

# IMPRESSIONS OF COSTA RICA (1895)

Text by John Randolph Spears, correspondent to the *New York Sun*

## Table of Contents

<b><i>FROM SHIP TO SAN JOSE</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b><i>THRIFT IN COSTA RICA</i></b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b><i>A COSTA RICAN CITY</i></b> .....	<b>32</b>

## FROM SHIP TO SAN JOSE<sup>1</sup>.

Things seen in a short trip in Central America.

Courteous Treatment in the Custom House—The Crowded Railway Train—St. Louis Beer Bottles About a Church in Costa Rica—The Inns of the Country—A Mule that Was a Humorist—An Artistic Statue

All things considered, I suppose there is no route of equal extent open to the traveler anywhere in Central America on which one may find so great a variety of matters likely to interest a foreigner as that from Puntarenas, on the Gulf of Nicoya, to San José, the capital of Costa Rica. One arrives in the gulf by steamer, of course, my journey thither having been made, as was told recently in *THE SUN*,<sup>2</sup> in a remarkable old coaster just ready to fall to pieces of her own weight. I found the town of Puntarenas,<sup>3</sup> as might have been expected from the English translation of the name, Sandy Point, built on a low spit of sand that the currents of water had built from the north shore out into the gulf. There was ample water for big ships in the roadstead before the town, and sufficient for small steamers like the one I was on, behind it. We anchored in the roadstead, however, and immediately received a visit from the port officials. Then we might have expected the steamer to haul alongside a substantial-looking pier that we could see jutting out into the water, but she did nothing of the kind. Instead, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Article published by *New York Sun*, Sunday, April 7, 1895, page 7

<sup>2</sup> Sunday, March 24, 1895

<sup>3</sup> Puntarenas — Spelled Punta Arenas in original

passengers got into a ship's boat, and were rowed to the pier. There we climbed up a steep stairway, and then carried our baggage to the Custom House located on shore.

This pier I found to be the first matter of interest in the journey to San José. As a mechanical structure it was in but one respect peculiar or interesting; it was an ordinary aggregation of iron piles, girders, braces, and flooring built out into the usually calm waters of the gulf. Its peculiarity was that it was on the one hand very much larger than, and ten times as expensive as the requirements of a small boat pier demanded, and on the other hand it was neither strong enough nor long enough to serve for the landing of cargoes direct from the ships. Why such a pier should have been erected there was more than I could understand then. Afterward I learned that it was one of a dozen or so erected along the south sea shore of the Spanish Main for the benefit of the owners chiefly.

Every passenger and every pound of cargo landed at the ports where these piers exist must pay toll to the pier owners, whether the pier be used or not. At each of these ports there is also a lighterage company, whose boats must be used for the cargo always, and by the passengers generally. The pier company and the lighterage company have usually the same stockholders. The companies hold concessions from the Government which last from twenty years upward, and most valuable concessions they are, for the amount of the yearly commerce in the port being known in advance, together with the cost of erecting the pier, the companies have been enabled to so arrange matters as to pay from ten to twenty percent. dividends every quarter.

The charges at Puntarenas are comparatively light. I paid but 44 cents for the privilege of climbing the stairway with my baggage on my back and walking thence with it to the Custom House. I learned that longshoremen are usually on hand to help with baggage, but no passengers willing to hire a longshoreman [were] expected to arrive on my steamer, so none was at hand when I landed.

At this port I had my first experience in passing a Spanish-American Custom House. I had read books of travel that told long stories of venal, domineering officials and of annoyances which travelers were made to suffer in order that they might be forced to pay blackmail. And I was carrying with me a camera and several rolls of film. I could not show the officials what was within either the camera or the rolls without ruining the film already exposed and ending all hope of photographing the odd things I was to see in the journey before me.

Worse yet, I did not know enough of the Spanish language to explain the matter properly. So, I made up my mind that the officials would refuse to pass the photographic apparatus without an examination until I had parted with more money than the whole outfit cost in New York.

With easily imagined feelings I walked into the Custom House baggage room. I found it a cool and airy place after my walk with the baggage in the hot sun. A pleasant-faced young native received me with a smile, and when I apologized for my inability to speak the beautiful Castilian language by saying I had been in Spanish America but a brief time, he was good enough (also sinful enough) to reply that I spoke it perfectly. Then I told him, in reply to his questions, my name, place of residence, business, and the journey I was making, all of which facts he noted on a sheet of paper.

*"That you may wish to put your baggage on the scales in order to weigh it,"* said he, when this was done. I did so promptly. He weighed the stuff, collected the 44 cents pier charges, shook hands, said *"No more; good bye,"* and the business ended. I was free to go anywhere in Costa Rica.

Since then I have passed a good many Customs officials in various parts of Spanish America, and I am bound to say that no one ever treated me discourteously there, and so I am free to say that I believe the writers who tell of ill treatment are smugglers or liars.

With the landing pier and the railroad, to be described further on, Puntarenas contained but one other point of special interest to the traveler, as far as I could learn. There was, of course, a shady plaza. There were plenty of tall palms with their long, green fronds waving and glinting in the sunlit breeze; there were quaint houses; there were plenty of barefooted natives (the population is said to be 3,000), all dressed in cheap cottons and calicoes; but all these may be found in any tropical village. And the one point of special interest would have attracted none but Americans, and if I may judge by what I read in some of the American newspapers, not all of them. I see so many editorial sneers at every demand for old-fashioned Yankee patriotism in dealing with international questions that I am half afraid that only the few of us who know how these sneers work against the hopes of Americans in foreign countries, would have cared to see what I have termed the remaining point of interest in Puntarenas. For it was only the American flag waving from the Consul's window—the flag that was one time known as Old Glory.

One leaves Puntarenas for the capital city by rail. I think the little narrow-gauge train would be of interest to anyone. When leaving the town, I arrived at the railroad station only about two minutes before the train left. There was a heavy-looking engine with two cars only in the train. The car next to the engine looked somewhat like a common passenger coach in the States. Behind that was a plain, flat car like those used for lumber in the States. This car was piled four feet high with packages of merchandise, of which the major part was salt in cylindrical bundles three feet long by nine inches in diameter, wrapped in wild plantain leaves. On top of the merchandise were a lot of trunks, valises, and bundles, the baggage of the passengers, while overall, sitting, standing, and clinging as thick as pigeons on a roost, were the second-class passengers, every one of whom was barefooted. They were actually two or three-deep in places—children were sitting on the laps of adults, while babies were in the arms of the children.

All of this I took in at a glance as I stopped before the ticket seller's window facing the platform and paid a dollar for the privilege of riding first class for fourteen miles, the length of the road. At the rear steps of the coach a trainman took my baggage and tossed it up on the platform car. There was not a square inch of room there uncovered by human beings, so far as I could see, but my bundles were caught by a man standing there, and they somehow subsided from view at once.

Then I observed that the coach seemed as full of passengers as the open car was. These passengers all wore shoes. The steps and the platform were covered, but they made "room" for me in some way, and up I went. Though the door was full, a passage opened that I might enter; but after that further progress was impossible. Every seat was occupied by at least two, and it was a narrow-gauge coach, with only scant space anywhere. Some of the seats were three-deep with adults and babies, like the spaces on the open car. The aisle was packed like that of an elevated car in New York during commission hours. And that was on a red-hot day in the torrid zone.

But did anybody grumble? Not a word. The scene was not alone remarkable as a specimen of closely packed passengers. Nearly everybody had a bottle of some kind, and most of the bottles contained native rum. And it was a short time between drinks. Those who did not drink ate fruit, generally oranges. And without any exception everybody within sight laughed and talked in the

cheeriest, merriest way imaginable. It was not a picnic either, but a common, everyday train load.

While I was looking at the strange scene I heard the signal to start and turned to look toward the open car, more than half expecting to see some of the crowd clinging there tumble off. Indeed, had I been on the coach platform I should have got my camera ready for a snap shot in anticipation of such an accident. An instant later there was a tremendous jerk from the engine and away we went. Everybody fore and aft swayed under the impulse, the young women and girls screamed and clutched at those nearest them, and then away we went, everybody laughing and talking very much louder than ever.

As I said, the road there is about fourteen miles long, all told. It ends at a town called Esparta. We made, I think, four stops along the way, and it took an hour and a half to cover the route. I suppose some people left the train at each stop, but I am not sure of it. I saw that a lot of both men and women (those who had been drinking most) scrambled down from the open car at each stop, but they all soon climbed back again, I think. Some left the first-class car in like manner and returned again. Of one thing I am sure, and that is that neither the heat nor the fun nor the pressure of the crowd decreased one iota until Esparta was reached. Then the passengers faded out of view, as if by magic. I had to climb upon the flat car and hunt out my own baggage. There was no system of checking baggage nor even anyone to care for it *en route* or at the end of the journey. Everyone just helped himself. By the time I had succeeded in doing this there were not three passengers anywhere near the cars.

A small boy who acted, if he did not look, like the boys one finds about country railroad stations in the States—a boy who smoked a cigarette, chucked stones at stray pigs, and showed abnormal activity in other ways, was lounging about the train. I asked him if there was a hotel in Esparta. He said yes, "*sí*," and without more ado grabbed up two of my bundles and started up the street. A hundred feet away we came to a one-story wooden building, whose various parts on two sides of a street corner leaned up against each other in a way to suggest a want of braces. A door was found on one side, and the lad opened it, put the baggage just within, held out his hand, and said: "*Ten cents.*"

"*Is this the hotel?*" said I.

"*How not?*" said he. So, I gave him the coin and went in.

The room was silent and dusty, and furnished with a few well-worn wooden chairs and a round center table, with several worn newspapers of ancient date, including the always beautiful *Paris Illustré*. There was not a soul in the room or in a hall which I found adjoining or in the court within. So, I left my baggage and started out to explore the town. Of course, I found the proprietor afterward, and he proved to be a Frenchman who had the French taste for good things to eat.

Going back to the railroad station I found a lot of the cartmen, of whom THE SUN told a story<sup>4</sup> not long ago, transferring the freight from the capital. Nearby was a little machine shop under a shed, with tools for making simple repairs to the rolling stock of the railroad. A little further on was a sawmill of the buzz saw type, with some other wood-working machinery. Six men were here working, with no end of palaver and perspiration, over the two parts of a small split pulley which they were trying to fit over a shaft. I watched them for ten minutes and then went away, almost as weary over their work as they were. The saw logs in the yard were peculiar. Everyone had been squared up into a stick of timber in the woods. Then one end had been cut into the form of a spearhead, and marks on the log indicated that oxen had been hitched to this spearhead to drag the timber from the woods to the mill. All of the timber was of a kind of cedar, and the lumber was beautiful.

After seeing the mill, I was not surprised to find the main part of the town built of wood. The house walls generally and the floors that I saw were of inch planks. Some were roofed with iron and some with tiles. Some were painted. But the arrangement of the rooms was generally that of the adobe-walled houses of other Central American towns. There was a row of rectangular rooms built around a rectangular court.

After a time, I came to the plaza with its church, and found both church and plaza interesting, especially the plaza. The church was an old-time structure, with stone and cement walls, built into the form of a cross. Standing as it did in what may almost be called a shanty town, there is an air of solidity and strength about it that gave it unusual majesty. To add to this was the fact that it was built on a plaza that was elevated two feet or so above the surrounding streets and lots. Nor was it remarkable alone in its location or by contrast with its

---

<sup>4</sup> Date unidentified

surroundings. The churches I had previously seen in Spanish America all stood in arid little deserts of sand or of sand paved with cobble stones, but this one was surrounded by a charming little park. The plaza was enclosed by a low stone wall. To all appearances the wall had been built and then the space within filled two feet deep with loam, after which the surface was levelled and divided by gravel walks into beds where endless varieties of flowers were cultivated. Such masses of colors as those flowers presented to the eye can rarely be found outside of tropical regions. Nor were the flower beds remarkable alone for the colors of their flowers. The borders of the beds seemed even more remarkable to one who comes from the land of the Women's Christian Temperance Union than did the masses of colors within, for every bed was surrounded by a row of beer bottles. St. Louis beer bottles at that. There was nothing wrong about the bottles; they were very good dark glass bottles. And there is nothing the matter with St. Louis beer; it is first-rate beer. But when one who comes from the United States bends down over a cluster of particularly beautiful flowers in a church garden and finds that as the flowers wave to and fro in the soft, sweet tropical breeze they alternately hide and reveal the legend "Export Beer," he receives something in the nature of a shock. At least that was my experience before the old church of Esparta.

