The Cathedral of Our Lady

BETTY ALICE HODSON

INTRODUCTION

Just one block from the central plaza of a small Mexican town, on La Calle de Las Rosas, stands a small Cathedral, built in 1830 by the hands and the sweat of peones who labored on nearby haciendas. It is built of limestone and marble, and is one of the finest Cathedrals in Northeastern Mexico, even though it is small, and seen by few but the townspeople. I shall try to show how it is seen through the eyes of three different people.

1. A Native

Juan Pedro Serraz de Onatey Driego walked slowly up and down La Calle de Las Rosas, in front of La Cathedral de Nuestra Senora, waiting for the time for evening prayers to begin. As he walked toward the plaza for the second time, he met Padre Jacobo, priest of the Cathedral. Juan Pedro greeted him cordially, with a smile.

Juan Pedro was a kind, good natured sort of a young man, with more money than was good for him. However, he behaved well, most of the time, and was well liked by all. Perhaps his best trait was his kindness to his peones, a trait seldom seen in the rancheros. Like all handsome young men, his thoughts were often on the young ladies, and as he strolled up and down, he thought especially of Maria Concepcion, his sweetheart, whom he was soon to marry. Her face could not be called beautiful, but the light that shown from her eyes made it seem so. Many times Juan Pedro could not get the thought of those luminous, black velvet eyes off his mind. And now as he strolled, they were constantly before him.

As the bells of the Cathedral tolled the time for evening prayers, Juan Pedro returned from his dream, shook himself slightly, and smiled. He turned toward the Cathedral just as the last rays of the setting sun were striking it, bringing out the pink tones of the limestone and the blue of the marble. Juan Pedro thought he had never seen it seem so beautiful. Just before he entered the door, he stopped to admire the lovely bell towers, with their bells that had been cast in Old Spain, the perfectly formed columns and arches, and the well sculptured figures of saints surrounding the door. For nearly twenty-two years, now, Juan Pedro had entered that church at least twice a day, to offer a prayer to the Virgin. Tonight he would offer prayers to all the saints, in the honor of his Cathedral, the divine and holy piece of architecture which had been his spiritual home for all these years. Juan Pedro, has head high, step firm, and eyes bright, entered the Cathedral, and with his sombrero in his hand, he slowly walked toward the altar.

2. An American Business Man

James E. Mason, a middle-aged American business man, known as "J. E." to his friends and business associates, walked, or rather bounded, with forced American vitality, up La Calle de Las Rosas. He was the president of a large American mining company, and he had come to Mexico to see about buying some large gold mines. Being a typical American, he wore what all American business men wear when in semi-tropical lands; white flannel trousers, white silk shirt with a brightly-colored silk scarf knotted at the throat, and a cream-colored Panama hat, with a silk band to match the scarf. He had another typical
American trait: he detested and distrusted all Mexicans and called them unflattering names.

It was early morning in the little Mexican town, and most of the townspeople were walking slowly toward the little Cathedral that was just ahead. The only thing J. E. could understand about the Mexicans was their beautiful women. But he could not understand why the young ladies ignored him when he smiled and tipped his hat to them. Neither could he understand the black looks that were thrown his way by certain of the young men when he did this. He attributed this to the fact that all Mexicans were hot-headed, and he glanced around furtively to see that no one had a knife to stick in his back, as he had so often heard was done. J. E. could not understand the "laziness" of the people; they walked slowly to church, and slowly home, while he rushed around all the time. Of course, he had to admit to himself that he didn't seem to get much done, but he at least tried.

J. E., much to his chagrin, was going to have to go to church with these people. It was Sunday morning, and even though he was not a Catholic, he considered it his "duty" to attend some church, and La Cathedral de Nuestra Senora was the only one for miles around. Before he entered the door, he stopped to gaze at the edifice, as it was bathed in the early morning light. Suddenly, as the bells began to toll, three white doves flew out from the tower, and soared against the rose-colored sky. J. E. wasn't thinking of the beauty of the building, nor of the religious purpose it served. To himself he said "Whew, what a job! Must've taken a lot of money." He didn't even see the sculptured saints surrounding the door. As he started in the door, he glanced toward the altar, and saw the lithe young men and women kneel gracefully before it. With a slightly reddened face, he took off his Panama, and respectfully walked toward the altar.

4. A Good Neighbor

Marian Hawley had just graduated from a large university in Northeastern Texas. She had majored in Spanish, and studied about the people of Mexico and their customs. Now that she was in Mexico, she found good use for these studies. It was still rather a puzzle to her how she had ever been sent to this little town. She had a job with a travel agency, and she had been sent to look over this town, and to get information concerning its interesting places. She had arrived two days ago, and she thought that those two days had been the most interesting of her life. When she arrived, she went to the home of Senora de Lareda y Alvarez, a widow with whom she was to stay while in town. Dona Alvarez had two sons, who were two and three years younger than Marian. They promised to show her around, and they had shown her everything.

On the first day she had visited many little shops, where they made and sold hand-made articles — jewelry, lace, embroidered goods, felt sombreros ornamented with silver and mother of pearl, boots, shoes, tooled leather goods, and pottery. In most of the shops, as she was leaving, the craftsman would give her something he had made, and would grin bashfully when she profusely thanked him. In one of the shops, as she was explaining the purpose of her trip to a leather worker, she noticed a nice-looking middle-aged man talking in low tones to the elder of the Alvarez boys. Later the boy told her that she had been invited to attend a wedding fiesta at the man's rancho.

Marian didn't awaken until after eleven o'clock the next morning, and the boys awoke just in time to dress for lunch. After lunch, they visited the home of the mayor, who showed Marian some articles
of furniture which his ancestors had brought from Old Spain in 1797. Since the boys had said they had one more place to show her before siesta time, they soon left, after Marian had promised to dine with the mayor and his wife that night.

As they walked around the plaza toward La Calle de Las Rosas, the boys told Marian the history of La Cathedral de Nuestra Senora. She was intensely interested in it before she saw it, and when she did see it, she could do nothing but stand and stare. With the bright afternoon sun shining on it, the Cathedral looked all pink and gold, and showed all the carving in detail. Marian slowly walked through the doorway, and in the quiet of the little Cathedral she hardly dared to breathe, for fear of disturbing the saints. She walked slowly up to the altar, stood for a few minutes looking at the carved figures of Mary and Jesus, and slowly knelt to pray. As she neared the end of her prayer she said, more as a question to herself than a plea to the Virgin, “Why can’t all people be like these in this little town? If it were possible, greed and wars would be unheard of, and the world would be more as He intended it to be.”

Americanism

HERBERT EATON

Americanism. This is not a new word to me; in fact, it is one with which I have been familiar for several years. Yet it has not been long since I have come really to understand and appreciate it. “Americanism,” to me, is the one word which symbolizes all of the ideals of a great nation. It signifies the ideals of which we are very proud, the ideals which our ancestors set up and struggled and fought to maintain, the ideals which we are fighting to preserve against our enemies today. It is the love of our churches and the free establishment thereof regardless of our religious creed. It stands for the principles and rights of a free people, the freedom of speech and of the press, the freedom of opportunity and of enterprize, the right of the individual to seek the kind of employment he chooses, the right of the individual to sell his products to anyone at any time, the right of the individual to use the proceeds of such sales as he sees fit, the right of the individual to own private property, the freedom of election and assembly. All this is Americanism — the one word which symbolizes all of the ideals of a great nation which today, by the preservation of these ideals, stands as a guiding star for the conquered peoples of the world, leading them from the pit-falls of barbarism onto the road of peace, hope, and happiness.