MEMORABLE GUATEMALA (1896)

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(1) GOING TO GUATEMALA.[1]

Text by John Randolph Spears

A STUDY OF LIFE ALONG CENTRAL AMERICA'S BEST RAILROAD.

Story of a Thrashing a British Consular Agent Got—Picturesque Salt Works in the Swamp—Indian Girls and Their Pineapples at Palin—One Result of Foreign Influence on Simple Natives.

The green sea, the crystal white surf crashing on a low, black beach; the long row of low wooden houses facing the surf, with an iron pier running from them out to sea; the dense mass of green foliage just back of the houses; and, away beyond all, two lofty volcanoes, blue with the distance and rising into the clouds, combine to make a picture of the little port of San José, Guatemala, rarely equaled for beauty, even in the tropics, where every spot is picturesque. The surf is especially to be noticed. The breakers meeting over the point of Cape Hatteras to hurl the spoondrift[2] skyward, the long swells from the Pacific pounding the beach at Monterey, and the waves of the South Atlantic pouring over the singing sands of the Copacabana, at Rio Janeiro, must all awaken the enthusiasm of every traveler who beholds them; but nowhere on the continent, I guess, can anything be found to equal the sunlit radiance of the huge masses of foam that come roaring in over the dead black beach at San José. Doubtless it

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[1] Published by the New York *Sun*, January 5, 1896, page 2; Edited by Duncan S. Campbell, February 2019

[2] Spoondrift — Spindrift; spray blown from waves during a gale at sea

is the contrast of live white and dead black that gives the surf here its predominance, and such favoring conditions are rare.

As seen from the sea, San José is of small moment. There is a row of wooden buildings facing the sea. They stand where the spoondrift from a gale must wet their verandas. They are founded on a narrow bank of broken lava sand thrown up by the waves at the edge of a mangrove swamp. The bank is practically an island, with swamp ditches cutting it off from the mainland. A small ragged collection of native huts stands on partly dry land back in the swamp, the row of houses facing the sea being devoted to such purposes as offices for shipping, railroad, and other companies, with a custom house in the middle and a hotel for transients at one end of the row.

There is absolutely no harbor at San José. The beach is not even curved. But there is such a good anchorage that a lot of double-ended lighters are kept offshore for carrying goods between ships and pier, while a steam tug, not so large as those used for towing canal boats in New York Bay, is employed in towing the lighters.

The pier is built of iron piles and trusses and does not differ materially from such structures in the United States, but the story of the [origin] of the pier is worth telling. As I heard it, one John James Magee, a naturalist, was, say twenty years ago, gathering insects for the British Museum, and holding up the British flag as consular agent in the swamps of San José. One day a British merchant ship came to anchor off the swamps. Thereat, the Comandante of the port got into a surf boat (there was, of course, no sort of a pier there then) and started off to board the ship in the usual way of customs officials. Meantime, Consular Agent Magee got into another boat, and, being in a hurry, rowed out ahead of the official and boarded the ship. It was, of course, contrary to Guatemala law, as it is contrary to the customs laws of all maritime nations, for even a foreign consular agent to board a ship ahead of the customs inspector, but Magee didn't mind a little thing like that. Of course, the Comandante was incensed at the disregard of his right and dignity, and, as not infrequently happens among hotheaded people, he let his indignation get the better of his discretion. That night he sent for Magee to come to headquarters and explain the offense. "*Magee treated this order with contempt, of course*," as the Englishman who told me the story said. "*That's generally the best way to treat these squirt gun*[3] *officials when*

[3] Squirt gun — Water pistol

their dignity is hurt, but it didn't work so well that time." The Comandante, instead of pocketing the affront, sent a file of soldiers, who compelled Magee to come. Then when Magee showed himself to be defiant and insulting, the Comandante strung him up and had him whipped, according to the custom of the country (though contrary to its laws) when Comandantes deal with insolent people. The blows were laid on with a will, for the soldiers shared the indignation of their superior.

That was a right serious licking for any foreigner to get in a Central American swamp town, where any sort of a wound is likely to produce lockjaw, but Magee pulled through and made formal complaint to his Government. Then came the British warships. The was no denying the offense. It was a question of reparation, and Guatemala was let off on condition that the Comandante be cashiered and Magee receive a satisfactory return in cash. Cash was scarce, and a compromise was effected by which he got $30,000 in gold with a concession to build, and operate for a long period, a pier at San José.

