

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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The City Hotel
Córdoba, Córdoba
April 17, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

I am now a student in the School of Economic Sciences of the National University of Córdoba. Already I am beginning to understand some things about the Latin way of reasoning which I have not fully appreciated. In textbooks, in classes and in discussions there is always a vast lot of theorizing. It is sometimes a real job for my North American mind to see much practical meaning behind it all. Listed among the courses which I am taking are Industrial Economics of the Region, Agricultural Economics and Economic Geography of the Nation. Curiously enough, the professor of the first named course has concerned himself thus far with industrial organizations in other countries, emphasizing the importance of the German cartel and the United States holding company. The point to which his lectures are leading--this is my best guess--is the fact that important utilities and industries of the Argentine have been established by foreign capital. The professor of Agricultural economics is also fascinated by big vistas. His big point is that the nations of the world have been preparing for war since the last war and that the restrictions of trade imposed by nationalistic, self-sufficient policies have been the most potent forces affecting Argentine agriculture. He points to Italy's battle for wheat and the German and Japanese armament industries. The professor will not harbor the thought that trade restrictions have been a cause of the war, the war having been a foregone conclusion from the very start. He can see no logic in the assumption that some nations have practiced trade restrictions because they thought, perhaps mistakenly, that they might protect their standard of living by means of this expedient. The fact that some nations have followed trade isolationism and have failed to build armament industries suggests nothing to him. The discussion of big theories by professors and students alike apparently is a favorite sport. In this regard it is perhaps pertinent to note that Argentina is a crossroad for all theories. Fascist theories on economics are well known here and are mixed up sometimes with English and United States ideas. The results are most curious. Russian theories have been given impetus by the tremendous industrial power which the war has proved that country to have.

The mixture of economic ideas which I note above is perhaps well-illustrated by a discussion speech delivered to me by a student who fancied himself unusually well-informed in the broad field of economic theory. Said he in effect: The United States, in many ways, has the elements of the corporate state. The NRA has effected this change and, even today, is bringing about profound changes. At dissertation's end I informed him that long, long ago the NRA had been invalidated by the Supreme Court and that, in Hugh Johnson's own words, it was as dead as a dodo. His answer to my "conclusive" reply was that I was mistaken. Undoubtedly, although understandably, I had confused the NRA with one of the many other alphabetical agencies of the United States government. And that was the story to which he stuck.

I have discovered that I must learn to discount sources of information which I shall have occasion to use in my studies. Even government reports have a tendency to be visionary. I have just finished reading a provincial government survey of social and economic conditions. Hundreds and hundreds of words were written, explaining laws which have been approved but which have never gone into effect. The publication, and the laws, are just so much political window dressing. I have at hand a "basic book" on the Argentine in which there is a detailed explanation about how illiteracy is being banished from the Republic. The percentage of literacy in each province is given. The figures have no relation with reality. As a matter of fact nobody knows, for example, what the percentage of illiteracy in the Province of Córdoba is. The Statistics Institute of the School of Economic

Sciences at present is making a survey of an average Cordobese town which will give some idea of the work which education has ahead of it in rural districts. The percentage of students who don't start to school is not known. In any event it is considerable. In the town in which the survey is being made there are 68 in the primary grade, 54 in the first grade, 24 in the second grade, 21 in the third grade and 13 in the fourth grade. There is no schooling in this town after the fourth grade. Obviously more than half the students who start to school never enter the second grade and less than a quarter of them enter the fourth grade. And, of course, all who ever attend school are considered to be literate. In fairness, there is another aspect to the problem which must not be forgotten. Conscription is practiced in the Argentine. All youths called for service, if they do not know how to read and write, are given elementary instruction. Reserve officers of the Argentine army have told me that an average of above 40 percent of those called for army service do not know how to read and write. If illiteracy is so common among the youth, how much is there among the older generation? It certainly is much worse. There is one inescapable fact, throwing all the graphs, statistics and written apologies on the subject out the window: Educational facilities and practical education, excepting perhaps the city of Buenos Aires and Rosario, leave much to be desired. To hazard any intelligent comments on the Argentine illiteracy problem, or on many others, it is quite necessary to have some direct contact with the real problem to see it in any kind of perspective. Each morning I go to the Statistics Institute to read and study the sources that are available and to discuss with students from the campo and the city the subjects in which I am most interested. Most of them have modest backgrounds. Their opinions and frank answers to specific questions are valuable in discounting "basic works" which try hard to make miserable reality a bit Utopian.

