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Mexico's Army and Ours

MANY officers and men have I shaken hands with in the brief days since this wave of war rolled south and broke on the shore of Mexico, and no officer nor man have I found who was immune to a certain infection. This infection, however, might be described in surgical jargon as "beneficent." On the face of it every mother's son of them has told me something that cannot possibly be true. Only one out of all of them could have told the truth, and it is beyond my powers of discernment to pick out this man. But I have yet to meet an officer of soldiers or marines who has not only solemnly assured me but with glistening eyes of enthusiasm has averred that his regiment or battalion, officers and men, for discipline and efficiency, is the finest in the entire army of the United States. Furthermore, each one disclaims any personal prejudice in the matter, and usually concludes with the statement that it is generally conceded in army circles that his regiment or battalion is the finest. I wonder if such esprit de corps exists in the Mexican army. What our army and navy is was splendidly demonstrated when our bluejackets marched aboard their ships before our drawn-up soldiers while Admiral Fletcher transferred the command of Vera Cruz to General Funston. Boys they were, all boys, the flower of the young men of our land, and they marched with the clacking rhythm of "boots, boots" on the pavement along the broad lane formed by the regulars on one side presenting arms and on the other side cheering American civilians. It was a joy to see the faces that tried not to smile with pleasure over the applause for work well done, and to catch the involuntary sideward glances of boyish eyes not yet quite disciplined to the level impassive look of war.

These thousands of sailors marched straight down the dock end and disappeared. The effect was uncanny. What was becoming of them? The smokestacks of a couple of tugs showed at the dock end, and that was all. And yet the river of men flowed on and on, sailors and marines, officers, bands, hospital squads, and moving banners, sun-tanned men of the *Arkansas*, the *Florida*, the *Utah*, the *San Francisco*, the *New Hampshire*, the *South Carolina*, the *Vermont*, the *Chester*, and the *New Jersey*, all without a hitch or halt, and disappeared. It reminded one of the tank of the New York Hippodrome, when the long lines of stage soldiers march down into the water, knee-high, hip-high, shoulder-high, then heads under and are gone.

But out at the dock end, besides the tugs, was a flotilla of launches and cutters that received those thousands as fast as they arrived and carried them at a single trip to the battleships lying in the inner and outer harbors.

Two Types of "Gringo" Fighting Men

OUR soldiers and sailors are markedly different in type. It must be curious how this happens to be so. Do land life and sea life make the difference? Or does one common type of man elect the sea and another common type elect the land? The sailors are shorter, broader

shouldered, thicker set. The soldiers are taller, leaner, longer legged. Their faces are leaner, their lips thinner. They seem to the eye tougher, stringier, sterner. The sailors' faces seem broader across the cheek bones. Their lips seem fuller, their bodies more rounded.

Most notable is the difference when they are grouped into marching masses. The sailors have a swinging, springing, elastic stride. The soldiers' legs move more mechanically, more like clockwork legs, with a very tiny minimum of waste motion. It is prettier to watch the sailors marching with all the swaying elasticity of their bodies, and yet one receives the impression that, when it comes to the long killing hiking, the soldiers would easily outwalk their comrades of the sea. A great throng of Mexicans, numbers of them without a doubt having sniped our sailors during the first days, looked on this display of what manner of men we send to war. The haste and advertisement with which they doffed their hats to the Stars and Stripes was absurd and laughable.

One cannot but imagine what the situation would be like were it reversed—were Vera Cruz populated by Americans and in the possession of a Mexican army. First of all, our *jefe politico*, or mayor, would have been taken out and shot against a wall. Against walls all over the city our soldiers and civilians would have been lined up and shot. Our jails would have been emptied of criminals, who would be made soldiers and looters. No American's life would be safe, especially if he were known to possess any money. Law, save for harshest military law, such as has been meted out by conquerors since the human world began, would have ceased. So would all business have ceased. He who possessed food would hide it, and there would be hungry women and children.

Quite the contrary has been our occupation of Vera Cruz. To the amazement of the Mexicans, there was no general slaughter against blank walls. Instead of turning the prisoners loose, their numbers were added to. Every riotous and disorderly citizen, every sneak thief and petty offender, was marched to the city prison the moment he displayed activity. The American conquerors bid for the old order that had obtained in the city, and began the bidding by putting the petty offenders to sweeping the streets.

