

A Visit to Sonora, Mexico

By VERY REV. DEAN HARRIS *

WHEN I passed out of the Arroyo of the Churches, it was well on in the afternoon and the sun beat intensely hot upon the steep trail, while the whole atmosphere was motionless and penetrated with heat. No man, experienced in mountain trails, would trust his life down these precipitous windings to the best horse that ever carried saddle. The long suffering "burro" or donkey, with the pace of a snail and the look of a half fool, may be a butt for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in animal histories; he may be ridiculed and despised in cities and on the farm, but in the mountains, amid dangerous curves and fearful, dipping trails, the donkey is king of all domestic animals.

The burro is not, as Sunday-School books picture him, the clown and puppet of domestic beasts. He is the most imperturbable philosopher of the animal kingdom, the wisest thing in his own sphere in existence, and the best and truest friend of the mountaineer. He is a stoic among fatalists, a reliable staff in emergencies and an anchor of hope in dangerous places. Like the champion of the prize ring, Joe Gans, or the sporting editor's "king of the diamond turf," Cy Young, the donkey "neither drinks, nor smokes, nor chews tobacco"; in a word, he's a "brick."

The greatest avalanche that ever thundered down the sides of the Matterhorn, the loudest detonation of volcanic Vesuvius, the roll and heave and twist of Peruvian earthquakes; any one of these or all of them "in damnable conspiracy" could not turn a hair on the hide of his serene equanimity. No mountain goat, leaping from rock to rock, can give him pointers. He is contentment and self-possession personified; he will eat and digest what a mule dare not touch, and will thrive where a horse will starve. Work? I have seen hills of fodder moving on the highway and thought with Festus that too much learning had made me mad, till on closer examination I perceived, fore and aft of these hills, enormous ears and scrawny, wriggling tails and under the hills little hoofs, the size of ordinary ink bottles. Down the dangerous mountain trails his head is always level, his feet as sure as those of flies and his judgment unerring. His muscles and nerves are of steel, his blood cool as quicksilver in January, and his hold on life as tenacious as that of a buffalo cat. But more than all this, the burro is one of the pioneers and openers of civilisation in Mexico and the Southwest. Patiently and without protest or complaint he has carried the packs of the explorers, prospectors, surveyors and settlers of uninhabited plateaus and highlands. With his endurance, his co-operation and reliability, it became possible to profitably work the silver mines of Mexico and the copper mines of Arizona. He helped to build railroads over the Sierras and across the plains and deserts of New Mexico, California and Arizona. He brought settlers into New Mexico, into Arizona and the Pacific lands, and with settlers came progress and development, peace, education and prosperity. Therefore, all hail to the burro! In grateful recognition of his kindness to me I owe him this commendatory tribute. He has done more for civilisation in these lands than many a senator in the halls of the capitol or LL.D. from the chair of Harvard.

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We descended to the land of "Las Naranjos," of the orange orchards and banana groves, and as the sun was setting entered the picturesque and ancient town of Urique. Founded the year Champlain first sailed the St. Lawrence and eight years before the

Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock, Urique has never known waggon, cart, carriage or bicycle. Its archaic population of 3,000 souls, mostly Indians and Mexican half-castes, has few wants and no ambition for what we call the higher life. If the wise man seeks but contentment, peace and happiness in this world, these primitive people are wiser in their generation than we. I must confess that among the civilised and half civilised races of Mexico I found a cheerful resignation and more contentment than I expected. Unprejudiced study of their social and domestic life leads me to believe that there is here a much more equitable distribution of what we call happiness than in much busier and more brilliant life centres. The fertility of the arable land, the continuously warm climate, the abundance of wild and domestic fruit and the simple life of the people are bars to poverty and its dangerous associations. It would be well for many of us if we could change places with these people, drop for a time the life of rush and hurry and artificial living into which we of the North have drifted, and take up this dreamy, placid and uneventful existence. We deplore what we are pleased to

