

EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
SERIES I NO.6

HOW MEXICO TRAINS ITS RURAL SCHOOL TEACHERS.

MEXICO CITY
JANUARY 1928

HOW MEXICO TRAINS ITS RURAL SCHOOL TEACHERS.

George Bernard Shaw's famous "dirty dig" at the teaching profession-- "those who can do; those who can't teach"-- may be a fair statement of the unfortunate impotency of the English schoolmarms and masters. Even the ingenious Mr. Shaw, however, would be hard put to it to make this quip fit the class of teachers with which Mexico is seeking to man its rural schools. The rural school masters in Mexico both can and do, and for this very reason they also teach. What they can do, is, perhaps judged from some points of view, rather simple; but simple or complex, the fact is the whole pedagogical procedure in Mexico's new rural schools is founded upon the basic principle that the teacher must gain his right to teach by actually being able to do the thing taught. To have heard someone's lecture, or read somebody's pamphlet on how to plow a field, or weave a blanket, or make soap, does not suffice. He must be able to demonstrate these things "en propria persona."

By this statement it is not intended to leave the impression that by any means all of the 3,000 and more rural school teachers now employed are ideally equipped for their work. Indeed, the whole scheme known as the "Cultural Missions" has been devised mainly for the purpose of filling in the all too obvious gaps in the training of those at present in charge of the rural schools. Inadequately prepared as many of these teachers are, they must

serve as best they may for the time being. But what of the future? What is being done to train new teachers to take the places of the ones who drop out or prove inefficient? Where will Mexico recruit its instructors for the 2,000 new schools which the federal government hopes to establish during the next few years? To answer these questions is to describe the work of the recently organized "Escuelas Normales Rurales."

"The Rural Normal Schools", states the official decree of the Secretariat of Education, "shall have the following objects:

"1. The preparation by regular courses of teachers for the rural schools in the small communities and indigenous centers.

"2. The cultural and professional improvement of the teachers in service in the region where the school is located by means of short courses given during the vacation period.

"3. The incorporation of the small communities in the region into the general progress of the nation by educational extension work."

In order to insure the best conditions possible for achieving these objects, the official communique further ordains that these normal schools shall be located in the rural districts themselves, preferably at points offering easy means of communication with the more important centers of population. At least 6 hectáres of land (about 15 acres) shall be allowed each school for the purpose of instruction and experimentation in the theory and practice of agronomy and animal husbandry. The school building shall be equipped with living quarters for the students and faculty, and have ample space for class-rooms and the shops for the "pequeñas industrias".

A final indispensable prerequisite is that the school building shall be so located as to permit the adequate functioning of an "Escuela Primaria Rural Anexa" (i.e., a model rural primary school to furnish the normal students with practice classes).

It is unnecessary to give here in any detail the curriculum of the two year course offered by the "Escuelas Rurales Normales". Sufficient it is to state that in the four semesters of approximately five months each (a three weeks vacation is allowed at the end of a semester) only those subjects are taught which will be of the most immediate and practical value to the future teachers in putting into practice the program of the rural schools. In order to become a student in a rural normal school one must be 15 years old (14 for women) and have completed at least the four year course of a primary school. Those students able to pay are charged for their board and room; for deserving students who cannot pay a certain number of fellowships are provided. The schools are run as co-operative societies on a cost-plus basis. As time goes on it is hoped that each school will be at least 50% self-supporting.

The educational extension work, mentioned above, calls for the giving of special short courses of not more than three weeks duration to the local rural teachers already in service. Also an integral part of this extension work is for the students and members of the faculty to hold classes, give popular lectures, organize "fiestas" and in other ways to attempt to raise the level of life in the neighboring communities.

So much for the "proyecto" of the "Escuelas Normales Rurales"

as it appears on paper. What is actually being done to translate this plan into action? A summary of the official statistics will give some idea of the progress which has been made in this field of educational endeavor to date. The first normal school especially adapted for the training of rural school teachers was established in 1925. By the end of 1926, 8 schools were operating in various states with an enrollment of 485 students and a teaching personnel of 51. At the present time (August, 1927) these figures have increased to 9 schools; 625 students; and a teaching staff of 87. The rural practice schools annexed to the normal schools count a registration of 1,080 children (838 in regular attendance) and 35 teachers.

"La Escuela Normal Rural de San Antonio de la Cal",

High up on the slope of a mountain about three miles from the capital of the state of Oaxaca stands an imposing two-story building. During the time of Díaz this "edificio" with 1,200 acres of land was the seat of an "Agricultural Experimental Station". For one reason and another, but mainly because in 1915 the government, wishing to set an example in the state, gave all but 75 acres of the land to the neighboring villages for "ejidos", the station was abandoned. Ten years passed and by 1925 only the main walls of the building were left standing. "The roof, the floors, and the out buildings were in ruins". In these days of strenuous educational activity in Mexico, however, "old ruins" are just so

many challenges to the educational leaders. In July, 1925 the Secretary of Education, Dr. Puig, decreed that the state of Oaxaca should have a rural normal school. Whereupon, not without hard labor and a strict economy in the outlay of funds (the whole expenditure was something less than \$5,000), the work of rehabilitating the former agricultural station was accomplished. "La Escuela Normal Rural de San Antonio de la Cal" was formally opened in November, 1925. True, much remains yet to be done. The floors are a little wobbly; the furnishings are crude and the equipment inadequate; and the stables and out-houses are still in a rather dilapidated state. But, nevertheless, the fact remains that where once stood only the crumbling walls of an abandoned experiment, now stands a Normal School that is a "going concern". Eleven "maestros" are busily engaged in turning 67 native Oaxacans into rural school teachers. Seventy-five little Zapotecan Indians attend the practice school and 35 adults are enrolled in the night classes. Six or seven "hectáres" are now under cultivation and just this week the school has acquired 14 mules with which to work the rest of the land. The standard curriculum for rural normal schools, with its emphasis upon a type of practical social knowledge for the improvement of rural life in Mexico, is in full force.

One little story will serve to illustrate the work of "extensión educativa" being developed in the surrounding countryside. On either side of the school at a distance of a few kilometers is

located a small village. Now it seems that for years on end these two "pueblecitos" have had a feud over the question of the limits of their lands. To say the least, it was rather unpleasant for the citizens of one village to be caught after dark within the bounds of the other village. And it was not unknown for an occasional member of one or the other of the clans to come upon death in ways not altogether natural. A most unfortunate, but sad to say, not an unusual state of affairs for neighboring "pueblos" in Mexico. Now enters the Rural Normal School, and, more particularly, with the school a certain teacher of music. "Music," said this gentleman, "is reputed to have charms to tame the savage breast"-- or words to that effect. At any rate he sallied forth and soon had the bands of the two unneighborly villages practicing together at the school building. And lo! and behold! a little music did lead them, for now the two villages do abide in peace and mutual respect.



Main Building-Rural Normal School-Oaxaca.



Director of Rural Normal School-Oaxaca
and a Local Rural School Board.



Class in "Curtiduría"-Rural Normal School-Oaxaca.



The Pottery Master - Rural Normal School
Oaxaca.



"Escuela Primaria Rural Anexa" -
Rural Normal School - Oaxaca



Demonstration of Bee Culture - Rural
Normal School - Oaxaca.



Class in Agriculture Rural Normal School -
Oaxaca.



Demonstration Class - Rural Normal School
Oaxaca.



"And a Little Music did lead Them"
Rural Normal School - Oaxaca.