

SILVER IN MEXICO.

A TRIP OF OBSERVATION THROUGH THAT COUNTRY.

Wages Low and Cost of Living High—Miserable Condition of the Farmer—Such Conditions Would Bring on a Speedy Revolution Here.

El Paso, Texas, Oct. 26.—I have just concluded a tour of Mexico, which I made for the purpose of determining whether business and wages and prices of farm produce were really as satisfactory as has been claimed and particularly whether the conditions are such as to encourage the people of this country in adopting the financial system of Mexico.

I met and talked with two passenger conductors between Torreon and El Paso, Texas, about the wages of that class of railroad employees. Unlike the officials of the Mexican Central and other roads in Mexico, the men in the operating department do not receive gold for their services. They are paid in paper money or silver worth a little more than 50 cents on the dollar. These gentlemen would not permit me to quote them, but talked freely with the understanding that their names were not to be used. They said it was the policy of all railroad corporations in that country to "stand in" with the powers that be, and refuse to discuss the financial system of the republic. This, they explained, was because the government granted big concessions to the railroads which were developing the resources of the country. One of these conductors said: "My salary is \$100 per month. I pay \$20 a month room rent, or a total of \$240 a year. I pay for board that I would not eat in the States, \$1 per day, or \$365 a year. It costs me \$20 per month for room rent for my wife. There's \$240 more. Then I have to pay \$25 per month for her board—\$300 a year more to add to the total. The rules compel me to buy two suits of clothes per year, for which I have to pay \$70 per suit. Out of the 50-cent dollars which we have left after paying out these sums we must buy all our clothing. Figure it out yourself and you will find that it takes considerable financing to make both ends meet. The American who is down here is not allowed to be pretty well up in arithmetic, because he has got to do some calculations each month to find out just how much his dollar is worth."

The other conductor corroborated all this and more. "My expenses in Mexico are greater," he said, "than in the

any of the towns or cities of the United States. For instance, in the City of Mexico a six-room house crowded up into a row of one or two-story buildings rents for \$60 per month—\$10 per room. A railroad man who cares for the comforts of his wife and children would not pen them up in a sun-dried mud house of two or three rooms for which he would have to pay \$25 to \$30 per month—all he could afford to pay—so he leaves them in this country, and if he has anything left after his living expenses are paid at the end of each month he converts his 50-cent dollars into dollars worth 100 cents the world over and sends them to his family.

Railroad Wages.
Locomotive engineers in Mexico receive from \$125 to \$225 per month in Mexican money, while on the western roads in the United States they are paid from \$125 to \$200 per month in gold, or its equivalent.

Freight conductors are paid from \$125 to \$200 per month in Mexico, while the wages range the same in this country with a dollar worth twice as much. Firemen get from \$70 to \$100 per month in Mexico. Here they get from \$60 to \$100, and at the end of the month they don't have to figure how much their dollars are worth.

Division superintendents in Mexico receive \$350 per month in the cheap dollars, but just over the line their salaries range from \$250 to \$325 in gold. Trainmasters average about \$165 in Mexico, but in this country their average is about \$160—nearly double when figured on a gold basis.

Mexican railroads pay telegraph operators in a depreciated currency from \$40 to \$80 per month. On our western roads they get from \$40 to \$100 a month in dollars worth 100 cents everywhere.

Chief operators, to whose hands are entrusted life and property, are paid from \$80 to \$150 per month in Mexican silver, while the same class of men in this section are paid an average of \$140, or almost double.

The Mexican railroad companies pay their station agents from \$50 to \$175 per month. On western roads the wages range from \$40 to \$150 per month in 100-cent dollars—that's the difference.

I am certain that there is not an American laborer who works on the section who would want to go to Mexico. There the average price paid section hands is 50 cents per day, and they work from sunrise to sunset. Compared with the money paid to American laborers, these poor unfortunate section hands receive practically 25 cents a day. On my return home I talked with several gangs of section men who receive from \$1 to \$1.25 per

wages ranged about as they do in the United States. The shop men at Topeka receive about the same wages that are paid on the Mexican Central and other roads in Mexico, with possibly a few exceptions, but when you consider the 100-cent dollar of Uncle Sam and its purchasing power, and compare it with the Mexican dollar at 50 cents and the prices of the commodities of life in that country, an object lesson is presented that a child can understand.

