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Women of Tehuantepec.

While many of the customs and characteristics peculiar to the people of Mexico are fast being dissipated by the steady ingress of modern ideas, there still exist in the remote districts of the republic a few communities that steadfastly cling to their inherent usages. Such a community is Tehuantepec, one of the most antique of Mexico's prehistoric cities. It is situated on the west shore of the peninsula which bears its name, near where the Tehuantepec River empties into the Pacific. Although in the heart of a country that is dry and sterile, the margins of its river can be irrigated and there it is a picture of fertility and plenty. Fields of sugar cane spread along on either side, groves of stately cocoanut palms rustle their long, crisp, green plumes above them, and native huts with half-naked children about them are hidden in the shade of mango, orange and lime trees.

The town of Tehuantepec fills the whole valley of the river, and contains together with its surrounding "barrios," some 12,000 inhabitants. On the south it climbs a rocky hill several hundred feet above the river, and from the door yards of the houses, perched upon the rocks, a fine view may be obtained. Lofty, round-crested mountains arise in the distance, the blueish tints of their barren sides shading gradually down into the dull brown of the surrounding plains, through which desert waste runs a slender ribbon of green, marking the course of the Tehuantepec.

Centuries ago, a wandering tribe of Zapotecas found this stream, built their town upon its borders and reclaimed a narrow strip of its valley that reaches down to the Pacific coast, ten miles to the westward. There are comparatively few men in Tehuantepec, the great majority of the male population being absent most of the time at work on the plantations beyond the mountains which divide the isthmus. As the traveler leaves the railway station and goes into the town he will at once remark the changed surroundings that a few hours of travel have brought him. In crossing the isthmus he has journeyed from the comparatively modern town of Coatzacoalcos into a district inhabited by a race of people that to-day are the same as they were hundreds of years ago.

They are a separate branch of the Zapoteca tribe, with customs, traditions and festivals quite as peculiar to themselves as their own exclusive history. There is a total absence of modernism about Tehuantepec, which fact is doubtless owing to its lack of inducements for men of energy and capital to settle there. The irrigable strip along the river is hardly worth considering, but to the native Zapoteca it is all-sufficient. Here they have their gardens, cocoanut groves and fields. Those who are so fortunate as to have inherited a bit of ground with a water right live in the midst of plenty; the others go elsewhere to seek work. Thus it happens that Tehuantepec is a town of women. Here the sex take the initiative in everything. In the market place there authority is supreme, and they will admit of absolutely no competition on the part of mankind. The men are simply not permitted to sell there. They are a superb race of women, these Zapotecas—tall, straight, lithe amazons, of queenly carriage and pure brown complexions. Every forenoon the great, square, open-sided market house is literally packed with them. Some bring native chocolate, some brown sugar, others flowers and vegetables, here to exchange for ornaments and cotton cloths, the product of the native looms. This is the mart where all the petty native commerce centres, and here the women sit or stand in statuesque poses, trading, laughing and joking. It is a truly novel scene, animated by the badinage of these picturesque creatures with the forms of women and the minds and hearts of children. Their costume is a curious mixture of the elegant and gaudy, the primitive and the opulent, all combined in the dress of the same person—elegant because of the rare grace of those who wear the clinging robes that serve as garments; gaudy because of the gay colors they combine; primitive and opulent, in that these women, shod only with plain leather sandals bound to their brown, shapely feet with thongs of rawhide, wear strings of gold and jeweled ornaments about their necks. They have a great fondness for necklaces made from gold coins. Their most characteristic article of adornment is the "huipil." This is a huge white headdress made of a lot of stiffly starched native lace, and is worn in various ways, according to the current occupation of the wearer. At present it is worn well back on the head, with a careless, indifferent grace of manner. At home it is thrown about the shoulders in the manner of a cape, or yet more like the great frilled collar of Queen Elizabeth's day. For religious festivals it is drawn down the back, a wide, ruffled surrounding the face, thus giving the wearer an exceedingly demure and sanctimonious expression. The balance of the vesture consists of what is known as the china probolana, or national costume of Mexico. Seldom is this quaint attire to be seen outside

