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Mañana Is Today

By A. L. CAMPA

DURING the height of the depression, a philanthropic organization sent the Navajo Indians a carload of pickles in order to alleviate the wants of that tribe. Unaccustomed as the Redmen were to such relishes, they were made no happier by the sincere efforts of their white brothers to appease their hunger. Pickles are a delectable embellishment to the menu when we like pickles, but if we don't like them, they add nothing to our happiness. Dried mutton or corn would have fulfilled the wants of the Navajo far better than the savory pickles. Equally disheartening were the results of the discarded system of Indian education that forced a child to enter school for a given time, at the end of which he returned to the village and "took to the blanket." Many a head shook, disillusioned and disappointed, because the Redman insisted on finding happiness in his own way. Until recently, an Indian's own reaction to living and his philosophy of life had not been greatly taken into account. The object was to make a white man, a poor imitation at that, rather than a better Indian; and the results were obviously very unsatisfactory.

"Happiness," someone has said, "is getting what you want." When it is pickles you want, beans will not satisfy. But if the other fellow prefers beans and refuses our pickles, we find a name for him and call him, disdainfully, a "bean eater." Moreover, some of us want our beans at a different time, adding another element to the acquisition of happiness. Thus, not only is it "getting what you want," but, "when you want it." In the satisfaction of material needs, the world differs very little. We all demand food and shelter, the means by which to live; but the ends for which to live, the spiritual phase of life, is not so uniformly satisfied. In formulating our criterion of spiritual guidance, we have

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before us three periods in life that determine the order of our existence: the past, the present, and the future. Our philosophy of living will revolve around one of these three as a point of departure, depending upon what time of life we consider most essential. The present is a reality, the past a recollection of a reality that has ceased to exist, and the future a conjecture of what may come to pass. Hence, the last two form the basis of romanticism, since one is no longer here and the other has not yet arrived.

If we consider romanticism as a phase of life created by the imagination and opposed to realism, we cannot deny that all people are romanticists. But the quality of that romanticism will depend upon what it is based. Both the Anglos and the Mexicanos are romantic, except that American romanticism is based on the future, and Spanish romanticism is nourished in the past. In this trinity of time, the present is greatly modified by the choice one makes of what has gone before or what is about to come. American children, from an early age, are taught that the present is simply a preparation for the future, that the past is past and gone, and that one must look into the future for a vision. "Don't cry over spilt milk." "Hitch your wagon to a star." "Save for a rainy day," and "Be prepared." The present is projected into the future to such an extent that the child lives for the day when he shall grow to be the president of a bank, a college professor, a policeman, or a successful engineer. In school the boy is tempted with stories of men who disregarded the present in order that they might achieve something great in the future. Yes, such a philosophy has produced men of vision, or simply imagination, men who live constantly in the hope that some day "their ship may come in." Much may be said for this type of romanticism in the formative period of youth. Such men are willing to work their way through college, scrubbing floors, cleaning windows, and denying themselves untold happiness; in the present, in order that the acquisition of the diploma, in the end, may bring about the longed-for fulfillment of their

desires. When men have visions of the future, we speak of them as building "castles in Spain." Spanish castles to a Spaniard are merely recollections of what once was a reality. Castles built upon the future are rather American bungalows.

The interpretation given to present, past, and future determines the philosophy that guides society. American society, while it may be dissatisfied, is always hopeful because of the insight and faith it has upon the future, and in the midst of the greatest depression it can say: "Prosperity is around the corner." Hispanic philosophy is, in many ways, quite the contrary. To a Mexicano the future is an unreality of which he is conscious only insofar as it can be projected into the present. The American may see it as a hypothesis upon which to speculate safely, sell on the installment plan, or buy insurance, but in New Mexico the future is attacked with a fatalism that is little short of a roulette wheel philosophy. *A ver que Dios nos da. Come what may, there is consolation in the popular belief that No hay mal que por bien no venga.* "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

The great emphasis is placed on the present, because, after all, the present constitutes a reality. When the present is past, it forms the basis of romanticism, a romanticism that is based upon that which once was a reality. To Hispanic peoples the past is interpreted in terms of achievement, lineage, and custom. Even their songs eulogize an old love, *Un amor que no se olvida ni se deja*, while in English, future old age is romanticized in "Silver threads among the gold." The former sings of a love that *was*, the latter of a love that *will be*. The Mexicano does not forget his tradition because it is his past, the basis for his romanticism. Tradition to the American, however, means an expedient, a convenient course of action. The course of action in New Mexico is determined by conditions that exist in the present rather than by accepted formula. Witness the judge who ruled that cases be determined by their merit

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and not by precedent. A story is told of a Mexicano whose young wife ran away. The judge assured him that he would soon forget, and added, "Who knows, tomorrow another girl will come along."

