scanty forces. This is known as the "Reconquista". The British occupied Buenos Aires somewhat more than six weeks.

The Reconquest was a turning point in Argentine history. The then Viceroy Sobremonte and other Spanish authorities, having ran away upon the first appearance of the British, leading citizens met and appointed General Liniers to command the native forces, and after the Reconquest, a Congress was elected by popular vote and conferred on Liniers all the powers of the Viceroy. It was a revolution in fact if not in name.

The second British invasion occurred in 1807 and was made by a larger and more thoroughly organized expedition, being able to disembark some 12,000 men. Buenos Aires had had ample news of the threatened danger; troops were drilled and trained; cannon were cast; and powder was hurried from Chile, carried over the mountains on willing shoulders. Viceroy Sobremonte had returned and after abortive attempts to reassume power, had been by popular vote formally deposed and imprisoned. The man of the hour was Liniers.

As a precautionary measure, the British captured Montevideo in February. The Commander-in-chief, Sir Samuel Auchmuty, a native-born North American who had sided with England at the opening of our Revolution, reported from there to his Government:—"The oppression of the Mother-country has made the natives anxious to break the yoke of Spain, and although their ignorance, immorality and innate barbarity render them completely incapable of self-government, they desire to follow in the steps of the North Americans and erect an independent state".

Another North American named William White, who had lived several years in Buenos Aires, tried to bring about an agreement between the Argentines and the British by which Argentine independence under British protection would be secured. Nothing came of the suggestion, but the attention it attracted shows that even when armed invasion was threatened, any chance to escape Spanish oppression had adherents.

The British army was brought over from Montevideo and landed at Ensenada, now the port of La Plata. General Auchmuty had been

succeeded by General Whitelock, a Court favorite of limited military capacity. The British marched against Buenos Aires, and in places had partial success, but the result of the attacks which lasted from July 2 to July 6 was complete success for the Argentine defenders. This is known in history as the "Defensa".

The British retired to Montevideo, and some months later returned home. During their stay in Montevideo, they published a newspaper which had considerable circulation both there and in Buenos Aires; and that organ and contact with British prisoners who had generally friendly treatment from their Argentine captors, confirmed the public opinion that Spain was decadent and that unrestricted commerce with the whole world, as practiced by England, was the one thing most to be desired.

Mention should be made of Francisco Miranda, the earliest and greatest of all the apostles of South American freedom, and today practically forgotten. He was born in Venezuela, fought under Washington, a friend of Hamilton and of Lafayette, a participant in the French Revolution, a confidant of the younger Pitt, distinguished by Catherine II of Russia, and known personally to Napoleón who considered him a lunatic inspired by a spark of sacred flame. He was an extraordinary man, a champion of liberty in both the Old and the New World. He tried to induce England to invade Spanish America to bring about its independence, but the untimely death in 1806 of Pitt, the champion of American Colonial freedom, frustrated his hopes. He centralized the revolutionary tendencies of the Spanish Americans resident in Europe, organized systematic relations with the dissatisfied in Spanish America, and founded in London towards the close of the XVIII century, a great secret society with which affiliated all those who strove for American emancipation. The London lodge was named the "Great American Reunión", and under its auspices during the early years of the XIX century, a chain of subsidiary lodges called the "Lautaro Society" was organized throughout Spain. Further reference to this powerful society will be made.

At this point, a brief glance at conditions in Europe is necessary. The alliance between Spain and France, made in 1795, lasted until 1808, when Spain joined England in the effort to crush Napoleón. Napoleón thereupon took his armies into Spain and completely conquered it with the single exception of the city of Cádiz which held out under the protection of the guns of the British fleet. In the same year, King Charles IV abdicated in favor of his son Ferdinand VII, who unhappily was promptly captured by the French. Napoleón made his brother Joseph, King of Spain, and this improvised monarch sent a messenger to the River Plate inviting submission. It was refused. The legitimate King being captive, a Council was established in Cádiz to govern in his name, but in 1810, the people of Cádiz revolted against the Council, assassinated the Governor, and a Regency composed of reactionaries assumed power to act for Ferdinand VII.

Advices reached Buenos Aires about the middle of May, 1810, that the first act of the Regency had been to revoke the decree of the new Viceroy, Cisneros, which had made Buenos Aires a free port, and had further ordered that the former laws covering monopoly by Spain of all Colonial commerce should be enforced more strictly than ever. "This", says Mitre, "was the echo of decadent Spain, which feared its captive would escape and tried to chain it to abuses by enforcing them".

