

THE PORTO RICO OF TODAY

BY FREDERICK A. OBER,

Author of "Porto Rico and Its Resources."

THERE has recently been a great deal of discussion as to whether or not the island of Porto Rico should have free trade and a civil government. As a person's opinion is liable to personal bias, depending upon his social and political affiliations, perhaps the best thing I can do is to give an account of what I have seen and heard during my recent trip over and around the island, leaving my readers to make their own deductions. In the first place, I may mention that I was here 20 years ago, in the year 1880, and again eight years ago, on my latter visit as a Chicago exposition commissioner. Thus, having seen the island when under Spanish rule and having met the ruling people, such as the captain general, alcaide, comandante, etc., I shall have a good basis of comparison as between the past and the present Porto Rico.

It may seem a trivial matter, perhaps, but the first thing that struck me at my entrance for the third time into the beautiful harbor of San Juan was the absolute freedom accorded arrivals here as contrasted with the incessant watch kept over one during the old regime. As the great walled city of San Juan loomed before me the first time, with the glorious Morro Castle, historic and impressive, I was, of course, seized with a desire to photograph the picturesque scene and pitched my camera for a snap shot after we had crossed the bar and sailed into the landlocked harbor. I had no sooner done so, however, than my arm was gripped by a sailor, who, I learned, was a Spanish soldier.

That was 20 years ago, and conditions were exactly the same when I made my second visit in 1892, for before I could take any photographs whatever, even in the country, far from the fortifications, I had to procure a permit from the alcaide. It was given me with alacrity, to be sure,

may have been. It may have been from real love for the Americans or from a desire for change, for certainly their condition could not have been worse than the Spaniards made it. They were oppressed by foreign rulers, staggering beneath the burden of every species of taxation, and had no voice in the management of affairs.

And yet, badly off as they were, it is the opinion of General Davis that their lot was better than it is now. For he says: "Instead of proving a blessing to the inhabitants, as they had so fondly anticipated, annexation to the United States has thus far brought them only additional woe, and unless immediate remedial measures are taken by this government the distress and discontent now prevailing will spread, and the difficulty of regenerating the island will increase. With prosperity, with means of procuring the necessities of life, no difficulty will be experienced in maintaining order and in educating the people in the American methods of administration. But to leave them in destitution and to fail to provide means by which they can lift themselves from the poverty encompassing them will breed discontent and make them intractable to American rule."

By "remedial measures," of course, the general means, first, such legislation on the tariff question as shall settle it for at least a definite term of years. In my various trips I conversed with all classes of people, from the "ghetto" or poor farmer, of the mountains to the rich "hacendado" or sugar estate owner of the coast valleys, and the universal cry was: "Give us anything, anything but this uncertainty. We will be satisfied with a 15 per cent tariff or even a 25 per cent, but what we want, of course, is perfect freedom of trade—not free trade, necessarily, but freedom of trade." Mark the difference! The discontent is not so apparent, at least on the surface, as seems evident from General Davis' remarks. He, of course, as commander in chief of the United States forces, receiving daily reports from all quarters of the island, may be cognizant of more disturbances and more suffering than the mere traveler. According to the reports of those with whom I have conversed and who claimed to be well aware of the facts, our government is steadily pauperizing the island by the issuing of free rations. It is pointed out that so many thousands of millions of rations are daily or weekly issued in the country districts, and this fact, the alarmists say, proves that the population is starving.

zons were entirely independent of the Americans, as their subsistence practically grew wild, and that they didn't need our charity. But when I asked him about those pitiful appeals for help that came wafted toward the States last year and about the shiploads of provisions that we sent them he was silent. No indeed, they did not send any provision back; they devoured them all and then held out their hands for more!

Now, is it not rather pitiful for any one to say that the people of Porto Rico are still suffering from the effects of last August's hurricane when more than six months have passed since it occurred? Thousands of poor natives met their death in that hurricane, and the evidences of its havoc are seen yet on every side in the ruined huts, the wrecked buildings of sugar estates and the demolished houses and overturned trees along the roads in the country districts. If there was anything left of consequence not destroyed or injured, it was merely because it was not in the path of the storm. In going from the port, or plaza, of Ponce to that city I saw a 20 foot steel wagon bridge which had been swept by the flood from its abutments and carried into a field more than 100 feet away. The bed of the stream it spanned was strongly anchored to its abutments, yet the river came down with the hurricane and carried it away like a cork! The other day when I saw that stream I might have walked across it dryshod on the stepping stones that protruded above the water.

