

The City Hotel  
Córdoba, Argentina  
July 22, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The territory of the Chaco has forests of quebracho, small cotton plantations, two modest-sized cities and mosquitoes. Quebracho forests are not majestic like those forests of red wood or pine which are to be found on the North American continent. An ordinary quebracho tree is about 20 feet high. It stands on the level Chaco terrain, rather distinctive looking among gnarled and hardy scrub growth. I should not wonder if 80 percent of the Chaco were covered with quebracho forests. In the heart of the cotton country, of which Sáenz Peña is the important city, cotton plantations are only clearings in the great extensions of quebracho. Chaco mosquitoes are healthy and many of them are weathering the coldest winter in more than 20 years. It would be surprising if the area adjacent to the Río Paraná--and of which Resistencia is the important city--did not have swarms of mosquitoes, because of the thousands of square acres of marshland to be found there. Another distinctive feature of the Chaco is the relatively large number of long-horned, Cimarron cattle. Quebracho, criollo cattle, cotton, mosquitoes, Resistencia and Sáenz Peña--that is more or less the Chaco. This Territory is bound to play an increasingly important role in the economics and politics of the Argentine. Lying in the sub-tropics, the Chaco has grown like a tropical plant. Twenty-five years ago it was almost forgotten and practically unpopulated. This Territory is an extension of the Bolivian and Paraguayan Chaco for which, a few years ago, a bloody war was fought. A few decades ago the Territory was the hunting ground of nomad, Guarani Indians, numbering perhaps no more than 25,000, who somehow managed to live off the country. With an area of approximately 62,000 square miles, the Territory now has an estimated population of 360,000. In 1920 there were only 60,000 people in the Territory. The increase is partly due to the development of the quebracho extract industry, but more especially to the settlement of the southern two-thirds by cotton farmers.

The economic development of the Argentine has not separated the social system from tradition. Feudalistic forms of the Spanish colonial regime, which economic impulses have failed to greatly modify in most parts of the Republic, are noticeably absent in the Chaco. There the small farm system is in full development. In the practical sense there is no latifundio or land problem in the Chaco. Of the 13,766 chacras which the Minister of Agriculture notes in the 1937 report, less than 150 were of more than 200 hectares and most were less than 100 hectares, or less than 250 acres. This is not to say that there are no large landholders in the Chaco. It does mean to say, however, that practically all cotton and farm land is in the hands of small farmers. Indeed, almost 50 percent of land devoted to agriculture is in the hands of foreign-born immigrants. The Chaco has been settled and developed in the past 25 years. Of the 425,000 hectares under cultivation, two thirds of it is devoted to cotton raising. The Chaco produces more than 80 percent of all the cotton grown in the Argentine. In 1920 only 23,000 hectares were planted to cotton; whereas in 1940 there were 365,000 hectares seeded to this crop. Population growth has matched the increase of cotton culture, it would almost seem, hectare by hectare. Excepting the 90,000 hectares planted to corn, cotton is the only major crop. Mixed farming, because of the heat and other climatic factors, is relatively difficult in the Chaco. Livestock does not fare well in the Territory, although there are slightly more than a million head of cattle. Of this number more than 800,000 are of the Cimarron type. Indeed, it might be said that this hardy, unique kind of cattle has its last stronghold in the Chaco. The reason why there are so many Cimarron cattle in the Territory is because the best breeds cannot survive. Not the least of the difficulties, I am told, is a blood-sucking insect which saps the vitality of Shorthorns,

Herefords, etc., but which cannot penetrate the double-thick, double-tough hide of the criollo cattle. Other types of livestock are so few in the Chaco that they need not be mentioned. During the harvest season Chaco farmers need cotton pickers, 60 percent of whom come from the relatively poor provinces of Santiago del Estero and Corrientes. There is a touch of irony in this situation, for both Santiago del Estero and Corrientes have a proud provincial distinction; whereas the Chaco is still "Indian country." Non-traditional in many ways, Chaco farmers are proving the value of cooperative organizations. They have built many cooperatives to receive an important percentage of their cotton crops. Almost a third of the farmers in the Territory are members of cooperatives.

Disappointment awaited me at Santa Fe. The Disatnik brothers, students at Córdoba University, had promised that they would take me on an excursion to the country where I might visit some chacras. The war had effected a scarcity of gasoline and car owners had no choice but to leave their cars in the garage. It will be best to take a look at Santa Fe chacras in two or three months to see whether or not government loans and the liberalization of chacra contracts is promoting mixed farming. One agricultural student with whom I talked in Santa Fe and who is well-acquainted with provincial farming expressed the opinion that the government program only meant more chickens. He did not think that cattle or swine raising was being stimulated. Santa Fe province soil is especially suitable to grain farming. There are few large estancias in the rich section of the province. Practically all are of relatively small size, many of them being less than 1,000 hectares and most of these divided into chacras. However, I had the opportunity to cross the province by omnibus. The small estancias have an ordered appearance to them, especially at this time of year when there are no corn fields to obstruct the view of the flat pampa. There is one symmetric field after another, with fine cattle pasturing in some and greening wheat in others.

