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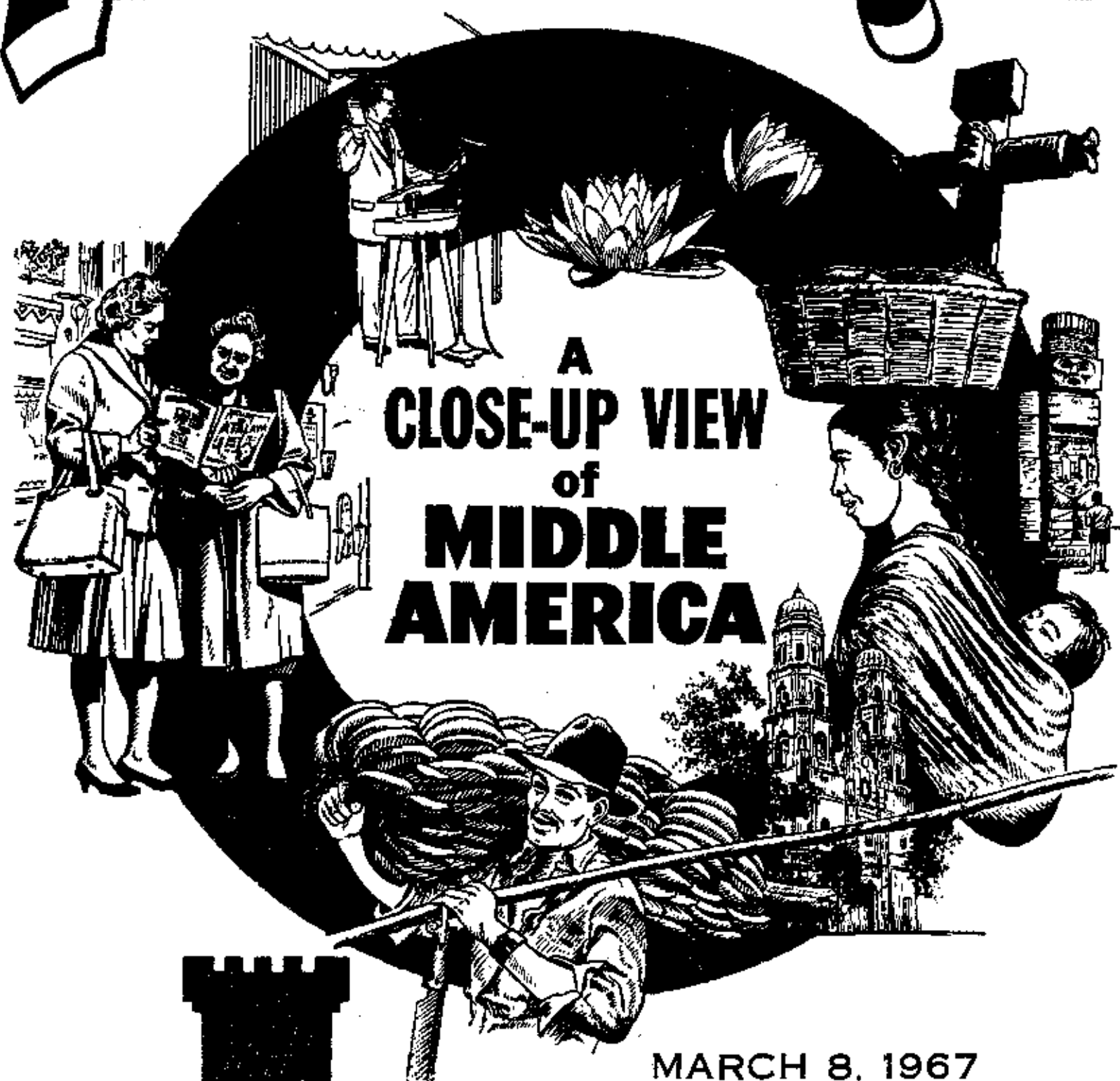
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Awake!



A
CLOSE-UP VIEW
of
**MIDDLE
AMERICA**

MARCH 8, 1967

THE REASON FOR THIS MAGAZINE

News sources that are able to keep you awake to the vital issues of our times must be unfettered by censorship and selfish interests. "Awake!" has no fetters. It recognizes facts, faces facts, is free to publish facts. It is not bound by political ties; it is unhampered by traditional creeds. This magazine keeps itself free, that it may speak freely to you. But it does not abuse its freedom. It maintains integrity to truth.

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"Awake!" pledges itself to righteous principles, to exposing hidden foes and subtle dangers, to championing freedom for all, to comforting mourners and strengthening those disheartened by the failures of a delinquent world, reflecting sure hope for the establishment of God's righteous new order in this generation.

Get acquainted with "Awake!" Keep awake by reading "Awake!"

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Awake!

"It is already the hour for you to awake."
—Romans 13:11

Volume XLVIII

London, England, March 8, 1967

Number 5

Where Is Middle America Today?

VOLCANOES! Earthquakes! Revolutions! Are these the thoughts that flash to your mind when mention is made of Middle America? Or do you think of bananas, coffee, pineapples and other tropical fruits? To many this storied region, from Mexico's border with the United States down through Panama, may be just an exotic vacation playland with enchanting native foods and entertainment. Well, Middle America is all of this and more!

Here Christopher Columbus and other adventurers came in search of riches. Here the Spanish conquistadores discovered wealthy cities of brilliant civilizations—those of the Mayas and Aztecs. Here European empire builders subdued the natives and forced them to become converts to Roman Catholicism. Along these shores sailed the buccaneers, taking their toll of the treasure-laden transports. Here, after centuries of harsh domination, the now-mixed population fought for and gained independence.

But all of this is history. Where is Middle America today—politically, economically, religiously, socially and morally?

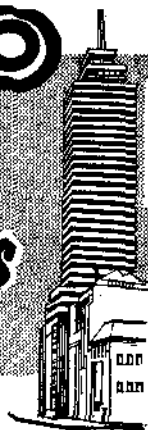
The best way to find the answers to these questions is to visit personally this region. Such a visit became a reality for many hundreds of our readers during the month of December 1966. The occasion

was a series of international assemblies that were organized by Jehovah's witnesses in Central America. Guests were invited and expected from Canada, the United States, Great Britain and other countries. At this time of year it meant that many of these travelers would be leaving behind cold northern latitudes, heavy warm clothing and gray skies. As they prepared for this journey, whether by car, bus, train or plane, they eagerly anticipated the opportunity of having a firsthand look at this part of the world, which so often is featured in the headlines of the world news.

We are sure that readers of *Awake!* magazine are keenly interested in knowing what those visitors saw and heard as they traveled from one country to another, attending the assemblies, visiting towns and villages, marketplaces and natural beauty spots, talking to the natives and seeing how they really live. Politically, Middle America is the battleground of different ideologies; economically, it is between the rich and the poor; religiously, great changes are being made; morally, the people are cascading downward with the rest of the world. More details of this close-up view of Middle America had by these eyewitnesses are presented in the following pages for your benefit.

MEXICO

-A Land of Contrasts



A Look Around the City

While our chief interest in Mexico was the assembly to which we had been invited, let us first take a look at the city. Our brief tour solidified the opinion that Mexico is a land of contrasts. Eye-catching to the stranger is the great variety of architectural designs. How impressed we were with the large, modern office buildings, which serve as a tribute to competent designing and engineering! Yet in contrast we noticed buildings of great antiquity, some dating back practically to the beginning of Spanish rule. Even these, though, testified to the ability and artistry of the builders.

AS WE stepped aboard our powerful jet airliner and settled down for the start of our long-anticipated trip to Central America, the atmosphere was filled with excitement about what lay ahead. Of course, we knew that there would be hundreds of others of our spiritual brothers from Canada, Germany, Australia, and so forth, thirteen countries in all, embarking on a similar venture. Now it was our time for a firsthand look at a land of contrasts—Mexico!

We soon learned that we had to be prepared for new things, since everywhere the visitor to this land turns he is confronted with a combination of the familiar and the unusual, the ancient and the ultramodern, the ordinary and the rare. The new arrival in Mexico City who speaks only English is immediately confronted with a change: why, everyone is speaking Spanish! But to our surprise many of the common people know a few words of English. This, together with their helpful disposition, made for an interesting and very pleasant trip.

After passing through Immigration and Customs, we were ready for our first taste of real Mexico. If up to this time we had imagined the people to be forever slow-moving and casual, our first taxi ride altered that view. The cost was very little and the driver got us to our hotel without any complications. But by the time we arrived we were convinced we knew how small a "hairbreadth" is. We were sure it is the distance between two Mexican taxis weaving in and out of heavy traffic with split-second timing. And to make matters even more exciting, we were trying to get used to the idea of loaded buses picking up and depositing people while still moving.

Who could speak about Mexico without making some comment about the beautiful art that is everywhere in evidence? Before our visit was completed we had seen many frescoes and murals in hotels, restaurants and public buildings of the city. We must admit, though, it was quite a surprise to see some of the subjects of these murals, especially the famous and controversial ones by Diego Rivera. In addition to emphasizing social struggles and revolutions in the country, he often portrayed the Catholic clergy as having been oppressive and greedy in their dealings with the people.

One of the tours arranged for visitors to the assemblies in Middle America was to lovely Chapultepec Park in Mexico City, where the National Museum of Anthropology is located. The park, we learned, had been used as a place of entertainment as far back as the time of the Aztec ruler Montezuma II in the sixteenth century, and we could well believe it,



Scene from the Folklorico Ballet presented in the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City



Victims of Catholic Inquisition about to perish, woman to be garroted, man to be burned. As depicted in mural by Diego Rivera in the National Palace, Mexico City

for with lakes, trees and flowers it truly is a beautiful garden spot. It derives its name from the *chapulives* (Indian for "grasshoppers") that were so plentiful here in former times.

The museum was to us another example of contrast, for the structures themselves were most handsome and modern and yet they housed ancient relics of Mexico's past. Compared to historical museums many of the visitors had seen in other countries, this one was outstanding. The museum provided a free tour guide who helped us to understand, to a degree, the different civilizations and cultures of the ancient Teotihuacans, Toltecs, Mayans, Aztecs, and so forth. The intelligent and helpful way in which the material is presented and classified made the visit most informative. It was evident that the ancient Indians usually had every phase of life dictated by their religious beliefs.

We noticed that these Indians worshiped the sun, moon and stars, and also that sex and serpent worship figured prominently in their religions. While all the tribes were idolatrous, the Aztecs, who dominated the Central Plateau, are infamous for their barbaric worship involving cannibalism and human sacrifices to the extent of 100,000 victims a year. And then we saw the mammoth Stone of Tizoc, or the Sacrificial Stone. The groove hewn on its surface has led many to believe that, on such a stone, black-robed Aztec priests would, with a quick slash of an obsidian knife, gash open the chest of a victim, just

below the ribs. Then, while it was still pulsating, they would rip out the bleeding heart and offer it as a sacrifice in order to ensure the rising of the sun each morning.

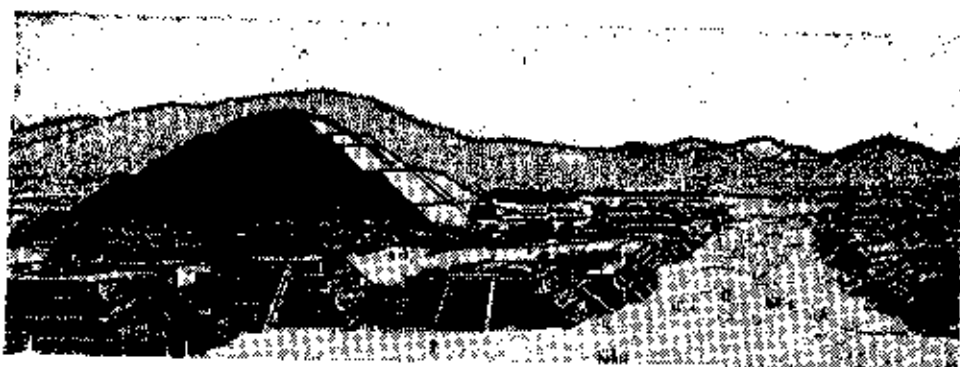
Religious Temples Past and Present

Our fascinating tour through the National Museum stimulated our desire to visit the actual sites of some of these archaeological excavations. One such visit took us to the site of the giant pyramids near San Juan Teotihuacán, some 29 miles northeast of Mexico City.

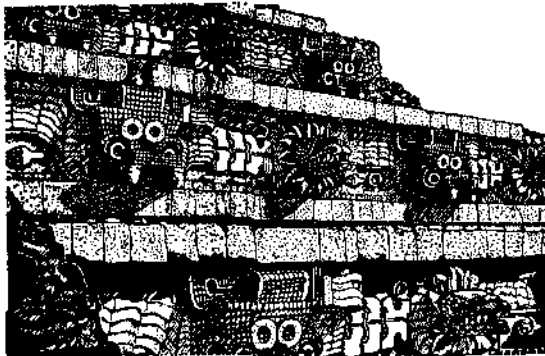
From a distance we saw the gigantic structures looming above the countryside. But before getting a close look, we went through the museum at the site and learned something about these colossal pyramids built about 200 B.C.E. by the Indians called the Teotihuacanos. The very name Teotihuacán is mythical, signifying "the place where men become gods," or "place where the gods reside." The ruins we were about to visit at one time constituted a "holy" city, and the priests and religious leaders were the rulers of the people.

