


When they were first married, my Father and Mother lived in an apartment which was part of a house belonging to the Number One undertaker of Mexico City in those days. The little funeral cars, drawn by mules, went along the tram-lines along the Avenida Chapultepec to the other side of the Park, where they branched off for Dolores Cemetery. This junction, where the big flower market is to-day, is still called the "Cambio de Dolores".

The landlord had built a little tower on his roof as a look-out, from which he could watch the traffic through binoculars and keep a check on how business was going. This must have been slightly depressing on a bright Sunday morning.

Mother and Dad then moved to Calle Colon, just off the "Alameda", where I was born.

Father had gone into business with a friend here in order not to have to travel after he got married. The business failed, and he lost everything. Taking his small family, he went home to England to start afresh, but before he found work he received a cable from Grandfather. My Uncle William had died of typhoid fever, and Grandfather wanted Dad to come back and take his place. *in the family business* So back he came to make his home in Mexico.

As ~~the~~ family grew, we moved several times to larger houses, and when I was four we moved to quite a big place, Calle  \$ 10, where we remained for a long, long time. It was a type of house of which there were many here in those days. The living-room and master bedroom faced the street beside the big "saguan". The other bedrooms opened out of each other in a long line, with a corridor outside so that the dining-room could be reached from the living-room without going through the bedrooms. At the end, in a wing

which enclosed a small garden, was the dining-room, with kitchen and pantry opening from a passage-way. At the back was a big yard, and right at the bottom were servants' quarters, a stable and a big artesian well from which all the water was drawn. There was running water only in the kitchen, and it had to be pumped in. The well was covered over, and we were forbidden to investigate. Brigido, the porter, used to draw the water up in buckets, and when he was doing this we got a chance to peep into the clear depths.

For lighting we had oil lamps in the living-room, one hanging over the dining-room table, and a couple in the kitchen. In the corridor and over the "saguan" there were oil lamps with reflectors. I remember the lamp standing on the living-room table, which was covered with a red cloth. When we got older Dad and Mother would read to us in the evening by the light of this lamp. With all the rest of the room in darkness, sitting around the table only our faces could be seen.

In the bedrooms we had candles, making the room a different place at night, full of strange corners where all kinds of things might be lurking. My brother was always messing around with the candles and one night he put a celluloid doll's head in the flame with a great deal of success. The flame caught the curtain, the room lit up, and there was great excitement.

For years, Father tried to persuade the landlord to put electric light and running water into this house, and even offered to buy it so as to have these improvements made, but the owner flatly refused, saying his walls would be ruined. I wonder he allowed Dad to put in a telephone, but perhaps he was never consulted. When we finally did move we had great fun turning the light switches on and off and just opening a tap when we wanted water. However, we had

no sooner got into our new house when we all got scarlet fever, which decided Dad to build his own house. For the time being we stayed on in this house, and the years spent there were very happy ones.

My Mother was a real home-maker to whom the happiness and welfare of each member of the family and household came before any thought of self. I loved everything about my home. Indeed, I would have been ungrateful not to respond to the love and care which were ours. We were lucky to be born at a time when there were no chaotic ideas in our parents' minds as to what they wanted and expected of us, and what was right or wrong. So we knew where we stood. This does not mean to say that there was any lack of understanding or forgiveness, but I think that to-day young parents are confused with so much child psychology.

It sounds very grand to say that Mother had five servants, but when you consider that each one did only one specific thing, and that salaries seem^d low - though one peso then bought as much as fifteen or twenty to-day - things look different. There were some large houses where as many as ten or more were kept.

First there was Bartola, who could hardly be called a servant. Then came Cleofas, the cook. Like all cooks, she had her days. There were times when we found it better not to go into the kitchen to ask for one of the "tortillas" she was making. She came from the village of Milpa Alta, beyond Xochimilco, and after about ten years with us she retired to run her little store there. The store had been supplied for years from Mother's stock of sugar, corn, coffee, flour, candles, etc.. However, she was a very good cook, and there was a lot to do. Water for drinking was boiled first, and then put in a stone filter with a lid on it,

from where it dripped into a big earthenware jar. This was all enclosed in a wooden cage with fine wire netting to keep the flies out. The water was taken from a large dipper, and it was nice and cold. Milk was boiled for fifteen minutes, and all vegetables were cooked. Mother supervised all this herself, but in spite of all precautions three of us managed to get typhoid fever.