But I was going to say that the hurricane, terrible as it was, occurred so long ago that there has been time for the putting in and harvesting of several crops

who make money on their workers by charging them 10 cents per day for subsistence and pocketing the difference. I can prove my assertions by reference to official reports.

No indeed, it is not the "people" who are making this clamor for higher wages and lower tariff, for free tobacco, sugar, etc., and the franchise. Not one in 100 of them knows what the franchise is, or what. Not one in 100 can read or write or knows whether the queen of Spain or President McKinley rules Porto Rico. In fact, the majority do not care, so long as they are permitted to do as they like, to wear their native costume of rags and ribbons, to lie in a hammock and take a siesta at midday, to celebrate Sundays and feast days (the more the merrier) by "chule" or dance, drinking and cock-fighting. There was a time when the richer classes made much of the bullfight, but they submitted to its banishment with good grace, so long as they were permitted to retain their cockfighting. For here the fighting cock and not the bald eagle is the national bird. If we could prove that the eagle would whip the fighting cock, we should win their everlasting devotion.

The huts of these country poor are made of a loose framework of poles covered with a thatch of palm leaves or the spathes of the royal palm, which is laid on in broad strips and is known as "yagua." From this material, in fact, the people here derive much that is useful in their domestic economy, as the women use the

children who are being educated in the primary schools and who are rapidly becoming Americanized. Like the Indians of the States, the present generation of adults will be slow to assimilate new ideas and adopt new methods, but the children will eventually accomplish all that is hoped for and prove the regeneration of the island. All children of the Spanish race are precocious and make great progress up to a certain age, especially as linguists. I was astonished to note the progress the pupils of all the schools I visited had made in the learning of English, the youngest of them readily taking difficult words to write on their slates from dictation and rarely making a mistake. There is already a small army of enthusiastic teachers in the field, and they will eventually accomplish more than the army of soldiers toward the uplifting of Porto Rico.

The sympathetic nature of the people, to which I have alluded, is shown to good advantage in the joyful celebration of our local holidays, and they have fairly revelled in the new holidays, such as Washington's birthday, which lately went off with great eclat, and particularly the Fourth of July, which they call "el Cuatro de Julio." Some of the soldiers declare that this fervid enthusiasm is displayed not because they love Washington and the Fourth so much as the addition of another "feast day" to the calendar, which already contains about 200, every one of which is a holiday and consequently devoted to gambling and cockfighting. He who says it may, it cannot be denied that the average Porto Rican is a gambler and a lover of sport by instinct, and he cannot see for the life of him why the government should seek to suppress his pastimes.

I have devoted most of my space to these people of the lower class because they constitute the bulk of the population, and it is mainly about them that the stories are circulated in the States respecting starvation and penury. Yes, they are poor, but as I trust I have shown, if they starve it is not their own fault. At the same time they are not lazy, only improvident and shiftless, without any incentive to labor except the pressure of poverty. If one gains a dollar he will expend it in cents or so for food, the smallest amount necessary for a bare existence, and the remainder he will squander.

But it is not the real sufferers who are complaining most. It is the merchant, the sugar planter and the politician in embryo. You may hear in the States fearful tales of estates devastated by the hurricane and plantations destroyed, and

while it is true that many coffee plantations were utterly ruined, yet, strange as it may appear, many, if not most, of the sugar estates were not so seriously damaged. The coffee, which is sold simply by the washing of the fertile soil down from the hills upon the cane fields. In some cases the estates were covered more than 10 feet in depth with richest soil and thus fertilized for many years to come.

And, again, tariff or no tariff, the sugar raisers can make great profit on their crops, which they have been holding back in order to benefit by the addition of any price of whatever is taken off the duties. It is a simple matter, and the same is true of the tobacco growers. They have held on until the tariff should be settled, when their cigars will be worth just the present price plus the tariff removed! Personally I believe that there should be no tariff, but the fallacy of the cry about "oppressed Porto Rico" is apparent when we reflect that coffee, which constitutes seven-twelfths of the island's exports, is absolutely free, and only sugar and tobacco planters will be benefited by removal of the tariff.

The sum total of Porto Rico's present troubles may be expressed in one word: uncertainty! The soil is so fertile and fruitful in some districts, as in the tobacco region of Cayey, being cultivated to the very mountain tops, that the island cannot fail of its future destiny, which is to be one of the garden spots of the world.