On the twelfth day after leaving Córdoba I had completed the circle of the north and was back at the starting point with three or four days to spare. So I went to Buenos Aires, arriving there Thursday morning. It was a dreary, rainy day. I had time to find a room in a hotel on the Avenida de Mayo and to take a position on the sidewalk just as the funeral procession of former President Roberto M. Ortiz began to enter the Avenue from the Plaza Mayo. When the procession was yet two blocks away, a demonstration of protest began. The commotion grew as the procession approached. Black funeral carriages piled high with flowers came into view. Then the windowed, black carriage bearing the remains of the former president. Then followed the pride of the Argentine army, the mounted grenadiers of San Martín. It was at them that the crowd was directing the demonstration. An organized group of young men, described by Porteño newspapers as "students," were pressing close to the grenadiers. One newspaper reported that the "students" were shouting: "Presidents, yes; dictators, no!" All that I heard was the chant: "Libertad! Libertad! Libertad!" The grenadiers were having trouble keeping the "students" at a distance. The mounted guards had drawn their swords and were prepared, if needs be, to use the flat sides of them. Just as this part of the procession came alongside my position, motorcycle and mounted police arrived and in one swoop sent the crowd scurrying from the street to the sidewalk. What did the students want? They desired the privilege of bearing the casket of Ortiz upon their shoulders as a homage to him. Ortiz has a place in the hearts of many in the Argentine. He was a great champion of Democracy and his sincerity and high purpose is acknowledged even by those who disagree with his views.

Those who really want to understand the Argentine can find many clarifying explanations in the philosophy and the political utterances of Dr. Ortiz. As a young man Ortiz took an active part in Argentine politics. A liberal, he believed that Argentina could become Democratic in fact as well as in form. He believed then, as he did to his death, that the education of the masses was the first essential in attaining the ideal. He believed that a government which did not represent all par-

ties could not govern well. He believed in the value of compromise. In plain words he fought demagoguery, the immorality of a political system which is a heritage of the old, decadent Spanish colonial government. Once he said: "I do not believe, as so many pretend to believe, that Democracy is bankrupt. Democracy has not failed in our country, for it never was truly and completely practiced here. The fundamental principles of Democracy have been ignored in practice because petty and short-sighted interests have dictated policy. This evil has its origin in the habit of seeing in Democracy only the rights which it offers to those it benefits and in the tendency to forget the duties which Democracy imposes. Those who have brought political crisis upon us have ignored the popular will." Ortiz, who was a devout Roman Catholic, insisted in the necessity of tolerance and was a champion of freedom of worship, the right of every man to "walk humbly with his God." Ortiz, too, saw clearly the two important currents which have formed the Argentine mentality and which are so confusing to foreigners who have the wit only to judge others by themselves. The first and the oldest current is that which swept down from Peru and the altiplano. It brought the religion of the Cross and empire by the sword. From these two influences developed religious sentiment, the worship of courage, a cavalier attitude after the manner of the Spanish and an overflowing romanticism. The second current followed the trade routes of the Atlantic and entered through the port of Buenos Aires. Trade and contact with the world brought the liberal ideas of the Democratic revolution, cosmopolitan characteristics and a desire to obtain economic prosperity equal to that of the rich nations. Everywhere in the Argentine, to varying extent, these two ways of life have collided and are colliding.

The war has caught up with the Argentine. One problem after another is arising. About two weeks ago Buenos Aires, Rosario and other cities of the litoral began to run out of fire wood. The winter has been unusually severe and consumption was high. Before the war Argentina imported coal and fuel oil from abroad. Precious little arrives these days. When I traveled through the north fire wood was piled at every railroad station. However, the facilities of the state railroad seem to be inadequate to bring supplies enough to the cities as a substitute for coal. Newspapers are continually worried about the small stocks of news print. The gasoline shortage has stranded traveling men, or limited their journeys to railroad lines. Many service stations are without gasoline. Although the Argentine has rich oil fields, they have not been exploited to the extent that the country can supply all its combustion needs. Many people seem to think that the gasoline problem, and the many other shortage problems which are arising, can be solved easily. In a discussion on the gasoline problem with several traveling men, all of them took the optimistic view. I suggested that they might be right about the gasoline and then asked them what they proposed to do when their tires wear out. "Oh," one of them commented in an assured manner, "we shall buy Brazilian rubber."

During the past two weeks I traveled in five provinces (Córdoba excluded) and one Territory. They were: Santiago del Estero, Tucumán, Santa Fe, Salta, Buenos Aires and the Territory of the Chaco. My itinerary was as follows: Córdoba to Tucumán; Tucumán to Metán; Metán to Sáenz Peña; Sáenz Peña to Resistencia; Resistencia to Santa Fe; Santa Fe to Córdoba; Córdoba to Buenos Aires and back. I traveled more than 4,000 kilometers. On the long trips I rode on three separate railroads, The Central Argentine, British-owned; the State Railroad and the Santa Fe Railroad, a French enterprise. I also traveled on an omnibus line. In addition to the longer trips, I took several side trips by train and automobile. In the old days, before the coming of the fence, cattle used to roam the limitless pampa. Almost always there was one place to which they formed a kind of attachment and to which, no matter how far away they wandered, they returned. That place was called La Querencia. The expression has attained a broad meaning; in my case it is where I hang my hat. And so after much comings and goings I am back again, at least for a time, to my Querencia.

Sincerely yours,

*Francis Herron*