SEÑORITAS, PEONS, SOLDIERS, PRIESTS (1895)

Articles by John Randolph Spears

Table of Contents

(1) DARK-EYED SEÑORITAS.[1]

Text by John Randolph Spears

CHARMING WOMEN OF THE SPANISH AMERICAN RACES.
LADINOS AND ARGENTINES.
A STUDY OF THE FAIR FROM TEXAS TO TIERRA DEL FUEGO.

A Living Picture in the Saloon of a Montevideo Steamer—Enthusiasm of the Argentine Men and their Appreciation of the Beauty of Their Women—Their Ways of Praising Them—Hotels and Customs—How They Paint—Photographing a Tehuantepec Girl—The Girls of Buenos Ayres—Some Dresses—A Coquettish Race—Central American Women—Independence and Virtue of the Argentine Women.

Among the many pleasant recollections of the journey during which I gathered the notes for the series of articles on the Cape Horn region, Patagonia, and Buenos Ayres, none will linger with me longer than that of the evening when I left Montevideo bound to the Argentine capital on one of the comfortable little river boats that ply regularly between the two cities. The boat was admirably

[1] Published by the New York *Sun*, Sunday, February 10, 1895, page 2; Edited by Duncan S. Campbell, February 2019.

adapted for the purpose. The crew, and especially the steward's force, were well trained and willing. The dinner was served as soon as we were well clear of the ship's berth and the baggage had been disposed of, so that everyone was at ease. The bill of fare was long and varied and the cooking superb. But better than all else, I happened to be seated at a table with a number of educated gentlemen of the Argentine Republic who were not only enjoying themselves thoroughly, but were anxious that I, the only stranger at the table, should partake of their pleasure. We were on speaking terms while the soup was still hot in the plate, we were well acquainted when the fish had disappeared, we were as old friends are long before the roast and salad had come. Naturally we lingered long over the liqueur. We had an endless number of topics of conversation. I had innumerable questions to ask, and they the answers ready. But in all the time we passed around the table, say two and a half hours, I think that we did not talk about any one subject more than ten minutes before some of my new friends turned the attention of all in some way to the women of the River Plate region.

There was excuse a-plenty for doing this. The boat had just the right number of passengers. Every berth had been taken and every seat at the tables was filled, while none had to wait, and of all that crowd the women numbered at least a half. One glance—could any man have been found so unappreciative as to give a mere glance—would have been sufficient to show that the gentlemen had ample reason for talking and thinking of nothing else than the women. One must see such a gathering as that was—a gathering made up almost entirely of Latin-Americans—to understand why the picture the women offered was sufficient to occupy an educated man's attention for two hours and a half. For the whole saloon was but a living picture, and in that picture the eye could rest nowhere save upon its most attractive features. There were men, of course; there were also chairs and posts and dishes.

"You have traveled much?" said one of my travel mates inquiringly.

"In the Americas, somewhat," I replied.

"In Canada?"

"Yes."

"Mexico and Central America?"

"Yes."

"You are just from Brazil?"

"Yes."

"Good. Tell us where you have seen the most beautiful ladies."

"Do not think I would flatter you, gentlemen. This salon has the most attractive gathering of ladies I ever saw."

"Waiter! Haste! A bottle of iced wine," screamed my questioner in delight, while all at the table applauded me vociferously and to my great astonishment.

The reader who notes carefully the question and the answer will see why I was astonished at the applause. The gentleman asked me where I had seen the most beautiful women, and I evaded his question while answering truthfully that that was the most attractive gathering of them that I had ever seen. I had half-expected the bright-witted fellows to see my evasion, but the real sincerity of my commitment carried them away, and they became wildly enthusiastic after the fashion of the people when pleased.

Later, when they had asked me indirectly my special object in visiting the Argentine, they became, at my reply, once more enthusiastic. I not only appreciated the good qualities of the ladies of the River Plate, but I was going to tell about them in a great American newspaper! I met my table mates for the last time just outside the Custom House in Buenos Ayres next morning. We shook hands cordially, and the last word the last of them said to me was *"ladies."*

"Make a special study of our ladies," he said.

And that is what I shall try to do here, in spite of the fact that the ladies in question would very properly call it sheer impudence for me to do so. It is impudent in any man to put down in cold print anything either in praise or criticism of what he can never understand or appreciate fully, and it is particularly offensive for a writer to express a judgment in a matter in which he can by no means be well informed. But my excuse for going on with this article shall go with it. I cannot help myself. The subject is too delightful to be ignored.

But in order to convey a better idea of the Latin-American women to the Yankee reader, I shall be obliged to draw on notes made in Central America, Mexico, and the interior or western part of the Isthmus of Panama in the year before I went to the Argentine. For the dominant race in all of these countries is of the same origin as that in the Argentine. They are of Spanish descent and there is a mixture of native Indian blood in their veins. The mixture is called the Ladino race. The differences are due to the differences in the races of Indians with which the old Spanish invaders associated.

So then we begin with a consideration of the beauty of the Ladino women. Every book that I have read relating to the region in question refers to the women, and without exception the women are called beautiful in their early womanhood. Even the Englishmen, who find nothing else so good as it is *"at home, don't you know*," praise the beauty of the Ladino women. *"There are few cities in the world where handsome women are met with to the same extent as in the Argentine capital,"* says Mr. C. E. Akers, already quoted in other matters. *"As for the ladies, you see many girls of striking beauty,"* says the late Theodore Child, who was a distinguished art critic of Paris in his day. In the presence of the great array of testimony that can be brought to prove the beauty of the Ladino women, it ill becomes me to say I do not think they are beautiful. And I do not wish to say exactly that; but I think that attractive is a much more accurately descriptive word. Perhaps my meaning will be plainer if I say that the photographs of Ladino women are rarely beautiful, although their faces as one sees them excite the admiration of the traveler.

When Mr. Theodore Child said *"you see many girls of striking beauty,"* he was writing of the fashionable driveway in Palermo Park, Buenos Ayres, and was thinking of the bright, the fascinating young faces he had seen there; faces that were never for a moment in repose while he was looking. The ladies go to the park for a beautiful drive, of course, but they know they are on exhibition, a part of a great living picture. They know the walks are lined and the other carriages filled with either admiring or envious people, and they are exhilarated by the thought of it all. No one who has seen the Palermo drive on a Sunday evening will wonder that even a staid critic should have spoken of strikingly beautiful faces, even though sober second thought suggests another word in place of beautiful. Running over in my mind the many assemblages of the kind that I have seen between Texas and Tierra del Fuego, and comparing my memory of the faces there with the photographs purchased in the same cities, I have no

hesitation in declaring that the women of the region have faces that in repose are plain, but when they are animated, as in any social gathering, they are charming beyond description.

I have said this much about the beauty of the women before telling anything else about them, because I have rarely talked three minutes with anyone about my journey in the region without hearing the question, *"Are the women as beautiful as they are said to be?"* So far as my countrymen, including men and women, are concerned, the chief matter of interest in the region visited is the beauty of *"the dark-eyed señorita."* And so, as said, I have done as well as I could to give judgment on their faces as I saw them in public.

In obeying the injunction of my short-time friend on the river steamer to *"make a special study"* of the ladies, I was at a very great disadvantage in Buenos Ayres, because I lived at a hotel all the time. At the hotels the ladies are always more or less on show. There is no such thing as home life in a hotel. The Ladino ladies, I think rather more than others, prize the good opinion of even the passing stranger, and so at a hotel are constantly made up, so to speak, for inspection. Nevertheless, one can observe certain facts about them there which give an insight into their character. For instance, I never saw a Ladino lady, old or young, at the hotel or on the street, who was not powdered, and a tremendous proportion were enameled. The sale of preparations to give artificial appearances to the human face in the Spanish-American countries is something astonishing. The use of these preparations is something to make any Yankee wish to protest. But when one considers all the facts in the matter, the habit of painting the face is not only natural to them, but it does not indicate the same mental bias that the habit of painting indicates in a Yankee woman. All the writers who have noted and condemned this habit of the Ladino women seem to have forgotten that the Ladinos are of Indian as well as Spanish origin. The Ladino make up their faces for the same reasons that Indians do it.

They wear corsets, the wealthy do, as Yankee women do also. They also put rings in the ears and on their fingers, and other circles of precious metal around their wrists. The object in view in each of these acts is the same as in the others. They do not paint the face to deceive the beholder into supposing that he sees their natural complexion. There is manifestly no attempt to conceal the fact that paints and powders have been laid on. Therein, it seems to me, they have a great advantage over our Northern ladies who paint and bleach the hair, for here the attempt is to make the face seem to be a thing it is not and cannot be.

The fact that girls in their teens paint their faces in the exact style practiced by their mothers, girls whose natural features, as seen in their homes, are simply beyond criticism, shows the whole motive and desire in this matter. I remember well the first time that I saw a young girl who had been so painted. It was in Santiago de Veraguas, Colombia, the "Holy City" once described in THE SUN.[2] I was boarding at the house of a widow who had half a dozen children, of whom one was a girl of fifteen. This girl was, like most of her race, plain featured when her face was in repose, but when animated had such talking eyes and flushing cheeks and smiling mouth as would astonish as well as enchant the stranger. A prettier girl as she appeared at her home I have rarely seen.

Among other things in my baggage was a camera, and I went about the city taking views on the next day after my arrival. On returning to the boarding house at noon the lassie saw the box and asked me what it was. So, I explained it to her and then told her if she would stand still at a spot I pointed out I would take her photograph.

How does the reader suppose she regarded the proposal? She was almost offended because I had proposed to photograph her just as she was, in house attire. She forgave only because I was a foreigner, and therefore could not understand the proper way of doing things. When I learned all this, I told her to dress herself as she pleased and then pose for me. She was delighted at that, and, after the midday meal, came in all her finery—a silk dress, bright ribbons, silk hose, and low shoes, and a quantity of paint on her face and neck that simply masked her. I took the photograph to please her, but I took another one unawares next day, in order that I might have something to remind me of the girl as well as of her paint pots.

Then I argued the matter with both the girl and her mother through an intelligent interpreter, to make sure that no mistakes were made. I told them the girl was very pretty when not painted, and that a photograph of her when she was painted was wholly unnatural. The old lady listened to all I had to say, and then replied:

"I understand you, but you cannot yet understand out customs. She is a pretty girl, and she is prettier when she is not painted than when she is. But she is still more

[2] Date not identified

beautiful when she has no clothes on than she is dressed—ah! she is extremely beautiful then. But we cannot photograph her so, and for the same reason we cannot photograph her without paint on her face."

The ladies in Spanish America paint their faces because it is the style to do so, even when it detracts from their beauty: and it is the style among them to paint the face profusely because of the strain of wild blood in their veins that has come down from the old days.

Then in the warm latitude, and in the hot season in Buenos Ayres, the ladies use powder to absorb perspiration—throw it on by the handful, so to speak, and then wash it off, say, twice a day. I do not think that even a finical critic could find fault with this comforting habit.

Buenos Ayres is such a cosmopolitan city that the stranger looking for national traits is very apt to go astray; he may easily mistake an Italian or a citizen of France for a native, unless he be a Spanish scholar, but there is one trait of the native men of that city that is so prominent that all travelers have observed it, and it is a trait that helps one to understand the character of the women. More than any other thing in the world the Argentine young man delights to stand where the ladies must pass, and as he stands there he makes remarks about them which they must hear. The favorite lounging places of the dandified youths of Buenos Ayres are the candy stores, and, after church services, the steps of the churches. The Argentine women are constant in their love for church forms and sweet things, and the places of worship and candy stores are thronged. Standing where they really interfere with the passing women, the young men say things in praise of every woman that passes and say them so that the women must hear. Does this custom offend the Argentine woman? Not a bit of it. She likes it. She does not seem to hear the words; she passes along unconcernedly; but when she is in her carriage she tells her chaperon, if she be unmarried, or her companion, if married, all about it. She never misses or forgets a word. Foreigners are outraged and insulted by the custom. Many a dandy has had his nose smashed, and eyes blacked by the brawny fist of a foreign woman's escort before he had got the pucker of the last word out of his lips. And no words of mine can portray the astonishment of the dandy under such circumstances. Neither can I tell how much the Argentine girl is astonished when she sees the anger of the foreign girl at this custom. The Argentine young man hears with delight his own mother and sister praised thus, as the mother and sister are delighted to hear themselves praised.