The news created a profound sensation. On May 18th., the Viceroy issued a rogatory decree, entreating the people to remain loyal to the Mother-country. The Argentine leaders replied that the Government of Spain had lapsed, that orders emanating from the self-appointed Regency in Cádiz were without legal value, that as there was no King there could be no Viceroy, and that therefore it was right and necessary that steps should be taken to arrange for self-government. These ideas were proclaimed throughout the city and were received with general applause. A committee headed by Castelli called on the Viceroy and on the City Council, asking that an expression of public opinion be secured, but met with resistance. The leaders threatened that if the authorities did not convoke the people, they would, and would employ force if necessary. The Viceroy and Council reluctantly consented, and the most influential citizens were summoned to a public meeting to be

held on May 22nd. in the Town Hall, now on the west side of the present Plaza Mayo. At this meeting, Bishop Lue declared that "While Spanish troops held an inch of Spain, that inch commanded America, and while a single Spaniard existed in America, he should command the Americans". The session was adjourned to meet on the following day, when it was again adjourned until the 24th. There were intrigues by the Viceroy and his friends, and there were dissensions among the patriot leaders. The meeting on the 24th. was prolonged far into the night, and the public, waiting outside in the cold rain, became impatient. Nothing was decided even after the protracted discussions and on the next morning, May 25, 1810, the sun shining brightly, the Plaza filled with people who went in procession to the Town Hall and presented a written demand signed by numerous citizens, requiring that full governing powers be placed provisionally in the hands of a Committee whose names were given. Refusal was impossible, and the Argentine then and there definitely assumed the rights of self-government.

"The revolution", Mitre remarks, "was effected without bayonets or violence, by pure pressure of public opinion, triumphant on the grounds of reason, law and public welfare; abstaining from persecutions it with dignity removed the chains which had bound the nation and assumed the rights of sovereignty with uprightness and moderation".

The population of the entire Viceroyship in 1810, including negros and tame Indians, is calculated at 800,000, of which 250,000 lived in Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Corrientes and Uruguay, principally close to the rivers. In the same year, the population of the United States was 7,000,000, most of which lived close to the Atlantic seaboard. These figures give an idea of the limited number of people who undertook the foundation of a new State in South America.

Differing local impulses but the same contributory provocation from the Regency in Cádiz caused all the Spanish American Colonies to revolt in the year of 1810. In 1811, a Spanish writer said:—"The germ of the evils produced by wrong policies, the injustices of our Government and the iniquities of the public employees in the Colonies, finally exploded and almost simultaneously". As far back as 1783, the famous Count Aranda had told the King: "Americans will undertake to secure independence as soon as favorable opportunity presents". The opportunity had come, and from Mexico to Patagonia, all Spanish America threw off the yoke of the Mother Country and assumed the prerogatives of free and independent nations.

Perú and Upper Perú, now Bolivia, was the stronghold of Spain in South America. The population all told was about 2,000,000, the Royal forces were numerous and efficient, and what was more important, the Viceroy, Abascal by name, was a very able and loyal Governor. If the revolution in Lima in 1810 had prospered, South America would have obtained its independence at once, but the movement was there suppressed within a few weeks, and South America had to endure disastrous and fratricidal wars for fourteen weary years.

The revolution in Buenos Aires was the most coherent and solidly founded of all similar Spanish American efforts. During the ensuing six years Spain succeeded in regaining its ascendancy everywhere with the single exception of the Argentine, which country was destined to be the focal point from which radiated new and successful struggles to achieve independence.

The first thought of the Argentine leaders was to ensure harmony of action in all the territory within the boundaries of the Viceroyship. The revolution occurred on May 25th. 1810, and in June of that year, an expedition of less than 1,000 men, under the nominal command of Colonel Ocampo, but whose real military chief was Antonio Balcarce, left Buenos Aires to give support to the movement in Upper Perú. General Liniers, the hero of the "Reconquista" in 1806 and of the "Defensa" in 1807, had raised the Royal Standard in Córdoba, but had fled, in company with a few supporters upon the approach of the Balcarce army. He was overtaken, judged by a summary court-martial presided over by Castelli who had adopted the Reign of Terror policy of the French Revolution, and was immediately executed. Balcarce continued northward into Upper Perú, and on November 7, 1810 defeated the

Spaniards at Suipacha. This was the first victory of the South American revolution.

In September of that same year, Belgrano departed for Paraguay with an army which likewise numbered less than 1,000 men. After gaining some slight advantages which enabled him to get close to Asunción, he was defeated at Paraguarí and subsequently on March 9, 1811, at Tacuarí, both in Paraguay. Belgrano was a poor general but a great citizen, and though he lost battles, he won the respect of his enemies. After Tacuarí, he reorganized and extricated his army in a way that gave him considerable fame, in addition to which his insidious revolutionary propaganda destroyed local Spanish authority. Belgrano was the real founder of Paraguayan independence.

