

## CHAPTER XII

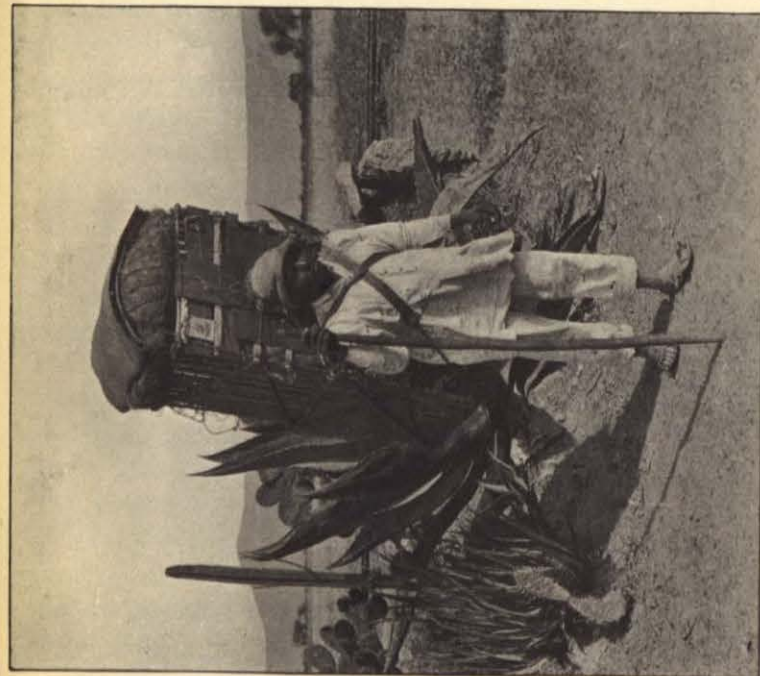
Education—Government encouragement and institutions—Federal District and Territorial establishments — Number of schools and pupils — State schools—Private schools—Course of studies—School systems—President Diaz and education—Religious instruction banned—Priestly influence — National University—American School—Government support of native talent—Art students and their work—Art exhibitions.

EDUCATION commenced very early in Mexico. When Hernán Cortés took the City, on 23rd August, 1521, a course of education, of a kind, was already in vogue; while, in 1522, so active were the new Conquerors, that the City contained school-houses sufficient to hold 1,000 pupils. Eight years later was founded the College of San Juan de Letran, while in 1840 the College of San Nicolas de Hidalgo was founded at Patzcuaro, and King Charles V. of Spain became its patron. In 1553 the University of Mexico was opened, eighty-three years before Harvard College, Cambridge, U.S.A., came into existence, and by the end of the 16th century there had been established seven seats of higher education. With the expulsion of the Jesuits, and after the Franciscans had had public and private education practically in their hands, a pause in the enthusiasm took place; but nevertheless, when Baron Alexander von Humboldt visited Mexico in 1803, he was so astonished at the development of higher education in the City of Mexico that he wrote: "No city in the new world, not even excepting the U.S.A., has scientific establishments as grand and solid as those of the Mexican capital."

After the Revolution of 1821, a further attempt to improve the education of the country was made, and the short-lived Emperor Yturbe, in March 1823, declared: "The first aim of Government must be the organisation of a system of public instruction," a sentiment which was endorsed a little later by



A MEXICAN PEON WOMAN, NEAR CUERNAVACA.



A MEXICAN PEDLAR.

Photo by H. Infield Scott.

Don Lucas Alamán, who, on many occasions, publicly stated, "Without education no liberty."

Dr. Samuel Johnson once observed: "Much may be made of a Scotsman if he be caught young." The same may certainly be said of the Mexican, or, indeed, of any Spanish-American; for where education has been tried, it has been found almost invariably successful among the Latin-American race, a fact which is regarded as one of the most hopeful factors in the gradual improvement amongst the South and Central American Republics of to-day. No one has been more alive to the advantages of education than President Porfirio Diaz, and I may go further and say that, since the consummation of Independence, no statesman in Mexico has done more—and few as much—to promote the cause of education.