Then there was another curious feature about this old church. The use of wood was, apparently, a fad in the town which the priest had taken up. The interior had been celled with planed and matched boards, while the tile floors remained as of old. I guess that most people seeing the outside of that church would be impressed very favorably by it. Massive walls and tile roofs fit together as naturally as gulches and cascades do. But what must one say of fresh, new matched ceiling above floor tiles worn into hollows by the bare feet of generations of worshippers?

A broad highway leads away from Esparta over rolling hills and through romantic valleys—over a mountain divide at last—toward San José. It is a very good road in the dry season, plenty good enough to be enjoyed by less adventurous riders of bicycles than those who have given us books about their journeys out of the way. And it is a highway that leads right across from Puntarenas to Port Limón. So here is a modest but right interesting trip, which the wheelmen, so far as I know, have heretofore overlooked. Some of the points of interest they would find may be properly mentioned here. It is a road so wide and plain that no guide would be needed even by the least experienced of travelers, and there is, moreover, a telegraph line all the way. The places for

rest and refreshment are strewn along the part of the road that I traveled as thick as ice-cream pavilions at a seaside summer resort in the States. These places would not at first glance seem inviting to the wheelman unaccustomed to tropical life, for they are generally nothing but thatch-roofed shacks built of poles by the wayside and contain but little furniture or anything else except a bar, where all kinds of drinks from sugar water to native rum are sold. But one who knows how can always find two handy hooks for his hammock under ample shade and where the cool breezes blow, while the woman who is usually found behind the bar will bring tempting wheat rolls, crisp tortillas, and the best coffee ever sold in a wayside shack, as soon as the traveler gets his hammock a-swinging. At the more pretentious places one may have, by waiting a little while, fried eggs and rice, and that is a combination worth the attention of Yankee cooks. Now, places for rest and refreshment are almost as essential for the comfort of bicyclers, one may say, as good roads are. But there is one fact about the shacks that would always irritate the wheelmen. They are never located on a crest or the top of a divide. I saw here and there one standing half way up some of the hills, but as a rule they were clustered in the bottoms of valleys. One may therefore guess that the Costa Ricans never stop on a mountain's top to enjoy the scenery while they rest the mules and take a drink of something refreshing, although the scenery there is something charming. The Costa Rican invariably stops, it seems, to rest and refresh himself before a climb instead of after the climbing is done.

In addition to the shacks one finds very fair hotels at the towns that at intervals of four leagues lie long the highway, and in these the traveler sees interesting features a-plenty—among the rest something to carry him away to the country hotels of his own land. There is very little in common between the adobe-walled, tile-floored buildings of Costa Rica and the wooden hotels of rural United States, and quite as little between the hosts of the two regions, but along the route I found the same dining room wall decorations that I have seen in about every country dining room that I have visited between the Bay of Fundy and the Golden Gate. I refer to a most remarkable series of lithograph prints of game and of fruits. Little more than a reference to the series is needed, for every reader will recall the gorgeous platter of strawberries, grapes, watermelon, peaches, apples, cherries, what not—all in season at once, apparently, and all of impossible colors—that hangs on one wall of the halfway house; the collection of game that includes a duck, a rabbit, and three quail with the butt of an old muzzle-loading shotgun and a powder flask that hangs on another; the picture of striped bass, pike, and half dozen trout with the butt of a fish rod, reel and



all—the rod with which all these fish were caught—that hangs on a third. All of these I found on the dining room walls of the hotels along the route to the capital of Costa Rica. If anyone wants a proof of the old adage that the devil is good to his own, let him consider the enormous sale that these wretched prints have had. But there were other specimens of lithographing, both native and Yankee, that while reminding one of his home had nothing in them specially to harrow the soul. In native work was a portrait in black of Gen. Don Próspero Fernández,<sup>5</sup> and in Yankee work was a colored hanger portraying a long, lank, smiling Gloucester fisherman with a huge codfish hanging down his back. There was also a Yankee picture of a cigarette girl with not too much clothes on. The picture of the Don was a regular campaign lithograph, of the sort that politicians use in the States when running for office. As the two pictures of men hung on the wall side by side I was compelled to admit that the Don was beyond doubt a handsomer man in the eyes of the ladies than the Yankee fisherman, but the latter was no slouch. Moreover, the Yankee was hanging there to promote peaceful Yankee trade rather than to gather followers for the next Costa Rica revolution—the trade in Yankee cod liver oil.

In one of the hotels, the *Nuevo* of Atenas, there were on the wall two signs or notices to guests that were novel. The one said, "*It is prohibited to tilt back the chairs,*" and the other that, "*It is prohibited to occupy the hammocks with spurs.*" The chairs in the sitting room were imported goods and of a construction so frail that they would have gone to pieces had a heavy man tilted back in them. The ordinary chair of the region is made of a framework of cedar pieces, say, one by two inches large, in cross sections, all well put together. It will stand any man's weight in almost any position. The other notice grew out of the facts that every hotel furnishes hammocks in the sitting room, just as Yankee hotels furnish a sofa of some kind, and that careless travelers would put their boots, spurs and all, into the hammocks in spite of the damage the spurs would work.

Another thing likely to attract the traveler's eye is the native beehive to be found hanging under nearly every verandah along the road. A stranger would scarcely guess what the beehive really was without a close examination. The wild honeybees thrive in that region, and the natives often find their stores of honey in hollows of the forest trees. Sometimes a hollow limb is occupied by the bees, and when such a limb is found the native cuts the occupied part free from the tree, and, carrying it home, hangs it under his veranda. A hole is sawed

---

<sup>5</sup> Próspero Fernández Oreamuno (1834-1885) — career military officer; President of Costa Rica 1882-1885; reformist.

into the limb in such a fashion that honey can be extracted and the hole closed again. So, the native thereafter has a perpetual supply of honey. I saw in some places two, and in one three, of these crude hives under one veranda.

In one of his notions of what constitutes a personal ornament, the ordinary Costa Rican is as much like a Yankee cowboy as one steer on the range is like another. It is the style in Costa Rica for the men to go armed, but huge cheese knives, called machetes, are carried instead of cowboy revolvers, because the law prohibits revolvers. Men of the barefooted class everywhere in the Spanish Main carry these huge knives to a remarkable extent, but nowhere is the custom so nearly universal as in Costa Rica. This habit, I suppose, is a relic of the influence of the old buccaneers. The ordinary machete is a stout blade, two feet long and two inches wide, with a point at one end and a cow-horn handle at the other. It was often used as a sword by the buccaneers but was chiefly useful in hacking a pathway through the tangled forests of the tropics. One cannot even now leave the regular trails of the forest region and hope to travel any distance worth mentioning without an edged tool to cut away vines and brush. So, the machete is as necessary to the tropical countryman of today as it was to the buccaneer. But it is not the countryman alone who carries it. It is in Costa Rica well-nigh universally worn. Not only do men who never have occasion to cut a brush wear them, but the boys are everywhere as well provided. Even the youngsters down to seven or eight years of age are always seen playing about the shacks and in the public highways with eighteen-inch machetes by their sides. Just imagine a schoolhouse yard full of boys all armed in that way. Yet that is something the traveler in Costa Rica may see. One can easily guess that this style is not only a relic of the old days, but that it is due to the ever-present expectation—one almost says the ever-present hope—that a revolution will break out within a brief time. Probably the worst effect of the military form of Government prevailing in Spanish America is in the fact that it takes the thoughts of the people from the arts of peace to the arts of war, and very naturally the carrying of a sword begets the wish to bathe it in blood.

A traveler interested in agriculture would notice that the country along this road is irrigated, after a fashion, and that barbed wire is coming into use. The huge canals to be seen in the States are not found, but about every plantation has its own sources of water supply and a system of small ditches. The chief crop grown was sugarcane, which was for the most part cut up at the size which Yankees cut sowed corn and was used for feeding stock. As told in another issue

of THE SUN,<sup>6</sup> large quantities were sold to the cartmen who thronged this route. They chopped up the cane into bits an inch long before feeding it. It is an excellent fodder, though one would say it must leave the animals rather soft where no grain is fed. They use the seed of the cane, however, as a substitute for grain. But as soon as one gets high enough above the sea to permit its growth he finds everywhere in Costa Rica the plantations of coffee; but of these the story will be told at another time.<sup>7</sup>

My personal experiences in the ride over this route, insofar as they help to portray the region, were not without interest. For instance, the fact that I had to hire a mule to carry me and my baggage was in itself interesting. Here is a broad highway that in the dry season is a very fair wagon road. It is really as good as half of those of the States at all seasons. The distance from Esparta, at the end of the little railroad already described, to Alajuela, at the end of a railroad that runs into the capital, is only about thirty-six miles. There are dozens of people passing over the route each way, on every pleasant day at least, for I saw them myself, and yet no one has the enterprise to establish a stage line there. One must hire a mule. The man of whom I got mine talked English perfectly. He said he did not establish a stage line because he could make more money out of mules alone. The regular price for a saddle mule was \$8 for the journey, he said, but to me it would be \$6, because he had a great affection for citizens of the States. Even at \$6 he was making more money, he said, than he could from a stage, because the latter would require four mules and a driver, and no passenger would pay more than \$5 for a seat. What with the wear of the stage, the salary and stealings of the driver, and the occasional trips without any passengers, he thought it wouldn't pay. It would require an average of ten passengers, he thought, to yield dividends, and that seemed a large number to him.

I paid the little French hotel man at Esparta \$2 for my dinner and lodgings, and just at sunrise rode away on a stout mule, with my baggage piled on behind me. After jogging on comfortably for an hour, I stopped at a shack and ate good tortillas and drank a cup of coffee with milk, for all of which I paid 15 cents. A little further on the wind began to blow, and thereafter life was somewhat of a burden, because the dust was flying continually in my face. However, at noon I reached the *Nuevo Hotel* at [San] Mateo and there got a breakfast of rice, eggs,

---

<sup>6</sup> Date unidentified

<sup>7</sup> Issue of April 21st, 1895

roast beef, bread, and coffee that were good enough, while the mule had a good feed of sugar-cane fodder.

I mention the mule and the fodder because about all I remember of the rest of the day's journey pertains to the mule, and I think he was ungrateful. The mule is the slyest of humorists, but I didn't know the fact so well that morning as I did at night. After leaving [San] Mateo the road climbs a long, steep hill for several miles, and we (the mule and I) followed the trail in the heat of the day. The mule showed he did not like that. He was accustomed under a native rider to cover eight leagues in the forenoon, instead of four as I had done, and then resting during the heat of the day, after which he dashed on four leagues more, and the journey was done. But I did not wish to cover the route so rapidly, so the mule came to understand from this, I suppose, that I was a foreigner who wore no spurs, and he took a mean advantage of me. As we began to mount the hill his step began to moderate by degrees that varied with the grade of the road. As I had already observed that the sun was hot I made no objections. After a few minutes of this, and while yet the grade was no steeper than three per cent., the beast began to zigzag from side to side of the road like an overloaded pack mule on a Colorado mountain side. The mule all this time had had his eye on me instead of on the path before us, and so, before my natural indignation at a zigzag trail on a three per cent. grade could manifest itself further than by a change of countenance, he altered his pace and walked more swiftly as well as in a straight line up the road.

Just then the dump and a few shanties about a small, low-grade gold mine not far from the trail attracted my attention, and when next I looked at the mule he was zigzagging more slowly than ever. But as before, he picked up his feet the moment he caught my eye, and on we went.

Eventually we got up where the road was really steep, and there I gave him his head and we trudged along so slowly that I began to wonder whether the owner hadn't given me a sick mule. Then I remembered that with my baggage and all the mule's load was not far from 240 pounds. I began to feel sorry for the beast, and while I was thinking about the matter he ambled out to one side of the road where a big mango apple tree on a little bench in the mountain side made a thick, cool shade, and deliberately laid himself down on the grass.

I was in a quandary then sure enough. The hotel at Atenas, where I proposed to pass the night, was at least nine miles away, and here I was apparently with a

sick mule on my hands. I walked about the beast, feeling at once sorry for it and vexed at the owner, and unable to imagine what I should do next for several minutes. Then I happened to notice the eye of the supposed invalid. Go where I would that eye was on me. And it was just as bright and intelligent an eye as was ever seen in any quadruped.

Holding the end of the halter in my hand, I backed over to a hedge, nearby, and cut a sprout about four feet long and as thick as my finger at the butt. It balanced in the hand beautifully, but the wood seemed a trifle tender, so I cut another. As I balanced this in my hand with the other, the mule got on his feet with a bounce. He was as frisky as a colt when I mounted, and from there on over the divide and into Atenas he went along without ever a zigzag or an attempt at loitering. And I did not strike a single blow with the whip, either.