slowly up the side of the opposite mountain. The air was preternaturally still and was filled with the reflected glory of the departing sun. The sky to the east was like a lake of blood, and under it the ancient mountains were coloured in deep purple and violet. The sun was an enormous ball of fire floating in the descending heavens and above it were banks of clouds through which flashes of bloody light came and at times hung to their fringes. Just before the sun plunged behind its own horizon its light penetrated the motionless clouds in spires, and when the sun dipped and was lost, the spires of glory quivered in the heavens and waves of red and amber light rolled over the atmospheric sea. Sharply outlined to my right was the mountain rising above the Urique like a crouching lion and holding in its outstretched and open paw the unknown and attractive little village.

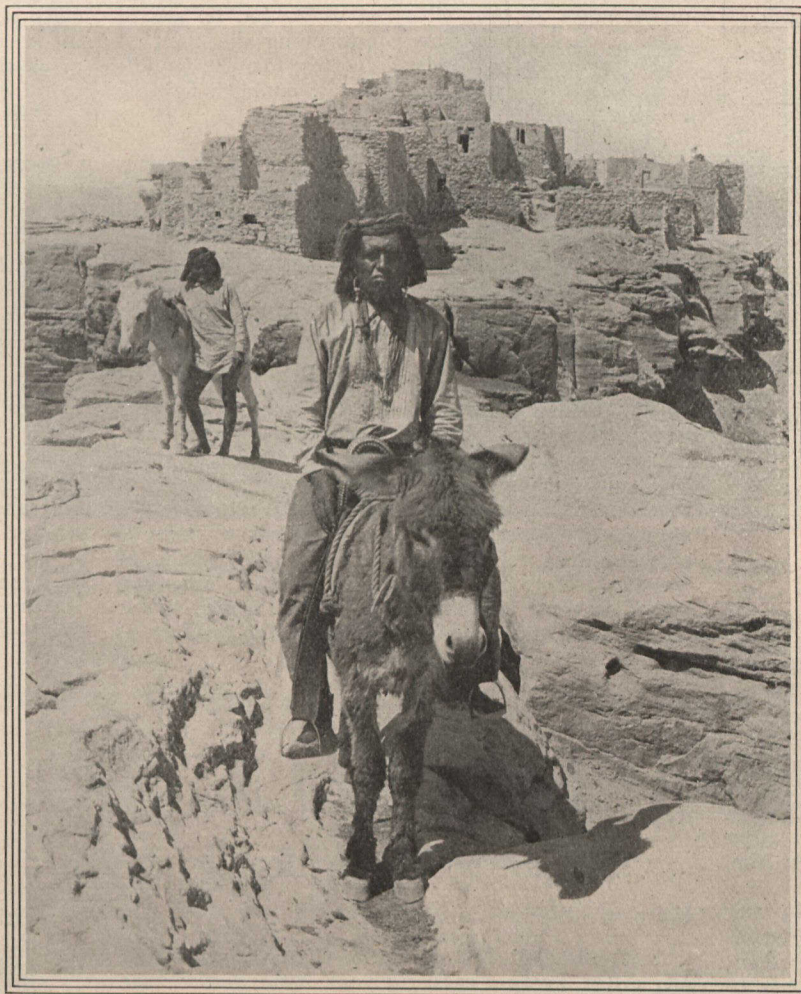
It is only nine of the night, but all lights are out and the village sleeps. My window is open, I can hear the flow of the Urique, and as I listen to its gurgling waters a cock crows across the river. The crow of the cock changes my thoughts which carry me back three years, and bear me to a room of the "seaside cottage" in the negro town of Plymouth, Montserrat, West India Islands. Unable to sleep I am seated at my open window looking out upon the tragic waters of the Caribbean Sea. The moon swings three-quarters full in a cloudless sky, the air I breathe brings to me a suspicion of sulphur escaping from the open vents of La Souffriere, the volcanic mount rising to the west and dangerously near the negro village. I can hear the wash of the waves combing the beach and see the "Jumbo lights" in the windows of the negro cabins to remind the ghosts of the dead and the demons of the night that friends are sleeping there. It is 2 o'clock in the morning, a sepulchral quiet possesses the uncanny place, when—the cock crows. Then from out a large hut, down the shore street, there comes a negro well on in years, followed by a young negress, two women and three men. They do not speak, nor shake hands, they exchange no civilities, they separate and disappear. Who are they? Snake worshippers. Great Britain owns the island and British law prohibits, under penalty, the adoration of the serpent. Stronger than the law of Great Britain is the law of African superstition and the fear of the demon that dwells in the white snake, so reverently guarded and fed by the family who live in the hut. Again the cock crows. Where am I? Oh, in Urique. There is no noticeable difference in the crow of the cock the world over. This friendly bird from over the Urique river warns me it is getting late. I must go to bed, so "Good-night to Marmion."

