CITY'S SPANISH COLONY LIVES IN ITS OWN LITTLE WORLD HERE

It Is Like the Homeland With the Rivalries of the Old Provinces Still Lingering—Each Group Has Its Centre, Its Societies, Dances, Picnics, Theatricals.

THE guitar is a pensive instrument. You realize it now, as the player sings to himself. A sad and sentimental song, in a dialect of Spain, full of words which have made their special home for centuries in one ancient kingdom of the peninsula. The player is slumped on the wooden bench. His face is as unmistakably Spanish as that of the god Bacchus in Velasquez's "Los Borrachos" in the Prado, and his voice has the harsh Spanish resonance which gives more concern to expression than to mere dulcetness.

It ceases but the singer remains in a sentimental dream of parting and despair. The group in the little bodega (bodega is the word), murmurs; the men draw deep on their black cigarettes. One speaks a word of applause, but quietly, and not with the energy of an "Ole!" at a jota neatly danced. From the rear a girl cries: she pleads for the muñeira, which the Galicians dance. The men join in the request.

But their words are drowned in a clatter: a train is passing on the Ninth Avenue elevated.

There is a Spanish-speaking colony of size in New York. It is like Spain itself, with rivalries of old provinces still lingering; it is like all the Spanish-speaking world in the two hemispheres, great nations lying here in the little, keeping separate at home, yet mingling in common interests. Here are not Chelsea nor old Peter Stuyvesant's farm, but Estremadura and Leon; half across the town Argentina lies next to Castile and Uruguay is near by, with Cuba in the offing.

Here, diminished but intact, is the Spanish world of today—an order which has brought subways and taxi strikes to Madrid, mixing them with legendary burros and the heritage of Phenicians and Visigoths, of Moors and conquistadores; Cortez learns to fox trot and youngsters born in Harlem berate one another with epithets which were time-honored long before Seville got her cathedral.

Hold to Their Pride of Race.

But whether they come from Valencia or from Chile, these Spanish-speaking folk hold to their pride of race. They have, too, a common turn for functions and such an affair as the banquet for New York's Spanish-American Consuls, arranged recently by the Pan American Society, brings forth a knack for ceremonial.

Were there, however, no such State affairs to focus attention the day by day life of the colony would go on, spontaneously creating the functions that it must have. Here is a colony of perhaps 30,000, half of them from Spain, a fifth as many from Mexico and the rest from Central and South America and the West Indies; they are scattered over Manhattan and Brooklyn, each group having its little centres, regional societies—regional not by present neighborhoods but by States and provinces in the old countries. It is a little city stretched thin over the big city of New York, yet probably from one end of the year to another there is not a week without a dozen functions: theatricals, picnics, sometimes spectacles, and even, when it can be managed, the zarzuela—the topical opera with dialogue, a sort of vaudeville with a tang. But mostly they dance.

No end of stuff has been written about the esthetics and the psychology of the Spaniards' dancing. But it has not been written by any Spaniard. For him it is enough to dance. America perhaps has sophisticated his taste. In his special newspapers, published here, the waltz and one-step and fox trot figure in the advertising column headed, "Instrucción" alongside the indigenous dances.

But watch. You are at a baile—one of several balls, some masked, being given this night by one society and another. The orchestra is Spanish but it plays jazz; race shows in the eyes of the girls, in features and manner, and in the talk there is no mistake, but as for the fox-trotting and comportment, they might well be the second generation from Cork or Düsseldorf. The fox trot ends. But look at that slim boy and his girl over there; another couple, still another. Fingers snap like castanets. A song and humming take the place of the orchestra; then the instruments themselves come in, as spontaneously as the dancers. The place is alight with the joy of the dance that has cropped out. It is the jota.

Dancing Their Main Pleasure.

Each part of Spain has its own type of jota and if the crowds are big enough you may see half of them in an evening—though not necessarily every evening. Or in a day, for it is easier for the old dances to break through when the feet are on the green. There is no trammel then of new manners and one-steps. Somewhere in the picnic crowd there will be a man who has brought his gaita, a bagpipe affair such as has made music since the beginning of time when the young ones of the village danced. He will start this cornemuse going. Another instrument joins in, a laud, descendant of the lute. Bandurrias, mandolins, guitars from Spain and their strings from Spain, too.

The musicians gather in little groups, the Catalonians here and the Asturians over there, and the Murcians down at that other end, and the crowd disintegrates into little clusters. If you would know how "Ole!" is cried when its praise is merited, watch then. All the jotas (and each is the best). A group from Barcelona swings into the Sardanas. Cachucha, stately bolero, the other dance which is of Seville alone and that which Valencians call a rhapsody—as many more, each with its group; the young folks crying out, the old ones tapping and nodding and all of them laughing. The little bagpipe whines away and the bright figures whirl and bow and the self-proud provinces are shaken into one whirling kaleidoscope—at a moment like this you get an idea of why the Spanish dance. They dance for the same reason that they eat.

They dance in their homes, too, and wherever else there is the opportunity. If one of the societies gives a matinee, it ends in a ball at half past six in the afternoon: "a las 6 y media gran baile de pension," say the bills. And let old Spain, with its ideas of the ritual of the dance have its own way, frowning on the tango, but there never was a tango danced for the Spanish colony here that lacked a good house.

More frequent are the theatricals. Look over the announcements of a fortnight and it becomes clear why Lope de Vega three hundred years ago set the pace for Spanish dramatists by turning out 2,000 plays. They are all needed. When the supply runs short, the playwrights of the colony turn to and write new ones for the occasion. Comedies for the most part, running strongly to one act, and often a program of monologues and dances and songs, sung always by "el aplaudido" Señor This or That, or "la distinguida artista" Señorita So-and-So.