No property was confiscated. Anything commandeered for the use of the army was paid for, and well paid for. Men who owned horses, mules, carts, and automobiles competed with one another to have their property commandeered. The graft which all business men suffered at the hands of their own officials immediately ceased. Never in their lives had their property been so safe and so profitable. Incidentally, the diseases that stalk at the heels of war did not stalk. On the contrary, Vera Cruz was cleaned and disinfected as it had never been in all its history.

The Various Benefits of Being Conquered

IN SHORT, American occupation gave Vera Cruz a bull market in health, order, and business. Mexican paper money appreciated. Prices rose. Profits soared. Verily, the Vera Cruzans will long remember thus being conquered by the Americans, and yearn for the blissful day when the Americans will conquer them again. They would not mind thus being conquered to the end of time.

An exciting sight was the cleaning up of the Naval School, which had been so disorganized the first day by the five minutes of shell fire from the *Chester*. Immediately the city had been turned over to the army by the navy, the first battalion of the Fourth Infantry and Fourth Field Artillery descended upon the Naval School. In a trice every window was vomiting forth the débris that clogged the interior. And then was fought the second battle of the Naval School. Thousands of poor Mexicans—men, women, and children—surrounded the building and

battled over the old shoes, shattered furniture, and discarded clothes. It was the women who fought fiercest and most vociferously, and, to the accompaniment of much hair pulling, many a pair of linen trousers and its legs irrevocably separated. They struggled and squabbled and ran hither and thither like ants about a honey-pot. For once war was kind to them, and, instead of being looted, they were themselves tasting the joys of looting. And alas! I saw the ruined pretties rain down amid the mortar dust from my lady's boudoir and the two red, high-heeled Spanish slippers borne off in opposite directions by gleeful Indian women.

Fighting Qualities of the Peon

AS I write this, beneath my window, with a great clattering of hoofs on the asphalt, is passing a long column of mountain batteries, all carried on the backs of our big Government mules. And as I look down at our sun-bronzed troopers in their olive drab, my mind reverts to the review the other day of our soldiers and sailors. Surely, if the peon soldiers of Mexico could have been brought down to witness what manner of soldiers and equipment was ours, there would have been such a rush for the brush that ten years would not have seen the last of them dug out of their hiding places.

And yet this is not fair. The peon soldier is not a coward. Stupid he well is, just as sillily officered; but he is too much of a fatalist as well as a savage to be grossly afraid of death. The peon bends to the mailed fist of power, but never breaks. Like the fellah of Egypt, he patiently endures through the centuries and watches his rulers come and go.

Changes of government mean to the peon merely changes of the everlasting master. His harsh treatment and poorly rewarded toil are ever the same, unchanging as the sun and seasons. He has little to lose and less to gain. He is born to an unlovely place in life. It is the will of God, the law of existence.

With rare exceptions he does not dream that there may be a social order wherein can be no masters of the sort he knows. He has always been a slave. He was a slave to the Toltecs and the Aztecs, to the Spaniards, and to the Mexicans descended from the Aztecs and the Spaniards. It must not be concluded that there is no hope for him in the future. He is what he is to-day, and what he has been for so long, because he has been made so by a cruel and ruthless selection.

The Elimination of the Spirited

IF A breeder should stock his farm with the swiftest race horses obtainable, and employ a method of selection whereby only the slowest and clumsiest horses were bred, it would not be many generations before he would have a breed of very slow and very clumsy horses. Life is plastic and varies in all directions. Occasionally this breeder would find a beautiful, swift colt born on his farm. Since kind begets kind, he would eliminate such a colt and perpetuate only the slow and clumsy.

Now this is just the sort of selection that has been applied to the peon for many centuries. Whenever a peon of dream and passion and vision and spirit was born he was eliminated. His masters wanted lowly, docile, stupid slaves, and resented such a variation. Soon or late the spirit of such a peon manifested itself and the peon was shot or flogged to death. He did not beget. His kind perished with him whenever he appeared.

But life is plastic and can be molded by selection into diverse forms. The horse breeder can reverse his method of selection, and from slow and clumsy sires and dams breed up a strain of horses beautiful and swift. And so with the peon. For the present generation of him there is

little hope. But for the future generations a social selection that will put a premium of living on dream and passion and vision and spirit will develop an entirely different type of peon.

A Soldier Against His Will

BUT we must not make the mistake of straying after far goals. The time is now. We live now. Our problem, the world problem, the peon problem is now. The peon we must consider is the peon as he is now—the selected burden bearer of the centuries. He has never heard of economic principles, nor a square deal. Nor has he thrilled, save vaguely, to the call of freedom—in which even freedom has meant license, and, as robber and bandit, he has treated the weak and defenseless in precisely the same way he has been accustomed to being treated.

