



SAN JUAN HARBOR. VIEW FROM CASA BLANCA, PONCE DE LEON'S HOUSE.

## THE ISLAND OF PORTO RICO.

BY FREDERICK A. OBER,

Late Commissioner in Porto Rico of the Columbian Exposition.

THE "great navigator" who discovered the New World was very felicitous in his names for the lands he found, and it was with good reason that he called Borinquen, the Indian island, Puerto Rico, after the noble harbor in which he watered his ships in November, 1493. As Aguadilla it is known to-day, and the same palm-shaded spring gushes forth now as then, in volume sufficient to supply a fleet.

Fifteen years later another of fame's favorites, Ponce de Leon, landed in the bay, where he was well received by the Indian cacique Agueynaba, who gave him specimens of gold. In the year 1510 he founded the town of Caparra, now known as Pueblo Viejo, abandoned the year following for the more advantageous situation of San Juan. The Indians becoming, as the Spaniards say, *disgustados*, because they were reduced to slavery and compelled to labor in the mines, rebelled, and murdered all the white men they could catch outside the settlement. The Spaniards had told the guileless red men that they were immortal, and for a while they believed them; but Cacique

Agueynaba finally conceived a theory of his own, and proceeded to put it to the test. In accordance with his orders, two of his followers caught an unprotected white man while fording a stream (which is known and shown to-day), threw him down, and held his head under water three long hours. Then they took him out, but still with fear and trembling, and, dragging the body to the bank, sat by it during two whole days, until unmistakable signs of decomposition convinced them of the man's mortality. In the end—and it came quickly—the Indians, to the number of half a million or so, were exterminated; but that was a mere incident in Spanish colonization, and the places they left vacant were filled with blacks from Africa.

San Juan, the city founded in 1511 on the north coast, soon became a place of importance, and not long after settling here Juan of the Lion Heart built himself a castle on the promontory above the harbor's mouth, and there he planned the voyage through the Bahamas which resulted in the discovery of Florida, in 1513. But his search for the fabled



Fountain of Youth was not so fortunate; and so in 1521, being stirred by the news from Cortez in Mexico, he set forth again, this time to be wounded by an Indian arrow, to die in Cuba, and to be brought back to San Juan, where his ashes still repose, in a leaden case, beneath the altar of the Dominican church.

From his castle, known as "Casa Blanca," the view he often gazed upon is still outspread, through screens of palms above the crenelated wall around his garden, across the landlocked bay which, so many times since De Leon's death, has been the scene of naval demonstrations.

Those early settlers may well have deserved their fate; still, one may hardly withhold sympathy from them in their many and varied misfortunes. In 1515 they had a visitation of ants which devoured everything before them; and then, soon after the insects had been driven away or destroyed, an epidemic of the smallpox decimated their ranks, swiftly followed by another disease, more insidious, but scarcely less fatal in its effects. In 1529 French pirates burned the town of San German, on the south coast; the fierce Caribs ravaged the eastern provinces, carrying off some of their prominent men to be sacrificed at cannibal repasts; and seventy

years later, in 1595, "that great pirate, Don Francisco Drake," appeared off San Juan, which city he sacked, the English claim; but to be gloriously repulsed, the Spaniards say. The fortifications of San Juan then mounted seventy pieces of artillery, with thirty-four in the great Castillo del Morro alone. There is no doubt that a Dutch attack was repelled in 1615, and another English attempt defeated in 1678; but in the latter instance the Porto-Ricans were aided by a hurricane, which destroyed many of the ships of war. The islanders were wont to point many a moral with this signal instance of divine interposition, until a fleet of their own was similarly destroyed, in 1702, when it seemed to them more rational to ascribe such an event to natural causes.

During the greater part of the seventeenth century the *filibusteros* and *bucaneros*, composed of combined Dutch, French, and English renegade adventurers, continually harried the coast and attacked the supply galleons coming from Spain. At first entrenched in the island of St. Kitts, they were driven out by a fleet under Don Federico Toledo, fitted out in Porto Rico, when they flocked to the island of Tortuga, north of the coast of Haiti, whence they preyed upon Spanish commerce at their convenience.



