

***A TREATISE ON DOMESTIC
ECONOMY, FOR THE USE OF
MOTHERS AND HOUSEWIVES***

Josefa Acevedo de Gómez

Translated from the Spanish by Sarah Sanchez
With an Introduction by Catherine Davies



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'La Hamaca' (or 'A South American Hammock'), a painting by Edward Mark Walhouse (1817-1895), in *Acuarelas de Mark: Un testimonio pictórico de La Nueva Granada*, Banco de la República, Bogotá, 1963, p. 274.

INTRODUCTION

Life and Works

Josefa Acevedo (1803-1861) was born in Santa Fe de Bogotá, capital of the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Granada. With a population of some one and a half million, this was an unremarkable backwater of the Spanish Empire. Fairly peaceful since the peasant rebellions of the 1780s, it was run by a colonial administration whose officials were recruited from peninsular Spaniards residing in the Americas and from the local creole elite (mainly of Spanish descent) whose sons were educated in letters and laws precisely for this purpose (Earle, p. 2). These extended families were in-bred and close-knit, proud of names and heritage they considered illustrious, faithful to family loyalties and allegiances, and functioning in their much circumscribed political and civil spheres as clans to protect and further their class interests. Josefa's family was typical among the enlightened elite. Her father, José Acevedo y Gómez (1773-1817) was a wealthy, educated gentleman "of noble blood and good appearance"; her mother belonged to the no less distinguished Tejada family (Acevedo, *Recuerdos nacionales*, p. 9). Josefa was the eldest daughter of eight siblings, and was particularly close to her brothers Pedro (b.1799), José Prudencio (b.1806), Juan Miguel (b.1807) and Alfonso (b.1809), all of whom went on to have distinguished public and military careers.

In July 1810, in response to Napoleon's invasion of Spain and the dethroning of the Spanish monarch, a group of town councillors and other distinguished men of Santa Fe set up the first Assembly (Junta) of New Granada constituted independently from Spain. At first it swore

allegiance to the interim Spanish Regency, but by the end of the month these assurances were disregarded and a revolutionary army was formed. Thus were sown the seeds of Colombian independence. Josefa's father took a leading role on the crucial night of 20 July, "acclaimed by the people as its tribune, he made use of his great intelligence, imposing words and political knowledge" to persuade them not to abandon their project and to constitute the Assembly by law (Porrás Troconis, p. 514). In 1811, the New Granadine Antonio Nariño assumed command of the government of Santa Fe and by 1813 the city had declared its independence from Spain. The Spanish officials and local royalists resisted, but the city was secured for the revolutionaries by Simón Bolívar in 1814. The First Republic, dubbed later by Colombians as the "patria boba" or "silly homeland", was to last six years. As a young child, Josefa was witness to this period of political tension and revolutionary euphoria. Her mother, Catalina Sánchez de Tejada, was hosting patriotic salons and her brother Pedro had signed up for the revolutionary army at the age of eleven.

However, events took a turn for the worse. In 1814 the Spanish King, Ferdinand VII, was restored to the throne and promptly initiated a military offensive to recover the rebellious dominions in the Americas. This was to be the "Reconquest". Opposition to the colonial administration was considered treason, and troops were dispatched from Spain under the command of General Pablo Morillo. Santa Fe was recaptured in May 1816. A month later public executions of the insurgents began. José Acevedo fled on foot to the east towards exile in Brazil, accompanied by seventeen-year old Pedro, but the journey proved

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too arduous. He became ill and in 1817 he died and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Andaquíes mountains. Pedro returned to tell the tale and Josefa, deeply moved, wrote her first published poem, dated 1823, in her father's memory. She also dramatized Pedro's emotive account of their father's flight in a short story or, more accurately, testimony, published as her father's biography: *National Memories: José Acevedo i Gómez* (1860) and again posthumously as Scene no. 7 in *Scenes of the Private Life of New Granadines for the Instruction and Entertainment of the Curious* (1861). Some indication of the fear and horror experienced by the family in these years may be ascertained from these first-hand accounts.

