

THE LAND OF THE NOONDAY SUN--MEXICO IN MID WINTER.

BY JUSTICE WALTER CLARK, LL. D. Zicatecas is just within the tropics, as we passed the line of Cancer a few miles back near Calera, but the city is over eight thousand feet above sea level.

In all the Mexican towns of any size there is a Plaza de Armas or Central Plaza in which the band plays nearly every night and whither everyone goes. On one side of this plaza is invariably the cathedral; on two of the other sides, if the town is a state capital, the governor's palace and the palace of the State legislature and Supreme Court.

According to the custom of the country, there was "an endless chain" of girls, in groups of two, three, or four, promenading in one direction, with a similar chain of young men going in the opposite direction, while the older people sat on the benches and seats. Thus every girl can be seen in succession by every young man in the other chain, and both parties make good use of their eyes.

If he receives encouragement, or thinks he does (for there are vain youths and feminine flirts in Mexico as elsewhere), he contrives in some indirect way to transmit a letter. The first letter is never noticed; it would be contrary to the female sense of propriety to capitulate so easily. The second letter is answered by means of the same underground route, and in a non-committal way is calculated to terminate or encourage his suit.

In Guadalajara, there is a double walk way around the plaza. By tacit consent, on the outer one of these the young men and maidens of the lower classes, the wearers of the zerapes and rebosos, promenade, with their endless chains going in opposite directions, while at the same time on the inner walk, separated from the outer one by a row of seats, the young people of the upper classes do the same in their American or French costumes.

What class a person belongs to or shall associate with, is settled in Mexico, as elsewhere, by a kind of tacit understanding, for there is no law or regulation, and in Mexico there is a total absence of those race distinctions which exist in the United States, or the caste requirements of India.

The census gives ten thousand as the number of negroes in Mexico, an infinitesimal number in the total population. Indeed, during my whole stay in the Republic I saw only six negroes, of

whom four were Pullman car porters and two were barbers. Three of the six were natives of the West Indies, and one of the latter, it may be incidentally mentioned, was fluent in six different languages, due partly to the fact, probably, that living in the seaport town of Tampico his vocation as barber brought him in contact with sailors and people of many nations--still a negro speaking six languages is something out of the ordinary.

The costume of the people of the upper and middle classes has conformed very generally to our own, so that no difference can be observed, and very often it is impossible to tell whether to address a person in Spanish or English. The lower classes in some sections adhere altogether to their former dress, but in other sections of the country in this particular they have to large extent followed the example of their superiors in social position. The distinctive features of the former dress wherever retained, is for a man, a tall cone shaped hat of felt or straw, with a wide brim called a "sombbrero," a pair of exceedingly tight fitting pants, and a gaudy blanket wrapped round the upper part of the body and often held so as to conceal the mouth.

The police are very efficient, attentive to their duties, and very polite. At night every policeman carries a lantern, and this is set out in the street in front whenever he may happen to be on the sidewalk, so that looking down or up the street rows of these lanterns can always be seen. Stop up to one of these men and ask him where your hotel is, and he will not only tell you but, unless you object, he will go with you to the next policeman who will in turn pass you on till you reach your destination.

The railroads in Mexico, with the exception of one of the railroads between Mexico and Vera Cruz, known as the "Queen's Own" because built by the English, have been constructed almost entirely by Americans with American capital, supplemented by government appropriation, and are managed by Americans. They are as well managed as the railroads this side the border, and indeed the Mexican Central, which system controls some two thousand miles of track, is handled with unusual ability.

As to speaking the language, one not understanding the native tongue will find less difficulty in travelling in Mexico than in France or Germany. It is almost impossible to enter a railroad car, or a hotel at which travellers stop, without finding Americans. They are everywhere and in every business and seemingly all prosperous; many of them have been wonderfully so. Then besides, as has been said, the conductors and many other railroad employees are Americans.

If one desires to strike out for himself the language is a very easy one to learn. Spain having been the remotest of the provinces of Rome when the barbarians made their irruptions, it

was less submerged, and hence the Spanish tongue more closely resembles Latin than either Italian or French. It is a great aid in learning Spanish to have acquired a knowledge of Latin at school. But even to those who have not, the language presents few difficulties. It must be remembered that though an "encyclopedic," or "unabridged" dictionary contains over one hundred thousand English words, the number of words used by us in ordinary speech is said not to exceed five hundred. So in travelling in a foreign country the man who can memorize two or three hundred words and a few phrases can get along very well.

The pronunciation is easily learned and the accent and intonation also by a little practice. It is more difficult to understand a foreigner than to make him understand you, in speaking his language, because his words at first seem to run together. But so it is with us all. In conversation our words are not spaced as in writing or printing, but we speak as the old Romans and Greeks--more true to nature--wrote their books and inscriptions, i. e., without any space between words, using only the period at the end of a sentence. This digression is for the benefit of our countrymen who may feel deterred from visiting the country on account of the difference of language, but for the reasons above stated they will find far less inconvenience, if any at all, on that score than in travelling on the continent of Europe.