It never attained to the limit of its production under Spanish rule because all efforts toward development were checked and checked, but under the fostering care of wise American methods the future of this beautiful island will be full of promise.

The problems and vexations that now arise are of a temporary character merely and will disappear in the process of time, as people and country are healed with the civilizing ideas of the great country to which they are annexed. It should be borne in mind that the island is undergoing a formative process, that experimentation is necessarily the order of the day, and that it may even take a generation of time to accomplish the eradication of evils that have been growing for centuries.

The wonder is that we have succeeded so well when it is known that the Latin race, to which these people belong, and the Anglo-Saxon, to which we in the main belong, will no more mix than oil with water. But despite the radical racial differences and the friction occasioned, it is alleged by political expediencies the Porto Ricans are impressed with our honesty, our integrity of purpose and good intentions, and in the main will cling to the United States rather than revert to Spain again or be set adrift. They have the good sense to appreciate the fact that a native of this island, who takes the train, light, transportation, telephones, electricity, not to mention good government, freedom from oppression, protection from internal and external enemies and the blessings of education will eventually work out their material salvation and set them on the road to unexampled prosperity.

SAN JUAN, Porto Rico.
[Copyright, 1900, by F. A. Ober.]

striking evidence of the marvelous transformation which has been effected in the reconstruction of the town since May last it was officially reported that the town was in complete ruin and that not a single building had been left standing by the devastation.

Henry Clews, the millionaire banker, is something of a mathematical wonder. He is a lightning calculator and can do

fabulous sums by a rapid process of mental arithmetic. Senator Frye of Maine is fond of the pine woods of his state. "I long for the season to end," he said, "to get into the summer woods and breathe in the pine scents again."

W. D. Howells says in his lectures on "Hawes and Havelock in Fiction" that American women are better developed intellectually than American men.

THE MERRY SIEGE OF MAKEKING.

The most picturesque, and in a way the most mercurially tragic, scene of all the South African war drama have been enacted in and about Makek. The light-hearted and yet heroic way in which the little garrison of that frontier town held out so long against the Boers is one of the most thrilling stories of the campaign.

Makek has a population of about 1,500, with a native kral of 3,000 blacks. It lies 80 miles from Cape Town and is the half-way house between the Cape and Bulawayo. It has no hills about it, but lies on the open veldt, as flat as a pancake. An ant heap or two, a few scrub mimosa bushes and a slightly elevated ridge on one side of the town alone break the dull lines of the rolling prairie. This, in fact, is the only place where the fighting has taken place about the town of Makek.

Before the Boers had invaded British territory, Colonel Baden-Powell, the most active fighting officer who ever wore khaki, began to fortify this spot in the wilderness. The inhabitants of Makek, as a rule, laughed at the colonel, who went on gathering his arms, laying his mines, digging his trenches, training his men and preparing for the foe which no one really expected. By November the Boers had in position their famous "Big Ben," a quick firing Krupp 12 pounder, a Hotchkiss, a Maxim, and a few other field guns.

spitting away at Makek from dawn till dusk. There had been 40 British Bechuanaland police in the barracks outside the town before the siege began, and these Baden-Powell made the core of his little army of defense. Nearly all citizens volunteered for service. The first thing Baden-Powell had to do was to sweep the town clear of traitors and spies. This was no easy task. The spies were finally expelled, however, and some 40 Fenians taken prisoner and locked up. Then he set about marking out the line of his exterior defense works. This included a railway that ran a good way round the town, up and down which bustled an armored train, forever snarling and spitting out at the Boer lines like a frightened cat. Then came the homecoming of the town. Every one started burrowing like jack rabbits. Holes were dug from one end of the place to the other. Makek was studded with bombproof cellars, all ordered by Baden-Powell, the brain of that beleaguered collection of human moles. The result was that when first Cronje and later Snyman began pouring their shells into the place the expected death and destruction did not take place. In fact, there was something almost comical in the method of procedure. Outpost forts had been stationed beyond the limits of the town proper in every quarter. These were held by small forces of volunteer sharpshooters, with a field gun or two. Telephone wires were stretched from these outposts to the colonel's headquarters in the center of Makek. At these outposts men with long telescopes stood all day long and watched the big guns of the Boers away off on the dim horizon. Whenever they saw that "Big Ben" was about to send in a shell there was the tinkle of a telephone bell, and the information was at headquarters in six seconds. In Makek itself they had a big alarm bell, and when that bell rang people did not expose themselves unnecessarily. So when it was known at headquarters that a shell was on its way to the town the bell was rung, and everybody scampered, rushed, tumbled under cover.