Ever since that time the British consular agents of Central America have been telling that story with a far-away look in their eyes, and itching thrills running up and down their backs, but only one, the man at Bluefields, Nicaragua, has been able to nag the authorities into offering him an indignity worth a cash assessment. Magee built the pier, and every passenger and every pound of freight bound from foreign parts to the capital of the country and the region round about it must pay him tribute. I paid to his agent $2 myself, when I had been hoisted, with a couple of bundles of baggage, to the top of the pier, although a printed schedule in Bulletin 32 of the Bureau of American Republics, Washington, says $1 is the price for a man with 100 pounds of baggage. In 1890 Guatemala imported over 600,000 packages of goods and exported nearly 60,000,000 pounds of products, of which 55,000,000 was coffee. Coffee pays 25 cents per hundred pounds to Mr. Magee, and he handled the bulk of the exports on his pier. Mr. Magee is said to have accumulated over $5,000,000 gold.

One lands at San José by means of a whaleboat-shaped launch and a cage that lifts him from the launch to the pier floor. This part of one's journey would be interesting to a novice, but after having come ashore under the cliffs at Acajutla [El Salvador, Ed.], it seems tame. The custom house stands at the head of the pier, and all baggage is carried into it on a small flat car. I watched a dozen passengers open their baggage for inspection and they were all treated with noticeable courtesy.

The Guatemala Central, the railroad from San José to the capital of the nation, ends right alongside the custom house, and it is in a variety of ways a very interesting railroad for Americans. First of all, it is an American enterprise. Mr. C. P. Huntington and a number of other Southern Pacific capitalists are the owners of it. A glance at either the roadbed or the rolling stock would show the nationality of the management. It is the only road in Central America where the passenger cars are clean, and all that pertains to the road is in perfect order. For a contrast in railroads, one should travel in an English-made car on the Costa Rica road and then come to San José, for, with their broken windows, their shutters hanging awry, their door panels split, their films of dirt, and their almost total lack of springs, the English-made cars of Costa Rica are as uninviting as a neglected tenement. These are mere statements of facts familiar to all who have traveled in the region, but I found that it was not in good form to dwell on them when in company with the English-speaking foreigners of Central America. It is worth noting that a lot of the freight cars of the road had been built at the company's shops at the capital.

If the traveler have time to look around San José, something he is reasonably sure to have when he returns from the interior, he can find several matters likely to interest him. For instance, there are the salt works. As said, San José stands on a salt water swamp; the ground is the detritus from lava mountains, held in place, for the most part, by mangrove roots, though many savannas are found in the swamps. In the dry season, the savannas are firm enough to sustain oxen and carts, but the salt water oozes up at every high tide. This ebb and flow of salt water through the soil furnishes the basis for an industry exactly suited to the habits of the natives. For time out of mind, they have observed that, when the tide has ebbed during the dry season, the hot sun quickly dries the surface of the soil in the savannas, and that the drying turned the black alluvial earth gray with a deposit of salt. The deposit, though visible, was too thin to be scraped up, but the natives were equal to that emergency. They scraped up the salt-bearing earth to a depth of an inch over as wide a surface as needed to fill big wooden vats, some of which were made out of logs hollowed canoe-fashion; and, in later years, some of boards and frames like those familiar to frontiersmen in the States when leaching wood ashes to make potash. The salty earth in these vats was then leached with the salt water from shoal wells beside the vats, and then the brine was concentrated in pans and kettles. The vats and leaches were, in all cases, covered in with great peaked thatch-roofed structures, which, as seen from the edge of a savanna, are extremely picturesque. Nor should one

with an artist's instinct fail to look into one of these structures, for, what with the few rays of light that struggle past the spectator in the door, and the red illumination of the wood fires in the low furnaces under the pans, and the dim figures of swarthy, naked men moving about, and the wavering smoke from the furnaces disappearing in the murk above, there is found a picture of life that can rarely be seen elsewhere.

Salt making is the only productive industry of the place, but there is one other salt-making factory worth seeing. It stands on the beach half a mile west of the pier. A little wooden shanty has been erected there, and under it a small steam pump and a couple of pans and kettles for evaporating brine. Adjoining this stands an iron-roofed shed 150 feet long, 30 feet high, and 15 broad. The roof is supported on stout poles and the space under it is divided into four floors, six feet apart, made of slender poles. Each floor is piled four feet deep with fine brush, while just under the roof is a trough running the full length of the shed. The scheme is very simple. The steam pump forces sea water into the trough under the roof, and from the trough the water runs through leaky pipes to drip and run down through the brush floors clear to the bottom, where it is collected in a wide trough and conveyed to the pans. During the dry season, the warm breezes are said to concentrate the water considerably. The foreman, who was also the engineer, had two men and a boy to help him in cutting fuel, attending the pans, &c. He said the works produced 600 pounds of salt at a cost of $5 for running expenses, and that the salt sold at 5 cents a pound.

This factory was the property of a capitalist, of course, and it was run steadily. The rancho factories were owned by smaller capitalists, who ran them intermittently, that is, whenever they wanted a little money for current expenses. The idea of running them day and night for enough years to accumulate an independent fortune would have seemed ridiculous to them. They believed in enjoying life as they went along. On the other hand, as a Yankee said to me, the foreigners considered them "*the darnedest, laziest beings under the canopy; and what makes me hottest at them is that they despise me as a slave, because I'm here for the stuff and willing to work seven days in the week to get it*."

