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SOME NOTES FROM THE DANISH WEST INDIES MADE IN SANTA CRUZ

“ We (the United States) could not view an interposition for oppressing them (the Spanish-American Republics) or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power, in any other light than as a manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States. . . . The American continents should no longer be subjects for any new European colonial settlements.” [PRESIDENT MONROE, 1822.]

Influence of English Language—A Successful Planter—How to Treat the Blacks

ON the night of February 9, 1889, after a day in St. Thomas, I jumped into my canoe *Caribbee* and paddled off to a rakish-looking fore-and-aft schooner of forty-nine tons bound for Santa Cruz, another Danish island. The night was lighted by brilliant stars. The moon, young but precocious, like most things in the tropics, shone upon the well-flattened sails of the schooner as strongly as would a full-grown moon in our less luxuriant north.

The rakish-looking craft was the *Vigilant*—famous not merely by reason of her great age, but as having achieved renown in the various rôles of pirate, privateer, slaver, man-of-war, and lastly, mail packet. Although it was recorded that she was built in Baltimore in 1790, she is to-day one of the fastest boats

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of her size in these waters, making her forty-mile run from port to port usually in four hours, and with the punctuality of a steamer. She is of great beam, and illustrates how the principles governing ship-building in the last century differed, in the United States, but little from those of to-day. On remarking to the negro captain upon the perfect manner in which his sails set, he told me that they were of cotton and made in New York. This *Vigilant* is much of a pet in Caribbean waters, and her captain is as proud of his little craft as any North Atlantic skipper of his 18,000 tonner. Before I had been an hour on board passengers and crew had laid before me the fullest evidence, direct and circumstantial, touching the political, social, and historical value of the *Vigilant*. The Danish Governor always travelled in her when visiting Santa Cruz, and occupied usually the middle "Dog House" on the starboard side. Lest it be assumed that kennels are here substituted for cabins, let me explain that the term "Dog House" is applied to a species of chicken-coop about six feet long, thirty inches wide and thirty-six inches high, in which the most favored of the passengers spend the night. These sleeping-boxes are lashed securely to the poop rail, and form six sleeping compartments of the most desirable kind, owing to the ventilation secured by means of lattice work, which faces, of course, away from the rail. The schooner provides a mattress, two little pillows, and a sheet; passengers are not expected to undress beyond slipping off their shoes and coat, the latter being then thrown about the shoulders. Lying thus in a "Dog House," as in a palanquin, one can chat with the captain until sleep comes, or be enter-

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tained by observing how the vessel is worked, for the sliding doors can be opened to such an extent as to give one the feeling of sleeping on the deck, protected by a wooden canopy on three sides.

In 1825 the *Vigilant* first took her place in history. It seems that the Danish Government had despatched a war-vessel to hunt down a Spanish pirate who made a business of cruising between St. Thomas and Porto Rico, much to the discouragement of honest sailors trading in these waters. But the clumsy Danish warrior was too big and too slow to follow the Spaniard in the intricate channels and over the shallows which the pirate knew by heart, and people began to lose faith in the power of the Danish Navy to protect them. In this hour of darkness, however, as on most occasions of the same kind, a young deliverer sprang up in the shape of a gallant Danish officer, who submitted a scheme for beating this Spanish freebooter at his own game. Picking out thirty men with a taste for the sport, he sailed away from Santa Cruz with this same little forty-nine-tonner, and in a few hours sighted the pirate. The *Vigilant* was, of course, mistaken for a merchantman, as she sailed along the mountainous shores of St. Thomas, keeping her crew well out of sight, and raising in the Spaniard's mind the prospect of a short and easy struggle. Local history says that when the pirate ran alongside and her crew were in the act of boarding, the gallant Norsemen sprang up as one man and delivered a volley so galling that the enemy was demoralized and routed, with slaughter so great that the Spanish deck ran with blood for several minutes after the fight was done.

