

2136
H49
Copy 1

*"Advance proofs from December McClure's
for release December 25th."*

The Country We Forgot

by

DANIEL HENDERSON

1919

21-6198

F-2136
1449



The bust of Christian IX still looks out over the harbor

Gift

Author

OCT 19 1920

The Country We Forgot

by

DANIEL HENDERSON

Upon complaint from certain natives of the Virgin Islands, a Congressional Committee has been appointed to investigate conditions in that territory. McClure's has anticipated Congress and "scooped" the magazine world in this story.

"THE people of the United States don't care a rap about the Virgin Islands!" said a young American whom I met in St. Thomas. "Few Congressmen realize our needs, and scarcely one person in a hundred thousand knows anything about our location, our conditions, or our problems!"

What he said was true. My own experience on the steamship "Brazos" bound for San Juan, the port from which I was to sail for the Virgin Islands, proved it. There was the typical American tourist, for instance. He came lurching down the long deck, steadying his wind-beaten bulk by frequent clutches at the rail. He espied a copy of the ship's wireless in my hand, and down into a vacant steamer chair he thumped. He read the wireless reports from home and launched into a discussion of the League of Nations. I turned the

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

conversation to the Virgin Islands. He grew apathetic. Were they near Porto Rico? No, he didn't intend to visit them—only well-known places were on his itinerary.

There were Americans on the boat whose business took them to Porto Rico. The man who sold tractors did not think there was a sufficient market for them in the Virgin Islands to justify a side trip to them from San Juan. The Hebrew clothing salesman on his annual trip through the West Indies did not see enough business in sight in this new American territory to pay him to make the trip. Americans located in Porto Rico praised the hospitality of the people of the Three Virgins, but really, it would be better for a person to spend his whole time in seeing San Juan, Ponce, and other Porto Rican towns. It seemed not so much the country we had forgotten, but instead, the country of which we had never heard.

I had expected to find a steamer waiting to transport me to the Islands; instead I found a two-masted schooner, a Herreshof yacht that had been built to defend America's cup from one of Sir Thomas Lipton's assaults, but which, failing in the trial races, had been forced to earn her salt in the sea lanes of

DANIEL HENDERSON

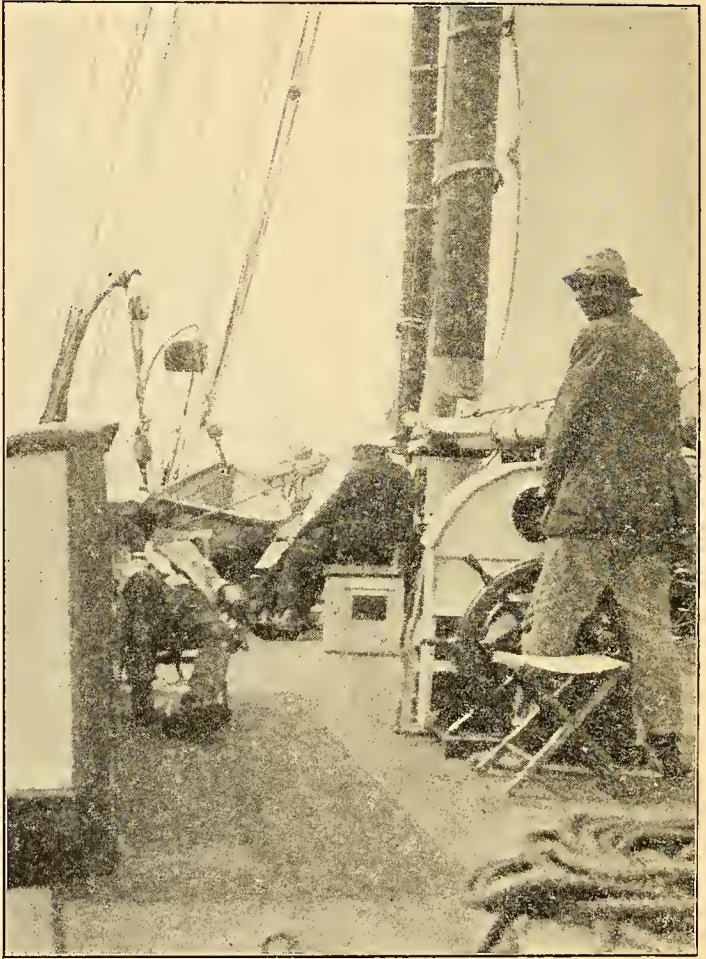
commerce by carrying all sorts of cargoes. She now lay moored to a wharf in San Juan, awaiting her share of the motors, gasoline, flour, garlic, and all those varied articles which the tides of trade had cast upon this Porto Rican shore.

I glanced at her dubiously; so did the group of young American business men who strolled down to the wharf to see me off. The "Brazos" had just plowed her way into harbor through heavy seas. It was hurricane season. Could this two-master span the eighty miles of abnormally high waves to St. Thomas without mishap? It was this boat or nothing, so I put doubt behind me and went on board.

Perched upon an odorous crate, I watched the "Virginia" load.

HERE TOO: POSTAL INEFFICIENCY

Down the street from the splendid modern building which houses the Federal offices in San Juan, came the mail. The mode of transporting it was in sharp contrast to the imposing post-office from which it came. Two brown-skinned natives in nondescript attire pushed down the wharf a grocer's hand truck, piled high with mail bags. Around the truck gath-



A deck view of the "Virginia," the sail-boat which is the only link between Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands

ered native stevedores. Each hoisted one of the bulky, blue-striped bags to the top of his head. Up the swaying boards that served as a gang-plank they went, dropping their burdens through an open hatchway in the after deck of the ship. Later I saw these bags unloaded upon boats at the ship's side, and only the nimbleness of one of the native handlers saved a carelessly-thrown bag from dropping into the Caribbean Sea. Later, at St. Thomas, I found that the personal squabbles and inefficient administration of the post-master—a political appointee—were on every tongue.

My own experiences were soon to impress upon me that Uncle Sam had paid twenty-five million dollars for these islands and forgotten to provide a way to get to them. Senators and Congressmen can visit them on battleships. The Governor of the Islands very properly has provided for him the cruiser "Vixen"; but the ordinary patriotic citizen who desires to visit our new territories from San Juan—the logical route between them and the United States—must undergo all of the discomforts and privations that attend a three or four days' voyage in a primitive sailing vessel, with no food except that which the passenger himself

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

provides, and with no other means of sleeping than in a coop on deck or in an ill-smelling cabin, the berths of which are shared indiscriminately by whites and blacks, men and women, well or seasick.

