

THE DANISH ANTILLES.

Their Inhabitants, Products and Political Significance.

San Juan, Jan. 15.—The Danish Antilles, following the order in which they are usually named by geographers, consist of the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, the last better known, perhaps, by its Spanish title of Santa Cruz. St. Thomas, though thus placed first in the list, stands second only in extent of surface area, while in comparative agricultural value it is the least important of the group.

From the time of the earliest colonization of the West Indies by the European nations, the island of St. Croix, the largest of these Danish islands, has been constantly known as one of the most productive of the whole archipelago in its yield of cane sugar, and during the first three centuries and a half of occupation, its plantation owners accumulated great fortunes and lived upon their half-feudal holdings amid surroundings of baronial splendor, each succeeding generation sending their offspring to foreign universities and maintaining among themselves a highly exclusive aristocratic caste. It was here, it will be remembered, that Alexander Hamilton, while in his extreme youth, acting as manager of one of those lordly estates, the property of a relative, found his first useful field of activity and gave precocious promise of the masterful gifts which were destined to distinguish his remarkable career.

ISLAND OF ST. CROIX.

St. Croix lies lower upon the sea than the other islands, its highest elevations being much less than those of St. Thomas, in particular, which last rise, at one or two points, to an altitude of about 1,200 feet. Of probably greater geological age than its sister isle, the processes of nature, through the effect of long erosion, have spread wide the lava cast of dissolving volcanic crusts and prepared the fertile fields whose virgin acres were eagerly seized upon and laid under tribute by the first comers, and even now, in these days of almost profitless production, still continue to glow with the rich fruitings of an intensive cultivation. St. John has far more cultivable land in proportion to its size than has St. Thomas, but so much greater are the advantages offered by St. Croix, in this way, that little attention has been paid to these undervalued resources. As with the small rural population upon St. Thomas, the chief pursuit of the inhabitants of St. John has always been intercoastal small boat navigation, boat building and repairing, and fishing.

ST. THOMAS ISLAND.

St. Thomas lies scarcely 15 miles to the eastward of Culebra, the little isle which has lately become the center of so much interest as the base of this winter's important naval maneuvers. The two isles are nearly equal in size, and are about as much alike as two peas in a pod. They are mere small, rocky keys in the chain of the Caribbean, of which there are many such along the course of its semi-circular sweep over some 500 miles of sea. Largely unclothed by vegetation, save upon the littoral slopes by narrow fringes of native grass lands and upon the heights by scattered clots of lower-class tropical growth, such as certain inferior forms of acacia and some dwarfed species of thorn-bearing shrubs, they present little that is picturesque or striking, as they rise sudden and colorless above the glittering blue plane of the ocean.

CULEBRA AND ITS PEOPLE.

Culebra has 700 inhabitants, a full half of which live in and near a small village, and the population of St. Thomas is practically all gathered in its little city of Charlotte Amalie, of 10,000 people. Cattle are bred with some success in Culebra, on the limited wild pasture lands of the lower levels, but the rearing of goats seems to have been all that has been attempted in this way upon any considerable scale among the arid hill-sides of St. Thomas. Both islands are without fresh-water rivers or springs, but Culebra has one or two small sluggish streams of a vile brackish character. In both, cisterns are alone depended upon for public and private water supply. It is held, however, by competent judges, that fresh water exists plentifully at certain depths, and that a sufficient quantity to solve all problems could be reached through the medium of drive wells. So far, no effort in this direction has ever been made. That such will be undertaken at any time in the future for purposes of agricultural irrigation, in view of the sparseness and paucity of the soil, is not among the probabilities.

HARBORS OF THE ISLANDS.

St. Thomas and Culebra derive their only importance from the fact that each contains a deeply indented shore line, within which lie the only good harbors to be found between Santo Domingo and the Windward Islands. Culebra has two of these, one known as Great Harbor, and the other as Target Bay. Great Harbor is landlocked on three sides, and its opening into the sea is partially barred by a coral reef which extends from the deadlands of the west coast, and leaves an entrance channel unsafely narrow for the passage of our larger naval ships. There is anchorage for but a limited number of vessels within this bay, and as a matter of fact, during the maneuvers, none but ships of smallest draft have made use of its waters. Target Bay is little more than an open roadstead, but it is here that the ships comprising the North Atlantic squadron have had, and still continue to have, their rendezvous while waiting orders in the progress of the movements. On Dec. 12 the ships lying at anchor in this bay were the Kearsarge, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Alabama, Atlanta, San Francisco, Massachusetts, Chicago, Albany, Dolphin, Nashville and Mayflower.

Standing upon a commanding point of the harbor's shore, at that time only the most remote of these ships could be seen by an observer, as those of the largest class were moored beyond the reefs in what may be fairly termed the open ocean. Save as to storms from the north, Target bay affords no shelter whatsoever.