COUNTRY GIRL AND CALABASH-TREE.



The Morro of San Juan, standing well out at sea, was a chip on the Spanish shoulder at which passing fleets could not resist taking a shot or two. The last great attack upon San Juan, previous to the American bombardment of this year, was in 1797, by the English, under Abercrombie, who were compelled to retire after a three days' siege.

During the century that has elapsed since that event the inhabitants of this rock-ribbed fortress town have boasted the impregnability of their fortifications, until so rudely disturbed by the guns of modern battle-ships.

Until it was discovered that Porto Rico possessed great value as a "strategic center" of naval operations, the fair isle slumbered undisturbed, merely a link, and no important one, in the emerald chain that separates the Atlantic and the Caribbean. Suddenly naval folk became aware of its importance; they saw that while it borders on the Caribbean Sea, yet it breasts the rough Atlantic waters; that it is equidistant, or about a thousand miles, from Key West and Colon; from New York fifteen hundred miles, which is half the distance from Cadiz; thirteen hundred from Newport News, which is half the distance to the Canaries. It lies, in fact, at the very point that we should have selected for a coal-ing-station, had we unrestricted choice of

location. All the arguments that have been advanced for the acquisition of the island of St. Thomas, sixty miles distant, and for which at one time we were almost ready to pay seven million dollars, apply with tenfold force to Porto Rico, with its six good harbors to the one of St. Thomas, and its commercial as well as strategical potentialities.

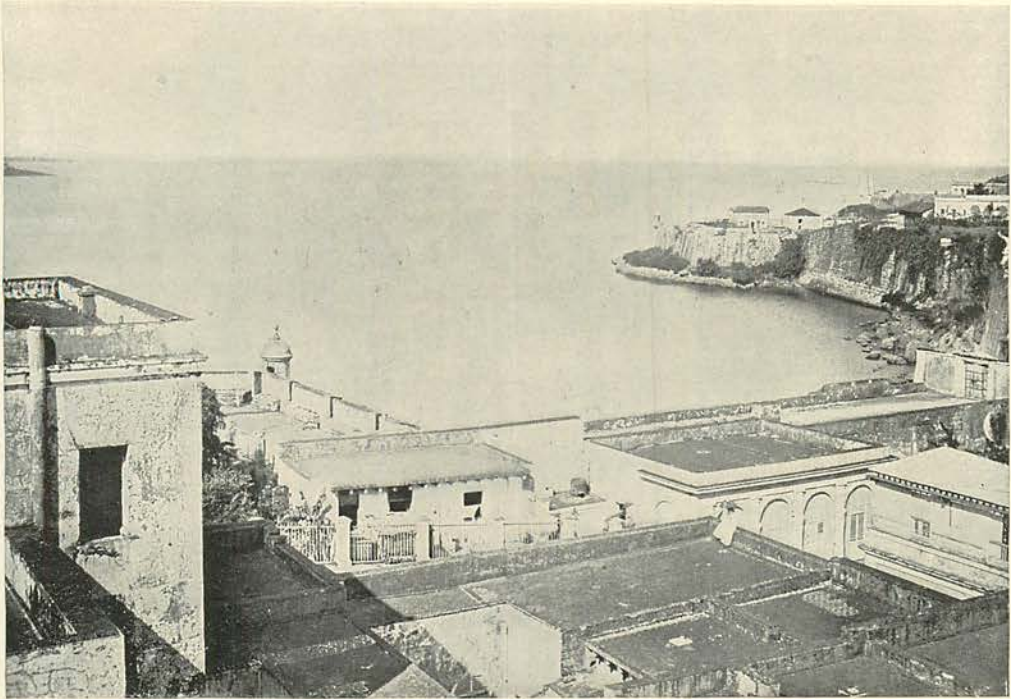
The commerce of the island is chiefly with the United States; and for the last ten years, according to the available statistics, we gained half a million each year in exports, and two millions in imports. Its exports to Spain in 1895 were over six million dollars, and to the United States ten times that amount; its imports from Spain for the same year being about nine million dollars, and not twice that amount from the United States. In size Porto Rico ranks as fourth of the Greater Antilles, coming after Jamaica, being only 108 miles in length, to its rival's 149, and of about equal breadth, or between 40 and 50 miles, with an area of 3600 miles, as against Jamaica's 4193. Yet it is said to export nearly or quite double the quantity of sugar, tobacco, and coffee that its neighbor sends abroad.

