

## MEXICO AS IT IS.

### Graphic Pen-Picture of An Extraordinary People.

(Max J. Welch, in the Tuscarawas, Ohio, Chronicle.)

In general Mexico is an old-fashioned country. Get your big family Bible, if you have one, and look at the ancient pictures of the beggar, the water carrier, the gentleman, the slave, and you have a picture of Old Mexico. The jack, the mule and the ox are beasts of burden. "Fear work and be contented" is the native motto. The warm climate makes nature's clothes good enough for the poor. The masses delight in selling something for a living. A fruit stand on the corner, a fly bush that wags with a capital of eight pennies constitute a business. An enterprising Mexican walked up to a fruit seller and said: "How much will you take for your outfit?" The woman looked at him and replied: "I won't sell you the outfit, because I would have nothing to do the remainder of the day."

A Mexican gentleman in the days of his courtship spends the most industrious part of his life. The patience of an American would never win a Spanish lady. Across a thirty-foot street from our residence there lived a wealthy lady, who had two courtable daughters. Young men would stand upon our doorstep every evening, gazing across the street through the windows upon the fair ladies. It was always a mystery to me how the two ladies knew which one was being courted and by whom. I became deeply interested in the affair and was highly pleased, from the fact that our front door was well guarded every night without charge. The first stage of Mexican courtship consists in "playing bear." The lover stands across the street and looks through the window at his fair one. Rain or shine, he is there every night. A glance from the girl, a tip of the hat from the gent, is free to the public. If, after three months of daily duty, the gent succeeds in attracting the attention of the lady then the second stage begins. About 9 p. m. the lights are turned out. The lady appears behind the bars. In Mexico all windows look like those of an American jail. In former days it was necessary to put iron bars over windows to prevent thieving. It is stated that the practice is continued for the purpose of keeping the boys and girls apart. I have been told some wonderful stories of the possibilities, through the bars, of an ambitious youth. To continue the courtship the young man walks rapidly up street, crosses over and walks down past the window. A shake of the hand, "good evening" and "good night" is the recompense for three hours' waiting. I tried standing on our sidewalk in the attitude of courtship, but could never make more than ten minutes' progress at a time. My room mate was shocked at the boldness of my competing with a native. I lost the day in not entering the bicycle races of the season, for there stood the lady in robes of white, with wreaths of flowers to put around the winner of the race. When a courtship has arrived at the stage of marriage the young gentleman is invited into the house of the lady for the first time. That is the great event of their lives. After a few receptions and a dance the young man enters upon life's career, beginning immediately to look for work.

The poorer classes court and marry on the mutual agreement plan. The reason of this is that the priest exacts a fee for marriage beyond what the poor can pay. I heard of one couple who lived together happily, reared a family and at the end of twelve years got married in style. Upon being asked why they married after so long a time the man replied: "At first we were poor; since then I have made considerable money and thought we could now follow the laws of our church." The price for a church marriage in Aguascalientes is from forty to a hundred dollars, as the priest may decide.

Many a young man has started in life with the idea that if he can only get an education he is safe. After years of toil he discovers that success depends upon getting an opportunity to put his education into practice. This is the condition of affairs in Mexico. I was riding down street in a mule car and a bright young Mexican conductor was pointed out as the son of an Ex-Governor of our State. He had been through their best schools and colleges, but never had an opportunity in practical life. A conductor gets one dollar a day, silver, and a "rake off." We wanted to know why the company did not discharge all conductors who pocketed the extra pennies and were told that if all such were discharged there would be nobody to run the railroad.

The educational system in Mexico can be improved. A child is through school when only in the primary. Then he enters college, which is under the jurisdiction of the Church. The average Mexican learns to read and write. I have seen some of the finest script from the pen of a poor workman. They seem proud of their talent, but it may as well be hid under a bushel. We had a young Mexican in the offices on clerical work. He had been clerking about for years. His education appeared to be purely mechanical.

