

*Our southern neighbor succeeds
in educating its illiterates*

Mexico's ABC Crusade

By Audrey A. Georgi

IF you teach 50 people to read and write in Mexico you will be given a medal by the President. You'd even have a chance in a raffle to win some land. If you teach 25 people, you may be given a year's pass to your favorite movie or may ride all the busses and street cars free for a year. If you teach 10 people, your name will be printed in gold letters in a book of honor. University students who teach 50 illiterates to read and write need not pay any more tuition to the University. And there are scores of minor awards such as books, food, clothing and merchandise.

Mexicans are past-masters at stimulating public interest in ventures by raffles and prizes. In part, the reason that they already are having success in their campaign to alphabetize illiterates is that stimuli are provided for all, alphabetizers and alphabetized alike.

This campaign against illiteracy was initiated only last March but already thousands have learned to read and write and are now making good use of their newly acquired talents. The enrollment in classes the country over at the time of this writing passes the two million mark.

Besides, several other Latin American countries, namely, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala and Colombia, are following Mexico's lead in

this idea of educating their illiterates—a gross necessity in any democracy! They have all started similar ABC Crusades.

The final results of the campaign against illiteracy in Mexico could not be estimated accurately until February of 1946, when the one year of official government effort to educate ended. However one can note what has been accomplished to date, and contemplate what very well may result within the next six months.

The Secretariat of Education has a very modest goal—3,000,000 to be alphabetized within the year! According to the census of 1940 the illiteracy rate in Mexico was 47.88 per cent, one of the blackest records anywhere in the world. These 3,000,000 are not even one-third of the 10,000,000 illiterates!

Efforts have been made in the past to combat illiteracy in certain regions in Mexico. Five years ago, for instance, when Javier Rojo Gomez, now City Regent of Mexico, was Governor of the State of Hidalgo, he gave the backward Otomy Indians of that state an opportunity to learn to read and write, but the results were very meager. The present campaign has tried to profit from the unfortunate experiences of previous efforts. And the very fact that this present ABC Crusade is

not a first trial venture lends it more merit and gives it great possibilities of success.

The law of August 30, 1944, originally provided that every Mexican from 18 to 60 who knew how to read and write would be required to teach one illiterate. However, this turned out to be impractical, for not everyone who knew how to read and write could teach some one else. An adaptation was made, then, so that those individuals who wished might delegate their duty to a regular school teacher who would be financially re-imbursed by them.

Collective centers were established, some of which were sustained by groups of individuals, others by industries, banks, business offices, labor unions and syndicates.

Later the *patronato* system developed and was very efficient in organizing classes and providing teachers for the groups. The *patronato* is a kind of committee composed of public-spirited citizens, merchants and others, who are the exclusive board for the campaign against illiteracy in their particular community. They disseminate propaganda urging illiterates to attend the collective centers. They make personal visits to the homes of their fellow citizens stirring up interest in the campaign. They collect contributions to pay teachers their salaries, and they conduct special raffles of merchandise after the classes to stimulate attendance or as rewards for pupils' progress.

In the Secretariat of Education they tell a ludicrous anecdote of how a well-dressed middle-aged Mexican woman came pompously into the Office of Alphabetization one day

and demanded that they dispatch someone, the police if necessary, to locate the girl she had been teaching. It seems the ungrateful little wench had disappeared the previous week after she had almost learned to read and write.

"And if I don't get her back to finish with her," lamented the woman, "I shall have wasted two whole months!"

Fortunately for the well-being of the campaign, however, such characters are the exception. Most people are giving unstintingly of themselves, for no one can enter into the work without feeling its magnitude and eventual success. The teachers of Mexico are bearing the real weight of the campaign. Many, besides teaching their classes all day long, have two or three collective centers of illiterates to teach evenings, but all of them agree that it is such a worthwhile endeavor that they do not mind the extra hours nor the small financial recompense which they receive.

RESULTS OF CAMPAIGN

Figures on the campaign are accurate and easily obtainable for the Federal District, so we look at them to see what progress has been made during the first three months of endeavor. In June there were 1275 centers under the auspices of the Department of Education of the Federal District and 1315 centers outside their control, or a total of 2590 centers in all of Mexico, D.F.