A compact little island, an irregular parallelogram in shape, it can be easily governed, and readily made defensible; while its sister isle of Cuba, with its seven hundred



IN THE MARKET-PLACE, PONCE, THE LARGEST CITY IN PORTO RICO.





FORTIFICATIONS OF SAN JUAN—SOUTHWEST ANGLE, LOOKING WESTWARD.

miles of length and its two thousand miles of coast-line, cannot. While the mountains, swamps, dense forests, and bayous of Cuba afford secure hiding-places for the insurgents, with consequent prolongation of a rebellion, in Porto Rico, on the contrary, the physical features all lend themselves to the continuation of whatever system happens to be in power. In a word, there are no points of vantage whence a rebel against authority may emerge to annoy his enemy, no retreats that are not also accessible to the Spanish soldier. This is the simple reason why uprisings have never made head in Porto Rico, why they never will. Many a time the banner has been raised with "*Patria, Justicia, Libertad! Viva Puerto Rico libre!*" inscribed thereon, but only to be trailed in the dust at the point of Spanish bayonets, and those who bore it sent, some to Africa, some to be shot.

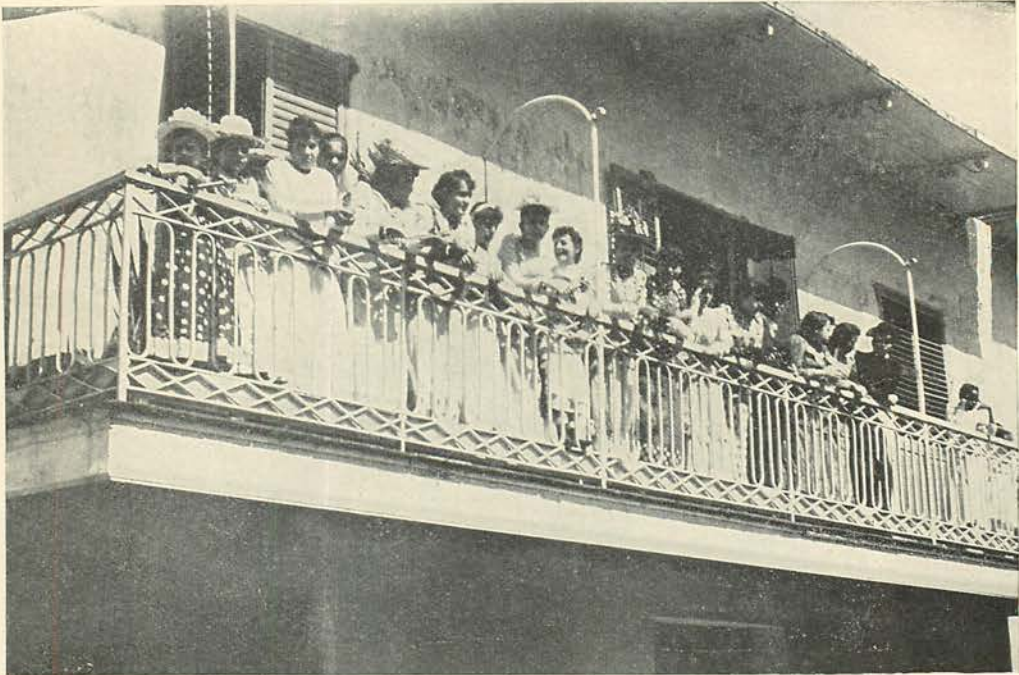
The entire aspect of this island on the northeast verge of the Caribbean is peaceful and paradisaical. An interval of twelve years lay between my first and second visits to Porto Rico; yet, though I had traveled in other countries meanwhile, I could recall no such scene of grandeur, tempered with the melting loveliness of a tropical landscape, as greeted me when I approached the north coast of the island. It is indeed, as the Spanish writers who have seen it say, a