Sometimes the dandy and the foreigner discuss the matter calmly, no personal questions being involved.

"You are looking for an amorous intrigue, an affair of the heart, when you praise these ladies; you hope someone will in some way recognize you. Is it not so?" said I to one of the dandies.

"Certainly."

"You do not think it insulting to the ladies?"

"What an idea! No, sir. Would I seek one who was not adorable? If I seek her, it is because she is attractive. Is it, then, an insult in your country to let a lady know that she is physically attractive?"

Remarkable as it will seem to the Yankee reader, I am confident that the women of Ladino blood are flattered by the amorous urgency of their male friends, while neither husband nor brother nor father is angered by the intent of the seeker for an intrigue. Of course, success would call for blood there as elsewhere.

The traveler who would see distinct national customs of dress may as well avoid Buenos Ayres. The Argentine women have the Paris styles as soon as we do, and they adopt them as readily and with equal good taste and sense. There is no distinct style among the women of the serving class, either. The same may be said of the very wealthy throughout Ladino land. They all follow the French as near as may be. But in Central America and Mexico one can find the most graceful styles of native dress, due, of course, to a mixture of the old Spanish with the old Indian ideas of the fitness of things. And the further one gets from the regular routes of travel, or rather from the highways of commerce, the more attractive are the costumes of the native women. In these out-of-the-way places, too, the habits of work, the carrying of burdens on the head, for instance, tend to develop the form to a most beautiful degree. In the interior of the Isthmus of Panama and in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as well, I found the women of the poorer class to be the most graceful on the continent, north and south, while in dress they were the most picturesque if not the most tasteful.

To see the young women come to the villages in the western end of the Isthmus of Panama to trade, short skirted, free limbed, round breasted; decked in savage finery—with gorgeous red flowers about their ears and over their glossy black hair: with cardinal ribbons at the ends of their long black braids; with low-necked, wide-flounced white chemises, and a single deep-colored flower over the breast that contrasted at once with the white starched cotton and the warm brown tint of the sun-kissed chest; with flowers in the hands and flowers on the baskets of produce they poise on their heads—Caramba! That is to see a perfect picture of womanhood in the bloom of youth.

The low-necked, wide-flounced chemise, and the skirt that does not interfere with the free motion of the limbs, may also be called the distinctive dress of the women of Nicaragua, while the women of Costa Rica wear a waist[3] that is high in the neck. In Honduras I saw but little of the women. I was there while a revolution was waging, and the women kept out of sight, but those I did see wore waists high in the neck also. In Guatemala the dress of the poorer, or as the rich there would say, the dress of the peon women, was a marvel in one respect. The skirt was made in simple fashion of calico, and it was held in place by a belt. Above the skirt was a waist of thin white cotton, a little, but not much, better than cheesecloth. In style it was a mixture of a loose jacket and a short chemise. It was almost sleeveless, and it was devoid of any such thing as a yoke. It had no buttons or hooks; it was made to slip on over the head, and when it was on the body it looked more like a fold of cloth thrown over the shoulders than a made-up garment. In fact, it was, indeed, little more than a very loose bag with a hole in the middle through which to thrust the head and other holes in the sides through which the arms were thrust. And yet some of these waists, as seen in the market place of Guatemala City, were among the most interesting and beautiful pieces of workmanship I ever saw. The sewing up of the cloth into its bag-like shape was but an infinitesimal part of the work of making one of those waists. Once it was in shape the owner began with a fine needle and the finest of colored threads to embroider it in stripes running across the shoulders and the back. In the ordinary waists these stripes were mere zigzags of color, such as one finds in the markings of the old pottery dug from the ruins of pueblos in New Mexico, but here and there was found a woman with the soul and skill of an artist. It was then that the traveler found something for wonder—birds that dashed down on rodents crouching in fear; jaguars and panthers that crushed the bones of deer and wild boars; serpents that coiled to spring; wild beings of

[3] Waist — Garment covering the body from the neck to the waistline; waistcoat

a dozen forms that fought in savage fury or fled in despair, and every one showing its fury or its fear and its taut or its quivering muscles to even the most careless beholder. No such savage beauty in embroidery as this can be found elsewhere in the Americas.

But these market women, as a rule, are not to be compared in either form or grace with their cousins in the interior of the Isthmus of Panama or in Tehuantepec. And the reason for this lack is found in their style of carrying heavy burdens. Instead of posing the weight on the head they suspend it on the small of the back by a strap that passes across the forehead. Men and women both carry burdens in this fashion in Guatemala. It compels them to lean forward as they walk along, and in consequence they are never erect and never graceful. The burdens they carry, however, are very great, nor is that all that is remarkable about them as porters. They carry their burdens almost on the run. Their gait is a distinct trot. I have seen a man with a hundredweight of earthenware jars on his back, his wife with at least sixty pounds and two girls with thirty or forty pounds each all trotting along the highway together at six miles an hour. It is an interesting spectacle, but that kind of labor does not promote beauty of form or feature in the women. On the other hand, carrying a ten-gallon jar full of water poised on the head strengthens those muscles that give the women who practice it a shape of body and a grace of motion to which other women can only approximate. Small burdens are carried poised on the head here as elsewhere in Ladino land, and the same swift gait is preserved when so burdened. I once photographed a group of five girls who were trotting along at no less than six miles an hour of whom four carried bundles on the head.

The dress of the women of Tehuantepec is peculiar in several respects; it is so peculiar in all respects, in fact, that one hardly knows which part to mention first. The ordinary head covering, however, will do to begin with, and a right curious garment for the head it is. It is, indeed, a waist, properly speaking, and not a headdress, though used as a headdress almost continually. Imagine a short, sleeveless waist, made on the model of a bag with a hole in the bottom, through which to pass the head, and others in the two corners for the arms, and there is the foundation for the garment. It is commonly made of thin white cotton and is perhaps eight or nine inches long from the top of the shoulders down. This part of the garment, however, is utterly lost to sight by what is attached to it. Around the neck is sewed a stiff-starched ruffle at least six inches wide. Another of equal width is sewed to each sleeve hole and around the bottom of the waist still another. These ruffles are often as much as seven or eight inches

wide. The method of wearing it varies with the occasion. In ordinary times, about the home, in the market, or on the street, the woman suspends it across her head by the seam that unites the ruffle to the lower end of the waist, and throws the ruffle back, so that it stands out over her neck and down her back like the feathers of the headdress of a North American Indian chief. The garment thus placed and hanging down the woman's back is so much like the Indian feather headdress that I really believe the one suggested the other.

But when going to church—the Tehuantepec women are very regular in their attendance on church services—the garment is put on so that the neck hole surrounds the face and leaves its starched ruffles standing out in all directions like the leaves in a sunflower or the rays in a sunburst. There is still another method of wearing the garment, though rarely so used, and that is as a waist. This is at certain festivals when all gather at a public platform to dance. The waist is then a waist, but it is not as becoming then as in the every-day style of wear.

This garment is called by a name that is usually pronounced "wah-peel," but some call it "wee-peel." I suppose the name is a contraction of the Spanish word *escaupil*, which is the name of a kind of ancient Mexican armor. It is made of silk by those who can afford to buy silk, and the waist proper will then be made of colored goods. The ruffles are almost always white.

The waist which the Tehuantepec woman wears continually as waist has neither sleeves nor neck yoke, nor any particular form. Rich and poor, old and young, wear a simple sack that is sleeveless, and slips on and off over the head. Its quality and color varies with the taste and purse of the owner, and it is about as simple a garment as one could well imagine. Occasionally one sees a narrow ruffle or a bit of different cloth used as a binding, but that is all the ornamentation attempted. This waist was made shorter in former years than it is now. It then showed about two inches of bare skin above the skirt. On the advent of foreigners, when work on the Tehuantepec Railroad was begun, much comment among the foreigners was created by the style. These scions of civilization were incited to evil thoughts when they saw the bare skin of the woman's waist, and so said that the custom of short waists was immodest. Scions of civilization have the habit of calling customs that are different from their own immodest. Here they talked about it so much that the Government, to please them, decreed that all waists after a certain date should overlap the skirt. The pious foreigner is a great man among aborigines, great in some respects. The women had not known they were immodest until the foreigner came.

Of skirts there are two kinds, and both are remarkable. The one is a simple length of cloth, say two yards long and of ordinary calico width. This is wrapped around the waist and the upper corners tucked in—just how is more than I know, though one may often see women partly readjust the garment as they work over their stall in the market place. This readjusting is rather startling to a stranger. The goods is loosened up and seems ready to drop, but a deft movement of the hands tightens the strain about the waist a bit, and then the corners are tucked in next to the flesh in a fashion so careless that the stranger thinks they must come out the first time the woman's body is bent, and so let the garment fall. I guess the women understand how a stranger views the matter, for I noticed that when a foreigner went to the market the women went through with the motions much more frequently than when natives were passing by. It is a coquettish race.

The other skirt worn is a skirt proper, but is made of two kinds of goods. The lower half is always white or of a light color, while the upper half is more frequently some shade of red than of any other color. This arrangement of the colors in a dress skirt seems very odd to a traveler, but the placing of white next to the ground shows that the women are remarkably cleanly in their habits. I never saw a woman so dressed whose skirt was not perfectly white; it was clean. When by accident the white part is soiled the skirt is changed for another.

Shoes are not unknown in Tehuantepec, but they are scarcely ever worn by the women. They dance barefooted in the public balls and go to church so as well. They are peculiar also for their love of gold coins as jewelry. Any gold coin is prized, but the one ambition of the maiden's heart is an American $20 piece. Every sacrifice is made to get that coin. When any coin is obtained a gold ring is soldered to it and then it is worn by a cord about the neck. It strikes the traveler as very odd to see a barefooted woman wearing a hundred dollars' worth of gold coins about her neck, but that is a common sight there. Elsewhere in the Ladino region the wearing of shoes is the badge of aristocracy. There are two classes everywhere: those who wear shoes and those who do not.

Of the influence of custom and style I had a curious illustration in Honduras. It was during the revolution of Bonilla,[4] and about all the women of Tegucigalpa were rebel sympathizers. To stop their talk, which helped the rebels more than

[4] Manuel Bonilla (1849-1913) — politician; general; twice President of Honduras.

gold, for it supplied recruits, eight women of the barefoot or peon class were arrested. After their hair was clipped off they were marched through the city afoot to the penitentiary. The disgrace of having the hair cut off and the clipped head exposed was considered so great that one woman died of the nervous shock. The universal custom of wearing the hair in the peon class is in two braided tails that hang down the back.

A common expression among those who have traveled through the Spanish-American nations is that *"When you have seen one, you have seen them all: they are all alike*." Nothing could be further from the truth so far as the women are concerned, and that, I think, has appeared from what has already been said. In Buenos Ayres the men are the storekeepers as well as the salesmen. Dapper, nice little exquisites are behind all the counters where natives are the proprietors. Throughout the Isthmus of Panama and about all Central America the women run the stores. The wealthiest of women are not above selling a cent's worth of pins and saying *"Many thanks"* to the customer. I suppose the keenest competition for trade that I saw was in the towns of the Isthmus of Panama, and there the matron sat all day at the cash box with her eyes alternately on the counters and the sidewalk before the open doors. And when one who was passing the doors hesitated for only an instant or gave a second glance at any article there displayed, she sent one of the salesgirls to talk to the possible customer, to invite him in and place a chair where he could sit down, and so inveigle him into buying. Nor were the girls more polite to one than another. I saw a ragged Indian who had only ten cents to spend treated as politely as the most opulent customer. But in almost all parts of Spanish America, as in Buenos Ayres, the politeness of the storekeeper is reserved for the natives. The foreigner, and especially the English-speaking foreigner, gets scant courtesy because, as has already been explained in THE SUN,[5] he deserves none at all.

