

August 21, 1942  
 The Chile Hotel  
 Buenos Aires

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Everything is decided and set. Tomorrow a two-motored plane of Panagra will wing me toward Mendoza, later over the Cordillera to Santiago and finally north by way of Lima, Balboa and Miami. I shall be two or three weeks in the coming, because the bottleneck existing at the Canal Zone strands civilian passengers for indefinite periods. However, I think the bottleneck will delay me but little. Knowing that if I went directly to the Canal Zone that I would have to wait some time, I have booked stop-overs of several days at Mendoza, Santiago and Lima. Hence I shall spend the "waiting period" in Mendoza, Chile and Peru. In any event it is farewell to this rich, immense country--Adiós to Argentina. During my more than eight months here the people, in all the places where I have lived, have treated me kindly. It is a high compliment to the hospitality of Argentina and the Argentine people that one does not feel a stranger here. I know after I have gone that I shall have a longing to return again some day. Though I have seen much and have had the opportunity to study many things about the Argentine, I do not feel that I have "covered" the country. I have not yet seen that considerable part of Argentina lying on the eastern side of the River Paraná and which comprises the provinces of Entre Ríos, Corrientes and the Territory of Misiones. There is the rich valley of the Río Negro, the vast spaces of Patagonia and the Territory of the Pampa. Then, too, I suspect that one does not really know Argentina until he has seen rich, agricultural Buenos Aires and Santa Fe provinces in the spring season. And, lastly, there is huge, conglomerate Buenos Aires which many people, both here and abroad, seem to believe is the one important part of the Argentine. There is much to be studied in Buenos Aires: The great newspapers, the foreign colonies, the estanciero class which makes up the aristocratic set of Buenos Aires and which lives off the income of feudal estates, the growing middle class, the poor working people who live grouped together in one- or two-roomed apartments called conventillos, the institutions of the country which are in the federal capital, the political stratifications which are at least ten years ahead of the rest of the country, labor unions which are beginning to shape their organizations, specific foreign influences, that Buenos Aires which is the capital of the littoral but which is not quite the "spiritual" capital of all the Argentine, that curious mentality which is the Porteño mind, and so on. I am not going to make observations on all these topics, for I feel that I am not well enough acquainted with Buenos Aires to speak with much authority. However, I shall make some casual observations about the first two topics.

In these days and in spite of the state of siege the great clash between the ideologies is apparent in the metropolitan newspapers. Critica is the most outstanding pro-ally newspaper and, in my judgment, is the most North American in technique and has the most "punch" and reader interest of any Buenos Aires newspaper. It would not surprise me if Critica would some day lead all other Argentine newspapers in circulation. Critica is leftist, nationally and internationally. Critica's editors have the knack of taking press association news, dressing it up and supplementing it with special articles which have an authentic sound to them. It is the only large newspaper in the city which is continually insisting on social reforms and which presents human interest material to fortify its editorial campaigns. In fact it seems to be the only large Argentine newspaper which appreciates the importance of human interest themes. The conservative class and the traditionally-minded people look upon Critica as a fomentor of social discontent. Freedom of press is not regarded as highly here as in the United States and many express the view that this or that newspaper should be censored into inexistence because it causes "social unrest." Another newspaper which in these days is interesting is El Pampero, the axis newspaper,

whose sensational reports are so preposterous as to be incredible. There are some who laugh at El Pampero. But there is method in the mad manner in which El Pampero is edited. It does have some effect on Argentine opinion. Whereas the overwhelming majority of newspapers serviced by the North American press associations merely display pro-ally news prominently and limit their editorial comments to occasional compliments of the United Nations, El Pampero appeals to the pride of the Argentines. Although patently a German organ and believed to be subsidized by the German Embassy, El Pampero speaks out as if it were true-blue Argentine and concerned only with preserving "Argentinidad." This persistent theme often is buried under a fantastic war-success story. It is a cleverer approach than many allied supporters are prone to believe. El Pampero is forever striking hard blows at foreign capital. Never does an issue of El Pampero come out that Argentines are not reminded either that the British took the Malvinas islands from Argentina, or that they tried to capture Buenos Aires at the turn of the Nineteenth Century, or that the Yankees are waiting for the opportunity to dominate all three of the three Americas. There are Argentines who find an appeal in this kind of demagogy. Most other newspapers follow a middle-of-the-road policy, including the world-famous La Prensa and La Nación. However, the way that news is displayed suggests the pro-ally sentiments of most of the leading newspapers. The state of siege prohibits direct comment on the war.