Railroad men are consumers and are interested in buying their goods where they can get them cheapest. If the Mexican dollar would buy as much as the American dollar in such articles as food and clothing, the railroad man in Mexico would have little to complain of. The American dollar will buy double the amount of the staple commodities in Mexico, and in this country it will buy nearly three times as much in the common articles of food. The best place to ascertain the cost of articles in general use is at El Paso and Juarez, border towns separated by the Rio Grande river, which is the boundary line. There the man who desires to ascertain the relative values of the two moneys will gain some valuable information. While I was there Mayor R. F. Campbell of El Paso went to the stores in El Paso and secured prices on the staple groceries and articles that a laboring man would have to use. Then he went over to Juarez and got the prices of the Mexican merchants on the same articles, for which they would pay in Mexican silver. After compiling his figures he made affidavit to the statement which follows:

	In U.S. Mex.	In Mex.
Matches, per gross	\$.50	\$1.20
Pickles, in five gallon kegs	2.25	6.50
Vinegar, in five gallon kegs	.50	1.40
Baking soda, per dozen	1.06	2.40
Salt, in two-pound sacks	.40	.50
Royal baking powder	4.00	9.00
Molasses, per gallon	.75	1.60
Beans, per pound	.03	.17
Candles, per box	5.00	11.75
Butter, per dozen	2.00	6.25
Dried plums, per pound	.11	.25
Macaroni, per pound	.10	.25
Dried apples and peaches, per pound	.11	.25
Dried prunes, per pound	.10	.20
Arbutle's coffee, per pound	.20	.40
Tea per pound, 35 cents to \$1 in El Paso; in Mexico	.70 to 1.50	5.50 to 10.75
Sugar, per 100 pounds	.05	.12
Rice, per pound	.05	.12
Canned tomatoes, per case	2.25	7.00
Canned peas, per case	2.25	8.50
Crackers, per pound	.07	.21

Fought for Corn.

At the town of Siloa, 150 miles from the City of Mexico, I saw an object lesson of Mexican energy and activity. Travelers who have explored Mexico will tell you that the masses are lazy, listless and indifferent, but there are exceptions to the rule. When the Mexican Central passenger train halted at the station the usual great crowd of natives were there to meet it. The vendors and beggars and the curious specimens of humanity of the neighborhood were all there. On the opposite side of the depot stood a train of hogs which were being shipped by Armour of Kansas City to the City of Mexico. It had been sidetracked for the passenger. Instantly there was a mad rush of men, women and children for the hog train. The brakemen had taken from the caboose several sacks of shelled corn and were feeding the hogs. A few gallons of the corn fell to the ground, and one hundred men, women and children fought each other like demons to get hold of a few kernels to eat. The race was to the swift, and despite old women and half-clothed children were trampled upon by the muscular Mexicans whose hunger for food made demons of them.

Farming.

The traveler who goes to Mexico to study the conditions of the people ought to stop a day or two at the border, as I did. I crossed the line at El Paso, Texas, where I had a good opportunity for comparing the methods of farming in both countries. On the Mexican side of the Rio Grande is a valley that stretches away for many miles, which has been under a crude system of cultivation for over three hundred years. The lack of enterprise, thrift and prosperity is noticeable everywhere, while over on the Texas border, with fewer natural advantages, are large and commodious homes, well improved farms, big stock ranches, and every evidence of a contented and prosperous people.

The Classes of Mexico.

