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THE SCANDINAVIAN COLONIST

“The Tropics will become more and more the source of food supply for the world.”—JOSIAH STRONG, “Expansion,” p. 42, ed. 1900.

Denmark in the West Indies—A Canoe Cruise Round St.
Thomas—Negroes in Santa Cruz

DENMARK, Norway, and Sweden—and we ought to include Finland as a former Swedish province, though not of Scandinavian origin—these countries with a common religion, contiguous territory, common love for the sea, offer something of a paradox in colonial history. Each of these countries sends forth each year a large number of her children to the United States, where they command better remuneration than those of any other nation. The best ships of the world are glad to have among their crew the element they represent, and the Norwegians have almost a monopoly in the manning of American yachts. Throughout the world, Scandinavians are met with wherever men are required who combine personal courage, education, and fidelity. They seem to have all the virtues which fit men to found and carry on colonies, yet they have none of their own worth mentioning.

Norway, which has shown perhaps the least ambi-

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tion to possess colonies, is a practical democracy like Switzerland. The less democratic Denmark and the comparatively aristocratic Sweden have made one or two efforts of insignificant character.

On a cruise through the West Indies, not long since, I fell in with an intelligent and prosperous Scotch planter, who had been home on his holiday and was returning to his estates on the Danish island of Santa Cruz. Of the many planters I had met among the Antilles he was one of the few who had nothing to complain of, yet he was *not* under the English flag, and was on an island which had suffered by the abolition of slavery, quite as much as any other. He asked me to come and pay him a visit, promising me at the same time that I should on the spot find an answer to many questions which vexed me. But he advised me first to visit St. Thomas, the chief Danish island. So we parted to meet again in a few weeks.

At St. Thomas I unshipped my little cruising canoe for a circumnavigation—to discover what there was Danish about the place. There was a little pink fort with a handful of fair-haired, blue-eyed soldiers and officials, some working in a vegetable garden, and evidently strangers in the place. I had to pay a tax of \$2 for the right to leave the harbor, and for this I got a pass in the Danish language. But aside from this there was scant evidence of Scandinavian influence in the place.

On the streets were English signs, and the Anglo-Saxon had stamped his impress everywhere, not by act of government, but by the obvious desire of the community. At the boat-landing I accosted a vener-

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able negro fisherman for particulars about the coast. He spoke only English; told me his name was "Uncle Ned," and offered to pilot me all the way round, to say nothing of acting as steward, cook, or general utility man. But when he saw my craft, which had a beam of thirty inches and weighed eighty pounds net, he shook his woolly head solemnly, and said that: "De good God won't nebber forgib you for tempting Providence in dat yere fiddle-box."

However, his love of praise won the day, and he fitted out his boat with \$2-worth of bananas, coconuts, rice, sugar, chickens—in fact a good supply for a week. It was worth the journey to see Uncle Ned throw his head in the air, and patronize his fellow-blacks, and expatiate upon the canoe, which he described to his fellows as an "American submarine torpedo boat." For the sake of peace I had warned him not to touch it for fear of an explosion, and even to-day I am not penitent for that departure from truth.

The chief port of St. Thomas is the ideal refuge for the pirate and smuggler, for it is divided by a long narrow island, the land end of which is separated from the main island by such shallow water that only coasting craft can get from one side to the other. And thus were the pursuing men-of-war decoyed in the olden days. They chased their light-draught enemy into port at St. Thomas, and while they followed him in on one side of the long narrow dividing island, the cunning freebooter slipped out at the other side, by a passage impassable to a man-of-war. Out through this channel I went, and I could take soundings with my double-bladed paddle.

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Uncle Ned was right—Providence took her revenge—and a squall capsized the canoe. But no harm was done, for she was righted again and finished the circumnavigation. Each night we slept out in our respective boats, and Uncle Ned proved himself a master-cook, particularly with boiled chicken and rice stewed up with a species of curry sauce. This black man watched over me as though I had been his baby, and over a camp-fire, on the edge of a coral reef, he gave vent to his aspirations, which were to be an Englishman under the Stars and Stripes. As to the details of this proposition, he was not particular—his political philosophy went no further than observing that English and Americans spoke the same language, had money to spend, and gave the negro, on the whole, a pretty good time. As to the Dane, Uncle Ned bore him no ill-will, but, from his point of view, the Anglo-Saxon brought prosperity.

