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A Problem In Cultural Integration.

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## EDUCATION IN MEXICO

### A problem in Cultural Integration

#### INTRODUCTION:

The last seven years in Mexico have been distinguished by a revitalization of educational activity such as few countries of the world have had the good fortune to experience. In a series of studies made some months ago I attempted to set forth the most important and original developments in this educational renaissance. (See: Educational Studies, Series I, Nos. 1 to 7) For the most part, however, my previous reports have been informational in character and only slight attention has been paid to the more fundamental (and albeit, more theoretical) aspects of the question. With a view, therefore, to rounding out and completing the survey and of bringing the whole matter up to date, I have thought it appropriate to present in somewhat greater detail those underlying environmental, social, and economic forces and factors which have created the problem of education in Mexico. It is obvious that the only basis for fruitful and intelligent educational planning in Mexico or in any other country is a thorough and complete understanding of the social milieu.

The question before us, then, is: Specifically and concretely what is there in the past history and the present situation of Mexico which makes us constantly refer to education as a "problem"? Is this "problem" different from that to be found in other countries? and, if so, wherein and for what reasons does this difference arise? In a word, what is the problem of Mexican education?

As an introduction to what is to follow in this study and as a text and general summary of the data which I am about to present, I can find no better passage than the following from a book recently published by Ernest Gruening:

"An appreciation of Mexico needs above<sup>all</sup> a revision of our concepts of time and of the changes that a given unit of time, such as a century, is expected to work in the development of what we may call 'progress' or 'civilization'. This attitude is especially difficult for Americans of this generation who live during the most rapid transformation the world has ever known ... To understand Mexico one must think in terms of other centuries as well as of this. One must realize that its anachronisms introduce factors virtually unknown to us in the United States of this day.

"In Mexico we deal not merely with many races but with many epochs, with many stages of human progress, and merely to assert or assent to this proposition falls far short of driving home its full significance. We learn, in fine, that many of Mexico's troubles are rooted in a past which in point of years seems very distant, but in fact is extremely recent and often merges into the present. In Mexico, a society that in part is primitive, and varyingly represents successive stages of the advancement through which other peoples of the world have passed, is invaded by modern industrialism and many modern social theories.

"A primitive religion, a Praetorian army, a mediaeval church, handicraft folkways into which twentieth century mechanism has intruded, tribes, a highly educated and modernly cultivated minority - all these

are found today in Mexico. The time element is the transcendent factor in the understanding of that country."

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The above quoted passage serves very well to answer in a general way the questions which have been raised in this study. But, as its author states, simply to assent to the general proposition that in Mexico we are dealing with many races, many epochs, and many cultures, falls far short of an adequate realization of the significance of such a statement. Indeed, to give adequate meaning to this proposition would require nothing less than a whole shelf of books on Mexican life and culture. Unfortunately this shelf of books has not yet been written. Some information, however, is available and for the present it will be adequate for our purposes to throw such additional light as we may on the question by a judicious selection of illustrations and examples of the cultures and epochs which do at the present time co-exist within the confines of what appears on the map as "Mexico".

#### Illiteracy as an Index to the Problem of Education in Mexico

Before seeking to sketch in a picture of the environmental, racial, and cultural heterogeneity of the Mexican nation, let us consider briefly the question of illiteracy.

The 1921 census gives the total population of Mexico as 14,334,780. Of this number 6,879,348, or 65.27 per cent. of the population above ten years of age cannot read or write. In terms of racial groups the figures are as follows:

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Racial Groups	Total Number Above 10 Years	Illiterate
Pure indigenous (Indian)	3,050,552	2,424,895
Indigenous mixed with white (Mestizo)	6,301,280	3,962,242
White	1,047,521	447,009
Race unknown	130,500	23,186
Foreigners	91,887	22,016
Total	10,621,740	6,879,348

In several states the percentage of illiteracy of the population above ten years of age rises as high as 80 per cent. and even in the Federal District the percentage is 24.09.

Possibly in the last few years of increased educational activity on the part of the federal and state governments the percentage of illiteracy in the whole population has been somewhat reduced. Also, it should be noted that in a predominantly agricultural country where life is relatively simple the ability to read and write may not be as important as it is in a highly complicated industrialized civilization. But even so, from the point of view of modern standards in such matters, the situation revealed by these statistics is about as bad as could well be imagined.

In the narrower sense, then, the problem of education in Mexico is that of teaching something over two-thirds of the people to read and write the Spanish language. Such a statement of the matter as this, however, commits the logical and factual error of over-simplification and is, therefore, entirely misleading. The stamping out of illiteracy is the easiest part of the task which confronts the Mexican nation. The real job

to be accomplished is one of far greater magnitude. It is a job of economic and social engineering and consists, on the one hand, of nothing less than raising the standard of living of practically a whole people from a level of miserable animal subsistence - a standard of living always below the line of comfort, decency and good health and often bordering on starvation; and, on the other hand, of the cultural integration of a nation now made up of races and groups separated by "abysmal differences in thought and feeling."

#### Cultural Heterogeneity in Mexico

Putting aside for the moment the question of the part that must be played by education in the economic habilitation of the Mexican people, let us turn our attention to a few illustrations of the thesis: Mexico is not one, but many countries; within its borders are a number of widely disparate groups, differing in race, traditions, language, customs, and habits of thought.

#### The Environmental Basis

First, consider the physical and geographical basis and background of Mexican life. No matter to what subject one turns or what aspect of life of the Mexican people one wishes to study, everywhere and always one must first consider its relations to the omni-present environmental factor. Crossed and criss-crossed with mountain ranges, drenched with perfect deluges of rain in some parts and gasping for a drop of water in others, tropics along the coasts, and peaks with never melting snow on the central plateau, heat and cold, wet and dry, high and low - surely no country was ever blessed - or, if you will, cursed - with so curious a

melange of climates and topographies shoved up together almost within shouting distances of each other as this land of the snake and the eagle. I shall not repeat here a systematic description of the well known features of the physical aspects of Mexico. (For a detailed description see Agricultural Studies, Series I, N° 1.) It is sufficient for the purpose at hand simply to remind the reader of the great and sudden variations which characterize the Mexican landscape. Five minutes contemplation of a good relief map tells the story more eloquently than hundreds of words.