Though lacking somewhat of the picturesque Costa Rica road to the sea—features due to the location of that road on the mountains overlooking a deep valley—the Guatemala Central has matters of interest of its own. There are big cane and corn fields that are irrigated, and in which men can be seen using hoes Yankee fashion. There are some sawmills that remind one of the backwoods of

Indiana. There is a station, Escuintla, where the morning train stops "*twenty minutes for breakfast*," and where passengers can stand up at a counter to eat sandwiches and drink coffee, or they can sit down to a square meal, as they choose, sandwiches costing ten cents each and the square meal one dollar. There is a zig-zag climb up the mountains which reminds one of the Tehachapi Pass[4] in southern California, in that there is a steep and picturesque climb. It is alleged by some people that the Pacific Ocean is visible from the crest of this climb, and others emphatically deny that this is so. I saw several foreigners get excited over the discussion of this matter and call one another ugly names. It was a smoky, foggy day when I went up. I don't know the fact, but it seems worth mention, for the reason that two or three writers have said the ocean could be seen there, and that three-fourths of those whom I met, including some railroaders, called the writers idiots and other offensive names.

There is one feature of the trip, however, on which all travelers are united, and that is the pineapple market at Palin. We are all agreed that the Indian girls who bring pineapples to the train at Palin are beautiful in form and attractive in feature, and that they offer the pineapples for sale in a way that no foreigner is able to resist. We all agree, too, that the short, embroidered jackets they wear over their shoulders, and the folds of cloth hung about their loins in lieu of skirts make a picturesque attire. Further than that, we agree that the pineapples, even when considered calmly after the train leaves the smiling sales squaws behind, are simply perfect. A good pineapple is the one tropical fruit that reconciles the Yankee traveler to the loss of the Rhode Island Greening and the Baldwin,[5] but nowhere during my journey did I find any equal to those sold at Palin. The price one pays for them depends on circumstances—on one's knowledge of the people and of the language, and so on. One of the foreign passengers paid 25 cents for two, and a little later another foreigner got two equally fine for 5 cents. Thereat, we chaffed the first buyer unmercifully, on the theory that he had tried to flirt and had made a failure of it. But he had his revenge. Three of us were strolling in the suburbs of the capital, along the cart road leading to Palin, a few days later, when a party of Indian girls came along, bound home from a trip to market. They were about passing us without looking to the right or left, as is their custom, when one saw the liberal fellow out of the corner of her eye and stopped. Then all, in most graceful and charming fashion, thanked him for his purchase on the train and utterly ignored the rest of us.

[4] The Tehachapi Loop in Kern County, designed to gain altitude, was opened in 1876
[5] Varieties of apples cultivated in the United States

When the train is three-fourths of the way to the capital (the road is seventy-one miles long), Amatitlan, on the shore of a very picturesque lake, is reached. The lake, with the mountains beyond, makes a lovely picture, but I guess the most interesting think about it was the open-air laundry. The road follows the lake shore for several miles, and women can be seen at frequent intervals standing in water up to their knees, doing laundry work. Each woman stood beside a lava boulder—a genuine volcanic bomb, no doubt—and used it as a washboard. The top of the boulder invariably had a smooth space, just about the size of a Yankee washboard, worn on a slanting side, and it was on this smooth spot that the clothes were rubbed. The fact that women everywhere in Central America beat the dirty clothes, instead of rubbing them, made the rubbing noticeable. One of the passengers told me that the smooth places, which in some places were cuts, two or three inches deep, had been worn there by the attrition of clothes. It may be so, but I saw such rocks in a stream near the capital where the cuts had been made with chisels. Most noticeable of all, however, was the dress of these washerwomen. That is to say, they were dressed—they wore skirts and jackets instead of thin, clinging chemises, such as can be seen in many out-of-the-way parts of Central America, and as could have been seen here before foreigners came to build a railroad.

To the casual observer, the fact that the women were now dressed somewhat according to London and New York ideas, when under the public gaze, showed a decided advance in civilization. To one who inquired into all the circumstances, it showed nothing of the kind. For them, the old style with the old habits was better than the new style with the new habits that came with it. In the old style, they were not immodest. No native thought it out of the way to see a woman in a clinging chemise washing clothes at the edge of the lake. The garb was changed because of the effect it had on the civilized track layers. Once the really modest women came to understand the thoughts of the railroad builders, they made haste to change their attire. Then it was found, strange as it may seem, that the new dress was not only inconvenient, but it served the very purpose which the casual foreign observer supposed the old dress served. It led to immodesty. The foreigner comes to these natives as the Devil came to the Garden of Eden. After his arrival, the natives put on fig leaves, so to speak. And having learned the taste of forbidden fruit, they seem to like it immensely. I repeat that the foreigner who goes among simple Indian tribes, and by either sermons or jeers tries to alter native habits in the matter of dress, is literally a devil to that people, no matter what cloak he may wear. But this is a statement that

few will believe, because the sincerity and, in some cases, the heroism of the missionary priests blind the public to the frightful results of the mistake they make.

