

The City Hotel
Mendoza, Argentina
December 15, 1941

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Darkness had hardly set in the evening of December 5 when the first lights of Rio de Janeiro began to rise out of the sea as the good ship Argentina sailed into the most beautiful horizon of our voyage. The curving line of lights, which is the city of Rio de Janeiro, came into full view. We were entering what travelers say is the most beautiful port of the world. Indeed, it was "a thing of beauty." At 10 p. m. we set foot on Brazilian soil. A party of us decided to take what in the morning we discovered to be a daring trip. We hired a taxi and climbed the steep and sheer sides of Corcovado, the mountainous hump which rises 2,100 feet above the city, and upon the top of which is the statue of El Christo Redemptor. This was the sight of sights, a view which can only be had in the full darkness of night. Pictures of it can be seen in a travel booklet or bought for a few hundred reis in any novelty shop in Rio, but the dimensions of the spectacle, the setting of it, the tremendous feeling which it offers can only be had by the seeing. Where is the picture which can float white, wispy clouds around you until you are in a fog and then vanish them as if by magic! Where is the picture which can make your heart pause as you look straight below and far beyond at the twinkling lights of a tropical city. That is the Rio which I shall remember. The other sights and impressions were striking. But Corcovado at night was the grandest of all.

Father O'Donnell, the chaplain of the S. S. Argentina, is a priest of the Dominican order. He is a forthright man, a man with the direct way of the North American. He gave me entry into a LaSalette Monastery in Rio and a Dominican Monastery in Buenos Aires. I met and talked with members of the orders. It was in these places that I received my first impressions of the Catholic Church in South America, the role and significance of which is much different from the Catholic church in the United States. Somehow the church seems to be mixed up with the history, the past and the traditions of these countries and has not yet taken the proper place in the life of the people which the requirements of the day suggest. North American Catholics would wonder at the laxities which obtain and which are viewed with not too much concern. Today in the city of Rio de Janeiro there are many, many priests. Many of them do not minister to the common people. A great number say mass and carry on special religious work for stipends. The average person does not contribute to the support of the church. Donations from rich people are the source of most revenue. The missing of mass on Sunday is not viewed as a cardinal sin. It is common for children to be baptized after they are 10 years of age. An important concern about a baptism, in the view of Brazilian Catholics, is to have a Godmother and Godfather who will present handsome gifts. There appears to be an infiltration of North American priests and priests educated in the United States into South American religious orders. Their ideas are modern and they will in some measure assist the church to break with the traditions of the past and to adopt a more independent and vigorous policy. As a simple example, the priests wear a long garment called the Sótano. They do not like it. The people do not like it. But the tradition remains unbroken. As one Latin American said during the voyage: "Why can't our priests dress like men?"

It was not until 5 o'clock the afternoon of December 8 that the first news of the Japanese attack upon the United States was known by the passengers of the S. S. Argentina. Members of the Argentine delegation were as much disturbed by the news as

we from the states. When it was announced later that the Argentine government would recognize the United States as a non-belligerent the deputies aboard the ship were very pleased. Particulars about the war were hard to get. Actually little was known until we arrived at Buenos Aires. Friday the S. S. Argentina sailed. The returning passengers were anxious to return to the states, but did not look forward to the voyage as it promised to be a long one and one filled with uncertainties. The stars and stripes were removed from the sides of the ship. It is rumored that two Brazilian cruisers will accompany the ship until it is met by a U. S. Navy convoy.

The wars in which the United States is involved have unsettled the foreign exchange value of the dollar. The cheapest kind of money is United States currency. The currency exchange rate is about 3.40 pesos to the dollar. However, traveler's cheques bring more than 4 pesos to the dollar. Reason given for the heavy discount of cash is the fact that it is necessary to send the dollars to New York for conversion into pesos. Insurance rates have kited because of the war. Hence the heavy discount. It does not seem reasonable that the spread will continue to be as big as it now is. North American tourists have paid some fancy prices lately. A North American is spotted a block away, and there are very few of them who have not paid some tuition. I was no brighter than some of the others.

The city of Buenos Aires is a place of contrasts. In some ways it is more modern than a North American city. In other ways it is a bit of the past. Take the subway for example. It surpasses that of New York. The subway is immaculate; it is speedy. But the outstanding thing about it is that it is a gallery of art. At every station there are colorful murals depicting various aspects of Argentine life, all of them by some artist of one or the other of the several modern schools. Street traffic is frightening. There seems to be no rule or regulation. There are many plazas in Buenos Aires, and the streets and avenues approach them from every angle. Streets are filled with small buses and taxicabs. Pedestrians do the best they can. The Porteños are well-trained. Just as one of them is about to be struck by a vehicle he jumps to safety as if prompted by some sixth sense. Drivers of buses and taxis expect this reaction. Buildings like basilicas and the Opera de Colón are 20 to 30 years in the construction. Like those of the old world, they will stand for centuries. Sidewalk cafes are everywhere. No one is in a hurry. The impetuous North American who wants to have done with everything in a moment's time soon finds that that is not the Argentine way. Dinner is at 9 o'clock in the evening, if not later.

I called on James I. Miller, vice president of the United Press in South America. One of Miller's aides is William W. Copeland, general news manager for South America. Copeland was graduated from the University of Missouri in 1930. We talked over matters of common interest on two occasions. Al Hayden, correspondent of the Chicago Daily News and a friend of Professor Schultz, is in Santiago, Chile, at the present time. Newspaper men are focusing a good deal of attention on the Pan-American conference to be held in Rio during January.

Saturday morning, December 13, at 7:30 o'clock the Railroad of the Pacific pulled out of the Estación de Retiro bound for Mendoza, the capital of Cuyo, the gateway to the Andes, where "Spanish is sung when it is spoken." The Pampas Húmeda has some of the characteristics of the rich, level land of the middle west. The grass crops of the Pampas are more lush, a lighter green. It is obvious that the rainfall in this area is much greater than that of the farming country of the states. There are no modern farm houses on the Pampas, two or three to a section. All that one sees are low, two or three-room buildings which, when one approaches the Pampas Seco, become miserable creations. The corn has been planted--I am sure it was not drilled--in more or less even rows, but the rows are not in exact formation like they are in the corn belt of the states. How the corn plant can be cultivated and

finally "laid by", I am at a loss to say. Of course, it is the great extension of grass and grazing land and fattening cattle which catches the eye. That is the pride of the Argentine. It struck me at once when I saw the richness of this land and the order which could be brought to it that a few agricultural colleges could do a great work. Throughout the day as we crossed the Pampas smoke-like spirals could be seen in many directions of the Pampas. I wondered what the gauchos were burning. Finally, one of them approached us. It was a torbellino, a thin, tall whirlwind of dust. Apparently this is a natural phenomenon of the Pampas which does no damage.

Sunday afternoon I was the guest at tea of Dr. and Mrs. Alfredo Metraux. The Metrauxs have lived in Mendoza for 30 years. They have seen this country develop from almost nothing. Dr. Metraux is going to be most helpful. Tonight he has invited me to dine. Afterwards we shall discuss a plan. At present I have temporary accommodations in a hotel. I intend to move in a day or so.

Very truly yours,

Francis Herron

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