

only a few years more will witness an upward and onward progressiveness heretofore unknown.

At home, also, their range of accomplishments is extended. Where formerly señoritas employed themselves in lacework and embroidery, they now cut, fit, and make their own dresses with taste and skill, copying closely European and American fashions, and taking much pleasure in the selection of the various styles.

During my sojourn at the capital, one young señorita graduated in dentistry. She began at once assisting her father, who was a dentist, in his office, the fact being announced in all the leading daily papers.

Happily the class which most needs this aid and encouragement is the one most benefited by it—the excellent, faithful, and hospitable middle class.

It need not be inferred that husbands interdict their wives from sharing intellectual enjoyments. Yet one—a distinguished man of letters—remarked to me that it was all very well for American women to walk along with the men in science and literature, but it would never do for Mexican women to know any place aside from the home, with its relation to husband and children. If so, they would at once grow unhappy and discontented.

A Mexican gentleman, who had lived a great deal in the United States, and appreciated the Americans as a people, freely admitted to me that he had made the “double mistake of marrying two American women.” If this remark savored of a lack of gallantry, it bore, however, a general truth, for the races are not, as a rule, suited to each other conjugally.

But some of the most majestic old dames it has ever been my fortune to know are among the Mexican women. They step as if descended directly from Montezuma, and the manner in which they uphold the dignity of their homes is something well worth seeing.

In neither sex is the slightest effort made to conceal age. Even young ladies on the shady side of an “uncertain age” do not seem aware that the least derogation attaches to that fact, but with a quiet unconcern state the exact number of their years.

Having so many servants, the lives of the women are much easier with regard to household labors than with us. There is no hurry—no necessity for it; but, though custom yields to *négligé* in the mornings, sacques and skirts, loose low shoes, and no corsets, hence no inconvenience as from the more formal toilet of our women, their maladies are quite as numerous. The lack of exercise, and excessive indulgence in rich, highly-spiced peppery food, may account for many ailments.

Children sum up, generally, ten, twelve, and sometimes as many as fifteen to eighteen in number, many not reaching maturity. In few instances do the mothers nurse their babes, the wet-nurse being “the power behind the throne.”

I was agreeably disappointed, however, to see so few instances of personal deformity. Near-sightedness is prevalent all over the country, and is accounted for by the excess of light outside and its deficiency, with lack of ventilation, in both homes and schools.

Mexico is an earthly paradise for children. The little monarchs hold high sway in the affections of the people; and from the moment they see the light it is a long hey-day of enjoyment and child-play. Expressions of the tenderest love are lavished on them without affectation, whether in the street, the house, or the shop, and, regardless of how many may have preceded him, the new baby is hailed with delight, and takes superior rank in the household.

No country can produce more marvelously beautiful, brighter, or more precocious children. They are happy by nature, and, though indisposed to quarrel with each other either in the house or street, yet somehow they manage to assert their rights.

The childish prattle in the sweet baby Spanish is melody itself, coming from these winning and most lovable little creatures. Beautiful Alfonso, the baby boy of Señora Calderon—a little more than two years old—came tapping at my door one day.

Opening it, I asked, “What do you want, precious one?” Taking my hand and looking archly in my face, he said, with baby incorrect-



ness, "*Sabo Ingles*" ("I know English"). "Well, then," said I,



LITTLE ALFONSO. "I KNOW ENGLISH."

"speak to me in English." "Gooch," he replied, laughing, shaking his head, and, as I caught him in my arms, patting me on the cheek. My name was the only word he knew, but he had rehearsed it with his nurse until his pronunciation was perfect. After this, every visitor was made aware of his proficiency in English, the whole family entering into his own enjoyment of his knowledge. No wonder these darlings are so little under control when they are so cunning and interesting!

National tastes and characteristics are early developed.

Among the first is, that noise of any kind—laughing, crying, and walking heavily—is rude and unbecoming.