As the railroad of Guatemala begins at an example of the work of modern engineers, as good for the purpose as any to be found anywhere—that is to say, at a modern ocean pier—so it ends at another good example. The station, the car yards, and the shops of the railroad company in the suburbs of the capital do not strike the traveler as in any way novel or different from what he might expect in the United States. And when he passes out of the fenced yard and finds a bob-tailed horse car loaded to desperation, so to speak, he is ready to believe that modern progress, which is not to say civilization, has taken a right good hold on at least one country in Central America.

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(2) THE CITY OF GUATEMALA. [6]

Text by John Randolph Spears

A TRAVELER'S VIEWS IN THE PARIS OF CENTRAL AMERICA.

A Landlady who remembered a Yankee Captain Kindly—Policemen Who Carry Clubs Only—An Interesting Class of Porters—Where Washing Clothes is Like an Afternoon Tea—Obstreperous Foreigners and the Police—The Supply of Drinking Water—Wages and Native Wage-workers—Story of the Kanakas.

They called Guatemala City the "*Paris of Central America*" whenever people who knew the place spoke of it anywhere in the region. Even natives of other countries there, who were not lacking in vanity, did this, and that was enough to excite a lively curiosity in any traveler; but I gathered from what was said that, when saying this, they had no reference to Paris libraries of books, or to any collections of art works, unless, indeed, living pictures for private exhibition could be called works of art. I understood them to mean that it was a city of wealth and leisure and a knowledge of the art of entertaining travelers. It was said to be unique among Central American cities in that it had a race track, with pretty fair imported as well as native horses to use the track, while good roads were to be found round about, and a livery stable with carriages as well as horses to let. There was a grand opera house and a grand bullring. There were a number of excellent hotels. All these things I found to be true, but insofar as these matters were importations from other countries, or like foreign models, I avoided taking sides about them. Instead of going to the best hotel in the city, for instance, I entered a building that had the word "Huéspedes" over the door, that being the sign of a common boarding house. A driveway led to the court, and when I had gone in I found a tame coon and a yellow pup the sole visible occupants. These two were wrestling in a most vigorous but friendly fashion in the shade of a veranda. After I had watched the play for a minute the pup got a nip that made him yelp, and then the landlady looked from an open window and discovered the stranger. She made me welcome in a fashion not unknown to Yankee landladies. She was effusively glad to see a man willing to pay in advance, and she installed me in a room that had four beds, three of which were taken by lodgers, "*very gentlemanly*." When I told her in reply to a question that

[6] Published by the New. York *Sun*, Sunday, January 12, 1896, page 5; Edited by Duncan S. Campbell, February 2019

I was an American, and not English, she expressed her pleasure more effusively than ever. She had had an American boarder, one Capt. Rutler, she said, and "*he was an extremely good man - he tried to teach me English*."

"*That is good*," said I. "*Do you remember the English he taught you?"*

"*I cannot talk it, but I remember many words—yes. He taught me to say*, 'I love you.' 'Do you love me, sweetheart?' "Kiss me, love.' *Do I speak well?*"

She had a shrill voice, red hair, a thin, freckled face, and cross eyes—Capt. Rutler's taste in choosing pupils was not at all what that of an ordinary traveler would be—but, of course, it was proper as well as truthful to say that what she knew of English she spoke with a pure American accent. And all this seems worth telling from the fact that it illustrates somewhat a phase of life in the tropics.

In an article on the women of Spanish America, printed in THE SUN some time ago,[7] reference was made to the remarkable embroidery to be seen on the jackets of the Indian women in Guatemala. The blanket on my bed in this boarding house was a specimen of native art work in the same style. It was composed of thick, hard-twisted cotton threads woven into two strips, say six feet long and two and a half wide, which were afterward sewed together with a thread of the warp. As a mere textile fabric, it was interesting because of its strength and firmness, but as a work of art it was beautiful. The body of both parts was of cotton, just as it came from the pod; but, by the use of black threads in both warp and woof, a pair of jaguars facing each other, open-mouthed and ready to spring, were depicted on one part, while the other part of the blanket showed two cocks with heads down in fighting array. As was said in referring to the work on the jackets of the women, the Indians of this part of Guatemala were gifted with a notable ability as artists. As in charcoal sketches by a master hand, the coarse threads of the blanket showed figures instinct[8] with savage life. I have not seen anything in the art exhibits of New York likely to stir the beholder more.