One of the views of the women of this region likely to interest the reader is that of their occupations outside of that of storekeeper. It is the fashion among travelers to say that women do all the work while the men swing in a hammock. Belt, who wrote *The Naturalist in Nicaragua*, says so, but I am bound to say that this statement is not quite fair. Let it be admitted that as one travels along the highways and through the streets of Central America he commonly sees women at work and men in a hammock, and still there is abundant proof in sight that the men not only work but work hard. For instance, in the mountain regions of

[5] Date not identified

Honduras on the road from Amapala to Tegucigalpa I saw miles of stone fences, magnificent fence walls, too, although that is distinctively a cattle region. They had fenced the range with stone walls. Can any such range fencing be found in the United States? Now, that is only a single instance out of a hundred that I might quote if this were an article on men instead of women. The truth is that women do the housework, and they take their time about it, so they are employed almost always, almost all day, as the traveler sees them. The men are more frequently seen idle because they can earn enough for the simple wants of the family by working a short time at stretch. A little corn and a little rice and a little lard, with a few bananas, serve for the daily food, while a dollar and a half will almost keep a man supplied with clothes such as he wears, for a year. Why should he work when a week's labor will keep the family a-going for a month? He has solved the problem without it. Nature solves it for him.

But there is one spot in the region where all the sarcasm of the traveler is merited by the men. It is a region where the women not only do the housework, but they earn the family supplies, and that is in the northeast corner of Honduras. The census returns of Honduras are remarkable for showing a peculiar class of women workers. In the Department of Olancho there were, in 1889, 235 women gold washers, women who worked in the streams with native bowls washing gold from the sands, and so supporting themselves and families, including the husbands, who simply did no work at all. They get the gold, too; for, in spite of the use of gourd and earthen bowls, they are extremely skillful in spilling the soil and saving the precious metal.

One may find everywhere women who do laundry work for a living, of course, and some of them support husbands and lovers by their labor, but Spanish America is not unique in this respect. In the case of the women who keep stores, the men do not live in idleness: they are commonly the wealthiest and most active men of their countries. In short, I am convinced that, with the exception of this Honduras State of Olancho, the women are no more overworked than they are in the United States. So far as the town of Buenos Ayres is concerned, they do not work enough for their own good. A woman who is above the peon class in that city almost invariably becomes too rotund by the time she is 25, and at 35 is, not infrequently, gross.

The census of Honduras, already mentioned, which, by the way, is the work of Don Antonio R. Vallejo, a gentleman whose breadth of mind particularly fitted him for the task, contains a table showing the various occupations followed by

women in the nation and the number in each. As an exhibit of the condition of women there some figures are well worth quoting. For instance, out of a population of 307,289, of whom 221,714 are put down as having no special profession, there were 135 women engaged as school teachers, 5,825 seamstresses, 1,399 bakers, 748 cigar and cigarette makers, 228 grocers, 236 gold washers (one on the Department of El Paraíso), 2,580 laundresses, 1,804 ironers, 681 makers of pottery, 922 spinners, 109 weavers, 744 hat makers, 5,732 servants, and 180 candy makers. To this I may add that in a census report of the Department of Chiriquí, Colombia, a number of women capitalists are reported, women whose business is practically that of private bankers, for they live by discounting commercial paper and lending money.

Among the occupations of women that do not as yet figure in the Honduras census is that of workers on coffee plantations. Women are the mainstay of the coffee planter in the picking season and when curing and sorting the berry. In Costa Rica help is so scarce that women make as high a $2.50 currency of the country per day picking berries. When it is considered that 25 to 30 cents is the ordinary price of a woman's work, the position of the coffee picker can be understood.

On the whole, I think the women of Spanish America, so far as work is concerned, are to be envied instead of pitied by their northern neighbors, for the fact is they are less dependent on the male sex, and, save in the matter of the ballot, stand more nearly on the same footing with the men, At the same time they have by this independence lost nothing.

It is a curious fact, observed by all foreign women resident in Spanish America, that the servants there, both female and male, dislike service with foreigners. The servant in a native house is a servant in every sense.

"In our Constitution we say all men are equal," said Gen. J. M. Aguirre to me, *"but we by no means admit that statement in common life."*

The servants do not feel humiliated by the domineering of native masters and mistresses. They take it as a matter of course. But rarely can a foreigner be found who succeeds in managing native help. They are prejudiced against the English-speaking foreigner particularly. If this prejudice can be overcome, the native help is said to be excellent.

Scarce need it be said that the traveler can have no fit opportunity for observing the women of a strange country in their relations to their husbands and children. He can, of course, see them only in public gatherings or at most in boarding houses. Still some observations made thus may be of interest. I can remember, for instance, but two cases of quarrels between husband and wife, although I have made three different journeys in the region. One was in one of the Nicaragua Canal Company shanties, where a man was beating his wife. The canal employees said he was a vicious brute and often did so, but they added that that sort of treatment of women was not common there. On the beach at San Juan del Sur, in Nicaragua, I saw another quarrel. A man and a good-looking young woman were walking along, talking in low but animated voices, when a woman not so good looking came from a pathway through the brush with a slender cane in hand and ran across the sand to the couple. The couple were so busy talking that they did not see her until she was upon them, and that was a bad thing for the good-looking girl. At the sound of the woman's feet both man and girl looked up in startled fashion, and then the man ran away quickly. The girl cowered on the sand and the woman beat her with the cane over the back till the blood stained her white chemise waist. After the beating, the woman came to where I and a friend were sitting on the sand, some ten rods away, and told us that the girl had coaxed her (the woman's) husband away and was altogether a bad person.

On the other hand, I everywhere saw that the women of the region seemed to be well treated by their husbands, in all respects but one, of which something will be said further on. In the matter of courtesy, the women are well treated.

Of their character as wives I can do no better than quote the words of an American who had passed more than thirty years among them and had married there. He said:

"If you could learn the real history of all the Yankees in this country you would find that three-fourths of them had left the States and come down here because of trouble with their wives at home. I do mean to excuse or defend such conduct—I will give you the facts and you can think as you please. To such men the women of this country are a revelation. The change from their old way of life is so great that nothing can drive those men back to the States. Let us take, for example, the case of a man I know, who, in the States, married a school teacher. She was a well-meaning woman, but she was not a good match for this man. Having been a teacher, she naturally had the habit of correcting mistakes in others—not only

errors of speech, but other mistakes. She had ideas of her own, and they were commonly somewhat different from those of her husband. When he put a picture on the wall she thought it would look better somewhere else. The bric-a-brac he put on the mantel would look better on the shelf. The color of his neckties did not become him, according to her ideas, and she must needs go along when he bought clothing. These are small matters, but in business it was the same. Did you ever hear a woman say, 'If he had taken my advice it never would have happened?' *There are a plenty—I guess two-thirds—of the Yankee wives who think their husbands aren't near so smart as they might be, and these wives take pains to let their husbands know their opinions. This man's wife was of that kind. He made mistakes, as all men do, and he never heard the last of them. There was no violent outbreak: it was just a quiet, unending nag.*

"Another peculiarity of this wife was that she was constantly on the lookout lest her rights were violated. She had as good a right to do this and that as he had, and it wasn't any worse for him to wash dishes or mind the baby than it was for her to do so, even though his doing so interfered with his work as a supporter of the family. No man was going to treat her as she saw other women treated. And that was a saying repeated daily and oftener.

"That was not all. He was of an affectionate disposition: he liked to fondle and pet his wife, and he wanted above all things on earth to be fondled and petted in return. She permitted him to pet her usually. She did not rebuff him, but scarce once in a year did she volunteer the slightest caress—not the slightest.

"Naturally the life in that home went from bad to worse. From gentle criticism to fault-finding and scolding the transition is too easy. And the man, who was an excellent provider as well as of an affectionate disposition, eventually soured under the treatment he got. Then came a third person into the field—a widow who had some of the gentler characteristics the wife had not. She could and would volunteer praise, for instance. Then came jealousy. The man had done no wrong, but that did not matter, and so to end it all he disappeared, and came here to begin life over again.

"That was all wrong, wasn't it? Of course. He was a skilled wood worker, and so readily found employment. Thus, he got acquainted and learned the language, and did very well here every way, but meanwhile he was living at a boarding house and was not happy. He wanted a home and he got it. That was wrong, too, of course, but he is the happiest man in Central America. His new wife, if you may

call her so, had one right of which she thought daily and nightly and which she cherished above all others, and that was the right to study his likes, and dislikes—even his whims—and learning them to strive in every way to gratify his wishes. To pet him was her chiefest delight but one, and that one was to be petted in return. If he said or did a thing, that was the right thing to say or do in her opinion. His saying or doing a thing made it right in her mind. He was not always right, of course. He made mistakes, and she sometimes saw that he had done so. Did she cherish the memory of the mistake and throw it in his face? Never. She forgot it utterly, but she never forgot his successes, and, above all, she had the tact to remember them at the right time to encourage him. He had ambitions. She learned and shared them to an extent that enabled her to help him in them. In short, this little Ladino girl—this half Indian half Spanish sweetheart—had in him about all there was in life for her. She was supremely happy in making him so. She didn't know anything about her rights beyond that. Your Yankee woman with spheres to fill will read of this with supreme contempt. They have something to do besides coddling a man all the time. Let it be so. Those who want women with spheres can have them. You enterprising fellows call us lazy and unprogressive and all that. We do not care. Did you ever read Sir Thomas More's description of Utopia? He says: 'For what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties, neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife?' *There you have it. We live in Utopia, and it is because our wives have the sweetest dispositions in the world."*

On that night mentioned in the beginning of this article, when I crossed from Montevideo to Buenos Ayres, there was one compliment which my new-found friends paid to the women of the region over and over again. The ladies of the region, they said, were of a disposition *muy simpático*. The Spanish words are given for the benefits of the readers who understand the language. Literally translated they mean very sympathetic, but as used on the River Plate they mean about all that a man could wish for in a sweetheart.

As I think over all the things that were said to me about the Ladino women as wives I am bound to conclude that they are models of sweetness in disposition, patience, cheerfulness, vivacity, with a desire to please. If they were lacking in any respect it was in education and a knowledge of the world. I have had women who were social leaders in their cities ask me what part of England New York was found in, and I have every reason to believe that the convent education of Latin America is altogether superficial outside of religious matters. Then, too, they have one characteristic that is found among some Yankees as well as in

Ladino land. The women are, to be blunt, disposed to be slouches at home, especially after marriage.

In Buenos Ayres I met a Boston Yankee who was in the bank business, and had made it a special object in life to get well acquainted with the native or Argentine families, an object in which he had succeeded. After learning this I asked him many questions about their family life, and finally if husbands and wives were faithful to their marriage vows. He replied:

"Their wives are more faithful than wives are in the States; the husbands are considerably less so than Yankee husbands."

In the census report of Honduras for 1889, already mentioned, is an important table bearing on the subject of the family relations. It is entitled *Movimiento de Población*. It shows that out of 2,350 births registered in the capital city of Tegucigalpa only 785 were legitimate and 1,571 were *naturales,* while in the whole nation, out of 13,288 births 4,630 were legitimate to 8,658 *naturales.* This book gives the total population of the nation at 307,280 and of Tegucigalpa at 59,015. From this it appears that in Tegucigalpa forty illegitimate children were born to every 1,000 of the population. Well-informed men said to me that this proportion of illegitimate births would hold good throughout Central America. The Governments elsewhere, however, have not been enterprising enough to make a census, so the actual figures are not at hand save that a report of the Minister of Justice in Guatemala shows the births, deaths, and total population.

In Buenos Ayres province the last complete census was made in 1880. Returns in the matter in hand show that out of a total population of 526,581 there were 115,800 children of fourteen years and under, of whom 34,789 were illegitimate. Since the illegitimate children are likely to receive less care in early life than the legitimate, the proportion of births out of marriage must be much larger than these figures show. However, the table of births for 1879 shows in the country districts there were 21,359 births, of which 15,452 were legitimate, while 5,907 were not; in the city there were 8,532 legitimate births to 1,346 illegitimate. In the entire province, from 1872 to 1879 inclusive, it is said that 104,277 legitimate births occurred to 41,707 out of wedlock. It is worth noting that in the frontier regions there was then less attention given the marriage ceremony than in the city. From later returns (the Health Board report for

1890) it appears that things are going to the bad in Buenos Ayres. This paragraph appears in the report:

"The returns for births for 1890 show the number of illegitimate children born during that year to be equal to 130 per mil. of the population; in 1889 the proportion was 126 per mil.; in 1888, 124."