Montevideo at first apparently supported the May revolution of Buenos Aires, but shortly afterwards changed its attitude, recognized the authority of the Regency at Cádiz, and though its subsequent history has many points of contact with that of the Argentine, it never again became a component part of the nation. The pure Spanish element was stronger in Montevideo than in Buenos Aires, where the creoles dominated.

It should be noted that up to here, no mention has been made of a Declaration of Independence. Indeed none was made for over six years or until July 9, 1816 at Tucumán. The May movement was a revolt against Regency tyranny, an assertion that the colony should be locally even though temporarily autonomous. The Argentine intellectuals argued that Spain had ceased to exist as an authority over America, and that during the King's captivity the Colony and not the Regency would assume the Royal prerogatives; but there was no disposition to deny the King's eventual overlordship. The Provisional Council under the Presidency of Saavedra installed itself in the Fortress on May 25th. 1810, and swore to preserve the country under the sceptre of Ferdinand VII and to observe the laws of the kingdom. Although governing as an autonomous body, it always invoked the name and authority of the King, a rather anomalous position. The expeditions to Upper Perú under Balcarce and to Paraguay under Belgrano used the flag of Spain, and the same emblem daily flew over the Fortress and city of Buenos Aires for three years. It was not until 1813 that the oath of allegiance to the King was abolished, and all Spanish civil, military and ecclesiastical employees were removed from office.

Belgrano had chafed under the use of the Spanish flag. Acting on his own initiative, he had lined up his troops on February 27, 1812, on the heights of Rosario overlooking the river, and made them swear allegiance to a new flag of his own designing, a celeste and white tri-bar. For this he was reprimanded by the Government. A few months later, on the second anniversary of May 25th., as Commander of the Army to Upper Perú, he had troops again swear allegiance to the same flag in his camp near Jujuy; and for a third time, on February 13, 1813, on the banks of the river still called "Río del Juramento", in front of the Spanish Army, one week before he won the battle of Salta, he had his troops repeat their oath to the new flag. One of the final acts of the Tucumán Congress on July 25th. 1816, was to officially adopt as the National emblem of the Argentine, the Belgrano flag, the same one with which we are all familiar.

The year 1813 was fruitful in reforms. The Assembly ordered a general census so as to control elections and to learn the civil, economic and military potentialities of the country; ordered the cessation of obligatory work in the mines and on the ranches by Indians and peons; decreed free commerce in and exportation of grains and cereals; provided for the absolute liberty of foreigners to enter and leave the country, to traffic and to acquire property; restricted in various ways the prerogatives of the Church and of the religious orders; established the liberty of the womb as concerned slaves; and reformed abusive regulations covering tribunals, codes and prisons. A new coat of arms was adopted, on which the Phrygian Cap upheld by clasped hands, symbolizing Grecian Freedom, and the rising sun shedding its morning beams over the great River Plate, replaced the lions and crosses of the Arms of Spain. Lastly and sentimentally the most important, the Assembly adopted the present National Hymn, which was written by the elder Vicente López—"Oid mortales el grito sagrado—

Libertad, libertad, libertad". The body which effected these sweeping reforms was presided over by Rodríguez Peña whose illustrious name is still venerated by all Argentines.

In the same way that San Martín dominated the final chapters of the history of Argentine Independence, Belgrano dominated the opening ones. Belgrano was born in Buenos Aires on June 3rd. 1770, being one of the younger of seven brothers. His father was an Italian, a man of means and standing, while his mother was an Argentine lady from Tucumán. He was educated in the San Carlos College in Buenos Aires, afterwards going to Salamanca, Spain, and eventually graduating in 1793 from the University of Valladolid. He became acquainted with French philosophers and teachings, and was a close student of the French Revolution. He returned to Buenos Aires in 1794 to become Permanent Secretary of the Consulate, in which important position he continued until the English invasion of 1806. He emerged with credit from the troublous times which followed and became one of the leading figures in the May revolution. He was free from ambition, gentle and modest, and though lacking the iron qualities needed in times of revolution, had strong principles and an undeviating sense of duty. He was exceeding patient and was most pains-taking in his attention to administrative details. His training had not prepared him to lead armies to combat but when appointed considered it his duty to accept. He went to Paraguay, as we have seen, and lost battles but won a moral victory. He started for Montevideo in 1811 at the head of another expedition, but was recalled by civil strife in Buenos Aires. He was made in 1812 Commander of the Army to Upper Perú, relieving Pueyrredón who subsequently played such a distinguished part in Argentine history. Belgrano's specific orders were to avoid a battle and to retire to Córdoba, instead of which, on his own responsibility, he awaited the Spanish Army at Tucumán and completely defeated it on September 25th. and 26th. 1812. José María Paz, one of the great Argentine military geniuses, who was present as a lieutenant of artillery remarks that while the fighting was on, Belgrano seemed confused and irresolute; quite different from what Mitre says about San Martín whose faculties were never so active nor his mind so clear as when in the midst of battle. Belgrano followed the retreating Spaniards northward and inflicted another and a crushing defeat at Salta on February 20, 1813. As a victor, he was much too magnanimous, for he released the captured army, and allowed it to return to Perú on its individual oath never to again take up arms against the Argentine. The Peruvian Bishops released the Spaniards from their oaths because they had been given to rebels against the King and excommunicants of the Pope. Thereupon the Spanish Army was reorganized and disastrously defeated Belgrano at Vilcapugio on October 1, 1813 and again at Ayohuma on November 12th. 1813. Belgrano was ordered to deliver the remains of his army to San Martín, which he did on January 30th. 1814. This was the first and only time these two great men ever met.