From this time on the *Vigilant* has never ceased to

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be highly respectable, and has entwined herself to such a degree in the affections of the people, that when, in 1876, she disappeared in eleven fathoms of water by reason of a hurricane, nothing would do but have her fished up and once more sent shuttling up and down between St. Thomas and Santa Cruz—a journey she makes so regularly and methodically as to give rise to a plausible superstition, that she finds her own way over the intervening forty miles without compass, chart, or rudder, and that she would speedily pass into dissolution should any irreverent owner seek to force her to run elsewhere than on her present route.

My fare between the two islands was \$2.50, or ten shillings, which included the use of one of the dog houses. Even at this price I am told that the packet would not pay expenses but for a government mail subsidy. In addition to the fare, each passenger is forced to get a passport at a charge of thirty-two cents, a strange rule when it is remembered that both islands are under the same governor.

At nine o'clock of the morning following my arrival in Christianstaedt, I took my seat in the "Royal Danish Mail Coach," for a ride of about twelve miles, to visit my Scotch friend.

The custom-house flanked one side of the square from which we started. Close to this was a miniature fortress painted pink, opposite to which was the Caribbean Sea. To get my ticket for the mail I went before a flaxen-haired Danish official, who pocketed a dollar, and in return stamped me a piece of cardboard entitling me to a seat. Of the West Indies no islands can show cleaner towns, more polite negroes, or better evidences of good government than those of Den-

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mark. Despotism is the rule, but it is the despotism of a gentle master rather than that of an "overseer." Its laws read as though conceived in the dark ages, but being applied with intelligence and promptness, they excite little dissatisfaction. Responsibilities are laid upon planters, such as inspecting highways, preventing smuggling, taking a part in legislation, burdens not only heavy in themselves, but carrying penalties with them if neglected; yet my Scotch friend, who had lived here thirty-three years, defended the laws most stoutly as being the foundation of what prosperity they enjoyed.

He is full of energy and good sense. He applies to his planting principles common in other industrial pursuits, and consequently has little fault to find. Every other year he makes a run to Europe for seven or eight months, by this means invigorating both body and mind, so as to resist the effect which perpetual summer is apt to have upon even the strongest constitutions. He is reputed rich, his estate bears at least evidence that he is not in need of capital; he understands his people, and they in turn bear goodwill in their eyes when they see him; he understands thoroughly the laws under which he lives and accepts with cheerfulness the varied duties which the Danish Government forces upon him. Especially does he select for praise the statute which places a heavy tax, some \$700 a year, I think, upon those who attempt to play the rôle of absentee landlord. Much of the prosperity of Santa Cruz my friend traced to the fact that the estates are blessed with the presence of those who own them; that these owners are not able to foist their local responsibilities upon mercenary agents; that the

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negroes are in daily contact with the men most deeply concerned in the welfare of the island, and consequently less apt to suffer from neglect or harshness. To this absentee law my Scotch friend attributed the fact that no other of the West Indies could show so healthy a state of feeling between black and white as Santa Cruz.

The negro, thought my friend, must not be bullied, neither must he be given a free rein. You must have your orders strictly carried out, but, on the other hand, you must be considerate in framing these orders. When the black mother is nursing her child, and the father has a sore foot, then is the time to visit them and show kindly feeling. The negro cares less for money than the white man, but attaches greater importance to sentiment.

The Royal Danish Mail Coach had its official character stamped behind in Scandinavian script, and before starting the mail-bags were carefully locked into the rear box by a fair-haired officer of the Government. A few limp-looking soldiers belonging to the pink fort across the way, continued to throw over the scene a suggestion of Danish rule in the Caribbean Sea, which suggestion might easily have been strengthened by the presence of a Danish uniform on the box seat. But our driver was not even a Dane; worse than that, he could speak not a word of Scandinavian, was black as tar, and looked as though just from a Carolina cotton-field.

