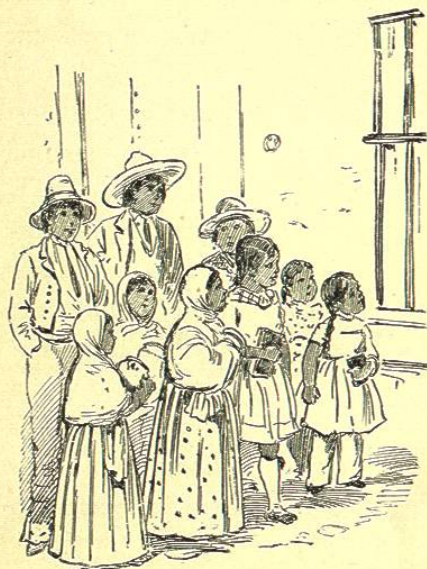


doubled under, and almost universally tied with a piece of red tape. Their white hose, a world too short, had an antique look to eyes accustomed so long to the brilliantly arrayed legs of the children of the United States. Evidently extra full lengths had not reached that country, as the above-mentioned hose terminated below the knee, where they were secured (when secured at all) with a rag, string, or a piece of red tape of the same kind that adorned their braided locks. Those who wore shoes had them laced up the front, sharp pointed at the toes, and frequently of gay-colored material. As their dresses sometimes lacked several inches of reaching the knees, the intervening space of brown skin exposed to view was sometimes quite startling, especially so, if—as was often the case—their pantalets were omitted. Frequently, when these were worn, they were very narrow and reached the ankle, the dress retaining its place far above the knee. A row of big brass safety-pins down the front of their dresses performed the office of buttons.

The boys were simply miniature copies of their fathers, wearing sashes, snug little jackets, blouses, and in some cases even the sandal.



A GROUP OF MY LITTLE FRIENDS.

The advent of one of these light-hearted groups was always a happy diversion to me. Often they came laughing and chattering in a gentle monotone down the street, throwing paper balls at one another, playing "tag"—it has a finer and more sonorous name in their majestic tongue, for it rolled off euphoniously into "*ahora tu me coges*" ("now you've caught me")—performing many other pretty, childish antics just after some peculiarly heart-rending spectacle of poverty and suf-

fering had wrung my heart. They soon learned to divine my sympathetic interest in them, and occasionally some of them would stop before my window, and exchange with me amusing remarks. They were very bright, and laughed incredulously, exchanging winks and nods with each other, when I tried to make them believe that I was a Mexican. I asked if they could not see from my dark hair and eyes that I was one; but they refused to be convinced, saying: "You may look like a Mexican, but you can't talk like one." In the course of time, all shyness vanished, and often, when in other parts of the house, the young voices gleefully calling "Señorita! Señorita!" would bring me to the drawing-room, and there would be my barred windows, full of little dark mischievous faces, their brown hands stretched out to me through the iron bars, through which their dancing eyes peeped. When my housekeeping was in better running order—comparatively speaking, of course—I sometimes gave them trifling dainties. Cakes they accepted gladly, but when in my patriotic zeal I tried to familiarize them with that bulwark of our Southern civilization—the soda biscuit—they rejected it uncompromisingly, spitting and sputtering after a taste of it, and saying: "*No nos gusta*," ("We don't like it"), "Good for Americans—no good for Mexicans."

A pretty child in a nurse's arms stopped before the window, and laid her tiny brown hand on me caressingly. Nurse told her to sing a pretty song for the señora, when she began:

No me mates ! no me mates ! no me mates !
 Con pistola ni puñal ;
 Matame con un besito
 De tus labios de coral.

Don't kill me ! don't kill me ! don't kill me !
 With a pistol nor a dagger ;
 But kill me with a little kiss
 Of your pretty coral lips.

I asked her to come again, and as they moved along the pretty creature waved her hand at me, saying: "*Mañana ! en la mañana*" ("Tomorrow morning very early"), which aroused my fears, justly enough,

for I never saw her again, it being their universal custom to postpone everything for the morrow—a time which I felt would never come.

The mansion and its associations were so well known that every servant whom we employed could contribute some item of interest concerning its history. An old citizen related to me that at the time of Gen. Taylor's entrance into the city there were in it nine most beautiful and interesting señoritas, daughters of the original founder, Don A—. Naturally, every little detail and event concerning them was eagerly absorbed, and nothing gave me more thorough gratification than the discovery that my very first and best friends made after arriving were the descendants of one of these nine señoritas. Don Benito G—, an accomplished gentleman of Castilian descent, who has occupied the highest positions in the state, wooed and won his lovely bride when she was in her early teens, and for many years they remained under the paternal roof. Here their three beautiful children first saw the light, and their infantile days were spent in these grand old rooms, amid the flowers of the court and surrounded by an atmosphere of beauty and refinement.

