

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

The City Hotel
Córdoba, Córdoba
May 19, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

There is a serious criticism which Yanquis seem always to level at the Argentine. I have read it in current articles in North American magazines on the Conference at Rio de Janeiro and in United States estimates of the effectiveness of the Good Neighbor policy. I have heard it from North Americans who were "passing through." I have seen it in books which antedate the war crisis. I have heard a professor of the School of Economic Sciences note the criticism, discuss it calmly, dispose of it as being a failure on our part to interpret properly an "exterior characteristic" which the Argentines have inherited from the Spaniards. I myself have tried to analyze it, for I feel that there is a grave mistake being made and that the error will not be corrected unless the "exterior characteristic" is really and truly understood. There is another criticism which often accompanies the one of arrogance and which has an affinity to it. That is the characteristic of many Argentines of being absolutely sure that they have the answers to difficult problems. I know many Argentines very well. I have many Argentine friends. If I were to express my view as to whether or not the average Argentine is arrogant, my ready answer would be that he is not. I am convinced in my own mind, after five months residence in various parts of the Argentine Republic, that the so-called arrogance is mostly an "exteriorization" and that the positive-sureness stems from his "spiritual" interpretation of things. The Argentine's apology for the latter must be that he has a different set of beliefs than those of North Americans who, by the way, are just as unwilling to compromise their assumptions as Argentine is.

Whether one goes to the postoffice to buy stamps, to the railroad station to purchase a fare or to the soccer football ticket office, it is not the practice to stand in line and wait one's turn. Just logical, practical people of our temperament do that. Argentine's push, shove and fight their way through, irrespective of how many may have preceded them, irrespective of whether those waiting for attention are lame or halt, beautiful or not. If one has a preconceived idea that politeness demands a gentlemanly attitude in such a situation, he might just as well go home for he isn't going to buy a stamp, take a trip on the train or see the football game. If a movie or stage presentation is one minute late everyone begins to pound the floor with their feet, to whistle and shout to high heaven. The noise continues in growing crescendo until the feature begins. If one is irked by something, it is quite proper to hiss. Young men and old men look at attractive women, turning their heads to continue their appraisal. They often speak to passing women whom they do not know or have never seen before, sometimes say more than they probably should. The ordinary expressions of the language are much franker than those in English and the literal translation does not give a proper evaluation of the meaning. If an Argentine has his picture in the newspaper, he is likely to tell his friends about it and may send them clipped copies so they cannot fail to see it. It is a custom to secure all the prestige one can. Titles are so important that often people in 200-peso-a-month jobs have them. Most ordinary citizens have cards to hand out. The title of Doctor is awarded by many schools and colleges of the universities. It is much easier to secure than a Doctor of Science or a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the United States. There is a saying in Córdoba that there was once a Cordobese who was not called Doctor. Young men who make no more than 80 or 90 pesos a month will spend 16 pesos for a shirt and comparatively as much for ties and other clothing so that they can parade the paseo street of the city and impress young ladies with their elegance. People accept a compliment with pleasure; they do not try to discount it or be

shy about it; nor do they hesitate to hand them out themselves. There are hundreds of traits like these. They are a part of a way of living for these people. Because they may seem strange and be interpreted as arrogance by traveling Yanquis, who is to blame?