The significance of the geographical diversity of Mexico in relation to the problem of education is twofold. First, the widely different conditions of life in the tropics and in the colder uplands, in the northern deserts and on the southern and eastern mountain slopes, have through the ages made entirely different demands upon the inhabitants. Accordingly, there have grown up in these various regions institutions, folkways, habits of life - in short, cultures - which present as great variations as the regions in which they are found. Second, the mountain ranges which cross the country in almost every direction have uniformly acted as highly effective barriers to social communication. This means that to the socially differentiating demands of diverse environmental conditions is added the culturally solidifying force of isolation. The end result is that to this day throughout the length and breadth of Mexico are found large groups living in "cultural pockets"; almost completely cut off from any intercourse with their neighbors, these groups live uncontaminated and unchanged the life of their forefathers.

But it is not alone the environment acting either directly or indirectly which has produced the cultural heterogeneity which characterizes



present day Mexico. There is also the imponderable factor of race. In the present state of conflicting scientific opinion in this field it is impossible to say exactly what weight should be given to this factor in the determination of the cultural complexion of any given group, but of the fact that the diverse racial composition of the Mexican population exercises some influence in the direction of cultural differentiation there is no doubt.

Conventionally, the population of Mexico is divided into three classes; Whites, Indians, and Mestizos (i.e., the results of the crosses between the indigenous races and the whites). Under these headings the 1921 census gives the following figures:

Pure indigenous groups (Indians) - - -	4,179,449 or 29.18%
Mestizos - - - - -	8,504,561 or 59.33%
Whites - - - - -	1,404,718 or 9.80%
<u>Race unknown and foreigners - - - -</u>	<u>246,052 or 1.71%</u>
Total population - - - - -	14,334,780 or 100%

As I have written elsewhere, these statistics are, of course, only approximately correct. At best (since census takers are not physical anthropologists) they serve to indicate only the larger outlines of the racial composition of the population. The picture is in reality even more complex. No one of the three major classes indicated in the above table represents a "pure" or homogenous racial stock. The term "whites", for example, refers in the main, of course, to the Spanish element in the population. But the Spaniard, it must be remembered, <sup>is</sup> ~~are~~ a hybridization of all the racial stocks of Europe plus whatever the terms "Moors" and "Jews" represent biologically. Again, what the census lists as "pure indigenous" population is made up of at least two markedly different racial stocks, in

turn divided into an undetermined number (probably fifty or more) subtypes. The mestizos are anything that cannot be put in one of the other two classes.

#### Language - Fact and Symbol

Both environmental and racial forces, then, predispose Mexico to cultural diversity. Concretely, what are the results of the out working of these and other (historical) forces in Mexico?

One of the most easily identifiable indices of cultural differences is that of language. If two groups speak different languages we can be pretty sure that they will also vary in other elements of their culture, i.e., in their customs, beliefs and institutions. At the time of the Conquest there were scattered over Mexico some hundreds of Indian tribes. Linguistically, these tribes can be divided into fourteen families. Such a division is, however, purely a matter of convenience for philologists and does not mean that members of the same linguistic family were able to talk to one another. Indeed, we know that quite the contrary was the case and that these fourteen families were in turn made up of anywhere between fifty and one hundred separate and distinct dialects.

Now all this would be of interest for historical reasons only were it not for the fact that many of these Indian dialects persist down to the present day. If the reader will place before him Map N° 1 attached to this study and entitled "Geographic Distribution of Linguistic Families and the Survival of Indigenous Languages in Mexico" the significance of these linguistic survivals will at once become clear. The colors on this map represent different linguistic families as these families were distributed at about

the time of the Conquest. Within the colored areas are smaller divisions indicated by letters. It is these latter which show approximately the location and the extent to which the various indigenous languages are still spoken in present day Mexico. Different authorities estimate that there are between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 Indians now living in Mexico who cannot speak a word of the Spanish language and possibly an equal number who speak their native tongue by preference. Let us put the matter conservatively and say that there are 3,000,000 individuals who cannot or do not speak the language common to the country. In other words, roughly one-fifth of the total population of Mexico cannot be reached through the ordinary channels of communication. This by itself represents a tremendous problem; for it is obvious that the spread of ideas, the transmission of the group heritage, the creation of a fund of national memories, aspirations and ideals - in a word, education - presupposes a unified and effective means of communication.

But the complete story is not yet told. Even if by some magic all the native dialects now spoken in Mexico should disappear tomorrow, the most important and difficult aspect of the problem presented by these groups to the educational authorities would still remain; for, as we have already noted, the language of any given group is only one element in a whole complex of cultural traits; these dialects are like red flags announcing the presence within the body politic of undigested "cultural lumps" - congeries of alien habits, customs, and institutions. Here is the real problem of education in Mexico: how shall these foreign substances be modified, broken up, and assimilated into a larger national culture?

### Cultural Diversity

Mexico is culturally heterogenous in two closely related ways. First, there are numerous, isolated groups differing one from the other which have maintained intact a relatively primitive way of life. These groups constitute a large part of the population and are to be found scattered throughout the rural areas of the country. Second, within those groups which have come more or less in contact with each other and which have been more or less subjected to the influences of modern civilization there still persist a number of indigenous cultural elements. In other words, the small pueblos and the cities (and this is true even of the City of Mexico) do not present a culturally homogenous picture. What the sociologists call "cultural lag" is very marked and a very appreciable number of primitive indigenous beliefs, practices, attitudes, and customs exist side by side with the superimposed cultural elements of modern industrial civilization.

A few case studies of what for convenience we have identified as these two types of cultural heterogeneity may help to make my meaning a little clearer.

On Map N° 2 labeled, "Ethnographic Map of Mexico-1928", are indicated by numbers and colors the various indigenous cultures existing in present day Mexico. Some of these cultures have been modified by contact with Spanish colonial civilization (especially through the agency of the Catholic Church) and by the more recently introduced modern industrial civilization; others, located in more inaccessible and isolated regions, have been maintained practically unchanged. As an illustration of one of the

relatively uncontaminated groups we may take the following description of the principal aspects of the life of the Tarahumares who live in the north-western portion of Mexico (colored light green - No. 38)

"The Tarahumares are divided into numerous tribes, scattered throughout the mountain range which bears their name. Each tribe takes the name of the place where they live and this place, in turn, has derived its name from some striking characteristic which it presents. Thus, the Basihuarichis are those Indians who live near a hill which is girt by a wide belt (faja) of yellowish-white color.

"The Tarahumares present among themselves both physical and social differences, but there do exist, nevertheless, bonds of fraternity. One can see at times tall men, well built - a brunette type with perfect features, revealing dignity in their bearing; but there are other types marked by coarse features, medium stature and very dark skin.

"All of the men living in this region are remarkable runners (their manner of hunting and catching deer is to tire them out by running them down). They are skilled as well in jumping. They climb trees with great facility, scale cliffs and crags of the mountains and seem immune to fatigue.

