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ON THE ISTHMUS.

SPLENDOR OF THE SCENERY IN PANAMA.

The South American Soldier—Customs at the Cemeteries—"Coffins to Let"—The Scant Costumes of Panama—The Costliness of Dying Exceeds That of Living.

PANAMA, Jan. 17.—Nowhere on the civilized or uncivilized earth is there witnessed a stranger sight than on the short journey across the Isthmus of Panama from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Its gorgeous and vast vegetation, its waving palms and luxuriant bananas, its tall grasses and brilliant flowers are rarely beautiful; but these one can see all over South America, in the neighborhood of the equator. It is the human conglomeration that is most unique and interesting.

The European managers, engineers and contractors brought their peculiar following, and the whole, with the native elements, makes up a cosmopolitan population, wonderful in its character, recklessness and general appearance. No one is surprised at anything one hears or sees in this strange land, for the Turk, the African, the Mongolian, the European make up a heterogeneous jumble and do about as they please.

The government demands that all men and women shall wear a trifle more covering than the traditional fig leaf, and when a ship load of Africans from the south coast arrived in Colon a year or two ago, cases of shirts and trousers were sent them before they were permitted to land.

Poor wretches! Their fate was sad. When they were put to work it was found, strangely enough, that they could not stand the climate. They died like sheep, and after a month of experimenting the living lot were sent back to Africa. About this time a Chinese merchant came to their town with a load of trunks painted a brilliant green.

One of the interesting features of the isthmus is the soldiers. They are a scrubby lot. The Colombian government, which supports nearly 3,000 of them, calls itself very strong in consequence and thinks it is fully prepared for war with any other South American republic. These soldiers wear a uniform consisting of red breeches and blue frock coats, but very dirty, ill fitting and coarse.

If the Colombian soldier is an oddity the Panama policeman is a marvel. He lounges about town, smokes cigarettes, walks into the saloons and sips native whisky by the hour while on duty, gambles in the Chinese houses and occasionally goes to sleep on the benches of the plaza. I should imagine the Panama policeman's lot to be a very happy one. He is paid eighty cents a day (equal to sixty cents of our money). The soldier gets one dollar a day (about seventy cents of our money) and has to find himself. The policeman's appearance is even more disreputable than that of the soldier, which is saying very much. But there is a dingy, careless, go-as-you-please air to every government official, high or low, in Panama and on the isthmus, which shows a woful lack of system, training and power.

All roads lead to Rome and all mule paths along the isthmus make for Panama. There the motley masses gather on Sundays and feast days and enjoy the bull fights, the cock fights and the other innocent pleasures prevailing. They flock into the city day and night, spend their money fast and furiously, eat, drink and are merry, finally returning to die, life is held cheaply here, for death stalks grimly over the entire state. I met a French physician on the Panama plaza. He was drinking absinthe and smoking cigarettes, and his mercurial nature was all buoyancy and joy. And yet he was almost the last of a gallant coterie arriving here within the year. "There were eleven of us physicians left Paris last February to serve the Panama Canal company," he said. "The fever caught us nearly all; within seven months eight of us died; myself and another is all that is left of our group. Others are here and more are coming. If I live I shall return to Paris next autumn; if I die—well, and he shrugged his shoulders and silently watched the blue smoke curl from his cigarette. Late at night, when the lamps are

lighted and the cafes open, the gaiety of Panama promading is witnessed and you see the city at its best—or worst. You hear the rustling of dresses, the cries of children, the confusion and feverish fun of a tropic fete. It is all wildly strange and picturesque, this mingling of nations. The soft music of the Spanish guitar prevails, and you feel yourself in a land of passion and pleasure. When you go on the ship after midnight—for if you are a wise American you will sleep in the bay—you have to pass Panama petticoats galore. These far southern cities are like unto Paris, perhaps unto Sodom and Gomorrah, in this particular. The isthmus clearly has its worldly pleasures as well as its worldly pains, but the shadows are very deep and the sunshine is not always clear. The heat is dense and heavy from January to January; all business ceases from 10 in the morning until late afternoon, and even then it is carried on with an enervating listlessness, for the air is filled with insidious disease, and no one knows just what to-morrow will bring forth.

