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LA ANTIGUA

Carpenter Writes Among Ruins
of the Oldest City of
Spanish America

A Capital Which Rose and Fell Before Washington Began to Be—Its Grand Cathedral

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ANTIGUA, Guatemala.

YOU have probably never heard of Antigua? Nevertheless it was long one of the great cities of the North American continent. It was famous a hundred years before any settlement in the United States began to be. It had its tens of thousands when our Dutch ancestors landed on Manhattan island, and its colleges and its cathedral when the boys of the Pilgrims were first trotting the cow paths which formed the streets of old Boston. It had palaces and public buildings when we had only log cabins, and its ruins show that it far surpassed any other city of North America for 200 or more years after the continent was discovered.

The Old Capital of Spanish America.

I have seen all the ruined cities of the world, but I know none more interesting than those of this old capital of Spanish America. I have tramped through the streets of Pompeii, and have explored the remains of Zimbabwe in northern Rhodesia. I have explored Timagad, the once buried capital which is now being excavated on the edge of the Sahara, and have wandered about over the site of old Carthage. A few years ago I was in Baalbek, that old ruin in the mountains of Lebanon, and it is only a few weeks since I wrote to you about Quirigua, the city of the Mayans in the Motagua valley, not far from here.

The ruins of Antigua lie at the foot of two mighty volcanoes. They represent a metropolis which was destroyed again and again by earthquake and eruptions until the people of Guatemala gave up in despair and moved their capital to where it is now.

The site of the city is 30 miles from the railroad, and it took me 10 hours of hard riding on the back of a mule to reach it. It was situated here in the mountains on the slopes of the Volcano de Agua and of the Volcano de Fuego, which, translated into English, mean the mountains of fire and of war.

These mountains are symmetrical volcanoes. Each is as beautiful as Fujiyama in Japan, or the Moyo volcano of southern Luzon. Fuego now and then rumbles and it is said that it may at any time break out in eruption. The Volcano de Agua is now quiet, but 14 years after the old city was started it burst forth in a deluge of water and reduced it to ruins. Some think the water came from a lake in the volcano, which the eruption threw out like a mighty cloud burst, and others say that it came from torrential rains, which had been pouring for seven days and which rolled down the mountains, bearing forests, rocks and earth in their floods.

That first city was founded by Pedro Alvarado only 32 years after Columbus first crossed the Atlantic. Alvarado was an officer of Cortez and he was sent with an army of 250 Spaniards to conquer the countries of Central America. He enlisted great hordes of Indians, subduing the natives. He reduced tribe after tribe to slavery, branding them and selling them in the public markets. He chose this place as his capital, and architects came over from Spain to lay out the city. It was just about the time of his death that the town was destroyed and the Indians here believe that it was largely done as a judgment upon his wife, who complained to the Lord because she had lost her husband.

A Seat of Culture and Learning.

In rebuilding the city the Spaniards chose a site about two miles away and there erected their capital. This remained in existence for 230 years, when it was again destroyed by the same volcano which had brought on the flood. The new capital was laid out with the idea that it would be the metropolis of North America and for generations it was the center of culture and learning of southern North America. It was destroyed in 1773 by earthquakes and at that time it had 120,000 people. In 1800 Boston had only



Practically Slaves—A Group of Indian Workmen—Officials and Soldiers at the Right.

24,000, and it was a city of wood.

This old capital of Guatemala was a city of stone and stucco. Its streets were paved with stones, and it had buildings which covered acres. It had 49 churches, four of which were parish churches, whose priests were under the government, and the others had been established by the Spaniards, who built them in gratitude for the prosperity given by the Lord. There were also eight great monasteries, five convents, two big hospitals and three massive jails. There were palaces galore, and outside the city were 70 Indian villages surrounding it like the setting of a diamond.

In the center of the city was a great plaza, upon which faced the cathedral 500 feet long and 120 feet deep. This was lighted by 50 windows, and over its grand altar was a dome 70 feet high, supported by 16 columns of stone faced with tortoise shell and adorned by bronze medallions of wonderful beauty.

The monastery of San Francisco had more than 3000 people within its walls, and the College of the Jesuits was even more beautiful. Further on I describe the ruins of these and other buildings, which give some idea of the magnificence of the capital. It was a wealthy city. Its white inhabitants had thousands of slaves, and gold and silver were brought in from the mountains and sent from here by the shipload to Spain. The land about was cultivated, and everything was prosperous beyond the dreams of avarice.

Destroyed by Earthquakes.