"Some live in caves; others live in nothing more than "pens" (jaulas) made of flat stones piled to the height of approximately a meter and a half and enclosing an area of some four square meters. Always in the center of this "pen" there is a fire and around it gathers the family and their friends; there they cook, there they sleep, and there they sicken and die.

"For clothing, the men usually wear a drab colored blanket loosely wrapped around their bodies. They also have a breech cloth which passes between the legs and is secured by a "faja" or belt which tightly encircles the waist. The head is tied in a cloth and, though they have sandals for the feet, they usually carry them in their hands or under the arm. The women's clothes are somewhat better for they wear skirts and a voluminous chemise made of unbleached cotton cloth. The head is left uncovered.

"They live upon corn, beans, peas, lizards, snakes, birds and whatever grubs they can find. The heads of cattle or goats are preferred above all other meats for their religious festivals.

"Their language is guttural and soft, showing slight variations from tribe to tribe.

"Marriage requires only the authorization of the parents of the couple and what we should call concubinage is for them perfectly moral.

"Their religion is an incomprehensible mixture of pagan and catholic ceremonies. At times there are solemn and mystical rites where all is meditation, unction and withdrawal, while at other times there are explosions of wild joy, manifested by dances and terrible drunken orgies enacted in front of the catholic images.

"Sacrifices are made in these religious ceremonies. The ceremony consists in the killing of three animals, after which the greater part of the meat is ground up and stirred into their favorite drink...Before the silent and attentive throng the tribal chief takes a sample of this drink (called tonari) and scatters it first to the four corners of the earth and

then upward so that God may have his share. Next, he and his assistants drink of the mixture and afterwards the whole populace is allowed to imbibe without restraint.

"In an hour the ceremony (which starts in an exalted fashion) descends to the lowest depths. Shouts, quarrels, fights, smothered children, burned men, outraged women - all this is enacted by the funereal glow of the red flames of pine torches. The importance of the festival is measured by the number of animals killed. Usually it begins with three and proceeds in arithmetical progression up to twelve. By that time the apotheosis of religious fervor is reached. People living eight days distant often come to participate in these festivals...

"All of these tribes are superstitious. Night fills them with an uncontrollable fear. They are acquainted with the properties of some curative herbs and it is said that in a village near the border of the State of Sinaloa there is a family which knows how to dry and grind a plant which cures rabies.

"One can pass his life among these people without eliciting any definite information; for if a question addressed to them is in the affirmative they answer in the same way, while if it implies a negative answer, a negative answer will be forthcoming. They seldom fulfill their promises, but never deny that which they have really done, even though it be a crime.

"They are distrustful and flee to hide themselves from every stranger. And to hide is easy for them, for, with their dull blankets, bleached by sun and rain to every shade and tone of the earth, rocks and

vegetation, they have all the defenses of wild animals that seem to melt into the landscape. Their bearing is serious and their faces as wild as the country in which they live...

"They have no songs, nor any method of writing. Their legends are nothing more than cruel stories drawn from common superstitions - nothing to reveal that in times gone by they were a superior race. But in spite of all, their eyes show unmistakable intelligence and with time, patience and money they can be shown the way to a better life".<sup>3</sup>

In the case of the Maya Indians in the territory of Quintana Roo we have an illustration of a culture already definitely disintegrating and degenerating under the influence of certain aspects of modern industrial exploitation and as a result<sup>of</sup> the tyranny of the local "military" chiefs. The following rather naive account of the situation in Quintana Roo is taken from a report by one of the Federal school inspectors:

"The Maya Indians who live in the Territory of Quintana Roo are divided into three groups: the first and greatest in number, and for that reason the most important, occupies the central part of the Territory and recognizes as supreme chief, General Francisco May. The capital of this group is Santa Cruz de Bravo. The second in importance is established in the northern part of the Territory. This tribe recognize the supreme authority of a different general, Juan Bautista Vega, and has for its capital Santa Cruz Chumpón. The third and smallest group occupies the southeastern part of the region, recognizing as chief General Queich, who has established his capital in the village of Icaiché.

"With the exception of the last named nucleus, these Indians are



completely autonomous and outside of the Territorial (Federal) jurisdiction,-a condition made possible by the immense forests and the lack any means of communication. Nevertheless, in the last few years, due to the great development of the commercial exploitation of chicle, the natives have had a certain amount of contact with the chicle workers, for a season of seven months each year. These workers, however, being themselves without "culture", have added nothing to the life of the native. Nor have the chicle contractors or foremen tried in any way to raise the level of the natives. Fear of competition and the knowledge that if the Indians were "enlightened" they would put a stop to the abuses and odious immoralities which organized capital has established have led the contractors to maintain the status quo.

"The Maya Indians lead a miserable life. With neither aspirations nor ideals, they vegetate as did their ancestors, Scattered through the forests they live in nomadic groups numbering from 50 to 160. Their houses are made of palms thatched over a framework of wood, and are built in groups or hidden alone in the forests. The astonishing fertility of the soil gives to the villages a picturesque aspect. Banana trees, the zapote plum and other fruit trees grow in abundance. Their diet is poorly balanced and insufficient. For the most part it consists of a drink called pozole which is a kind of a dough diluted with water, a plant called chaya, bananas and, from time to time, pork or deer meat. So great is the indolence of these peoples that they do not even raise domestic fowls. For this reason in the Indian villages a hen brings a price of eight or nine pesos and eggs sell three or four for one peso. Nor is hospitality known

to them. They receive travellers with great mistrust and invariably deny them food or drink. There are only two of the indigenous colonies in which a visitor can obtain what he needs and they are Santa Cruz de Bravo and Petacab. These places are situated on the road which one is forced to travel when going to or from Yucatan. But even in these villages one must have an understanding with General May or Lieutenant Poot.

"The tribes are subject to a military regime of the chiefs above mentioned and the authority of these men is represented in each village by a Captain, Lieutenant or Sergeant. For civil authority there is an Indian who judges and sentences delinquents, native or foreign. These sentences generally are executed by whipping. The number of lashes given varies from one to four arrobas (25 lashes constitute one arroba) according to the degree of guilt. Despite the prohibitions of the government of the Territory, to this day it has been impossible to suppress this barbarous form of punishment.

"In their religion, the Indians practice fetishism, animism and other superstitions. In Santa Cruz their priests <sup>celebrate</sup> ~~practice~~ daily ceremonies before the tribal god, an idol made of wood, General May built and inaugurated in January of this year a temple for the cult of fetishism."

