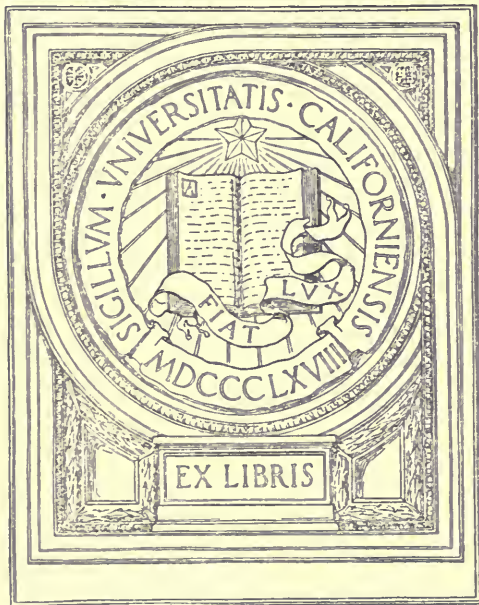




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The Fair Land of  
Central America

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THE AUTHOR AND HIS WIFE PUNTING ON THE *LAGUNAS* OF MEXICO

# The Fair Land of Central America

By

Maurice de Waleffe

Translated by

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"Gambetta's Life and Letters"

Preface by

Sir A. Conan Doyle

With Twenty-four Illustrations from Photographs



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## Preface

WINDLESHAM,  
CROWBOROUGH,  
SUSSEX.

*October 24, 1909.*

DEAR M. DE WALEFFE,

I did not reply sooner because I wanted to read your book. I have just finished it and I think it quite charming, very witty, instructive, and full of interesting observations. I am entirely of your opinion that you are the first author to write impartially about men and matters in those parts of the world.

I fear that my opinion concerning the future of Central America is worthless. But could I return to earth a hundred years after my decease, my first question would be: "What are the United States doing?" I like the people and the country, but I don't feel at all sure about their future. At the end of another hundred years, Germany, France, and England will all be represented there more or less; but in the case of the United States,

## Preface

we must remember that they represent forty-five countries without a natural centrum ; and there is always a possibility that some superior force may come and dissolve the nation, either by arousing the race-hatred of the West for the East, or by future labour troubles between millionaires and workmen. I hope this will not come about, for I myself believe that the United States are a force for good in this world ; but such an event is always possible.

With sincere thanks, believe me, yours very truly,

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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# The Fair Land of Central America

## THE AMERICAN PROBLEM

The United States want to take possession of Latin America—Danger to Germany and England—Loss to France—Sentiment versus business—New stars—Superiority of French boats—Nautical notes—The last of the sharks—The water-lilies of the *Bourgogne*—Christopher Columbus' erroneous and revolting opinions.

THE United States have made up their mind to conquer South America. Washington aspires to become the capital of an enormous empire, comprising, with the exception of Canada, the whole of the New World. Eighty million Yankees want to annex, not only forty million Spanish Americans, but such mines, forests, and agricultural riches as can be found nowhere else on the face of the globe.

## The Fair Land of Central America

This huge enterprise is not a thing of the future : it has already commenced. The war between Cuba and Spain, the relinquishment of the Panama Canal by France, the Stars and Stripes' ominous cruises in South American waters, all show the existence of some fixed idea, and Europe would do well to see that her interests are not endangered thereby.

Latin America is a first-rate customer to Germany and England. But when goods manufactured in New York and Chicago are allowed to enter the country free of duty, London and Hamburg will find that their trade with Latin America is practically ruined ; the custom-house barrier will close the market to them.

Californian wines are not to be compared with our French clarets, and our fancy goods will be able to hold their own against the American article for some time to come. But when South America has learnt to speak English and to consider Boston as the hub of the intellectual universe, France's time-honoured fame as the seat of learning will receive, as far as the Latin races are concerned, her death-blow. Such cities containing over one million inhabitants, as Rio and Buenos

## The American Problem

Ayres, will cease to be attracted by the loadstone Paris, and will gravitate round New York.

It is no laughing matter ! Until lately, Central America used to send her sons and daughters to finish their studies in France ; she now sends them to the United States. The older members of most families speak French ; the younger generation only speak English.

What language will they speak to-morrow ? Will the Spanish-American Creole contrive to free himself from the rapacious beak and widespread wings of the American eagle depicted on the almighty dollar ? The struggle between the wealthy republic, whose current coinage is represented by a heavy gold piece worth one hundred francs, and a wretched tropical republic whose wealth is all on paper, where one sees bank-notes of the value of one centime, cannot be of long duration. However, Chili, Brazil, and the Argentine Republic are in a prosperous condition ; and seventeen Latin republics, speaking the same language and observing the same customs, would be a big mouthful even for Uncle Jonathan, whose tusks, as everyone knows, are pretty tough.

## The Fair Land of Central America

But can and will these nations resist ? In order to solve this problem, I went to interview those States which Washington has already begun to swallow : Panama, already in the ogre's jaws ; the five Central Republics, already in its clutches ; and Mexico, more exposed to danger but better able to protect herself, for she is now resisting the invader with all her might and main.

At first sight it would seem as if it would be better in the interests of the French language if the United States' little plans were frustrated. But in the superior interests of humanity, would it not be better if a more energetic, enterprising race took possession of this still uncultivated continent ?

Happily, our prestige is not entirely dependent upon the fate of the Latin races. The geographical position of our country cannot be surpassed. As in *Hernani*, where a certain old duke pretends that he comes of such a noble family that " he is descended from all the kings in Christendom and akin to all the dukes on earth " <sup>1</sup> France laves her

<sup>1</sup> " . . . qu'elle touche à la fois

Du pied à tous les ducs, du front à tous les rois ! "

## The American Problem

feet in the Mediterranean while her forehead lies on the shores of the North Sea ; and thus she includes both Latin and Northern races among her children. The born protector of the oppressed, she knows full well that she has no need to cringe before other nations ; strong and weak alike love her.

Would you like to have a typical proof of that fact ? While the young *señoritas* of Central America now go to complete their education in New York, the misses of that city come to finish their studies in Paris. The United States' Minister at Panama, that is to say the highest representative of the American supremacy in Latin America, had his three daughters educated in Paris ; he wanted them to imitate my compatriots, and he has succeeded : they are French from head to foot.

I do not say that three accomplished young ladies can console us for the loss of the Panama Canal. But at least we can see that the conquest of South America by North America would push Paris into the background and bring New York to the fore. It is true that it would be better for our interests if such an event did not take place ;

## The Fair Land of Central America

however, we run no risk of being entirely eclipsed. That is one consolation, and we can afford to sit still and watch the struggle between the two Americas.

I left Cherbourg March 18, and reached the Antilles March 31. A few days later I arrived in Venezuela, from which country I went, from republic to republic, and from capital to capital, until I reached Mexico. I followed nearly the same route as that taken by Christopher Columbus four hundred years before me.

Things have changed somewhat since those days.

All the illustrious Genoese navigator thought about was whether he would be able to bring back "gold and spices" from the New World. The only thing which we care about nowadays is whether the New World will still continue to buy its machinery and manufactured articles from us.

But the difference only lies in words. It is the old, old story—money. The poet Heredia describes the old *conquistadors* and their vague dread of the unknown in the following verses:—



# The American Problem

“ . . . When, bending over the prow of their white caravels  
They watched bright, unknown stars rise  
From the ocean's bosom and mount into unknown skies.”<sup>1</sup>

I stood leaning over the prow of a black steamer ;  
I, too, watched mysterious, ominous, unknown  
stars, the forty-five stars of the flag of the United  
States, rise from the bosom of the ocean !

The European who wants to get to Central America has two routes from which to choose : he can either go via New York or else by the Antilles. The first route, which would seem the shortest, will be the most uncomfortable as long as no railway connects New York and Panama.

Sea-sickness, far more terrible in the tropics, the tedious American custom-house regulations, the most horrible institution on the face of this earth, more horrible in America than even in Turkey, and lastly the wretched boats which ply between New York and Colon<sup>2</sup> all help to prove that this is the worst route. Now the voyage

<sup>1</sup> “ . . . Quand, penchés à l'avant des blanches caravelles,  
Ils regardaient monter en un ciel ignoré  
Du fond de l'Océan des étoiles nouvelles ! ”

<sup>2</sup> Colon, or Aspinwall.

## The Fair Land of Central America

by the Antilles, on the contrary, is accomplished without a change in seventeen days, and becomes like a pleasant yachting trip as soon as one passes the ever-restless coast of the Azores.

Six European navigation companies invite the choice of the would-be traveller. However, the management on the Italian and Spanish boats leaves much to be desired. As the Dutch boats are cargo-boats and touch at every port the voyage is much longer. The German, English, and French companies alone compete in the matter of speed and comfort. The latter, having just built some new and very luxurious boats of seven thousand five hundred tons, comes first on the list. In reality the pleasure of such a voyage depends upon a factor which no company can guarantee : one's fellow-passengers across the ocean who, for a whole fortnight, represent the civilized world to you. For the beauty of a sunset at sea, the poetry of the dolphin's movements as it turns a somersault between two waves, the flying-fish as it skims over the foam like a silver arrow, the grandeur of the tempest and all the splendours of the ocean are powerless to prevent us feeling lonely. Man has ever found his fellow-creatures more interesting

## The American Problem

than anything else in creation. We are terribly sociable animals. If we ever manage to fly about among the stars, those myriads of planets will only bore us if we have nobody with whom to exchange our impressions.

That is why it is best to choose a boat belonging to one's own nationality, that is to say a boat whose crew and staff speak one's own tongue. Foreign boats may be more amusing, but it is much better to resist the desire to be amused, even if one does happen to speak English and German fluently. We can speak other languages, but we can only converse in our native tongue. Each nation has its own particular faults and failings, but we soon perceive that those with which we are most familiar are the easiest to bear.

Except for this fact, it is usually agreed that the French boats have the best cooking, while the German and English are the best managed. You know you are on a French boat when the stewards joke or swear at each other behind your back. You know that you are on an English boat when the uneatable meat has to be deluged with hot sauces before you can swallow it, and when the

## The Fair Land of Central America

pastry and cakes, apparently constructed of pasteboard, seem made expressly for the punishment of the greedy. Lastly, you may be quite sure that you are on a German boat when a trumpet announces the dinner-hour : Forward ! march !

Travelling is being brought to such a pitch of perfection and comfort, that we must hurry up if we want to describe a sea-voyage as it now is. To-morrow coal will perhaps be replaced by radium or wireless electricity. The great transatlantic boats of thirty thousand tons which race across the ocean from Europe to America in five days and which to-day seem the very latest thing out, will then seem as far away from us as the frigates of Trafalgar or the galleys of Salamis. It would be very interesting if we could see the log-book of one of those galleys or of a royal frigate of olden times. We wonder what life on board ship was like in those days ; *Robinson Crusoe* and Petronius' *Satyricon* owe much of their popularity to their graphic description of daily life.

But the boats which go to the Antilles are by no means as large as those which cross to New York.

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Such monsters as the *Lusitania* and the *Mauretania*, whose boilers devour a ton of coal every minute and cost the company about eighty thousand francs each day of the voyage, are much too grand for Central America. The latter country already finds it hard enough to pay the Transatlantic Company for its steamers which scarcely consume more than a ton of coal in a quarter of an hour, and which can go to Mexico and back for the sum of three hundred and twenty thousand francs—a mere trifle !

Certain boats are like certain trains in which it is not the first but the third-class carriages that pay. So it is on board certain ships where, if only first-class passengers were carried, the company would soon become bankrupt. It is the emigrants, huddled together on the fore-castle, and who sometimes number nearly a thousand, who represent the largest profit ; for they pay fifteen francs a day, while their food only costs the company from fifty to seventy-five centimes at the most. They squat or lie on deck, higgledy-piggledy, almost on the top of one another, humming some national air through their noses or playing loto—a dangerous game ! The sly dog who draws the numbers

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is an old hand at it ; he is a consummate swindler. I was shown an unfortunate peasant from Galicia, who had lost seven thousand francs, representing four long years of hard work under a tropical sun.

The first-class passengers only play bridge at one centime a point, but they have other pleasures : good food, amusing books, and siestas in deck-chairs on the promenade deck, fanned by the breeze and rocked by the sea, which pleasant operation produces an exquisite feeling of drowsiness. And then the first-class passengers never do any work. I have been on twelve different boats ; never have I seen a passenger using the leisure hours of a sea voyage in order to study or read any serious book. The same man to whom a lazy day would seem unbearable on shore, will spend weeks between heaven and sea without using his brain. The steamer's engines work for him. Everyone feels as if they were being hurried along by millions of steam-horses galloping as fast as they can, day and night, in the monster's throbbing ribs ; and the sensation of such a race is enough to take away any wish one may have to work.

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And yet how lonely the ocean is ! In the whole of the Atlantic I only saw one inhabited spot on the outward journey : that spot is one of the islands of the Azores ; we went so close that we could almost touch it and were able to read the time on the face of the village church clock. . . . You can't even do that on the homeward journey. The ship goes farther north in order to profit by the Gulf Stream, that great stream of warm water which describes a majestic curve before it goes to act as a sort of huge heating apparatus to European civilization ! And the only living creatures which lift the blue winding-sheet of this desert are, with the exception of a few flying-fish, a family of whales, three black backs, three jets of foamy water following one behind the other ; papa goes first, then comes mama, and lastly the young hopeful. These animals are not very inquisitive. The sight of a boat bigger than themselves seems to wake neither interest nor fear in their minds ; and they, unlike the porpoises who follow the boat for hours, methodically plunge along and continue on their journey without turning to the left or to the right. And the sharks ? those wonderful sharks which land-lubbers imagine follow boats

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in order to swallow up anyone who may happen to fall or to be thrown overboard? The sharks are nowhere! They swim far too slowly! It is impossible for them to keep up with a steamer making twelve knots an hour. The speed of the modern transatlantic boat has been too much for these connoisseurs of human flesh! There must be a deplorable number of unemployed among the sharks!

No one thinks anything of making a sea-voyage nowadays. You are exposed to very little danger, less than in a train, and far less than in an automobile. You run no risk of being shipwrecked unless your steamer collides in a fog with a sailing-vessel. Steamers look upon sailing-boats in the same light as automobiles regard market-carts on a high road. You are lost if a collision occurs! The *Bourgogne*, notwithstanding her watertight compartments, sank in a quarter of an hour, engulfing hundreds of human lives, with the exception of sixty who were rescued by the three-master which ran her down. The ship's boats were useless; on such occasions they are always seized by the emigrants, who keep them at the point of the knife. This was what happened in



## The American Problem

the case of the *Bourgogne*. But the emigrants did not benefit by their capture, for the waves smashed each boat to pieces against the hull of the vessel as soon as it was lowered into the sea. In case of accident, the best thing to do is to throw oneself into the water with a chair or any piece of wood capable of being used as a buoy.

Life-belts are capital things when you know how to fasten them on—which very few passengers know how to do. One of the sailors saved from the *Bourgogne* told me the following gruesome story :—

“ Many of the ladies seized their life-belts which they, unaware that they ought to fasten them under their armpits, with one accord fastened round their waists. So when they jumped into the sea, the weight of their bodies bent their heads under water. In the dim evening light the dark surface of the sea seemed as if covered with water-lilies.”

Ladies always seem particularly beautiful and fascinating on board ship ; but when you reach

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port, you suddenly perceive that they are rather plain if anything, and that it is because they are few and far between that you value their society so highly. If I were a pretty woman, and if I did not suffer from sea-sickness, I think I should spend my whole life on board ship, even if I were the only woman on board, on condition that I had a good strong bolt on my cabin door and a revolver within my reach. Don't laugh! Anyone who would write a book called *Nights on a Transatlantic Boat* would have plenty of yarns to spin, and could make our hair stand upon end with horror at the dreadful things which might happen if there were only two or three women to every hundred men! But I did not go to America in order to tell you stories about the fair sex, unless I except American ladies.

But let us wait a bit!

My steamer forged along over a sort of vast watery prairie, apparently formed of clumps of floating grass; these clumps were seaweed from the Sargassa Sea, and it was probably owing to their presence in the Gulf Stream that Christopher Columbus discovered America. The presence of this alga made him think that the land which

## The American Problem

produced these tufts of grass must be near at hand, and so he was encouraged to persevere. What a mistake! Christopher Columbus made many; in fact, he made nothing but mistakes. He died unaware that he had discovered a new continent and firmly convinced that he had only touched at the West Indies.

Neither did Columbus, as is generally believed, assert that the earth was round. He explained the sudden deviation of the magnetic needle when passing the Azores, by declaring that the earth was shaped like a woman's breast and that he had just sailed round the tip. He sent long documents to the Spanish sovereigns in which he affirmed that the Island of Cuba was larger than the whole of Spain; and he proved, Bible in hand, that it could only be the terrestrial paradise described in Genesis. He praised the good-natured Indians, whom he saw running about stark naked on the seashore, uttering cries of joy, and offering him flowers and fruit in token of their good-will; and he writes to their Catholic Majesties: "These people will make good slaves."

He was a great man, but he was always making

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mistakes or expressing erroneous opinions. His example gives me courage to continue, and I shall now endeavour to follow where he once trod.

## THE ANTILLES AND VENEZUELA

Two charming divinities: the yellow fever and the plague—Tartarin as a planter—A negro Mediterranean—Venus in the Barbadoes—Fried dolphin and turtle cutlets—An American Hong-Kong—The colour problem—A terrestrial paradise—Vampires—The everlasting Castro—Four hundred revolutions in one century—Seven thousand generals—A ball in Venezuela—Why Venezuela can afford to defy Europe.

WHEN one has been rolling about on the top of a boiler for a fortnight without intermission, endured the horrors of sea-sickness, slept badly, eaten little, shivered with the cold in Europe, roasted in the tropics, and lived in the sickening stench of hot grease which exhales from all engine-rooms and manages to poison the air on the best regulated transatlantic boats; when one has reached that state when the most ardent lover of the sea would give all the oceans in the world to be able to lie down in silence on a plot of green grass for one single hour; in short, when one has already begun to catch a glimpse of the Promised Land, and when

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the palm trees, swinging their vegetable plumage 'twixt azure sky and indigo sea, welcome you and whisper to you that your troubles are all over—well! when all that happens you would do well to refrain from expressing your satisfaction on learning this welcome piece of good news.

For if you go and interview the captain, in order to find out when you can land, you may be disagreeably surprised to hear that much ornamented personage reply that no one can land on account of the quarantine.

“But I am going to the Island of Trinidad!”

“Can't be done, sir. Trinidad is in quarantine; they've got yellow fever there.”

“Never mind. I only wanted to go to Trinidad to see what it was like. I will go on with the boat to La Guayra, the seaport for Venezuela; I've got some business to do there.”

“Can't be done, sir. La Guayra is in quarantine; they've got the bubonic plague at La Guayra.”

The yellow fever and the bubonic plague were the two divinities who came to greet me on the

## The Antilles and Venezuela

threshold of tropical America. If they had not turned up, their sisters malaria, malignant fever and black fever would have appeared. There are, I believe, fevers of all colours, characterized by the colour of the vomit. It was a pleasant look out! The passengers bound for this terrestrial paradise put the finishing touch to your terror by recounting horrible stories. According to them, clouds of mosquitoes dance like a troop of vampires round the landing-stage.

“ You’ll be bitten as soon as you land. When once you’ve been bitten, you’re bound to get fever ; and whoever gets fever is a dead man ! ”

When you venture to remark in a trembling voice :

“ But how is it that you and your families have managed to keep alive ? ” they reply

“ Oh ! *we* were stung in our cradles. We have been vaccinated, so to speak, and so we cannot contract fever. But new-comers are at the mercy of the mosquitoes.”

Each colonial is quite proud of his country’s own particular disease, and assumes a superior air when addressing the pale, trembling foreigner.

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Tartarins are found all over the world and are quite as plentiful among planters as among Alpine climbers. As to the shopkeepers in those seaport towns, whose interest it is to attract visitors, they manage to drive the latter away by their awful accounts of their neighbour and rival's misfortunes. Thus, in the West Indies, two islands—Jamaica and Trinidad—are fighting for the honour of supplying England with their different commodities. Jamaica, thanks to her proximity to the United States, has, at present, got the best of it. However, Trinidad is getting stronger every day ; standing as she does at the mouth of the Orinoco, she enjoys the position of foster-child to Venezuela.

Whenever anyone dies of anything but old age in Trinidad, it is amusing to see how Jamaica hurries up to lay an embargo on any boats foolhardy enough to touch at that pestilential Trinidad !

The barber of the steamer which brought me from Europe, a boat which touches regularly at both islands, confided to me that this was the eighth time that he had passed by Trinidad without being allowed to land. Crew and passengers





TRINIDAD: WOMEN GOING TO MARKET



MEXICO: THE STATE PRISON



## The Antilles and Venezuela

are obliged to stay on board, for Jamaica, with her threat of an embargo, is just over the horizon ; and so it has to be.

One can see that England's boast that all her colonies pull together must be taken with a pinch of salt, and that local interests come before international competition. This is a reassuring discovery, for it shows that no race, no matter how proudly it may boast of its splendid isolation, will ever be able to form an exclusive government on the face of the globe. The English colonies are all jealous of one another and abuse one another, just as the French and Spanish colonies used to do, and as the widely separated States of the all too vast Republic of the United States will to-morrow hate and abuse each other—that is an important point in the pan-American problem. But before reaching Trinidad—where I landed, notwithstanding all their yellow and black fevers which, however, did not manage to scare me, for I find that the best recipe in order to keep young and strong is to look at everything through rose-coloured spectacles—I landed for a few hours, the first time I had been on dry land since we left Europe thirteen days ago, at Barbadoes,

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another English possession, of less geographical importance but quite as thickly populated as Trinidad.

Populated—yes, indeed, with negroes! For everyone knows that that huge expanse of water stretching from the Caribbean Sea to the Gulf of Mexico, called by the geographer Reclus “the American Mediterranean,” might be termed, especially if one adds the coasts of Florida and Louisiana, “a negro Mediterranean.” For three centuries the slave trade was carried on without interruption. Every hue of the African epidermis is represented, from the ebony-black of Congo to the mahogany-red and gingerbread-yellow of Guinea.

Add a large proportion of mulattoes, quadroons, mongrels of every degree. Some little stark-naked niggers, like small statues carved in rose-wood, gazed up at us with pale blue or light grey eyes, the cause of which the honourable negro ladies who gave them birth alone can explain. It is becoming quite a difficult thing to find a perfectly black negro.

These millions of negroes do as little work as possible. The English were obliged to import

## The Antilles and Venezuela

Hindus to the Island of Trinidad in order to get someone to do their heavy jobs for them. The negroes do not pretend to be of princely birth, but they refuse to be slaves! What can you expect of a race which lives upon a halfpenny-worth of bananas a day, and which can make a pair of pink calico drawers and a tattered shirt, or a petticoat and a mauve muslin bodice, last for a whole year?

However, the agents for the Panama Canal, thanks to the promise of a daily wage of one dollar, managed to persuade whole shiploads of these negroes to go back with them to Panama and to work for them. When our boat left Barbadoes, it took two hundred more of these negroes with their wives, brats, rags, and poultry. These wretched creatures, so tightly packed that they could scarcely move, lay huddled together on deck day and night. They managed to eat and to sleep, however, and to be sick, also, for the sea was rough. Poor creatures! poor negro race! This, perhaps, was their first voyage since that far distant day when a slaver brought their ancestors chained together in the hold, like a drove of cattle.

## The Fair Land of Central America

These negroes came up on deck unfettered—at least, we could see no chains. Things are a trifle better than they were three centuries ago—that is something! However, they seemed fairly contented. Those of their number who were not too ill laughed or chanted aloud out of their prayer-books. One little orange-coloured mulatto girl, of about fifteen years of age, rolled her soft brown eyes with a savage grace as she replaited her woolly tresses before a tiny piece of looking-glass.

A torrid sun was blazing overhead when we cast anchor before the Island of Barbadoes. The ship's boat took ten minutes to reach the shore. Hardly had we taken our seats in the boat, when the sky began to lower; then a fine, cold rain commenced to fall; it quickly became a deluge which wetted us to the skin and penetrated through our parasols and thin white linen clothes. The sun did not reappear until we had reached the hotel, where we arrived muddied up to our eyes. This was to teach us that it is advisable not to visit the tropics in the rainy season.

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To get to the hotel we had to traverse the whole town, or rather the whole village ; for lanes run between the gardens belonging to the Europeans' villas and the rows of negro cabins. We met a little girl, who had also been overtaken by the storm, trotting along under a big umbrella with her petticoats carefully tucked up ; she evidently belonged to some well-to-do family, for her little underclothes were white as snow ; nothing could have been more pretty and more quaint than those little bare black legs and feet protruding from under the white lace frills. I was reminded of some of our French seaside places where other little girls show their funny thin little sunburnt legs just in the same way, when they tuck up their petticoats in order to play on the beach. But there the flesh was black, and I suddenly felt oh ! so far away !

When these dusky or orange-coloured little girls are a few years older, they will set up house in one of those cabins situated on the road leading from the quay to the hotel. The cab-drivers of the place will not forget to ring the big bell, which they always carry on the seat by their side, whenever they happen to be driving any wealthy

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gentlemen! All seaport towns are alike, but immorality is more barefaced in tropical seaport towns than elsewhere.

Barbadoes, being an English possession, boasts of an excellent hotel, where you are received under a veranda by crowds of black servants clad in white jackets adorned with gilt buttons. They are very fine ; and they evidently know that fact, for they despise the tourist, and, except at meal-time, take care to do nothing but look ornamental. You have to look out for yourself ! No one pays the least attention to you, and you might pocket all the ornaments off the drawing-room mantel-piece without anyone taking the trouble to stop you. That is probably the reason why there are no ornaments. A drawing-room in the Antilles is a sort of a barn with little tables and straw chairs. The walls and floor are as bare as the back of one's hand. Luxury, here, consists of keeping one's woodwork spotlessly clean ; poverty means living in a dirty wooden shanty. The hotel at Barbadoes is a first-rate hotel.

At luncheon, for one dollar you can have fried dolphin (a delicious dish), turtle cutlets (very



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tasteless), fried bananas (a horrible mess), sweet potatoes (no better), and the never-failing and comforting curry, a dish of rice dressed with a greenish, peppery sauce, the Asiatic's favourite dish, as the *couscous*<sup>1</sup> is the African's favourite dish. In all English colonies, when you don't know what to choose from the barbarous restaurant menu, you ask for curry and your lost appetite returns at once. It is scarcely to be wondered at! The effect of a mouthful of curry is just as if you had discharged a pistol down your throat!

I only spent a few hours in Barbadoes, but it did not strike me that English education was very advanced in that island. At least the inhabitants are not very good at arithmetic; for when I asked the lady-cashier at the hotel to give me sixty stamps, that honourable Creole dame took up a sheet of stamps and carefully counted them one by one until she got to the sixtieth. The idea never occurred to her that she might give me six rows of ten stamps. When you ask for your bill in

<sup>1</sup> *Couscous*: the name of an Arabian dish consisting of very small balls of minced meat and flour fried in oil.

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that hotel, I should advise you to see that you get it two days before the boat starts.

I made many other observations in the animal and vegetable kingdom on the Island of Barbadoes ; but as I soon started for Trinidad, where one sees much the same things only much more beautiful, I will say no more on that subject. I knew that I should be able to get a passport at Trinidad for Venezuela and wait for a chance to go on to Caracas, where I intended to try and beard the formidable President Castro in his den.

So I went back to pass one more night on the *Orinoco*, that ancient English boat which brought me from Europe. The *Orinoco* is thirty years old ; were she an elephant, a carp, or a *Parisienne* she would still be quite young ; but as a steamer she is far too old.

The *Orinoco* knows nothing about the luxury of the modern transatlantic boat. When she takes in her coal, instead of swallowing her fuel through a little aperture in her hull, as all properly conducted boats do nowadays, she takes it through a large hole on deck, which operation for the next twenty-four hours turns the deck into something as clean as a coal mine.

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Of the thirty-five passengers who embarked at Southampton and Cherbourg, I was nearly the last man to suffer from that operation. My companions were already scattered about on the three or four inter-colonial boats which, together with the *Orinoco*, lay in the harbour and were now about to weigh anchor and sail to the Guianas or the Greater Antilles. These thirty-five passengers had become such friends during the fortnight passed in each other's company, that they organized a fancy-dress ball for the last night of the voyage! We had exhausted every topic of conversation, and we knew each other so well that we were beginning to get tired of each other! And that night we separated and sailed away towards other lands where we shall soon forget that we ever met.

These men and women, whose Christian names and little faults and failings I knew, were suddenly dead to me, as if they had never existed. That young French engineer, who was going to explore some Venezuelan mines, was dead to me! The pale English girl, who was going to be governess in some far-away corner of British Guiana, was as if she had never existed! The red-faced

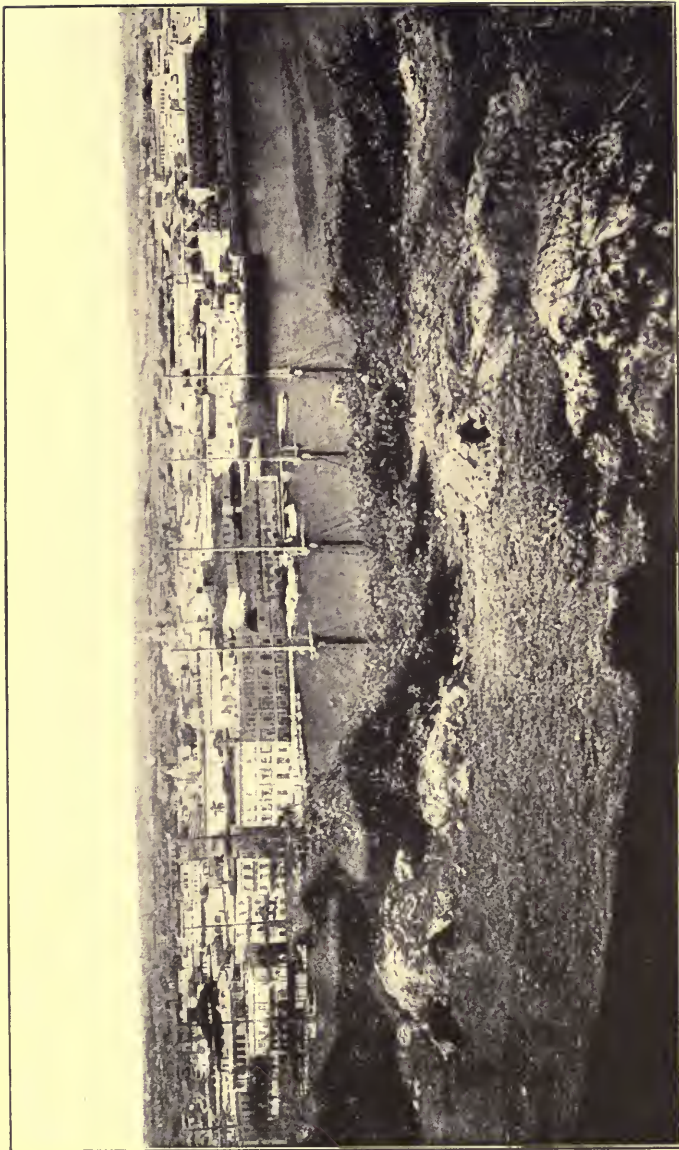
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jeweller from Berlin, with his high collar, who intended to open a branch establishment in Havana, was quite forgotten! The beautiful lady, whose two little daughters had amused us throughout the voyage and who were going to join their papa—a planter on some tropical island adorned with an old Spanish name—had faded away into the past!