Fond of Their Stage Folk.

The colony is fond of its stage folk. There are not enough of them. Sometimes an amateur company will essay a zarzuela, but it takes work and daring; the cast, for any proper showing, requires fifteen or so people, and there is the music, and the libretto from Spain must be adapted, with New York gags thrown in. It is an ambitious task, but has its rewards. New York took to it with enthusiasm when a Spanish company (not of amateurs) produced "The Land of Joy" a few years ago.

It is not all an amateur affair, this stage work of the colony. There is a group of professionals, headed by Pilar Arcos, who give performances sometimes on Sunday afternoons in an uptown theatre. Uptown is a prosaic term: the region takes on a touch of glamour when it is called "la alta ciudad"—the upper city.

All these Spanish folk have a proper sense of the grandeur of eminence, whether of the stage or the arts or anything else. Not even the Italians outdo them in homage to fame. There was Carmencita, the dancer: that was long ago, somewhere about the time of the Spanish-American War. You hear of her yet. "Ah," says the old-timer—(he is a sombre man from Bourgos and he buttons his coat as if he were drawing a cloak about him)—"Ah, la Carmencita! But there were not 500 Spaniards here then. I knew them all."

Now it is otherwise, and a Benevente or an Ibañez, a Sorolla or Raquel Meller is received with a happy reverence, as if the visitor brought a precious vial of Summer sunshine from one's own province. Perhaps the visitor is not of the arts, but a tennis star, like Manuel Alonso or Firpo. Ah! As the Castilian proverb has it, now you're talking. Firpo, whom even the sport reporters call "el muy grande hombre." What need of bullfights when you have here the great bull of the Pampas himself?

The speakers of Spanish in New York do not give all their sporting interest to discussing Señor Firpo. There are clubs, teams, of various sorts. Barcelona settos with Costa Rica and so forth, and championships emerge and the college hero of fiction finds a companion in the star player of phonetic futbol. But the life is varied, and all through it the original savor survives, just as the jota will come at times of itself when the fox trot is done.

The colony listens in on the radio and it is happy when there chances to be a Spanish number. It plays the guitar, but also the phonograph; it has its special catalogues which emphasize such records as fandanguillos and bulerias. It has its libraries, with the Spanish weeklies, and books, new and old, and while it is true it sometimes reads not only Galdós and Valdés, but such an author as Charlotte M. Braeme; even she takes on a bit of color when she becomes Carlota.

And when the diligent newcomer sets himself to learn English, he translates word by word such bits of the obvious as "Spanish girls have wonderful eyelashes." The lesson done, he reads the day's horoscope in his newspaper: it is like all horoscopes, but in Spanish it fits better into the background. Say, "Those born today will be lucky in love," and it sounds baldly like a line from the intimate advice given in some newspapers. Put it thus, however, in what has been called the language of love: "en el amor serán muy afortunadas," and the English mind supplies the necessary setting of moon and balcony.

Where They Can Be Found.

Probably more of the Spanish colony read the shipping news in their paper than the horoscopes: their life here, whether lowly or fed by argosies, has been built up largely around ships. The workingmen among them live in numbers along West Street and Washington, from Charlton to Fourteenth there are more across town, in Roosevelt Street and Cherry and Catharine. There is a cluster of boarding houses and restaurants in the east 'teenths and some in the west, in old pilastered houses, and others as much as five miles or more to the north, while the tobacco and coffee districts are zones of themselves. There are restaurants and a shop or two around Pearl and Wall Streets, and here and there in unexpected corners of Manhattan and Brooklyn are little places with magic thresholds; one steps across and in a stride is a thousand leagues away, where the pimiento is a staple or where women's hands deftly pat-pat-pat as they flip tortillas into their pancake shape.

In such a place as these last they know what a holiday is worth. They are just as glad when it's Washington's Birthday as when it is the day of Spain's patron saint, or May 2, which is the Beginning of the Spanish Insurrection, or May 10, the birthday of the Crown Prince. A holiday means more dancing.

Of all this most of America remains oblivious. An up-State lawyer asking information on an estate in Uruguay is as apt as not to address the Spanish Consul. The colony, however, is self-sufficient. Here are its own churches and organized life and its functions, and it makes its way and grows into an important part of the American commercial scheme. The men maintain philosoophy in their coffee houses and the women assent when they read a paragrapher's line in one of the Spanish language periodicals: "New York is a paradise for the women." And they do not forget the country whence they came. Of their many societies there is one, Sada y Sus Contornos—Sada and its vicinity. A little society of folk from a village near Corunna. It was formed to raise funds for a schoolhouse in Sada.

There is another club which also is small. It has its headquarters in Cherry Street; though small, it is well to do. This is the Sociedad Vasco-Americana. Here are the Basques—Spanish Basques, not French. In all America there are not many of these folk whose language is their own, unrelated to the tongues of neighboring peoples. When they talk together the Spaniard can understand little of their idiom, if any. But they are a part of the colony none the less. The Atlantic is deep enough to swallow up the passes of the Pyrenees. Besides, they know how to dance, too, and the Basques themselves will tell you that all the kingdoms have no dance like the porrusalda.

64 YEARS IN FACTORY.

SWISS papers report the recent retirement of a 72-year-old textile worker of Wattwyl, after having worked in the same factory since her eighth birthday. Her last day was made a festive occasion by her fellow-toilers. The table at which she had labored so many years was covered with flowers and more material gifts.