

# **BOOKED** *for* **TRAVEL**

**TORTILLAS, TEQUILA, AND THOU**

**A TREASURY OF MEXICAN FOLKWAYS.** By Frances Toor. New York: Crown Publishers. 1947. 542 pp. \$5.

**YOU MUST GO TO MEXICO.** By Cecil and Fred Carnes. Chicago: Ziff-Davis Publishing Co. 1947. 130 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by BETTY KIRK

ON AN enchanted midnight almost ten years ago I sat on a crumbling rock wall flanking an ancient cemetery and watched pinpoints of light wavering up the hillside toward me. Other lights appeared from behind and beyond the church to the left. As they converged onto the slope, the pinpoints became candle flames, and the flames revealed coppered heads behind them. Gradually, in the massed candlelight the bodies of rebozo-swathed women carrying babies and baskets took form. Each sought some unmarked spot upon the earth, lowered her bundles upon it, placed the candles like altars before them, and knelt.

Bisecting the plot on which the figures kneeled, was a long pole resembling a football goal post. It was hung with pumpkins and squash and corn, all tied with colored streamers and interwoven with marigolds. Toward dawn three old men came and, standing before it, began a chant that was answered by the women in chorus. Still later, as the dawn light seeped across the lake, drunken men stumbled up from the cantinas below to join the women and old men of the Tarascan tribe. Being foreigners, we left then to return to Patzcuaro and not invade any longer the privacy of the Indians on the Island of Janitzio, celebrating the Day of the Dead.

Many times thereafter I asked in Mexico, of all who might know, about the significance of the strange pagan ceremony. Yet I could never discover more than fragmentary reports on the fusion of a Bachanalian harvest festival with the traditional fiesta celebrated throughout Mexico. Upon publication of Miss Frances Toor's "A Treasury of Mexican Folkways" I thought the answers would be found at last. Turning eagerly to her account of this event, I was disappointed again. Miss Toor tells only what can be found in the average guide book.

Throughout the impressive volume her treatment is the same. She does



—Diego Rivera.

Fruits of Labor.

not tell the how nor the why of her fascinating subject matter; she only reports it. Her method is not that of the folklorist who illuminates through scholarly understanding the origins and developments of a folk pattern. It is that of an observer, who has perhaps seen more of Mexican native life than any living person, but who has been content to record it, without explanation or interpretation.

This amateur's technique forbids any comparison with such authoritative works as B. A. Botkin's "Treasury of American Folklore" or with Miguel Covarrubias's masterly "Mexico South." Miss Toor's is at its best in the section on "Songs and Dance Music," prepared with the collaboration of Concha Michel. And complete disappointment with the book is avoided by the ten superb color plates and 100 drawings by the distinguished artist Carlos Merida, and by the inclusion of 170 photographs.

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**W**HOLLY unlike Miss Toor's massive work is the gay and engaging "You Must Go to Mexico," by Cecil and Fred Carnes. Here is a slim volume, written with zest and charm, which tells all you need to know for your next trip. Calling Mexico "the Shangri-la for motorists," it is designed for those who drive down the Pan-American highway and depart from it for various circle tours.

## *Guidebooks on Mexico*

**Terry's Guide to Mexico.** By T. Philip Terry. Privately printed. \$4.75. (The old standby first published in 1909, now in a 1947 reprint with maps, plans, and a thousand oddments of incidental information.)

**New Guide to Mexico.** By Frances Toor. Crown Publishers. \$2.50. (1946 revised reprint of a pocket-sized guide by the professor of folklore at the University of Mexico.)

**Mexico South.** By Miguel Covarrubias. Alfred A. Knopf. \$7.50. (Huge, rich album of Mexicana by the painter, photographer, anthropologist, and geographer who in 1946 parlayed all his talents into this massive work.)

**Viva Mexico!** By Charles Maccomb Flandrau. D. Appleton-Century. \$2. (Sprightly and accurate 1937 study based on longtime association with Mexican people.)

**Mexico and Its Heritage.** By Ernest Gruening. New York: Century. \$6. (Scholarly history written in 1938 by an ex-journalist and current Governor of Alaska.)

A miracle of condensation, it gets necessary details over with quickly, then concentrates upon having fun. Warnings on prices are given—"You start with American inflation and add on Mexican inflation"—and various rackets are exposed. Particularly welcome is news of hotels that gyp. But most of it is given to vivid descriptions, such as calling El Salto Falls "a long vanilla soda," or to such amusing renditions of native legends as the authors' interpretation of the Ixtaccihuatl-Popocatepetl tale. If you must go to Mexico, either in body or spirit, a pleasant companion will be this volume by the brothers Carnes.

