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Editorial Note:
Joan Maragall, The Spanish Woman

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EDITORIAL NOTE

We are pleased to publish an article, "The Spanish Woman," written by Joan Maragall and published in English translation in *The Englishwoman* 4 (May 1909): 374-79. This article should have appeared as an appendix to Geoffrey Ribbens's article "Joan Maragall at the Edge of Modernity" published in our volume "Barcelona and Modernity" (*Catalan Review* XVIII, 1-2: 97-105). We regret the delay in this publication and express our apologetic thanks to Prof. Ribbens for unearthing the piece and making it available to our readers.

THE SPANISH WOMAN

(Translated from the Spanish.)

I

The educated public is generally aware, I take it, that the short-skirted and tambourined Spanish woman, with a knife in her garter, exists only on the boards of music-halls. There, and in pages of works of imagination, she flatters our taste for the exotic with stage property which has no other foundation than a brief period in the history of Spanish dress at the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, continued to the present day as a picturesque makeshift to mask the absence of direct study and observation. Setting her rudely aside, I need make no effort to convince my readers that the real Spanish woman is a representative of the European type, of which she is a mere variety, determined, as are those of every nation, by accidents of climate, race, or history, which make no fundamental difference in the type's main features.

None the less, when we compare this variety with others to be found in European countries in which the life of to-day is lived more fully, it takes on a character of its own. Then it will be seen that, besides the differences resulting from natural conditions to which I have referred above, there are others more striking still produced by varying conditions in education, economy, legal status, sentiment—in a word, by differences in culture and social surroundings. In Spain itself we find types the differences between which are no less radical than those which separate any one of them from other European types. The Andalusian and the Catalan, for instance, lie farther apart than do the latter and the inhabitants of Southern France; and, again, women in Madrid, Barcelona, or Bilbao live a life much more nearly resembling that of the northern European capitals than that of their sisters in many provincial cities in Spain. However, I shall do my best to limit myself to the most essential traits of the life of our peninsula, in order that my remarks may have as wide an applications as possible; though I must confess that, as a Catalan born and bred in Catalonia, the most living part of what I have to say will refer mainly to Catalan women.

II

In Spain the hub of woman's social life is the family; this is the main point. The desire for personal independence, the wish to exercise a direct influence upon public affairs, which in other countries has given rise to what is known as Feminism, is with us practically unknown.

I do not mean that there are no isolated instances of such aspirations; the sociologist Concepción Arenal [*sic*], and the eminent writer Sra. Pardo Bazán, among others, are well known. There have certainly been women who have played an important part in public life, and have achieved wide fame; but I do maintain that, as a collective phenomenon affecting the social atmosphere, Feminism is unknown in Spain.

Neither the intellectual culture of the average woman nor the intensity of economic strife, which in other lands seems recently to have produced in woman a rebellion against confining her activity to the four walls of her house and a desire to live and work alone, have in Spain become strong enough to stir up such longings. I would not be thought to mean that the Spanish woman is stupid or lazy, or that she represents the southern—or, rather, oriental—type, a mere object of luxury and pleasure. On the contrary, speaking in general, I affirm that our women are thriftier, more trustworthy, more intelligent than our men, that in Spain women as women are worth more than men as men; but also that the Spanish woman gives all she has to her home, and that all her worth is absorbed by her family. Her goal is to be a mother, daughter, sister, and, as far as these natural relationships are concerned, I believe that she is unsurpassed in brain, heart, and hand by her sisters in any other country. But with all her virtues, I do not credit her with the ability to carry out, or even to imagine, a scheme of life independent of the family. Here every woman, be her class and surroundings what they may, looks towards marriage from youth up. Marriage is her accepted fate, and if she misses it she makes shift to bind herself to a family as best she may: as sister, aunt, sister-in-law, as a relative in some degree, or out of pure friendship, she seeks the protection of a home, bringing in exchange her activity, her love, and her care.