Napoleón abdicated and Ferdinand VII reassumed the throne of Spain in 1814. He at once announced his intention to scourge America with fire and sword as punishment for disloyalty—the days of Pizarro and Cortez were to be outdone. Belgrano and Rivadavia were sent as special commissioners to London to arrange for English protection but were unsuccessful. Rivadavia went over to the Continent where he did loyal but fruitless work, while Belgrano returned to the Argentine, reaching Buenos Aires early in 1816, in time to attend the Congress at Tucumán and there render inestimable service.

When the Tucumán Congress met in March of 1816, the cause of Spanish American independence was practically lost. In 1810 all the colonies had revolted, and between 1814 and 1816, all had been reconquered with the single exception of Buenos Aires. Ferdinand VII had made effective his threat to punish America with fire and sword. In one year (1815) he sent to Perú over 10,000 fully equipped veteran soldiers under the command of an accredited General, Laserna by name; and in November of that year, the Argentine Army of Upper Perú, commanded by Rondeau, was thoroughly defeated at Venta-y-media, and soon after in a rear-guard action, was routed and dispersed at Sipe Sipe. No defense was possible against an invasion from the North. This was when Upper Perú was permanently lost to the Argentine. Another

famous Spanish General named Morillo was preparing to sail from Cádiz for the River Plate with a large force of rested and veteran troops; and to crown the desperate situation civil strife had broken out. A horde of bandits from Santa Fe, Entre Ríos and Uruguay was threatening the doors of Buenos Aires like a pack of hungry wolves. Nothing could have been more disheartening than the conditions which confronted the Tucumán Congress when it commenced to deliberate on the fate of the nation.

The glory of saving the situation is principally ascribable to San Martín. This unfathomable man, the enigma of Argentine history, was born on February 25, 1778 in the Province of Corrientes in a town since obliterated. At the age of eight years, after a short primary education in Buenos Aires, he was sent to Madrid to school, where he remained until he was a few months over eleven. He then entered the Spanish army as a cadet, served in Africa against the Moors, in France against the Republic, in the Spanish fleet when defeated by Nelson at St. Vincent, fought against Portugal and again under Wellington during the Peninsula Campaign. In his twenty years service under the Spanish flag, he had had experience on land and by sea, in infantry, cavalry and trenches. In 1811 in Cádiz, he joined the "Lautaro Society", about which reference has already been made, went to London and affiliated with the Mother Lodge, taking in company with Alvear, the fifth and highest degree. About this time, Bolívar of Venezuela, O'Higgins of Chile, and all the other famous liberators became active members in the same Lodge. San Martín and Alvear reached Buenos Aires on the good ship "George Canning" on March 9th. 1812, San Martín being 34 years old while Alvear was only 23. San Martín was without friends or family or fortune, having as his only asset, his successful military career, while Alvear, the son of a wealthy and influential family, stepped immediately into prominence and became a dominant figure in political circles.

San Martín was made a Lt. Colonel in the Argentine Army, that being the grade to which he had risen in the Spanish Army; and he started a school of tactics, discipline and military morality on a plane of efficiency and elevation theretofore unknown in Spanish America. He was a profound believer in the axiom that battles are won in the training camps. His special pride was a regiment of Mounted Grenadiers, for whom he designed the uniform, the same worn today by the stalwart young men who do guard duty in Government House.

The Spaniards held Montevideo and controlled the nearby waters. Raiding parties up the rivers were frequent, one of which destroyed at San Nicolás three small Argentine sloops-of-war; although the operations were usually limited to robbing ranches and villages of cattle and food with which to supply Montevideo. San Martín followed by land one party which eventually disembarked at San Lorenzo, a few miles north of Rosario, where he attacked and defeated it. The battle of San Lorenzo was small in size, the Spanish landing party numbered 250 and San Martín had only 125, but the result was important, for river raiding ceased. It occurred on February 3, 1813, less than a year after San Martín's arrival in Buenos Aires, and won for him considerable fame; so much so that he was selected to take over from Belgrano the command of the Army of Upper Perú after the defeats of Vilcapugio and Ayohuma.