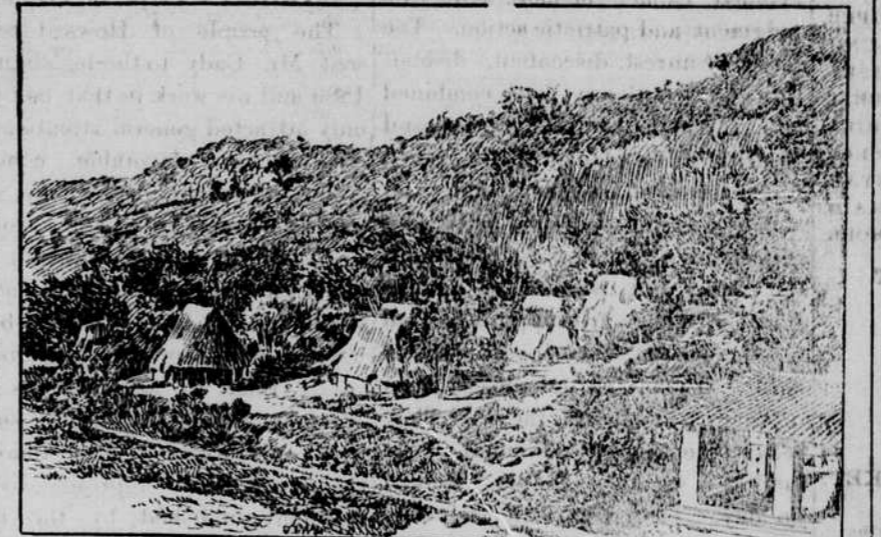
There are only two classes in Mexico—the very rich and the very poor. There are about 13,000,000 people in the republic, and one million of these own the lands, the mines, the manufactures and other enterprises. The railroads are owned by foreign capitalists. This class is prosperous because it is the policy of the government to aid by large concessions any enterprise that will tend to the development of Mexico's inexhaustible resources. Back of this is President Diaz' standing army which would shoot to death any body of laboring men who would even consider the matter of striking for better wages. Why should not these big enterprises prosper when they can employ labor for almost nothing? But the magic touch of this prosperity has not left its impress on the other 12,000,000 who constitute the toiling masses of Mexico. The men who work on the great haciendas, or plantations of the rich, are today in as deplorable condition as they were before a mile of railroad track was laid in the republic. During the past seventeen years that country has experienced its greatest growth in railroad building and mining. Within this period the Mexican dollar has fallen from 8 per cent above par, as compared with American gold, but labor has remained stationary. The common farm labor has ranged from 25 to 37 cents per day, while the Mexican dollar has fluctuated from \$1.08 to 43 cents. Therefore, it is not true that there is a tendency to increase the wages of the millions whose toil produces the wheat, the corn, the cotton, the coffee, the tobacco and the fruits of Mexico.

The agricultural lands of Mexico are owned by a few men. They have

amassed great fortunes off the cheap labor of the poor people and are growing richer every year. These great haciendas contain from 40,000 to 350,000 acres. Each landlord employs from 300 to 1,500 men. I visited several of these haciendas. The owners live in palaces and are surrounded with every comfort that heart could wish. Around and about these palaces are scattered the adobe or sundried, one-room mud houses of the laborers. The average wages paid these men is 26 cents per day. A few get three bits a day, but the number is limited. In many of these so-called homes the luxury of a dining table, chairs, bedstead and knives and forks to eat with are unknown. A sheepskin or a mat thrown upon the dirt floor serves as a bed. Not one in twenty of these huts have a floor. There is no paper on the wall, no pictures, no books, no music, except the cries for food which come from the lips of the half-naked, hungry children. It matters not to this great class of people who plant, cultivate and harvest the crops what the price of wheat, barley, potatoes or other staple may be, for they have no share in the profits of their labor. In fact, they never taste any of these articles. Their food is corn, with an occasional allowance of

dersold by those of the smaller towns. For example, a pair of blankets that I can buy in Topeka for \$2.50 would cost \$6 there. A three-piece oak bed room set that could be purchased at any furniture store in Kansas for \$25 was offered me for \$150 in the City of Mexico. Unbleached muslin costs 15 cents and the cheapest calico 13 cents per yard, and with 33 inches for a yard, at that. Coffee, one of Mexico's staples, costs 60 cents per pound, and butter ranges from 75 cents to \$1 per pound.

Before going to Mexico I was told that I could buy as much with the Mexican dollar in Mexico as I could with our 100-cent dollar on this side of the line. I am prepared to deny that proposition, and in proof need only refer to another object lesson which impressed itself on me. A street car line connects El Paso, Texas, with the city of Juarez, the Rio Grande river between them forming the boundary line. I rode over to the Mexican town, and on the car was an intelligent young Mexican. When the car approached the Juarez end of the bridge he crowded up into the corner to hide a bundle behind him. Just then the representative of the Mexican government came aboard to see if the occupants had dutiable goods. Nothing was found on which a tax



HOME OF THE POOR FARMERS WHO WORK FOR 26c PER DAY.

beans. These they get through the hacienda store. The ration for each man is one and one-half pints of corn per day. If he has a wife and six children, as is generally the case, he would have to draw from the store account twelve pints each day. The hacienda owner charges all the way from 8 to 12 cents per pint for shelled corn, and at the end of the year when a settlement is made the poor farmer finds himself helplessly in debt, and his slavery continues.

