

Grand Hotel Italia
Rosario, Santa Fe
February 16, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Traveling across the pampa by railroad one passes many stations. Going to and from Mendoza my curiosity was aroused because there was very little one saw beyond the railroad station. The Argentine town and city in the pampa region is not visible. There is a railroad station. There are alamos, eucalyptus, sauces llorones and ombú trees. The buildings of the towns and cities are a story or two high, and although Argentine trees, with the exception of the alamos, are not as tall as those which grow in most parts of North America, one sees little but the railroad station and the trees. That is why I went to Junín. I wanted to see what was behind a railroad station and among the trees.

Junín is 250 odd kilometers due west of Buenos Aires in a rich part of the pampa. It is in the estancia area. The only industry is agriculture, though it is a more balanced kind than in many parts of the pampa where the estancia system is the basis of society. Beef cattle is the first concern. Corn and cereal farming is secondary; but it is becoming increasingly important. There is some dairying--up to the present an unstable part of agriculture in the Argentine due to poor marketing conditions, a lack of local creameries, bad roads and certain monopolistic practices by the purchasers of dairy products. Because of the war, the dairy industry is expanding. This week an Argentine ship left Buenos Aires with a dairy cargo bound for the United States. Junín is in the area of the pampa where there is a heavy rainfall, probably more than 40 inches. I have never seen more butterflies than there are in the countryside near this city. There are clouds of them. It is a beautiful effect they make. Oddly, there is a new feature to the agriculture of this vicinity. It is the sunflower. The sunflower is being cultivated in the Argentine for the oil that can be extracted, this product being used as a substitute for the olive oil and other cooking oils which before the war came from Spain and Italy. There are acres upon acres of sunflowers, more than there are in the state of Kansas. Junín itself is a lazy-seeming city. The tempo of life is slow and leisurely. The criollo influence is marked. Away from Buenos Aires, that character of Argentine life is immediately apparent and it influences the standard of living to a great degree. Thus it is that in the provinces the people want more leisure, and leisure becomes a part of their standard of living. Here is a simple factor of which I had never thought and which I do not remember ever having read in a book. It does seem that a standard of living has a direct relation to what people want. In Junín the people have leisure. For this they sacrifice good plumbing, or plumbing altogether. For this reason they have only a relatively few blocks of hard-surfaced, rough, brick streets. For this reason they have a municipal park which is a weed patch. For this reason they can only afford shoes which are a kind of sandal or slipper. There are exceptions to this. There are people in Junín who want to have and do have a higher, or different, standard of living. They are merchants, the English who run the railroad and other enterprises, the owners of estancias and property and travelers.

This kind of civilization, with all its contrasts and with all its faults, has its charms. In the leisure of provincial life there is characteristic a hospitality and friendliness that, if not lost, is at least lessened in the great commercial centers. When I left Junín seven new-found friends were on hand to see me off. I called them "Mis Amigos de Junín." They were criollo boys, their ages ranging from 10 to 16 years. What interested me was that they scarcely had the elements of a formal education although Argentine law requires that youths attend the schools of the state for

six years. Some of these youths had quit school. One of the boys did not know what the capital of England was, although he did know that Paris was in France. None had ever been to Buenos Aires. One of them asked if I had come to the Argentine by automobile or by train and was amazed when I told him that the only possible way was to come by airplane or boat. Thoughtful over the vast distance which separates the Argentine and the United States one of the youths asked me if it would take 30 years to walk to the United States. One afternoon five of us went on a hike into the campo. They taught me the names of the native trees and the birds; they swam, caught ranitas and sang provincial songs. Finally we returned to Junin. At the outskirts of the city, Osvaldo, the brightest and second youngest of the group, entered a building at the entrance of which there was an indescribably dirty and tattered curtain. He told me and the others to wait outside. There were several men leaning against the building, wearing the campesino pantalones which are neither bombachas nor pants. Because of the curtain at the entrance and the idle men about, I asked the youths if this were a boliche. They told me it was a panaderia. Presently Osvaldo came out with a package of sweet bread. It must have cost him twenty cents, all the money he had. A typical provincial gesture, playing host. We ate the sweet bread. I told the group it was my turn to be host and that we were going down to the confiteria and have a treat. Ernesto, who is 10 and the "youngest living member of the band," said that he "had shame" to go to the confiteria. It is seldom that criollo youths have the money to patronize a high class confiteria and probably more than once these youths had been warned by the mozos and the proprietor to keep their distance. Then, too, they were dressed very poorly. Don't worry, I told Ernesto, they won't throw us out for we have the plata to pay our way. When we got to the confiteria, Ernesto, proud as a Spaniard, entered first.

From Junin I went back to Buenos Aires where I had two long talks with Mr. Paul Nyhus, the agricultural attache. Mr. Nyhus is going to make a trip around the Argentine corn belt, probably starting Thursday of this week. He has invited me to accompany him. He has written to some Argentine friends and it is possible that he may be able to "place me" for a time with them in the pampa of Buenos Aires province. Because these arrangements take time and also because the holidays of carnaval began Saturday, I took the occasion to make a trip to Santa Fe to inform myself about the Universidad del Litoral and to stop off at the important inland port city of Rosario where I have more friends and acquaintances than in any other part of the republic save Mendoza.

