

THE COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF SPAIN.



SUNNY Spain, the land of romance and adventure! What visions the word conjures up of deep blue cloudless skies, and glorious sunshine flooding the whole landscape with an effulgence of light beside which our brightest days appear pale and wan! How one seems to see its rugged hills and fair smiling plains clothed with rich groves of olive or orange, and the fruitful vineyards teeming with their luscious produce!

And as accompaniment to the beauties of nature, memory paints in glowing tints the inhabitants of this favoured land. The mind recalls pictures of fascinating Spanish *belles*, attired in short wide skirts, which allow dainty feet and ankles to show to best advantage, the effect being heightened by spotless hose and smartly-buckled high-heeled shoes. The graceful figure and well-poised head are coquetishly veiled by a lace mantilla, while the indispensable large fan is brought into play with all the art known only to a Spanish girl.

Then, too, there are the dark-skinned, black-whiskered, firmly-knit men in low-crowned hats with up-turned brim, or the wide shady *sombrero*; short jackets profusely decorated with small silver buttons, the waist encircled with a crimson *faja*, or sash, while black knee-breeches and hose complete the costume, displaying and setting off remarkably well-shaped limbs.

As a matter of fact, however, these fancy-painted pictures would hardly bear the test

of everyday observation; for, in this nineteenth century one may live in some parts of the Peninsula for years without coming across (except on the stage) the old-time national costume which we have described.

Romantic Spain of the novelist, painter, and poet, is almost exclusively Andalusia; the northern and eastern provinces differing widely in many striking points, even as to the language. In the southern half of the Peninsula the long occupation of the Moors has left traces which it will yet take many a generation to efface. The seclusion of the women in the south, for instance, is still semi-oriental, although this is gradually giving way before the advancing tide of modern ideas. But in spite of the insensible influence brought to bear on Spanish conservatism by an increasingly liberal education, and by growing contact with other nations, English girls would fret sorely at the trammels with which custom hedges in her Spanish sisters.

The Andalusian girl of to-day, even amongst the lower classes, is never allowed out of the house alone, even upon the most trivial errand or for the shortest distance; she must be always accompanied by a relative or dependent. Should she break her shackles—which by the way she does not feel as such—she would be exposed to impertinent looks and remarks from the men she might meet, and would certainly lose caste with her friends.

At certain hours of the day, and more especially at certain hours of certain days of the week, the unmarried girls of the upper and lower middle classes encase themselves in their tightest corsets (which as a rule are entirely discarded in the house), and don a costume in the latest fashion. Thus armed for conquest they are escorted to the promenade or *paseo*, whither resort bachelors, eligible and ineligible. Should one of these be favourably impressed by some fair one, he proceeds to declare his preference by what in England would be called impertinent staring, and by persistent following at the heels of the lady. If intent on forsaking the paths of single blessedness, the ordinary usages of society are employed to obtain an introduction; but if these fail, it is by no means unusual for the smitten youth to follow the young lady (unless she happens to be escorted by a relative of the sterner sex) and pour into her ear, with all the fervour of the southern imagination, the most extravagant praise of her beauty.

To these blandishments the lady apparently pays not the slightest heed, though, if there is any sympathy, a quick glance from her is sufficient to encourage her admirer. He will then, as a rule, follow the *señorita* to her home, and prowl around the house at every possible moment until the damsel appears at one of the barred windows. These manœuvres are repeated for a considerable length of time until, after much perseverance, the patient swain is rewarded with a few words—perhaps of expostulation. These lead to explanations and declarations of undying love and devotion on the part of the gentleman. Should these be favourably received, the young lady will then ask her mother or nearest female relative if Don Such-an-one may speak with her regularly at the window. Permission being granted, he is considered as her *novio* or sweetheart, but only on probation. It is no uncommon thing even in broad daylight to come across these infatuated *novios* holding sweet converse—somewhat disjointed and interrupted it is to be feared—with a girl perched up on a fourth or fifth floor balcony, while the lover is craning his neck from the pavement below. The common staircases too, of the tall houses let out in flats are by no means despised by

love's votaries, the writer having more than once discovered a young couple whispering soft nothings through the tiny grating of the thick outer doors.

All this savours to our insular notions of the decidedly ridiculous, but on the other hand the freedom of intercourse with the opposite sex accorded to English and American girls is regarded by their Spanish contemporaries as in shocking taste, and eminently improper.

After a more or less lengthy acquaintance cultivated in this manner, the suitor, if in a position to marry, speaks to papa and asks his permission to enter the house. Matters are then regarded as critical, and shortly afterwards a visit may be expected from the father, or if he is dead, from the mother of the young man to the nearest relative of the lady, formally to "ask her hand" on behalf of the bashful lover. One sees frequently in the newspapers an announcement that Señor Don So-and-so has visited Señor Don somebody else a *pedir la mano* (to ask the hand) of his lovely daughter Carmen or Mercedes, as the case may be, for his son.