As an example of the way in which the Virgin Islanders and their relatives in the United States suffer today for lack of ready transportation to the United States, let me cite the following case:

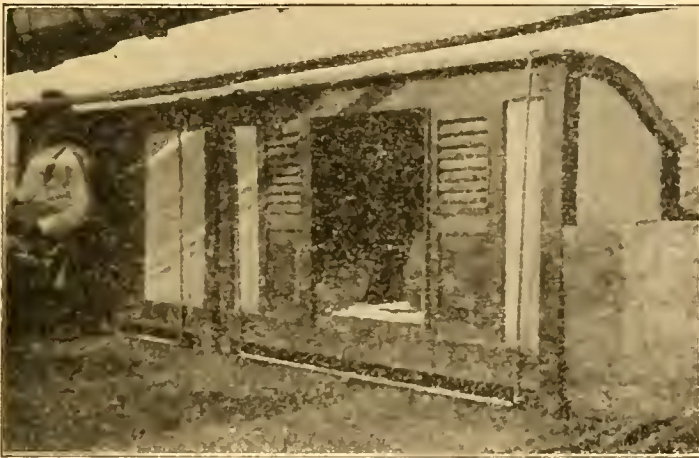
Father Blank is an American Redemptorist Father, now stationed at St. Thomas. He received a few weeks ago a cable message stating that his father, who lived in Baltimore, was seriously ill and wished to see him. No passage was procurable at St. Thomas. He came in the "Virginia" to San Juan, hoping to obtain transportation on a steamer leaving there, but was informed that all berths had been booked for weeks ahead. He tried to persuade an army transport to take him, but there was a rigid rule against carrying anyone but soldiers or their relatives. As he was wondering what attempt to make next a cable came that his father was dead.

Nothing can weave the United States more closely to the West Indian Islands than steam-

DANIEL HENDERSON

ships. On the Quebec liner "Guiana," on which I managed to secure passage home from St. Thomas, were a dozen young men and women coming from the Virgin Islands and neighboring islands belonging to Holland, France and Great Britain, to go to college in the United States. Some were even going so far as Valparaiso University, Indiana.

In March, 1917, the Danish flag went down over the Virgin Islands and The Stars and Stripes arose. The purchase price was twenty-five million dollars. From a military viewpoint the price may have been a fair one at the time. At the present time, even the price



The "Virginia's" skipper and the primitive berth in which Mr. Henderson spent three nights

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

of five million dollars, for which the islands could have been obtained a decade ago, seems high. St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix are the three principal islands of the Virgin group. St. Thomas and St. John lie close together and constitute one governmental territory. St. Thomas and St. John have an area of forty-eight square miles—about twice the size of the District of Columbia. About ten thousand people live on St. Thomas and about one thousand on St. John. Most of the inhabitants of St. Thomas are crowded into the little town of Charlotte Amalie, which spreads itself out around St. Thomas bay.

The town is built on a series of hills that form an emerald horseshoe about the turquoise waters of the harbor. The houses run from the beach up the hills, as if they intended to cover the summits, but halfway up they tire, and leave the peaks unconquered. The cluster of white and red steeples and roofs surrounded by palms and tropical flowers, and with the yellow beach and blue water at its feet, give you the impression that you are entering a quaint and lovely toy town, and the rumors that have come to you of discontent and contention and misery seem unbelievable.

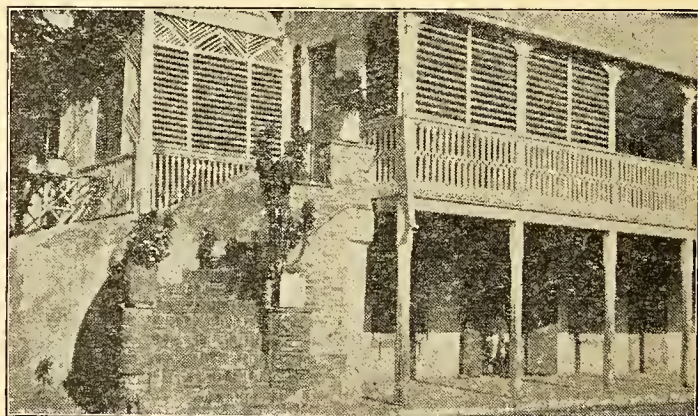


The little town of Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

On the outskirts of Charlotte Amalie dwell a little community of white French fishermen. The natives call them "Cha-Chas" in contempt. They are fishermen, desperately poor. They live in hovels that are worse than those occupied by the blacks, yet they possess a code of morals that few of their contemners can boast; and—what few of the other races here can say—they marry their own kind and keep their white strain pure.

Forty miles south of St. Thomas lies St. Croix, the largest and most beautiful of the Virgin Islands, with an area of eighty-four square miles and a population of about 15,000. Christiansted, the capital, and Frederiksted, its



A house of the better class in Frederiksted

DANIEL HENDERSON

rival, lie twenty miles apart, at opposite ends of the island, with a fair road connecting them. Christiansted has facilities for a fine harbor if the reef that bars its entrance could be dynamited. Frederiksted, the port nearest St. Thomas, has its harbor on the open sea, yet due to its southwest location, it is well sheltered.

Too many human problems press upon us for discussion to permit me to dwell upon the tropical loveliness of these islands; the humming birds that peck out of your sugar dish as you eat; the pet deer that in St. Croix are almost as common as dogs; the friendliness and courtesy of their people; the pirate castles and legends; the turbaned street merchants; the cool, ever-blowing trade winds and healthy climate; the blue waters in which bathers revel the year round; indeed all those charms that have made neighboring islands winter paradises for northern people. Given a larger American colony, and prompt and comfortable steamer service, there are big inducements here for private capital to erect a chain of American-conducted hotels on the green hills overlooking these shores.

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

AMERICAN OR DANISH?

It adds a piquancy to these towns, even if it makes one reflect that we have forgotten to create an American atmosphere here, to find Danish traditions and customs still prevailing. The Danish settlers themselves are neighborly, industrious and well-intentioned people; yet an American visiting the Islands remembers the enormous purchase price and wants at least an American atmosphere to show for it. In Charlotte-Amalie, I heard the native band play "The Star-Spangled Banner," and watched "Old Glory" rise to keep its daily vigil over the harbor; yet under its folds I saw the bust of a Danish King looking out over the harbor as if it was still under his dominion.

The street corners still carry sign-posts bearing Danish street names, such as, "Tolbodgade," "Hospitalgade," "Kongegade," etc., the last syllable in each case meaning "street." Larger than any American business inscriptions are such signs as "Den Dansk Vandiske National Bank" and "Det Vestindiske Kompagnie." These signs, it is true, have painted under them their English meanings, which are, respectively, "The National Bank of the

Danish West Indies," and "The West India Company, Ltd."

