

BOLÍVIA: SHANGRI-LA OF SOUTH AMERICA

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Mr. Tejada has given us a delightful picture of his native Bolivia. Illustrations are taken from the author's collection.

"The Shangri-La of the new world"—this phrase aptly describes Bolivia, one of the least known countries of Spanish America. Hidden away in the remote Andes, at the very heart of the southern continent, Bolivia is practically unknown to tourists who rarely penetrate to its Tibet-like elevations. The natural setting is a fantastic one, with a rarefied atmosphere as stimulating as champagne, majestic mountains that dwarf the Alps and rival the Himalayas, a great inland sea of incredible beauty and vast stretches of weird and barren plateau alternating with the lush vegetation of hidden protected valleys.

The principal and most populous region of the country is its western half, called the "altiplano"—a tableland some 13,000 feet high, pierced with gigantic mountain-cones (Illimani, Illampu, Mururata, Huayna Potosi and many others) that seem to scrape the brilliant blue sky. Here the wind wails incessantly over the vast stretches of scrub vegetation, and huge Biblical-looking pillars of dust rise constantly from the ground in twirling spirals. Here men, donkeys, and railroad trains are reduced to tiny specks under the gigantic heavens. Here browse hundreds of the curious llamas—tiny camel-like creatures with long-necked dainty heads brightened by a red woollen tassel in

the ear, diminutive packs on their backs, and high-stepping cloven hooves.

In the midst of the altiplano lies Lake Titicaca, a gigantic body of water that stretches between Bolivia and Peru and covers an extension larger than all of Switzerland. Its turquoise waves carry fragile reed canoes called "balsas" and modern lake-steamers, and its shores are made picturesque by fields of a purplish-grained cereal called "quinua," by waving eucalyptus trees, and grazing sheep and donkeys, and the adobe huts of the country people.

Here and there—as though they had been scattered carelessly over this gigantic countryside—one comes upon the estates of gentlefolk, the villages of the Indians, and then, unaccountably a large city like Oruro or Potosi or the capital, La Paz. La Paz—the ancient Ciudad de Nuestra Señora de la Paz (City of Our Lady of Peace)—is the highest capital in the world, perched about two and a half miles in the air. It is a metropolis of several hundred thousand souls, set like a jewel in a perfect bowl of encircling mountains, its proud buildings shimmering in the rarefied air. There are broad new avenues lined with modernistic terraced houses of blue and green and white and ochre plaster; and side by side with them, steep centuries-old narrow streets, winding uphill over tortuous



These Indian women wear a derby hat like the "cholas," but a distinctive jacket of their own: rich velveteen heavily beaded and embroidered.

cobbles, lined with ancient Spanish houses touching wall to wall and giving the passerby a glimpse through their massive arches into paved inner courts with trees and wells.

To complete a sketch of this picturesque country, we must not forget the unexpected subtropical valleys tucked away amidst the austere mountains and quite invisible until one stumbles accidentally upon them like the original Shangri-La of James Hilton's novel. Such is Yungas, two hours' drive from La Paz: a veritable paradise of wooded canyons, exuberant fruit trees, wild orchids, and screaming green parrots.

Like Tibet, Bolivia is a land of ancient and mysterious traditions. Centuries before European men discovered a new world, what we call Bolivia today was the cradle of the oldest civilization in this hemisphere—one that was already obscure in the night of time when the later empires of the Incas, Aztecs, and Mayas flourished in North and South America. Little is left of this prehistoric culture, save what archaeologists have been able to piece together from the wonderful monoliths and ruins at Tiahuanacu on the altiplano. Here a race of gigantic men, more than eight feet tall, had built a city of temples and palaces and public buildings, of which the most interesting remnant is the Portal of the Sun, believed to be religious in its significance and astronomical in its construction. Tiahuanacu was already in ruins when—as legend tells it—two demigods were born on an island in nearby Lake Titicaca. These were Manco-Capac and Mama-Ocillo, who went to Cuzco and founded the Inca Empire; and modern Bolivia's Titicaca remained, until the time of the Spanish conquest, the sacred lake of the Incas.

During the colorful days of the Spanish colony, Bolivia—or Upper Peru as it was then called—was a great center of wealth and culture. The city of Potosi—the Villa Imperial, or Imperial Town of the Spaniards—was the silver mint of the Spanish crown. And the city of Sucre boasted the third university to be founded in the entire new world: the Universidad de San Francisco de Charcas, established in the sixteenth century and still flourishing today.

The colorful inhabitants of Bolivia are perhaps the most picturesque feature of this picturesque country. Like the Tibetans, and natives of other cold and mountainous countries, the native men wear ear-muffs. And also like the Tibetans, they have a rich fund of folklore.

In Bolivia there are great differences between the three groups of the population: the white people of Spanish or other European origin, the Indians, and the "cholos" of mixed Spanish and Indian blood. White persons form a sophisticated and cosmopolitan (if relatively small) group with the same general customs to be found in Europe or the United States. Business and the professions occupy them; motorcars, the cinema, bridge, tennis, club-life, and even roulette are their diversions.