I was through a Mexican barracks. It was like a jail. All the windows were barred. They had to be barred so that the conscript peon soldiers might not escape. Most of them do not like to be soldiers. They are compelled to be. All over Mexico they gather the peons into the jails and force them to become soldiers. Sometimes they are arrested for petty infractions of the law. A peon seeks to gladden his existence by drinking a few cents' worth of half-spoiled pulque. The maggots of intoxication begin to crawl in his brain, and he is happy in that for a space he has forgotten in God knows what dim drunken imaginings. Then the long arm of his ruler reaches out through the medium of many minions, and the peon, sober with an aching head, finds himself in jail waiting the next draft to the army. Often enough he does not have to commit any petty infraction. He is railroaded to the front just the same.

He does not know whom he fights for, for what, or why. He accepts it as the system of life. It is a very sad world, but it is the only world he knows. This is why he is not altogether a coward in battle. Also it is why, in the midst of battle or afterward, he so frequently changes sides. He is not fighting for any principle, for any reward. It is a sad world, in which witless, humble men are just forced to fight, to kill, and to be killed. The merits of either banner are equal, or, rather, so far as he is concerned, there are no merits to either banner.

He prays to God in some dim, dumb way, and vaguely imagines when he has been expedited from this sad world by a machete slash or bayonet thrust or high-velocity steel-jacketed bullet that all will be made square in that other world where God rules and where taskmasters are not.

Yet, deep down in the true ribs of him, there is a vein of raw savagery in the peon. Of old he delighted in human sacrifice. To-day he delights in the not always skilled butchery of bulls in the game introduced by his late Spanish masters. He likes cock-fighting with curved steel spurs that slash to the heart of life and cast a crimson splash upon the dull gray of living.

His Fatalism

AND still the peon is not exipated. There is another side to him. He is a born gambler, as well as fatalist, and he is not averse to taking a chance; though his own life be the stake, he plays against another's life. How else can be explained his nery conduct, deserted by his officers, in defending Vera Cruz against our landing forces?

Now I am not altogether a coward. I have ever been guilty on occasion of taking a chance. And yet I am frank to say that I would not dream of taking a chance on the flat roofs of Vera Cruz against thousands of American soldiers and a fleet of battleships with an effective range of five thousand yards.

But this was the very chance many a peon soldier took. He sniped our men from the roofs in the fond hope that he could kill a man and escape being killed himself. Also, he was stupid in that he did not realize how little chance he had. Nevertheless, and on top of it all, he was not afraid.

They say that he and his fellows even dared to crawl unwounded, amid the wounded, into the hospital cots under the Red Cross, and to draw blankets over themselves and the Mausers, and to crawl out occasionally to the roofs for another shot at our sailors. When it became too hot for them they hid among the wounded again. Now this is a deed too risky for my nerve or for the nerve of any intelligent man. But I insist that these Mexican soldiers were stupid enough voluntarily to take the chance. From this another conclusion may be drawn, namely, that the sorry soldier of Mexico is not altogether amiable and is prone to be nasty and dangerous to the American boys who have crossed the sea to take "peaceable" possession of a customhouse.

I saw the leg of a peon soldier amputated. It was a perfectly good leg, all except for a few inches of bone near the thigh which had been shattered to countless fragments by a wobbling, high-velocity American bullet. And as I gazed at that leg, limp yet with life, being carried out of the operating room, and realized that this was what men did to men in the twentieth century after Christ, I found myself in accord of sentiment with the peon: it is a sad world, a sad world!

An Example of Swift Destruction

IT IS a sad world wherein the millions of the stupid lowly are compelled to toil and moil at the making of all manner of commodities that can be and are on occasion destroyed in an instant by the hot breath of war. I have just come back from the vast Cuartel, or Barracks, of Vera Cruz. Such a destruction of the labor of men! Bales upon bales and mountains of bales of clothing, of uniforms of wool, of linen, of cotton, disrupted, torn to pieces, scattered about, infected by possible diseases that compel a final cleansing by fire. Huge squad rooms, knee-deep in the litter of things the toil of men has made—hats, caps, shirts, modern leather shoes and rude sandals of the sort worn on the north Mediterranean half a thousand years before the days of Julius Cæsar; saddles and saddle bags, spurs, bridles, and bits; entrenching tools, scattered contents of soldiers' ditty boxes, canteens and mess kits of tin, serapes from the north, mats from the hot countries, meals partly eaten, half-cooked messes of food in the kitchen pots, smashed Mausers, cymbals and tubes, drums and cornets of a brass band that had departed abruptly and bandless.