No one is quite sure where the people who built these massive structures came from or even what language they spoke. Unlike the pyramids in Egypt, which were usually tombs of the Pharaohs, the ones before us closely resembled the ziggurats of ancient Babylon and served the same function, as bases for elevated temples. First we walked around the Citadel, a vast stadium surrounded by a wall and enclosing several temples. One of them, the temple of Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, gave us insight into the religion practiced there. Not far from the Citadel is the Pyramid of the Sun. When this monumental pyramid was in its glory, covered with stucco, hand painted a reddish color, and with a temple on its summit, it must have been awe-inspiring. While its base is about the same size as the Cheops Pyramid in Egypt, it is only about half as high. We accepted the challenge to climb to the top, but long before we got to the top our panting and aching lungs reminded us that at 7,000 feet it is not easy.

The temple that once crowned the pyramid



Huge Pyramid of the Sun and the Avenue of the Dead at Teotihuacán, Mexico



Heads of serpents and other deities ornament the temple of Quetzalcoatl, Teotihuacán, Mexico

is gone, but still we were impressed by the grand panoramic view of all that is below, including the "Avenue of the Dead" stretching in front of us. While archaeologists do not fully understand all the aspects of the religion carried on at this "holy" city, it was obvious that the worshipers were very interested in the sun and the moon. The whole city, in fact, was built according to very critical astronomical calculations as to the relative positions of the sun and the moon.

Before the tour was over we also visited the Pyramid of the Moon and the beautiful buildings designed for the luxurious living of the Teotihuacán priests. Having already seen other evidences of Babylonish religion, we were not surprised to see a painted "cross" among the things worshiped by the Indians. Yes, even at

For sake of Indians who claimed that Jesus impaled was human sacrifice and so no different from their religion, Catholic church depicted only Christ's head on this cross outside Mexico City



Devotees frequently approach the Catholic shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico City, on their knees. In mid-December 2,451 persons on pilgrimage here were treated for injuries, mostly bleeding knees



this one site there were many evidences to support the claim that these people, or their ancestors, derived their religious ideas from ancient Babylonia, where ziggurats, serpents, crosses and astronomy were all integral parts of false religion.

We were looking forward to a visit later that day to a modern religious site, but decided to stop for a typical Mexican meal. It did not take too long to get across to a helpful Mexican waiter what we wanted and then proceed with the new and unusual. There were *enchiladas* or flat corn cakes called *tortillas* stuffed with chicken and covered with spicy *mole* sauce, *crispy tacos* made out of fried *tortillas* filled with vegetable and meat, *guacamole* or avocado salad, and a fillet of steak.

It was, as we learned to say, *delicioso!*

The Roman Catholic shrine of Guadalupe was our next stop. According to the historical facts, when the Spanish conquistadores moved in, Roman Catholic missionaries followed in their wake. Church-State rule became the



Native Mexican woman preparing "tortillas," thin cakes of unleavened cornmeal

way of life in "New Spain," as Mexico was called soon after it was conquered in 1521. The Catholic church was bent on converting the Indians, even resorting to the terrible "Holy Inquisition" from 1571 to 1820. Nonetheless, from what we saw at the Guadalupe Shrine, we realized that in many respects the Catholic church had made compromises and concessions in its efforts to convert the Indians.

In the very courtyard of this large church the Indians on certain festivals offer up their children, in pantomime, as a sacrifice to the sun-god. While we were not there for such a festival, our visit did reveal many Mexican men and women following the torturous practice of crawling on their knees up to the

church, sometimes covering a mile or more. Visitors to this shrine should not be shocked if they see blood on the pavement. We were even more startled, though, when inside the church, to see what was going on at a glass case containing a religious relic. The worshippers were rubbing their hands over the glass case and then wiping their own faces and the faces of their young babies, in order to receive blessing or protection.

How much did the Indians have to change in order to become Catholics? Well, before the Spaniards arrived, the hill of Tepeyac, where the Catholic shrine is now located, was the site of a shrine to Tonantzin, an Aztec goddess of earth and maize. It was also interesting to learn that the "virgin" idolized at this place, and, who supposedly appeared in vision to a native in the

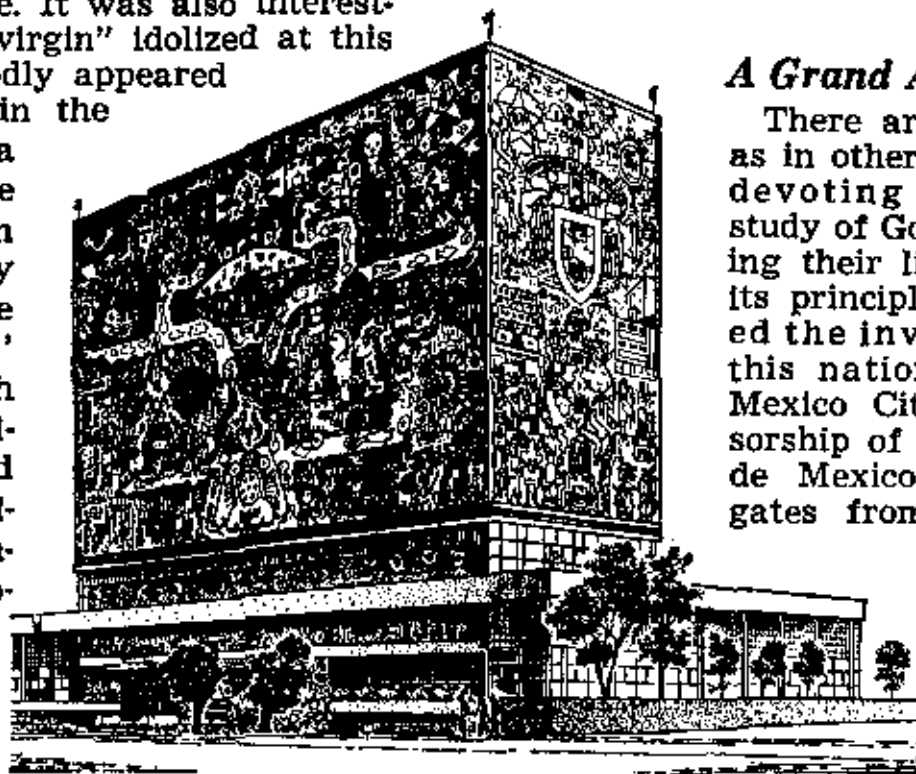
sixteenth century, has a dark complexion. Since many of the people in Mexico are similarly complexioned, the image of the "Dark Virgin" hanging in the church would be more appealing than a fair-skinned likeness. Understandably, one writer commented: "Many orthodox Catholics have complained that the Mexicans were never Christianized at all, and that Catholicism was, instead, Mexicanized."—*Mexico* by W. W. Johnson and The Editors of *Life*, page 136.

The Needs of the People

Some of the visitors who came by automobile were especially conscious of the contrast between those who lived in the city and those in the rurals. Though Mexico has produced engineers, scholars, doctors and lawyers who have turned the capital into a modern city, facilities and conveniences such as hospitals, schools, electricity and adequate water supplies are not found everywhere. One can drive through town after town at night and never see a light.

The visitor to this land of great contrasts who stops to ponder the question "What do these people need the most?" comes to some very definite conclusions. Education is at the top of the list. It is true that for some there are opportunities for advanced learning in

Mexico, such as at beautiful University City that had its founding with a special charter from the king of Spain in 1551. However, many of the common people first need to learn to read and write, so they can study the Bible. But why the Bible? Because it is the Word of the true God. From it the people can learn the truth that can set them free from the superstitions and creeds of men, both those brought down from pagan forefathers and those propagated by the clergy of Christendom. By studying the Bible and letting its moral principles mold their lives, people can gradually pull themselves out of the cesspool of immorality in which so many wallow.



Library building, National University of Mexico

A Grand Assembly

There are many in Mexico, as in other countries, who are devoting themselves to a study of God's Word and shaping their lives in accord with its principles. We had accepted the invitation to attend this national convention in Mexico City under the sponsorship of La Torre del Vigia de Mexico, which had delegates from all the Mexican states. Preparations had begun months earlier, since some 23,000 delegates were expected, and never before had Jehovah's witnesses

in Mexico assembled in such a large group.

For the delegates coming from distant parts of the country, transportation was a problem. Hence, arrangements were made for special trains. The National Railroad Company co-operated by allowing representatives of the convention's Information Department to board the four special trains eighty-five miles outside the city. Then, while the final miles were clicking off, the convention delegates received information as to transportation within the city, location of hotels and rooming accommodations and other arrangements made for their comfort and enjoyment. However, there were other trains on the way that in effect became "special" trains as time went by. As regular trains passed certain locations, additional coaches full of Jehovah's witnesses were added. One train from the northern part of the country could not pull all the passenger coaches that were finally added, and, as a re-

sult, the train had to be divided and an extra locomotive used to bring them to the assembly city.

The arena in Mexico City was ready and waiting for the arriving delegates. A week before the opening date Witnesses from the city had converged on the arena and given it a thorough cleaning. In fact, the watchmen at the Arena Mexico commented, "This is the best cleaning the Arena has ever had!"

A high percentage of those in attendance had been taught to read the Bible by Jehovah's witnesses. For example, in 1964, 199 reading classes were in operation and 1,230 adults learned to read and write. The Mexican Minister of Public Education acknowledged this by writing a letter of commendation to the representative of Jehovah's witnesses. Once the humble Mexican people learn to read they are able to study God's Word and apply its principles in their lives. Such ones were especially thrilled at the convention when Rodolfo Lozano from the branch headquarters in Mexico released a pocket-size version of "Things in Which It Is Impossible for God to Lie" in Spanish. Later the president of the Watch Tower Society, N. H. Knorr, when invited to address the audience, released the book *Life Everlasting—in Freedom of the Sons of God* in Spanish to 28,818 assembled Christians. The visitors who were invited to attend the English program were delighted to have a glimpse of some of the Witnesses from distant parts of Mexico in their native costumes. They knew that, though these people spoke a different language and in their bright clothing looked quite unusual, they were at heart unitedly worshiping the same God.

All at the convention rejoiced together when, for the main lecture, "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom," on Sunday, December 4, the attendance was announced as 36,556! This was about 13,000 more than originally expected. And there was the additional joy of knowing that 1,082 persons dedicated their lives and indicated they were now Jehovah's witnesses.



President N. H. Knorr of the Watch Tower Society (on the left), through an interpreter, addresses 36,556 delegates to the cultural convention in the Arena Mexico

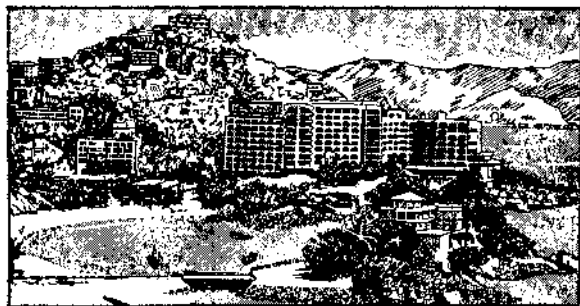
Travel by Automobile

While many of the foreign travelers were leaving for Guatemala by plane, some drove by automobile to the next assembly. After negotiating the crowded, fast-moving traffic of Mexico City, what a contrast it was to get out on the open roads of the country, where one meets stubborn burros and slow-moving ox carts as often as automobiles and trucks. Driving at night especially was "hair-raising," since one never knew what to expect around the next curve. And curves there were! Coming down out of the mountains to the coast near Arriaga there were so many sharp twists and turns that one felt like a

corkscrew by the time he reached level country.

Many drove down to Acapulco, the famous resort area. While most persons who go there are solely interested in swimming, eating and pleasure-seeking, the Christians visiting there after the Mexico City assembly were able to associate with spiritual brothers making up the ten active groups of Jehovah's witnesses in that city.

Looking back on Mexico, we visitors hold fond memories of this land of contrasts, where the rich and poor, old and new, enlightened and mysterious exist side by side. We will long recall what we have seen and the pleasure of associating with our brothers who also are looking forward to the time of total peace and paradise under God's kingdom.



Acapulco, famous international resort. Here 1,100 of Jehovah's witnesses carry on teaching work

THE first planeload of visitors arriving at Guatemala's "La Aurora" Airport to attend the "God's Sons of Liberty" Assembly, December 7-11, 1966, surely received a hearty welcome. Smiling missionaries and local Witnesses, some splendidly dressed in colorful native style, furnished visiting sisters with beautiful corsages, and the Guatemalan Airlines provided the lilting music of the marimba. A huge sign bearing the message "Welcome Jehovah's Witnesses" adorned the façade of the airport building. Cooperative officials waived customs inspection, and the excited travelers boarded chartered buses to their hotel rooms. At the hotels, too, the "Welcome" signs were out.

And what was the first impression of Guatemala? What could it be but one of friendliness and color? A land of lofty mountains and deep valleys, of forests and green highlands, of hot lowlands and invigorating altitudes, surely reminded us of Switzerland. The Indian population, constituting over 55 percent of the total, are noted for their colorful dress and their tribal handicrafts, which are to be seen in profusion in the village markets. Even among the crowds at our assembly one could quickly note the outstanding features of this or that tribe.

