

# Among the Aymaras of Bolivia



Women of the plateau of Bolivia

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**L**A PAZ, Bolivia.—The Bolivian government is at last waking up to the condition of its Indians. Three-fourths of the population of this high plateau are little more than savages. They have churches, but their religion is a combination of superstition interwoven with the customs of medieval Christianity. The government has schools, but the Indians do not attend them, and not one in a hundred can read or write. Thousands of them are in a state of debt slavery, and tens of thousands are so sodden with alcohol and narcotics that for the most of the time they are little better than brutes. The government has established a compulsory system of education, and it has thrown the schools open to all Bolivian children. Nevertheless, but few of the Indians go to school, and not one in a hundred has any ambition to rise above his present condition.

One of the new movements for the elevation of the Indians has to do with the reorganization of the Bolivian army. Military service has been made compulsory for all between the ages of 15 and 21. The selection of the troop is made without regard to race, and in this way thousands of Indians are brought to the military barracks and schools from every part of the republic. Here they are drilled by German officers and instructors. They are taught to obey and to learn to read and write and do primary sums in arithmetic. They are kept from drinking, and they acquire such civilized tastes and wants that when their military service is over they are not contented to go back to the semi-savage life of the villages. Those who do go carry the seeds of civilization with them, and a crop of new ideas and new customs is beginning to sprout.

**Fine Looking Fellows.**  
I have seen a great many of these Indian soldiers during my stay. They are fine looking fellows and are said to have good fighting qualities. They have great powers of endurance and are noted for their frugality and patience. The only trouble is that the army is not large enough to take in more men and there has to be some weeding out of those who volunteer to go into the service. At first the Indians were afraid of the army, but they are now keen to serve.

All the above statements relate to the Aymaras. They are the chief nation of red men upon the plateau of Bolivia. They are numbered by hundreds of thousands, and altogether are twice as many as the Indians of the United States. They belong to a race that is said to antedate the Incas, and to have been so powerful that the Incas were never able to subjugate them as they did the other Indian nations that populated the western part of the South American continent. After the Spaniards got possession of the country, the Aymaras were enslaved, and they are in what might be called a condition of debt slavery today. It is a state of peonage not unlike that which prevailed in the days of feudalism. Much of Bolivia is still a feudal country, and the men and women are practically bought and sold with the farms on which they live. The fact that the land permits them to leave upon the payment or transfer of their debts does not alter the matter, for it is known that their attachment to their homes is such that they will not do so. Many of the Indians on the industrial farm near Lake Titicaca, whom our missionaries are now trying to civilize, have belonged to that farm for generations, and they have always done a certain number of days' work every week for the right to stay there and cultivate the lands allotted to them.

**Tenure About Same.**  
The same conditions of tenure prevail upon most of the large Bolivian farms. The Indians give two or three days of each week to the owner of the land, and they are allowed the remaining days for themselves. They receive no pay for their work except the ground rent of the little patches which they are allowed to farm. If their master needs only a part of the time he has the right to hire them out to others, and if they do not obey them he can inflict certain punishment upon them. It is against the law to strike an Indian, but, as one Englishman tells me, such striking is perfectly safe if it is done when there are no white witnesses present, as the courts will never accept the statement of an Indian as against that of a white. This woman has been living in different parts of Bolivia. She says that a system of child-slavery is common in the highlands and out-of-the-way districts of both Peru and Bolivia, and I understand that it prevails in some parts of Ecuador as well. Said she:

"There is no doubt but that Indian children are bought and sold to be used as servants. Indeed, I myself have bought girls and boys ranging in age from 2 to 12 years. At times I have taken them in out of pity to give them a home, and at other times because I wished to use them as servants. Such buying is more often the form of a lease than in the way of regular bargain and sale. It is like the buying out of children to work for their board and clothes, as was once



A child slave of the Andes

common in some parts of our United States.

**Sell Children.**  
"When times are hard or famine comes the Indian fathers or mothers will often bring in their boys and girls and ask you to raise them as servants. They will expect from ten to twenty Bolivianos for them, or \$5 to \$10 in gold. There are regular contracts made for this purpose, and a part of the contract reads that they shall have the right to take the child back upon the payment to you of 10 cents per day for every day you have had it. This payment is a sheer impossibility, and the purchase of the child means that you have the right to it until it grows up. The law provides that you must train the child and teach it to read and write. It also provides that it must be well treated, but this depends upon the caprice of the purchaser. Many of the servants are gotten that way."