There are those who insist that these people do not desire and would not enjoy and appreciate a better condition in life; that they prefer a mud house to a comfortable home; a sheepskin in preference to a bed, and a blanket to cover their nakedness and keep them warm instead of clothing. There is just as much reason and truth in such a declaration as in the oft-repeated claim that the free silver policy of that country is beneficial to the laboring classes, for neither assertion is true. There is no more peaceable, patient and hard-working class of people on the globe than the poor laborers of Mexico. They are not responsible for the policy that has tended to degrade rather than lift them up. They know nothing about the benefits and blessings of education, but they can look about them and observe the conditions of the rich, and although they may never hope to advance from the life of slavery that is now upon them, it is idle folly to say that these people would not appreciate the little home-comforts that make life worth the living.

Beggars Everywhere.

The City of Mexico is the flower of the republic. I was not disappointed in finding there the concentration of enormous wealth, because I had heard much of the magnificent homes, fine business blocks, the beautiful drive to Chapultepec, the great parks—and the bull fights. But amid all this gorgeous display of wealth I found undeniable evidences of poverty and hunger everywhere. The halt, the lame and the blind are not the only class who beg you to give them money on nearly every street corner. Strong men and women, able to work, vie with the afflicted in their appeals for "centavos." The only reason I can give for this general begging is that they can make



FARM HOUSES IN MEXICO.

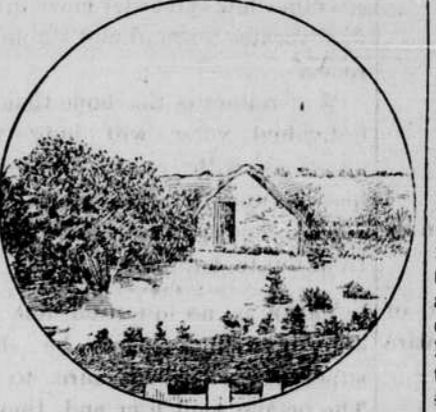
more money at it than they can work from one to three bits per day. How many thousand beggars there are in the City of Mexico can only be guessed at. The newspapers of that city admit that the beggars are a reproach to the republic. It is claimed that of the 300,000 inhabitants, 7,000 are homeless and sleep in the parks and on the streets, with the broad canopy of heaven as their shelter.

A Comparison of Prices.

The prices of some of the common articles of merchandise furnished an object lesson which I shall not soon forget. The City of Mexico is the metropolis of the republic, and it is fair to presume that the merchants are not un-

could be levied and the young man smoked his cigar leisurely until he was out of sight of the Mexican office. Then he alighted, taking with him twenty pounds of American granulated sugar which he had purchased at El Paso for \$1. If he paid for this sugar in Mexican silver it cost him a little less than \$2, for Mexican silver is worth 62 cents that day. The same quality of sugar was selling in Juarez for 15 cents per pound, and if he had purchased it on the Mexican side would have paid \$3 for it.

This little incident caused me to make some investigations as to the



HOME OF THE SECTION FOREMAN

price of staple commodities on each side of the line. In Juarez these prices prevailed:

- Beans, 5 to 6 cents per pound.
- Sugar, 14 to 15 cents per pound.
- Coffee, 50 to 60 cents per pound.
- Soap, 9 cents per pound.
- Bleached sheeting, 20 cents per yard.
- Prints, 12½ cents per yard (33 inches).
- Candles, 3 cents each.

On the western coast of Mexico corn is a drug on the market, and the farmers were selling crops grown two years ago for from 20 to 25 cents per bushel.

Beef cattle, as fine as any on the American ranches, are sold on the Mexican plantations at from \$25 to \$35 per head, while ranch cattle bring from \$12 to \$16 per head. All classes of stock are sold by the head, and not by the pound. Ranch horses can be bought for \$12 per head. Mules were quoted at from \$20 to \$50 per head.