Then my brother, Wilfred, got diphtheria. He was a quiet little boy, with a heart of gold, and I loved him dearly. I was terrified for him. His bed was put in the living-room, and a cot was put in for Mother. A sheet soaked in something was hung over the door. The doctor had been there most of one evening, and when he left I went and sat by that sheet, where I could peep into the room and see my brother. Mother was resting, and Father was walking Wilfred up and down. When he finally slept and Father laid him in his bed, I knew he would be all right and crept back to my bed. I became a firm believer in prayer that night, and was also convinced that Father and Mother would drag us through any misfortune.

Next in the list of servants came Maria, the laundress, a fat, good-natured soul; Laura, who did the bedrooms; and Carmen, a girl who looked after the dining-room and helped Cleofas in the kitchen. Brigido, the porter, answered the door, and kept the street, garden and yard clean. He also cleaned the lamps and if he was in a good humour he allowed us to help polish the reflectors in the lanterns. He also took care of our pony, Dolphin, and we taught him to play cricket and baseball, but he got so good at batting that we always put him in last, otherwise he would have been batting all afternoon. On Saturday nights he used to have a large bottle of "pulque" and would sit outside on the step of his room saying, "Cuidate, Brigido, si tu no te cuidas, quien te va a cuidar?" ("Take care of yourself, Brigido, if you don't care for yourself who will?")

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These servants were all part of the family and were well fed and taken care of. In the large kitchen there was a long table where they sat for hours over their dinner. There always seemed to be plenty of time in those days.

The cooking was done on a long "brasero" with about six grates of different sizes where the charcoal was put. The oven for baking was placed on top of the longest of these.

Mother used to like to go to market herself often, and I loved to go along. We walked to the market and came back in a yellow-flag 'carretela', as the better ones did not like to carry the baskets. Those were the days of bargaining. All the fun would have gone if the vendor had asked the fair price at once. He would ask a big price and Mother would say, "Is it made of gold, or did you bring it from abroad?" He would enjoy this, and say, "Oh! the 'niña' (or Señora) is funny. You offer, then." Mother would offer him half, and gradually they split the difference. My Aunt Jessie like to tell the story of one merchant who asked a peso for some fruit. She offered him fifty centavos, and he finally said, "Bueno, ni tu, ni yo. Setenta y cinco centavos." ("Alright, neither you nor I. Seventy five centavos.")

One day when we wanted oranges for marmalade Mother went to an old man who had them in piles in front of him. She said she would take the whole lot. He was quite upset. "Ay, no, niña, don't do that to me. What would I do for the rest of the day?" So there was nothing to do but take some and send Brigido afterwards for the rest.

Mexicans always love a "fiesta" and will go to any amount of trouble over it. Birthdays were always made a great fuss of. We would find a ring of flowers around our breakfast plate and something especially nice cooked for us. All the servants loved Mother, and for her birthday there were great preparations, starting from days

before. The 'tamales' which were made for breakfast were prepared the previous day and then the girls were up at dawn to put them on to steam. Instead of coffee there would be 'atole' - a thin gruel made from corn and flavoured delicately with cinnamon, sometimes coloured pink. I can remember Mother sitting at the end of the table, with flowers on the back of her chair, and all her presents on the table, and the steaming 'tamales' and 'atole' being brought in, and the servants all making pretty little speeches. They always had something nice to say. Father always felt so embarrassed at the Mill when his birthday came around because the foreman and several of the heads in the office would make him really lovely speeches, and he always felt his answer was inadequate.

For dinner, then, there would be 'mole' and all the things that go with it, ending up with a delicious sweet and a cake. One couldn't move after all this, and the servants were still sitting around their table at about 5 o'clock.

The first birthday I spent here after being away for nearly nine years, when I left for my work in the morning I found the path from the front door to the gate strewn with rose petals, and there was a dish with a large bunch of grapes brought by Bartola. I had to go back into the house for a few minutes to straighten myself out again.

To-day, all this would be considered servile, I suppose, and one takes care of the people in one's house because it is right, but the personal bond has gone and I am surprised how little I find myself caring when a servant goes.