

# When San Jose Was Young

A Series of Interesting Articles of An Historical Nature Prepared Especially for The News by a Well Known Author and Journalist.

NO. 64 SCHOOL IN THE GOLDEN AGE

In the thirties and forties it was difficult to educate boys and girls, especially those living on the great ranches. Some children never went to school, and a few of the great families had representatives who could not write their names. Some of the *hacendados*, those who had the most valuable ranch ever known in California, were unable to write. Small value was set on education. The *Don*s had cattle, acres, trunks of gold. Life was sunny, joyous. Why burrow in books?

Only the most progressive *Don*s had tutors for their children. Among these were the *Sunols*, who lived in town; the *Alvares* of the *Milpitas*, and the *Bernal*s at the *Santa Teresa*. At the *Santa Teresa* were several adobes and among their inhabitants were many children. These young people had their lessons in one school. Often they were joined by their relatives, the *Ortiz*s and the *Cantua*s. These children were taught for several years by *Senor Ortiz*, or *Mastero Ortiz*, as he was called, a courtly Spanish gentleman with a full beard.

With the years, *Ortiz* developed a weakness for *aguardente*, which all deprecated but endured. Poor *Mastero Ortiz*! He was such a good teacher, so kind. The parents closed their eyes to the shortcomings. But not the children.

One of the most mischievous girls of that time was *Teresa Cantua*. If a *vagabundo* fell asleep intoxicated, *Teresa* covered him with corn, so that the hens and their chickens could pick at him. Sometimes she played witch. She stole into the wood-choppers' cabins, swept their houses, cooked their dinner and stole away again, always pretending that she was a witch. That was when she was a good witch.

Sometimes she was a naughty witch. Her naughtiness caused the departure of *Senor Ortiz* from the *Santa Teresa*.

One of the *Bernal* sons was about to be married, and everybody was busy preparing for the wedding reception. In the early days it was difficult to get sweets, of which the Spanish people were very fond. *Mrs. Bruno Bernal* made a delicious glee pumpkin preserve, and she hid a great jar for the fiesta. The children looked at the jar covetously, but they were forbidden to touch it.

The wedding fiesta approached, wine was freely offered, and of this *Mastero Ortiz* had plenty. He came into the class room and sat during the lesson hours. The children watched him. He napped, and presently he snored.

*Teresa Cantua* became a naughty witch. She thought of the glee pumpkin preserve, and she summoned the school girls to fetch the jar.

Soon *Mastero Ortiz's* dignified beard was smeared by *Teresa* with preserves. The *Mastero* had the habit of passing his hand over his forehead. *Teresa* put the preserve on the *Mastero's* forehead, on his fingers. Then the naughty

witch dipped the preserve from the *Mastero's* chair to the closet, where the jar was hidden. Her villainy perfected, *Teresa* invited the girls to feast.

After the preserve jar was placed in the closet, *Teresa* summoned *Mrs. Bruno Bernal* and showed her *Mastero Ortiz* sound asleep, the flies feasting on the preserves on his forehead.

"Look at the *Mastero*," cried *Teresa*. "He is covered with your preserves."

*Mrs. Bernal* was amazed. "Can it be that he had eaten them?"

"It must be," said the naughty witch. *Teresa* showed *Mrs. Bernal* the empty jar.

This was the last straw. *Mrs. Bernal* had endured the *Mastero's* amiable weakness for *aguardente*, but his lack of consideration in taking the wedding preserves was unendurable. She awoke the *Mastero*.

Greatly embarrassed, *Senor Ortiz* rose and apologized for being asleep in the school room. "That was bad enough, to be sure," said *Mrs. Bernal*, "but you ate my preserves. How dared you?"

*Senor Ortiz* did not know what *Mrs. Bernal* was talking about, but he bowed low. "I beg your pardon, *Senora*."

"Don't deny it. The preserves are on your hair, in your beard. You have even tracked them to the closet where I hid them."

The *Mastero* inspected himself. "Can it be that while I was not myself, *senora*, I ate your preserves?"

"Of course," said *Mrs. Bernal*.

The class was dismissed. The teacher was guilty. "It must be true, but I don't remember. He looked at his sticky fingers. "I see I am not fit to remain here. I will go away."

"It is best," said *Mrs. Bernal*.

In disgrace, *Mastero Ortiz* left the *Santa Teresa* ranch. The naughty witch allowed him to go. A few weeks later, she confessed her wrong-doings. Then *Mrs. Bernal* and the naughty witch sought out *Mastero Ortiz* and made him an apology.