The chief inconsistency with American customs is that of the money used on these islands. Uncle Sam, when he bought them, made concessions to Denmark that do not appear to be "good business." The most glaring is the one made to the National Bank of the Danish West Indies, by which the exclusive "monopoly to issue bank notes" is continued for the term of years set forth in the original charter by the Danish government—until the year 1934. Thus we have the anomaly of an American territory dealing for the next fifteen years almost exclusively in Danish money. The yearly budgets of the three islands are made up in terms of Danish francs—a franc being equal to 20 cents of United States money. I sent a porter into the post-office at St. Thomas to procure me change for a dollar bill, and he came back with five francs and a "bit" piece in his hand—the "bit" represented the premium allowed on the American dollar. To make matters simple for Americans, it is stated in English on each coin just what its value is in United States currency. On the notes, however, there is no such translation. You read in English that

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

the bank will pay to the bearer on demand five francs in gold; the value of five francs is left for you to discover. When an American goes to draw a check for, say, \$10, he writes its equivalent in Danish money.

The bank officials are accommodating, and American business men in the Islands found no fault with them—yet to permit this Danish institution to continue its peculiar monopoly implies that even at the beginning we forgot that new American business men might come to these islands and want to use the currency to which they had been accustomed. A planter stated with a chuckle that one of the reasons he voted for the income tax was that the Danish bank would have to leave some of its large profits in the Islands, for the upkeep of the country, instead of sending them all to Denmark.

A humorous instance of Danish methods is found in the apothecary shops, one of which is located in each town. Each of the apothecaries has been granted by the Danish Crown the exclusive right to operate in its locality. When the announcement came of the purchase of the Islands by the United States, and when it became known that the Danish Bank had

DANIEL HENDERSON

been protected, the apothecaries complained to the king that they had been overlooked, and were now subject to American competition. Denmark had more money than she knew how to use. Here were loyal subjects who thought they had been injured. Money would salve their wounds. To each apothecary the king made a grant of \$30,000. Two years have elapsed since then and each apothecary is doing business at the same stand, with no American rivals in sight. Business is booming. They carry side lines of American canned goods and confections. They will continue to prosper during their lifetime—and each has stowed away at good interest—\$30,000.

THE BENEVOLENT "POOH-BAH"

Like one of Gilbert and Sullivan's immortal characters, Pooh-Bah, who filled simultaneously the office of First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chamberlain, Attorney General, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Privy Purse and Private Secretary, is G. C. Thiele, who is Judge of the Town Court, Judge of the Dealing Court for the administration of debts, Police Master, and Member of the Colonial Council by appointment. As policeman he arrests a man;

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

as judge he tries and sentences him. Hearing these things you enter his office in a critical mood, but you meet a modest, good-natured, obliging young man who smilingly confesses himself guilty to the crime of performing so many duties, and who ventures an explanation that makes you go back and reconstruct your preconceived opinion of him.

The reason is this: Until its new code of laws goes into effect several months hence, St. Thomas is being administered under the old Danish laws. Judge Thiele was formerly the assistant judge, and when his superior resigned he took his place. He is of Danish birth, but when the transfer was made he gladly complied with that section of the treaty that permitted him to become an American citizen. He then was perhaps the only man in St. Thomas who thoroughly understood the workings of the Danish law (the Islands have been such a poor field for lawyers that legal talent is lamentably scarce) and he was appointed by the American governor to administer there various offices while the temporary form of government lasts. As there is no money available to pay the salary of a Police Chief, and as there is little law-breaking in St. Thomas, he has been given charge of police

DANIEL HENDERSON

affairs. He suggests instead of criticising him for the work he is doing in behalf of law and order in Uncle Sam's new possessions, it would be fairer to cite concrete cases in which his filling these offices has worked an injustice to any person—a thing that no one seems able to do.

No one can fail to discover as he inquires among all classes of men in St. Thomas as to the way in which Judge Thiele performs his duties, that he is upright and just. His chief enemy appears to be a colored lawyer from the States whom he had debarred from practicing law because of the extortionate fees charged poor clients.

Any important sentence made by Judge Thiele is reviewed by the Governor, and in all cases the man at the bar has a right to appeal to United States courts. Only one appeal has thus far been made—and this—a minor case—is still pending in the court to which it was sent.

It is, of course, distinctly un-American for a judge to act as chief of police and trial judge as well, and the quicker this rule is changed, the better; yet one leaves the Islands with an opinion that coincides with that of all of Judge Thiele's American associates: that he is too fair and too valuable an administrator of jus-

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

tice for his adopted country to be lost to Uncle Sam.

THE PASSING OF THE PIRATES

The port of St. Thomas was once the rendezvous of pirates whose "Jolly Roger" terrorized the Spanish Main. The decaying castles of "Bluebeard" and "Blackbeard" on these shores are pointed out as the former abodes of two of the choicest of these cut-throats.

Such men are only traditions now, but it appears that up to the time the United States purchased the islands the pirate spirit existed in a more subtle and refined form. This is not to say that honest business men were in the minority in St. Thomas in those years; but, if those who know the customs of this port are to be believed, of sharp dealings there were many. Such transactions took this form:

The St. Thomas signal station would show that there was a new ship about to enter the harbor. Out to meet it would go representatives of rival concerns, each begging the captain to appoint him his agent for obtaining supplies. The skipper having chosen one, this individual would take the captain, engineer or steward ashore; provide wine or women for

his entertainment, and, when the mariner was sufficiently befuddled through such hospitality, would get his signature to a receipt for ship's stores that was two or three times more than would be delivered by the agent.

The same condition is said to have existed in regard to coaling—many a skipper or engineer would find that he had signed a receipt for hundreds of tons more coal than he had actually received, for which the owners of his boat must eventually pay. Sometimes, too, the same methods would procure from a captain permission to paint or repair his ship, when such work was unnecessary.

These practices were stopped when "Old Glory" rose over St. Thomas harbor. The honest business man—and there are many of them in the Virgin Islands—has now a fair show for the trade of the port, and the captain of a vessel does not now need to pass by St. Thomas for fear of overcharges. When the maritime prosperity of this port is renewed, its business will be conducted on a sound basis.

THE HAUNT OF THE HURRICANE

The Virgin Islander discusses hurricanes very much as we chat about the weather. The lot of the official weather observer is a hard

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

one. Each building is provided with hurricane doors and shutters in addition to the usual ones, and when warning of a cyclone comes all these must be closed. In the case of the Redemptorist fathers, who have both houses and churches to protect, it takes forty minutes to shut all their doors and shutters. When this preparation is made by the people, and no hurricane comes, they are vexed at being put to the unnecessary work; but if, on the other hand, a hurricane came without the observer having warned them of it—a tornado of criticism would be hurled at him.