I am free to admit this mule story reads like a traveler's untrue tale, but it is true nevertheless. The mules of the Spanish Main are the traveler's best friends. They are hardy, and where the roads are bad are so sure-footed that a stranger had better trust them than his own judgment. But they are quick to learn the peculiarities of their riders and to take advantage of them. And there is nothing they will observe in a foreigner so quickly as the absence of spurs.

If one may judge by the size of the spurs and the ox goads used by natives throughout the Spanish Main, the region is a field where missionaries from the society for preventing cruelty to animals are needed.

Last of all, I came to what I found at the little city of Alajuela and to pay the stable proprietor for the use of it, but when I reached the stable the proprietor refused to take the money. Just why he did so I could not understand, but I found out eventually that the owner had telegraphed on that he would see me in San José and collect the money. This seems worth telling for the reason that the proprietor did not hunt me up until three days later, a sufficient length of time to have enabled me to leave the nation had I been so disposed. And this illustrates somewhat of Costa Rican methods.

Of the town itself little need be said save that its streets were paved as well as may be with cobble stones, that its houses looked neat and well kept, that the hotel at which I got breakfast was notably neat and clean, with waiters in dress suits, and that the plaza was one great and beautiful flower garden. But, attractive as such masses of color as these must always be to a visitor from the

North, a Yankee traveler, with only a short time for examining the plaza, would ignore them to look at a bronze statue that has been erected there. It is a statue that is the pride of the nation and more, too, than that. It is looked upon and venerated much as Charter Oak<sup>8</sup> was venerated elsewhere. Pictures of it hang on house walls everywhere in the nation as conspicuously as lithographs of patron saints. And it is a statue that is almost as interesting to citizens of the United States as it is to Costa Ricans.

Among unlearned people of Costa Rica this statue is known as that of "*the man who whipped the United States*." Among the learned it is the statue of Juan Santamaría, the hero of the battle of Rivas, in the war with Walker's<sup>9</sup> filibusters.

So far as I was able to learn, Central America has many statues and some paintings, but only one work of art—the statue of Juan Santamaría. One may see in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, for instance, a bronze equestrian effigy of Morazán,<sup>10</sup> the liberator. It was erected at great expense, but it is like the equestrian statues of Washington to be seen in the States—an atrocious caricature of the man mounted on an impossible horse. Elsewhere I saw a life-size marble statue of the liberator in his uniform as an officer, but it was as little like the famous old soldier as a barnstormer<sup>11</sup> is like *King Lear*. In straining themselves to idealize their subjects, the artists who make such statues as those of Washington commonly succeed only in producing something contemptible, and nowhere is the demand for idealized subjects greater than among Spanish-Americans. But the case of Juan Santamaría was different from any that ever arose in Central America.

Juan was a common private in the army that Costa Rica sent to help Nicaragua expel the audacious Walker. This army, with that of Nicaragua, finally got the filibuster cooped up in the public market at Rivas, near Lake Nicaragua. The market consisted of a small block or square, surrounded by a thick adobe wall, from which on every side a thatched roof rose toward the center. Here the interlopers remained, unable to get away, and yet comparatively safe from attack. They had loopholes through the walls, and so great was their skill with

---

<sup>8</sup> Charter Oak — Large white oak tree, formerly located near Hartford, Connecticut, which came to symbolize US independence.

<sup>9</sup> William Walker (1824-1860) — US citizen who organized private military expeditions to Central America, with the intention of creating (and ruling) English-speaking colonies.

<sup>10</sup> Francisco Morazán (1792-1842) — Honduran politician; liberal reformer; sometime president of the Federal Republic of Central America; executed.

<sup>11</sup> Barnstormer — One who travels through rural districts giving theatrical performances.

the rifle that the mention of a Yankee with a gun makes the ignorant Central American's flesh creep to this day. To approach the market place was to meet a fire so deadly that the attacking troops could not be forced to try it again after the first attempt. Meanwhile the attacking officers had tried to utilize the roofs of nearby houses as points from which to fire on the interlopers, but without avail, because of the shelter the thatched roof of the market afforded. Then attempts were made to throw combustibles to the thatch by hand, and flaming arrows were fired at it from bows, but nothing of this kind availed, and as a last resort the commander called for a volunteer who would cross the open space at a corner and thrust a flaming torch up into the dry thatch of palm leaves.

And that was a call for a man who would give his life for the good of his country. No man could cross that space with a torch and return alive. The sentinels behind that wall were fighting for life, and the balls from their rifles would overtake the volunteer. But the man for the occasion was there, and his name was Juan Santamaría of Alajuela. He died as he had expected to, but he fired the thatch first and Walker was driven out.

Standing amid the flowers of the public plaza, on a pedestal that lifts him up where all may see, is the Juan in bronze—with bulging eyes and hollow cheeks and thick-lipped mouth close shut; with a flaming torch in his right hand and an old flintlock in the other; with muscles strained—even with the toes of his bare right foot compressed as he stoops for the forward leap. Here as in no other statue can one find portrayed the half-heroic, half-mad emotions of the soul and the quivering muscles of the limbs of an American Indian who is hurling himself to a certain death. For Juan, in spite of his name, had little, if any, white blood in his veins. The name signed to this statue as sculptor is A. Dureune.

But not alone on the way that the art of the designer has made it to stir the heart of the spectator is this statue interesting, for it furnishes an instructive study in the character of the people. The statue was erected by public subscription. That the committee who had the matter in charge should have left the design of the hero himself to the artist is more than could have been expected of such committees in the States, and Costa Rica is to be congratulated. With this in mind one may overlook and forgive sundry bas-relief plates on the pedestal alleged to portray other scenes in this tragedy—plates that were plainly in accord with the sentiments of the committee rather than in accord with the ideas of the artist. One of these plates represents the officer calling for a volunteer—the officer with his sword and other trappings and uniform in dress

parade array, while Juan steps from the ranks with his hand on his heart and his eyes rolled up till only the whites are visible. On another plate is seen the charge of the Costa Ricans on the blazing market place—the whole body of troops in perfect line, stepping together as if moved by a common lever, while poor Juan is lying half way across the street, dying, with his hand still on his heart and his eyes turned up.

Now if I read the character of this people aright, Juan was left in the hands of the artist unhampered by instructions, because he was a common soldier. He could be portrayed as he was because none would be found to object. But when Morazán, or any other man of good family, is to be made in effigy the feelings of his relatives must be consulted. It would never do to let the scar on his chin or the pimple on his nose or even the stains of camp and of battle go into a statue where everybody may see them. However, there are right few in any country who can say, "*Paint me as I am.*"

There is still another instructive fact about this statue. While the citizens of Alajuela were collecting the money to pay for it, the papers of the country of course had much to say about it and about the man for whom it was to be erected. No sooner did this talk begin than an ex-lieutenant of the Costa Rican army that operated against Walker, a man who was drawing a pension for services alleged to have been rendered in the army, came forward and asked for an increase of his pension on the ground that he was the one who fired the thatch and that the story of Juan was untrue. Singular as it may seem, this ex-officer was not laughed at until he was driven into the obscurity from which he came, but, on the contrary, many partisans arose to denounce Juan Santamaría, and a great controversy stirred all Costa Rica. The Costa Ricans seem never to have observed how utterly ridiculous it was for a living man to claim the honor. For, of course, no one could have fired that thatch and escaped the bullets of Walker's men. Besides this it was like the barefoot Juan—the man who from his earliest youth had carried a machete and dreamed of scenes of bloodshed—to throw away his life in a mad dash for glory, and it was not like the dilettante booted officials, whose dreams of conquest are usually of an altogether different sort. It is a curious matter of record in the histories of all nations that when a great emergency has arisen and a volunteer of heroic mold was needed, it was always an officer who did the calling and generally a private who made the sacrifice.



Of the remainder of the journey to San José little need be said. It was a ride on the main line of Costa Rica's railroad, and that is a road that can be better described at another time. The ride was devoid of incident, so that part of the journey was the only one not abundantly worth the trouble of making.

THRIFT IN COSTA RICA.<sup>12</sup>

## A Land of Small Farms where Prosperity goes Barefoot.

Common Errors Concerning the Costa Rican Peons—Though Poorly Clothed the People are Thrifty and Well to Do—Wealth from Coffee Plantations—Millions of Buried Treasure everywhere.

Of all parts of the Spanish Main which I have seen there is none in which "*observers imbued with the pride of race and the prejudices of civilization*" will receive ruder mental shocks than in Costa Rica. For it greatly disturbs observers of that kind—travelers of Saxon blood, especially—to unlearn their knowledge of things that are not so. And in Costa Rica one unlearns some of the most cherished teachings of his youth. Consider, for instance, the ideas of the ordinary Yankee traveler making his first journey in Central America. With the pictures of the sterile New England soil in his mind and the chills of New England winters still in his bones and the wealth he has gained in spite of these adverse circumstances in his pocket, doesn't he know very well that hunger is the father of industry and thrift, and that wealth is the child of third generation? He thinks he does. "*Humanity can reach as advanced states of culture only by battling with the inclemencies of nature in high latitudes*" is another way of putting it, since culture and penury do not thrive together under the same roof in these days. And then, doesn't he know that the people of the tropics are not the laziest of all the earth? If he doesn't, it is not for want of books of travel to tell him so. Even a scientific observer like Helt, the author of *The Naturalist in Nicaragua*, says:

"Everywhere throughout the central provinces deep, ingrained indolence paralyzes all industry and enterprise, and, with the means of plenty and comfort on every side, the people live in squalid poverty."

And in another place, he says:

"The only work is done by the females—the men keep up their dignity by lounging about all day, or lolling in a hammock, all wearied with their slothfulness, and looking discontented and unhappy."

The Yankee traveler enters Costa Rica necessarily imbued with the pride of race and the prejudices of civilization. A week's stay in any country is too brief for

---

<sup>12</sup> Published by the *New York Sun*, Sunday, April 1, 1895, page 3

any study of it and yet it is quite enough to enable one who will seek the facts to learn, astonishing and incredible as it may seem, that the Costa Ricans are among the most industrious, thrifty, and prosperous people on earth. It is only a tiny nation and its population was but 215,000, or four to the square kilometer, according to the census report I got there. But nowhere in the United States can a region of like extent and population be found that can make so good a showing in those matters which Yankees are supposed to prize most—industry, thrift, and wealth.

#### BAREFOOTED, BUT HE HAD A ROLL.

As I said, this seems incredible in the face of the testimony of the books of travel, but I cannot see how a man could cross the country now without having the truth of the matter thrust upon him. I saw evidences of it before I had been ten hours in the country, although I did not at first appreciate them. The fact, for instance, that the wretched little train running from Puntarenas to Esparta was crowded to suffocation with passengers, was significant. People who are poverty stricken do not pay a dollar for the privilege of riding fourteen miles, or even sixty cents, the second-class rate. And the reader is warned not to jump to the conclusion that the paying of sixty cents was extravagance on the part of the barefooted crowd who covered the second-class car. The next ride I took on the railroads of the country was from Alajuela to San José. I got into the second-class car. After a little time, one of two barefooted and poorly dressed men, who had been conversing earnestly in a low voice, got up and looked about the car until his eye fell on me. Then he came to me carrying a bank bill worth \$100, for which he asked me to give him bills of smaller denomination. I did not have them, and I would not have accommodated him in any event because to see a man like that with such a bill was so unusual that I at once jumped to the conclusion that he was a sharper, made up in imitation of a farmer, and was trying to swindle the stranger by flim flam<sup>13</sup> or some other game. So, the bill was offered in the next seat with a polite request for change. The occupant of the seat, who was barefooted and as poorly dressed as the other, pulled out a roll from the scarf he used as a belt, displaying not less than \$400, and gave small bills for the large one.

Now, although I had seen the throng on the little road from Puntarenas; had seen the sleek oxen of the cartmen on the road to Alajuela, and learned that

---

<sup>13</sup> Flim flam — Deceptive nonsense

each man owned his outfit and made good wages with it; had seen the little stores and resting places along the route where retired teamsters traded with those still active on the calling, one other experience was needed to make me question the correctness of the views about the people of the torrid zone that I had carried to Costa Rica with me. That Costa Ricans might be even passively engaged in accumulating wealth did not for a moment occur to me. But the matter of the \$100 bill was so novel that the next time I wanted to go anywhere on the cars I took a second-class ticket, hoping to get further interesting notes. And I succeeded.

