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"MISSIONARIES" - MEXICAN STYLE.

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Stimulated by the patriotic Mr. Hearst the United States Senate has lately been once again busily engaged in taking the lid off of Mexico. The air is filled with the unpleasant odours of a stew of intrigue, plots and counterplots, and the devious doings of newspaper men and renegade government clerks. And no matter who is finally proved guilty, for most people in the United States the end result is the establishing of another unpleasant association with the word Mexico. It is difficult enough for the average citizen of the United States, depending for his facts upon the daily press, to build up any sort of a balanced picture of even his own country, but when it comes to a country like Mexico where wars and rumors of wars have been the only stock and trade of the newspapers for almost a generation, to "see it clearly and see it whole" is practically impossible. And yet, strange as it may seem, even in Mexico the people do not subsist solely on a diet of revolution.

Pugnacious and ambitious generals continue, to be sure, playing at their old game, but this is not the whole story. Things are happening in Mexico today which have never happened before; things which may in the long run relegate even the generals to the pages of the history books. There is, for example, in Mexico at the present time an extremely interesting and highly significant movement for the dissemination of knowledge and enlightenment to every corner of the nation. It is the purpose of this article to deal with one aspect of this modern educational movement. The following survey of the work of the "Cultural Missions is an exhibit of Mexico in "revolution",

a revolt, however, not of generals and armies against the government and the established order, but of teachers and the leaders of education against ignorance and nescience.

The most serious problem which the Mexican government had to face when it undertook to launch its program of mass education was to discover and train teachers. The whole rural school movement would stand or fall depending upon the success with which the educational authorities were able to solve this problem. In a country torn apart ~~for~~ for years with revolutionary strife and political disorder it was much easier to provide logs than it was to find a sufficient number of Mexican Mark Hopkins' to sit on them. What is true of all schools is peculiarly true of the small, isolated, one man, rural school: the teacher must not only be an individual devoted to his profession, but, also, obviously he must know something to teach. Furthermore, even after rural school teachers have been obtained in sufficient numbers to man the schools, there still remains the formidable administrative task of keeping them on the job. The nature of their work is such, denied as they are the stimulation of association with their fellows, and subject at the best ^{to} only a cursory supervision, that some system must be devised for improving their technique and renewing their spirit.

The first attempts on the part of the government to deal with these questions of teaching personnel took the form of "Institutes" held during the vacation periods in the larger towns, generally the capitals of the states. This type of work, however, failed on two counts. It did not produce teachers fast enough to meet the demand; and it did not reach

the very teachers most in need of help- those in the rural schools. The idea of the "Cultural Missions" was conceived in an effort to make these Institutes more effective in the rural field. The notion was in the air, and some tentative experiments had already been made, but not until the early part of 1926 did the Sub-Secretary of Education, Moises Sáenz, building upon the ideas of José Vasconcelos and Roberto Medellín, and with the able assistance of Elena Torres, succeed in devising a practical working scheme for the Missions.

A separate department was created in the "Secretaría de Educación" known as "La Dirección de Misiones Culturales". After five months spent in organizing and training the personnel of six groups, in May 1926 the department was ready to send forth its "Missionaries" into the Mexican wilderness.

In brief outline, the constitution of each Mission was as follows: (a) A "Jefe" or Chief of the Mission whose duties were to co-ordinate and direct the work of the whole group and to teach the classes in the theory of education- with especial reference to the organization and conduct of rural schools; (b) a "Professor" of Agriculture to teach the theory and practice of vegetable and flower gardening, fruit raising and "general farming"; (c) an instructor in Physical Culture, in charge of games, sports, and physical education; (d) a Social Worker, entrusted with the difficult task of teaching the elements of simple medicine, hygiene, sewing, cooking, and anything else that might be of value in making life more healthy and comfortable in the rural district; (e) a varying number of instructors in "pequeñas industrias", i.e. small industries, such as tanning, the preserving of fruits

and vegetables, the making of soap, and the construction of simple furniture for the home and school.