In 1822 an organised scheme of education was tried in Mexico, when the System associated with the name of Joseph Lancaster received a very full and fair trial. When Lancaster met with a violent death in the streets of New York in 1838, his family went to reside in Mexico, and that may, perhaps, to some extent explain the enthusiasm with which his methods were taken up by the country of his family's adoption. Anyhow, the Government of that day gave the reform movement its moral and material support, with the result that to-day we see some 557 primary schools supported by the Federal Government in the Federal District and Territories, attended by 60,000 pupils, which are alone controlled by the Federal Government. Independently of these, however, including both State and Municipal institutions, there are in the Republic of Mexico about 9,500 primary, secondary and professional schools, as well as 2,750 institutions supported by the clergy, associations and of a private nature, or, say, a total of some 12,250 schools. The Government also supports many other excellent institutions, among which may be mentioned the School of Jurisprudence, the School of Medicine, the School of Agriculture and Veterinary Instruction, the School of Engineers, the School of Fine Arts, the School of Arts and Trades for men, and a similar institution for women, the School of Commerce and Administration, a National Conservatoire of Music, the Preparatory School, a School for

the Blind, a School for Deaf Mutes, several reformatory schools, Naval and Military Schools, in addition to 22 Public Museums and 61 Libraries, containing from 500 to 180,000 volumes each. The last school census taken was in 1902, and according to the figures then published, it seems that the Federal District educated 54,052 children, and in the Territories 15,700. At that time the Government had 498 schools, of which 337 were in the Federal District, 103 in the Territory of Tepic, 45 in the Territory of Lower California, and 13 in the Territory of Quintana Roo.

"Education is our foremost interest," said the President of the Republic in an interview upon the subject not long ago, "and we regard it as the foundation of our prosperity, and the basis of our very existence. For this reason we are doing all that we can to strengthen its activity and increase its power." Through the influence of General Porfirio Diaz, schools have been established for boys and girls in every community of the Republic, while upon his initiative has been created a Department of Public Instruction, presided over by its own Minister. President Diaz, in many of his acts and ideas, reminds one forcibly of our own good King, Alfred the Great, who was one of the wisest, best, and greatest of English monarchs. The President shows in this, as in so many public acts, that he is also a great leader and born ruler of men. Personally, he has made a very complete study of education as carried on in other countries, and he admits that he has learned a good deal even from Japan. The grades of schools, the general plans of study, the courses in which subjects are divided, the method of teaching employed have all been determined upon by him after mature deliberation with other authorities. In order to show that the system is thoroughly carried out, it may be mentioned that in 1903, 8,000 parents or guardians were fined for neglect, after being admonished once, in sending to schools the minors for whose education they were responsible.

The school system of Mexico is, I should say, unique, and it has had its own peculiar developments. It is neither Spanish nor American, but Mexican. Beginning with the primary, the pupils are passed into the grammar and high schools, and are finally sent to preparatory and professional

schools. The general plan for obligatory elementary education in Mexico comprises civic instruction, the national language, arithmetic, natural science and the history of Mexico, practical geometry, drawing, singing, gymnastics and military drill, and, for girls, embroidery and sewing. The study of English is compulsory in certain grades, and upon this point the President of the Republic has publicly said: "Now that we are teaching English in the public schools of Mexico, the people of the U.S.A. should reciprocate by teaching Spanish in their schools." I have yet to learn that the U.S.A. has taken the hint. Certainly no one would believe it from the little amount of Spanish spoken by Americans. In addition to her system of elementary schools, Mexico has a system of higher and superior schools.

As is the case in the Argentine Republic and almost all other Roman Catholic countries of to-day, while much attention is given to mixed education, no attention whatever is devoted to that dealing with religion; in fact, the giving of religious education is forbidden. Possibly the Mexican Government has seen from experience the ill-effect of education under the priests, from which infliction in the early days the whole Republic suffered, an experience which convinced the authorities that as there is not, and never can be, any possibility of unanimity in regard to religious instruction, the State should not attempt to provide it. The feeling in Mexico against the Church's interference in any form of government is intense, and those who know the previous history of the country under the priests' domination will not wonder at it.

Although religion is not taught, moral precepts are; and temperance is one of the main virtues inculcated in the minds of young Mexicans. This teaching is obligatory in the primary schools of the Federal District and the Territories of the Republic, and every means is used to engage only teachers who are total abstainers. Temperance Societies are organised in all the more advanced schools, into which pupils are invited to enroll themselves, without undue pressure, while prizes and decorations are used as incentives to temperance. The earnest efforts towards teaching temperance made by the Governors of the States of Chihuahua (Señor Creel) and

Zacatecas (Señor Pankhurst) are referred to more fully in another portion of this work, under the respective States.

Another excellent innovation is teaching pupils how to keep books and accounts, which has of late been introduced into some of the schools. A special department, with all the conveniences of a modern office, is reserved, and here book-keeping is taught under the direction of special teachers.

I visited a very large number of the schools in Mexico, both Government and private, and in one and all I was deeply impressed with the happy, clean, and contented appearance of the children. There was no evidence of physical force or other than moral influence used in inducing them to attend, or to carry on their studies. They came merrily to school and departed as merrily thence, just as happy as children of that age should be. The school work appeared to be admirably arranged, and both teachers and pupils apparently entered into it with eagerness and intelligence. This phase was not peculiar to one State, but was to be observed in all alike.

