

# TRANQUIL MEXICO IS WORRIED ABOUT NEW YORK

Article and Photographs by SHERRIL SCHELL



There is something informal about the lace counter

OPINION on the boat among the Americans was solidly lined up against the professor who was taking his wife to Mexico. If he wanted to bring her along, why hadn't he selected California, Canada or some other tranquil spot for his vacation? Why choose Mexico of all countries, where both would be insulted, robbed or possibly murdered? In the smoking saloon blood-curdling stories were exchanged for his edification—tales of horror that would have supplied material for a hundred movie plots of the regulation border variety.

The fifth day out the professor was seen to leave a half-emptied glass of Scotch on his table and hastily make tracks toward the purser's office. On the way he encountered his wife and stopped to tell her that he had decided to take her home on the same boat. Mrs. Professor was not so easily managed. She wanted to know the why and wherefore, and the professor was obliged to sit down and relate what he had overheard.

A well-dressed Mexican gentleman reclining in a nearby steamer chair listened to the conversation with serious expression. After the professor had finished his report and had taken up the subject of return tickets he sprang to his feet. Introducing himself and apologizing profusely for having "listened in," he plunged into an eloquent defense of his country. Speaking with the authority of one who had lived his whole life in Mexico, he assured them that their fears were groundless. He guaranteed them complete safety and finally brought them round with a promise of introductions to high officials who would smooth the way for a certain archaeological enterprise they had in mind.

The professor had some misgivings, however, as the steamer slid into the bay of Vera Cruz. Sinister looking Indians were assembled on the dock and rent the air with their cries. These were the *cargadores*—in other words, the baggage express of the seaport. Going down the gang-plank the passengers were obliged to run the gauntlet of a mob of dirty peons, who clutched at their clothes and battled fiercely with each other for the privilege of carrying their luggage.

Although there is a night train to the City of Mexico, the wise traveler waits over until next morning so as not to miss the scenery along the route. Timorous Americans figured that it would be less dangerous to travel by daylight, but gave the scenery as their excuse for putting up with the heat and mosquitoes of a Vera Cruz night. The little squad of soldiers provided as an escort was not one to inspire confidence, and nervous fingers felt for unaccustomed automatics as the train stopped suddenly a few miles out. Strange as it seemed, no bandits appeared, only a straggling group of Indian women with roses for sale. Evidently the dreaded encounter was to happen further up the line. As the train panted up into the high mountains the stage was set in perfect fashion for the darkest deeds. Just the spot for a bloody encounter with Zapatistas, Villistas, the Americans knew not what. But "it was roses, roses all the way," and baskets of strawberries and Mexican onyx held up temptingly to the car windows by sweet-voiced Indian girls.

A few weeks ago one of the leading Mexican papers ran a page of recent crimes in the United States under the heading: "Shall Mexico Intervene?" The American colony is getting rather sensitive about the publicity given to our lawlessness in the Mexican dailies and spends a good deal of its time in trying to explain it away. There also seems to be a plethora of American crook pictures now showing in Mexico, which also adds to its embarrassment. Some of the foreign residents say they are glad to see Mexico getting even. If the average American thinks of Mexico as the land of bloodthirsty *banditti*, the Mexican is rapidly coming to the conclusion that all Americans are either safe-blowers or yeggmen.