The great effects of some of the shells were interesting. In Riese's hotel two newspaper correspondents were playing

billiards when a shell burst in the building. The concussion shifted the heavy billiard table and the two players were knocked down, but beyond a good fright were unharmed. Another good fright passed right through a house where five people were taking breakfast, but the one who was hurt, though the entire roof of the house was taken off. At another time it took 13 Boer shells to kill just one dog.

When Baden-Powell found the Boers pressing in too successfully, he decided on his historic sortie. In this he lost many men, but even this blow did not seem to dampen the ardor of the gallant and light-hearted colonel. He got into the town singing parties joining enthusiastically in the chorus of "A Little Tinted Girl" and "The Gaiety Girl" and "The Geisha." Then the Boer "Big Ben" would cough a hundred pound shell into the town, and the impromptu concert would come to a sudden end.

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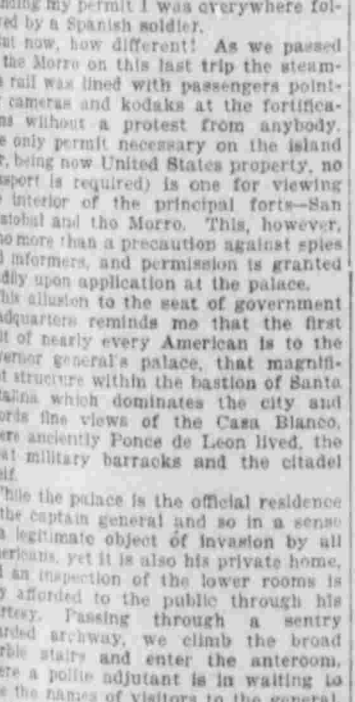
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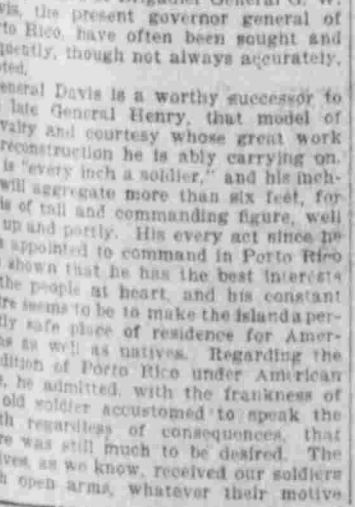
"El Cuatro de Julio" The Fourth of July in San Juan.



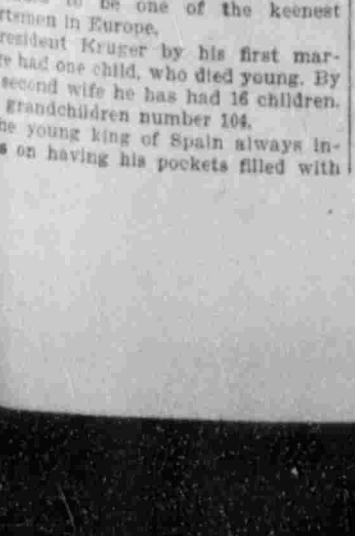
A Flourishing Native Family in the Interior.



Cockfighting, the Porto Rican's Favorite Amusement.



Typical Scenes in Porto Rico.



and a great profusion of regrets and apologies that one coming there in an official capacity, as I had come, should be subjected to such annoyance. But notwithstanding my permit I was everywhere followed by a Spanish soldier.

But now, how different! As we passed by the Morro on this last trip the steamer's rail was lined with passengers pointing cameras and kodaks at the fortifications without a protest from anybody. The only permit necessary on the island for, being now United States property, no passport is required) is one for viewing the interior of the principal forts—San Cristobal and the Morro. This, however, is no more than a precaution against spies and informers, and permission is granted readily upon application at the palace.

This allusion to the seat of government headquarters reminds me that the first visit of nearly every American to the governor general's palace, that magnificent structure within the bastion of Santa Catalina which dominates the city and affords the view of the Casa Blanca, where anciently Ponce de Leon lived, the great military barracks and the citadel itself.