The average enrollment in these centers was 40 with an average attendance of 30. The number of students attending the collective centers in the Mexican capital is 38,-

550. Conservatively it is estimated that over 2,000 persons have been taught to read and write in Mexico City in the first three months.

Professor Hernan Morales of the Secretariat of Education, who has been one of the chiefs of the campaign against illiteracy since its initiation, was most optimistic concerning results to date outside the capital. He reports over 25,000 collective centers and 113 patronizing groups all through Mexico.

The best results have been obtained in the following districts: Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roa in the south; Sonora, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi and Tlascala in the north.

The least progress, according to Professor Morales, has been made in Queretaro, Yucatan, Guerrero, Michoacan, Jalisco and Puebla. Reason for the slower progress in these places vary, such as purely political reasons in the case of Yucatan and lack of good organization in Queretaro.

Many remedies have been formulated to nurse the backward districts to a more healthful condition. Secretary of Education, Jaime Torres Bodet, poet, idealist and man of deeds, is untiring in his personal efforts to stimulate the campaign. He takes entire box cars of books on his tours into the backward outlying districts. Of late he has also been taking United States movies. This is a real stimulus in some regions where they have never seen movies!

Propaganda for hygiene and sanitation is being made concurrent with the learn-to-read-and-write ideal, and the big manufacturers of soaps,

dentifrices, toothbrushes, drug store patent medicines and antiseptics are sending millions of samples to centers all over Mexico.

The manual used in teaching illiterates to read and write is an officially compiled instruction book, the *Cartilla*. Two school teachers, Dolores Uribe Torres and Carmen Cosgaya Rivas, under the direction of Professor Morales, prepared the lessons after a careful study of many primary textbooks. Then Jaime Torres Bodet added 10 more lessons to be used as more advanced reading lessons. The many excellent illustrations throughout the *Cartilla* make it more easily assimilated.

There is little other officially printed matter being used in the campaign. A lined exercise or work book comes with the *Cartilla*, in which students practice drawing and then writing letters, words and finally entire paragraphs. A book in which the more advanced can write in ink is also provided.

To combat the lure of the cheap thriller comic books, *Chamaco* and *Pepin*, the Secretariat of Education has recently begun publication of a magazine called *Chapulín*. This is a well-planned, constructive, comic-historical magazine with stories of world heroes, fairy tales, ancient myths and news reports of happenings on the world fronts. But as *Chapulín* has not yet one-fiftieth the circulation of *Chamaco* or *Pepin*, it cannot afford as many attractively colored cartoons and illustrations. This puts it at a disadvantage.

One unexpected problem was the need to educate the reading tastes of newly-alphabetized individuals. The Mexican educators are proving

they are equal to the task, and bit by bit they hope to wean at least the adults away from this inferior literature.

The writer has recently had the opportunity of visiting several diverse types of collective centers in the heart of the Mexican capital. In the forepart of June she attended the Belisario Dominguez School's five centers. Two weeks later she managed to visit a very different kind of collective center in the Mercado Martinez de la Torre, one of the poorest, lowliest market places in Mexico City.

A typical class room in the first group mentioned was in a crude, unpainted building very much in need of repair. The furniture was most inadequate with small children's desks not even fastened to the floor. On the walls were tacked crudely-made posters showing vocal sounds. The young and pretty teacher in a becoming dress was placing exercises on the blackboard to be read in chorus by the class. In contrast to the teacher's appearance, the students were mostly poorly garbed *Mestizas* who were probably servant girls, though a few of the older women were better dressed.

One woman had brought her baby with her and it cried very much, but no one seemed to mind. All went to work writing in their copy books in complete seriousness. Some of them wrote very slowly and awkwardly as if their fingers were too stiff to bend. One is constantly reminded of the long suffering patience which makes the Mexicans capable of enduring so much.