They had all gone, disappeared into the distance like smoke, like the smoke of the steamers which were now carrying them away over the horizon!

Human life is but the prelude to the dance of death.

Trinidad and Jamaica are both struggling to obtain the honour of supplying England with their own particular commodities. "Trinidad is going to be the Hong Kong of South America." Everyone makes the same remark in speaking of this island's position at the mouth of the wide Orinoco. That may be. But one thing is certain, and that is that the whole of Venezuela already goes to Trinidad to do its marketing. Its enormous stores sell everything under the sun, from "hair-wash"



HAVANA: BIRDS-EYE VIEW

Reproduced by permission of York & Sons, Notting Hill



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to dye the *señoritas'* hair a becoming shade of red, to iron bridges and railway-engines. In a certain shop nearly as big as the *Louvre* or the *Bon Marché*, I paid one dollar for a straw hat of the very best quality; it would probably have cost me double that price in Paris.

This result is due to the Scotch who have monopolized the import trade, while the export trade, represented by plantations of cacao trees, still remains in the hands of many old French families who were driven from San Domingo by the Revolution.

For the foreigner, the charm of Trinidad neither lies in its hardware stores nor in its plantations of cacao trees, but in the wonderful and astonishing tropical vegetation which still covers three-fourths of the island with an immense, uncultivated forest. No doubt the French Antilles possess quite as luxuriant forests, but Trinidad has one advantage in that carriage-roads run through its forests. You can drive there in your victoria just as if you were driving in the Bois de Boulogne.

Who make and keep these magnificent roads

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in good condition? Certainly not the two hundred thousand negro inhabitants of that island; for they, having worked too hard during three centuries of slavery, have evidently sworn to take things easy until Judgment Day. No! those road-makers are Hindu coolies from the banks of the Ganges, who are engaged to work for five years. One hundred thousand of these coolies have settled down at Trinidad apparently for ever and aye. They have built villages where they worship Siva and still observe the laws of caste with the greatest care. Of course they do not associate with the blacks.

The only mongrels whom one sees at Trinidad are negro Indians, mixed bloods, a very well developed, mahogany-coloured type, with handsome, refined features; but being descended from slaves and savages they are predisposed to slavery and savagery.

As for the mulattoes, that is to say the offspring of black and white races, they form a clan to themselves between the pure white Creole and the coloured folk. They do not stay mulattoes for long. In tropical countries the mulatto race becomes black after three generations; it becomes



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black again, black in skin and mind if not in pretensions! This is a very important fact, because it does away with any hope of seeing the huge negro populations of the Antilles, Central America, and the United States mingle at a future time with the white race. Contrary to the Spanish-Indian mixed race, which now peoples all the Latin American States and which is one of the most original specimens of humanity under the sun, the negro-white mongrel must eventually disappear into the past.

The millionaires of Trinidad dwell in splendid mansions built round the Savana, a sort of huge park laid out in the English style and planted with magnificent trees beneath which cattle, with spotlessly clean hides, browse day and night. I shall never forget my first strange walk in the Savana on the night of my arrival. The stars, twinkling between the leaves, seemed so close owing to the clearness of the atmosphere that they just looked like Chinese lanterns at an evening fête. Great beasts lying in the velvety shadows and warm grass underneath gigantic trees gently raised their horned heads to look at us while we walked past them; they reminded me

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of a herd of tame deer, ignorant of man's cruelty and peacefully dwelling in this terrestrial paradise.

Several of the benches were occupied by pairs of negro lovers seated side by side ; their white garments alone betrayed their presence. Their faces, as dusky as night itself, were quite invisible. A white suit was making love to a white muslin costume ; both wearers seemed headless ; and although they had apparently been guillotined, they still continued to bill and coo.

Tropical nights are treacherously warm and sweet. Nothing warns you that the damp earth and hot air are very dangerous. The coral snake, which is about as big as one's finger and whose bite is usually fatal, glides along in the thick green grass, while myriads of disgusting insects hover in the air. The redoubtable vampire, twice as big as the European bat and always thirsty, flies in and out of these beautiful trees, while thousands of mosquitoes are ever waiting to inoculate you with malaria or yellow fever. I was told a story of a young Creole lady who slept one night with her window open and was found at dawn bloodless, as white as a sheet, and already quite cold. A

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little purple scar beneath her breast alone showed where the vampire had sucked the life-blood from her veins. The terrible kiss is so gentle that it does not even wake the victim.

The salary of the English Governor of Trinidad amounts to £6,000 ; were he king, he could not have more power ; he has the use of the most beautiful garden in the Antilles. Some marble tombstones dotted about on a green lawn make one corner of this garden particularly pathetic. A beautiful woman of thirty-five years of age, the wife of the late Governor, sleeps there under a stone which bears quite a recent date. The friends who took me to see this little mound knew the sleeper very well.

“ She was a charming woman. She was killed close to our house by falling out of her carriage. Only five minutes before the accident she had passed us driving herself in her tilbury and had gaily saluted us with her whip. . . .”

The broken-hearted husband asked to be given a post in another colony. It appears that he is likely to have a splendid future. There is no future for his poor wife who will now never leave Trinidad ! Many a traveller thinks he is landing only

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for a few days on some foreign shore who never leaves it again.

On the Island of Trinidad, where the tenacious English have been waiting for more than a century to get a footing in the fabulously wealthy but untamable republic of Venezuela, there is only one topic of conversation. At the Club—a magnificent club which cost fifty thousand dollars and where one finds every variety of cocktail under the sun, but not a single book—at the Ice House, a bad hotel where the cooking is very good ; or at the Queen's Park, a good hotel where the cooking is bad ; in the Governor's heavenly garden, or in the French Consul's humble home, everyone whom I met, shopkeeper or planter, English, French, or Venezuelan, could only talk of one person : Castro, the everlasting Castro !

El Señor Cipriani Castro, the most celebrated man in South America since the time of Bolivar, is the talk of the whole world. So it is not to be wondered at that he should be the favourite topic of conversation with the inhabitants of Trinidad, all of whom feel the effects of his policy in a more or less direct manner.

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As long as anyone can remember, Trinidad has always been the haunt of Venezuelan revolutionists. Whenever a revolution breaks out in Caracas—and there have been one hundred and four revolutions in less than a century—the victorious party takes up its abode at the Yellow House, which is the presidential residence, while the vanquished party makes off to Trinidad, where it immediately begins to hatch another conspiracy. A plot was commenced when Señor Castro came into power, and it has been maturing for the last ten years ; it ought to be ripe by now ! While strolling up and down that delightful public walk which encircles the Savana, I was shown several groups of excited men dressed in straw hats and short jackets. They were Venezuelan generals. I was assured that Venezuela possessed seven thousand generals—the other soldiers are only colonels—so the presence of two or three dozen generals among the revolutionists at Trinidad ought to surprise no one.

When Colonel Corao passed through Trinidad a few years ago fleeing from Señor Castro's wrath, he suggested to the French Transatlantic Steamship Company that they should buy him an old

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tub of four thousand tons—the *Versailles*—with which he flattered himself he would be able to exterminate the entire Venezuelan squadron. The bargain was not concluded. So General Corao set up in Paris, where he took to racing and in future contented himself with winning money on our race-courses. The generals whom I saw in Trinidad did not strike me as being either rich or clever enough to be dangerous to their country.

I heard all sorts of contradictory reports concerning Castro himself, the dictator who refuses to be deposed, and who, for the past ten years, has managed to baffle all his countrymen's efforts to get rid of him. One person told me that he was dying of a loathsome disease, and that he was invisible to all except his most intimate friends. Another person assured me that he had lately given a ball in imitation of some of Nero's orgies at his summer palace at Miraflores; it seems that all the ladies were personal friends of his and that they were all arrayed in the costume of Eve.

Rubbish! Joking apart, I must confess that General Castro seems to inspire even his most deadly enemies with a certain amount of respect.

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The man evidently impresses everyone who has anything to do with him, with his extraordinary energy, pluck and intelligence.

But I was not to see him yet. The North Americans in Colon, who are on very bad terms with Castro, had just put the port of Caracas into quarantine under pretence that plague had broken out in that town. I could still enter Venezuela if I wished to do so, but I could not be so sure of leaving it. So I postponed my visit to the great man and remained outside La Guayra, the seaport of Caracas, with which town we were forbidden to hold any communication.

I stayed from sunrise to sunset on the deck of the boat which was to take me on to Panama, examining the perpendicular mountain behind which Castro's invisible capital can resist any amount of bombarding. Old wiseacres in Europe, who talk of a possible naval demonstration against La Guayra by the massed squadrons of the world, have never seen that squalid, straggling village with its two or three hundred hovels crouching at the foot of a sunburnt rock. A few shells would soon reduce those hovels to ruins. But the little locomotive which zigzags up and down, and

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pops in and out of the mountain, would only have to disappear down a tunnel with a sarcastic whistle, for Venezuela, having retired into her shell like a snail, to be able to defy all the fleets of the world !



## PANAMA

A rising young diplomatist—The pleasures of travelling in Colombia—Athens devoured by Rome—Fashions on board ship—The poultry is kept inside—The story of a honeymoon trip—A travelling museum of ethnology—Panama is a fraud—A cold bath or a good meal?—The human moth—Captives—The President's country-seat—Feminine caprice—Two views of Panama—Cellars and bird-cages—The Yankee beats John Chinaman—"Dingler's Folly"—France at the mercy of a mosquito—Politicians—Dictature tempered by a call to arms—"Cheat, but don't break each other's heads!"—Lazyland—Cooks and dressmakers—Four-legged worshippers—A bishop and a theatre—The Panama Canal—A novelty in forests—The Canal will be finished about the year 1920—Japanese spies—Why the Yankee will succeed where the Frenchman failed.

WILL the Belgians be proud to learn that their country is now suitably represented in Colombia by a rising young diplomatist? They ought to be, were it only to reward their brave countryman who has carried their flag to that distant land. For it is not a small matter to go and plant the flag of one's country, or indeed any flag whatever, at Santa Fé de Bogota. The fifteen days' sea-

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voyage is a mere nothing. But the European steamer, which puts you down at Puerto-Columbia, only brings you to the threshold of the real journey, which consists in ascending the River Magdalena for two more terrible weeks: terrible on account of the heat, the mosquitoes and the fever.

I happened by chance to cross the ocean with the plucky Belgian who had accepted this mission, which the forty members of his country's consular corps had refused to undertake. His name was Soubre; he was thirty-five years of age, short, wiry, remarkable for a beautiful golden beard, a tremendously high collar and a very distinguished air. Well-read and a capital linguist—two accomplishments which seldom go hand-in-hand—this M. Soubre was a fascinating fellow. If all Belgian consuls were up to his standard, that little country would be fairly well represented abroad.

This *chargé d'affaires'* luggage consisted of seventy-five trunks—and he was travelling all alone. His wife was not to join him for some time. Seventy-five trunks for one man are not bad! Such a man ought to like to be fashionably dressed,

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and that is just what he did like ! However, his seventy-five trunks contained not only his clothes but all his furniture. It seems that one can get nothing at Bogota ; everything has to be brought from Europe.

A French engineer, who was going to work a gold mine in the mountains, had brought five thousand chests with him ! He had to convey all his machinery piecemeal up the dangerous River Magdalena. Three hundred chests containing dynamite were placed on a little river steamer, between the engine-room and the diplomatist's seventy-five trunks. For several days dynamite, boilers, engineer and diplomatist were going to live cheek by jowl under a broiling sun, on an unknown river, at the mercy of a negro stoker. Not only were they exposed to the risk of getting sunstroke, but they were surrounded by yellow-fever mosquitoes, with dynamite under their feet and crocodiles all around them ; and then people say that diplomatists have an easy time of it !

The chief cause of Colombia's troubles, including the greatest of all her losses, the loss of the province of Panama, lies in the fact that her capital

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is too far away from the coast. We noticed, on putting in at Puerto-Columbia, how the poverty of this country, which is six times larger than France, was reflected in the rate of exchange. If you land with one hundred francs in European gold, you are given ten thousand francs' worth of paper-money ! There is paper, paper everywhere, and not a piece of metal to be seen. You receive bank-notes to the value of one centime, and precious dirty notes too ! No one in Colombia can say that money does not smell.

The street-hawkers in Puerto-Columbia sell snakes, panama hats and emeralds. The emerald mines are on the other side of the country towards the Pacific. Colombia also possesses splendid prairies ; indeed, in the matter of horse and cattle breeding, she might become a successful rival to Argentine. But Colombia, with her three million civilized and uncivilized inhabitants, the former of whom are for ever dabbling in politics, that curse of all Latin races, is too thinly populated. The result of this state of affairs is that the " Wharf " and the entire harbour, the only things worth seeing in Puerto-Columbia, were constructed by the United States and belong to them. Bogota

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may well boast that she is the Athens of South America, the town where the purest Spanish is spoken. . . . The fate of all Athenians is to be devoured by the brutal and matter-of-fact Romans.

At last the boat brought us that Sunday morning, April 12, to the famous harbour of Colon which, in the near future, hopes to become the Suez of the Pacific, the gate to the other half of America, to China and Japan, the key to the richest countries on the face of the globe. Three or four navigation companies already ply between Colon and New York, three or four others go to Europe, so that the harbour that Sunday was crowded with English, German, Spanish, and French transatlantic boats, including the steamer which had just brought me.

The latter, a newly-constructed boat of seven thousand tons, dwarfed all her rivals ; her captain, who was proud of this fact, entered the harbour backwards, which, it seems, is the smartest thing a boat can do.

Colon is nothing but a hideous, straggling town composed of several hundred huts built of planks and sometimes of biscuit-tins, and protected from

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the ever-hungry mosquitoes by wire-netting, which makes them look like a row of larders or poultry-runs.

The poultry is kept indoors in the hot weather ! The poultry in this case is black, inside and out, and concocts all sorts of negro dishes behind the wire-netting. Few American seaports tempt one to come again or to prolong one's visit.

The captain of the French boat told me an anecdote of two passengers on his last voyage, a young Spanish couple, belonging to the aristocracy of Madrid, who had decided to spend their honeymoon in the New World. First they were to visit Venezuela and Colombia, then Panama ; then they were to go to Peru and Chili, cross the Andes from Santiago to Buenos Ayres, and so back to Lisbon via Rio de Janeiro. It sounded most fascinating. But La Guayra, the port of Venezuela, was quite enough for our young lovers. Just as they were leaving the luxurious French transatlantic boat in order to land at the foot of that arid, sun-scorched mountain inhabited by ragged, dirty, famished, dark-faced hidalgos, their courage failed them. They quite forgot why they had come ; they no longer took any interest

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in the fact that pretty Caracas, with its marvellous scenery, lay behind that rocky barrier. They only saw an outlandish-looking town, and so they decided not to visit Venezuela. On reaching Colombia, it was not a mountain but a wild, deserted savanna which frightened them. So they made up their minds that they would wait to land until they reached Panama.

But when they caught sight of Colon with its hovels, its mosquitoes and its niggers, the young bride began to cry. The transatlantic was going back to Europe on the morrow, so they remained on board and returned to Europe without having once set foot on shore. It will be a long time before South America becomes as popular a place for honeymooners as Switzerland and Italy. And yet they were mistaken. If they had taken the train which runs from Colon to Panama, they would have soon seen that the journey was worth the trouble.

This railway is by no means a novelty, for it has been in existence for the last fifty years. I believe it was the first to be constructed in the New World.

It was not the train which was a curious sight,

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but the travellers. There are no separate classes and compartments as in Europe. So each huge car contained a collection of human types which any museum of ethnology might envy.

A most extraordinary looking family was seated just in front of me. The father was a Chinese storekeeper. The mother resembled the Caribbean savages who still run wild in the almost unexplored forests of those islands. The three young daughters were tidily dressed according to the fashion affected by the *señoritas* of Panama, that is to say, in white skirts and black shawls. They all took after their mama, in that their sallow faces were triangular-shaped, but they also had the long narrow eyes of their celestial papa. They looked sly and not at all disinclined to flirt. What strange dispositions those daughters of a savage and a mandarin must have! . . . But perhaps they are really very simple-minded; perhaps their minds have reverted to the old barbaric chaos of elementary instincts? Who can say? . . .

A little farther along the car were two mulatto gentlemen from Jamaica, in English suits and loud neckties. Just in front of them some Mexican



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cowboys lay stretched full length on the seat ; they had made themselves comfortable by discarding all their garments except their trousers and shirts ; their revolvers lay by their side. A handsome American lady, eyeglass in hand, haughtily eyed them from top to toe. She was evidently the wife of some high functionary on the Canal, and she wore a dress which must have been made in the Rue de la Paix, and a hat for which some New York milliner, on her return from Paris, had probably asked at least one hundred dollars.

Yellow, red, black, white and chocolate-coloured brats ran about and tumbled over our feet, squalling in English, Chinese, Spanish, or, what is worse than all, the negro dialect of these three languages. So we sped on towards Panama, towards one of three huge junctions of the world of to-morrow, whither all the races of the Old World will flock and will amalgamate like metals in a furnace. That operation was very nearly accomplished then and there, thanks to the temperature ; for I felt as I sat in that car as if I was melting like butter in a frying-pan.

The heat was something astonishing. If the

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train had not hurried up we should have melted into one huge block of variegated humanity, and the porters at the terminus would have had to dig us out piecemeal from that melting-house on wheels ! The prospect of such an event was not tempting ; so I did my very best not to melt and to keep myself to myself, but it was a close shave.

Our train took nearly three hours to cross the seventy-three kilometres of isthmus, and stopped at about twenty villages inhabited by workmen on the Canal. It was much the same scenery as at Colon : larder-like hovels with black poultry running about inside. At times we rushed through virgin forests, where many trees had once been cut in order to make sleepers for the railway, but where the ever-encroaching tide of vegetation had already obliterated all traces of desecration and had woven an impenetrable thicket. We were then in the dry season ! When the rains begin, the telegraph poles have to be overhauled from time to time, for they have a little habit of suddenly producing green twigs. One or two nights suffice to cover them with creepers. A local wag said that he only had to plant his walking-stick

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in the ground to see it immediately begin to put forth young shoots.

At last we reached Panama.

But was that really Panama?—that sun-baked, waste land sprinkled here and there with colonial houses all exactly alike, and all as uninteresting as so many packing-cases?

No, that was only the American quarter of Panama. The old Spanish town was farther on, huddled together on a neck of land laved by the Pacific. Of the huge, almost shoreless ocean, the biggest expanse of water on the face of the globe, one only saw a little blue lake, very like the Lake of Geneva, with a few tiny boats at anchor. One has to exercise all one's geographical knowledge in order to grasp the fact that hundreds of similar horizons lie beyond that silver streak.

I am not a very firm believer in Nuñez de Balboa's wonderful deeds of valour, that *conquistador* who crossed the virgin forests of the isthmus and who, four centuries ago, was the first to discover this unknown lake.

History tells us that Balboa drew up into battle array the six hundred Spanish soldiers and Indian

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porters who accompanied him, dressed himself up in his armour, and, with his helmet and sword, waded up to his waist in the water and there planted the flag of His Catholic Majesty, declaring in a loud voice "that he took possession of this ocean, its islands and its dry land, from pole to pole, in the name of the King, his master, by a special brief from the Holy Father, until Judgment Day!"

Where the devil did this *hidalgo* learn that this blue lake stretched from pole to pole? If I had been in his shoes I should have set sail with enough provisions for a two days' trip. But historical personages are very fond of uttering speeches written fifty years after their demise.

Panama, or at least the American quarter, the town which one first sees on leaving the railway station, resembles a town in the Congo State. It has just the same appearance of a temporary encampment; it is built on piles on the side of a slope, and the sight is not a pretty one. But there is a good deal of solid comfort hidden behind those plank walls.

The hotel is enormous and everything in it is as clean as new paint. Negroes, expressly im-

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ported from Jamaica because the native article does not speak English, wait upon you in spotless white liveries. The rooms are bare of ornaments, but each is provided with a bathroom. The hotel-keeper, however, seems to think that one requires nothing more. He takes no interest in the kitchen arrangements. The food is left to the tender mercies of a heathenish nigger and is awful. You can scarcely eat what is offered to you. But the china is so clean, the table-linen so white, the jugs of iced water or iced tea so tempting that you prefer to die of hunger in this clean haven of rest rather than eat tasty dishes in a second-rate Spanish inn.

And this was my first comparison between North and South Americans. The houses of the former are so clean that you could eat off the floor—if you could find anything fit to eat. The latter have plenty to eat, but one lacks the plate and fork, without which one cannot eat in peace and comfort.

I had to choose between a cold bath and a good meal. It was too hot : so I chose the bath !

If North and South Americans felt, I won't say

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friendship, but any sympathy for each other, the supremacy of Washington over the entire New World would only be a question of a few years.

But they detest one another. The American's inability to understand the Spaniard constitutes the most serious obstacle to the expansion of the United States.

It is at Panama that one notices the antipathy existing between the two races which are obliged to live together there. Women help to amalgamate nations. Now there can never be any intimacy between a North American miss and a native *señorita*.

Everyone knows that American women lead very strenuous lives, but that they lack intellectual culture. The *señoras* of Panama do not wake up until about five o'clock in the afternoon.

The twilight awakens the first stars in heaven and the first bats in the air; the *señoritas* then begin to stroll up and down the public promenade.

Until that hour you only meet in the burning streets bold-faced negresses in showy blouses or

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slim half-bred Indians lost in voluminous petticoats, such as our little first communicants wear, trotting along sedately and looking like so many little bells whose clappers had been smothered in folds of tulle.

The young white girls do not go out until after sunset. The white woman becomes a moth in the tropics.

I do not say that they wait to go out until the evening breeze begins to blow, for no one knows what that means in Panama. The sun is so hot, that when it sinks into the sea no cool breeze stirs the leaves. One feels that the great ball of fire is still blazing away under the water. However, it no longer beats down upon one's head and one can venture out of doors. The young Creole then leaves her room, as bare of books and ornaments as a savage's cabin, where she has spent the day dragging herself from hammock to looking-glass and back again. Arrayed in a white skirt and a Parisian blouse, this pretty little flirt goes to stroll by the sea on the esplanade of the old Spanish fortress called Las Bovedas. Her *novio* or fiancé is waiting for her and offers her his arm. The mother follows behind with the un-

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married sisters, and the lovers begin their evening walk.

Las Bovedas is a bastion jutting out into the sea ; it formerly overlooked the two gulfs, that of the canal on the right, and that of old Panama on the left. The Spaniards, and the Colombians after them, converted it into a fortress and a prison. The United States made them remove the guns ; the prisoners still remain. It is not exactly what one would call a sanitary or wholesome prison ; the cells are small vaults situated beneath the level of the sea. Nothing could be cooler. Thanks to the infiltrations of brackish water, the revolutionists, who used to be herded together with the common thieves, came out of prison with their limbs twisted by rheumatism. The Spanish governors denied that fact. If we believe them, their prisoners were twisted, not by rheumatism, but by immoderate laughter ; no doubt these fits of hilarity were provoked by the attacks of thousands of highly diverting rats from which they were obliged to defend themselves to the best of their ability.

But all that belongs to the past. The esplanade,



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on which the young ladies of Panama walk and take the air, no longer hides in its bosom anyone except thieves and murderers. Alas! a man's a man for a' that!

*Men* are buried alive under our feet, and I felt ashamed to walk to and fro on their tombstones enjoying the beauty of sky and sea. The cry of sentinels on the watch lest any of these unfortunate creatures should try to escape quite spoilt the golden splendour of the silently falling stars.

But the belles of Panama, the daughters of hard-hearted *conquistadors*, don't know what it is to feel pity. They chatter to their *novios*; one and all are busy building the enchanted palace of the future; they revel in their youth and in their love.

They have but a short time to be happy! Once married, the Spanish-American woman, as in the Mother Country but even more strictly here, will have to stay at home. The married women in those parts of the world lead the life of a cloistered nun.

When once the women of Panama are married they usually have a child every ten months. I

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saw families with fifteen children, the eldest of whom was not yet twenty years of age. If one allows for deaths and miscarriages, just think what a life the women must lead from their fifteenth to their thirty-fifth year. Truly the Spanish woman sees nothing of life, at least what we in Europe call life. Between the young girl and the young mother, the young wife has no place. When she is once married she never goes into society. Even if she could spare time from her maternal duties, the habits and customs of her country forbid her to go out with any other man than her husband—and *he* never takes her out.

The fact of the matter is that the husband leaves his wife to look after her household and goes off to flirt with other women less absorbed by that interesting occupation. Every married man in Panama has two or three establishments; the wife knows it and says nothing. She will even adopt her husband's illegitimate children if the mother dies. Should she refuse to do so, everyone would blame her. But she never does refuse. The first thing a young girl says to her *novio* is :

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“*Mi corazon*,<sup>1</sup> if you ever have any children by any other woman, bring them to me and I will love and tend them !”

A certain wealthy merchant who had exactly twenty-seven establishments was pointed out to me. He is a very orderly man. He makes up his accounts every Saturday and divides his weekly profits into twenty-seven little paper packets, which his negro servant then carries to twenty-seven different addresses. His friends chaff him on account of the number which beats the record.

Habits and morals would seem but a question of latitude, and the inhabitants of hot countries seem forced, *nolens volens*, to commit polygamy !

We should do well to pause before we assert that Spanish wives are less happy than French wives. The Spanish mother adores her children. Her numerous progeny afford her much real and wholesome pleasure. Are Frenchwomen, with their small families of two or three children, really to be envied ? Do they, by trying to appear

<sup>1</sup> *Mi corazon* : my heart.

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young and to keep their husbands' affections, really fulfil the laws for which they were created ? The young girls of Panama, who at fifteen years of age are really beautiful, soon become dowdy matrons ; but they have some compensations. As far as the interests of the race go, the advantage is incontestable. As far as individual happiness goes, if one could peruse the diary of a French wife and that of a Spanish-American mother, who knows whether one would not find in the record of the latter's life more golden pages and more happy anniversaries ?

But social and intellectual life suffer alike. The worldly American women find that the Spanish-Americans are loath to open their doors to them, and that when their hostesses have smiled sweetly they don't seem to have much to say for themselves. They are not invited out to dinner-parties. The Spanish home is a nursery ; it is not a drawing-room. A Parisian *concierge's* room contains more ornaments, more luxuries than one finds in any of the wealthy men's houses in Panama.

I will cite as an example the country-house

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where I was received most cordially by the President of the Republic of Panama. The latter, who was formerly a doctor, is seventy-five years of age and very wealthy ; he had just returned from a visit to Europe, which Paris, perhaps, still remembers.

He has a beautiful garden planted with magnificent trees ; I saw no flowers, however, and very little fruit, for no one seems to care about it. The house is tidy and nicely kept, but almost bare of furniture. The most important thing in the place is the hammock wherein Don Amador Guerrero, after seventy-five years of hard work, has earned the right to rest and to doze. We know other presidents of other republics, who do just the same thing. . . .

But his wife, his sister, his daughters, and his granddaughters, who live with him, lead monotonous lives, which would soon kill a North American woman. And yet the President's wife is rightly considered to be a very superior person, the very soul of the young Republic, and one of the artisans of its independence.

All the ladies whom I met were equally intelligent and sensible, but the cares of a household

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seemed to satisfy their intellectual needs. Such subjects as society, art and travelling are as a closed book to them.

And then they are suddenly startled by the arrival of some American women, the wives or daughters of diplomatists, admirals, or chief engineers, who have lived in Paris, travelled all over the world, visited every museum on the face of the globe, flirted in three or four languages—or else the daughters of free America, who wear yellow cowboy breeches when they ride on horseback—that is quite the thing to do out there!—and break off a game of tennis in order to go a crocodile hunt. These women lead the fashion for more modest folk to follow. They form a little society all to themselves.

Although there is not much chance to make a show in a country where there are neither palaces, nor flowers (for they are almost unknown), nor carriages, nor Paris fashions, where nobody is very rich, still with saddle-horses, fine table-linen, a little silver and exquisite cleanliness everywhere, books, artistic photographs and light summer costumes, they manage to get along fairly well. When there are two or three good

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talkers and two or three pretty women a little clique is soon formed.

However, the matrons of Panama, who feel completely out of it and prefer to shut themselves up in their own homes (*en su casa*) and never go out, find the manners of the intruders far too free and easy to suit their ideas of propriety.

Perhaps you will say that they are only sulking! And what harm can the rancour of a handful of women do to the gigantic machinery of President Roosevelt's Pan-American policy? Yes, but behind the women of Panama are all the South American women, as behind the female representative of North America are her sisters in the North. As I have already shown, the men are divided into two camps: one invades, the other opposes the invader.

Will the struggle always remain a peaceful one and only concern commercial interests? The Yankee thinks he is going to win. Will it become open war? Then . . . the South Americans will not let themselves be beaten like mere Red Indians. The United States will soon find that the game is

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not worth the candle ; for the candle, in this case, would cost too much.

Mr. Roosevelt's policy is therefore at the mercy of a handful of women. Every Yankee who marries a South American wife will acquire influence in the United States. The others are only building sand-castles on the seashore.

Only, as the Yankees are a nation of engineers and not diplomatists, they all prefer to build their sand-castles.

Panama has two towns because there are two Americas, and because Panama happens to be the one spot in the New World where these two Americas meet, not to join forces, but obstinately to thwart each other's plans and to stand and glare at each other like two infuriated bulls.

This duel is a most interesting sight to watch. Panama shows us what will be the future of the Latin races and to what extent they will be able to oppose the Germanic invasion. A boxing-match is now taking place in Panama between the English, German, Dutch, and Scandinavian citizens of the United States, and the Spaniards and Italians who people South America from Mexico



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to the city of Buenos Ayres, which is rapidly becoming Italianized. I fancy that Northern and Southern Europe will both be rather wiser at the end of the bout than they now are.

Picture to yourself the old Spanish town of Panama, lazily stretched along the shores of the Pacific, on a peninsula which used to be quite isolated from the main land by old fortifications, while the American quarter winds up a neighbouring hill called Ancon. The Spanish houses, which are built of bricks, are all low and provided with large cellars. The American houses are built of wood and raised well above the ground by piles. It would seem as if the Spaniards tried to shield themselves from the blazing sun by grovelling underground, while the Americans tried to raise themselves above the torrid surface of the scorched earth. The Spanish-Americans live in cellars, and the Yankees live in bird-cages.

But the latter do not give you the impression of feeling at home. Four years have already passed since the Zone, which is ten kilometres long on either side, was given over to them. This was the huge ransom which the young Republic of Panama had to pay those who helped her

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to shake off the yoke of Colombia ; for the first workmen on the Canal, the French, had never owned an inch of free Zone.