This indicates that about one-third of the births occur out of wedlock in that city. The reason for this condition of affairs in Buenos Ayres is not far to seek. They have practically adopted the French marriage laws. The fuss and bother and expense—especially the expense—are so great and the rules so difficult to comprehend that an increasing number of young people solve the problem without the aid of priest or magistrate. And much the same may be said of other Spanish-American countries. Even where the French laws were not in use the priest demands a high fee and there is commonly a jangle[6] between priest and Government over the civil marriage question. In Costa Rica, for instance, in one little town I visited I found the people in an uproar because a woman married by civil process to one man had left him to get married to another without a divorce and the priest had aided and abetted the woman in leaving her husband and had publicly performed the bigamous ceremony, saying that civil marriage was no marriage.

An illustration of the loose sections that prevail in Spanish America about the subject of marriage is found in all the mining regions. The head men of the mines—superintendents, foremen, mechanics, bookkeepers, and so on—are nearly all foreigners. The English, the Germans, and the Americans have the lead. Nearly all of these men keep house with native women as housekeepers. The result of this condition of affairs, because of the peculiar mental characteristics of both the men and the women, is simply shocking. To get their housekeepers the men profess a love for the women which they do not feel while the women are always sincere in their affection for the men. It is a union likely to be broken at any time by the man's leaving the country, and it is sure to be broken after a comparatively brief period, so the woman is left broken-hearted. That is, of course, a matter of small consideration to such men, but meantime children are commonly born. The fathers go away to leave these little ones to poverty and neglect. Worse yet, there is a rule in some camps that any woman giving birth to a child shall leave the camp and in no case return. In such cases,

[6] Jangle — Noisy quarrel

when the inevitable happens, the most shocking cases of murder of innocent life usually follow, in order that the superintendent may not learn that his rule has been violated. The prejudice which prevails in Spanish America against foreigners as a class is not without reason.

The study of the social evil in Spanish America will be found a most interesting one, even though the traveler be obliged to do it at second hand. Everywhere that I went, except in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, the foreign residents spoke of native wives much as the gentleman in Buenos Ayres did. They were called notably faithful, but in San José several foreigners said at least half the wives had lovers. A student of human nature may wonder how it is that the women are virtuous when the men are *"considerably less so"* than in the United States, and I asked the question of natives as well as foreigners.

In Buenos Ayres the natives replied: *"Our girls may have the disposition to go wrong, but they have no chance. They are never out of sight of their mothers or trustworthy chaperons. We do not allow them to be chaperoned by wives just married, either. We employ old women. Our wives are faithful because of the disgrace of being otherwise. Consider that in this city all the sporting women[7] are foreigners. You will not find a native girl or woman in the brothel unless she be of foreign blood born here. We have encouraged the introduction of foreign women of that kind, because by keeping the sporting houses[8] full of foreign women we widen and deepen the gulf that separates our women from a life of shame. We teach that it is a disgrace to go wrong, of course. We add to this the feeling of contempt which we all have for most foreigners. Our women are by nature shocked at the idea of a life of shame; they are shocked at the idea of associating with immigrants, but when you put before them a life of both shame and of association with vile foreign women, they are simply horrified."*

Men about town in Buenos Ayres confirm these statements made by natives. As has been told, the social evil in Buenos Ayres is very carefully regulated by the city Government, and it is kept entirely off the streets.

in San José, Costa Rica, the proportion of sporting women in the population is very large, according to the residents. There are several streets occupied by

[7] Sporting women — Prostitutes
[8] Sporting houses — Brothels

them, and it is said that nearly all wear shoes, and have always done so. This is significant, for it proves that they are from the aristocratic class.

Port Limón on the Atlantic side of Costa Rica had the only public dance house I saw in the region, although Panama had a plenty of them in the boom days[9] of the canal. Panama in the matter of social evil is almost a counterpart of Rio de Janeiro. These two cities alone of all south of the United States, permit the evil to be openly flaunted on the streets. All street cars of Rio—even those bound to the most aristocratic parts of town—pass through narrow streets lined with houses, from which women lean and leer at every man that passes. Many of these streets are so narrow that an impudent woman can reach out from her window to twitch a man on the sleeve as he rides along, and there are women who do it, too. There is a house of the kind across Carioca square from the American Consulate, where the women parade their forms by day as well as by night. There are two houses opposite the British Consulate in Rua Gonçalves Dias. The upper stories in the chief shopping street—the Rua Ouviderare [?], filled with the women—and a viler, more impudent, and more damnable lot of women cannot be found. Rio Janeiro is the Sodom of the Americas. Panama is not quite the Gomorrah, but it is bad enough. It is no place for a study of the character of the women of Spanish America, for it is an exceptional city.

Perhaps one may get an insight into the character of the women from an incident in my experience at David, the capital of the Department of Chiriquí, at the west end of the Panama isthmus. The people were in a turmoil over their priest when I was there, and I enquired.

"What is all this talk about the priest?" said I to an English-speaking resident.

"The priest? Oh, he likes the women too well."

"But I have been told that priests were allowed a certain latitude down this way."

"So they are, but this one hogs the harem."

"Eh?"

[9] Work on a canal began in 1881 but had been abandoned by 1894.

"This one does not discriminate. He takes all he can get and he interferes with the rest of the sporting men.[10]"

"What will be done about it?"

"He will be transferred."

If one may believe what is told, the cities of Nicaragua, except the settlement of Greytown,[11] are devoid of houses of sporting women. Greytown, however, is a town of Jamaican negroes, and not at all a Nicaragua town. In Nicaragua I fell in with a Yankee commercial traveler representing a drug house who had had much experience in Spanish America. He was, moreover, a sporting man. He said:

"These women of Nicaragua are peculiar. If you should pile up a hundred dollars in gold before one as the price of her favor she would throw it in your face and burst into tears of real shame. But if you secure an introduction through her mother or some elderly woman and tell her that you loved her at first sight, and make frequent visits, bringing little presents, such as bright ribbons and trinkets—vowing the while that you love her with all your heart—why, there is no telling what might happen. All the rich young men of Managua and Granada have sweethearts. The sweetheart does her lover's laundry work, and the price paid is always the same, $20 per month. Curious condition of affairs, eh?"

"Do traveling men in the drug line hire laundry work done at that price?" said I.

"No, they don't, even when they would like to do so. These women of Central America are as tantalizing as they are fascinating. Incredible as it will seem to you, they actually prefer one of their little pinched-up, ignorant countrymen for a lover to the largest, and handsomest and best-informed foreigner."

The commercial traveler spoke with an earnestness that was comical. He was the more amusing from the fact that his words betrayed the cause of his lack of popularity among the Central American ladies. He was too sure that he was better-looking—more attractive than the native men were. There was a shade of arrogance in his bearing. He was astonished as well as grieved that he was not

[10] Sporting men — Clients of a brothel
[11] Greytown — Former name of San Juan de Nicaragua

at once admired more than the native men whom he despised as specimens of physical manhood. Now, that is the kind of a bearing which the Ladino woman will tolerate least of all. As a wife she is proud of being submissive. As the unconquered object of a man's adoration she is the most delightful of tyrants. He must not only humor her whims, but he must clothe himself in becoming humility. She is the one to condescend. The humblest barefoot girl of the mountains must be sued for as a princess even by the king—the president of the republic. He must tell her that she is the queen of all hearts, he the most unworthy of her suitors, and he must make her believe he believes it—that he is sincere. The foreigners usually feel a superiority to the men, and so they naturally think the women ought to be glad of the chance to welcome such fine fellows as they are. And they merit the scorn their arrogance receives.

While looking over the stock of a photographer in Guatemala City one day I asked for the portrait of the handsomest native woman of the town. The photographer spread a dozen different photographs of women before me and told me they were all considered beauties, but neither was universally called the leader.

"*You must use your own taste*," he added.

Thereat, after a little hesitation, I picked out one that seemed to be rather more attractive than the rest. My choice made the photographer shout in glee, and he called an assistant to come and see the one I had selected, and he in turn shouted. I asked why so much hilarity, but had to wait some minutes for their mirth to bubble off. Then they explained. The portrait was of one Miss Fona Montes, and Fona was the leader of the demi-monde. A most remarkable condition ruled in the half world of that town too, for Fona had obtained of the Government a concession or monopoly by which she alone could conduct the nefarious traffic there. She was the proprietor of one house and sold licenses to two more. Of these two one was run by a California woman with girls (so called) from San Francisco. The American house, according to the men about town, was so popular with the gilded youth that nothing less expensive than wine and brandy by the bottle was sold there. The native places sold beer, and rarely any other drink.

Lack of space forbids further consideration of this most interesting topic, the women of Ladino land, but the reader is warned against jumping to the conclusion, from what has been said, that these women are any more immoral than

their sisters of the north. Paradoxical as it may seem in the face of the census returns, I believe they are less immoral. At the worst they are as a class faithful to their loves. The common talk that a warm climate makes people lax in virtue is all nonsense. Human nature is much the same the world over. There is no word in the Spanish language for home, but I have never seen so many happy homes as among the oft-misunderstood people of Spanish America.

- O -

(2) LABOR IN LATIN AMERICA.[12]

Text by John Randolph Spears

THE OCCUPATIONS, PAY, AND CONDITION OF THE PEONS.

Central American Bricklayers and Tilemakers—Dress, Houses, and Food—A Sugar Factory on the Isthmus—How the Farmers Live—The Coffee Plantations—Independence of the Laboring People.

This is to tell some of the facts about the working men—the peons—that were observed, and may at any time be observed, by a traveler who will look without prejudice during a journey to Central America. The Yankee workman who thinks his lot, though not perfect, is much better than that of any other workmen in the world, will find here something to think about. It is worth his while, at least, to consider what his standard of excellence in this matter is and to compare it with that of the dusky-skinned peon. The producing industries of Central America are so few in number that there are not many opportunities for direct comparison between workmen of a kind in the two countries. But, for instance, if a man is a brickmaker, or a cowboy, or a farm laborer, or a boatman, or a house builder, or a distiller, or a hotel porter, or a street cleaner, will he lead a more desirable life where potatoes and apples grow and snow flies, or in the shade of the palm and the orange and the banana? And those who, for any reason, have concluded that the average peon is a loafer who swings all day in his hammock, leaving his wife to support the family, may find here something worth considering, also.

One may begin with brickmaking. Central American houses, with very rare exceptions, are roofed and floored with burned clay. The roofs are made of tiles of a semi-cylindrical form, and the floors of square tiles, the art of making which is practically that of the brickmakers of the Hudson River valley. The first yard that I saw was in the woods between Lake Nicaragua and the Pacific Ocean.

A man had begun building a house and had got on as far as erecting wall frames of thick poles with a roof frame above of slender poles, which had been sheeted over with the sort of cane used for fish poles in the United States. This done, he

[12] Published by the New York *Sun*, Sunday December 15, 1895, page 4; Edited by Duncan S. Campbell, February 2019

set to work to make tiles for the roof and the floor. A hole was dug in the ground near the house and the loam thrown out and as far away as possible. When the clay beneath was reached, it was mixed with water and tempered with sand to suit the workmen, and then formed into half-round tiles by slapping a chunk down on a smooth log about six inches in diameter. The log was the shaper. The man formed the tile over it as a woman might shape a piece of raw pie crust over a rolling pin, spatting[13] it to the thickness with her hands and cutting it to the length desired with a wooden blade. There were a number of logs used for shapers; but, when forty of the tiles had been formed, the logs were full. This much done, the workmen retired to the shade to rest and meditate until the moist tiles got stiff enough to hold their shape when stood on end. When enough had been made and dried to cover the roof, the tiles were piled back in the hole from which they came, with a bed of wood beneath, and were then covered over with earth, with holes in the cover, so that ventilation was not wholly retarded. Then the wood was fired, and this one firing served. It is in this fashion that a majority of Central American tiles are made, although the burning is frequently done in furnaces made of tiles, somewhat in the shape of a small Yankee brick kiln.

