

was small, she had made some excuse and escaped from their friends in the dining-room or the drawing-room to come to the foot of the stairs and listen. "Mother!" And when he was asleep, his dream had journeyed with her back into the circle of lamplight; it had taken its place there like a ghost. And now—

Far more often—at all times—in all places—like now, for instance—she never settled down, she was never off her guard for a moment but she heard him. He wanted her. "I am coming as fast as I can! As fast as I can!" But the dark stairs have no ending, and the worst dream of all—the one that is always the same—goes forever and ever un comforted.

This is anguish! How is it to be borne? Still, it is not the idea of her suffering which is unbearable—it is his. Can one do nothing for the dead? And for a long time the answer had been—Nothing.

... But softly without a sound the dark curtain has rolled down. There is no more to come. That

is the end of the play. But it can't end like that—so suddenly. There must be more. No it's cold, it's still. There is nothing to be gained by waiting.

But—did he go back again? Or, when the war was over, did he come home for good? Surely, he will marry—later on—not for several years. Surely one day I shall remember his wedding and my first grandchild—a beautiful dark-haired boy born in the early morning—a lovely morning—spring!

"Oh, Mother, it's not fair to put these ideas into my head! Stop, Mother, stop! When I think of all I have missed, I can't bear it."

"I can't bear it!" She sits up breathing the words and tosses the dark rug away. It is colder than ever, and now the dusk is falling, falling like ash upon the pallid water.

And the little steamer, growing determined, throbbed on, pressed on, as if at the end of the journey there waited. . . .

KATHERINE MANSFIELD.

## Land Feudalism in Mexico

**I**N the semi-arid north of Mexico are land holdings fifty miles across, the shortest way—a million, even two million, acres. In Jalisco, to the south, land is better divided than in most parts of the country. Probably no hacienda there comprises more than two hundred square miles. Yet the estate of Don Manuel, who is by no means a whale among the rural grandees of Mexico, has twice the extent of the Italian republic of San Marino!

Were you to visit him at San Gabriel, you might think yourself on one of the latifundia of Roman Africa in the time of the Emperor Augustus. Of modern democracy not a trace. Don Manuel is young and contemporary, a product of the oldest of English schools and an Oxford graduate—but he has to play the patriarch with his people. If a son is incorrigible, Don Manuel gives the scamp a serious talking to. If a peon gets drunk and beats his family, they bring the matter to Don Manuel. It is he who builds the church and pays the priest. He provides what passes for schools, as well as medicines and, in dire cases, a doctor. He puts up houses for his folk, and three-fourths of his three hundred cabins huddle near the huge mansion about the flagged patio where the amo lives when he is not in his town house in Guadalajara. The rest are on outlying ranches. Half a regiment of men work on the hacienda and its population can scarcely be less than two thousand souls.

Corn is grown on shares. The amo, who furnishes seed, implements, oxen and supplies for the

peon's family, gets half. Rare is the peon who saves his half and prospers. When Juan has sold his sacks of corn, he pays for the seed and supplies which have been advanced to him, buys new clothes and goes on a spree. Soon his pockets are empty and again he calls upon his amo to let him have provisions on credit.

Wheat—the same is true of cane, barley and chick peas—requires machinery and is, moreover, a money-maker, so the amo grows it with hired labor. For this he pays twenty-two cents a day plus five quarts of corn and a weekly three-and-one-half quarts of beans. Then there is free pasturage for the peon's live stock. Here and there a share tenant gets to the point of having peons working for him. One who has undertaken one hundred and fifty acres hires the men to keep sixteen yokes of oxen moving; another has taken forty yokes.

Don Manuel owns twelve hundred yokes of oxen, but a third of them are not working on the place this season. He claims that his tenants are planting less than usual because of their fear that the land bearing their crop may be confiscated by the Agrarian Commission and handed over to some village. So far nothing has happened, but the fitting out of the one village within his hacienda with a common (ejido) would take about 1,700 acres of plow land besides rough pasture.

On the Mexican plateau the splitting up of the latifundia is in some degree hampered by the necessity of storing the run-off of the rainy season to

succor the crops in the dry season. Across certain swales on Don Manuel's property, for instance, have been built dams creating three large reservoirs and two small ones. A big one is planned which would complete the irrigation of the plow land. It will cost \$100,000 besides drowning a fine field.