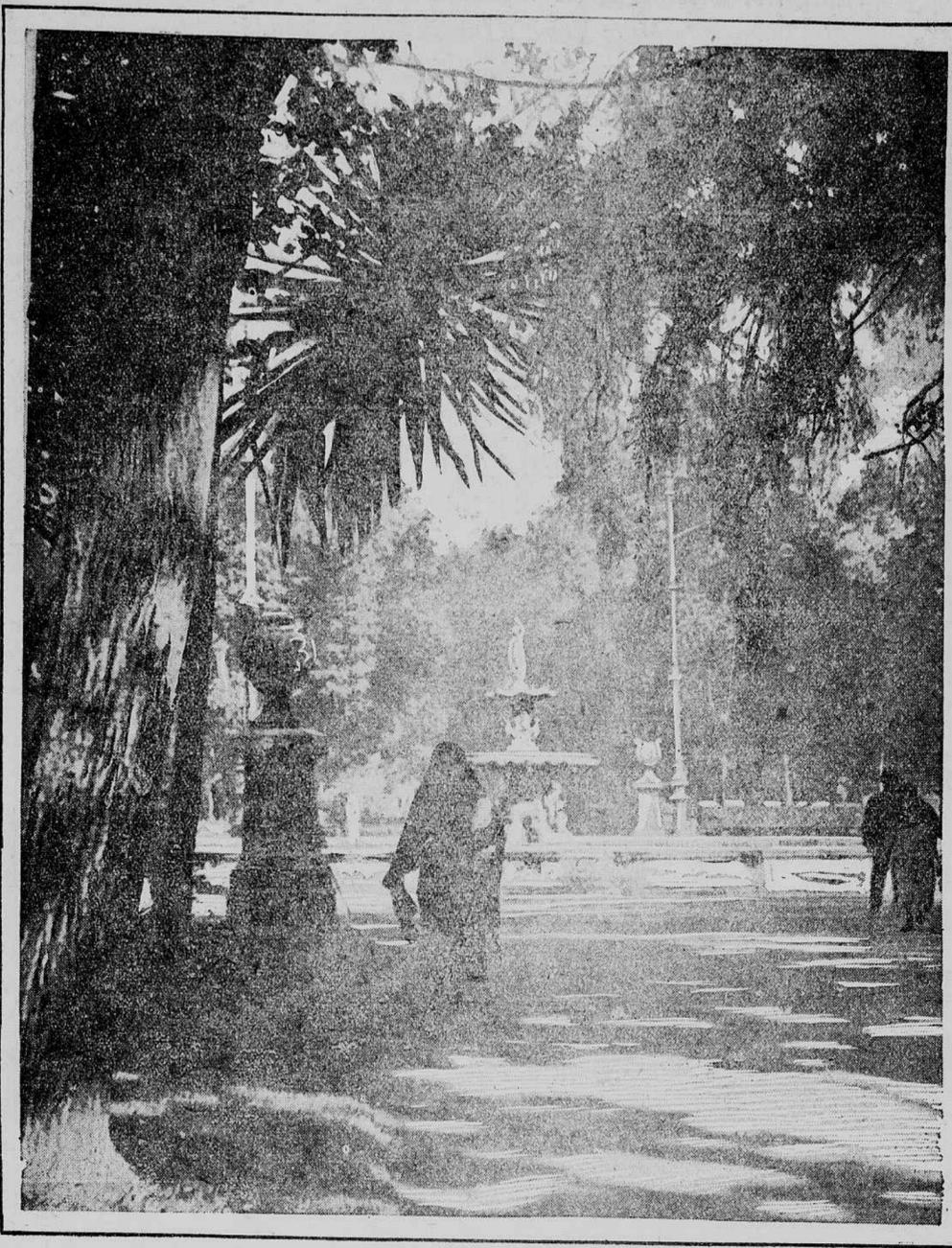
It is a common sight in Mexico City to see youthful employees carrying bags of gold and silver from one bank to another. Strolling

along Francisco Madero Street, they stop every now and then to chat with a friend or to gaze in a shop window. It is true that there is an occasional hold-up in the City of Mexico, but the percentage of crime during the last year was lower than in many cities of its size in the United States. From all accounts there seems to be a great deal of small thievery, but personally I have never had the experience of being victimized by the "ratero." Nor have I ever heard of any one being robbed at first hand. On the contrary, in going by streetcar to Tlalpam, one of the suburbs of the capital, I left a hand satchel under the seat and got off forgetting it. An American friend told me I would never see it again, but within an hour I had recovered it at the "lost and found" department of the street railways.

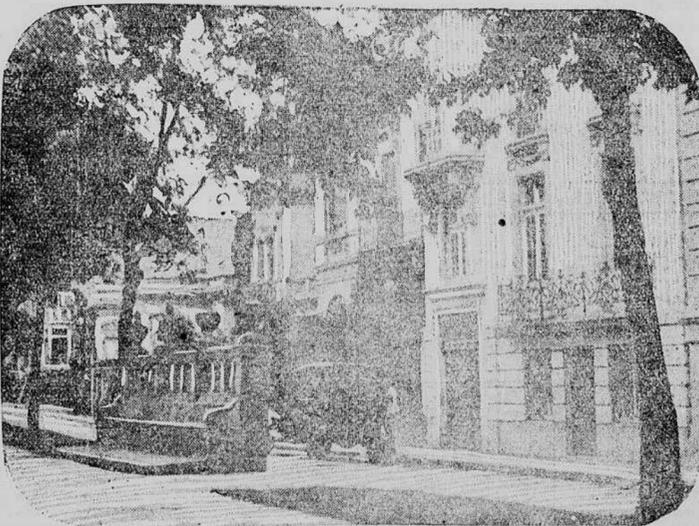
A friend of mine, an American opera singer, put \$150 in her pillow slip one night before going to bed and forgot all about it for three days, when suddenly, while driving on the Paseo, she remembered her carelessness. Rushing back to the hotel with stories of light fingered Aztec gentry ringing in her ears, she ran up four flights of stairs and found the money exactly where she had placed it. Calling the \$5 a month Indian chambermaid, she asked if she had known that the money was under the pillow.