#### A MAN WITH \$2,700 A YEAR.

In the seat with me was a man whose gray hair and beard and well-wrinkled face showed that he getting on past middle life. He was dressed in well-worn but clean and neatly patched blue overalls and a shirt of the same material that, like the trousers, was clean and neatly patched. He had a hat, however, that was considerably the worse for wear, while the leather scabbard in which he carried the ever-present machete, was noticeably ragged—it was, considering the style of the region, positively disreputable. His wife and daughter (as I soon learned then to be) sat in the next seat, and all three became sociable with me as my knowledge of the language would permit within five minutes after I offered them cigarettes with matches for fire. Supposing the man to be a farm laborer, I asked him about coffee, of which a plantation was then in view, and, among other things, about the prices. He showed so much interest when prices were mentioned that I could not at first follow him, but directly I comprehended that he was talking almost exactly as I had heard farmers in Kansas and Nebraska talk about prices of corn. Caramba! Coffee was a good crop, or it would be but for the accursed middlemen. The rich man with his money could own a mill as well as coffee trees, and so could prepare his crop as he pleased and market it to the best advantage, while the poor man must sell his little product just as it came from the tree, to the mill owners who paid what they pleased, and so they made all the money. He became so excited as he talked that it dawned on me that he must be personally interested in the sale of coffee in spite of his appearance of extreme poverty.

*"That you may have coffee trees of your own, then?"* I said.

*"Very few, sir,"* he said, with a deprecatory shrug.

*"And you had to sell your coffee to the mill?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"And how much did you sell?"*

*"Only 100 quintals, sir."*

*"And the mill owner. Of how much did he rob you?"*

*"Of \$10 per quintal at the least. I got \$27 per quintal. He got \$40. I should have had \$37."*

So, then, here was a coffee planter, a farmer, who had sold his crop for \$2,700 cash down and, as I afterwards learned, it was a crop which he had made with the labor of his own family. In addition to the coffee, he had produced enough sugarcane, corn, beans, and rice to feed his family, and had moreover reared some cattle and hogs and poultry. In fact, the food of the family had cost him not one cent. The \$2,700 cash received for coffee was well-nigh net profit on the labor of that family for a year, and yet there he sat dressed in a suit of clothes that, when new, had not cost him \$4, and it was patched, patch upon patch. His wife and daughter were dressed expensively, but they were barefooted and rode second class.

If, now, the reader will try to imagine a New York State farmer with \$2,700 a year visiting Albany with his family, dressed and riding so, a very good notion of Costa Rican thrift will be obtained. And then, if the reader will consider what kind of farm it is in New York that will produce a cash income of \$2,700 a year above the food of the family, an idea of Costa Rican wealth will be had. For this was not an exceptional case, not a lone crank of a planter afflicted with the meanest of prides—the pride that ostentatiously flaunts rags.

A RICH NATION.

After seeing such evidences of wealth, I was prepared to believe some of the stories told me by the people I found in San José. For instance, Mr. Albert Wollenweber, a former citizen of the United States and now a hotel man in San José, said that Costa Rica was preeminently a land of small farms. The cartmen I had seen along the highway, he said, in seven cases out of ten were

landowners. At least three-fourths of the men to be met in the second-class cars were owners of plantations. They owned a yoke of oxen and a few other cattle. They had fields where sugarcane, to a considerable extent, and a little rice, corn, and some beans were grown. They had pigs and poultry. But, more important than all else, they had coffee trees. The Costa Rican peon, or farm laborer, with his family, was still willing to work on the big plantations in the season, but every year the number of available hands grew less because of the increase in the peon's private holdings. The cultivation of coffee by the peon class was a comparatively new thing among the Costa Ricans, but, having once taken hold, it was spreading among them like wildfire on a dry prairie.

Mr. Venancio [?] García, one of the wealthiest men in Costa Rica, began life as an apprentice to a jeweler in the States. Having finished his trade, he returned to Costa Rica to practice it, and he put his profits into planting, He said:

*"Everything that you will hear about the wealth of the barefooted class in Costa Rica is true. It is a bad thing for us who have large estates, because we can get no laborers. It is a good thing for the nation, of course. It is a fact, of which I may say I have personal knowledge, that three-fourths of the families of Costa Rica are worth \$10,000 each or more."*

Although Mr. García spoke of Costa Rica dollars, then worth about forty-five cents in gold each, he portrayed a marvelous condition of affairs, for his words proved those of Mr. Wollenweber, that Costa Rica is a land of homesteads, and unmortgaged homesteads at that. The reader who recalls the description of the Costa Rica national prison, wherein it was said by the prison superintendent that neither the terrors of the sharks nor the relentless whirlpools could keep the prisoners from all but hopeless attempts to escape, will understand why they braved all to get away. Even these prisoners were in many cases owners of homes as well as heads of families. It is a sign of a right healthy condition of affairs when a people are found continuously subject to homesickness.

#### EFFECT OF THE COFFEE TREE.

When one comes to look for the causes of all this prosperity he finds his quest one of unusual interest. Probably the very beginning of it all can be traced to Don Francisco Javier Navarro who, in 1796, brought from Havana, Cuba, to Cartago, Costa Rica, the first coffee ever intended for cultivation in Central America. At Cartago was a good old-fashioned priest who took the coffee and

planted it in the gardens on the church property, and from them raised trees which may be seen to this day—trees from which coffee berries were carried as seed throughout Central America and Mexico. In my notes I have two different names of this padre—Padre Valverde and Padre Velarde. Don Joaquín B. Calvo, a Costa Rica writer of repute, gives the latter name. The good padre was like a Mormon elder in one respect, he preached the gospel of agriculture as much as he did the other gospel, but that was in the days of Spanish control, and not until that blight was removed could any industry flourish. Eventually, in 1840, there was a sale of municipal lands by order of president Don Braulio Carrillo, with the condition attached to the deed that they be planted to coffee. Under the influence of the farms thus created the cultivation spread, so that by 1861 the country produced 100,000 quintals of 100 pounds each.

That was a little over thirty years ago. The sale of the coffee was made in foreign countries and it brought foreign cash, gold or its equivalent, into the country. It is certain that more of the equivalent than of gold was brought—equivalent in the shape of luxurious apparel for the fortunate owners of coffee trees. It cannot be said that a boom in coffee followed, but the spread was rapid, so that in 1888 there were nearly 7,607 coffee farms in the country, with 25,248,686 trees in Costa Rica, not to mention the other millions of trees to be found elsewhere in Central America.

But in 1861 the trees were all on the great plantations, just as they are now in all the other countries of Central America except Salvador. Something was found in Costa Rica that gave the barefooted laborer a start on the road to wealth as a coffee planter. I made diligent inquiry to learn what it was but could get no definite answer. At first thought one would say that it was under the system of land laws which permitted every citizen to take up for nothing all the land he wished to cultivate, but it cannot have been this, for on the Isthmus of Panama and throughout Central America the same laws have prevailed. Government can have had little, if anything, to do with promoting prosperity, for while the laws are in nearly every respect admirable they are administered, as in all Spanish-American countries, by a military despotism. The cause must be sought in the dispositions of the people themselves. Here, too, the investigator at first finds difficulty, for the native Costa Rican, like every other Central American, is a Ladino<sup>14</sup>—a cross between the Spanish invaders and the aborigines. But the aborigines of Costa Rica, it appears, were different from

---

<sup>14</sup> Ladino — People of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent, especially in Central America.

those found elsewhere on the Spanish Main—they were of a sturdier mold than the weak Caribs of the islands at the north, and at the same time were much wilder than those who have left the wonderful monuments of their civilization throughout the Spanish Main. They resisted the Spanish invaders as stubbornly as did the corn planters, and with greater success, because they could on occasion flee to the wilderness and there await another chance to strike a blow. To this day the Talamanca tribe of the east is unsubdued, and I saw at Limón a Nordenfelt murder gun<sup>15</sup> that had just been imported for use in a raid against them. And yet at times the Spaniards had strong footholds among them—so strong that two galleons sailed every year from the Estrella River to Spain with the gold dust and silver bars the mines there yielded. But in 1610, and again in 1707, the Talamancas rose against the Spaniards and wiped them out, putting some to the torture by pouring melted gold down their throats, and since 1707 the placers and the true fissure veins that yielded two shiploads of precious metal a year have remained unworked.

Then there is the Río Frío region at the north, where a race of Indians, supposed to be white, until within less than a score of years have held sway. That too, was a river supposed to flow over golden sands, though the sap of the rubber tree was what eventually drew there the adventurers who found that the Indians were like other American aborigines in color. When I was in Costa Rica these Indians were still governing themselves, though Nicaragua rubber thieves and Costa Rica guards were playing hide and seek all through their country.

So, it appears that throughout Costa Rica the aborigines were of a superior race, and blood will tell. The blood that produced the hero Juan Santamaría of Alajuela produced the typical Juan—the peon—of Costa Rica. From time out of mind every man of them has had it in his heart to make for himself some kind of home. Elsewhere in Central America farm laborers could be found to live contented in the shacks erected for them on the plantations of the rich, a system the region inherited from the days of Spanish control; but in Costa Rica the great plantations are, and always have been, fringed with little plantations. Juan worked the cane and the corn of the master, but he had cane and corn of his own which María and Juancito worked. Naturally, as the master found coffee a good crop to grow, Juan saw the advantages of it, and he carried home berries from the master's trees for his own plantation.

---

<sup>15</sup> Nordenfelt gun — Multi-barreled rapid-fire armament, patented in 1873.



## COSTA RICAN HIGHWAYS.

And then, on top of the coffee, came comparatively good roads leading to market. In the United States special consular reports on *Streets and Highways in Foreign Countries*, issued in Washington in 1891, there is no reference whatever to Costa Rica, and the reader might suppose the country did not have any roads. Now, in 1891 Puntarenas was the nation's port, and commerce with Europe was by the way of the Horn or Panama. A cart road ran from the port to Cartago. The cost of exporting coffee was immense. But coffee worked an improved condition of affairs. The old cart road was extended to the Atlantic side, and hither and yon across the plateaus as the coffee trees spread. Then came Mr. Minor C. Keith<sup>16</sup> with his railway schemes, out of which was evolved a continuous rail line from Port Limón, with its piers at which a ship could load, to the capital city San José, ninety-six miles away, and still on to Alajuela, so that but twelve leagues of roadway remain uncovered by rail between the two oceans. To a Yankee, with the New York Central's four tracks in his eye, this Costa Rican narrow gauge railroad seems a small affair, and it is a common thing for foreigners there to speak of it contemptuously. But to the Costa Rican planter, whatever his holdings, it was a boon beyond adequate description. The coffee-planting peon, who had obtained his land for the labor of clearing it, suddenly found that it was worth anything from \$500 to \$1,000 an acre. Being an Indian, he probably expressed no great surprise at this, but being a Costa Rican as well, he promptly sold his plantation whenever the top figure was offered him, and going back a little further from the railroad, took up more wild land and began once more to make a plantation. And this has been done to such an extent that all the land conveniently situated has been taken up, so that one must pay good money for wild land if he would go into the coffee business in Costa Rica. Still, good Government land, within carting reach of the railroad, was to be had at \$2.25 gold an acre when I was there.

## PROFITS IN TRUCK RAISING.

But it is not on coffee alone that the peons of Costa Rica are growing rich, even though coffee is the chief article of export. So much land and so much labor have been put into the coffee crop that Costa Rica no longer raises enough food to satisfy her own hunger. The land convenient to the great cities that once was devoted to garden truck is now covered with long rows of trees that stand in

---

<sup>16</sup> Minor Cooper Keith (1848-1929) — US businessman (nephew of Henry Meiggs), with interests in railroads and banana plantations.

the shade of tall plantains—long rows of coffee trees. So, garden truck has risen in price in a way to make rural Long Islanders gasp. One of the first places I visited in San José was the public market, and here are some of the figures I gathered; Potatoes (little ones at that), \$12 a barrel; three small onions for 10 cents; eighteen pods of string beans in a bunch for 5 cents; small cabbages, 15 to 25 cents, according to quality; strawberries, 1 cent apiece; mulberries, 50 cents a pint; eggs, four for 23 cents; butter, \$1.25 a pound; beef, stew meat, 30 cents; steaks and roasts from 35 to 40 cents a pound; chickens, \$1 to \$1.25 each; corn, \$4 per 100 pounds; rice, \$10 per 100 pounds; flour, \$11 per 100 pounds; wood for fuel, \$12 a load of one-quarter of a cord.

