

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Hotel Londres
Venado Tuerto, S. F.
March 19, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

It is not a custom in the Republic of Argentina to stay up election night, enjoy an oyster stew and wait for the election returns to come in. Counting ballots here is a long ceremony. The poll boxes must be duly sealed, sent to a provincial capital or designated election board and counted with slow and exact precision. It is logical that this kind of formula be followed, for an election is a solemn, civic rite, almost as solemn as the discourses which the candidates pronounce. The election held in the Argentine Republic Sunday, March 1, can be compared to the Congressional elections which are held every two years in the United States. After 15 days almost all the ballots had been counted, although as this is being written the results in Santiago del Estero and Buenos Aires province are still being tallied. By reason of the election the Executive Authority is again confronted with a Chamber of Deputies which is unfriendly to many of his policies and to those of his ministers. In United States terms this means there is a Democratic President and a Republican Congress, or vice versa. Dr. Ramón S. Castillo, the vice president of the Argentine Republic, but exercising the Executive Authority because of the illness of President Roberto M. Ortiz, is a Conservative Party member (P. D. N.). His party derives its support from the provinces. There are two other major parties and a number of smaller ones. The other important two are the Radicals and the Socialists. These two parties, it can be said in a general way, form a liberal, leftist bloc, a kind of "Popular Front." It must be said that they compete strongly against each other in liberal areas, particularly in the bailiwicks of Buenos Aires. Until the recent election the Radicals were thought to have a certain claim on the majority of seats in the Congress from the city of Buenos Aires. The Socialists were conceded the minority seats. After a nip and tuck fight the Socialists reversed the traditional status and won the majority. The election in Buenos Aires this year was hailed by all groups and factions as a civic achievement. All agree that the election was fair and honest, and that even in the provinces a general improvement was noted. In the Argentine there is not the participation in elections which there is in the United States. In the city of Buenos Aires approximately 350,000 votes were cast, a new high. There are more than 3,000,000 people in the city. In the provinces the percentage of participation was markedly less.

The outward signs of a political campaign here are somewhat different from those of the United States. There are relatively few posters picturing the handsome features of candidates and noting that they are models of honesty and integrity and defenders of the public weal. It is the custom to whitewash or paint political slogans in huge letters on buildings and walls. Government buildings do not seem to escape. Indeed, in some cities and towns they seem to be preferred. On election day there are police, or deputized assistants, at every polling place. In provincial elections it is not uncommon for an opposition party to state that it has no chance to win because of the interference of the provincial authorities in the election and to proclaim a "vote strike." The Argentine people are long on form and rules. When Acting President Castillo went to the polls he neglected to bring his Libreta de Enrolamiento (Proof of Military Service), and was not allowed to cast his vote until a friend went to his house and secured it. The recent election seems to indicate a continued advancement of the Argentine people in Democratic procedure. It is particularly heartening at this time when the issues are so significant and important, and during a period when the nation is under a State of Siege. In all fairness it should be noted that the State of Siege is not as bad as it sounds. It would be well, I think, for foreigners to appreciate the many liberties which are accorded to them in this country, liberties which Argentines are not allowed to enjoy. Under the decree, which is the State of Siege, Argentine newspapers are forbidden to comment "on the measure imposed by the Executive Author-

ity, or to hazard judgments on the international situation, or to publish anything which might tend to perturb the peace of the nation." Yet, the Argentine government allows foreign periodicals, movies and other opinion-making and opinion-asserting media to enter the country in unrestrained volume. Even articles pointed in their criticism of the Argentine government are permitted to pass and to be distributed. Before British, North American or Axis newsreels are shown in the Argentine theatres, there is an announcement posted requesting the audience to refrain from expressing unneutral emotions. The Acción Argentina, a youth organization, has had its activities curtailed to such an extent that the organization has lost a great deal of its political importance. The Argentine government has imposed no restrictions on the British Order of the Bellows which continues to collect war funds on the basis of a monthly "air score."

Monday I met Mr. Desmond Holdridge, a Reader's Digest, or Selecciones, representative for South America. We had a long talk. Mr. Holdridge explained some of the qualities which Digest articles must have before they are acceptable. The standards are very high. It is essential for articles to have the "Digest twist." Like most artistic techniques the Digest twist has a simple, but difficult formula. Two important features of it are the title and the quick, simple summary of the first paragraph. Testifying to the merit of the technique and Digest appeal is the fact that the Digest has a World Edition of 5,000,000 copies, being the most cosmopolitan and catholic of all magazines. Holdridge has been in Argentina looking for Digest material. He has recently completed an article on the colectivos, the jitney buses which carry a good percentage of Portefios to and from work. In fact, all large provincial cities have the colectivo system. Formerly taxicab driver-owners who could not make expenses, the taxi owners converted their automobiles into jitneys and established routes, charging a maximum fare of 20 cents Argentine. In the course of time they organized into associations, systematized the transportation system and standardized the "jitneys." One of the singular results of the colectivo system has been an increase in the value of suburban property, for they made it possible for people to move away from the subway and street car lines. To appreciate the Argentine city transportation problem it must be remembered that the ratio of motor vehicles to individuals is 30 to 1 here; whereas in the United States it is almost 4 to 1. Another subject which interests Holdridge is the Argentine club, about which I wrote in a previous letter. He has also been studying the troublesome "Fiebre Aftosa" problem.