**HOW GREEN WAS MY FATHER.** By David Dodge. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1947. 216 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by CARLETON BEALS

**T**HE title of this funny book is a literal translation of the title of a Mexican movie comedy on the boards when Dodge passed through Mexico to Guatemala in his Chevrolet, with his wife and little girl. "Green" or *verde* is Mexican slang for a "skirt-chaser," but Dodge uses it in the American slang sense of "sucker." The sucker, he cheerfully sets forth, was himself, though

he feels pretty sure he wasn't quite as big a one as his little girl, Kendall, and his "tactless wife," Elva, made him out to be.

However, by his own account, he came pretty close to perfection as a general ignoramus and easy-mark, and it is precisely this "Innocents Abroad," babe-in-the-woods approach that provides much of the hilarity of this little volume. His route through Mexico is studded with an unending series of closely spaced eight balls. He struggles from behind each of them manfully, chiefly by plenty of leg work, industrious gullibility, and his hand ever held forth with coin of the realm. Five-year-old Kendall got along swimmingly with all ages, and her smile proved more effective in melting hard-hearted officials than even the author's ready shower of pesos. His wife's role seemed to have been to collect all the local lounge-lizards about her and violate all the social customs of the land.

By managing to hit all the rough spots and hit them real hard, the author avoids a single dull moment in his book; and his predicaments are so absurd and mostly so unnecessary, his telling of them so inflected with humor, with clever bon mots and gags, that laughter bubbles from every page.

He is helped in his tale by the fact that he hit Mexico at the moment when post-war travel was at the peak of difficulty, and he would have weakened his account considerably if he had sloughed off his pose of "the rube at large" to show the slightest comprehension of the why of Mexican habits and psychology. It is not, therefore, a document about Mexico but about American provincialism.

Had Mr. Dodge known Spanish, had he known something about Mexicans, he might have discovered that he could have gotten such extraordinary services, not by paying for them but as a gesture of kindness and friendliness. As it was, the author repeatedly insulted friendly hosts by trying to pay them for their generous assistance. But this little homily should not detract from the fact that Mr. Dodge has written a delightful, mirthful book, which was all he set out to do.

**SONORA SKETCH BOOK.** By John Hilton. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1947. 333 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by IVAN T. SANDERSON

**H**ERE at last is a book about Mexico entirely devoid of either patronizing condescension or starry-eyed whimsy. The book, moreover, is well titled for it

is just that—a book of delightful little sketches in which, be they in prose or in pencil, the author-artist has captured the strange white sunlight of Sonora and the beauty of its wild-life and people with consummate finesse. Reading this book will be almost pure delight, for every one of the forty-one sketches is either interesting, amusing, or poetically beautiful and often all three at once. It should be read.

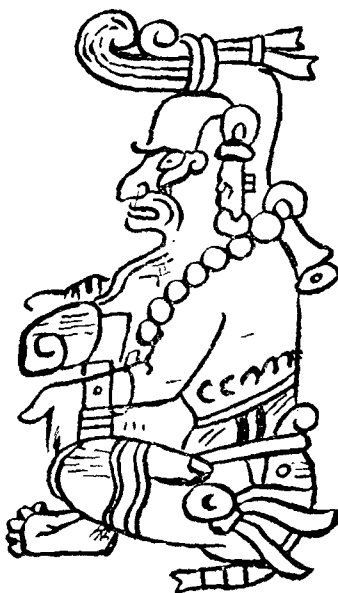
### A Note on Mexico

Truman flew to Mexico  
On the Sacred Cow he flew  
'Twas a notable event  
For he is our President  
And he flew away to distant Mexico\*

**W**ITH this song, and many a seasoned story, El Harrito, the Flying Presidente, is being immortalized as a cementer of good relations without diplomatic equal. Four months after Truman's trip, Mexico is still throbbing with good neighborliness. Over the tables in Sanborn's House of Tile in Mexico City, and in the adobe huts of the interior, Mexicans are still talking about "Harrito" (like saying Harry, boy!), and the quiet way he placed the wreath on the monument of Los Ninos Heroes—the cadet heroes of Chapultepec. It seems, at last, that more Mexicans are calling us "primos," which means cousin, than many another word which they have found appropriate through the years.

Here in the United States, the Mexican Government Tourist Bureau which normally issues about fifty tourist cards a day at its New York office alone, averaged eighty a day during the week of Alemán's visit to

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— From "A Treasury of Mexican Folklore."  
Aztec Sun God—also worshipped by tourists.

*In a word, it's ...*

# MEXICO



Of course, it's Mexico—the far-away land that is so near ... land of siesta and fiesta ... land where the sun shines on flower-bright valleys and towering snow-capped volcanoes ... land of burro and boulevard ... cathedral and cafe ... pyramid and skyscraper ... Mexico, where a world of wonderful contrasts awaits vacationers, all the year 'round.

Yes, for all the thrills of travel, the word is still ... Mexico. And remember, the dollar still buys more in Mexico!

*No passports are required—crossing the border is almost as easy as going to another state. Be sure to write for new booklet—yours for the asking.*

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JULY 5, 1947

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