

Mexico in San Antonio

IF you wish to form a just estimate of the potentialities of any race, you naturally seek for your laboratory an environment in which the race has had at least a fair chance for development. The Italian and Russian races would be most outrageously misjudged if they were studied exclusively through some of their more wretched peasant communities; China and Japan have been grievously slandered through the occidental assumption that the characteristics of coolies are characteristics of the race. We in America, with our vast experience in the transformation of miscellaneous foreign types into standardized Americans, ought to be safe against the fallacies resulting from a confusion of nature with nurture.

We are not safe, however, and every time we are confronted by a race which presents an appearance of degradation we cry, "Here at last is a race of which no good can ever come." Just now the race whose apparent defects press themselves upon our notice is the Mexican. The Mexican problem is not merely one of foreign policy, although the Mexican in Mexico is perplexing enough. It is also an immigration and labor problem, and a problem of local politics besides. Mexican laborers are steadily crossing the border and dispersing through the country in search of work. They are everywhere in the Southwest, and are appearing in increasing numbers in the northern states of the Pacific slope and of the Rocky Mountains. Some, too, are appearing in the Middle West. Mexican laborers have found work as far away from the border as Milwaukee. There is no legal bar upon Mexican immigration. No head tax is exacted, no records are kept. Is this laissez-faire policy wise? All depends on what kind of man the Mexican really is, not as he appears after he has grown up in oppression, ignorance, superstition, but as he would be if he had a fair chance in life. Where shall we find Mexicans in this condition? Perhaps nowhere, but it is approximated in San Antonio.

Mexicans who are pure Spanish, Mexicans who are pure Indian, and all intermediate grades, as well as Mexicans who are part Scotch, Irish, German, Italian, are to be found in San Antonio. There are Mexicans in plenty whose stocks were settled in Texas before the days of the Texas Republic, and Mexicans driven out by each of the successive waves of revolution in the last six years. Most of the Mexicans are poor, but many of them are rich. As Mexicans, they appear to be excluded from nothing. They play the game on fairly equal terms in

business, the professions, politics. They are admitted to social clubs and there is no ban upon mixed marriages. Is there a race prejudice against the Mexicans? A little, of course; toleration comes hard with the Anglo-Saxon. But ask an old San Antonio resident whether he dislikes the Mexicans. "No, I couldn't do that. I've been with them all my life."

If there is anyone who ought to know the Mexicans, it is Mr. W. G. Knox of San Antonio. Mr. Knox is a devoted educator, an excellent representative of the American schoolman, our best national contribution to civilization. Since boyhood he has known the Mexicans and liked them, and for the last sixteen years he has taught them in the Navarro public school, of which he is head. Mexicans are not segregated in the public schools of San Antonio, but the Navarro school is in the Mexican quarter, and of its twelve hundred pupils, more or less, ninety per cent are Mexican. All manner of Mexican children are represented here, blond and black, wee brown sprites born in San Antonio and big fellows of fourteen just over from Mexico. Mr. Knox has watched their steady advance from grade to grade and has followed their progress in the commercial or high schools, or—the usual case—at work. Here, then, is a man who ought to be overflowing with generalizations on race differences. But he isn't. Mr. Knox knows of no characteristic intellectual differences between Mexican and American children. Such differences as he notes are mere matters of degree, and minor degree at that. "At least," you prompt, "the brighter ones are the purest Spanish." "No," says Mr. Knox, "many of my best students are of the darkest types."

The Mexican child, according to Mr. Knox, enters the American public school under a severe handicap. As a rule he knows only Spanish, and his parents are most likely to be illiterate. He is too poor to equip himself fully with books, and he has not learned the virtues of regularity. As an offset, he is more eager to learn than the American child. He comes from a hovel and the school is a wonderland for him. Besides, his parents are vastly interested in his progress. When he can read, it is occasion for celebration among all his kin, and abundant is the little soul's opportunity for showing off. Of course he gets somewhat spoiled. Mexicans spoil their children anyway, loving them beyond the measure known to Anglo-Saxons. Their theories of discipline are drastic. "Do what you will with him, only save me the bones," such are the

disciplinary instructions left to the teacher. But at home the little Mexican, especially if he is winning glory through his scholastic achievements, does about what he pleases.