The main exhibition hall of the beautiful Parque Centro America, out on the edge of Guatemala City, was the meeting place of a truly international group. United States citizens, Canadians, Mexicans and visitors from over-

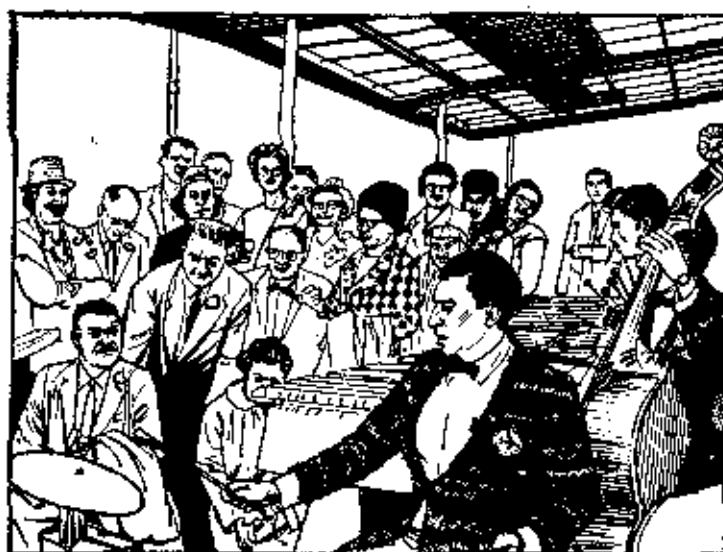
GUATEMALA

A Tropical Switzerland

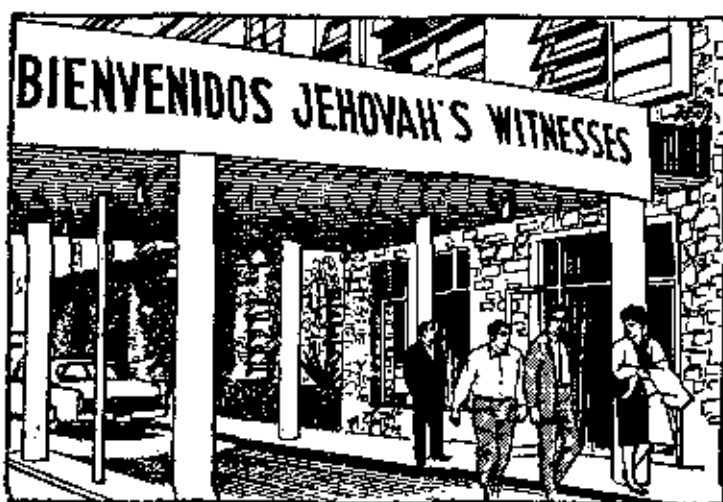
seas mingled with a fine cross-section of Guatemala's own people. At one end of the long hall on the platform there was a typical native hut of corn cane with thatched roof, and in front were colorful floral decorations. Around

the main building and other lesser buildings of the Centro the peace and quiet of a pleasant park added to the delight of the conventioners.

The assembly's Rooming Department had quite a problem to care for the influx of visitors, not alone from other lands but from all across Guatemala, from Atlantic to Pacific. Rooms in homes and hotels were soon exhausted, and many who had come from remote parts of the country had little money to spend for accommodations, and at the same time would be easily bewildered by city travel. The solution: One of the clean, large auxiliary buildings of the Parque Centro America was set aside as a place for families to sleep on the floor in their own little groups, happy to be surrounded by scores of other such family groups who had come to this city to enjoy the



The lilt of the marimba at Guatemala City's airport welcomes foreign delegates to the assembly



Sign on Biltmore Hotel, Guatemala City, bids arriving Witnesses "Welcome"



View of a volcano across beautiful Lake Atitlán, not far from Guatemala City

spiritual good things of the assembly. For some it was not at all unusual to sleep on a mat on the floor.

A Look at the Country

The features of Guatemala are almost as varied as the tribal groups it contains. In area the land is more than twice the size of Switzerland. There is a hot tropic plain along the ocean where corn, cotton and cattle are the main products. Coffee plantations ascend well up the slope to an altitude of some 6,000 feet above sea level. At 5,000 feet there are passes that penetrate to the interior mountainous plateaus and alpine valleys that may reach an elevation of 10,000 feet, topped by volcanic peaks towering as high as 13,000 feet. In the temperate highlands, where the air is cool and invigorating, apples and fresh vegetables abound. The mountain slopes of this tropical Switzerland are usually covered with pine and other evergreens.

One of the tours arranged for visitors at the assembly took us up into those highlands to see beautiful Lake Atitlán, nestling in a ring of volcanoes. At a village along the way and at other little villages around the lake we had opportunity to see and mingle with gaily dressed Indians in outdoor markets, where all sorts of strange fruits, vegetables and local handicrafts were changing hands. Some of our companions were heard remarking that they had not seen anything so beautiful since they had visited Switzerland, so impressed were they by the scenery in this re-

gion. As the late afternoon approached we were glad to have sweaters and wraps along, for the air at these altitudes is distinctly brisk.

High up on the sides of hills we observed the coffee plantations, the coffee trees flourishing under the shade of taller trees that protect them from the full strength of the tropical sun. When the coffee berries ripen to a rich red, men and women and children will come and pick them by hand, readying them for transport to a coffee processing plant. We were told that in blossom time the mass of white flowers on the coffee trees sends forth a fragrance rivaling that of the orange grove in bloom.

In the upper highland regions of this tropical Switzerland the population is almost solidly Indian. Illiteracy is high, and Catholic tradition, admittedly mingled with preconquest paganism, enslaves the minds of the majority. However, it is in just such an area that Quetzaltenango, second city of Guatemala, is located, a place where there is now a flourishing congregation of Jehovah's witnesses. Even one of the Watch Tower Society's traveling representatives in Guatemala is one of these humble Maya-Quiché people.

Fusion Religion in the Highlands

We were under the impression that what we had seen in Mexico of Indian religious practices had prepared us for anything to come. How wrong we were! What we came upon in Chichicastenango, another town of the Quiché territory, brought home to us how deep-rooted paganism is among the Catholic Indians of this whole region.

After a tortuous drive over dirt mountain roads we were happy to park our little automobile where traffic came to a standstill in the town. But why were the streets so crowded

on this Sunday afternoon? Like carefree tourists we strolled down the crowded thoroughfare, quite unprepared for the shock that awaited us just around the corner. Before we realized it we were in the midst of a religious procession temporarily stalled as a large bus was forced to back down out of the way. Then the music started. In front of us rose the slow, booming tones of Indian drums. From behind came the shrill,



Visitor fascinated by scene at village well in Guatemala



Parading the image of Santo Tomás through the streets of Chichicastenango

erie sound of fifelike *chirimia* (pipes). Solemn Indians in bright handmade garb, bearing incense holders and portable shrines, slowly shuffled down the street. Meantime we were cautiously backing out of the milling crowd and heading toward the Guatemalan Witness who accompanied us. Perhaps he could explain.

It seems that Chichicastenango is a focal point for worship by thousands of Indians in the adjacent mountains. They still maintain the pagan rituals inherited from their ancestors. Down at Santo Tomás Church we watched in amazement as they first approached a large burning brazier on the lower steps and burned copal so that the smoke might guide their prayers to the gods, just as their ancestors had done long before the Spaniards arrived. They crawl on their knees up into the church to light candles on the floor. Each candle supposedly represents the spirit of an ancestor, who serves as an intermediary in gaining them favor with the gods. Flower petals are placed around the candles to represent favors owed, and liquor is sprinkled on the petals. Food offerings are even made. And all of this paganism is conducted down the center aisle from the front door to the altar of the Catholic church, year in and year out.

Reference to the liquor used in these ceremonies reminds us of something we were told: Many Indians believe that when drunk they are much closer to the immortal spirits of their dead. As if these pagan practices on the steps of and inside the Catholic church were not enough, many of these Indians go to the mountaintops to bring their grievances before ancient stone idols, feeling that these know more about righting wrongs than does the god worshiped in the Catholic shrine.

Concerning this fusion of pagan and Catholic ritual the Guatemala Tourist Bureau offers this observation: "The religious rites solemn-

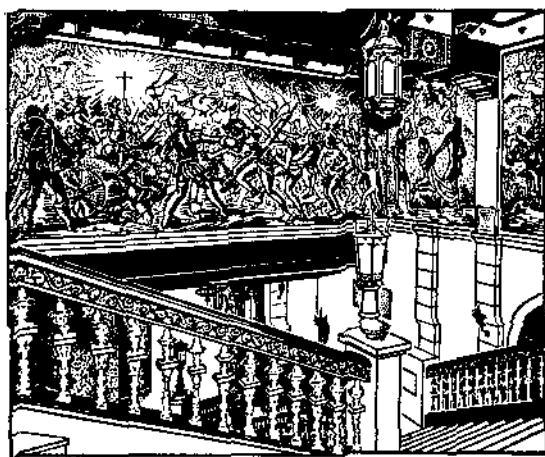
nized in the smoke of the incense and of the thousands of candles and punctuated by the murmur of prayers in a language of strange origin, are an interesting mixture of paganism and catholicism."

All too soon we had to turn our backs on Chichicastenango and head toward Lake Atitlán, which we hoped to see before sunset. On the way we passed an Indian staggering down the middle of the dusty road, swinging his machete in long arches. According to the Indian idea, he must have been very close to the spirits of his ancestors. How long we will remember the sights and sounds of colorful and startling Chichicastenango!

Other Facets of Guatemalan Life

The Spanish influence, as distinct from the Indian, is most noticeable at Antigua, the ancient capital, some twenty-five miles from Guatemala City. Back in 1773 severe earthquakes reduced much of this place to ruins. However, we could still see the typically Castilian homes surrounded by high walls and guarded by heavy wood doors, ornamented with brass grills and knockers, and often surmounted by a coat of arms. Churches and chapels, colleges and hospitals, though now mere shells, testify to the solid masonry employed in their construction. Once a bastion of Babylonish religion, Antigua now has a congregation of thirty-two of Jehovah's witnesses in addition to two full-time Watch Tower missionaries.

In its central plaza one could easily imagine himself to be in old Spain. The fountain still operates, and around the square are fine old buildings, some of them with arched balconies of the Spanish Renaissance era. In the heat



Cross-bearing priest blesses slaughter of native Indians by the Spanish, as depicted in mural in National Palace, Guatemala City



A cemetery where the dead are put in wall tombs—but only for as long as payments continue

of the afternoon people sit in the shade of the plaza's trees and enjoy a siesta. Always there is a great number of vendors who suddenly come to life on the approach of anyone who looks like a tourist.

In Guatemala City itself we went around to see some of the unusual places and activities. For example, we visited a handweaving establishment where colorful designs are woven from memory by expert craftsmen. Then there is that unusual cemetery where, in great thick walls that rise some fifteen or twenty feet high, the remains of the dead are filed away in what look like the openings intended for drawers in a filing cabinet. We were interested in knowing why some were empty. It seems that the first payment for care of the remains covers a period of five years. Then, if additional payments are not forthcoming, the cemetery authority removes the remains to a field. This opens the vault for another paying customer. Elsewhere in the same cemetery are the palatial chapels for housing the dead of the wealthier classes. On the religious "All Souls' Day" Guatemalan Witnesses come here to offer comfort to mourning ones of all classes with the Bible's message of resurrection and life in God's new order.

Monuments of the Past

Guatemala abounds with archaeological sites where remains of a long-gone civiliza-



At Tikal this Mayan ruin, the Temple of the Giant Jaguar, towers 155 feet out of the Petén jungle in northern Guatemala

tion have come to light. One group of twenty-eight visiting Witnesses tell of their thrilling plane trip over mountains and tropical jungle to the Tikal ruins in the northern province of Petén. Imagine walking as they did around the huge pyramidal structures. Some of these structures are as high as a twenty-story building. From atop the highest the scene is one of jungle greenery stretching away as far as eye can see, broken here and there by the plastered tops of other Mayan edifices. Immediately below and all around, the ground is screened by tree branches festooned with vines.

The visitor cannot help meditating on what must have been here at one time—exactly when we do not know. Tens of thousands of laborers must have felled the trees, fashioned the heavy beams, dragged the heavy stones, mixed water and lime, hoisted materials higher and yet higher until the finishing touches were made. Then hundreds of artists were needed to paint beautiful designs on the inner walls of temples. Expert craftsmen were needed to execute the sculptures appearing on altars and monuments. What a teeming population there must have been! But now all is desolate and silent, and the few inhabitants today are made up of some *chicleros*, who collect the sap of the *sapote* tree for the chewing gum industry, and those who are in demand as laborers at the archaeological diggings.

The skill that produced those mighty monuments, as well as the pottery and the tiny carved objects of jade, wood and obsidian, is all of a high order. There must have been efficient organization. Great crops must have been grown to support a vast population. Yet no one today knows what became of the population, why they forsook their great ceremonial cities, or where their burial places are. Indeed, in this entire Tikal complex only a comparatively few skeletal remains have turned up. It may well be that these mysteries will not be cleared up until resurrected Mayans tell their own story.