When a Mission goes into the field generally a small village is selected as headquarters. The places chosen—often they are miles from the railroad—are selected almost entirely on the basis of their need. The program followed for the three weeks duration of each Mission is standardized, but at the same time flexible enough to be easily adapted to the needs and problems of the place. Care is, of course, taken to hold the Missions at such times and such places as to insure the greatest attendance possible of federal and state rural schools* teachers. After a building has been obtained (a school, a church, or even an old abandoned house) the equipment for the kitchen, library, manual training classes, agriculture, and sports, furnished by the Secretariat of Education, together with what can be borrowed in the village is installed and the work is ready to begin. Appropriate classes are organized by the various professors of the Mission for the student-teachers and for the town's people. Model gardens are planted, miniature model houses and schools are made in the carpenter shop, and demonstrations are given of how to preserve fruits, wash babies, build toilets, make furniture, cook bread, and play volley ball. In short, everything possible in the course of three weeks, both in theory and practice, is done to realize the two major aims of the Mission: (a) the training and improvement of the rural school teachers; and (b) the raising of the cultural level of the "pueblo" in which the Mission is held.

The work of the "Cultural Missions" is still more or less in the experimental stage. However, the results which have already been obtained appear to give evidence of the fact that the educational authorities have hit upon a novel, effective and relatively cheap scheme for the rapid development of the rural schools and the "incorporation of the neglected rural masses into the cultural life of the nation". The success of the Missions is in part due to the excellent manner in which the whole idea has been adapted to the immediate educational needs of the nation. Even a casual reading, however, of a few of the official reports of the work of the various Missions makes it very clear that the greater part of the credit for whatever has been achieved belongs to the "Missionaries" themselves. To work ten and twelve hours a day, week in ^{and} week out, often under the most uncomfortable conditions, for only 10 pesos a day (something less than \$5.00) requires a type of devotion and a spirit of self-sacrifice as unusual as it is commendable. (Each member of the Mission is paid the same salary and out of this he must defray all his expenses with the exception of railroad fare).

During the first year of its existence the "Dirección de Misiones Culturales" held 44 Missions in 13 different states, reaching approximately 3,000 teachers. The total cost of this work was 114,742 pesos (c.\$57,250.00), or, on an average 19,123 pesos (c.\$9,400.00) per year, per Mission.

A year's experience is perhaps too little on which to base a final judgment of the value of the work of the Cultural Missions- especially that aspect of the work which looks to raising directly the standard of living in the small

centers where the Missions have been held. A careful follow-up study, for example, in the state of Oaxaca where six Missions were held last year, is needed to test the extent to which the seeds have actually taken root. However, certain facts are obvious; and one of these is that twenty-one days is a pityfully short time in which to hope to change and improve folkways and mores which have ^{been} centuries in the making. Simple as the program of social amelioration is which the Missions are seeking to propagate, it, nevertheless, represents a veritable revolution in the life of the rural population of Mexico. A people that has for centuries slept on a straw mat on the floor, shared its little "jacal" with the pigs and chickens, and subsisted mainly on a diet of "tortillas" and "frijoles" is not likely in the course of three weeks to see any due and sufficient reason for beds, baths, pig pens, and pickled pears. That part of the program which has for its aim improving the technique and raising the ideals of the rural school teachers will, no doubt, continue to meet with appreciable success. But even here no miracles are to be expected. For the most part the rural school teachers are shackled by the same traditions and superstitions as the people with whom they work. And, even when this is not the case, their good will more often than not exceeds their intelligence and knowledge of the social forces with which they are seeking to deal.

All of which is not so much a criticism of the work of the Cultural Missions as it is a statement of the fact, which the educational authorities themselves have been the first to recognize, that there is a long hard row yet to be hoed in Mexico before the fruits of education will begin to bloom.

Centuries of neglect and virtual slavery, and decades of revolution and social disorder have left their marks upon the people. These marks cannot, and will not, be effaced over night. If any proof of this generalization were needed, the very obstacles which have impeded the work of the Missions in the various states- class stratification and prejudice, religious fanaticism, inefficient and ignorant political appointees as school inspectors, the inertia of age encrusted customs, the hogging of the land by the rich and the powerful, the jealousy of state and federal educational officials- are proof enough. The fate of the movement of mass education in Mexico is inevitably bound up with the larger fate of the whole social revolution. And social revolutions are not consummated by the overthrow of governments or the execution of generals, but only by years of patient study and wise leadership.

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The Cultural Mission At Actopam, Hidalgo- A Case Study.

The little "pueblo" of Actopam is two hours by train north and west from the famous mining town of Pachuca in the southern part of the state of Hidalgo. So far as the place itself is concerned there is nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other villages that dot the great central plateau of Mexico. That is, nothing save the very interesting old church of San Nicolás Actopam. With its tower rearing straight simple lines stark against the sky, and with its square masses dominating the town, this church is something of a curiosity in Mexican ecclesiastical architecture, for it is distinctly Gothic in style and spirit. History has it that it was founded in 1546 by a group of Italian friars. Like so many churches

in Mexico the greater part of the structure has been allowed to fall into ruins, empty and desolate, with only a section here and there taken over for secular uses. The church proper is still reserved for religious worship, but one of the adjoining buildings is now a municipal hospital and the ground floor of what was once the cloister has been turned into barracks for a sleepy little garrison of twenty-odd soldiers.