While the palace is the official residence of the captain general and so in a sense a legitimate object of invasion by all Americans, yet it is also his private home, and an inspection of the lower rooms is accorded to the public through a sentry guard's gateway, we climb the broad marble stairs and enter the anteroom, where a police adjutant is in waiting to lead the house of visitors to the general, and so was admitted at once to an interview, which was one of the most pleasant features of my visit. The views of a man in the position of Brigadier General G. W. Davis, the present governor general of Porto Rico, have often been sought and frequently, though not always accurately, quoted.

General Davis is a worthy successor to the late General Henry, that model of civility and courtesy whose great work of reconstruction he is ably carrying on. He is every inch a soldier, and his mobile will aggregate more than six feet, for met up and partly. His every act since he was appointed to command in Porto Rico has shown that he has the best interests of the people at heart, and his constant desire seems to be to make the island perfectly safe for residents for Americans as well as natives. Regarding the condition of Porto Rico under American rule, he admitted with the frankness of an old soldier accustomed to speak the truth regardless of consequences, that there was still much to be done. The natives as we know, received our soldiers with open arms, whatever their motives

But the people are not starving, and, in fact, are very far from it. The leasing of the railroads signifies nothing. Suppose, for instance, 10,000 tons of free food were to be issued in the poorest part of any great American city, or in a populous center of the country for that matter, is there any doubt that there would be thousands of people ready to accept this gift? And is it likely that they would feel inclined to work much while they were being fed for nothing? Human nature is about the same in Porto Rico as it is in the States, and, moreover, the natural indolence of a people born and bred in a tropical climate is increased by the charity of a paternal government.

General Davis recognizes this evil in the wholesale distribution of supplies for nothing, and he proposes as a remedy the employment of the poorest people in great public works, as the building of roads, etc. In fact, thousands have been so employed, but the bulk of them, having developed a liking for the pay of charity, revolted at the suggestion of going to work at a wage approximating their old rate of compensation and "struck." The government contractors increased their wages, and they struck again and at last accounts were still striking. Over at the east end of the island, where the laborers on the sugar estates had never received more than 50 cents a day in their lives before the advent of the Americans, a band of them struck against a proposed wage of \$2 a day, demanding \$10. It is quite likely that they will keep on demanding an increase until all their supplies are exhausted and then go to work at the old rate of 50 cents a day perfectly contented.

As for starvation, that is altogether out of the question. To prove this let me ask, for example, what would be the condition of New England were it in the enjoyment of a climate that bestowed perpetual summer and in which fruits and vegetables of all sorts grew all the time, so that the harvest following fast came upon the other's heels?

Anything in the world will grow here, and there is not a week in the year when some dozens of kinds of nutritious fruits or vegetables are not ripening. Compare, then, these two regions climatically and contrast the north, with its rigorous winters and short summers, with the perpetual summer land of Porto Rico. And there are all sorts of climates here, too, for one can have a radically different climate at a few miles by riding from the coast to a high mountain as well as a change in vegetation.

It is the boast of the better class here that Americans shall never buy their lands at less than double their value, since even the poorest people are not forced to sell as the can live on bananas as entirely if need be. One of these said this to me, remarking that his fellow citi-

in this region, where the maturing of fruits and vegetables is merely a matter of weeks and not of months. If the people are suffering now from the lack of food, it is entirely their own fault. They have only to scratch the earth a little with a sharpened stick, drop in a seed or a tuber, and nature does the rest. Literally at some seasons they have only to lie beneath a tree and open their mouths for the ripe fruits to fall into them. And yet, notwithstanding the time that has elapsed since the hurricane, there are thousands who prefer to exist on charity rather than do a little work in their gardens. They might have had even bananas and plantains in full fruitage if they had attended to them within a month after the hurricane, for bananas and plantains will grow almost spontaneously from the shoots of the old plants and require but a few months to mature, while such vegetables as yams, tannias and sweet potatoes will ripen in a few weeks. And, again, it has rarely been observed that any of the old plants and require but a few months to mature, while such vegetables as yams, tannias and sweet potatoes will ripen in a few weeks. And, again, it has rarely been observed that any of the old plants and require but a few months to mature, while such vegetables as yams, tannias and sweet potatoes will ripen in a few weeks.