But the Indians of the Bolivian altiplano are quite unique. Silent, stern, melancholy, coppery-faced and aquiline-featured, they are of pure Aymará and Quechua racial stock, and in the main speak their own autonomous language rather than Spanish. Every one of them is a subject for the camera or the artist's brush, not only for his costume of hand-woven and home-dyed

cloth, but for his odd grace of bearing—whether it be a venerable white-haired grandmother who walks barefooted down a country road, spinning as she goes with a quaint distaff held in her hand; or a solemn little Indian boy in his "poncho" with a slit for the head and his ever-present knitted "llucho" cap with ear-flaps; or a buxom matron wearing a dozen full-gathered skirts at a time and twirling in the monotonous rhythm of the dance. These Indians live as their forefathers did in thatched-roofed houses with the family's burro, chickens, and two or three small black pigs running around freely in the enclosure that corresponds to a garden. Despite his comparative poverty, the Indian has moments of colorful social life—like, for instance, his wedding when he may decorate his houstop and wall with colored flags, and mount himself and his bride on milk-white mules with silver saddles.

But even richer in color is his psychological world, peopled with all sorts of supernatural beings that have been left over from an earlier religion and curiously blended with Christianity. He always sets little crosses along the gable of his house to keep away evil spirits. He avoids places which he is convinced are haunted by the "duendes"; ghosts of babies who died unbaptized, and who come back to pelt the intruder with stones. He places a sharp knife under his bed when he is ill, in order that it may cut his pain in two. He goes to sorcerers and sorceresses to have spells put upon people, and will himself practice witchcraft at home—using a waxen image of his enemy that he binds with string, just as he wishes to bind the enemy himself in real life.

Still more picturesque than the Indian is the "cholo"—not particularly the men of this class, but the women, the delightful "cholitas" of La Paz who are famous for their exquisite costumes, their laughing ways, their half-Spanish charm. The chola is very different from the Indian woman, and makes no effort to imitate the white one, but is proud of her own customs and way of life and above all of her magnificent clothing and jewelry on which she spends a considerable amount of money. All of her clothes are costly—from her French-heeled high-laced boots of green or wine-colored suede, or bronzed kid; to her "pollera" or full gathered skirt of heavy satin in magenta, blue, red, rose, golden yellow, or black; to her embroidered and deeply-fringed silk shawl in light pink or green or some rich dark color; to her black or gray or tan felt hat shaped exactly like a man's derby and worn above her lively face with two glossy black braids hanging down. Every "chola" owns one or more pairs of handsome large earrings in silver or gold—often set with real pearls, and sometimes even with rubies or diamonds. These are worked by hand in a curious and distinctively Bolivian style, as are the beautiful pins used to fasten the chola's shawl over the left shoulder—generally in the shape of a small dagger to which is attached (by a chain) a silver or gold fish with articulated scales and tail. Nothing more lively can be imagined than a group of "cholas" in holiday attire walking down the street, talking among themselves in merry and high-pitched voices, displaying their heirlooms of silver jewelry, wearing two or three silk shawls of different colors apiece, and stepping smartly on the pavement in their extremely high-heeled boots or a more modern type of little black patent-leather shoe shaped exactly like a ballet slipper.

The picturesque side of Bolivia is of course the most appealing one to an American unfamiliar with the country. But there is another practical, down-to-earth side that is of vital interest to Americans: Astonishing as it may seem, Bolivia, a veritable Shangri-La of mystery and color and strangely-remote geographical situation, is "right in the thick" of the world-wide fight for democracy.

Back in 1809, Pedro Dominga Murillo, a private individual of La Paz, made the first attempt in all of Spanish America to revolt against the dominion of Spain. It was he who "lighted the torch" of freedom that was to be taken up by Bolivar and San Martin, and was to bring emancipation and democratic government to all of the republics to the south of the United States. Murillo's revolution was unsuccessful; he was hung by the Spaniards, and after death his head was cut off and exhibited in a cage as a terrible lesson to would-be lovers of liberty. But, as Bolivian and universal history show, his "torch" of freedom could never be extinguished—and on the anniversary of his gallant uprising, a great torch-light procession is held in La Paz and goes under the name of "las tea (torches) de Murillo." Don Pedro Domingo's spirit lives on in Bolivia today, and is expressed in this stirring line of the national anthem: "morir antes que esclavos vivir"—"better to die than to live as slaves."

So it is not surprising that the dominant public sentiment in



This little girl in her father's arms holds tightly to a strand of "serpentina"—the gaily-colored paper used at all festivals. Bolivia is strongly sympathetic to the United States and Britain. To be sure, there has been much Nazi propaganda, but fortunately it has been self-defeating. The former German Minister, Ernest Wendle, was expelled from La Paz many months before the Rio conference, because he had attempted to make a coup d'état and seize the government for Hitler. Since then, Bolivia has broken relations with the nations of the Axis, and has frozen the credits of Japanese, German, and Italian residents. Right now, Bolivia is the United Nations' principal source of tin; her production of this precious metal, which is immense, is being turned out exclusively for the United States.

Bolivia's democracy is not merely one of political sympathies, but—to an ever-increasing degree—is becoming one of everyday life and of public education as well. The Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, ably headed by Dr. Hector Ormachea, has made great progress along extremely modern lines in recent years. Nearing completion is a vast new structure which will make it the first "skyscraper university" in Latin America. Scientific and technical studies are gaining in prominence: an astronomical observatory is about to be inaugurated, and physics and mathematics will receive new emphasis in the projected Department of Exact Sciences. For there is a new generation in Bolivia which believes that the material betterment that springs from science cannot mar ancient beauties, and will but enhance the charm of the Shangri-La of South America.



A "Ilokalla" or Aymara boy, wearing the characteristic cap with ear-muffs used on the cold and windy plateau.