The cost of living on the isthmus is not expensive, but the cost of dying is very considerable. One must be a millionaire to quietly give up the ghost and be buried decently, with anything like the pomp attending the obsequies of a middle class citizen in the United States. Coffins are so expensive that they have a peculiar way of making economical the "path which leads but to the grave." Therefore it is not uncommon to read in the two great cities of the isthmus this rather startling legend:

COFFINS TO LET. Having arranged to spend a day or two on the canal, and time being valuable, I had Mr. E. C. Horst, who accompanies me through Spanish America as artist and photographer, examine as to the methods of burial, and after a careful investigation he reports:

The cemeteries of Panama, five in all, are at Cocoa Grove and are within one minute's walk from one another. They are all managed by one firm, Sves Obarrion y Cia. One of these gentlemen went through all the graveyards and explained everything of interest. The five cemeteries are the foreign, the Chinese, the Jewish, the old Spanish and the new Spanish. People may be buried in any of these according to desire. The managers of the cemeteries are the only ones in the business of manufacturing, selling and letting coffins, so they have a coffin monopoly just as the Boston Ice company has a monopoly of ice, or as a New York house has a monopoly in hams.

There the Panama Canal company manufacture whatever coffins they need for their employes, and transact a very brisk business in this particular. In the price of coffins there is a wide margin, the sum being from \$7 to \$100. If even \$7 is higher than can be afforded, an old coffin more or less clean, in good condition of repair, can be hired for one-tenth the selling price of a new one, and a second hand coffin of rather disreputable appearance be bought for interment at \$1, the corpse being transferred at the grave. This is done to a large extent. For instance, if a poor man's friends want to give him a first class send for a little money, they can hire a \$100 coffin for one-tenth, i. e. \$10, and buy an old one for interment at \$1, making \$11, or hiring a \$40 one, the whole cost is only \$5, or he may buy a \$1 one at once and not hire any other, or he may go still lower by not using any coffin at all, in which case he is sandwiched between two weather beaten boards. It is said that he sleeps as long and perhaps as comfortably this way as in the most superbly trimmed receptacle.

The graves are not sold, but rented for one or two years. If the regular rental is not paid, the body is disinterred, the bones thrown in a common heap and the coffin used as a second hand one. This is a very general result of burial. The same system prevails, too, in the Boreas, where holes in masonry are let for \$12 for eighteen months. Friends are usually neglectful after a period of mourning, and the common heap of bones kept in a huge yard is enormous. There Celestials, Caucasians and Africans are mixed up like Buttercup's babies. This jumble of human remains suggests much trouble when Gabriel blows his trumpet. Who will be able to find the full complement of his own skeleton? The agile one may make up his own deficiency from the pick of the rest, but the slow moving individual will be apt to miss it. I fear there will be many misfits at the celestial gate. Who can tell whether one is entitled to admission if one is composed partly of some one else? The very thought is disagreeable and perplexing.

Government in Cimarron. Poet and political rhapsodist have described in captivating lines the descent of civil government, a divine ordinance, Minerva like, full grown and perfect from the mind of Deity. But the historian must be more prosaic and exact. He sees that men originally combined in squads against other men and wild beasts, then many squads in one tribe, and thus on, the local being merged in the general, from the day when the original Aryan, living in his hut like a wild beast in his den, combined with his fellows, to the day when the British parliament legislates for 300,000,000 people. The initial processes have been repeated hundreds of times in the far west. A company started "across the plains"; they organized, elected a captain and a "sheriff." A few hundred men of all nations found themselves in a mining gulch, far from courts or capital; they organize, make a government and wait for regular courts and laws to overtake them. In Colorado there were once fifty independent governments. That civil government is purely a human invention is conclusively shown by the fact that man is continually inventing it. Cimarron is only the latest object lesson in that line. Its government is now in fairly successful operation, and the people are waiting to see what congress will do.—Exchange.

THE WASHINGTON JOKE.

HOW CERTAIN MONSTROSITIES WERE FASTENED UPON AMERICANS.

One Who Has Long and Patiently Suffered from Its Ravages Unburdened His Mind Regarding This Crying Evil—A Boy Can Laugh at Anything.