I am speaking of the mass of the population, of perhaps 90,000 of the 1,000,000 inhabitants in the island. They are desperately poor, but they don't mind that, for poverty here does not mean what poverty in a cold climate means. They require little clothing and are happier with none on at all. A bit of coarse bread in the morning, a banana and a plantain or two at noon and the same at night satisfy their cravings for food. This is chiefly the diet of the laborers in the cane fields. They can subsist on a cent a day, and there are many rich owners of sugar es-

tates who make money on their workers by charging them 10 cents per day for subsistence and pocketing the difference. I can prove my assertions by reference to official reports. No indeed, it is not the "people" who are making this clamor for higher wages and lower tariff, for free tobacco, sugar, etc., and the franchise. Not one in 100 of them knows what the franchise is, or what. Not one in 100 can read or write or knows whether the queen of Spain or President McKinley rules Porto Rico. In fact, the majority do not care, so long as they are permitted to do as they like, to wear their native costume of rags and ribbons, to lie in a hammock and take a siesta at midday, to celebrate Sundays and feast days (the more the merrier) by "chule" or dance, drinking and cock-fighting. There was a time when the richer classes made much of the bullfight, but they submitted to its banishment with good grace, so long as they were permitted to retain their cockfighting. For here the fighting cock and not the bald eagle is the national bird. If we could prove that the eagle would whip the fighting cock, we should win their everlasting devotion.

The huts of these country poor are made of a loose framework of poles covered with a thatch of palm leaves or the spathes of the royal palm, which is laid on in broad strips and is known as "yagua." From this material, in fact, the people here derive much that is useful in their domestic economy, as the women use the children who are being educated in the primary schools and who are rapidly becoming Americanized. Like the Indians of the States, the present generation of adults will be slow to assimilate new ideas and adopt new methods, but the children will eventually accomplish all that is hoped for and prove the regeneration of the island. All children of the Spanish race are precocious and make great progress up to a certain age, especially as linguists. I was astonished to note the progress the pupils of all the schools I visited had made in the learning of English, the youngest of them readily taking difficult words to write on their slates from dictation and rarely making a mistake. There is already a small army of enthusiastic teachers in the field, and they will eventually accomplish more than the army of soldiers toward the uplifting of Porto Rico.

The sympathetic nature of the people, to which I have alluded, is shown to good advantage in the joyful celebration of our local holidays, and they have fairly revelled in the new holidays, such as Washington's birthday, which lately went off with great eclat, and particularly the Fourth of July, which they call "el Cuatro de Julio." Some of the soldiers declare that this fervid enthusiasm is displayed not because they love Washington and the Fourth so much as the addition of another "feast day" to the calendar, which already contains about 200, every one of which is a holiday and consequently devoted to gambling and cockfighting. He who says it may, it cannot be denied that the average Porto Rican is a gambler and a lover of sport by instinct, and he cannot see for the life of him why the government should seek to suppress his pastimes.

I have devoted most of my space to these people of the lower class because they constitute the bulk of the population, and it is mainly about them that the stories are circulated in the States respecting starvation and penury. Yes, they are poor, but as I trust I have shown, if they starve it is not their own fault. At the same time they are not lazy, only improvident and shiftless, without any incentive to labor except the pressure of poverty. If one gains a dollar he will expend it in cents or so for food, the smallest amount necessary for a bare existence, and the remainder he will squander.

But it is not the real sufferers who are complaining most. It is the merchant, the sugar planter and the politician in embryo. You may hear in the States fearful tales of estates devastated by the hurricane and plantations destroyed, and while it is true that many coffee plantations were utterly ruined, yet, strange as it may appear, many, if not most, of the sugar estates were not so seriously damaged. The coffee, which is sold simply by the washing of the fertile soil down from the hills upon the cane fields. In some cases the estates were covered more than 10 feet in depth with richest soil and thus fertilized for many years to come.

And, again, tariff or no tariff, the sugar raisers can make great profit on their crops, which they have been holding back in order to benefit by the addition of any price of whatever is taken off the duties. It is a simple matter, and the same is true of the tobacco growers. They have held on until the tariff should be settled, when their cigars will be worth just the present price plus the tariff removed! Personally I believe that there should be no tariff, but the fallacy of the cry about "oppressed Porto Rico" is apparent when we reflect that coffee, which constitutes seven-twelfths of the island's exports, is absolutely free, and only sugar and tobacco planters will be benefited by removal of the tariff.

The sum total of Porto Rico's present troubles may be expressed in one word: uncertainty! The soil is so fertile and fruitful in some districts, as in the tobacco region of Cayey, being cultivated to the very mountain tops, that the island cannot fail of its future destiny, which is to be one of the garden spots of the world.

It never attained to the