Nineteen students between the

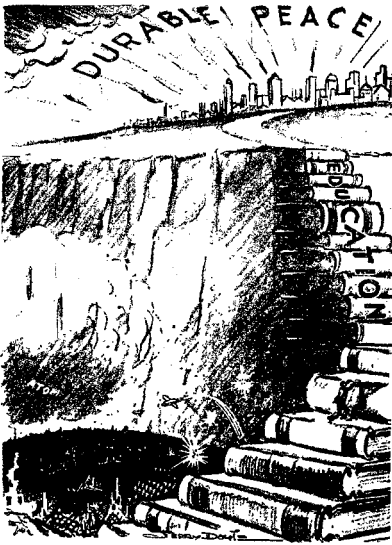
ages of six and forty were present when the class began at 6:30 but more kept coming all through the hour. Their teacher kept hearing them recite one by one as each stood in turn by her desk.

The two class rooms in the Mercado Martinez de la Torre were housed in a rude shelter constructed of great sheets of tin and wood. It barely served to keep off the rain and to keep out some of the fierce afternoon wind and dust. In each room was a long table with low benches on either side. These were filled to capacity with eager students. An enthusiastic woman was teaching about 50 charges in one room, while in the other room a man was conducting class for an equal number. The majority of the students maintained small stands in the adjacent marketplace and, for that reason, particularly desired to learn figures. They were an ill clad, backward-looking lot as a whole with not nearly the possibilities of the servant girls at the other school.

POOR ATTENDANCE

These groups were all in the Fifth Delegation. The Chief Promoter, a young teacher, Concepcion Ramirez de Espino, explained that there are on record in the Fifth Delegation some 40,000 illiterates. In spite of all they do to inspire an interest in the centers, not even one-half of these attend the classes.

This brings up one of the biggest problems which the educators have to combat in the campaign: attendance of illiterates. There are all kinds of reasons why more illiterates do not take advantage of the opportunity to learn to read and write.



Jerry Doyle in *The Philadelphia Record*

"STEPS GOING UP"

Many of the *mestiza* servant girls, for instance, are denied the right to attend school by their selfish mistresses. In such cases the law may be invoked, but this is a very arduous and technical procedure and is not always done. In other cases a woman may have five or six children and no one with whom to leave them while she attends class. She is thus prohibited from attending the centers.

So far as the men are concerned, it is usually their own whims and vices which keep them from attending the classes. Even the poorer class Mexican men are relatively free but most of them prefer to spend their idle hours in a bar or a pool hall to a classroom. There are simply too many tempting diversions in a big city.

In the rural districts there are still more serious problems. One is distance and transportation. In many places the *Cartillas* have had to be hauled to their destination on men's shoulders. Most of the country people do hard physical labor all day long. It is reasonable to suppose that by night they are too tired to have any energy left for walking miles to a country schoolhouse just to learn to read and write. The miracle is, though, that many of them are doing it. Given half a chance, a rural Mexican can accomplish wonders. In some places, for instance, children of seven and eight years old do men's work on a diet of corn *tortillas* and beans, then learn to read and write at night school or at classes held at four to six in the morning, and they have accomplished this within a period of two or three months!

There is a brick-manufacturing town of San Bartolome Naucalpan a few miles outside Mexico City where a little boy of six, who carried bricks on his back all day long, learned to read and write at the collective center. His teacher from El Salvador believes that the Mexican character possesses a special facility which enables a student to grasp ideas rapidly and accurately with a minimum of effort. Several other educators with whom the writer talked agreed that the Mexican illiterates can well utilize this extra sense or facility to ease their struggle to learning. Perhaps it is simply an open, eager, hungry mind, after so many centuries of intellectual abnegation.

Members of the Secretariat of Education report that several Un-

ited States Americans—not missionaries either—have made themselves committees of one to go into some little hidden village and teach the natives reading and writing as well as elementary hygiene. Fundamentally dramatic and humanly appealing is such a situation where, with relatively little effort, an individual can accomplish very much in helping fellow human beings.

When one sees a little boy who had lost both hands in an accident master the art of writing with his feet; a little girl, nearly blind, learning to read as she clutches her book close to her eyes; a life term prisoner reading a newspaper after three months of study in the prison collective center; a Mexican woman write her first letter to her husband who is in the United States as a *bracero*—when one sees things like this, he is terrifically impressed. It is obvious that the Mexicans themselves are taking the campaign in great earnest and results are being obtained.