One could go on quoting illustration after illustration of the varied ways of life to be found in the many relatively isolated communities scattered throughout Mexico. The two cases here cited are not unusual, but it must not be thought that the level of existence is quite so primitive in all parts of the country. On the contrary, certain groups, although their customs and institutions are markedly different from those

which characterize what we are pleased to call civilized societies, possess a culture which is of a high type measured by any standards. In the little village of Teptlapa in the State of Oaxaca, for example, we are told: "at the end of each year when the city administration is changed the outgoing officials are sent to jail for one month in punishment for any offenses or abuses of the public confidence which 'by chance they might have committed while in office'. This is the regular custom in this village and every one accepts it as natural and desirable that the retiring city administration should spend a month in jail."

In another little village of the same State of Oaxaca (Yalala) political use and wont demands that any individual aspiring to become the Alcalde or Municipal President must begin by serving as errand boy for the whole village. After a year in this capacity he is then allowed to become the village watchman, then the town clerk, and so on up through the various grades of public service until at the end of nine years he is finally elected to the highest office.....

Of the second type of cultural heterogeneity which we have described, that of the survival of primitive beliefs and customs in relatively civilized urban communities, illustrations are legion. One living in Mexico City need not go out of his own house to find them. For example, a few weeks ago the writer's wife contracted a mild case of la grippe. The cook (a pure blooded Indian), upon hearing of this, immediately volunteered to treat the case. Nothing loathe, the lady of the house was straightway subjected to the following procedure: first, on each side of her head was

pasted a little green leaf (called chicadores); next a bit of baked lemon peeling was rubbed on the soles of the feet, in the joints of the knees and elbows, and on the palms of the hands; finally she was forced to drink a hot concoction consisting of a mixture of lemon juice, cognac, and certain herbs. The student of anthropology will immediately recognize the first two steps of this treatment as variation of magical principles familiar in many parts of the world. The decorations on the side of the head were (as the maid admitted upon being questioned) to ward off the mal ojo (evil eye); the rubbing with the lemon peel was designed to draw out the pain (evil spirit).

To whatever aspect of life one may turn, one encounters (especially among the lower classes) evidences of the survival of beliefs and customs of similar import to the "cure" just described. The corn for Mexico's bread (tortillas) is still ground by hand on the primitive stone metate. The rituals which accompany the making of pulque (a drink made from the cactus plant) go back in a direct line to Aztec days. Even some of the articles of clothing, as one may see by studying the ancient codices, have suffered only slight changes since pre-conquest times. And so it goes - "in Mexico we deal...with many epochs, with many stages of human progress."

#### Education and the Standard of Living

As I have already pointed out, the problem of education in Mexico is not only to give the people a common cultural heritage, but also, and of no less importance, it is a problem of how to raise the standard of living. Throughout the rural areas of the country (and about 75 per cent. of the

population may be classed as rural) the overwhelming majority of the people live in a manner which can only be faintly suggested by the economist's phrase "minimum of subsistence". Although this unhappy situation is in part to be accounted for on the basis of political, economic, and historical factors, there seems to be little doubt that at bottom it is simply a question of ignorance. It is unnecessary to cite figures and cases to prove this point. Anyone who has traveled in Mexico beyond the environs of the capital can testify to the truth of the statement that ignorance is the high wall which shuts the Mexican peasant away from a better and a happier ~~means~~ ~~of~~ life. They remain in poverty and ill-health, largely because they simply do not know how to improve their condition. They need to be taught how to till their lands, how to care for their physical wellbeing, and how to utilize the natural resources of the country side. They need to be taught how to cook their food, how to make their clothes, how to build their houses. In short, they need to be taught modern methods of living.

#### WAYS AND MEANS OF SOLVING THE PROBLEM

So far the problem. What has modern Mexico been doing to solve this problem? *education?*

The answer to this question has already been given in detail in the educational studies which were referred to at the beginning of this article and in this place it will be unnecessary to do more than recall the broad outlines of the program which is now being followed.

#### The Program of Rural Education

The major emphasis in the post-revolutionary activities of the Mexican federal government has been placed upon rural education. The back-

bone of the whole system is the one-teacher rural school. According to the latest statistics there are now scattered over Mexico more than 4,000 of these schools with an enrollment of some 200,000 students. In addition, there are about 6,000 state supported rural schools with an enrollment of around 400,000. Teachers for the rural schools are being trained in nine federal normal schools. A more specialized type of education is given in the six federal agricultural schools. Finally, a most important part of the rural education machinery is the "Cultural Mission". There are now seven of these missions which move about the country and hold institutes for the rural teachers. In all of these educational institutions the principle of acción is in force. This means that emphasis is placed upon active, functional, and vocational procedures designed to give the student a highly practical type of training.

Taken together the above mentioned agencies form what is now the "going concern" of rural education in Mexico. This whole system (built from the ground up in less than seven years) has been worked out largely on pragmatic lines. The need has been so great, there has been little time or disposition for experimentation or theorizing. Using the materials which were at hand and adopting those methods which seemed to work, the authorities have done the best they could with the limited funds at their disposal. And, it must be said that the whole effort has been remarkably effective. Gratifying results are already apparent; the social wreckage of ten years of revolution is gradually being cleaned up and the way being opened for a new and fuller life for the hitherto neglected rural masses.

#### Successes and Failures of the Present System

In the last few years, then, Mexico has grappled mightily with

the forces of ignorance and darkness. All along the line advances have been made; here and there the territory of the enemy has been invaded and conquered. But, as the educational leaders themselves clearly recognize, the battle is not yet won. In one sense, to be sure, it can never be won for the campaigns of education must be ever waged anew with each generation. Mexico now has 1,311,005 of its children in school, but there are still 1,636,759 children with no school to go to. Mexico has thousands of adults in night schools, but more than 60 per cent. of the population is still illiterate. Mexico now has 4,000 federal and 6,000 state supported rural schools, but only a small percentage of these are properly equipped or have adequately trained teachers.

The most and the least that can be said is that Mexico has scaled the first heights and taken the first line of defenses in its fight towards the light. Now, as the administration of President Calles draws to an end, there is a disposition to rest a moment for a breathing spell, to take stock of what has been accomplished and on the basis of the past seven years' experience to prepare for new advances. From the spoken and written words of the educational leaders one gathers that this stock taking has revealed certain weaknesses in the present system and method of attack and to a consideration of these weaknesses we may now address ourselves.

