

Progress in Mexico

MEXICO: A REVOLUTION BY EDUCATION. By George I. Sanchez. New York: The Viking Press. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JOSEPH HENRY JACKSON

WHEN Mexico's armed Revolution ended in 1920, education was stagnant. There were practically no rural schools. In the towns, teaching was a matter of hide-bound formalism; under jurisdiction of various states or municipalities, each with different requirements, teachers could do no more than function in a sort of social vacuum. Indeed, it had occurred to very few that they should do anything else.

In 1921, however, President Obregon changed all that. He established the first Federal Secretariat of Education with Jose Vasconcelos as its head. Vasconcelos was that rare enthusiast who knows what he wants and how to go after it. With the slogan "*Educar es redimir*"—"To educate is to redeem"—as his war-cry, he set to work. And when he spoke of "redeeming," it was the Indian he meant.

He faced a difficult problem. There were no trained teachers. There was no definite plan. He had no administrative machinery; the whole task had to be undertaken from scratch. His answer was the creation of "Cultural Missions." The success of that inspired scheme is best shown by a table the author prints in this book. The first Cultural Mission, created to educate Indians and train teachers at the same time, held one Institute in 1923, in one State, with 147 future teachers in attendance. In 1935 there were eighteen such Missions, covering twenty States; they held seventy-five Institutes and 4,494 teachers attended.

It is the story of this extraordinary progress that Dr. Sanchez tells in this book, which was written under a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, though it is not a publication of that Fund but the author's own presentation of his findings and opinions on his own responsibility.

The original problem, of course, was immensely complicated by the fact that about 15% of the population spoke Indian languages, and that of this group only 53% spoke any Spanish.

The word "group," however, is misleading. Actually the Mexican Indians are divided into thirteen general linguistic classes. There is also a multitude of tribes and clans speaking many strange tongues and dialects, scattered through jungles and forests, separated by impassable *barancas*, parched plains, mountain peaks. Added to this was the obstacle of class difference. As the author writes, "The Mexican people did not know what they wanted. In fact, the Mexicans, as a People, have not existed."

How the plan succeeded is the burden of Dr. Sanchez's narrative.

The *misioneros* were really promoters; their job was to sell education to the Indians. In their groups were soap-makers, tanners, carpenters, teachers of domestic science, hygiene, and sanitation. From the beginning, the idea was general cultural advancement on all fronts. These pioneers might establish a marketing association or a school for painting. They might find themselves teaching music or weaving or the proper method for digging a proper latrine. Their first job was to gain the confidence of the villager. After that their job was to make the school a community affair, not merely a house for instruction. Education included everything that had to do with living; it had to.

Eventually, out of this groundwork came the socialist schools, established in districts sufficiently advanced or already more urban and literate. Their object

was and is to teach ideas. It is hard for most American minds to adjust to the notion of a school concerning itself with social or economic reforms, and under a federal rather than a state regime at that. But Dr. Sanchez shows that this was the setup necessary under the Mexican scheme of things. Education in the Mexican socialist school is not a formal system, carried on in a deliberately purified environment; it is, as in the Cultural Missions, a part of the real-life process within the life of the school's community.

There has been difficulty arising from the violent separation of Church and State in Mexico; Dr. Sanchez grants this. But it is interesting to note that he sees signs of this condition bettering itself. Already, he says, educational leaders are realizing that while government marches on the ground of safe historical precedent when it limits opposition to the Church to the question of political autonomy, intrusion into religious fields is of no value to a general federal program for education. As to the success of the system so far, Dr. Sanchez demonstrates beyond doubt that it has become the greatest single force in Mexico.

I Am the Horseman

BY THOMAS HORNSBY FERRIL

I AM the horseman you noticed across the prairie,
I am what made you say:

How beautiful

To ride so far away into the blueness . . .

Yet I have buckled one hole instead of another
In the throat-latch of the bridle of a horse
As if one hole in a strap were a doom or a sunrise.

And I have charged and overcharged until
They gasp with love and cry to stop, these ranges,
And slowed them to the lift of a coffin hinge.

Nothing you name is alien to these pressures:
The wars, the manifestos, distributions,
The old transgression of the grass across
The lovers and the skulls of lovers . . . nothing . . .
I scuff them down the prongs of rabbit brush,
All silvering the wind, all yellow gone.

The glance I give the twisting of a hoof
In the pennycress is as old a glance a man
Can give the earth.

Who has seen more a morning
Into battle or an evening coming home
Along Scamander or the Little Big Horn?

For who has changed the nature of a sunflower?
By what apportionment of blood? What whispering
Above the poised spear to split the breast?

Here in the loneliness of cottonwoods
Oh, I have overthrown the world with you;
I've propped your bleeding head, the last flag passes:

What is the meaning of the sage brush now?
What is the policy of the councillors
Now if the crotch of a tree outgrows a boy?
If an old man stares at a falling leaf at sundown?

The Man Who Did What He Wanted

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session and thus exaggerated; but for this very reason he became a type, an archetype, I believe, of one species of the human temperament. There have always been men like Thoreau, with a consuming passion for the wild—some hunters, some fishers, some scientists; most, however, not any of these things, but only men and women whose hearts are healed by intimate contact with the fields, the waters, the woods. In literature they have many spokesmen:—Virgil, Chaucer in his mood and Shakespeare in his, Herbert, Walton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Jefferies—the list could be indefinitely extended. What I wish to emphasize is that of them all, Thoreau's is the purest, the strongest, and the clearest devotion, and the most consistently articulate. He is the type poet-naturalist, as Montaigne is the type humanist, Pepys the type gossip, Milton the type Puritan, Shakespeare and Leonardo da Vinci the types of universal mind. This is his eminent distinction as man of letters, precisely as his resolve to come out and learn how to do what he wished is his distinction as a modern seer and homely philosopher.

