

Hotel 9 de Julio  
Junín, Argentina  
February 6, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The first newspaper of Mendoza, Los Andes, has its editorial offices in what, a few short years ago, was the house of a rich criollo family. Time and fortune have changed circumstances. The writers and ad men of Los Andes can, if inspiration comes hard, take a few steps from their offices and look out into the garden which, in this country, is not out of place beside the office building of the fast-and-furious profession of the Fourth Estate. It is apparent that there is no killing pace on a provincial city newspaper in the Argentine. One edition a day is enough, and if something happens betimes it will keep until tomorrow provided the story has the proper dramatic qualities. Curiously enough, the two great newspapers of the country follow much the same kind of routine as Los Andes. La Prensa and La Nación are both break-of-dawn newspapers. They come out in the morning and that is the last you hear of them until the next day. They are unlike the morning and evening newspapers of the United States which seem to have an edition everytime there is a flurry of war bulletins, until one is not sure whether they ought, in the interests of accuracy, to be typified by any part of the day.

Telegraph communications to Mendoza are not as dependable as they might be. Perhaps that is due to the magnetic quality of the Andes which can mix up the Morse code and other kinds of electric impulses as much as sunspots sometimes do. Hence Los Andes cannot use a teletype machine. The United Press Associations sends the news by telephone. Having arrived at Mendoza the sound impulses are recorded on discs and ultimately put on paper through a dictaphone method. This provincial newspaper obtains a good string of news, foreign and domestic, through this method, up to 20 galleys being set daily. Los Andes is owned by the Calle family. The newspaper is Pro-Democratic, but in these days when the State of Siege prevents out-and-out, straight-from-the-shoulder comment, Los Andes resorts to various expedients to keep its views before the public. Following a custom which seems to be typically Argentine and which, incidentally, may indicate the youth of this country, Los Andes prints nothing but foreign news on the front page. Being Pro-Democratic it places the most important and best seeming allied news on the front page. Sometimes, as Fabian Calle points out, this is very difficult to do when the fortunes of war have not marched well. A clever way of keeping the Democratic point of view before the people is the printing of North American editorial features, such as the articles of Walter Lippmann and George Fielding Elliot and reprints from blunt Time Magazine. It is apparent that the State of Siege has prevented a lot of thunder in the editorials of the Argentine press. Editorial writers pen discreet observations, with the element of politics neatly in the background. There are one or two exceptions to this general statement which I shall indicate later. I inspected the "back shop" of Los Andes. Anyone who has ever set a stick of type by hand does that. There is not much to report except that Los Andes has the latest German rotary press (purchased and set up since war's beginning), Canadian newsprint to go with it, a dozen of Mergenthaler's linotypes and an engraving department which does a good job on ad work but which makes news cuts with too coarse a screen.

Some day when I go back to Mendoza I am going to call on Jacinto B. de la Vargas. It is best perhaps that I give him a fictitious name. De la Vargas will be a lawyer then. He doesn't want to be a lawyer. He wants to be a newspaper man. Strange this, for he is a newspaper man now. De la Vargas says he is going to get out of the news-

paper game as quickly as he can because it is a starvation business. He now does a leisurely trick for Los Andes (from 19 to 23 o'clock), writing articles on agricultural and economic topics of Mendoza. The wage scale for this kind of writer is from 160 to 350 pesos a month. De la Vargas says that this is the average salary for the ordinary newswriter in the Argentine. The result is that good newspaper men try to hold down two jobs, a regular reporting job and one as an editorial writer. With two jobs and two salaries they can make their way. I asked De la Vargas where newspapers derive their revenues. In the case of good newspapers, the revenue comes from advertisers. In the case of chica newspapers--and that includes the chica newspapers of the large cities--well. Well, De la Vargas told me things about these newspapers with words, and more important things with his eyes and the shrug of his shoulders.

In the Republic of Argentina there are 310 daily newspapers. Of them 60 are in the city of Buenos Aires. As I have indicated, the most famous and the best are La Prensa and La Nación. Between them there is no serious competition for the morning field. But in the afternoon and evenings there are a host of papers, most of them using North American technique. Some of them are tabloids. All have scare headlines. The personalities behind these newspapers, some of which are money makers, are as storied and as individual as Pulitzer and Bonfils. There is the material for a dozen books about these "Lords of The Press" if those who know their histories would only write them. About one man in particular there are many dramatic stories, possibly because he is only recently dead. As an example, there was a famous, well-advertised match company which stated for years that it had 40 matches in its small packs. This editor bought a great many cartons, had every box opened and the matches in each counted. There were not 40 matches in any of the boxes. He called this fact to the attention of the manufacturer who paid him well for this interesting discovery. The most famous axis newspaper in Argentina is El Pampero. The State of Siege has cramped its style. Not having the news services and features to choose from which other newspapers have, El Pampero has been accustomed to make observations and conclusions on topics of moment, thereby filling its columns. El Pampero has been warned by the government that it will have to get out of the custom of making observations and conclusions on certain topics of moment or it will not have the privilege of publishing. One of the evening newspapers which is on the allied side, almost evangelically so, the other day printed a map of the three Americas with all the countries which had broken relations with the axis in black and those which had not in white. There were but two countries in white, Chile and Argentina. Under the map, which was displayed on the front page, was the legend: America Is One.