Gratifying to me has been the ease with which one can make friends with the youth in every part of the Argentine Republic. The third day I attended classes, six of the students invited me to have supper with them. By evening's end I had been initiated into the student body. We started out on pizzas--a kind of flat, spongy bread, topped with tomato sauce, spices and sardines. Then we had churrasco and wine. Churrasco is very criollo; it is fire-cooked or asado meat. And Mendoza wine is just the thing to provoke the wit of everyone. Argentine youth are, almost without exception, more thrilled about the United States than the people of the United States. There is an old saying, often quoted in the Argentine: "See Naples, and die!" Naples is not in Italy, these students state. It is the United States. They do not talk like this for effect. One soon learns when the Argentine is talking for effect. I am certain that Argentine youths have an admiration for the United States such as they do not have for any other foreign country. How they crowd around to ask eager questions! To them the United States is lindo, formidable, machanudo. As long as the United States does not change its inherent character, this attraction is bound to grow and to have a profound influence. The United States impresses the young much more than the old. To Argentine youth the United States means opportunity, action and doing. They are attracted by our provincialism, a terrific provincialism born of a country more than 5,000 kilometers wide and plenty long as well. Somehow, we have qualities which youth readily comprehends.

We would do well to study the universal appeal which United States movies seem to have. What is the secret of that appeal insofar as other nations are concerned? I have asked this question of Argentines time and time again. Most always they say that the reason is that they can understand United States movies, in spite of the language hurdle. United States movies are all action--even the sophisticated, mundane ones--and it is easy to follow the plot. The rough-house quality of our comedy has no finesse to it, but no one can fail to understand it. European movies, by contrast, are heavy with art and acting. Although European movie dialogue is also translated, it is not readily understood. Then, too, United States

movies portray a different kind of living, a modern, liberal philosophy. Youth is always susceptible to change. The Argentine youth wants to break with Spanish colonial traditions and social norms. That tradition is going to be broken, Argentine youth frankly asserts, as soon as it can be managed. The average Argentine youth wants to take his best girl to the movie or a dance without mother or brother coming along. The other night I saw another Argentine movie. It was called "American Melodies," and was produced as a spiritual message to good neighbors. I wish that it might be brought to the United States and shown so that we might see how we appear to the Argentine. I do not think the United States public would appreciate the characterization which this Argentine movie gives us. I must confess that I laughed like a criollo. The United States character in this all-American movie was a rich girl with no manners or inhibitions who was forever chasing a man, drinking cocktails, singing or dancing. José Mojica, the Mexican, was the star. I am certain in my own mind that the Argentine producer did his best to portray a real, typical North American, one that would meet with North American approval. The most amusing scene of all was when the United States girl gave an order to an Argentine porter in English. Irritated when the porter did not understand, she spoke out loudly: "Did you ever see anything like that? He doesn't even understand English."

One of my Cordobese friends is Señor Héctor Pacheco, the editor of La Voz de La Interior, one of Córdoba's daily newspapers. Señor Pacheco is a sincere United States admirer and hopes to go to the United States so that he can study North American journalism technique. Newspapers indicate some fundamental things about Argentine provincial society. Córdoba, the third largest province in the Republic, has a population of 1,300,000 people. In the entire province there are but 45 newspapers, of which only 8 are dailies. Of the eight daily newspapers six of them are in the city of Córdoba itself. Weekly newspapers cannot be compared with the type that are published in the United States. A good midwestern weekly has the value of 10 of these rural papers. Large country communities do not have the diversified business enterprises necessary to support first-class newspapers. Many newspapers live by the grace of politics. Yet, in the cities (in many parts of the country) the spirit of progressive journalism is being felt. It is heartening to note that the most prosperous and most progressive newspapers are those which are independent, divorced from politics and operated on the principle that the "public journal is a public trust." In Córdoba the two best newspapers, Córdoba and La Voz, derive their revenues from advertising. The other newspapers have political ties with the exception of Los Principios, a Catholic vehicle. Also indicative of the economic organization of the Province is the fact that there are 21 branch banks of the Banco de La Nación and 51 other banking institutions, including those which do a loaning or mortgage business alone. The number of newspapers and banks reveals that there is not the economic basis for the town--as it is known in the United States--in the Argentine.

It is a kind of relief to have a permanent address for a time again. My friends in the states, who have not been certain what my address might be from week to week, can now use the one on the first page of this letter. And by all means fly the correspondence down.

Sincerely,

Francis Herron