

# United States Has Revolutionized the Island of Porto Rico

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—Uncle Sam's greatest victory in Porto Rico has to do with a worm. I have written how he has raised the island from beggary to prosperity, and how his foreign trade has been multiplied 40 per cent. How the wealth of the people has risen from almost nothing to \$1,000 per family, and how they are now growing rich off of coffee, tobacco and sugar. Further on in this letter I will tell how mountain trails have been changed to stone roads, and how justice and good government have taken the place of disorder and graft.

Uncle Sam's fight with the worm has been bigger than any of these. And still the worm is so small that you could lay it on the little finger nail of your baby and it would just crawl around the edge where the nail is joined to the flesh. Nevertheless at the time we took hold of the island it was sucking the life and strength out of 95 per cent of the people. Almost every one had it. We did not know what it was, but we thought the Porto Ricans were a degenerate nation and that their pasty, pale skins, flabby muscles and lackadaisical ways were hereditary and could not be changed. It was some time before we discovered that the worm was naturally as strong as we are and that their weakness existed because they were sick. It all came from this little worm which was gnawing their vitals.

**Dr. Ashford Discovers Hookworm.**

The presence of the parasite was discovered in 1907 by Major Bailey K. Ashford, a United States army surgeon, and since then a great fight has gone on against it, resulting in the cure of hundreds of thousands and in confining its ravages to the poorest classes of laborers who live far off in the mountains.

The discovery of this worm in Porto Rico led to our knowledge of it in the southern states and to the great hookworm experiments which have been taken under the Rockefeller fund to control it.

The first active hookworm campaign, however, was undertaken by Major Ashford in Porto Rico, and today there are forty-five dispensaries scattered over the island to which sick patients come to be treated. During the last year 49,000 men, women and children have been treated at these dispensaries, and of these 19,000 have been completely cured and 7,000 more are still improving under treatment. In all the island more than 25,000 have been treated, and the hookworm has been practically wiped out of the towns and villages.

**The Deadly Hookworm.**

It is due to the work in Porto Rico that we now know all about the hookworm and how to control it. It is believed to have been brought here from Africa at the time the first slaves were imported. It is known to have existed among the African pygmies and it is thought to have come to Porto Rico in 1492, with the founding of the first sugar plantation. The worm began its work in the lowlands and gradually made its way through the island. It is now strongest in the mountains and it is found almost everywhere on the coffee estates.

The hookworm comes from an egg which hatches out in the earth twenty-four hours after it is laid. It is said to live or hatch anywhere else than in the earth, and it is the worm itself that crawls into the body of the man. It enters through the feet. The mount of the Porto Rican laborers go barefooted, and during the rainy season, when the ground is wet and damp, a scratch or sore on the skin enables the parasite to crawl in. A poor state of health makes its ravages easy. There was a great increase of the disease after the hurricane of 1905, at which time thousands were practically starving and the food of the people was low.

The entrance of the worm through the skin has been prevented by persuading the people to wear shoes and watch out for their feet during wet weather. In many of the rural districts the sanitary conditions are still bad and parts of the country are peopled with the worms and their eggs.

One can easily tell the men, women and children who are being eaten up by these parasites. They look weak, pale, dull and flabby, and it is almost impossible for them to do more than half work. Most of them are afflicted with nausea, vomiting, headaches and palpitation of the heart, and with some these symptoms continue for years, while others gradually fade away and die.

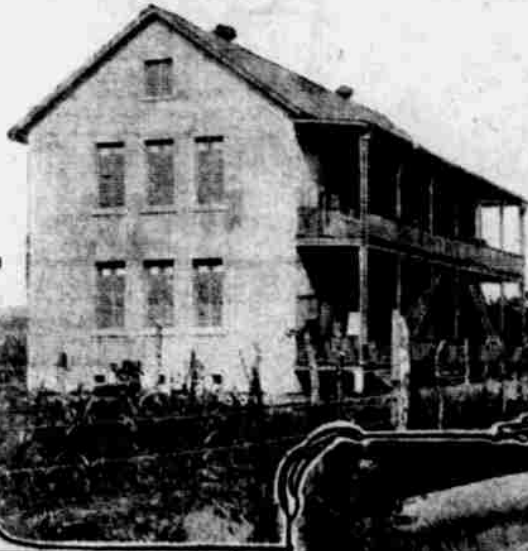
**Feed an Red Blood.**

But let me tell you how the worm works. The doctors say it feeds on the red corpuscles of the blood. This is the life-giving fluid, and a good healthy man ought to have five or six millions of them in every cubic millimeter of all the blood that flows through his veins. Not long ago, inasmuch as I was far under par, I had my own blood examined. A doctor jabbed a pin into my ear and took out a drop of my blood and tested it. He found that there were over five million red corpuscles per cube, and even this number made him shake his head and look serious. Now the Porto Rican with the hookworm has only two and one-half million of these red corpuscles, so you can see where he stands. Another part of my test was as to the hemoglobin, which also relates to the quality of this blood. If the test rises to 100 per cent it is excellent. My test showed 65, and now after treatment it has risen to ninety. The average Porto Rican with the worm has only 60 per cent of that stuff in him, and nevertheless upon such a physical condition he has had to labor from daylight to dark on the sugar estate, and in the coffee plantations. He has been a sick man all the time, but he has had to work. The curing of hundreds of thousands of such people is a part of what Uncle Sam has done in Porto Rico.