Good News for Guatemalans

Guatemala thus has its mysteries. And it has its problems too—illiteracy, poverty and



Guatemalan Witnesses received the new Spanish-language book "Life Everlasting—In Freedom of the Sons of God"

banditry. During the present uneasy situation, with Communist guerrillas active in a number of regions, those driving through the country are halted frequently at checkpoints along the routes. Describing the experience, one of our delegates said: "I saw the large ALTO (Stop) sign and two officers with rifles waving me to a halt. One got on each side of the car. The one on my side asked to see my personal papers and the documents authorizing me to have the car in the country. While he was reading them I glanced over at the other soldier, who looked rather nervous with his rifle in full view and his finger on the trigger. And if he was nervous, I can assure you, so was I! The papers in order, they made me open the trunk and glove compartment. Of course, there were no guns or grenades. When satisfied we were not guerrillas, they smiled and signaled me to proceed. I did, with pleasure and relief. But it would take a long time to get used to this kind of thing."

Yet, even with such difficulties in the land the growth of the Kingdom work in Guatemala is impressive. Since President N. H. Knorr of the Watch Tower Society first visited a few publishers here in 1944 there have been gratifying results from the labors of zealous missionaries and local Guatemalans. Indeed, during the past eight years the number of Witnesses in the country has doubled.

At this assembly the evidences of continuing increase were to be noted. After the speech on the subject "Responsibilities of a Baptized Witness," Friday, December 9, 102 Guatemalans signified their dedication to Jehovah God by submitting to immersion in water. In doing so they were, in effect,

saying to all observers, "We are determined to serve as faithful witnesses of Jehovah and his Kingdom as long as we have breath."

Sunday morning at ten o'clock the main public discourse of the assembly was presented by President Knorr. The audience of 2,475 (which exceeded by a thousand the number of Witnesses in Guatemala) gave rapt attention as the speech "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom" was interpreted to them. Prolonged applause indicated the appreciation of these eager listeners for the recital of thrilling prospects in store for lovers of God and righteousness in a New Order now near.

As we parted from our Guatemalan brothers and sisters, they assured us of the great encouragement and pleasure they had derived from the presence of so many visiting Witnesses in their midst, and we felt truly appreciative for the comparatively peaceful and easy conditions under which we can serve Jehovah in our respective home countries. Many of us had accompanied the Guatemalan Witnesses in the field ministry, preaching from house to house, and had observed the willingness of the people to listen to the Bible's message. But we had also observed the lack of education and the other problems that many of these humble people face. How easily now we shall be able to visualize the faithful work of our spiritual brothers in Guatemala as they patiently continue to search for sheeplike persons and "deliver them out of all the places to which they have been scattered"—Ezek. 34:12.



Heavily loaded Indian woman receives assembly invitation from a Guatemalan Witness

El Salvador

A Gem of the Tropics

A GAIN it was time to mount our great mechanical bird and take off into the clear blue skies of Middle America, winging our way over lofty mountains and deep valleys, on our way to San Salvador. Actual flight time from Guatemala City is only about thirty-five minutes, but minutes that are filled with awe and delight at the breathtaking grandeur of the changing scene far below.

When we touched down at the bright little airport on Sunday, December 11, the assembly of Jehovah's witnesses was already under way, having commenced the previous afternoon. The smiling faces and warm handshakes of Watch Tower missionaries and Salvadoran Witnesses welcomed us and we were swiftly transported to a modern hotel perched high on a hill overlooking the city. From the hotel entrance rose the majestic mass of a volcanic peak. It was extinct, we were assured, but well worth seeing, so we made mental note to arrange our affairs so as to examine it at much closer range.

First we were eager to get to the National Gymnasium where our spiritual brothers would be assembled. As we drove through the clean streets, passing gracious homes and gardens filled with tropical plants and multicolored flowers, we were surely impressed by the up-to-date look of the city. The Gymnasium, a large round concrete structure shaped like a covered bowl, was already humming with convention activity. Salvadoran Witnesses were anxious to greet us even though they knew no English and we little or no Spanish.

Between sessions it was a delight to chat with missionaries, be introduced to many with whom they are conducting Bible studies, and, with a straw, sip the refreshing milk of the coconut through a small hole punched in its tough exterior.

Gems of Scenic Pleasure

El Salvador has been called "Gem of the Tropics," and provision had been made for us to view some of its scenic spots. One tour took us to

the tropical park called "Los Chorrros," featuring a deep glen carved by waterfalls through the surrounding rock formation. On huge stepping-stones that seem to be precariously floating in the stream we made our way upstream to a cavernous bowl into which water gushed from above in numerous streams.

Chartered buses took us through rich farmlands where coffee and sugarcane dominated the scene—our destination, the beautiful Lake Coatepeque, the steep volcanic shoreline of which we had noted from the air. Were it not for the form of the shoreline it was difficult to believe that this peaceful, azure lake had at one time been the scene of a belching, steaming volcano. Along this lake's edge the Salvadoran Government maintains a beautiful park with furnished cabins that may be used without charge for several days after obtaining the appropriate permit. From this point our party boarded buses again and traveled upward through the green countryside to a point where we could get a rewarding view of the volcano Izalco in action. True, on this occasion the peak was releasing only lazy clouds of steam, but it was interesting to get so close to a live volcano.

Now we must go and see Boquerón. Yes, that is the volcanic peak that seems to rise practically from the vicinity of our hotel. It seems so near, yet a considerable time is required to negotiate the steep gravel road that approaches the summit by many twists and turns. The last few hundred yards must be made on foot up the rough trail, but what a view! Looking back we had a panoramic view of San Salvador with its gleaming houses and its backdrop of verdant mountains. But wait till we reach the rim of Boquerón. What a strange sight meets our eager gaze! Here is a huge inverted cone, hollow, approximately a mile across at the rim and dipping steeply down to a depth of some 1,500 meters. And, strange to say, the sloping sides are clothed with lush undergrowth and trees, the color of which takes on a deeper shade where the sun's



Izalco, volcano in El Salvador

direct rays cannot reach.

Gradually, as the eye becomes adjusted to the scene, the visitor can detect first one little house, then another, then others. Yes, away down those steep interior sides of this volcano people are living and raising crops on the rich volcanic soil. But how do they get down there and how do they bring out their crops to market? Ah, there are narrow paths that wind downward into the crater, in places rendered safer by means of cable stretched across the steeper and more dangerous spots. Do you wonder how it feels to be living in the crater of a volcano? These folks just conclude that, since nothing has happened in the last fifty years, why should anything happen in the next fifty years? Meantime they surely live a secluded life.

Then there was the "Museo Arqueológico," a small museum, but well laid out, and containing a number of intriguing pieces that have been dug up in El Salvador. One that catches the eye is a pottery bowl, probably once used for copal or incense. Strange shapes and figures have been sculptured around its exterior, one of them a cross. When we asked the curator the approximate date for the bowl, he told us it was probably 500 B.C.E. And other specimens are said to date back as far as 2000 B.C.E. So, even if this latter date is off a few hundred years, here we have the cross emblem in use some 3,000 years before the Spanish conquerors introduced their religious imagery to Middle America!

Religious Confusion

In El Salvador we encountered considerable evidence of the confusion of mind among the people with respect to religious worship. After four hundred and fifty years of effort at conversion of the people to Roman Catholicism, the majority know little or nothing about the Bible and God's purposes. Instead of making a clean break and a clear distinction between paganism and Christianity, Catholic policy was to throw down pagan temples and build their own on sites considered holy by the natives. Specially con-



Stone relics said to date back to 2000 B.C.E. bearing cross symbols. Dug up in El Salvador

trived religious festivals were substituted for pagan festivals, frequently using the same rituals. Thus even today Salvadoreans will practice the forms and ritual of their Indian forefathers in combination with those of the Roman Catholic Church. As one historian describes the religious situation in Middle America: "Especially in Indian towns the ceremonies of the Church appeared inseparable from the old pagan forms of idol worship. It may be safely said that in many com-

munities in the [Spanish] colonies, the Roman Catholic religion had broken down and had become devoid of much of its European significance by grafting upon it many non-Christian practices."—*Outline History of Latin America*, Wilgus and d'Eca, published by Barnes and Noble Inc., New York, page 94.

Historian Santiago Barbarena, in his *Historia Antigua de la Conquista de El Salvador* (*Ancient History of the Conquest of El Salvador*), declares that the Indians already had a high priest or pope called Papahuaquín when the Spaniards arrived in America. The conquistadores found it difficult to account for this and many other similarities to their own religion. Later chroniclers purposely avoided use of this term in order not to confuse the Indian pope with the Roman pontiff.

Lack of accurate knowledge of Bible principles is reflected in many ways in the family and public life of the country. Trusted servants are difficult to find. Men worry about the safety



The market comes to one's doorstep in San Salvador

of their wives and daughters if they go on errands or to school unaccompanied. The 1964 edition of *Anuario Estadístico (Yearbook of Statistics)* reports that more than 50 percent of all births in El Salvador are illegitimate. The religious confusion affords no restraint upon such a situation.

Real Gems in El Salvador

Bible knowledge, however, is reaching many people in this beautiful land. They are learning that opportunity for life in God's new order is open only to those who now conform their lives to the righteous standard of Jehovah God. They are happy to make the changes and associate with a clean organization in which people can trust one another and find honorable, peaceful fellowship in the service and worship of the true God, Jehovah. The depth of their appreciation is shown by the obstacles they will overcome in order to attend Bible-study meetings and further the interests of Kingdom preaching. One family, for example, has to cross three miles of lake in a dugout canoe to get to meetings. When the lake is low they wade through three miles of swamp instead, and this three times each week.

Getting to the assembly and enjoying all its sessions was no easy matter for some. One Salvadoran father of four children was determined to be there with his family even if he had to sacrifice his secular job. His employer, not normally lenient about such mat-

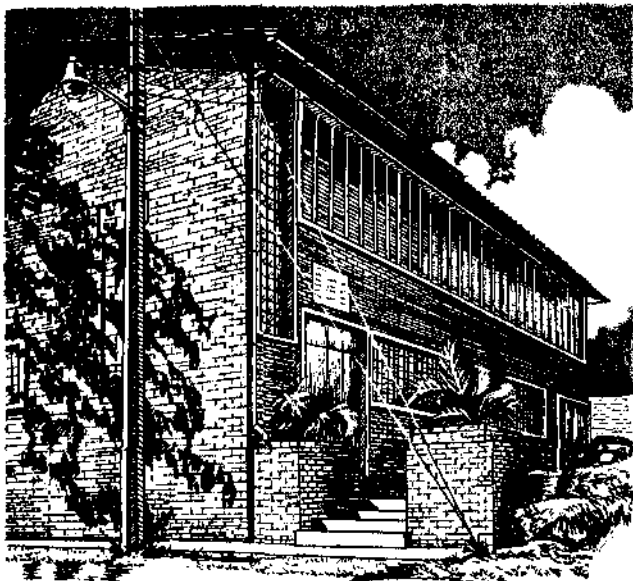
ters, gave his permission and then later tried to retract it. The Witness told him that in that case he would have to find another employee. The matter was reconsidered and the permission granted. Another Witness with a similar problem was advised by an acquaintance to lie about the purpose of her request for leave of absence. She refused to do this and was frank with her employer. He said: "That is why you are different from the others. You can have the five days off."

But, now, back to the Gymnasium and just in time for a meal in the assembly cafeteria. As we passed along the serving line, how interesting to observe the various items served: rice, then shrimp with ginger sauce, fresh watercress, fried bananas with sour cream, mashed beans fried crisp, tropical fruits, and finally *tortillas* or hot corn cakes!

After the fine meal some more happy fellowship with our spiritual brothers and sisters and then another session of the assembly program. This is the public lecture "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom," to be delivered in Spanish by the vice-president of the Watch Tower Society, F. W. Franz. There was an atmosphere of expectancy as the crowds came in and filled up row upon row of the concrete seating around the bowl. The total of 4,780 in attendance gave rapt attention and loudly applauded at the close of the session.

On Monday morning a goodly number turned out to hear the discussion on "Responsibilities of a Baptized Witness." One hundred and five persons rose to signify that they had dedicated their lives to the service of Jehovah God and were ready to submit to water immersion as public testimony of their decision. This is but another evidence of the rapid growth in the number of Jehovah's witnesses in this land. In the past ten years the number has more than doubled, and the attendance at this assembly's public discourse was four times the total number of Witnesses in all of El Salvador.

El Salvador truly has many honest-hearted persons who long for the righteousness of God's kingdom. It is with satisfaction that we reflected upon the fact that there are many capable missionaries and ministers of Jehovah's witnesses who are willing to lend them a hand to get on the road to life. Even some of the visitors from abroad to this assembly are wondering if they cannot somehow arrange their affairs to move to this land and join in bringing the message of the Kingdom to people who thirst and hunger for Bible truth.



Branch Office of Watch Tower Society in San Salvador. Auditorium serves as a Kingdom Hall for local Witnesses

HONDURAS

Emerging from Darkness to Light

AS WE were about to leave San Salvador's very modern airport, it was learned our plane was headed for San Pedro Sula in Honduras, where we would have to change to a smaller plane for the trip to Tegucigalpa, the capital of the country. This, then, was the start of our trip into this land that stretches from the Caribbean Sea on the north down to the Pacific Ocean on the south.

We were content, however, with this side trip to San Pedro Sula, even though it meant traveling more than three times the distance and took us four times as long, for it afforded a chance to see the northern part and coastal area of the country. As we descended to this low coastal plain we found ourselves flying over flat tropical land that is cut up by many rivers and streams. Much of this land has been cleared of tropical jungle and turned into banana plantations. The houses we saw from the air were all built on stilts because of the dangers from flooding. When our plane landed, the heat and humidity hit us especially hard because of our coming down from the cooler elevation of San Salvador. After a brief stop to change planes and to go through Immigration and Customs, we welcomed the invitation to board the plane and head for Tegucigalpa and its higher altitude.

