

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Hotel Nogaró
Buenos Aires
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Dear Mr. Rogers:

One way to give the history of a country is to recite the stories of the men who made it. The last half century of this country's history would have a pattern if one knew intimately the circumstances which surround the life of Don Santiago, the master of the Estancia El Deseado. It is not for me to attempt to give this story, for it is one that is long in the telling. Besides, Don Santiago alone can tell it rightly. I have lived for a full week on the Estancia El Deseado with Don Santiago. I leave it with a fuller idea of what the Gaucho must have been, must have wanted and must have believed. For certainly the peon has many of the traits of the Gaucho. There are seventy of them on the Estancia El Deseado. But of all the memories which I shall keep, none will be more lasting or meaningful than my recuerdos of the master of El Deseado. I shall think of him, a young man of 66 years, who can ride the spirited criollo ponies as fast and as surely as Don Segundo Sombra must have ridden. Don Santiago, with his parents and his brothers and his sisters, came to Argentina from California in 1885. His father was an Irishman from New Zealand who wanted to give his children a heritage of rich farm land upon which they might live and prosper by hard and honest work. There are before my mind several images of Don Santiago, all of them out of the rich storehouse of stories and experiences which he relates. There is one of him as a boy, shy and already knowing of Castillian, greeting strangers in the campo with an "Ave María." There is another of him as a young man breaking a clod of earth in the alfalfa area of the Argentine and discovering that it was not a clod, that it had none of the qualities of a clod, but was small, and fine and rich in all its particles. I can see him holding with open palm the black earth, and the sun, with unbelievable magic, being reflected by a hundred particles of quartz. For this was sandy loam. What could grow better in this soil, with the aid of God and the sun and rain, than grasses and pasture? I shall remember him, now the young man of 66 years, explaining the agriculture of his estancia with scientific fact, but mostly as a thing of nature. And what he said was simply and wisely spoken, for a knowledge of nature is a kind of wisdom.

The story of my visit to the Estancia El Deseado has two parts to it. There is that which belongs to sentiment and "ambiente," the feeling and the spirit of the campo. It is the sort of thing out of which a philosopher, if he is a poet or a novelist or a composer, can fashion a creation. To this Don Santiago mostly belongs. And to this also the peon and his way of life have a claim. To me the peon is partly a Gaucho. Most of the seventy odd peones at the Estancia El Deseado have no families. Some of them have been at El Deseado so long that they form part of its tradition. There are young men, old men and middle-aged men. Some of them work for a month or two and move to other campos. Most of them are Spaniards or Criollos--which is to say that they are probably Spaniard-Indians. There are also a number of Portuguese and now and then a European who has become a peon by fateful circumstances. The peones receive 40 pesos a month if they are drifters and 50 to 55 if they are men who work for more than a year at El Deseado. In addition they get their food and a place where they can rest upon their sheepskin, often the only thing, save their cuchillo, which they really possess. They cannot afford to drink fine liquors or wines, only the common caña which is as heady as desire might wish. They cannot afford--or at least they do not possess--the mate and bombilla which is the traditional container for mate. Instead they sip mate tea as if it were soup from a tin plate. They love and ride a horse like a Gaucho. Often they do not own one, for the years and civilization have made a prisoner of the campo, dividing it into fenced fields and potreros. Many a peon, therefore, in his travels prefers to walk. Arriving at an estancia he climbs the double gates, for they are locked, and enters to ask for work or the favor of a meal. If he has a horse, the

horse must stay without. If a peon wishes to buy a horse he can have one for a month's work. Like the Gaucho, the knife or cuchillo which he carries behind in his sash-like belt is his tool of all work. He kills and eats an animal with this implement. If he must, he saves his life or guards his honor with it. Many say there are no more Gauchos. What is this type of man who loves a horse, who drinks his mate, who has no family and no home and who in his heart would like to see the fences disappear so that he might ride his own "flete" in whatever direction?

There are people who say that Urdampilleta is one of the nicest towns of its size in the Argentine. The streets of Urdampilleta are alternately mud and dirt, depending on the rainfall. The Southern Railroad passenger trains stop there twice each day for five minutes, going to and from Buenos Aires. In addition, there are freight trains which carry the produce of the estancias--cattle, hogs, sheep and some grain--to Buenos Aires so that it can, if there be a market and ship bottoms, be sent to Europe. No one seems to know how many people live in Urdampilleta. Some say there are more than 2,000 and others insist there are not nearly so many. The Province of Buenos Aires three years ago established an elementary school in Urdampilleta. Now the authorities, if they so desire, may enforce the law of the land which requires that all Argentines complete the sixth grade. If the law is enforced in all the zone around, the school will have to be enlarged and more teachers will have to be secured. The electric plant has two diesel engines of 50 and 25 horsepower each, the largest of which can produce 45 kilowatts per hour, more than enough for the average load. The Banco de La Nación and the postoffice are the busiest places. The drug store, really exceptionally neat and well-stocked, seems out of place. The Intendencia, or town hall, is the outstanding building, being all white and having the straight lines of modern architecture. The Catholic Church comes next, having been finished last December and costing 50,000 pesos. Don Santiago and Don Roberto, his brother, are proud of the church, for they were the heads of the building and finance committees. A year ago this spring the church members went to the clay deposits of the region and burned their own bricks. The bricks were joined by adobe mud and sealed on the outside with a cement coating, so that the rain could not erode the adobe substance away. And the people of the town? Many families earn their livelihood in the campo. The father may be a peon, or a cook or capataz on an estancia. Obviously, their condition in life is most humble. The others are small storekeepers, employees of the bank, the postoffice, the railroad, professional men and political officeholders. And there is a newspaper. Once a week it is published. It is no larger than the sheet on which this is written.

