



Medicine in Mexico: From Aztec Herbs to Betatrons (Texas Pan American)

Gordon Schendel

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A witch doctor casting an evil spell in a steaming jungle village; a young medical-school graduate cleaning a machete wound in a rat-infested thatched hut; a world-renowned scientist doing research in Mexico City—all were part of the mid-twentieth century medical scene in Mexico, a country of great cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical contrasts.

Gordon Schendel, in collaboration with Dr. José Alvarez Amézquita and Dr. Miguel E. Bustamante, relates the history of medicine and public health and welfare in Mexico. This absorbing story begins with a great indigenous culture; continues with Spanish Colonial rule, the unproductive first century of independence from Spain, and the years of revolution; then concentrates on the modern nation.

The Aztec civilization evidenced a knowledge of pharmacology and the fundamentals of health far in advance of contemporary European societies. And almost one hundred years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, New Spain boasted a comprehensive "Public Health Administration" and a hospital system that served all classes. However, throughout Mexico's three centuries as a Spanish colony and its first century of independence, millions of its citizens suffered abysmal poverty. Thus when the Republic of Mexico entered its post-Revolutionary era, the majority of its citizens were plagued by superstition, illiteracy, malnutrition, and the other "diseases of the poor."

The principal part of this story tells how Mexico attacked these problems, and how in a few short years it became a leader and a model for all Latin America in the fields of medicine and public health and welfare. The book is based on Mr. Schendel's research and observations and on his many interviews with doctors and government officials. It will be of interest to the medical profession and to concerned laymen of all nationalities, for it illustrates how a dynamic nation met challenges that all countries of the world, developed and underdeveloped, must face.



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