The houses are roofed with galvanized iron, and it is when these are torn loose by the wind and sent flying through the air that the greatest danger prevails. A prank of the last great hurricane was to blow an aged colored man out of his bed, carry him and the bed down a hill, hurtle him against an obstruction and kill him, and then lift his corpse and leave it lying on the still upstanding bed.

WOMEN COAL PASSERS

One of the unique scenes at St. Thomas is the line of strapping colored women who serve as coal passers on the coaling deck of the

DANIEL HENDERSON

West India Company. These are full-fledged union members and idolize George Moorehead, the negro organizer who obtained for them an increase of pay from 1 cent to 3 cents a basket.

The baskets of coal weigh about 100 pounds, yet these women carry them on the tops of their heads without steadying them with their hands. Sometimes a man-of-war comes in to coal with a band on board. The band plays while the coaling goes on—perhaps there is an ulterior motive behind this. At any rate, the women, laden with their heavy baskets, walk towards the ship with a sinuous dancing movement very much like a “shimmy” and the coaling is done in record time.

Life in St. Croix and St. Thomas has been rendered vastly more enjoyable by two bands organized by our navy, and composed entirely of natives. The play in the public square, morning and evening, at the raising and lowering of “Old Glory,” and on three evenings a week give a program that is hugely enjoyed by the native population, to say nothing of the Americans. Whenever the band marches through the town it is followed by a singing, swaying crowd of darkies.

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

MARRIAGE WITHOUT CEREMONY

American standards of race purity are thrown to the winds here. The population may be considered as a mixed race. In America our census inquiries show four classes of persons: single, married, widowed or divorced. In the Virgin Islands a fifth class is added, which includes a large portion of the native population—those who live together without the marriage ceremony.

When a priest or minister remonstrates with this class there comes a variety of excuses: the white men who owned or had charge of the estates on the islands under previous governments set the example, and the couple concerned are only following in the footsteps of their masters; or a man will give the excuse that when he lives with a woman and regards her just as his "keeper," she will do the housework and in addition go out in the fields and work with him, but if he makes her his wife, then she realizes that she is more independent and will not work in the fields; or, a couple will say that they do not know yet whether they want to live a lifetime as man and wife, and therefore must have what is equivalent to a trial marriage. The trial will run on for

DANIEL HENDERSON

years, children will be born and grow up but still the ceremony does not take place. Another excuse, generally given by a woman, is that she wants to have a fine marriage ceremony, and must wait until she and the man she lives with can save up enough money to afford it. This last excuse the priests and ministers use as a means of getting such couples to marry. A wedding ceremony elaborate enough to satisfy them is planned and the long-delayed step is at last taken. In one case an old native woman stood up as a bride, in the full array of white garments and orange blossoms, surrounded by her children and grandchildren.

A native woman came to the door of one of the priests one night accompanied by four children of varying shades of complexion, and begged him to help her to get support from the government for her brood.

“Why doesn’t your husband support them?” the priest asked.

His query brought out the information that each of the four children had had a different father, each of which had deserted her and to none of which she could look for financial help.

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

Since the American missionaries began work on the Islands they have lain stress on the importance of marriage. One priest informed me that while formerly in his parish there were five marriages a year, last year there were thirty-seven.

One day, in making a religious survey of a certain sugar plantation, the observers went round with the native overseer of the place. They called at his home, saw his family consisting of a wife and three children, and then began their tour. Outside a certain hut they met a grinning half-naked urchin whom the overseer carelessly greeted. In another spot they met a little girl. When the census takers asked their names and parentage, the overseer said:

“Those are my children.”

“How is that?” asked one of the observers. I thought we met your entire family when we started out!”

“Oh,” answered the man, without the slightest indication of shame, “those are my outside children!”

Unions thus formed are dissolved as carelessly as they are begun, and because of the thousands of deserted women and children,

DANIEL HENDERSON

poverty and sickness are increased. Vigorous work must be done to save the children of these parents from following in their footsteps.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

In St. Croix, facing the harbor, stood a distinctly modern American building—the ground floor devoted to stores, the upper to offices. Gold letters painted on its stucco front told me that within this place were centered a half-dozen American industries.

In an upstairs room, clad in a cool white suit, I found a well-groomed American attending to business with the alertness and despatch characteristic of lower Broadway in Manhattan, but very amazing in this land of lazy ease.

This man was Robert L. Merwin, a native of New York State, former consular agent for the United States in St. Croix when the island was a Danish possession, and now perhaps the most representative American business man in the Islands. He is agent for the Quebec Line, Lloyd's, the New York Board of Underwriters, and has a dozen other business irons in the fire. In addition to these many interests, he is Chairman of the Colonial

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

Council for Frederiksted and is also Chairman of its Poor Commission.

I cite Mr. Merwin's activities to show the opportunities that await Yankee ingenuity and capital in these territories.

Merwin's great-grandfather settled in Milford, Conn., in 1842, and all of Merwin's ancestors are buried there. Merwin, despite his home-loving forebears, came to St. Croix in 1885, when he was twenty-two years old, to establish a branch house for L. W. and P. Armstrong, West Indian shipping merchants with headquarters in Connecticut. Merwin, after six years of West Indian experience, went into business for himself. Now, when a concern in the United States, England or Canada seeks representation in St. Croix—all inquiries lead to him.

Men like Merwin and his son, Miles, who is now ending his war term in the Navy and coming back to St. Croix to join his father in business, are fair examples of other outposts of American business I found in the Islands. For the development of these territories there should be more of our opportunity-seizing business men there.

HAVE WE A SINN FEIN OF OUR OWN?

A few months ago, Rothschild Francis, a negro representing a group of native workers in St. Thomas, presented to a committee of Congress a petition setting forth a list of grievances that indicated that there was something rotten in the former state of Denmark.

Were the grievances presented by this delegate true? Was there poverty and misery and mis-rule in the Islands? Had we forgotten that here were thousands of new Americans with problems and aspirations similar to ours, waiting in vain to enjoy the blessings Uncle Sam usually pours out with generous hand on



Rothschild Francis and a group of radicals who want home rule

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

those who come under the guardianship of his flag? It was in search of answers to these questions that McClure's Magazine sent me down 1,500 miles of blue water to the Virgin Islands.