An English concern doing business in Mexico finds it pays to employ all United States men at a good salary for any position of responsibility. We had a Mexican contractor on adobe and mason work; he was kept because a Mexican workman would labor for him at one-half the price that he would for a foreigner. He was very popular among the poorer classes and had been a leader in a great political uprising. At the end of each week, as I made out his check, he would stand in an attitude of suspense wondering how much he would draw. If he received more than he expected he would laugh heartily, set up the cigarettes and shake hands. If he received less than enough to pay his men I had to make out another check for more money. I asked him one day why he did not get a book and keep track of his work and run a bank account. He said: "What use is money to me, only to spend and have a good time."

Our public schools teach that Mexico is a Republic. It is a Republic in name and a monarch in practice. President Diaz received his office somewhat after the "Kentucky style." When the former President died Diaz bought as many leaders as possible with presents and money and then began a wholesale execution of all opposers. The militia would ride out of town and some political leader would try to make his escape, whereupon he was shot. The number of leaders that tried to escape was enormous. In order to prevent bloodshed hereafter in filling the President's chair the Government has provided a Vice President, who will assume responsibility after the death of Diaz.

Politics in Mexico is extremely ridiculous. They have regular elections and the people vote for one candidate, who is previously chosen by the President. A Mexican votes as many times as there are polls in the city. The more he votes the greater is his respect for politics, and he is liable to a fine if he does not vote at all. I had the pleasure of being in the capital city of the State of Aguascalientes during the election for Governor. The new candidate first went to the city of Mexico and procured the necessary papers from President Diaz, which entitled him to the Governor's chair. Upon his return to Aguascalientes he was met by a reception committee, a brass band and a torch-light procession. I supposed the affair was all settled. The next week there was an election for Governor. In surprise I said: "Why, the Governor was appointed a week ago." "Yes, he was appointed, but the citizens have to vote for him, anyhow." My informer, who had been in Mexico some time, said: "You should have been here four years ago to fully understand Mexican politics. A rich ranchman and stock raiser, having some political aspirations, decided to run for Governor on an independent ticket. He kept the matter secret until a few days before election. The President's candidate had been appointed and the best citizens had called and paid their respects to the new Governor. On election day the ranchman appointed workers at all the polls, who bought off most of the votes at the price of a drink of whiskey. About the middle of the afternoon this telegram was sent to President Diaz: "Your candidate is losing; a ranchman is getting the votes." Diaz telegraphed back: "Close the polls." The votes were counted and the ranchman was elected by a large majority. The strange part of the affair follows. The Ex-Governor ruled that each person in the State is entitled to a vote. The count showed that less than half the people had voted. Then the Ex-Governor ruled that he could cast one vote for each citizen that had failed his duty. The ballot-box was stuffed for the President's previously appointed candidate and the ranchman has not been heard of since. The standing army is maintained by volunteers. They have a queer way of volunteering. Mexicans are not overly enthusiastic about anything except rest. They take no interest in gov-

ernment or patriotism. A good healthy citizen sometimes gets on a good, healthy drunk. He is escorted to the police station and placed in a room to sober up. On his awaking in the morning he is presented with papers duly signed by himself which go to certify that he has joined the standing army for four years. If he refuses he is shot as a deserter. He decides to take his chances of being shot elsewhere and is uniformed and marshalled out a fullfledged soldier.

Police in the cities make life safe. On every corner is a policeman with a red light on duty all night. His light is placed in the middle of the street. A reward is offered by the Mexican Government for a light that can be stolen from a policeman. The fear of this induces the latter to watch his light closely. Every hour there is a merry whistle all over the city, which means, "All is well;" and each policeman picks up his light and advances one block. On his way he tries all the front doors to see if they are locked. Room mate and I were reading one night, when of a sudden a big, burly policeman fell in through the door. His apology was: "Excuse me, you should lock your front door at night."