*panorama agradabilisimo*. In the extreme northeast rises the highest peak of the central cordillera, in the Luquillo Sierra, known as "el Yunque," or "the Anvil," variously estimated at from thirty-six hundred to forty-five hundred feet in height. The hills are of lesser elevation toward the west and southwest, but the whole north-central country is rugged and uneven. Between the spurs from the main range lie innumerable secluded valleys, where the soil is of great fertility. The impressive features of the landscape are the rounded summits of the multitudinous hills, which leave the coast in constantly rising billows that finally break against the cordillera vertebra; yet all are cultivable, and cultivated, to their very crests, though the higher mountain peaks are forest-clad.

More than thirteen hundred streams, it is said, of which number perhaps forty or fifty attain to the dignity of rivers, rise in the hills and seek the coasts, most of them running northerly, though the best harbors are in the west and south. But notwithstanding the great river flow, portions of the island in the southwest are afflicted with drought at times, owing to the precipitation of the northeast "trades" against the northern hills.

The higher hills are clothed in the





A BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE PLAZA, SAN JUAN.

exuberant and diversified vegetation of the tropical forest, where tree-ferns flourish, and great gum-trees and mountain palms tower aloft; at lower levels are the cedar and mahogany, walnut and laurel, with many others noted for their useful woods. Throughout the island are found those trees and shrubs valuable for their gums, as the mamey, guaiacum, and copal, while the list of medicinal plants includes most of those, invaluable to our pharmacopœias, which tropical America has given to the world. These are the *silvestres*, nature's wild children; but of cultivated plants there is no species peculiar to the tropics that does not flourish here. In the littoral levels, between the mountains and the sea, grows the sugarcane, which may be cultivated up to an altitude of three thousand feet. It was introduced here from Santo Domingo, having been brought to America either from Spain or the Canaries. The annual yield of sugar is estimated at about seventy thousand tons.

In these fertile lowlands, also, tobacco does exceedingly well, and the annual production is said to be quite seven million pounds. It may be cultivated on the hills, but the true mountain-lover is the coffee, which does not do well below six hundred feet, and is at its best a thousand feet above the sea. It was first brought here from Martinique, in 1722, and now yields to the extent of seventeen

thousand tons annually. Maize, the true Indian corn, is indigenous, as is the yucca, the aboriginal "staff of life"; and both grow everywhere, as well as the pineapple, which is more reliable and more universal than the peach of our north-temperate zone. Cotton and rice are found at nearly all elevations, the latter, which is the chief food of many laborers, being what is known as the mountain variety.

Bananas and plantains are wonderfully prolific, bearing fruit in ten months from planting. The plants virtually last sixty years, being equally long-lived with the cocoa-palm, which produces nuts in six or seven years, and thereafter during the space of an ordinary life, its yield being reckoned at a hundred nuts a year. The annual product of bananas is given as two hundred millions, and of cocoanuts three millions. The entire range of tropical fruits is represented here, such as the guava, lime, orange, aguacate, sapodilla, and avocado pear; while all subtropic vegetables may be raised, including those of the south-temperate zone, such, for instance, as are grown in Florida.

The mineral kingdom has not been so exhaustively exploited as the vegetable, but more than traces have been found of copper, coal, and iron, as well as vast deposits of salt. The rivers at one time ran to the sea over beds of golden sand, and from the



streams to-day (as in the neighboring island of Santo Domingo, where the first American gold was discovered) the natives wash out nuggets, by the crude processes of that distant day when Agueynaba went prospecting with his false friend Ponce de Leon.