In 1814, the famous Admiral Brown blockaded Montevideo by sea and Alvear attacked by land with 4000 troops which had crossed to Colonia. The Spaniards sailed out on May 16th. to meet the Argentines, but by strategy Brown got between them and land and completely destroyed their fleet. Alvear laid siege to Montevideo and took it by assault on June 22nd. This was an important victory, for it gave control of the sea and rivers to the Argentine, and lessened the danger of attacks on Buenos Aires by expeditions from Spain.

San Martín became convinced that the conquest of Lower Perú through Upper Perú was impossible—that only a defensive warfare could be successfully waged in the north, and that the real road to Lima was via Chile. He kept his opinion secret, but pleading ill-health asked for the post of Governor of the Province of Cuyo with headquarters in Mendoza. He was given this appointment in August, 1814, and upon arrival began to organize from the limited

means at his command what he subsequently called the "Army of the Andes". He worked on this for two years, hiding his plan from everybody as far as he could. At the end of that period, when the Tucumán Congress inaugurated its labors, San Martín was one of the dominant figures in the Argentine. It is hard to understand how he acquired this prestige, for his only military exploit in the Argentine was the battle of San Lorenzo, and we have seen how small were the proportions of that event. His command of the Army of Upper Perú had not been marked by anything of importance, and he had voluntarily sought out a distant and little visited point, away from the main lines of travel and segregated from what were considered the seats of war. Yet in 1816, he was one of the greatest moral influences in the country. He did not attend the Tucumán Congress, although the Presidency of it would have been his for the asking. His mouthpiece was Godoy Cruz, and his written advice and instruction to that faithful representative afford much of the existing illuminating information covering the period.

We have seen how disheartening the general situation was at the time Congress convened. San Martín wrote to Godoy Cruz:—"What steps should be taken to save us? I know what they should be and Congress must apply them in the interest of public welfare, but if such steps are not taken during this year (1816) I fail to see any remedy. Everything will have ended". He allowed his secret to be known to a few friends. Perú must be attacked through Chile. "Until we have taken Lima", he said, "the war will not end". He, through Godoy Cruz and Belgrano in person, constantly urged a declaration of independence. Members argued that before making such declaration, the form of Government to be adopted should be agreed upon, and marked differences of opinion were expressed regarding National authority and Provincial rights. "I die every time I hear Federation mentioned" said San Martín to Godoy Cruz. "If in a government already constituted and in a country educated, inhabited, artistic, agricultural and commercial (I speak of North America) difficulties in the conduct of the last war with the English (War of 1812) arose from the Federation, what would happen to us who lack these advantages? If with all the Provinces and their united resources we are weak, what would happen if each one was separated from the rest?" San Martín and Belgrano continued to insist that the declaration ought to be made. Congress had been in session for over three months, and no decision had been reached. "Is it not ridiculous", said San Martín to Godoy Cruz, "that we coin money, have our national flag and shield, and even make war on the sovereign to whom it is said we belong, and do not declare our independence. The enemy treats us as insurgents, and with much reason". On July 6th. Belgrano made a long and important speech, and three days later—July 9th. 1816, the declaration was made, "Truly", exclaims Mitre, "San Martín and Belgrano were the real founders of Argentine Independence".

Again San Martín wrote to Godoy Cruz, "Congress had made a master-stroke by the declaration of independence. Only I would have desired that it had made an exposition of the just motives we Americans have in emancipating ourselves".

There was a general agreement among the Argentine statesmen of the period that a constitutional monarchy was the form of Government best suited to the needs of the country. Great Britain was the model to be copied, self-governing Britain which had emerged stronger than ever from the tempest of revolution in Europe that followed the upheaval in France. Loyalty to an Argentine Crown would unify the divergent elements and end the civil strife which had commenced within a year after the May revolution and whose end no one could foresee. In 1814, Rivadavia, as Argentine Commissioner to Europe, saw Ferdinand VII and as a solution of the trouble between Spain and the Argentine intimated that a son of this monarch might be called to Buenos Aires and made King. Soon after Belgrano's return from England in 1816, he wrote Rivadavia who was still in Europe. "The public is generally favorable to a constitutional monarchy, although opinions are divided between Incas and Bourbons". Belgrano had worked out a plan under which a descendant of the Peruvian Inca was to be crowned King of the River Plate to rule under the guidance of a Council of Regency and the seat of government was to be the ancient city of Cuzco. This was to be a real American Kingdom. Rivadavia favored the selection of a European Prince with Buenos