Near the city of Guatemala, I watched the men at work in a tile yard on several occasions. They had a smooth plot of hard ground, like that used by brickmakers in a small village brickyard in the United States. They had a few small tile-covered sheds under which unburned tiles could be protected from rain; but the usual way of treating sun-dried tiles was to pile them in ranks two feet high, and then cover them with burned tiles. The clay was worked with hoes, shovels, the feet and the hands of the workmen. When a cone-shaped pile of clay four feet high had been made, the men went at it to form the tiles. A frame made of five wooden slats was the matrix. It looked something like a window sash fit to hold two panes of glass, each the size of a tile flattened out. This was placed on the smooth level ground and filled heaping full of the tempered clay. The clay was slapped in with considerable force, and then a wooden knife was drawn across the top of the frame to level down and scrape away the superfluous clay, leaving the frame level full. Then the frame was lifted clear of the clay and put down at one side, where two more tiles were formed, and so on. When these thin rectangles of clay were partly dry, they were lifted up and put on half-round formers, much like the logs the men in the woods had used. Square tiles for floors were formed as in the first process for roof tiles.

[13] Spatting — Slapping

The men worked as swiftly, while at it, as men in a Yankee yard would do, but there was no foreman around to give orders or find fault when one of them stopped to roll and smoke a cigarette. They put in eight hours a day, but because of feast days and saints' days, they did not average more than five days a week. The dress of the workmen consisted of cotton shirts and trousers and straw hats. Their homes were houses that had dried clay walls with the tile roofs and floors. So far as shelter and ventilation and other comforts are concerned, this is the best kind of a house known to the tropics. The wide verandas were always sheltered by palms and trees of various kinds. The homes were therefore picturesque. The furniture consisted of benches and hammocks only for seats and beds. The cooking was done by the women at an open fire under the back porch. When I asked the men if they had plenty to eat, they said they had, and that they were astonished to learn that I thought they might sometimes fare poorly. Their food consisted chiefly of corn bread, rice, boiled plantains, beef, eggs, and coffee. Every man had special clothing to wear on Sundays and feast days. This yard showed the tile workmen at their worst, because it adjoined a city where there was a constant demand for their product. That is to say, they had to work harder here than in any other yard I saw.

Nearly all of the readers of THE SUN know how the workmen in the New Jersey and Hudson River brickyards live. Their homes are grimy, blank-walled wooden houses that face the arid desert of the yard, unrelieved by any touch of color to cheer the eye. They have food that is sufficient in quantity while the season lasts, but at the end of the season they are sent adrift, "*dressed in overalls and an undershirt*," as an observer at Fishkill said to me. "*They become hoboes*."

The wages of the Central American brickmaker average 50 cents a day, but he has all the pleasures of life that his Northern brother is able to appreciate, he does not have to work as hard while at it, nor as many hours in a day; and, what is (or ought always to be) of more importance than this, he is left to work on honor—there are no slave drivers to yell at him.

The first cane mill and sugar factory that I saw was in the interior of the Isthmus of Panama. The cane fields came very close to the house. The mill was made of three vertical logs of wood that revolved together by means of wooden pegs that served as cogs. A long, bent pole was secured to one of the vertical logs, and, to the end of this, two oxen were yoked. As they walked around the machine, the log rollers revolved and a man fed the cane in between the rollers,

and most of the juice was squeezed out, to run into a trough below. From the trough, the juice was carried in big gourds to iron vats and boiled. The skimming from the vats and the molasses that was left when the sugar was drained, were all fermented and distilled into rum in a small still, imported from the United States. All the machinery was under a tile-roofed shed. The proprietor of the ranch worked with his employees. The. suit in which he was dressed—hat, shirt, and trousers—would not have cost $1.50 in New York. The employees included men and women, and, as they worked, they talked and laughed continually. One can find such scenes as this—men and women working together cheerfully and contentedly—in the United States, but they are not found in the sugar factories of Brooklyn, Philadelphia, or Baltimore. They are found in the maple groves of the Northern States when, in the springtime, the warm days that melt the snow are followed by frosty nights. Maple sugar making in the United States, because of the peculiarities of the season and the work and the location of the industry, has usually been at once a frolic and a profitable occupation; but, in Central America, the people seem to be wise enough to make a frolic of a like industry that lasts much longer every year.

But sugar making is not the only rural industry that is carried on by the Central American peons as a frolic. There. are places, for instance, where one can see every part of the making of a corn crop at one time. On the plains of Oaxaca, Mexico, the traveler sees plowing, planting, cultivating, and harvesting all in one day. The implements of agriculture would be very properly scorned by a Yankee farmer. The plow made of a crooked root is in common use. The beam of this plow is a long pole that is lashed firmly to the yoke of the oxen that drag it. The plowman guides the plow with his right hand and prods the cattle with an iron-pointed goad held in the other. When this method of plowing is compared with the gang plows dragged across the Sacramento Valley by four teams of strong horses, the Oaxaca farmer seems ridiculous. The Sacramento plowman turns twenty times as much ground in a day, and does it much better. But whether the Sacramento plowman gets as much pleasure out of life as the one in Oaxaca is a question easily answered. He does not.

The Oaxaca farmers live in villages. Historians commonly say that the Spanish-American farmers live in villages now because they had to do so in former days for the sake of defense against Indians. But the custom came over from Spain. The Spanish scheme of colonization gave each settler a lot in a town site, where his home was built, a farm plot where he raised his vegetable food products, and a wide range for his cattle. The natural sociable disposition of the Spanish-

American people is entirely suited to life in villages. They go daily from the village to their fields, often several miles distant, when cultivating them. Such a trip would be considered a terrible waste of time by a Yankee farmer, but to the Spanish-American this is a part of the pleasure of life. The famers and their families go trooping out of the villages together. They go to their daily work as Yankees go to the annual Sunday school picnic. At the fields thy leisurely turn the soil, clear away weeds, gather the crop. I remember especially one lot of people gathering corn. More than a score of men and women were pulling the cured ears from uncut stalks. I saw young women pelting young men with ears of corn, and children romping over the soft earth, and old folks gossiping and everybody unrestrainedly happy.

In the United States the rural insane asylums contain a greater proportion of farmers' wives than of any other class of women.

The nearest approach to downright hard work to be found in rural Central-America is on the coffee plantation. The ground between the rows of trees must be cleaned frequently because of the luxuriant growth of tropical weeds. The men, with broad, sharp shovels, shave the spaces between these rows, bending to their work much as the old Yankee reaper used to bend over cradle or scythe. I talked with many plantation owners about this work. The foreigners among the owners commonly complained that their workmen would do a certain stint every day that was not a Sunday or a feast day. This stint was usually completed before 11 o'clock A. M. Neither money not love could keep the laborer at it longer than that. The price of this day's work was, say, 25 cents gold. Three prices would not induce a man to do two stints, and if he were unduly urged to earn extra pay, he would leave the plantation altogether. The employers who complained of this custom were hopeless of the future of Central America. What kind of a future was there before a man who, having food and raiment, was therewith content?

The old fable of the grasshopper and the ant did not originate in Central America. The grasshopper—the clodhopper[14] as well—can fiddle the year round, if he wishes to do so. And that does worry the ants beyond measure. But the man who is born to a grasshopper's estate con judge for himself whether the lot of the farm hand, on $10 a month, hauling manure as the snow melts away, and digging and planting and haying and mowing away and reaping and binding

[14] Clodhopper — Clumsy, uncouth rustic

and cutting and shocking and husking for the rest of the warm season, and chopping wood with mittens on when the snow flies, with no recreation save an occasional all-night dance or a donation visit, and no day off worth mention, — whether this sort of a hired man's life is better than that of the ease-loving peon on the plantations of Central America.

Mention has already been made of the fact that the peon who is displeased with his employer, at once leaves the work. Labor unions are unknown there, but strikes are common enough—strikes that no one can justly condemn, too. They are strikes of individuals. It is the right of a man to leave work that he does not like. The peon is the most independent worker I ever saw. He can get his living from the soil and the forest, regardless of employers. Nothing irritates employers from monarchical countries so much as this independent spirit of the peon. It worries them greatly to have to treat a servant with consideration.

It is commonly said by travelers that the peons swing in their hammocks while the women do all the work. This is not true, but it is true that women, to whom falls the housework, and who not infrequently share the work of the field, work more hours than the man. But one who supposes that the women are overworked—are slaves—is a superficial observer. It is this class of blind travelers that have taught the average reader to suppose that American Indian squaws were always ill-used slaves. Save for the placer gold mining region of Honduras, where the women wash out the gold, the men do the work that supports the family. They clear the land and make the crops and earn the wages. Because the space of a few hours a week suffices for this, they do often swing in the hammocks while the women grind the corn to make bread. But even the women gold washers of Honduras have many more hours for gossip and recreation than the wives in the New York tenements or on the New England or the Kansas farms.

Very likely the reader will think of the opportunities which the Yankee laborer has for rising to positions of wealth and influence as belonging exclusively to the Yankees. Abe Lincoln and Garfield and Commodore Vanderbilt and Rockefeller, and a host of other Yankee peons, who became eminent in one way or another, come to one's mind. But in Central America there are parallel cases. Honduras has had a President who used to leave Cabinet meetings to go home and make tables and chairs for sale. The Ezetas, Carlos and Antonio, who not long since ruled Salvador, once thrummed the guitar, and sang songs on the streets of Tegucigalpa for a living. A cowboy was, not so long ago, President of

Costa Rica, and one of the most beautiful statues in North America, was erected in Alajuela in memory of a barefooted peon. Something was told in THE SUN not long ago about the peons of Costa Rica who have grown rich by planting coffee trees. Costa Rica is not alone in this respect, although it is the leader in that way of the Central American republics. The coffee planters do not always seek social distinction, but when they do, they generally succeed as well as the new rich of the United States do—just about as well.

Of the boatman, the street sweeper, and the other peons of Central America, no detailed description need be given. To do that would be to multiply facts without adding to information. From the point of view of the traveler who is in a hurry, the *poco-tiempo* disposition of the peon is exasperating. To the employer who is a driver—who is anxious to get rich quickly and "*return to God's country*"—the refusal of the peon to do more than one stint a day is vexations, almost beyond endurance. But what must be said of this from the point of view of the laboring class—the point of view of the one who is and expects to remain a bare-footed peon? And then it should not be forgotten that even these stint workers do accumulate wealth, when the stint is worked out on their own ground, and that the ground may, in many parts of Central America, be had for the taking.

Nothing has been said of the evils in the life of the peon. Other travelers have already called attention frequently to supposed evils that he endures, and to some that are real. The travelers speak of his thatched and mud-walled home as something intolerable, and so it would be, at least for a time, to about all who read THE SUN. But I have seen men who were college bred, who had been swathed in fine linens and silks and fed from silver and cut glass from their birth, who also had wealth to buy anything they wanted—I have seen men of such antecedents living in mid huts on the Patagonia desert, and in log huts on the deserts of the Snake River Valley. I am not so sure that a four-walled hut is always an unmitigated evil. In short, so far as physical comforts are concerned, I cannot believe that the Yankee workman is as well off as the peon.

This is not to say that the workmen of the United States would be better off if they should adopt out of hand the habits of the peon. Nor is it to say that, all things considered, the peon is better off than the Yankee workman. There are evils that are serious enough in the peon's lot, but they are due not to climate, but to the forms of government inherited from the days of Spanish rule. I do not believe that a beneficent climate and a soil that produces subsistence for men

with a minimum of toil, will together naturally tend to make men lazy. It is true that the very active men of the world are now found in temperate zones, and that many men who go from temperate zones to the torrid do become indolent there. But the highest civilization found by the discoverers on the American continent was in the warm zone, while the climate of ancient Greece and Rome and Egypt was not frigid. The chief evil that I could find among the peons is the fact that their road to promotion lies through the barracks of the army. The peon who would rise in Central America must make renown as a soldier, and it is because of the efforts of brainy men among the soldiers to get on top that the countries are so often disquieted by revolutions. The people of Central America are now as ambitious for military renown as the people of the United States are for money. And when a foreigner speaks of military renown as something not in itself worth the seeking, the thinking native will reply:

"*Certainly, it is not. I do not seek it for itself, but for the opportunities it will give me for doing something worth doing in the world*."

So, he deceives himself as the Yankee does when he says: "*I do not seek wealth for itself, but for the opportunity, &c.*" So, it happens that the people of Central America are ruled by military chiefs who are absolute monarchs while in power. All the evils of an absolute monarchy weigh down the people. There is neither free speech nor a free newspaper in the region, and the only vent for free thought is in the bore of a musket barrel. It is therefore not a good place for a laborer with a Yankee's habits of thought, even though some Yankees have gone there, and with tact and industry have accumulated wealth. But, because there are, in most places, free common schools, and in some—Guatemala City, for instance—schools where the mechanic arts as well as the contents of common school books are taught, and because foreigners with new, if not always praiseworthy, ideas are stirring up the people, great changes are making there.

