The READER'S DIGEST

MARC A. ROSE · *Senior Editor*

Pleasantville, N.Y.

To the Juan Trippers:

It's infectious. I hadn't intended to write a line, but reading the accounts other travellers (let's not say "fellow travellers") produced, I caught the fever.

Since I wasn't writing for publication there was no need to "tell all," which would have involved duplicating much that others have written. Here, then, are random Argentinian snapshots, just for a very exclusive and distinguished circle of readers.

But if by improbable chance, any of you should want to use all or any part of this informal travelogue, go to it. You're welcome.

It was fun to beat up a typewriter again. Don't get much chance any more. My Boss thinks editors should edit, and not take bread out of the mouths of writers!

Your'n

Marc A. Rose

paintings and even more intelligent in making him the sole arbiter of what is to be purchased. The collection shows a high level of merit and a few canvases -- one of a scene in a tavern with strong light and shadow on the rugged faces of a trio of singing peasants -- are outstanding.

The lower floors are a public school, for children from four or so to twelve or thirteen. Here, too, the artist's influence is apparent. Each classroom displays a large mural by Martín, all scenes of waterfront life. His idea, Martín explained, is to impress upon the children that the work their fathers do has dignity and importance.

Argentine public school children wear uniforms -- white smocks, hardly different for boys than for girls. The effect is surprisingly pleasant; the children look fresh and clean and of course the smock hides all distinctions between the patched and the prosperous.

Kindergarteners were at play in rooms that had but three walls; the fourth side opened on a large patio. They were charming, as little children are anywhere.

Children in more advanced classes sprang as one to their feet when we entered a classroom; faintly embarrassing, somehow.

At least two classes were going through military drill, the commands barked at them with all the harshness of a drill sergeant. They marched with the German goose-step. In another room, children were acting out a play on a stage. The play was about an Argentine hero, a drummer boy, who in some war or other seized the Argentinean flag and waved it defiantly in the face of the enemy. For this he was shot down. One little kid after another mounted the stage seized

the flag and spouted the heroic line, then fell dead as another youngster pulled the trigger of a popgun.

I had seen all this before -- children learning militarism and glorifying war. Mussolini's pathetic little black shirts and Hitler's youth -- who shouted insults at you when they heard you speaking English, as early as 1935 -- came to no good end. One hates to see that the same sad nonsense still goes on.

Stores and shops in Calle Florida are as modern as New York's. In fact there was a window display that outdid in elaborateness anything I ever saw elsewhere. The window was filled by a handsomely arranged display -- mannequins in lingerie, lounging in a tasteful boudoir. Nothing so remarkable about that. But as you watched, the whole set rose out of sight and another complete room rose from below to take its place. And then another. And then a fourth. Then the first again. And so on. Just how the stages got back to the basement from which they kept rising was a fascinating mystery, never cleared up.

Harrod's, the great London store, has also the largest department store in Buenos Aires. I thought its interior bleak and tasteless and the swirling mob was such that I quickly got out. It was the first day of the winter sales, which are a B A institution, it was explained.

In elegant contrast is the Farmacia Franca-Inglesa. Here all is quiet, decorous, dignified, outwardly quaint and old-fashioned.

The appearance is deceptive. This happens to be the largest drug store in the world. It has 500 employees. It sells no cokes, malteds, coffee, hamburgers, waffle irons, postcards, kodak films, cigarettes or candy bars. It merely fills 5,000 prescriptions a day. Of these, 3,200 call only for something out of a bottle -- penicillin, vitamin pills, quinine -- but 1,800 have to be compounded. There is an ingenious system of coupons in varying colors and designs, with code numbers, which not only makes certain the customer gets the right medicine, but also records which clerk received the prescription order, which pharmacist compounded it, and which two pharmacists checked it. Behind the old oaken front counters, everything is ultra-modern. There are four prescription compounding laboratories; one for external remedies -- salves, ointments and so on; one for internal medicines containing no toxic drugs; a third for internal medicines with toxic ingredients and a fourth where morphine and the other habit-forming drugs are dispensed, under the most rigorous system of checks and controls. The young graduate pharmacists start in laboratory No. 1, and in time, and by passing an examination at each step, arrive at the responsibility and increased stipend of No. 4.