Rothschild Francis is listed in a Commercial Directory of these islands as conductor and manager of the Eureka Orchestra Club, formerly bandmaster of the defunct "Amateur Brass Band"; vice-president of the American Historical Research Society; organizer of the St. Thomas Section, Socialist Labor Party of America (which society is stated to be "the pioneer of socialism in the Virgin Islands"); and president of the United Laboring Association. His original trade was that of shoemaker. In the September issue of a negro publication he is hailed as president of the Workmen's Council, "One Big Union." The negro labor element in St. Thomas elected him to be a member of the Colonial Council.

The work of Rothschild Francis—and of all labor union leaders on the Islands—is supported by dues of twenty cents a week levied on each member. Rothschild Francis was sent to the United States on money contributed by the members of his labor union, and while in

the States had received additional money from the Virgin Island Protective League, a body of colored men, natives of the Island, who now live in New York City. He stopped in New York on his way home to address a meeting of the latter group, and was heralded in their circulars as:

“The Honorable Rothschild Francis—
Labor Agitator, Race Fighter and Legislator.”

While I was in St. Thomas I saw the officers of his union selling in the streets copies of the September number of a New York publication entitled “The Messenger: The Only Radical Negro Magazine in America,” a publication every article of which flamed with hatred for the white man and with incitements to violence. It was illustrated with cartoons condemning the Booker Washington type of leadership and showing the “new negro” in a speeding motor car equipped with automatic rifles and revolvers, shooting down crowds of fleeing white men—to make America safe for the colored man. Next to an article advocating that the American negro adopt Bolshevism, appeared an article by Rothschild Francis on the need of changed conditions in the Virgin

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

Islands. In introducing Francis the editor also bestowed on him the title "Race-Fighter." This paper by Francis was by far the most temperate article in this hate-creating publication, yet the association of himself and his fellow-workers with so vicious a propaganda, leads one to question whether Francis is the right type of leader for the easily-swayed negro element. Rival labor leaders say that he has embraced the dangerous doctrine that all things belong to the laboring class, and is in favor of short cuts to ease and prosperity instead of the old-fashioned but true principle that the way to prosperity is through faithful, productive work.

The claim of Francis to be the leader of the working people was thrown into doubt when a colored member of a larger union handed me this prepared statement concerning Rothschild Francis's "Working People's Committee":

"It does not represent more than about 200 of the entire laboring population of this island, and these are for the most part malcontents from the largest labor organization extant in St. Thomas, which is known by the name of the "St. Thomas Labor Union," whose entire membership stand at present over three thousand strong. The president of this institution is George A. Moore-

head, the most popular labor agitator ever known here as the recorded membership of the union testifies, hence it is easy to understand from these facts that Francis is not the accredited representative of the Working People. Francis has barely succeeded in influencing a few by blatant and unreasoning appeals to the ignorant crowd, but the more intelligent class of laborers will have nothing to do with him and his movement."

One of the things Rothschild Francis advocated in his petition to Congress was a change in the present legal system by which a Judge tries a prisoner without jury, subject to review of his decision by the Governor.

Trial by jury for which Francis asks is theoretically a fair and American principle. On these islands, however, the population is 7.4 per cent. whites; 17.5 per cent. white and negro blood; and 74.9 per cent. negro blood. The negro element is very largely composed of men of untrained and primitive minds. Thus the jury box would be filled with colored men, swayed too often by negro lawyer-orators who have been inflamed by Bolshevistic principles and whose principal stock in trade is to rail against the white men who supply the capital and brains necessary to the prosperity of the Islands.

Another of the pleas of Francis is for "Suf-

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

frage based on manhood." At present the right to vote is extended to male citizens who are 25 years of age, whose personal income amounts to \$300 a year or who own real estate or other property yielding an annual income of \$60. This law thus insures that only responsible men can cast a ballot. The tendency is to give the native the franchise as soon as he has the intelligence and education to use it rightly, and a wholesale granting at present of the vote to the ignorant classes would tend to make of the Virgin Islands another disrupted Hayti!

Francis also appeals for a "reconstruction of the school system in direct accord with the American conception." Plans to do this were completed before Francis left the island. Beginning with the Fall term, schools were being conducted in accordance with American principles; and compulsory education was in force.

More of justice is present in the plea of Francis for a Homestead Act that will turn over uncultivated land to the people. The tragedy of St. Thomas, from an industrial standpoint, is that if there is not sufficient work in the harbor, the great mass of working people have nothing else to do. These have

been drawn to the town by the larger wages paid for harbor work, and once a town resident, it is hard to get the negro to go back to the land.

"Yas, I know Rothschild Francis," said the black "boatie" who ferried me ashore. "I gave some money to help send him to the States."

"What is he trying to do up there?" I asked.

"He wants to better conditions for us working men down here. You see, this harbor can't support all the workmen—not enough ships comin' in. See all that land"—he swept his arm around to include the uncultivated hills that girded the harbor—"it is mostly owned by people who live in Europe. Them people will rent land to laborers, dollar an acre a month, but after the laborer puts it under cultivation, if times are bad and he can't pay up, the land is taken away from him and thrown back into bush for stock-raisin'. We want it fixed so laborers can work the land and make this island self-supportin'."

In St. Thomas the soil is almost hopeless at present. If this land is to be opened to the native, the United States should first furnish agricultural experts to prepare it for cultiva-

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

tion and instruct the negro how to work the soil. Though the land owners protest that the average negro is too shiftless to work the soil, incentive should be given to the ambitious and hard-working negro to become a property owner. The policy, if extended, of allotting small holdings of land to the laborers will do much to keep them on the islands and promote their ambitions. Instead of charging the negro a rental that he cannot afford to pay, some fair-minded planters have adopted the plan of letting him work it on a profit-sharing basis. If this were made the universal practice, a homestead act would be unnecessary.

This "Working People's Committee" asks, too, a law to regulate the scale of wages in St. Thomas. The Government, however, has done all that is possible to set the example to private employers. In a public statement it has set forth the rule that:

"Every citizen of the United States residing in our islands should have an opportunity to earn for himself or herself by honest, healthful toil, a decent, healthful living," and has announced that while it can not impose its labor policy upon local communities, "it will welcome the public approval and support of its policy, which will become in reality the labor policy of the Virgin Islands of the United States."

Planters and harbor employers complain that the average negro laborer in the Virgin Islands is usually content with a sum of money small enough to supply his most primitive needs. If he is paid more by the day, he will stop working for the week when he has accumulated the sum he is used to receiving. Wages that seem very small when measured by the standard of the United States, are offset by the fact that the laborer lives under tropical conditions; subsists on easily-obtained fruits and vegetables, rather than meat, and needs less clothing than northern men and women.