In the first place, it has been discovered that a highly centralized system has of necessity carried along with it a standardized program. For the most part this program has fitted into the needs of the various rural areas fairly well. In many regions, however, especially in those relatively isolated districts where the primitive cultures have been

maintained more or less intact, the program not only does not fit, but in some cases has worked positive harm. As the federal inspector of rural schools in the State of Chihuahua put the matter in one of his reports, "the program of the rural schools has been designed for the mestizos whose mentality is entirely different from that of the Indian...and this, together with the lack of knowledge of the Indian's language, has made it extremely difficult for the rural teachers in this region to make a suc-  
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cess of their schools."

In a recent address the Acting Secretary of Education, Professor Moisés Sáenz, has pointed out very clearly the failure of some of the rural schools to take into account the nature of the reality with which they must deal and the necessity of flexibility in their program.

"The school of acción", said Professor Sáenz, "represents one of the most important contributions to our educational system. It is true that not all of the schools are of this type, but each one is striving toward this goal. The philosophy is a new one and has, therefore, the enthusiasms and exuberances of youth; but it also has all of its exaggerations. We must be careful not to let this new idea lead us to mere disorder; a certain amount of control and system is always necessary...At the same time, it must be pointed out on the other hand that much yet remains to be done in the way of de-formalizing our schools...There are still too many teachers being turned out by our normal schools who are convinced of the infallibility of their little methods and systems. Often the influence of this type of teacher is more harmful than good..."

"The problem of cultural integration (which is the problem of



education in every country) in Mexico, because of the urgency of its solution and because of the nature of the social forces which we must integrate, presents certain special aspects. We are trying to accomplish in one generation what other nations have taken centuries to achieve. At times our nationalism has been rather violent; but there is a reason for this. The time is short and our culture is being menaced by outside forces. There are in Mexico cultural traditions which the school neither can nor ought to disregard...It would be foolish to disregard them and more foolish not to make use of them. To conserve the valuable elements in the indigenous cultures and to combine them with the new concepts and the new customs of modern civilization, is the most important task which confronts the Mexican educator."

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The clear implication of these words of Professor Sáenz is that neither the rural schools nor the normal schools as at present constituted have been entirely successful in meeting the needs of those communities which because of their difference in "mentality", language and customs from each other and from the rest of the country, require special types of educational treatment. Apparently, these very interesting agencies, the "Cultural Missions", are also subject to something of the same type of criticism. In reviewing the work of the Cultural Missions, Dr. Puig Casauranc, former Secretary of Education, has pointed out in a recent publication that, although the Missions have worked very well as teacher training agencies, they have more or less failed in their intention to act as instrumentalities for improving and raising the level of life of the rural communities. And this for at least three reasons: First, the Missions have gone into the various communities without adequate knowledge

of the geographic, economic and social background of the region; second, the period of 21 days in each community has proved to be wholly inadequate for effecting any real changes or of making any lasting improvements in the life of the people; and, third, often the personnel of the Missions has not been adequately trained for the job.

#### Restatement of the Problem

With these criticisms before us we are now in a position to summarize and restate the problem of education in Mexico as it now stands. Briefly the situation is something like this;

Whereas, for various reasons Mexico is not culturally homogenous; whereas, there are a number of groups which differ one from another and from the rest of the country in language, customs, beliefs and institutions; whereas, the rural schools and other educational agencies which have been developed in recent years have proved satisfactory for some (relatively civilized) parts of the country, in other parts the problems presented have been so varied and so different that the standard program has failed in a greater or less degree; and, whereas, the cultures of many of these aforementioned groups, already being subjected to the disintegrating effects of haphazard and chance contacts with alien social forces, are eminently worth preserving - Therefore, it is urgently necessary and highly important that some new attack be launched, that some new method be devised for a more effective realization of Mexico's new educational ideals.

Specifically the matter comes down to this: in those regions where the present educational institutions have failed there is a need for some new type of agency to deal with the situation - a type of agency, be it said, which will act only on the basis of an intimate knowledge of the life

of the people, acquired through careful study of their whole culture. Such an institution as this would obviously function in two ways; first, it would solve the problem of how to deal with the culturally disparate group; and, second, it would build up a body of experience and knowledge which would be a foundation for all future educational planning in Mexico. It would be at once a novel and effective instrument of education in its own right, and it would furnish the basis for improving and strengthening the agencies already in existence.

#### The Permanent Missions

Now, interestingly enough, in the last few months the Ministry of Education has been experimenting with an institution of just the type indicated in the foregoing paragraph. This new institution is called <sup>a</sup>Mision Permanente (Permanent Mission). As the name suggests, it is an outgrowth of the older type of Mision Cultural Viajera (i.e., the <sup>Movable</sup>"Movable Cultural Mission" described in my Educational Studies, Series I. N° 3).

The idea of a special type of organization for the study and solution of the varied social, economic and educational problems presented by the different environmental and cultural regions of Mexico is not new. As early as 1919, for example, Manuel Gamio, the well known Mexican anthropologist, and his associates not only developed the idea in some detail, but in the three volume report of their work in the Valley of Teotihuacan clearly demonstrated what could actually be done in one region. The program outlined by Gamio in the introduction to this report was as follows:

"The extent of our territory does not offer the usual conditions, geographically, biologically and climatically, which in other countries have largely contributed to the formation of populations which, ethnically, culturally and linguistically are homogeneous. On the contrary many and distinct local conditions have greatly influenced the dissimilarity of the Mexican population.

"In fact, our population is not homogeneous. It is heterogeneous. The different groups which constitute it differ in their historic antecedents and racial characteristics, in the manifestations of their material and intellectual culture and in the expression of their ideas by means of numerous languages and dialects.

"In short, we are justified in asserting that the population of Mexico is a conglomeration of little known regional groups. They differ among themselves according to the divergence of their present innate characteristics; of the geographical, climatic, botanical and zoological conditions of the regions inhabited by each of these groups and according to their racial, cultural and linguistic antecedents.

"In view of the above facts, this Department has found it convenient to concern itself with the following points:

"1st. Gradual acquisition of knowledge referring to racial characteristics, to manifestations of material and intellectual culture, to languages and dialects, to the economic situation, to the environmental and biological conditions of regional populations of the present and of the past in Mexico. - 2nd. Investigation of what really practical and adequate means should be employed by official bodies (federal, local and municipal) as well as private institutions (scientific, altruistic or workmen's associations; the press, masonic lodges, the church, etc., etc.), in order effectively to stimulate the physical, intellectual, moral and economic development of the people. - 3rd. The stimulation of the racial approximation, the cultural fusion, linguistic unification and the economic equilibrium of our various groups, which only in this manner will ever form part of a

coherent and definite nationality as well as of a true fatherland."