Sunday morning we attended church twice, the first mass at Urdampilleta and the second at Pirovani some 15 kilometers away. There was little money taken up at the collection, Don Santiago explaining that the revenues come mostly from the large estancieros who give a peso a day and individual gifts as the special requirements of the parish demand. The Spanish influence was apparent in the size of the congregation. Mostly women and children assisted at mass. When this laxity is pointed out, some Spanish counter with the observation that the God in Spain is different from the One in Argentina. As a counter force to the evident laxity, the church is attempting to develop the Catholic Action. The results were apparent at Pirovani. The Catholic Action has for its purpose the training of youth. Although there were no nuns at Pirovani the children were well-trained in the responses which seem to be customary here. Young men of the parish were conspicuous for their absence. The young women were out in force and seemed to be in charge of the training of the younger children. There were other outward signs of Catholic Action, including a parish community and educational center which is rising.

We have now arrived at the second part of this account, the part which concerns itself with some of the problems and aspects of El Deseado as well as some comments on its evolution. The story of El Deseado and Don Santiago is linked closely with the

life of two of Don Santiago's brothers, Roberto and Juan. Before the turn of the century, with the aid of their father, they began to acquire land which is the basis not only of El Deseado, but of other estancias of the Campion Brothers. Many of the newcomers to this country were reluctant to acquire more than 400 hectares, because they thought in terms of the old world and could not see the evolutionary processes which were to build this huge landed system. At the very first, Don Santiago relates, the down-payment on land was nothing. That is to say, the owner asked nothing for the first year's produce, 20 cents an hectare the next year and on a graduated upward scale for seven more years until the land was paid for. Strong and energetic workers, the Campion family, without capital save their own wealth of effort, built up their holdings which are models for the pig industry of this country. Because of the war demand for hog products the Campions have been expanding this branch of their livestock. Hog raising has always been a poor third in the Argentine livestock picture, with cattle and sheep in the lead. Two important reasons are that there has never been a consistent or important overseas demand for pigs and the other is that the Argentine prefers beef. Estancia El Trio, that of Juan Campion and incidentally named after the three brothers, is outstanding in the Argentine. At present there are 30,000 pigs on the 15,000 acres of this estancia, more than five times the number at El Deseado. I visited El Trio one day with Don Santiago. There are tremendous warehouses filled with tons and tons of corn, barley and oats. But the principal feed is alfalfa. It is a curious sight to see pigs, hundreds upon hundreds of pigs, in dozens of potreros feeding on alfalfa like so many sheep. Their diet is balanced with feed grains. Hog numbers at El Trio, and at the other Campion estancias, are being increased at a fairly rapid rate and may go above 40,000. In ordinary times there are less than 4,000,000 hogs in the Argentine. Now the figure is above 6,000,000. That the expansion will go much farther than this is doubtful because Argentine estancia owners, although waking to some of the possibilities of hog production, do not in general take to this branch of livestock raising.

One morning the capataz came to the Estancia house to announce that the fiebre aftosa had broken out in the campo. The cattle in question had mouth sores and were bleeding. It had been more than a year since a case had been reported at El Deseado. The order went out to move the cattle from the corn fodder in which they were feeding into soft pasture, one without stemmy grass. Away from the tough feed which irritates their mouths, the cattle show an improvement in two or three days and are then on their way to health and happiness again. The actual loss in cattle from the hoof and mouth disease is very small, for the estancieros usually note it before the infection is spread to other parts of the campo, Don Santiago states, and treat it correctly. There is a serum which lessens the effects of the disease, but it is usually not given, for it is a huge task to inject it into whole herds, the numbers of which often mount into the thousands. It is not uncommon for cattle to have the foot and mouth disease two and three times, and there are even cases when they have had it four times. It is the first attack of the disease which threatens the health of the animal, especially young animals whose hearts cannot stand the strain which the disease places on them. Young animals suffering from the disease and made to run often fall over dead. The second time the disease is said to be mild and the third time scarcely noticeable.