Aires as seat of Government, in order to stimulate contact with the outside world. Both plans had partisans and both were discussed at the Tucumán Congress, but when put to a vote, the Belgrano project was formally approved. Today the plan seems so fantastic that it appears incredible it ever received serious consideration. The great majority of the delegates wanted a monarchy; "Where there is no subordination, there is no government", wrote Rivadavia, and the details were secondary. San Martín approved of the Inca project, as he would have approved of anything that promised internal quiet, but on condition that the Regency be limited in number:

"If the Regency is composed of more than one person", he wrote, "everything is paralysed and the Devil takes us. In effect, we only have to change the title of our Director, and we have a Regent". Pueyrredón had been elected Supreme Director on May 3rd. 1816, and had undefined but practically dictatorial powers. Three years later (in 1819) another Congress sitting in Buenos Aires approved in secret session a project to bring a King from England and looked to France for support. The leaders had a profound lack of confidence in the popular capacity for self-government, yet in spite of this, the public feeling was inarticulately and incoherently inclined to a Republic, and due to this unspoken pressure, in the end nothing came of the monarchical plans.

Spain and Portugal in Europe, Brazil and the Argentine in South America, were always inharmonious neighbors, even when allied, which was only occasionally for they were more frequently at war. Carlota, a sister of Ferdinand VII, married the Portuguese Prince Regent who lived at Rio, and planned to rule both Brazil and the River Plate. Brazil became an independent kingdom on May 13, 1816, and in the same year Montevideo separated itself from Buenos Aires, with which it had been connected since Alvear and Brown took it from the Spanish in 1814. Brazil captured Montevideo in 1817 and held it for ten years, thus bringing a new danger to the doors of Buenos Aires.

After the Tucumán Congress, San Martín came up from Mendoza and met Pueyrredón on July 15, 1816, at Córdoba. As in all the San Martín conferences this one was surrounded by mystery, but it is known that among other things Pueyrredón approved of San Martín's plans to attack the Spaniards in Chile, and promised his aid.

San Martín returned to Mendoza, and completed his preparations. He brought back word that the Supreme Director intended to liberate all slaves, and suggested that owners anticipate the act of emancipation and turn their slaves into the army. By this means he added 710 colored troops to his infantry, that being the branch of service he desired to strengthen. He found a practical chemist and made powder locally. He discovered a young priest, Fray Beltrán, with a turn for mechanics, and made him chief of ordnance. Beltrán not only made rifles and cast cannon, but invented successful devices for transporting heavy and cumbersome articles over the rugged Andes. Shoe-makers and harness-makers and clothes-makers, and the makers of all the rest of the multitudinous articles required by an army, were found or improvised. San Martín needed mounts for the cavalry, and he induced local ranchmen to sell him horses at six "pesos" each, payable in script acceptable at the local Custom House. He obtained 900 head.

By the middle of January, 1817, he was ready to start. To divert attention and confuse the Spaniards, four expeditions simultaneously crossed the mountains. One left San Juan and took the road for Coquimbo; another left La Rioja with Copiapó as destination; a third went through the southern pass which lead to Talca; while the main force, in two divisions, took the nearer routes. Las Heras, with the artillery, went over the Uspallata trail, through the divide where the Christ now stands; while San Martín with the bulk of the army, travelled the Los Patos road, some forty miles to the north. The two columns were to meet at Chacabuco on the Chilean side. The entire undertaking was perfectly planned and admirably executed.

The three minor expeditions were small in number, from 100 to 200 men each, and all victoriously attained their objectives. The

main body was composed of 4000 fighting men, of which 3000 were infantry; there were 1200 camp helpers, 120 miners to break road, and drivers and mechanics. It started with 1500 horses, 13,000 mules and 600 steers. The trip across the Andes took 23 days. On February 12, 1817, the two columns reunited at Chacabuco and found awaiting them a Spanish army of about one half their own strength. San Martín's tactics of diverting the enemy's attention by attacks at various points had succeeded.

The battle was short and the Argentines were completely victorious. Two days later, or on February 14, 1817, San Martín entered Santiago, and sent a memorable despatch to Buenos Aires.—"The Army of the Andes has the glory to report:—In 24 days campaigning, we crossed the highest mountain chain on the globe, finished with the tyrants and have given liberty to Chile."

Chacabuco was the battle of most momentous consequences in South American history. When news of defeats on every hand had killed patriotic hopes and nothing remained to the Argentine but the same humiliating domination which had been imposed on all other Spanish American countries, news of a victory as complete as it was unexpected was heralded from one end of the continent to the other, and faith in the cause of independence was renewed.