"*I have been in your country*," said Gen. J. M. Aguirre, as we rode down the trail from Tegucigalpa toward the Bay of Fonseca. "*and I appreciate all the great luxuries of the country. I hope to live even long enough to see many of them in my own country, but I hope that the natural inclination of my people to procrastinate may not be wholly lost. I want to see newspapers and books in their hammocks—do you understand me?"*

- O -

(3) PANTHERLIKE SOLDIERS.[15]

Text by John Randolph Spears

CENTRAL AMERICA'S PECULIAR FIGHTING MEN.

Swift, Cautious, and Fond of Ambush—Averse to Stand-up Battles, but Neither Cowardly nor Weak—Instances for Heroism—Remarkable Things in the Discipline and Uses of Salvador's Army.

In order to convey to the reader an adequate conception of the Central American soldiers, it will be exceedingly helpful, I think, to consider first some of the characteristics of the American lion, *felis concolor* of the zoology books, because these soldiers, and all other Latin-American soldiers, for that matter, as far as I have seen them, are of the *felis* family among human fauna.

People who dislike cats should not jump to the conclusion that this is said to disparage the men, who are to be considered. For instance, there are the methods the panther adopts when about to attack any watchful prey; say, the guanaco on the desert plains of Patagonia. Sneaking from knoll to bush and bush to knoll, where any such shelter is to be found, crouching ever lower as it advances, it finally arrives within two or three rods of its intended victim. Here it stretches its lithe form for an instant on the ground, and then, with two mighty bounds, lands on the animal's back, and with one swift stroke breaks its neck. It is a whirlwind attack, made when not expected. If handy shelter be lacking, the panther is by no means discouraged. He will lie down behind a bush that is a long way off, and first with one paw and then with another, claw the air above the bush. He will wave his tail or two paws at once, and then repeat each motion over and again with infinite patience, until the curiosity of the other animal is aroused and it is drawn within striking bounds.

The panther is a prince of still hunters, but, like all others, it frequently misses when reaching out to make the mortal stroke. The victim may become alarmed in the nick of time. The distance may be miscalculated. A claw may slip as the

[15] Published by the New York *Sun*, Sunday December 22, 1895, page 7; edited by Duncan S. Campbell, February 3, 2019

mighty leap is made. So, the panther falls short. But even when the forepaws claw long rents in the hindquarters of its prey, and a third bound, if made quickly enough, would insure success, the panther abandons its attack and the prey goes free. He will wait for another chance as good as that one had seemed to be.

Then there is the peculiarity of the panther in the presence of an animal it believes to be its superior—in the presence of man. It flees until winded and then climbs a tree or leaps to the heart of a clump of brush, and there turns and looks fierce. But the gaucho of South America rides within easy striking distance and brains the beast with a *bola*, while the Yankee cowboy either shoots its life out with a revolver or lassoes it. Panthers may even be stabbed to death with a big knife in the hands of a resolute man, but the man must be actually resolute, not a mere *bravo* for, should he tremble or quail in the mere glance of his eye, the panther will claw his life out as it would that of the dog, which it instinctively hates.

Of course, panthers, like all cats, quarrel among themselves. One has but to consider two old cats competing for the favor of a sleek tabby to appreciate the fight two male panthers make. Yowl and snarl, swagger and spit, threaten and dare, and not infrequently end it all by one's sneaking for cover without any fight at all, or an aggressive bull pup comes along and sends both snarlers flying to the top of the nearest wall. And yet, when they do get together, they literally make the fur fly. It is a well-known fact that some cats fight each other until one is dead and the other mortally hurt.

Then, too, the never-dying hatred of the panther for its natural enemies is to be considered. Dogs are best known as its enemies, but it shows its mettle best when in the region inhabited by jaguars. The jaguars are cats on equal terms with the panther, as far as strength and agility go, but the pluck of the panther—or, perhaps, its superior wisdom—almost invariably makes it the winner.

Last of all is the disposition of the panther when neither fighting nor seeking prey. The panther has been portrayed by cowardly and casual observers as the desperado of the continent, when, in fact, it is of the most playful disposition. "*It is always a kitten at heart*," says Hudson, the best authority on panthers. When it has failed to strike a victim it never sulks or snarls. The chances are it will turn from its failure to begin rolling a round stone or a stray tumbleweed, as a house cat would a spool or a marble. On the plains of Patagonia, where they

are best known, panthers are kept often as house pets, and only their antipathy for dogs and their love of sheep and colts get them into trouble when so kept.

Here then, as I saw them, are the soldiers of central America portrayed by a description of the American lion. Their Indian blood makes the Central American soldiers take to shelter and ambush when fighting. When Col. Garfias with his regiment started up Picacho Mountain, above Tegucigalpa, Honduras, to drive the revolutionists from the little tableland where the waterworks reservoir was found, as was told in THE SUN the other day,[16] his men sneaked from rock to rock, and the enemy in falling back did the same.

During the same revolution, Gen Vásquez had the forces of Policarpo Bonilla cooped up in a place called Tatumbla. His men outnumbered Bonilla's, and besides having cannon, they were better armed and better supplied with ammunition. The village Bonilla occupied was in a valley, while Vásquez occupied all the hills around, save one. When Vásquez attacked this hill, his force, though greatly superior, insisted on running forward from rock to rock, Indian fashion. But the most noticeable feature of the Tatumbla situation was in the length of time the two forces sat looking at each other and doing nothing but fire an occasional shot. They were literally snarling and spitting at each other for days. Then Bonilla slipped away in the shadows, and next day was found in the suburbs of the capital and holding the crest of a mountain that commanded the town. It was here that I found the two combatants, and for three days I saw them facing each other, snarling and growling, but doing no more, and then Bonilla slipped away again. When Bonilla left Tatumbla for Tegucigalpa, he made a regular panther spring upon his enemy, but, for lack of ammunition, failed to get a good claw-hold on his victim's neck. And, panther fashion, he neither worried over the failure nor made another immediate dash. He waited until he had another chance as good as that and then made another leap. He came back again, this time with his claws so well sharpened that Vásquez was the one to sneak, and he eventually sneaked across the border. There was not one good stand-up-and-fight battle in these wars, not have I ever heard of a body of Central American troops carrying a position with the bayonet.

With these things in mind, every English-speaking man I met in Central America spoke contemptuously of Central American soldiers. They were called cowards, of course, and it was asserted that they had neither tact not persistence. It was

[16] See https:// donduncan.org/spears/jrshonduras.pdf

said over and over again that one English or German regiment, properly equipped, could sweep the country from San José de Costa Rica to Guatemala City. To my mind this is all nonsense. I heard such talk in the presence of natives, and the natives listened, as it seemed to me, in an attitude like that of a panther crouched in the brush when the gauchos are after him. They did not resist, but they were right dangerous to attack hand to hand in such circumstances. But I have at hand many instances of heroic bravery shown by soldiers of this blood. In the last revolution in Nicaragua, a mere boy crossed Lake Nicaragua with a small force and, attacking San Carlos, carried it as a panther kills an antelope, by a mighty dash. The boy actually killed, it is said, the commanding Colonel in a fair sword fight. The statue to Juan Santa María seen in Alajuela, Costa Rica, perpetuates the memory of a deed as brave as any that has been celebrated in song. There was a call for a volunteer to set fire to the marketplace thatches in San Jorge, Nicaragua, at the time filibuster Walker's men were cooped up there by the combined forces of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. That was a call for a man willing to give his life for his country. No man could cross the open street to the marketplace walls and back again and escape the bullets of Walker's riflemen. Everyone knew that, but Juan was the man for the hour. He burned out the filibusters, but it cost him his life. And when Peru fought clear of the Spanish yoke there was a case of like character. A body of patriots, left to guard a large magazine of powder, were attacked by a royal force so great that resistance was hopeless. So, the commanding officer sent his men flying for safety, but remained himself until the enemy were upon him; when he fired the powder, Sampson-like, he destroyed more in dying than he had destroyed when alive.

Latin Americans (Brazilians) have been known to make as brave a charge, perhaps, as any in history. While reporting the revolution that the Brazilian navy made two years ago,[17] I saw something of the attack the insurgents made on the Government troops holding the city of Nictheroy,[18] opposite Rio Janeiro. It was a dash of 600 men among 3,000, equally well, if not better, equipped, and the 600 well-nigh won. And then there were the prisoners taken by Gen. Vásquez from Bonilla's forces, who were shot to death while I was in Tegucigalpa. They stood up against the church wall, watching the squad of executioners form in line with loaded guns, and then, as the guns were aimed, with one accord they shouted:

[17] Publication and exact dates not identified
[18] Nictheroy — Present-day city of Niterói

"*Hurrah for liberty!*"

So died nine typical Central American soldiers. The man who says the Central American soldiers are cowards is wholly blinded by the pride of race or the prejudice of religion, or both. There are quite enough instances of individual bravery to offset all cases of individual cowardice of which travelers have told.

But this is not to say that either the Central American soldier or the Central American military system is altogether admirable. No one who has seen the Seventh Regiment, N. G. S. N. Y.,[19] on parade can look at the ordinary Central American soldier without a smile. His uniform consists of a blue drilling shirt or blouse, blue drilling trousers, and a straw hat—nothing more. He commonly carries an old-style Remington rifle, and this is held, even when on drill, much as an Adirondack woodsman holds his Winchester—"at all angles." And that is the soldier in the regular army in time of peace. The revolutionists that I saw in Honduras had for uniforms only white bands around their hats. Their clothing included the common cotton shirt and trousers worn by field hands—they went to battle as they went to plant corn. Their arms were for the most part pitiful to look at. They carried the cheap little pot-metal, muzzle-loading shotguns, made in England for the export trade. To put in two drachms[20] of powder and four buckshot would be to load them to the last gasp. It was on such weapons as these that the revolutionists staked their lives. And that they did this is worth considering in forming an estimate of the men as soldiers. It may be admitted by their friends that the soldiers there make a sorry appearance when compared with well-drilled, well-equipped soldiers. But this is easily accounted for. They are poor in money always. Every man must serve as a soldier, but the troops one sees are at best raw recruits, for seldom does one see a body of them who have served more than a year or so.

As was said, the panther is in ordinary life a most cheerful, happy-go-lucky fellow. Officers and soldiers are, on the whole, cheerful, happy-go-lucky fellows. It is right hard work to drill—too hard, in fact, today. *Mañana*—tomorrow we will drill until we learn not only the manual of arms, but the movements of regiments. But tomorrow never comes. However, when I was in Salvador and in Guatemala, I saw some drilling that was pretty well done. Every Sunday morning there was a grand parade of the soldiers of San Salvador in the Plaza de

[19] N. G. S. N. Y. — National Guard of the State of New York
[20] Drachm — One eighth of an ounce

Armas. A battery of six German field rifles, a troop of fifty-six cavalrymen, all told, and four regiments of military took part in the display. The battery unlimbered and went through the motions of firing on an enemy in various quarters without any noticeable mistake in handling the guns; but the guns, except for use on the paved streets, would have been wholly useless in the rainy season. The guns were three-inch rifles, long and wicked-looking, but the carriages had 2¼ inch tires, I think—in any event, so narrow that the gun would bury itself out of sight in the mud at the first jump off the pavement in the rainy season. The cavalry troop made a dashing appearance, in spite of the fact that the horses paced instead of galloped when urged beyond a walk. The men carried carbines, which they handled remarkably well.

The most striking peculiarity of the infantry was the step. Plainly they had been drilled to step together, and preserve the line in good order when swinging, but they took two steps where a Yankee regiment would take one. Even their double-quick was but a mincing pace. They were only fairly proficient in handling guns, when judged by our standard.

Some of the stories told me about the Salvador army were interesting. A German Colonel at $500 in gold a month and a German sergeant at $125 had been imported by the Ezetas to instruct the Salvadorian soldiers. Such large pay, together with the privileges given these foreigners, excited the envy and jealousy of the natives very much, though this ill-feeling rarely was exhibited. One day, however, the commanding General, on entering the quarters of the artillery, found the German Colonel loading shells for the field pieces with smokeless powder, and ordered him to stop it. The Colonel, although a strict disciplinarian, concluded that the shell loading was none of the General's business, and said so. An appeal was taken to President Ezeta, who sustained the General. The Colonel at once resigned and demanded his passport, whereat the President changed his mind and told the Colonel to do as he pleased thereafter. Next day the General again entered the room where the Colonel was loading shells, this time smoking a cigarette.

