

THE EDEN OF MEXICO

Nellie Bly Paints Pretty Pictures of the
Sights in Old Cordoba.

PARADISE OF FRUIT AND POSIES.

He Discovers an Intelligent Race of Indians Whose
Women are Beauties.

HISTORY OF MAXIMILIAN'S AMERICAN COLONY

Special Correspondence of the Dispatch.

VERA CRUZ, May 29.—On opening my door one morning to leave for the railway station a man, who had recently been waiting by the side of the entrance, sprang forward and seized my baggage. My first impression was that he was a robber; but I retained my screams for another occasion and decided it was a mero who wanted to help me to the train. Remembering former experience, and wishing to profit thereby, I rushed after and caught him just at the head of the stairway. Clutching his blouse with a death grip, I yelled: "Cuanto?" "Un peso," he answered. Well, as I was a healthy American irl, and as strong as one can be after several months' training on beans and cayenne pepper, I had no intention of giving a great big brown fellow \$1 for carrying a five-pound satchel half a square. I said "no" in a pretty forcible manner, and gave weight and meaning to my monosyllable by jerking the satchel away. He looked at me in amazement, and as he saw I was not going to be heated he said 50 cents. I said nothing, and, picking up the satchel, trudged down stairs. At the door he once more approached me and asked how much I would give. "Un medio," (6¼ cents), I replied. "Bueno," he said, and took it at the price, while I congratulated myself on saving 93¾ cents.

The car was full of people, who, we found out afterward, composed a Spanish opera troupe. Although they were not many they filled the car, and in order to get a seat we had to put down shades, beer and wine bottles, band boxes, lunch baskets, a pet dog, a green parrot and numerous small things. Every woman had at least three children which were cared for by as many nurses. Oh! what a howling, dirty, lazy nob!

The pretty little town of Cordoba lies about two miles from the station, and street cars, hauled by four mules, await each train and carry the passengers to the village—first-class, 12½c. The cars wind through little streets shaded on either side by beautiful foliage, which, every here and there, gives the tourist tantalizing glimpses of the exquisite tropical gardens within. The street car passes the only hotel in the town—the Diligencia. It is a low, one-story structure, and looks more like a cattle yard than a habitation for human beings. The overhanging roof droops toward the pavement, and is within a few feet of the ground. Inside one sees a little porch on one side which, covered with many trailing, curling vines, serves for the dining room. Opposite is an office and bed room combined, where, at the desk, sits a grizzled-haired man writing, ever writing from morning until night's shade hides the tracing from his aged eyes. He greets one with a weary, pathetic smile, and

A FAR-AWAY LOOK

in his saddened eyes; as though wondering what has become of all the guests who used to trip in gayly, with black eyes and white teeth sparkling in evident pleasure at reaching his hospitable board, with whom he grasped hand, and in true Mexican style said: "My house is yours," and that friend responded: "Your humble servant." Poor old landlord, he has lived too long! The advent of civilization has rushed in upon his friends and crushed out his trade. The noisy old diligencia has long ceased to rattle except in his memory, and the modern street car stops at his door once in many months to leave him a white-faced, curious stranger, whom he greets with that strange smile and then returns to his writing, waiting for that which is nevermore.

A man and woman came in on the same train, and the latter offered her services to us, being able to speak the two languages. When we entered, the chambermaid took my troublesome baggage and led us back to where the rooms formed a circle around the court. In the center stood a large basin where several old horses and mules—which looked like old "Rip" a ter his long—were lazily drinking. They paused long enough to survey the unusual arrival. When we entered our room the chambermaid—who is always of the male gender in Mexico—sat down my baggage and demanded 50 cents. I, not feeling disposed to throw money away, decided not to pay one cent. Accordingly I laid aside my few words of Spanish and spoke to him in English. "What do you want? I don't understand," &c. At last he took two quarters from his pockets and held them before me on his open palm. I calmly reached out, and, taking them, was going to transfer them to my pocket when he, in great alarm, yelled: "No, no!" and grabbing them tied them up in the corner of his handkerchief, with great haste and evident pleasure. It had the effect of curing him, for he immediately shook hands and left without demanding more.

Cordoba, or Cordora, was established April 26, 1647, with 17 inhabitants. It was during the time of the Viceroy Diego Fernandez de Cordoba, Marquis of Guadalcázar, and was named for him. King Philip III. of Spain issued the charter on November 29 of the same year. The population to-day, composed of Mexicans, 2 Germans and 1 American, is 44,000. It is built compactly. The town is clean and healthful. Nearly all the streets are paved, but everything has a quiet, Sunday-afternoon appearance. There are no public works, but the surrounding plantations, which mark it as one of the prettiest places in Mexico, furnish work for the people. The Indians are cleaner and better looking than those around the City of Mexico, and children are not so plentiful. But one pulque shop is running, consequently there are less drunken people than elsewhere, yet the jail is full of prisoners. On Sunday people are permitted to visit their friends in jail. They cannot go in, but they can go as far as the bars and look through. The prisoners are herded like so many cattle. Their friends carry them food. They push a small basket through the bars, and the intervening officer puts it through another set of bars into the hand of the fortunate receiver. Sometimes the prisoners get a few pence and are enabled to buy what they want from the vendors who come there to sell. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to say which mob looks the worse, the one on the inside or the visitors.