As it is impossible to begin at once the study of all the regional populations throughout the republic of Mexico, it was resolved to select the principal areas inhabited by representative social groups. For this purpose a classification of geographic zones was made in which the typical regions of investigation are fixed as follows:

México, Hidalgo, Puebla and Tlaxcala.  
Veracruz and Tamaulipas.  
Oaxaca and Guerrero  
Chiapas  
Tabasco and Campeche  
Yucatán and Quintana Roo  
Jalisco and Michoacán  
Querétaro and Guanajuato  
Chihuahua and Coahuila  
Sonora and Sinaloa  
Baja California

These zones comprise the various physical, climatic and biological aspects of the national territory, and include the various historical, racial, cultural, economical and linguistical characteristics of the entire population of Mexico." <sup>7.</sup>

Gamio, however, for various reasons, was not able to carry out his program beyond the first step, and for a number of years nothing further was attempted in this line.

In the latter part of 1927 Dr. Puig Casauranc became interested in the matter of regional studies and appointed a commission to report on the subject. After some months this commission drew up a plan for what they called "Permanent Cultural Missions". The essential elements in this plan are set forth by Dr. Puig Casauranc as follows:

"Various departments of the government (including Agriculture, Industry, and Health) have been engaged in educational extension work of one type or another looking to the improvement of life in rural communities

of Mexico. In order that this work shall be efficient and effective in the highest degree it is necessary that the present scattered and uncoordinated efforts be drawn together in an integrated and directed program. Only by concentrating and organizing our attempts to improve the social and... economic conditions of the rural communities can we obtain the best results...

"The commission which has been charged with the study of this problem is definitely of the opinion that, although the task of the economic rehabilitation and the social reorganization of the rural population of Mexico lies outside of the scope of the rural school as such, this fact does not by any means relieve the educational authorities of responsibility in the matter. Our general philosophy of rural education, the future growth and development of the rural school itself, and the general progress of the nation demand that we enter this larger field of social reconstruction.

"The commission is further agreed that this work should take the form of a series of concrete demonstrations involving the implantation and development of functioning institutions in the rural communities. And with this as a basis it has decided that the following program shall be developed by the 'Permanent Missions' in each of the communities selected for experimentation:

"1. Industrial Activities: Study of the existing industries; study of the natural products of the region; study of the means of communication; study of the markets; study of the economic necessities of the area; suggestions and assistance in establishing industries appropriate to the region.

"2. Agricultural Activities: Survey and study of the kinds of products (agricultural and forest) appropriate to the region; organization of

agricultural exploitation; organization of agricultural labor; development of agricultural credit.

"3. Social Activities: Improvement of home life in its material, social and moral aspects; study and improvement of social customs; study of diet and food; survey of educational conditions; investigation of the division of labor, child labor, and home industries.

"4. Health Activities: Development of a general program of rural hygiene based on a study of the conditions and needs of the community; prophylaxis against intestinal diseases, tuberculosis, venereal diseases, small pox, etc.; campaign against mosquitoes and flies; education in child care.

"This, in general, represents the plan of action. Each Mission will consist of : a social worker, a doctor (with special training in public health), an agronomist, a visiting nurse, and an expert in pequeñas industrias (small industries). For the year 1928 a Mission will be established in each of the following regions:

"1. Xocoyucan (State of Tlaxcala): The population in this region is purely indigenous (Indian). The Mission will make its base at the Federal Normal school located at San Diego Xocoyucan and will include in the area of its operations the some fifteen communities lying within a radius of six kilometers from this center. It is estimated that the Mission will be able to reach about 8,550 adults.

"2. Cañon de Huajuco (State of Nuevo Leon) The Mission will establish its base at Villa de Santiago, and should be able to reach a population of some 20,000 (of whom approximately 75 per cent. are illiterate). This region should furnish interesting comparisons with the others which have been

selected, for practically all of the inhabitants are mestizos. Pulque is unknown here; the land is divided up into very small farms; and peonage is practically unknown. Notwithstanding these facts the social and economic conditions leave much to be desired.

"3. Zacatlán (State of Puebla): In this mountainous region of Puebla there are approximately 6,500 peasants. The social organization is typical; the population is pure Indian; there is almost a complete ignorance of Spanish; property is well divided, but the general level of life is very low.

"4. Yautepec (State of Morelos): This is a region of ejiditarios (i.e., where the property is held communally). The population of the area numbers about 7,000; wages are very low and there is almost a complete lack of work; community badly organized; great need of economic rehabilitation.

"5. Mexé (State of Hidalgo): The Mission in this region will make its base at the Federal Agricultural School. The race in this area is purely indigenous (Otomi); economic conditions bad.

"The highest hopes are entertained for the success of this experiment. It is believed that the 'Permanent Missions' will not only supplement and complete the work of the rural schools and of the 'Movable Cultural Missions', but that they will hasten the improvement of the rural adult population. The five 'Permanent Missions' which it is planned to put into the field this year will be able to reach no less than 50,000 individuals. If their work is successful, and, if in the future we can multiply the number of these Missions, there is every reason for us to look forward to the early incorporation of Mexico's rural masses



into the civilized life of the nation."

Unfortunately, for lack of funds and for other reasons, the Department of Education has been able to put into the field this year only two Missions. The results which have been obtained from these two Missions, however, have been highly gratifying. Both in the information which they have been able to gather and in the actual changes which they have wrought in the life of the people, they have more than fulfilled the hopes of their founders. In the opinion of the writer, the "Permanent Missions" represent a new and valuable contribution toward the solution of Mexico's peculiar and oftentimes baffling educational problems. The Missions are, to be sure, experiments. But they are experiments in the right direction and they deserve to be tested out under the most favorable conditions. Unusual problems demand unusual measures for their solution. Mexico may never become a unified and integrated nation, but no one will ever be able to say that she failed to achieve this goal because of a lack of original and courageous ideas.

NOTES.

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3. Varela, Salvador- Informe del Inspector de la Zona Oeste del Estado de Chihuahua Sobre el Problema Educativo en la Sierra Tarahumara, Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública. March, 1927.

