

## Dr. A. P. Kephart Continues Story on Travels and Experiences in Old Mexico

By DR. A. P. KEPHART

Mexico is our nearest foreign neighbor. I use the word "foreign" because Mexico is so much more different and the extremes are so much greater than in Canada, in the sense that the whole design of living, the climate, and the topography are different and strange to us. Mexico is almost all of it farther south than Florida and extends as far west as California and east as far as the tip of Florida; almost all south of the Tropic of Cancer and therefore tropical or semi-tropical; almost all mountainous and very high, making for the most part a tropical climate tempered by high altitudes. The people in the different States and sections vary in illiteracy from 50 to 75%, and, while in one town they boast of more than thirty millionaires, for the most part they are very poor, a large proportion living in one room huts without floors, windows, stoves, sanitary facilities or furniture. This picture is changing very rapidly now with the coming of good paved roads and electricity and new schools, but among the mountain Indians resistance to progress is very severe. The witch doctor has more influence than the government assigned graduate physician and the parental illiteracy more than the attractions of the new government schools and the pressures of compulsory attendance which cannot be enforced. For example, it is not unusual for the physician to find a pregnant woman as delivery time approaches in agony and turning blue from the cord tight around just below her ribs, as prescribed by the witch doctor, to prevent the unborn child from going in the wrong direction. Of course we do not have to go as far as Mexico to find similar and as stupid superstitions with which physicians and others have to contend.

President Aleman is almost universally admired. His people mourn because they cannot legally re-elect him for another term. They praise him for the new schools all over the country and for the provision that each college or university graduate, except physicians and lawyers, must teach for a year in some back country school, but the same hill people are not eager for the opportunities offered. Physicians and lawyers must also give a year of service where sent and then for the rest of their lives give several hours per day to government service. Why didn't we discover this device? We do provide for apprentice teaching and for internships but we have not sent graduates to the sticks to serve isolated and the less privileged.

Twelve years ago, on our first visit to Mexico, as we drove along, almost every white clad man or boy we passed carried a machete, the almost universal tool of the peasant, and wore a sarape. The loaded burro and men, women and children carrying on their backs or heads what seemed to us to be almost impossible loads, were everywhere. Now, after twelve years, these sights are still common but not as numerous and trucks and autos have become more common.

Native markets are still everywhere and among the most picturesque sights. One visits all of such markets he can reach to make quick surveys of native life and products, handmade merchandise and to see the primitive people, some in family groups in their primitive or native costumes, tending their stands or booths, or preparing the noon meal right where they are, perhaps over a small charcoal pot, filling the streets and plazas in complete disregard of traffic. In fact, if informed, the

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visitor does not venture to drive through a market or into it. Occasionally it is barely possible and we were caught once in the largest market in Mexico City, creeping slowly as reluctant natives made way for the foolish and stupid Americans, an experience not to be sought or repeated. There was no unpleasant treatment, merely surprise and perhaps disgust. If you should visit Mexico do not miss the two enormous markets in Mexico City, at some distance one on each side of the Cathedral Plaza, and the most unique one at Toluca, about forty miles west of Mexico City. You cross the mountains at above 10,000 feet. Toluca has changed to be almost unrecognizable after twelve years and the market has changed also for it seems a little better organized, but is just as strange, native, and varied as ever. It fills the streets over an area which seems like about a third of a mile each way, making almost a square mile of market, all centered about a great central market building, 200 by 300 feet. The streets are filled with tables, stands, stalls, covered and uncovered, and many many sellers with their meager wares merely spread out on a cloth or paper or in baskets on the paving of the street. We hastily estimated that there must be not less than 500 different persons engaged in trying to sell a colorful variety of goods from fruit, vegetables, meats, to clothing, hardware, trinkets and ornaments of all kinds. Animals are usually butchered, sold, and

eaten on the same day because of lack of refrigeration, although in the cities and resorts this is changing rapidly. It is a common sight in the villages and in most of the markets even in the cities to see meat hanging in long thin and flat strips, usually on the outside of the shop. We were told that the well-to-do and the fine hotels even send their servants or representatives to the markets daily to buy perishables for consumption, that day and that these things are bought in small quantities.