These were the prices in the dry season when the roads were good and everything of the kind sells at the lowest figures. In the wet season the prices run a half higher. Of course, these prices were in Costa Rican money, but imagine corn selling for \$1.80 gold per 100 pounds, as it did there!

Juan understands this condition of affairs fairly well. He does not devote all his energies to coffee, as the great planters do, but he grows the garden truck for the cities. There was but one man of wealth engaged in gardening near San José when I was there, and his wealth consisted of ten acres of ground. He would not tell what he cleared from it per year, but Walter Ingalls, living at San Juan, Nicaragua, offered him \$25,000 cash, and he refused it, although he said he would be glad to sell out and leave the country.

Nothing has been said about the banana growing, though it is the great industry of the Atlantic coast, because it is not to any extent in the hands of the peon class and because, too, it has been overdone. Of its possibilities something will be told at another time.

#### WAGES OF FARM LABORERS.

Meantime wages have increased among the laborers of Costa Rica in a way to almost frighten the coffee planter. To appreciate fully the facts in this matter one must know something of the condition of farm laborers elsewhere in Central America. In the neighboring nation of Nicaragua, for instance, they told me that when a planter wanted hands to gather a crop he notified the Alcalde of the district, giving the number needed. The Alcalde then notified the peons to the number needed, and the peons had to go to work whether they would or no. The wages they received varied from thirty to forty cents a day in the

depreciated money of the country, and they could demand a week's pay in advance, so that they were not wholly enslaved; but they were so near to it that if they abandoned work soldiers would bring them back to it.

In Costa Rica the laborer is free to go or stay, as he may elect, and so, because it pays him well to attend to his own trees, he is electing more and more frequently not to go. And when he does go, he asks for a little better pay every time. Instead of the 40 cents a day in Nicaragua during coffee picking time he gets \$1.25 a day for ordinary times, while the expert pickers get as high as \$2.50 a day for their labor. More interesting still is the fact that women make the top price as often as the men do. They are paid by the quantity picked, and women do as well as men. Then, too, women are employed in sorting coffee, for which they receive 50 cents a quintal and are easily able to handle from three to four quintals a day. As this is an employment lasting longer than the picking season, it is of more importance. In Nicaragua the women get from 25 to 30 cents a day.

In view of all these facts, it is safe to say that no country in the world that has its population divided into distinct classes has a peon class living under better conditions than the peons of Costa Rica. And that the aristocracy is on the whole and in the long run always enriched and improved or impoverished and degraded with the rise or fall of the bare feet, is something that one need not repeat here.

#### WHY THEY GO BAREFOOTED.

To complete, after a manner, this brief study of the people of Costa Rica, it is proper to consider some of the more obvious effects of the accumulation of property by the farm laborers. As already intimated, the majority of the peons, who have their thousands of dollars, continue to wear well-patched cotton clothes, ragged hats and no shoes. The reasons influencing them to do so are as interesting as their manner of acquiring wealth.

*"Why do you not buy shoes and fine clothes?"* said I to the old peon who had 100 quintals of coffee to sell annually.

*"La Señora has finer clothing,"* he replied.

*"Yes, but why not you, too?"*

*"I am too old."*

*"I beg pardon, no. You have worked hard all your life. Now you should rest and dress well."*

"It is that I have worked hard all my life. I would not feel well in fine clothes. And my neighbors who have seen me as I am all my life, what would they say?"

In this reply we get an insight into the character of the people worth considering. The peons, not only of Costa Rica but of all Central America as well, are held in the strongest bonds by public opinion—especially the opinion of their own class. When I was among the United States Indians in the Indian Territory<sup>17</sup> a number of years ago I saw graduates of the Carlisle school going about in reservation rags, although they had much better clothes in their huts. They told me that this was done because the unlearned reservation Indians always ridiculed every departure from reservation customs which the school Indians made. The fear of ridicule is a strong trait in the Indian character. So here in Costa Rica the peons remain in their old peon clothes, in spite of wealth, rather than incur the ridicule of their associates. That the ridicule would often be merited, were the peons to adopt aristocratic dress, scarcely needs to be said. The shoe pinches the oft-bared foot.

That the women are less subject to ridicule is a matter of interest, too, for it portrays the female heart. They were always dressed in finer fashion than the men. The poorest lass in the nation, having only a chemise and a skirt, decks herself nevertheless till a Yankee belle at Easter time might envy her—decks herself with such a wealth of wild flowers that she is charming in spite of poverty, and even in spite of a plain face. The addition of gay ribbons and silks to these flowers, one almost says, is not to dress her in finer apparel even when they replace cheap cottons. But the peon women usually continue to go barefooted. Of course, this is due not so much to what their associates would say as to the natural dislike for pinching the foot.

#### A SILK HAT ABOVE SHOELESS FEET.

But if one will go among the peons on a gala day, he may see the natural effect of wealth in changing the clothes, even of the men. Juan may wear blue drilling

---

<sup>17</sup> See articles by John Spears (unsigned) in *The Sun*, April 7th and 28th, 1889

on ordinary days, even on a trip to the capital, in spite of a cash income of \$2,700 a year, but on a holiday, he blossoms out in something finer—in a starched shirt with a stand-up collar that has a scarf with a pin in it. He puts on a store coat ready-made that almost fits, and he sometimes adds above that a silk hat that shines in a most glossy fashion—all that he puts on while continuing to keep his feet bare. Juan in such a rig is a comical sight, very—he is almost as comical as the New Yorkers who wear silk hats above sack coats and tan shoes. But he is not ridiculous in Costa Rica. He even leaves off his shoes to avoid ridicule.

There are still other ways in which the peons make their wealth manifest in dress and ornament. The women almost invariably wear dresses that are high in the neck, even when at their work, and that is in notable contrast with the flowing, low-necked chemise which the Nicaragua women wear, instead of a dress waist. The men, too, almost invariably carry coats on their arms, if not on their backs, unless actually at work. It is a rare thing to see a peon standing on the streets of San José without some kind of a coat in his back. Another sign of wealth is seen in the stocks of goods carried in the stores, especially in the jewelry stores. Juan is learning to carry a watch under his cotton girdle. He puts a clock in his shack, too. Meantime the numbers of peddlers of cheap jewelry in the country and the sales they make are astonishing. Juan has the Indian's love of trinkets. The peddlers are to a very large extent Arabs. How these Mohammedans happened to invade Central America is more than I could learn, but Costa Rica has the majority of the host to be found there. Last of all, the habit of carrying the old-style pirate swords known as machetes is also a manifestation of wealth. It is as much as the head of the family elsewhere can afford when he keeps one or these more or less useful weapons by his side, but in Costa Rica, not only the father, but every one of the boys who is old enough to wear clothes also wears the big knife. The father often owns three or four, each of a special form for a particular use; one for use among the crops in lieu of a hoe, one for trimming coffee trees, one for ornament or a sword, and so on.

#### MILLIONS OF BURIED TREASURES.

To sum it up, the Costa Ricans, comparatively speaking, are very well provided for in all respects, but even when this is considered one has accounted for a very small part of the income of the peon families who own \$10,000 or more. Naturally I asked many people what was done with the surplus cash. The reply inevitably received was astonishing. They turn their money into silver coin and bury it.

If there is one unselfish patriot among the rulers of Costa Rica, that reply is enough to make him hang his head in shame. The system of government is of such a character that the masses of the people are afraid to trust the banks; they are even afraid to allow one another to know that they have any surplus, lest they be robbed of it by forced loans in time of Government need. There are untold millions of buried treasure in Costa Rica. If the Costa Rica Government had the confidence of the people it could wipe out the foreign debt in a month. The people would dig up the idle coin from under their houses and take bonds instead. And yet, Costa Ricans have always done and are now doing what some of our Americans think is the one thing needed to make a perfect Government. They have placed and have kept the making, the interpretation and the execution of the laws in the hands of "*the best people.*" The Johnnies and the Mikes—the Juancitos and Miguelitas—aren't in it, so to speak, at a Costa Rica election. It is not intended to discuss here any system or form of government, but only to state the fact that in Costa Rica, as in all Central America, the exclusion of the Johnnies from a share in the affairs of government has worked disastrously. The worst Governments on the American continent, whether national, departmental, or municipal, are those managed by the so-called "*best people.*" In other words, under a republican form of government it is safer to trust Juancito than Don Juan. Indeed, when I consider the conditions which prevail throughout the Spanish Main—the idle neglect of opportunities, the hand-to-mouth life, the utter lack of progress and development almost everywhere apparent—I believe that I could prove that all these evils are due, not to any enervating influence of climate, not, primarily, to any inherent defect in the blood of the race, but to the blight which comes from depriving the Johnnies of the fruition of their natural ambitions in politics.

#### MENTAL CULTIVATION.

In the matter of mental cultivation, I found the Costa Rican peons about like the people of Hatteras Island off the coast of North Carolina, the island of which Cape Hatteras is the only well-known point. They had about all learned to read and write when children, but in general matters they seemed to be narrow minded, bigoted, and uninformed. Each people showed the natural effects of isolation from the world and of the undisputed control of a single religious denomination. The Costa Ricans are all Catholics and the Hatteras folks are all Methodists. The Costa Rican peons do not travel outside of Costa Rica, and the Hatteras folk remain hemmed in between Pamlico Sound and the deep sea. The

traveler from the States finds himself in Costa Rica everywhere regarded as a heretic. The peon will be polite enough, for he is by nature of gentlemanly instincts, but he is prejudiced against heretics. He feels toward the heretics as the Hatteras folks feel toward a man who openly plays cards. Lacking knowledge, the Costa Rican is unable to distinguish between Walker, the filibusterer, and Uncle Sam. He thinks that when his hero, Juan Santamaría, died to oust Walker from the market place at Rivas he "*licked the United States.*" So, his patriotism stirs up a resentful feeling in his breast at the sight of a Yankee.

It is because of these things that many Americans in Costa Rica, and in all the Spanish Main for that matter, find a residence there very distasteful, to put it mildly. The American there commonly gets into the habit of speaking of the United States as God's country and sighing as he says it. And then he drifts into the belief that there is no hope for the region there. If he talk to a new comer or write home for publication he may not only be incapable of saying all the good of the people they deserve; he may score them unjustly. I cannot be sure, of course, that I have been just, according to knowledge, toward the peons in what has been said here, but I am confident that I have not overstated their good qualities or overestimated their capacity for improvement. That a good deal of space has been occupied in considering them must be admitted, but unless I have been entirely wrong in my facts the matter was worth it, for the Costa Ricans, even though they are not as yet by any means an ideal race, have proved untrue the long-accepted theory that hunger and cold are necessary to develop industry and thrift. After a man has traveled through Costa Rica with his eyes open he will no longer even believe that "*humanity can reach an advanced state of culture only by battling with the inclemencies of nature in high latitudes.*"

A COSTA RICAN CITY.<sup>18</sup>

Impressions of a Visitor to San José, the Capital.

A Plaza to be Proud of.

Causes and Evils of Military Government in Central America.

Cheap Cabs and Low-priced Hotels—San José a City of One-story Houses All Very Much Alike Outside—What happened when a Costa Rican President Bought a Lottery Ticket—Sights and Quaint Wares at the Public Market—The Government Building an Expensive Playhouse—A Dentist's Romance—The Prejudice Against Foreigners.

When a man arrives at San José, the capital of Costa Rica, after a journey from Panama, not by steamer, but for the most part overland on mule back, as I did, he comes with an appetite for city life. Such variations from the ride through the wilderness as had been furnished by two brief trips on coasting cattle boats, a night in a rotten dugout, and the trip from the Pacific to San José had only made me more sharp set for such comforts as one may obtain in a city where hotels replace the wayside shack, bathtubs the stagnant pool, carriages the slow-paced mule, and servants are found ready to take the burdens which one has had to carry for oneself. So, I was prepared on arrival to think well of San José, no matter what kind of town it might be. I mention this fact in order that the reader may be able to understand the frame of mind in which the notes made during my brief sojourn there were written.

But while I may thus seem to be prejudiced in favor of the town, I think I was, in truth, only rendered able to give a judgment on its merits that would be more nearly just than that pronounced by a traveler fresh from such a metropolitan center as New York, Paris, or London. The traveler directly from New York compares San José with the Yankee metropolis when, in fact, he should in fairness compare it with some such interior town as Richmond, Va., or Utica, N. Y. Even such a comparison would not be totally fair, for San José claims only 25,000 inhabitants, while the province has, all told, but 63,000. When one goes to a Central American city from the great Northern metropolis, he needs to pass a few weeks in the wilds on the route in order to get into a fair-minded condition—in order to appreciate the smaller town.