The Spanish remained in control of Santa Fe for three years until Bolívar's victory in the Battle of Boyacá in 1819. A liberal revolt in Spain against the King, and mutiny in Cadiz of reinforcements destined for South America, put paid to the "Reconquest" for the moment. Bolívar and Morillo signed a truce in 1820. In New Granada the wars with Spain came to an end and Bolívar's Republic of Gran Colombia was finally established. Josefa had lived the first seventeen years of her life in painful and turbulent times. But, apart from her father's death, the family had remained united and rejoiced at the liberation of New Granada. They were all fervent liberals and patriots; her brothers Pedro, José Prudencio and Alfonso quickly rose to become distinguished officers in the republican army (Colonel, General and Lieutenant Colonel respectively). As a woman, Josefa was destined for an advantageous marriage, according to custom, into the family clan. However, if she thought that peace and security lay ahead she was

sorely disappointed. A decade of warfare with Spain was followed by another decade of civil war between the New Granada liberals (such as the Acevedo, Gómez and Tejada families), and the conservative Bolívarians. These struggles between conservatives, favouring strong central government with a powerful executive, and liberals, proposing constitutionalism and federation, were to dog Colombian politics to this day, and they affected Josefa's early married life disastrously.

The newly founded Republic of Gran Colombia (1819-1830) was vast, comprising New Granada, Venezuela, Ecuador (yet to be fully liberated) and Panama, with the capital in Bogotá. Its elected President was General Bolívar, a believer in the necessity of strong centralized government to prevent regional rebellions and secession. Its constitution was likewise authoritarian and centralist. Bolívar (a Venezuelan), left Bogotá to continue the independence wars to the south (hostilities with Spain had resumed in 1821) and left his liberal vice-president General Francisco de Paula Santander, a New Granadine who was elected by Congress in 1821, to govern Gran Colombia meanwhile. After a series of victories in battle, Bolívar returned to Bogotá in 1826 and set about undoing most of Santander's legislation. He had already warned Santander against the liberals who he referred to as "the vilest and most cowardly of men" (Lynch, p. 218). Santander resisted the government imposed by Bolívar which he viewed as militaristic and despotic. Tensions between the two men and their widely differing political strategies grew to such a pitch that in August 1828, partly in response to a rebellion in Cartagena led by the mulatto General José Prudencio Padilla (who was executed that year),

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Bolívar assumed supreme power. This was “personal power, exercised by decrees that had the force of law, and through appointments that were under his control” (Lynch, p. 238); the Vice-presidency was abolished. One month later, in Bogotá, an attempt was made on Bolívar’s life. The principal conspirators met in the house of Luis Vargas Tejada, a liberal politician. Bolívar escaped, thanks to the quick thinking of his mistress Manuela Sáenz, and took immediate measures against his enemies. Among these were the Acevedo, Gómez and Tejada families, all liberals and supporters of Santander. Santander himself, though not directly involved in the attempted assassination, was arrested and exiled to Europe and the United States. Colonel José Acevedo, who had joined the republican army aged fourteen to fight for independence, was imprisoned by Bolívar, referred to by Josefa in a poem lamenting her brother’s imprisonment as a “tyrant” and “inhuman despot” (dated 22 March 1831; Acevedo, *Poesías*, 1854, p. 21). Alfonso Acevedo, who had refused to swear the oath of allegiance to Bolívar, was relieved of his duties. But the member of the family who was to suffer most in these reprisals was Josefa’s new husband, Diego Fernando Gómez who was sentenced to internal exile.

In April 1822, at the age of nineteen, Josefa married Diego Fernando Gómez, her father’s cousin; due to the close consanguinity of the future spouses, special dispensation had to be sought for the marriage. Gómez, seventeen years older than his wife, was at a highpoint in his career. He was widely respected as a senator and an incorruptible magistrate in the central High Court, the kind of principled official necessary in the new republican

judiciary. The couple settled down and three daughters were born, though the eldest, Amelia Julia, died in infancy in 1825. Gómez's illegitimate son, Joaquín, joined the family and Josefa willingly adopted him as her own. However, Gómez, like the majority of New Granadine men of laws, was also a staunch supporter of Santander and was seriously implicated in the attempt on Bolívar's life. In October 1828 he was imprisoned, first in Bogotá and then in the north in the Caribbean port of Cartagena. In 1829 Josefa wrote a poignant poem regretting the deaths of her father, daughter, and brother Pedro, and the exile of her husband to the insalubrious north.

Shortly after the failed assassination attempt, Colonel José María Obando in allegiance with Colonel José Hilario López rose up against Bolívar in the south of Colombia in the name of the liberal revolution, though they eventually made their peace. At the request of executed General José Prudencio Padilla's women-folk, Josefa wrote a song (dated 1831) in honour of Generals Obando, López and Moreno ("At the Request of the Sabogal and Padilla Ladies this Song was Written in Honour of Generals Obando, López and Moreno"; Acevedo *Poesías*, 1854, pp. 26-27), in which she praises them as heroes and valiant warriors and denigrates the unnamed Bolívar as the ungrateful tyrant who wished to make New Granadines slaves. Gómez, under close surveillance in Turbaco, was finally released in 1830. Afraid of further reprisals if he returned to Bogotá immediately, he took refuge in his country estate, "El Chocho", near Fusagasugá. He need not have feared, however, for Bolívar, ill and despondent at the break up of Gran Colombia had renounced his Presidency and was on his way to voluntary exile

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in Europe. In December 1830 Bolívar died. Gómez refused to dress in mourning (Acevedo, *Biografía*, 1854, p. 27).