With a crack of his long-lashed "bull-whacker," our vehicle left the pretty square; and flaxen soldiers, officials, pink fort, and the vision of Denmark immediately faded along with them. Our "Royal Mail" was

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a Yankee "rockaway" country wagon; our team was made up of one little mule and one horse to match; no one that we met spoke anything but English; the currency was dollars and cents; the plantations that we passed were for the most part owned by English, Irish, and Scotch, and the local names had little in them to suggest any but British or American ownership.

Our black driver of the Royal Postwagon told me about the general riot in 1878, in which the blacks gutted the towns and burnt most of the plantations—not, so far as I could gather, from any conspiracy, but rather from a universal feeling of being unjustly treated, which needed only a little rum, a little mob, and a little talk, to develop into a little riot for whose suppression the little Danish garrison proved totally inadequate.

This riot was the legitimate outgrowth of one in 1848, which ran its course much in the same way and marks the year in which slavery was abolished in the Danish West Indies. The abolition of slavery, however, did little for the comfort of the blacks, for the law compelled them to work for ten cents a day and to remain under yearly contracts at that rate on their respective estates. They had some of the appearance of making their own bargains, but, practically, were little better off than before, although the estates furnished them privileges that represented more than their wages, such as free hospital service, the right to keep pigs, chickens, and cows at the expense of their employer, the right to cut cane for themselves, as well as some much-prized rum and cane-juice. Added to

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this the old people were looked after so long as they lived.

The riots of 1848 abolished slavery in name; in 1878 the riots led to the abolition of fixed rates of pay and annual contract, leaving the negro free to sell his labor in the highest market, and, on the other hand, releasing the employer from many expensive burdens which formerly accompanied the forced-service system. To-day the negro can claim no wages, he must take what is offered, and the employer, on the other hand, is freed from the necessity of providing what may be called "Extras" for his hands. The whites in 1878 thought they were ruined. The blacks thought the day of jubilee had come. It soon transpired that the planters had joined in a labor "pool," binding themselves to pay but twenty cents a day; and the blacks wakened from their riotous debauch to find that while their wages seemed larger in coin, they were smaller when measured by the comforts procured by a day of labor.

My Scotch friend was wise as well as energetic, and while he paid, of course, only the wages agreed upon by the Planters' Union, he managed to secure at the hands of his black workingmen and women, good work cheerfully performed. And the reasons were—first, he looked after them well, saw that their cabins did not leak, and that their little grievances were promptly attended to. Secondly, he allowed them little indulgences in the line of sugar-juice, rum, free pasture, right of trading, etc., so that the wages on his plantation represented, according to his calculation, a trifle over thirty cents a day.

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The negro needs guidance, for he is an imitator; he needs sympathy, for he lacks the power to stand alone, and, like most children, he needs at times parental correction to remind him that authority is lodged in superior intelligence. Unite these forces, as in Santa Cruz, and you have a black population in whose midst the white man can enjoy life. On the other hand, throw them over to a caricature of parliamentary government as in Hayti, and you produce a black people not pleasing to any well-wisher of the race.

I saw in town here a document which suggests that the blacks of bygone days must have been "hard cases," indeed, if the laws touching their punishment bear any relation to their disposition to sin. In 1733 a placard was issued by the Royal Council affecting Danish islands, from which I copied these provisions:

1. The leader of runaway slaves shall be pinched three times with red-hot iron, and then hung.

2. Each other runaway slave shall lose one leg, or if the owner pardon him, shall lose one ear, and receive one hundred and fifty stripes.

3. Any slave being aware of the intention of others to run away and not giving information, shall be burned in the forehead and receive one hundred stripes. . . .

9. One white person shall be sufficient witness against a slave; and if a slave be suspected of a crime, he can be tried by torture . . . etc.