At the time of our acquaintance these favored children of a distinguished family were in the bloom of early manhood and womanhood, José Maria, the eldest, aged twenty-six; Benito, twenty-two; and Liberata, a lovely, dark-eyed girl of sixteen. She was a charming representative of her Andalusian ancestors; the graces of her person added to the beauty of her disposition. In imagination her exquisite flower-sweet face rises before me, her soft luminous eyes, shaded by lashes of wondrous length and beauty, sweeping a cheek that glowed like a luscious peach.

These friends began at once, without ceremony or ostentation, to show me the gentlest attentions, and from the unlimited treasure-house of their warm Mexican hearts they bestowed upon me a generous devotion that brightened my life and made me love and respect their land and their people for their sakes. In every circumstance they proved to be animated by the noblest impulses of our common nature, and one of the happiest discoveries I made during those days of a be-

wildering struggle with a new civilization, was that, despite the representation of many of my own countrymen, fidelity, tenderness, and untiring devotion were as truly Mexican characteristics as American. It is doubtful in my mind if the people of any country lavish upon strangers the same warmth of manner or exhibit the same readiness to serve them, as do our near-at-hand, far-away neighbors, the Mexicans.

At daylight one morning, soon after we were installed in the house of his ancestors, Don Benito, Jr., accompanied by several young friends, favored us with a delightful serenade, in which the beautiful Spanish songs were rendered with charming effect. He was an excellent sportsman, and always remembered us after his shooting excursions, while I received daily reminders of affectionate regard from Liberata, the gentle sister.

Don José Maria was a young man of varied accomplishments and acquirements, among which the knowledge of English was duly appreciated in our growing friendship. He had liberal and progressive ideas; was well versed in American literature, was a regular subscriber to the *Popular Science Monthly*, *North American Review*, *Scribner's*, *Harper's Magazine* and *Bazar*, besides others of our best periodicals—and took a lively interest in our politics.

To all these magazines we had free access through his kindness, and welcome as waters in a thirsty land were these delightful home journals, where mails were had but once or twice a week in this literary Sahara.

After the death of his mother, when Liberata was only an infant, desiring to relieve his grief-stricken father, this admirable elder brother took almost entire charge of the little creature, filling the place of mother, sister, and brother. It was to me an exquisitely pathetic story, this recital of the young brother's effort to train and care for the motherless baby girl, even superintending the buying and making of her wardrobe, which must have been the most bewildering feature of his bewildering undertaking.

Among other things he was anxious to have her become familiar with American methods of house keeping and cookery. I could but

laugh, though a tear quickly followed, when she described how her brother translated the cooking receipts in *Harper's Bazar*, and then requested her to have American dishes concocted from them; what moments of despair she had over the unfamiliar compounds, and what horrible "messes" sometimes resulted from the imperfectly understood translations.

This devotion of brother to sister often recalled a similar experience in my own life. The ideal José Maria was my brother William, who had made a like idol of me. His was then a newly made grave, and I had only time to place a flower upon it before beginning the journey to old Mexico. While I had stepped across the boundary line of ages and was endeavoring to decipher the hieroglyphics of an Aztec civilization, which were stamped upon every form and feature that I saw, here I stood face to face with a repetition of my own life. It was but following the promptings of a woman's heart to believe in these kind strangers and to cherish their friendship.

In due time I had gathered about me many kind and congenial friends, who vied with each other in contributing to my happiness. One of these, Doña Pomposita R—, without knowing my language, began to instruct me in her own. Winks, blinks, and shrugs did the most of it: but come what would, she never gave up until everything was clear. We sat in the patio on the afternoon of her first visit, and among other things was her determination that we should converse about Don Quixote, she being familiar with his story in the original and I in my own tongue. Many of the humorous adventures of the Don were called up by her in the most amusing manner. In rapid succession she mentioned the men with their "pack-staves," the "wine-bags," and was finally overcome with laughter as she said that our grand old house reminded her of the isle of Baratania, where Sancho Panza was governor.

She then sang in a low, sweet tone many operatic airs, among them, "Then You'll Remember Me," and others equally familiar, possessing an added charm in the sweet Spanish. Near night-fall she arose to go home, saying Pancho—meaning her husband—would soon be

there, and she wished him never to enter their home and find her absent. Placing her arm affectionately about my waist, in her sweet Spanish she said to me: "In my country it is very sad for you, and you are far from your home and people, but do not forget I am your friend and sister; what I can do for you shall be done as for a sister." Her husband, Don Pancho, shared fully in her professions of friendship, and on one occasion, when a hundred miles away from the city, sent us a *regalo* (gift) of a donkey-load of grapes.