In the manner of a few minutes the feet of war had trod under foot and passed on. Those who fled had fled hastily, leaving their last-issued rations behind. Those who pursued had paused but long enough to fire a myriad of shots and race on. The empty bandoliers marked the trail of the American sailors and marines. In the stables were the officers' automobiles and carromatas with seats for grooms behind. But there were no horses, and the automobiles had been smashed. Thousands of hours' toil of men's hands had been annihilated.

The streets of Vera Cruz teem with beggars. Our soldiers are pestered by the starving, ragged poor. A thousand meals cluttered the Cuartel, already mildewed and being eaten by cockroaches and stray cats; woven cloth and manufactured footgear sufficient for ten thousand poor were destined for the flames. I agree with the peon: It is a sad world. It is also a funny world.

A Square Deal?

THE query inevitably rises: How is the peon to get a square deal? And who will give him a square deal? By square deal is not meant the Utopian ideal dreamed of a far future, but the measure of fair treatment that is possible here and now in civilized nations. The men of the civilized nations are only frail, fallible, human men, with all the weaknesses common to human men just in the process of emerging from barbarism. Nevertheless, with such men a squarer deal obtains than does obtain in savagery. The much-mixed descendants of the Spaniards and Aztecs can scarcely be called civilized. They have had over four centuries of rule in Mexico, and they have done anything but build a civilization. What measure of civilization they do possess is exotic. It has been introduced by north Europeans and Americans, and by north Europeans and Americans has it been maintained. The peon of to-day, under Mexican rule, is no better off than he was under Aztec rule. It is to be doubted that he is as well off. On the face of it, his much-mixed breed of rulers cannot give him the square deal that is possible to be given by more intelligent and humane rulers—that is given to-day by such rulers in other countries in the world.

Motes and Beams

THIS is the problem to-day for the big brother to the nations of the New World. Oh, make no mistake! The big brother's hands are not clean, nor is his history immaculate. But his hands are as clean and his history is as immaculate as are the hands and histories of the other nations in the thick of transition from barbarism and savagery. He even has societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, the members of which very frequently interfere between a horse and its owner, and hale the owner to court for punishment.

The mixed-breed rulers of Mexico seem incapable of treating the peon with the measure of fairness that is possible in the world to-day and that is practiced the world to-day. The Mexican peon residing in the United States at the present time—and there are many thousands of him—is far better treated than are his brothers south of the border.

Never mind what his legal status may be or is alleged to be. The fact is, the peon of Mexico, so far as liberty and a share in the happiness produced by his toil is concerned, is as much a slave as he ever was. He is so much property to his rulers, who work him, not with treatment equal to that accorded a horse, but with harsher and far less considerate treatment.

Of course, the owner of a horse, when arrested by an agent of a humane society, indignantly protests that the horse is his property. But a wider social vision is growing in the foremost nations that property rights are a social responsibility, and that society can and must interfere between the owner and his mismanaged property. But somehow the old order is hard to change. There is a narcotic mangle in phrases and precedents. It is an established right for society to step in between a man and his horse, but it is still abhorrent for a nation to step in between a handful of rulers and their millions of mismanaged and ill-treated subjects. Yet such interference is logically the duty of the United States as the big brother of the countries of the New World. Nevertheless, the United States did so step in when it went to war with Spain over the ill treatment of the Cubans. But is required the blowing up of the *Maine* to precipitate its action.

Big Brother's Job

AND here in Mexico the United States has stepped in, still dominated by narcotic precedent, on the immediate pretext of a failure in formal courtesy about a flag. But why not

have done with fooling? Why not toss the old drugs overboard and consider the matter clear-eyed? The exotic civilization introduced by America and Europe is being destroyed by the madness of a handful of rulers who do not know how to rule, who have never successfully ruled, and whose orgies at ruling have been and are similar to those indulged in by drunken miners sowing the floors of barrooms with their fortunate gold dust.

The big brother can police, organize, and manage Mexico. The so-called leaders of Mexico cannot. And the lives and happiness of a few million peons, as well as of many millions yet to be born, are at stake.

The policeman stops a man from beating his wife. The humane officer stops a man from beating his horse. May not a powerful and self-alleged enlightened nation stop a handful of inefficient and incapable rulers from making a shambles and a desert of a fair land wherein are all the natural resources of a high and happy civilization?