To which the husband answered dubiously, "Oh, yes, *mañana*, but what do I do now?" He could not be made happy by thoughts of tomorrow. New Mexico, likewise, is the land of *today*, and if there is a future, the Mexicanos are willing to wait until it comes around and is transformed into a reality. Meanwhile, the future is conceived in an undetermined light, expressed in an indefinite term, *mañana*. The translation of this word has led to a misinterpretation of purpose on the part of those who view the New Mexican with the degree of objective criticism characteristic of so many Hispanists. *Mañana*, like the shrug of the shoulders, expresses a remoteness that the word "tomorrow" does not convey. It does not mean tomorrow. A hunter passed a broken bridge several times near a New Mexican village, and every time he was assured that it would be fixed *mañana*, but the bridge was not fixed on the morrow. How disappointing is life in New Mexico to those who plan every minute of the future and know definitely that on Monday they will play bridge, on Tuesday attend a meeting, on Wednesday a dance, and bathe on Saturday! Julio Camba, the Spanish humorist, says: "We improvise everything, our fun as well as our work." How amusing it is to be told a week in advance that one will be called upon at a banquet to make an "impromptu" speech! The time for improvisation is the present, and he who lives in the present, while leading a very improvised existence, will live more spontaneously and with more zest. Call on a New Mexican friend and the evening turns into a social gathering. A dinner, a dance, a love affair, and even a fight may ensue, but none of it will be planned beforehand. The Anglo has calling hours, makes arrangement for his good times, and plans to meet a person whom he wishes to befriend.

New Mexico has been called the "Land of Mañana," that is, the "land of today," when analyzed. "Never do today what you can do tomorrow" is an interpretation of mañana that is both superficial and pre-conceived. The New Mexican never puts off until tomorrow what can be done *only* today. Life must be lived today, else one finds, too late, that the calendar does not turn backwards. The time to sit in the sun is when the sun is shining, for there is no guarantee that the sun will shine when wanted. Many a picnic has been ruined because of the insistence of planning ahead of time for it. The Mexicans are moved to have a picnic when the weather is conducive. It is the philosophy of the realist, the present rather than the future. The sunny side of the house is a convenient rendezvous on sunny afternoons, but on cold days the same men who lounged lazily, vegetating against the wall, may be seen bringing in wood. To a Nordic this manner of doing is incomprehensible.

An educator was being shown through the rural districts in the mountainous sections of New Mexico late in the fall, and he noticed that there were no stacks of wood laid up for the winter. He inquired from his traveling companion what sort of fuel these people used, and he was informed that they used firewood. "But," he insisted, "where do they keep it?" He was told that the wood came from the neighboring woods, but still it was very peculiar that the New Mexican mountaineers made no provisions for the coming winter. The educator continued by asking: "And what do these people do when they need wood?" Whereupon he was promptly informed that the Mexicanos get their wood when they need it, and not before.

To most observers this attitude toward life means nothing more than indifference and laziness; to others it appears to be a series of contradictions. It is contradictory if we call it laziness and sheer indifference; not that there may not be, as in all men, those who are in reality indolent. But, laziness is an indisposition to exertion, and not a sequence of activity and inactivity. We characterize the Mexican

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peasant as a lazy indifferent fellow, yet the market is filled with millions of craft products made tediously by hand, and with superb craftsmanship. The same peasant that sits in the sun and enjoys his leisure turns out millions of sarapes, crockery, etc., but he uses a different yardstick in employing his time and accounting for the future. A certain "wantlessness" restrains their acquisition of wealth, and living in the present consumes what the "provident" put away for the future.

Yes, the Mexicanos in New Mexico continue living *today*. The thought of the morrow is far removed from their consciousness. Their Anglo brothers push on, forfeiting the present. Young boys turn to little men, young girls to little women. The former have bank accounts, the latter hope chests, but the Mexicano plays when he is a boy, works when necessary, pays for the bride's outfit when he marries her, and in his old age turns back and says: "Alla en mis tiempos." (Back in my day.) He has no desire to be young again, he is happy with the present, ages gracefully, and will derive great pleasure from recalling the past. It is his romanticism, a long sequence of realities. Old women need not paint their face to appear young, nor do old men need to turn to foxy grandpas. But when they were young, they were allowed to do what young folks do, and their parents lost ~~the~~ sleep because their children had no thought of tomorrow. In Spanish, even grammatically, the future is of little importance. In the last decade the future subjunctive has disappeared; the future tense is formed with the *present* of the auxiliary, and we continue to use the present to express a future! "La semana que entra vengo a verle." (Next week I *come* to see you.) The most representative character of Spanish literature lived fast and furiously in the present, so much so that he was threatened with a future punishment to which Don Juan answered very characteristically: "Tan largo me lo fiais" (so late in coming), that is, he took no cognizance of the future.