Farmacia Franca-Inglesa has an Injection Room, the newest of ideas. Suppose your physician says you are to have a shot of penicillin each day for a week. You file the prescription with the Farmacia, show up daily and a registered nurse administers the injection. It is a busy place. Shots are given only on doctor's prescription of course. "How do the doctors feel about it?" "Delighted to be rid of the nuisance. There are too few doctors in

B A and they are all overworked. And of course it is much more convenient for thousands of patients, who work down town."

Employes in the Farmacia get two and a half hours for lunch. The reason is that there are no decent places in the business area where they can afford to eat; the good restaurants are too expensive for them. So they have to go home and come back. The idea of an employe cafeteria is rather new, but it is catching on. The Farmacia is installing one in the new plant it is building where it will manufacture its own line of cosmetics.

Restaurants seem expensive to the Argentinian, ridiculously cheap to the Yankee. The answer is, of course, that the Argentinian peso has gone to the dogs. The peso used to be 42 cents. The official rate now is 9.2 to the dollar, but nobody pays any attention to that. (Except that the hotels and other obvious spots have to keep an eye peeled for government snoopers.) Penalties for black marketing are severe. Most of the shops will sell you 14 pesos for a dollar.

I invited a young Yankee and his wife to take dinner with me at La Cabaña restaurant. He said they couldn't; their first baby was due any day. And anyway, he was horrified. La Cabaña was outrageously expensive. He would send me to a very nice place where he and his wife often went and got a grand steak dinner for four pesos. Well, that's 28 cents, at 14 to the dollar!

In defiance of his warning, four of us did go to La Cabaña, and an excellent place it is -- a bit on the order of Lüchows in

New York, or Loch-Ober's in Boston, or the old Bismarck in Chicago. We had a Martini apiece; a big plate of big shrimp; a steak of baby-beef (a Gargantuan baby); a vegetable; good beer; fruit; Argentinian cheese (darned good -- like a mild Roquefort, somewhat) and coffee. And then we called for the check. Eighty-four pesos! In other words, $6 for the four of us.

One expatriate from the States took a crowd of 17 to his home for a steak broil. He had bought 60 pounds of steak just the day before and flung it into the freezer, he explained, so there was plenty. Someone asked him what it cost, and he said a peso the pound. Seven cents!

It is excellent beef, but NOT as good as our very best. It is wholly grass-fed and therefore has not the firmness you get in good corn-fed beef. The kind the 4-H kids produce each fall, for example.

Why can't we have some of that good, cheap meat? For an excellent reason. Aftosa, the foot and mouth disease. I had been inclined to believe that it is only the selfishness of the cattle states lobby that by using the aftosa scare keeps us from getting cheap meat. An American business man, thirty years in Buenos Aires, firmly corrected that impression. It is the Argentinian propaganda line, he said. Aftosa is a real menace. It is endemic in the Argentine, where the cattle have developed a certain tolerance, that is, the animals do recover though they can never again yield prime beef. Our herds have no such tolerance. Meat will carry the infection for a year. One outbreak in California which destroyed a

million dollars' worth of cattle and nobody knows how many hogs started when a farmer fed his hogs garbage, including meat scraps, from a steamship which used Argentinian beef.

One Argentinian rancher lost 10,000 hogs out of 40,000 last year from aftosa.

How is it that England isn't afraid to import Argentinian beef? She'd rather not, but she has to eat. The meat is perfectly harmless to human beings. But England, Holland and some other European countries as well, have constantly to fight foot and mouth disease. It isn't so much of a menace in a country where cattle are fenced in small fields, in small groups -- not allowed to run the range in vast herds. Mexico has just got through killing a million head of cattle, with our help, to fight an epidemic. (Uncle Sam picked up the check, as usual.) The outbreak started from Vera Cruz where a small shipment of Brazilian cattle was admitted.

Quotation from a recent release of the Argentine Embassy (typical, by the way, of the Embassy's shaky English):

"There are no scientific fundaments to support the statements of the Venezuelan cattle owners regarding the possibilities that aftosa fever cases recently discovered in Venezuela were originated in a cargo of Argentine meat."

Venezuelans obviously think otherwise.

It is often pointed out that there is no aftosa in Patagonia, and that we might raise our ban against Argentinian beef imports from that region. That might be an effective good will gesture,

placating Argentina (if anybody wants to placate the Perón government) but it wouldn't get us any beef. Patagonia is sheep country.