The mild rule under which the Santa Cruz blacks now earn their thirty cents a day, may lead them to look upon such provisions of law as intended merely to frighten, never to be put into execution; and let us

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hope that these bloody laws were never called into use. But such as they are, they illustrate here, as similar ones did in the Southern States of North America, what brutal instincts are aroused by such an institution as slavery. And all the more striking is this illustration when we remember that the men who made these cruel ordinances were descended from the liberty-loving Norsemen, the men who planted the seed of self-government in every country that now enjoys its blessings. A young Danish physician named Isert, who visited Santa Cruz in 1787, tells in his diary how a slave belonging to a neighbor had broken some article of household use; that to punish him for this offence his mistress ordered him stripped naked and hung up by his wrists to a nail. She then took a needle, and for the space of one hour amused herself by slowly passing it in and out of all parts of his flesh, while the poor devil shrieked until the neighborhood could no longer endure the sound, and the tigress was by them induced to give up her sport.

What Isert saw in Santa Cruz in the nature of cruelty to slaves surpasses anything in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and must have made his book very unwelcome to the planters of that island. He tells of slaves that were flogged until their flesh broke, when the wounds would be rubbed with pepper and salt, leaving behind them pains as enduring as they were acute, and scars that went with them to their last day on earth.*

* Governor Iverson was the first representative of Danish authority in these islands. In 1672, the year he arrived, he issued rules for the government of his islands that leave no doubt as to his ideas of personal authority and accountability. Even then, there was the little pink fort to which all came who wanted a passport. The fine for leaving the

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On reaching the half-way point of our journey, a shady spot, we handed our team to a cheery black hostler, who in return gave us his fresh pair. On again we went, the bull-whacker cracking about the little beasts as it probably cracked fifty years ago about the father of the present driver. It is on this account, perhaps, that negroes show such delight in cracking whips, even when no animal is in sight. In Antigua I noticed that the old negress who acted as overseer to a party of black girls in the field carried in her hand a long lash fastened to a handle as long as one's arm. She vociferated energetically, urged them to their work by loud threats and wordy encouragement—acted at times to me as though she meant to lay the lash across the backs of one of her people—but the owner of the plantation assured me that her lash was regarded by herself and her co-workers as merely emblematic of office.

My twelve miles seemed short, and in due time I was deposited with my luggage at a cross road where my friend's Yankee buggy awaited me, for the mile or so to his house. The road through the length of Santa Cruz, that is to say, fifteen miles, is macadamized, of good width and sheltered by a succession of

island then was five hundred pounds of tobacco, and the man who assisted the fugitive was made responsible for all his debts. But Iverson was, for all that, a God-fearing man, for he ordered all his Danish subjects, under penalty of twenty-five pounds of tobacco, to attend divine worship, in the little pink fort, every Sunday morning; nor did he except foreigners, for they suffered the same penalty if they did not turn up at the afternoon service.

In those days every householder was bound, on a penalty of one hundred pounds of tobacco, to "keep in his house, for himself and every man in his service, a sword with a belt, and a gun with sufficient powder and ball."

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graceful cocoa-nut trees whose tops wave in the trade-wind as though fanning the traveller below. From this main road, a smaller but equally well-laid one led through field after field of tall rich sugar-cane, to Litchfield plantation. When I first saw the cane, I was reminded of Indian corn (maize), the cane being, however, more luxuriant in foliage. Each in its way is the noblest product of its respective latitude, and neither, I am sure, can feel hurt at the family resemblance to which I refer.

My Scotch friend received me at the steps and led me into the broad hall-way of his home, through which one looked to the south over the Caribbean Sea, and to the northward toward the volcanic peaks that face the Atlantic. Through all the rooms of the house passed the air in gentle circulation, giving refreshing sleep at night, that blessing which makes any heat by day supportable. Life on a plantation is comparatively dull save to one interested in the working of it, and the fields of cane which to my friend were books full of thrilling stories, to me represented little beyond a pleasant patch of healthy-looking green. We rode about his acres, inspected his boiling vats, saw the cane crushed, watched the juice pour out, felt the heat of the boiler fires, admired the cleanliness of the machinery, and made the round of the negro cabins.