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If there be any state in the Republic of Mexico about which it is difficult to obtain accurate or exact statistics, it is Sonora. Populated largely by Indians and miners scattered over the whole state

and immune to the salutary influence of law, it is difficult to take its census or bring its population under the restraining checks of civilisation. Hermosillo, with 25,000 people, is numerically and commercially the most important town in Sonora. It is 110 miles north of Guaymas. The harbour of Guaymas is one of the best on the Pacific coast, it is four miles long, with an inner and outer bay, and will admit ships of the heaviest tonnage, and could, I think, float the commerce of America. The Yaqui River, of which I will have occasion to write at another time, enters the Gulf of California, called the Gulf of Cortez by the Mexicans, eighteen miles below Guaymas. The Sonora flows through the Arizona valley, which is known as the Garden of Sonora on account of its incomparable fertility. Formerly it was dominated by the terrible Yaquis, and a few years ago the depopulated villages and ranches were melancholy reminders of the ruthless vengeance of these ferocious men.

The Sonora River valley, with its wealth of rich alluvial land, its facilities for irrigation and adaptation to semi-tropical and temperate fruits and cereals, will eventually support a great population.



Photograph of a Tarahumari Indian, riding away from the Casa Blanco, a pre-Columbian ruin in South-Eastern Sonora, Mexico.

PHOTOGRAPH BY UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD.

term their ignorance, but are they not happier in their ignorance than we in our wisdom, and are not we of the North, at last, learning by experience the truth of what Solomon said in the days of old "For in much learning is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

The delightful little gardens and patches of vegetable land stolen from the mountain present a dozen contrasts of colour in the evergreen foliage of the tropical trees and vegetable plants. The red river of the Urique, after emerging from the great canyon, flows gently and placidly through the peaceful village. The river is not truly a deep, clay red—not the red of shale and earth mixed—but the red of peroxide of iron and copper, the sang-du-boeuf of Oriental ceramics. Rushing over irregular beds of gravel and boulders and by rock-ribbed walls, it cuts and carries with it through hundreds of miles red sands of shale, granite and porphyry, red rustings of iron and grits of garnet and carnelian agate.

The evening of the next day after entering the quaint and picturesque town, I stood on a ledge overlooking the narrow valley and again saw the long, snake-like shadows of the Suaharos creeping

* The "Canadian Courier" has the privilege of publishing this advance chapter from "By Path and Trail," a book of Southern Travel by Very Rev. Dean Harris, which is to be published in October. This volume deals with incidents of travel in Lower California, Sonora and Northern Mexico, and treats of the Yaqui Indians, the Digger Indians and Papagoes. Dean Harris, who was born at Cork, Ireland, 1847, came to Canada at an early age and was educated at St. Michael's College, Toronto, and St. Anne's, Quebec. After holding several positions of responsibility he was appointed in 1884 to Parochial charge in St. Catharines. Dean Harris is a writer of fine literary judgment, a churchman who has accomplished a great work in his diocese, and a man whose genial personality has won him friends among all classes of the community. A former volume, "Days and Nights in the Tropics," appeared some years ago and showed the vivid descriptive power of the ideal raconteur.