

# My Impressions of New York Women

WRITTEN FOR THE COLONIST SUNDAY MAGAZINE by MISS HELEN LANGFORD a VICTORIA GIRL who BECAME KNOWN IN NEW YORK as "THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN IN BLACK"



[Editorial Note.—The police of New York City were mystified for several months during the present winter by the appearance, in the early morning, usually just before dawn, of a young and pretty woman, dressed in black knickerbockers, long boots, and mannish coat, who passed briskly up and down the walks several times, and then disappeared. The young woman appeared to be of refined nature, and as there was no occasion for it, the police never discovered her identity nor the reason for her strange walks at dawn. Three weeks ago the New York Herald solved the mystery by locating the young woman at the Hotel Ansonia and interviewing her. She said that she was Miss Helen Langford, and that her home was in Victoria, B. C. She was, she said, finishing her education in New York and she took her early morning walks, as being, in her mind, conducive to good health and clear complexion. Incidentally, the Herald learned something of the young woman's opinion of New York women, and also discovered the fact that three portraits of the young woman were hung last year in the Academy of Design, while Charles Dana Gibson was engaged on his second portrait of her.

Seeking to establish the young woman's connection with Victoria, the Colonist Sunday Magazine wrote to the address given in the Herald's account of the interview, asking for a photograph and an article dealing with Miss Langford's impressions of American women. The portrait and article were received forthwith, accompanied by a courteous note, and are published here.]

It is not an easy thing to define the American woman. As a matter of fact, one must study her long and seriously if one would know her, for she is not, as many have argued, either superficial or foolishly frank. She can clothe herself in an atmosphere of reserve which absolutely conceals her personality even from her closest friend, and it is only after long and continued acquaintance under all conditions that it is possible to understand her. I know a great many American women—women who move in all grades of society—and to me the most interesting is the woman born among ease and luxury, whose main object is seeking that amusement and distraction which will most effectively help her while away the idle hours.

Perhaps the most attractive thing about the American woman is not her beauty, nor her grace, nor her gaiety of spirits, but her genius at repartee. The American woman is "smart"

in conversation as well as in dress. To employ an Americanism—one "cannot get much change out of the typical American society woman." This repartee comes from her ability to think quickly. She is ever ready to give a smart answer to what may be a rather impertinent remark. She can "hold her own" very successfully whether in the society of men or of her own sex.

I remember once being the unconscious listener to a conversation between an American man and a young American girl of perhaps sixteen. It was at an evening affair, and the young American girl had evidently been looking with some favor upon an Englishman who was present, and the American, to tease her, perhaps, said: "You are rather fond of that big Englishman, are you not?" And the young girl, without a pause, looked him squarely in the eye and replied: "I have known Americans that I liked less." This ability to "answer back" is inbred in the feminine population of the States. She is taught to look upon man as rather inferior to woman, and therefore has no fear of him, and this often stands her in good stead. When an American woman wishes, she can break up a whole roomful of conversation with her biting remarks. Yet she veils her shafts and they do not have the sting which they might have did they come from a less clever conversationalist.

But, while the conversation of the American woman is often liberally sprinkled with epigrams and smart sayings, it is, except in very rare cases, neither deep nor instructive. She reads the latest novel and sees the latest play, and about these and similar subjects she is always ready to converse. She takes no interest, as the Englishwoman does, in politics or state topics, even though her husband may be closely connected with both. American men very seldom talk to their wives on business matters, for they know only too well that it would not interest them. This genius for making money she admires, but she does not want to talk about it. It bores her. She does not even want to know how her husband makes

his money. It comes, and that satisfies her. When retrenchments are necessary owing to a bad year, she wants to know the cause and, without volunteering very much sympathy, hopes that good times will come again and promptly forgets all about the matter, unless things become worse. Then, of course, she is obliged to take notice. She could not earn her own living, nor does she expect to. Her husband was intended to provide for his wife and family—it is often his sole right to a place in his own household—and when he fails to do so, she wants to know the reason. And he, poor man, feels that all the sympathy should be showered upon her for having tied herself to a money-making machine that has slipped a cog and is consequently, for the time being, out of business. Temporary misfortunes like these do not bind the American and his wife closer together, but are often the beginning of the open breach.

In America—at least in the American metropolis—women are "on top." They rule, and their rule is accepted as a right. They take the lead in everything, save business matters, and as a consequence they are somewhat spoiled. They do not intend to be selfish—it is inbred—but they look to be waited upon, to be flattered, to be made much of, to be showered with all the blessings of this life, and the men are, apparently, quite willing to give them their desires. In America, as in no other country, the woman reigns. Yet, with it all, she possesses so much charm, so much grace, so much good-heartedness, so much hospitality, and so much wit, that men forget her imperfections and gladly bow down before her.