During the last four years the Americans have managed to build a town which looks more like an encampment than a city which has come to stay. Engineers and officials, on coming to settle here with their wives and families, bring their furniture, their food and even their niggers, who come from Jamaica and can only speak English ! They get their milk, butter and meat from New York.

They mean to earn their " money " without letting one cent of it fall into the pockets of the native storekeepers. One of the latter in my presence gave vent to his indignation in the following remark : " They're worse than the Chinese ! "

The Chinese, who steal to the cemetery at night in order to dig up their dead and send them back to China on the sly by the next boat, have never aspired to annex Panama to the other possessions of the Sons of Heaven. They make their pile and then they cut their stick. Have the Americans, notwithstanding the additional

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star which proudly shines on their banner, any other and more elevated ambition? Yes! At Panama they have bestowed two benefits upon the population by ridding it of the yellow fever and by laying down water-pipes.

The Colombian government never made any improvements. When once the inhabitants of Panama had paid their taxes, the money was conveyed by mules to far-away Bogota; never was a cent spent on local improvements. At Bogota, the dictator then in power, haunted by dread of the dictator of to-morrow, had something else to do with his money than to spend it for the good of the ratepayers. The expenses incurred by civil war swallowed up everything, while the wretched ratepayers swallowed the poisonous water brought in casks by the peasantry. The Americans laid down water-pipes, and, with the money obtained from the sale of this pure water, were able to undertake the paving of the streets, which are now perfect.

But the greatest benefit which the inhabitants owe to the Americans is the disappearance of the yellow fever which used to decimate the

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French in a fearful manner, so that Panama had become a sort of antechamber to the grave. The traveller can still see, on a hill at the entrance to the Canal, a house known as "Dingler's Folly,"<sup>1</sup> which has a very sad history. The chief engineer, Dingler, arrived in Panama from France in 1883 as the company's representative, and built this house out of bravado on a pestilential swamp. He only laughed when people tried to frighten him with gruesome stories of the yellow fever. "It only attacks drunkards and rakes!" he used to reply.

He never occupied this house which had cost him fifty thousand dollars because, before it was finished, his son, his daughter, and his wife all died one after the other of yellow fever. The unfortunate man returned to Europe broken-hearted. He died in a lunatic asylum.

The American occupation coincided with the discovery of the way to inoculate the terrible fever which is due to the bite of one mosquito among many thousands, the *stegomia fasciata*,

<sup>1</sup> *Folie Dingler*. The French word *folie* has two meanings: folly or madness, and a country residence.

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a mosquito apparently exactly like all its brethren except that it has three white stripes on its hind legs. The female alone is dangerous ; the victim feels no evil effects for the first ten days. But the creature's powers of inoculation last for six months ! It has time to poison a whole town !

As the *stegomia fasciata* only breeds on the surface of stagnant water, one need only drain all marshy land for it to disappear and the yellow fever with it. If the discovery of the hema-tozoaires is due to the splendid work of a French physician, M. Laveran, the Americans at Panama have at least the merit, by no means to be despised, of having done their very best to turn their discoveries to good account, and they deserve all praise.

They have made war with marshy land all over the isthmus, and heaven knows how much that means in those seventy-five kilometres of virgin forest. No water is allowed to stagnate there ! It is forced to keep running all the time. The result is truly wonderful ; not a single case of yellow fever has appeared in Panama since 1905 ! This tropical cemetery has become one

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of the healthiest towns or, if you prefer, one of the least unhealthy along the shores of the Pacific.

The fame of nations depends upon little things ! If the yellow-fever mosquito had been discovered ten years earlier, the French would not have died like flies. The Canal would have been finished by them and not by the United States. The fate of the Latin race would have been quite different !

General Bonaparte wrote on the eve of the 18th Brumaire : “ Help me to deliver France from her legal oppressors ! ” Every South American general who wants to try his hand at being a dictator says the same thing. He always promises to put an end to the present state of red-tapeism and verbose anarchy by a powerful government which will act and not talk. But as the result of these acts only ends in the dictator filling his own pockets, people soon begin again to prefer words to deeds.

In no matter what part of the world you may be, if you see three men talking together in a public place, you can guess what they are talking about

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by their nationality. In Germany they talk of the army ; in Russia they talk of bureaucrats ; in England they talk sport ; in the United States they talk business ; in Monaco they talk of roulette ; in France we talk of women ; and in Turkey they talk of nothing at all.

At a dinner-party the German talks of what he thinks ; the Frenchman talks of what he likes best ; the Englishman of what he wants ; and the Belgian of what he is eating. But the Central Americans never talk of anything but politics. What else would you have them talk of ? Of art, science, or literature ? They possess neither artists nor savants, and their literature, which is too absolutely unenterprising to tackle such serious subjects as history, romance, or drama, contents itself with blossoming out from time to time into sentimental poetry, that most monotonous branch of literature when it does not awaken deep echoes in the world of thought and action. It is only too easy to explain this intellectual poverty in the Spanish-American by saying that it is a question of nationality and geography. The race, from the time of Cervantes and Velasquez, has done less than any

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other nation for the general welfare of Europe. Their country is a huge continent, sparsely populated, with a trying climate. The race and the locality are evidently unfavourable to the development of superior intellectual culture.

The younger members of the legal, commercial and medical professions in Central America have already made great strides. They compare favourably with the members of similar professions in Europe. But then they are mostly educated over here, for the greater number of them come to finish their studies in France, while several go to Switzerland and a few to Belgium.

Only on returning to their far-away little capitals, to Caracas, Lima, and Bogota, these half-cultivated men have too little to do—either because there is no competition or else because business is slack—and too many inducements to spend their leisure hours in trying to govern the republic. It is easy for a young and ambitious man to climb to the top of the tree ; and when he gets there, he can pretty well do what he likes. Who would dare to gainsay the dictator ? Has a dictator ever allowed himself to be thwarted ?



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The past is one long record of revolution and anarchy. Can public opinion check him ? Public opinion is represented by rabid partisans and merciless adversaries. Neither disinterested judges nor sacred principles exist ! Everyone has a right to be a despot, and everyone has a right to revolt if he feels inclined to do so.

The constitution favours this state of anarchy. In choosing between the Republic as we understand that institution in France, where the deputies are all-important and the president of no account, and the Republic of the United States, where the senators count as something, but where the president, who is elected by the nation, enjoys far more power, the old Spanish colonies decided in favour of the latter. New countries need a powerful person at the head of affairs. But while in North America the general state of prosperity and the excellent standard of public education are unfavourable to any attempts at despotism, in South America, where the deputies only meet from time to time, the man who can manage to keep at the top of the tree is all-powerful, can give all the best berths and positions to his relations and sup-

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porters, and becomes a despot for the time being and tries to remain so for the rest of his life.

Such a thing is often possible ; at least, the president always tries to become a dictator. That is why revolutions break out as regularly as flowers bloom in spring ; some of these revolutions are fomented by the president himself in order to keep at the top of the tree after his term of office is at an end ; others are fomented by his rivals who want to push him off the nest.

The elections are a perfect farce. The president then in office manages, either by threats or by strategy, to keep the electors away from the ballot-boxes. In Mexico, Porfirio Diaz' spies keep everything in their own hands. In Colombia each of Reyes' agents has eight or ten votes. In Ecuador the present president refuses to submit to the people's wishes as expressed by the elections. In Venezuela, Castro does not even take the trouble to get himself re-elected.

Czarism has been termed "monarchy tempered by assassination." We may say of the South

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American governments that they represent despotism tempered by a call to arms. As the man is, so is his system of government. In the case of Porfirio Diaz, who is a clever old gentleman, it answers admirably ; but when a two-legged brute, who only thinks of lining his own pockets, gets the power into his own hands, it becomes a terrible weapon of destruction. As men of genius are scarce and brutes swarm, it may be considered a failure on the whole.

The young republic of Panama elects her first regular president next July ;<sup>1</sup> for Don Amador Guerrero, who had reigned for the last four years, was nominated by politicians who proclaimed the nation independent without first consulting that nation's wishes.

Don Amador does not intend to offer himself again as a candidate ; it is not often that a president willingly descends from his elevated perch ! The fact that he is seventy-five years of age explains a good deal.

The struggle will be a keen one. Each candidate

<sup>1</sup> The election, thanks to the presence of the American troops, came off at the appointed date and was undisturbed by any rioting.

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has a family to provide for, and what a family ! Most people out there have ten or twelve children. As the years go by, the head of the family usually finds himself the proud possessor of one hundred grandchildren. When grandpapa becomes president, those grandchildren take possession of the republic ! All the most comfortable berths, all the nice little pickings and perquisites, all the delightful diplomatic missions abroad when a great deal of pleasure is combined with precious little work, are given to those grandchildren. That means wealth for one half of Panama and ruin for the other.

It was a question of life and death before the Yankees came to the isthmus, for the two factions invariably flew to arms. As to the ruin, it was so complete, the winning party knew so perfectly well how to pluck its victims, that the Spanish-American inhabitants of Panama have made it a habit only to buy such furniture as is absolutely necessary—beds, tables, chairs. Even in the best houses one sees no luxuries, no unnecessary ornaments. You may go into the homes of rich families who have lived there for four centuries, and you think yourself in the temporary hut of

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some emigrant who only arrived in the city yesterday.

The police of the American Canal will see that the elections this time are, if not perfectly square, at least peaceable. One cannot expect more even from the United States.

The Yankee politician's electoral device is: "Cheat, but don't break each other's heads!" This system seems to answer so well in the great northern republic that the little southern republics would do well to make up their minds to adopt it.

The Neapolitan *lazzaroni* are proverbially lazy. But they only represent a certain portion of the population. The other inhabitants, those thousands of workers such as cab-drivers, vine-dressers, gardeners, fishermen, pedlars, vendors of coral and macaroni, who dwell on the shores of that enchanting bay, work and work hard.

If you want to see a race which does nothing, a nation which seems entirely given over to laziness, you must go to Spanish America.

The inhabitants of Panama strike one as being particularly lazy, because Panama at first gives

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one the impression of being a very busy place. Some of the houses are built as if they were meant to last ; they were built by Frenchmen. The streets are well paved and water-pipes have been laid down ; these are the work of the Americans. The banks belong to Jews, and the shops are kept by Chinamen. One even sees workmen and labourers ; the latter are usually negroes.

But take away all the foreigners, the newcomers. Try and find out what the native of Panama does to occupy himself, that is to say the Spaniard, of more or less mixed blood, who has owned the land for the last four centuries, perpetuates his race with the fecundity of the rabbit, is one with the land as the horseman is one with his trusty steed, as rust on iron, influencing it for better or for worse according to his good or bad qualities. What do the people of Panama do ? Nothing, or, at least, as little as it is possible for people to do who have to feed and clothe themselves ! Of what does their food consist ? Bananas grow by the roadside, fish swarm in the bay (Panama, in the Indian language, means rich in fish).

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It costs more to dress oneself. Men may do without shirt-collars and wear the same pair of filthy trousers ; women may wear the same shabby black skirt ; but the day comes when the shirt or the pair of old shoes, inherited from some remote ancestor, fall off you piece by piece and you are obliged to replace them.

The population of Panama, realizing this unfortunate necessity, occasionally consents to do a few odd jobs.

The women become dressmakers or servant-maids. Oh, Parisian hostesses, who complain of your cooks ! go and see the cooks of Panama ! Do your domestics grumble when you invite a few friends to lunch or dinner ? The cooks out there don't grumble ; they just give warning !

“ I should like to entertain a little and to be able to give a few dinners ! ” a lady belonging to the foreign colony confided to me. “ But if I were so foolish as to tell my cook that I had invited some friends to dinner this evening, she would leave me before nightfall. She is engaged to cook for the family ; she does not intend to give herself any extra work. So, as

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we have to get everything from the hotel, the shortest and easiest way to entertain one's friends is to invite them there."

Neither cook nor chamber-maid will consent to sleep under your roof. The servants desert you at night. But the most remarkable creature is the dressmaker whom you engage by the day. I know all about her, for I myself engaged a certain damsel whom I shall ever remember as the very incarnation of industry in Panama. I had had no end of trouble to unearth her and had hunted in vain for a whole fortnight. She had to mend some underclothing which had been torn by the unutterably awful laundresses. At last one woman, who was more industrious or poorer than her sisters, agreed to come and sew for one dollar a day.

But her ideas concerning the meaning of an ordinary day's work were most peculiar. She did not put in an appearance until after her dinner-hour, that is to say about two o'clock in the afternoon, and she departed punctually at five o'clock. She explained to me that it was too hot to work in the morning. A white *señora* is afraid of getting sunburnt. I had to



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acquiesce, although it seemed to me that her chocolate complexion ran no risk of being spoiled by the sun.

She arrived, sank down on a chair with an air of utter exhaustion, drew the work towards her which she had commenced on the previous afternoon, and took a few stitches with an expression on her countenance as if she were too feeble and limp to do anything. Then she suddenly produced a fan from her pocket and began to fan herself, while she sleepily examined the room and its occupants. However, she did not fall asleep, but took up her work again from time to time. At five o'clock she actually displayed a little energy and almost went off in a hurry without taking the trouble, however, to tidy anything. She called a cab in order to reach her home, which was a few minutes' walk from our hotel. The cab cost her the fifth part of the hard-earned dollar. But what can you expect? There is a limit to human endurance!

However, I was very pleased with my find. She was the only seamstress in Panama! And I feel deeply grateful to her.

As to the men, they manage to make those

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necessary articles which even the most primitive town can hardly do without. They make clumsy copies of European goods, ask a fancy price for the same, and take a month to finish what we can do in a day's work. If you try to make them hurry, they reply, "*Mañana!*"<sup>1</sup>

*Mañana!* In the shop, in the office, no matter where you go, no matter what you require, the reply is the same. It is the land of *Mañana*.

Such is the life of these thin, sallow-faced people; so thin and so sallow are they, that one feels a brute for expecting such limp-looking creatures to do anything at all. So when I say that the natives of Panama are lazy, I hesitate whether I ought to attribute their indolence to the South American race in general or rather to the anæmia and malaria-breeding climate.

The population has evidently lost all its vim and energy. Any resistance against the hordes of sturdy, hustling Yankees who come here to work on the Canal is out of the question. Those great fresh-complexioned, square-jawed fellows with their brawny legs encased in leather gaiters could

<sup>1</sup> *Mañana*: to-morrow.

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gobble up the republic's three hundred thousand inhabitants at one mouthful, and take possession of the land before the natives knew what they were after.

If Central America only consisted of towns like Panama, the question as to whether the Latin races would resist would have been solved, and I should have been able to take the next boat back to Europe, abandoning the New World to the tender mercies of Chicago storekeepers.

But Panama is the junction, the trysting-place of many races ; and all these races use Panama as a sort of dumping-ground for their cripples and good-for-nothings, which said cripples and good-for-nothings have married and inter-married to such good effect that Panama constitutes quite the most extraordinary zoological garden on the face of the globe. I cannot recommend it as the best place in which to study the human race.

But in Costa Rica and Mexico I was able to form an opinion of the Spanish-Americans.

Panama possesses an old cathedral and a brand-new theatre ; both buildings are equally

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uninteresting. But the bishop of the cathedral and the manager of the theatre are interesting in that very funny adventures sometimes happen to them. It is the country's fault for being so small ; it was only born yesterday, and it is not quite sure if it will still be alive to-morrow, because it only came into existence in order to bring forth that colossus, the Canal, the infant which perhaps will devour its mother in the near future ! The principality of Monaco, which only lives by its roulette, is another instance of the same thing. The big-wigs of these Lilliputian States have to put up with a bad job.

I heard *el señor obispo* say mass in his cathedral during Holy Week. This tall, thin, bald-headed, long-nosed individual looked rather distinguished in his faded purple robes while he held out his ring for the faithful to kiss. Unfortunately the cathedral was full of dogs. It is the only cool place in the town, and as mass is said with the doors wide open, the canine population is most assiduous in its attendance. All the hideous curs which lie about, and rove through the red-hot streets, gladly run to cool themselves under the dark arches.

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They slumber peacefully, undisturbed by the music and the lights, undisturbed by the faithful who are few and far between. It would almost seem as if they enjoyed going to church. They are interesting converts to Catholicism ; however, they do not seem to arouse much interest in the breasts of the other worshippers, for, with the exception of these dogs, even on Easter Sunday I could only count ten white people in church. The congregation was composed of about one hundred coloured people. But Spanish-Americans are by no means all equally devout. They are very devout in Mexico and Colombia, the capital of which, Bogota, a town of eighty thousand inhabitants, boasts of two thousand priests and monks. But the other States profess to believe in nothing ; most of them have banished the monastic orders.

Fate was once very unkind to the poor Bishop of Panama. Mr. Roosevelt paid an official visit to the Canal last year. A cablegram was sent mentioning the names of certain persons in Panama whom the President of the United States wished to invite to visit him on his ironclad. This cablegram mentioned the big-

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wigs of the republic, two or three important private men interested in the Canal and "Bishop."

Whereupon someone hurried off to inform *Monseigneur* that Mr. Roosevelt was very anxious to see him. The bishop, rather surprised but delighted to hear this piece of news, quickly put on his best clothes and hastened to join the other distinguished guests. The party took the train for Colon, crossed the isthmus, got into a gaily-decorated boat, and soon began to go up the side of the ironclad upon which Mr. Roosevelt was standing, awaiting his guests. The President, on seeing a gentleman in a purple cloak climbing up the side, looked rather surprised, bowed, and then glanced round at the assembled guests, and asked for "Bishop."

"Bishop? Why, there he is, sir!"

Alas! Bishop was the name of an American employed on the Canal, a personal friend of Mr. Roosevelt. The Bishop of Panama had never been invited! All the same he was kindly received, but the day must have seemed very long to the unfortunate prelate, who only spoke Spanish and who walked about looking very

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disconsolate and strangely out of his element on that heretical ironclad.

This same town which, when it belonged to Colombia four years ago, had neither paved roads nor water-pipes, absolutely wallows in wealth now that it is in the hands of the United States, and has built itself a theatre of stone with some pretensions to beauty. The architecture might be called Italian Renaissance if the façade were not adorned by a rather startling eruption of Gothic gargoyles ; however, it is not bad. It cost, together with the President's house which adjoins it, one and a half million francs—a mere nothing. An artist, a native of Panama now living in Paris, received one hundred thousand francs for decorating the ceiling and the green-room. This ceiling, on which is depicted the quadriga of Apollo ascending into clouds adorned by beautiful women, is executed in the style of the ceiling of the *Opéra-Comique* in Paris, and shows much taste and good drawing ; it is quite a work of art.

But when one possesses such a beautiful theatre with such a magnificent ceiling, one longs to make use of it. A manager was appointed and received

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seventy-five thousand francs to go to Europe to engage a first-rate company, "numbering one hundred artistes," the newspapers stated, "who will give twenty operatic performances ! "

Seventy-five thousand francs for one hundred artistes was not much, only just enough to pay the voyage from Europe to America, there and back ! So the manager wisely contented himself with going to Havana where he engaged an operatic company which was performing in that town. These artistes accepted on condition that they gave the twenty operas in succession and that they only remained in Panama one month at the very longest.

It had to be ! The theatre-goers of Panama heroically prepared to go to the opera every night for one month, knowing that they would not have the opportunity of going again for a whole year. The boxes, which cost fifteen hundred francs, were eagerly snapped up. On the night before the troupe was expected to arrive there was not a single box to be had. Young ladies toiled all day long over their costumes. The opening night was to be something quite unprecedented.

Alas ! that night was not to be ! The company



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never turned up. The manager, pale, disconcerted, appeared all alone on the stage, holding a cablegram in his hand ; another *impresario* had got at the artistes, who one and all pretended that they were suffering from a mysterious epidemic and declined the seventy-five thousand francs !

It was a cruel blow ! The ballet-dancers, who had already arrived by an Italian steamer, had to be shipped off again, and the gorgeous costumes hung up in their wardrobes ! A cabinet council was summoned in order to consider the situation ; the latter is still being considered, and the theatre is still closed. From time to time some of the richest citizens invite one another to come and see the beautiful ceiling, which is then illuminated for five minutes, “ so that people can see what it looks like by artificial light.”

But the stage is left in darkness ; it would be too depressing to turn on the lights with no play and no players !

France, after having spent too much time and money on the Panama Canal, now seems to have forgotten that it ever existed. The reason is

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that she no longer possesses any interest in the Canal. There, as elsewhere, we sold our birthright for a mess of pottage ; in the case of Panama we acted wisely, for the Canal had ceased to be worth anything in our hands.

But the corpses of thousands of *gentils Français*, and from seven to eight millions of our good money, lie in the red clay of that cutting. And the Americans, after feeling about in the dark for four years, are now adopting the dead men's plans in order to finish the task begun by them. So, though the Stars and Stripes may float in proud isolation on that day when the waters of the two oceans rush for the first time into the Canal, all eyes will behold the French flag, like a pale wraith of what might have been, waving behind the banner of the United States. . . .

How far have they got at present ?

They are hard at work. And what a work it is ! and what a strange and wonderful sight it is !

The *conquistador* Nuñez de Balboa took four weeks to cut a road through the impenetrable virgin forest which then covered the entire isthmus. All that happened four centuries ago, and

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the isthmus is still covered by that forest. It is with great difficulty that the railway can protect itself from the ever-encroaching tide of vegetation.

But the forest of Panama has become a strange sort of forest. Here and there in the underwood one comes across a locomotive half buried in the thick grass. A palm tree grows out of the funnel and waves its green plumes to and fro. Bindweed and creepers have taken possession of whole rows of railway cars which were once shunted on to a siding. A little farther on a huge iron machine, painted blood-red and looking like one of the strange beasts described in the Apocalypse, thrusts its paraphernalia of teeth and claws through the branches of the trees. It is a dredging-machine which was once washed away by a flood and stranded here. A few hundred years hence somebody will discover it and will think it some horrible relic of the Spanish Inquisition.

These are the waifs and strays of the French Canal. In other places one finds heaps of rusty, bent, twisted and broken iron which look as if some dreadful disaster, such as an inundation, had taken place.

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My readers must not think that the Yankees despised our machinery, but they had to widen the old railway track in order to run their newly-invented one hundred ton locomotives. They are still using such of our plant as they can, for they find it most reliable. The chief engineer, Colonel Goëthaëls, showed me some old French drills which were working away at a fine pace : “ They are twenty years old, but they are ten times better than those which they send us from America nowadays.”

I climbed down into the celebrated Culebra Cut. Batches of negroes were working away under the tropical sun. Rows of drills were drawn up in battle array, and we heard muffled sounds of dynamite exploding inside the hill. Steam-shovels were hard at work behind us. Their long steel fangs were gnawing away at a perpendicular cliff of red clay. The iron jaw scratches and devours, describes half a circle, spits out its mouthful of soil into dirt-cars, and then returns to gnaw away at the apparently inexhaustible mountain of tufa. The plucky little insect intends to devour that mountain.

It is only a question of time and dollars. The

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chief engineer assured me that the Canal would be finished by 1915 ; some disinterested experts say not before 1920. It costs the United States forty million dollars a year. Thirty thousand workmen work eight hours a day ; of these men, twenty-five thousand are negroes who earn six francs a day, three thousand are Spaniards who earn eight francs, and the others are Americans, all of whom are mechanics or overseers, the least of whom receives at least seven hundred and fifty francs a month.

These wages were fixed when the Canal was begun by the French. But the staff is splendidly paid in true Yankee fashion ! Colonel Goëthaëls receives, besides his colonel's pay which is fifteen thousand francs, one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs a year. His four subordinates receive seventy-five thousand. There are also one hundred officers of the American army who must find engineering a more paying job than fighting the Japanese in a mountainous country.

The Japanese !—ah ! that is another important point to be settled in this problem. The Americans' reason for making the Panama Canal

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was that it might be used for military purposes. It cannot pay its expenses unless it makes the boats pay their weight in gold, which would have the effect of making them immediately take the old route by Cape Horn. And that is why we acted wisely when we relinquished our scheme.

But if the Japanese were to beat the United States' squadron, the tables would be turned, the Canal would be at their mercy, and the gate of the Pacific would then become the gate of New York !

That is why Panama is full of yellow spies. The French consul told me the following typical anecdote : He, together with a Japanese captain who was then travelling in the service of his country, happened to be blockaded in Havana, when that town was being besieged by the Americans. The Japanese officer, a jolly, delightful, well-educated little creature, often dined with him. No one could forget his face when they had once seen it, for his forehead was marked by a long scar from a blow which he had received during the Chinese war. A short time ago our consul happened to take the train to Panama.

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At each station wretched Chinese pedlars came to the windows of the car and offered cigars or fans to the passengers. Whom did he recognize among them? The Japanese captain with his scar!

The yellow-fever mosquito has disappeared. But there is another yellow mosquito who is biding his time until the Canal is finished, and then he will go to work.

One thing alone can prevent the completion of the Canal at the date fixed: and that is an inundation. The Rio Chagrès is often in flood, and has obliged the Americans to dam up a valley a mile wide—truly a task worthy of the time of the Pharaohs! and perhaps of the Danaïdes, too! . . . For when the dam is completed no one knows whether the water will not filter through, or flow over the walls. It will have to take its chance.

The French plans, either less foolhardy or more cautious, avoided this dam by a long *détour*. Let us hope that the Yankees, who always seem to come to grief when they try to modify our plans, will be more lucky this time, for they deserve to succeed.

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The task of boring through mountains and damming up rivers in the tropics is a difficult one.

The American engineers' wives and families have a hard life of it, for they are scorched by the sun, soaked by diluvial rains, stung by mosquitoes, and obliged to live on tinned food. It is true that the scenery is very beautiful. But venerable trees and magnificent sunsets, orchid-like butterflies and butterfly-orchids, luminous insects whose bodies shine at night like Chinese lanterns, boa-constrictors and crocodiles twenty-four feet long, all those sights which at first astonish one soon become as familiar to the eye as a cabbage-patch. They live very lonely lives, eat salted food, drink lukewarm water, and yawn all day long. . . .

For the last time I passed in the manager's own little private car through this human ant-hill, among this population which toils and slaves on those seventy-five kilometres of land, that narrow red ribbon which stands out in such vivid contrast against the green forest.

Other races dwell there besides the Spaniards and the negroes. The chief of the police force, who accompanied me, told me that he knew of



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fifty-four different nationalities from all parts of the world. It is quite like the tower of Babel !

It appears that they live more peaceably than in the old days before the flood. However, we met gangs of wretched convicts dragging their chains under the ever-watchful eye of their gigantic guardians, splendid fellows in khaki uniforms. These convicts are employed to break stones. They talk of re-establishing the penalty of death by hanging on the gallows.

The soil, when dug up, is found to contain myriads of sea-shells. Nature—or, who knows, some long forgotten race ?—once dug a canal between the two oceans, but it closed as, perhaps, it will do again some day.

With all our knowledge and all our ingenuity, what are we after all ? Little children playing on the beach with spades and buckets between two tides.

The main point, in short, is that the Panama Canal will be opened eventually. Why is the Yankee going to succeed where the Frenchman failed ?

Science and machinery are altogether out of

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the question, for the Americans, after having despised our plans and rejected them as worthless, have now made up their minds to carry them out religiously ; and then the French plant, although twenty years old, still works far better than similar machinery made but yesterday in the United States.

Is it a case of better management ? Everybody knows that confusion and waste existed on the isthmus in de Lesseps' time. But although the Americans may be more methodical, they are perhaps more wasteful. They have got plenty of archbishops' sons and young officials, who want to get rich as quickly as possible. The commissariat, for instance, is suspected of making a very good thing out of Panama. Here is another example : The post of superintendent on the railway between Colon and Panama, a post which consists in collecting the ticket-money, and for which a ticket-collector on a tramway in Europe would earn five francs a day, is supposed to be worth one hundred thousand francs to its lucky possessor, who has to control much traffic and many passengers, but who himself is controlled by no one. When this humble employé goes back

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to Panama by the last train at seven o'clock at night, he leaves his cap in the railway station and puts on a straw hat like any other gentleman, dresses himself in a white suit and goes to dine with his wife at the only fashionable hotel in the town. The shareholders in the American railroads are really very forbearing! But the fact is that the trains out there are so fond of running off the lines that perhaps ticket-collectors are supposed to run great risks. If they manage to save their own lives, public opinion considers that they are entitled to pocket half the profits.

So Americans are neither more clever nor more conscientious than the French. But they are not likely to be wrecked on the rock which was the latter's ruin; their success does not depend upon stocks and shares—their canal is a military undertaking—and they no longer dread the yellow fever.

As officials paid by the War Office, they are sure to receive every year the two hundred millions destined to defray all expenses incurred by the building of the Canal. But, above all, they are sure that they will not die out there. It is interesting to hear the few survivors of the French Company

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relate what Panama was like in the time of the yellow fever, that dreadful malady which used to break out unexpectedly and carry off its victims in a few hours ! The French died like flies. From the chief engineer to the humblest workman, no one was sure whether he would be alive on the morrow. And so they tried to forget the danger by drinking and gambling.

The Cathedral Square at Panama, that little sleepy square which now looks so respectable, was filled every night with drunken, half-crazy groups of revellers. When the dancing-saloons and gambling-dens lit their lamps, everyone used to rush and throw their last farthing on the green baize roulette-table. What was the good of hoarding money when the hospital nurses were in the habit of stealing hard-earned savings from under the dying patient's pillow ? The workmen on the Canal had to pass the cemetery on their way home every night ; all those white-wood pegs, bearing the names and the registered numbers of the dead men in black letters, looked like a ghastly game of dominoes, and seemed to say : Whose turn next ?

The discovery of the infernal microbe and its

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destruction by draining its breeding-ground—the marshes—sufficed to reassure the terrified city. The climate is still debilitating, and very few people manage to escape an occasional attack of malaria. But if a great many negroes and Spanish workmen still die there, the American population has learnt to keep in good health.

When twilight comes, and with it the hour when toil ceases, when long trains filled with workmen move off laden with their variegated burden of human cattle towards the scattered caravansaries along the line, the Yankee engineer or overseer climbs up to his little wooden shanty on the hill. There behind the wire gauze which protects the veranda from mosquitoes, a rose-coloured Chinese lantern was lighted as soon as the first stars began to awake in the heavens; it tells him that the soup is smoking on the table and that his white-robed wife is swinging to and fro in her rocking-chair. That home, half tent, half barn, doesn't look as if it could stand much wind and rain. How isolated it seems at the edge of the forest, surrounded by almost uncultivated land! The man thinks of her who consented to follow him and to dwell—for many a long year, perhaps—behind

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those ugly plank walls. He feels a lump rising in his throat ; his eyes fill with tears and he swears that he will make his pile, and a jolly big one, too !

That is why the Americans will be able to finish the Panama Canal.