The appearance of a Mexican city strikes the eye at once as something very different from an American city. In the first place the houses apparently have no roofs, because their roofs are flat, with just enough elevation at one side to run the water off, and this top is entirely concealed by parapets. Then there are no chimneys; the climate does not require them. When it is unusually cool, they use, in the northern part of the Republic, little barsterns containing burning charcoal warm the hands, and in the humbler homes the fire that cooks the meal is sufficient. But even this has to be resorted to very rarely and only in the northern states.

The enforcement of the criminal law is far better than in the United States, for it is more efficient and more prompt in our country year before last, by official returns, more than ten thousand capital offences were committed, out of which vast number one hundred and seven were executed by law and two hundred and forty seven by lynch law. In Mexico, with its twelve million people, from the best data obtainable, the capital offences committed are less than one thousand annually and a case of lynch law is unknown. That the race is prone to homicide and the ignorant class to larceny is undoubtedly true, but a firm government represses and punishes with a promptness and certainty that deters. The manner of executing the law would not suit our people, but as a means adopted to the end, it is the best possible for the people and the country which has adopted it.

Brigandage has been entirely suppressed. The country is patrolled by picked troops, known as "Rurales." These receive one dollar a day and are constantly on the alert to maintain order. The regular army is largely recruited from the Indian race and is paid much less. Whenever a train stops at a station a soldier in uniform, with sword or gun, is stationed on the ground near each car door. This is a relic of former days. It was necessary, and it is still useful to prevent petty thieves entering the cars. In some of the more northerly States, this seems dispensed with now in whole or in part, but in the greater part of the country this custom still prevails.

At Zicatecas I slept in a convent and in the city of Mexico in a palace, for convents and emperors having been abolished these buildings now serve more useful purposes as hotels. The Catholic churches are now all owned by the government and preaching in them is by permission. Under the old regime many more churches were erected than were actually needed and consequently some of them, though not many, are now used for secular purposes. I saw a convent that has been converted into a bull ring and more than one church that was used as a barracks for the soldiery.

(Continued next week.)

GOOD MEETING IN BEAUFORT.

Correspondence of the Progressive Farmer. I have been waiting to see if some brother, more competent than myself, would not give an account of our last County Alliance meeting, and have searched diligently each issue of THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER since for same, and not finding it, I can stand it no longer.

I, in company with as grand a patriot as ever lived, Bro John Pate, left his house on Wednesday before, between 11 and 12 o'clock, and drove to Bro. T. I. Waters, who is our County President, a distance of about 40 miles. Talk about a man prepared for "Sby-look" all his hosts, including the gold-standard, Bro. Watson is that man. I tell you he lives at home and boards at the same place, judging from the looks of his tan trough and the shoes of his family. He not only knows how to tan leather, but to make shoes as well, and his estimable companion knows fully as well how to make cloth. Even though it is though in this country that we can't grow wheat, Bro. Waters is equal to the emergency, for he has been raising wheat from which he has his own flour ground for sometime.

Right here I'd like to say that some of us have been talking about the idea of trying to see if could not make an arrangement to have some of our cotton manufactured on shares, like we do wool. If any of the brethren have ever made any trade of the kind, we would be glad to know of it, terms, etc. I was agreeably disappointed with our county meeting. I can't say that I went to help perform the burial ceremony, but to try and help build up the waste places. We had the best represented meeting that we have had in more than two years, and everything passed off harmoniously, and I'll say right here it was the first county meeting that I ever attended but what every brother seemed to be in a hurry to have the meeting closed, but this time it looked like every brother present hated to see the time for us to part. As for myself it was a real treat for me to meet with the brethren all over the county. I have never attended an Alliance meeting in my life, but what I felt well paid for the time so spent.

I can't close without expressing my happiness over the action of the State Populist Party Executive Committee, for there is a strong element in North Carolina, that no party or party boss can be induced under any circumstances to vote for a gold standard man if they know--matter not what his party name is--and if the party stands out for principle the honest man, i. e., voters in all parties will come to us. We don't expect office holders and office seekers to come.

Before I close there is one other matter I would like to speak of, though it doesn't effect good Alliancemen much, and that is, the manner in which country people are so often taken in by some "smart alec" traveling through the county with wagon selling various things on time. It almost looks like they could sell "Billy" goats at fabulous prices on time, though I am happy to say Alliancemen seldom bite at such bait.

R. H. LANE.

BRO. LANE WRITES.

Correspondence of The Progressive Farmer. BELLAIR, N. C.

Our Alliance has almost disbanded, and most of the members seem to have lost hope of doing anything in the line of reform. I am looking for reform by sticking to the right--not through parties or patrons. I want to see the farmers united and organized and all good people standing together. THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER has improved greatly, and I come nearer reading all in it than any of the eight papers we take, though I have quit reading such strong partisan, senseless articles as our Bro. Kestler wrote some time ago. If someone else had not replied to him, I should. Such articles do not improve anything, but enjender strife.

I would like to find time to write you an occasional article from our section, but am rather too busy digging a living out of 36 acres of land for a family of eight to find time to write much.

Yours fraternally, DANIEL LANE

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