St. Thomas has a magnificent and unequal harbor of great size, and safe and accommodating depth. That it would serve the purposes of the United States excellently well is shown by a chart that has been prepared by an engineer resident in the island, and thoroughly familiar with the waters of the whole coast. This well executed design exhibits the ships of the whole American fleet lying at anchor within the bay. The draught of each vessel is carefully given, and the actual soundings of the stations, to which each is assigned, at the regular distances upon the chart, are cited from verified official records.

As Culebra will not answer our purposes, nor will any of the harbors of Porto Rico, it becomes clear, in the light of events of recent occurrence in Hayti and Venezuela, as well as in view of our proposed construction of the isthmian canal, and the necessity for its ample protection, that we have a great and vital need for St. Thomas. Can we hope still to acquire possession

of Denmark's little heritage in these western seas?

A recent visit to these islands has disclosed an intense sentiment of disappointment among the colonists in consequence of the recent action of the home government in the defeat of the sale treaty. Analysis of this feeling finds the motive differing according to locality. In St. Croix the single and absorbing interests of the sugar growers find a hopeless outlook in the continued closure of the American markets to their output. Were a plebiscite to be taken, the writer does not hesitate to say on the best information that is not half a score of votes would be registered against annexation. So bitter is the sense of injury that it has found voice in the pulpit with universal assent, though it is understood that the outspoken clergy have suffered some mild rebuke at the hands of the government church authorities.

In St. Thomas, whose voice finds a sympathetic echo in St. John, there is a scarcely less pro-sale sentiment than in St. Croix, although the government influence is naturally the strongest there. The reasons therefor are, however, somewhat different. They may be substantially thus given: The sole business of this island is centered in its port. Here ships have long been calling for coal and other supplies, and for repairs upon a large floating dock, but for numerous reasons the commerce of the place has been steadily passing into decay. The understood purpose of the United States to establish a naval station at St. Thomas, in the event of the purchase of the islands, held out a bright hope to the people for improved times. The prevailing local conditions of stagnation in all lines with some promise of change opens little prospect of betterment as things are, so in this we find the main-spring of the discontent.

OPINIONS CONCEALED FOR POLICY.

To the outsider who visits St. Thomas, and whose identity, being known, acquires the confidence of the leading classes, the pro-sale sentiment is frankly expressed. But among the working element there is no sort of concealment, every individual therein not actually employed by the government may be openly asked, and will be found, almost without exception, to be in favor of American ownership. Among the mercantile and professional classes there is reason for caution in speaking. This is soon found to lie in the quiet, punitive scheme through which the colonial administration "gets even." All sorts of petty annoyances are placed upon citizens who are marked for their "offensive partisanship" in the sale propaganda. This takes form in various ways. On one occasion three leading citizens were summoned before the police authorities and placed in a sort of "quarantine" for the purpose of ascertaining the share they might have taken in sending out certain legitimate news telegrams to the American press, which did not chance to be quite pleasing to the Danes. Official patronage is withheld, and the payment of bills quietly forced among those who are thought too active. Yet men in high places, and unquestionably well qualified to speak, tell you that not 5 per cent of all the population of the islands, if given the opportunity, would cast their votes against the sale. That the government does not wish to put its action to the test by a plebiscite has been made only too clearly evident. Outside the official class, a small number who oppose annexation are found among a few wealthy colored persons, who are said to fear the American prejudice against their race, and the possible loss of social dignity and prestige, which they might suffer in the event of the islands passing under the control of the states. A few others have taken the ground that the islands under such control would no longer enjoy the advantages they now hold as free ports of entry. The arguments of the latter are feeble, and find almost no acceptance.

VIEWS OF THE COLORED CITIZENS.

In view of the opinions of the former class, the alleged action of Admiral Crowninshield during his late visit to St. Thomas in declining to accept an invitation to dinner from the governor, because the American consul, who happens to be a colored man, was to be present, is greatly to be deplored, but it should not be accepted as reflecting the national sentiment in such matters. The St. Thomasans should note the handsome manner in which President Roosevelt downed a narrow feeling when he paid honor to Booker T. Washington, and was honored in turn by all right-thinking people for the act.

What the government commission from Denmark, now in the colonies, expects to do for the islands is not clear. It is plain that no large sum will be expended in the improvement of harbors by the present owners. What, then, will be done? Will there be an effort made to foster agriculture in St. Thomas and St. John? The latter is too small to warrant much, and the sterile heights of St. Thomas offer little in this way. The island could never be fitted to compete with its far more richly-endowed neighbors. St. Croix could scarcely be improved in any way, its lands are now marvelously rich, but the product of its cane fields finds no profitable market. It is a difficult situation, and calls for a display of unusual statesmanship. Just now the colonist of the Danish West Indies has his ear very much to the ground, nor does he believe that his hopes lie in any great extent in the near Danish throne.—Special Correspondent of the Los Angeles Times.