Because it is the habit of women of wealth, as well as of poverty, there, to buy family supplies at the market, the marketplaces of all Spanish America are

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[7] "Dark-eyed Señoritas", published February 10, 1895
[8] Instinct — Infused, imbued

always interesting; but what struck me as a decided Spanish-American novelty in the Guatemala market was the fact that the policemen were armed with clubs only, as far as anyone could see. I had observed that no soldiers guarded the pier when the passengers landed at San José, nor were there any soldiers seen at the stations along the line to the capital. That was novel, but to find policemen in the marketplace of the capital with clubs only, showed that the President had a confidence in his people little short of marvelous for that region. Why, even in Buenos Ayres, "*the Athens of Spanish America*" (and it really is properly so called), the policemen wear swords.

Next to the policemen in interest were the porters. No other city of Central America is supplied with public porters. They can be found at all business hours about the markets, hotels, and other gathering places, ready to carry anything from a bunch of greens to a piano to any part of the city or the nation, for that matter. Women sometimes help their husbands in the work. When I was ready to leave the city, a companion had a trunk and a valise together weighing 125 pounds, while my two bundles aggregated 65. We called a porter from the corner and he brought his wife along. The two got the trunk on the old man's back, where it was held by a strap that passed across his forehead. Then he took up the valise in one hand and told his wife to put the heavier of my bundles on top of the trunk. She demurred, but he insisted. She still demurred, wishing to carry it herself, so he turned and asked me to put it on his back, saying "*Women are always bad,*" whereat she smiled and let me do as he wished. She then had a bundle of 25 pounds only to carry. Perhaps the reader will remember this incident longer if I tell the fact that these two porters were full-blooded Indians, as are about all the porters of Guatemala.

I saw some of the porters carry enormous loads of vegetables. I should say that they were equal to 250 pounds, dead weight; but the most striking load was that of the pottery makers. They come to the market every morning with a rectangular frame crate (say six feet high and nearly two feet square on the bottom), supported on the back by a strap across the forehead. Each of these crates was full of pottery water jars, as a rule. I found the crates invariably so heavy that I was just able to lift them, but the porters carried them at a swift pacing gait that enabled them to cover not less than six miles an hour over the country roads. The fact that they always travel at the same gait is quite as striking as the weight of their loads. Old and young, even children of five or six years, keep it up for more miles than I like to tell, lest I be thought exaggerating. And the children carry loads in proportion to their size, even loads of crockery. Moreover,

these youngsters show a pride in the loads they carry, just as a Yankee farm boy finds his bosom swelling with long breaths the first time he is trusted to drive a team by himself. They are only Indians, a whole lot of people in the United States think, we ought to send no end of missionaries down there to civilize them; but, if to solve the problem of life is to turn one's work into play, perhaps we might better import some of the Indians as schoolteachers. The very happiest family groups imaginable are to be seen on any pleasant morning along the roads leading to the market. And yet, each member of the family will be carrying a considerable load.

The women who have small children always carry them on their backs by means of a cotton scarf that is tied across the breast. An additional load is then carried on the head. For the load on the head, a basket peculiar to the country is made. These baskets are round, three feet in diameter, and six inches deep. The fruit and vegetables in the market are commonly displayed in them.

There were a number of soldiers in the market, but not on duty. They were after food different from that served in the barracks, and a lark, and they were finding both, if a stranger could judge by the attentions they received from the younger sales squaws of the market.

Perhaps the article on sale in the market that would astonish the Yankee traveler more than any other was the milk of the burro. This milk is also made into cheese, and I can testify that it is excellent cheese.

The traveler who has seen how carefully all parts of the cattle from the stock yards of Chicago are turned to account would be interested in seeing a number of gardens in Guatemala that are enclosed with walls made of cattle horns ingeniously piled together, and still more interested in the entries of a number of very stylish houses, the pavements of which are composed of the shin bones of cattle set on end in ornamental patterns between cut stone.

An institution of the city which no one can avoid seeing is the public laundry. At convenient distances along the principal streets may be found tile-roofed pavilions—one-story pagodas would perhaps describe them better. Most of them are circular in form, and all the roofs are supported on brick and cement pillars. A deep cement trough, waist high, runs all the way around each pagoda, save where there is a doorway, and this trough is kept brimful of water by a pipe from a hydrant. Inside of the trough, and on a level with and facing it, is a row

of shallow, rectangular tubs made of cement—they are not more than six inches deep on the trough side, and but an inch on the inner side.

