

CHILD LIFE IN MEXICO.

Come with me on a journey to the warm sunny southland of Mexico. As we walk along the streets and in the parks of the cities you will see some children beautifully dressed, carrying elegant French dolls, riding expensive bicycles, or playing with other costly toys. But see how many more of the children are in rags, their feet bare, faces and hands dirty, hair unkempt, and so hungry that they will run to pick up any piece of bread or bit of fruit that is thrown in the street. It is with these children of the poor I wish to make you acquainted to-day.

Let us visit them in their homes. Be careful where you step, for there is much mud and dirt! What smells! they almost make one sick! Look into that doorway. You see a small yard, where pigs, chickens, cats, dogs, and babies are rolling in the filth. Each of the rooms you see opening into the yard is the home of a separate family. The floors are of beaten earth, and nearly always damp. There is little or no furniture. A straw mat serves as bed and a roll of old rags for pillow, and at night all the members of the family sleep, huddled together, in the same clothes worn during the day. Their pet animals sleep in the same room with the rest, and the doors are closed tight. The wonder is that they do not all die of suffocation before morning.

At meal time they squat on the ground around the little charcoal fire, and eat out of the two or three dishes in which the food has been cooked.

On the straw mat, among some rags, is lying the baby, only a few months old. How dirty! It looks as though its face had not been washed for days—perhaps it never had a bath. Its clothes are just pieces of old cloth or calico—a little shirt, a calico waist and perhaps an old apron wrapped about its legs; no pretty long flannel skirt to keep baby warm, not even a piece of blanket for covering, poor little thing!

In some houses I have seen the baby swinging in what is called a hammock. This consists of a frame made of four boards fastened together at the corners, to the bottom of which is loosely nailed a piece of strong cloth, which is allowed to sag slightly in the middle. Short ropes are tied to the four corners, meeting about two feet above the centre, where they are all fastened to a long rope, which is attached to the rafters overhead. Often the smallest child in the family is seen swinging this boxlike cradle.

On the street the women generally carry their babies strapped tight to the back in the folds of their long rebozo; the little heads and legs bob up and down till I have often wondered that they did not come off. Sometimes baby is tied with equal tightness to the mother's breast, thus leaving the hands free for other work.

The children early learn to creep, and get into everything. They are taught to walk so soon that many become bowlegged or even lame. Babies are allowed to eat everything—beans, tortillas dipped in chili sauce, fruit that is green or overripe, and even pulque is given them. When I think of these children of the poor, their insufficient clothing, improper food, and the filth in which they live, not to mention the ignorance of their mothers, my wonder is, not that so many thousands of them die in infancy, but that any live and grow to maturity.

Not long ago, in the market place, I saw a woman sitting on the ground, with a pile of fresh vegetables to sell. Beside her sat a mite of a child not a year old. It had a ragged handkerchief tied about its head, while a little shirt that came only to its knees, and a calico waist, were all it had on, though the morning was cold and frosty. I watched the baby a minute—it had only three or four teeth, and was nibbling a crust of bread. Suddenly it grabbed a little earthen pitcher and began to drink. "What is the baby drinking?" I asked the mother. "Coffee and sugar," she replied. I peeped into the pitcher; there was no milk in the coffee, which looked black and strong, but baby seemed to like it. I have seen that same child suck an onion as though it were sugar candy, and eat raw carrots.

Even quite small children have to work. One day I saw a woman carrying a big basket on her back. It must have been heavy, as she had to grasp it with both hands, and so could not lead her child, a little girl 'only two years old, who trudged by her side, also carrying a bundle on her little back. "Mamma, mamma, I am tired; it is so heavy," she was saying. "Yes, but hurry, and we will soon be there," replied the mother, and on they went.

Children of seven or eight have to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. Even those not more than five or six will be seen carrying babies so heavy that they can barely stagger along under the burden.

The girls in the home have to grind the corn for tortillas (corn cakes), carry water,