The above prices, of course, prevail in the cheap Mexican dollar, worth a little more than 50 cents, and these articles are produced by the toil of millions whose average daily wage is 26 cents, in the same depreciated money.

D. O. M'AVOY.

Roman Canals in Britain.

The first canals in Britain were constructed by the Romans. Of these the most remarkable are the Caer Dyke and Foss Dyke cuts in Lincolnshire, which are by general consent admitted to have been of Roman origin. The former extends from Peterborough to the River Witham, near the city of Lincoln, a distance of about forty miles; and the latter from Lincoln to the River Trent, near Torksey, a distance of eleven miles. Of the Caer Dyke the name only now remains, but the Foss Dyke, though of Roman origin, still exists, and is the oldest British canal. Foss Dyke, according to Camden, was deepened and rendered more navigable in 1121 by Henry I. About 1841 it was widened to the minimum breadth of 45 feet and deepened to the extent of six feet throughout, and thus this ancient canal, which is quoted by Telford and Nimmo as "the oldest artificial canal in Britain," was restored to a state of perfect efficiency, at a cost of forty thousand pounds.

TEXAS MISREPRESENTED.

An Atlanta Doctor Who Told a Field Story About the Drought.

Tyler, Smith County, Tex., Oct. 6.—(To The News.)—The Atlanta Journal of September 30 last contained an interview with a certain doctor of that city on the condition of Texas, her crops and people, that demands a reply from some person with more information than the doctor. The large headlines to the article are "The Wolf in Texas." "An Atlanta Man From the Lone Star State Describes the Dread Prospects of Poverty." "Doctor—Interviewed." He tells how the fearful drought "burned the earth up and destroyed the ground's fertility."

The Atlanta doctor is unknown to me and perhaps to Texas people. If he was better known maybe this reply would be needless. But assume that he did travel in Texas and that he did see the worst drought in parts of this state since the year 1851, still the statements are far from being correct. In his extended tour through the West he tells a sorrowful tale of the condition of the crops of the West, and especially in the state of Texas. The doctor relates only one exception to bad crops, "and that is from Helena, Ark., up to Southern Mississippi." And there the land will make "from half a bale to a bale of cotton to the acre and from thirty-five to seventy-five bushels of wheat to the acre." This must be an enchanted land, a marvelous paradise for the farmer "from Helena, Ark., to Southern Mississippi." Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas are far away from the real wheat country and do a little business in comparison with the doctor's golden grain land "from Helena, Ark., up to Southern Mississippi."

The doctor says no rain fell in Texas since May 1, and in some sections no rain since April to the day of his interview, September 30, 1896. Suppose the weather reports were drawn on the doctor and they showed rainfalls since April of two inches, four inches and as high as seven inches at one dropping in large areas of Texas. The picture drawn by the doctor is a "sorrowful tale" of woe and distress, such as would choke off every man who dreamed of cheap lands and a comfortable home in Texas. Listen to his mournful weepings for the miserable people of this state: "Much cotton that was planted has never come up. There has not been enough moisture to generate the seed." He proceeds: "Corn is almost a total failure this year;" that the "little half-grown stalks that have dried up in the summer sun rustle mournfully in the wind that sweeps across the barren waste." The Georgia doctor when interviewed must have been in a sad state of mind.

These statements were published as if they were based on facts in a reputable journal in the largest city in the great state of Georgia as coming from an "Atlanta man." Now, what do the people of Texas think of such statements? What do the people of Georgia think of them? And what do the people "from Helena, Ark., up to Southern Mississippi" think of them? The best test of such assertions, perhaps, is the price that the staple productions of Texas bring in an open market. At the city of Tyler, about the geographical center of Eastern Texas, where the Cotton Belt Railroad crosses the International & Great Northern Railroad, is in the midst of the drought-stricken area, and I will submit the prices at retail here to-day of some of the leading staple productions of this section of the state, viz.: Cotton, best grades, 7 cents; corn in shuck, 40 cents; hay, best quality, \$10 per ton; dry salt bacon and clear sides, 5 cents and 6 cents; corn fed pork on foot, 3 cents; prime beef, 1½ cents; flour, per barrel, \$4 to \$5; October peaches, 60c per bushel; fall apples, large, 75 cents to \$1 per bushel. These prices could not exist if these articles had not been made here. The fact is that Texas has an abundance of feed for man and beast, notwithstanding a severe drought for Texas occurred this past season. This state will still make more cotton than any other state in the Union. No one can safely estimate the cotton crop yet, as the fields are green, and the plant is loaded in many parts of the state with growing bolls that with late frost will mature into good cotton.