---

<sup>18</sup> Published by *New York Sun*, Sunday, June 23, 1895, page 5



My experiences in San José were those that any ordinary traveler might meet. I did not know a soul there, and I had no introductions. I knew but little of the language, and absolutely nothing of the town beyond the fact that a railroad terminated there and that it had several hotels. The railway train from Alajuela arrived in the afternoon and stopped beside a platform, with a building alongside and a yard and a fence beyond that were enough like the outfit of a country railroad station in the States to make me feel myself at home. And when I had passed through the fence I found a line of cabmen standing just off the sidewalk as they do in the States, and every one of them shook his whip toward me and shouted something that was not to be distinguished in words, though it could not be misunderstood. Selecting one at random, I was assisted into a two-seat carriage of American make; but instead of asking me for my destination and driving away, the jehu<sup>19</sup> hurried back to his place and began tooting for more passengers. He seemed to be in luck that day, for the seats were quickly filled. Then he called for the fare, and each passenger paid a *real*, or twelve and one-half cents in the money of the country. That was the price for each, whether one or four had the carriage, and since the rate of exchange made a *real* worth only about five and one-half cents gold, I concluded that Costa Rica had the cheapest carriage service of any civilized country in the world. By the hour the rate was 25 cents—say 11 cents gold. And yet there were plenty of men in the business day and night, though I observed that very few people were to be seen on the streets after 8 o'clock at night. Indeed, San José was in this respect the most remarkable town I ever saw.

From the station I drove to a hotel kept by a Frenchman. The swell hotel of the town, as I afterward learned, was known as the English house, but a stranger who asks for a hotel kept by a Frenchman will very rarely go astray, no matter what part of the world he may be in. The hotels of San José are all remarkably good for the prices charged. The very swell place charged \$4 a day, and the next—the French—\$3. For this last sum one had a large, clean, airy room on the second floor (all the hotels are of two stories), with abundant furniture, and a door opening on a shady vine-clad veranda, while the table included from seven to nine courses, cooked and served by French experts—all of that for less than \$1.50 a day gold.

Naturally, the first thing a stranger notices in San José is the lack of variety in the models of the houses. Every block or square seems to be covered with one

---

<sup>19</sup> Jehu — Cab driver

house only, and that is a house one-story high with a smooth, whitewashed wall of plaster or cement, and above all a roof of tiles. The wall is, indeed, broken at intervals by windows covered with iron bars and by heavy wooden doors, on every one of which is a metal knocker. In spite of variations in the size of doors, the arrangement of iron bars and the forms of knockers, the blocks seem to the casual observer exactly alike. Even blocks occupied by business houses, such as dry goods stores and tailor shops and hardware stores, are almost exactly like the homes of the people. As I took my first walk along the streets of San José I happened to pass the home of the President, and observed, when it was pointed out to me, that it was to be distinguished from a hardware store in the next block only by the rich hangings over the windows. Of course, each block contains many houses, the partition walls of which may sometimes be seen in a ridge in the tile roof above. And when one enters a house he finds a degree of privacy which a dweller in a New York flat, or even in a New York house, might envy. The thick adobe walls extend entirely around the lot on which the house stands. Each house is a row of rooms built around the lot and depending for light and air on the interior court on which all rooms open. When a citizen of San José is at home he is entirely shut off from his neighbors; so far as eyesight and sounds of neighbors are concerned, he might almost as well be in the midst of a desert. But not all the blocks are covered by one-story houses. In spite of the fact that earthquake shocks impend, the hotels, as said, are of two stories, having been built so to get guest chambers a plenty without buying large [...] of ground. Then there are a few business buildings, such as banks, that boast of two stories. The national palace is also two stories high. In these buildings, and, in fact, in all modern houses, the adobe and the brick walls are strengthened with wooden timbers, so that while an ordinary tremor of the earth could easily slide the tiles from the roof, the walls would remain standing.

The stranger notices further that the streets are paved with macadam instead of stones and that water is commonly running through the gutters. The water comes from hydrants on the corners. Of course, the macadam gives a smooth street, but because of the constant traffic of the cheap cabs the streets are covered with a thin layer of dust continually during the dry season. Having no system of sprinkling carts, the people, to lay the dust, go out and dam the gutters at intervals with old coffee sacks or cast-off clothes, and then, when the water is deep enough, take a shovel or a dust pan or some other dish, and, scooping up the water, throw it over the street till the dust is turned to mud. But, because some houses are unoccupied and because some citizens are not careful in such matters, San José is a dusty town in the dry season.

## USES OF THE PUBLIC PLAZA.

The pride of the town is its plaza, and rarely will one find a more beautiful little park than this same plaza. A pavilion has been erected in the center for the use of the military band. In the trees and about the pavilion one finds always a variety of native birds, the chief of which is the gaudy-feathered toucan. The pavilion seemed to be a favorite resort for these big birds, and they had cut and torn the upper part of it so that parts of the frames looked as soft-wood hitching posts do after impatient horses have chewed them for a time.

Sunday always brings two large crowds to the public plaza. The larger crowd gathers in the afternoon to hear who the lucky ones were among the purchasers of tickets in the lottery during the week previous. The lottery company holds its weekly drawings at the pavilion in the park and the park is crowded when the drawing takes place. The visitor is told that the drawings have always been fair, save on one occasion, when the President bought a ticket and sent word to the company that he needed a little ready money. He drew first prize—\$2,000 cash of the country.

The other crowd comes rather early and is attracted by the President, who, with a couple of hundred soldiers, always attends mass at the big cathedral that faces the plaza. When the service is over the President comes out, takes his hat from a valet, who has stood at the door holding it for him, and then drives away in a carriage with the valet on the box with the driver. But neither the President nor the valet nor the driver wears a uniform as is done in Guatemala.

After the President is gone, the soldiers file out and line up on the pavement facing the church and are then inspected by the General in command of the department, accompanied by several under-officers. I observed that the General took a proper look through the barrel of each musket to see if it were bright, and that he lifted the flaps of the cartridge boxes and did such other things as were necessary to learn whether the soldiers' equipments were in fighting order. But he did not insist on any soldier wearing well-blackened shoes, or shoes of any kind. They wore sandals instead.

## UNDER MILITARY RULE.

The presence of the long files of soldiers in the great church every Sunday morning is not in itself, of course, a matter to disturb anybody, but the fact is that a sojourner has soldiers within sight or hearing unceasingly in Costa Rica, and the time comes when he wishes that he might at least attend church service without having the gold lace of martinet officials thrust into his face and the blare of a bugle obtruded on his ears. The curse of the military rule is no worse in Costa Rica than in the other Latin American nations. Honduras and Salvador were much worse off in this respect than Costa Rica when I visited them; but this rule is irritating beyond endurance to an American anywhere in those nations. The barracks of the artillery, and those of the infantry as well, were in the heart of the town. One could not go out to buy a yard of calico or a cigar without seeing soldiers and muskets. There were a few hours of the day when the infernal scream of a bugle was not to be heard. The discordant notes not only filled the streets, but they penetrated to the uttermost parts of every place of business, to the schoolrooms and the public library, and they disturbed the air in every parlor and bedchamber in the town.

But the lack of melody in the discordant blasts was the least of the evils attendant thereon, for the bugle calls were the ever-present reminders of the system of government prevailing. It is this bayonet rule, everywhere present, that exasperates the American traveler, and prevents his doing the people full justice in what he may say of them. But one of the most interesting facts about the rulers and ruled is that they do not know that they are living under a despotic system of government. They rejoice in the name, and the name only, of a republic. They often ask foreigners, as they asked me, why emigrants would go from Europe to the United States by the thousand when not one would go to Central America, where one could much more easily obtain a living. And when, in reply, a foreigner frankly says that it is because the Central American Governments are more despotic than those the emigrant leaves behind, the questioner is commonly offended, because he thinks the reply is untrue, and that an untrue reply was made purposely to offend him. It is useless to argue with a Central American on this point to refer to the law compelling all citizens to serve in the army just as Germans and Russians must do, to refer to the fact that every State and every county in the little nation has not only a Governor, but a military commandant; that both of these rulers are appointed by the President, and that the military man is in all cases the real ruler of his district. The fact that the words of the Constitution guarantee the liberty of the citizen

is sufficient. One may almost say that, so long as the word is right the fact may be anything, and the Spanish American will be content. Newspapers are suspended, citizens are arrested without warrant, and both imprisoned and shot to death without trial. How a people, who had a sufficient love of liberty to throw off the Spanish yoke seventy years ago, should still willingly live under tyrants more arbitrary than Charles III of Spain is a matter of the greatest wonder to the American traveler. And yet when one reads the history of the settlement of Central America, and of the Spanish-American institutions generally, the matter is plain enough. As long ago as the time of Columbus it was provided by an edict of the Spanish monarch, when the region of Costa Rica was to be settled, that "*the natives be forced to have dealings with the Spaniards, and that the work for wages under the guidance and oversight of caciques; the natives must hear mass,*" and so the order continued detailing the system of actual slavery under which the natives were to live, but at the end of the order it was stated with a flourish that they were "*to do all these things as free persons, for such they are.*" It is a fact that the unfortunate Indians who by the thousand were worked to death in the old Spanish mines were, by the word of the law that condemned them to slavery, free persons. That is to say, at the very beginning of the settlement of Central America the slavery that actually existed was carried on under laws that ostentatiously talked of freedom. And that is not all. Whenever a new colony was sent out by the Spanish rulers—as when California was settled, for instance—the rules of life of the colonists, to the most minute particulars, were laid down in the regulations of the colony. "*Religious duties must be attended to; persons must not leave church after the sermon begins; persons must not have company late at night and must not be out of their homes late at night for any purpose,*" and so on. Further still, the colonies (colonies as distinguished from missions) were always military outposts, or located near military posts, and the ruler of the district was a military man. The people of Central America have never known any other kind of government than the military. When Costa Rica and the other nations threw off the yoke of Spain, it was not because, as colonists, such regulations as those mentioned had governed them. They did not object to the regulations; neither did they object to the fact that the commandant of the presidio, or military post, was at once the Governor, the Judge, the mayor, the school trustee, &c., of the district. They objected to the fact that this many-titled ruler was a greedy Spaniard sent out from Madrid. They wanted native rulers instead. The only thing accomplished by the Spanish-American revolution was a change of commandants, and none of the fierce little revolutions that have occurred at regular intervals since has accomplished much more. The paternal system of government in the old days

gave to each colonist land, which in some cases amounted to eleven square leagues per man; it gave him in addition tools, stock, and a salary in cash for a year or two. It told him that he was a free citizen, but he would get a licking if he failed to attend mass on Sunday or was caught on the street after 8 o'clock at night. The happy-go-lucky half-blood Indian colonists liked having the physical necessities of life provided, and having the name of free men, they were therewith content. One has to keep these things in mind when traveling through Spanish America, if one would understand the people.

#### EVERY SIXTH MAN AN OFFICER.

To give some idea of the military burden supported by the people of Costa Rica, it may be said that the law provided for 1,000 men only, in times of peace, but "in times of internal commotion," 5,000. Naturally, under a military dictator, the "times of internal commotion" prevailed continually. A revolution continually impended, and the people said [?] that more than 5,000 men were under arms. According to a Government *Informe* the number of commissioned officers on duty in San José at the time of my visit was 1,131, as follows: Generals of division, 7; Generals of brigades, 5; Colonels, 21; Lieutenant-Colonels, 76; Lieutenants, 193; sub-Lieutenants, 612. The pay of the troops, by the same authority, up to the rank of Colonel, was as follows: Privates, \$1 a day; corporals, \$1.10; sergeants, \$1.25; sub-Lieutenants, \$55 a month; Lieutenants, \$60; Captains, \$70; Majors, \$75; Lieutenant-Colonels, \$80; Colonels, \$120. Of course, the gathering of officers at the capital was larger than that found elsewhere, but at every State (provincial) capital and at every county (cantonal) town was to be found a *cuartel*, as soldiers' barracks are called here, and in it a company of men, with corporals, sergeants, sub-Lieutenants, Lieutenants, a Captain, a major, a Lieutenant-Colonel, and, in the cases of State capitals, officers up to the rank of General of brigade at least. The population of San José was said to be 25,000 all told, and it certainly was no more than that, and yet of that number over 1,100 were commissioned officers—for every twenty-four men, women, and babies in town there was one military officer in his gold lace and sword. Or, to put it otherwise, every sixth man was a commissioned officer. I should not have believed such a condition possible but for the figures in the *Informe*. The country readers of THE SUN will perhaps better appreciate the condition of affairs in Costa Rica if they will try to imagine every town of 1,000 people or more in the United States provided with at least thirty soldiers of the regular line, and the usual officers up to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel or

higher, every one of whom was the creature of the President, and not one of them a citizen of the town where he was stationed.