It is true, as Francis states, that the housing conditions of the native laborers on the island are miserable and unsanitary. Their shelters are called "rooms" instead of houses, and their large families eat, sleep, bathe and entertain their friends in the one room. Americans and Danes protest that attempts to give the natives houses of three or four rooms have been made, and that they will use only one of them; yet the white men of the Island will do well to recognize that the present "room" system is a relic of a bygone age, and that they will get more efficiency and content-

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

ment out of their workers by making better provision for their physical, mental, and moral needs.

On St. John's Island, where there is no town and no industries, the poverty of the natives is extreme—one wonders how they manage to exist on the little food available. Most of them live on two meals a day. For breakfast they use sugar dissolved in hot water; for dinner, a piece of dried fish with a portion of "Fungi"—which is corn meal boiled in a bag and then squeezed dry.

The average native will not work on Saturday, Sunday or Monday. While he is kind and gentle and usually well behaved, he is also lazy and improvident. If he can work two days a week at a wage of 80 cents a day, the \$1.60 thus gained is considered by him sufficient to provide for his wants for a week. The present school authorities have been forced by such conditions to advocate, not the license which some of their misguided leaders seek, but instead a law which will compel the native to work at least long enough each week to provide food and clothing for his children, in order that these may be able to attend school.

DANIEL HENDERSON

It is the opinion of representative men of the Islands that the chief thing which Rothschild Francis came to the States to advocate lies in the clause of his petition which asks that natives be permitted to fill all public offices whenever qualified. As most of the native citizens are colored, this clause aims to fill the offices with colored men. Civil Service rules apply on the Islands and there appears to be nothing to prevent the native holding office when he fits himself for the task. A Sinn Fein movement is undoubtedly at work among the negroes of the Islands, but native ability does not strike one as having reached the stage where things will go efficiently without the brains and executive ability of the white American.

THE JUNGLE STRAIN

“Take up the White Man’s burden,
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard —”

Among the colored people on the Islands, who outnumber the whites ten to one, are a half-dozen labor agitators, with a score more enterprising young colored men waiting for

a chance to step into their places. A negro who, if born in Africa, might fill the office of a tribal chieftain, becomes in these islands a labor leader, and is 'surrounded with as much pomp and secures as much homage from his circle as an African clan bestows on its king.

The career of George A. Moorehead is a case in point. Business men in St. Thomas regard Moorehead as the natural leader of his people and prefer to deal with him rather than with his rivals. They say that he is free from Bolshevistic tendencies, and preaches to his people that to earn more pay they must produce more. The St. Thomas Labor Union, as has been said, far outnumbers any other body of workmen in St. Thomas. Moorehead originated the first successful strike at St. Thomas by which the men and women coal passers received a substantial increase. He invented a gorgeous regalia for the officers of his union; he is fond of parades and on such occasions rides at the head of his adoring followers mounted on a big bay horse.

One of the saving elements in the race situation is that, once a negro labor leader rises to power, and deals with white men as the representative of the laborers, he comes to see

that the future of his people depends on these men who supply the money and brains for the development of the Islands, and gradually become conservative. Once he has signed an agreement with the planters, or with the harbor interests on behalf of his people, he tries to make them live up to it, but there is always danger of their losing control to some "race fighter" in their own ranks who chafes at restraint.

In St. Croix, D. Hamilton Jackson, once a violent agitator, has calmed down recently, and this has given an opportunity to Morris Davis, a negro of the most dangerous type.

One day Davis, originally a field laborer, walked into the grounds of a St. Croix planter. "I hear there are workers on this estate who don't belong to our Union!" he cried. One lone toiler was pointed out as having declared his intention not to belong to the Union. Thereupon Davis ordered a "walk-out." The director of the estate hurried to the scene and demanded of Davis what his business was.

"I want justice!" foamed Davis.

The director pointed out to him that in his agreement with the labor union no clause had been inserted forbidding him to employ men

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

who did not belong to the union. "In the face of my contract, is it justice for you to interfere with my laborers?" he asked.

The only reply Davis made was to order the plastic negroes to leave the grounds. His influence was strong enough to draw them off that estate and five neighboring ones, and to tie up the work of these estates for two days during its busiest season.

The real labor leaders repudiated the action of Davis when they heard of it, and induced the workmen to return. Davis meanwhile busied himself in forming a union of the stevedores at Frederiksted, embittering them by wild speeches against white employers.

A FALSE STRIKE

Here is one of the reasons for skepticism towards labor on the part of West Indian employers:

A certain engineer in a sugar factory located near San Juan told his employer that parts of the machinery needed overhauling and that the plant had better be closed down for a few days.

The engineer had little acquaintance with labor conditions and was amazed when the factory owner said to him:

DANIEL HENDERSON

“All right, I am on good terms with the local labor leader. I will pass him a little money to call a strike. Then we won't have to pay the men while we shut down.”

The plan worked. The labor leader called the men off their jobs; they went, happy in the prospect of a holiday that was at the same time a rebuke to “Capital.” A few days later their leader told them that the strike was called off; and back to the factory they went. The machinery was working now in fine shape. Only three people knew that the wages saved by the employer had gone to pay the bill for repairs. A sorry story is this—one that reflects no credit on the factory owner; yet worth the telling to show that the ignorant class of workers in these undeveloped countries are as liable to exploitation by their own leaders as by the capitalists they rave against.

It was largely due to the incendiary talk of Morris Davis that the little garrison of marines that were recently withdrawn from Frederiksted and stationed at Christiansted were sent back post haste by the Governor. I visited a sugar planter on his lovely estate in St. Croix, where, for every white face, one saw a hundred black ones. While I sat on his porch hearing him tell of the negro uprising of 1878

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

in which his brother was killed by the blacks, I listened to his daughters and their companions dancing to the music of a Victrola, apparently as carefree as if they were in the heart of New York. The United States can forget many things about these islands but let it never forget that living in lonely sections of the island of St. Croix are families of pure Anglo-Saxon blood, the men, women and children of which are as much in need and as much entitled to police and military protection as those in the most populated sections of our country.

The laborer who is a native of the Islands is generally peaceful and industrious; it is the blacks who come from other islands to work on the sugar estates, who are irresponsible and shiftless. It is hard for the vicious type of negro to get firearms, but houses and cane-fields are easily ignited and his chief mode of destruction is to steal up under the cover of night and set fire to them.

No American is more needed in the Virgin Islands than the Marine; no one is more wanted by its white inhabitants; and yet no one has a lonelier existence than this same "Devil Dog." Few homes are open to him.

DANIEL HENDERSON

The white citizens will point to his occasional outbreaks as a reason for remaining aloof, but such outbreaks are too often caused by his being thrown on his own resources for amusement.

