TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The Lean Lands by Agustín Yáñez was first published in Spanish, under the title Las tierras flacas, by Editorial Joaquín Mortiz in Mexico City in October, 1962.

The action of the novel takes place in the early 1920's in the barren hill region of Jalisco, beyond the small town of Yahualica, the "pueblo" of *The Edge of the Storm* and the Clamores of this novel. Whereas *The Edge of the Storm* describes life in this small town during the eighteen months that preceded the Revolution of 1910, *The Lean Lands* deals with the struggles of the farmers living on the small isolated farms, so remote as to be beyond the reach even of doctors and priests, where the people rely almost wholly on superstition and their belief in magic.

The author, Agustín Yáñez, is one of the most important writers in Mexico today. Born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in 1904, he published *Baralipton*, his first successful work, in 1930. Since then he has written about many aspects of Mexican living and thinking; he has deliberately set out to give a complete picture of "la realidad mexicana," the title of a series of lectures given at the Colegio Nacional in 1953. He has written about childhood in *Flor de juegos antiguos*, adolescence in *Archipiélago de mujeres*, the life of the city in *Ojerosa y pintada*, the life of a small provincial town in *Al filo del agua*, and the life of the countryside in *Las tierras flacas* and *La tierra pródiga*.

In the sense that he finds his inspiration in the familiar scenes, sights, and sounds of his province, even in that section of it he has made peculiarly his own, Yahualica and the surrounding country-side, Yáñez is a regional writer; but his concern with people as

human beings, and his ability to make them live fully in the moment and milieu he describes, makes his work of special interest to the foreigner. By a curious paradox, his characters are both deeply Mexican and at the same time universal.

But Agustín Yáñez is not only a creative writer of great ability. His introductions to many of the books in the collection Escritores Mexicanos, published by the National University, as well as his analyses of his own creative processes in his lectures at the National University and the Colegio Nacional, reveal him as a penetrating and stimulating literary critic.

As Governor of Jalisco (1953–1959), one of the largest and most important states in Mexico, he proved that an intellectual could also be a man of action and the record of his administration, the number of schools built, and the miles of roads providing necessary links for the development of the country, is impressive. Now, as Minister of Education, he has set in motion a widespread reform of the nation's whole educational system.

The very qualities which make his work such a faithful record of the reality he is expressing—his exact and detailed descriptions of the countryside, his careful reproduction of the regional idiom with all its wealth of imagery, and, in this book particularly, the use of country sayings and regional proverbs—make it difficult to translate. But, since there is so much that can be conveyed, it was felt worthwhile to make the attempt.

Mexico City

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