It would be interesting to study the English, North American and German "colonies" in Buenos Aires. The English colony is by far the largest and the oldest. It is remarkable how the English, generation after generation, retain their national identity and how relatively few of them really fit completely into Argentine society. There are a number of reasons. English who can afford to do so send their children back to England for schooling. Their investments are of such a type that they need a large administrative group. The British in Buenos Aires speak of the British community where they associate and keep their culture intact. There are many Argentines, second and third generation, who are both English and Argentine. They are English by reason of tradition and education and Argentine by reason of birth. One hears English spoken on the streets of Buenos Aires. For business reasons many Porteños study and learn at least an assortment of English expressions. The aristocratic Porteño society has adopted the five o'clock tea custom. English Saturday is accepted universally by Argentines who are always happy to close their stores come a holiday or any fairly legitimate reason. The insignia of the Order of the Bellows is worn by many people. Like most foreign colonies in the Argentine, a great percentage of the English are concentrated in Buenos Aires. The English do not seem to be nearly so excited as to the role Argentina is playing, or is going to play, in the world crisis as the North Americans. "You know old boy," I have been told by English acquaintances, "Argentines don't like you Yankees. Or have you found it out?" I have asked English, by way of reply, if the Argentines were fond of them. "Yes," they have answered me, "Argentines like us because they think we are crazy."

The North American colony is relatively small, but it seems to be quite cohesive, some 2,000 members belonging to the River Plate Society. This week for the first time I met a fair number from the North American colony and I discovered, a bit to my surprise, that we did not agree about many things in the Argentine. The reason, I think, is that I am a provincial, having spent most of the eight months that I have been here hundreds of kilometers from Buenos Aires. Quite a number of North Americans were "experts" on Argentine politics and could tell just what was going on behind the scenes in this country. Some of them subscribe to interesting theories; whereas those which I have some faith in are too commonplace to be of much merit. I am certain they did not appreciate my point of view when I suggested that the best way to understand President Castillo's traditional ideas was for them to go out to Catamarca, Castillo's province, and live for a month with the Catamarqueños and the goats. Another opinion to which many subscribed and which seemed a bit amusing to me was that the English were not popular with the Argentine people. Not knowing German I did not get to visit the German colony here--which, as you know, would have been quite a feasible thing to do, this being a neutral country. I am quite certain that Argentines like many things

about us and about the English. Other things they do not like. For one thing, Argentines do not like to see people come into their country and live apart--be they English, North Americans, Germans or Africans. The fact that "colonies" exist at all and tend to perpetuate themselves make Argentines feel that foreigners are here for but one reason--to feather their own nest.

Now let me close the chapter on Córdoba. The last day and half of my stay there was by way of being hectic. I was the recipient of that farewell type of hospitality for which Argentines are so famous. I doubt if it is matched anywhere in the world. There were no less than three homenajes, plus a farewell demonstration at the railroad station. The night of August 12 the students of the Fifth Year of the School of Economic Sciences held a dinner in my honor. Speeches followed, flash photos were snapped and the evening ended with a visit to the Number 1 confiteria of the city. Speeches at a homenaje are most trying, for the speakers use every spiritual word in the language and bestow compliments which are beyond reason. The difficult moment arrives when the honored guest has to arise and to say something in keeping with the occasion. The second homenaje was given the noon of the following day by some of my closest friends. The dinner was interrupted by a phone call to one of the young ladies who attended. It was her mother who had become apprised of the fact that there was no chaperone present. At mid-day, in broad daylight, in Córdoba a chaperone is necessary to protect the sacred honor of one and all. One of the Argentines--a very promising young fellow who is engaged to be married to the young lady--spoke to the mother and obtained permission for the daughter to remain until dinner's end. Never again, it was made plain, was such a liberty to be taken. The third homenaje was given by the Circle of the Press in their clubrooms just before train time. There was a round of cocktails. Be it said to the credit of the "boys of the press" that they were not given to speech making. Horacio Rodríguez made a five minute talk. I added a gem or two by way of response and everyone had another Vermouth. One of the reporters proposed a toast to the Democracies. Everyone didn't drink the toast. It was later explained to me that Argentina, after all, was neutral in "thought, deed and action." I know that attitude very well by now--at least as it exists in the provinces--though it is surprising how many foreigners argue that it does not exist at all. The Argentine position, at least in Córdoba, is passive with regard to the war. There are a lot of protestations made about Democracy, but many an Argentine explains in the next breath that there is no purpose to be served in getting mixed up in this war for the "commercial domination and political hegemony of the world." The demonstration at the train was the most spontaneous and the one which I appreciated more than all. Approximately thirty-five students and other friends were on hand to bid me farewell. As I knew it would occur, the train pulled out of the station with the students shouting a chorus of "chaus." Macario and Patriarca swung onto the platform of the coach and rode for a block so that they might be the last to say goodbye. Then they jumped to the ground and were lost from sight. And I wondered when, if ever, I would see them all again.

Sincerely,

*Francis Hermon*