**Home Get Only Board.**  
Practically all the domestic labor of La Paz and other cities of Bolivia is done by the Aymara Indians. In some cases they are paid wages and in others they get nothing but their board for their work. In the latter instances the servants are peonage, who are sent in from the country to do a certain amount of work for their masters, who live in the city. The leases by which the Indians hold their little homes and lands provide that they may be sent from time to time into the town to work as house servants. Such periods are limited to a week or so for each person, and in some of the houses of La Paz the servants are changed every two weeks, a new one coming to relieve the old one. A land owner with a large number of Indians on his estate may agree to furnish you a house servant for a year, sending man after man, in relays as it were, to fill up the time. When the peonage comes to work in his master's house he usually brings with him enough bags of llama manure to serve as fuel for the cooking during his stay.

While there he carries all the water, brings the vegetables and meats home from the market, and it is his business to empty the slops and clean the pots and pans. There are many of these peonages on the streets of La Paz. They go along half double carrying great copper or clay water jars on their backs. They act as the watchmen of the houses, sleeping at night on the stoops inside the door that leads to the street, and they must get up and open to the people who go out or come in. They do all sorts of drudgery, and some kinds that servants of other classes will refuse to do. Indeed, one may have twenty other servants, but he must still have his peonage.

**Attached to Masters.**  
Notwithstanding these hard conditions, the Indians are attached to their masters. They will work for them for little or nothing rather than for a foreigner who may pay them good wages. They make their masters' grievances their own, and are ready to engage in any battle if instigated by them. This often causes feuds between the Indians of neighboring farms, and gun fights and stone fights are common. The stone fights are usually by means of the sling, which is the natural weapon of the Aymara. He uses it to keep his sheep from straying from the flock. He hurls it with it and from behind his but watches for his enemy and sends a rock crashing through his brain.

Not long ago there was a big stone fight between the Indians of two plantations, one belonging to a foreigner and the other to a native Bolivian. The foreigner had bought the estate and the

Bolivian wanted to force him to sell it cheap. It adjoined his property and was especially desirable on other accounts. He asked the foreigner his price and was told that it was \$15,000. He wanted it much cheaper and in order to make him sick of his bargain he invited his Indians to stone those of the foreigner. They did so, but the foreigner made such a brave fight that the Bolivians came to him and offered to take the place at his original price. The foreigner replied: "I will sell you the farm, but the price has risen. I offered it to you a month ago for \$15,000, but after what you have done you cannot have it for less than \$20,000." "I will take it," was the reply. "I have had enough trouble about this already and rather than have more I will pay what you ask."

**Huts Are Scattered.**  
The huts of the Aymara Indians are scattered over the plateau, and also high up on the slopes of the Andes. They are usually in villages, but sometimes far apart on the plains. But few houses are more than fifteen or twenty feet square, and some only eight or ten. Sometimes a family may have a half dozen houses enclosed by a mud wall, but the most of the buildings are for the stock, and as a rule the family uses but one. It is not easy to enter such homes.

The Indians do not like strangers, and in making my investigations I have had them show fight and warn me to leave. Such huts as I have seen into are little better than pig pens. They have walls so low that you can reach the thatched roof without effort, and the single door is so small that you have to stoop to go in. The floor is the ground, and the furniture is only a few skins and a little mud stove or oven, built up in one corner. The fuel is the manure of the llamas and sheep, and the cooking is done in earthenware pots, which are used not only for boiling and stewing, but for cups, saucers and plates. There is no outlet for the smoke but the door, and it blackens the roof and the walls.

The Aymaras sleep on llama skins laid on the floor. They have no night clothes, and wear the same garments at night as during the day. They usually sleep sitting, backing themselves up against the wall and drawing as closely together as possible in order that all may get under the blanket and so that the heat of their bodies may aid in keeping them warm.

**Cook Outside.**  
Where there are several huts the cooking is done outside the houses, and sometimes an oven is built against the wall, having a cover perhaps to protect it from the wind and the snow.

The food of these Indians is simple. A favorite dish is a stew known as chullena, made of dried mutton. The sheep is killed and skinned. The body is then split open and laid out flat and left out of doors to be frozen. The next night it is sprinkled with water and frozen again. It is then hung up to dry. It does so without spoiling, and some becomes so tough and hard that it will keep for months. When used it is cut into bits and boiled a long time. Vegetables are cooked with it, and often some chuno, that is frozen potatoes, which are prepared in such a way that they will keep quite as long as the dried mutton. This is done by soaking the raw potatoes in water and then allowing them to freeze. They are soaked and frozen again. The skins become so loose that they can be rubbed or trodden off with the bare feet. After this they are dried.

(Continued on Page Ten.)

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