My cruise was instructive in so far as it proved, at least to my own satisfaction, the very small impression produced in this place by a government representing one of the most vigorous branches of the European family.

Denmark has been for many years ready to sell this island to the United States, and at one time (1870) General Grant had arranged the purchase for \$7,000,000. The Danish King published a pathetic farewell address to his loyal and dearly beloved subjects in the West Indies. The bargain was on the point of being consummated, and the loyal subjects had become scandalously jubilant over the prospect of ceasing to be Danish, when the American Senate

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refused consent, and the West Indian blacks who had bought American flags furlled them up against a better day.

Let us recall also that two centuries ago the Great Elector of Brandenburg, whose descendant now occupies the Imperial Throne of Germany, colonized St. Thomas. Of this occupation I could find no visible trace in 1890.

The Danish Government has not succeeded in the West Indies—it has made its colonial experiment, and is now quite willing that others should take over the unprofitable venture. Had she many islands like England, things might have turned out better, for the cost of administration would not have been relatively so heavy. Many of England's islands are unprofitable, but she has so many successful ones that she can afford a few failures. Her operations may be compared to those of a great steamship company which can afford to have a wreck now and then and treat her losses with equanimity. Denmark is in the position of a shipping firm with but one or two vessels—the loss of one means almost ruin.

From a commercial point of view it is desirable that all the West Indian islands be under one flag. The territories are so small, that one governor and staff could do the work now laid upon several. A judge to-day could hold court in several islands, where in past times the absence of steam would have made such an operation difficult—not to say dangerous. It is England which to-day gives the most satisfactory government in the West Indies, and, speaking purely from the stand-point of political economy, it is reason-

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able to think that the colonists of the French, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish West Indies would be better off, as planters and merchants, for a change to the Union Jack. Aside from England, the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe are the only ones in which the home government has made a deep impression by means of religion and language, but not so deep but that the colonists would very soon be satisfied with an administration that cost them less money, guaranteed them local liberty in the way of language and religion, and, better than all, promised them a better market for their produce.

Since the abolition of slavery and the adoption of free trade in England, the English West Indies have not been prosperous—indeed many plantations have been abandoned completely. No doubt the past generation of planters grew up with bad business methods—they expected that sugar would always remain high, they lived too much away from their estates, and no business can prosper that does not receive personal attention. The price of sugar went down, and there was not on hand a breed of planters qualified to meet the new economic situation created by bounties to beet-root sugar on the continent of Europe. The estates were mortgaged—new machinery was not used, and planters trusted to a change of luck rather than to their own efforts.

Then to aggravate a situation already bad enough, the official administration was very costly—even though efficient. A little West India island with no more territory than a big farm and no revenue worth mentioning, was weighted with an official staff that

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would have sufficed for an East Indian state as large as France—and equally populous.

Little impoverished islands persisted in living as though they expected each day a restoration of their pristine importance. They had lost much of their commercial as well as their strategic value in the eyes of the mother-country, and were, consequently, regarded as merely tiresome when they persisted in complaints for redress. The British press was too busy chronicling progress at the Antipodes in Africa and India to give much time to a question that was very complicated, and promised to excite very little public interest.

And so it happens that the British West Indies to-day look less to London for prosperity, and more to New York. What the Briton wants is liberty and self-government. He will take a plantation in Sumatra or a ranch in Texas, so long as his rights are respected and there are prospects of doing well. So far as the West Indies are concerned, he will settle in Cuba as cheerfully as in Jamaica. No man moves his domicile so easily as does the Anglo-Saxon—and no man holds so tightly to his nationality. If the Anglo-Saxon drifts readily to the British flag, it is because that flag represents liberty and good government. He settles under other flags whenever they promise him equal advantages.