**A Sanitary Island.**

Indeed, the present plans of the government are such that the island is now about as sanitary as any part of Latin America. At the time we took hold the death rate was about forty per thousand, and this compares favorably with any other similarly populated country.

We have practically wiped out the snail. When I visited the island twelve years ago it was raging, and at that time our government undertook the greatest vaccination job of all history. It had the army start to work to vaccinate the whole people. There were at least 500,000 snails on the island during my stay, and the people were so disabled in places that work practically stopped. Among the places I visited was a vaccine farm where the army surgeons had 25,000 cattle ranging from eight months to a year old. They used these to get vaccine matter, taking as many as 2,500 points from a single beast. Since then the vaccination has kept up from time to time. Twenty-six thousand and persons were vaccinated last year, and the



Typical School House



New Reinforced Concrete Public Market at San Juan

doctors keep their eyes on the children. As a result there is no smallpox in Porto Rico, and very few cases of varioloid.

**The Water Supply.**

At the time we took charge the water supply was had almost everywhere. The streams were used as public sewers and the people took their drinking water from them. In all of the cities I found wells not far from the seaports, and the doctors estimated that 50,000 houses had disterns whose water was polluted in that way. The custom of burying the dead was another source of disease. The cemeteries were crowded and great piles of skulls and other human bones were found in some of them. Uncle Sam has caused new cemeteries to be opened, and he has established in remote districts many new ones, where free burial is given to the poor.

Porto Rico has now its own health department, with an advisory board, consisting of a health supervisor, a physician, a druggist, a lawyer and a civil engineer. A great deal is being done to wipe out tuberculosis and the general condition of the people is 100 per cent better than it has been before.

**Automobile Roads for Porto Rico.**

Next to the hookworm, one of the biggest things Uncle Sam has done in Porto Rico has been in the good roads movement. He has started the work, and the people have furnished the money to do the business.

There is no part of the United States which has such a road development as has had Porto Rico since we took hold. At that time the island had 170 miles of good highways. These were built by the Spaniards and mainly for military purposes. They consisted of one long road across the mountains from the Caribbean sea to the Atlantic and some branch roads running here and there. These military roads were as good as any drive-ways in the United States. They were as smooth as the floor, without pebbles or ruts, and they wound their way in easy slopes over the mountains. In some places they hung to the sides of the hills and in others they made innumerable horseshoe curves so that you could see the road above and below you. I went over that road in 1900 and I was told it had cost about \$25,000 a mile.

Today you will find roads like that connecting the chief parts of Porto Rico, and you can go in an automobile all over the island. The roads have cost only \$10,000 a mile and they are now spending about \$50 per mile per annum to keep them in order. The aggregate length of the macadam roads is such that if they were placed end to end they would reach from New York almost to Chicago, and that would be a better automobile road than if it were composed of strips from the best roads of New England.

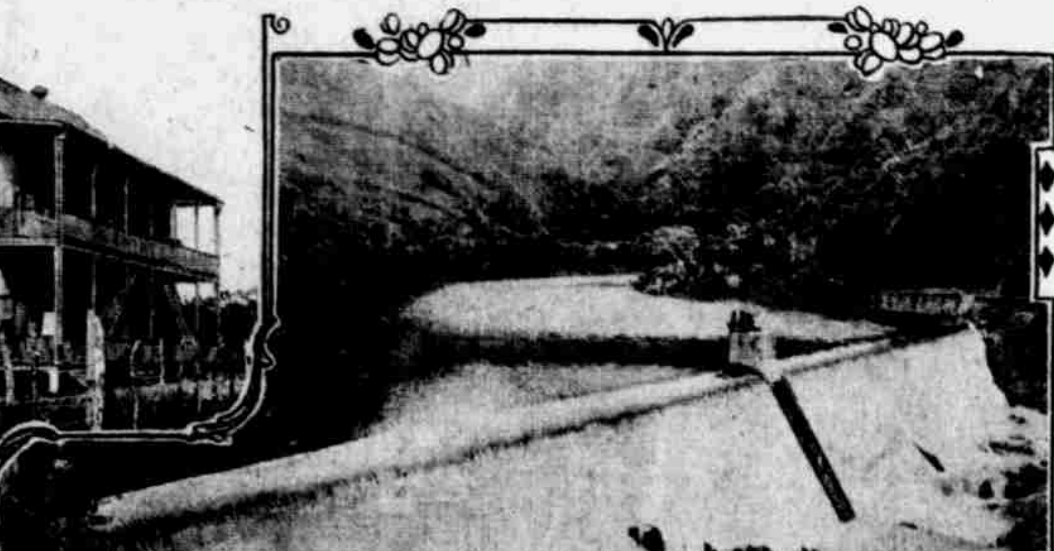
In addition to this wagon roads have been made in the mountains connecting with these automobile highways and new trails have been cut so that transportation is everywhere possible.