Babies do not creep because always in the arms of the nurse, who does the greater part towards amusing them. They are so tractable that in sitting for a photograph they naturally take a graceful, easy position, upon which even the artist cannot improve. The portrait of Alfonso is an instance of this kind. I took him to the artist, and without either of us touching him, he assumed the position as presented.

Clinging as they do to inbred traits, the universal habits of all children exhibit themselves. If they are not given the drumsticks of the fowl, I have seen their great luminous orbs gather moisture until tears would overflow in distress at the appropria-

tion by some one else of this important appendage. No child is excluded from the table or asked to wait; even on ceremonious occasions their places are reserved. They are admitted into the full confidence of the family circle, and such interesting events as births, marriages, and deaths are discussed in their presence with the utmost freedom.

Boys begin to smoke about ten years of age, but never do they indulge in the presence of their elders—not even an older brother. Few games and but fewer outdoor sports have been provided for them; and until within late years, bicycles or gymnasiums were unknown. But they are grand little horsemen, when fully equipped in the national dress; though sometimes rather grotesque when mounted on a hard-mouthed "billy goat" instead of a horse, accompanied by a train of boys. One rides, another leads, and still another uses the lash. I have seen two boys on one "billy," and this usually obstreperous animal yielded quite kindly to the caprices of the riders.

Girls have quite as little diversion, and often I have seen them playing self-invented games, in close imitation of church scenes—with altar, candles, and swinging censers—the boys acting as priests, while the girls, as nuns or plain worshipers, would file into the imaginary church.

The home discipline is of the mildest. If a correction be necessary, it comes in the form of an appeal, both parents showing tender leniency. An infraction of the household laws brings no punishment from the mother, and if persuasion and tears will not avail, the culprit goes free. At school the discipline is of the same character. No scolding, no correction or use of the rod is ever permitted. The laws of the country are express and explicit on this point, and even a parent so inclined could not grant this privilege to the teacher. But parents and teachers vie with each other in inculcating all the laws of politeness and courtesy.

I wish I could tell half I have seen of the graces and courtesies of these children. In the Alameda, with kindly deference, they will



always yield to elderly and infirm persons their own cozy and shady seats. On entering a *sala*, where there are few or many guests, these exquisitely polite little gentlemen will go all around shaking hands with every one present. They never break into the conversation, but when addressed will modestly join in it; then, wishing to retire, will say, "With your kind permission," and again shaking hands, move gracefully from the company. Girls are no less imbued with the same spirit of courtesy.

A Mexican boy never thinks himself too near manhood to pay the compliment to his mother of kissing her hand every time he comes into her presence. But I have sometimes seen evidences of a double motive in this pretty custom. Every one of these lads loves to patronize the *dulce vender*, and to do so he must keep in the good graces of his mother. While he stoops to imprint a kiss upon her hand, he whispers in her ear, "Give me a medio, dear mamma, I want some *dulces*." This appeal is never resisted.

Children are entertained by their mothers with an inexhaustible supply of tales and legends. Kings and queens are generally the subjects of these stories, and while their origin is Spanish, much Mexican sentiment is ingeniously interwoven with them.

Something more must be said about the dear babies and their clothing. In the Aztec country, baby's wardrobe is an unpretentious affair. The custom prevails of supplying only a very few simple articles. A square yard of flannel and one of muslin, hemmed all around and edged with lace or embroidery, known as *pañale*, are wrapped around the infant's body and worn for three months, when little drawers—*calzoncillos*—are substituted. Dresses are held in reserve, to be worn on special occasions.

In wealthy families now, however, European wardrobes for babies are used, yet many still adhere to the original mode. At night the nurse wraps a small *rebozo* tightly about the arms and hands of the little one. She explains that baby will become frightened at his hands and scratch himself with his nails. In some families the *rebozo* is kept wrapped around the little one's arms and hands, both by day

and night, so there is no danger of his taking fright at his own development.

Poor little babes! They do look so uncomfortable, inveigled in the folds of the relentless *rebozo*, their bodies straightened out full length, so that neither arms nor legs can toss about if colic or other baby malady should overtake them.