In the gate of the old Danish fort that serves as marine barracks at Frederiksted, I found "Yuma," a huge, one-eyed bull-dog. The young medical aide with whom I motored around St. Croix told me the dog's history, which is parallel in several respects to the story of the dog hero of "The Call of the Wild."

During the war, marines coming East from the Pacific coast, passed through Yuma, Arizona. The next day the owner of a bull-dog in that city was searching frantically for his pet. When the marines reached their destination they led out of the car as their mascot a bull-dog which they had not possessed when they boarded the train on the west coast. Singularly enough, the dog's name was "Yuma."

Fortune sent "Yuma's" new owners to various places, but always the bull-dog went along, until at last he entered upon his career as ruler over the native canines of St. Croix. To see

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

"Yuma" minus the eye that had been gouged out by an automobile, you would scarcely expect much of him in a fighting way, but I was vehemently assured by the marines that he had "cleaned up" every dog on the island. Indeed, they offered to send "Yuma" out into the country with me to a certain estate where "Yuma's" chief adversary lived, but my acquaintance with the surly-looking old champion had been too short for me to take liberties with him, so I declined the offer and accepted their word for "Yuma's" fighting ability.

A VANISHED NAVAL BASE!

There is as yet little to show that the much-heralded prosperity American possession was to bring to St. Thomas harbor is on its way. The German Hamburg-American Line was the principal customer of this port before the war. It built a great dock and its steamers touched here twice a week. It was the transshipment port for Germany for its trade in South America and this line alone made St. Thomas a thriving place. The gap left by the war, and by the shutting out of the German interests has not been filled. Where in pre-war days an

average of fifty ships a day visited the harbor, there are now barely a half-dozen.

The United States Shipping Board to help matters, has recently made this a stopping port for its ships bound to and from South America, and is building two oil tanks to supply its oil-burning vessels with fuel. The floating dry dock, which is one of the harbor's main facilities, is in active operation.

Danes still retain control of most of the harbor's facilities, and are anxiously waiting for Uncle Sam to send prosperity to the port. The Danish West Indian Company, Ltd.—a subsidiary of the East Asiatic Company—operates the coaling pier, and controls certain parts of the harbor. During the war the United States, fearing that some of its stockholders were of German birth, tried unsuccessfully to procure a list of them. Whether such was the case is problematical, but one fact would have been revealed that few people know—that the principal shareholder is Prince Axel, cousin of the King of Denmark.

Mr. H. P. Berg, managing director of this company, a shrewd business man with wide shipping experience, believes that the prosperity of St. Thomas as a shipping center will

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

be swiftly restored if American capital invests money to improve the present facilities of the harbor, and to restore the different routes for which St. Thomas was the center before the war. He holds that, owing to the great increase in the cost of ships and in their running expenses, the future shipping of the world, in order to save time and money, must be planned so that large ocean liners will touch at easily accessible ports and there transship their passengers and cargoes by smaller and cheaper vessels to their destination. St. Thomas is admirably fitted to be such a center. Steamers from Europe and America would find it convenient and economical to stop here and connect with smaller steam or motor ships plying between St. Thomas and the islands and countries bordering on the Caribbean Sea. Thus shippers throughout the world could forward their goods on bills of lading via St. Thomas. This would not only restore the property of the harbor interests, but benefit the merchants as well. Mr. Berg also advocates making St. Thomas a "free port," so that American or foreign merchants can store goods intended for transshipment there for any length of time, without paying duty on them.

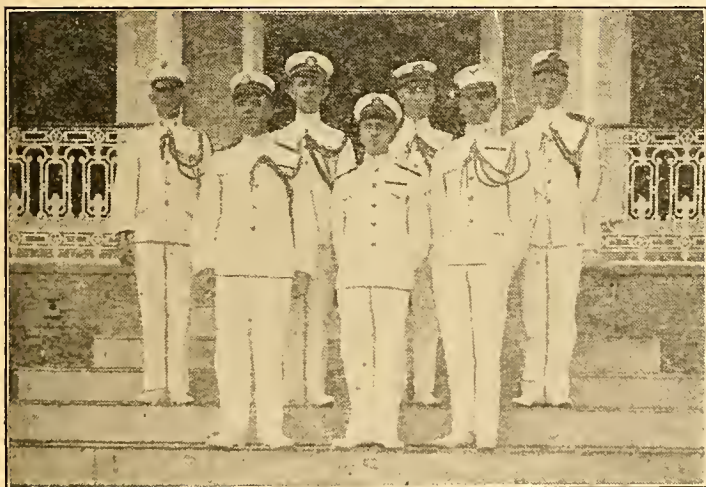
DANIEL HENDERSON

This would make St. Thomas an emporium, with ample supplies on hand for quick shipment, thus enabling American merchants to keep ahead of foreign competition.

These measures, however, are predicated upon first bringing to St. Thomas the necessary ships.

WARDS OF THE NAVY

The administration of the Islands by Rear-Admiral Oman and his staff is painstaking and efficient. The business men of St. Thomas and St. Croix agree that the new Governor is



*Rear-Admiral Joseph W. Oman (front row, center)
and his staff, efficient administrators
of the Islands*

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

democratic, easily approachable, and faithful to the interests of both territories. Around him are a staff of selected naval aides, under the leadership of Commander N. R. White, a human dynamo who has served in his present capacity since the United States took possession of the Islands, and who plunges heart and soul into every plan that will help the Islands. These aides are young, clean-cut and "on their toes" to make their administration reflect honor to the United States. Yet, for all the devotion to duty of these men, it is plain that we have forgotten them, too. Where millions of dollars would be required to bring the Islanders out of their poverty-stricken and diseased and uneducated condition, Congress allotted them at first only one hundred thousand dollars, and any other sums allotted them since have been miserly in proportion to the crying needs of the Islands.

We have forgotten to give them money for schools—though education will do more than anything else to save the boys and girls of the Islands from the evils that surround them. There are only nineteen public schools on the three islands. In the country districts the children walk four miles over hills five hun-

DANIEL HENDERSON

dred feet high. The average salary for teachers is \$24 a month. The problem of getting teachers is made still harder by the fact that due to a Navy rule, the teachers receive only temporary appointments. The country schools have no desks; the children sit on benches without backs. On the wild island of St. John, the School Director, Henry C. Blair, travels on horseback over steep mountain trails. Here the schools are eighteen miles apart. In some districts of St. Thomas and St. Croix, for lack of school houses, rooms are rented from the Moravian Church. There is need for Manual Training teachers; for high schools and night schools. There is no encyclopedia in the schools and even the school directors are forced to go without reference books. There is no map of any town or of the Virgin Islands in any of the schools. There is only a three months' supply of paper on hand. The supply of text-books is only half of the amount needed. There are no white teachers; the native teachers now employed were either trained in Denmark or in Moravian schools; these, however, have gladly embraced the American school methods now in operation. American Catholics have recently opened

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

schools, which, the School Director says, are conducted efficiently. There is no high school in the Islands and boys or girls who desire secondary or higher education are forced to go abroad. Each year from thirty to fifty pupils go out of the lower schools with no avenues open to continue their education. Thirty thousand dollars is badly needed for reform schools for girls of weak morals and for boys of vicious tendencies. At present the only school of this kind is housed in a cellar.