The following year the Republic of New Granada was declared, with a new liberal constitution (1832) and Santander as President. Santander governed until 1836. Loyal politicians such as Gómez might expect to benefit from this fortunate turn of events. Indeed, Gómez was one of the three civilians who governed New Granada as the constitution was being drawn up, before Santander took office, and he was offered the post of Secretary of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. Josefa and her family, it would appear, had survived a second decade of war and strife, and the 1830s looked hopeful. However, in August 1831 Santander received a letter informing him of Gómez's firm decision to retire from political life due to certain domestic developments, "azares domésticos" (Galvis Arenas, p. 45). Santander replied in November, "It is a calamity that Gómez has renounced public life and that he should suffer [...] such domestic misfortunes" (Galvis Arenas, p. 46). What had happened at home? Apart from a cluster of emotional poems written by Josefa, dated 1830 and 1831, in which she offers prayers to God, laments her humiliation, tears and ignominy ("I did not defend myself, though I could have done so/ I was haunted by my conscience and fear"; *Poesías*, 1854, p. 12) and wishes to forget the joys of the past, as happiness will never return ("Now the name of wife/ I shall never hear again"; *Poesías*, 1854, p. 25), the episode is clouded in mystery. A possible answer to the cause of the crisis is to be found in Isaac F. Holton's travel journal, *New Granada: Twenty Months in the Andes*, published in New York in 1857. Holton, a

professor of Chemistry and Natural History at Middlebury College, United States, described his visit to “El Chocho” shortly after Gómez’s death in 1853. Recounting Gómez’s imprisonment and exile he wrote:

Three years brought great changes. He [Gómez] left his lady, Señora Josefa Acevedo de Gómez, an estimable poet, worthy of the companionship of Mrs [Felicia] Hemans and Mrs [Lydia Huntley] Sigourney; he found her the mother of a babe conceived in his absence. They separated. He became a sot. She retired to a home in the edge of the vast Andine forest, a few hours from here and where she pours out the bitterness of her soul in touching strains, demanding of Death why he takes the happy and the hopeful and overlooks her. I write these things more freely as in these few days news has reached me that the unhappy husband [...] has left this world. (Holton, p. 303)

This might have been idle gossip. The identity of the alleged child’s father or the fortunes of the child itself, if it survived, have yet to be disclosed. Josefa makes no reference to any such man or child in her poems and she explicitly refers to her two daughters, Amalia and Rosa, as Gómez’s children. Her poetry expresses a sense of injustice and misunderstanding, yet she does acknowledge that she committed grave mistakes. Twelve years later she wrote a poem in which she referred to the disaster that “I madly brought on to myself” (*Poesías*, 1854, p. 71). At no point does she blame her husband; indeed whenever she refers to him it is with respect. She often recalls the happy early days of their marriage with nostalgia, before the

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events of 1830-1831 changed her life for ever. What is certain is that Gómez and Josefa lived apart for the next twenty years and that Gómez did indeed distance himself from political life. Josefa became critically ill in 1832, but pulled through thanks to the firm support of her mother and brothers (she wrote a poem in 1835 in praise of family love, “family friendship/ mediocrity and unchanging peace/ trust and the most sincere forgiveness” (*Poesías*, 1854, p. 41). Due to these personal circumstances that removed them from the centres of political intrigue, Josefa and Gómez were relatively unaffected by the death of Santander in 1842, or the War of the Supremes (1839-1842), in which regional leaders, including Obando, fought for a Federal state. The centralist constitution of 1843, which was the government’s response to this latest outbreak of sectarian violence, resulted in a period of relatively stable government. During these years, the 1830s and 1840s, Josefa raised her two daughters who each went on to marry the partners of their choice. Far from writing political poetry, she dedicated her verse to her brothers, daughters, grandchildren and close friends. In 1845, with money made available to her by her niece, Josefa published her *Essay on the Duties of Married Couples: Dedicated to the Young People of New Granada*. It was an immediate success and was followed three years later by the equally popular and lucrative *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (see Davies, Brewster and Owen 2006, pp. 203-207). In the early 1850s, the liberals López and Obando, extolled twenty years earlier by Josefa in her poetry, became Presidents of their country (1849-1853, and 1853-1854 respectively) and introduced liberal reform. In 1850 Josefa published a biography of her recently