4. Unpublished report of federal school inspector in the Territory of Quintana Roo, June 1928.

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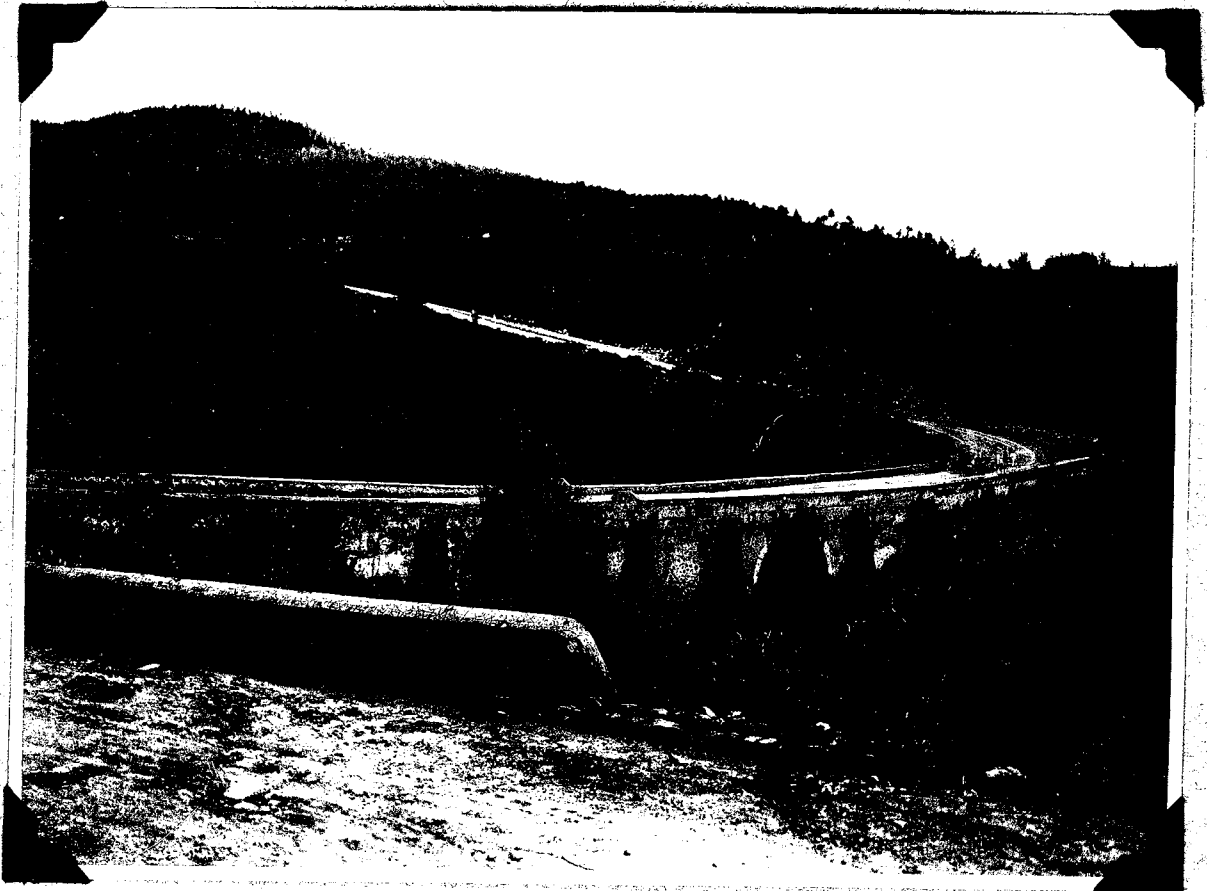
6. Speech by Moisés Sáenz reported in "Excelsior", Sept. 14, 1928.

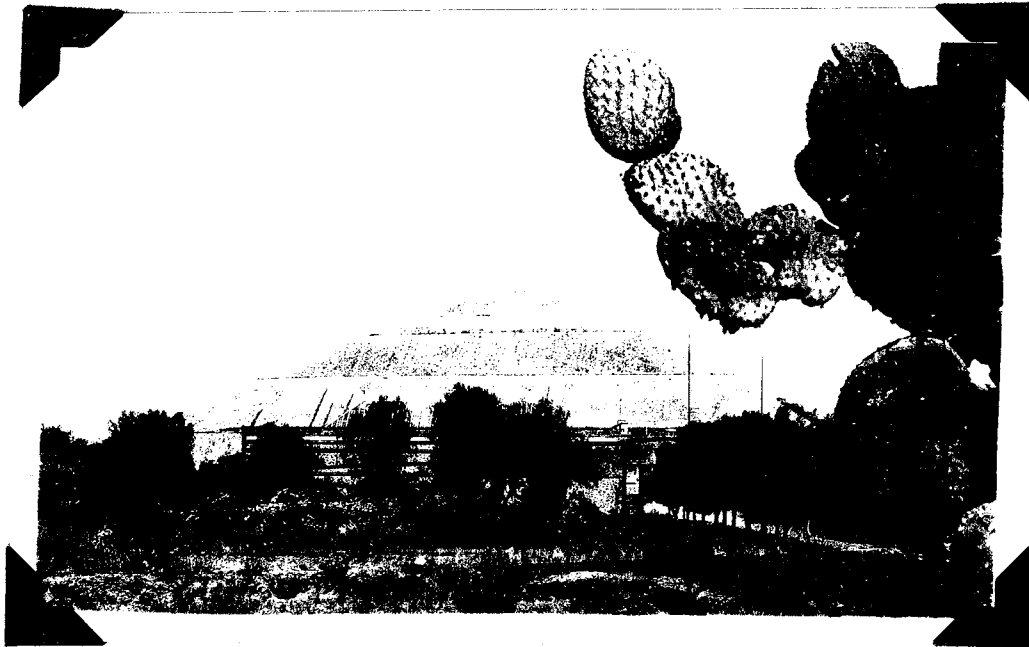
7. Gamio, Manuel- Introducción Síntesis y Conclusiones de la Obra: La Población del Valle de Teotihuacán, México, 1922, pp. x-xi.