MARKET AND GARDENS.

The market at present is situated on the ground around the plaza, but some well-disposed Spanish gentlemen are building what will be one of the handsomest market houses in Mexico. It is situated on the edge of town, and the surroundings are most pleasing. On one side is the ruins of an old convent, famous for the goodness of the sisters, their exquisite needlework, their intelligence and beauty. But time has laid its hand heavily upon the structure, and it has fallen into decay. At the back stands a high marble shaft, broken at the top, and dotted with green cactus which have sprung forth from the little crevices. It has the appearance of very old age, but was erected in honor of those who fell in the fight for liberty. One of the finest gardens in Mexico bounds the other side. It is the property of the gentleman who gave the ground and is building the market house, which alone will cost \$50,000. It is a marvel of beautiful walks and cunning retreats. It seems absurd that such a spot, so fitted for love-making, should be placed in a country where they don't know how to make use of it. In the center stands a Swiss cottage built of cane, with a stained glass window. A stairway, also of cane, leads to the second story, and little balconies surrounding the colored windows give one a lovely view of the entire valley and surrounding hills. I wish it were in my power to give some idea of the beautiful flowers which are forever opening up their pretty perfumed faces in this entrancing spot. There are thousands of roses, of all colors and shades, from the size of a gold dollar to that of the fashionable female's hat. One spot shows tiny

flowers fit for the fairies, of wonderful shade and mold; next would be a large, healthy, rugged tree, which bore flowers as delicate and dainty as any plant in existence. It reminded one of a strong father with his tiny babe in his protecting arms. The handsome avenues are perfect bowers of beauty. The little birds in the foliage twitter softly but incessantly. It is all life, but in a subdued, gentle monotone, soft as the last lullaby over the little child who has closed its eyes and, with a smile, joined that heavenly band to which it rightly belongs.

This is the only place in Mexico where we found a man who knew enough to have the flowers separated by a green lawn. It is the universal rule here to grow anything but grass, which is considered an unsightly weed. A Spanish gentleman once took me to see the grounds surrounding a Mexican mansion. The trees, flowers and shrubs, as well as the statuary and fountains, could not be excelled, but the ground was bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard, and swept as clean as a dancing floor. "This place has cost more than \$5,000,000, and thousands more yearly," explained the gentleman. "You have nothing in the States to compare with it. Look at the large grounds and handsome mansion of Charles J. Clarke, in your city, and think of the unsightly grass which surrounds it." Our mind went back to the fine green lawn, dotted with handsome trees and shrubs, and divided by the wide pebbled drive which leads up to the door of Mr. Clarke's residence, and our politeness did not restrain us from saying: "It not only surpasses this treble-fold, but is one of the prettiest breathing spots in existence. It is like a pure diamond set in a ring of iron."

PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

Cordoba supports three public schools and male and female academies, one theater and about 30 churches. The finest church, located next to the plaza, cost thousands of dollars. It has a marble floor and 20 altars, dressed in the finest lace, with silver and gold ornaments. The frescoing displays exquisite workmanship. The images are wax-clad, and quaint.

The plantations surrounding Cordoba grow oranges, pine apples, coffee, bananas, tobacco, rice, coconuts and peanuts. Coffee was introduced into the West Indies in 1714 and here in 1800. It grows best in a temperate zone, and Vera Cruz raises more than any other State in Mexico. Most every variety requires protection from the sun, and will die if set out alone, so those having large groves plant coffee in them. Others make double use of their fertile land by planting groves of cocoa palms with the alternate rows of coffee trees. The leaf and bark of a coffee tree resemble that of a black cherry. The blossom is white and wax-like, with a faint perfume, and the berries grow on a branch like gooseberries. A tree will bear three years after planting the seed, and on one branch will have ripe and green coffee and blossoms all at the same time. When ripe it is gathered and laid on the ground to dry, being stirred every morning to dry it equally. This whips the hull off, and it is taken to the village, where it sells for 4 cents a pound. Each hull holds two grains. One tree will live and bear, with little or no cultivation, for 80 years. Bananas are four years old before they bear. The finer banana is never seen in the States, as it will not bear shipping. The kind shipped there the people here consider unfit to eat unless cooked, and they prepare some very dainty dishes from them. There are more than 50 different varieties, from three inches in length to three-quarters of a yard. The small ones are the best. The leaves are used by the merchants for wrapping paper, and by the Indians for thousands of different things.

Tobacco now grows in about half the State of the Republic, and thrives up to an elevation of 6,000 feet. Formerly its cultivation was restricted to Orizaba and Cordoba, and a leaf of it found growing elsewhere, either accidentally or for private consumption, was, by law, promptly uprooted by officials appointed to watch for it. In 1820, 2,000,000 pounds of it grew in this district, but now the output is greatly decreased owing to the heavy taxes. Sugar cane grows in all but six States, up to an elevation of 6,000 feet. It requires 18 months for crops to mature, except in warmer soil, when it takes from 8 to 10 months.