"*Take that cigarette out of here instantly*," said the Colonel. The General smiled, knocked the ashes from it to the floor, took another puff and said:

"*The President says you can do as you wish. So, I can too. You cannot order me.*"

The Colonel carefully put his loading tools on the table, rose from his seat, and going to the General, took hold of his shoulder, whirled him around to face the door, and then kicked him out of the room and across the yard beyond. That settled the standing of the Colonel and the sergeant in the Salvador army. They took no orders and what they gave were obeyed. But people told me that Ezeta's importing of foreigners would overthrow his Government, and very likely it did help to do so, when the opposition at last arose.

Another story of Ezeta's method of drilling raw troops probably will seem incredible. Two English-speaking businessmen assured me that two squads of troops were often sent into the country, where one squad was set firing down a road while the men in the other were set running to and fro across the road, dodging the bullets as best they could.

Some of the provisions of the Salvador Constitution relating to "the armed force" are worth quoting, because they show the most conservative Salvador view of the proper status of a national army. Thus Article 132 provides that "*the armed force is established * * * * to enforce the law, to preserve public order, and to cause constitutional guarantees to be a fact*." With that in the fundamental law, it is found easy for army officers to exercise the duties of policemen and magistrates as well as of sheriffs and executioners in the districts where they are stationed. In fact, the usual duty of the standing army is everywhere that of policemen, save in the few large cities where policemen are maintained. Even in towns of a few hundred inhabitants, one finds a squad of troops with a commanding officer, who is rarely of a lower rank than that of Colonel, in charge. Prisons of all kinds are governed by them, of course. Streets are swept by prisoners, who are watched and directed by soldiers. I saw this done in several towns. If there was such a thing as a dog pound in the country, soldiers would serve as dog catchers. People in the United States who believe in placing Federal guards at all polling places, when elections for members of Congress or for a President are in progress, can see their ideas in this matter illustrated at any election in Central America. The polls always are guarded by soldiers. In short, the whole region is ruled by military despots.

Article 133 of the Constitution of Salvador is found to be especially useful to ambitious military leaders. It says: "*The armed force is essentially obedient and it has not the power to deliberate in matters of military service.*" The commanding officer of a force deliberates nevertheless—sometimes decides to overthrow the Government. In such a case as that, the entire force under him is

almost always "*essentially obedient*." When Carlos Ezeta inaugurated the revolution that placed him in power, he was in command of the troops gathered in Salvador for a great celebration. There was a grand entertainment at the national White House. The President had no suspicion of treachery, and, for that matter, neither did the troops. The troops were ordered by the Ezetas to take possession of certain parts of the city and to clear certain streets and to fire on certain people, and all this they did, not knowing a revolution was intended. In the midst of the firing the President came among them. He had been feeling sick and had gone to bed and to sleep, but was awakened by the firing. Going to the men who were firing down the streets that centered at the White House, he asked them if they knew who he was, and they said they did.

"*Cease firing*," said he. They did so.

"*Ground arms*," he continued, and it was done. The President was (unexpectedly to the conspirators) in control once more. The conspirators fled. But at that moment he staggered and fell to the pavement and died. His friends say he had been poisoned. So, the conspirators once more began directing the troops, and the revolution was accomplished. When I was in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Gen. Domingo Vásquez was the chief of the army, but when he determined to take the executive chair, he merely directed the President to resign in his favor, and it was done.

The traveler who talks with foreigners living in the cities of Central Americas hears the form of Government prevailing there discussed more than any other subject. The military despotism is denounced, of course, on all occasions, and on nearly all occasions Uncle Sam's Monroe doctrine is mentioned and denounced also. The foreigners believe that, but for the long arm of Uncle Sam, all Central America would be brought soon under the "*protection*" of some European Government, and "*order would be restored and preserved*." It is talked and probably believed that England and Germany would divide the responsibility of protecting the region. Order having been guaranteed, it is supposed that prosperity would come to the region protected with widespread wings—especially to the region under an English protectorate. When I first heard such talk, I used to ask how it happened that British Honduras did not prosper and Jamaica was retrograding so rapidly, although a part of Her Majesty's domains. But I soon stopped asking such questions. They were plainly considered rude.

The truth is, the military system of Government is natural to the people. When the Central Americans threw off the yoke of Spain they merely changed individual rulers, and not essentially the system of Government. They substituted natives for the imported officers, and that was a gain, of course, but they were still ruled by military officers. The generations since have grown up under that system, and they know nothing of any other. More than that, their system of religion inclines them to such a system of Government. Practically all the people are church members, and, of course, the one bias of mind which a Church creates is that of unquestioning faith and obedience. I doubt if a hundred men can be found in the Spanish Main who have a real conception of what constitutes a free Government.

To establish a free Government in Central America it would be necessary either to change the whole habit of thought of the whole people, or else to import enough immigrants, who understood and believed in free Government, to outvote the natives. It is, of course, impossible to import any considerable number of people who know anything about a free Government. Whether a people whose religious as well as secular training has tended to produce the present system of Government can be changed, except very slowly, until they will inaugurate free Government, is a matter which almost any traveler in the region would say was doubtful.

- O -

(4) PRIESTLY PECULIARITIES.[21]

Text by John Randolph Spears

SOME SPANISH-AMERICAN IDEAS IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS.

In a Church Containing $11,000,000 Worth of Gold and Silver—Courtesy to Foreigners—The Priest's Pledge of Purity—Native. Adherence to Forms—Churches Worth Seeing—Church Property taken for Schools—The Church's Influence.

This is a story of churches and priests in the Spanish Main, and that is a story over which any traveler may hesitate longer than over any other that he can gather in that region, for the reason that religious zeal on the one hand, and prejudice on the other, will scan his work with searching eyes, and not only trip him up at every step aside from the narrow trail of absolute accuracy, but will very likely ascribe a desire to mislead the reader where only an unavoidable stumble was made. Nevertheless, it is a story that ought to be told for a variety of reasons that will readily suggest themselves, the chief of which is, as it seems to me, the fact that here is a region where practically there is but one Church body, and where practically everybody has been baptized into that Church.

During a journey from Panama, west and north, overland through the Spanish Main to Paso del Norte, Mexico, opposite El Paso, Tex., I was bound to see not a little of the churches and the priests and to hear no end of stories of the doings in connection with them; but, of all that I saw and heard, nothing seemed quite so impressive as my first glance into the great cathedral at Puebla, Mexico. People throughout the journey had often told me that, of all churches of the region this was the most magnificent, invariably explaining their admiration by saying that here was a church so rich that, in spite of losses of millions of dollars' worth of gold and silver taken from it by the Mexican rulers, there remained no less than $11,000,000 worth of precious metals within its walls, besides other articles of value. That about every English-speaking man I met in the Spanish Main should have gauged the interest in the church by the amount of precious metal within its walls, was in itself a matter worth considering; and so, although not

[21] Published by the New York *Sun*, Sunday, January 5, 1896, page 4; edited by Duncan S. Campbell, February 2019

especially interested in somebody else's hoarded wealth, I went to the cathedral first of all, after reaching Puebla. It was about 10 o'clock in the morning—an hour when I was likely to find few people there. Passing through what seemed to be the most-used entrance, I found, a few feet beyond the door, a small stand draped with a cloth that fell to the stone flagging. In the center of the stand was a plate of solid gold, six and a half inches in diameter and an eighth of an inch thick. On this gold plate, which was placed there to receive contributions, lay a copper cent of the coinage of the country.

Quite a number of visitors came and went while I was in the cathedral, and a considerable portion of them commented in English on what they saw. I heard one nice-looking old lady say to another nice old lady: "*If only Brother Talmage could see this—millions of gold on the walls, and on the saints—isn't it all beautiful?—but so pagan!*" I saw other strangers come in, and after one comprehensive look around, walk across the flagging and kneel before an image with every appearance of sincere devotion. Others, the majority of the foreigners who entered, in fact, looked about with idle curiosity for a time and then went out. But, so far as I observed, no one except myself gave any attention to the striking portrayal of the wealth of the recipient and the poverty of the donor which the gold plate and the copper cent afforded. And that seemed too bad, for if it be a good, practical, sensible thing to pile up wealth in a church building, penny by penny, then here was an example for all mankind; while if there is anything that ought to be criticized in such doings, then here was the object lesson.

In the little village of La Mesa, in the department of Santiago, in the western part of the Isthmus of Panama, and again at Horconcitos, a few leagues west of La Mesa, I saw something that seemed well worth the consideration of anyone studying the people from a religious standpoint. In each place, a priest had excited his people to begin building a great church. Church building in these places was a matter that involved very little beside the manual labor of the members of the congregation. The walls were to be made of adobe bricks, made of clay dug out of the earth and dried in the sun. Tiles are everywhere used for floors and roofs in that region, and these could be formed and burned by almost every man in the congregations from the abundant materials at hand. To support a roof, the people invariably use the trunks of trees, with the fishpole cane for sheeting, and these two were abundant and nearby. A plenty of men in the congregation could whipsaw enough lumber for uses within the church, and the altar decorations from the little old churches already in use could be transformed to a new one.

That these congregations began their work with enthusiasm was perfectly plain. The ground plan in each case was as large as that of any church in New York City, although the total population in either district did not exceed 1,200, and I doubt if it reached 1,000. To shelter a huge congregation was plainly not the object in view in planning so great a church. I asked two or three people in each place, and some along the route who knew of the buildings, what the object was. Some said it was for the honor of God and his saints. Two men (natives) said it was to gratify the ambition of the priests. One said:

"*Why do people in the United States try to build bigger churches than they have need of? I think it is because they want to outshine their neighbors. They try to make everybody and themselves believe it is for the glory of the saints, when it is pride*."

Alas for the glory of God and the saints—alas for pride, as the case may be. When these widespread walls had been built up as high as the workmen could conveniently reach without scaffolding, the enthusiasm faded away. The power of the priest was not sufficient to keep them at it. They determined to rest, but were prevailed on to lay enough tiles on top of the unfinished walls to keep the rain from melting the structures down altogether, and then they quit. No one seemed to think there was any chance of the work on either structure being renewed. In fact, had anyone been so inclined, the old walls would have been useful only as clay beds.

The first priest with whom I had any extended talk was living in Remedios, in the department of Chiriquí, Isthmus of Panama. It was on a Sunday, and the village was full of cowboys who had come to town, as United States cowboys might do. I saw many of them drinking rum, and eventually there was a deal of shouting and some running of ponies on the street. Then two men got to quarrelling, and one hit the other over the head with a stout [...] handle. The blow cut an ugly gash in the fellow's head, and he went off across the plaza, shouting, cursing, and staggering, with his hair over his eyes and the blood running down the side of his face in a stream. In this condition he almost ran afoul of the village priest, a collision being prevented only by a smart jump the priest made.

Seeing this jump, the cowboy turned and recognized the priest. He fairly gasped at the sight, and then down he went on his knees and begged forgiveness. The priest spoke soothingly, and the man went on weeping.

I was standing by at the time, and the priest invited me to go home with him. His home was an adobe-walled house with a high-pitched roof of palm leaves. It had been divided into two rooms, and a notched log served as a ladder to reach the storeroom above. Houses in that region are rarely arranged for even a garret above, but the upper room was no indication of any special luxury in the priest's home. The house was, on the while, very plainly furnished, but it had more books than I had seen altogether in the other villages of the Isthmus. This priest had been a cigarmaker in Mexico and Cuba during his youth, but natural inclinations led him into the priesthood. He treated me cordially, of course—I never heard of a priest treating a foreigner there in any other way—and I enjoyed my visit very much.