There are no native quadrupeds here larger than the agouti and the armadillo, but birds are relatively numerous, with a few of fine song, and some of brilliant plumage. All domestic fowl do well here, and the great pastures of the northeast and southeast support vast herds of cattle and horses, which suffice not only for the needs of the island, but are exported to all parts of the West Indies, being held in high esteem.

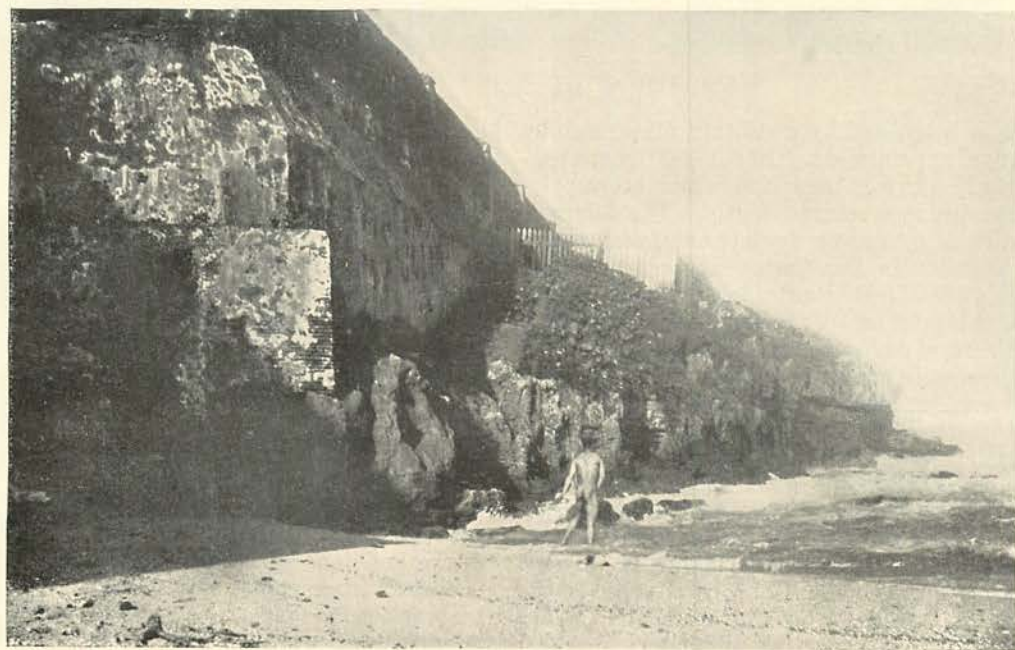
There are no poisonous reptiles to be feared, but insects of questionable character are too numerous for comfort. This island, indeed, were a Paradise without them; even with them, the inhabitants seem to experience little trouble. The worst of these are the scorpions, centipeds, tarantulas, wasps, mosquitos, some species of ants, ticks, chigoes, and fleas. The heat of a tropical climate like that of Porto Rico, which, though rarely exceeding 90°, is continuous, is conducive to the breeding of insect pests of all sorts.

The climate is hot and humid, but not inimical to health, except locally, in the marshy districts, and in cities where the

ordinary rules of sanitation are neglected. There is no yellow fever away from the coasts. Though all the seasons may be indicated here, yet only two are distinctly recognized, the rainy and the dry, the first lasting from July to December, and the latter from January to June, both inclusive. The midwinter days are most delightful, differing but little from those of autumn in southern Spain.

