

## The Record's Commission of Inquiry to Mexico.

Trumbull White Gives a Vivid Description of Scenes of Poverty and Squalor in the City of Mexico, and Draws Some Comparisons with Localities in Chicago and New York.

**Dense Ignorance and Stolid Indifference of the Masses of the People to Be Considered in Comparing the Condition of the Young Republic with That of the United States.**

Special Correspondence of the Chicago Record.

City of Mexico, Sept. 17.—This morning I spent some hours walking about in what my escort called "the slummiest of all the slums of the city of Mexico." It cannot be denied that they are pretty bad. The streets themselves are cleaner as to surface rubbish and dust than the streets of the poorest quarters of Chicago, and show evidences of much more frequent sweeping. But that is because peon labor is so cheap that sweeping doesn't cost much.

In the houses, however, the poverty and uncleanness of the people are offensively in evidence. There are odors that defy analysis. There is an amazing absence of furniture. The squalor and the apparent indifference to it are distressing. People are crowded together in small rooms, with no possible privacy for the sexes, and, as witnessed at every turn, with no particular desire for any. A few earthen and tin vessels for cooking and eating purposes, and a stove of brick or stone, with holes in the top for a charcoal fire, seem to be the only dining-room and kitchen furniture. For beds, a few straw mats and some sheepskins are sufficient. Most of the floors are earthen, and the walls, of course, adobe.

At its farthest limit this expedition terminated with a walk along the bank of the Viga canal. This waterway is the avenue over which the greater part of the market supplies of the capital come to the city. It is from thirty to fifty feet wide, and extends for about twenty miles out into the country, between market gardens almost all the way. In the early morning the canal is crowded with the boats of the peons who supply the markets. The flat-bottomed craft are loaded, till they are almost concealed, with fodder for stock, with fresh vegetables and fruits, and with native manufactures of pottery and all sorts of trinkets that may appeal to purchasers.

For a long distance from the city the hither bank of the canal is lined with stalls and booths. They are all temporary, erected daily by the huckster who has something to sell, and usually consist of nothing but a rickety awning. Here in the shade are hundreds of men and women with their wares to sell, calling out the qualities of the goods, much after the fashion of the fakirs who line the approaches to a county fair at home.

Besides the wholesale supplies of fruits and vegetables, which are brought here by boats and then carried to the city markets on the backs of burros or men, are the things which may be wanted by these business representatives of the peon class. Refreshment stands serve the usual articles of Mexican peon diet—corn cakes or tortillas, beans or frijoles, steaming sweet corn on the cob, peppers with meat, which is to say chile con carne, and pulque-shops are very near.

So all day, while the people who have gone to the city with the cargoes are away, their companions stay by the hundreds of boats which poke their noses against the bank, and do what they can to carry on the trade while they wait. In the afternoon the fleet makes sail again, by the power of a pole against

the bottom of the canal, and works its way home, to return in the morning.

On the return from this journey I passed through a street crowded with small shops and people of the poorest class, where there came to my nostrils an odor at once strange and yet familiar. It came from an open sewer, running the length of the block down the middle of the street. It was perhaps ten feet wide, and the surface was not more than four feet below the level of the street, with a low stone wall on either side for safety to passers. The surface of the sewer was covered at the lower end with the usual debris to be seen in such places, and in the other portion of its course the water was thick and offensive.

This is a journey of comparisons, and here is one of the truly odious. It was not pleasant to find that open sewer in a busy street, within four blocks of the federal capitol. But the odor that reminded of home was that of the Chicago river, an open sewer a thousand times greater than this one of Mexico, with less current than this one, with fouler and thicker flow, and running for miles instead of a few squares through the city.