A few weeks ago it would have been difficult to find a quieter, dreamier, little "pueblocito" or a more neglected old church in all Mexico. But not so now! Today the whole building fairly hums with life and activity. Children are running in and out of the door; from within comes the noise of saws and hammers; there is a pleasant smell of burnt "tortillas". In front and to the side the ground has been freshly spaced and parcelled out into little gardens. Even the soldiers have been inspired to clean a little of the eternal filth out of their quarters and to set their women washing their uniforms in the neighboring well. One might think that the old friars had miraculously come to life to labor once again for the glory of God and the King of Spain. And as a matter of fact, this would not be far wrong, for the Missionaries have come again- not, to be sure, in the name of God, nor yet the King of Spain, but in the name of education and the good life. A Cultural Mission has installed itself and started its activities on the second floor of the old cloister.

The day on which I arrived in company with the Chief of the Department of Cultural Missions, Señor Rafael Ramirez, was the beginning of the second week of the program. We were received by the "Jefe" of the Mission, Señor Javier Uranga,

and the Social Worker, Miss Vesta Sturges. The "Jefe" is a rather tall, good looking man, with an air of the military about him. Despite the gray hair about his temples, he is still somewhere in his middle thirties. He has the enthusiasm for his work of a man who has voluntarily spent ten years traveling around his native land and an appreciation of the problems with which he has to deal that comes from sixteen months spent in the field as head of a Cultural Mission. Miss Sturges, although an American, has been in Mexico a number of years and is what the Mexicans call "simpática" (just right). She brings to her work not only a sympathetic understanding of native rural life, but a technique and a knowledge acquired in a varied experience with social problems. (She is a graduate of Pomona College and has worked with charity organizations in the United States).

A tour of inspection reveals the fact that all the regular activities on the standard program of the Cultural Missions are underway. In one corner of the spacious gallery surrounding the patio of the old cloister a class in canning and preserving fruits and vegetables is busily at work; in another corner a few students are working on the crayon drawings which are tacked up all over the walls; here is a class in soap making; downstairs a noisy and enthusiastic group is being given instruction in manual training; outside a dozen students are spading and digging in the garden plots under the direction of the "Professor" of agriculture.

It is interesting to note that even the business of living together and conducting the affairs of the Mission ~~are~~^{is} utilized for the purposes of instruction. The student

body is divided into three small groups- A, B, and C. During the three weeks of the Mission each group takes its turn in helping in the kitchen, waiting on the table, and policing the building. The students also form a cooperative society with their own officers and directors to defray the expenses of food and materials.

A typical daily program for the 41 rural teachers in attendance reads something like this:

7-8	Group A.- Commissariat.
	" B.- and C.- Physical Culture.
8-10	" A.- Class in Education.
	" B.- Agriculture.
	" C.- Social Work.
10-11	" A.- Social Work.
	" B.- Education.
	" C.- Agriculture.
11-12	" A.- Commissariat.
	" B.- Pottery Making.
	" C.- Manual Training and Weaving.
3-4	" A.- Agriculture.
	" B.- Social Work.
	" C.- Education.
4-6	" A.- Commissariat.
	" B.- Small Industries.
	" C.- Pottery Making.

Twice a week there is a "Social Hour" after supper. To-night happens to be the occasion of one of these fiestas. A number of the village folk drop in and sit down rather shyly on the long benches. Some of the students dress up in improvised costumes and stage a mock wedding (my own mosquito net is commandeered to serve as the bridal veil). Others burlesque the national dances, give dramatic recitations, or sing songs. On certain nights, we are told, music is provided and the whole village is invited to dance.

This particular Mission has apparently been very

successful in its work with the people of the village. The "Presidente" of the pueblo is enthusiastic. He has done every thing in his power to help along the good cause, even to the extent of taking two old ladies convicted of murder out of jail to help in the kitchen. Twenty-four village mothers and about fifty girls are attending the classes given by the Social Worker and the "Professor" of "pequeñas industrias".