"Como no, senorita?" the girl answered. "I have made up your bed twice since you put it there."

Americans are not unpopular with the Mexicans. For the most part our compatriots who remained during the various revolutions and the Vera Cruz occupation went about their affairs freely and without molestation. Your average Mexican bothers his head very little about recognition or the absence of recognition. He is interested, first of all, in politics of a more local nature and only becomes excited about our country when the newspapers proclaim the possibility of intervention. Some prominent Mexicans are bold enough to declare openly that they would welcome intervention, but the wise American does well to drop this word from his vocabulary when he crosses the border. Mexicans are a sensitive



The Alameda, City of Mexico, a garden of tropic flowers and a favorite promenade



A glimpse of the Paseo, Mexico's beautiful avenue, which somehow suggests our own Riverside Drive



Color a-plenty, both in flowers and people.

and high-spirited people, and most of them see red if such a contingency is even hinted at. Speaking generally, the masses seem to be as well off as they were during Porfirio's rule. A great many of them seem to be underfed, but they have been underfed since the time of Montezuma.

On the whole, there appear to be fewer beggars than formerly, and the Indian population seems to be better clothed. The Obregon government is doing much for education and plans to do a great deal more when the treasury funds allow it a freer hand. The scheme already under way for the art education of the people is almost ambitious. Every child will be given the opportunity of learning some art or craft under the guidance of experts. An effort will be made to make the students forget European traditions and to concentrate more on native forms and designs.

In spite of all her troubles our southern neighbor has shot ahead of us in the creation in her Cabinet of a Minister of Art. But, then, there were painters and sculptors in Mexico long before there was a United States. One likes to remind smug Bostonians that the University of Mexico was founded some fifty years or more before the Pilgrims landed in New England. The instinct for art with the leisure and temperament to cultivate it may bring forth wonderful results in the future. Much is expected from the new school of painters and sculptors, young men who have broken away from French conventions and who are striving to revive the glories of the pre-conquest period. Already one genius has arisen, Diego, well known in Paris, who is called the Mexican Michaelangelo. His masterpiece, the impressive mural decoration in the Escuela Preparatoria, without betraying any signs of imitation, has all the breadth and power of the Italian master. This painting, "The Creation," the noted critic Best-Maugard declares is the greatest work of art in the Western Hemisphere.

There are many amusements in the City of Mexico, and the American is never at a loss for something to do of an evening. The theaters and cabarets are diverting, and the opera, although not up to New York stand-

ards, is well worth while. When the new National Opera House is finished the Mexicans will have performances on a grander scale than those to which they have been accustomed. Negotiations have been opened with the Chicago Opera Company to give the inaugural series, and a huge Tiffany glass curtain is being put in place which the American colony hopes will serve as a refutation of the Mexican theory that America has no feeling for art.

Then, too, Mexico has its Symphony Orchestra and more than its share of vocal and instrumental concerts. Godowsky always fills a large recital hall whenever he comes here, at prices in substantial advance of what he receives in American cities. Tetrazzini was a prime favorite in Mexico City long before she was heard of in New York or London. "La Boheme" was given its premiere there three years previous to its first production at the Metropolitan, and many important orchestral works have been played by the National Symphony and other orchestras that are still waiting for a hearing in this country.

The great hero of the hour is an American. "Babe" White, "the human fly," is climbing nearly every day to the top of the great Cathedral, and "El Hombre Mosca" is a name that is on everybody's lips. Nearly fifty thousand Indians gathered one day in the Zocalo, the immense plaza in front of the famous old church, to witness his hair-raising stunt and stood with popping eyes and dropped jaws while he pulled himself over the ancient stones of the facade and slid to the top of the flagpole on the tower. The shout that went up from the multitude of ecstatic Indians would have made Jack Dempsey green with envy.