In fact, what I call tubs are really washboards, though all the washing is done in them. A level shelf to hold the dirty clothes is found on one side of the tub and another for the washed clothes on the other. So, it happens that wash day with the Guatemala washerwoman is like an afternoon tea or a church sewing society meeting in Yankee land. The women go to these pavilions in the cool of the morning, with their children on their backs and the laundry stuff on their heads. The children are bathed in the trough first of all—a wriggling, splashing process that sets everybody in sight laughing, including the youngsters themselves, and then, when they have been turned loose to accumulate a fresh layer of dirt in the street, the mothers begin the slightly more serious work of rubbing the clothes in the tubs, rinsing them in the troughs, and discussing the deeds and qualities of their neighbors who are not present. As they work, a chemise-like waist sometimes goes awry, and occasionally some elderly laundress finds the waist a nuisance and slips it from her shoulders altogether. Acquaintances come along and stop to join in the gossip. A passing man makes a jibing remark and flees in mock terror at the storm he has raised over the troubled waters, or some youth is attracted by a bright face behind a pile of clothing and stops for a minute, never longer because of the remarks of those whose faces do not seem so bright to him. I have seen picnics in the States where the people did not have half as much fun as the women in the laundries of Guatemala do.

But if the traveler would see what I suppose to be the most picturesque laundry in the world, he should go into a deep ravine in the plain, just beyond the west suburb of the city. Narrow goat trails lead down into this ravine, here and there, and in one place a cart road has been hewed out, and a bridge built over the brook that tumbles and froths along at the bottom. It is better, if more difficult, to climb down one of the goat trails. One hears merry voices before he reaches the bottom, and, when at last he rounds the bend, or parts the green brush that had obscured the view, he finds perhaps a score of women and children in and around the brook. Each woman will be standing up to her knees in water beside a boulder with its top smoothed off to serve as a washboard. The piles of clothing lie on the grassy bank of the brook, or over a handy rock. The women pick the garments from these piles, souse them in the brook, soap and rub them, and then spread them on the green grass or the bushes to dry. They are negligé[9] in

[9] Negligé — Carelessly informal or incompletely attired

attire: the younger ones are beautiful in form; there is an abandon in their talk and gesture that is not checked by the presence of a well-behaved stranger; they stop to rest in graceful attitudes on the sloping banks of the stream. Behind and over them rises the steep wall of the gulch—a mass of green foliage, save for the black volcanic rocks that jut out here and there. That is a picture well worth a long journey to see, but only well-behaved strangers should venture there. The other kind would get hurt.

One sees a curious mingling of the old and the new in Guatemala. The streets are swept, for instance, with rotary coir brooms drawn by mules, like those in use in the United States, while the houses are swept with little bundles of bamboo splints about the size of a round paintbrush tied to the end of a small sapling. Then, although the porters are seen everywhere carrying heavy bundles, there are modern Yankee trucks in town—the kind known as slovens[10]—having the bed of the truck within four inches of the pavement to facilitate loading heavy articles. The peon class carry no machetes here, as they do elsewhere in Central America. They often wear coats, and on Sunday they go to church wearing stand-up collars with flash neckties, and even with silk hats on their heads, though barefooted, and that is a striking combination of the old and the new. It is almost as striking as the taste of those Yankees who wear silk hats with tan shoes or sack coats.

As one travels through Spanish America and meets the Consuls there, he finds himself able to account for their selection as a class (there are many exceptions) only on the theory that the nominating power supposed the climate to be deadly. But, on the other hand, the best of Consuls finds himself in a quandary very often, because of the character of his countrymen who appeal to him for help. I rarely met an English-speaking workman who had been any time in the region who did not tell with glee of having "*licked a greaser policeman*." The railroad men had no end of stories about encounters with soldiers as well as policemen in Mexico, but everywhere it was counted great sport to "*clean out*" one of the local policemen. I saw one case myself that was typical of all, though the foreigner was a German who had been a railroader in Mexico and a resident of the United States. This man was a frequenter of a Yankee saloon near the railroad in Guatemala, and of a native cockpit hard by. One day he got pretty drunk at the saloon and then went to the cockpit, where he made so much trouble that the aid of a policeman was invoked. The policemen took one look at the

[10] Sloven — Long, low, four-wheeled cart, drawn by horses and used to move heavy loads

German and then ran to the street for help. The German followed and got the policeman just as he was blowing his whistle. During the next two minutes, that policeman got what the German called a "*d—d good licking*." Then two more policemen came, and the three got a licking together, for the German was a hustler and the policemen refrained from using their clubs. They were able to whistle for more help, however, and eventually a dozen police arrived, and the German was carried to the station. As soon as he was locked up, the offender wrote a note on a slip from a notebook, and a policeman, at his demand, carried it to the German Consul. In two hours, the German was free on the street. He told me his Consul had ordered his release instantly from the Chief of Police, and that the Chief of Police had obeyed the Consul. The majority of the foreign colony applauded this German Consul. I suppose that, as a rule, Consuls there do very much as this German did, but many of them, especially the Yankees, go to the opposite extreme. What with the rowdies, he will have to deal with on one side, the concession grabbers on another, the style and formalities to be observed in dealing with native officials, and the natural desire to hold up "Old Glory" while doing justice in all cases, the office of Consul is a trying one. But I did not meet a single one of these officials who did not think that his previous experience had so well fitted him for the task that he felt obliged to yield to the unanimous desires of his countrymen and offer his services to a new Administration at Washington for another term.