One of the most profitless methods of selling to a Mexicano is the payment plan. One of two conditions will result. He refuses altogether, because he is afraid to tie himself to the future, or he will buy and be unable to make the payments when they fall due. Usually the company will recover the goods and the salesman will swear that these people have no word, and that they are all dishonest. The wise merchant will approach with his goods on pay day when they have money, because they will forget that there are thirty days to the month and spend in one day the wages that should carry them for the remaining twenty-nine days. The process is reversed from the usual conception that the Mexicanos will work a whole month in order to spend it in one day. They will spend it when they get it. In Mexico, the *peones* in a sugar factory were getting fifty *centavos* a day. A very altruistic capitalist increased their wages to a *peso* a day. Three days later, no one showed up to work. When the workers were questioned, it was disclosed that fifty cents a day paid amply for their wants, therefore, when wages went up to a *peso*, it was necessary to work only three days a week. Again, the Mexican of the West Coast puts out a fish hook a day, catches a shark and goes home, but on Saturdays he puts out two hooks to take Sunday off.

Statistical studies show an amazing drop of Mexicanos in public schools. The usual comment of the unenlightened is that the children are naturally dull or that they have no ambition. Is it because the New Mexicans have no interest in education, or because they are lazy? I wonder how much of the curriculum is in itself valuable and interesting, and how much of it is merely a preparation for a future that the Mexicano's philosophy does not take into account. There is no doubt that the curriculum for the Spanish speaking child needs to be vitalized more. In addition to the realism of the Spaniard and the impassiveness toward the future, there are other elements that characterize the Mexicano in New Mexico and complicate his philosophy of life to an outsider.

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The new world *mestizo*, the result of a racial amalgamation, is a product that is not yet well defined. Like any biological hybrid, it is susceptible to irregularities and throwbacks. This fact adds greatly to the incomprehensibility of the Mexicano. The Indian has contributed a feeling of resignation and stolidity of character that has made possible the survival of life in New Mexico despite the great difficulties under which the population has had to live. It is remarkable to see the amount of suffering and want these people have been able to withstand. The lightheartedness of the Spaniards in the midst of an unkind fate is merely a complement to the basic endurance of the Indian. It is a philosophy determined mostly by the current flow of circumstances, a philosophy that is spontaneous, brilliant, and superficial, but durable. Spanish philosophy may not have the vertical dimension of the Nordics, but it does possess a horizontal one that adds variety, lightheartedness, and gayety to life.

Place Europeans in the same conditions that the New Mexicans live and they will become dissatisfied, refuse to remain and leave a ghost town in their wake. Anglos who come to New Mexico with a living income are disconcerted by the complacency with which life is led in the midst of poverty, and scantiness. This very resignation is conducive to the peaceful state of affairs, a condition that is to be preferred these days to the constant shifting of population that depression has produced. The highways in New Mexico are not filled with thumb riders who, in a turbulent horde, seek to better themselves by a change. The Mexicano plods on, whether with a burro, small acreage, working for the highway, or perhaps some Americano. There is no danger that these men will start a march to Washington.

New Mexico offers two groups with a different understanding of life who are striving to live peacefully with each other. Both resort to comparisons in an effort to understand each other's ways. To judge comparatively two peoples that are not analogous is dangerous because it is

misleading. The question that remains is not which is superior, or which will be the standard, but rather, wherein are the differences a complement to each other?

In a further consideration of a cultural amalgamation in New Mexico one must take into account that American civilization is, for the most part, dependent upon industrialism, while New Mexico is composed of rural communities where the folk element is still a vital force. The rural element of English speaking United States has not found it so difficult to establish itself under more or less comparable conditions but the urbanized crowd in such a society finds little in common with the New Mexican peasant.

The more salient manifestations of folk culture appear in the form of craft and architecture. These are the things that the tourist and the newcomer consider concrete evidences of New Mexico culture, but what lies back of these products remains much of a mystery, even to those who are sympathetic. Furthermore, there are other equally important phases of this Mexicano's life that need to be presented to a public that will, in time, either blend with him or outnumber him to extinction. The language of New Mexico, the song of the troubadour, the folk theatre, and other forms of folklore constitute a fundamental basis of his existence. Take each one of these elements in its native state and deal with it as a living force rather than as so much material to be catalogued according to some pre-conceived index. In the end we shall have a picture of a state that is still vastly different from most of the others, though comparable, to some extent, with three or four that have a mixture of populations and a satisfactory provincial way of life.