While I was in the Republic the Federal Government decided upon spending a further sum of \$3,500,000 (£350,000) upon the erection of new school buildings, the classes being divided as follows: First class, which comprises primary, elementary, and superior educational courses; second, primary elementary schools in the City of Mexico, and in the country-seats of municipalities; third class, primary elementary courses in rural towns.

One of the most important events so far as Mexico is concerned will be the establishment of a National University, founded to celebrate the first Centennial of the Independence of Mexico, to be held in 1910. It is somewhat remarkable that so progressive a country as Mexico should have hitherto been without a University, and there can be no question that, in spite of the admirable system of education already existing, the want of such an institution, especially by the upper classes, has been greatly felt. One consequence has been that many intelligent young Mexicans have had to go to the United States of America or to Europe in order to complete their education; while others, although doubtless inclined to do so, have been loth to leave their own country and their people, so that their "finishing" has been impossible. No doubt the proposed

University will be found equally useful to the great middle-class of the Republic, as it will enable them to give their children a first-class education at a comparatively small cost, and without the necessity of sending them out of the country for the purpose. The Mexicans are so patriotic, and the Government is so liberal in these matters, that I fully expect to see the National University of the City of Mexico amply endowed by the time the Centenary comes round. Once established, all the various faculties will be found welded together in this one great University.

In the general system of education, mention ought to be made of the many night-schools, which have been established in pursuance of the Government's solicitude for the working-classes. These schools are of two classes; the supplementary, of which the purpose is to supply primary instruction to those who have not been able to acquire it; and complementary, intended to afford grown-up persons, already provided with the grounding in knowledge, an opportunity to improve themselves, and add to their stock of information. The supplementary night-schools of Mexico City were attended last year by 3,692 pupils, and the complementary schools by 448 pupils. The educational advance in this direction has already been marked.

Education in Mexico is entirely free, the Primary, Normal and Professional alike receiving everything—instruction, books, etc.—without a penny of cost to them. I question whether this policy is altogether a wise one. At one time such a system was no doubt necessary enough; but to-day, when general prosperity has established itself throughout the length and breadth of the Republic, self-respecting citizens could have no objection to contributing a moderate amount to the National schools for the education of their children; and by inviting the students of the professional classes to pay something towards their instruction, more would be available for the very poor. True democratic government should essay to teach a spirit of independence; and while grounding all in the elementary studies, leave professional instruction—in the absence of special cases such as I have referred to elsewhere—to individual enterprise.

Curiously enough not a single school in Mexico City has

hitherto been provided with a playground. It seems remarkable that, with thousands of little children going to school every day of the year, no sort of recreation-yard should have been provided for their amusement. This was the old Spanish idea, but the Mexican Government, in all the new school-houses being built, is wisely providing suitable ground for recreation and exercise purposes.

Those who have attempted to educate working-men in England and upon the Continent of Europe have confessed that higher education among them has generally proved a failure, and that it is difficult to keep a man at labour after he has once had the benefits of instruction. The effect upon the Mexican peon, however, has been far from unsatisfactory; and I do not know of a single case where a peon, having received a free education, has proved ungrateful or worthless, failed to return to his trade, or evinced feelings of discontent. In the old Spanish days it was deemed a very great offence to educate a Mexican peon; but this anomaly disappeared when the Mexicans were emancipated from Spanish rule. It is contended by those Mexicans who have studied the question in their own country that labour is advanced by higher education among the peon working-classes, and produces the best type of worker and citizen.

One of the best foreign educational establishments in Mexico is the American School, which has at present some 400 pupils, including those in the kindergarten, from the first to the eighth grade, and the high-school. One of the difficulties with which the Government has had to contend up till now is that among private schools throughout their jurisdiction, while wishing to have their pupils recognised by the official authorities, the proprietors have not been willing to carry out the full programme of studies as laid down by the Department of Education. The Government has, therefore, introduced a system of rigid inspection of all schools within their sphere, and the inspectors of the Territories and Federal District are very zealous in carrying out their duties.