deceased brother General José Acevedo, co-authored with her youngest brother Alfonso. Her brothers and husband could now be written into the historiography of New Granada as national heroes and a series of biographies followed. Josefa's political connections and unwavering liberal convictions were proving advantageous in the commissioning and publishing of her writings. The biographies she wrote represented family events as national events, and family history as the history of the new nation. The pen, not the sword, was her patriotic contribution. In this way she situated herself as the good republican mother, wife and sister, the shaper of cultural memory, the chronicler of the patriots' feats, and the means by which they were commemorated for posterity.

In 1852, as she reached the age of fifty, Josefa moved to live with her daughter Rosa, her son-in-law Anselmo de León, and their children, Herminia and Ernesto (who later became an important poet). In order to repay their kindness and to make some economic contribution to the household she made her son-in-law her literary executor and gave him the copyright of her work and her earnings. She explains this in a poem: "If fortune is against you/ I will work for you/ I still have energy and strength/[...]I have a golden lyre/ that breathes gentle words/ Yes, my Anselmo, you know well/ My lyre shall be for you" (*Poesías*, 1854, p. 107). She went on to publish an officially commissioned biography of her husband (1854), the book of autobiographical poems already referred to (1854), a biography of Alfonso Acevedo (1855), and finally the biography of her beloved father (1860). She continued writing and publishing, therefore, almost in defiance of the

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civil wars of the mid-1850s, the reconfiguration of New Granada into the Granada Confederation in 1858, and the civil wars of the 1860s. In addition to these major contributions to the historiography and literature of Colombia's nascent but troubled Republic, she wrote *Republican Catechism*, which, according to Monsalve, "demonstrates her republican ideas and patriotism" (Monsalve, p. 784), an *Oracle of Fruits and Flowers*, several plays, a book outlining her ideas, and an unpublished Diary (Monsalve, p. 784). Her homeland, New Granada, was finally constituted as the United States of Colombia in 1861, the year Josefa died. Josefa, the "first woman writer of the [Colombian] Republic" (Martínez Carreño, p. 9), died in Pasto with her daughters at her side at the age of 58. A final irony is recounted by Monsalve:

the Municipality of Bogotá denied Doña Josefa a corner of the public cemetery (built by her brother Governor Alfonso de Acevedo) where her remains might have been reunited with those of Diego F. Gómez and her grandson, the poet Ernesto León Gómez, so her desolate family scattered her ashes on the river and they slowly floated away. (Monsalve, p. 784)

Today Josefa Acevedo is widely acknowledged as "a pioneer of women's writing" in Colombia, as "she opened up a space for a torrent of women writers who followed in her footsteps" (Martínez Carreño, pp. 72-73).

Conduct Literature

Both the *Essay on the Duties of Married Couples* (1845) and the *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1848) are examples of Colombian conduct literature. Prescriptive conduct literature for men and women dates back to the earliest times, but it was in the eighteenth century, particularly in Britain and the United States, when the conduct book outstripped the courtesy book written for the aristocracy. As Nancy Armstrong has convincingly argued, the rise in popularity of the conduct book for women, from the eighteenth century until today, was a sure sign of the rise of the middle classes. In her study of "the ideology of conduct", Armstrong comes to broad conclusions that are entirely relevant for a study of the manuals written by Acevedo. She sees in this literature the construction of an ideal self-contained space of prosperity and order existing in parallel to the public world of political turmoil and commercial life, a virtual space far more effective than Defoe's island. This domestic sphere which women controlled was one in which men's competitiveness was tamed, it was "a private economy apart from the rivalry and dependency that organized the world of men" (Armstrong, p. 113). In this respect, the domestic space and the conduct literature that instructed how to create it had a real political impact. Moreover, of particular importance in societies such as Colombia where continuous hostilities threatened to shatter the fragile state, conduct literature prescribed a social and economic model that crossed the political divide and might be adopted by middle-class families irrespective of political persuasion. It strengthened common interests and values, as all respectable families,

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liberals and conservatives, desired prosperity and well-being in the home. As Armstrong explains with reference to competing political agendas in eighteenth-century England,

The female [...] provided a topic that could bind together precisely those groups who were necessarily divided by other kinds of writing. Virtually no other topic appeared to be so free of bias towards an occupation, political faction or religious affiliation. In bringing into being a concept of the household where socially hostile groups felt they could all agree, the domestic ideal helped create the fiction of horizontal affiliation that only a century later could have materialized as an economic reality. (Armstrong, p. 107)