The coastal plain of Honduras extends east of San Pedro Sula for many miles into the Mosquito territory, so named after the Indian tribe of that area. In this jungle country they build houses out of mahogany because it is cheaper than pine-wood. And it was along this coast of Honduras where Columbus touched land on his fourth voyage, in 1502.

A former president of Honduras described this land as "the country of the four 70s." (*Time*, May 19, 1961) He said this because of

"70 percent avoidable deaths," 70 percent of the people live in the primitive conditions of the rurals, 70 percent of the population are illiterate and 70 percent of the children are illegitimate.

It is the same story as told in many countries. Where Roman Catholicism has ruled with a high hand the people have suffered and in darkness have been held back from making progress. In the early sixteenth century, after securing their hold on Mexico, the Spanish successfully pressed their campaign of conquest into Honduras, bringing her people also under the heel of Rome. The countries that first rebelled against such clerical oppression were the first to begin making progress toward the light; countries less fortunate were slower in making the change.

Obviously, one of Honduras' greatest problems is the economic plight of her people. A poor people cannot be heavily taxed, and lack of tax money hinders a government from building schools and hospitals, paving roads and improving the living conditions of the people. For such reasons, it is argued by some, the national lottery is the best form of taxation. But, in reality, this is one of the curses of the country, for those that can least afford to gamble are the greatest victims.

What, then, is the solution to the problem of raising the living standard of the people of Honduras? Those who have little or no education, who live a very primitive life, who have only the minimum amount of food, will, in turn, work for little or nothing more than their daily ration of food. It is such people who provide the manpower for the cultivation of the vast plantations of coffee, bananas, pineapples and cotton for which these Latin countries are famous. To change drastically the cost of labor in any one coun-

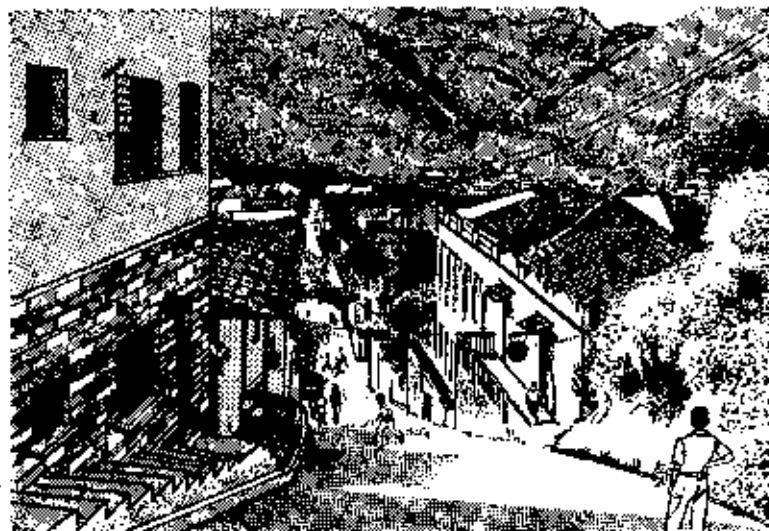


Photo by the author, taken in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

try would immediately price that country's produce out of the world market.

For example, if Honduras were suddenly to start paying the common laborer a minimum wage of \$1.50 per hour, instead of perhaps \$1 per day, the people would, in turn, have more than ten times as much money to spend. They could live in nice homes and enjoy the finer things that a higher living standard affords, and at the same time be in a position to pay much higher taxes so that more schools and hospitals could be built. But just as suddenly as this was done the price of coffee, bananas, and so forth, would be raised to ten times their current prices in the American grocery store, and either the housewife there would buy one-tenth as much or would find a substitute altogether for the product. So just as suddenly as the Honduran coffee picker got a raise to ten times what he was earning, just that suddenly he would work only one-tenth as long, if indeed he had a job at all.

So it seems to be a vicious circle, this economic one, and one that is most difficult to break. The problem of raising the standard of living of these people as a whole is far more than that of one or two countries here in Middle America. It becomes a world problem.

It is for these reasons that many men in authority are content with the status quo. If the native is given little education, not encouraged to raise his standard of living, he remains hopeless of having any more than his meager existence, does not quit his job to seek other employment, and the price of coffee and bananas on the lower east-side of London or New York remains about the same.



55,000 acres are devoted to bananas, Honduras' most important crop

But changes for the better have been made in Honduras. It was a little slower in coming because it took longer for the country to free itself from the shackles of Church-State rule, and because of the frequent turmoil and insecurity caused by successive revolutions. Twenty years ago there were few paved roads in the capital, only one hotel and no high buildings.

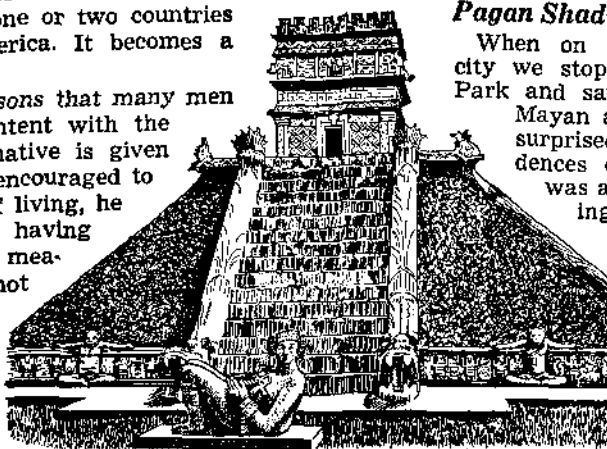
Today the large towns here are like islands of prosperity in the midst of the land. International business inter-

ests and the constant flow of visiting tourists into the capital give Tegucigalpa a glitter of good times not seen in the country as a whole. Here are all the latest inventions of the twentieth century for sale—transistor radios, stereos, electric appliances of all kinds, some of the world's finest watches, imports from Europe, America and Japan—and at a price 50 to 100 percent more than their regular value. In this way the government seeks to protect the local currency and stop the flow of money out of the country. But this, in turn, tends to create a two-class society, the very rich and the very poor, those who can and those who cannot afford these finer things of life.

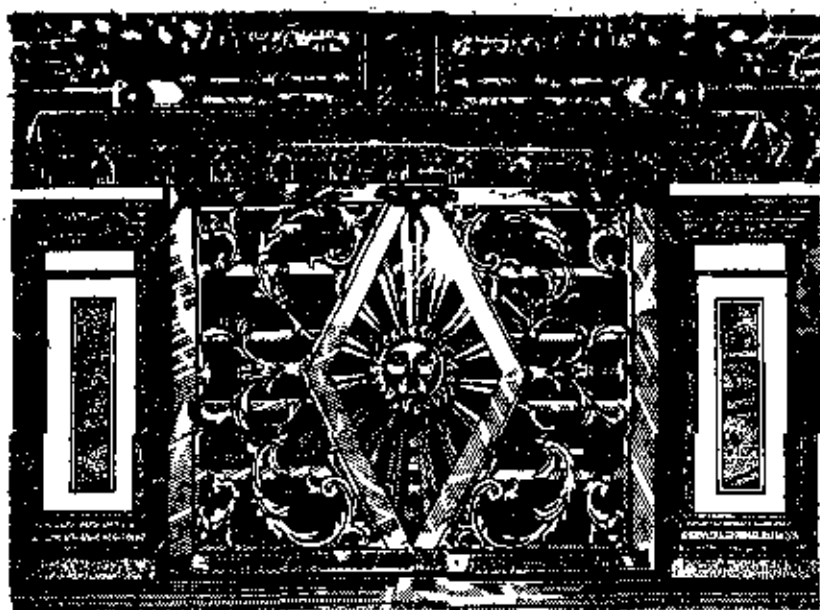
Pagan Shadows Still Linger

When on our tour around the city we stopped at La Concordia Park and saw replicas of ancient Mayan artifacts, we were not surprised to find many evidences of pagan religion. It was amazing, though, in going from this park to the

Dolores Roman Catholic Church to find there numerous similarities. The cross, of course, was prominently displayed, just as we had seen it as part of Mayan symbolism. We observed the blazing sun on the



Replica of Mayan temple unearthed in Honduras. Seen in La Concordia Park, Tegucigalpa



Sun symbol at entrance to altar in the Dolores Church in Tegucigalpa

main altar and, above that, the sun with a face, a symbol of sun worship.

We learned of other evidences of ancient sun worship being absorbed into the religious life of Catholics. It seems that most churches in Honduras are built facing from east to west, even when this puts them out of line with the street. The altar is toward the east, consequently, when the priest is saying the mass about 6 a.m., he is facing the rising sun. Those who drove through Honduras realized that even at death the people do not escape this devotion to the sun. Along the road one can see crosses to mark where traffic deaths have occurred. But no matter how odd it looked, the crosses always faced the rising sun. The same was true in the cemeteries. Probably most of the people never stop to inquire why such traditions are followed, but for us it proved interesting and revealing.

Even though the people in general are burdened with such pagan traditions, their friendliness is helping many to come out of darkness into the light of Bible truth leading to life eternal. Missionaries report that, when standing at doorways talking to people, friendly strangers often walk over and quietly listen to the good news from the Bible.

People Who Have Seen Light

Impressive as some of the urban changes appear to the casual tourist, we who were on this special tour saw that greater progress in a spiritual and moral way has been made by Hondurans. For example, when we attended the assembly of Jehovah's witnesses, here in Tegucigalpa, December 14-18, we met hundreds of persons who had been set free from the dark bondage of pagan worship, which was often associated with immorality, and were basking in light of truth beaming forth from the Bible.

Of course, we were not the only ones who had to travel a long distance in order to attend the convention. In fact, many of our spiritual brothers in Honduras endured a much more rigorous trip than we. Tegucigalpa is not connected to the northern coast by railroad. Since that section is where 70 percent of the congregations are located, it was necessary for 450 of the brothers to come from the coast in a caravan of eleven buses. It is a trip of only 180 miles, but with the ups and downs, and curves over rough roads, the journey took ten to twelve hours. The newspapers on both the north and south coasts took note of this accomplishment. There was another group of forty that came all the way from the Caribbean port of La Ceiba, and that despite the fact that there are only thirty-five of Jehovah's witnesses in the congregation there!

These brothers were all richly rewarded for their strenuous efforts to attend. They expressed the thought that the assembly program, especially the Bible dramas, seemed especially designed for the circumstances in Honduras. There, as in other lands, nationalism is on the increase. Some government officials, with the public agreement of Mormons, evangelists and others, have been trying to force all schoolchildren to participate in nationalistic rites. Hence the brothers listened attentively to the discourse on the importance of Daniel's words for our day.

With immorality so common among the people and so many young people being influenced by sensual dances and styles of dress, the younger delegates especially appreciated the superb drama, "Look to the Bible as Our Guide in Life." Even though in Honduras many look at one who does not engage in immorality as being a "misfit," the brothers saw and felt the Bible's forceful counsel on such matters. And how fitting that this demonstration was put on before a huge mural mounted as a



Kingdom Hall, on ground floor of the Branch Office of the Watch Tower Society, Tegucigalpa

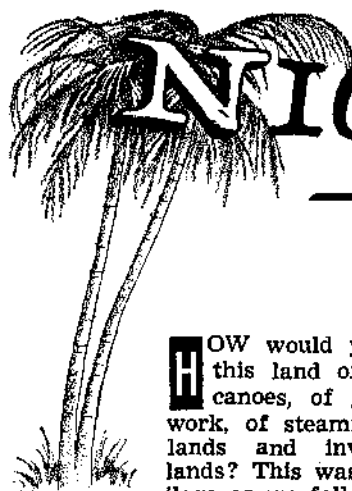
backdrop to the assembly platform, depicting the paradise to be enjoyed by all who resist temptation and do live in accord with God's Word!

Such application of Bible principles has already made the Witnesses in Honduras a distinct people. We learned that along the northern coast, where bananas are the big crop, companies often prefer to hire Jehovah's witnesses because of their honesty and faithfulness. In 1954 when there was a great cutback in workers, thousands losing their jobs, not one of the Witnesses was affected.

On Sunday, December 18, the public discourse of the assembly was scheduled to be delivered in Spanish at three o'clock by F. W. Franz, vice-president of the Watch Tower So-

ciet. In this country where there are some 900 Witnesses, what would be the response to the great amount of advertising of the subject "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom"? We soon got the answer when 1,422 in attendance expressed their enthusiastic reception of the vital message from the Bible. Many more heard the public talk over the radio, a hookup of eight of the country's radio stations broadcasting the talk in its entirety. Two days before the public talk sixty Hondurans were baptized in token of their dedication to Jehovah God.

All too soon the assembly here in this land that is fast emerging from darkness into light was over and it was time for us to head for Nicaragua.



NICARAGUA

*—Home of a Gay
But Hard-working People*

HOW would you like to visit this land of lakes and volcanoes, of gaiety and hard work, of steaming tropical lowlands and invigorating highlands? This was to be our privilege as we followed the tour of Middle America's series of "God's Sons of Liberty" International Assemblies. Doing some advance research, we learned that Nicaragua is actually divided roughly into three zones: the highland area that takes in the extension of the Rockies from the north, the Caribbean coastline known as the Mosquito Coast, so called after the Indians of that name, and the heavily populated, fertile area that lies along the Pacific coast.