"Washington is not a real man to us; he is a steel portrait," said Bob Ingersoll, and in that sarcasm is a bit of very sound philosophy. It is the tendency of all peoples to exalt their heroes towards the rank of demigods. Washington's real features are idealized in the standard portraits; a halo of glory obscures the actual Lafayette, and to many people William Penn is scarcely more a historical personage than Romulus or Agamemnon. But the American sense of humor has revolted. Seeing no other way to dissipate the semi-historic halo, the satirist has devised the G. Washington joke. When one has laughed at the impossibly good great man he can then investigate with more impartiality.

There is the cherry tree and little hatchet story, for instance; how much fun the modern paragraphist has made out of it. But it never was a fact. Then there is the silver dollar—and Washington did throw a silver dollar across the Potomac—as to which a statesman of the inflation era unburdened so far as to say: "There was nothing wonderful in it—a dollar would go a great deal further" than than now. There are also the almost original G. Washington joke of Artemus Ward, and the quite aboriginal burlesques of Bill Nye and Army Knox.

But here and now it is proposed to deal only with the old stand by, the fine old crusty joke. And at the head of the list, honary with age, is that merely verbal transposition: "This is Birthington's Washday." Of course it was originally made by a child or a booby, perhaps by a blundering schoolboy. That sort of thing is a favorite amusement with children. Listen to the progressive babble of a group in their word building stage of life, thus: "John Jefferson, Jeff Johnson, Jen Jefferson, Joff Jenson, Joffer Jenson, Joff Jenson, etc. This is one of the ways they learn to talk. And to talk, this was born 'Birthington's Washday.'"

No doubt it had a hundred thousand birthplaces. Go to the Green Mountains and the lathy Vermonters give it to you with a grin as something quite new and refreshing. In Oregon it is a perennial joke. Make your bed in Philadelphia, it is there. Take the wings of the morning and fly to the swamps of Louisiana, and the sallow creole enlivens you with the remark: "Well, this is Birthington's Washday." As a joke there is absolutely nothing in it. And that's the reason why it lives. The lowest capacity can catch on to it.

Even a Digger Indian who knows English will smile at it. When you first heard it in childhood you laughed immoderately; it struck you as supremely funny. Twenty years later you could still smile, but only out of politeness to the speaker. At forty you felt like hitting somebody. And now, in old age, you smile again—not at it, like O, no! but at remembrance of the time when you could laugh at such a lingual monstrosity.

I remember, as if it were but yesterday, when I first heard it. Approaching the door of the village seminary on a miserable February morning, I met "the cutest boy in Stoneburg," as we all admitted. His face was red with suppressed fun, his jacket was almost bursting with laughter, as he broke forth: "O, Johnnie, did you know this was Birthington's Washday?" For a half minute I stared, then the force of the broken backed perversion struck me in all its verbal absurdity. I fell back against a locust tree and laughed. I sat on the plank walk and laughed. Every time I cooled down the "cute boy" repeated it, and off we went again. We saw the teacher at the window, and crossed the street to the blacksmith shop and sat on the bench and laughed. O happy days, when we could laugh! For many a year that boy ranked in my estimation as "just too smart for anything."

"Crossington Washing the Delaware" is another of the same sort, a little more elaborate. Another is the standard query: "If the father of his country could look on this administration, what would he think of his children?" But we are indebted to recent humorists for many agreeable variations. Mark Twain modestly claims an improvement on Washington: "He could not tell a lie—I can, but I won't." Artemus Ward's dry humor has put many of the old anecdotes about Washington where they rightfully belong, in the category of the ridiculous. The "hatchet" has been laughed out of good society. Even the joke of the newspaper reporter's "hatchet," pinned upon his coat, with the inscription, "I cannot tell a lie," has become stale. The original hatchet story, and the remarkable dream of George's mother about his putting out the fire which was destroying the house, were pure inventions of a good Mr. Weems, who got up a series of little histories for peddlars, and according to the notions of the times added some goodly-good anecdotes of the Mary-had-a-little-lamb order. The same Mr. Weems took Maj. Horry's notes on Gen. Marion and made them into a "life" which is half romance.

Life, the humorous paper, gives this, which must be credited as new: THE THOUGHTFUL BOY.