A QUAIN PLANTATION.

One remarkable thing is that the men who own the fine gardens surrounding the village, do not live near them, as one would suppose, but inhabit stuffy little houses in the midst of the town. One bachelor has on his plantation plants from all parts of the world, over which he has traveled 10 times. He cultivates all kinds of plants in existence, among which we noticed what is known as the "Traveler's tree." It is a strange looking thing, with long, flat, thick leaves growing up as though planted in the center and hanging loose at the ends. The flower is beautiful, with three long petals, the upper two white and the under one a sky blue. It is of a wax-like stiffness. Readers of books of travel will be familiar with the tree. It derives its name from the fact that it grows in the desert where no water is to be found. On thrusting a penknife into its body a clear stream of water, probably a pint and a half, will flow from one cut, and people traveling through the desert quench their thirst from this source, hence its name. The water is very cool and has a slight mineral taste, but is rather good and pleasing. It gives water freely all day, but, after the sun sets, is perfectly dry. The bread and quinine trees are among his interesting collection. One odd plant attracted attention. It bore a round, green leaf, but wherever there is to be a blossom the four leaves turn a pretty red and form a handsome flower, each leaf forming a petal. The true blossom, which does not amount to much, being long and slim, like a honeysuckle, forms the stamens. It is of foreign importation, and grows in a climbing vine, whole arbores being covered with it. The grounds are surrounded by a hedge of cactus, which is strong and impassable. The Yucca palm and fruit cactus grow off in a corner by themselves. Several small streams run through this plantation, spanned by lovely rustic bridges. In the deep ravines are found ferns of every variety known, and on the trees a collection of orchids which, I believe, has no equal in any country. The happy owner, who is a bachelor worth about \$20,000,000, lives in a little house in the center of his town, which has never been furnished until last winter, but in the courtyard he has plants from every country in the world, for which the shipment alone cost \$40,000.

Down by Cordoba I found a tribe of Indians who are not known to many Mexicans excepting those in their vicinity. They are called the Amatecos, and their village, which lies three miles from Cordoba, is called Amatlan. Their houses, although small, are finer and handsomer than any in the Republic. Flowers, fruit and vegetables are cultivated by them, and all the pineapples, for which Cordoba is famous, come from their plantations. They weave all their own clothing and have their own priest, church and school. Everything is a model of cleanliness, and throughout the entire village not one thing can be found out of place. The women are about the medium height, with slim but shapely bodies. Their hands and feet are very small, and their faces of a beautiful Grecian shape. Their eyes are magnificent, and their hair long and silky. They dress in full skirt, with an overdress made like that we see in pictures of Chinese women, or like vestments worn by priests of the Catholic Church. It is constructed of cotton in the style and pattern of lace. Around the neck and ends it is beautifully embroidered in colored silk, the dresses always being white. On the feet they wear woven slippers of a pink color, and on their heads a square pink cloth long enough in the back to cover the neck, like those worn by peasant girls in comic operas. The arms are bare, covered alone with bands and ornaments. The neck is encircled with beads of all descriptions, and is also hung with silver and gold ornaments. The earrings are very large hoops, like those introduced into the States last fall. They never carry a baby like other tribes, but all the children are left religiously at home.

A HARDY RACE.

The men are large and strongly built, not bad featured, and wear a very white, low-necked blouse and pantaloons, which come down one-third the distance between waist and knee. They also wear many chains, ornaments, bracelets and earrings. They are always spotlessly clean, and if they have a scratch on their body—of which they get many traveling the thorny roads—they do not go outside their village until entirely healed. They are industrious and rich, and never leave their homes but once a week, where they bring their marketing and sell to the Indians in Cordoba, as they are never vendors themselves, selling always by the wholesale. Their language is different from all the others, but they also speak Spanish. The women are sweet and innocent. They look at one with a smile as frank as a good-humored baby's, and are undoubtedly the handsomest and cleanest people in the Republic. I would not have missed them for anything, and can now believe there are some Indians like the writers of old painted them.

In the time of Maximilian a colony of Americans asked the Emperor for land on which to settle. He kindly gave them their own choice, and they settled at Cordoba, where they had the advantage of the tropical climate and were secure from yellow fever. They were 300 in number, and in a short time, with true American industry, they made business brisk. Three American hotels were established, and the plantations were the finest and most prosperous in the land. Maximilian looked on the little band with favor and gave them ample aid and protection. During the rebellion the liberty party made raid on their homes, destroyed their property and not only made them prisoners and hurried them off to Yucatan—a prison from which there is no escape—but murdered them whenever they wanted some new amusement. Maximilian was powerless to help those who had prospered under his care, and just when he was to be shot the last of the colony, who feared the liberty party, deserted their once happy homes and went to another country. Only one remained, Dr. A. A. Russell, who has been the solitary American here for 29 years. The hotels have disappeared, and the plantations, now possessed by Mexicans, bear no traces of their once tidy and prosperous appearance. This is the history of the first and last American colony ever founded in Mexico, given me by the last remaining colonist, who reminds one of the last chief inconsolable and disconsolate, keeping vigil at the tombs of his people until death shall claim him too. NELLIE BLY.