The one question which a traveler on returning from Central America hears most frequently is this: "*How did you find the climate?"* There is abundant reason to believe that the climate of Guatemala City, like that of all the upland region of the Spanish Main, is the healthiest in the world. In the first place, every foreigner I saw there said it was entirely healthy. But the most important testimony was found in what I saw of the sanitary conditions of the city. Though better in its drainage than some of the cities of the region, the location and the care of closets and cesspools are abominable. Worse yet, the city, which stands on a tongue-like ridge, drained both ways into streams found to the east and the west of the city, and these two streams unite some distance below. A short way from the junction, a dam has been built to form a pond, and this pond, that catches the whole drainage of the city, is a chief source of supply of drinking water for the people of the town. I could not get any tables of vital statistics, but people said the death rate would compare favorably with that in Yankee cities supplied with good water. They have some typhoid fever and other zymotic[11]

[11] Zymotic — Relating to a contagious or infectious disease

diseases, but the fact that anybody lives while drinking such water proves that the climate is health-inspiring to an extraordinary degree.

There is one department of Guatemala (?) which is noted for the longevity of its people. It is composed of high tablelands—somewhat higher than that of Guatemala City. The number of people over 100 years of age is said to be extraordinary. I have given considerable space here and at other times to the matter of climate, but it seemed proper to do so because the popular notion that the climate of the torrid zone is deadly, or at least deteriorating, is wrong. It is in the habits of the people, native and foreign, that death finds a way.

Among a number of other Americans, with whom I became acquainted, was a young man who was employed as foreman on a plantation where 180 acres of land was devoted to coffee and sixty to sugarcane. According to him, there were employed on this plantation eighty-five men and women in caring for the plantation and its crops. This included the cleaning of the coffee [...] for market, and the making of white sugar of the best native quality, say the "coffee A" of a Yankee grocery. This [...] man received $45[?] silver a month and his board, which he said was the average wages for a foreman. The field hands received 35½[?] cents a day, and had the free use of huts to live in, and of land on which they could raise corn and beans. They got all the bananas they wanted to eat from the plants that shaded the coffee trees. They had to buy their coffee and whatever else they wanted and did not raise. On these terms, the owner had usually kept his force as full as he needed, but he was more fortunate than most planters of the region. Other people told me that the very best farm laborers in Guatemala receive 75 cents per day, and a considerable number of [...], but the average is 34½[?] cents. The full-blooded Indians are accounted much better workers than those with white blood in their veins.

As in all the Central American States, a laborer who agrees to work for an employer and accepts pay in advance can be compelled by process of law to do the work. A file of soldiers will be sent to conduct him to the plantation, and if he runs away, then he will be put into the army and kept there until his pay at 25 cents a day will amount to enough to repay the advance of wages with interest.

That is to say, the farm laborers and workmen of a like ilk virtually sell themselves into slavery when they make a contract. This, on the one hand, saves the employer from the loss of money advanced, but on the other it gives him an employee who works like a convict. The whole labor system of Spanish America

is in a most deplorable condition, in spite of the fact that the laborers can emancipate themselves when they choose to do so, by settling on Government land and planting for themselves. To improve this condition of affairs, Guatemala and Mexico have tried importing Kanakas from the South Sea Islands, in imitation of some of the British colonies in the Australia region. I talked with a Canadian who had been interested in importing the cargo brought to San José, Guatemala, and who was familiar with the facts in the case of the cargo taken to San Benito,[12] Mexico. I said to him that I had heard that the gathering of Kanakas for Central American plantations was really a slave-catching business, though, nominally, the hiring of free-will laborers.

"*You can take my word for it*," he said, "*that that is all bosh. In the first place, anyone who knows these islanders, as they live in their native houses, must admit that their condition has been infinitely bettered by bringing them here. On their islands, they have nothing but coconuts and fish for food, and when the fish fail them, they starve. It is their custom at such times to take their old folks out to sea and drown them, while, even at the best, they have a very precarious time of it. Here they at least have all they can eat. Food is all around them, and the owner of the plantation could not keep them from it if so disposed. No one goes hungry here. Then they are under contract for five years, at from $5 to $7 per month; and, at the tend of that term, they must be returned to their island homes, if they wish to go; but, no one supposes they will be as brutal as not to see the better conditions that surround them here*."

That was the statement of the case as seen by one who helped promote the enterprise. There was nothing said about the Christianizing of the Kanakas, astonishing as it may seem, as one of the blessings that come to them through the forced emigration from the islands to Guatemala. And that was a little unfortunate, too, because then the statement could have been loaded into parallel columns with the stock statement from some old-time slaver trading between Africa and the coast of Cuba, and found to be word for word identical with it, save as to the wages and return of the laborers.