It was not pleasant to see the market supply of fruits and vegetables reaching the city over a sluggish canal of muddy water, lined along the bank with people who were unclean in their persons and in their habits, to be sold in crowded stalls, poorly ventilated and carelessly attended, or on the open sidewalk. But in the whole situation there was an imperative reminder of the fruit and vegetable and meat trade of Chicago. These muddy streams and the open sewer were no nearer the food markets than is South Water street to the Chicago river. The sidewalk stores here were no more crowded than the ones of South Water street and Fulton market and the Haymarket. And I have seen the basements of Chicago where bananas ripen, and where fruit is stored by street hucksters, in the places where they sleep in filth. And I can be lenient with Mexican carelessness of the same sort. I will go further. In Chicago and in New York there are streets as accessible as these of the worst and "slummiest" of Mexican slums—streets that are known to those who work for the health and the welfare of the poor, that so far as their pavements and their odors are concerned are not a bit cleaner than these. There are houses where men and women and children are crowded into a common living-room, with no more opportunity for privacy of the sexes than here. They are but little cleaner. They are differently furnished, but not much better. Their poverty may seem to be not so gross, but measured by the wants they know and realize it is worse. They have severe extremes of heat in the summer for which to provide fuel, while these of Mexico need never worry about the weather. But it is not the poorest of the poor who are shown to tourists who visit Chicago, from which to draw comparisons as to the condition in the United States.

Grant, unhesitatingly as we must, that there is an immensely greater proportion of the labor of Mexico in the deepest

poverty, there are still two sides to the study of their condition. The country in its modern era is less than a score of years old. Its people are barely beginning to learn that there are better things than what they have known, and a knowledge of a lack is the first essential toward a remedying of it. The people are a mixture of two bloods. One is that of the Aztec Indian. It makes stolidity, endurance of physical and social and economic burdens without complaint, a matter to be expected. The other is that of the Spaniards who conquered the land. It gives the volatile spirits of the people, the characteristics which make them satisfied if they are amused by frequent holidays and national or church festivities, if they are sufficiently fed, and if the sun shines. And the mixture of these two streams makes them a contented race.

The first essential to an advancement is a general sentiment of discontent, turned in the right direction. To day the peons of Mexico are without aspiration, and until that lack is supplied they are resting in the contentment of blissful ignorance. As they are now, the comparison should not be made between them and the intelligent white laborer of the United States, but rather with the most ordinary negro laborer of the more remote portions of the south, as he was just after he was freed, not only without education and the means to advance himself, but without aspiration for advancement, or knowledge that there was any such thing.

There is a gradual but very slow rise discernible in the general level of the peons, and a constant though not numerous rise by those who are exceptions to this lack of aspiration, and who are able in some way to become independent and even to work into the levels next higher. President Porfirio Diaz himself is an example of this accretion to the higher classes from the peon level. But an increase in general education is the only influence that can induce more rapid progress in the masses of the people. And a compulsory education law is no doubt the only influence that can promote this.

How soon compulsory education can be established by legislation is very problematical. There are those here, as elsewhere, who argue against it because of the discontent it would produce among the masses, because, they say, an educated peon is spoiled for work. But it is impossible to believe that the leaders of thought and progress will accept any such argument as sufficient to oppose beneficial laws when it becomes possible to enact and enforce them.

It is to be remembered that the foregoing has been written to apply only to the lowest class of peon labor, which, large as it is, does not include the whole population, as many seem to suggest. There has been an interesting estimate of the population, made by one of the most competent authorities in the republic, as to the numbers included in the various classes. It is based on a total population of 13,250,000, which is probably about 600,000 too large, and is, of course, purely arbitrary, as the census does not include such information. His estimate is that there are 500,000 proprietors, 450,000 government employees, 200,000 Indians, 750,000 engaged in mercantile pursuits, 350,000 employees of railways, 2,000,000 artisans, 1,500,000 laborers, 2,250,000 miners, 750,000 employees of factories and 4,500,000 engaged in agriculture.

In this classification he includes as proprietors all owners of enterprises of all sorts, commercial, manufacturing, financial, mining, etc. The govern-

ment employees include the army and the police forces, in addition to all employees of the various departments. Those engaged in mercantile pursuits include employees of commercial enterprises, but not factory hands. Artisans include masons, bricklayers, carpenters, etc., not including employees of railroads and factories, as well as all persons engaged in piece-work manufacturing in their own homes.

It is difficult to arrange a division of classes that will name any except upper and lower. Any description of a middle class would be purely arbitrary. In most of the homes above those of the peons one will find good housekeeping. American women living in the republic have assured me that the kitchens as well as the rest of the houses, of upper and what they call middle class people are scrupulous, clean and orderly, their dishes and linen immaculate. As to the manner of the life of the rich, it is sufficient to say that they enjoy American and Parisian comforts and luxuries. Their homes are furnished in the height of fashion, their dress is in the latest mode and of the finest fabrics, their horses and carriages are not surpassed anywhere.