The Readers' Digest, the Spanish edition, is doing effective work. In the past few weeks the sales of this magazine must have increased enormously. The Digest can be bought at almost any news stand in the country. The thing which has really made the Digest popular is the fact that it is being sold for 40 cents Argentine money. This is equivalent to 10 cents North American money. I have no idea who is paying the "subsidy" for this magazine, but it is money well spent. Time Magazine also is easily found. Time is typically North American in its approach to news subjects. Blunt, and always ready to make a good guess if the facts cannot be gotten, Time now and then falls into error. There are many educated Argentines who read English and who like to read Time. Time's positive statements on Argentine politics is not appreciated by them. We who are North Americans and who take the blunt manner for granted and who like to have "punch" when our news is dished out even if the "punch" is only a good guess forgive a mistake. Time would help its own cause and that of the United States if it edited its Latin American news for its Latin American edition with a bit more care. See Time's report of the Conference at Rio for an ill-advised simile: "As cool as a glass of mate." Mate is served steaming hot, never in a glass, always in a small, oval-like thing called a mate. It is sucked through a metal reed affair called a bombilla.

7-2/6/42

I came down to Buenos Aires the latter part of last week with some letters of introduction. There is one lead in particular which intrigues me, though I have no assurance that it will amount to anything. One of the letters was addressed to Luis Nelson who is the owner of three estancias, each in a different part of the plains area. One of the estancias is in Buenos Aires province, another is in Santa Fé and the other is in the province of San Luis. If one could visit each of these estancias he would get a good cross section of the different kinds of estancia life. The best blooded stock is found in Buenos Aires province; in Santa Fé there is a mixture of cattle raising and cereal farming; in San Luis the Pampa is dry and there is but little grass and a scrub growth. A few hundred miles makes a tremendous difference in the various parts of the Pampa because the average rainfall varies from 10 to 40 inches annually in the different areas. As luck would have it, Luis Nelson was not in Buenos Aires and is not due back for a week. The office manager suggested that I send him a letter and await a reply. I have done so. Rather than remain in Buenos Aires where the weather is hot and the air is humid to the saturation point, I came down to the provincial city of Junín for a few days.

The Pampa is a sight at this time of year. There are some people, however, who are not impressed by it. They believe it to be a tiresome vista since it is flat to the end of every horizon. There are people, it is true, who feel that there is no real outdoors which is not blessed with hills and wooded slopes. The Pampa has no hills. Its trees are not old and large. But with all its differences, there is probably no place more like the prairieland of the middle west. Only those who live for a time in a prairie country learn to appreciate it. In the Pampa there is more pastureland. Sometimes a single pasture goes beyond the vision of the eye. The corn has now tasseled and the silk is darkening. Growing in a thick and beautiful confusion, one wonders how the corn harvesters will be able with much method to pick the crop. One wonders whether the owners of estancias, their tenants and the farmers of the chacras will go through the formality of picking the corn since there is no market for it. They no doubt will. Somehow the government will find the funds to underwrite the purchase of the crop for which the world--now in the chaos of war--has much need but cannot secure.

Sunday afternoon in Buenos Aires I saw two newsreels of the UFA, the German release, and a Japanese short entitled "The Powerful Japanese Fleet." The German reels were quite ordinary, showing a few staged scenes of the Siege of Odessa and the Fuhrer shaking hands with Count Ciano. The Japanese propaganda film on the fleet was something to see. The destroyers and cruisers appeared to be built atwater level. The battleships looked like floating pagodas. Monday I called on Gordon Reid's friend, Dr. Enrique Gil. Dr. Gil is practically a Missourian. He has visited the University of Missouri on several occasions. He has two pictures of Dr. Walter Williams hanging in his office, also group pictures in which Dr. Middlebush and Dr. Warsaw, head of the Spanish department, appear. Ah, yes, that reminds me. Won't someone please tell me whether we beat Fordham in the bowl game New Year's day!

Sincerely,

*Francis Herron*