

200.—SANITARY REPORT ON OLD PROVIDENCE ISLAND, UNITED STATES OF COLOMBIA.**By C. G. HERNDON, P. A. SURGEON, U. S. N.**

The island of Old Providence is situated about 250 miles north of Colon, from which place it can be frequently reached by schooners trading between the two places. This island, with Santa Catalina, from which it is separated by a very narrow and shallow channel, is some 4 miles long from north to south and from 2 to 3 miles wide. With the adjacent island of Saint Andrews, it forms a part of the State of Cartagena, and is governed by an official appointed by the Bogota Government, resident at Saint Andrews. The island is mountainous in its central part, one peak being as much as 1,100 feet above the sea. Its structure is coral line. On the northwest part is a harbor nearly a mile wide and extending about the same distance into the land. The mountains and hills are very rocky and covered with thickets of thorny bushes. The soil is not, as a rule, arable except along the sea-shore, where there are many little farms which extend entirely around the island. The seasons are the wet and dry; as a rule, the former begins in the latter part of April or the first of May, and continues up to the first of December. During the dry season the trade-winds are continuous, and keep the temperature at about 78° F. During the rainy season the heat is oppressive.

The arable portion of the island is very productive; sugar-cane, the cotton-plant, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, bread-fruit, yams, and both sweet and bitter cassava grow abundantly. The bitter cassava is eaten by the people up to a certain stage of its growth, after which it is fed to the hogs which thrive upon it. Excellent oranges, limes, pines, cocoa-nuts, tamarinds, &c., grow in abundance. Uncommonly fine poultry, good beef, kid, large and small pigs, can be bought at very reasonable prices. The adjacent waters swarm with fine fish and turtle.

The population, numbering between 800 and 1,000, is a mixed one, and contains but few pure whites; it is for the most part a mixture of negro and Indian, with a streak of Spanish and American blood. The negro element is for the most part from former slaves, who were sent over from Jamaica. The Indian and Spanish elements come from the mainland, and the American from seamen who have visited the island in trading vessels. The men are uncommonly tall, well developed and fine looking, and as a rule are industrious and thrifty; they engage in farming, fruit-growing, and stock-raising; many of them are expert fishermen and turtle catchers, and not a few are employed as seamen on vessels engaged in trade between the island and the United States, the

Spanish main, and Colon. The women are for the most part employed in household duties, though sometimes they work on the farm. As a rule they marry young; the child-bearing period, as a rule, begins when they are sixteen, and often continues up to the fifty-second year. Many of them are very prolific; several of them told me they had given birth to as many as fifteen children. While this may be true in many cases, I saw a large number affected with serious uterine disorders, which seemed to be due to early child-bearing, and who had been more or less disabled for years. A number of them dated their trouble to a protracted and hard labor, which had occurred early in their married life, and since which no conception had taken place. During labor they are attended by midwives who have no knowledge whatever of obstetric procedures. I had an opportunity to converse with some of the midwives, and while they seemed amiable and anxious to do their best for their patients, they had absolutely no knowledge of the subject. The people generally are very courteous in their manners and amiable to a degree. They are scrupulously neat in their persons and dress.

The whole population, judging from those I met, is an uncommonly intelligent one. It was the exception to find an adult who was unable to read and write, and in walking about the island I several times saw children, with books and slates, standing by their elders and saying lessons to them. Education is encouraged by the Bogota Government, and a schoolmaster is paid from the public funds. A strong religious sentiment seemed to pervade all classes, many of them being members of the Baptist Church, of which there are two in the island. The marriage ceremony must be performed by a magistrate, and, as a rule, is afterward also solemnized by a minister. A number of people live along the shores of the harbor, and though without any sharply defined boundaries, this settlement has been named Isabel.

Upon the arrival of the ship at Isabel I learned from some natives who came on board that a number of people in the island were greatly in need of medical attention. The next morning I went on shore and had a conversation with a Mr. Archibald, the leading merchant of the island, who corroborated the statement. I proposed to him to have a room fixed up for me as an office at some convenient place, and told him if he would do so I would come in at certain hours every day during the stay of the Albatross in port and do what I could for the people. To this he readily assented, and immediately began to fit up in his own house a large, well lighted and ventilated apartment for an office; he also sent out word to various parts of the island by people who came in during the day to make purchases that I would be at his place every morning. I was met at the outset by a difficulty in the great scarcity of medicines in the island and the entire absence of even the simplest surgical appliances. Two merchants in the town kept for sale a few medicines, but their stock in trade was very

small, and consisted principally of patent purgative preparations; a small quantity of quinine and tincture of the chloride of iron was found. In this dilemma the medical and surgical outfit of the Albatross was drawn on as far as stores could be spared. I was told that no physician had ever resided in the island, and that sometimes the people, when very much in need of professional advice, go up to Saint Andrews, or even to Colon; but only a few can afford to do this, as the trading schooners charge heavily for a passage. The island seems to have been singularly free from epidemics of all kinds. No vaccination has been practiced for years, and yet there has not been a single case of variola introduced, notwithstanding the commercial relations existing with Colon, where the disease is not at all uncommon. I urged upon several of them the importance of vaccination, for should the disease ever once get a foothold its ravages would be great. Unfortunately the Albatross was without virus at the time, otherwise I would have been allowed to vaccinate many. It may be that they are protected to some extent against variola and yellow fever by the negro element running through many of them.

This island presents an excellent field for professional work for well qualified medical missionaries, or for a young practitioner, who, during a residence here for a year or two, would gain a far more extensive personal experience than he could, as a rule, hope to gain at home in a much greater length of time. The place is easily reached, at frequent intervals, by trading schooners from Colon.

The following enumeration of diseases will give an idea of the nature of the cases which I saw during my visit to this interesting island: Febris intermittens and remittens, adynamia, diabetes, lumbago, rheumatismus (articular and muscular), anæmia, senectus, epilepsia, hysteria, neuralgia (facial and intercostal), cataracta, conjunctivitis, pterygium, hypertrophia cordis, palpitatio, asthma (catarrhus, bronchial, and nasal, acute and chronic), phthisis, pleuritis (with purulent effusion), ascites, congestio hepatis, constipatio (acute and chronic), fistula in ano, prolapsus ani, splenitis (acute); also one case of chronic enlargement of spleen, vermes (lumbricoids, common), gonorrhœa, phymosis, necrosis (of ribs and of bones of foot and leg), eczema, ulcers (leg and foot), vulnus laceratum (almost entire scalp had been torn from head by machinery of a sugar-mill), ammorrhœa, menorrhagia, prolapsus uteri, lacerati cervix uteri, ante and retro flexures of uterus, ovarian tumor, lucorrhœa (very common). The amount of venereal disease in the island is very small, only three cases in all being seen, and these were in men who had contracted the disease elsewhere.

FISH COMMISSION STEAMER ALBATROSS,

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