of such primitive towns as Tehuantepec. The bodies, or camisa, of fine white linen and insertion of drawn work is embroidered around the neck and sleeves in red and green. The upper part of the skirt is of plaited satin, generally emerald green, but at times of various other hues, below which is a very deep border, either of highly colored cloth or of white plaided drawn work. Around the waist is knotted a broad red sash or "rebosa," while on state occasions the stockless feet are frequently incased in bright green slippers. By far the most attractive feature combined in this costume is the hand-made lace and drawn work of the huipil, camisa and skirt flounce. Few foreigners have any conception of the amount of painstaking labor expended upon the beautiful designs in drawn work, for the manufacturing of which the Mexicans are so justly celebrated. In Tehuantepec, as in some other communities, it is the sole occupation of a large proportion of the inhabitants, and there the passer-by can scarcely look into an open door without seeing the frame with the linen stretched in it, and the household, of all ages, seated around it, some pulling threads out and others weaving in the various figures.

The work is done mainly by the middle class, and with more or less skill, according to the practice, taste and intelligence of the family. Only by a comparison between drawnwork that is carefully and firmly made of a good quality of linen and a smooth thread with that which is loose, uneven and poorly finished at the corners can the difference in their relative values be appreciated. All grades of the work are offered at the railroad stations by the persistent peddlers, who congregate there upon the incoming of the trains, but the purchaser must depend upon his own judgment as to the quality. The native senoras will assure him with their most winsome courtesies that every piece is muy bonito y fuerte—very pretty and strong—without much regard for truthfulness. It is all cheap, however, at the prices asked for it, considering the amount of work and the time spent upon it; but a few good specimens are a much better investment than a large collection of inferior work. It is, in the first place, beautiful in itself; it is lasting, and it is genuine in all that it claims to be. It is no new invention with which to allure the tourist, but represents an industry as old at least as the Spanish invasion and settlement of the country. Neither is it a work that has deteriorated with the modern invasion of Mexico, for, while it is true that a great quantity of cheap drawnwork is made and offered for sale at a low price, the fact remains that work as fine as ever was made in Mexico can be found to-day, if one knows where to look for it and makes known that he desires the very finest article. Specimens are constantly being executed that were never heretofore perfected for beauty of design and perfection of skill. But there is a sad oversight on the part of both manufacturers and dealers in drawnwork in Mexico that can, perhaps, be realized only by a visitor from the states or some other foreign country. This is the absence of old historical stitches in the designs now to be found in the markets. Systematic inquiry of the foremost dealers and among the drawnwork makers themselves in the City of Mexico for such old and formerly well-known stitches as the "Marguerite," "Guanalupe," etc., has elicited the invariable answer that they were no longer in demand. The statement is undoubtedly true, for not a single specimen of the two stitches mentioned could be found, while the old perfileradoras shook their heads sadly and said: "No, we have no old stitches; nobody wants them any more. The dealers encourage us to form new stitches for variety."

Tehuantepec is perhaps the one exception to the foregoing rule among all the towns where drawnwork is extensively made. This fact can only be accounted for by the remote location of the community. There old designs are the rule rather than the exception. One historical stitch or design that may be found there in great quantity and perfection is the "cross and crown." This has the small Greek cross in one square and the wreath or crown in another, with squares of the original material at intervals between. It is one of the prettiest and most serviceable of the designs now made, and one that is eminently characteristic of the very religious community where it is found. It is a great loss to the art that the other designs have been dropped, for the time was when they were, for the property of states and bishops. In former times the windows and beds of noble palaces throughout the republic were draped with these exquisitely wrought fabrics, each embodying, among other quaint conceits, the particular design emblematic of the locality.

