

## NOT FOR PUBLICATION

FH: WSR-3

The Turismo Hotel  
Mendoza, Argentina  
December 24, 1941

Dear Mr. Rogers:

There is the roughest kind of motor road leading out of Mendoza into the valley of the Rio Mendoza to Las Cuevas and the Chilean border 212 kilometers to the west. At 4:30 o'clock the morning of December 19 I set out with Mr. J. E. Johns, for 17 years representative of the All America Cables in the Argentine and the only other United States citizen in Mendoza, to traverse this highway and to inspect the several stations of the cable company along the route. It is a trip for which there are now no excursions and one so rough that the springs and supports of Johns' car were broken by trip's end with hard iron pounding against hard iron. It was an hour before dawn when we left the oasis which is Mendoza and began the climb of the primer plano of the Andes. We scaled the foothills, passed the springs and spa at Villavicencio before dawn. The road up the primer plano is tortuous and dangerous. There are vast, dark spaces below. The top of the primer plano is 10,000 feet.

We were on the rolling table land of the primer plano when the dawn broke. In the distance, many kilometers away, were the highest mountains of the Americas, with Aconcagua's jagged, distinctive peak the highest of all. Even from the distance we could see the blizzard which the winds perpetually blow upon the summit of the highest mountain of the cordillera. Aconcagua reaches 23,080 feet into God's Welkin. Below us was the valley of Uspallata, a desert except for a carpet of green in the full middle. We made our way to it 4,000 feet below. The green became fields of barley, pasture for ganado, grazing land for the fine horses of the valley and alamos which are the sign of life in the Argentine. From Uspallata the road follows the winding cañon of the Rio Mendoza into the Andes proper. There are no other mountains like these, I suppose, save in the Himalayas of India or in other far reaches of the world. The stratified, metamorphic and igneous rocks are tilted and twisted together in curious designs and colors. God really must have given the earth a mighty shake when He made these mountains! It is summer in Mendoza and the desert is as hot as sin. We had left that below and slowly the snow was coming to meet us. The road had only been open a few days and is yet closed at the border. We soon were passing through snow cuts higher than the car. In the morning small streams poured over the road bed. In the afternoon they became young rivers.

During the winter months only a few hardy people live in the mountain pass which is the Camino de Gloria that San Martin made famous. Those who stay there find their lives periled by the unpredictable avalanches. It is not uncommon for avalanches to come from both sides of the mountains and to meet head-on--a thousand thousand tons of snow, ice and rock. Such happened last winter in the cañon, causing an artificial lake to form which later broke and destroyed kilometer after kilometer of the Trans-Andine railroad. Our progress was slow, but we reached in succession La Puente del Inca, Las Leñas where there is an All America station and Las Cuevas which is the end of the line. At Las Cuevas the ridge which marks the boundary of the Argentine and Chile is a few kilometers away. "Where," I asked, "is the Christo de Los Andes, the statue of peace which is pictured in every geography book?" Johns pointed to the mountain snows. "It is there," he said. "The summer suns will make it appear some time in January or, if not then, February."

This cañon and mountain pass is important. For the communications between two sister American republics depend upon it to a great extent. At the moment there are only two types of communication operating--the Trans-Andine railroad with improvised,

temporary track which tunnels under the last barrier and the an-American airline which is routed through the valley of the Río Mendoza. The automobile road is still closed. Then, of course, there are the telegraph and buried cable lines. Keeping them open is a perpetual task. Avalanches sweep aside ten to thirty telegraph poles at a time. As a result companies have buried cable lines. They try to keep two lines open as a kind of insurance against the impairment of the other. There are three operating companies which have lines in this valley: The Western which is a British company that also services the United States' Western Union; the National which is the Argentine-Chilean government company; the All America Cables Company which is the line of the International Telephone & Telegraph Company. At the present all the companies are doing a tremendous business because of the war. Government and newspaper cables have doubled and tripled. Businesses in a flux of uncertainty are cabling for assurances and reassurances. Private cables have also increased.

Of the several Criolla moving pictures I have seen, the one I liked the best was "José, Mi Hermano." Like most Argentine pictures I have seen, the theme was a sad one. I liked the way the protagonist said "No." He said it often, softly and with a finality. I liked the way the heroine, who committed suicide, said "¿Comprende?" She said it like she did not believe the hero really did understand. She had a wistful way about her. I felt sorry for her. It was really a simple plot. There was a Cinderella girl and a handsome opera singer. The opera singer sang at the Opera de Colón. I recognized the place. The Cinderella girl fell in love with the opera singer. He made her his leading lady out of sympathy for her. He ended up by falling in love with her. The Cinderella girl did not believe that such a wonderful thing could happen to her; so she jumped into a lagoon. This contra-tiempo made the opera singer very sad indeed. From that time on he did his singing at the opera without a prima donna.