The chief centers of population are Ponce, on the southern coast, with thirty-eight thousand inhabitants; and San Juan and Mayaguez, with about twenty-seven thousand each. The principal harbors are San Juan and Arecibo, on the north coast; Aguadilla and Mayaguez, on the west; Ponce (roadstead), Arroyo, and Guayanilla, on the south; and Humacao and Fajardo, on the east. In some respects Ponce, the largest city, is more attractive than the capital, San Juan. It has a fine cathedral, several plazas, a large theater, excellent stone buildings, and an abundant supply of pure water conducted from the hills by means of aqueducts. In going from the port of Ponce to the city one may note the direction of the prevailing winds by the dust-covered canes, which are on the southern side of the road, while those on the north side are bright and clean.

Communication between cities is chiefly



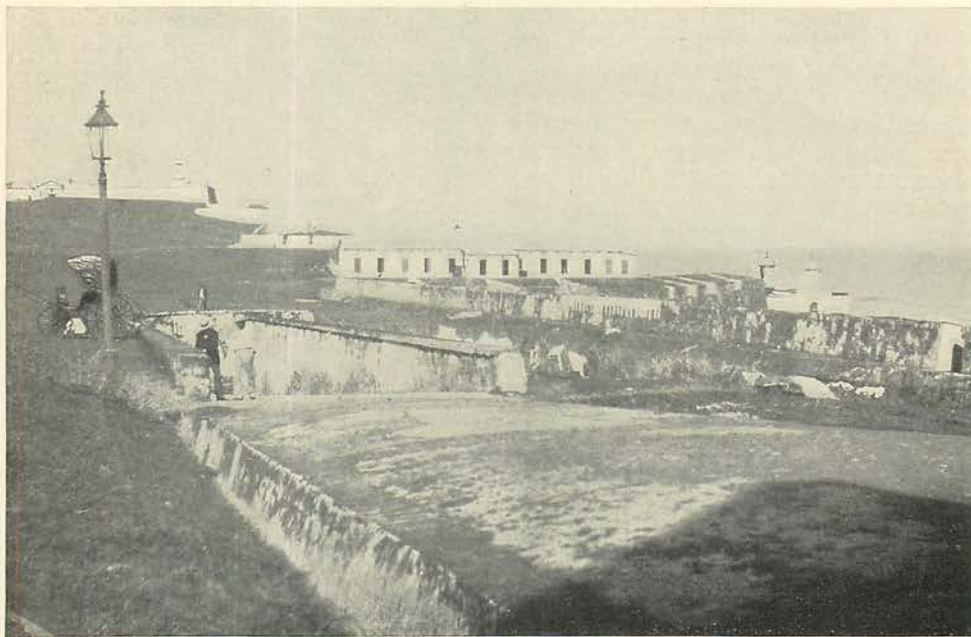
UNDER THE SEA-WALL, SAN JUAN. OCEAN SIDE OF FORTIFICATIONS.



coastwise, though there are some good roads and many bridle-trails. A railroad has been projected around the island, and about one hundred and thirty miles have been built of the total four hundred to be constructed; while there are nearly five hundred miles of telegraph lines, connecting all important points, besides two cables maintaining communication with the outside world. These are controlled by the government, which is vested in a captain-general appointed by the crown,

causeway and two bridges. Within the curvature of a deep and landlocked bay lies the harbor, sheltered from all except northerly winds, with a "boca," or narrow entrance, which vessels drawing three fathoms can enter and find anchorage within at any depth to six fathoms, with two and a half at the wharves.

The seaward or western front of the islet on which the city is built is precipitous, and here is perched the old castle known as the



MORRO PARADE-GROUND, NORTH OF GLACIS, SAN JUAN.

who is assisted by a military junta, also by royal appointment. About 5000 troops regularly garrison the island, which are supplemented by a reserve militia. The colony is divided into seven departments, with representation in the Cortes according to the number of inhabitants, and the captain-general is president of the assembly of the island, the royal *audiencia*. Recently Porto Rico has been more profitable to Spain than Cuba, the annual revenue usually exceeding expenditures by a million and a half of pesos, the last statistics available giving the former as 5,455,000, and the latter 3,906,000.