TO SNUFF VOLCANOES.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY MADE BY AN AUSTRALIAN.

Volcanoes can easily be extinguished, says the New York Herald. A New Zealand man claims (and there are many who agree with him) to have discovered a liquid by means of which volcanoes can be extinguished quickly whether active or threatening.

Many diseases of the human body set in the same manner as volcanoes. Dyspepsia, Rheumatism, Kidney Disorders, Female Diseases and many others, all begin with a slight rumble of pain and distress, and if not treated in time will burst forth in all their fury, causing all who are so afflicted the most intense suffering and making life a complete burden.

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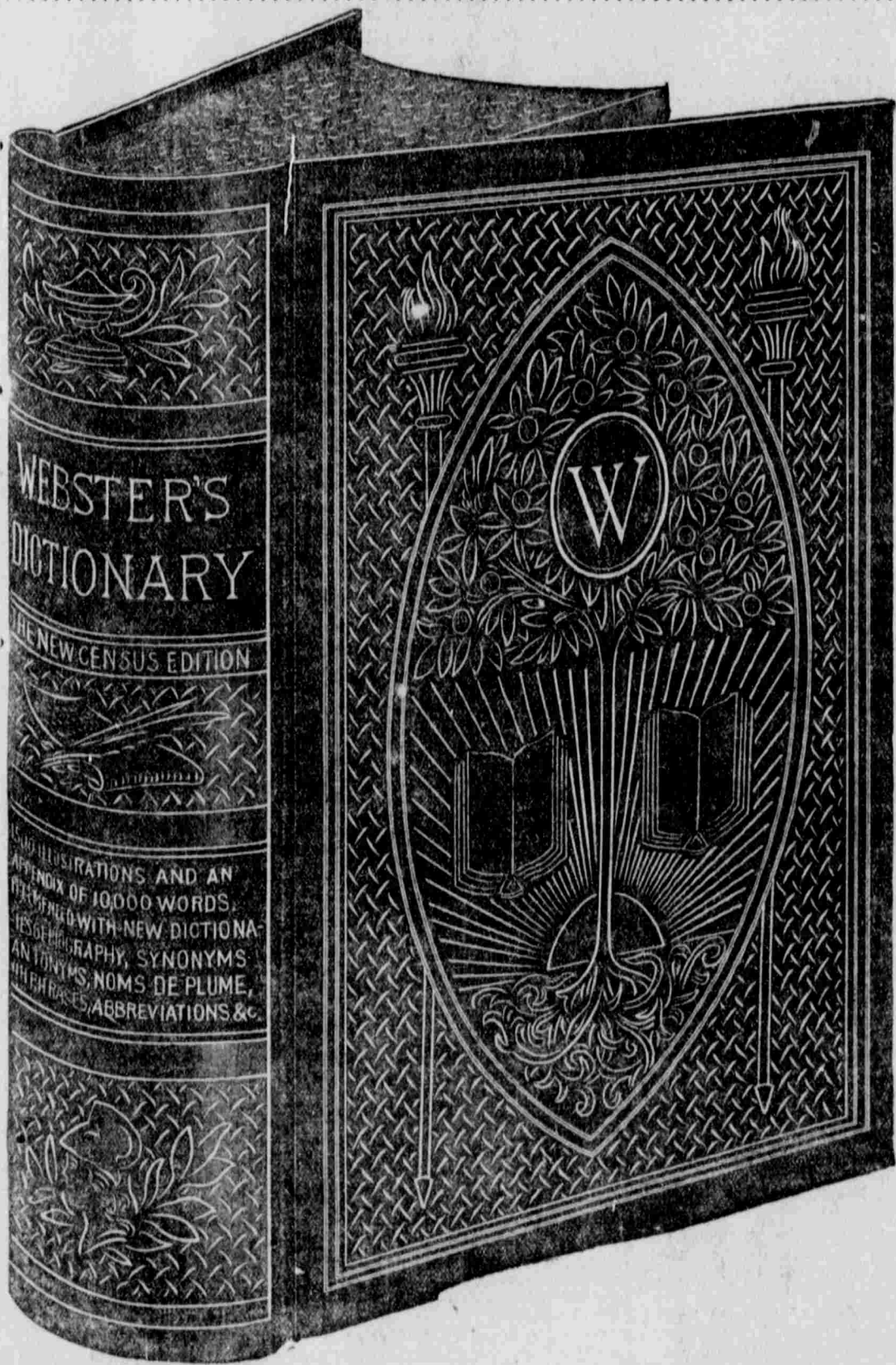
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