

DARK-EYED SEÑORITAS (1895)
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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 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*.¹ 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.

¹ See <https://donduncan.org/spears/jrspanama.pdf>

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 our customs. She is a pretty girl, and she is prettier when she is not painted than when she is. But she is still more 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 waist² 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.

² Waist — Garment covering the body from the neck to the waistline; waistcoat

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 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,³ and about all the women of Tegucigalpa were rebel sympathizers. To stop their talk, which helped the rebels more than 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

³ Manuel Bonilla (1849-1913) — politician; general; twice President of Honduras.

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*,⁴ 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 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

⁴ Date not identified

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 not 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 jangle⁵ 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

⁵ Jangle — Noisy quarrel

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, 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 women⁶ 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 houses⁷ 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 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 days⁸ 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 Ouvidere [?], 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

⁶ Sporting women — Prostitutes

⁷ Sporting houses — Brothels

⁸ Work on a canal began in 1881 but had been abandoned by 1894.

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?"

"This one does not discriminate. He takes all he can get and he interferes with the rest of the sporting men.⁹"

"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,¹⁰ 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

⁹ Sporting men — Clients of a brothel

¹⁰ Greytown — Former name of San Juan de Nicaragua

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 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.

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