This multiplication of reservoirs saves many a crop but requires capital. In the interests of Mexican agriculture thousands of such dams should be built and thousands of fields become reservoirs. Who will do this? The state? But the state lacks the capital and practical judgment the job calls for. Cooperative credit associations of the Raiffeisen type? Most of the peons are no more ready for cooperation than Egyptian fellaheen. Their sons? Perhaps, but the education for it has not yet reached them. So water storage is a serious obstacle to the speedy conversion of the latifundia into one-family farms.

Governor Nieto of San Luis Potosi, one of the leaders in the chopping of the haciendas into small farms, admits that the proper development of agriculture in the dry part of his state calls for hundreds of reservoirs for water storage and many leagues of distributing ditches; and that this greatly adds to the difficulty of creating homesteads.

The peon cabins as usual are built on the poorest, stoniest land at hand and the little gardens of from one hundred to two hundred square yards are by no means flourishing. The adobe houses contain two to four rooms and are roofed with tile. The floor is usually earth but sometimes flag. Windows are rare, but the cabins are cheered by potted flowering plants.

Compared with some haciendas San Gabriel is a paradise for peons. In the state of Michoacan I saw a chain of low hills looking out over a vast expanse of corn losing itself in the distance. On an eminence is a hacienda house, residence of the administrator, the master living no doubt in Mexico City or Paris. Then for half a mile the scrub-clad hillside is pustuled with two hundred Lilliputian huts piled up from rocks. A man could hardly stand erect under the ridgepole. One room, dirt floor, no windows, roofed with canes, shakes or tiles. No bed save a straw mat, no covering save a serape. These habitations of men are smaller, leakier, damper and more noisome than those the master provides for his mules!

The hillside is covered with tiny patches, enclosed by high walls of stones picked up to uncover a little dirt. Here struggle hills of corn and beans, the staple food of the workers. So on this poor declivity the peons have to dig themselves in like gophers, while a stone's throw away the hacendado reserves his fertile level leagues to grow corn ten feet high!

Returning to Don Manuel, it is plain that his system is fitter to make human vegetables than to make men. Since all live in his houses and on his land, Don Manuel is master of the situation. No

one to whom he objects can come upon or be upon his principality. He owns six million mescal plants and his huge distillery is not a stone's throw from his house; but if any one on the place is caught supplying liquor to his peons, off he goes. Don Manuel is not above sowing wild oats himself, but when one of his peons makes his cabin a bawdy house or a gambling den the man is evicted at once. Such paternal care for his people's morals!

The priest in the hacienda church one Sunday preached a sermon denunciatory of the master's dealings with his people, but the next day he apologized abjectly to Don Manuel and explained to his flock that he had been loco. Last year a "Bolshevist" came upon the place and began haranguing the peons under the big tree. He urged them to take the land and till it for their own benefit. Don Manuel attacked him—for an insulting remark about his family, he claims—and pursued him to the borders of the hacienda, lashing him from horseback. Presently some soldiers came, but as Don Manuel attacked him—for an insulting remark and showed fight they went away.

The peon type is timid, dependent and unprogressive. A missionary who has worked in Mexico forty years notes among the Indians, "an almost incredible apathy. Sometimes they appear as helpless as little children." Again and again he has met with disappointment in trying to introduce improvements among them, such as persuading them to pipe water to the village from a spring half a mile away, to fill up holes so that in wet weather the roads should not become a quagmire, to bridge a stream dangerous to ford. To him it is nonsense to deny that the peon element is capable of development, but his hope is in the children, not in the grown-ups.

Says a British vice-consul:

Neither peon nor city workman have any thought of tomorrow, any instinct to save, or any desire to own land. This lack of ambition is racial. The pure Indian is absolutely unprogressive. He is stagnant, asleep, until he finds himself alongside foreigners. Then he wakes up. The masses are capable of education, but it will take generations—at least two—even if every influence were brought to bear which the ruling element is capable of applying.

It is a commonplace that if you double his wages the Mexican laborer will work for you only half as many days. Even when you lay in his lap the means of living better he will not change. A mining engineer told me:

When I was running an American-owned mine in Chihuahua it seemed to me a shame that the miners should be living under trees and in brush huts. So I got my company, which had made 42 percent that year and was feeling cheerful, to allow me \$25,000 for housing. I built sixty little two-room cabins, each with proper door, windows and floor. Well, sir, would you

believe that by the end of a year there wasn't wood enough in those cabins for a tooth-pick? They had sold doors, windows, locks and hinges, and destroyed the floor by building their fire in the middle.