It is open to discussion whether this portion of the proceedings may not be worthy of imitation in other countries. It must certainly save the suitor much embarrassment, and the experienced elders are able to go coolly and thoroughly into the financial part of the transaction in a business-like spirit, untrammelled by love's doubts, or fears, or hesitations.

Supposing everything to be satisfactory, the ceremony of betrothal or *tomar dichos* takes place. The young couple with their near relatives meet at the parish church, where certain papers are filled in (and charged for); the banns can then be called in church. Before the actual marriage ceremony, however, each party must present a document signed by a Catholic priest, affirming that he or she has confessed and received absolution. A state official attends to legalise civilly the marriage, and as with dissenters in England, his presence is absolutely essential to the validity of the ceremony.

As soon as the impending marriage is formally announced, presents from friends and relatives pour in. Two or three months before the wedding-day, the house for the newly-married couple is chosen and furnished by the bridegroom. The ceremony may take place in the morning or afternoon. If the bride is young, her dress is white, with wreath of orange blossoms and veil; if of maturer age a black dress and lace mantilla are considered more correct. There are no bridesmaids, but a *madrina* (literally godmother), and witnesses are indispensable. After the ceremony, the guests assemble in the house of the bride's parents, or if more convenient, in a private room in some hotel, where an elegant repast is served, but there is no wedding-cake. A *soirée* usually follows, in which the bride and groom take part; the latter retire before the evening is finished, going to their own house. The following day the newly-married pair pay a formal visit to their respective parents, and then start off on the wedding trip.

On their return they send bon-bons and confectations of sweetmeats in elegant *bonbonnières* to their friends, which are followed by cards "offering their house." Until etiquette is complied with on this point, no visits are made to them.

In Biscay and the northern provinces the marriage customs differ in many particulars. For one thing the men are to our ideas more respectful and less importunate in their wooing, and the girls are consequently more circumspect. The custom of not allowing unmarried girls out of the house alone is, however, rigidly

enforced, and the promenade is also the happy hunting-ground for the youths of the district.

In the villages of Biscay the maidens of the poorer classes wear a distinctive costume from that worn by matrons or widows. It is in the "Valle de Aratia," which is called the heart of Biscay, that the ancient customs are most rigidly kept up. A head kerchief of bright colours, made by the wearer's own hands, is the distinctive mark of the single girl. The preliminary steps of making acquaintance on the *paseo* are similar to those already described, excepting that the man keeps his distance better, and the maiden is more careful to assure herself that the *pretendant* is actuated by deeper feelings than mere caprice. As in Andalusia and other parts of Spain, the lovers are never left alone; all the wooing must be overheard by the *dueña*, who is, however, often very lenient and discreet. As soon as the lovers

are agreed, the family of the man makes a formal visit to the family of the girl, and exaggerated compliments as to the beauty of the bride, and the worth of the future bridegroom, are exchanged. Contrary to the custom in Andalusia, the woman brings all the necessaries for the house. In the country, however, and amongst the poorer class, the couple share and share alike, and the two fathers perform a sort of duet together. Says one, "I give a bed." "I also," replies the other; but not infrequently when one father has reached his limit and refuses to follow suit, the match is unromantically broken off. But when no such catastrophe occurs, the parents between them manage every business detail, down to procuring the necessary documents, such as certificates of baptism, of good conduct, exemption from liability to military service, etc. The religious ceremony is upon

the same lines as the Roman Catholic service in England, except that in the middle of it thirteen pieces of money are placed on a plate with the marriage ring, and presented to the priest. This money is locally called *saras*, and varies in value according to the position of the parties. If of silver, the money is kept by the priest, but sometimes *onzas* of gold are presented, and these are afterwards withdrawn by the bridegroom, and are usually made into earrings and bracelets for the bride.

It is only their just due to add that Spanish girls make excellent wives and tender mothers. As a rule they take an industrious part in all domestic matters, and are pre-eminently "keepers at home," while their imperfect education and lack of intellectual interests are to a great extent counterbalanced by their natural wit and intelligence, and the fascinating *gracia* of their manners.

A LADY IN THE LAUNDRY.

By the Author of "We Wives."

PART V.

TAKING OUT STAINS.

"I MIGHT as well use a nutmeg grater," groaned little Mrs. Bowen, one morning, as she rubbed her face gently with a hem-stitched article. "This handkerchief is of the finest linen. What can Bridget do to make these things so raspy?"

Bridget was not offended at being asked about her method.

She willingly owned that all her mistress's kerchiefs were passed through starch water.

"They'd just be wisps if I didn't," she explained. "An' I would have double the number to wash every week."

The offence came in when Mrs. Bowen requested that no Glenfield should be used for the future. Bridget tossed her head and—

Next week a pile of soft rags were laid on the dressing-table in the pink room. At the end of the octave, too, Mrs. Bowen found her sachet empty. She had used all the unresisting wisps in a very short time.

"Of course there is a *via-media*," decided Miss Bond when helplessly appealed to. "Cottony things like Bridget's last venture look soiled before being taken out of the pocket. I will tell her what to do."