The visitor wanders about without embarrassment and attracting little attention from the natives, even if he is taking pictures, unless he is foolish enough, as some Americans unfortunately are, to make himself offensive or conspicuous. When he inquires or shows interest in buying he is treated with kindness and gentle courtesy. In fact we have found in some twenty-five different foreign countries that from the most primitive to the most modern the common people are kindly and helpful but that there are exploiters and rascals everywhere alike, (except of course in the United States!) At Acapulco on the Pacific in Mexico, the American Riviera, as in Nice, on the French Riviera we paid our peso or franc for a chair on the beach or promenade where one could sit all day if he wished without molestation except from the attention of peddlars and beggars and no one seemed to care whether we were prince or pauper, movie star or beggar, as



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long as we ourselves were modest and courteous.

One wonders who is really civilized, particularly when he discovers for himself that near Mexico City there are ruins the antiquity of which no one ventures to estimate accurately, probably at least ten thousand years, indicating a kind of civili-

zation and religious worship which could follow only many thousands of years of slowly evolving culture. What were the people like? Were they civilized or primitive, illiterate, or cultured?

The above reminds me of the area south of Mexico City, two or three miles long and wide, completely covered by a lava flow from ten to thirty feet thick from a volcano which has disappeared. Excavations uncovering skeletons and structures indicate at least prehistoric times. As you drive around this kind of discovery and see in the distance the towering snow-clad peaks of Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl which have not been active for centuries, one wonders about the naive conception of the age of the earth which puts it at something just over 6000 years.

Popo and Ixta tower up over 17,000 feet high. They dominate the Mexican skyline for nearly all of the central and southern part. For forty miles north and south they are still to be seen. As they dominate the scene so they seem to have figured in the life and beliefs of the ancients for it has been observed that if one sights along the tips of the two pyramids north of Mexico City they are exactly in line with the peaks of these two volcanoes. Since the pyramids have religious significance in Mexico, being adjacent to a large temple area of ancient times, we judge that these two volcanic peaks have entered into and become a part of that significance. Popo

seems now to be smoking or steaming. This is easily to be confused with clouds which hover over such peaks but it has been established to be steam or smoke and some fearful souls fear that it is the beginning of a period of activity which may be responsible for the many earthquakes. There have been recorded as many as 1000 shocks a year, many occurring right along in a short period of time. We experienced two of the more severe ones. We are glad now that we did and can see the humorous aspects of them but at the time we were not just sure whether they might not be tragic. We were preparing for our journey to Acapulco, 300 miles to the southwest. I had gone to the garage, a big brick building housing at least 50 cars, to get the car for the trip. As I stood by to open the door I felt a very peculiar whirl, as if I had pivoted on my feet and were swinging my head around in a two foot circle. I leaned against the car and wondered whether some strange illness were coming over me. The car was moving back and forth, rocking back at least eight inches and then forward again. I then began to speculate on whether to escape a falling building or to get the car out first. I decided on the latter. When I reached our room the hanging lamps were still swinging. There were twelve shocks in five minutes, the severity of which can be best realized by the fact that a water tower near by was rocking from side to side and the water was spilling out

on both sides; a tree just in front of our room, its trunk about thirty inches in diameter, was weaving from side to side from the base, and the branches as if in a strong wind. My sister was in her bath-room brushing her teeth. She had asked her physician what to do in case of fainting and he told her to lie down on the floor and call for help. When things began to weave and sway she assumed that a fainting spell was on so she lay down and called to another sister in the adjoining room. She called to her husband that Pearl was fainting. He replied, "Well I feel dizzy myself." Damage was slight. After much experience buildings are planned to take the shocks and the only visible damage in the city was a twenty foot crack in the wall of one of the larger hotels.

At Acapulco one morning a number who lived where we did reported hearing a large body

strike the side of the building right by their own rooms. My wife said she thought a big truck had collided with the wall outside our room. Others thought the same thing. Of course we found that there had been a fair sized earthquake shock at about mid-night. We appreciated having these two big shows put on while we were there.

Please do not get the impression from what has been said to this point that all Mexicans are illiterate natives, that all buildings are huts, and that all are dirty and primitive. Let me tell you another time about the contrasts along this line.

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