San Martín did not follow up his victory as thoroughly as he should have. His mind had turned with characteristic absorption to the next step of his great plan, the preparation for an expedition against Lima where existed the headquarters of Viceregal strength and authority in America. The Spanish forces after Chacabuco reunited and reorganized in southern Chile, and important reinforcements from Perú landed at Talcahuano, a port which had successfully resisted Argentine attacks. A strong army capably officered and fully equipped, started northward from Talcahuano to recapture Santiago and reconquer Chile. Comparatively little opposition was encountered until the Spaniards were close to Santiago, when San Martín took the field and resisted further advance. More than that, he slowly but surely pushed the Spaniards southward, and seemed about to force them back into Talcahuano. A surprise attack by night by the enemy at Cancha Rayada was unexpectedly successful and the combined armies of Argentine and Chile were defeated and dispersed, losing all their artillery and most of their military stores. The disaster happened on March 20, 1818. The patriot armies reformed as they retreated before the victorious Spaniards; and sixteen days after Cancha Rayada, San Martín turned at Maipú, faced the confident and more numerous Spaniards, and administered a defeat which freed Chile forever from the domination of Spain. San Martín always considered this his best campaign. By pure force of character and of genius, he rehabilitated in a few days a crushed and retreating army, and turned defeat into victory. The Spaniards took refuge in Talcahuano, and from there sailed back to Perú. Chile was free.

The Anglo-Spanish alliance of 1808 to crush Napoleón gave Spain freedom at sea, and she took full advantage of the privilege. Between 1811 and 1818, she transported 42,000 veteran troops to different points in America, and moreover kept trade routes open on the Pacific coast of South America and elsewhere. San Martín could not risk an expedition to Perú until he controlled the Pacific Ocean from Chile to Panamá. Reference has been made to the destruction of the Spanish fleet of Montevideo in 1814, by Admiral Brown, an Irishman who had spent his youth in the United States. In response to insistent suggestions from San Martín, an expedition under Brown sailed from Buenos Aires in October, 1815, went through the Straits and on January 21, 1816, attacked Callao. Failing to capture that port Brown blockaded it for three weeks, went on to Guayaquil and Ecuador, and returned to Buenos Aires after numerous and picturesque adventures. This is the first time the Argentine flag had appeared on the Pacific. In 1818 the celebrated Lord Cochrane offered his services and was given command of the Pacific squadron. By purchase and by capture, the naval forces were augmented and in 1820, San Martín saw the realization of his desire to control the sea from Panamá southward.

This paper would be too long if it attempted to cover all the difficulties with which San Martín had to contend. He had trouble with the jealous and avaricious Cochrane; a mutiny occurred among a body of his troops in San Juan, there was anarchy in

Tucumán, Córdoba, San Luis and even in his beloved Mendoza. The Government of Buenos Aires ordered him to return to put down the growing civil strife, but he refused, urging the fundamental necessity of destroying Spanish domination in America. Historians call this "The Great Disobedience." He allowed none of these things to distract his attention, and on August 20, 1820, sailed from Valparaíso in 8 ships and 16 transports, carrying 4430 soldiers of which 2313 were Argentines, 1805 Chilians, and the rest of scattering nationalities. There were also 1600 sailors and mariners, of which 600 were foreigners, mostly British. The expedition stopped at intermediate ports, from which incursions were made. Again the Spaniards did not know where to expect the attack, and when the fleet appeared before Lima early in July, 1821, but little defense was made. The trip from Valparaíso to Lima consumed 10½ months. The Spanish forces retreated to Upper Perú, where they strongly entrenched themselves in the mountains and settled down to await reinforcements from Spain. San Martín took the title of "Protector of Perú" and assumed full civil and military authority.

Brief mention must be made of the Venezuelan movement, whose dominant figure was Bolívar. Venezuela revolted in 1810, was reconquered in 1813, arose again and was again reconquered in 1814. A third uprising took place in 1815, and a war of fluctuating fortunes followed until 1818, when the Spaniards were driven from the country. In that year (1818) O'Higgins whom San Martín had installed as President of Chile, wrote Bolívar suggesting united action against the enemy. Bolívar replied that he would operate against Quito while the Argentine-Chilean forces operated against Perú. In effect Bolívar crossed the Andes in 1819, winning an important victory at Boyacá, similar in many respects to the Argentine achievement at Chacabuco two years before.

During his absence across the mountains, the Spaniards reorganized, and Bolívar returned to Venezuela and in 1821 at Carabobo won another great victory. As Maipú had freed Chile and the South three years previously, so did Carabobo free Venezuela and all the North. It occurred eighteen days after San Martín entered Lima. At San Martín's suggestion a conference between Bolívar and himself was agreed upon, and took place in Guayaquil on July 26, 1822. The interview was continued on the following day and then San Martín departed for Perú. Nothing is known of what transpired at this historic conference. No one was present except the two principals, and neither at that or at any subsequent time did either ever reveal what happened.