It is not only in connection with general education, however, that the Mexican Government has manifested its keen desire to improve the condition of the people. It is extremely liberal in its instructing or paying for the instruction abroad of all

citizens who display ability or inclination to enter upon an artistic career. As an instance of this I may mention the case of Señor Ricardo Castro, who, having early in life displayed a strong musical talent, was sent to Italy in 1902, for a four years' stay, in order to study at the expense of the Government. He has since abundantly justified this action, by becoming a celebrated composer. A similar case was that of Señorita Elena Marin, a clever young soprano. In the month of November last year Señor Castro came back to Mexico to produce a grand opera written by him, which proved a great success. At about the same time the House of Deputies granted a pension to the famous Jalisco historian and writer, Dr. Augustín Rivéra, a distinguished savant, and the oldest literary man in the Republic still at active work. Among distinguished Mexican poets and *literarii* who have been favoured by the Government may be mentioned Juan de Dios Peza, the Longfellow of Mexico; José Peon y Contreras, Alfredo Chavero, Peñafiel, Juan A. Matéas, Luis Gonzalez Obregon, Enrique Granados, and the Librarian of the Augustin Library, Señor Vigil. The arts, law and medicine, music, drawing and painting, have no less generously been encouraged by this most discriminating and discerning Government, which needs no supplication or prompting to help its sons or daughters to make the most of any natural talent which they may possess.

The performances of the Government bands and orchestras, which are liberally endowed, are a constant source of delight to residents and foreigners living in Mexico, and one is astonished to hear the apparently uneducated men who form the members of the bands, performing Wagner, Beethoven, Chopin, Bach and other difficult composers in almost a flawless manner. In Mexico City alone there are eleven Government bands, composed of some of the best talent in the Republic. The wages paid to the musicians vary in proportion to the time they have served, the extent of their talent, the interest which they take in their work and the instrument they play. The lowest remuneration, however, is \$20 (£2) a month and expenses.

In all such matters as art-exhibitions the Government is equally liberal, and President Diaz himself seldom fails to

grace with his presence any notable or worthy exhibition of a native character. General Diaz towards the end of last year, for instance, paid quite an unexpected visit to the studio of a poor artist, Señor Gedovius, who had previously seen better days, but whom poverty and misfortune had reduced to practical beggary. Entirely unsolicited, the good-hearted President visited Gedovius, bought one of his pictures, and, by the attention which he thus directed to him, succeeded in raising him again from poverty to practical prosperity.

Mexican art students have upon occasions displayed great ability at various exhibitions, and among the better-known native artists I may mention Señor Leandro Izaguirre, who has displayed marked talent in copying such masters as Velasquez and his Goya studies, which he made while in Rome; Señor Alfredo Ramos Martinez, a successful painter of pastels, his work being altogether excellent, and showing great command of colour; and Señor Alberto Fuster, who has studied in Rome, Florence and Milan, and has painted several successful pictures, such as "Sappho," "The Greek Artist," etc. Another successful painter of pastels is Señor Gonzalo Bringas; while Señores Juan Telles Toledo is a distinguished portrait painter; Francisco Goitia, who is yet quite a boy; Ignacio R. Rosas, and several others display more or less talent.

Sculpture is also well represented by such artists as Señores Fidencio Nava, Enrique Guerra, Arnulfo Dominguez and Gonzalo Bringas, already mentioned in connection with painting. At an exhibition of work by Mexican artists, held in the month of November last year, there were 219 pictures entered, all being the work of young and promising men who had been pensioned and sent abroad by the Government for the purpose of improving their studies.

### CHAPTER XIII

Early printing—The first press—Rose manuscripts and books—Printing of the "Constitution of 1857"—The modern press—*Mexican Herald*—The staff and building—Native press—*El Imparcial*—Influence of Mexican newspapers—Popular readers—The old type of journal—Value of advertisement—Intelligent Peons—Self-instruction—Museums—Valuable Aztec collections—Public libraries—Learned societies.

The first press introduced into Mexico was that brought over by the Viceroy Mendoza, in January 1536, at the request of Archbishop Zumarraga, the vandal who ruthlessly destroyed all the written archives of the interesting Aztec race, and by whose act of sacrilege the present generation is deprived of any real knowledge of that marvellous people. The first book ever printed in Mexico was the *Escala Esperitual para Llegar al Cielo*, and it appeared in 1537. No one living ever seems to have actually seen a copy of this book, but it is claimed that one exists somewhere in the private collection of a Mr. C. F. Günther, of Chicago; probably if it did bibliographers would know something of it.

There are still many valuable old tomes printed from the press of Don Juan Pablos—or Pablo—who seems to have had the monopoly between the years 1546 and 1559. Some of these are to be seen in the Government Library at Zacatecas, and the courteous custodian of that well-conducted, generously-maintained institution entertained me for some hours displaying his treasures for my delectation. Antiquarians would revel in some of these priceless old books, mostly in excellent condition. There are two enormous volumes of sacred music, used by the choirs of the Mexico Cathedral in the seventeenth century, on view at the National Museum, as fresh and unsoiled as on the day they left the hands of the pious friars.