Our big plane braked to a stop at the Las Mercedes Airport near the capital of Managua, where we received enthusiastic greetings from a great crowd of Nicaraguan Witnesses as well as some of the Watch Tower Society's missionaries. Hearty embraces were the order of the day. Customs officials consented to dispense with a thorough checking of the baggage, and so soon we were aboard special

buses and en route to our hotels. Ours was but the first of six planeloads that brought 320 delegates to the Managua assembly scheduled for December 17-21, 1966.

The Parque de Exposiciones y Ferias in suburban Colonia Centroamerica was the site of the assembly, an open-air location with covered stands face to face and ample space between for a unique platform arrangement. In front of the platform and reaching forward about fifty feet there was a typical tropical garden with real pineapple plants at one end, large-leaved yucca plants, many varieties of tropical flowers, a miniature lake, and two paths leading to the stage. Forming the back of the platform there was a huge relief map of Nicaragua vividly marking its mountains, lakes and volcanoes. On either side there were three real banana palms, transplanted and seen in their natural growing state. From our seats we could see Lake Managua stretched out in one direction and the green hills and mountains in other directions.

Here, perhaps more than at any other of our assemblies so far, the foreign visitors were approached and greeted by young and old. The handshake and a big grin often had

to substitute for conversation, but there could be no mistaking the spirit of warmth and friendship they represented. That Nicaraguans are a happy people quickly becomes evident. How relaxing it was to sit among them and enjoy the assembly program, while frequently resting our eyes on the surrounding green of the hills!

Some of Nicaragua's Past

It is amazing how the good humor of this people has survived the sorrows and oppressions they have experienced, first under rule of pagan priesthods, next under Spanish Church-State rule, and then under political opportunists and foreign interferers. The country gets its name from "Nicarao," an Indian chief of the time of the Spanish conquest. The mass of the people were like beasts of burden under the rule of pagan theocracy. But did they fare any better under the all-pervading influence of the Roman Catholic Church? The situation today answers that question. Fifty percent of the population is still illiterate, though many long to learn how to read and write.

Back in pagan times the trinity idea was prevalent, for the Indians believed that their supreme god had three different manifestations: Lightning, Thunder and the Thunderbolt. They believed in a soul as distinct from the body and in the reincarnation of creatures; the good being reincarnated as birds and the bad as serpents. According to a modern historian: "Chief Nicaragua and other vassals gladly accepted the Catholic religion, being baptized by thousands. Without any doubt whatever, the new Christian [?] teachings should have been very easily comprehended by the Nicaraguan worshipers as they then had the belief of a spirit which animates the body, which they called 'yulio,' as well as places of reward and punishment for the good and for the bad." —*Geografia y Historia de Nicaragua* (Geography and History of Nicaragua), Julian N. Guerrero C.

Today in Catholic Nicaragua the people celebrate many festivals that have come down from ancient times and that have been given Catholic titles. But the rituals and the dances are still the same as in their pagan days. Masks, skins, beads and incense are still the elements of their festivals, regardless of the saint or virgin that is supposedly honored.

It is claimed that Catholic priests of the past have tried to prevent these religious dances, the majority of which are of superstitious and idolatrous origin. Nonetheless, today they are an integral part of Catholic religious festivals. Historian Torquemada (not the infamous Inquisitor of Spain) had this to say on the subject: "In these festivals of these people which



Quiet beach with background of hills as viewed from the port of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua

are [in fact] prayer, they dance dressed in rich styles with precious feathers on them, decorated also with a variety of coins among trinkets and mirrors, carrying upon themselves a considerable weight of these adornments. They dance singing praises to the Saint which they are [supposed to be] honoring but in the dance they sing the history and the deeds of their ancestors and those of their false gods."—*Nicaragua, Land of Marvels*, Paco Gallegos, Managua, September 1964.

Nicaraguans Are Hard Workers

Besides the gay side of their character, which finds expression in their numerous festivals, even though they are mixed up with false religious ideas, there is the other side also. They live in a country that is rich in resources yet not really economically rich. So they have to work hard for their *cordoba* (one-seventh of the U.S. dollar). Cotton, corn, coffee and sugar have to be harvested, most often the laborious way. Gold and silver have to be dug from their mountains. Cattle and dairy farms have to be manned, and cedar, pine and mahogany logs have to be hewn from the forests that cover four-fifths of the country.

As we observed our Christian brothers and sisters from all sections of Nicaragua at the assembly site we could see that they truly represented a cross-section of the population, most of them unable to indulge in luxuries. Nevertheless, they were cheerful, communicative, eager to learn and happy to have the opportunity to come from their far-separated homes to this spiritual feast of good things.

They had worked hard to make the assembly a success. At an outdoor site such as this some provision had to be made for the housing of the various departments of the assembly organization. Undaunted, they set to work and constructed opposite the platform a long, low, native-style hut with cane walls and thatched roof. This was divided into small compartments that were utilized for administration, in-

formation, literature, travel and other departments. Here, too, was located the refreshment stand.

The Nicaraguan Witnesses were surely energetic in their campaign of advertising the principal discourse of the assembly, which was delivered Sunday afternoon, December 18, by the Watch Tower Society's president N. H. Knorr. In a country where the peak number of Witnesses last year was 822, it was most gratifying to see a crowd of 1,654 giving close attention to the lecture "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom," and loudly applauding the release of the new book in Spanish, *Life Everlasting—in Freedom of the Sons of God*. Just as President Knorr held the book high, a huge replica was raised above the platform to the surprise and delight of the audience.

On Tuesday morning one of the speakers presented some sobering thoughts on "Responsibilities of a Baptized Witness." At the close of his discourse seventy-one Nicaraguans rose to be questioned as to their dedication of their lives to God and were then baptized.

The assembly was most successful. Due to its international flavor it received much favorable radio and newspaper comment. One company donated all the coffee needed for the assembly. A beverage company provided ample equipment such as freezers, paper cups and napkins and even loaned loudspeakers to strengthen the sound arrangements. This same firm also provided all the purified, bottled water that would be needed so that the native *frescos* (cold drinks) could be enjoyed by the delegates.

Seeing the Sights

We travelers from abroad were very pleased that arrangements had been made for us to see something of the beauty and the scenery of Nicaragua. For example, one four-hour tour took us south of Managua past a crater lake and a lava bed remaining from the eruption of the Volcano Masaya in 1775. In ancient times, we were told, the aborigines hurled virgin girls into the crater as offerings to appease the gods.

Politically there has been unrest in Nicaragua. Throughout Managua we saw political posters and crayoned slogans on

walls and buildings, many of them giving evidence of tension and bitter hostility. Indeed, we got the impression that Nicaraguans were approaching their scheduled election in an atmosphere reminding one of a volcano ready to blow off. Events subsequent to our tour justify the feelings we had, for newspapers told of bloody rioting and demonstrations that have brought sudden death to men, women and children.

We found the city of Granada, founded in the sixteenth century, to be a quaint place filled with reminders of the Spanish rule and customs. From this lakeside city we sailed in motor launches, among the more than 300 islets at the western edge of Lake Nicaragua. On some of them we saw beautiful modern summer lodges and on others interesting native huts. This portion of the lake is appropriately called "the Venice of the Tropics." Lake Nicaragua is a veritable freshwater sea, for it reaches a length of some 100 miles and at its widest some 40 miles. Its waters contain swordfish, sharks, tarpon, alligators and a number of other deepwater fish. Interestingly, its sharks are akin to those of the Pacific Ocean, though the lake's connection is with the Atlantic Ocean.

It was certainly a peaceful interlude to be able to cruise along among the islands, feasting our eyes upon the jungle growth, the tropical fruit trees including the huge mangoes, and the gently waving coconut palms. The local people fish from primitive canoes in these waters in order to add flesh to their diet of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The next part of our tour was by bus. We climbed the winding road into the highlands, while crest after crest of the road brought us delightful scenes of a green and smiling countryside. In places the air was filled with the sweet scent of flowering trees and shrubs. Then, in the cooler air of the higher altitude, we came to the coffee country. A stop was made at one plantation at 3,000 feet, where we enjoyed a panoramic view of Managua, Lake Managua and beyond to the rolling mountains with their volcanic peaks. The owner of the plantation had a Spanish type of home, with its central patio and a surrounding garden in which colorful birds flitted among a wonderful variety of trees and shrubs.

Many of us travelers had had the opportunity to go with native Nicaraguans as they preached



Watchtower Society director L. K. Greenlees addresses conventioners at the Fairgrounds, Managua, Nicaragua

the Kingdom message from house to house, and so we had firsthand observation of the innate kindness and hospitality of the people. Indeed, some were even encouraged to think seriously about moving to this country to help with the preaching work, seeing that there is at present but one Witness to some 2,100 of population. The sentiments of all of us may well have been expressed by one international traveler, who remarked: "I looked forward to

coming down here to help the Nicaraguan brothers to appreciate the unity and love of the international congregation of Jehovah's people. I now find that the encouragement is mutual; they have been most encouraging and inspiring to me."

Time now demanded that we get back to Managua, say good-bye to our Nicaraguan friends, and finalize our arrangements to leave for the next country on our itinerary.

BRITISH HONDURAS

—A Land Often Overlooked

LOCATED on the east coast of Central America, between Guatemala and the Caribbean Sea, this little country is often overlooked by travelers. But it was not overlooked in the plans for the series of "God's Sons of Liberty" Assemblies that we were attending. Though many of the international travelers were disappointed that they did not get to British Honduras, due to failure of the airlines to fulfill their promises, those of us who did reach Belize enjoyed our visit.

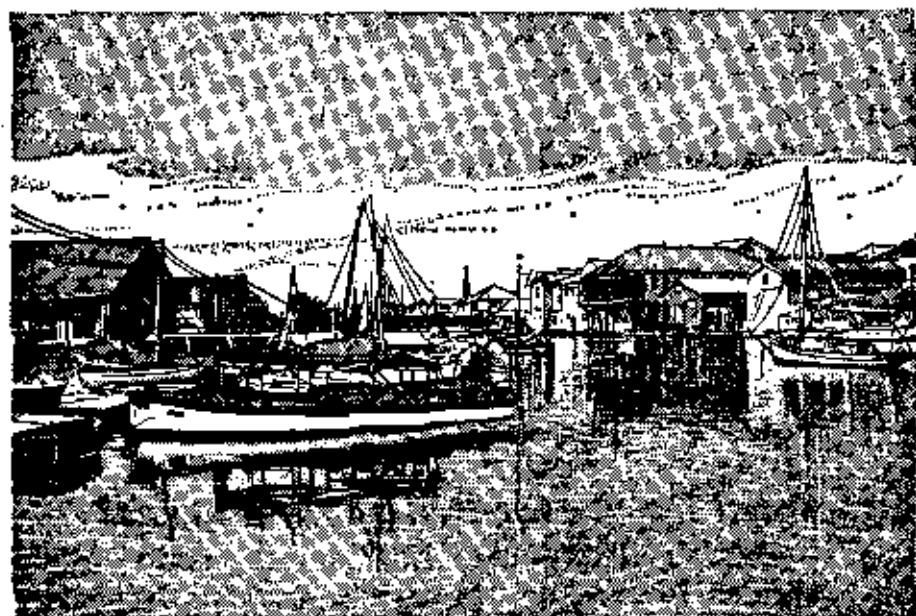
The approach by plane afforded a panoramic view of the country, revealing its physical features. For example, to the north lie the low, humid coastal plains, with Belize, the capital, guarded by a reef-lined harbor. Large ships have to anchor outside the reef and lighters ply from ship to shore. Southward

the land level rises into a mountainous area with high plateau country bordering on Guatemala. Here sparkling waterfalls punctuate the mountain streams, affording scenic thrills that are difficult to match anywhere.

Along the reefed coastline, in the blue Caribbean, there are countless *cayes* or islets where the visitor may find quiet and seclusion from the bustle of populated places. British Honduras has few population centers apart from Belize, and even though that city is probably viewed by local people as somewhat of a metropolis, its population is less than 20,000. It has the appearance of a provincial town. Frame buildings, many of an earlier era, still predominate. Here and there a modern structure speaks of progress and the desire to get away from the ways of the past.

It is said that the highest point in the city is only four feet above sea level, and this is why, as you look around town, you note that most of the homes are built up on stilts. Surely a wise precaution when we call to mind the tremendous damage inflicted on this coast in 1931 and in 1961 when hurricane winds whipped up huge tidal waves. In that latest disaster many of Jehovah's witnesses and a number of neighbors took refuge in the second floor of the Watch Tower Society's branch office in this city, one of the strongest and most attractive buildings in the area. Now the Government has declared it a national refuge in event of disaster.

Because of this low elevation Belize



Larger ships cannot penetrate the coastal reef that shelters this harbor at Belize

drains off water from its streets by means of shallow open gutters, which have to be swept down regularly.

Meeting the People

As we walked among the people of Belize we soon noted that the population is a mixed one. The majority are descendants of Africans who settled in the area at the time when Belize was used as a slave center back in the 1880's. They have adopted many of the European ideas and customs, and we were happy to learn that among this section of the population there is an excellent appreciation of the value of God's Word, the Bible. Their warm, friendly attitude is expressed by a quick smile and pleasant word at meeting.

