

Aboard the S. S. Argentina
Enroute to Buenos Aires
December 5, 1941

Dear Mr. Rogers:

It was not until November 29 that Señora Ghioldi gave me my first lesson. Hence there were four days during this voyage that I did not have an instruction. And I fear that the abbreviated course which I am taking in Argentine geography, history, economics, civics, literature, etcetera, will be far from finished when we dock at Buenos Aires. For it seems that no matter what topic or subject of instruction we begin with on a certain day, so many interesting and curious matters arise that we really do not concern ourselves with all the phases of the subject at hand.

Señora Ghioldi is the wife of Señor Americo Ghioldi, a member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Republic of Argentina from the Province of Buenos Aires. I met Señora Ghioldi through her son, Americo Ghioldi, hijo, the evening of November 28. I was doing my best to hold up one end of a conversation in Spanish with him when Señora Ghioldi passed our way. We were introduced. I explained to her that Americo was my jovent professor. She was delighted that there was a North American on board who was trying to speak Spanish and who wanted to know about the big and little things of her country. Was I going to stay in Buenos Aires very long? No? Might I possibly change my mind? No? At any rate Americo would be glad to travel the city with the North American some time during the short visit there, for there was much to be seen. The next morning I met Señora Ghioldi on deck and she invited me to take a lesson on the geography of the Argentine. She drew maps of her country on a blackboard, lectured on the provinces, the governments of the territories, the livestock, the rivers and the sierras, petroleum and other natural resources, asked questions and was asked questions. The instruction was in Spanish, for Señora Ghioldi can speak precious little English. At lesson's end she promised more lessons.

Each day Señora Ghioldi has instructed me. There are others who are becoming interested, and they pause if they are promenading to take part in the lesson. Señora Ghioldi is very proud of her country. Señora Ghioldi is very proud to have a North American pupil. She delights to ask me questions about the lessons we have had and to receive a correct answer, especially if there are any Argentines about. We have studied the parliamentary system, the newspapers of the Argentine, the railroads and highways, the export and import trade, the physical characteristics of the country; and we have taken a trip by railroad to Mendoza, capital of the Province of Mendoza. The latter was one of the most interesting of the lessons. We took the trip by two different routes, one through the middle of the Province of San Luis and the other by way of San Rafael. When we arrived at Mendoza, Señora Ghioldi insisted that we cross the Andes on the "camino de gloria," so called because it was through this pass that San Martín, the great libertador, came to Mendoza and there organized his cavalry units, a tactic which he borrowed from Emperor Napoleon. I cannot describe the flash of eye nor the proud gestures which Señora Ghioldi displayed on the occasion when she spoke of San Martín, his hazañas and exploits, the monument which is dedicated to his memory in the sierras, or when she told of the bold strokes for liberty which were realized in Chile by Gregorio O'Higgins and in the north by Simon Bolivar.

There were interesting aspects to the lesson of December 2. I am curious to find out more about the subject. Of the 44,000 kilometers of Argentine railroads all but 14,000 kilometers are English-owned. The smaller figure designates the ownership of the Argentine government. The English own all the major railroads which

fan out from Buenos Aires to the Pampa Húmeda, the richest part of the Argentine. The Estado, or government, does not have the facilities yet to send even one locomotive into the great city. Practically all the government railroad lines begin at Santa Fé. It is a matter of pride with the Argentines that practical steps toward Pan-Americanism have been taken in the sense of linking other countries to them by railroad, or as their expression has it by "brazos de hierro." And these ties of iron have been, or are being effected, in spite of the fact that the railroad industry is dominated by foreign capital. One of the railroads being planned is a line which would link the northern and western provinces with Antofagasta in Chile. The advantage to the Argentine is that such a link by the common carrier would provide an outlet for some of the Argentine meat and agricultural surpluses which are in demand in that part of Chile and to make available another Pacific port for the export of such produce. Señora Ghioldi did not forget to point out that the first railroad--10 kilometers in length--was built in 1857 by Argentine capital and that Sarmiento and Avellaneda had the first ride over the road. Señora Ghioldi believes that the state has a great future in the railroad business.

Of those who are going to Buenos Aires approximately thirty-five compose the Argentine delegation which was invited to visit the United States. There are but five deputies on this boat. Others in the Argentine party are the families of the deputies and functionaries who came as assistants and interpreters. One of the deputies is from the Province of Tucúman, two from the Province of Buenos Aires, one from the Province of Santa Fé and one from the federal district of Buenos Aires, which is equivalent to the District of Columbia in the United States.

It is a curious thing but the War of a Thousand Years which the Spaniards fought with the Moors will change my eating regime on Fridays. The War of a Thousand Years ended in the reign of Los Reyes Católicos (the Catholic Monarchs), Ferdinand and Isabella. They gave the last defeat to the Arabs. During that war the people of the Kingdoms of Spain were granted permission by a special dispensation to eat meat on Friday. The dispensation has never been taken away and has followed Spanish-speaking people to every part of the globe. As long as one is under the See of a Bishop who is Spanish, the law of the church with respect to the eating of meat on Friday does not obtain.

The boat trip thus far has been a happy experience. The second day out was a bit rough. The choppy sea that day affected me somewhat, but I really did not get sea sick. Since then we have passed over calm, beautiful seas with the trade winds blowing warmer as we went. I am amazed that the water of the ocean is so clear. There is always a striking quality to the color of it. Some times the sea is as blue as the sky. Some times it is a blue of great depth. Some times when the light is right, it is green, a clear green. I have not yet seen an angry sea. I wonder how it looks then. We were disappointed when we learned the day after we sailed that we were not going to call at the Barbados or any other island in the Caribbean. All of us watch the ship's chart closely. Our course up to December 3 was almost as much east as it was south. We were well out in the Atlantic at all times. We crossed the equator at 8 o'clock the morning of December 2. The morning of December 3 we sighted a grey cloud of land far to the west of us--low on the horizon but uneven because of the backdrop of mountains. Through the glasses we saw the port city of Pernambuco. There were spirals of smoke which we were told came from the sugar and tobacco factories. For the first time we entered a traveled sea lane. Before mid-day two men of war came over the horizon, their course set straight toward us. In an incredible time for ships they were near us. They were United States ships, one of them the battle cruiser Omaha and the other one of the newly built destroyers. This sea lane is their regular beat. We have sighted other ships, tankers and slow freighters. Some of them go so slow that they appear to be anchored. Our speed has been uniform, varying scarcely more than a few knots a day. In a 24 hour period we

travel approximately 445 nautical miles. Clocks have been advanced twice since leaving New York. That will give you an idea of how far east we are.

The very surprising thing to me is how quick the days have passed. By now we all know one another--South Americans and North Americans. It was harder to meet the South Americans than the North Americans. And it took more time to meet the few English passengers on board than anyone. The North Americans, we of the states, knew one another from the word go. It was simply an I-am-so-and-so-and-who-are-you introduction. With the South Americans the polite introduction and pleasant talk about nothing in particular seemed to be required. That done the South American was very genuine and agreeable. He makes a good companion. His humor is not of the bombshell or uproarious type which so many North Americans display. In the deck sports he was always forward to suggest a concession favorable to his opponent and plainly showed an admiration for fair play and sportsmanship in others. I have the feeling that the South American values friendship very highly and for that reason is slow in extending it. Since starting the trip I have begun a diary. Each day I write out a short running account of impressions of from 200 to 250 words in length. It is very valuable as a reference guide.

The next adventure is in the offing. We are hard by Rio de Janeiro, the home of the Cariocas.

Sincerely yours,

Francis Herron