Upon arriving at El Paso, Texas, I was met by an American agent of the Mexican Central Railway, whose duty it is to give pointers to persons on their way to the interior of Mexico. His first advice was: "Get your money changed." I wanted to know what the matter with Uncle Sam's money. He said, laughingly: "It's worth two for one in the United States, but it isn't worth anything in Mexico." It is great fun going down to have money changers throw out two for one, and the excitement continues by having the pockets bulge out with money after each pay day, but the feeling is reversed upon returning. However, I think a man should consider himself fortunate in return only.

Much has been said for and against the value of the Mexican dollar. This much can be said in its favor: "It goes in Mexico." At the time of the drop in price of silver Mexico lived upon agricultural products, buying all foreign manufactured goods. The drop in silver doubled the price of everything imported. The result was that importation stopped. Foreigners took advantage of the situation and began building home industries in Mexico, employing native help. The change has been marvellous. Aguascalientes four years ago was a city of beggars. To-day it is the beginning of enterprise.

The prices paid for labor in Mexico to-day are as follows: At the smelters and manufactories, laborers, 25 to 50 cents per day; carpenters, 75 cents to \$1.50; machinists, \$1 to \$2; clerks, \$25 to \$50 per month. Industries managed by Mexicans only: Farmers' help, 15 to 25 cents per day and board; tailors, 50 to 75 cents per day and board; carpenters, 50 cents per day and board; servants, \$4 to \$8 per month. In many cases the servant boards himself on a salary of \$10 per month.

A Mexican could not get employment in the United States at any price. The majority of natives lack skill, have a great inclination for rest and are very careless.

At the smelter it was found advisable to hire United States carpenters at \$4 gold per day in place of Mexicans at 75 cents gold. The reason why labor is cheap in Mexico is because it is cheap labor.

I was going the rounds one day and found four men unloading a car of lumber. One man was inside the car throwing out a plank once in a while and three men were sitting under the car smoking cigarettes. I looked at the crowd rather sharply and they crawled out and went to work. I came back in about five minutes and found them smoking as before. The only way the Mexican element can be worked to advantage is to hire an American "cussing" machine as a foreman for a gang.

Being anxious to learn Spanish I would often ask a foreman what he had to say to his men. He would sometimes reply: "You had better not learn that, as the language isn't spoken in Heaven." A good joke is told on the wire mill at Monterey. A duty was to be put on wire nails, and upon this agreement between President Diaz and stockholders of the company the factory was built. At the next assembly of the Legislature a duty was placed upon wire nails and also the wire of which the nails were made. As the wire was all imported the duty ate up all the profits of the mill. The matter was explained to President Diaz and he promised to have the error corrected. The next body of Legislators got the matter twisted and took off all duty on wire nails and left the duty on the wire. This closed the mills until the duties were properly adjusted.

The chief difficulty in foreign mining enterprise in the Government in past years has kept such loose records that no one is sure of his land title being good. After a mine has been put in good working order some old Mexican will hob up with a prior claim which he can prove to be good. It

requires a Philadelphia lawyer to purchase property in Mexico and be sure of the claim.

Religion controls the poor classes in Mexico. We walked into a great stone structure during religious service and there upon a hard stone floor was a body of kneeling peons. The first arrivals go up front and kneel; then each succeeding person kneels until the church is full. Those who cannot enter kneel outside. I have seen on special religious holidays peons kneeling out in the middle of the street.

The Church is the great opposition to foreign enterprise. It sees that the foreign element is not religious and that the latter is teaching the peons new tricks of the trade.

I had an opportunity of seeing what foreign missions are doing in Mexico. There is a very neat little Presbyterian mission church in Aguascalientes. A party of us were walking past the mission one evening and we saw lined up in front of the church a body of soldiers. I asked: What are those fellows doing here? "Why, don't you know this is the night of the great jubilee for the election of Governor?" was the reply. Well, what of that? I said. My friend replied: "When these people get out in mobs and become excited the first place they break for is the mission and smash in the windows, break up the furniture, etc." I could not have believed it had not the soldiers been silent witnesses.