The Caribs of the southern highlands are descendants of island Indians who settled here in order to maintain isolation. They are distinct in their traditions and have endeavored to avoid intermarriage and association with other peoples. They even have their own language. Among these people sickness is viewed as no chance happening, but is considered to be the result of someone trying to hurt the ailing person. Right away the spirit doctor or *Buwei* must be consulted. Through him the invalid's dead ancestors are appealed to for aid in restoring him to health. Perhaps some disgruntled spirit needs to be soothed with a gift, they believe, or the treatment may even involve calling a special feast during which the saying of a mass in the Catholic church may be considered advisable. The ecstatic dancing at such feasts has been known to lead to a trancelike condition and actual harassment by demons.

The Bible's pure message is badly needed among these people in order to set them free from such gross superstitions. It was a real pleasure to us to learn that the message of Jehovah's kingdom is finding acceptance among the Caribs, and that from their ranks have come some who are already enjoying

spiritual freedom and are serving as true ministers of Jehovah God.

Assembling with Freedom Lovers

The assembly site was in a park along Belize's seafront. Here our brothers had to erect their own grandstand, large enough to seat about four hundred people. The mayor of the city even came out to see this preparatory work, for, as he said: "Some day we may have

to install such facilities."

And another man approached and said: "We can indeed learn from you people. What an undertaking!"

The many fine features of the program as enjoyed by brothers at our other assemblies were keenly appreciated by the British Honduran audience also. The Bible dramas and talks were loudly applauded. There were a few anxious moments when it became evident that President N. H. Knorr of the Watch Tower Society would not arrive in time for the scheduled public lecture, due to a delay in the incoming flight. However, the chairman invited John Groh, a visiting director of the Society, to substitute for the president. What a joy it brought the brothers who had worked so hard to make the convention a success to see 755



J. O. Groh, one of the directors of the Watch Tower Society, delivers the public address at Belize, British Honduras

present for this outstanding session! Since the peak number of Witnesses in the country is 385, it was certainly a big event to assemble with so many lovers of Bible truth.

Though his arrival was belated, N. H. Knorr did have the opportunity of speaking to the audience, at which time he passed along to the British Honduran Witnesses the warm love of those who had assembled at Mexico City and Guatemala City. This brought them great delight.

What Future for British Hondurans?

British Honduras has made some rapid strides toward self-government. It is hoped by the party presently holding office that in 1968 plans at present under way will bring inde-

pendence. Nonetheless, the movement in this direction is still quite cautious because it is well known that complete independence could produce grave economic and political developments.

The real freedom that enlightened people enjoy is the freedom that comes with knowledge of Bible truth. Many British Hondurans are seeking this kind of freedom, and many are already free. The facts speak eloquently

of this, for there is one active Witness in British Honduras for every 287 persons.

We are sure that the "God's Sons of Liberty" Assembly at Belize has opened many more eyes to the road to spiritual freedom. Our prayer is that they will follow that road and find peace. We shall always cherish the memory of our few days spent in company with our Christian brothers here, thankful that we did not overlook British Honduras.

COSTA RICA

Rides a Wave of Prosperity

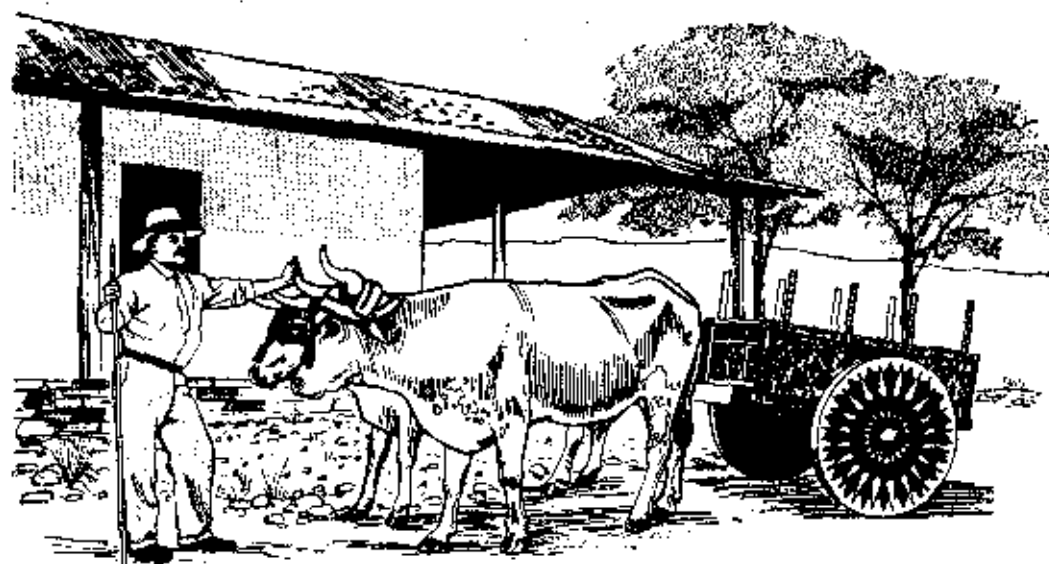
PROSPEROUS and progressive! This is the first impression we get upon arriving here on our tour of Middle America. The modern airport, the fine highway into the capital of San José, the clean streets, the gaily hand-painted oxcarts, the number of big cars, the scarcity of barefoot natives, the number of foreign enterprises and sales representatives for all sorts of imports—these are the things that create the image of a thriving state of affairs. In the rurals there are lush vegetable gardens, dairy farms, and cattle ranches in addition to thousands of acres of rich coffee and banana plantations. We see why the travel folders call this country, which has abundance of orchids, the "Garden of the Americas."

Here one can enjoy about any climatic temperature desired and get it any time of the

year too. Along the coasts in this torrid zone it is tropical. In the central plateau where the capital is located the altitude is between 3,500 and 4,000 feet above sea level and the temperature year round varies from the high 70's to the high 50's. Colder climates are found on the slopes of the mountains, which range up to 12,000 feet.

Costa Rica appears to be economically stable and this is reflected in the relaxed air of confidence and security manifest by the people generally. There was, too, that degree of independence characteristic of people who are earning their living by hard work. It was a pleasure for us tourists to mingle with them and cultivate their acquaintance.

When we asked about Costa Rica's educational system it was pointed out that elementary public schools are provided by the government and attendance is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 12. There are also many secondary and vocational schools, both government supported and privately operated. The National University has an enrollment of nearly 6,000 students. As a result, illiteracy is lower than in any other Latin-American country. Costa Ricans pride themselves on being cultured, well mannered and tolerant of others. There are no integration-segregation problems,



Owner proudly displays brightly painted oxcart typical of Costa Rica



Coffee berries as they grow on the tree

even though these people stem from many different racial origins.

Prosperity on Credit

Economically, how sound is this outward display of prosperity? was a question we asked various businessmen who were in a position to know. Their answers were eye-opening. Without a doubt, the country is a rich one. Agriculture is its principal business, coffee being a main export, but it is also an important manufacturer of many products. As a consequence people have money to spend; unemployment is at a minimum.

But the unhealthy aspect of the matter is that credit with the World Bank is not good. The people in general spend much more than they earn. An overextension of credit has allowed people to get things far beyond what they can afford. The truth of the matter, were an accounting to be made, would show that Costa Rica's prosperity resembles an inflated balloon that has raised the people far above a solid and secure economy. That this appraisal of the country's economy is a correct one became manifest when, at the end of the year, the *colón* tumbled in value from a par of 15 cents when buying United States dollars, to as low as 7 cents on the black market. Drastic measures for tightening credit and imposing high import duties were taken in an effort to stabilize the economy.

The Spiritual Condition

Another question we were asking here in Costa Rica was about the prosperity of Roman Catholicism, for it is still the official religion of the State. Since, in many Catholic countries, very few men regularly attend church, it is unusual to find that here the father often takes the lead in these matters. However, there is evidence that the clerical grip on the lives of the people is weakening, as more and more

are withdrawing their support from this centuries-old system.

One of our tours took us to the ancient city of Cartago, the former capital of Costa Rica, where the famous idol of "Our Lady of the Angels," the official patroness of Costa Rica since 1824, is enshrined. This image is nothing more than a carving of stone, about eight inches high, that has been adorned with a golden mantle and a crown studded with jewels, the whole estimated in value at \$175,000. In 1950, when this idol was presumably stolen, the whole country was in an uproar. The security of the borders was strengthened to the point of practically sealing them off, a three-day period of national mourning was declared, and every available detective agency was called into action, including the bloodhounds of the United States' FBI. But after the noses of bloodhounds led to the priest's house, and after the image was discovered hidden in an out-of-the-way place right in the church itself, some people began to realize that the "theft" was nothing more than a hoax, to revitalize the waning devotion being given to this speechless and sightless idol.

However, with the passing of time people soon forget these things and thousands continue in their spiritual slavery to religious superstitions, attributing miraculous cures to this stone idol. There are sections of this church here in Cartago where the walls are covered with glass cases containing miniature gold and silver replicas of different parts of the human body that have been supposedly cured. Every part of the body is represented—eyes, legs, arms, breasts and even the sex organs. People who recover from a disease or ailment come on pilgrimages to this church, buy from the parish house a replica of that part of the body affected, and then give it back to the church as a token that "la negrita," as they call the image, healed them. We who were on this tour



The vast crater mouth of the Irazú Volcano, which in the recent past brought so much damage to a large area of Costa Rica



Replicas of body parts, supposedly cured by intercession of the patron saint of Costa Rica, line a basilica wall at Cartago

recalled to mind that we saw this same fraudulent practice being carried on in the cathedral of Guadalupe in Mexico.

It was to this fanatically religious city of Cartago that two special pioneer publishers of God's Kingdom were sent in 1955. At first they were hardly able to give their sermons or mention Jehovah's name. Many times when they were preaching from house to house mobs would form, making it impossible for them to continue. Later the Witnesses were accused of being Communists, but gradually, as the people learned better, their attitude changed and Bibles began finding their way into the homes of the people. Now, we learned, there is a congregation of Jehovah's witnesses prospering here in Cartago.

MARCH 8, 1967

'Best Assembly Ever in Costa Rica!

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything!" "I have never been so spiritually upbuilt before in all my life!" These were some of the comments native brothers made about the "God's Sons of Liberty" International Assembly held here, December 21-25, 1966. But what was it that made this assembly so different? we asked.

For one thing, more work went into its preparations than for any other assembly ever held here. It was not possible to obtain the Baseball Park (Parque de Béisbol) until April 1966. Even then the seating facilities were inadequate, making it necessary for our brothers to spend the weekends for several months repainting and rebuilding a section of the bleachers. Stages for the double sessions in Spanish and English had to be designed and built. The backdrop for the main stage was in five sections that revolved on pivots facilitating a quick change. Hundreds of potted flowers had to be grown. Cafeteria facilities had to be set up. In all of this, businessmen were very helpful too. For example, one concern installed (free of charge) four high-capacity electronic water filters that provided an abundance of purified water. Chairs were rented for half price and sound equipment was obtained at a fraction of the regular rental fee.



Banner advertises the public lecture, on face of Baseball Park entrance, San José, Costa Rica

Much interest was aroused in our assembly due to the wide publicity given it by newspapers and radio broadcasts. An exclusive interview with the Society's vice-president, Brother Franz, was also broadcast over a nationwide radio network.

And the program of the assembly—what a wonderful feast on Bible truths it proved to be! The dramatized demonstrations were certainly a thrill, with recorded dialogues, background music and sound effects. The colorful costumes and the realistic backdrops projected the mind of the audience back in time to the Biblical periods in which the events originally occurred.

On Friday, December 23, the spiritual prosperity of Jehovah's people was further increased when seventy-three took on the responsibilities of baptized Witnesses. That evening the assembly was enriched with the release of the new book in Spanish, *Life Everlasting—in Freedom of the Sons of God*. Then on Sunday afternoon, December 25, the climax of the spiritual blessings came when 2,974

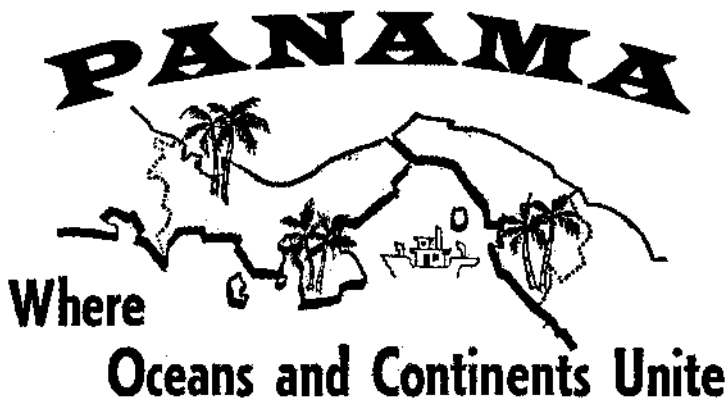
heard the talk "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom." This attendance, in spite of the exceptionally bad weather, topped any previous gathering of Jehovah's people in this country by more than a thousand.

What a contrast between this truly joyful gathering in the Parque de Béisbol that we were attending and the raucous crowds that jammed the center of San José every night during this Christmas season! Every night the police blocked off about ten blocks of Central Avenue to allow those merry-makers full license to throw their confetti and carry on like wild pagans. It was very obvious to onlookers that the honoring of Christ was the last thought in their minds. Why, their make-believe Santa Claus got more attention than the founder of Christianity. Truly we are thankful that we were attending the assembly that had Jehovah's blessing and approval, and that we were counted among those in Costa Rica who are really prosperous, being "rich toward God." —Luke 12:21; Matt. 6:19-21.