I am indebted to Dr. Alfredo Metraux for many things. He has assisted me in getting settled here. He has offered me the hospitality of his home. He has introduced me to many people. Through him I have made contacts with instructors and professors at the University of Mendoza, men in the wine and canning industries and he is to introduce me to still more people. The hospitality of all these people knows no bounds.

One day I inspected the Bodega Trapiche, the second largest in Cuyo. Raul Venegas, the proprietor, sent his private car for me and personally showed me every phase of the industry-art. The Bodega was founded in 1883; it produces more than 800,000 bottles of wine each year, some of which is exported to the United States. We drove through the vineyards, inspected grape plants which are from 30 to 60 years old. It takes six years to make champagne. To make some of the valuable vino tinto requires more than 10 years. Consequently the proprietor of a Bodega cannot quickly adjust his production to the needs of his market in the case a war or a cataclysm. After the grape is brought to the Bodega, the juice is pressed and separated on a quality basis. Then it is ready to be fermented. During the entire period of fermentation and aging the juice and wine touches nothing but wood. In the case of the Bodega Trapiche the wood is oak. The artistic aspect of the grape industry comes into play when the wines are tasted and blended. They are blended for color, acid content, for reasons of taste, etc. This art has a special name: Crianza. The art of wine tasting is inculcated into an individual over a long period of years. That is the significance of the word "crianza." Although the grape plant is subject to plant diseases, the real bane of the grape is the frosts which come in September and October. Although the frost does not kill the grape plant it makes it unproductive for the season. Argentine people are as proud of their wines as they are of their Beef. In this country drinking is an art. Sunday afternoon Dr. Metraux gave me an instruction in the art of wine drinking. He called for Cognac, a wine which in these lays is worth its weight in gold. Cognac should be served only in Copas Napoleon,

according to Dr. Metraux. These Copas are curious, globular affairs. He showed me how the glass should be held, how the heat from the hands warms the wine and causes the perfume of the wine to rise from it. Enjoying the perfume is a great part of the art of wine drinking. He told me that vino tinto should always be served warm because the perfume was best when so served and that vino blanco should be served cold for the same reason.

This week I "started" to college again. Examinations are now being held at the University of Mendoza and will continue until the last of the month when the college will close down and the instructors will leave for the playas or on vacations. There is no summer session here. Carlos Lazzeti, a young professor of social sciences, has been most kind to me. He introduced me to members of the Facultad de Agronomía. I have been assisting at the examination sessions. It is really a good exercise in the language for me. In each course some twenty questions are listed, all of which the students should be able to answer. Each student is given these questions long before the examination. Anyone who can answer all the questions well has a comprehensive knowledge of the course. On examination day the students report at the classroom. They draw numbers from a lottery contraption called a Bolilla. They then lecture on the question or problem which is theirs by reason of the lottery. Three instructors or professors are present as judges. They interrupt the student at will to make inquiries or to correct mistakes. When the students have all completed their lectures, the judges closet themselves and immediately decide on the grades the students are to get. The best grade is Sobresaliente, then Distinguido, Muy Bueno, Bueno and so on. The professors of Agronomía allowed me to sit in with them yesterday when they made their decisions. They have given me no rest with their questions about United States agriculture. Although it is still in the talking stage, they have invited me to take a field trip or two which they may make during the vacation period to the south of Cuyo. The professors at this young University are themselves young and eager-minded people. The students whom I have watched under the test of examinations appear to have applied themselves to their subjects. The universities and secondary schools of the Argentine do not have extra-curricular activities. Education is in the reach of a very few and for that reason it is a serious concern.

The university group is quite frank. Why are books and articles written on the Argentine by Englishmen and North Americans so riddled with misconceptions and errors, they ask. We realize, they assert, that we are Argentines and that we can not properly judge ourselves. But we do not believe that writers really see us and our country as we are. There is one point which all of them make: The people of the Argentine seem to be viewed as people who are Spanish and Italian and European in origin and who for that reason cling to peculiarities and customs of the countries of their origin. As Lazzeti said: "That is precisely what the people of Spain and Italy and the other countries of the old world think of us. If there is one country in the world which should be able to understand what it means to us to be Argentines, then that country is the United States of America which has a similar origin."

It is the day before Christmas. The provincial government has placed in public places signs which read as follows: "Dance, drink, laugh and sing when you celebrate Christmas and the New Year. That is the proper way to celebrate. Do not be so ill-mannered as to shoot fire arms or disturb the public sense by exploding fireworks." I hope it will be a safe and sane Merry Christmas.

Sincerely,

*Francis Heron*