But ambition, with the children, balances the spoiling and the Spanish, and if we omit from consideration the new arrivals of advanced age in every degree of retardation, the Mexican children make as rapid progress through the grades as American. In writing, drawing and music they are better than the American; in mathematics, as good, in English they are inferior. They are good at baseball, inferior at football—a matter of physique. In the early grades they are mainly Spanish-speaking, in the later, English-speaking. The finished product of Mr. Knox's school is abundantly in evidence in San Antonio. In an hour's stroll about town Mr. Knox will introduce you to enough of them to shake out all your preconceptions of white-race superiority. Wherein would you change these straight, frank-eyed, easy-mannered young men? How handsome some of them are, how fair and square they all seem to be in their mental attitude. In El Paso they say a Mexican is unreliable. Ask these San Antonio young men how long they have been with their present employers. Three, six, ten years—the impression you get is one of decided steadiness. Mr. Knox admits that his boys are not noted for saving their money. But what boys, so handsome as some of these, born to bask in the bright sun of San Antonio, would be thrifty?

They are not rhetorical. They argue as pointedly as any young Americans for or against intervention in Mexico, and have a more or less disdainful attitude toward the fiery language of old Mexico, as we of the North have toward the belated representatives of pre-bellum American oratory. All that high-sounding Latin—it's a bit disappointing to discover that it is not temperament but tradition.

At El Paso they say a Mexican remembers only a grudge; for favors received he has no memory. At San Antonio they say a Mexican never forgets either favor or injury, and they will produce authentic instances of each kind to convince you. At El Paso they say that the labor of teaching Mexican children is one of disheartening difficulty. Mr. Knox has thriven under it, and presents every appearance of a man to whom life has been worth while. Perhaps the discrepancy results from differences in sympathy.

The El Paso schools were planning an historical pageant, and it seemed to the organizers appropriate to deck out the children of the Mexican school as representatives of the Stone Age. The parents were terribly outraged. If any children were to expose their limbs and wear skins, let them

be the Americans. Explanations were of no avail, and the Stone Age still rankles in El Paso. Let the reader derive his own moral from this incident. Now for another incident. On one occasion when Mr. Knox had his pupils salute the flag, he observed that a few children, of families recently arrived, refused to salute. We have heard of schoolmasters elsewhere who had children arrested in similar cases, and of juries who convicted them, and judges who sentenced them. To these recalcitrant little Mexicans Mr. Knox explained that a salute to a flag was a compliment to the nation, and not a disavowal of the allegiance one might owe to another nation. Further, there was no reason why American children should not salute a Mexican flag; and he made occasion for a salute to the Mexican flag. Since that time he has had no recalcitrants.

These are little things, and it is out of little things nations make deep friendships or great hatreds. So much is clear: if the Americanism that flows over the border into Mexico were the Americanism of Mr. Knox, we should hear very little of the ineradicable antipathy between Greaser and Gringo.

Go among the Mexicans that have been long subject to the benignant influence of San Antonio, and you form a conception of the Mexican problem quite different from the conceptions you form on the border or far inland. Here is a people well endowed intellectually, eager to learn, capable of artistic expression, with an emotional life intense, but wholesome, with extremely vital family institutions, and apparently with enough coöperative instinct to manage the practical affairs of life without the capacity for individual accumulation necessary for survival in a race like our own, unsocial, unkind. This people has fallen on evil days; progressive exploitation, followed by general disintegration, has torn apart millions of these intimate family bonds, thrown despair into hundreds of thousands of breasts, made for happiness, demanding so very little for happiness. And we on our side know only to use the thick fingers of diplomacy or the brutal fingers of imperialistic exploitation. Mexico may work out her own salvation, but she will owe few thanks to us. Or she may sink into barbarism, independently or under us, to our immense cost. For if there is one thing needed to enrich our life, it is a contiguous civilized state with something other than the real estate, railroad, banking trust-organizing interests to live for. Such a contiguous civilization we might have in Mexico in one generation if Uncle Sam could be to Mexico what Mr. Knox is to the little brown boys and girls in the Navarro school. This is impossible, you say. Why?

