

OPEN LETTERS.

Trade with South America.

IN the idea of the Pan-American Congress there is much that appeals to one's sense of "manifest destiny." It attracts us just as the Federation of the British Empire attracts Englishmen. The scheme is not wholly experimental, for it rests on the theory which was at the base of the German *Zollverein*, out of which came ultimately a united Germany. No one seriously dreams that from this Pan-American Congress may ultimately grow an American republic, although such an institution as an American court might easily be an outcome. It is hoped that commercial treaties will be the result, and that an enormous trade will spring up between the United States and the other American republics. But reasoning from my personal knowledge of the republic of Colombia, and assuming that what is true of that must be in some degree true of the others, I cannot take a sanguine view of the methods which have been so far proposed.

The South American delegates have been induced to come here, and they have been taken on a great sight-seeing trip. They have been shown our railroads, our grain elevators, and our mills, in the hope that they will tell their people that it would be well for them to sell their raw material to *los Americanos del Norte*, and in turn to buy goods from us. Is there an instance on record where commerce was manufactured to order in this way, or in which the laws of trade were in time of peace overridden by sentiment? Is it not true that trade has invariably passed through "the day of small things" before it became sufficiently dignified to be called commerce, and that in its inception it was the result of the efforts of one or more men who supplied to a people that which they wanted to buy? In other words, if our merchants want the trade of South America, must they not get it in the same way that trade has always been got, by carrying to other nations something they want and can afford to buy?

American manufacturers have been in the habit of forwarding to Colombia such goods as they thought the Colombians would buy, and have then been surprised to find they made no sales. Many of these goods were absolutely dead stock for the simple reason that the people had not an idea of how to use them or could not apply them. What is the use, for example, of shipping a McCormick reaper to farmers that grow no wheat? Some of the goods sent out could not be sold because, in a country of canoes and pack-mules, they could not be carried. For instance, the standard American white cotton is woven twenty-seven inches wide. This cannot be sold in Colombia, because with pack-mules the *carga*, or pack, must not be more than twenty-two inches long, as otherwise it will gall the hips and shoulders of the animals. American cotton can be roped on a pack-mule, with the bolts lashed vertically, but such a pack is very apt to get disarranged, and the *cargero*, or muleteer, charges more for the trouble he is put to. Naturally the merchants in the

interior of the country purchase English or German cotton, woven to forty-four and folding to twenty-two inches. Again, the Americans have shipped—and may still ship—colored prints to Colombia. These have been very bright and pretty, and have been such as have sold well in this country. They have not sold there except among a few of the ladies who have seen them. Why? Simply because the majority of Colombian ladies wear nothing but black and white, and the peon women do not want the new patterns. If there is any person on earth who is conservative, it is the peon woman. In colored prints she wants the same pattern and the same material her mother and her grandmother wore before her and which her daughter will wear after her. These patterns are not pretty, being chiefly purples with white spots, but, such as they are, they have been worn by the lower-class women in Colombia for centuries. Why should an American manufacturer try to overcome such a prejudice—if you like—as this? The Germans and English are wiser in their generation. They make the prints the peon women want, and they color them with the ugly purples these women admire, and they make them of a width that will pack easily on a mule, and of a weight that gives eight pieces as a mule's load. And then they sell them, and the trade grows to such a point that we are compelled to pay our Colombian bills for rare woods with exchange on England.

Mr. E. P. Pellet of Barranquilla, Colombia, at one time United States consul in that city, was so much struck with the absurdity of American shipments of prints that he procured samples of all the prints sold in Colombia. With these samples he prepared a table giving weight, width, and length, and the number of pieces of each imported through the Barranquilla and Carthagena custom-houses for one year. He mailed the whole package to the president of the Boston Chamber of Commerce, advising him by letter of his action and saying he supposed the information would be of sufficient value to the Chamber to make it worth their paying the postage. This amounted to \$2.37. The president of the Chamber of Commerce that year did not consider the package worth \$2.37, and it was returned to Mr. Pellet, who thereupon paid the postage both ways. I have that package now, and I considered it very cheap at the \$5.00 which it cost me. They are poor cottons, full of clay and not well woven, but they will sell in Colombia better than the handsomest prints made here.

We believe, and with reason, that with our great wheatfields, our enormous mills, and our labor-saving machinery, we are in a position to command our fair share of the trade in breadstuffs. We sell flour to England and she makes "biscuits," called by us "crackers," and sells them to Colombia. There is no reason why we should not have this trade if our manufacturers would consider the necessities of the market. I saw in the little town of Zaragoza some *cargeros* packing a box of American crackers on a mule. As far as Zara-

goza the box had come by steamer and steamboat, but from this point to Remedios it was to travel on a pack-mule. The box was four feet long, two feet wide, and twenty inches thick. The *cargeros* procured a long gang-saw and cut the box, crackers and all, exactly in halves. Over the open ends thus made they tied raw-hides to protect the contents, and then lashed the two halves in place with the pack rope. Alongside of this American box was one from England. It measured 22 by 22 by 20 inches, the wooden sides, top, bottom, and ends were more closely joined, and it was just the right size to pack easily. Which box would bring its contents in better condition to Remedios after a six-days' trip through woods dripping with moisture from the heavy, nightly, tropical rains — the English or the American? What were the chances for those American crackers after they had traveled for six days under filthy raw-hide covers? Who would get the next order for crackers — the English or the American merchant?