It is estimated by the same gentleman who classified the population that in the larger cities 50 per cent of the people can read, in the small cities and towns 40 per cent and on the ranches and in the villages 10 per cent. The proportion of those between the ages of 10 and 35 years who can read and write, he says, is much greater than the proportion of those from 35 years upward, showing an increasing education among the young people. Another well-informed man, who has lived for many years in Mexico and is acquainted with nearly every portion of the republic, says that he rarely finds a young man in the rural districts who cannot read and write.

### TRUMBULL WHITE.

#### His Experience Against Gold.

I am a business employe and one who would give overtime and all honest means to please my employer and to promote his business interest. My boss is a staunch republican and consequently for the gold standard, but my whole business experience since 1866 is against it, because I never saw such general prosperity since 1873. "M. F. W." cities in your to-day's paper what he considers as two lapses of logic of the free silver advocates. He pretends as a mere juggling with a phrase the assertion that prices will rise as a consequence of free silver and says it can be only apparently but not actually. He is mistaken. There will be no cheap dollars. There will be the very same dollars in weight and fineness as now, only they will have an intrinsic value of 100 cents as they have now only a token value of 100 cents. The only reliable principal of political economy of supply and demand would bring the ancient value of silver back. Silver dropped 25 per cent in value from 1873 to 1890 because there was no more use for all the silver output in the world and the only reliable buyer was India, but since 1891, in reply to the warlike McKinley tariff, England has closed the India mints, has bought silver as cheaply as it could and has hammered it down in price. This made a further decline of 30 per cent, so that we had in 1894 only 45 cents in a silver dollar. England used the decline of silver to cheapen the value of food produce and cotton, without damaging her colony, India, in revenge for the McKinley tariff. By opening our mints to free coinage we would create the first important demand for silver since 1873 and the

consequence would be that silver would have to rise and gold, in consequence of less demand, to fall. As the United States is the greatest nation in the world, with 70,000,000 brainy, diligent, enterprising people, we would be able to hold the balance of 16 to 1 against England. Then the other European states are as tired of the single gold standard as we are and it would not take long before we would see Germany, France and other countries allied with the United States in bi-metalism. The United States was the first nation to imitate England in the demonetization of silver and can be the first in remonetization. The dollar we will have will be a true American, independent dollar, a dollar promoting American enterprise, American industry and agriculture, a dollar making the American wage-earner a truly independent citizen, a dollar promoting the re-employment of all the idle help in agriculture, manufacturing and every business enterprise. F. X. B.

Chicago, Sept. 26.

#### The Republican Fizzle.

The big guns of the gold standard battery were brought into action in Rensselaer last Friday, and a more disappointed lot of promoters of manufactured enthusiasm it would be hard to find the standard bearers of the state ticket, Farmer Mount, and Mr. Remy were both to be played the same day and not a stone had been left unturned to get farmers in and the town folk out, to whoop 'em up for the g. o. p. There were not to exceed 500 people, men women and children in Rensselaer who lived beyond the city limits.

The alleged procession that paraded the streets of Rensselaer was a laughable affair, whether it was intended as a serious campaign demonstration or a burlesque—a sort of living cartoon imitation of the "Ku Klux Klan," is hard to determine. By being liberal the voting element of the posse may be put down as fifty.

Eight or ten men, young and old marched under a banner inscribed first voters club; evidently four or five of them have been neglecting a citizen's duty for several years. They wore "valer" hats and carried silver canes, presumably as emblematic of their favoring gold and silver bi-metalism by consent of "Your-up."

The marshals that were sent out on the several roads to escort the big delegations in were obliged to return alone with their wide expanse of cardinal sashes floating in the breeze. It is the time the republicans have failed to make a success of a rally.

This failure has uncovered the naked truth regarding the situation in Jasper county. The farmers are not rallying at the call of the party bosses, they are not enthusiastic for McKinley or Mr. Mount, and not curious to hear or see the state nominees. It means much to the republican managers, for they have discovered that their old line voters propose to vote for their own interests this fall, even if the consumers of farm products do have to pay more for them, and they know that William J. Bryan and free silver has many friends who do not parade the fact to the party whips. Jasper county is for Bryan and the republicans know it.

Let the friends of silver in tenth congressional district bear in mind that Jasper county is for William Jennings Bryan now and will prove the fact November 3.

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