Don't pull that one on me about Latin girls aging quickly! At my right, at the wonderful dinner dance Ambassador Griffis gave at the Embassy was a cute little chick whose name I never did get straight. Really cute. I made a rough estimate she might be twenty-four -- maybe 28. And pretty soon she said she had to get home early, she had things to do in the morning. "And what in the world do you have to do?" somebody taunted her. "Well," she said spiritedly, "I have four children to get off to school. I didn't get up early yesterday, and they skipped school. And the oldest one was hit in the mouth yesterday by a golf club which knocked out a tooth. And to a 17-year-old girl, that is a tragedy."

The Jockey Club of Buenos Aires deserves its world reputation for lavish luxury. It is a huge Victorian palace in the midst of the city. Within it is gloomy with carved black oak. It is richly furnished. Ceilings are high enough to make you think of Grand Central Concourse. Quiet, deft men servants are everywhere. The chef is an artist, the cellar is one of the best in the world, they say who pretend to know.

The Club owns and operates the city's two race tracks. Even after paying huge revenues to the government, they are profitable enough to maintain this fabulous establishment.

At luncheon I remarked to the Argentinian gentleman at my left on the impressive set-up. I went on to say that I had always heard

it was not only one of the most luxurious but also one of the most exclusive clubs in the world. He looked at me quizzically. "It was," he said. "It is not quite so exclusive now. The government set up a fish market in the street, in front of our entrance. After a time, we decided that after all, we should admit certain gentlemen to membership, whose applications had been waiting unsuccessfully for some time. Government people. The fish market is gone now."

The labor laws lay fantastic restrictions on hours per week, hours which may be worked in an unbroken shift, and so on. Editorial offices, for example, find the only practical way they can comply is to work from 2 p.m. until 8. Nobody even to answer the phone in the morning.

South Americans are late diners. Hotel dining rooms do not open until 8:30; go in at that hour and the waiters will be laying cloths, unstacking chairs, filling saltcellars. Ten o'clock is a popular hour to dine. Just about my bed time.

Employers in the printing trades were faced some months ago with a demand for a 47% increase in wages. In the Argentine, wage negotiations are carried on in the presence of the Minister of Labor, or his deputy. The employers protested that never in any industry had wages ever been jumped 47% in one leap. There were long arguments; the deadlock stretched out for weeks.

One morning, the Minister opened the meeting by saying he had an announcement to make. The President's wife had noted that the printers' negotiations were taking an unusually long time, so she

had decided to look into the situation. She had called for all the papers, had studied them conscientiously. It was her conclusion that the workers were perfectly reasonable, and should get their 47% -- retroactive for several months.

There was stunned silence among the employers.

The Minister turned to the union representatives. "Señora Perón wonders if, as a token of their appreciation for her taking up their cause, the printers might not like to present at least half of the retroactive part of the award to her charities -- the Ayuda Social de Maria Eva Duarte de Perón."

But naturally, they would!

"And this, my friend," said the owner of the largest printshop in B.A., "this is what you call S.O.P. -- standard operating procedure -- for Evita."

Quotation from a recent release of the Argentine Embassy:

"The Central Committee of the General Confederation of Labor announced that its members will contribute annually to the Social Aid Foundation Maria Eva Duarte de Perón, an amount equivalent to two daily wages, corresponding to May 1st and October 17th. This resolution was adopted in spite of having been opposed by Señora Eva Perón because as it was expressed in the Confederation's statement, it considers a patriotic duty to contribute to the work of social solidarity that is being accomplished by that Institution."

In other words it wasn't necessary to twist their arms.

On the front of my friend the printer's establishment, by the way, one can still read the faded lettering which reveals that this was once a movie studio. It was, in fact, the very studio where Evita acted in films. For two years after he had bought the property and paid for it, she would not let him take possession -- not until she had finished her movie career.

Time has been barred from the Argentine because of some candid remarks about Evita. So now it is read more eagerly than ever. It is a bootleg item. Thousands of Argentinians have summer homes across the river in Uruguay, and their "hot" mail is sent from and received at the summer address. Or a Montevideo address is easily arranged. There is, of course, a steady flow of smuggled letters, magazines, books and whatnot across the river. "Opposition" people will tell you mail posted in B.A. sometimes doesn't reach its destination. They are also careful what they say by telephone. Maybe they're just prejudiced. Maybe.

The glorification of General San Martín is so overdone as to defeat its purpose. It is probable that no Argentinian ever will want to hear the Liberator's name again, because of sheer surfeit. Every newspaper every day must print "Year of the Liberator General San Martín, 1950" across the top of every page. Forty-five newspapers which failed to do so -- inadvertently or otherwise -- were closed by the government. Most, but not all, were permitted to resume publication later. Buy a handkerchief in a shop, and the sales slip bears the legend. Every letter is postmarked with the words.