Tehuantepec is probably the only town in Mexico where laces and fabrics of native drawn work still form an essential feature in their sectional garb. Until of recent years a head dress closely allied to the "huipil," excepting that it was usually black and unstarched, was universally worn throughout Mexico. It was the old familiar mantilla. It is a source of the greatest regret on the part of every one who visits the republic that the senorita has so generally laid aside this graceful coiffure and adopted Paris millinery in its stead. It matters not how richly trimmed they may be, these fashionable modern hats seem out of place in Old Mexico. Half the charm of the country lies in its antiquity, its quaint and individual customs; and when a custom is so universally becoming as is the mantilla to the Mexican senorita's face, it seems a real misfortune to give it up. With the interchange of commodities between the two republics there will, of course, come a greater or less interchange of customs, but we fear the

women of the states can never learn to adjust the mantilla with the native grace of the Mexican-born woman. So the dame of Zapoteca still clings to her "huipil" and the peon woman to her "rebosa," but the Mexican lady has discarded her Spanish lace mantilla and they are being sold on the streets, and in the shops by the dealers, as curios. Many of the old ways may still be seen in Mexico. Every evening on the Paseo Mexicano gentlemen are seen in the picturesque national or "oharro" costume, but the lace mantilla on the dark-eyed senorita will be looked for in vain.

BLIND GIRLS.

Awful Fate to Which They Are Condemned in China. There is, perhaps, no fate more sad than to be born a blind girl in the Chinese Empire. It is bad enough and sad enough to be born just a girl. For in the eyes of Orientals woman commands small respect, and the advent of a girl baby is viewed by people in the humbler walks of life as a calamity for which the only compensation is the fact that later on she will be a saleable commodity—if she grows to be fair, according to Chinese standards.

But a blind girl! From the cradle she knows nothing but neglect, abuse and contemptuous disdain. Father and mother and brothers and sisters, if she happens to have any, unite to make her life a burden. Her days are spent in drudgery and her nights in that darkness which with the blind differs from the day only because it is quiet.

By the time she reaches the age of 14 she has been taught to sing, to play upon some instrument, and she is then sold outright to one of a class of women who make this trade in blind girls their business. And it is then that the real life of acute misery begins. The hair is plastered with perfumed ointments and ornamented with gaudy artificial flowers, the cheeks are painted thick with rouge that lies in patches over a coating of powder, which lends to the face a ghastly hue. The blind, expressionless eyes are emphasised by the livid blue that is used in this pathetically grotesque "make-up," and the effect of the whole is heightened by the gay, multi-colored gowns in which these travesties on mirthfulness are clad.

The woman who owns these wretched ones rarely retains any girl who has outlived the bloom of youth—say 18 years of age at the outside—and every night in the streets of the city you may see these hags, accompanied by their creatures, who play, sing and endeavor to be as attractive as they know how.

The women who control these pitiable girls have in many cases grown rich by their agency, but for the girls themselves there is no hope, no future, no release. It is absolute slavery, and of the most revolting nature. Death is the only possible means of escape, and kindly nature sees to it in most cases that this relief comes swiftly.

DRESS REFORM.

The Duchess of Fife, the daughter of the Princess of Wales, has undertaken a Herculean job. It is nothing less than the destruction of the English fashion of going decolette promiscuously. The English women expose themselves more than the women of any other civilized nation, despite their boasted prudery. The women of wick-ed France, surprising to state, have long since abandoned the low-necked gown for ordinary events. Yet their English and American sisters continue to abbreviate their bodices at every possible chance. The Duchess of Fife does not frown the decolette down entirely; she merely maintains that at common entertainments, such as at the theater, the seaside or at ordinary receptions, a yard or two of shoulder, neck and arm are exposed needlessly. At the first night of some great opera or play she would go with her gown cut low, but despite the Queen and the fashions of all the world, she must say that on some occasions this dress is entirely out of place. Just what effect her crusade will have is hard to predict. The Queen is firmly set for the low-necked style, and will allow no lady to be presented at her court unless so attired, yet the Duchess of Fife is quite a leader in society, and is supposed, in addition, to have the sympathy of her mamma, the Princess of Wales.

REMARKABLE SHOOTING.