What he did is a little different from what he wished to do. I think he would have gladly admitted (at least toward the end of his life), what I assert here, that a great part of his rambling and much of his intimate study of grasses, moonlight, pines, and the rivers of Concord, was pure pleasure and done as such. He wanted to do it, and he would have done it had the desire to write never turned over in his mind.

¶ Yet his controlling purpose, which becomes clearer and clearer as one reads on in his "Journal," was first to make himself an intimate of nature and then to set forth in words the "perfect correspondence of Nature to man." Not sentimentally, although he was subject to ecstasy in the presence of natural beauty. Not scientifically, although with pain, with crude instruments and imperfect books, and ever held back from easy knowledge by his reluctance to destroy life, he acquired an amazing competence in botany, discovered the law of the succession of forest trees, made what is probably the most complete calendar of the seasons for a given locality, and acquired the materials for a natural history of man in Concord which his life was too short to make into a book.

What he accomplished was to pull together two books, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" and "Walden," of which the latter fully expresses his genius, and the former, though badly edited, should have been enough to make the reputation of any writer. In addition he prepared, though not for final publica-

tion, three travel books on a new plan. And finally he drew from his "Journal" for lectures which finally became essays, handfuls of assembled ideas of which "Civil Disobedience" in his philosophic vein, and "Wild Apples" in his mood of a shrewd and passionate love for nature, have gone round the world. "

Yet, "Walden" aside, the final purpose remained unachieved. His "Natural History of Men in Concord," as I have called it, or "The Concord Year," which would have been his more probable title, is still unquarried from the two million words of his Journal. His brave hope that since the poet was bound to write his own biography, a good journal was work enough for him to do (Walden Edition, x, 115), was belied by the vast extent, and repetitive and often confused nature of the material of his "Journal" itself, from which only the master's hand could make what should have been his definitive book.

Henry Thoreau was always groping for a form in which to cast his abundant materials. He thought, as I have said elsewhere, by paragraphs and sentences, and these, indeed, are, with the rarest exceptions, finished and usually final in his "Journal," which is no hasty record of recent impressions, but careful writing that is usually a rewriting of earlier notes. He found such a form for "Walden," which is sufficiently held together by its idea of simplifying life, but even "Walden" is overstuffed with observation the purpose of which is clear only in the light of his great project of the history of man in relation to Concord nature and of Concord nature in relation to man. But what he chiefly lacked was time. His method of literary work was laborious in the extreme. Far from being the idler that Stevenson thought him, his daily time schedule would shame a New York lawyer. In addition to pencil making, surveying, and the family chores, which, when a garden was to be made or the pig brought back to his pen, were not inconsiderable, he kept as rigorously as he could to his scheme of a daily ramble of three hours or so, or a cruise on the river, which was often supplemented by a dawn or midnight excursion. These trips were his laboratory, and his reports, written usually in the field, sometimes at night, and rewritten and supplemented with scrupulous care for truth and expression in his "Journal," represent in themselves a high-pressure stint of daily composition. To this was to be added reading and study, both extensive. For his books more time had to be found somehow—and was best found by him in his sojourn at Walden Pond. These books, like Emerson's, were made up from journals—from sentences and paragraphs sometimes scattered over years which must be brought together, related, remoulded, and given coherence and a final unity. I can imagine no more laborious

or time-consuming method of preparing for publication.

— This is the real explanation of the disparity between Thoreau's fame and the number of his completed books of major quality. After "Walden" he never completed a book, although he left much assembled material for essays or travel books that needed only editing by another hand. He died at 44, still hard at work upon the background of humanity in Concord.

But he found somehow and never spared time and energy for his style. The books waited while he labored upon his paragraphs. Style, as such, Thoreau affected to despise, believing that words were nothing without real life behind them. I say affected, because if Henry Thoreau had a weakness it was for fine words, especially when they had the gristle of felt experience in them. He loved bravura also, even impudence in language. Nevertheless his Yankee sense, and perhaps his close reading of the classics, led him straight and true here as elsewhere. Thoreau's best prose is as good as any written in his century. In its directness, which is sometimes homely and sometimes eloquent, in its curt, vigorous rhythms, its delight in racy words, its wit, it is the best American prose ever written, and as American as it is good. The tradition of homely wisdom, compressed and pointed in a phrase which flows through him is still alive in "The People, Yes" of Carl Sandburg, published in 1936. He could tell a story, he could make an epigram, he could invent an unexpected figure, he could handle the rhythm of a paragraph until it seemed that not the wording but the thought was musical; yet his great distinction is in those subtly phrased and almost insolently beautiful passages of poetic prose in which his ecstasy blends with ruthless realism to make sentences that only an inhabitant of the confident nineteenth century, only a native of God-charged New England, only an independent Yankee, and usually only Thoreau could have written. As in the justly famous passage from "Walden"—

If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimiter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throat and feel the cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business.

Here then is a type of world mind, vigorously shaped, perfectly developed according to its own laws, and made completely articulate in and through the little town of Concord.

This essay in slightly different form will be published as an Introduction to "The Works of Henry D. Thoreau," Edited and Selected by Henry Seidel Canby (Houghton Mifflin Co.).