PANAMA CITY was the last stopping place of our Middle America assembly tour, just before taking off for Colombia, South America. From San José, Costa Rica, to Panama's Tocumen Airport is but a short hop, but the difference in latitude and in altitude makes itself felt very quickly. The blazing sun and high humidity at first seemed to sap one's energy. However, after some rest in one of Panama's modern hotels we were ready to visit the assembly locations and explore what we could of the country.

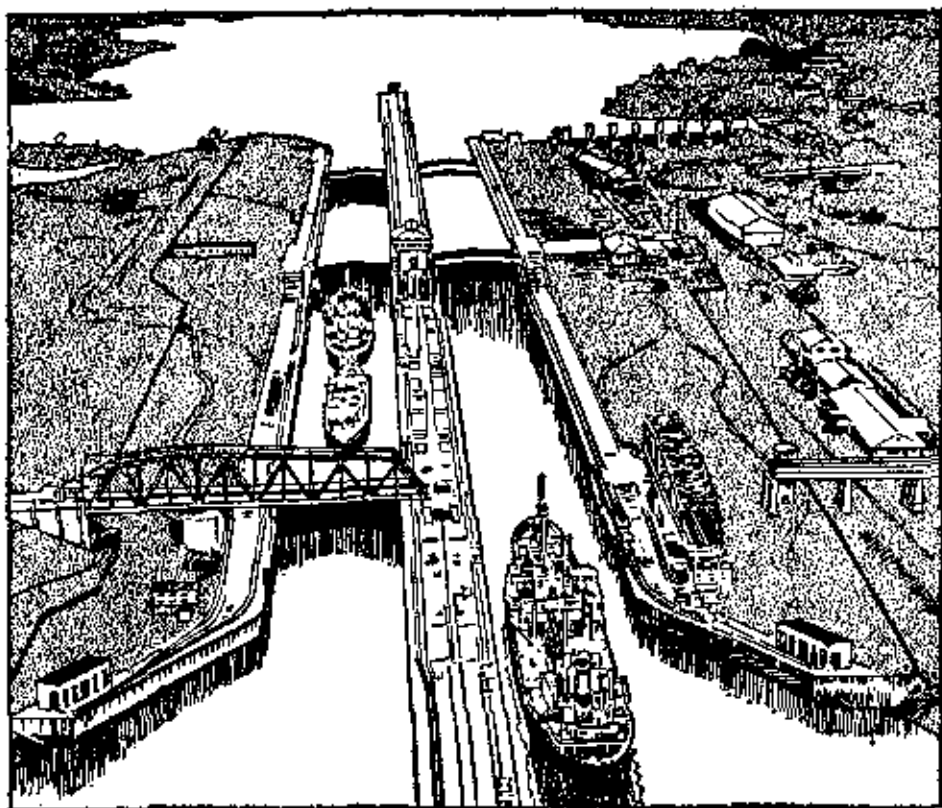
Most persons know that the celebrated Canal here joins the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. But what comes as quite a surprise to the visitor in Panama City is the information that there are waters of the Atlantic now lying north and partly west of him, and waters of the Pacific lying south and even east. Puzzling? Yes, until you examine the map and observe that the Republic of Panama is like an "S" lying on its side, and the Canal cuts through the middle of the "S" in a northwest-southeast direction.

Panama can also claim another vital bond of union, and that is the recently completed



Thatcher Ferry Bridge, near the Pacific entrance to the Canal. This land link carries traffic high up over the approach to the Canal, and so constitutes an important feature of the Pan-American Highway system. Like the Canal, this Bridge also lies within the Panama Canal Zone, a narrow strip in the center of the Republic that has been leased to the United States Government for operation and protection of the Canal.

Naturally, the Canal and adjacent points of interest just had to be included in our tour. It was surely educational to be there right at the spot and see how this great waterway raises huge oceangoing vessels to eighty-five



Some of the more than 13,000 ships that transit the Panama Canal each year. Here seen at the Miraflores Locks near the Pacific

feet above sea level, and all of this without any system of mechanical pumping. The dammed waters of the Chagres River and Gatun Lake are released by gravity into the appropriate canal locks either to raise or to lower the ships in transit.

We wondered how the ships managed to negotiate the narrow canal locks without damaging them. The answer came as we watched how a number of electric-powered "mules" were harnessed to each side of a transiting ship to make sure that it did not veer to one side or the other. While centered by cables from these mules the large ship proceeds through the locks. The dispatch with which mighty ships are moved through the locks helps us to understand how 35 ships can be cleared through the waterway each day, 13,000 ships each year, and, as a total since the Canal was opened in 1914, more than 360,000 vessels.

Interest Focuses on Panama City

However, unique and interesting as the Canal is, our interest was focused particularly on the capital of the Panamanian Republic, for there two assemblies of Jehovah's witnesses had been organized, one for Spanish-speaking delegates and one for English-speaking delegates. True, this would mean some degree of separation, but it also would mean that the full program that had been enjoyed in so many northern assembly places would be available for both sections of the population. The two auditoriums secured, the Gimnasio (Gymnasium) Neco de la Guardia for the Spanish and

the Edison Theater for the English sessions, are located in Panama's densely populated south end.

Speaking of dense population, some of us travelers had never before seen a district like that known as "Los Chorrillos." Narrow streets, two- and three-story buildings jammed together, and noise everywhere. Add to this the apparent confusion of buses of all sorts, sizes and colors in endless procession, dropping and picking up passengers anywhere and often while still in motion. Negotiating a narrow corner, the bus driver just has to mount the sidewalk with his front wheels, and let the pedestrian beware! Homes and small business establishments along the main streets are like cubbyholes, some wide open to the passing throngs and others with only the lower half of the door closed. And everywhere, on streets, in doorways, on verandas, there are crowds of people, young and old. Verandas above the street are festooned with clothes-

lines bearing the household wash.

Often a bus is simply a pickup truck, open at the back and covered over much below shoulder height, and equipped with two long benches facing each other. One just gets in and grabs a seat before the driver starts up again. If one happens to be a standee, then he will have to stand in a low hunch and hope he can straighten out upon reaching his destination. Five cents is the usual fare in these about-town buses. Larger buses with more seats crowd three people into every seat.

The city has its better sections, too, sections where there are gracious Spanish-style homes and apartments, and at the north end of the city where the Watch Tower Society's fine branch office is located are to be found some excellent hotels, such as the Continental and the Panama Hilton. Here, too, are areas where upper-class housing developments are under way, such as that known as Punta Patilla. Out beyond this development is what is known as Old Panama, the city that Captain Morgan raided centuries ago, and where now there are only ancient ruins around which a pleasant park has been formed.

Other Visitors

Of course, not all the foreigners attending the assemblies in Panama City came by airplane. Some of us drove from San José, Costa Rica, by car. What a sight it is to drive by miles of lush banana trees with huge stems of green bananas hanging gracefully in the

warm breeze! With such a stimulus, we could not resist stopping at one of the roadside stands in a little village and buying a "hand" of this luscious fruit at four or five bananas for five cents.

Those who had driven all the way from the United States were, by this time, accustomed to stopping for police or customs inspections. So it did not seem too unusual to stop at automobile checkpoints at regular spots along the Panamanian highway and provide the friendly police officers with name, license plate number and destination so they could write it in their large record books. More unusual was the sight of two- or three-foot-long iguana, tropical lizards, scurrying off the road as our car approached. We did not mean to disturb their pleasant sunbathing, but we had an assembly to get to in the capital.

Assembly Highly Appreciated

Witnesses throughout the Republic really exerted themselves to attend the "God's Sons of Liberty" Assembly, scheduled for December 24-28, 1966. Most other Panamanians were concerning themselves with Christendom's approaching festive season, but not so those who knew and were anxious to please the true God, Jehovah. From a far western province came three chartered buses with 150 passengers. One little fellow of five years of age began picking beans months before so as to be able to pay his bus fare. All the pioneer ministers of the Witnesses were present.

For the public lecture, "Mankind's Millennium Under God's Kingdom," delivered on Sunday, December 25, there was a combined audience of 2,110. On the following day a total of sixty persons responded to the talk on baptism, and were taken to a lovely swimming pool in Balboa, Canal Zone, where they symbolized their dedication to Jehovah God. This constituted the highest number ever to be baptized at one assembly in Panama.

During the assembly we learned how thoroughly the 1,500 Witnesses in Panama are covering their unique assignment of territory. No *campesino* (small farmer) is overlooked. From plantation to plantation the Witnesses go, carrying a message of hope and comfort to natives who are busy fertilizing, spraying, pruning and harvesting the banana crop. Out into the small towns and villages the Witnesses travel with their message on film, and rejoice to find large audiences turning out to receive the Kingdom message in this form.

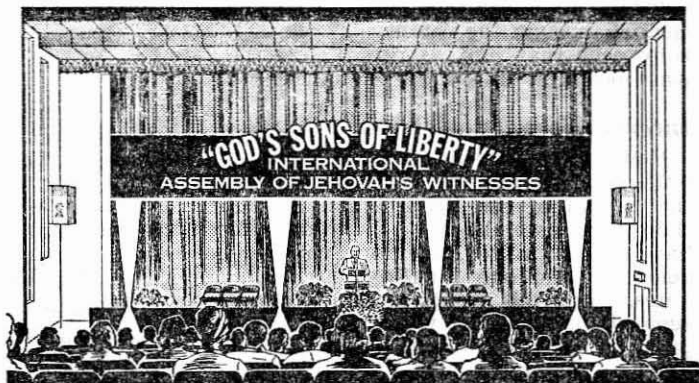
Being unspoiled by excessive entertainment, hundreds of country people will come from far and near when one of the films is shown.

The Indians who inhabit the San Blas islands along the Caribbean coast have always adhered to their ancient folklore and have frowned on foreigners. Eventually one of the tribe brought home a wife from the outside, a wife who had come to appreciate the truth about God's purposes and had spoken to her husband about it. Now they are sharing the good news of the Kingdom with others in that remote area, and a traveling Witness minister and his wife even visit them regularly, riding the swells of the Caribbean in a *piragua*, a long, narrow canoe made from a hollowed-out tree trunk.

Among the isolated Darien Indians, who live in the rain forest area along the Pacific coast bordering on Colombia, there is now a group of interested persons who are also visited by a traveling Witness overseer and his wife. Single-motor planes and *piraguas* are their means of travel as they strive to reach and preach to the natives who can understand Spanish. Often they sleep on improvised beds or on the floor. At times their plane may get stuck in the mud of natural airstrips, so that they must get out and stand in the mud until the pilot manages to get onto a solid stretch of ground.

These and other grand experiences we heard either during the program itself or while eating in the cafeteria of the assembly, where we enjoyed such native dishes as *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) or beef and fried plantain (large cooking bananas).

Many were the expressions of appreciation for the Bible dramas enacted upon the platform. As some local Witnesses said, this pointed manner of teaching Bible principles of con-



N. H. Knorr, president of the Watch Tower Society, delivers the keynote address to conventioners in Panama City

duct was just what was needed here, for there is much immorality, prostitution and consensual marriage in Panama.

Privilege of Panama Witnesses

The Republic of Panama, by reason of its position on the routes of world commerce and travel, attracts tourists, businessmen, people of many nations and of all walks in life. The organization of Jehovah's witnesses here enjoys excellent opportunities to preach to one and all, and the evidence is that they are doing so zealously, regardless of the cost in time and effort. People are taking note of their zeal and good conduct, and it is making a deep impression.

One official of a prominent airline remarked that Jehovah's witnesses were the most orderly group of people with whom he had ever worked. Their calm, uncomplaining attitude during the holiday season when flights were frequently off schedule won the praise of many airport officials.

A local missionary reported that one young man, employed at the Panama Hilton Hotel, where many of the visiting delegates were accommodated, was so impressed by the good conduct of the Witnesses that he wanted to have a Bible study in his home and learn more about such different people. At a restaurant where many of the visiting delegates of varied

racial origins ate breakfast regularly, the headwaiter approached one and inquired: "Who are you people? You all seem so happy, and there is no discrimination among you—how can it be?" He was pleased to learn that we were the same people who published the book *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, which he already had. He was encouraged to read and study it with his Bible.

One woman in downtown Panama came and requested that a Bible study be conducted in her home. Why? Well, one of her little girls attended an assembly session out of curiosity, saw one of the Bible dramas and came home so filled to overflowing at all she had seen and heard that the mother just had to find out what it was all about.

The name Panama, we were told, is an Indian word having the meaning "plenty of fish." Doubtless there still are plenty of fish around its shores. However, as our visit to this land came to a close, our minds were on quite a different kind of fishing. We were reminded about Jesus' words promising to make his followers "fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19) As we said good-bye to the Panamanian Witnesses and departed for the airport we rejoiced with them that they have the privilege of serving here where oceans and continents unite, attracting people of all kinds to the worship of the true God, Jehovah.



"A FRIEND OF PEACE"?

The whole world is crying for peace. Yet peace seems farther away than ever. Have we any real basis for hope?

The Bible speaks of God as the One who "is making wars to cease to the extremity of the earth" and who establishes "the abundance of peace until the moon is no more." If you are "a friend of peace" you will concern yourself with these Bible promises. Learn how and when they will be realized. Read

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