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Lord Kitchener—the Man and the Legend

A GREAT leader carries a legend as a saint wears a nimbus. It is the mark of his greatness, and of a soldier who failed to impress the imagination of his men and his country one might say that he was a brilliant tactician, or a scientific strategist, but one could not say that he was a great leader. Many a soldier who was an indifferent general by textbook standards has made a legend round himself. Some marked peculiarity of personality he must have, which serves as a peg for anecdote and wonder; it may be the silence and reserve of a William of Orange, or the dashing gallantry of a Henry of Navarre. Some noticeable and arresting peculiarity of physique is almost necessary to a really popular legend—the small stature of Eugene of Savoy, the “conquering nose” of Wellington, and the beauty of Claverhouse. If a soldier with a personality and a presence has won victories, what do his men care whether he won them by the book? If he touches the imagination, the legend will grow, and because our fancy has been stimulated, all that he does will seem rather bigger, rather stranger than the deeds of other men.

There has been nothing in our history quite like the Kitchener legend since the days of Wellington and Nelson. He was not loved like Nelson, nor was he quite the oracle that Wellington became, but he had come to seem to the masses, both in the army and in the street, our one indispensable man, our tower of strength, our unconquerable will. The handsome and slightly theatrical physique helped to explain it. The reputation for decision, driving power and soldierly bluntness was its real nucleus. It became the fashion in the days of our imperialist reaction, between the Nile campaign and the Boer War. All the current anecdotes turned on this phase of Lord Kitchener's character. He was the man who “would stand no nonsense” and drive straight to his goal, and the popular imagination pictured the Cabinet trembling at his nod. His friends and his critics fixed on the same trait. The critics who remembered the *battue* at Omdurman, the digging up of the Mahdi's head, the farm-burning and the concentration camps in the Transvaal, dreaded his touch on affairs for precisely the reason which led his admirers to call for it. The mob likes ruthlessness in a soldier, and if Lord Kitchener had possessed the kind of vanity which loves to posture as a dictator, he might have led a Tory-militarist reaction, as Macmahon and in a sense Wellington did. The people who read the *Daily Mail* and gossip in suburban trains would have cheered themselves hoarse if he had sent the Liberal Cabinet or

even the House of Commons “to the right-about.” That was half his legend, and he played upon it consciously. The other half was its more solid and enduring part, the confidence that he and he alone was the inspired organizer of victory, the Carnot of our hour of need.

Legends are a good basis for an estimate of a leader. True or false, they are his power, his magician's wand, and what a man is thought to be is often more important in history than what he is. On one point the legend did the man gross injustice. No popular soldier ever had less of the mingled vanity and brutality that makes a dictator. Lord Kitchener was the simple professional soldier, with no interests and no opinion outside his work. So far was he from wishing to dominate the Cabinet that he regarded himself from the first as Mr. Asquith's junior officer, and served under him with the kind of simple loyalty which the old-world colonel gives to his general. The notion which at first dazzled the Northcliffe school, of using his legend to further a comprehensive militarist reaction, was based on a vulgar misreading of the man. It expected him to demand conscription, and even pictured him “taking away that bauble,” if the Liberal majority in the Commons had hesitated. He was in point of fact a late and reluctant convert to compulsion, not indeed because he had any objection to the principle—principles were not his stock-in-trade—but because it was an unfamiliar system of which he had no experience. If Lord Kitchener's unique power over men did not tell in the Cabinet, the reason was that his was the direct intuitive mind of a man of action. I have heard a colleague describe his difficulty in defending or explaining his opinions round the table at Downing Street. He always saw his conclusion, sharp, definite and firm, but his reasons remained mysterious, until he had leisure to retire to his office and put them down on paper. The legend was equally mistaken when it attributed to Lord Kitchener the conventional conqueror's brutality. A certain coldness he had, even a ruthlessness about means, and it suited him to be considered ruthless. But his great work in the Soudan was his beneficent constructive toil on behalf of its cultivators and its peasants, and in South Africa it was his chivalrous soldierly instinct which defeated the “bitter-enders,” and shortened the war by many a long month.

There did indeed come a time when the legend embarrassed the Cabinet, and it might have been glad to see a less formidable man in Lord Kitchener's place. He had become indispensable, however, not because his qualities were really necessary, but because his prestige had become a national asset. The men had enlisted in “Kitchener's army.” The country had a blind faith in Kitchener's magic. The