The natives believe in putting their religion into practice. At the smelter we had a very devout pumpman. One day the water supply suddenly stopped. Something had happened and the pumps refused to work. The master mechanic went down to the river, and there in the middle of the pump house was the attendant upon his knees praying for the pumps to start. The master mechanic in a fit of laughter told us how he awakened the praying attendant and asked him why he did not ask the saints to help start the pumps.

The Mexican replied: "I did ask the saints, but the saints don't care a d— whether the pumps go or not."

One of the strangest sights in Mexico is a funeral. A native can be said to be truly religious. He believes that a friend or relative is better off dead than alive. "To be dead, to be happy forever; to be alive is to be miserable," is the way he reasons. Therefore, when a member of the family dies a feast is held. Dancing and wine lend joy to the occasion.

We heard so much about the strange methods of burial that room mate and I spent Sunday afternoon in the graveyard to see for ourselves. Inside a high adobe wall there are two burial grounds. The first is much the same as the American cemetery. Lots are bought and monuments erected and preserved for time to come.

In the second, or pauper, ground lots are rented for two years. If a relative, at the expiration of that time, happens to remember that he has a dead responsibility on his hands, and also happens to be the proud possessor of two dollars which he does not know what to do with, he rents the silent abode for two more years. If the lot is not again rented the bones are dug up and thrown down a deep shaft and the grave is ready for another. After gathering up the fragments of skeletons that lay around we went to the deep shaft and peeped in. There was a mixture which would have caused a feeling of joy to a proprietor of a bone dust factory. A shaft fifteen feet in diameter was filled to a depth of fifty feet with human bones. As we looked down it was with solemn thought. I was in the midst of an argument as to what is the difference whether our

bones are separated from those of our neighbor by clay or air, of what does it matter if we are not collectively in the same spot.

We looked around and saw a Mexican coming down the walk with something on his head. Following him was a woman and child. Upon close investigation we found the man smoking a cigarette and on his head was a board. Upon the board lay the body of a girl about 8 years of age. They proceeded to a grave—that had been previously used and went about burying the dead in a business-like way. Flowers were strewn on the bottom and the body laid gently away, and the man, with the assistance of a sexton, covered up the human form. No coffin was used and no tears were shed. Upon going out we asked the gate-keeper if he knew the people who had buried the child, and if they were its parents. "Oh, yes," he replied. "I know them, and that was their child."

The term pleasure in Mexico is looked upon with a chilly sensation. A man may get into a railroad wreck, help pull out living and dead and be warmed up with the exercise and excitement, but when he sits on a stone step and watches a first-class bull fight his blood runs cold. It was our fortune to see one of the finest bull fighters on the road. The scene began with the first bull killing four horses in quick succession. Each time he would chase out into the middle of the ring and look for more.

Many a pen picture has been drawn in the finest language in our popular magazines of "a Spanish bull fight," but one look is worth a month's reading. The strength of a mad bull is something enormous. He would toss a dead horse several feet in the air with the use of only one horn. Our seats were next to the ring, on top of a stone wall about eight feet high. One of the fighters threw some gaily colored clothes over the rope in front of us. After the bull had chased all the fighters away he saw those red clothes and made a grand rush over the five-foot fence and tried to climb the stone wall. It is only by gazing into those wild eyes that one realizes what courage is necessary on the part of the bull fighter to walk out with a sword and a little red flag and send the mad bull to his doom.

Blood-curdling excitement will sometimes give way to the humorous. It was the duty of an attendant to open a large gate, through which the mad bull tore out into the centre of the ring, kicked up his heels and looked around for something upon which to charge. Seeing the attendant closing the gate the bull made a grand rush for him. The latter being busy, did not notice the bull until within a few feet. The bull gave a snort and boosted the fellow over the fence in a manner that caused roars of laughter.

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