The same person who will push one aside so that he may have the privilege of buying a stamp first is not so rude as one might imagine. Ask him to tell you where a street address is. What will he do? If the address isn't more than half a mile away he will practically accompany you to your destination. Sunday I went to a soccer football game with one of the students. We fought like wildcats to get in. Here the Latin temperament was at work. In the usual course of events an incident arose on the sporting field that led to a discussion as to whether one of the Belgranos had done one of the Talleres wrong, or vice versa. There was a great stir. One could look up into the stands and see hundreds of people debating most emphatically with one another. It seemed that the forefinger of each right hand was within an inch of someone else's nose. There wasn't a fight in sight, although I am told that the result is not always so happy. With a minute or two left of the contest and with the result in no doubt I proposed to my friend Rinaldi that we leave so that we might get a head start on the 15,000 to 20,000 people there. Rinaldi showed no disposition to leave. I was game to remain and risk my life in the frantic mob which I pictured would converge on the narrow exits. The action of the crowd was entirely different from that of North Americans leaving a sporting spectacle. Everyone filed out without hurry. There was no crush. We took our time walking to the street car line and had no difficulty in boarding a tram at once. The truth of the matter is that Argentines are just as much surprised by our actions as we are by theirs. One Argentine friend told me confidentially that Argentines like North Americans, in spite of their faults, because they have the saving grace of being more "simpatico" than some other types of gringos. North Americans have a lot of spirit and there is never a dull moment when they are around. They are more like the people in the movies than they think. But, of course, it is true that North Americans have an abundance of caradura faults. To be a "caradura" is to be bold. It is to be, for example, a non-conformist with respect to Latin manners, manners which to our mind may seem over-courteous, perhaps fictitiously so. We are quite an abrupt, to-the-point kind of people. That is not the best form here. I am certain that I am not going to judge Argentines by their general, exterior manners. I shall judge Argentines most of all by whether those I have met have passed the test of being likeable. I am certain in my own mind that Argentines will not judge me on the standard of whether or not I have caradura traits, but whether I am simpatico or likeable. For my part I am willing to stand or fall on that basis. And I can truthfully say that the Argentine is passing my test quite easily.

And now a few words on Argentine basic beliefs, those to which their judgments unconsciously conform. In one of the few realistic books I have come across on Argentina (Grains of Sand authored by Nicolas Repetto) there is this paragraph: "When one reads a history book of the Argentine, the impression is created that in the entire history of the country there have been but two forces: political parties and military coups. While the parties contended, the governments passed resolutions, the armies fought and the people maintained absolute silence. Our politics lacks clear and practical ideas. It has too many vague and transcendental principles." In estimating the Argentine mind, I think it can be said that "transcendental principles" are more important in judgment-forming than practical or realistic factors. That is where, essentially, the clash comes between the North American way of thinking and the Argentine way. It is useless for North Americans to argue that realism is more realistic than "transcendental principles." And it is equally ineffective for Argentines to explain that "transcendental principles" are more transcendental than realism. It is the view of both mentalities that their basic beliefs are more important and that in an argument they should be given an over-weighting importance. In one class, as an example, it was brought up by the professor that negroes of some states of the United States did not have equal rights because of

discriminatory laws. Because of those laws they could not vote. The students were much upset by this discovery. They told me they were quite disappointed in this condition in the great republic of the north and suggested that the evil be corrected immediately. To them the reprehensible thing was not the fact that negroes in certain states could not vote, but that there were laws designed to prevent them from voting. If the laws were repealed and the same condition existed the students would scarcely object. It would be the part of folly to beg the question and to argue that many people in the Argentine do not, in all reality, have political suffrage. It would carry no weight to explain that the negro of the South has more economic freedom than the people of the Chaco (pueblos desamparados). In another class the professor explained what he considered a discriminatory, un-Democratic kind of North American legislation. He stated that United States immigration legislation was directed principally against orientals, that therefore the legislation was un-Democratic, etc. In contrast, he averred that the Argentine constitution and the laws thereunder were the most liberal and humanitarian in the world and that a discrimination like that he cited in the United States would be impossible in this country. The fact that the United States law, in its most important aspect, was designed to limit immigration because the country was becoming populated is a point which would carry no weight. The fact that Argentina itself in effect is limiting immigration to people with economic backing is no counter-argument. It is the "transcendental principle" which counts in both cases.

The past week has been a busy one for me. If I would allow the students, they would monopolize all my time. They insisted I attend a "homenaje" one evening for one of the Senior students who is to be married soon. The homenaje is a tribute that is given a friend for the least kind of excuse. If one gets married, writes a book, gets a Doctor's degree, becomes a politician or wins a sporting event a homenaje is in order. Usually all the friends sign a "pergamino", a parchment, and a flash photo is taken of the gathering. There is a banquet and flowery speeches. Next week I may have a distinguished visitor. Dr. Carl C. Taylor, agricultural analyst who is making a special survey of the Argentine for the Department of Agriculture, has written that he expects to come to Córdoba soon. At present Dr. Taylor is in the Chaco where the cotton picking season is in full swing.

Sincerely,

Francis Herron