Young America to his father, who has recently visited the tomb of Washington—Why is Washington dead? Father—Of course he is—a long time ago. Young America—Then why does he keep on having funerals? George Washington himself occasionally perpetrated a mild joke. On one instance he and some brother officers went to see a deaf, whose height was seventeen inches long and his body but twenty-seven. The general asked him whether he was a Whig or a Tory to which the boy answered as he had been taught that he "had never taken an active part on either side." Hostilities had ceased and the army at Newburg was only waiting for the definite treaty of peace, so an officer ventured to introduce to Washington a New

Yorker whose patriotism was suspected—in fact, a "quiet Tory"—but most unwisely did it with a sort of apology. "O, never mind," said Washington. "Mr. B— is like that big headed boy at Matton— he has never taken an active part on either side."

In conclusion the following are offered as mild attempts to do up two prominent professions: A LONG LINE OF THEM.



Teacher—Who was the father of his country? Class—George Washington. Teacher—Right. Now, what particular thing was he noted for when he was a boy? (Silence.) Well, well, what did he raise on his plantation? Bright Boy—Nurses.



First American Citizen—Who is that ancient looking ducky over there? Second American Citizen—Why, that's one of Washington's body servants. First American Citizen—Washington? Who's he? It is even remotely possible that the magnitude of the late war will in time make the Revolution seem like a mere series of skirmishes! J. H. BEADLE.

Washington and the Children. The venerable Mrs. Semmes, who died a few years ago in Alexandria, used to tell this story: After Gen. Washington had retired from office, and was living at Mount Vernon, he accepted an invitation to dine with her father. Many distinguished men were bidden to meet him, and the awe and excitement of the young people of the family grew intense as the great occasion approached.

The children, according to good old Virginia custom, dined with the guests, but as there was not room for them at the large board, a side table was laid for the little girl, who was afterwards Mrs. Semmes, and two other little girls, one of whom was afterwards the mother of Gen. Robert E. Lee. As the dinner went on, the three girls, with their rosy cheeks and innocent gurgles of laughter, attracted the attention of the general, who, during the solemn speech making, cast many furtive glances toward them. They had agreed, child like, to eat of exactly the same dishes, and accordingly all took the same kind of fish, vegetables, meat and dessert. Washington beckoned to a waiter, poured out four glasses of some simple cordial, and then, followed by the man with the glasses on a tray, crossed to the children's little table, bowed profoundly, and said: "Young ladies, will you all drink with me?" "It was the proudest moment of my life," Mrs. Semmes said. "Washington was regarded as the greatest of living men, and this notice from him was an honor which would make any child happy beyond words. He knew this, and took the trouble to give three foolish children this happiness, which they never forgot."

Washington Sings the "Derby Ram." When Washington, after the revolutionary war, was traveling through Connecticut he visited Hartford, staying at the Bull's tavern there. A boy came into the kitchen of the tavern and said: "I want to see Gen. Washington." The functionary on duty did not propose to let any mere boy see Gen. Washington merely for the asking, and said as much. "But I have a note for him," remonstrated the boy. "From whom?" "My father, Chief Justice Ellsworth." "Oh, well," and the functionary relented. Gen. Washington read the note and said to the boy: "Your father invites me to dinner, and I will do more than that, I will go and breakfast with him." And he did the next morning. Fed after breakfast he took the twin sons of the justice, each on a knee, and sang them "The Derby Ram," an old English ballad, beginning, "It was on a market day," and setting forth that the ram of Derby was so big that the birds built nests in the wool on his back, and the butcher who undertook to kill him was drowned in the blood.—Cor. New York Independent.

By George! Washington! By George! our victories were won. By George! our liberties secured; By George! immortal Washington By George! who suffered and endured In war's alarms, through battle's ill; At Trenton and at Valley Forge; In peace, on Vernon's sunny hills. The honors all were won, by George By George! we stand, by George! we swear. One day the nation grows to men. The soldier brave, the statesman rare. For monumental memory By George! whose glory is our fame! By George! whose deeds we call our own! By George! whose honor and whose name. By George! is ours, and ours alone —Jo King in Puck There was a very curious contrast between the first and the second inauguration of George Washington, the first was conducted with all the pomp and ceremonial the young republic could muster, the second as quietly as possible.

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