Besides seeing the soldiers inspected and the lucky numbers of the lottery drawn in the public plaza, the citizens of San José gathered there at stated times to hear the military band play. To my mind, the military band of Costa Rica was as well worth the attention of lovers of music elsewhere as was the celebrated Mexican band that made a tour of the United States a few years ago. The band numbered forty-six instruments. The *maestro director* was Don Mateo F. Fournier. Don Mateo not only had charge of the band, but he was also chief instructor of a class of thirty-four apprentices. For the benefit of any theatrical manager who might wish to show a Central American brass band to the people of the United States, it may be said that Don Mateo's salary was but \$150 a month in Costa Rica money, while the rest received from \$60 down to \$25 a month. In gold Don Mateo got less than \$70 a month.

#### AT THE PUBLIC MARKET.

The first place of public resort that I visited in San José was the market. The market place occupies a square of the city and is the property of a corporation holding a concession or monopoly of the market business. A row of small storerooms, say 12 feet wide by 20 deep, was built around the block, each having doors and windows facing the street and the interior court. People pass through these to the court, and there are four wide public entrances to the court also. The court is paved with cement and shaded by a succession of iron roofs or pavilions ten feet wide, supported on iron columns. Between the pavilions are gutters draining into the sewer, and water is constantly flowing from hydrants through the gutters. The little store rooms are occupied, as one might imagine, by merchants selling dry goods, notions, hardware, crockery, and clothing of all kinds ready-made. A few are occupied as meat markets. Under the pavilions are found meats and vegetables, with other products of the country. The stuff is sometimes piled on counters and sometimes heaped on the cement floor.

At one place I saw a man standing behind a bench on which were heaped a hundred iron ox goads. The goads were of iron and from six to eight inches long, including a socket to fit over the end of a pole. In the street I saw men using these goads. The driver walked ahead of his oxen, which was a good way to do, because he thus usually avoided the dust. When he wished go round a corner

or hurry the oxen, he turned on them and with his goad jabbed one or the other, or both, in the shoulder. Every ox had its shoulders as thickly spotted with scars from the goad, as the rest of the body was marked with individual hair roots. The hair was thinly scattered, and the skin practically one broad cicatrix<sup>20</sup> on each shoulder. I noticed that some of the drivers had little knots of stout twine around the goads about one inch from the sharp points. These were the merciful drivers. They put the twine on the goad so that it should not sink more than an inch into the flesh. The goads sold for 70 cents each, native money.

Near the ox goad merchants was a bench with stacks of cakes of sugar on it, and behind it a brown-skinned native woman smoking a cigar. The sugar looked like the blackest of the maple product found in New York. Although made from cane juice, it tasted quite a little like the maple. The reason for this similarity of taste was, as I learned, that the sugar had been made in an open kettle over a wood fire in the woods, while the cane juice had been pressed from the cane by rollers made of native tree trunks. Like the dark maple product of New York, this sugar had the flavor of the woods and the open air, and the smoke and cinders of a wood fire. The sugar sold at 10 cents a pound, native money.

A little further on a woman was making coffee over a charcoal fire. She poured boiling water over the coffee and let it drip through a sieve-bottomed can into a pot. Then she let it steam a bit, after which she ran it through the coffee grounds again. I bought [an] ordinary American breakfast cup for 10 cents. She put in some bluish milk and some of the dark sugar her neighbor sold. The combination did not look inviting, but a taste changed my mind. It was so good that I bought a second cup, whereat she smiled sociably at me and said aside to her neighbor, thinking I would not understand: *"Ah, see. He is no mule; he is a gentleman."*

This remark is especially worth noting, because it calls attention to the feeling which the natives there have toward foreigners—more particularly those of Saxon blood, of which something will be said further on.

#### MATTRESSES AND CIGARETTE CASES.

A little further on, I came to a pile of native mattresses for beds. They were simply rush mats two inches thick. The rush stalks and leaves were cut green,

---

<sup>20</sup> Cicatrix — Scar



the seller said, and, when cured as hay is cured in the States, were tied up in substantial rolls two inches thick and as long as the mattress should be wide. Then these rolls were woven into a warp of stout twine, and in that way the best mattress I saw in Spanish America was made. If the quality of the beds of the poor be taken as a standard of civilization, then the Costa Ricans lead all others between Panama and the Río Grande. In the Isthmus, I found cots covered with dried ox hides that were as stiff and unyielding as boiler iron. In Nicaragua, even in the best hotel of Granada, I found the same kind of cots, but benches made of slats split from the trunk of a palm tree were also used and these were a little the worst of any bed I ever saw. In Salvador and Guatemala, the poor slept on mats of rushes that were one rush only in thickness—say a quarter of an inch thick at best. In the Tehuantepec region of Mexico, it was the same and so, too, in Honduras. But everywhere in these countries one found from one to three hammocks in every house, and as many of the family as possible slept in these. And the hammock is the best bed ever devised.

The Costa Ricans are peculiar also in that they carry their cigarettes in home-made cases—little pocket-sized affairs big enough to hold a dozen cigarettes. They were woven from pita<sup>21</sup> fiber—the fiber that is used in making Panama hats. Ordinarily the case is made of plain white fiber, but some makers used dyed fiber and produced very pleasing patterns. When I asked a woman the price of a plain one she said 20 cents. I offered her 10 cents and she took it. Then while I lingered over the fancy ones she sold a plain one to a native for five cents.

An interesting feature of the market was found where native crockery was on sale. There was nothing noticeable about the bowls, jars, and water bottles save that they were plainly of native make, but in addition to the articles of household use there were stacks of pots [...] in clay of horses [...] Here was a field especially worth the attention of the archaeologist sharp, who thinks that every clay or stone image dug from an Indian grave is a sure enough idol.

Perhaps the most interesting single object seen in the market was a mill of native invention and manufacture for grinding coffee or any kind of grain. The maker dressed a block of gray lava into the form of a cube about a foot large. In the top of this he hollowed out a hopper that reached the center of the cube, and from the bottom of the hopper a short tunnel led to a cone-shaped cavity in one side. In this cavity was snugly fitted a cone of lava stone that was so

---

<sup>21</sup> Pita — Fiber-yielding plant, such as an agave.

supported that it could be turned with a handle. Coffee placed in the hopper naturally ran in between this cone and the cavity, where it was crushed, but to insure a constant feeding in of the coffee the inventor had lengthened out the cone and cut four propeller blades on it. These operated in the bottom of the hopper and through the short tunnel, forcing the coffee along.

#### FOR WAR AND LOVE.

Mention has been made in THE SUN<sup>22</sup> of the universal habit in Costa Rica of wearing knives two feet long. Naturally, the number of these machetes on sale at the market was immense. They were for the most part of English make, and very cheap, but the man who wanted one of superior quality always called for an American blade, and paid a dollar native money extra for it. There were a few of native make—wrought iron blades of no better quality than the English stock, but they had handles of horn inlaid with bone in pretty patterns that made them saleable, although the price was as high as that of a good American blade—\$3 native money.

The Costa Ricans were noticeable for inlaid work in other things. They made leather scabbards for the machetes that had not only leather of different colors set into them, but bits of bone also. But the most interesting bit of inlaid work was the horn finger ring. Threads of brass, copper, silver, and gold were worked into the slender hoops of horn, and very pretty vine-like patterns formed. Names as well as initials were worked. A circle of black horn, no thicker than a knitting needle, could be found with as long a name as Juanita written in it with delicate gold wire. There were also rings that showed the Costa Rica equivalent for sweetheart (*novia*) and other terms likely to attract lovers, and the maker, a grizzly old slouch, who polished each ring on his stubbly bearded chin before he handed it up for inspection, said that such rings were in greatest demand, while those with names and of baby sizes were next in the number of sales. There was also a good demand, he said, for rings carrying two names—say, Juan and María—and these were commonly sold in pairs, one of a size to fit the little finger on Juan's hand, and the other to fit the third finger on the hand of María. The rings sold at from 25 cents to \$2 each, according to workmanship.

The Costa Rica broom would exasperate a New England housewife beyond endurance. The material for making brooms was piled up for sale in big stacks.

---

<sup>22</sup> See article of April 7th, 1895

It consisted of slender splints four feet long, split from some sort of straight-grained palm, they told me. Enough of these splints to make a roll an inch and a half in diameter constituted a broom. The roll was bent and the ends brought together. Then a stout lashing of pita fiber was put around the doubled bundle half-way between the ends and the bend, and the broom was complete. The Costa Rica housewife grabs the bundle at the bend, and, stooping over till she can reach the floor with the ends, makes the dust fly. When the broom makers of the Mohawk Valley find their chief market (New York city) overstocked, it would pay them, perhaps, to send a missionary to San José, and to all the other towns of Spanish America as well.

Then there are a lot of fakirs<sup>23</sup> in the market, who, having no permanent stands, wander through the aisles, selling handkerchiefs, flowers, brass jewelry, and so on. Like the fakirs of New York, they have to keep one eye searching for customers and the other eye on the police, for if they stop for any length of time a policeman will make life a burden for them. The police, too, are interesting, because so different from those seen at home. They are such slender little fellows that I am confident an average of their weight would not exceed 115 pounds, if it reached so high.

As said, this marketplace is at present a monopoly. No one may sell vegetables or meats elsewhere, but anyone who pleases may rent a room or a stall in the market, on paying a fixed price. Those who had rooms facing both the street and the court paid from \$20 to \$25 a month, money of the country, according to the location. A pavilion space 5x14 feet large, between the roof posts, brought \$1.25 a week, and half that space in the part of the court, where half-spaces were rented, 50 cents a week. The sellers who squatted on the pavement with their goods before them paid 25 cents a week, while the fakirs, whom the police kept on the move, paid nothing. The rents will not seem very high to the Yankee market dealers, I should say, but the gross income of the company from rents in 1891 was \$48,415.44, and in 1892 it was \$50,725.59. From this last sum, dividends to the amount of \$39,758.66 were paid, the nominal capital being \$215,000. It is said that on the actual investment the dividends run from 20 to 25 per cent. per annum.

---

<sup>23</sup> Fakir — Itinerant peddler

## A GOVERNMENT PLAYHOUSE.

The particular feature of the city of which the natives of San José were proudest was the great stone theater then in course of erection, not by private enterprise, as would be the case in the States, but by the national Government. In the minds of the San Josefinos the building of a theater and the subsidizing of actors was as legitimate a charge on the national treasury as the building of a schoolhouse and the employment of teachers. Indeed, as between the theater and the school, the theater was regarded as the higher educator. No one knew how much the new building would cost, but several hundreds of thousands of dollars were sure to be absorbed before it was finished. As the ordinary revenue of the Government was not sufficient for the ordinary expenses, this theater had been provided for by a special export tax on coffee. The one industry of the country that was bringing any wealth worth mentioning into the nation was taxed to provide the rich people of the capital city with a place of amusement. Imagine Uncle Sam taxing exported wheat that a home for *Trilby*<sup>24</sup> or *Little Christopher*<sup>25</sup> might be erected in Washington.

Of schools, properly so called, the Costa Ricans have not a few, and the foreigners in town spoke well of the colleges, and especially well of the National Institute, supported by the Government. There is a national library that was well selected, and a pretty good national museum. In the common schools a number of books written by native scholars are used, and these books were, in my mind, much better adapted to their purpose than anything brought from Paris, where about all books used in Spanish America are printed.

## A SAN JOSÉ ROMANCE.

To show something further of life in San José, the adventure of Dr. B. B. Bray, an American dentist, who was unwillingly mixed up in a Costa Rica romance, is worth telling. Bray, like almost all American dentists in Spanish America, had a large practice. Among other patients was the daughter of one of the wealthiest citizens of the town—a very charming young lady. Having a mind of her own, she fell in love with and determined to marry a suitor who was very much disliked by the rest of her family, and especially by her father and mother. Under the social laws of all Spanish America, no unmarried lady may meet a gentleman save in the presence of a chaperon, and because of this the chances

---

<sup>24</sup> *Trilby* — Stage play first performed in Boston in March 1895.