The first cargo imported came to San Benito. The number who arrived alive was 240. "*It was plain they had been badly treated on the voyage*," though "*that was not the fault of the importers*." In fact, they were just "*about starved when they landed*," and "*they ate everything eatable down to grass roots that they could lay*

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[12] San Benito — Port located on the Pacific coast of Mexico, close to the Guatemala border

their hands on." In consequence "*180 out of the 240 died of dysentery*" within a week. "*The rest were distributed*." The importers of Guatemala having learned the disastrous (financially) result of that venture were careful to have an abundance of suitable food waiting for the Kanakas when landed in San José, and "*the percentage of loss was very small*." Only a few died of dysentery. The rest were acclimated and distributed among those who had advanced the money for the venture. Time enough had elapsed when I was there to show that the cost of the Kanakas to the importers would amount to 50 cents a day silver for the five years. This was counted high-priced labor, when the quality was considered; but, owing to the scarcity of hands, the employers were fairly contented. When asked what arrangements, if any, had been made to send the Kanakas home, the man with whom I talked repeated what he had said about the Kanakas not being so brutal they could not see they were better off in Guatemala than in their old homes.

The truth is they will never be returned, and the importers never had any intention of returning them. No Central American would own slaves—not he. He would elevate a lot of degraded islanders from a diet of coconuts and fish to one of corn bread and beans. He would sign a contract to pay them $7 a month. He would cheerfully agree that they should be returned at the end of five years. Having the forms all filled out just right, he would put the islanders at work, and keep them there, with bayonets if need be. He would "*Transfer his contract*" to another planter for a price, and he would fail to make provision for returning the Kanakas to their homes; but he would be very indignant if accused of having in any way deprived these Kanakas of their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To an outsider, it seems that when these Kanakas ask for fish they get a stone, but the Guatemalan points out that the shape of the stone is perfectly that of a fish, and is astonished that anyone should suppose it was not a fish so long as the form was right.

Not every traveler would care to make a practice of visiting cemeteries, but there are at least two in the nation of Guatemala that ought not to be ignored. The finest cemetery of Central America is just outside Guatemala City, though this fact is only a lesser reason for visiting it. The chief features of interest will be found in the methods of disposing of the dead. First of all, as one enters the well-designed gate in the wall, he finds himself in what may well be called a storage warehouse for the human dead. There is a long hallway on each side of the entry, parallel with the street. As one walks down this, he sees vaults to rent, and vaults that are rented, and above the others in tiers. Each vault is just large

enough to hold a coffin. The renter puts the coffin in and seals the door with a slab of marble on which the usual biographical facts are carved. As long as the rent is paid, the remains lie in peace, and no longer. There are two basements also devoted to vaults of the kind—in all, many hundreds of vaults have been prepared so. Then there are whole streets lined with tiny Gothic stone and metal and cement structures, somewhat in imitation of the old country cathedrals. There are spires and minarets and towers, with no end of sculptured saints and angels, facing the streets. On going behind these structures, one sees arched openings, or the doors that close openings, each of which is large enough for a coffin. The tomb of the late President Barrios is the largest and most expensive in the cemetery. It is a huge vault in the side of a hill, not unlike vaults about New York, with bronze allegorical figures and filigree work about the huge gate in front. Elsewhere, there are hundreds of little cement vaults above ground, each of which has two little chambers, one above the other, for coffins; and in still another place are many one-coffin vaults. But, perhaps the most curious part of the cemetery is the single grave section, where the poorer people lie. Here the coffins are buried in rows, as in the United States. But instead of designating the dead by a biography carved on a headstone, there are long wires strung over the graves, and over each grave swings a sheet of painted tin, on which may be read the usual facts about the dead one who is buried beneath. And it is not alone the odd appearance of the swinging signs that attracts attention: the signs are vociferous with creak and groan, as they sway to and fro with the wind. Certainly, if Central American resurrectionists have nerves, that section of the cemetery is forever safe.

The other cemetery worth visiting is in the swamp, along the beach at San José. The villagers have, for many years, carried their dead eastward along the beach and buried them in the sand, just within the shade of the jungle growth. The graves lie exactly as the graves of the dead at Kinakeet on Hatteras Island do—graves of which THE SUN once told a story. And, as at Hatteras Island, so here at San José, nature's mood has changed since the cemetery was first planned; so that, instead of allowing the dead to rest in peace, she has started a sand wave rolling across the little cemetery before a relentless wind, which first buries the grave and its cross out of sight, and then, recovering all again, digs down to discover the coffin and break it to pieces and expose the bones to the wear of the sand blast. The living have come to the rescue, and have driven stakes in one place and piled logs in another, hoping to stay the destroying power, but in every case their labor was vain. I have never seen any conflict between man and

nature that seemed quite as pitiful as that afforded by the cemeteries of Hatteras Island and San José de Guatemala.

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