As the only fortified city, the possession of which carries with it that of the island, San Juan, the capital, deserves perhaps particular description. It is situated at the extreme western end of an island on the north coast, about five kilometers long and two broad, connected with the mainland by a

Morro, between which and the city proper lies a parade-ground some twelve hundred feet in extent. Trapezoidal in shape, San Juan rises amphitheater-like from the bay, completely inclosed within massive walls from fifty to one hundred feet in height. In general appearance it has some suggestions of Algiers, with its gaily colored houses, jutting balconies, airy miradors, and inclosing medieval walls; though not so imposing as that "diamond in an emerald setting," nor so picturesque.

Morro Castle dates from Ponce de Leon's time, but the Morro as it stands to-day was completed in 1584. The *faro* stands here, with a first-class light, and within the Morro's walls are the buildings of a small military town—quarters for troops, a chapel, bake-house, and guard-room, with dungeons down by the sea and underneath. This is the citadel, the initial point of the line of circumvallation,



composed of connected bastions, castles, and *fortalezas*, running from west to east, to the Castle San Cristobal, thence north to the ocean.

The oldest portion of the line is at the southwest angle, and is called the "Fortaleza," the platform of which supports the captain-general's palace, and was built in 1540. The sea-wall to the north is pierced by the gateway of San Juan, which affords entrance to the glacis of San Felipe del Morro, between the palace and the semi-bastion of San Augustine. Turning southwardly from the Fortaleza, we note the bastion of La Palma, and the semi-bastion of San Justo, in the curtain between which two is the arched entrance from the Marina, or outside ward, to the intramural city, and known as the Puerta de España. Beyond it, to the east, are the bastions of San Pedro and Santiago, the latter in the eastern wall, the middle part of which is pierced by the landward gate called the Puerta de Santiago, protected by a ravelin of the same name. The fortress San Cristobal, though sometimes called a castle, is in reality an amplification of the fortifications facing east, or landward, and extends from the bay on the south northward to the ocean.

These fortifications in their present shape were projected in 1630, and virtually finished between 1635 and 1641; but San Cristobal and the outworks were not completed until the comparatively modern date of 1771. The eastern advanced works consist of two lines of batteries, protected by a deep moat; of the small fort of San Antonio at the bridge of that name; and at the extreme eastern end of the islet a still smaller fort, San Geronimo, which defends the bridge of Boqueron.

Oceanward, reliance is placed more in the cliffs and foaming breakers than in artificial bulwarks. Directly beneath the northern wall, entrance from the city to which is by a gate through the Morro glacis, lies the principal cemetery, filled with mausoleums, *panteons*, and marble monuments. While those who can afford it are sealed up in cinerary cells of the vast columbarium against the fortress wall, other hundreds merely occupy rented graves, from which they are evicted at the expiration of a certain term of years, after a custom prevailing in all Spanish countries. Over the gateway of this cemetery juts an ornate sentry-turret, and above it stands a metal figure of the recording angel.

The houses of the intramural city are  
VOL. LVI.—70.

built mainly of *mamposteria*, with plain fronts, sometimes having Tuscan cornices, flat roofs, and iron balconies. Of the thousand houses within the walls, not more than half the number are two stories in height, but few are three, and all, of course, are chimneyless. The streets are flagged, but filthy, for the supply of water is scant, chiefly derived from rains; and though occupying an unexampled situation on a high tract of land between southern bay and northern sea, San Juan is frequently scourged with yellow fever and other diseases endemic in the tropics.

There are two plazas and several plazuelas in the city, which afford breathing-spaces, while in the Marina outside is a small but beautiful public garden used as a pleasure resort. The chief buildings are the governor's palace, the city hall, the archiepiscopal palace, two colleges, three hospitals, and eight places of worship, including the cathedral, with three spacious naves, and a high altar of finest marble. In the church of La Providencia is the special patroness of Porto Rico, Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, whose cloak alone is valued at fifteen hundred dollars, and her jewels at twenty thousand.