Acevedo's books extol liberal and republican values, and are circumspect about the role of the Church, but nowhere do they exacerbate or incite political controversy. Conduct literature was a response to enlightened thinking and gradual but profound political and social change, not least in the material conditions and expectations of women. It indicates the revaluation, the added value, attributed to the domestic space in modernizing societies, and a shift in views on the relations between men and women. By the nineteenth century, the home was not longer envisaged as a site of production but of consumption; candles, bread, soap, were bought not made. Shopping became important, and taste in the choice of consumer goods, the family's quality of life and well-being (rather than birth) was an indication of respectable social status (Morris I, p. xi). The sumptuary display and

excessive luxury of the aristocracy was devalued in favour of inconspicuous consumption, discretion and moderation (Armstrong, p.116). All these traits are present in Acevedo's *Treatise* which provides a fitting template for a new republican society. Women played the major role in the creation of the domestic ideal, so conduct literature, written by men and women, was aimed primarily at them. The books were popular because middle-class women wanted to learn and to know. The domestic thus became a field of knowledge, a profession and expertise that respectable women could pride themselves on mastering and which they exercised more capably than men. An example of a popular conduct book, among many, is Thomas Webster's *An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy*, 2 vols, written with Mrs Frances Parkes, published in 1844. It consisted of 26 "books" of diverse information, ranging from instructions on the building of a house and kitchen; appropriate heating, ventilation and illumination; the duties of servants; suitable furniture, food, drink, and fabrics; the preservation of food, recipes and distillation; and carriages, horses and health. The *Encyclopedia* is a scientific book, teaching chemistry, physics and physiology to women so they could fully understand the reasoning informing the authors' instructions.

The ideal housewife was constructed in these books as efficient, active, and practical; she was a manager and accountant who aimed for cost effectiveness and tight control; who used her time and her husband's money to gain maximum advantage for the social unit (the family) living under one roof. Prudence, moderation, discretion and modesty were the personal qualities best

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suiting to the enterprise. Time should not be wasted on religious devotion and intellectual pursuits, such as reading novels, the decadent habits of the aristocracy, but in acquiring mastery of the skills of good household management. Women might excel or fall short as in any profession, but their productive labour in the domestic sphere was thus acknowledged and esteemed. At the same time the reproductive labour of women was also highly valued; motherhood was represented as an almost saintly duty, a "sanctifying act" (Vickers and Eden III, p. viii) that demanded life-long commitment and self-abnegation. The duties of the middle-class wife and mother, social management and moral discipline, conferred great social responsibilities on women, and endowed women who fulfilled society's expectations with respectability and high social status. In this way the new "domestic woman" complemented the rational, progressive "economic man" (Armstrong, p. 97). Marriage, a "cultured domestic partnership" (Morris I, p. xii), made women the civilizing influence on men and ultimately on society as a whole.

There were numerous conduct books written by and for middle-class women in nineteenth-century Britain, France and the United States, and some may have influenced Acevedo. Many of the authors belonged to dissenting families, for example, Sara Stickney Ellis (1812-1872), author of the best-sellers *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*, London, 1839, and *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility*, London, 1843, was a Quaker married to a Congregationalist minister (Vickers and Eden III, p. 27). Phebe Lankester (1825-1900), author of the popular *Domestic Economy for Young*

Girls, London, 1875, was a Baptist married to a physician (Vickers and Eden II, p. 353). Her book, like Acevedo's, gave practical advice on household management in the form of clear and concise instructions in an informal, conversational tone. Other books of this genre include *Cookery and Domestic Economy for Young Housewives: Including Directions for Servants*, by the Mistress of the Family, Edinburgh, 1851; *Practical Hints to Young Females, on the Duties of a Wife, a Mother, and a Mistress of a Family*, 1815, by Mrs Ann Taylor, and *Domestic Duties; Or Instructions to Young Married Ladies on the Regulation of their Conduct in the Various Relations and Duties of Married Life*, 3rd edition, 1828, by Mrs Parkes, which like Acevedo's manual, includes a section on the Regulation of Time. Topping them all in popularity, with over 60,000 copies sold in its first year of publication (1861), and almost two million copies sold by 1868, was *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, published by the twenty-five year old journalist Isabella Beeton (Humble, p. vii), married to Samuel Beeton publisher of the immensely popular *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* to which she contributed. Mrs Beeton's aim was to encourage men to spend more time at home, rather than eating out in clubs, and her book was to play an important part in the growth of the Victorian "cult of domesticity" (Humble, p. xii). Although Acevedo's *Treatise* and Beeton's *Household Management* are different, in that the latter, though a compendium of knowledge of domestic economy, is primarily a cookery book, they share many features. The first three chapters of Mrs Beeton's book on The Mistress, The Housekeeper, Arrangement and Economy in the Kitchen, and Introduction to Cookery, and the