As we rode over a piece of pasture-land, I was struck by two brilliant plants that reared their heads about eighteen inches from the ground, bearing flowers of lemon and crimson color. All about them the grass had been closely cropped by the browsing animals, who, however, seemed to know by instinct that these

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plants were not to be disturbed. "The negroes know it well," said my friend, "for they are good hands at poisoning." Then he called out to a passing laborer to tell him the name of that flower. The man promptly said "Bechuana," adding that I must not touch it. It was the deadly ipecacuanha which I subsequently noticed in St. Thomas.

The Dominican missionary, Labat, writing in 1699 from the islands, tells the following to illustrate the negroes' familiarity with the art of poisoning—a tale which is capped by some recounted by Canon Kingsley from Trinidad.

A slave belonging to a neighbor of the priest, when on his death-bed asked for his master in order to confess to him that he had poisoned some thirty of his fellow blacks, and in this way. One of his nails he allowed to grow longer than the others, and under this one he secreted the juice of a poisonous plant, which was done by simply scratching it with his nail. Then he invited his victim to drink a glass of rum with him, the first glass of which went well enough. When he filled his glass the second time, however, he held the poisoned nail in the tumbler sufficiently deep to allow the liquor to be permeated with it, and gave this to the unsuspecting guest, who in less than two hours from the time of drinking died in horrible convulsions. Labat declined to name the plant whose effect was so deadly, though he made experiments with it that satisfied him of its power—no doubt this same ipecacuanha.

The little town of Frederikstaedt, at the western end of the island, had little beyond the name to suggest

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the country to which it owed allegiance—and very much to proclaim it as belonging to England or the United States. American paper dollars passed current; our purchases in the market were at the rate of so many cents, not so many krone or gulden; the vehicles that scurried about were from New England; the horses might have come straight from Texas, so much were they like mustangs; the shops appeared to have been supplied from London. The one hotel in the place was in its interior economy the counterpart of what one might have found in any small town in Canada. The inhabitants—negroes, of course, for of whites there were so few as to be hardly worth mentioning—might have been picked up in Louisiana or Georgia, dress and all; and their houses had little to distinguish them from what their black brethren in the States would have built.

Many of the houses were of solid masonry, after a fashion common in Spanish America and the tropics generally, looking cool in the hottest days by reason of the free play given to air and the ample shade beneath their picturesque arches. A squad or two of fresh-faced Scandinavian soldiers garrisoned the fort of Frederikstaedt, high-cheeked, healthy-looking boys, some of whom were digging in the garrison garden as we strolled by; suggesting, however, the inmates of a besieged enclosure rather than soldiers in control of a colony. The black policemen wore Danish helmets, but their speech was English, while the occasional official notices that ran in the name of the King of Denmark, were in English! The negroes talk only English.

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The women of Santa Cruz are like antique goddesses of Ethiopia. They march along the highway with a freedom of step, a grace of poise, an elasticity and erectness of carriage, a dignity of presence that makes one stop and wonder if there can be many of this heroic build. Our feeble products of super-civilization would see in these artless children of the tropics a beauty unobstructed by interference of vulgar fashion. Their feet are bare and their light skirts are lifted to a point slightly above their knees by tucking them, as did the Spartan girls of old, deftly up into the zone that encircles the body. Shapelier feet and ankles were never seen than those that carried these breezy ebony maidens, their skirts swinging merrily about them as they sang their way to town carrying on their heads pretty baskets filled with fruit. The carrying of weights on the head operates for these daughters of the new world as for those of Italy. It accustoms them to hold their heads well; to throw their shoulders back; to expand their chest; to carry their spinal forces perpendicularly, and to attain that which athletes acquire only by patient training—the art of walking from the hips. Their life is naturally an out-door one; the cost of their clothing for a year is probably less than a few pairs of gloves for one of our girls; their head-dress is the picturesque bandanna; they happily don't appear to know what corsets are meant for, and consequently they furnish to-day a picture of health, fine lines of figure, and general appearance of "style," that could not be matched in Mayfair, though the winsome ladies of Tokio approach them in grace of carriage.