Then came the earthquakes and eruptions. In 1558 there was a plague, and in 1583 there was a great earthquake, which destroyed a large part of the city. In 1601 there was another plague, and 50 years later the earth trembled again, and masses of rock rolled down the mountain slopes into the city.

About a generation later the plague came for a third time, and then after a respite of 30 years the volcano had another eruption, during which the earth shook and the thick walls of the churches cracked like egg shells. The last earthquakes were those of 1773. At that time the mountains seemed to be on a continuous shake, the tiles flew from the roofs of the houses like straws blown about in a gale of wind and the bells rung as the earth trembled. The domes of the churches were split, the roofs of the monasteries fell in and many monks at prayer were buried in the debris. At last the final earthquake was on the 13th of December, 1773. This destroyed so much of the city that the people decided to move. The king of Spain took it up and sent out his orders that the site of the capital be changed. He was obeyed and the Guatemala City of today lies on a little plateau 30 miles away. It is so surrounded by ravines and gorges that the earthquakes do not trouble it. It was laid out on the plans of the old city, but it has never reached its magnificence, and the population now is

at least 20,000 less than was that of the old capital at the time of the removal, now more than 139 years ago.

The Antigua of Today.

I wish I could show you the Antigua of today as it lies about me. Some of the old buildings have been repaired and new ones erected, so that we have now here a population of perhaps 5000, made up of Indians and whites. The most of these people live in low one-story buildings of brick, covered with stucco and roofed with red tiles. Much of the material has come from the old city and the windows have antiquated balconies which extend out over the street and which are barred with wrought iron, torn from the ruins. Some of the carved wood of Moorish design has been kept and not a few of the doors are quaint and antique. Many of them have door knockers of iron, silver and brass, and some have a lattice work over the windows which reminds one of the Moors. There is still a plaza in the center of the city, upon which stand the government buildings and the ruined cathedral. The houses are painted all the colors of the rainbow. They stand close to the streets and are entered by great doors, which are sometimes heavily barred.

You see Indians everywhere, and Indian babies swarm. Nearly every woman has a baby at her breast or on her back, and the boys and girls go along with babies hung to their backs as they do in Japan. The children are put to work early. I see Indian boys of six carrying burdens and girls of the same age trotting along with loads on their heads.

From the Top of the Cathedral.

But come with me and let us take a look at the ruins. I have met here Father Rossbach, a delightful priest, who has charge of the old church of La Merced. He is an American who is doing missionary work among the people of his faith in Central America, and he has provided a guide for us in the person of a Grand Rapids boy who has come here for his health. The boy's name is Lawrence Henner. He speaks Spanish and he can show us about.

We go to the plaza, and entering the cathedral wind our way around and around up the narrow, dark steps of the tower until we come out on the mighty roof of the structure. It is formed by 14 great domes, which make one think of the buildings of Egypt. Back of these is the court, now in ruins, the walls and roof having been torn away and only the great columns with their carved capitals still intact. This building covers over an acre and it was full of worshippers when we had only log churches.

The view from the roof is magnificent. We can see how the city lies in a circular nest in the mountains. Outside the basin is covered with coffee plantations and within the buildings have patios whose gardens and orchards make the setting beautifully green. It is a town built in a forest and garden with

these mighty ruins rising out of the green.

Just next the cathedral is the old university. We enter the court, which is surrounded by arcades where walked the students of 200 years ago. A part of the building is now used as a college and in the court the school-boys were drilling. The teacher, with two whips in his hands, is directing the marching and I photographed the boys as they tramped.

The Convent of San Francisco.

We take a carriage and drive to the Convent of San Francisco. Here are the ruins of a mighty church and monastery which in their prime must have been of great beauty. The entrance gates had statues of marble and above them are the coats-of-arms of the king of Spain. We pass in through great pillars beautifully carved, enter a courtyard and thence go on to the body of the church. This is one mass of ruins, but the Indians have made homes in the walls, and they have carpenter shops and blacksmith shops where the monks once muttered their prayers. Right over the arched door is a beautiful statue of the Madonna, and in the niches of the church front are 14 statues of saints. The decoration within is wonderfully beautiful, but there are trees now growing in the main hall and moss and bushes cover the walls. Right in the main body of the building the Indians have erected an oven, where they cook, on the site of the ancient confessionals.

There is only one part of the old church which is still intact. This is a little sacristy at the left of the main entrance, where mass is regularly said. This sacristy has what I suppose are many of the ornaments of the old church. Its walls are covered with carvings, oil paintings and statues painted with gold. A statue of Christ, with a cross on his back, stands in front of the altar. It is robed in purple, embroidered with gold and bands of gold lace. At the right, protected by bars of iron, is a recess in the wall which is said to contain the body of a famous priest, who was so noted for his friendship for the poor that if he found a sick man on the street he would put him on his back and carry him to the hospital. There are numerous wax images hung to the walls of this grating. Some are of the Madonna, and others are of legs and arms sent in by the sick, who hope to be cured. There are candles burning in front of this recess. Some of the oil paintings from the old church are beautiful, as are also two benches of mosaic wood inlaid with ivory.