Only animals of the unicorn type can contract the foot and mouth disease. Cattle, sheep and hogs belong to this classification. Horses are immune. The virus is most at home in a wet, fairly tepid medium. The disease is most common during rainy periods and when the temperatures are not uncommonly hot. During dry, hot weather there is little fiebre aftosa. One reason why it is difficult to control the disease is that cattle are often driven a hundred or more miles from the breeding zone to the feeding zone. If they are diseased the virus is carried for miles and miles.

The cellar silo, common to the Argentine, illustrates the magnitude of estancia farming. During my stay at El Deseado several were made. These silos are very cheap, nothing being needed in their construction except the dirt that is dug from the trench into which the alfalfa is deposited. In building a silo, a trench approximately 8 feet deep, 18 feet wide and from 75 to 100 feet long is dug. Into the trench as much as 100 ton of alfalfa is dumped and packed. The alfalfa is piled in the open field on flat, horse-drawn affairs which have no wheels, only runners. The horses are driven into the trench and the alfalfa is tripped off the "rastra," as it is called. Besides pulling the rastra the horses serve the double purpose of tramping down the alfalfa in the silo-to-be. It is best if a rain occurs during the period that the alfalfa is uncovered in the trench. If such occurs the alfalfa will begin to undergo a chemical change which, in effect, reduces it into an almost half-digested, sugary substance. There is a tremendous heat generated within the alfalfa pile, and the smoke of its combustion can be seen issuing from many places. Before the combustion can proceed to the point of fire and the alfalfa can escape into the air from which it had its origin, the silo is sealed with dirt. This type of silo, holding a tremendous amount of feed, will preserve the silage from ten to twenty years.

Often Argentina is compared to a fan, for the reason that Buenos Aires is the center of all activity and the highways and railroads lead directly to the federal capital. For practical purposes, there are no cross-country, north-south highways or railroads. Motor highways in the provinces are in a primitive state. Farmers give a kind of grade to country highways by plowing a ditch on both sides. Trunk highways are little if any better. The plains region is flat and riverless, the water being absorbed by the alluvial soil and making its way to the ocean underground. When there is too much rain, some of the land becomes swampish and small lakes form. Urdampilleta is 363 miles from Buenos Aires and even farther from the ocean; yet it is only 100 feet above sea level. When Argentine roads turn muddy they are an unimaginable mire. Farmers planning to send produce to market may find the distance of 75 to 80 kilometers, or whatever the distance may be, to a railroad loading point impossible to traverse. For this reason a homely, odd and remarkable wagon was invented years ago to battle the mud. The rear wheels stand higher than a man can reach. As many as 15 horses pull the lumbering, tremendous thing. The wagons bear names. One of the Champion wagons is named "La Mala Suerte," or Bad Luck. Country roads, among other reasons, are keeping North American cars popular here. United States made automobiles, although they use more gasoline than the pigmy types which come out of Europe, can stand much better the rough and tumble careers which they must lead in this country. They are not jolted to pieces. European cars cannot stand the wear and tear. The weak-powered motors which are in them must work overtime.

It seems that the men who have a vocation in life accomplish most. There is a French word which describes them, but which has partly lost its meaning when used in English. They are amateurs. René Massaux of Pirovano is an amateur. In the alfalfa zone there is no experiment^{station} for agriculture except that which René Massaux conducts. He has spent thousands of pesos studying alfalfa, developing types which will resist the freezes of the latitude and kinds that will make the most of the climatic and soil conditions of the region and produce the most seeds. He has also experimented with wheat, oats and barley. He has had such success that the British-owned railroads are selling and distributing his seeds without charging freight or commission in order to "foment better agriculture." A native of Belgium, Massaux came to the Argentine after the World War, worked with the Ministry of Agriculture for some years, but withdrew from that department to carry out the work which he felt was needed. Unofficially, the Ministry of Agriculture looks to him to carry on research work in the alfalfa zone. Agronomists of the Ministry and professors of the University of Buenos Aires keep in close touch with the work of Massaux. At last the rewards incidental to his work are accumulating and his seeds are becoming wide-

ly used. The hundreds of pesos which come to Massaux have only one meaning: They make possible more research. Such is the human side of science.

There is much more I could write about Estancia El Deseado. There is the picture of President Woodrow Wilson and the American flag at each side, hanging in the guest room. There was the party which Don Santiago gave Sunday night at his estancia for the North American. There is the costumbrista writer, Héctor Lagos, in whom a North American university is interested. We had two conversations on the really true Argentine "ambiente." And there is Don Santiago's invention, the factory at Urdampilleta which goes with it and the pictures and accounts of El Tronador, the mountain he dared to climb.

And last of all there is the mistake in judgment which Don Santiago made, but which he quickly corrected. Passing through the village of Pirovani Sunday morning by automobile, we were halted by the military and warned not to drive past the Intendencia. We followed instructions, for it was best to do so. "Che," said Don Santiago to me, "there was a little revolution last night. Nothing more." Then he spied a political sign which was whitewashed on a wall. "Che," he added, "I'm wrong. It's election day. Nothing more."

Sincerely,

Francis Herron