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final five chapters on Dinners, Domestic Servants, the Management of Children, Health, and Legal Memoranda (accounts, contracts, leases, wills, debts) express the same kinds of preoccupations with time, money and practical expertise as Acevedo's book. The abundance of this prescriptive literature across Europe and the Americas demonstrates the growth of literacy and popular demand for reading materials, designed and published by the middle classes, to enable young people and married women to adapt to their new allotted roles in society.

The source that most evidently served as a model for the *Treatise*, however, to the extent that Acevedo quotes from it and closely paraphrases it on several occasions, was not written by a woman but by a man. This was Benjamin Franklin's *The Way to Wealth*, first published in 1758 as a preface to his *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Franklin compressed in this small volume all the business know-how he had accumulated over the years. As recent editors write, "the essay has become one of the most important and enduring business books ever published" (*The Way to Wealth* 1986, p. 7). By the 1980s it had gone through some 1,300 editions (Wright, p. 55) and has been translated into almost every language. Though often read as an "intellectual tour de force" (Aldridge, p. 130), *The Way to Wealth* is primarily a business book targeting a male readership. Acevedo's skill was to write a treatise on the domestic economy in terms used by the economist Franklin to encourage thrift, self-reliance, and capital accumulation. This way she presented household management as nothing less than a business to be run by efficient and capable women.

Acevedo's choice is not surprising. Fellow

American Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) had also experienced and recorded the rocky road to post-colonial independence and republicanism, and had helped frame the Declaration of Independence (1776) of the thirteen British colonies. Franklin began publishing his popular *Poor Richard's Almanacks* in Pennsylvania in 1732. He continued to do so for the next twenty-five years, with annual sales of some 10,000 copies. By the end of the nineteenth century there had been 75 editions of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 56 in French, 11 in German and more in various languages including Spanish, Catalan and Chinese. Excerpts from *The Way to Wealth* are found in the local press of many countries, for example, "Consejos de Franklin a un joven artesano" [Franklin's Advice to a Young Artisan] appeared in the provincial daily newspaper *El Norte de Asturias* in Gijón (Spain) as late as 13 July 1868. Franklin entered into discussions with the French on the subject of American Independence and his reputation in France as a free-thinker and scientist became as great as that of Voltaire. His *Oeuvres* were published in Paris in 1773 edited by Barbeu-Dubourg and again in Nantes in 1823. The *Mélanges de morale, d'économie et de politique*, published by Renouard in Paris in 1824, 1825, and 1853, included *Conseils pour faire fortune* and *La science du bonhomme Richard*. The *Écrits populaires de Franklin* appeared in France throughout the 1830s, as did numerous abridged versions and extracts such as the *Morceaux choisis, comprenant La Science du bonhomme Richard* in 1834 and *La Science du bonhomme Richard* published in Editions Claudius by Renouard in 1845. Acevedo heads each of the chapters of her *Treatise* with a series of epigraphs

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taken from a French edition of *The Way to Wealth*. She may have used any of the editions mentioned above.

Franklin's *Almanack* was a self-help guide, full of practical tips and maxims on how to save time and money. Hailing from a Protestant family, but not particularly religious himself, Franklin created his own brand of utilitarian morality which he referred to as the "art of virtue". Although these writings on economics were for practical purposes, he never separated utility from goodness. His "art" was founded on thirteen virtues, all of which rank high in Acevedo's *Treatise*: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity and humility. He would then divide the year up into four thirteen-week courses and attempt to dedicate a week to each virtue. This, he argued, was the Way to Wealth. Acevedo quotes, paraphrases or develops many of Franklin's apophthegms. The epigraphs heading Chapter 1 on Time (see below, p. 9) quote (in French) the following Franklin passages: "but dost thou love life, then do not squander it, for that's the stuff life is made of" (*Poor Richard's Almanack*, p. 43); "If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be the greatest prodigality since lost time is never found again" (p. 44); "So what signifies wishing and hoping for better times. We may make these times better if we bestir ourselves. Industry need not wish, and he that lives upon hope will die fasting. There are no gains without pains" (p. 45). Those in Chapter 2 on Money (below, p. 38) quote: "What though you have found no treasure, nor has any rich relation left you a legacy, diligence is the mother of good-luck" (*Poor*, p. 45); "If you would be wealthy, think