On the back cover of this month's Selecciones there is a short article-testimonial by F. Molina Campos, the most popular of all Argentine artists. It is called: Que se destaque lo esencial (The importance of emphasizing the significant). Molina Campos compares his own technique in picturing the Gaucho with the "Digest twist." "My technique," writes Molina Campos, "consists in eliminating, without hesitation, uninteresting details which clutter up a picture and detract from its real purpose. I portray only the true and authentic characteristics of the Gaucho and his ambiente." In like manner, he adds, the Digest only selects the best articles, "condenses them, removes from them--as ruthlessly as I remove from my pictures--all that which complicates the sense, thus emphasizing the significant." Copies of the pictures of F. Molina Campos, who is the Argentine Walt Disney, are prized and difficult to secure. He portrays the "vanishing Gaucho." Copies of his pictures are distributed by the Alpargatas Company to customers and dealers. This company makes a cheap slipper which is worn by a good percentage of the peones and the people of the campo. They look like a light tennis shoe and can be purchased for as little as a peso. Before I leave the Argentine I am going to get some of Molina Campos' drawings even if I have to wear Alpargatas!

The month of March in Argentina is equivalent to the month of September in the United States. With "September" more than half gone, hot days are still to come. Last week the mercury hit 98 in the central part of the republic. Readings were much higher in the northern provinces. The weather follows a kind of pattern in the

pampas region. Day by day the heat and humidity mount until the saturation point is reached. A good rain follows; then a cool period. The same process is repeated. The hot, humid weather is caused by tropic winds which bring the warm, moist air into the pampas zone. The alternating cool spells are caused by the southern trade winds which are called pamperos. It is not uncommon for rather cool spells to occur in the summer and warm temperatures to obtain in out-of-season periods.

It was in one of Tirso de Molina's plays, I think, that the drama begins with a description of a river. From a bridge over that river a city is seen and described. When I saw the city of Córdoba last week I was reminded of that drama which I read more than eight years ago and the name of which I have forgotten. The Spanish professor, explaining the drama, said that it was customary in Castillian literature to exaggerate, that the magnificent river about which Tirso de Molina wrote might be jumped across. There is just such a "magnificent river" flowing through the city of Córdoba. If I were to imagine a typical Spanish city, I would imagine Córdoba. I would change the name of the Río Primero of Córdoba to the Río Manzanares, put an old, old span across it and call it the Puente Segoviana. The probable similarity between Córdoba and a Spanish city could be carried a long way. The buildings at Córdoba are old. In fact many of them were built by Spaniards. There are mountains in the background, and the land immediately adjacent to the city is rocky and unproductive like that in Spain. Approximately 300 years old, Córdoba was started by Jesuit Mission priests. In every part of the city there are religious buildings, the reason why the city is called the second Rome. Here one expects to see priests in the streets dressed in the sótano and wearing sandals, for Córdoba has an atmosphere in which out-moded customs are not out of place. There are burros on the streets of Córdoba. This provincial capital is 800 kilometers northwest of Buenos Aires. It marks the end of the pampas. The cereals and cattle grown and raised on the plains east of Córdoba do not belong to Córdoba. They move west to the Río de la Plata and the inland port of Rosario. Córdoba does not have much economic purpose. It is a provincial capital, a religious and traditional center. It is a stopping place for travelers bound for the sierra region. It may someday be a mining center. There are a few quarries in the mountains from which limestone rock is blasted and crushed into cement. There is an imposing hydro-electric plant at San Roque lake less than 50 kilometers away which enthusiasts assert will some day furnish power for Buenos Aires itself. There are gold, silver and less valuable minerals in the sierras. One can kick mica rock around. Only the beauty of the sierras is being exploited to any extent. In the mountains there are thousands of beautiful homes and hundreds of pension hotels. Córdoba has excellent rail connections. Centrally located in the Republic one has easy access to any of the populated areas of the country. A hundred kilometers travel east or southeast places one in the rich agricultural area of the pampas. One hundred kilometers, in this case, means the difference of 10 inches of rain annually. While at Córdoba I investigated the University. The University has more "facultades" than the one at Santa Fe. In fact one of the students said it was just like Oxford. And I have always wanted to go to Oxford!

This letter is being written from Venado Tuerto, a rich agricultural center of Santa Fe province. Mr. Nyhus selected it for me. Farming in this area contrasts greatly with that in the alfalfa region of Urdampilleta. Taking my evening promenade last night I was amazed and pleased to discover that the young women are accustomed to speak piropos.

Sincerely,

Francis Herron