## COSTA RICA

The first international court of arbitration—How people travel in Costa Rica—Two-legged and four-legged fellow-passengers—The most beautiful forest in the world—A feathered republic—The real habitat of the orchid—The capital of Costa Rica—Fashions among the female population—A lucky accident—Midnight marriages—A priest with seven daughters—Why are they always fighting in Costa Rica?—Strange French officers—Mr. Carnegie's five hundred thousand francs—Presidential pastimes—Abortive attempt to assassinate Cabrera, President of Guatemala—An illiterate president—Fragonard's *Swing*—The case of Father Pagès—An expensive and useless theatre—The Madonnas of Perugino—Romance in Costa Rica—The Yankee will conquer the whole of Central America in a quarter of a century—Five incapable charioteers—Country life in the tropics—A garden of Eden.

THE five republics of Central America situated between Panama and Mexico, that is to say : Costa Rica, Nicaragua, San Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, have just come to a decision which proves, not only that the United States are exercising undue pressure on those countries, but that the five republics realize that the time has come for them to resist with all their might and main ;

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and so Latin America has determined to stand up to Anglo-Saxon America.

Europe cannot afford to ignore this gigantic duel. When once the Yankees begin to dictate their commands to the whole of the New World, from Canada to the Straits of Magellan, that day will see the ruin of European commercial enterprise and import trade. London, Antwerp, Hamburg, Bordeaux, and Genoa will find that the New World has slipped out of their grasp for the second time.

The Spaniards, for three centuries, were in the habit of capturing any foreign vessels foolhardy enough to approach their colonies beyond-seas. When a storm threw these ships out of their course, the Spaniards seized them and sent their crews to rot in dungeons. The Yankees will not be obliged to employ such forcible means. A prohibitive tariff will suffice to clear the Atlantic of any other flag than the Stars and Stripes. We should do well to remember that fact.

So the five tiny States, who are anxious to escape the fate which befell Panama, have just inaugurated the nucleus of a federation, by founding in Costa Rica, which is the most go-ahead



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of the five republics, a court of arbitration, a sort of Amphictyon Council, whose decrees are to be respected by the whole of Central America. The United States do not seem to have opposed this federal institution. They probably think that it will serve their interests, while the Central Americans think that it will serve as a shield against their powerful neighbours. The future will prove who was right.

I left Panama in a hurry, because I wanted to assist at the grand *fêtes* which were to celebrate the inauguration of this court of arbitration in the capital of Costa Rica. It was but a short journey, just as if one went from Belgium into Holland ; only as you cannot traverse the thick forests with which the isthmus is covered, you have to go round by sea. The voyage only lasts two days, but what a voyage it is ! As one has to face more or less the same discomforts and dangers whenever one wants to go from one capital to another in those parts, and as those discomforts represent the most serious obstacle to the formation of a gigantic central State, I will relate my adventures during that voyage.

Costa Rica, like Panama, stretches across the

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isthmus and possesses two ports, one on the Pacific coast and another on the Atlantic. But the latter port alone is connected with the capital by a railroad. So, first of all, I had to cross the Isthmus of Panama in order to return and take ship at Colon, from which port boats leave for Costa Rica.

I hardly closed my eyes the night before starting, for the train left Panama at six o'clock next morning, and I dared not trust the negro who had promised to call me in good time. Unfortunately, my luggage had to be carried to the station by negroes. You need never be surprised at what a nigger will do ; you may be quite sure that everything will go all wrong. And that was just what happened ; they were late fetching my luggage, and the train steamed out of the station under my very nose.

Alas ! the boat from Colon to Costa Rica would weigh anchor without me ! I was told that I should have to wait until the following week. . . . No ! I then learnt that, by taking a train which started four hours later, I might still hope to arrive before the boat started. My niggers swore that I should have a good half-hour in which to get from

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the train to the landing-stage, which is two minutes' walk from the railway-station. So I determined to chance it. If I missed the boat, I could but return that night to Panama; the railway journey across the isthmus is so very cheap! I only had to pay eighty francs for those seventy-five kilometres—a mere nothing!

By the mercy of Providence, I reached Colon at one o'clock. The boat started at half-past one. But as you are not allowed to take your ticket on board ship, I had to go to the Company's office and take my tickets there. I hurried off, while a negro gentleman, grinning from ear to ear behind his huge collar, pledged me his word of honour in three languages—English, French, and Spanish—that my trunks would be conveyed from the luggage-van to the boat as if they were being wafted on the wings of a zephyr.

My readers are probably astonished at my anxiety concerning my luggage; but they will understand my feelings when they learn that everything in those parts is imported from Europe at great expense by shopkeepers who are obliged to pay very heavy duty and yet who expect to make their fortunes in three years. Thus at Chili

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one has to pay seventy-five francs for a pair of shoes. It is just as well when you have to pay such prices to try not to scatter your boots as you go along through life.

On reaching the Steamship Company's office, I found that I only had to pay down my money, which does not take long to do in any country. Having got what I wanted, I hurried off to the landing-stage, there to await my black commissioner with his huge collar, his three languages, and my mountain of luggage.

The boat for Costa Rica was puffing away impatiently by the side of the quay. It was a fruit boat, used for exporting bananas. Passengers are only taken as extras. It was very small and rather dirty than otherwise. Its few cabins were already engaged. The captain explained to me in four languages—one extra, because he was a Norwegian—that one can sleep quite comfortably on deck in the tropics.

Suddenly it began to rain. That means that two minutes later the water was up to my ankles, and that the lane down which my unfortunate luggage had to come was changed into a mountain torrent. I saw that it was all up with me. Unless

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dolphins came and dragged my nigger's cart like the shell of Amphitrite I should never get away from Colon that day. The boat began to weigh anchor. It was all up with me. The Norwegian captain expressed his opinion that perhaps my coloured gentleman was a thief. . . . He had probably hidden my luggage in the negro quarter of Colon, which quarter is so disgustingly dirty that no white person likes even to pass through it. It is inhabited by an extraordinary population of rascals, the scum of the four corners of the earth.

The rain grew worse and worse ; one could not call it rain. It was like a second ocean suspended in the sky and pouring down on to the quays with the roar of a thousand Niagaras. As I had given up all hopes of being able to leave with my baggage, I told them to take off my small luggage which had already been piled on deck.

Someone then flung me my portmanteaux and a glass-covered butterfly-case, containing several fine specimens. I had been expressly recommended to buy a butterfly collection when I went to Panama. You would do well to impress upon your friends that they always ought to buy

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collections of butterflies whenever they go to America! They are so easy to carry!

Oh! wonder of wonders! my trunks suddenly hove in sight! A marvellous-looking animal, with a mule's head—and dolphin's fins, probably—thrust its nose above the torrent, dragging a cart whereon I beheld my heaviest boxes piled on the top of the smallest and weakest packages. The only trunk which had a hole in it—I had tried in vain to get it repaired in Panama—had been carefully placed on the top of the pyramid, so that it might catch every drop of rain. For this exhibition of ingenuity my coloured gentleman in his tall collar, who was only an hour late, demanded the modest sum of one hundred francs—dirt cheap! I paid and went on board the boat, which had been detained by this providential storm.

The rain stopped. We started. I had only lost my butterfly-case and probably the contents of my dilapidated trunk, two packages out of twenty, hardly ten per cent. At that rate I could afford to stop at ten American towns before being absolutely shoeless and coatless.

The sea was calm—luckily! For we were ten passengers, packed together in a saloon which was

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meant to hold six or seven. If any of us had become sea-sick, I should have had to fly. There was only one class. My next-door neighbour at supper, who, from the state of his hands and his shirt-collar, must have been employed in some very dirty trade, drank his coffee out of his saucer and wiped his fingers on the tablecloth. When night fell, they found a berth for me in a cabin which was already occupied by three Chinamen. Those Chinese were very clean and did not smell of opium ! However, the atmosphere in that badly-ventilated cabin was too much for me ; I felt myself slowly melting away in my berth. Fearing lest I should disappear from the face of the earth and only leave a pool of water to mark my passage, I tore myself away from that haven of refuge and went up into the open air, which I found unpleasantly fresh. You are warned to keep awake, if you don't want to get an attack of pneumonia. A splendid moon enabled me to witness the innocent gambols of myriads of cockroaches and rats. At daybreak, we cast anchor in front of a low-lying coast, covered with palm trees ; this was the shore of Costa Rica. I saw a yellow flag fluttering on a little island to the left. It was

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there that we had to go through quarantine. Every American port is guarded by a lazaretto, where passengers frequently run the risk of having to spend a week of isolation, favourable to pious meditations, no doubt, but calculated to prolong the journey. My boat, by a lucky chance, had not touched at any plague-stricken ports. So I was allowed to land, pay the custom-house fees, pay the luggage porters, pay for my railway tickets, and finally seat myself in the car which was to take me that night to San José, the capital of the Republic of Costa Rica. However, the station-master warned me that, as rain had not ceased falling for the last week, the line was probably damaged in several places and that there was little chance of my reaching my destination.

I got off with a good fright. I reached San José safe and sound ; and I must add, before I go any farther, that everyone there was astonished at the wonderful good luck with which my little trip had been attended.

I have never seen the Island of Ceylon, which people say is the most beautiful spot on earth,



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but I question whether it can beat the splendid panorama through which the railway to San José runs. The forest which I had traversed the previous evening was but a miserable coppice in comparison. The railway first runs along the coast between avenues of majestic palm trees such as one finds in no botanical garden. There I saw every tropical tree under the sun—I won't weary you by telling you all their names, there are two thousand two hundred varieties—trees with colossal trunks from whose huge branches, rising nearly a hundred feet into the air, hung creepers like flaky, silvery pennants, called here *barba de viejo* (old man's beard). Words are powerless to describe the wonder and beauty of those green grottoes hung with vegetable stalactites. This magnificent forest is apparently limitless. It carpets the valleys, clothes the mountains in every tint of green, varied here and there with a red or yellow note, by a cluster of flowering trees, and fades away into the pale blue distance. We were in the rainy season. A thin veil of sparkling mist softened and blended the colours, which otherwise might have seemed too gorgeous, of that sheet of emerald water.

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This damp veil was sometimes lighted up by the unexpected vision of some startled ruby or topaz-coloured bird like a diamond flashing in the sun. What splendid scenery for a play! . . . but, alas! stage scenery is only paint and canvas. The real forest knows naught of the comedy and tragedy of life. That forest whispered in the breeze and basked in the sunshine as ignorant of the narrow railway winding through its glades as of the boa-constrictor which creeps and slinks through the grass at its feet.

Talking of birds, if one could find any spot on earth where one could establish that feathered republic of which so many poets, from Aristophanes to Edmond Rostand, have dreamed, Costa Rica would surely be the very spot. This tiny State shelters seven hundred different species of birds, double the number found in the whole of Europe. The largest of all is the white eagle. I must confess that I only saw one specimen, and that was in the museum at San José! But it looked so ferocious that, although it was dead and stuffed, it made me feel quite uncomfortable. The smallest is the humming-bird, no bigger than half a butterfly's wing. The most beautiful

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is the *quetzal*, a green bird with a scarlet breast, which a neighbouring republic, Guatemala, has adopted as her emblem because it can only live at liberty and dies as soon as it is imprisoned in a cage.

You will notice that I have said nothing about orchids although they are very plentiful out there, and were then in full bloom. It is because the orchid, the blossom of a parasite growing on the topmost branches of certain trees, makes no show. One scarcely notices it. This floral jewel, the most beautiful work of art ever made by the Hands of the Celestial Jeweller, seems formed to adorn the breast of some pretty woman at a ball.

All the lower region of Costa Rica is uninhabited. This terrestrial paradise still shelters one hundred and thirty different species of snakes, but Adam and Eve have fled. I must confess that it is very unhealthy. When the Catholic Church can make up her mind to adopt modern ideas, which she is bound to do in spite of Pius X, and when we allow the Bible to walk hand in hand with science, we shall no longer see a cherubim armed with a flaming sword standing at the

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gate of Eden : a malarial-fever mosquito will have taken his place.

However, now that the United States buy nearly all their bananas of Costa Rica—to such an extent that a company of fruit-boats has lately been started in order to supply them with one million *régimes* a month !—the American planters have brought negroes from Jamaica, and have built all along the railway track rows of little iron houses, from which those great, simple-minded niggers grin and laugh as they watch the train pass by. These shanties are already half hidden in the tall, rank grass and drowned beneath the overarching palm trees. Green parrots hang from the creepers and screech and chatter as if they were mocking us.

The passing train summons whole swarms of fat little naked niggers ; they paddle about in the warm rain, put out their tongues at us and pelt us with banana skins, while their mothers carry on their heads baskets of bananas which they ask us to buy with a broad grin.

When the train leaves these lovely plains and begins to climb up towards the mountainous region where the capital is situated, the scenery



COSTA RICA: TYPICAL BANANA FARM

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THE *MAINE* OFF HAVANA

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changes, and one might almost fancy oneself in the Engadine or in the Caucasus. It is still very beautiful, although more familiar to the eye of the European. The track crosses mountain torrents and precipices on tremendously high bridges. The bananas and negroes disappear and give place to Indians and coffee plantations. Little by little all the beauty fades away from the scenery. The vegetation grows thinner. Great, depressing reaches of stony tracts alternate with prairies, but they are no longer the lovely, smiling prairies of the lowlands. It hardly seemed worth while to take a three weeks' sea-voyage only to see scenery which reminded me of arid districts in Brittany or the Ardennes. Alas! the sky grew greyer and greyer. The horizon was now bounded by rocky peaks, and all my illusions lay dead and buried in a stone coffin under a leaden sky. I thought of all my most gloomy souvenirs of Norway.

The capital of Costa Rica is a fraud. Its magnificent railroad ends in a village hidden in the mountains and inhabited by twenty-five thousand peasants. Such was San José. What would-be wag told me that the houses were

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covered with roses? No doubt the roses were hidden by the houses, which are all alike, low, and no better than artisans' dwellings. The hotel was badly kept.

If San José is the most beautiful capital in Central America, what can the others be like? And how can these pygmy cities hope to withstand gigantic New York and Chicago?

Nothing is more deceptive than one's first impressions of a new town: they are seldom true; and after a sojourn, one usually goes away with quite another opinion. One can tell what the houses are like at a glance; one needs more time to see what the inhabitants are like. Now the latter, unless one happens to be an architect, alone interest the general public. The capital of Costa Rica impresses one unfavourably at first sight. The new-comer stands looking over the balcony of the wretched inn which has the impudence to call itself "The Palace Hotel," watches the toy tramway whose trolley is considerably taller than the dolls' houses, and immediately feels an intense desire to decamp!

But when I awoke next morning and saw





SAN JOSÉ: MAIN STREET. MILK-CARRIERS AND OX-CART



COSTA RICA: THE FOREST OF PÈRALTA

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the magnificent sun of the tropics, when I went to pay calls with letters of introduction which immediately procured me the friendship of several distinguished families, when I learned to appreciate the sweet, sunny disposition of the male portion of the population and the strange charm of the female citizens of the capital of Costa Rica, the exquisite climate, the charming picturesqueness of streets with a background of blue mountains, and the rare beauty of that hour when the clouds roll up from the Atlantic and from the Pacific, gather round the Cordilleras and form a canopy of unspeakable glory, like an apotheosis of flowers and flames, above the setting sun—ah! then I began to change my opinion completely. At the end of three days I felt as if I could spend the rest of my life quite happily out there.

It is quite true that the town is vulgar-looking and almost ugly. They told a fib when they said that the houses were covered with roses; but one might truly say that the young girls out there are like roses, white, yellow and red roses.

The women whom one meets in the streets

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always look as if they were going to, or coming back from a ball. At nine o'clock in the morning, in mud and rain, you will never see them except in satin shoes and white muslin furbelows. A long pale pink or pale green shawl covers their shoulders; a bright scarlet flower is usually stuck into the thick braids of black hair. Thus decked out, they walk up and down the streets of the capital with their arched eyebrows, their bright eyes and their faces more covered with rouge and powder than any *lorette* at the *Folies-Bergère*.

Their profession is much the same; they are both man-hunters. But let me explain that the *Costa-Ricienne* is husband-hunting. There are four girls to every boy in Costa Rica, so the sons are much petted. They are obliged to be careful of themselves and to look out for the traps which the weaker sex is always laying for them. As for the girls, their one idea is to get some young man into such a tight corner that he cannot get out of it! Papa and mama then appear upon the scene and force the author of the scandal to pick up the pieces.

I was invited to assist at a marriage which had

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been "arranged" after that manner. The necessary scandal had occurred during a picnic. At a certain moment the young lady lingered behind the party of guests on horseback and summoned her *novio* to her aid ; her horse's girth was loose and her saddle was slipping ! The young lover was obliged to seize the damsel round the waist in order to get her off her horse. But the girl's brother was on the look out ; he galloped up in a fearful fury and found the young couple entwined in each other's arms. Whereupon an awful scene took place. The women shrieked and the men shook their fists in one another's faces ! The girl's brother challenged the gay Lothario to fight a duel. As in all fairy stories, it ended with a marriage.

Please to observe that the bold minxes who invent these artful and complicated dodges are usually only thirteen years of age. Necessity is the mother of invention.

As to the aforesaid marriage, it was celebrated in the usual Costa Rican fashion ; nobody went to church ; the priest came to the bride's house and blessed the young couple in the drawing-room at midnight in the presence of the family

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and their guests. The happy pair solemnly exchanged ten coins, and then everybody began to dance under garlands of flowers and many-coloured Chinese lanterns. And their two lives were united—for a week!

For the honeymoon seldom lasts longer than a week. Spaniards are charming lovers but very unsatisfactory husbands. With the exception of Costa Rica, where the morals of the clergy are very strict, the *padres* of the other republics usually have a family to bring up—which they do most conscientiously. I was told of an extremely rich *padre* who gave his seven daughters splendid dowries, and who lived like a patriarch of old days and was universally respected. The clergy have a right to demand the firstfruits of stall and granary. There is a proverb in Spanish-America which says that there are only two professions in which a man can live comfortably—as president of the republic or as priest!

One would think that, with such morals, the laws would be very unjust towards women-folk. Not a bit of it! Nowhere in Europe will you find women better off. The married woman

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has entire control over her own fortune. If she earns her daily bread, her husband has no right to her wages.

Travellers in those new countries are always being astonished by something or the other ; a hundred years ago those morals would have been condemned by Europe as corrupt, and yet they possess certain laws which will probably not be passed for another hundred years in Europe.

Which are best—good laws or good morals ? One can but do one's best : if you don't possess very high principles, it is just as well to have good laws !

Why is war always breaking out in Central America ? It is partly the fault of the race and partly the fault of its geographical position.

The Spanish-American race is a quarrelsome race ; fiery blood ran in the veins of its ancestors, the old *Conquistadors* and the Indians. The geographical position of Central America has much to answer for ; the five little provinces, under Spanish rule, constituted a dependency of the Spanish crown and were called Guatemala.

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Nowadays each province hopes, by trampling on its four neighbours, to be able to reconstruct the great isthmian State to its own advantage. As soon as one state thinks itself stronger than its neighbours, it begins to plot and plan, hoping thereby to force the weaker states to accept the dictator of its choice. That is why war is always breaking out in Central America.

When things are very bad they usually take a turn for the better. Costa Rica, the smallest but the most sensible of the republics, suggested to her touchy sister-republics that they should call a sort of family council.

Their two powerful neighbours in the north, Mexico and the United States, both had very good but very different reasons for wishing peace to be maintained in the isthmus: the United States wanted to be able to complete their conquest undisturbed, while Mexico wanted to deprive the United States of any excuse for an armed occupation.

They both agreed that such an institution would be a very good thing, and each sent an ambassador to act as godfather to the infant council at its christening.



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The two godpapas, together with five delegates from the central republics, arrived in a modest third-class cruiser belonging to the Yankee navy, which, however, the local newspapers styled *una nave gigantesca!*

San José gave the messengers of peace a very charming reception. Instead of mobilizing the army of Costa Rica—it is true that it only numbers five hundred men—five thousand school-children were drawn up in line under charge of their school-ma'ams. The little boys were very neatly dressed; they each carried a small flag. The little girls, each holding a nosegay, looked charming and were better dressed than many country children in France. As for the school-ma'ams, they were natives of San José, and that town is celebrated for its beautiful *señoritas*.

The magistrates of the Supreme Court arrived in the smartest of landaus. The only fault one could find was that the coats of arms painted on the carriage doors were rather too large. But that is the fault of the arms of Costa Rica, which represent several mountains, a seascape, a three-master, and a setting sun.

Several carriages full of French officers followed

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at a brisk trot. I saw colonels of artillery regiments, captains of light infantry, troops of the line, and even the plume worn by our military cadets at Saint-Cyr. I was much astonished. But these uniforms were only a pretty compliment paid by the officers of Costa Rica to our naval outfitters.

As these uniforms are made of thin material, and as they have not seen much service as yet—Costa Rica has been at peace with her neighbours for twenty-five years, which the local newspapers call *immemoriale*—they are very becoming to their wearers.

The greatest day of all was the day of the solemn inauguration, when the American ambassador announced that Mr. Carnegie, the millionaire-philanthropist, had given him a cheque for five hundred thousand francs, in order to build a temple worthy of him at this first tribunal of arbitration.

Alas ! the new court will find that the difficulty lies, not in passing sentences, but in executing them.

I cannot imagine General Zelaya, who has been President of Nicaragua for the last fourteen

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years—although the constitution of Nicaragua declares that the president can only be elected for four years and that he is not re-eligible—I cannot imagine M. Estrada Cabrera, President of Guatemala, who is quite as fond of having his own way, obeying any decisions of the Supreme Court which do not happen to suit their own ideas. They will cause endless delay, recall their delegate under some futile pretext and then play 'possum.

Will the United States assume the rôle of sheriff's officer, of bailiff, and will they interpose by force of arms? That would only hasten what they are trying to prevent.

I will now tell my readers a few anecdotes concerning the despots of Central America.

As soon as the president of one of those little republics, which are less populous than many a big European town, has reduced to obedience or banished into exile the handful of energetic men who alone are capable of opposing his arbitrary designs, he only has to reckon with timid and isolated Creoles or with still savage and ignorant Indians. He is then free to do whatever he likes, either for good or for evil. Be he

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good or bad, liberal-minded or arbitrary, he need fear no rival, except that rival happens to be stronger than he. Until that rival appears on the scene, he will be absolutely all-powerful; he need respect nobody and nothing, neither the property nor the liberty of foreigners, as Castro proved in Venezuela when he despoiled and banished American, English and French subjects.

And Castro is not the only person who snaps his fingers at diplomatists and squadrons! It is only two years ago that General Zelaya, the President of Nicaragua, incarcerated some North Americans, and when the United States' consul protested, retorted by banishing him ignominiously from the territory of the republic without more ado. The United States swallowed the insult without a murmur and appointed another consul. They could not declare war against tiny Nicaragua. No one takes a sword to kill a flea!

General Zelaya, however, is rather an original individual. I will not speak of his obstinacy in keeping the power in his own hands, notwithstanding the Constitution. Neither will I mention his enormous fortune, estimated at fifty millions,

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although Paul de Kock's honest work-girls, "who were able to buy themselves diamonds out of their savings," are quite put in the shade by this orderly fellow who has managed to save fifty millions from a salary of one hundred thousand francs.

But that is quite an ordinary occurrence in America! No one is astonished at the fact that the widow of Barrios, a poor half-bred Indian who died President of Guatemala, should enjoy a dower of fifteen million dollars. Even in Costa Rica, which, however, is a model republic and well known for its honesty in constitutional and official matters, I was shown a young sub-lieutenant who on his majority had inherited seven and a half millions.

"His father made this fortune," they told me.

"Oh! indeed," said I. "Was he in business?"

"No, he was President of the Republic."

So Señor Zelaya, President of Nicaragua, with his fourteen years' dictatorship and his fifty millions of savings, is just like all past, present, and future presidents, except that he has one or two picturesque ideas about governing peculiar to himself.

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Whenever a revolution breaks out in Nicaragua, that is to say about every other year, he makes the rich citizens pay a "voluntary tax." If the said rich citizens don't seem particularly anxious to support the good cause, he has them imprisoned, or starved at home, or hung up by the thumbs, all time-honoured customs in America. But to General Zelaya belongs the honour of having invented a novel and agreeable punishment. When in 1900 several proprietors in Nicaragua, having been condemned to pay "voluntary taxes" varying from one to two hundred thousand francs, turned obstinate, he had them all brought to the barracks, where soldiers in his presence administered to the unfortunate men douches of iced water, salt and red pimento—"in order to wake them up a bit," he declared in his usual sweet, well-modulated voice. For the general was educated in France, at Versailles, and he prides himself upon his exquisitely polished manners, never raises his voice, and only uses very refined expressions.

That, however, is a characteristic common to all those little American despots. They are usually well educated and capital talkers. You

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return from your first interview delighted and sanguine. You soon change your tone. And yet they are not monsters. They are only cruel when they think it absolutely necessary to be so, and they hardly ever murder anyone except he happens to be their declared enemy. They are very gallant and think that persuasion is better than force. This, in fact, is the emblem of all these despots, from Castro, the master of Venezuela, to Estrada Cabrera, lord of Guatemala. The latter, however, only just lately had a number of persons, including several ladies moving in the highest circles, executed ; they had been plotting against him, and had tried to assassinate him. Then the tiger, who pretends to scratch, loses his temper and bites.

An eyewitness described the scene to me :

Some pupils of the Polytechnic School—five, say some ; seven, say others—tried to shoot M. Estrada Cabrera just as he was leaving his palace and passing in front of the troops on his way to attend a diplomatic reception. The attempt failed because the standard-bearer, who was to give the signal to fire by lowering the flag just as the President drove by, either from clumsi-

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ness or from emotion, lowered it so suddenly that the President was forced to bend his head in order to avoid it. As all the conspirators aimed at his head, all the bullets passed above M. Estrada Cabrera, whose hand was only slightly grazed by a stray shot.

Official reports say that the President had the culprits executed ; but they forget to add that he had the Polytechnic School "decimated,"<sup>1</sup> beginning with the colonel in command. For some time the prisons had been full to overflowing with political prisoners. Immediately after the attempt upon his life, M. Estrada Cabrera sent an order that all these prisoners were to be executed without being tried.

As the tyrant hates the sound of firearms, the unfortunate men were stabbed to death. About sixty of them were despatched like so many oxen. The slaughter then extended to the victims' wives, mothers, and sisters. . . . The capital of Guatemala, a big town with eighty thousand inhabitants, was terrorstruck.

Don't think that Señor Estrada Cabrera is a monster! He is a delightful fellow to talk to,

<sup>1</sup> *Décimer* : to execute every tenth person.



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and fascinates everyone who has anything to do with him. Only people *will* try to kill him, so he kills them. That is one of the charms of despotism.

Guatemala has had worse taskmasters. Rafaël Carreras did not know how to read, but he ruled her with a rod of iron for thirty years. When a diplomatist from a foreign country handed him a written note, he used to take it and look at it upside-down with the greatest gravity.

But Ruffino Barrios was the worst of all the despots of Guatemala. Ruffino Barrios will ever remain the prototype of the American dictator ; he was not only extraordinarily brave and as ambitious as Napoleon, but he was also brutal and hot-tempered. He had a very unpleasant knack of playing practical jokes. He used to have his enemies' wives placed in hammocks ; a bull, which had been purposely trained to gore and butt at these hammocks, was then let loose to torture these unfortunate creatures.

One evening the terrible President, while riding through his dominions, entered the village of a Spanish priest named Pagès. Despot and priest supped together. Barrios thought he

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would like to amuse himself by shocking his host, so he began to blaspheme the Virgin and all the saints in paradise. The priest got angry. The despot, who always carried a riding-whip in his hand, gave his host a cut across the face with it. But the priest was hot-tempered, too. He sprang at Barrios' throat, threw him on the ground and was just going to throttle him when a soldier, attracted by the noise of china breaking, rushed up, shot the priest in the back and killed him. The soldier was given the rank—of general.

Barrios had a cupboard in his house in which he kept his entire fortune. When he opened this cupboard, one saw three or four loaded revolvers lying upon piles of bank-notes. However, the pistols did not prevent him dying, like Father Pagès, from a bullet in his back. He was commanding a body of troops during a great battle against the neighbouring Republic of San Salvador, when he was killed by a bullet which did not come from the enemies' ranks. One cannot help feeling a certain amount of admiration for those fellows who, after all, are not responsible for a state of social anarchy which existed before they were

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born, who try to play the part of the lion among the wolves, who lay their royal paws on everything they can reach, who hold the entire pack of wild beasts at bay for twenty or thirty years, and then, like a worn-out king of the forest, covered with glory and weary of fighting, end by dragging their prey into some dark corner and there devouring it.

Only Latin America cannot expect that these old-fashioned, petty tyrants will be able to help her throw off the United States' formidable commercial yoke.

Such are my reasons for thinking that the new Central American court of arbitration will not prove a success.

But at least it will have done the inhabitants of Costa Rica one good turn : it will have enabled them to use their theatre !

This theatre has been the cause of much pride and much grief to them ; they are proud of it because it cost them ten millions, and they are grieved because they cannot use it for lack of actors.

This magnificent Carrara marble building,

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adorned with valuable carvings, gilding and rich velvet, is almost too beautiful for a town whose streets are unpaved and whose water supply and sanitary arrangements leave much to be desired. It seems a pity that such a beautiful theatre should never be used. San José is not exactly on the high road to the rest of the world, and the last theatrical performance took place eighteen months ago !

So they were delighted to be able to seize this opportunity in order to give a big ball, which was indeed a very smart affair. One might have thought oneself in Paris, and yet San José is only a small place with twenty-five thousand inhabitants ; but what people they are ! It must be a question of altitude. Water boils below one hundred degrees on the summit of Mont Blanc !

The ladies of Costa Rica, whose original costume I had already had occasion to admire in the streets, were dressed in the latest Paris fashions, and looked radiantly beautiful. The *Costa-Ricienne's* head is usually small and long, like that of a statuette of Tanagra ; but the oval face, slender nose, arched eyebrows, the brilliant black pupils shaded by heavy eyelids, remind one of

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the Virgins of the Umbrian School, the serious, refined Madonnas of Perugino.

These women are experts in the art of loving. In the train which took me from San José to the Atlantic coast, I met a handsome, distinguished-looking couple belonging to one of the oldest families in the country ; he was tall and slender, with an aquiline nose and a strong face ; she was delicate-looking and fair, which is very rare in those parts. They got out at one of the intermediate stations, where I was shown the towers of their castle perched high up on the mountain ; a beautiful place but terribly isolated. They must be very fond of each other to live all alone all the year round. And that is just what they are. Someone told me all about their romantic marriage.

It seems that she had loved him ever since they were children together. He was wealthy and lived the life of a fashionable young man about town, and was in no hurry to settle down. A certain millionaire from Honduras appeared upon the scene and fell in love with the young lady. She refused his offer at first, as she had already refused all other offers ; but her parents insisted, told her

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that she was wasting her youth, that the ungrateful swain did not care a straw about her, etc. etc. At last she consented to marry him. The evening of the wedding came ; as I have already mentioned, people always marry at midnight in Costa Rica. The whole town had been invited. The bride alone was missing. Her disgusted relations had to confess that she had refused to leave her room and to beg their guests to excuse her conduct. One can easily imagine with what feelings the guests retired. Another surprise was in store for them on the morrow, for they were informed that the bride was going to marry another man, the man whom she had always loved !