In their attitude towards men—to whom they have perhaps only just been introduced—they are a trifle too cordial. Five minutes after an introduction an American woman will allow herself to be flattered and complimented in a way that would embarrass an Englishwoman. As a matter of fact, she lives on compliments and never thinks it amiss for a comparative stranger to remark on the beauty of her costume or even of herself. Perhaps it is the ease with which the American woman receives a compliment that makes the compliment itself of no value or significance. An Englishwoman coming to the States for the first time often finds it objectionable to be flattered at every turn, knowing, as she does, if she isn't quite a fool, that it is a mere matter of form among Americans, and means absolutely nothing.

Then, I sometimes think that the American married woman cares rather less for her home than she does for outside amusements and excitement. She prefers to dine out, to go to the theatre, to have supper at a fashionable restaurant rather than spend an evening at home. Perhaps the apartment house is answerable for this. An apartment is not the best developer of home pleasures, and when there are children it becomes even less so. And therefore the habit of going out to find one's amusement grows, and the "home life," so precious to an Englishwoman, becomes a negligible quantity. In this, however, the men are just as much to blame as the women, inasmuch as the majority of them like some kind of recreation when the day's business is over, and this it is easier to obtain outside than at home. I will give the American man the credit of taking his wife out to a greater degree than any other. There is a good deal of comradeship in American marriages.

With regard to dress, there is no shadow of doubt but that the American woman is the best dressed woman in the world. We were brought up to consider the Frenchwoman the "embodiment of everything that's excellent"—in the sartorial line—but this has changed during the last few years, and an American woman, gowned as she knows how to gown, can even make Paris "sit up and take notice." The American woman excels in dress in every way. Especially careful is she regarding the three most important items in a woman's dress—shoes, gloves and hats. Frenchwomen are careful about these matters also, but Englishwomen—Well, I have seen an Englishwoman start out to make a social call must have cost a small fortune, her hat a little inferior to her gown—only a little—but the two noticeable blemishes, her gloves and shoes—white gloves with soiled backs and decidedly biased heels. That is where an Englishwoman as a dresser fails—in the little things that go to make up the perfect ensemble.

The New York woman not only dresses well, but looks well in her dress. She has excellent taste, possesses the true instinct as to what colors will suit her best, and how far she may go in the choice of a pattern. I believe many American women dress up to the color of their eyes, and when you do this you can never go very wrong in the choice of the correct shade for a gown. I do not say that all New York women are beautiful or even pretty, but they possess almost a genius for making the most of their attractions, and when ready for ball or dinner party they appear very stunning indeed.

One may argue that the American woman is everything that the Englishwoman is not and vice versa; that if we took all the good qualities of both and combined them, then we should have the perfect woman. Perhaps this is so, but would she be interesting? I think not. It is these very qualities of good and bad—or at least inferior—which make the woman the attraction she is.

The Englishwoman makes a more sensible mother than the American woman. She knows better how to bring up her children, and the English children are the better behaved. I remember being at the house of an American woman soon after I arrived in the United States, and a lady present asked the little daughter of her hostess—a child of nine—if she would visit her on the following after-

noon. The child replied that she was sorry, but that she was going to a matinee. Her mother, with some surprise, said: "Why, I didn't know that. Who are you going with?" And the child replied with the utmost sang froid: "Oh, didn't I tell you? I am going with So-and-so." And the mother never admonished her in any way for making engagements without her knowledge, or consenting to go to a matinee without first asking her permission. She never even enquired what the play was her daughter was going to see. And I discovered afterwards that the play was one quite unsuited to a child. This, of course, is utterly wrong and would never be tolerated in an English household. The habit of allowing children to go to the afternoon theatres when they should be out in the country air lays the foundation for that seeking after pleasure which in after years does not divert their minds but simply creates the greater desire for increased distraction.

Another thing with regard to the bringing up of children in America which is very wrong is the laxity in superintending their reading. I was in a subway train the other day and sitting opposite to me was a very charming woman with two children—a boy of perhaps nine and a girl a year older. The mother sat rather listlessly scanning the advertisements in the car, but each of her children was deeply absorbed in an evening paper—the yellow kind. The boy was gloating over the horrors of a terrible accident while the girl was studying the funny (?) pictures. Any mother who allows her children to read unreservedly the daily paper is taking upon herself a terrible responsibility. I believe the romantic accounts of elopements published in the sensational papers are answerable for half the scandals which cast so dark a blot on the young life of America.

## A BRITON ON BASEBALL

[An American's views on cricket and an Englishman's on baseball are apt to be equally amusing. This is preliminary to recording the important fact that during the summer of 1910 Kettle Howard, a thoroughgoing Briton, who writes a weekly department under the heading, "Motley Notes," in The Sketch, the well-known London illustrated paper, paid a visit to America, and in the course of his study of American life, as revealed in New York City, witnessed a baseball game. He was greatly impressed. His account of his experiences as printed in The Sketch makes delectable reading for the "fan."