In striking personal contrast were my two most intimate friends among Mexican women. Pomposita, like Liberata, had the petite figure, the dainty feet and hands peculiar to the women of that country; but unlike her, she possessed the high cheek-bones, the straight black hair, the brown skin indicating her Indian origin, of which she was justly proud.

But there was no contrast in the exhibition of their devoted kindness and friendship. Both were equally ready to assist me in adapting myself to the strange order of things and to aid in my initiation into the mysteries of their peculiar household economies. In case of sickness it seemed worth while to suffer to be the object of such exquisite tenderness, and experience the unspeakable sweetness of their sisterly ministrations.

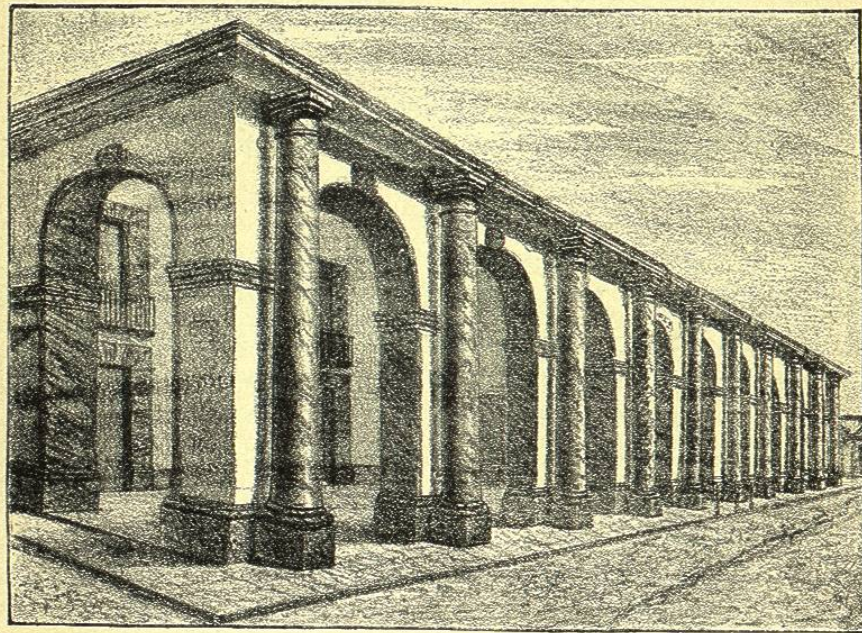
But the time came when an overwhelming affliction fell upon me, when the night with its countless stars and crescent moon told of no serene sphere where tears and grief are unknown. The shadows passed over my soul without a gleam to enlighten the gloom of the grave.

The oft-read promise to grief-stricken humanity, "Thy brother shall rise again," was powerless to console.

My sister Emma, the loveliest and most devoted of women, was suddenly called from this bright world in the summer bloom of her loving life, leaving four young and tender children, leaving all her relations and friends grief-stricken and myself in the depths of such anguish as only God and the good angels know. When we came into this world, it was in a large family of brothers who loved and petted the two wee girls with all the devotion of noble-hearted men. But

they had long gone forth into the world, our noble parents had been called to their last home, while we remained together, our hearts throbbing in unison. Now that she was taken, it seemed to me there was a void that no space nor object of the affections could fill, and the better part of my life was gone.

In these darkened and burdened days of grief I can only tell how true, loving, and tender were the hands that ministered to me. The



PORTAL IN SALTILLO.

other members of our party were absent on a journey, and these strangers nobly filled their places. In the long and painful illness that followed, Pomposita, Liberata and other friends never left me for a moment, day or night, and in deference to my sorrow all were robed in somber black. Every possible delicacy that could tempt a wayward appetite was brought; notes and messages came daily to my door, and numberless inquiries, all expressive of sympathy and a desire to serve me, from the male relatives of my friends. These affectionate and

tender attentions could not have been exceeded by those endeared to me by ties of blood.

Pomposita, though so young, as a matron took precedence, constituting herself my special nurse, in full accord with the Gospel injunction to love her neighbor as herself. In the fevered, silent watches of the night, how gently her soft little brown hand would pass across my brow as she murmured her sweet words of endearment, and how lovingly her arms encircled me as she held me to her warm and noble heart. She constantly reminded me of her first visit and her assurance that she would be my sister.

In every way they all sought to win me from my grief. Indeed, it seemed that the ministering angels themselves had deputed their high mission to my devoted, faithful, and gratefully remembered Mexican friends.

In this land of sunshine and brightness there fell upon my heart the darkest shadow of my life, the shadow of the tomb of my sister, who slept the dreamless sleep in her far-off, lonely grave.