Speaking of the courtesy of a priest reminds me of a visit I made to a church in Guatemala City. The foreigners in town told me that under a certain church could be found skeletons of men, women, and children, which, as the foreigners believed, indicated sorry doings in the convent that had formerly adjoined the church. If I wanted to see an evidence of the evil lives formerly led within the old walls, and get matter for a real sensation, here was my chance. So, I went to the church and told the janitor that I was a Yankee reporter who wanted to see the church and the mummies beneath. He asked me to see the priest about it, and I went with him to do so. We found the priest in the confessional, but when he saw that a stranger was waiting to speak to him (the confessional was open in front) he left his parishioner to come to me. I told him my errand and related what the foreigners had told me of the place, and ended by saying that I was entirely without prejudice, one way or the other. I wanted to see what was there, and to write what I might see and learn.

At this the priest laughed heartily and said I was entirely welcome to see everything. I found the mummies a very poor show. They were neither works of art nor exhibits for a criminal court. The notion that the skeletons of children found there were the remains of the offspring of nuns foully murdered to conceal a sexual crime is hard to characterize. If priests in these days are allowed to continue in their offices while their children roam the streets, there was no occasion for the murder of infants in the old days, when the rule of the priests was absolute. I should not have mentioned the matter at all, but for the reason that the story shows that the priests are courteous under adverse circumstances, and that foreigners in Spanish American countries are often led by

prejudices into wronging grievously the people among whom they live and do business.

As to the treatment the parishioners receive from the priests, I was dependent for the most part on the testimony of natives of the country. No one need believe that the priest rules there as a tyrant, even among the poor and ignorant. I saw natives kneel in the street and cross themselves before passing a church door. I saw the penny on the gold plate. But the influence of the priest is wholly personal.

In what directions this influence is exercised is a matter worth some consideration. The common charge among foreigners—that they are licentious—ought to be taken up first of all. Some facts were related to me showing that their notions of morality differ from the notions entertained by preachers in the United States. At David, in the Isthmus of Panama, the people told me their priest was to be deposed because he was attentive to too many women. "*He hogged the harem*," as one said who spoke English; and when I asked if it was merely a question of his taking liberties with "*too many*," the reply was in the affirmative. I saw for myself in various towns, beginning at Santiago de Veraguas, that the priests usually had housekeepers who were handsome women, and that there were children in the houses who called the housekeeper "*mother*", although the woman was said to be neither a widow nor a wife. In Alajuela, Costa Rica, a photographer from California, who said he was a faithful member of the church, came to me especially, to ask that I would expose the condition of affairs there. The priest, he said, made no pretense of denying the paternity of his children. The Californian was plainly shocked by such a condition of affairs.

At a little town where I remained overnight on my way from Puntarenas, Costa Rica, to San José, the landlady was very indignant because the village priest had performed a marriage ceremony for a man who wanted to wed a woman who had been married by civil process to another man, from whom she had but recently parted. There had been no divorce. The priest said the civil marriage was not binding. Not to multiply instances of this kind, it is likely that no one will deny that a majority of the priests of the Spanish Main hold their pledge of sexual purity very lightly. I asked the Alajuela photographer if the conduct of the priest there had had the effect of leading the women to make merchandise of themselves, and he replied that it had not, but it had led to very many unions without either a civil or a religious marriage ceremony. And that, I am sure, is the effect throughout the Spanish Main. In fact, I believe that it has led the

people very close to a mental condition where they regard the marriage service as a form only. They go through the service for the same reason that they follow certain other social usages—for instance, as they say *Que vaya bien* (that you may go well) to a traveler, or, as they say to a stranger who is temporarily a guest, "*The house is yours*," or as swell people in New York shake hands with their knuckles on a level with their noses, or carry canes ferrule end up. It is the proper caper—no more.

I saw a good many street services and parades. My journey was made in the spring of the year, when such things are common. An image was, in all cases, carried in the parade, and this was usually made of a wooden frame with a paper face, the whole as gorgeously arrayed as the means of the parishioners would permit. At Amapala, the figure was made to represent Christ riding an ass into Jerusalem. The mask of this figure had a moustache and goatee in black paint, which gave the face the appearance of a conventional villain on the stage. But it did not seem so to the people in the procession. They knelt down in the street facing the figure, and said prayers and went through other religious forms. I saw foreigners ridiculing such doings, and occasionally a foreigner told me he thought such things were heathenish. I asked many natives about their feelings in regard to the images in their churches and in their homes, for nearly every home there has an effigy of a patron saint set up in the best room. From the replies, I gather that they worshipped the saint, rather than the effigy, but I am not absolutely sure of this. They regard the wood and paper as sacred, undoubtedly, much as a devout Methodist or Presbyterian or Baptist regards the leather, paper and ink of his Bible. No devout Protestant would think of kicking aside a copy of the Bible which might happen to lie in his path, and a devout native of the Spanish Main would certainly resent an indignity offered to his image of a saint. There is, of course, no more heathenism in worshipping a paper doll than in worshipping a paper book.

But this leads to another matter of which almost every traveler in the region has made note. The people do unquestionably say many things that they do not mean. The gentleman says to the lady that he puts himself under her feet when he wouldn't get the floor dust on his knees for anything. The host presents his house to his guest. The common talk of mere acquaintances abounds in extravagant adjectives of praise. The caller who did not say "*por Jesus*" on hearing of even the slightest indisposition of any member of the family would be considered wanting in decent sympathy and respect. And these facts are the more interesting when it is remembered that the people of the Spanish Main are, on the

whole, half-breed Indians. One does not expect Indians to multiply words with strangers, but so much is the habit of multiplying words and the following of forms cultivated, that foreigners come to assert that the people are satisfied by mere forms—that they have no real appreciation of the word "sincerity". The people who make this charge know better, of course. Mothers love their children there, as elsewhere, and foreigners themselves testify that nowhere in the world are sweethearts so true to lovers. But it is true that these half-breed Indians do lay a stress on formality that is well-night incomprehensible to a Yankee. That people of Indian blood should take offense when something was done with good intent, but in bad form, will never cease to be a matter of wonder in the north, but so it is. Very likely the admixture of Spanish blood had much to do with it; but the main cause, I am sure, lies in their religious teachings. The Spaniards brought the sword in one hand and the cross in the other; and, fearing the sword, the Indians adopted the forms prescribed under the cross. They do not continue these forms of worship through fear of the sword, of course; but, worship having been a matter of form only with their ancestors, the old habit of thought has descended to the present generations. Under the conditions that have prevailed since the Spanish occupation of the country, the forms of religion have been about the most important factors in the daily lives of the people. So, it was entirely natural that people whose ideas of religion were chiefly concerned with forms should come to value forms in all other matters, to count forms as matters of very great, if not of chief importance.

It has seemed worthwhile to trace out the origin of this love of forms, because their adherence to forms is the feature of the national character there which Yankees are least capable of enduring.

No description of the cathedrals and churches that were called fine works of architecture will be attempted, for the simple reason that I do not know anything about architecture; but, I saw two different church buildings that might well strike the attention of any traveler. In the suburbs of Guatemala, on a hill that overlooks the whole city, may be found an old church that dates from the seventeenth century. It has thick walls and an arched roof of cement. It looks as if it might stand there for a thousand years yet. The walls within were hung with ancient-looking pictures of saints, and there were old images in niches there. A janitor conducted me through the church and out on the roof. He said the paintings were considered very beautiful, but they looked, save for their age, very much like the work of native, untrained artists, and it was this that made them interesting to me. There was something about them that made me think of the

art textile work, found among the Indians in the marketplace in the city at this day. The genius that handled the brush, painting saints, would have done better painting jaguars and birds of prey and warriors in battle, because it knew more about such things, and had a deal more of their nature in his blood than of that of the real saints. What with the location of this church, and its curious paintings, and its massiveness, I think it much better worth examination than the big cathedral on the central plaza.

The other church that interested me was in the midst of the mountains in the southern part of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico. I had followed the trail for two days from Tehuantepec, through as wild an inhabited region as can be found on the continent, I guess. The third morning, I came to a little hamlet,[22] wedged in between two ridges, where there was not enough level ground for any semblance of a plaza; but the people had built a church on such level ground as was there, and they were right proud of it. It was only a tiny hamlet, but the church was large enough for 800 people. The walls were built of tiles trimmed with flesh-colored porphyry, cut in huge, rough blocks. A few blocks of the porphyry had been built into the walls on no definite plan, apparently, and yet, the priest who directed the work had an artist's eye for an arrangement of tile-red and flesh-pink in the broad face of a church wall. Moreover, there were massive buttresses, through which huge stone pipes projected, to carry away the water from the solid cement and tile roof; there was a great dome at the rear; and, in front, a bell-tower of round stone pillars; and, above all, the cross. More interesting still, and yet not to be well described in limited space, was the front wall with its deep arched portal, its niches for saints, and its curious inlaid figures and devices for ornament, where church ideas had been delineated by a native hand. Certainly, I did not see anything, in either color or design, to equal this church. The much-talked-of cathedral of Puebla, with its eleven million dollars in precious metals, was not to be compared with that in the mountain gulch, save in the minds of those who worship the calf.[23]

While speaking of structures, it should be said that every church I saw in the Spanish Main was built, apparently, for worship, as distinguished from preaching. I did not see a pew or any other seat in any of them. There is preaching there, of course, but on such occasions the people carry their own chairs. During ordinary services, the people either stand or kneel, as the occasion requires.

---

[22] San Bartolo Yautepec

[23] Worship of the calf — Possibly a reference to the Biblical account of the idolatry of the "golden calf"

As has been said recently in THE SUN, there are very few paupers in Central America. Consequently, such institutions as orphan asylums are not to be found. There are hospitals in the large cities, and the people take great pride in them, but they are not Church institutions. The need of Church institutions of the kind seems nowhere apparent. But at Santiago de Veraguas in the Isthmus of Panama, a town noted for its religious enthusiasm in other days, the priests had turned a church into an asylum for poor and infirm women.

Save in Colombia, the Governments of all the nations visited were pretty well emancipated from Church control. The law of Colombia declared civil marriage invalid. A man who had been married by civil process in the United States could be lawfully married again by a priest in Colombia. In Costa Rica, the Government had bought the claims the church had formerly had. The right to preach other systems of religion was everywhere guaranteed, and in one place exercised. A Presbyterian preacher was located in Guatemala City; but, when I asked about his influence in making converts, people said he had none. Mr. F. Penzotti, who had sold Bibles for the American Bible Society of New York all through Central America, told me at San José, Guatemala, that such missions as that in Guatemala were useless. Another interesting statement he made was that, in the course of a little over a year, he had distributed about 14,000 Bibles—sold most of them—without having been at any time interrupted in his work by the priests.

It will be apparent to any traveler in Central America, I think, that the political influence of the priests has fallen off greatly in recent years; and, further, that his falling off is on no case due to the introduction of any other form of Christian worship or belief. Priests have been arrested frequently on the arbitrary order of an official and, without trial, imprisoned. A case of the kind happened while I was in Guatemala. People told me in Mexico about priests who were shot to death without trial; I know nothing of the facts, but I believed the stories. In every case of this kind, the priest, they said, had taken part in some political matter offensive to the rulers. If the common people of the region were under the influence of the priests, save as church members are always ruled by spiritual advisers, such harsh treatment of even traitorous priests would overthrow any Government there. Educated people everywhere told me that men—and even women—of their class were at heart either agnostics or infidels. What they called the age of reason had begun in Central America, they said. They still had their babies baptized, but that was because it was the style, and the

occasion gave opportunity to display no end of pretty baby clothes. In support of this assertion is the fact that I saw no one in any religious procession but members of the peon class, save that the priest was, of course, of the educated class.

On the whole, all the priests that I saw were of the cultured, educated people of the country. Instead of ruling their people with iron tyranny, Church and State have been so far separated that priests are not infrequently victims of the arbitrary power of the military despotisms governing the region. Like religious teachers everywhere, their interpretations of moral precepts are greatly modified by inherited mental and physical tendencies; and, as happens in the States, they are just about on a level with the people of whom they are a part. People who believe that any public form of Christian worship is better than no public form of Christian worship would find the present tendency of religious matters in Central America deplorable. People who believe that the observance of stated forms leads to insincerity, that appealing to fear degrades manhood, and that God despises a coward, will, like the Swedish mechanic[24] already quoted, find the condition of religious affairs there hopeful. But, in whatever light the Central American priests and their people are viewed, it would ill become a Yankee to say there was any reason for depriving them of the right for which the Puritan fathers emigrated, or for deriding them for exercising that right.

o - O - o

[24] Swedish mechanic — reference unidentified