They said: "You must certainly see a ball game before you leave the States."

I said: "I beg your pardon. A what?"

He said: "A ball-game—baseball, you know. Fastest game in the world. And you'd better hurry up or the season will be over. Why not go this afternoon?"

"All by myself?"

"'Fraid so. Business. But it's quite simple. Take the 'Elev.' to One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street, and get off at the Polo Ground. You'll love it. You'll go mad with excitement. Everybody does. Come back and tell us all about it. Wish we could go to, you lucky fellow! 'Bye!'"

"One moment. Am I right in presuming that the 'Elev.' is the Elevated Railway?"

"Sure." You'll be all right, all right. You can't go wrong."

As it happened, I did not go wrong—after a slight difference with a sort of toy-car known as the "Shuttle." Let me explain, briefly, the principle of the "Shuttle." It will be of interest to engineering readers. If you get on to the Elevated Railway at Fifty-Eighth Street, and you want to go to One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street, you take the "Shuttle" to Fifty-fifth Street. But you don't get out. You leave Fifty-fifth Street Station and travel a little farther in the wrong direction. Then you come back to Fifty-fifth Street, and change. Nothing could be simpler.

I paid a dollar to go into the Polo Ground, this sum admitting me to all the privileges of the grand stand. Having heard a good deal before leaving England of the lawlessness of the crowds at the baseball matches, I was careful to seat myself behind an elderly, very sedate-looking gentleman with grey whiskers. He had a score-sheet on his knee, and was evidently keeping a careful record of the game.

"How's it going?" I asked carelessly, my secret hope being that he would mention the names of the opposing teams.

"How's that?" he retorted.

I remained silent, thinking that his remark had referred to some point in the game that I had missed.

"What's that?" he translated.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I asked you how the game was going."

"Gee!" cried the old gentleman, with an intense ferocity that startled and shocked me. "I guess we got 'em cinched!"

I should have liked very much to know who had got whom cinched, but he began to write busily on his score-sheet, and I dared not disturb him again so soon. I killed time, therefore, by examining the players a little.

Baseball is a development—a fierce development—of the good old game of rounders. Whereas we used to strike at the ball with clenched fist, however, and the ball was a soft one, in baseball you strike at the ball with a sort of round-log, and the ball is a hard one. The gentleman who serves the ball to the batsman is called the "Pitcher." He does not lob it, or bowl it, or toss it; but shies it with tremendous force at the unoffending opponent. If the batsman can hit it with his leg, well and good; but if he can't, it is quite likely that the ball will hit him—on the arm, or the head, or the leg, or in the ribs. Thereupon, he writes with agony; the captain of his side rushes up to him, helps him into his sweater, and, to

cheer him up, the maimed wretch is allowed to move around to the first base.

I have been told—I don't know if there is any truth in it—that important matches have been won by the simple expedient of catching the captain of the opposing side a jolly good thwack on the head the very first time he faces the "Pitcher." Be that as it may, I had an idea that one or two of the batsmen actually allowed the ball to strike them on the body, for the sake of being permitted to move round to the first base. Such heroism as this is not to be met with every day, and it is only right that a popular baseball player should rank, as a hero, next but one to Jack Johnson, the President intervening.

I was greatly interested in the tactics of the captain of the batting side. This individual, instead of taking his ease and a cocktail in the dressing-room, stands near the first base and covers the "Pitcher" with obloquy. These remarks are accompanied by feats of agility expressive of the utmost and most decided contempt. I myself saw one of the captains of the batting side leap high into the air, his fingers working, his head well back. The crowd encouraged such demonstrations by savage yells, hoots, groans, and all manner of strange and disconcerting cries. The odd thing was to me that the winning side had all the sympathy. Everybody, it was clear, wanted them to win. There was not a soul present, so far as I could judge, who had one friendly word, one kindly thought, for the losing side. Perhaps they were unkind to the wives, or something of that sort.

And now, as my brothers of the romantic pen say, a strange thing happened. A batsman gave the ball quite a decent knock. That is to say, it eluded the farthest fielder and rolled toward the boundary, thus enabling the batsman to reach the second base instead of the first. I judged this to be a fairly ordinary event, but I was mistaken. The whole crowd rose to its feet—men, boys, women, and girls—and emitted one terrific and prolonged yell of delight. A young man in the front row deliberately threw his nice bowler-hat (here called a "Derby" hat) to the ground, and jumped on it. Two portly men embraced each other, dancing the while. A perfect stranger immediately behind me hit me, jovially, between the shoulder-blades.