This is what had happened ; just at the last minute the bride received a bouquet of flowers from the thankless object of her affections. In the bouquet was a note containing these words :

“ If you still love me, don't marry that chap from Honduras. I am willing to marry you.”

On reading these words the poor girl fainted. There was an awful family row that night, for the bride's brothers found the unlucky note ; they

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had great difficulty in making their sister tell them the writer's name. At last she told them, and they, burning to avenge their honour—for they still thought that they had been hoaxed—rushed off to the young man's house. They found him slumbering peacefully.

“ *Señores!* ” said he. “ I wrote it and I mean it. If your sister will consent, I shall esteem it an honour to marry her to-morrow ! ”

The ceremony took place on the morrow ; the whole town, which had calculated upon one duel at least with the rejected lover, was terribly scandalized. But he contented himself with remarking :

“ Had I married her, there would have been three unhappy people in the world. It is better that there should only be one.”

These words showed that the millionaire from Honduras deserved to be loved, if love, alas ! were a question of deserts.

I spent one month in Panama and one month in Costa Rica. I conversed with politicians from Nicaragua, Honduras, San Salvador, and Guatemala, so I think I am now in a position to reply

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to the threefold question which I asked myself on landing in Central America : Will the United States take possession of those countries ? How long will it take them to do so ? What effect will this conquest have upon Europe ?

Yes, the United States intend to conquer the whole of the American isthmus, from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to the Isthmus of Darien, and the conquest will be not only a commercial conquest—everyone agrees upon that point—but it will also be a political conquest. In the case of Panama it has already become an accomplished fact. As to Costa Rica, where the Yankees already own the flat banana-producing lands, it will take them about five years to buy, piece by piece, the high plateaux where coffee is cultivated ; and then Costa Rica will be devoured like Panama. The Yankees will then attack the next republic. If they take five years to conquer each republic, the Stars and Stripes, at the end of another twenty-five years, will have added five more stars to their constellation ; they will then float from the snowy lakes of Canada to the tropical forests of Colombia. Will they pass over Mexico, or will she, too, be included ? I will answer that



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question in my chapter upon Mexico. Let us first finish with Central America.

Costa Rica is the most peaceable, the most enlightened, and therefore the most powerful of the five republics. Everyone agrees that she is a good century ahead of her neighbours. When Costa Rica is at the mercy of the Yankee, the others will soon go under. Now Costa Rica is already undermined.

What is a country? It is a huge business-house. Costa Rica sells bananas and coffee. When we see a Yankee instead of a Costa Rican in every plantation, that is to say behind every counter, we shall be obliged to admit that the business belongs to America. The United States declare that they have no political ambitions; they promise to make no changes in the firm of the old trading-house, which, in future, will be worked with their capital and for their benefit, and will continue to be called the "Republic of Costa Rica." That may be. It is being done on the banks of the Thames, where many businesses belonging to old English firms are now being run by German capitalists. But what is done in England, the best governed country on the face

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of the globe, cannot be done in Spanish-America, in the most ungovernable countries on earth. Whether they like it or not, the United States will be obliged to take the reins of the five chariots which bear their fortunes into their own hands. The five native charioteers cost too much to keep and quarrel too much among themselves.

The commercial conquest of Costa Rica will be accomplished in two moves ; the first has already been made, the second is going to be made. The unhealthy and almost impassable forests on the Atlantic coast were, so to speak, neglected. The Yankees purchased them for a mere song. They have bought the railway, imported negroes from Jamaica, established a direct service of fruit boats between Costa Rica and New Orleans, and the banana trade has now become a most flourishing affair. They are now going to tackle the plateaux where coffee is cultivated.

However, these plateaux, unlike the forests, are not neglected. Land is worth its weight in gold up there. But the chief landowners' one desire is to sell their estates and to go and live on their income in Europe.

The fact is that country life in Costa Rica is

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rather unpleasant. All the servants are lazy, incompetent, insolent and dishonest. They neither know, nor do they wish to learn, what to do. They give notice if you make the slightest remark ; I might almost say that they only stay in your house just long enough to find something, a jewel, plate, or linen, worth stealing. Having made their haul, they decamp. Though you may catch them in the very act, they always get off scot-free, for their master knows by experience how lenient the judges are, and spares himself the trouble of calling for the lazy and incompetent policemen, who are very often the thief's accomplices.

The master does not always discharge his servant after he has been caught stealing. Theft is looked upon as a peccadillo, and people shut their eyes to it. In the best hotel at San José the chamber-maid stole my sleeve-links, a watch belonging to an Italian tourist, and a French lady's silk stockings. She was known to be a thief. She was caught in the very act two years ago. And yet the hotel proprietor still keeps her. He locks up all his own possessions ; his guests can look out for themselves !

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I was invited to stay in a pretty country-house at the foot of the famous volcano of Irazu. On the day of my arrival my purse, which I had left on a table in the drawing-room, disappeared. It was found in the maid-servant's trunk; she was but a child still and she confessed, with many tears, that she had acted at the instigation of the cook and the stable-boy, with whom she was to share the stolen money. The three culprits were dismissed, and other servants, who were probably no better, were engaged.

On Sunday the Indians get drunk and beat one another with their *machete*, a sort of sabre with which they cut their way through the virgin forests. The black workman is more sober, but quite as lazy and more revengeful. If he is dismissed, woe betide the landlord or overseer who tarries late at night at the entrance to a lonely wood! He will be found next morning with a bullet in his brain. The Indian steals, the negro murders.

That is why the rich landowners of Costa Rica only ask to be able to convert their coffee plantations, their fields of maize, and their pasture lands into good, hard cash, which, in those young

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countries, can be invested at ten and twelve per cent. That is why the Costa Rican, at the mercy of his dishonest servants, threatened with death by his black workmen, has only one wish: to live in Paris with an income of one hundred thousand francs. The Yankee who wants "to trade" has only to knock at the door: he will find it already open.

When once the Americans have got three-quarters of Costa Rica into their clutches—not including the fourth part, which belongs to the native peasantry—they will want to reorganize her finances and her police department. When one is at home, one wants to be master in one's own house. And so the name of Central America will disappear from the face of the globe.

The present President of the Republic, Señor Don Gonzales Viquez, to whom I expressed this opinion quite openly, did not agree with me.

"Take Costa Rica? Take Central America? But that is impossible. Europe would interfere! Europe would prevent that!"

How?—that my honest friend Don Gonzales Viquez forgot to tell me. England and France both declare that they take no interest in that part

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of the world. Germany alone seems to display any interest in the fate of Central America. But I cannot imagine the Kaiser declaring war against Uncle Sam in order to protect the petty tyrants of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Co.

Of course this annexation will be fatal to European interests. During the four years that the Americans have owned the Panama Canal, they have slowly but surely eliminated everything and everybody, capital and employé, not "made in America." It will be the same thing wherever they go ; the European will only have to pack up his traps and clear out. But what can be done to prevent this event ?

I was told to console myself by the thought that it would be a good thing for the European tourist ! He will be able to go and see Costa Rica, which is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, and Guatemala, which is no less beautiful, and enjoy all the comforts and improvements which the Yankee introduces wherever he goes. San José is going to build a magnificent modern hotel next year ; it will be run on American lines. So in future we shall not be condemned to endure the abominable dirt of the one hotel which at

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present is adorned with the high-flown name of the Palace Hotel.

That is quite true. However, it is poor consolation to the former owner of a palace to be invited by the new proprietor to visit it in comfort. Europe, had she wished it, might be cock of the walk in Central America. The inhabitants invited us. France preferred to go to Morocco, Germany to Turkey, England to the Transvaal, Belgium to the Congo. Perhaps they were wrong.

With a little method, a little more morality in public and private affairs—the presence of European colonists would soon have brought this about—these fertile and enchanting countries would have become a paradise for the white race. The Yankee is going to prove the truth of this statement.

## JAMAICA AND CUBA

The President's train has to make way for a banana train—The earthquake of January 14, 1907—Tourists burnt alive—Corpses sprinkled with petroleum—The banana's misdeeds—Another paradise guarded by mosquitoes—The land of the cigar—Good-bye to mermaids and sharks—The Cubans were once dirty but handsome—The Tobacco Trust—Spanish pride—The Cuban lives for love—Caged doves—The colour problem—Witchcraft—The history of Mr. Seneca, correspondent of the *Temps* newspaper—Business and sentiment—Spain has too many children—After the iron yoke, the silver bit—An intellectual desert—An unknown work by Victor Hugo—A skull used as a champagne glass—Suicide among poets.

IN order to realize what fate the United States are holding in store for Central America when she belongs to them, one need only to go to Cuba, where the Yankee conquest is already bearing sweet and bitter fruit.

It is easy to say that it is a simple matter to go to Cuba. In reality no journey is easy in that part of the world. In order to get to Cuba I had to change my train twice and the boat twice ;





JAMAICA : STREET SCENE IN PORT-ROYAL  
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COSTA RICA : SAN JOSÉ. HANDLING COFFEE  
Reproduced by permission of the Rev. Bishop Ormsby, Paris



## Jamaica and Cuba

and what trains and what boats they were ! The railroad in Costa Rica had been damaged by the rains. The train stopped in the midst of the forest during a perfect deluge of rain ; I had to get out of the car and carry myself and my baggage over a huge quagmire.

The United States have bought the railway of Costa Rica ; they use it for the banana trade. Passenger trains are only allowed to pass on sufferance. A traffic manager last year had the impudence to shunt the President of the Republic's train on to a siding in order to let a banana train pass ! The President sent in a protest. The insolent manager was summoned back to New York. But when presidents are treated with such scant courtesy, you can imagine what the ordinary passenger has to endure !

Our train was four hours late, and it was only by a miracle that we caught the German boat which started for Jamaica that very same evening.

These German boats, which ply between Central America and the United States and which touch at Costa Rica once a week, belong to the *Hamburg-American Line* and bear the names of the Hohenzollern imperial family. The boat which I

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took was called the *Prinz August Wilhelm*. There was a good deal both to praise and to blame about it; the cabins were luxurious, but the food was abominable: the bread was musty and the chickens burnt. And yet these boats are far better than those on the American lines, the *Pacific Mail* and the *United Fruit*, and so I did well to choose a German line.

We took three days to reach Jamaica; three days and three nights—three nights on the Caribbean Sea, such as one never forgets in after life. Thunder rumbled frequently; the hot air was so charged with electricity that the heavens were lit up every minute like a stage with footlights. The effect only lasted a second. I had just time to see the lightning flash, like myriads of golden lizards, across this phosphorescent wall, and then all became black again until another flash illuminated the fantastic architecture of the clouds. At daybreak I saw a thunderbolt, like a red-hot bullet, fall into the sea about a cable-length from our steamer with a great splash which threw the water high into the air.

On reaching Jamaica I beheld a scene of desolation which touched me to the heart. The



PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD

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THE HOUSE OF THE FRENCH CONSUL, JAMAICA, RUINED BY THE  
EARTHQUAKE OF 14TH JANUARY, 1907

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island itself is a paradise of flowers and verdure, but the memorable earthquake of January 14, 1907, reduced the town of Kingston to a heap of ruins. Eighteen months later, the voices of eye-witnesses of that catastrophe still trembled as they related some of the most painful incidents. One man had lost his whole fortune representing one million francs. The mother of another had lain dying for a fortnight in a stable which had been converted into a hospital. Another had seen hundreds of tourists imprisoned in the courtyard of an hotel, out of which there was no escape, and burning alive while they yelled with pain.

The town, which once boasted of its sixty-five thousand inhabitants, burned for three whole days. Cathedral, bank, theatre, everything was burnt. And then they had to make great heaps of the corpses in the squares and sprinkle them with petroleum, so that those thousands of dead bodies might not cause plague among the survivors. Many negroes were caught stealing and were shot on the spot.

The island itself, which is large—it contains eight hundred thousand inhabitants—did not suffer. It is all laid out in banana plantations ;

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and even when a banana field is beaten flat by a cyclone, it springs up again in twelve months.

Jamaica used formerly to live by the sugar trade ; but now it lives by bananas. Who, then, eat these millions and millions of bananas ? The Anglo-Saxon race. They all go to London, or to New York. As the banana is easily cultivated and extremely nourishing, it is destined to enjoy a long reign of popularity. One can foresee the day when it will become a successful rival to rice and potatoes.

At the present day it assures prosperity to the planters of Central America who cultivate it, but it also does a good deal of harm. The Indians and negroes have never been famed for industry ; they are now reverting to their old wild, vagrant habits. What is the good of working when one need only stretch out one's hand towards the bananas, which grow by the wayside, in order to get as much as one can eat in a day ? There are no labourers in the fields and no servants in town. Will the age of the banana be the age of universal laziness, and will that golden fruit prove a curse ?

I have just said that this island is a paradise ;



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but nowhere on the face of this earth do we find a perfect or a lasting paradise. Jamaica is only pleasant as long as the winter lasts. Just at that time it happened to be infested by mosquitoes : huge, countless and particularly venomous mosquitoes. My face and hands were one mass of sores at the end of twenty-four hours. My red, swollen forehead was like a panorama of the Alps at sunset. My hands had ceased to look like hands : they were like two melons. I felt I must fly ! What a pity ! The hotel was the first really comfortable inn I had met with in America. This hotel contained not only bathrooms but a swimming-bath in the basement.

And so I had to take the boat to Cuba, leave the English island for the Spanish-American island ! Now Spanish inns are abominable places ; Yankee hotels are clean, but the attendance is usually bad. The English hotel realizes perfection.

However, as the traveller, like everyone else, is obliged to consider his horse, which, in my case, was represented by my body, I was obliged to resist the temptations of this way-side inn ; so I sailed for Cuba in order to see how the United States treat their fallen foes.

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That short sojourn in Jamaica revealed to me another move in the Yankees' little game ; this English possession in the West Indian Islands, whose trade is nearly entirely monopolized by New York, at present does not think of shaking off John Bull's yoke, but when the latter sells her to Cousin Jonathan, the produce of Jamaica will be able to enter the United States duty free ; that day the Jamaican planters will illuminate their houses in honour of this happy event.

There are two themes upon which the tourist is always harping :— the tropical vegetation of Cuba and the local colour of Havana. That is because the greater number of these tourists come straight from Europe or New York ; they think that they are the first people to discover a palm tree or a Creole wearing a mantilla. But when you come via Costa Rica the impression is quite different. In fact, the island of Cuba is the least picturesque of all the West Indian islands. Its trees have been cut down in order to make room for the fields of sugar-cane and the tobacco plantations. Everyone knows that wealth and beauty do not always walk hand in hand. M. Paul

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Adam, who crossed the island on his way to the exhibition of Saint Louis, wrote that he had seen through the carriage window: "an exquisite vision of beauty, like a peep into the garden of Eden!" Who was the Eve who made that Adam think that the monotonous perspective of tobacco-fields resembled the Garden of Eden?

The only resemblance between Cuba and the Garden of Eden is that the little children there run about as naked as the angels in paradise.

As half the population is black, half these little angels are chocolate-coloured. They are the prettiest. The negro, whose face is so bestial when he grows up, makes an adorable baby with dimpled arms and fat little belly. For these tiny gentlemen munch so much sugar-cane that their inflated stomachs make them look like so many black bees. The white child, with its flabby cheeks and sickly look, does not compare favourably with its brown brother. He looks as if the heavenly Sculptor had made him out of the remains of the lump of plaster from which his little brother had been formed.

Havana is a big town containing three hundred thousand inhabitants. For the last ten years

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the Americans have been beautifying it and making it more healthy ; but they have also made it more commonplace. In another ten years it will be no more interesting to visit than New Orleans or San Francisco now are. The harbour used to be full of sharks which fed upon the refuse. The Americans constructed drains by which all the refuse was carried far out into the sea, and so these horrible, but picturesque, scavengers were obliged to move on.

The Cubans used to be very dirty in their habits but much admired for their personal beauty. Now they are clean and no one thinks much of their looks. Whole families no longer wash in the same basin in water which was only changed twice a week. The Yankee authorities have forced them to construct certain necessary sanitary conveniences and public baths, and to filter their water. That is something. But the Cuban *señoras* have left off wearing their gaily coloured shawls and now wear muslin blouses ; their *caballeros* have replaced the tight-fitting Andalusian trousers by the hideous sloppy suit so dear to the tailors of New York. From head to foot, from his closely-shaved chin to his clumsy boots,

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the Cuban tries, as much as his native elegance and vivacity will allow him to do so, to copy the thick-set, phlegmatic North American.

Cuba, like Panama, is a free republic, that is to say she is only free in name. Owing to recent disorders, she no longer owns a president of her own choice, but a Yankee governor, who is an arbitrary dictator. He has promised to retire next year if the nation will consent to elect its new president in an orderly fashion. But when once the Yankee capitalist gets his claws in, he takes good care to keep them there.

Cuba's riches, or to be more truthful, let us say her only rich possession, is the tobacco trade which employs thirty thousand workmen and represents an annual exportation of one hundred and fifty millions. The American Trust has monopolized nearly all the best-known brands, from the *Bock* and the *Henry Clay* to the least known. Three important brands, the *Upmann*, *Punch*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, have alone been able to keep their independence.

Señor Manuel Lopez, the owner of the *Punch* brand, returned to the managers of the Yankee Trust their letter in which they asked him for

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what sum he would consent to sell his manufactory, with this curt reply :

“ All the gold in the United States would not suffice to buy up Manuel Lopez ! ” Bravo !

That was true Castilian pride in its best form.

Having learnt something by this rebuff, the Trust sent a blank cheque to Mr. Upmann, with a message to the effect that the owner of that celebrated manufactory might fill in any sum he liked. Mr. Upmann returned the blank cheque.

Most of the owners, who allowed themselves to be tempted by gold, now regret their blind folly. I know one manufacturer who goes every day to the workshops of the Trust in order to see that the cigars, which still bear his name on their label, are made properly. They gave him two and a half millions for his name ; but that name he had made famous by his care and trouble in manufacturing his cigars ; he does not intend that his name shall be dishonoured by carelessness and inferior materials. So he continues to work for the honour of his name.

Nothing can take the place of the master's eye ; cigar smokers—I do not smoke cigars, so I am no judge—say that the celebrated brands

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are no longer the same thing now that they are made by a Trust. In old days competition and *amour-propre* forced the small manufacturer to choose the very best materials and to use the greatest care in manufacturing his cigars ; now, no matter how expert and how highly paid the ordinary workman may be, he will never be able to turn out an equally good article.

I wanted to inspect the workshops belonging to the Trust. But I was told that the workmen had been on strike for the last three weeks. It seems that they demand a rise of ten per cent, although their wages are quite high enough—they vary between ten and thirty-five francs a day.

However, by some lucky chance which I cannot account for, the independent manufactories had not gone on strike. I found them hard at work. I inspected one which employs one thousand workmen at Havana, and four hundred on its different plantations on the island. There is an old proverb which says that nobody is worse shod than the shoemaker's wife ; however, here was an exception to the rule, for these cigar-makers are great smokers and like to smoke the very best brands. The manufactory calculates

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that its employés smoke from seven to eight thousand of its best cigars daily! Those eight thousand cigars are put down as current expenses.

Tell me what you like best, and I will tell you what you are.

When we know that the Russians' favourite pastime is drinking, that the French prefer to talk and the English to play rough games, we know that the Russian is a dreamer, the Frenchman a logician and the Englishman a fighter. We must not imagine that, because Havana is celebrated for its fine tobacco, the Cuban's favourite occupation is smoking or rolling cigars between his fingers. If he *is* always rolling them, it is because he does so mechanically, without thinking what he is about. His thoughts are elsewhere. The Cuban only lives to love.

Doubtless the attraction of the sexes is a universal phenomenon; ever since the birth of time men and women have been attracted to one another. However, most men, and not a few women, manage to think of something else at times. But it is not so with the Cubans.

The Havanese begins to fall in love at the early



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age of eleven years, and he continues in that happy state until the day of his death. He chooses a trade, a profession, because he must do something to earn his living, but he takes little or no interest in it. And that is why he cares nothing for art and literature. What is the good? His mind is busy with other things: he loves. Would you have him take an interest in politics? He will do so sometimes in the hope of getting some well-paid berth which requires but little work on his part and which will enable him to surround the object of his affections with luxury and pleasures. If he travels it is only to go to Paris, the paradise of the North and South American.

His love is unlike that of Dante for Beatrice. The young Cuban does not pretend to be faithful, and his love-making is conducted on very prosaic lines. Some little mulatto girl usually gives him his first lesson in the art. Then he flirts with his cousins and friends, gets engaged, breaks off the engagement, finally marries and, on the morrow, goes off to make fresh conquests, and so on to the end of the chapter. Like the butterfly, he dies young. He tries to imitate the butterfly, with his huge shirt collar and his patent leather shoes.

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If you could see him in the public swimming-bath, you would be terrified by his thinness, his bent back, narrow shoulders, and projecting ribs. It is easy to tell how long it will be before he dies of galloping consumption.

The best streets, that is to say the Prado, the public promenade along the seashore, and the celebrated Calle Obispo, are filled with groups of five or six sneering, impudent-looking, clean-shaven young fellows, tricked out in the sloppy clothes beloved of their Yankee model. These young men used to annoy ladies walking alone in the streets. The American police, after having vainly tried incarceration, at last found the only remedy : they now fine the insolent fellows ten dollars, and as Don Juan needs all his spare cents to buy his neckties he now behaves himself.

For the Cubans are poor. The old Spanish colony and the new American colony divide all the island's riches between them. The Yankees had to buy the celebrated cigar brands, which they have now made into a Trust, from the Spaniards. Whenever the Cuban gets a little money he spends it in twenty-four hours on toilet articles and other luxuries. They do not care

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whether their homes are comfortable or not. I saw several flats whose owners pay eleven thousand francs a year for them ; the drawing-rooms were splendid, but the dining-rooms and bedrooms simply didn't exist ! They eat anyhow, at any time ; they sleep on camp-beds put up in any stray corner.

The Cuban woman is not a good housekeeper ; she, too, is always in love. When her brother begins to strut about, she begins to divide her day into two parts : she devotes the morning to her toilet, or rather to long meditations in front of her looking-glass ; unkind people say that she does not spend much time in her bath, because bathing is said to be injurious to the health. The Cuban ladies gravely recommend their foreign friends never to take a bath. All their washing consists of dipping a rag into alcohol and smearing it over their faces. When the family purse happens to be well filled, the alcohol is exchanged for a Parisian perfume costing one hundred francs a bottle.

At five o'clock, the Havanese, dressed in white with a sky-blue or a scarlet ribbon in her hair, according to whether her locks be fair or dark, her velvety eyes shining beneath the blackened

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eyebrows and her lips well rouged, takes up a position behind the high unglazed drawing-room window, which is usually on a level with the street and protected by bars. It is there that she spends the whole evening, seated in her rocking-chair, or standing behind the bars in order to purr and coo to her lover on the pavement outside.

If you walk down any street in the fashionable quarter between the Prado and the sea about the hour of sunset, you will see the same scene enacted over and over again. What do these caged doves say to their would-be tamers? Childish things, foolish nothings, or else bitter reproaches, jealous words which are the lover's last shift all over the world. So the Cuban belles spend the first years of their youth in flirting. Strange to say, notwithstanding this bad beginning, they make most excellent wives. Here, as in Costa Rica, all foreigners who know anything about the married lives of the natives, with one accord declare that the women are a hundred times better than the men. The Cuban woman makes a splendid wife and mother, while the husband, as a general rule, is not up to much.

Poor fellow! Is it really all his fault? His

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temperament is against him ; the flowers are so beautiful in those climes that he must be forgiven if he loses his head at times ; like the butterfly, he flits from one to another without being able to recover his senses. I have already observed in all Latin countries, and in Cuba in especial, that if tropical America is destined to be swallowed up by North America, if Spanish-American civilization is bound to disappear on account of its lack of higher education and commercial enterprise, we must throw the blame on the fascinating, bewitching Creole women. The fair sex is too fair out there ; she seems to stupefy her victims. The Philistines from New York and Chicago can come whenever they like ; they will find thousands of Delilahs ready to welcome them !

Havana has already become quite a fashionable town ; and it is destined to become still more so. The Americans confess quite openly that they intend to turn it into the Monte Carlo of the New World. Three or four Palace Hotels have already been built. The Prado is being covered with vulgar but luxurious palaces, whose façades look as if they were made of whipped cream. The Vedado, the rich quarter reaching from one end

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of the bay and connected with the Prado by a wide promenade facing the ocean and winding along outside white marble porticoed villas, took four years to build.

Towards evening many carriages driven by smart negro coachmen, in white liveries and grey hats, come to parade up and down. The two hundred automobiles of Havana rush along this road ten or twelve times in an hour and give one the impression that there must be at least two thousand of them in Cuba. A café, a Grecian temple and an old Spanish fortress try to draw the tourist's attention from the spectacle of a gorgeous sunset on the Caribbean Sea. In the port a huge steamer with its three decks was starting for New York ; as it steamed out of port it scraped the stones of the jetty. A sailing-vessel from Vera Cruz or New Orleans, flapping its white canvas wings, entered the port like a great bird, weary of flying, returning to its nest. I saw many mulatto women dressed in the latest Paris fashions lolling among the cushions of their victorias.

I might have been in Europe except for the coachmen's ebony faces and the mulatto women's swarthy complexions. The Calle Obispo, Hava-

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na's Rue de la Paix, reminded me still more of Europe. Nine out of ten shops pretend to belong to Frenchmen, sell Parisian toilets made in Cologne and Lyons silk ribbons woven at Neuchâtel. Both windows and shops are small. The Yankee's beloved caravansaries have not yet put in an appearance, but they will soon come.

A huge and hideous bank built of marble has already been erected. Enormous advertisements invite the passer-by to walk in and inspect the safe, whose massive door—a sheet of steel weighing fourteen tons—cost (at least, so the advertisement tells us) fifty thousand dollars. Surely a bank with such a solid door must be a safe place in which to invest one's money? I examined the wonderful safe; the door was round and the lock seemed as complicated as the inside of a clock. Jules Verne, in his *Voyage in the Moon*, describes a similar mechanism. Let us hope that there will be no "moonshine" about this bank! But a financier's honour is, in many respects, similar to a woman's honour. It can be but a poor thing if it has to depend on bolts and bars; and a quarter of a million francs is a heavy price to pay for a lock.

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The old Spanish town of former days, before the advent of Paris fashions and New York bluff, can only be seen in the shabby quarters such as the Calle San Isidor or the little theatre of the *Actualidades*.

The Calle San Isidor is the sailors' street, such as one finds in all seaport towns. Here we see dancing-saloons and drinking-shops galore. Most of the women whom one meets in this quarter are Spaniards ; but some of the *habituées* are black.

The popular little theatre of the *Actualidades* is more picturesque. The most celebrated Andalusian dancers do not disdain to appear on its smoke-begrimed stage before a highly-coloured audience. The Spanish patrician, such as Goya painted her, with her thin, waxen-hued visage and her great restless, feverish eyes, elbows the mercury-coloured mulatto woman in the stalls which are only separated from the herd of excited, gesticulating negroes by a thin partition.

One evening I saw a dancer, as agile as a panther, arrayed in a spangled dress, her face streaming with perspiration and her fingers clutching her castagnettes, writhe and twist above the foot-lights. Two little bare-headed Spanish ladies,



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seated in the balcony—probably they, too, were dancers—pelted her with roses, a perfect shower of roses, which they had just bought of the flower-girls! It seems that the ballerina had surpassed herself that night, no doubt in honour of the little comrades in the balcony, and the audience, crazy with delight, yelled itself hoarse; those hundreds of harsh, guttural voices sounded very much like a death-rattle.

The dancer in the spangled costume, a thin, dark woman with rather too long a nose but beautiful eyes, encouraged by this audience of connoisseurs, skipped about the stage, reared herself up like an Arab steed, writhed like a snake, shook her black locks as if she were shaking ashes from a torch, bent and swayed like a palm tree, sank down like a tired wave on the sea-shore, and finally took up her position in the middle of the stage with nostrils dilated, head thrown well back, and hands on hips, like a statue of proud defiance.

All the men and women in that theatre were pale and trembling with excitement; they, too, had danced that wild dance of desire and revolt. And when she courtesied, breathless and ex-

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hausted, they all sank down into their seats with a weary sigh.

Will this passionate nation really consent to eat humble pie at the phlegmatic North American's behest? Alas! has it not always expended its energy over similar futilities and trifles?

Mr. Taft, Mr. Roosevelt's successor at the White House, not very long ago paid a visit to Havana. With his hands behind his back, his lighted cigar still between his fingers, he proposed a toast which awakened fond hopes in the breast of many a Cuban patriot. During the course of his speech, he said:

"My friends, we don't want to annex you, we want you to keep the government in your own hands. So next year we are going to withdraw our troops as we have already done on a previous occasion. But remember! If your political squabbles lead to another outbreak of civil war and if trade is imperilled in your country, we shall return, and this time we shall never leave you again!"

The political men at Washington mean what they say. In every country, home politics come

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before foreign politics. Before satisfying their imperialist ambitions, Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Taft will take care not to alienate the votes of the Southern States ; for the latter are dead against an annexation which, they fear, would injure their sugar and tobacco trade. But it is the same all over the world : politicians propose and financiers dispose. When once the redoubtable cape of the presidential elections has been passed, the Yankee business men who formed the Havana Tobacco Trust, who built the Santiago railway, who have bought all the best plots of ground on the island, will force the United States to annex Cuba.

I must confess that the rich Cubans secretly desire this annexation. Four years ago, during the disorders which caused the Yankees to intervene for the second time, Havana was very nearly pillaged. The army of insurgents was about to enter the capital, when the rebels' mothers and sisters, imitating the conduct of the Roman matrons towards Coriolanus, went and begged them to delay their entry for a few hours, thus giving the American soldiers time to arrive upon the scene.

This civil war lasted forty days and ruined the credit of the Republic. In future the Cubans

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would be unable to count upon French and English capital ; the island was completely at the mercy of Yankee capitalists.

Both rich and poor in Havana detest the American occupation, because it humiliates them. They feel the heavy hand of the master. When the governor, Mr. Magoon, placed policemen at either end of the street in which his palace is situated and forbade anyone to pass under his windows after dark, lest the noise of a carriage or cart rumbling over the pavement should disturb his slumbers, the haughty Cubans, forced to go out of their way to please him, realized that they had got a hard taskmaster. But the memory of that day when Havana was nearly pillaged by bands of crazy negroes led by a handful of ambitious men, obliges them to champ their bits in silence.

The fear of the negro in those climes is the beginning of wisdom. Cuba contains about two million inhabitants, half of whom are black. And the Cuban negroes, although they are no longer slaves, are the most ignorant and unintelligent in the whole of the West Indies. Many of them seem as ignorant as their African ancestors, whose witchcraft they continue to practise. One

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of the most horrible of these customs consists of tearing out the heart of a white child and giving it to some palsied old nigger that he may eat it and become young again. There were two cases of this horrible crime during the fortnight I spent in Cuba. It is useless to torture the culprits by strangling them with the garrot ; they still keep up this terrible custom.