There is another factor in Colombian trade which does not seem to be at all known here, and to which I have seen no allusions in the many articles that have been written in connection with the Pan-American idea. This is the credit system of the country, a system which is so strange as to excite the constant wonder of all North Americans who study it. In a country where for centuries the people have been obliged to rely wholly on canoes, animals, or men for transportation of goods, it has been impossible for country merchants to meet the importers often. One or two visits a year have been all that could be accomplished, and out of this has grown the custom of fairs. Twice a year the importers on the coast pack up their goods and travel to Maganguè. For many years Mompos had the fairs; but the river Magdalena changed its bed, and Mompos dwindled while Maganguè grew. During the fair weeks Maganguè is filled with people, and the amount of business transacted is enormous. The merchants from the interior come down the river, bringing with them the hides, ivory nuts, dyestuffs, or whatever else they have collected during the preceding year or six months. They square up their bills with the importers either with the articles themselves or with the money they receive for them, and lay in their new stock of goods. The whole trade of the country is done at these fairs, and at them all the exports and imports change hands. It must not be supposed, however, that all Colombian trade is done at Maganguè. There are fairs at Bogota and other cities, but that at Maganguè is one of the largest. Out of this system of fairs has grown that of credit. The importer, or jobber, of the coast sells his goods to his country customers on time, and this may vary from one to two fairs, six months or a year. In fact, it might be said that the importer, or jobber, does not get his pay until the raw material bought with his goods can be sent to him. It may be seen at a glance that such credits as these make large capital necessary, and it is by no means always the case that the importer on the coast has this capital of his own. He in turn relies on the support of his correspondent in England or Germany, who must be prepared to give credits varying from one to two years; and these correspondents are helped by the English and German banks. Now when we talk about changing the trade of South America and pouring it

into the laps of our own manufacturers, these things must be considered. I know importers in Carthagena and Barranquilla who sell an enormous quantity of goods each year, and who have many of the merchants of the interior as their customers. These customers are among the best in the country, they have large *clientes*, their trade is sure, and their credit is of the best. Yet if those importers could get American goods made and packed for the market, and if they had every desire to sell them in place of English or German articles, they could not. The American manufacturers could not give the necessary credits, for our manufacturers could not appeal to American banks to help them out. What bank in New York would advance money on notes signed by South American merchants? I venture to say that outside the foreign banking houses having branches in this city, there is not one that knows the standing of the merchants in Barranquilla or Carthagena. There are a few mercantile firms that have this knowledge, but it is not to be found in the banks. Under these circumstances, does not the idea that we can get this trade by holding a Pan-American congress, by making a big "hurrah," or by glowing speeches on the identity of republican government north and south,— than which no greater bosh can be talked,— sound ridiculous? The Congress is a good thing, and from it will probably grow many valuable projects, but it is not the way to get the commerce.

I know two young men in Colombia, one a German and the other an Englishman, who were sent to that country by manufacturing houses with instructions to study the trade, the conditions of supply, the credit system, and transportation. They were also directed to buy everything of native manufacture they could find which they thought their respective houses could duplicate. Each of them spent two years in this work without selling a penny's worth, but the third year the goods began to come over. The two travelers carried these to the interior towns, where the fairs were held, and sold them. This was in 1880. In 1885, when I last saw one of these men, he told me his sales that year would be over \$150,000, and I had no reason to doubt his word. Germany and England have no patent on this method of creating trade. There are two New York houses who nearly control the trade in their respective goods in Colombia. One of them controls its specialty so completely that German and English houses, although they have imitated the stamp, name, weight, shape, brand, and packing case, cannot wrest it from the Americans, simply because merchants from the interior demand a sight of the New York bills of lading before they will buy. The managing partner in this house said to me: "We have a man who does nothing but travel in new countries. We send him into a country with orders to buy every article of native manufacture in our line. These he brings back and we make up goods like them in weight, shape, size, and finish. We make about fifty dozen, and the next year he goes back. As he travels, he gives away samples wherever he finds a man whose opinion seems worth having. Then, about two years afterwards, we get our first order. It probably is a very small one, not more than two dozen, perhaps, but we make it up and send it out. From that it grows until, ten years after our traveler went in, we have the trade. Now the secret of success in this business is to give the people

what they want, not what you think they want; to give it to them better made and of better material, and to make your profit out of the difference between machine and hand work. You maintain the trade by always keeping your goods up to standard and never trying any experiments."