A visit to the classes in Education or Social Work convinces one of the simple, practical nature of the program of social improvement which Mexico is seeking to realize through its rural schools. "Your chief aim", said Señor Ramirez in talking to one of the classes, "should be to make your school a true community center. I mean this not only in the sense that you make your school a natural and pleasant gathering place for the people, but, also, that you should constantly strive to raise the level of life in your community. No matter how well you teach the children to read and write, if there are still homes in your village where people sleep on the floor, allow animals to stay in the house, wear dirty, ragged clothes, and eat unhealthy food- then you are a failure as a teacher. Furthermore, remember that the school must be flexible enough to meet the needs of the community. If, for example, the children must help their parents and cannot come at 8 o'clock the hour which you have set, then let them come at 9 or 10 o'clock. And in the night schools, if the adults want only to learn to write and not to read, then teach them to write- or whatever else they may desire. You are to be at once a servant and a leader in your community".

In her classes the Social Worker puts this same emphasis upon the necessity for the rural teacher to make his school a focus of community life and an inspiration for a higher standard of living. Through lectures, demonstrations, and the construction of little completely equipped model houses she exerts every effort to make the rural teachers see that they must be more than mere teachers- they must be apostles of the "good life". Furthermore, she tries to show them that the "good life" is not necessarily something that is strange and foreign to be imposed from above, but that it can be best achieved by building upon the native arts and crafts of the people. The materials are already there, the people have only to be taught to use them. They must be taught to eat more eggs and vegetables, to drink milk, and make cheese. The women must be made to realize that their own simple, one-piece garments, are at once cheaper, easier to make, and more artistic than the ugly, two piece dress introduced by the Spaniards..."And when you attempt to teach your people the principles of hygiene and simple medicine", Miss Sturges tells her students, "do not ride roughshod over what you have learned to regard as superstition. Do not try to destroy at one blow their faith in religious charms or in the folk remedies of the old "medicine men". Often these have their value. Be content to work slowly and to introduce your health reforms only after you have demonstrated their superiority over the old ways".

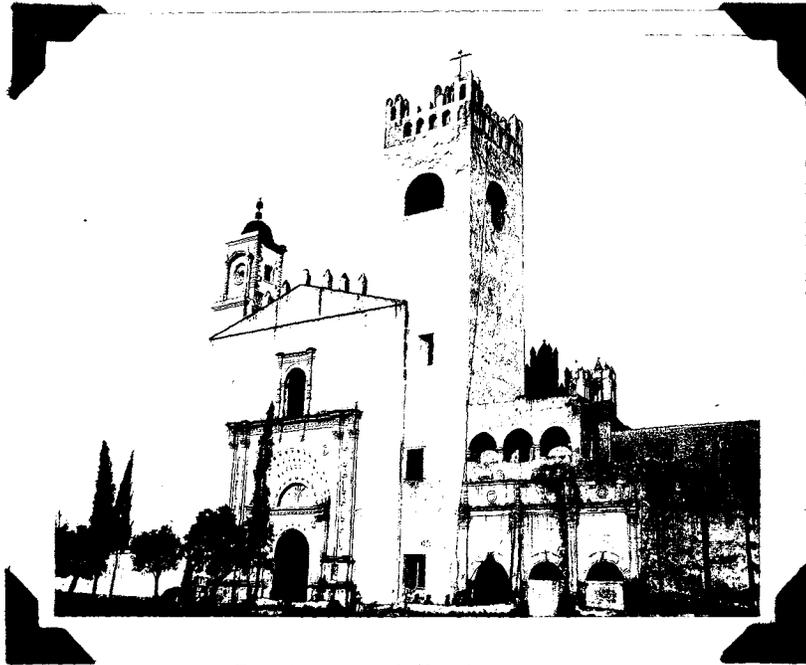
Thus the Missionaries preach their new gospel. And thus they seek to pour new wine into old bottles. Today- 6 Missions and 3,000 rural schools; tomorrow- a Mission for every state and 5,000 rural schools. This is the dream. This is the new note in Mexican education.



The "Jefe" of a "Cultural Mission."



Typical Village Where "Cultural Missions" are Held - Actopan.



The Church at Actopan.



An American Social Worker.
Cultural Mission at Actopan.



A Class in "Carpenteria"
Cultural Mission at Actopan.



Village Gathered to Receive a Cultural Mission - Yulalag, Oaxaca.



Rural School Teachers at a Cultural Mission - Yauhuitlan, Oaxaca.



A little Zapotecan Indian - Cultural Mission - Etlá, Oaxaca.



A. Class in "Agricultura" - Cultural Mission - Yulalag, Oaxaca.



A Class in "Carpentería" - Cultural Mission, Yulalag, Oaxaca.