Is the negro capable of being educated ? Yes, certainly, but to what extent ? And will there be no sudden relapses ? That learned man, Dr. Montanet, professor of anthropology at the University of Cuba, told me of a typical case.

A black man from Hayti named Seneca was sent, while still quite a youth, to France, where he won first prizes for rhetoric and philosophy at the general examinations organized in all Paris *lycées*. The *Temps* newspaper, amazed at his intelligence, immediately offered him a place on its staff. So at eighteen years of age the black Seneca became correspondent of the great French newspaper.

However, Mr. Seneca soon asked to be allowed to take a holiday ; he wanted to go and see his old parents in the far-away West Indies.

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The editors of the *Temps*, highly pleased with his articles, gave him six months' leave, paid his voyage and promised to continue to pay his salary during his absence. The prodigy from Hayti, in elegant attire, embarked. No one heard anything more of him. At the end of his leave, still no news. They wrote to him ; no reply. The legation was asked to make inquiries : Mr. Seneca had gone off no one knew where. At last, after many months, a servant in the employ of the French ambassador at Havana came to tell his master that he had found the long-lost Seneca. The ambassador followed his footman, who took him to the negro quarter and made him enter a sort of dirty cellar. Here two great negroes, clothed in rags, were amusing themselves, like two children, by making a scorpion and a cockroach fight.

“ Is Mr. Seneca, who used to write for the *Temps*, here ? ”

One of the negroes, who was busy tying a thread to his scorpion's leg, lazily lifted his head and grunted :

“ Here I am ! ”

“ I've got a letter for you from the *Temps* newspaper.”

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“ The newspaper ? Oh ! be blowed ! I’ve had enough of that dirty work. I’m quite comfortable here, and here I shall stay ! ”

From that day no one has ever seen anything more of Mr. Seneca, who won first prizes for rhetoric and philosophy at a Paris *lycée*. He has gone back to his old negro habits. His African ancestry has been too much for that philosopher.

But it is not always the case.

At the present moment one of the most distinguished political men in Cuba is a coloured man who asks to be given the post of Minister of Public Education ; he deserves it ! But he won’t get it ! People fear that he will favour his race, whose assiduous attendance at the elementary schools already puts the white children to shame. The fact is still more marked at the University of Havana. There are but few coloured youths among the male students, because all high positions are closed to coloured folk ; but in the female classes, where they can work side by side with their white sisters, thirty out of the fifty female students are mulatto girls and half a dozen are negresses.

Between Uncle Tom’s cabin, the refuge of dark and bloody African superstitions, and that cabin

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suddenly transformed into an arsenal of modern science, the Cubans don't know which to choose ; the uneducated negro constitutes a danger, and the educated negro is no less dangerous. . . . And unfortunately Uncle Sam can do nothing to save the Cubans from Uncle Tom. The United States' ten million negroes give them too much to think about.

If consumption, the outcome of poverty and debauch, which begins at eight years of age in those countries, did not mow down whole troops of these prolific natives, we should have something else to do than to consider the problem of Latin America and Yankee America.

There would be only one problem : the colour problem.

The island of Cuba has suddenly begun to express tremendous admiration for Spain. When the Spanish training-ship, the *Nautilus*, stopped at Havana during its six months' cruise in American waters, the casual visit of this handful of Castilian sailors was made the pretext for a whole week of public rejoicings and an extraordinary exhibition of enthusiasm.



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Havana decked herself out in red and yellow flags—blood and dust: heroism and sterility; as long as that flag fluttered over her public buildings it was cursed and hated, but now that it floats over the dreams of the past its crude colours have changed to purple and gold.

A month before the arrival of the corvette, the Cuban newspapers every morning devoted several columns of print to this expected event; the public squares were decorated with triumphal arches, and the fashionable streets were so hidden beneath streamers and flags stretching across from one house to another that it was like walking through multi-coloured tunnels. Please to observe that the names of these streets, which used to remind the Cubans of the hated Spanish domination, were changed scarcely more than ten years ago. Please to observe that those triumphal arches stand close to the monument erected to some Cuban students who were shot for having insulted the tomb of a Spanish general. Please to observe that by a strange coincidence these newspapers at that very time were publishing telegrams from Madrid announcing the publication of General Weyler's memoirs.

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Weyler! Havana's latest tyrant; more detested by the Cubans than ever Russian governor was hated by the Poles! Weyler! the inventor of those "concentration camps" in which he herded the insurgents' wives and children, so that the troops up country might be unable to get food in the villages. When once he had got them safe he omitted to feed those wives and children, who died like flies. Havana was one of those concentration camps.

However, newspapers, triumphal arches, streamers, flags, all spoke of the *amor indestructibile* of Cuba for Spain, of the daughter for her mother! When the training-ship was signalled—it was a little sailing-vessel of fifteen hundred tons and it took four weeks to get from Vera Cruz to Havana: the transatlantic boats only take two days—the whole town went mad with delight. All the inhabitants left their business in order to rush up and down the streets as if they were demented; everyone wanted to see the *Nautilus* enter the harbour. The rich men of the town paid several hundred francs to be allowed to embark on the tugs which were going to meet the Spanish boat. The cannons thundered.



A STATION ON THE RAILWAY FROM MEXICO TO VERA CRUZ



COSTA RICA: ON THE PRAIRIES OF PÉRALTA



## Jamaica and Cuba

Fireworks had been prepared for the evening, but at midday the inhabitants could wait no longer, and the rockets, Catherine-wheels, etc., were let off with a terrific explosion, but with no more effect than a little cloud of smoke, just as if the blue ceiling of heaven had suddenly cracked and a little plaster had dropped through the crevice. And the niggers, poor, good-natured creatures, who, God knows, have no cause to love Spain, took the opportunity afforded by these universal rejoicings to send off crackers in the streets, which operation affords the greatest pleasure to the black race.

There was a constant succession of luncheon-parties and picnics, balls and banquets, where the astonished officers of the *Nautilus* received the most ardent protestations of affection in toasts, which were reproduced with great enthusiasm in the newspapers next morning. The officers did their best to reply suitably, and were polite enough not to ask the Cubans why they had not shown this affection for them ten years ago, before the war ; neither did they ask what Spain had done to deserve so much affection after such bitter hatred.

## The Fair Land of Central America

Spain, alas! had done nothing, and will never do anything. Spain, as the mother of the republics of Latin America, has borne too many children. Her children have drained all her strength; the huge effort of the conquest, when her best blood was shed on the plains of the New World, reduced her to such a state of weakness that she was nigh unto death. Poor mother! she was so exhausted that she was forced to keep quiet; in future her ambition was limited to making her children support her for three centuries. Her efforts to keep them in leading-strings, when they wanted to go their own way, used up her last remaining strength. Spain is like a decrepit old dowager who is about to die in the odour of sanctity. The lover of her youth, the heroic *conquistador*, long ago made way for the father-confessor.

But though Spain may have done nothing, the United States have been active; so active, in fact, that the Cubans have cause to feel uneasy. The Yankee financiers are preparing a silver yoke for the poor Cubans' shoulders; that yoke will be so grievously heavy that the Spanish yoke of iron will seem almost light in comparison.

## Jamaica and Cuba

The Cuban Creole feels that it is useless to struggle against the terrible business men whom the New York boats bring daily to his island. Slowly but surely, with law but no mercy on their side, they will reduce the planter of old days, the old trader, to the rôle of employé or clerk.

The Spanish colony, which is still the largest and the richest of all the foreign colonies, has cleverly exploited this ever-increasing dread to the benefit of the Mother Country. This colony, since the War of Independence, has adopted an attitude of disdainful indifference. It stands alone. It probably finds it more difficult to forgive the Cuban rebel than the Yankee rival. It much prefers the security afforded to it by the American occupation to the worries of a native government. Yet, such is the power of race feeling, that local interests and private spite are now being forgotten, and all are joining together to repel the intruder. The Northern invader, the fair-haired, red-cheeked giant, cold and methodical, who has coolly come to take the management of the Central and Southern races into his own hands, who forces the conquered to accept the English language, his morning

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tub, his hideous costume, and his rough games, and insolently says straight out that he despises the lingo and the customs of Spanish-America ; this Yankee who does everything he can to make himself detested has aroused a feeling of universal antipathy, not only in Cuba but in Panama, in Mexico as in Buenos Ayres.

The Cubans' enthusiasm for the sailors of the *Nautilus* reminds me of the enthusiasm displayed fifteen years ago by the Parisians for the Russian admiral Avellane's sailors. It was not that Paris really cared so much for Russia, but she wanted to show her hatred of Germany. In Havana it is not so much that Spain is regretted as that the United States are hated.

In what measure can this aversion impede the triumphal march of the stronger race ? It can help in that the latter, who means to rule by fear, lacks the troops necessary to ensure its supremacy. Now the United States have no army. Do they possess a fleet ? What good is an ironclad without a crew determined to win or die ? The navy of the Stars and Stripes is nothing but a band of many-coloured mercenaries. Now these did all very well to bombard the



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Spaniards' old wooden boats when there was no danger, but they would soon knuckle under if they had to face one of those terrible duels of artillery which had such a demoralizing effect even on the bravest of the brave at the Battle of Tsoushima.

If the Japanese navy ever beats the American navy, the United States will fall to pieces ; fair-weather friends often turn tail in a sudden squall ! The Southern and Western States would then recover their autonomy. Perhaps . . . but no one can be sure, for this would be an unprecedented event.

But one thing is quite certain, and that is that from one end of Central America to the other the Yankee prestige would fade away into the past like a bad dream, leaving nothing but a memory of bitter hatred.

There is not much sentiment about men and matters in the New World. But sentiment, on some future occasion, is destined to play an important part, and the Yankees are very foolish to shut their eyes to this fact.

It is in Havana that one really realizes how the

## The Fair Land of Central America

lack of all intellectual intercourse makes a long stay in this huge Spanish-America almost unbearable.

The novelty of the magnificent park-like scenery of the West Indian Islands, the luminous horizons of Panama, the high plateaux of Costa Rica isolated from the rest of the world by lovely virgin forests, were powerless to prevent me feeling that something was wanting. In Cuba, that great island, which is like the suburb of some huge town, one finds men and women to compensate for the loss of the glorious trees ; but I must confess that the specimens of the human race which I met there were terribly primitive in their habits and customs.

Both Creoles, the children of a tropical clime, and starving immigrants driven from Europe by hunger, care for nothing outside their own agricultural or commercial affairs ; they take no interest in anything whatever, and live in a state of intellectual penury of which our little European towns can have no idea. Here are two examples of their ignorance. In the best hotel in Santiago de Cuba, a town containing sixty-five thousand inhabitants, the hall-porter read on one of my



SANTIAGO: BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

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COSTA RICA: MILITARY BAND

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trunks the label of an hotel in Naples where I had been during a tour in Italy.

“Where’s Naples?” he asked the cabman who was helping him to carry my luggage. “Where’s Naples? What part of the world is it in?”

The cabman knew all about it and said :

“Oh! Naples is in Central America!”

While in Havana I had a conversation with the editor of one of its best newspapers. We were discussing a question of local politics in which he took the keenest interest. I recommended him to take matters more calmly, to remember that things do not last for ever, as Spinoza said.

“Spinoza!” said he, shaking his head. “Oh, yes! that German philosopher.”

You can imagine that journalists who fancy that Spinoza was a German, who write for a public which believes that Naples is in Central America, cannot produce anything very interesting. During my stay in Havana I saw all the best newspapers every day; with the exception of a few cablegrams in three lines on the latest events on the planet and the everlasting article

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on the elections, all space not devoted to advertising was filled with silly vapourings, written in Keepsake style, that is to say unless Fate is kind and has produced a sensational crime, or some national festivity has given rise to some enthusiastic outburst of patriotism.

The Cuban never reads anything else but his newspapers. The famous Employés' Club, a palatial building which cost seven millions to build, where twenty-five thousand employés can meet and talk together for the sum of five francs a month, contains, it is true, besides a fencing-school and a bar, a library of handsomely bound books. The works of Alexandre Dumas *père* stand side by side with those of Georges Ohnet. I don't know if anyone ever opens them, but I do know by experience that no one ever looks at Victor Hugo's works.

The library only possesses one book by him, and the title of that book is: "By Royal Command." Astonished at finding an unknown work by our great French author I hastened to take it down from its shelf; on opening the cover I perceived that the Cuban bookbinder had taken "By Royal Command," which was

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printed on the first page, as the title of the book. Not one of the twenty-five thousand members of the club had asked for that book or pointed out the bookbinder's error to the librarian.

The Spanish Antilles and the seventeen nations of Latin America, peopled with forty million inhabitants all speaking, with the exception of the Brazilians, the same language, count for nothing or next to nothing in the world of art and science. The only professor who deserves the title of *savant*, for he founded an interesting museum of anthropology, is Dr. Montanet, a Frenchman. In Central America I met two or three historians, who take an interest in Indian antiquities. I heard of two novels which had lately been published, one in Lima, the other in Bogota, in which the customs of Peru and Colombia are described. Bogota is also the only town in the New World which can boast of a School of Art, if one can give the name of school to a handful of painters who imitate Parisian or Spanish art. That is all. In architecture and furnishing everything is copied; no one thinks of trying to be original. All machinery and all agricultural implements are imported from Europe

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and the United States. Finally, if we include cookery among the sister arts, I must confess that this art is absolutely in a state of barbarism. It is atrocious.

Besides the profession to which he owes his income, and the usual politics—which are a profession also—the Spanish-American thinks of one thing only : love. To love he owes his taste for lyric poetry which he writes, if not perfectly, at least with great assiduity. It seems that Peru, Colombia and Guatemala all possess great poets. The Peruvian, José Chocana, is considered particularly gifted. As I am a foreigner I cannot tell whether they are really great poets, but I can quite see that they are very numerous, even numberless. There is not a single newspaper which does not print every morning long poems in praise of love. The *señorita's* eyes, teeth, lips, hair, hands and feet, are compared in turn to all the beauties in heaven and on earth. It cannot be denied that they are very much in love, but their way of expressing their feelings is not original.

People who try to be original come to a bad end. Misunderstood by their confrères, and often



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despised by the Muse who inspired them, they soon begin to indulge in all sorts of eccentricities. During a visit to one of those little capitals of Central America, I found that a native d'Annunzio had scandalized all the inhabitants. The poet had taken the opportunity afforded by a beautiful moonlight night in order to conduct his disciples, the local poetasters, to the cemetery. When there, they disinterred the body of a celebrated poet who had been dead for twenty years at least ; the skull was washed in spiced wine and used as a champagne-glass at a solemn banquet in honour of the deceased poet.

When European decadent poets want to make the respectable middle-classes "sit up," they write something in this style :—

"Let us rest with our feet reposing on the head of a forest lion,  
While we smoke our opium in the skull of a new-born babe."

As the respectable middle-classes in Central America never open a book, the decadents are obliged to have recourse to deeds instead of words. But the profession of poet is an expensive affair. What are they to do when they have no money ? Commit suicide ! A few years ago a certain poet, a native of Bogota, killed himself

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in the following manner. He was a great bearded fellow who, after reading the works of Signor d'Annunzio and Co., had become disgusted with Colombia. As he was not rich enough to go to Paris to live the life of his choice, he, like a sentimental seamstress, bought a quantity of flowers and dozens of perfumed wax candles, dressed himself in his best clothes, laid himself down upon his bed, and then shot himself through the heart. He was buried outside the walls of the cemetery. Colombia is the only country in South America which still remains Catholic to the verge of fanaticism. His mother and sisters had to do public penance in the Cathedral in order that Christian folk might forgive them for being related to a reprobate.

That is why it is dangerous to think in a country where no one thinks. If you want to turn your thoughts to good account and to avoid finding yourself in Bedlam, you must learn to think properly. If you think too much about certain subjects, you are sure to come to grief. Luckily for Central America this seldom happens.

## MEXICO

More mistaken ideas—A priestly paradise—Twelve million Indians—Priest-ridden natives—Cruelty to children—An archbishop's savings—Madrid in rags—Four hundred thousand inhabitants and three hundred and fifty churches—Saint Michael as a ballet-dancer—Ill-bred Yankees—The gods of Montezuma and Torquemada—In honour of the twelve apostles—Cock-fighting—Female saints—The scandal of the "Forty-one" Club—Gambetta's cook—Mexican cookery—A revolver shot—A menagerie of human beasts—The prisoners' bath—A novelty in prisons—An exhibition of ugliness—An American Rome—Bravery and religion—Lack of poetry—Prosperous foreigners—Why Pan-Iberianism is nothing but a chimera—Yankee ignorance—From Pullman-car to Embassy—The ruins of Palenque—An uninhabitable country—The great bear of the Rocky Mountains—Tragedy in the gold-mining district.

I REACHED Mexico in company with a Breton colonel, a Russian dancer, a Spanish priest and two Irish nuns. These were the first-class passengers on the French transatlantic from Havre which I joined at Havana. I mention them because soldier, dancer, priest and nuns were good specimens of the kind of immigrant

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who, I fondly imagined, would be plentiful in the Mexican republic. But I soon found that I was mistaken. The Mexican is neither quarrelsome nor amorous.

The Breton colonel had come to the New World, not because he loved fighting, but because he wanted to escape persecution at the hands of his fellow-officers on account of his very decided reactionary opinions. The Russian dancer had left Paris, not in search of new conquests in Mexico, but simply in order to escape from a jealous old admirer who, while he said good-bye to her on the quay, shed bitter tears and begged her not to leave him. In vain! Work means freedom, and the dancer was going to Mexico in order to earn her living by executing plastic poses in pink tights in a music-hall. She was dressed very quietly, and spent all her time nursing the other passengers' babies. The Spanish priest, dressed in a long grey linen cassock and a velvet cap which made me take him for a grocer at first, had a sloping head and the profile of a sanctimonious sheep. For the last thirty years he had been priest in an Indian parish near Vera Cruz which he invited me to visit.

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He was the dirtiest man I have ever seen. He had certainly been to Europe and back again in the same collar and shirt. I shuddered at the idea of sleeping at his presbytery, and I took care to stand at a safe distance while I thanked him very politely.

As to the Irish nuns, they were going to found a convent where little Indian maids will be taught how to save their souls and to do fine needlework, and where the community will make quite a nice pile of money while the catechumens, on condition that they sew fourteen hours a day, will eventually be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This is what happens in a good many religious establishments. One of these nuns was young and pretty; she looked as if she would have enjoyed a good laugh, but the elder nun made her sit on a bench by her side throughout the voyage.

The colonel and the dancer were casual immigrants, while the priest and the nuns were going home, so to speak.

Mexico is a perfect paradise upon earth for religious communities. I noticed this fact in the first town which I visited on my way to the

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capital. For Mexico is eight thousand feet above the level of the sea, and it is dangerous to go there without stopping at least once on the way. Doctors recommend new-comers to stop, when they have ascended one thousand feet, at a rather wretched-looking town called Orizaba.

Orizaba has sixty thousand inhabitants. I thought that I had tumbled into the midst of a religious community. One sees nothing but churches, and the inhabitants' chief amusement seems to be saying their prayers ; for, although my visit did not coincide with any festival, the faithful seemed to be going to and from church without intermission. Their dark, fanatical faces, their rags and huge hats remind one of the pilgrims of the Breton *Pardons*. When you get near them you see that they are Red Indians.

Mexico is not a Spanish republic, like the States of Central America which I had seen hitherto, and like all those of South America. It is an Indian State. It is the only Indian State. With the exception of uncultivated Honduras and worn-out Guatemala, the inhabitants

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of all the other republics are almost pure white ; so white are they that the Indian blood, dating from the Conquest, is hardly perceptible. As for the few millions of natives who dwell in the forests, they never come to the towns. Now it is quite different in Mexico, where out of fourteen million subjects twelve million are Red Indians. The present President of the Republic, Señor Porfirio Diaz, is of mixed blood, as was General Benito Juarez, the President who overthrew the Emperor Maximilian. The Creole of Spanish descent seems to be nothing but a foreigner here ; although he owns valuable *haciendas* he only seems to do so on sufferance, like the French *Provençal* who wants to monopolize the country's trade, or the Yankee who is equally anxious to buy its mines and railroads. Neither Creole, Frenchman, nor Yankee seems thoroughly at home.

The genuine, the real Mexican is a thick-set, cadaverous-looking boor who peoples the country and swarms in the towns, with his flat, broad face, small eyes, the face of an Asiatic but more massive and more sleepy-looking. With the exception of his enormous felt sugar-loaf hat,

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as big as an umbrella and as heavy as lead, he dresses like an Asiatic coolie in a shirt and a pair of linen drawers, is equally sober and long-suffering. The Chinese origin is very noticeable in the Indian, except that in this case it is a priest-ridden Chinaman. There were two kinds of priests : the priests of the time of the Aztec domination, and the priests of the Most Holy Inquisition ; both ruled by fear.

Everyone is familiar with the Aztec's monstrous religion, those sacrifices which demanded twenty thousand human victims every year, and their sacred banquets when they ate the flesh of little children, whom they had literally frightened to death, in honour of their gods. On the occasion of the consecration of the Temple of the God of War, which was built in Mexico some years before the Spanish invasion, a frightful hecatomb of seventy thousand captives took place.

A nation which could obey such priests could neither be very intelligent nor very cheerful. To the Spanish priests they owed slavery in this world and the prospect of hell in the next. Slavery has ceased to exist ; it has been replaced





A BULL-FIGHT IN MEXICO: ENTRANCE OF THE CUADRILLA

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## Mexico

by a ridiculous salary, but the fear of hell continues to dominate and awe these minds which have lived in a state of terror for so many centuries. It will be a long time before they can free themselves.

The only people who are fat and jolly in that country wear cassocks. Each priest is king and pacha of his little parish. I could hardly believe the wonderful stories of their morality and immorality, and I asked a good Catholic in the capital to tell me if they were really true. But the latter was obliged to confess :

“What can you expect? Priests are human beings like you and me. Our *padres* are not made of stone. . . . Of course there are exceptions to the rule.”

But there is one thing which is not an exception, and that is the Mexican clergy's wonderful knack of acquiring wealth. It is not yet fifty years since President Juarez confiscated all their goods and chattels, and they are already richer than ever! When the Archbishop of Mexico died a short time ago, he left twenty millions behind him.

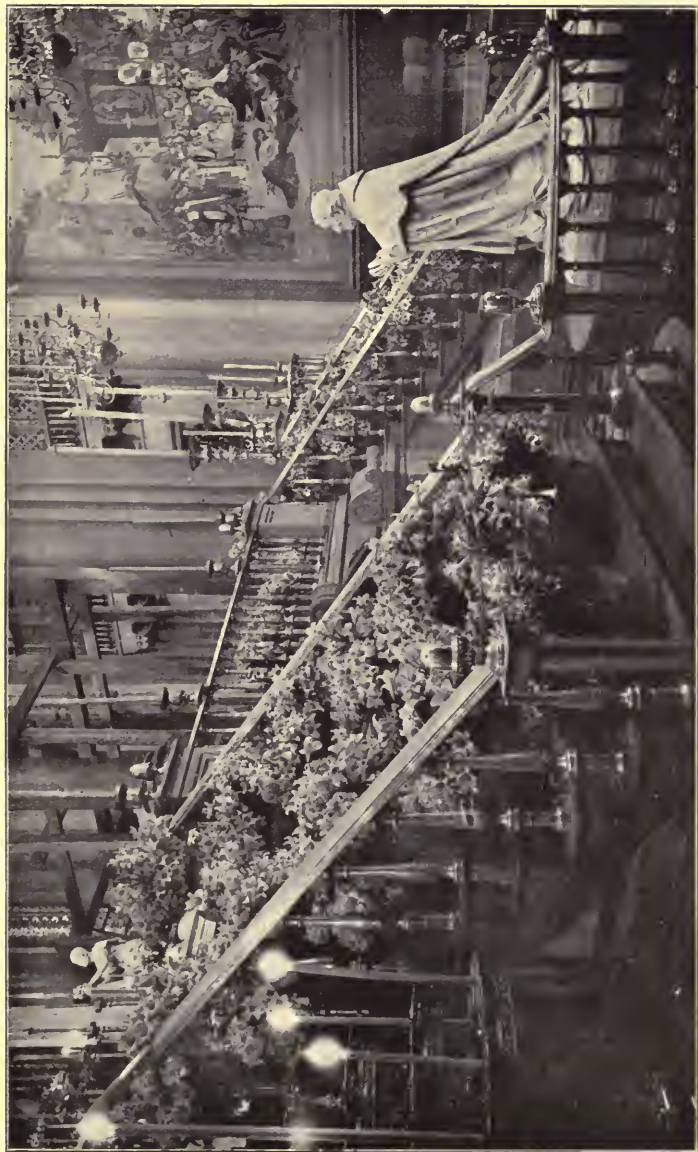
The Catholic with whom I was conversing

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pointed out to me the superiority of such a religious race and the advantages to be reaped by order and obedience. That is all very well for Dives. But if poor Lazarus, who lives in ignorance, dirt and poverty all the days of his life, who drinks brandy and eats pimento, gives his last farthing to buy a candle for the Virgin and expires in dread of hell-fire, could know and understand, he might find that this theory left much to be desired—at least, from his point of view.

The European tourist who comes to Mexico via Havana is able to admire one after the other the two biggest, the only two big towns in tropical America. In old days Mexico used to suffer by comparison. After seeing the Cuban capital, a maritime town with European luxuries, where people turn night into day, where the tramways run day and night without ceasing, the deserted, depressing Aztec capital, with its long, dusty streets, crowded with silent Indians, enclosed by mountains on all sides, impressed the traveller with a sense of poverty and neglect.

Things have changed since those times. For



SILVER RAILING OF PILGRIMAGE CHURCH OF GUADALUPE

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the last five or six years the two towns, once dirty and badly paved, have been attending to their toilet, pulling down their squalid slums and building villas and palaces. But Mexico has won the prize in the race for civilization and modern improvements.

The tobacco and sugar island has not been able to contend with the copper and silver mines, with the huge empire so peculiarly favoured by nature with its hot, temperate and cold climates, five times bigger than France, where two million European mongrels exploit twelve million Indians and where a clever man, Porfirio Diaz, who for the last thirty years has played the rôle of dictator, has shown us that despotism is not altogether without its uses when it is tempered by peace and order.

Although Havana is a very poor imitation of Barcelona, Mexico can rival Madrid in the matter of beautiful public buildings and private residences. But those wide streets lined with huge shops, those broad avenues crowded with the local millionaires' luxurious automobiles—so magnificent are they with their gold and silver fittings, that they almost look like strong boxes

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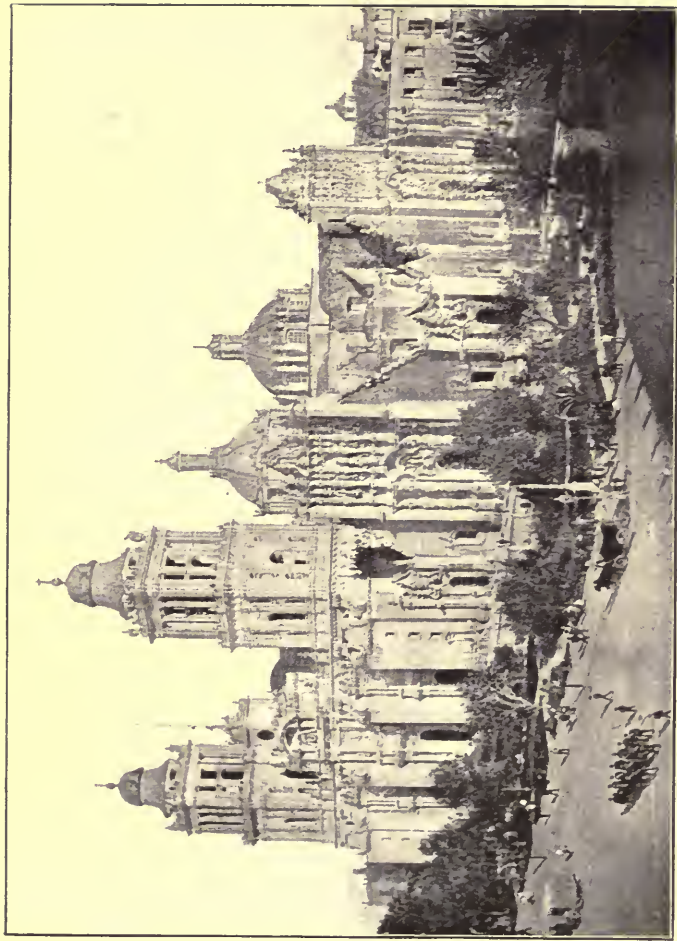
on wheels—all this pomp and ostentation are lost, alas! among the swarms of miserable, barefooted creatures, shivering with cold, hunger and fever, horribly dirty, blear-eyed, abject, covered with vermin and as innumerable as the stars or as their own fleas. Mexico may be a second Madrid; but if it is, it is a Madrid in rags!

Imagine London suddenly invaded by all the starving inhabitants of Ireland, or Paris inhabited solely by the poor populations of Brittany, and you will be able to get a faint idea of the contrast between the Mexican capital and the people whom one sees in its streets.

The Indian workman gets one franc twenty-five centimes for fifteen hours' work. I was assured that he could live quite comfortably on that sum on the *haciendas* and in the mines up country. I don't know anything about the matter. I only know that last year, in a big spinning-mill in Orizaba, they had to shoot four hundred strikers before their fellow-workmen could be induced to resume the yoke.

Be this as it may, in the big towns and in





CATHEDRAL, MEXICO

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## Mexico

Mexico in especial, many a workman who gets fifteen *piastres* wages at the end of a month's toil, spends ten *piastres* on gambling, three on *pulque* (the fermented juice of the aloe) and only gives his wife two *piastres*, representing the sum of five francs, to feed and clothe the whole family. This is the cause of the general cachexy, consumption and such terrible infantile mortality that parents, who usually have a child every year, think themselves lucky if they can manage to rear one or two out of the lot.

Social questions do not exist in Mexico. Alcohol and Catholicism keep the natives well occupied. Mexico, a town of four hundred thousand inhabitants, can boast of three hundred and fifty churches !

The President-dictator for life, Porfirio Diaz, is nearly eighty years of age. The question as to who will be his successor is as yet unanswered. Will the old revolutionary ardour burst forth again ? Most people think that it no longer exists. Thirty years of peace have deprived the handful of ambitious waverers of their leaders, for the latter have filled their pockets and got what they wanted. And then the Yankee capitalists are

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on the look out ; they would soon show their teeth. . . . But . . . but . . . although there is little chance of a political revolution, it is quite possible that there may be a religious upheaval. The Catholic clergy will lose their all-powerful protectress, the kind-hearted, strong-minded Señora Porfirio Diaz, who is thirty years younger than her husband and who has tremendous influence over his mind.

It was thanks to her that the President suspended the old laws made by Benito Juarez, forbidding religious communities to own landed property. His successor's wife is sure to be quite as pious, for the priests rule over all the women-folk out there. But will the new President's wife be as charming and as powerful as her predecessor ? All the white men in Mexico are disbelievers and freemasons. When a woman no longer stands between the clergy and those thousands of believers in nothing, Benito Juarez' confiscations will begin again.