And look for a moment at what that profit must be. The English goods sold in Colombia pay the retailer in the interior, the *cargeros* who carry them, the heavy freight charges of the river steamboats, the rent of houses in Maganguè in fair time,—half the people in Maganguè live off the fairs,—the importer on the coast, the steamship companies, the manufacturer who makes them, and the banks that help the manufacturer to extend credits. Eight profits, besides the cost of handling and insurance, must be paid by the peon women who buy those hideous purple prints, or the peon men who, arrayed in cotton shirts worn outside the trousers, dance the *coombiamba* to the music of the tom-tom and the rattling gourd.

We cannot get this South American commerce away from the English and Germans unless we can offer equal or greater inducements and facilities, which cannot be created in a day or a year. In the mean time we may push the commerce, but the pushing must be done in South America, not in Washington. The Pan-American Congress will do good work and its value will be seen, but this will not take the form of a sudden rush of the golden tide into the coffers of our merchants and manufacturers. They can have the tide if they like, but they must get it for themselves.

Alfred Balch.

Christopher North.

IN THE CENTURY for February, page 625, in the article "Emerson's Talks with a College Boy," is to be found the following:

Of the author of "Noctes Ambrosianæ" he [Emerson] said: "I liked him; not as Professor Wilson, but as Christopher North. He was a man singularly loved. Hare, author of 'Guesses at Truth,' wrote his life, but it was incomplete. Then Carlyle attempted it, but he wrote too much with the air of a patron, too much condescension, as a teacher might say, 'Fine boy!'—too much pat-him-on-the-head in it. I wrote Carlyle I would rather agree with Wilson than himself."

There is something very misleading in this. No life of Professor John Wilson is to be found in the collected edition of Archdeacon Hare's works, and a long and tolerably intimate acquaintance with Carlyle's writings warrants me in saying that Carlyle never wrote a life of John Wilson.

In no part of Carlyle's works is John Wilson even referred to, save once, in the "Life of John Sterling," Vol. XX., p. 186, library edition, and then only in a very brief way, showing the high approval by Professor Wilson, "the distinguished presiding spirit of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' of Sterling's literary work." Still further, the index volume of Carlyle's works, one of the most conscientious pieces of index work in our literature, corroborates what I have said.

The effect of the misstatement is aggravated by making Emerson say that he wrote to Carlyle, "I would rather agree with Wilson than himself." In the "Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson" I have not been able to find a single expression of opinion about Wil-

son. In Vol. II., p. 210, is the following from Emerson's letter in regard to Carlyle's "Life of John Sterling," sent to Emerson by Carlyle: "Yet I see well that I should have held to his [Sterling's] opinion in all those conferences where you [Carlyle] have so quietly assumed the palms." But this has no more to do with John Wilson than with Mahomet.

In conclusion, it seems to me in the highest degree improbable that Emerson could have made the statement attributed to him.

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An Anecdote of Admiral Farragut.

AT the time of the evacuation of Richmond I was at Point of Rocks on the Appomattox. Having visited Richmond, I was returning North on the boat from Fort Monroe to Baltimore when I was so fortunate as not only to be introduced to the Admiral, but also to spend a good part of the evening in listening to his shrewd but simple and unpretending conversation.

Referring to the cannon which lined the river's banks from Richmond down to Fort Darling, I said to him that I did not wonder that he did not care to try to reach Richmond by water. He replied that he did not care for the cannon, it was the torpedoes that he was afraid of. And then, in explanation of his contempt for the guns, he said that he had learned, in estimating danger, to rely much upon human imperfection, and that an experience which he had in youth taught him to do so.

That experience he went on to describe by saying that during the war with Mexico, the navy having nothing to do and getting rusty through inaction, he applied to the authorities at Washington to be allowed to take a ship or two and drop a few shells into Vera Cruz.

He was met with objections, and was told, among other things, that he would be blown out of the water by the guns of San Juan de Ulloa. "But," said he, "I told them I was not afraid of guns; and as a reason for not being afraid I gave them an account of my youthful experience. I was a midshipman on board the *Essex Junior*, under the command of Commodore Downes, a brave but somewhat reckless officer. It was during the war with Great Britain, and no vessel was allowed to enter New York harbor in the night without giving certain signals. Downes knew that there was such an order, but in haste to enter the harbor, and yet not having the signal, ventured in in the evening rather than wait till morning. When we came within range of the guns upon the shore, they opened upon us so warmly that we were obliged to lie to and send a boat ashore to explain matters. Some accident happened to the boat, delaying it so that we were under fire for half an hour within easy range, and yet were not hit. The incident made such an impression upon me that I made up my mind that there was no need of being afraid of cannon.

"At this point in my narrative," said Farragut, "De R——, who was present, exclaimed, 'The devil! Were you in that vessel? Why, I was in command at New York at that time!'

"'Ah!' said I, 'that probably accounts for our not having been hit.'"

The evening passed away in such pleasant chat, in