I give one example of a farmer in Smith county this year. I sold him fifty acres of land, unimproved, in 1895 for \$250. He moved on it in 1896, cleared twenty-six acres and fenced it, built a three-room house and out-houses and cultivated eighteen acres cotton and eight acres corn, all with his own labor. Yesterday he reported he had five bales of cotton picked and that he would likely get two more and had 250 bushels of corn. Or at the price above now ruling, if he makes six bales of cotton he will have for his crop \$310 cash, and in this "dreadful year" pay for his home and have \$60 left. If a one-horse farmer can buy a home in the woods and pay for it in one year in such a severe drought, what may he not do in all the lifetime of good years? Texas is the best poor man's country, all things considered, on this account, and those who seek a good country and a comfortable home should not be driven from their purpose by the "sorrowful tale" of the sensationalist. Respectfully,

W. S. HERNDON.

(Dallas News, Oct. 9, 1896.)

Col. W. S. Herndon, ex-member of Congress from Texas, is probably as well equipped for giving accurate information concerning Texas as any of her citizens.

We are also informed that present indications point to a heavy top crop owing to the average high temperature in September, and seasonable and abundant rains, and experts estimate the Texas cotton crop at 2,500,000 bales.



"COMMON CARRIERS."

United States. For a while I was on the upper end of a run on the Eagle Pass route and boarded at San Antonio, Texas. There I paid \$18 per month board. Now I am boarding in Torreon and pay \$40 per month in Mexican money. But the greatest expense to a railroad man in this country is the high price he has to pay for clothing. If I could do as the Mexicans do, go half naked, wear sandals for shoes, or go barefooted, I could get along pretty well on \$80 per month, for that is what \$160 in Mexican money is worth, especially when the cost of living here is more than double. I have to buy American shirts, American shoes and hats, and, indeed, practically everything I wear comes from the United States. They don't manufacture articles of a character here in Mexico suitable for our use, so when I buy a pair of shoes I have to pay double value and the duty added. This pair of shoes I am wearing cost me \$7.50 in Mexican money, and I could buy the same shoes in Texas for \$2.50 or \$3. The same is true of every other article that I wear. I wish every American railroad man who believes that the Mexican 50-cent dollar system is a good thing for wage earners would come to Mexico and take a few object lessons. I have had all I want of it, and will get back to the States as soon as a position opens for me."

House Rent.

If the railroad man in Mexico should rent a house as good as the home of the average conductor, engineer, fireman, brakeman or telegraph operator in this country, he would find himself bankrupt at the end of the first month. Rents are double what they are in

day in sound money, and I did not find one who intended to vote for a policy which would reduce the value of American labor to a level with that of Mexico.

Another class of poorly paid railroad laborers in Mexico is the freight brakemen. They, too, are the victims of the 50-cent dollar, receiving from \$35 to \$75 per month, while on this side of the Rio Grande American railroads pay from \$60 to \$100, in gold if they want it.

In Mexico a section foreman who lives in a mud house and on a mud floor, with a sheep skin to sleep on, without a change of clothing or enough table linen to wad a gun, is paid the munificent salary of from 75 cents to \$1.25 per day, in cheap dollars, of course. Who has not noted the well-painted homes of the section foreman as he sped over the Kansas railroads? You not only observe comfortable houses, with green lawns in front, bright and sweet faced children playing about the door, but if you will look inside, you will see modern furniture and plenty of it, carpeted floors, papered walls, pictures, books, magazines, lace curtains at the windows, and in many instances a piano or organ graces the parlor. All these things the section foreman has accumulated from his salary, which averages anywhere from \$47 to \$75 per month. The reason is plain. Every dollar is worth 100 cents and its purchasing power is three times that of the Mexican dollar.

What Money Buys.

I found in my investigations of paid mechanics and skilled labor in the shops of the Mexican railroads that