A large detachment of soldiers provided to keep the crowd in order had its hands full in keeping the mob from storming the Cathedral as the great hero descended. "Babe," it seems, has no liking for the embraces of enthusiastic Indians and was obliged to make a strategic exit through the sacristy to escape them. His picture is to be seen everywhere—in the movies, in newspapers and magazines—while every peon proudly carries his photograph in the ribbon of his sombrero.

There is one class, however, which has not joined in the general triumph, and that is the bull-fighter fraternity. The leading matadors are said to be most envious of the American's spectacular success. Gaona, Silveti and Belmonte, spoiled darlings of the people, are beginning to sulk, and their friends say they are fearful lest their supporters acquire a taste for steeple climbing and lose their relish for the sanguinary delights of the arena. But "Babe," it appears, is not in Mexico for long. He is looking for other worlds to conquer in South America. In the Argentine and Brazil, where the *corrida* is taboo, he will probably not come up against professional jealousy of a serious nature and will be master of all he surveys.

Bullfighting was forbidden under Carranza and many attribute the old President's downfall to the death reached the capital a *corrida* was given with great *ecelat* in the bullring. Since then no reformer has dared to raise his voice, and bullfighting remains more than ever a national institution. The government is of the opinion that bullfighting is a boon to Mexico in the present stage of its evolution. It is supposed to act as a safety valve for revolutionary steam. Be that as it may, the gate receipts certainly show no signs of dwindling. On the contrary, the 1921-22 season was a record-breaking one. About 25,000 people attended the recent Covadonga *corrida*, paying \$6 gold and more a head for the privilege. President Obregon and the aristocracy of the capital graced the function, to say nothing of the entire American colony. American residents denounce bullfighting to a man, but if one happens to be looking for an elusive compatriot of a Sunday afternoon one is pretty sure to find him seated comfortably in a front row of the Plaza de Toros.

## THE ORIGIN AND RISE OF THE FLAPPER

THE patient public has been enlightened as to the habits of the flapper. But no one has attempted to explain whence came this new genus. Did the flapper "jes' grow" to blossom in 1922?

Banish the thought! The flapper has been with us for more than three centuries, according to philologists. In 1729, history first makes definite mention of the flapper. Swift, in his "Gulliver's Travels," says: "The absent-minded philosopher of Laputa always kept a flapper in the family, whose duty was to strike gently the mouth of him to whom the speaker addressed himself." The flapper was then something to arouse memory. It was in this sense that Lord Chesterfield, in the year 1747, wrote in a letter: "I write you, by way of a

flapper, to put you in mind of yourself!"

Until 1852 did the flapper serve as a meek daily reminder. A writer in "Blackwood's Magazine" expressed the opinion of that day in his remark: "It is an advantage to have a flapper about us to remind us of our faults." But the vicissitudes of time brought a change to flapperdom. A quarter of a century later found the flapper an object used to shoo away flies. Always with looseness as a characteristic, soon many things which were noticeably flat and loose began to be spoken of as flappers. Even the long shoes worn by negro minstrels earned the title.

There is no missing link in the evolution of the flapper. In 1888 the term was applied to

a young duck which tried to fly. Here, evidently, is the maternal grandmother of the would-be-high-flying flapper of to-day—and of to-night.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century more particular instincts of the flapper began to be developed. Any loose part of an animal which flapped was a flapper. In the Museum of Natural History, the flapper of a porpoise on exhibition is shown to remind flappers whence they sprang. When, several years later, a man accosted a friend and said heartily, "Give us your flapper, old man," he was not asking him for his lady faire. He was merely offering to shake hands.

The flapper did double duty for a while, and took on the work of an intransitive verb too. "To flapper" meant to "walk with a loose, flapping motion." It also meant "to quiver" and

"to flutter," which can all be noted in the flapper to-day. And, of course, it is a verb of the active voice. So active that it brings before us the twentieth century flapper, the 1922, eight-cylinder, two earring model.

The flapper's versatility is due to her experiences in so many forms of life. Her walk and the loose waist, are second nature from the days she was part of the porpoise. She still does duty as a daily reminder. She can still chase away flies, birds and others who prey, even gift-bearing animals. The flat shoes, erstwhile pride of minstrels, are even condoned, as is likewise the boyish grip of the flapper that only she can give. It's all part of her original nature, combined with the forces of her environment. She is the evolution of a type which has been in the making three hundred years.