The Church of San Francisco was built in the shape of a cross, with a central hall, and a smaller hall crossing this at right angles. Just over the cross were three domes, each as big as the largest circus tent. Two of these domes are still intact, but the central one has been destroyed by the earthquake, and that part is roofed alone by the sky. The vines have climbed up the walls and entered the dome, and long lianas hang down into the church. It is now 140 years since these buildings were destroyed, and its ruins are practically unknown. If they were situated near Vesuvius instead of near the Volcano de Agua, they would be one of the wonders of the world, and would be mentioned in every guide book.

A Monastery Owned by Americans.

My next visit was to a Michigan institution. This was the College and Monastery of Recollection, the estate of which has been bought by Grand Rapids people and turned into a coffee plantation. I am told that they have also about 3000 acres on the sides of the Volcano de Agua, and they expect to plant this to corn.

The ruins of Recollection are about 300 years old. They are among the largest of the ancient capital, covering several acres. The walls are from two to four feet in thickness, but, notwithstanding that, the earthquakes reduced them to ruins.

The buildings were erected as a monastery and college, but the monastery is now used as a candle factory and a place to dry hides. I found a mill for grinding tallow, much like one of the old tan bark mills which were formerly common in the United States,

in the sacristy, and under the dome a lot of green hides were stretched. Nearby was an oven, used for cooking tallow, and the burning wood was smoking the altar and discoloring the ancient walls. In the patio of the College for Girls is now a cattle corral and Berkshire pigs are rooting among the debris. The estate which belonged to these buildings is now growing coffee and fruits. I went over it with the manager, Albert P. Plattie, and among other things he showed me a great concrete and stone swimming bath, built by its former owner. This bath was in the patio. It is 100 feet long and 10 feet in depth. It is formed of materials from the ruins.

The Priest an American.

During my stay here I have visited the Church of Merced, over which Father Rossbach, the American of whom I have spoken, has charge. It is a beautiful building with a front wonderfully carved. It is only 100 or 200 years old and was partially destroyed by the earthquake. It has been rebuilt and now stands on the ruins of the past. The reason for its reconstruction is told as follows:

One day when the mayor and some of the town officials were going by the ruins they heard a concord of sweet sounds. It was at the time of vespers and they wondered where the music came from. They thought they must be mistaken and got others to come and listen with them. The vespers continued and the people were so impressed that they decided to rebuild the church.

This is the tradition. The fact is that the church stands and that it is one of the most beautiful in Central America. During my visit to it it had been decorated by the Indians in honor of a saint day. They had drawn a design of a beautiful rug in the center of the hall and made the figures of this in sand of different colors. Around this sweet-smelling grass was strewn, while palm leaves lay at the foot of the altar. As we looked Indian women came in and knelt before the Madonna, crossing their hands and praying. During the holy week the Indians take the statues of Christ and the Madonna and carry them through the city from night until morning, praying the while.

This church has flat arches equal to the one at Panama. Its roof is upheld by mighty pillars, and the contrast of the white of the walls and the red brick is refreshing. It is a beautiful church, and if it were in Europe it would be one of the sights of its locality.

In the Coffee Fields.

This is a beautiful country. The soil is fertile and that about Antigua is covered with coffee and sugar plantations. The coffee trees grow from 15 to 18 feet high and they are loaded with berries. Many of the plantations are in large estates beautifully laid out with wide avenues through them. The avenues are shaded by cryptomerias, and the vegetation is that of the tropics.

There are many beautiful flowers, and great trees in blossom. There are numerous birds and this whole valley seems a Garden of Eden. It is no wonder it was chosen as the site of the ancient capital, and especially so from its beauty in contrast to the desert mountains above it.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

WHEN PAPA SLEEPS

When my pa's awake he's still
Dis alike you and me,
Never makes a bit of noise,
Dis still as he can be.

But when he goes to sleep, oh!
He makes such a clatter,
Scares you almost half to death
Wond'ring what's the matter.

First he gives a growl or two,
Then begins to rumble;
Then lets out a snort or two,
Then he'll groan and grumble.

Wonder if pa's broke inside,
Or been getting rusted?
'Spect I'd better have him fixed
Or he'll wake up busted.

—Annie Wood Cantrill.