I am glad I saw Mexico before this came about. One may say what one likes about the Catholic religion, but everyone must allow that it is picturesque. I shall never forget a statue of Saint

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Michael in the Cathedral at Orizaba. It stood beside a life-sized statue in wax of Jesus Christ fastened to the pillar and covered with horrible, gaping wounds, the face eaten with ulcers, a more hideous sight even than a horse disembowelled by a bull on the sand of the arena.

By the side of this monstrous specimen of Spanish realistic art, Saint Michael, with a girlish face, wearing a spangled bolero, his naked legs protruding from beneath a ballet-dancer's gauze skirts, was cutting a caper on a cardboard cloud. He was supposed to represent the joys of Paradise. When we get there, if we ever do so, we shall be amused. But, really, reverend gentlemen, your idea of Paradise is not exactly refined! If ever the day comes when the Mexican churches are despoiled of their treasures, I hope somebody will kindly tell me the name and address of the gentleman who buys Saint Michael of Orizaba.

In Mexico, as in the whole of Spanish-America, there is only one question : the Yankee problem, the North American business-man's threat to

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monopolize the nation's riches. However, this threat, which will not be realized for some time still in South America, has ceased to be a threat for Central America ; it has become a certainty and will have to be settled sooner or later. Are the United States going to devour Mexico or are they not ?

The attack, at present, is more gradual and less marked than one would think ; they are making a good show of resistance. So far, the North Americans have only hankered after the mines and the railroads. The agricultural *haciendas* are still in the hands of the chief Mexican families. The trade of the capital is monopolized by a colony of prosperous and industrious Frenchmen whom the United States will find it very difficult to oust. And what is more, the Yankees' army of invasion is badly organized. A diplomatist, who had just returned from the inauguration fêtes given by the Mexican Automobile Club, confided to me his impressions in the following terms :

“ What can you expect ? I came back by Washington. Nobody is more willing and ready than I to acknowledge the good qualities of



THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE IN HAVANA



AN AUTOMOBILE IN A MEXICAN VILLAGE





## Mexico

the Americans when they happen to be well-educated and refined, and I cannot shut my eyes to the faults and failings of Mexican society. And yet, many members of that society still revere the traditions of Spanish courtesy. I can quite understand why they shrink from that rabble of rotten financiers and vulgar, noisy adventurers from Texas who think that they are the superior race and that they are going to have things all their own way ! ”

The Mexican *señoras* complain of the bad manners of the Yankees who swagger about all over the place, jostle against them in the tram-cars and restaurants, and deafen everyone with their loud, shrill voices. I am only repeating what I was told. I must confess that I myself never remarked this rude behaviour. The Americans whom I met in Mexico were perhaps less polite than the Mexicans, who are extremely polite, but I always found them civil and even friendly.

When I say this, I am told that I didn't see enough of them, and that I didn't stay there long enough. I bow to the superior judgment of the fair sex.

## The Fair Land of Central America

The judgment of my own sex was not more favourable. After hearing of the ill-breeding of the Yankee "hustler," I now heard of his dishonesty.

An old Mexican general once said to me in great wrath :

"The American only comes here to swagger about and to dupe us. He buys for a few dollars the right to work some mine—he doesn't care much whether it is likely to pay or not—puts the document into his right pocket and a specimen of quartz into his left pocket, and goes back to the United States where he starts a company with a capital of several millions . . . on paper, of course. The only expense incurred by the company is for advertising, and that is done in fine style. As soon as the shares can command a price and when they find people foolish enough to buy them, the directors sell out their own shares and declare the company bankrupt. It is then discovered that the company was formed in some State where the laws are particularly lax, and so the trick is played. That is why we have just made a new law concerning mines, by which all companies, without regard to their

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origin, are subjected to Mexican law. The Yankees say that we boycott them. We are only protecting ourselves from sharpers—that is all!”

My old Mexican general exaggerated somewhat. I know a certain American mining company which does not exploit the pockets of its shareholders, but which works its land to such good effect that it can afford to pay its chief engineer a salary of two millions a year.

Be this as it may, the Yankee financier is not a *persona grata* in Mexico. The American ambassador in Mexico constantly has to interfere and to use all his authority in order that his compatriots may be treated like the other foreigners. If the Mexican Government dared, it would expel all the Yankees within twenty-four hours. It dares not do so, and it is not very likely that it will ever dare to do so, until the day when . . .

Uncle Sam tells the truth when he says that his little excursions into other people's countries are only for commercial purposes and not for any political ends. However, as he is detested by the Latin republics, he will never get them

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to tolerate him except by using force. This explains President Roosevelt's imperialism. In the case of Central America he need only hold the sword over its head. But he will have to draw the weapon from its scabbard if he wants to keep Mexico in order.

The Mexican accuses the Yankee of being greedy, ignorant and vulgar. As I have tried to show you, the Mexican is not altogether mistaken, at least as far as his opinion concerning the adventurer or the seedy financier who comes to spy out the nakedness of the land.

But the Northerner, in his turn, pretends to despise the Spanish-Americans in general, and the Mexican in particular. He says straight out that the Mexican has "all his old Spanish ancestors' faults and none of their good qualities." He is prejudiced! What virtues belong essentially to the Spanish race? Sobriety, courtesy and bravery. Anyone who can say that the Mexican Creole has no good qualities must be biassed. Then again, in the matter of vices, when the North American accuses his Southern

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neighbour of being dirty, lazy and cruel we must allow that he is not far out.

In Central America, as in Cuba, I myself noticed dirt and laziness on all sides. I should have said they were not cruel, had I not been to Mexico. One cannot deny the fact that the Mexican seems incapable of sharing the European's feelings of pity and horror at the sight of other people's sufferings and especially the sufferings of dumb animals.

It is scarcely likely that the offspring of an Indian mother and a Spanish father could be very tender-hearted. Among all the exponents of our different creeds, it was left to the priests of the Most Holy Inquisition and the Aztec religion to invent a god, a sort of chief executioner, who delighted in torturing his worshippers. It certainly did not occur to the Assyrians of old to institute ambulances for their wounded enemies. A certain bas-relievo at Nineveh represents a king of Assour blinding with the end of a pointed reed whole rows of kneeling prisoners with all the outward calmness of a telephone-girl seated at her desk and carefully driving each peg into its proper hole.

## The Fair Land of Central America

In acting thus, the royal personage probably wished to save himself any further annoyance rather than to do honour to his gods. However, we must turn to the god of Montezuma and Torquemada if we want to see the celestial ogre who lives on blood and burnt flesh.

The Aztec priests inflicted long and cruel tortures upon their victims. Twenty thousand men passed yearly through the hands of these saintly torturers, who accomplished their religious butchery in the open air, under the blue sky of heaven, on the lofty terrace of a five-storied temple which once stood on the site now occupied by the present Cathedral of Mexico.

Cortez' henchmen were not less zealous. Some of their number made a vow to strangle twelve Indians daily in honour of the twelve apostles !

Now that slavery has been abolished, the descendants of those Spaniards and Aztecs can no longer exercise their cruelty on their fellow-creatures ; so they vent their spite upon the unfortunate animals. Here are a few anecdotes :

A huge tortoise, which had been harpooned off the coast of Vera Cruz, was kept alive for three

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whole days outside a restaurant in Mexico. Each customer, as he entered, either kicked it on the back or on the head. Some of these brutes even tried to poke out its eyes with the ends of their umbrellas. There were roars of laughter when anyone managed to draw blood.

A French lady had to threaten her Indian cook with instant dismissal if she continued to pluck her chickens and pigeons alive without taking the trouble to wring their necks.

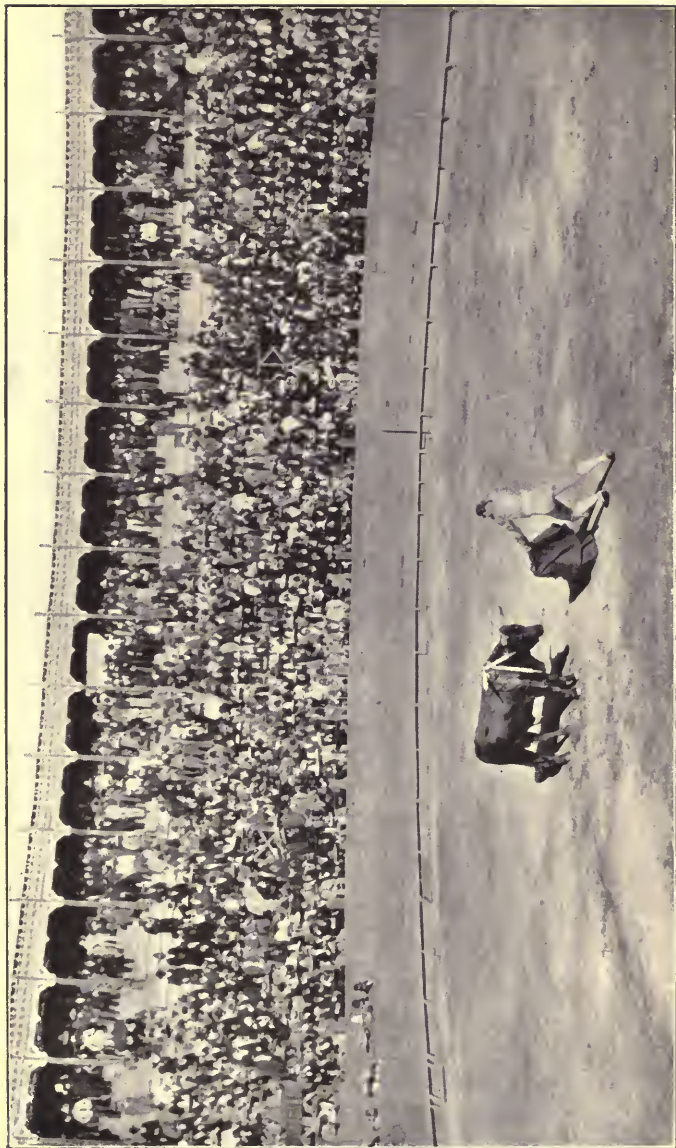
I will say nothing about bull-fights : everyone is familiar with these exhibitions of brutality. Here, as in Spain, the sight of a helpless horse being disembowelled is considered most interesting. I will say no more. . . .

But cock-fighting beats everything in the matter of cruelty. The Mexican lower orders spend the greater part of their earnings in gambling. The Mexican working man likes to watch cock-fights for the pleasure of betting, not for the pleasure of seeing two birds slowly peck each other to death ; but the horrible part of the thing is that the sight of the poor creatures' terrible sufferings seems to have no effect upon him. The two cocks are fed upon corn soaked

## The Fair Land of Central America

in alcohol. Their owners excite them at the last moment by plucking out a handful of feathers and by spitting in their faces. When a steel spur, ten centimetres long, has been attached to the left leg of each bird, they are let loose. Sometimes the first blow from that steel spur stabs the adversary to the heart. But it usually happens that the two birds go on hitting each other on the head with their beaks for many minutes at a time. The stronger attacks the weaker and soon reduces him to a horrible state. . . . I really cannot describe what then happens. . . . I looked at the faces of the spectators, Indian workmen, draped in their thick striped woollen blankets, or Mexican cowboys wearing their tall, sugar-loaf hats. Not one of them winced at this horrible martyrdom. The only thing they think about is whether they will lose their bet or not. I won't say that they enjoy watching the poor beast's sufferings; they don't even seem to see that it is suffering. They have no more feeling than a stick or a stone. . . . I am perfectly well aware that cock-fighting is practised in France and in Belgium. But Mexico is not Europe. I compared the two Americas. Now





A BULL-FIGHT, MEXICO



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the Yankee whom I saw at bull-fights out there always shuts his eyes when the bull thrusts its horn into the horse's side. He can't stand it, and he seldom goes a second time. Although the Anglo-Saxon is a great hand at betting, you never see him at a cock-fight. What he likes is a boxing-match with its marvellous display of pluck and endurance ; although it is a brutal sight, he revels in it, because he knows that the two opponents have accepted the ordeal of their own free will. But the martyrdom and the agony of an animal, the quivering flesh, the warm life-blood ebbing away, the dying horse whose limbs twitch convulsively, the bleeding cock—such sights shock the fair-haired, pink-cheeked Northerner from New York, Chicago or Saint Louis, in all of which towns one finds marble banks, highly polished oak bureaux, and gentlemen in spotless linen, but where the slaughter-houses are hidden away out of sight, where a man can die in his bed, and the beast in some quiet corner, without any unnecessary suffering.

After all, cruelty and tender-heartedness, like Pascal's Good and Evil, are perhaps only a question of latitude and longitude. The inhabi-

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tants of hot countries think nothing of nature naked and unadorned. People who live in cold climates are only accustomed to see her arrayed in a great coat. No wonder we don't always agree.

“The women are saints, the men are worthless!” Such is the opinion I frequently heard expressed on the respective value of the two sexes in Spanish-America. People who know America well tell me exactly the same thing. It is true that the women are saints; but they would find it rather difficult to be anything else, for they are kept shut up at home and are obliged to lead quite a monastic life. Travellers in Latin America are much surprised to find that the wife is virtually imprisoned in her nursery and her kitchen; this custom, which the Spaniards learned from the Arabs, in a big town like Mexico, produces the most curious results, in strange contrast with the customs of the French colony.

A highly distinguished Frenchman, a poet and a good man of business into the bargain, who is very popular with the Mexicans on account

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of his amiable disposition and who has already published one very interesting volume of "Aztec Poems" describing old Aztec customs, lately went to pay a visit to a distant *hacienda* accompanied by a European financier whom he wished to introduce to the *haciendado*. The rich proprietor, having received a letter announcing their visit, sent a carriage to the station to meet them, received them most kindly, gave them a magnificent dinner and placed all his best rooms at their disposal. He was all alone. His wife and daughters had gone away that very morning to stay with some neighbours, where they remained as long as any foreigners were under their roof!

This is local etiquette with a vengeance! The women of the family are never introduced to foreigners. In the capital, however, at certain official banquets to which the ladies of the European colony are invited, the Mexican big-wigs are obliged to bring their wives. A young diplomatist told me how he dined one evening beside a charming lady. On rising from the table, he plucked up courage to ask if she had a day at home.

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The young lady replied in the negative ; however, she confessed that her female cousins and friends came to see her on Fridays.

“ Well, if you will allow me, I shall do myself the honour——”

“ No ! no ! ” cried the husband, interrupting the conversation ; “ no, my dear fellow, I know that you are much too busy. Pray don't take the trouble to come. . . . It isn't the custom here.”

Then with a hearty shake of the would-be visitor's hand he hurried off his docile spouse.

The members of the diplomatic corps are not invited to any evening festivities, which, indeed, are only family parties. If they are invited, they always decline the invitation. The representative of a certain powerful nation, on arriving in Mexico, wanted to put an end to this ostracism, and announced his intention of giving a huge reception, for which he sent out quantities of invitations. Most of the invited guests did not even take the trouble to reply ; the others refused point-blank.

What was the reason of this behaviour ? Do the natives despise the foreigners ? Oh ! dear,

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no. They are the best of friends at the club, in the street, in the office ; they slap one another on the back most affectionately ; they call one another by their Christian names ; but you may know a Mexican intimately for ten years and you will never see his wife. Are these husbands jealous ? No, they are not even jealous. Many of these men have mistresses whom they invite you to meet without telling you that they are not legally married ; so that you may go on calling at their houses for a long time, thinking that you are calling on the lawful spouse, until you suddenly discover that the real wife lives in quite another house to which you are never invited. It is a question of *amour-propre*. The Mexican *señora* is badly educated. Her life of retirement makes her very shy. She doesn't know what to talk about. Her husband would feel humiliated were she to be compared with foreign women who have been emancipated by travelling and constant companionship with men. And then, in the present state of morals in Mexico, a wife who devotes herself to her servants and to her children suits him down to the ground, and he has no intention of allowing her to adopt

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the free and easy manners and habits of the European woman.

The Mexican husband is not fond of his home. How can he be so? Reading, works of art, intellectual conversation are closed subjects to him, owing to his lack of native wit and his want of education. He studies from ten to sixteen years of age—but what studies they are! The professors whom I questioned on this subject told me that they calculated that the Mexican student misses school every other day either because he doesn't feel well, because the weather is too fine or too bad, or simply because he feels lazy.

When he grows up, if he happens to be fairly well off, he does nothing; if he happens to have more money than is good for him he plays the fool. Once upon a time, the gilded youth of Mexico formed themselves into a rowdy club called "The Forty-one." Its list of members contained all the best names in the Republic, including the President's son-in-law. Their eccentricities scandalized the capital, which in some things is rather strait-laced. Rumours of their misdeeds reached the ear of the President. About



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nine o'clock one evening, just as dinner was being finished, the President's son-in-law rose from table in order to join his rowdy companions, when the all-powerful father-in-law begged him to sit down again and for once to spend the evening at home. The son-in-law obeyed—luckily for him! That very night the leaders of the "Forty-one" were arrested by order of the dictator and banished to the wild and distant province of Yucatan.

President Diaz is a Roman and a worthy follower of Augustus who cleansed Rome of its licentious patricians and sent Ovid to drink mare's milk in Scythia.

This was the end of the famous "Forty-one Club," whose former leader, shielded by his imperial relations, henceforth contented himself with astonishing Mexico by more harmless feats of valour. To him belongs the splendid automobile copied from that belonging to the German Kaiser; it is so covered with gold and copper that it shines like the sun. Each lantern is in the shape of a tower supported by two lions apparently made of solid gold. A carriage like that would make quite a sensation in Paris. But

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we must make some allowance for those new countries.

I was assured that there were at least one thousand automobiles in Mexico ; that is even more in proportion than we have in Paris. However, automobiles do not eat the largest holes in the Mexican's budget. Here, as in Spanish-America, love comes first. Buenos Ayres, Rio and Havana are the Eldorado of the *demi-monde*. At first one imagines that Mexico is more severe in its morals. Perhaps that is because it is less known. . . .

That is why the Mexican women run the risk of remaining saints to the end of the chapter. Female saints are so docile and so easily gulled.

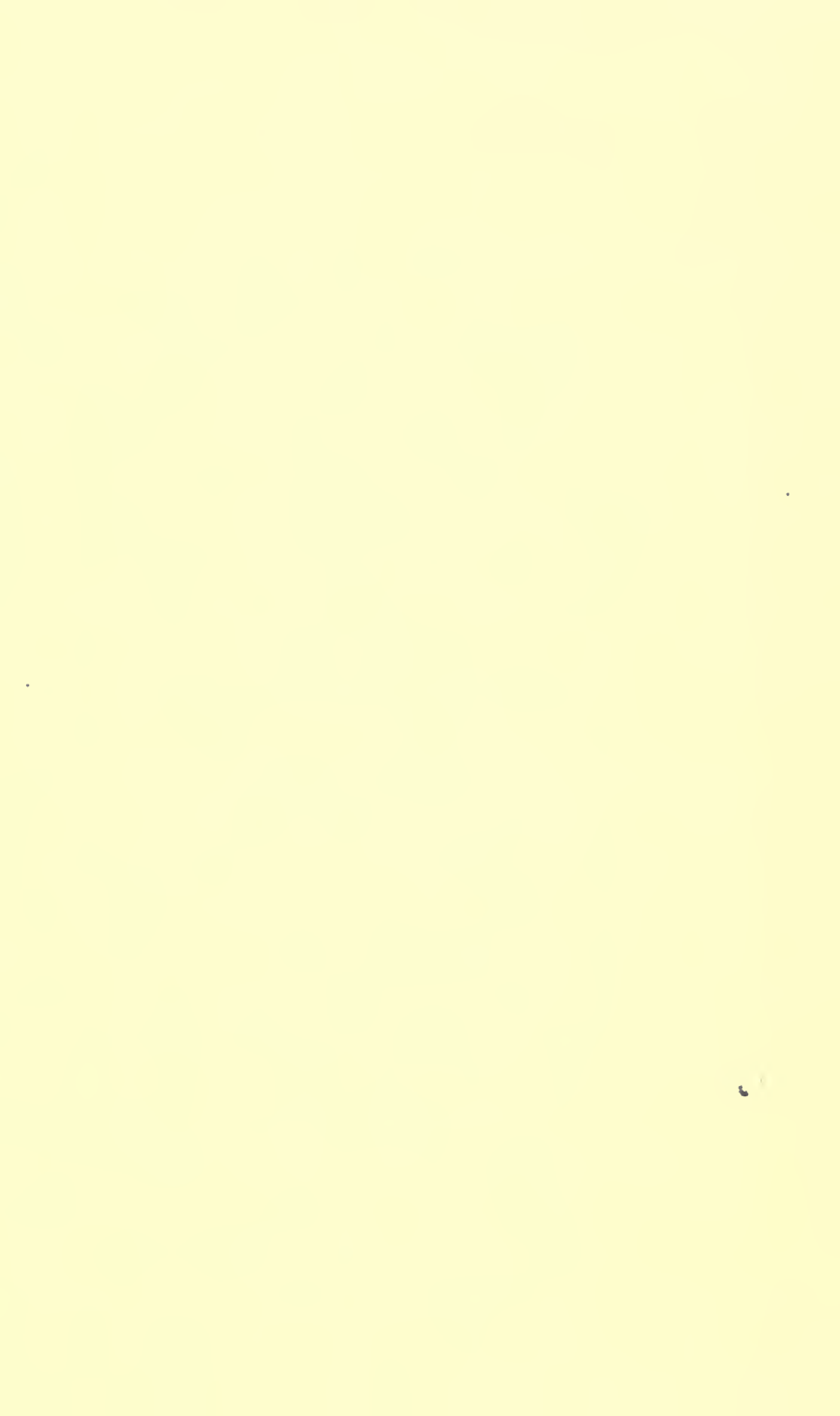
Mexico is not exactly the place for people who only live for pleasure. It has three hundred and fifty churches, but only two theatres, one for opera and one for drama ; both are small and poor-looking. The Mexicans are not a nation of theatre-goers. The rich have travelled too much and seen too many good performers. The lower classes prefer bull-fights and cinemato-



A BULL-FIGHT IN MEXICO

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graphs. The theatres can only count upon the middle classes.

The public censor complicates matters considerably. When translations of our plays are given in Mexico, the theatrical managers have to alter them to suit the country's code of morals.

The only smart restaurant in the place is a victim to official squeamishness. Private supper-rooms are not allowed ; by private supper-rooms, I mean that small rooms, separated by a door from the inquisitive diners in the public dining-room, are quite unknown out there. However, there are some small *salons* without doors, so that couples supping alone can be seen by everybody. The result is that the whole town soon knows that Señor So-and-so supped on a certain date with Señora or Señorita So-and-so. The scandal becomes public property instead of being known only to a few ; and so no harm is done to the public's morals.

The proprietor of that restaurant is a Frenchman, of course, and by no means an ordinary one ! He used to be Gambetta's cook in the old days when the former tribune was President of

## The Fair Land of Central America

the Chamber of Deputies. Gambetta sometimes deigned to go into his kitchen and to take a lesson in the art of eating. He used to sit down, call for beer and touch glasses with the staff, which consisted of six head-cooks and any number of scullions. My readers may think that these kitchen arrangements were rather too elaborate for one man alone. But Gambetta was not content.

“ Ah ! my boys ! this is all very fine for the President of the *Chambre*, but wait until we get to the Elysée and then you'll see, you'll see ! ”

As appendicitis finished Gambetta's career and prevented the “ boys ” seeing anything more, the future Paillard of Mexico went to be under-cook to one of the Rothschilds. But the Baronne de Rothschild was not very tactful in her treatment of her head-cook. One day when she had summoned him to her drawing-room to receive her orders, she flew into a passion with a footman who had forgotten to shut the door.

The head-cook rushed forward to shut it ; the baroness stopped him, crying in a shrill voice :

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“ Don't touch the wainscot with your greasy hands ! ”

Now the head-cook happened to be very proud of his exquisite cleanliness. He turned pale and, showing the great lady his hands, which were whiter than those of a prelate, said :

“ *Madame la baronne*, if my hands are too dirty to touch your wainscot, they must be far too dirty to do your cooking. I shall do so no longer.”

A quarter of an hour later he and his entire staff left the Rothschilds' hotel. The poor fellow paid dearly for his folly. He had a carbuncle on the nape of his neck. Blood-poisoning set in and he died a few weeks later. Vatel's death was more romantic, perhaps, for it is more poetical to die of a sword-thrust through one's body than to die of a carbuncle ; but does it prove a deeper feeling of professional dignity ?

His staff separated after his death ; and so tragic fate brought him who had been cook to Gambetta and to a member of the Rothschild family, to Mexico.

His restaurant is the only one where the waiters are trained in the European fashion and are

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really clean. The other restaurants leave much to be desired in this respect. Indian servants are good creatures, I am sure ; but their scowling faces and their bushy wigs made such an unfavourable impression upon me, that I always chose a table against the wall. I did not like to feel that those fellows were standing behind my chair. Whenever I asked for a knife, I always felt as if they were going to stab me in the back.

What can I say about Mexican cookery ? The most original dish I tasted was a dish of *aguacates* rolled in *tortillas* and cooked in sour milk. I did not ask for a second help. We may change our religion and even our morals during our course through life, but our tastes seldom change. It is easier to subdue our consciences than our appetites. The *aguacate* eaten raw without the pastry and the sour milk is quite delicious. It rather resembles the fruit of the egg-plant, and it tastes like an artichoke, only the pulp is more tender. It is imported to Europe where unfortunately it fetches a very high price. Together with the cabbage tree, it is one of the best vegetables in tropical America, as the Manilla



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mango is the best fruit. A frozen mango, eaten with a spoon as one eats an ice, is food for the gods, that is to say if the said gods don't mind a slight flavour of turpentine.

There are no cafés in Mexico, only bars where one drinks standing before the counter as in America. If you want to sit down, you must go to the club. The Americans have a Golf Club ; the Spaniards frequent another club where they can play cards ; the French prefer a club where they can have a game of billiards ; and the cream of Mexican society, together with the cream of the foreign colony, goes to the Jockey Club. The Jockey Club is lodged in a charming miniature palace of glazed bricks ; the Mexican dandies assemble daily under its porch in order to watch the procession of carriages moving up and down the fashionable Calle de San Francisco. It is considered "the thing" for friends to salute one another by quickly waving the right hand in the air like a fan. This occupation seems to afford the Mexicans exquisite pleasure, for nothing in the world can make them miss coming every morning and making the familiar gesture a hundred times a day. But I fancy that the

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real reason for their fondness for this very uninteresting pastime is that they hope, by going regularly to the club, to meet some fascinating lady. For love-making figures largely in the list of pleasures to be obtained in Mexico. And love is responsible for many family jars. While I was there a general, over seventy years of age, killed his young wife in a fit of jealousy. She was almost young enough to be his granddaughter.

Mexican husbands do not often use their revolvers in order to avenge their wounded honour ; such tragedies are rare. Love, unlike the automobile, is within everybody's reach ; and it has far fewer accidents to answer for than the snorting monster on four wheels.

Mexico has two prisons : an old Spanish convent where five thousand prisoners are huddled together in fetid courtyards, and a brand-new model penitentiary, a sort of huge steel safe where six hundred picked prisoners go through the process of being reformed according to the rules of psychology and modern hygiene.

You must inspect both of them if you want to

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compare our modern methods with the routine of the old system.

The *Penitenciaría* is conducted on "the solitary confinement" system. A round iron tower represents the central turret from which a warder, day and night, watches over the cages which are arranged in a circle around it.

It reminded me of a menagerie, and a menagerie of very ferocious beasts into the bargain, for the cages are all very solidly built and the windows are screened. The partitions are made of two sheets of steel between which a layer of gravel is heaped. Supposing the wild beast imprisoned behind those walls could manage to bore a hole through that steel partition, the gravel would immediately begin to drop through the opening and attract the warder's attention. It is a highly ingenious invention.

No one ever escapes from that prison! A single iron crow-bar bolts twenty doors at once. A fly could not hide in any of those well-lighted corridors.

If the electricity, which is supplied by the town, should happen to fail at any time, the warder only has to apply a match to two furnaces, which

## The Fair Land of Central America

are always stuffed up to the very mouth with wood, in order to set their own private dynamo working.

This is how twenty men manage to keep six hundred in order ; silence is only broken by the superintendents' whistle and sometimes, but very seldom, hardly once a month, by a revolver-shot, short and sharp, the automatic reply to the first sign of revolt.

However, the cells are arranged with an almost absurd regard to comfort. I was shown one of these cells. I caught sight of a prisoner (who suddenly rose like a flash of lightning and saluted the warder), a bed, a washing-stand with running water and the latest model in sanitary arrangements. The Indian who, when he is free to do as he likes, sleeps on the hard earth, never washes himself and does not know what decency means, cannot care much for these luxuries. But perhaps the prison authorities think that the fact of being obliged to be clean makes the punishment seem all the harder to a race which is naturally very dirty.

It must be so in the case of the daily tub which each prisoner is obliged to undergo in a

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special room. The red-capped convict gets no other exercise ; he has to walk quickly, for a warder, with lifted cudgel, makes him run down the passage at a good sharp trot. He goes into the bathroom and the door is bolted behind him. I stood on the top of the look-out which is erected in the middle of this bathroom and watched many prisoners undress and jump into the bath. High walls prevent them seeing one another. That is the idea of solitary confinement. Never do the unfortunate creatures see the faces of their neighbours by whose side they live day and night. They hear one another do the same things at the exact same hour as they are doing them themselves ; but they will never see their brothers in misery who are separated from them by those impenetrable partitions.

No wonder all those men looked haggard and fearfully sad. I was told some of their names. A young man, who looked like a student, had just put on his clothes again and placed the hideous red cap on his head ; he was striding up and down the yard in order to warm himself ; it seems that he was once a clerk in a bank and that he had forged money to the tune of half a million.

## The Fair Land of Central America

He had got eleven years. Another, who was scarcely any older but who looked sadder and more thoroughly cowed, killed one of his friends in a fashionable Mexican bar. He had been condemned to death and the sentence commuted to twenty years' penal servitude. In the next courtyard walked an old man with red eyes. He made me think of Baudelaire's lines :

“. . . Those eyes are wells made of millions of tears.”

He was once a colonel in the army. During a quarrel with his wife he killed his two little children in a fit of mad passion. He had got twenty years, but he won't last as long. And there was also the typical footpad who had committed eleven murders. One could see that he belonged to the lower classes. His neck was as thick as a bull's. He had been condemned to death. They were waiting to send five bullets into his hide until the President had rejected his petition for pardon. And in the meantime, he, like all the others, was made to take his daily tub. Educated men or common thieves—one system soon makes them all alike ; it is called the system of endless silence in endless solitude ; they soon lose their

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individuality. They all resembled the hunted, terrified, half-maddened beasts which one sees in menageries and which the lion-tamer, with his long iron crow-bar, chases from cage to cage until he makes them obey his commands. Have we the right to keep wild beasts in cages? It were better to kill them or to banish them to some desert land. But is it right to torture them?

They are not tortured in the other Mexican prison, the old *Prision General*.