As for my old friend with the grey whiskers, he was standing on his seat, his back to the game, leading the cheers. You have no idea what a noise that old man made. I was quite ashamed of him. I felt unwilling that he should attract so much attention to our particular bench. I plucked him by the trouser-leg, but he took no notice whatever. His score-sheet, his glasses, and his handkerchief were on the floor. And all this because some untidy stranger, now covered with earth, had made two bases instead of one.

The old gentleman kept it up long after the game had been resumed. When, at last, he did sit down, and I had restored to him his various possessions, I said courteously: "Would you mind telling me, sir, what all that noise was about?"

"Gee! Didn't yer see it? Fine, sir! Bully, sir! Oh, you Jack Robinson!" (This last, of course, to the successful player.)

"But what would you do," I said, "if he got all the way round? I don't see what more you could do!"

"What's that?"

"I say, I don't see what more you could do if he completed without interruption the whole round."

"That's all right—all right!" gasped the old gentleman, wiping his eyes and putting on his spectacles.

They were all just as enthusiastic when, half an hour later, I stole away. As I drew near the station, a bunch of inspectors darted at me.

"How's it going?" they clamored. "How's the game going?"

"I'm very sorry," I replied, "but I really haven't the least idea."

## MONTE CRISTO A PLAYGROUND FOR A KING

The King and Queen of Italy now own the Isle of Monte Cristo, made famous by the novel of Alexandre Dumas, who got the idea of his great work of fiction, "The Count of Monte Cristo," from an eccentric American named Taylor.

Taylor took a violent fancy to the lovely isle while yachting in the Mediterranean, and, visiting Florence, induced the Grand Duke of Tuscany (who at one time had established a penal colony there with a small garrison of soldiers to keep watch over the convicts) to sell him the ideal spot, where he lived in practical isolation—monarch of all his surroundings.

Having grown tired of his solitude, Taylor at length parted with the property to the Marquis of Ginoira, a wealthy Florentine, who had made a fortune from the manufacture of the well-known Italian porcelain and majolica.

He at once proceeded to stock the isle with game, so converting it into the finest sporting estate in Europe.

King Victor Emmanuel long coveted it, but during the old marquis's lifetime, finding it impossible to purchase the property, he leased it for some considerable time.

Here he spent his honeymoon, and here he and his queen, who is as fond of the place as her husband is, have always gone for their holidays, living quite simply in the picturesque retreat with their children and a small number of servants, absolutely without anything approaching state and luxury.

## MODERN COURAGE

In a historical tragedy there are always two heroes, one in the play, and the other in the box office.—Fliegende Blaetter.

# A

In a delightful letter Jessie Brown, a Victoria Agent Deans Cameron, writes to Wolfe's birthplace, mentioning the memo of the famous General at the letter is such a delicacy is needed for publication.

Dear Mother—Was about a dear day we spent in Victoria. It was a day to be proud of.

On Saturday we read that a special train would be run for those who wished to see the unveiling of the Wolfe monument. We didn't quire a permit or a ticket, but we were all at the barrier he asked for see other people coming army officers and ladies, etc., etc. As we could see carriages with beginning to fear it would be no plebeian we saw one carriage, etc., so we found out

Westerham, the little village in Kent, on, but, as some one from London. You can see some quaint old-wrought iron, Canterbury, etc.,—but I don't think which looks so much like a Christmas card as a ham.

This was a special train on this line, which part of England, calling around at half a dozen, picking up their things they start off. What we did. Leaving (which is between the station), we immediately Charing Cross Railway were south of the river again on London. We saw a few people the Street Station (in the course, we had to cross time, and went spinning a non-stop "special" at As Aunt Aggie said: "ed all the milk, it may passed through the name of "Orpington clucking—and I remember very far away from. Another station was we stopped on our way went up and down the name of the station, A thing's gone wrong, calling out Smithereen

We got to West twelve, and outside the tions, and "flies," and the "county families" day. A man selling paper told us that the ceremony and that it was just five station. (So ignorant whole thing that up till it was or where it was crowd, and found that attire. Pictures of W. dows, and flags were f

The first little refreshment was "The Wolfe." We knew they were a were so quaint and pic land one can tell the nearly always the most in the town—and they same plan. And such a straight line anywhere here surely follow the Britons. The little square, built of odd-shap ing up this street, with cred with ivy, we co (Every town and vill "High street," just as has "First street" or " balcony was a camera in one place we saw a The statue was in the on the Green, where t The statue was cove Jack, and around it Forming a hollow squ statue were some sol haps; also some Scouts crowds of people. Th roped off for "ticket-h And on the sidewalk o rejoiced in the name were the school child der and controlled by town. I don't suppose men in Westerham. the street was another ment, whose name was ard House."

It was a cold day, flurry of snow in the m was wet and cold, cold the half-hour, and then church came the surpl four clergy. They mar