Every shop window must display a picture of San Martín, or some more elaborate tribute. Add to this an unending succession of wreath-layings, bell tollings, moments of silence, special postage stamps, torchlight parades, official visits by delegations from other nations, each bringing its wreath. The whole thing reached its hysterical climax on August 17, the one hundredth anniversary of the death of the General in voluntary exile at Boulogne, France.

All this provokes ironical laughter among educated Argentinians. "It is grimly amusing to see this regime paying such exaggerated tribute to San Martín," one of them said to me. "I do not know how much of San Martín's story you know -- not much, I fancy. Well, he was a truly great man. He liberated the southern provinces from Spain, as Bolívar liberated the northern part of the continent. When the two met at the end of the victorious campaigns Bolívar proposed a deal; he was to be dictator of the north, San Martín of the south. General San Martín declined to enter the arrangement. He announced publicly his belief that no conquering general should ever become ruler of a country. To avoid being drafted and to escape hero worship, he left the country and went to live in France. You can imagine what he would have thought of Perón, and Eva, and the Perónistas!"

One doughty Colonel made a speech on San Martín's wife as a woman who had no desire to be a "Lady General" or a "Lady Liberator." B.A. chuckled with delight at the obvious thrust at Eva Perón. But the Colonel lost his government job. Pronto.

Others have described Perón and his lady, and their amazing team performance. Among my impressions:

Perón is very much the Colonel in civvies.

Evita is a "Babe"; let her walk down the street of any American town and there'd be wolf whistles in every block. She's the type. But smart in the head! That's the terrifying aspect of it.

Eva, her friends, and particularly her relatives, are doing just fine. It they covet any business -- say a profitable newspaper, or a radio station, or what have you that they want -- somehow it gravitates into their hands.

In the United States, the Postmaster General is traditionally the campaign manager of the successful political party. In the Argentine, he is Eva's mother's boy friend.

Another Embassy release:

President Chavez of Paraguay, visiting B.A. as part of the San Martín goings-on, was interviewed in "Democracia," leading Perón newspaper, as saying that Peronism is "undoubtedly the most interesting ideological movement of the Continent because it realizes its postulates according to the sentence, Better is to do than to say. Dr. Chavez said later that President Perón 'has no doubt an admirable co-worker in his noble, intelligent and abnegate wife, the Señora Eva Perón.'"

Just what an abnegate wife is, I am not sure, but I think better is to say than she do. (I write English good, too!)

I liked much better Ambassador Griffis' tribute to the lady. "She is," he said, dead pan, "an utterly tireless worker for the

welfare of her country. As she sees it." But of course HE didn't underscore.

It is rather a shock to the sanitation-minded visitor from the states to see the two-wheeled, horse-drawn milk carts of B.A. The milk is in a huge can and it is drawn off into the customer's pitcher from a spigot. No refrigeration. Picturesque. Colorful. Quaint. But the milk is safe only when boiled.

Out of tender concern for the little business man, the Perón regime harried the milk companies which delivered milk in bottles from modern pasteurization plants until they went out of business. Hardly consistent with the Señora Perón's solicitude for the babies.

Here is a city of 4,400,000 without a traffic light! The story is that they were installed, but no Porteña would pay the slightest attention to them. Actually there is an effective enough substitute. At intervals on main avenues there is a kind of crow's nest on a short mast. In the crow's nest is a cop. His sleeves, from elbow to cuff, are white. If you can see two sleeves, it's the same as a green light. If you can see but one sleeve, it's "stop." In other words, if he is facing your way, or the opposite, go. If he is facing a cross street, stop. It works pretty well. Incidentally, at night you do not blow your horn; you flash your lights. The button on the wheel that ordinarily sounds the horn is switched over to operate the lights. So you won't forget.

The Ministro Pistarini airport really is magnificent -- unnecessarily so, it seemed to me. Runways and hangars -- sure, they

should be the best. But marble restaurants, six-floor hotels, all the rest is "dog." Just the grim determination to be the biggest, the most impressive. Mussolini had the disease, too. He built the world's biggest public swimming pool -- that sort of thing. The Perón regime has gone him one better; for one of its workers' housing projects near the airport, it built <u>two</u> huge outdoor pools.