That old prison must be awfully dirty! I say "it must be," for I did not go inside. Notwithstanding all my splendid letters of introduction, I was only allowed to walk on the roof, that is to say, on the terrace from which one can look down into the inner courtyards.

These courtyards are like empty cisterns; they are very deep and much too small to contain the five thousand prisoners who swarm there so thickly that every paving-stone seems occupied by a crouching figure.

I saw no uniforms in that prison; the Indian keeps his rags, his huge pointed hat and his heavy

## The Fair Land of Central America

red blanket thrown like a shawl over his shoulders. And all are treated alike : the accused live side by side with the condemned ! Beggars undergoing a week's imprisonment for drunkenness elbow dangerous murderers who are " doing " their twenty years. As the latter are the " elders " of the prison they are given cudgels and told to maintain order among the other prisoners. The women and the political prisoners have special courtyards. I asked where the dormitories were : there were none. The prisoners sleep on the pavement. Only the well-to-do are allowed to bring their mattresses with them. I did not dare to inquire into the sanitary arrangements : they would have laughed in my face.

And yet all these prisoners looked perfectly happy. When they caught sight of me leaning over the edge of the roof, they all looked up ; they seemed inquisitive, almost merry, and certainly less sad than the Indians whom one sees wandering up and down the streets hunting for their daily bread.

What do they care for vermin and dirt, badly ventilated cells and the horrible food ? They are accustomed to it from their birth.



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In fact, if some charitable individual would promise to supply them with a daily allowance of *pulque*—from three to seven pints—I really believe not one of these fellows would want to leave!

The women's courtyard is even more cheerful. I saw the female prisoners gossiping round a pump. They welcomed my appearance on the top of their wall with loud laughter. Two or three—I don't say it out of conceit!—kissed their hands at me and held out their arms. If it had not been for their rags, dirty petticoats and native ugliness, I might have imagined myself in an Eastern harem.

Evidently these people are not afraid of the old prison. What a difference between the old system and the model *Penitenciaría*! Science and civilization have turned the harmless purgatory into a cruel hell.

The first was too pleasant, did not frighten the people enough. Will the new prison intimidate would-be criminals? I doubt it. No one can realize the horror of solitary confinement, the fearful loneliness of absolute solitude. One has to try it before one can realize it. Peni-

## The Fair Land of Central America

tentiary settlements, banishment to an uncultivated country, with less actual cruelty, would make much more impression upon the minds of future criminals. So, as we no longer believe in free-will and the old doctrine of expiation, ought we not to prefer the old-fashioned reformatory to our modern system of solitary confinement ?

Mexico is not the only country in the New World which can boast of having known civilization before the advent of Christopher Columbus. The Mayas of Central America and the Incas of Peru can hold their own with the Aztecs of Mexico in this matter.

But the Aztec domination alone left any very valuable traces and fairly authentic records. The history of Mexico goes far back into the dark ages.

If you want to know more about it, you must go and read at the municipal libraries. I can tell you what remains of the old capital of Montezuma now buried under President Porfirio Diaz' capital. There is not much ; about one hundred carved stones and that is all ! History tells

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us that Cortez razed the Indian town to the ground. Historians, however, observe that he respected the old plans when he built his Spanish capital. That is strange, because the Aztec capital was built in the middle of a lake and its streets were canals. Cortez would have found it a difficult matter to build houses on the surface of the lake.

So, although the lake is now drained and the canals have been dry for many a long day, one can still see traces of the Aztec city in the modern town. The enormous idols from the famous Temple of the God of War were used as bases for the Cathedral pillars ; and the same rock on which the Palace of Montezuma once stood—more magnificent than the palaces of the King of Spain ! said Cortez—now supports the palace of the President of the Republic.

As the Mexico of the Aztecs was built in the middle of a lake, we may presume that the inhabitants went about in gondolas. Here its resemblance with Venice ceases. It did not live by commerce, but by cruel slavery ; for the Aztecs, during long centuries of warfare, bartered and sold their vanquished enemies ; it was the

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Rome of America. When Cortez appeared upon the scene, Mexico was nearly as powerful as Rome, the mistress of Italy, after the Punic Wars, and it contained three hundred thousand inhabitants. Mexico was a surprise to the Spanish soldiers, for no European capital at that time possessed such a huge population; it must have seemed to them the biggest town in the world.

The Spaniards, notwithstanding their fire-arms, their steel armour and their great horses which struck terror in the superstitious Aztecs' hearts, would never have been able to take Mexico. Cortez showed his cleverness by making use of a certain stratagem which, several centuries before, had made the Rome of the Old World tremble many a time for its safety: he gathered all the vanquished tribes together and led them against the Rome of the New World. It was not a few hundred Spaniards, but six hundred thousand Indians who subdued that proud city.

No historian, as far as I am aware, has ever observed the resemblance between Aztec and Roman civilization. And yet anyone who takes an interest in the history of our different religions

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would find it worth his attention. We know what an important part sacrifices to the gods played during the Punic Wars, and how priests used to predict future events by examining the victims' entrails. Is it not strange to learn that on a continent whose existence nobody in the Old World ever suspected, and which itself was totally unaware of any other continents, the same warlike habits and customs led to the same rites, with this difference only, that, as the Aztec priests had no big animals to sacrifice to their gods, they continued to sacrifice human victims.

What shall we say except that martial nations are usually very superstitious? The Chinese are the most peaceable creatures on the face of the earth. Their religion has been humanized to such a degree that it is nothing more than moral philosophy. In the case of the Crusaders and the Mahometans we see that, when the religious instinct flows upon the smouldering embers of the combative instinct, the latter becomes a species of madness. These two instincts are brothers and inseparable. Show me one fanatical religion which has managed to live at peace

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with its neighbours ! The god of the Aztecs was just as powerless as any other heathen god to bring peace on earth and good-will to all mankind.

If the history of Old Mexico teaches us that fact, it will not have been altogether useless. But we must not expect it to teach us anything else. The two or three dozen stone idols contained in the National Museum in Mexico prove that the race had no idea of æsthetics and cared nothing for beauty. Although they may have been the Romans of America, the Aztecs were certainly no Hellenes. It was not their fault. The physique of the Indians, whom one sees walking in the streets of modern Mexico, is and always has been calculated to discourage sculptors and painters.

The nation was religious and brave. That is understood. But the race is so ugly and dirty, that it is difficult to think of it as being poetical in any way ; it will have to wait a long time for its *Salammbô* and its *Quo Vadis*.

The capital of Mexico is peopled with Mexicans —at least, so I believe ; but really at first sight



STATUE OF CHAC-MOOL, MEXICO

Reproduced by permission of M. Pellandini, Mexico City





## Mexico

one might doubt that fact. In the twelve or fifteen streets which contain shops with any pretensions to smartness, I tried in vain to find a Mexican shop. The milliners' shops are kept by Frenchwomen; the grocers' shops belong to Spaniards; the chemists are all Germans and the banks are run by Americans.

In the fashionable West End—who can explain why all towns seem inclined to spread from east to west?—where we find the most beautiful and luxurious houses, I noticed that nearly all the proprietors were French or Yankee. In fact, there are about twenty thousand foreigners among the four hundred thousand inhabitants of Mexico; but the foreigners are the only ones who work and earn any money. The genuine Indian, who constitutes the greater part of the population, stupefied by alcohol and superstition, is scarcely better than a domestic animal. As to the real Mexicans, that is to say, the descendants of Spaniards and Indians, who call themselves *gentes de razon*,<sup>1</sup> they all occupy official, clerical, military or civil positions. Those who go in for trade seldom rise above the rank of employés.

<sup>1</sup> *Gentes de razon* : men of judgment.

## The Fair Land of Central America

People who talk of Mexico's wonderful progress under the presidency of Porfirio Diaz, whose glorious reign is still continuing, should learn the following facts. This excellent despot has been able to establish order in his country's administration and security all over his dominions. But he has not been able to make his compatriots fond of work. The foreigner alone benefits by the present state of agricultural, commercial and industrial prosperity ; and although the foreigners' success benefits the country indirectly, that fact does not prevent Mexico from owing all her good fortune to the work of people who are not Mexicans.

The psychology of the latter makes an interesting study !

They come from all corners of the globe except from the other Spanish-American republics. For it is a remarkable fact that the seventeen Latin American republics—am I right ? I am always afraid of forgetting some of them !—hold no material or intellectual intercourse with one another. They are too much alike. They have nothing to give or to take from one another, and so they think that they have nothing to

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learn. The eyes of one and all are turned towards the United States or towards Europe ; no one deigns to take a peep at what his neighbour is about. Many an inhabitant of Buenos Ayres, who pays an annual visit to New York or to Paris, never dreams of going to Rio de Janeiro which is only round the corner, so to speak. People travel so little out there, that no one thinks of improving the means of communication. During my stay in Mexico, I met a Peruvian lady who, in order to get from her native land to Mexico, had been obliged to go up to New York ! And while in Havana, I met an Argentine who had just arrived from the West Indies via London ! The Brazilian Minister in Mexico told his friends at the club the other day that he had just experienced the greatest surprise which he had had since his arrival in Mexico ten years ago : a Brazilian had just arrived on a visit to some Mexican friends !

The American States' absolute indifference to one another will ruin any attempt at Pan-Iberianism, which Latin America might otherwise have found a powerful weapon against the masses of Anglo-Saxons from the United States. The

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Yankee, in his gradual but uninterrupted descent towards the South, will only find a cloud of dust to resist him.

Let us now go back to Mexico. With the exception of the Spanish-Americans, all nations are represented there. But three nations carry off the palm for numbers and for the industry of their representatives; those countries are the United States, Spain and France.

The French are the least numerous. There are about two thousand in the capital itself and about the same number in the provinces. But they have made the biggest fortunes by monopolizing the *nouveautés* trade and by building shops nearly as huge as the *Louvre* and the *Bon Marché*. These good folk, mostly natives of Dauphiny, start with a few francs, and earn big fortunes by a very simple process which consists of selling for five *piastres* in Mexico articles which cost five francs in Paris; they have no wish to meddle with politics. Their Mexican customers, who are inclined to consider them more as grasping money-grubbers than as benefactors to mankind, don't trouble themselves much about them, for they know that the French never remain long in a foreign land, and that

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they are sure to return to France sooner or later.

French banks have, of late, begun to take an interest in Mexican affairs ; as they have lent considerable sums of money to the Mexican Government, they are entitled to have a voice in political matters ; that voice may seem of little consequence, but it will be sufficiently powerful to turn the scales for or against the United States. For the United States alone threaten to monopolize Mexico's riches. The Spanish colony is divided into the humble folk, who sell groceries and keep pawnbrokers' shops, and the great lords who exploit huge *haciendas*. The natives are oppressed by both ; but the Government still keeps them in order, and is quite capable of giving them a good lesson if they go too far.

It is quite different with the citizens of the powerful neighbouring republic ! First, they attack the vital organs of Mexico's prosperity, that is to say, its mines and railroads. Although they are not such hard taskmasters as the Spanish *haciendado*, the natives find the yoke more galling, for the word of command or blame is given in

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another language. The Yankee does not even try to speak the language of the country. I met several men who had been there for ten years and who were quite incapable of asking for what they wanted to eat or drink in Spanish !

This inability or unwillingness to learn a foreign tongue, together with their own very different customs and code of morals, isolate them still more. They live quite apart from the Mexicans—and not, like the French, for a short time, but for good and all ; for they seem to find Mexico such a very nice place in which to live that they apparently have no intention of leaving it.

Of all the foreign diplomatists, their representative alone enjoys the title of ambassador, which title gives him precedence over his colleagues. This ambassador has the right to speak his mind for three reasons ; first, because he represents the stronger party ; then people say that he is a splendid fellow—in Yankee diplomatic circles Mexico is considered the most important post after London ; and, finally, he began life as a Pullman Car employé, which fact is entirely to

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his credit, but which does not teach one how to wear a dress-coat.

There are certain Ministers, like the French Minister, for instance, who only fear one thing, and that is that people will think them too zealous. American ambassadors do not figure in that crew. One of the secretaries at the United States Legation was lately requested to go to his chief's bureau. The ambassador looked up from his papers, stared at the young man, and said shortly :

“ Sir ! you have not been to the office in the afternoon for several weeks. I have calculated that you have defrauded our Government of so many hours' work by your laziness. Here is my calculation. I shall trouble you to come to the office every evening from nine o'clock to midnight until you have made up for lost time ! ”

How can we expect old Europe to resist these lunatics who think that everybody, including diplomatists, ought to work in their country ?

From the tourist's point of view, Mexico, situated on its elevated table-land, is of minor interest. A globe-trotter, who knew it well, said to me, in speaking of it :

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“ It is Gaul before the time of Julius Cæsar ! ”

But we find novel and beautiful scenery at the two ends of the huge republic, for to the south-east is the Atlantic peninsula of Yucatan, and in the north-west we find, on the Pacific coast, the deserts of the Sonora.

In Yucatan stand the famous ruins of Palenque, a heap of temples and palaces, the most important remains of American civilization before Christopher Columbus. The tropical vegetation has grown round the ruins. Walls covered with wonderfully delicate carvings are half hidden under the green velvety grass and the grey lace-work of tree-roots. In place of the ruined ceilings, a colonnade of trees one hundred feet high supports a dome of leafy branches impervious to the sun, where the chattering of monkeys and parrots replaces the echo of human voices long since hushed to rest. Nothing is more striking than the sight of a whole town slowly falling into ruins. It is as if Fate were tearing another page of human history from the book of the world.

I felt that I must go and see those ruins, and I wanted to start off at once. One can afford to



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devote a fortnight's leisure in order to realize what the world was like fifteen hundred years ago ! But an official who had spent eight months in those climes stopped me.

“ You foolish fellow ! Do you know what you will have to face when you get there ? The heat in Yucatan is awful.”

“ I can stand it ; I stood Panama.”

“ There are no hotels out there.”

“ I will lodge in a hut.”

“ The old walls, which you are so anxious to see, are infested with *tarantulas*, huge spiders which look very much like pieces of black velvet ; their bite is poisonous.”

“ I'll look out for myself ! ”

“ When you lie down at night, you will be obliged to throw off all your clothes on account of the heat, and then you will feel a cold, clammy serpent creeping over your body. The owners of the hut would be very angry if you were to kill that serpent. He is the household cat. He sleeps all day in the roof, and awakes every night to catch rats ! ”

“ I won't hurt him.”

“ When the rats feel the serpent biting their

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hind-legs, they make enough noise to wake the dead.”

“ I’ll stuff my ears with cotton-wool.”

“ The mosquitoes are terrible ! ”

“ I’ll take a mosquito-net.”

“ You don’t understand me. There are day-mosquitoes and night-mosquitoes ; when one batch goes off duty, the other begins operations. Woe betide you if they catch you napping and unprepared for battle ! You’ll be covered with bites, and you will swell up in the most horrible manner.”

“ The deuce ! ”

“ And then a special kind of fly will lay its larva in your flesh ; this larva is a sort of hairy worm, which causes intense suffering when it begins to grow. The sore has to be cut open and the worm pulled out hair by hair ; and then the wound is cauterized with tobacco-juice.”

“ The deuce ! the deuce ! ”

“ And then there are always numerous cases of yellow fever during the rainy season. The inhabitants are almost invulnerable, but the newcomers never escape . . . ”

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“ That’s enough ! Those ruins will have to do without me ! ”

As the South would have none of me, I turned northward, and made up my mind to go and inspect the mining district of the deserted Sonora. There are no mosquitoes there, no hairy caterpillars, no yellow fever. You “ hitch up ” with some prospector, on the look-out for a gold or a silver placer mine, and then you start off in quest of adventures. And what nice adventures they are ! You may expect to meet with three fellow-travellers : the bear of the Rocky Mountains, the frontier Indian and the white footpad. Such meetings afford much pleasure to both parties.

The bear of the Rocky Mountains has nothing in common, except his name, with his good old cousins in the Alps, the Pyrenees and Russia. He stands seven feet high, and charges his adversary with the rapidity of a race-horse. His hide, which is as hard and as tough as steel, is bullet-proof. His paws are armed with long razor-like claws which tear off your head before you know where you are.

The frontier Indian a few years ago was represented by the Apaches, now nearly exterminated.

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The Yaqui, once a friendly tribe but now the bitter enemy of the white man who has stolen all his territory, has now taken the place of the Apache. Whenever a white man falls into the hands of the Yaquis, they torture him and put him to death in the most horrible manner. . . . The Apache spares the lives of children under seven years that he may make slaves of them. But woe betide them if they try to escape !

But the white man who roams over the *sierras* on the look-out for prey in the shape of a lonely miner, is more implacable than the bear and more inevitable than the Apache or the Yaqui. He is usually an old prospector who is down on his luck, or who has killed his man in a fit of passion or on a spree, and has been outlawed in consequence. He knows that he will be lynched if he is caught, so he has pity on no one.

“The tragedy which forces an adventurer to become an outlaw,” said a friend to me, “is usually short and sharp. I witnessed a scene of this kind in a saloon which an American had built near a well-known placer mine. Here the miners used to have their meals, served by this American’s daughter. One day one of these miners, a rough,

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red-haired brute, scolded the girl for giving him food which, he declared, was not fit to eat. The sort of American girl whom one meets out there is not gifted with much patience. She simply flung the food in his face. The customer said nothing, wiped his face and went out to look for his revolver, which he had left in his cabin. He returned an hour later, found the saloon-keeper doing chores in his barn and shot him dead. They did not give him time to escape. He was immediately caught, bound and tried ; by tried, I mean that three of the miners took their seats on a sort of platform and requested the assembled crowd to say if they considered that the culprit deserved death. They all cried with one accord, ' Yes ! ' A rope was fastened to a branch, and the man was hung—but that was not all ! The curious part of the story was that before they hung him, when he was already standing pale and speechless under the tree, they asked him if he had any message to send to his people. Whereupon he called out, ' Jim ! ' Jim was among the crowd. Jim was told to step forward, which he did, and came and stood close to his pal. But neither of them said a word. At last Jim roughly passed his hand over the

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condemned man's chin, and said, ' Say, old friend ! you didn't shave this morning ; the rope won't run easy ! ' The condemned man chuckled ; I can still hear him. Not another word did they say. A minute later his body was swinging to and fro in the wind. One of the miners, who had managed the whole affair, stepped forward, crying, ' Let this be a lesson ! There are ten rowdy chaps here whom I should advise to leave the country if they don't want us to make them a similar present of rope-end ! ' In short, some of the rowdy fellows (whom I hope you may never meet if you ever happen to be alone at night near a deep pool) left the mining-camp that very evening."

" I shall not have the pleasure of making their acquaintance," I replied. " I shall see neither them nor your big bears nor your Indian torturers ! I can see that the Sonora is even a more uncomfortable place to travel in than Yucatan. Where can one find peace from mosquitoes and thieves in Mexico ? "

" In the Central States ! The climate is mild and the people peaceable. You might think yourself in Europe."

" Oh ! I know what I will do, then. I'll go

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back to Europe. I can then imagine myself in your Central States. It will be infinitely cheaper and more pleasant.”

That is why Mexico is not, and is scarcely likely ever to be, a happy hunting-ground for Thomas Cook and his kind.

## EPILOGUE

A disciple of Ernest Renan—East or West, home is best—A view of the Amazon—The charm of the *Parisienne*—*Una Madame*—The Sorbonne and the *Moulin Rouge*—On calling a spade a spade—A dishonest hotel-keeper and an ill-bred journalist—The Yankee tide beating against the Mexican embankment—Paris eclipsed by New York.

ERNEST RENAN, the Breton seminarist who studied for ten or fifteen years before he was able to convince himself that the Bible is full of romantic situations such as all modern novels contain, confessed that he felt rather small at the thought that he had had to learn Latin, Greek and Hebrew, read all the doctors of divinity and wrestle with his conscience before he became imbued with that scepticism which flourishes in every corner in Paris and which every street-arab professes from his cradle.

I felt equally small on landing in Europe after my trip to America. I had had to wander up and



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down for six long months, change boats seven times, learn Spanish, live with niggers, mosquitoes and inn-keepers, ruin my digestion by sampling twenty kinds of cookery, and worry two or three hundred men before I could arrive at this fact, that America, as far as picturesque scenery goes, cannot be compared with Europe. Neither the luxuriant forests of Costa Rica, nor the orchid avenues of Jamaica, nor the snowy peaks of Popocatepetl, can be compared, for instance, with that little valley on the banks of the Loire along which the train, which brought me from Saint Nazaire to Paris, meandered. Our dear old tourist-ridden Europe is still the prettiest land under the sun. The "stay-at-home Frenchman," who does not need to take a six months' *détour* in the tropics in order to discover the beauty and poetry of the banks of the Loire, is quite right.

Yes, but Ernest Renan had at least one superiority over the Parisian street-arab, for he knew the reason of his incredulity. He knew that his scepticism was incurable, that nothing could take it away from him, and therefore he felt a

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secret pleasure which the street-arab can never experience.

I myself experienced this feeling while seated in the train which brought me from my transatlantic boat to Paris. I realized the beauty of a French sky and the charm of European scenery far better than the stay-at-home, who has never left the temperate zone, can do.

Tropical sunshine is beautiful but monotonous. There are no seasons. It is always summer. The harsh, glaring vegetation knows nothing of the tender fresh green of young leaves in spring, nor the glorious tragedy of death enacted by our trees in autumn. While there, I asked an artist, who had just returned from a trip up the Amazon, the most beautiful river in America, to describe the scenery to me. In reply, he went and fetched a canvas which looked like a tricolour flag; it was painted in three strips of colour: one brown, one green and one blue.

“The brown strip,” said he, “represents the waters of the Amazon; the green is the forest along its banks; the blue is the sky. I steamed up the Amazon for three weeks and I never saw anything else.”

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He was probably suffering from a severe attack of disappointment! But it is quite true that, in that dry, scorching atmosphere, we miss the delicate tones of our European sky with its horizon veiled in silvery mist. Tropical Nature is as coarse and hideous as a naked negress. Our more modest Nature has taught us to appreciate the charm of veils and gauzes. That charm haunts us.

Seated beside me in the train was a Cuban planter who was going into ecstasies over the vision outside the carriage-window; fields bounded by green hedges, rivulets with their courses marked by curtains of tall poplars, villages and farms with blue-slate roofs, and—what is only seen in the Department of the Loire—any number of chateaux in all styles of architecture, from the great mansion of the last century, low-built and well-lighted, to the turreted manor with which every hill is crowned.

My Cuban planter exclaimed :

“What wonderful variety of scenery! In Cuba you find whole provinces of tobacco-plants stretching farther than the eye can see. It may be more practical, but it is not so pretty. Here all your farmers seem to think about is to blend

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the different tones of their cereals. What artists they are ! ”

I explained to my Cuban friend that the peasants of Lower Brittany know nothing about such matters. The culture of lands divided into small holdings, the régime of the small plot of land, lead to this happy artistic result. But he had just remarked another superiority of our country over his : not only is European scenery more delicately coloured, but there is more variety in it.

After the pleasures of sight the European, who has just returned from a voyage in the tropics, soon learns to appreciate the pleasures of taste. At last I was able to eat fruit and vegetables again ! The Southern and Central Americans never give you anything but meat, ten or fifteen dishes of beef, mutton and rice ! They are obliged to add a great deal of pimento and other spices in order to disguise the monotony of their menu. After a few months of such a régime, the foreigner feels that his stomach is going on strike, and that he must really think seriously about browsing the grass in the fields if he can't get anything better, or else an intestinal malady will come to settle

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matters for him, either by killing him, or by forcing him to go and get patched up in Europe. The native is more hardy and can resist. But when people talk of Latin America, of her quarrelsome despots and her dissolute morals, they would do well to remember this detail of psycho-physiology. The fact that the poor fellows' blood is overheated accounts for a good deal.

Most Americans refuse to admit Europe's superiority over the tropics, as regards scenery and the art of cooking. They prefer the scenery and the cookery to which they have been accustomed since their cradle. And it is quite natural that they should do so. To tell the truth, the only place they care for in Europe is Paris; and Paris, I think, is represented to them by the *Parisienne*.

In the New World, the *Parisienne* enjoys extraordinary popularity, and this fame she owes partly to dressmakers and partly to novelists. No goddess in the old days ever had as many worshippers as she has. Her charming shadow haunts the Central American in all his dreams of bliss. No miraculous statue of the Virgin ever attracted

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such crowds of pilgrims as now flock to see the *Parisienne* from every corner of the world.

I will not vouch for the fact that this beauty-worship is not an excuse for satisfying low tastes. Great popular upheavals are like great floods; they carry a terrible amount of mud wherever they go. Talking of hypocrisy, I am glad to be able for once to contradict certain sanctimonious humbugs with their everlasting :

“ Oh ! yes, my dear fellow ! French literature . . . If the French only knew what harm their literature does them abroad ! ”

An extremely clever and original author, M. Hugues Le Roux, on his return from a trip to the United States, turned the tables on his foreign friends by proposing that we, in the interests of France, should start a league against indecent foreign literature !

Heaven forbid that I should champion the cause of this obnoxious form of literature ! But M. Hugues Le Roux is mistaken as to the interests of France. It is quite true that the modern French novel and the modern fashionable heroine with her faults and failings sometimes cause

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my female compatriots considerable annoyance when travelling in foreign lands. When the Cuban wishes to describe a woman of easy virtue, he calls her *una madame*. Now *madame*, in Spanish, means a *cocotte*. French ladies coming to settle for a time in Cuba are warned not to allow their servants to call them anything but Señora, as the French term *madame* is impertinent.

And yet, what do we see out there ? The shops in the Calle Obispo, Havana's most fashionable thoroughfare, all call themselves French and pretend to sell Parisian goods. One would think they were so many temples erected in honour of the *Parisiennne*. We see the same thing in Mexico, in the magnificent Calle San Francisco, in the streets of the other big South American towns, and, let us say, in the streets of all the capitals in the world.

Paris is Aphrodite up-to-date. The whole world comes to worship at her shrine. Now, do you think that this would happen if she were only represented by a set of grave priests or refined art-lovers ? And so we are bound to confess that her coarse literature is a good advertisement, and, alas ! its effects are far-reaching.

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No doubt it is more flattering to one's vanity to live in the town of Minerva than in the city of Aphrodite. But one leads to the other. The Central Americans firmly believe that the road to the Sorbonne lies through the *Moulin Rouge*.

The interests of France are centred round her capital. Her commerce, arts and sciences are well known all over the world ; they make her fame glow like an illuminated sign. We must not be too particular as to the quality of the oil which feeds the beacon of such a powerful lighthouse.

Certain newspapers in Mexico and the Antilles did me the honour to reproduce some extracts from this book, which had already appeared in European newspapers ; in most cases, they spoke very favourably of my efforts, for which I thank them.

However, one Costa Rican newspaper discharged a perfect volley of abuse at my head ; the fact is not worth mentioning except that this outburst of temper furnishes rather an amusing epilogue to the psychology of the little republics of Central America.



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I gave rather a favourable report of Costa Rica on the whole; in fact, I went so far as to say: "At the end of three days, I felt as if I could spend the rest of my life quite happily there." That was somewhat exaggerated. But what could I do? I had been received so kindly, I had made such charming and distinguished friends that I saw this little American Switzerland under very favourable circumstances, and I felt really grieved to think that she must soon fall into the hands of the United States. I spoke of the "Costa Rican's sweet, sunny disposition and of his companion's strange charm." In fact, I was quite enthusiastic.

Well, my book was translated into Spanish; it seems that I said all sorts of awful things about Costa Rica and its inhabitants.

*Traduttore, traditore.* The Spanish translator must have made me say in Spanish what I never said in French. The Spanish tongue is not calculated to reproduce the lights and shades of our French language. But that was not enough. I must have miscalculated the depth of civilization in Costa Rica, for they don't seem to be able to appreciate irony. These young nations are still

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rather like savages. They can only perceive vivid colours.

This little incident proves that these Central American republics are unfamiliar with the impartial visitor. They only understand diplomats whose business it is to purr prettily no matter what happens, and business-men who know that silence is gold. I firmly believe that I was the first European writer to visit those little-known countries in order to describe things as they really are, study the race problem, and prognosticate the future of the two Americas.

The Costa Rican behaves like a monkey who sees a looking-glass for the first time. It puts out its tongue, and then suddenly flies into a temper and smashes the offending mirror into a thousand pieces. The *Republica*, the most important newspaper in their village, informed its readers that I hated Costa Rica. In those countries one is either friend or foe. When a man ceases to flatter you, you may know that he is preparing to bite.

What caused this outburst of satanical hatred on my part? My dislike of a certain inn, where,

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if you leave valuables lying about in your room, they disappear as if by magic. Theft is the Costa Rican's besetting sin. They were much astonished that I should complain, and that I should trouble the police for such a trifling matter. It would be a brave person who would want to pay a second visit to that hotel ; it was so dirty that a dog would have refused to live there.

The *Republica*, the most important newspaper in the village, at last discovered the reason of my dislike : it was all the fault of the Palace Hotel. Without that unlucky incident, I should never have thought of describing Costa Rica as anything but a paradise inhabited by angels. After that, everyone went back to their old occupation, which consists of bestowing fulsome flattery upon one another.

No, I am not so mean. Neither dishonest hotel-keeper nor ill-bred journalist could spoil the pleasant memory of Costa Rica, its splendid forests, its pretty women and the few distinguished and witty men who kindly did the honours of their little Fatherland. But, alas ! all my liking

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for them cannot prevent me hearing the step of the approaching Yankee.

It was the same thing in Mexico. I fear that I spoke even more bitterly of Mexico than of Costa Rica, because I expected better things of her. I belong to the Latin race which refuses to die. When I realized that civilization in Central America was unlikely to reach a very high standard of perfection, I turned towards great Mexico as towards the farthest outworks of Latin civilization and also, I must confess, of European commerce.

I was grieved to find her so defenceless. I came away with the impression that she owed her prosperity to the industry of her foreign colony. Out of fourteen million Mexicans, there are twelve million Indians who do not count, so stupefied are they by drink and superstition. The two remaining millions, notwithstanding their great love for their country, cannot be compared in the matter of vim and energy with two million Yankees taken from whichever State you like to choose; and there are eighty million "hustling" Yankees on the other side of the

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frontier. The embankment is bound to fall in sooner or later. Although the clean-shaven Yankee, with his great thick boots and his gold-filled teeth, may pretend to keep his fingers out of the political pie, in the north as in the south he intends to realize his ambition, which is probably of a higher standard than that of Spain and not inferior to that of France ; and when he has got what he wants, he will cease to trade with Europe, and will push the old mother on one side as if she were a stranger.

When once the Mexican embankment is broken down, the Yankee tide will flow along at its own sweet will. It will engulf Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, only to pause before the three important States of South America : Brazil, Argentina and Chili. The latter, they say, are made of better stuff. But the wave, which will then beat against their ramparts, will have become as formidable as a tidal wave ; and it is doubtful whether these countries will be able to do anything but just stop its progress for a short time.

In those days—and many of us who are now

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young men will see it—the United States will be more powerful than the whole of Europe put together. Rome will be situated in the New World, and Paris will be nothing but an Athens which is beginning to fade away into the grey mists and shadows of the Past.

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