A great deal of the business of the country is now done by automobiles. There are more than 600 in use and more are added every day. There were something like a hundred new ones last year. There are regular lines of freight and passenger motor cars between the chief cities, and regular automobile buses run over the military road from San Juan to Ponce. As it is now, one can leave San Juan after breakfast in the morning and be at Ponce, on the southern side of the island, for lunch. It used to hustle one to get there in two days.

**The New Steam Roads.**

When I was in Porto Rico, at the close of the war, there was only one steam railway. This was made up of short strips running from San Juan around to Ponce, with numerous breaks. It was part of a system that had been planned to belt the island, but only bits of which had been built.

Since we have taken hold this road has been improved and extended. The breaks have been filled, and the steam cars now run clear along the northern and western ends of the island from San Juan to Ponce, and from there to the port of Guayama. This completes four-fifths of the circuit of the island, and, in addition, there are many short line railroads which supply the sugar plantations. A very little more track would give roads all along the coast lands of Porto Rico. In 1909 the car service was miserable. The passenger coaches were little better



The New Comerio Dam



American Colonial Bank - San Juan

than our box freight cars and it was a rare occasion when the dinky engine did not break down. Today there are good American locomotives and comfortable passenger cars.

**Steamships to Porto Rico.**

Since the United States took hold of Porto Rico, the steamship lines connecting it with the rest of the world have not far from the seaports, and the doctors estimated that 50,000 houses had disterns whose water was polluted in that way. The custom of burying the dead was another source of disease. The cemeteries were crowded and great piles of skulls and other human bones were found in some of them. Uncle Sam has caused new cemeteries to be opened, and he has established in remote districts many new ones, where free burial is given to the poor.

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that money could not compensate for crime.

Today the judicial system of Porto Rico is much like that of the United States. There are fifty-eight justices of the peace, but they cannot fine a man more than \$10 or imprison him for more than thirty days. Their jurisdiction is limited to violations of municipal ordinances and petty crimes. They are much like our police judges. There are also municipal courts, where suits are tried in which the amount does not exceed \$200. The officers of these are elected by popular vote, and each for a term of four

years. Above these are the district courts, the prosecuting attorneys of which are appointed by the governor, and higher still, the supreme court, composed of five judges appointed by the president. This court sits at San Juan, and it possesses general appellate jurisdiction over the island.

**A Spanish Country Without Graft.**

One of the most remarkable things in Porto Rico has been the elimination of graft. Under the former government everything was bribery and corruption. Nothing could be done without greasing the itching palms of the officials, and

**Justice in Porto Rico.**

In the days of the Spaniards justice in Porto Rico was a matter of bargain and sale. The man who had the most money got the decision of the courts in his favor, and even today the judges are still offered bribes. I heard of a case in which a woman the other day called upon the attorney general and asked him just how much money it would take to get her son out of prison. She said she had been saving for the last five years, or ever since he had committed manslaughter, and that she thought she had now enough to buy him out. It was hard for the attorney general to make her see

this was so even to the recording of deeds and all transfers of property. Everything was taxed, even to the smallest bit of furniture of a banana-rotted shack. The poor had no rights that the rich were bound to respect, and it cost money to get a hearing in the courts.

At the time we took hold there were 2,000 prisoners in the jails awaiting trial, and many of them did not know the charges upon which they had been arrested. One man had been kept in prison for five months for stealing an empty bag, and another a year for stealing a chicken. A third prisoner, charged with stealing a hog, had been kept in jail a year awaiting his trial. The courts of Porto Rico then cost \$100,000 a year in salaries alone, and every official had a large allowance for writing materials.

Today all the accounts of the island pass through the hands of auditors selected by our Treasury department, and every cent must be satisfactorily accounted for. This is so of all branches of the government, and it is impossible for any of the public money to be spent otherwise than as laid down by the law.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

**A Bachelor's Reflections.**

Good intentions need careful nursing to keep them from going into early decline.

The way for a man to convince a girl she ought to marry him is for her father to try to convince her she ought not to.

A man wants to march in a political parade where he is ignored and a woman to go to a reception where she is snubbed.

—New York Press.

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