The Argentine "Idea of a University" is radically different from that of the United States, in spite of the fact that the greatest educator this republic ever had, Sarmiento, admired the United States educational system to the extreme. There is not the "flexibility" in the educational system which there is in the United States. The first six years of Argentine education are concerned with the elements--reading, writing and arithmetic--just as in the United States. From that time on education is not compulsory. It branches off into a college system, each branch of which has a definite purpose. All the colleges are preparatory schools. Hence there are colleges which prepare students for law and medicine; colleges which are in effect normal schools; colleges which give the elements of business and trade training. For the most part the colleges are not co-educational. If one is going to become a lawyer or doctor, he must go through the right college or he will not be admitted to the university. This kind of system would be difficult for young North Americans to feature. I have known North American college students who have changed professional courses in the second and third year of university life. In Argentina the youth must know what he wants to become when he enters high school. In Argentina there are six universities; in the United States there are a thousand. The courses in a university are divided into "facultades." One enters a single facultad, subject to the approval of the dean, and takes a prescribed course. There are no electives. One does not range over the broad field of knowledge like in the universities in the United States.

At Santa Fe I talked with José Ernesto Ahrens, the secretario general. He gave me an armload of university literature, including a summary of Sarmiento's views

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on the United States. Although Sarmiento's observations are a hundred years old they are still applicable in many ways. Santa Fe is a city which, in the right season, one would like very much. The day before I reached there the mercury reached 42 centigrade which is 107.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Santa Fe is a provincial capital and is the headquarters of the state railroad which has a network in the northern provinces of the country. Located in a rich part of the pampa, agriculture has evolved in a somewhat different way than it has in the province of Buenos Aires, due no doubt to the fact that the estancia system did not become rooted to the same degree. Farm units, visibly so, are much smaller in Santa Fe province. There are more farm buildings, more fences, more country roads, more windmills and more chickens. And the chickens look healthier, fatter--look more like chickens. Yesterday I ate some Santa Fe province chicken, the best I have eaten since I came to the Argentine. I have remarked in previous letters about the beef of the Argentine being more tender and savory than that of the United States. But the chickens are mostly tough and stringy. Hogs are second and third rate.

To Jorge Helmán, a young Rosarino and a graduate of the Colegio Nacional, I am indebted for showing me many of the interesting features of Rosario. Rosario, 390 kilometers from Buenos Aires and the greatest grain port of the world, does not appear to be poverty stricken by the collapse of the grain trade. There is all the movement here of a prosperous city. Perhaps that is because the frigorífico business is good. The port of Rosario alone indicates the effect of war. There are few ships arriving. They are mostly ships of small tonnage which ply the upper reaches of the River Paraná. In the midst of all this inaction a tremendous grain elevator is nearing completion. Although it is twice as large as the Cargill elevator at Omaha, it will be able to hold only a small percentage of the huge carryover of grain that the Argentine now has and which, with the harvest of the new corn crop, will be much greater.

Helmán introduced me to many of his young friends. He took me to the club of which he is a member. In a larger sense, the Argentine club is the answer to the need for athletics and social activity which the republic felt for many years. It is probably of English origin. There are no athletics in the Argentine schools and until a score of years ago there was little if any organized athletics in the entire country. Then the clubs began to spring up, providing swimming facilities and gymnasiums, sponsoring rugby and rowing teams and providing centers for social gatherings. Argentines say that the effect of the clubs on the training of athletes has been tremendous and that in another generation Argentina will produce athletes which will rate with the best in the world. My own association with Argentine youth gives me a confidence in them, for they have ideas which are surprisingly similar to those of North American youth. I refer to the middle class youth which is given educational and other opportunities. Upon no age group is the impact of North American ideas greater than upon the youth. They are simply eager to know and hear about the United States. If this theme seems to be repeated again and again, it is because it is demonstrated to me again and again. Take the case of Mario, the Minister of Interior's nephew. He, like many others, sings North American fox trots phonetically. He doesn't know what the words mean. He and his companions have an expression which they have just picked out of an American movie. They think it is very clever and they use it often. It is: "This is a free country."

It is carnival, that period before lent when the Latin has a gala time. In the Argentine the Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday are celebrated. The first two days of carnival have been disappointing because the heavens have opened and steady downpours have resulted. Carnival is mostly an outdoor show. The effect of rain is obvious. There are two more days of make-believe; so I may yet see the full show. In Rosario the center for carnival is on the Avenida Oroño where fantastic characters of imagination are in gigantic array. Among them are the North American contributions, Mickey Mouse and Popeye, both popular and simpático personalities. And there is also present a likeness of Patoruzú, that lovable Argentine character about whom I shall write when I know him better.

Sincerely,

Francis Herron