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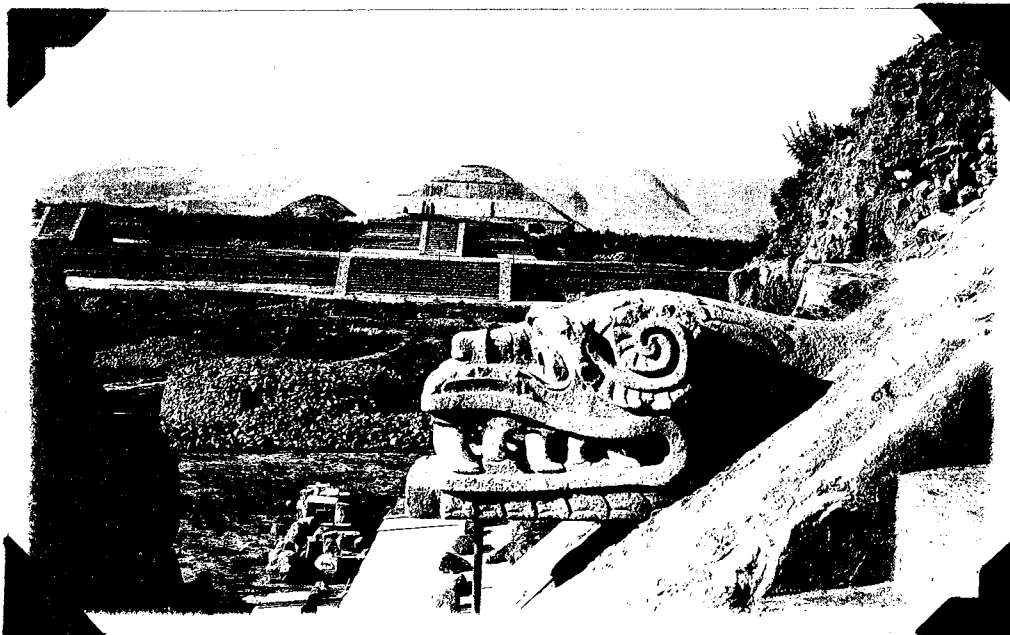


MOUNTAINS MAKE FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION-  
ROADS ARE EXPENSIVE IN MEXICO.





RUINS OF THE ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS OF  
THE VALLEY OF TEOTIHUACAN.





POTTERY MAKER-YUCATAN.



MEXICAN KITCHEN-NOTE THE PRIMITIVE "METATE"  
FOR GRINDING CORN-THE MATTING ON THE WALL  
IS THE PRIMITIVE BED OR "PETATE".



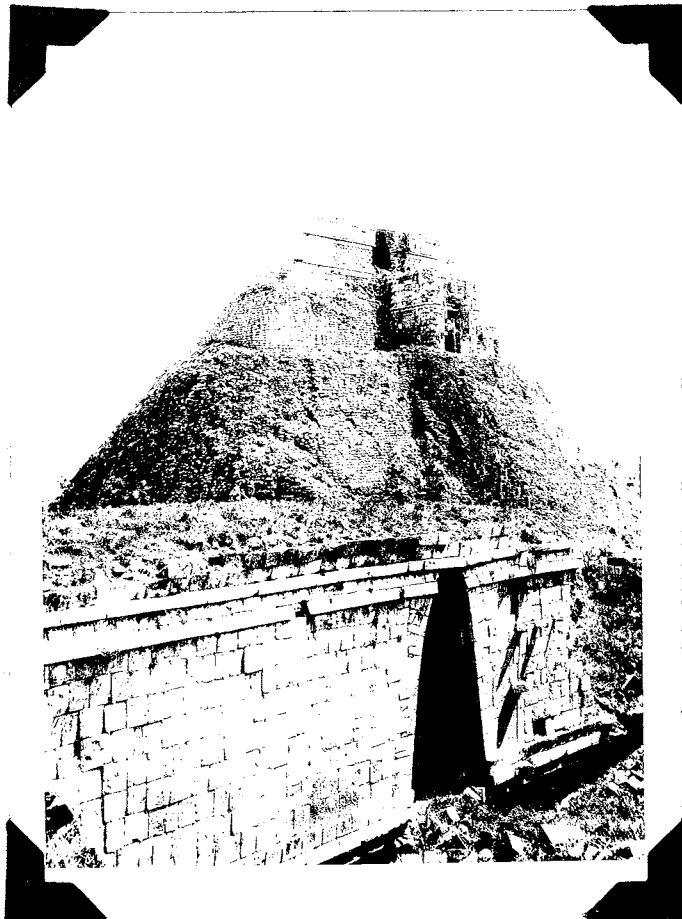
INDIAN CHILDREN-TEHUANTEPEC.



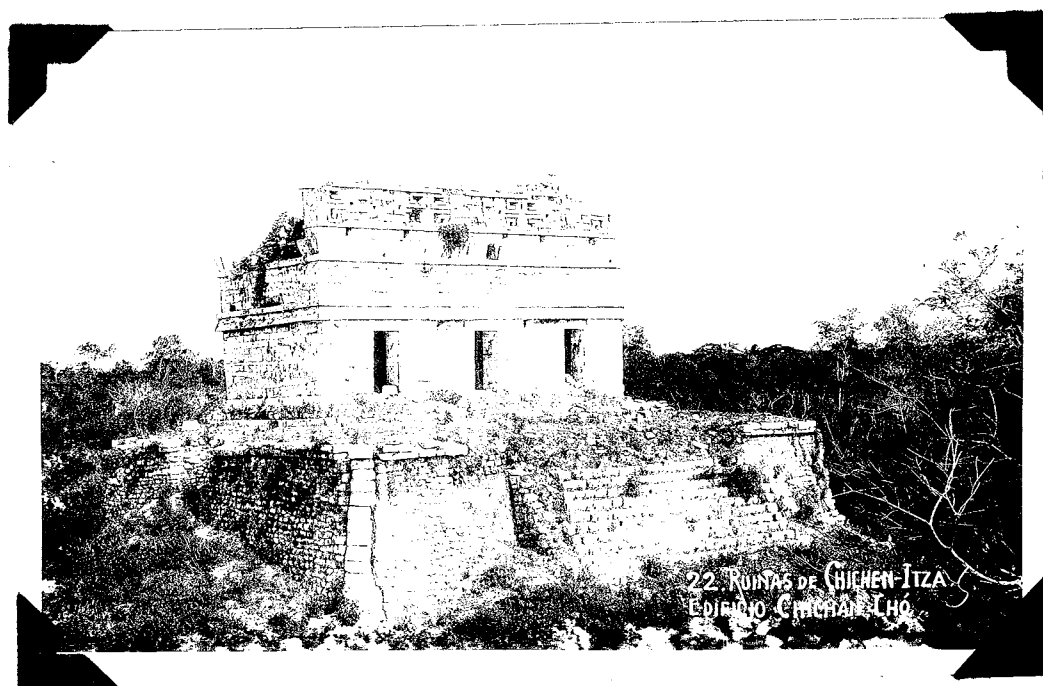
INDIAN GIRLS-TEHUANTEPEC.



PRIMITIVE METHOD OF CARRYING COCONUTS  
TEHUANTEPEC.



RUINS OF THE MAYA CIVILIZATION IN YUCATAN.





HUICHOL INDIANS-STATE OF NAYARIT.







"THEIR RELIGION IS A CURIOUS MELANGE"  
(DANCERS AT A RELIGIOUS  
FESTIVAL).