Those women that you see working as rude fieldlabourers in parts of Galicia or Aragon, among the workmen in the great industrial centres of Catalonia or Biscay, or in the factories, shops, or offices of Madrid and Barcelona, be sure that all of them, or their immense majority, will return, when work is done or in its intervals, to the family, which will be waiting for them, as wives, daughters, sisters, mothers. As such they will sit down to the table, or in a circle on the ground, and at night will sleep under one roof, and, when pay-day comes, will take their wages to the common purse of the family, to contribute to its maintenance, as they benefit by its protection. And this spirit prevails in the middle and upper classes, as it does among the working people, in that there the woman becomes the confidant and helper of her husband, son, or brother in his undertakings of every sort, in which she often takes an active share by assuming tasks which lie within her powers in the office or countinghouse, in the factory or shop, or even the library or laboratory. Even in the upper classes, where her help is least needed, and where a more advanced education might foster the spirit of independence, emancipated woman is looked upon askance, and enjoys small consideration. The feminine social unit that has broken loose and drifts is with us a rare and an unhappy thing. For these reasons the woman's question cannot, for the present, have the meaning in Spain that it has in other countries.

III

From very early times, Spanish civil law, principally through the influence of canon law and of Germanic customs, sanctioned and amplified by the *Fuero Juzgo*¹ in the times of the Goths, by the royal and town charters in the

¹ *Fuero Juzgo*: A digest of laws dating from the Visigothic kings of Spain, whose

Reconquest² period, by the laws of Toro and subsequent legislation, has dignified and upheld the position of women in the family. Very typical in this connection is the institution of *los gananciales* (earnings), by which all the fruit of the property brought by man and wife at the time of marriage, and earned or acquired by them subsequently, is held to be divisible by equal halves between the two.

It is noteworthy that in the special law of Catalonia, where the Roman system of the separation of property prevails, and where, in consequence, the legal institution of *los gananciales* does not exist, and women appear to be less effectively protected, individual feeling amply remedies the defect. For in Catalonia the husband gives his wife a hand in the administration of his property, and avails himself of his greater freedom in disposing of it by will, by frequently leaving her as *senyora y majora* (absolute mistress) of the whole patrimony, giving her the right to dispose of it among the children according to her choice, in favour of the one who acts most kindly towards her while she lives in widowhood. So that the lack of legal protection is more than compensated for by voluntary usage; and the husband's liberty is in reality of advantage to the wife.

Something similar is to be observed in public or administrative law. I will mention a measure introduced by the Conservative minister, Señor Dato, in 1900, which is the first step that has been taken in Spain in the direction of Socialist legislation. Part of this law aims at protecting the woman who works in the great industries. When she is about to become a mother she may retire from work in the last two months of her pregnancy and not return until four weeks after giving birth, during which period her employer is bound to keep her place for her, and to restore when she goes back to work. Even then, while she continues feeding the child at the breast, her employer has to give half-an-hour every afternoon for that purpose, without deducting anything from her wages. But I ought here to mention the fact that in this case, the law did nothing more than ratify a fairly general usage and observance; in Catalonia, at least, the dispositions of this law, or something very similar, were formerly in use out of natural deference to women and respect for motherhood and family life.

Legislation and usage are at one in this matter, and are but the echo of the respect which woman enjoys in Spain. They have helped to strengthen her natural position in the family, and to remove all motives or pretexts for the movement known in other lands as Feminism.

IV

To conclude, if any individual desire or impulse exists in the female sex in Spain outside the organization of the family, its object is religion. Spanish women, socially, have nothing before them but the family or the convent.

rule ended at the first Moslem invasion in 711 A.D. *Fuero*: Name given in Spanish to charters or royal grants of privileges.

² The long period during which the Christians were engaged in driving out the Moslems, down to the fall of Granada in 1492.

Even in the case of those who, though they live in a family, find that it does not absorb their entire activity, but that, because of their money or lack of household cares, they have some energy left to devote directly to social life, this energy, when it is not of the sort that perishes in the frivolities of Society, goes to works of charity, or to beneficent Associations, always of a more or less religious character, or simply to devotion or pietism. And when the charitable or religious impulse is not sufficiently counterbalanced by family ties, then the Spanish woman becomes a nun; thus it is that religious orders, especially female ones, swarm amongst us; thus it is that such vast numbers of convents are built. It is the same with the plebeian orders, candidates to which beg their entrance dowries from door to door, as with the more aristocratic ones, in which it may happen, that one lady provides with her single dowry for the erection of a magnificent convent.

Does this mean that Spanish women are more religious than others, or that a superficial piety shuts in their horizon, excluding other interests? I cannot decide so thorny a question; I do not wish to enter into the sanctuary of conscience. Suffice it to say that it is certain that, in Spain, woman finds nothing beyond the family but religion.

JUAN MARAGALL