

CALLING

Wednesday was my Mother's calling day. She had a large family as well as many friends to visit. She took my sister and me with her in turn. I think she did not like to go alone, or perhaps it made a good excuse if she wanted to leave early.

Except for being with Mother, looking very pretty in her best clothes, this aspect of life did not appeal to me at all. When we were ready to leave, Brigido would be sent for a blue-flag 'carre-tela' which was hired for the afternoon, and we would start off in style. It was rather a relief when people were not at home, and Mother took out her ivory card-case to leave a card. When we called at a house where there were other children it was fun, but otherwise we would be given a piece of cake or a biscuit and would sit quietly trying not to drop crumbs on the carpet.

My Sister ended her calling days very suddenly one afternoon. She had found the particular house rather dull after the cake was finished, and said, "Mother, let's go. I don't care for these ladies!" So that was that, and I, being too shy to voice my opinions, was left as Mother's sole supporter. I was even borrowed by my Aunt a couple of times. She had her own carriage, and we went to some very important houses. My Uncle, who was Lord Cowdray's right-hand-man out here in those days, had many connections in the Ministry of Don Porfirio Diaz. I remember the lovely houses and the beautiful manners of the people who lived in them.

These calls of Mother's would all get returned and one seldom knew when to expect people, but Madys and I had a quantity of frilly pinafores, sometimes used to keep a dress clean, or, as on these occasions, to cover up a dirty one when we were called in from the garden to have our hands washed and hair brushed, and be sent in to speak to the visitors. Our aunts never seemed to be particularly

concerned with our education or our behaviour, but the great-aunts, of whom there were many, always wanted to know if we had been good - the simplest thing was to say, "Yes" - and what we had learned, and sometimes my brother Thurston and I would be asked to play a duet or recite something. I suppose they were checking up to see if Mother was doing her duty by us. One of these great-aunts, Emily, or "t'Embly", as we called her, was most assiduous in her questioning. She would ask to see our sewing and promptly turn it round to see if the back was neat. My sister used to hand it to her wrong way up to save time. Being a widow and having no children of her own, she had a lot more time for keeping an eye on the doings of the family, and very little got by her.

After our inspection was over and we had been sent back to our play, Mother would settle down to hear the gossip. I don't think "t'Embly" would have been so happy if the family had always behaved as they should, and her calls would not have been so interesting either. I could hear Dad laughing over his supper as Mother passed on the news.