

The Turismo Hotel
Mendoza, Argentina
January 26, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Twice in the history of the four-centuries-old city of Mendoza two terrible earthquakes have reduced the city to nothing. There have been others of destructive intensity. The most devastating of all was in 1863, and the ruins of the old city can still be seen on the outskirts of the new. Mendocinos who lived here in 1928 have not forgotten the severe jolts of that year. For this reason there are few buildings more than a story high, for the fear is great that an earthquake may any moment shake the buildings into debris and tumble that about the ears of the inhabitants. For this reason, too, the great casks of the bodegas are so built that they can move with the trembling of the earth. Yet, for all these precautions, the Mendocino is frightened more by an earthquake than any act of God. Friday afternoon at 4 o'clock, almost on the hour, the earth began to roll. For a moment I thought I must be back on the S. S. Argentina. The sensation was not unpleasant. It did not occur to me to flee to the street and wait there until the Andes, the source of the trouble, had got over their restless spell. In good time the earth trembling was done. Many Mendocinos, mostly those with long memories, left their houses and shops for the relative safety of the street. For often, as I have since learned, the first shock is a warning of a terrible catastrophe to follow. As I remember it, there was only a rolling sensation, no sound. During the daytime the noises of a city hush the sound. But at night the shock is accompanied by a rumbling which emerges from the depths of the earth. Then one is frightened to action.

One reason I have little or no fear of an earthquake is the fact that I have seen Mendoza from the top of one of its few two-storied buildings. Besides, I have noted some of the construction methods, both in the city and in the campo. In the city there are many buildings of brick and cement construction, some of them being reinforced with steel. It is surprising, however, the great number of buildings which are constructed along the same simple lines as those of the campo. The chacra, or farm, house is an elementary affair at best. The floor is of dirt. The sidewalls are hardened mud, or adobe brick. The roof consists of nothing more than a few supports, caña, a thickness of newspapers, topped with an adobe mixture. If it is a superior kind of dwelling, a mixture of animal grease and salt coat the adobe roof so that the water will slide off easily, causing a minimum of "soil erosion." Another feature of the adobe house--one which an experience will not permit me to forget--is that it is a favorite habitation for wasps. In Mendoza the view is deceiving. Buildings and houses appear to be more solid and made of more heavy materials than they really are. This fact I learned with one look at the rooftops. There are a surprising number of adobe roofs in the very heart of the city. There is a great lack of plan and order to the dwellings because of the Moorish architecture which obtains. Because of this kind of architecture there are odd-sized yards, and in the odd-sized yards there are all manners of domestic creatures. As to the earthquake, an adobe roof coming down on one's head--although it might be an inconvenient circumstance--it need not be fatal.

Meantime, I have continued to learn more of the grape industry. Richard F. Cooper, chief of the agronomy department of the Pacific Railroad, was up from Buenos Aires this week making a special investigation of the filoxera danger and estimating the probable yield. With him and Christiansen and other interested agronomists we visited vineyards, questioned laboratory technicians and discussed scientific research methods being employed in Mendoza. The filoxera problem received much atten-

tion. There is one essential and singular difference between the filoxera of Mendoza and that of California. In California the filoxera has wings and can fly a modest distance. If the winged form exists in Mendoza, it exists as an exception not as a rule. When the wingless filoxera is moved to the laboratory and placed under different conditions, it has a tendency to grow wings. One Mendoza agronomist, believing that the winged form did exist, erected a grasshopper barrier in a filoxera-infested area and covered the barrier with tar. He then inspected the barrier for winged forms, but found none. Thinking that the filoxera might be a stratospheric insect, he placed a canvass top over the barrier and placed tar along the supports of the roof. He found the winged form. It is pointed out that the desert sun beating down upon the tent could easily change climatic conditions within the tent and so "evolutionize" the filoxera. Every bit of practical evidence rules against the winged form being in Mendoza in numbers. The filoxera follows the irrigation system, going only in the direction which the water flows. It takes about four years for the filoxera, after its presence is first noted, to completely cover an area. I have met a great number of agronomists in Mendoza, a number of them from other provinces. All of them know Paul Nyhus, the United States agricultural attache. They assert that Nyhus knows more Argentines and more parts of the Argentine than any other North American. He knows every Provincia and Gobernación in the country. Apparently Nyhus follows the technique of seeing every agricultural authority periodically and double-checks their judgments and assertions with them in the campo.

More and more I realize that any appreciation of the Argentine--its history, literature, spoken language, customs and philosophy--must have as an important basis a knowledge of the gaucho, even though the gaucho, in the strict sense of the word, is said not to exist any more. One might know every word in the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy and be lost in the spoken language here. Each criollo word has a lesson of the Argentine in it. And, by way of conflict, many of these words are not accepted by the well-educated Argentine or the "hombre culto." I have scouted the bookstores for an Argentine dictionary. There is none. So I have done the next best thing. I have bought six of the best gaucho novels I could find and am proceeding to learn criollo words by the context. When I have finished reading them, I propose to read six more. Many of these words are sprinkled in ordinary conversation. Many of them are provincialisms. I now appreciate this aspect of the language which Gordon Reid pointed out to me before I left the states. Really the best way to appreciate the gaucho and some aspects of the spoken language is to go to the campo. I think one would learn a lot of gaucho expressions, and many other things, sitting in a boliche, listening.

I have seen two military posts in the Argentine, both times accompanying Argentine citizens. I shan't, because these are troublous times, cite any specific facts nor even name the posts. In each case the military officials knew there was a north American in the group and gave us the run of the places. The first of the two was an air base, situated on the desert land. There were fighter and fighter-bomber planes of both Argentine and North American make. The Argentine planes are of North American design and are manufactured in Córdoba. The other place was a mountain post situated in a strategic pass. Troops based there are ski experts. At these posts, and elsewhere, one is conscious of the Argentine national spirit. Symbolic of it are the blue and white flag of the nation and the pictures and statues of San Martín, of whom Argentines are so justly proud.

The Argentine citizens whom I have met are much aware of the world crisis and realize that the results of it will affect him greatly. There appear to be conflicts of opinion here as great as those in the states before the war. The past week or two the conference at Rio de Janeiro has been a subject of common discussion. Though

it is too early to detail them, 'I now have some idea of the currents of opinion, the groups of people to which these opinions can be ascribed and some notion of the significance of them. Above all, if any observation can be made, the thing which must not be forgotten is the pride which the Argentine citizen has for the Argentine. Without this in mind, it is impossible to discover the real public opinion of the Argentine. Without this in mind, all calculations are likely to be in error.

Because I think it will serve my purpose to better advantage, I shall proceed to the plains within a few days. A friend here will forward my mail until I can arrange new headquarters. I have made some inquiries about educational institutions in the country. There are only six universities in the Republic--those at Buenos Aires, La Plata, Santa Fé, Córdoba, Mendoza and Tucumán. The first two are practically in Buenos Aires. Santa Fé is the only one, excepting the first two, which is close to the cereal, ganado and Iowa-like part of the Argentine. In any event the universities will not open for two more months and this appears to be a logical time to see the plains area. According to Argentines, the Gobernación de La Pampa is the most gaucho-like part of the country. I may take a look at that part of the country before I settle down on the Pampa Húmeda. Before leaving Mendoza there are a number of things I wish to do. I want to make some more contacts at Los Andes, the local newspaper, and gather up some of my Mendoza impressions. The friends I have in Mendoza are many and it is with regret that I leave them so soon. However, it is satisfaction to know that one can return some day and be no stranger.

Sincerely,

Francis Herron