The next week, accordingly, Mrs. Bowen rejoiced once more in crispy satiny handkerchiefs. Yet Bridget had been spared any recourse to the starch box.

"Wash the things well." Thus Miss Bond had directed her friend's cook. "Bleach. Then put in blue water. Fold. Pass through the mangle. Iron while wet. That is the little-known secret. Always smooth the edges first (a crookedly folded handkerchief never looks well), and on the right side. Then satin face will be nothing to the surface."

Miss Bond had another word to say about handkerchiefs too.

"They are not altogether pleasant things to deal with at times," she said to her friend. "But washing them need not be a disgusting operation. Soaking in cold water for twelve hours takes out every impurity. A drop of sanitas in the soaking water will also prevent the spread of infection. I am sure the way colds run through a house is often caused by careless laundry work. The heat handkerchiefs are subjected to in washing and boiling does not destroy all influenza germs. We must neutralise them, then, by sanitas. In its liquid form of course. It is quite colourless, and subsequent boiling removes all odour."

"My dear Annette! you are scientific as well as practical," quoth little Mrs. Bowen admiringly. "You have hit on the weak spot in our sanitary code. What is the use of doctors examining houses and dust-bins for microbes, when they let more than soiled clothes go out of a house?"

"I certainly have my own theories how influenza is propagated, at any rate," said Miss Bond, pursing up her lips and speaking oracularly. "It need not spread in your home, Bella, if you follow the above plan with your family. A big bottle of sanitas costs 1s., and is invaluable. In surgery as well as in the laundry. Bind up the children's wounds with a rag dipped in the liquid. No festers or lock-jaw will follow!"

Fortunately the latter misfortune does not often come after a cut or a bruise or a scrape. But Mrs. Bowen found her friend's recipe was a wonderful thing for "skinning" over broken knees and contused elbows.

"It seems to me, a lady who has cookies in her laundry will never be out of vinegar or salt," said Miss Bond one day to her friend as she gave this advice. "Another good thing is, that ammonia—and how would our jaegers look without ammonia?—is the best remedy for wasp stings. A third inducement to have proper laundry necessaries at hand is, that sanitas not only purifies linen, but mends up the family in the way of accidents."

"Three reasons for understanding the art of washing," quoth Mrs. Bowen, laughing. "It sounds like the triple heads of a sermon, Annette."

Lecture or not, Miss Bond was always applied to on every occasion that her skill was needed.

Mr. Bowen, I am sorry to say, was a trial to his wife in the matter of "slinging ink."

By a particular twist of his wrist when using a pen he could scatter quite a shower of black spots in an infinitesimal space of time. He was also warranted always to leave an inkpot wherever it was most in the way, and most invisible to the naked eye.

Result—disastrous to all tablecloths.

Now, on an oval table in the big drawing-room Mrs. Bowen had a much cherished oriental square. Foundation, crimson; embroidery, gold. We will say (under protest) that it was more Mr. Bowen's misfortune than his fault that this particular cloth should be visited by a deluge of ink from an open inkstand.

His wife fled to Miss Bond, almost in tears. Her Cairene treasure was surely spoilt.

"Quick—quick!" directed the energetic spinster, putting on her bonnet and running over to No. 17, "our best chance is while the stain is still wet. Oh, Mr. Bowen, how could you?" she inquired severely as she met that poor man.

There was sternness on her tongue but a twinkle in her eye.

"Pure cussedness, I am afraid," responded that gentleman in grieved accents. "I am sorry to say," screwing up his face in anything but a contrite manner, "there is a combination against my literary efforts in this house."

Then he went; very glad to get away from the bustle round the oval table.

"Get me some of the tepid boiled milk from breakfast," directed Miss Bond. "Now I am going to soak this unlucky stain."

With the tips of her fingers she gently rubbed the cloth in the warm milk, changing the fluid every time it grew tinged.

"The two P's—Promptness and Patience," she said as she renewed the milk for the fifth time, "are required with ink. Never be satisfied till the fluid you leave is colourless. There, Bella; now a rinse in lukewarm water and your cloth will be as good as new."

"Will nothing but fresh-boiled milk answer?" inquired the mistress, looking somewhat ruefully at the empty jug.

"Buttermilk is even better if you have it at hand. Warm, and use it exactly the same. Be careful to wash out every atom with water or a sour smell will remain. Finish by pressing with a cool iron."

"Annette, many thanks!"

Miss Bond waited. She knew this burst of gratitude betokened a lively sense of advice to come. She only tarried three seconds by the clock, then—

"If my husband spills ink on a white damask cloth (I hope he will never do so again, but it is well to be prepared) am I to proceed in the same way?"

"Not at all," came the prompt answer. "Salt is usually at hand in an eating room, fortunately. Rub a little on to the spot. Then apply lemon—one cut in half does best—and pour boiling water through. As demonstrated in the past, Bella."

Mrs. Bowen had almost forgotten that gone-by lesson. But she turned up her April "G. O. P." and refreshed her memory.

Anyone who meets with a similar misfortune can do the same.