of saving as well as of getting: The Indies have not made Spain rich, because her outgoes are greater than her incomes” (p. 51); “many have been ruined by buying good pennyworths.[...] ’tis foolish to lay out money in a purchase of repentance” (p. 53), and those in Chapter 3 (below, p. 66): “’tis easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it” (*Poor*, p. 56); and “pride that dines on vanity sups on contempt [...] Of what use is this pride of appearance for which so much is risked, or much is suffered? It cannot promote health or ease pain; it makes no increase of wealth in the person, creates envy and it hastens misfortune” (p. 56). If such values had proved beneficial to the construction of a federal republic in the north, they might be no less advantageous to New Granada.

The *Treatise*

Copyright for the *Treatise* was obtained in September 1848, and it was printed by José A. Cualla in Bogotá. The book is dedicated to Josefa’s niece, Dolores Neira, who financed the publication of *Essay on the Duties of Married Couples*. Only Josefa’s niece and son-in-law, Anselmo León, showed any interest in her *Essay*. In the Preface of the *Treatise*, which includes the typical woman writer’s disclaimer, Josefa emphasises that her work is not the fruit of study or meditation but of her free time, and that she does not write to gain literary fame. Her motivation is merely to delight and to be useful; to communicate practical tips to others to enable them to augment their means of subsistence. She adds that none of the fictional “episodes” or fables, introduced (as in Franklin’s work) to illustrate a point, are based on real-life

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characters: this is not, she stresses, an *oeuvre à clef*. She writes for women, especially “for those who do not have an immense fortune, but who do have a house to manage and a family to educate” (below, p. 10). The *Treatise* consists of three lengthy chapters, dealing with time, money and economies of sundry items (jewels, clothes, furniture and provisions). The first part of each chapter consists of a lucid exposition of the problems to be avoided and instructions on domestic economy, while the second part illustrates the lesson with a fable. As stated, each chapter is introduced by an epigraph in French quoted from Franklin.

Time is of the essence. Adult life expectancy in New Granada was forty or fifty years (below, p. 9), so every hour of every day should be used productively and not wasted in frivolous conversations or idleness. Women should rise at dawn and spend an hour tidying their house, an hour on personal hygiene, and half an hour for breakfast. They should dedicate the rest of the day to sewing, making flowers, teaching their children, or drawing. But the house should always be in perfect order, with everything neat and tidy, so that precious time is not wasted looking for things. The author remonstrates against those who breakfast at eleven, not because this is their custom but because the key to the larder has been mislaid. Some ladies walk back and forth, she writes, to fetch scissors and thimbles left lying around before they sit down to sew; tidiness is vital to save time. Servants too must be tightly controlled because they are often uneducated and wasteful; they use amounts of food in one meal that might have stretched to three. Another waste of time is to make unnecessary visits. Visits should

be kept to a minimum and take place in the first three hours of the evening; this will enable ladies to avoid time-wasters who accost them in the street with endless conversation. Carefully selected visits are useful as they make for good conversation, the exchange of ideas, and ultimately make people “kinder and more tolerant and communicative” (below, p. 15). Conversation, however, should focus on practical advice, such as recipes, discussion of works of literature, and news of misfortunes that can be alleviated. Music, art, singing, dancing and reading are acceptable if they do not take women away from their family duties. Fashion (for men and women) wastes time as it involves sewing silly adornments, embroideries, making hair rings, and so on. Excessive religious devotion is also a waste of time; to flit from church to church throughout the day to masses and prayers is not good for “a wife, a mother, a tutor, or head of any establishment except a convent” (below, p. 17). Too many celebrations, festivities, birthday parties, weddings, and funeral wakes should be avoided. Time should be spent working, taking exercise, learning and enjoying oneself in moderation; women should not be lazy or distracted; they should not whine “like beasts of burden nor laugh like silly cockatoos” (below, p. 20).

Money, like time, should be wisely spent. Women need to take a leading role in curbing consumption and accumulating wealth. They should demonstrate order, thrift and frugality in all things. Lists should be made of possible purchases in order of priority: necessary items, useful items, charitable expenditure and, lastly, pleasure and recreation. Money used for revenge, vices, corrupt practices or useless ostentation is