We have forgotten to provide free libraries in the various towns. There is not even a Dictionary available now for public use.

There are no teachers of agriculture in the schools, although most of the pupils will have to depend on the soil to earn their subsistence.

We have forgotten to provide the money needed in the hospitals. Our efficient American doctors have changed the former inefficient methods of child-birth, so that now expectant mothers are brought to the hospitals in ambulances. This has materially reduced the number of deaths from child-birth. Milk stations have been established; and babies are weighed and examined weekly. The infants are considered wards of the hospital for a

year. These methods have reduced infant mortality 50 per cent. These physicians have also taken long steps towards the control of widely-prevailing venereal diseases, but a great work is yet to be done. Ward furniture, bed linen, crockery for the kitchen, books and magazines to replace the ancient and torn literature now on the library table, are required. When the dearth of money for hospital equipment was most acute, the Red Cross came nobly to the rescue with \$60,000 worth of much-needed instruments and equipment, but there is need now for volunteer Red Cross nurses in all of the hospitals.

Our great evangelical bodies, with the exception of the Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Moravians, seem to have also forgotten these islands.

We have forgotten to provide reclamation engineers to help the zealous naval engineer who is in charge of Public Works to solve the irrigation problems of the sugar planters of St. Croix. While there is a fair rainfall here, the ground is so hard that the water runs down the hills into streams leading to the sea, and thus needed moisture is lost to the planters. St. Croix is the most fertile and productive of the three islands and can easily be made

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

self-supporting if irrigation can be successfully brought to it. It was suggested by a leading citizen of St. Croix that bonds be issued for these improvements by the group of planters who would benefit by the work, and that the issue be guaranteed by the United States. In Porto Rico irrigation has increased the output of sugar plantations over one hundred per cent., and there would seem to be small risk to the government in guaranteeing these bonds; while the prospect of making this island self-supporting would warrant the co-operation.

We have forgotten to provide money for sanitation. The streets, public gutters, markets and squares are kept clean and tidy, but none of the towns has a sewage system. In St. Thomas the harbor is used nightly for a dumping ground, and in St. Croix conditions are equally bad. There is a vast amount of public improvements desirable in the Virgin Islands, but undoubtedly the greatest needs at the present time are adequate water supplies and sewage disposal for the three towns.

In Christiansted during the last year a fire occurred that caused a large loss of property. This loss was due mainly to the shortage of water supply, which is solely derived from cisterns that catch the rainfall. The cisterns

DANIEL HENDERSON

are few and water is generally scarce. The fire engines often can not operate for lack of water. For fire protection, but more than this, for cleanliness and health, a satisfactory water system must be provided.

We have forgotten to supply adequate quarantine facilities to support Captain Liston Paine, the Chief Quarantine Officer, in his work of keeping contagious diseases away from St. Thomas. A sum sufficient to acquire Water Island, located where the vessels can be boarded before they enter the harbor, should be appropriated.

In the police department, we have forgotten to provide adequate money to pay salaries that will bring from the States men of the sterling type of Gilmore, the retiring Captain of Marines, whom the people of St. Croix want to make chief of police. The native police are drilled along military lines. In the country districts every estate is visited every other day by a mounted patrolman. Due to the regular meals the prisoners get, jail loses its hardship for many of the prisoners. The police are neatly uniformed and are evidently proud of their jobs.

We have forgotten to provide money for proper fire departments. The salaried force

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

for the three towns consists of less than a hundred men. Now, when a fire occurs, men and women, boys and girls, rush to extinguish it with buckets.

We have forgotten to supply stone crushers and similar equipment for the making and repair of roads on both islands—items vital to their prosperity.

Above all, we have forgotten to provide for a survey by experts of the agricultural, geological, labor, social, moral and industrial conditions of these islands, so that their undeveloped or retarded resources can be swiftly utilized.

ROOSEVELT'S FAITH IN THE ISLANDS

"The purchase of the Virgin Islands will cost the United States Government scarcely more than it would pay to build and maintain a dreadnaught. So it would be with the Virgin Islands. Uncle Sam should be prepared to keep their resources up to the same high standard that marks his other colonial possessions. Then, if war comes, he will have a naval station that will be worth to him a score of dreadnaughts."

The speaker was Merwin of St. Croix. The time was shortly after the beginning of the

world war. The man who sat listening to Merwin was Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, then making a tour of the West Indies, and paying an especial visit to the Virgin group, in the purchase of which he was strongly interested.

The Colonel's interest extended far beyond the mere acquirement of this naval base. He realized that the Islands should be kept up in accordance with American traditions. It was this feeling that led him to bring his fist down on the table between Merwin and himself and to say with characteristic earnestness:

"That is the best argument I have ever heard for the purchase and upkeep of these islands!"

The Virgin Islands were not self-supporting under the Danish rule, and they are not capable of maintaining themselves now. Denmark was too poor to maintain them adequately, but we have not that excuse.

The planters and shippers, who have little interest in the moral side of the drink question, complain that our Prohibition law, by closing down one of their principal industries, has further impoverished them, and they look to the United States to make good their losses in other ways. If we let these islands drift along in their present conditions serious trouble



0 015 807 005 4

THE COUNTRY WE FORGOT

threatens to arise. If we devote American ingenuity and capital to making them assets instead of liabilities, they and we will profit. They must be well policed, so that brewing labor and race troubles will be calmed and the Islands made safe for American settlers and investors.

The Navy Department is now doing its work of administration efficiently. If, however, the Naval officials at Washington can not secure from Congress the money needed to carry out the improvements for which there is a crying need, they can not hope, however good the personnel, to administer the Islands in a way that will reflect entire credit on their department. A banker returning from his second trip to the West Indies, shrewdly pointed out to me another handicap that goes with a naval administration. Officers of the Navy, he remarked, have as a matter of course, had little commercial training. The biggest problem the United States faces with regard to this new country is to make it self-supporting. The banker's suggestion was that, if the Navy Department is to continue in charge of the Islands it should have the co-operation of our biggest captains of industry in planning and carrying out the development of these plantations and