The largest edifice in the city is the Cuartel de Ballaja, three stories in height, inclosing an area of 77,700 meters, and used as quarters for the troops. The places of amusement are the theater, owned by the city corporation, several clubs and casinos, and the cock-pit. The last-named is to be found outside the walls, in the Marina; but the active participants in the exercises of the *valla de gallos*, the cocks themselves, are to be seen all over the city. Of a morning, particularly, the air rings with challenge and counter-challenge, sent forth in clarion tones, as at daybreak each owner of a bird (and this means nearly every male resident of San Juan) brings out his chanticleer and ties him to a stake driven into the sidewalk in front of his house. A common sight here is that of some fond fancier holding his feathered jewel in air at arm's length, and spraying head and wings with water with which he has filled his mouth. Bull-fights are rarely celebrated here, because, alas! San Juan cannot afford to import a really fine "line" of fighters, human and taurine, for the *corrida*; so the cock-pit, perforce, supplies its place.

It is difficult to differentiate the 800,000 natives of Porto Rico from their brother Hispano-Americans in Cuba, Mexico,



and South America. The statistics inform us that there is a total population of about 806,000, nearly half which number, or 326,000, are colored, many of the others very much "mixed"; and yet all adhere to the racial type, which is Spanish, as well as the language spoken by all. No great attention is paid to education, although there are 500 primary schools in the island, as well as those of secondary and higher grades. "The Puertorriqueños," says an author of the last century, "are well proportioned and delicately organized; at the same time they lack vigor, are slow and indolent, possess vivid imaginations, are vain and inconstant, though hospitable to strangers, and ardent lovers of liberty." Referring to the various peoples here, such as the Chuetas, or descendants of Majorcan Jews, the Gibaros, or Spanish-Indian mestizos, etc., the same old writer says: "From this variety of mixture has resulted a character equivocal and ambiguous, but peculiarly Puertorriqueñian. The heat of the climate has made them lazy, to which end also the fertility of the soil has conduced; the solitary life of the country residents has rendered them morose and disputatious."

A more modern author affirms that they are "affable, generous, hospitable to a fault, loyal to their sovereign, and will to the last

gasp defend their island from invasion. The fair sex are sweet and amiable, faithful as wives, loving as sisters, sweethearts, and daughters, ornaments to any society, tasteful in dress, graceful in deportment, and elegant in carriage. In fact, visitors from old Spain have frequently remarked their resemblance to the *doncellas* of Cadiz, who are world-renowned for their grace and loveliness."

The truth is that they all have the Spanish *cortesía*, and are more like the polite Andalusians of the south of Spain than the boorish Catalans of the northeast. Even the lowliest laborer, unless he be one of the four hundred thousand illiterates, signs his name with a *rubrica*, or elaborate flourish, and styles himself "Don," after the manner of the Spanish grandees; and the humblest shopkeeper, when receipting a bill, will add that he "avails himself with intense pleasure of this occasion for offering to such a distinguished gentleman the assurance of his most distinguished consideration!"

This need not imply affectation, nor even insincerity, but merely a different conception of the social amenities from that of the all-conquering American, who, it is to be hoped, will not treat this foible with the contempt which, in his superior wisdom, he may think it merits.

## THE ANNUNCIATION.

A PAINTING BY PIERRE MIGNARD, IN POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR.

BY LLOYD MIFFLIN.

THE radiant angel stands within her room.  
 She kneels and listens; on her heaving breast,  
 To still its flutt'ring, are her sweet hands pressed,  
 The while his lips foretell her joyful doom.  
 Tears—happy tears—are rising, and a bloom  
 Clothes her of maiden blushes that attest  
 The Rose she is. The haloed, heavenly guest  
 Lingers upon his cloud of golden gloom.  
 He gives to her the lily which he brings.  
 Each cherub in the aureole above—  
 Where harps unseen are pealing peace and love—  
 Smiles with delight, and softly coos and sings;  
 While over Mary's head, on whitest wings,  
 Hovers the presence of the Holy Dove.