In keeping with their character sometimes one encounters an individual who takes the campaign too much in earnest. There was the overly-enthusiastic City President of the little village in the State of Oaxaca, for instance, who said to the Minister of Education who came through on an inspection tour, "Mr. Minister, I can promise you for sure that there will not be one illiterate

left in Oaxaca a year from today for I shall personally see to it that everyone learns to read and write or I shall shoot him myself." An added note of irony is found in the fact that many of the City Presidents of these little out of the way village do not themselves know how to read or write!

The leaders of this illiteracy campaign and the Mexican educators prefer not to make predictions and they are very modest in their expectations.

As Attorney Enrique Gonzalez Vargas, head of the Federal District Alphabetization Office, states, "The campaign against illiteracy will not achieve its ultimate goal for five to ten years. Even then there will always be a small group which, for lack of mental ability, it will be impossible to educate."

Professor Hernan Morles also admitted that the Secretariat did not expect to succeed in teaching every illiterate in Mexico to read and write this year or next. He believes a greater and more important accomplishment than the immediate success of this campaign will be to set up a permanent office which might systematically continue to attack the illiteracy problem until it has been entirely wiped out.

As for the goal to be achieved by February—3,000,000 to be made literate—it looks very likely that they more than reached that goal.

• Some Washington spy reports that if you buy a pack of cigarettes in the Senate Restaurant you get a book of matches marked with the Senate seal and the legend: *U. S. Senate*. On the other hand, in the House Restaurant, your book of matches contains a picture of a shapely model in underwear.

• The quickest way to wipe out a friendship is to sponge on it.

—Woodman Magazine

Call the Mufti!

By Edgar Ansel Mowrer

From his column in the New York Post

THE Nuremberg judges are in possession of evidence that Haj Amin el Hussein, ex-Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the world's chief anti-Zionist, is the author of the Nazi plan for the extermination of over five million Jews. This is according to a sworn affidavit by Dr. Rudolph Kaszner, now in Geneva, Switzerland.

According to Kaszner's affidavit, the Mufti shares the responsibility for history's foulest massacre with Heinrich Himmler and other Nazi butchers.

In his affidavit, dated Geneva Switzerland, January 25, 1946, Kaszner states that S.S. Hauptsturmfuehrer Pieter von Wisliczeny, close cooperater of infamous Adolf Eichmann of the Gestapo, made to him the following statement:

"According to my opinion, the Grand Mufti, who has been in Berlin since 1941, played a role in the decision of the German government to exterminate the European Jews. He has repeatedly suggested to Hitler, Himmler and von Ribbentrop the extermination of European Jewry. He considered this as a comfortable solution for the Palestinian problem. He was one of Eichmann's best friends and constantly incited him to accelerate extermination measures. I've heard it said that, accompanied by Eich-

mann, he has visited incognito the gas chamber at Auschwitz."

Kaszner also quotes Eichmann as saying: "I am a personal friend of the Grand Mufti. We have promised him that no European Jew would enter Palestine any more. Do you understand now?"

This statement, according to Kaszner, was made by Eichmann in his office in Budapest on June 4, 1944. Wisliczeny, according to Kaszner, made similar statements in 1942 to an engineer, E. Steiner, and to M. B. Weissmandel of the Jewish Rescue and Relief in Bratislava.

Apparently, Wisliczeny has been, or will be, required to testify at the Nuremberg trials.

This raises a far more serious question—why is not the Grand Mufti in Nuremberg on the bench of the accused?

Kaszner, Wisliczeny, Eichmann and possibly Steiner and Weissmandel should be asked to repeat the charges in public hearings.

It is obviously time the full career of Haj Amin el Hussein, ex-Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, should be brought into the light of day. This fanatic Jew-hater is believed to be responsible for instigating Arab riots in Palestine and for the murder of Palestinian Jews. He bears the entire responsibility for the Iraqi revolt of 1941 against the United