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misspent. Luxury, for example purchasing a Bible in Latin for an uneducated seamstress, is roundly condemned; similarly a surfeit of unnecessary possessions is censured. If a house is well furnished it is shameful to spend on sofas, carpets, prints and other luxuries for interior rooms. Yet necessary instruments or utensils should be purchased of good quality. Among the most useful outgoings is a good education; this must be a priority in a family. But the education must suit the requirements of the individual. For example, it is not sensible for artisans to spend money on their children's education if it includes music, dance, modern languages and astronomy. Artisans should be instructed in morality, reading, writing, speaking correctly, the geography and history of their country, love of liberal institutions, knowledge of their own dignity and rights, and some mathematics, arithmetic, geometry and drawing, because they will need these in their trade. Books should be purchased, but again, suited to requirements. The skill of the good housewife is to be selective and to use the family income effectively. Any surplus money should be spent on charity rather than frittered away on frivolities. The rich who waste their money on unnecessary possessions rather than on social welfare are deplored. Indeed, social welfare is prescribed as one of the duties of the rich. But, again, the skill is to know how much to give and to whom; not all charitable cases are equally deserving. Many of the city vagabonds are merely vice-ridden layabouts.

The collective saving of time and money, the moral discipline inculcated into the new nation, starts at home with the personal habits of women themselves. Proper values and behaviour should

be taught to girls at a young age. Girls in particular should be taught how to keep accounts. All items of jewellery or clothing must be itemised and always returned to their rightful place, to prevent damage or loss, or time wasted searching. Clothes should be looked after carefully as they represent an outlay of capital. An expensive skirt must not be used for morning mass or to go to market; it might be soiled by the “swarms of beggars and the disgusting hordes that fill this city” (below, p. 69). Ladies should know how to clean clothes so that they give the correct instructions to servants who might otherwise ruin the garments. Children should keep their best shoes for walking, not for play. All clothes, especially children’s, should be repaired and darned to obtain maximum use. Girls need to be shown how to darn socks and sew, and how to alter clothes; a girl who knows that she must repair her own clothes will treat them more carefully and not climb trees or play with dogs. Stains caused by grease, acid and liqueurs must be avoided as they cannot be easily removed. Clothes should be mended after they are washed but before they are starched, and servants should not be asked to sew dirty clothes. Women are instructed to buy good quality clothes or to make them at home. Some final instructions are not to sleep on the sofas or spit on the carpets; not to buy chocolate, eggs, fresh vegetables or tobacco in bulk as they go stale or bad; whereas fruit in syrup lasts a long time, and spirits will keep for many years. Generally it is better to make chocolate, sweets and starch at home, and to buy bread, sausages, candles and soap as special skills are needed to make them.

The last fable of the book recounts the story of a

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family who goes to ruin because the wayward parents do not teach their children thrift and hard work. They are saved however by a friend's mother whose motto is "don't leave for tomorrow what you can do today" (below, p. 97). She teaches them how to rebuild their fortunes and fend for themselves. This mother acquired her good habits in England:

Mother had learnt about being orderly and economical in the country of orderliness, sound economy and prudence. In England idleness is almost unknown and middle-class women, far from being a burden to their husbands, are a comfort to them, as they assist with their work and are prudent administrators of all the money that those hardworking islanders earn and save. (*Treatise*, p. 93)

This was Josefa's vision of modernity and progress in Colombia: a domestic national economy founded on industry and self-reliance, modelled on that of Britain and the United States, initiated in the home and replicated throughout society.

The life works of Josefa Acevedo constitute an inspirational memoir recounting the survival of a woman and a family against adversity on all fronts. Ultimately they provide us with ideas on how to create a stable liberal society out of sectarian violence and chaos, ideas still valid and necessary today.

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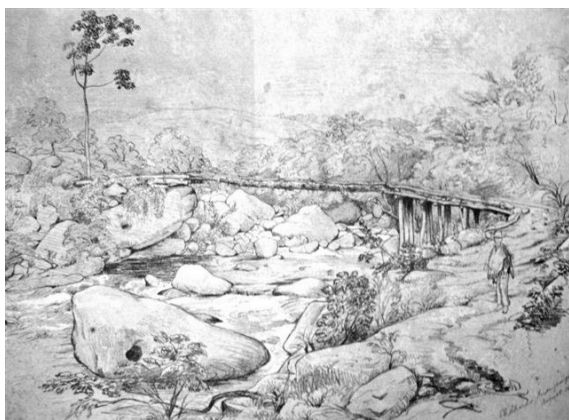
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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Asterisked footnotes are the author's own, while numbered endnotes are the translator's. The French quotations which appear at the start of each chapter have been left in their original form.

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'El Chocho- Fusagasugá', a painting by Edward Mark Walhouse (1817-1895), signed August 14th 1856, from *Acuarelas de Mark: Un testimonio pictórico de la Nueva Granada*, Banco de la República, Bogotá, 1963, p. 96.