The tallow candle which is shot through a door must hide its head before a seven and a half ounce plug of clay which has been so fired as to perforate an iron plate an inch thick. The velocity of the clay plug was tremendous. It has been estimated that the speed necessary must be over eighteen hundred feet a second. Experiments of this kind were conducted by Capt. Cooper Key, of the British Army, at the Royal Arsenal. A special gun was employed and pressed cylinders of raw dry clay three inches long and two inches in diameter were used. Eventually one of these plugs went through a cast-iron plate one inch thick from a distance of not more than twenty-five feet.

WHAT UNCLE SAM IS AT.

ITEMS OF INTEREST ABOUT THE BUSY YANKEE.

Neighborly Interest in His Doings—Matters of Moment and Birth Gathered from His Daily Record. There are now about 70,000 Italians in New York.

Tammany still goes on raising salaries, in spite of high taxes. The crop reports from the Northwest continue to be very good.

Doors and windows made at Tacoma go to England, Africa, and all parts of America.

There is great activity about the yard of the Chicago Shipbuilding Company at South Chicago.

The Monadnock block, Chicago, is said to have a daily population of 6,000.

The wages of about 20,000 men in Chicago have been increased from 5 to 30 per cent.

Augustus J. C. Hare has a room furnished with articles formerly the property of Pope Pius IX.

After his trip to Germany Senator Hanna will make a tour of Italy, stopping several weeks at Rome.

St. Louis expects to hold an Exposition in 1903 to celebrate the centennial of the Louisiana purchase.

The Minneapolis mills make 14,000,000 barrels of flour a year, and consume 60,000,000 bushels of wheat.

In 1886 the Erie canal carried to tide-water 1,489,000 tons of vegetable food; in 1897 it carried but 744,000 tons.

There are 42,893 Baptist churches in the United States, an increase of 500 over the number reported last year.

The hailstorms during a Nebraska storm a few days since were so large that many birds were killed by them.

The next census of the United States which will be taken in June, 1900, is expected to show a population of 80,000,000.

Mr. Andrew Carnegie has given \$50,000 to the fund for an engineering laboratory at Stevens Institute, Hoboken, N. J.

Lynching in the United States numbered 166 in 1897 and 127 in 1898. Since January 1st, 1899, there have been 31.

The Arkansas Legislature has passed a game law that will subject to a fine a woman wearing a stuffed bird on her hat.

The growth of the churches in New York city in the past year has been phenomenal, the membership having more than doubled.

A letter from Washington says that six detectives are always on duty to keep President McKinley from harm through cranks or fanatics.

A new cotton factory is to be erected at Wilmington, N. C. It will operate 10,000 spindles and 500 looms, giving employment to 300 operatives.

The total amount of the gifts and bequests of philanthropic people and the United States equalling or above \$5,000 made in 1898, exceeds \$38,000,000.

During March and April the export of manufactured goods from this country exceeded that of the same period last year by nearly \$15,000,000.

The debt of cities in New Jersey is shown by facts and figures compiled by the Bureau of Statistics and Labour to be in the aggregate \$69,370,094, an increase of nearly \$20,000,000 over 1890.

The late Mr. Henry B. Hyde, president of a New York insurance company, had for years received one of the largest salaries ever paid to any business man in the world—\$100,000 per annum.

Miss Helen Gould has purchased Lyndhurst, the country home of her father, the late Jay Gould. The property is in Terrytown, consists of 244 acres, and the price paid, it is understood, was \$344,000.

According to the Mazer Police Bill, which has become a law, no police commissioner or officer of the New York force may be a "member of any political club, association, society or committee."

The American Bible Society has in the last 83 years issued 64,000,000 volumes of the Bible. This society is at present in need of funds with which to meet the increasing demands for copies of the Scriptures.

The incorporation papers for the new women's hospital in Brooklyn, which Dr. Skene and his friends are soon to erect, set forth that the institution is to be known as the Skene Hospital for Self-supporting Women.

Thomas A. Edison is most particular as to detail. For instance, in selecting bamboo fibre for use in electric light bulbs he first collected a specimen of every kind known to science.