In his way of life the peon is as mobile as a graven image. A mining expert told me how he and his party prospected four weeks with a native guide. As they came to like him they repeatedly offered him their own food—bread, bacon, venison, jellies and such like. He steadily refused them all and lived on nothing but parched corn with a little brown sugar sprinkled over it.

The typical peon has no desire to stand alone and be left to look out for himself. An American who stood in high favor under Diaz recounts how, some years ago, he acquired a hacienda on which were about four hundred peons. With the place, of course, he bought the accounts against the peons which amounted to 12,000 pesos. Upon taking charge he called the peons together and told them that the work would go on as usual, but that in order to start right with them he forgave all debts from them to him. Henceforth they were legally free to leave the hacienda.

The next day to his surprise no peons appeared for work—nor the next. On inquiry he found that the peons felt that with the wiping out of their accounts they could no longer look to the master for help in trouble; so that sorrowfully they contemplated departing from the hacienda on which their forefathers had lived and died. The forgiving of their debts released them from the hacienda, it is true, but at the same time it released the hacendado from them. The master whose peons owe him nothing will the sooner rid himself of those who displease him. Hence, they were going away to seek a master who, by staking them, would restore to them their lost sense of security. When the American learned this he called his people together and announced that their accounts would be recognized as still binding. At once their forebodings left them and the life of the place resumed its wonted course. This man tells still another story to illustrate the peons' shrinking from responsibility. On either side of his hacienda he had a tract of woodland. Call these tracts A and B. He offered A to his peons on these terms: he would supply implements and seed and they should clear the land and keep the first crop, give him a third of the second, and half thereafter. Tract B was offered for sale on these terms: he would advance implements, seeds and supplies and the buyer should keep the first crop, but give him a quarter of the succeeding crops till the purchase price had been paid. The price was to be a dollar an acre. Not one peon touched tract B!

The Revolution wiped out the debts which tethered the farm laborer to the hacienda. Nor does the law now suffer non-payment of a debt to

abridge the debtor's freedom of movement. But still the peon is afraid to avail himself of this new liberty. He wants a master to lean on. I have not met one American who estimates that more than a tenth of the peons are equal to farming a piece of land successfully on their own account.

The more common opinion is that perhaps two or three percent might make good as independent cultivators. While all the Americans, whether hacendados or not, denounce the inherited land system and agree that the thing to do is to get the land into the hands of those who cultivate it, they put their faith without exception not in the peons but in their children, provided they receive the right kind of education.

The recent break-up of the great estates in Latvia, Esthonia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Jugoslavia, has been followed by a marked decrease in agricultural production. The exportable surplus of eastern Europe is only a twentieth of what it was and includes few breadstuffs. In the words of the correspondent of the Manchester Guardian "the peasant has come into his own but he lacks the capital to develop it, the implements to work it, and the knowledge to improve it." If this is the outcome there, what would be the outcome of the same process in Mexico? Compared with the Mexican peon the peasant who has foomled it in eastern Europe is a competent and resourceful being.

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS.

[This is the first of a series of articles discussing current social and economic conditions in Mexico, where the author recently spent several months. The second will appear in an early issue.—THE EDITORS.]

## The Walden School

**I**F ever you visit typical schools you have surely been struck by the remarkably pleasant impression left on you by the first grade classes. Those little tots who can't keep still for a moment, whose eyes are shining with eagerness or mischief or just life, are hard to keep out of the centre of one's attention. They are all so different; the teacher needs Argus eyes, if she is to know what is going on in the room. She has only two, but as a rule they are bright. I dare assert that a composite photograph of first grade teachers would reveal alertness, good humor and happiness, so far as these can be revealed in a type.

Now let us skip the intervening grades and attend to our impressions of the seventh and eighth. They are much less pleasant, are they not? Manifest eagerness has come to be concentrated in a few. The most look docile and mildly interested, if it is a good school. Most of them are trying honestly to live up to all reasonable expectations. A lot of nonsense has been ironed out of them and