<sup>25</sup> *Little Christopher Columbus* — Burlesque opera; first US performance in New York, 1894.

this lassie had for communicating with her lover were apparently very few. Still, such difficulties may be surmounted, and it was the method she took that got Dr. Bray into such trouble that he almost lost his life.

First of all, she bribed a servant to carry a letter to her lover appointing the dentist's office as a place of meeting. Accordingly, as Dr. Bray had [the] young lady in the chair, where he industriously hammered gold into a tooth cavity, in walked the lover with a priest. The young lady at once got out of the chair and ran to her lover, who then told the priest to go ahead with the marriage ceremony. At this point Bray, who knew that the girl's family disliked the young man, interposed and begged them to go elsewhere, and said if the ceremony were performed there everybody would say that he had helped them in their clandestine marriage, and so the dentistry business would be injured. The priest agreed with Bray, and at once declined to go on. Thereat, the lover bowed himself out, followed by the priest, the young woman returned to the chair, and Bray went on driving gold into her tooth.

The adventure had only just begun. In ten minutes, the young man returned with another priest, who would not listen to Bray's expostulations, and as soon as possible the young people were married, the tooth was completed, and the couple left. Then the storm broke. The girl's father and brother were wild with rage, but, singular as it may seem, their anger was wholly directed at Bray, and he was at once challenged to fight a duel. Bray got a friend of the family to go in his behalf and explain the circumstances, and also got the first priest to write that it was at Bray's solicitation that the ceremony was not performed in the first instance. But all this had no effect on the angry father. The ceremony had been performed in the office of the *gringo* (foreigner) and the *gringo* had got to fight, leave the country, or die. Even when the American Consul took a hand in to patch up peace, the efforts were fruitless. So, Bray loaded a revolver, put it into his pocket, and two days later (it was on a Sunday morning) met the girl's brother very unexpectedly in the park. The brother hit Bray with a cane, pulled a revolver, and shouting "*Defend yourself!*" blazed away.

Because Bray's pistol hammer caught in his hip pocket, the young fellow had fired five times before the dentist's pistol came in view. But, the moment it did appear, the youth turned and ran for life. So, Bray fired one shot, aiming low purposely, and cut the young man's heel, bringing him to the ground with a thump. The young man was still in bed suffering severely from the wound when I left the country, but I heard afterward that he recovered, and that with the aid

of the priests, who supported Bray in the trouble, in spite of his Yankee birth, peace was established.

This matter is worth the particular attention of those Americans who think of going to any part of Spanish America to make their fortunes. The most circumspect and considerate of foreigners may incur the enmity of some of his neighbors. Foreigners there have, as a rule, always shown their feeling of superiority to the natives. They have carried themselves arrogantly and have sneered at even the praiseworthy customs of the natives. So, the natives are prejudiced naturally against all foreigners, and when to this is added for any reason a personal dislike, the foreigner must often flee or fight to escape assassination. I feel myself bound to say that I believe that the prejudice of the natives against foreigners is almost always justified and that in quarrels the native is more often imposed on than the foreigner; but, because these things are so, the best-intentioned foreigner may get into serious trouble.

#### A WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION.

Another adventure in the career of two Americans in Costa Rica illustrates prejudice of another sort which every American will see in a journey through Spanish America. On the evening of Washington's Birthday, two Americans invited a lot of Englishmen to help open some bottles in honor of the day and as a pledge of growing goodwill between the old and the new English-speaking nations. The Englishmen, being jolly young fellows, responded. Near midnight, many bottles having been opened, the Americans decided that they ought to burn some gunpowder to further express their patriotism. So, they went to the railroad shops not far away, and, getting two anvils, put the powder between them and then fired it. The accompanying roar was glorious and the shouts of the crowd patriotic and congratulatory; but the doings were all contrary to law and the police gathered in the entire outfit.

When the sober second thought came, the boys wanted to give bail and go home but, because the police had been abused the officials refused to accept bail. So, the Yankees sent for their Consul and the Englishmen for theirs. Both came. The story was soon told. The Yankee Consul demanded that bail be accepted, according to the Costa Rican law, for the Yankees, and the officials smilingly accepted. The British Consul said that if any subjects of Her Majesty were so inconsiderate as to get into trouble through doing honor to George Washington, he should be glad to see them sweat for it; and he went away leaving his fellow

countrymen to pass the night, and, as far as he knew, some other nights, in a police prison. However, when the lion had walked out, the eagle put one claw beside its bill and winked at the unfortunate Englishmen. That is to say, the Yankee Consul used his influence in their behalf by explaining that the vast noise, so like a cannon, had been made in honor of the great and good father of the Yankee nation. And the unfortunate Englishmen who were prisoners had helped make the noise, because, in spite of their birth under a detested monarchy, they had the love of liberty in their hearts. Further than that, their Consul had abandoned them because of their praiseworthy desire to do honor to the great American liberator. They were, in short, to lie in prison because of their enthusiasm for the leader of the noble cause of freedom. Could such things be among liberty-loving Costa Ricans?

Caramba! Not as anybody knows of. Would the American Consul make to the police officers the honor to take charge of all the prisoners? You bet. So it was done, and all hands, including the police officials, went away to a quiet place and finished the night honoring George Washington in the most approved Yankee fashion.

#### THE NEGRO HAS A WHITE MAN'S CHANCE.

Still another feature of life in Costa Rica was illustrated by what I saw one day while going from San José to Cartago in a second-class car. A spruce, young, light-colored negro came into the car looking at every person in it till his eye fell on me, when he came to my seat and said in English that had only a slight negro accent: *"I beg your pardon. Are you an American?"*

*"Yes."*

*"I am looking for Mr. Davis. Are you he?"*

*"No."*

*"Sorry I troubled you, sir,"* he said, and was going on when I stopped him to make some inquiries which he answered fully and very cheerfully. Finally, I said: *"You are not a native here?"*

*"No, sir."*

"A British subject, I suppose?" I continued, almost all negro subjects there being Jamaican. The fellow grinned and then in the broadest of dialects and with emphasis said:

"No, sah. I'se a New Orleans niggah, I is, sah," and away he went. Two minutes later he was chucking the prettiest native girl in the car under the chin and making everyone nearly shout with laughter by witty remarks.

All this seems to me to be worth telling because it illustrates the fact that the negro has a white man's chance in Central America. This man in the United States, in spite of manifest education and culture, was simply, as he said, a "New Orleans nigger." In Costa Rica he was a gentleman with somewhat of the tastes and habits of a man about town. At first, this lack of prejudice against color seems to the Yankee traveler to be one of the most remarkable features of Central American society. In Rivas, Nicaragua, when Warner Miller<sup>26</sup> and his party of canal route examiners were there, they stopped at the house of a widow who was one of the society leaders of the nation—a social leader in spite of her negro blood and plainly marked negro features. Honduras has had a negro President, and the people there speak of him proudly and reverently. This seems strange to Yankee prejudice, especially when it is considered that the class line between aristocrats and peons—between shoe-covered and bare feet—is there much more distinctly drawn than in the States. However, one can easily see how this feeling came to exist if he will read the history of the region. The word "white" does not appear in any Spanish law governing the American colonies, and it was further provided that all citizens of these colonies should be Spanish citizens—the subjects of the King and so far on equal terms, no matter whether of white, black, or red blood. Further still, the chief aim of the missionaries and the aim of the other conquerors of the region was to gather the natives into villages, and in these colonial villages such citizens, regardless of color, received the same share of land, the same number of [goats?] and cattle, the same annual salary, and so on, as every other one. And they cast lots for advantageous locations, There was never any condition of society in Spanish America to create a prejudice against color and they do not understand the Yankee prejudice.

"Do you call yourselves in the United States models for the lovers of freedom to imitate?" said a lady who had been educated in the States. "Well, I say that until

---

<sup>26</sup> Warner Miller (1838-1918) — US senator; president of the Nicaragua Canal Construction Company



*you judge all men by their capacity and refinement, regardless of color, you are not quite civilized."*

I do not know of any reply that can be made to this, but if any colored man must leave the United States he can find a white man's chance in Central America.

#### THE COSTA RICA RAILROAD TRAIN.

If anyone would see a well patronized railroad in a thinly populated country, let him go to Costa Rica. The road there was built by Englishmen, for the most part, on Government account, and the greater part of the equipment when I was there was of English make. Trains were commonly made up with one American coach and two English coaches, built somewhat on the American plan, so that the traveler had before him, end to end, samples of the work of the two nations. After a look at the two kinds of cars, no one would wonder that the English young men in the city were willing to join the Yankees in celebrating the birthday of George Washington. The superiority of the American car was great enough to make any spectator an admirer of the Yankee as well as his products. And yet the Yankee car did not have a fair chance because, under the management of the road, the coaches were all allowed to go to ruin in most wretched fashion. Window shutters were smashed and hanging like the shutters of an old New York tenement. Seats were cut and broken. Doors were cracked and otherwise mutilated. Fresh paint, of course, was wholly unknown, and even soap and water were but sparingly applied. In spite of all, this the cars were crowded at every trip.

In one journey to Cartago I paid special attention to the mail. This city was, in the days of Spanish rule, the capital of Costa Rica. It is but a short run from San José, the present capital, and the passenger traffic between the towns demands two trains each way every day. Of course, mail is carried on each train, and because Cartago is one of the largest towns in the nation (it has 12,000 inhabitants), the mail is one of the most important in the country. The leather pouch which carried all the mail of each trip was just eighteen inches square, and it was about one-quarter full when I measured it. They told me that Cartago, with its 12,000 people, never got a mail that more than half-filled that bag. The city of Alajuela, though it has a population of 9,000, gets a mail of the same size as Cartago, because it is more of a business place in proportion to its size.

As compared with the mail service in the Isthmus of Panama, Costa Rica is far ahead, for even the outer provincial towns have a mail once a week, while every place at all convenient to the railroad has one every day. A mail once a month or once in two weeks at best satisfied the Isthmian towns.

#### A SUMMER RESORT.

Like New Yorkers, the people of San José are fond of the country in the hot, dry season, and the rich commonly go to their coffee estates at that time. Not far from Cartago there is a hot spring called the Agua Caliente, and known to the annals of the country for time out of mind because of its peculiar medicinal virtues, virtues which resemble those of the Arkansas hot springs. A hotel was built there, and a train line run from the hotel to the Cartago station. This ought to have been a good speculation. The location was picturesque, the hotel good, the baths of unquestioned benefit in a variety of ills to which the warm-blooded San Josefinos are particularly subject; but the blight of the country fell upon it—the blight that keeps the people from doing anything their fathers did not do.

Neither natives nor foreigners came in sufficient numbers to pay running expenses. It was suggested that the management try to make the place a winter resort for Americans by arranging with the steamship companies to carry tourists to Limón at special rates, and also by advertising in American centers of population, but the manager shrugged his shoulders. There was no disposition to send good money after bad.

I passed six days in San José. On the day I arrived I sent my soiled clothing to the laundry that did the hotel's work. The landlord said the clothing would be returned in three days. At the end of four days, the clothing not having arrived, I mentioned the fact to the landlord, who anathematized the laundress and said he would have the stuff brought the first thing in the morning. The next afternoon, no clothing having appeared, I went to the landlord and asked him to send a special messenger at my expense to get the stuff. He said he would do so with pleasure. Thereafter I waited until 7 P. M. but no clothing came, so I went to the landlord once more. *"Did you send for my clothing?"* I asked.

*"Certainly. It was not quite ready. I did not tell you so, because I thought you would know when it did not come."*

*"Well, then, when will I get it?"*

*"In the morning, without doubt."*

*"But I leave on the train at 6 o'clock in the morning, as I told you."*

*"Certainly, I know. I sent word to the laundry and your clothes will be here before 5:30 o'clock."*

*"But the laundress said she would bring the clothes two days ago without fail."*

*"Ah, yes, she did, but she is a great liar."*

*"Then she may not bring them in the morning."*

*"Have patience. She will bring them."*

But I could not have patience longer, because I could not spare the clothes. After much talk, the landlord offered to go to the laundry with me to get the clothes that night. We reached the house at about 8 o'clock and found the people about to retire for the night, but when they recognized the landlord we were invited in with flourish and ceremony. *"The clothing of this foreigner I sent you, where is it?"* said the landlord.

*"In the tub, sir. I put it to soak to-night and to-morrow I will wash it without doubt."*

It was even so, and I had to carry the unwashed clothes wet to my room, hang them over chairs for the night, and pack them, still wet, next morning. Worse yet, she demanded full pay for the washing, and on the landlord's saying that she could detain me by legal process if I refused, I paid the bill.

o - 0 - o