San Martín returned to Lima, convoked a Peruvian Congress, and on September 20th. 1822, delivered to it all of his civil and military authority. He placed his army at the disposition of the new government to assist in the final steps in the destruction of Spanish power, and sailed for Valparaíso on that same night. The only recorded expression of the reason for his sudden abdication was made to his friend and secretary, Guido, a few moments before his departure. "Perú is not large enough to hold Bolívar and me." He felt his work was done, that South American emancipation was absolutely assured, and he retired.

The final battle was won at Ayacucho in 1824 by an army under Sucre in which Colombian troops predominated, and the liberation of Spanish America was consummated. Fourteen years had elapsed since the first victory at Suipacha, years of effort and sorrow. The theatre of action was far greater than in our own revolution, the resources more limited, the difficulties greater. South America had won its freedom, but was exhausted and prostrate, Bolívar said: "We have acquired freedom, but at the expense of everything else." Even so, the cost was not too high.

In 1818 a mission from the United States under Rodney and Graham, accompanied by Secretary Brackenridge visited Buenos Aires, and from here advised that the independence of the Argentine be recognized. Rodney was named Minister, but died shortly after, and his body was the first one interred in the then new Protestant Cemetery. He was succeeded as Minister by Col. Forbes who served many years and was most highly regarded.

While San Martín was still in Perú, and two years before the final victory at Ayacucho, the United States recognized the

independence of all the new republics as an accomplished fact, declaring in 1822:—"It is the right of the South American peoples to break the bonds which tied them to Spain, assume the character of nations among sovereign nations, and create their own institutions in harmony with the natural laws of Almighty God." This declaration was followed one year later (1823) by the promulgation of the memorable Monroe Doctrine, in intent and in effect a policy of amity and protection.

England supported the attitude of the United States, Canning declaring in 1823:—"The independence of the Spanish Colonies is an accomplished fact. A new political element has appeared which in the future will dominate the relations between the two worlds. The battle has been bitter but has been won. The nail is driven and clinched. South America is free."

As the North American revolution was the great event of the XVIII century, in the light of the magnitude of its consequences which even yet are only partially visible, so was the South American revolution the greatest event of the XIX century. The United States can be considered as having reached full manhood, while the South American states must be still looked on as lusty youths whose growth is unattained. When growth has been attained, the South American states will take their places among the mighty powers of the earth and will play their important part in the struggle of humanity to make this a better and a freer world in which to live.

Transcriber's Notes:

Dotted line under a word indicates correction. Scroll the mouse over the word to see the original text.

- [pg. 3](#) "bead" changed to "read" (A PAPER READ)
- [pg. 3](#) "origen" changed to "origin" (obscure origin for)
- [pg. 4](#) "lead" changed to "led" (led exploring)
- [pg. 6](#) "origen" changed to "origin" (it's Colonial origin)
- [pg. 7](#) "religous" changed to "religious" (religious belief was)
- [pg. 11](#) "oppresion" changed to "oppression" (Spanish oppression)
- [pg. 12](#) "confident" changed to "confidant" (confidant of the younger)
- [pg. 12](#) "extraodinary" changed to "extraordinary" (extraordinary man)
- [pg. 13](#) "reaccionaries" changed to "reactionaries" (composed of reactionaries)
- [pg. 13](#) "profund" changed to "profound" (a profound sensation)
- [pg. 15](#) "employees" changed to "employees" (employees in the Colonies)
- [pg. 16](#) "fraticidal" changed to "fratricidal" (and fratricidal wars)
- [pg. 16](#) "ascendency" changed to "ascendancy" (ascendancy everywhere with)
- [pg. 18](#) "employes" changed to "employees" (employees were removed)
- [pg. 19](#) "religous" changed to "religious" (religious orders)
- [pg. 19](#) "Hymm" changed to "Hymn" (present National Hymn)
- [pg. 20](#) "seem" changed to "seen" (as we have seen)
- [pg. 22](#) "commisioners" changed to "commissioners" (special commissioners to)
- [pg. 24](#) "eventualy" changed to "eventually" (eventually disembarked)
- [pg. 24](#) "numbered" changed to "numbered" (landing party numbered)
- [pg. 24](#) "ocured" changed to "occurred" (occurred on February)
- [pg.](#)

[25](#) "En" changed to "In" (In 1814)

[pg. 25](#) "assult" changed to "assault" (by assault on)

[pg. 25](#) "imposible" changed to "impossible" (Perú was impossible)

[pg. 30](#) "Custon" changed to "Custom" (local Custom House)

[pg. 32](#) "the the" changed to "the" (from the domination)

[pg. 35](#) "en" changed to "on" (on September 20th)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF ARGENTINE INDEPENDENCE ***

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