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### *Grand Rapids and Ponce*

Ponce, Puerto Rico, Aug. 7.—As one of the Journal dispatch boats circled slowly past the war ships and transports into the harbor of Ponce the correspondents, veterans of Santiago, and other campaigns, began to array themselves disreputably. They donned breeches of brown duck and shirts of the hues of almost every kind of vegetable, and their hats were slouch, dirty, twisty-wise and a discredit to them. The correspondents also armed themselves. In the end they somewhat resembled jail birds, which is the business of men good at the game of war.

The yacht dropped anchor and another correspondent came from the shore. He had arrived two days previously. Upon sighting the formidable group on the quarterdeck he burst into hoarse laughter. Later he explained the wonders of Ponce. It was no Daiquiri. It was no Siboney. It was no cable station at Guantanamo. Ponce, to be sure, was a city with hotels and shops and public hacks and barbers and ice and ales, wines, liquors and cigars. If a man lost all his lead pencils he could jaunt casually into the street and buy more. If there happened an unhappy soul with no tobacco, there was no period of intolerable anguish. In case of need, for instance, there could be found such a person as a dentist. And the correspondent went on to say that the generals and the newspaper men were in the habit of riding to the front—the terrible front—in carriages. The ferocity died out of the arriving war correspondents. In carriages? Name of heaven!

Viewed ashore, Ponce, two miles from its little sea port, developed four striking things immediately—American buggies, naked babies, trees laden with flaming crimson blossoms, and the enigmatic smile of the Porto Rican. They were all burning in the sunshine and dimmed by the white dust of a tropic city. They were all guarded by the American soldier, a calm, bronze and blue man with a bayonet. And herein lay the supreme interest, the interest of the juxtaposition of Michigan and Porto Rico—Grand Rapids serenely sitting in judgment upon the affairs of Ponce. This made one marvel; this was the extraordinary situation that dazed the thoughtful American. It was as if a journal had announced: “A Rochester trolley car has collided with an ox cart in Buenos Aires.” You could not gauge the thing; you remained simply astounded.

Afterward there was the enigmatic smile of the Porto Rican. It was enigmatic at first because we thought of it too hard. We weighed it too much. We reflected upon it until it became simply confusion—a conciliatory, joyful, fearful, crafty, honest, lying smile. But at length emerged this fact—the Porto Rican, taking him as a symbolized figure, a type, was glad, glad that the Spaniards had gone, glad that the Americans had come. What the troops received at Ponce was a welcome. The cheering was led by the responsible men, the merchants, the land owners, the people with purses. When your man with a purse cheers he has got to mean it. Otherwise he would choke to death.

In the applause there is a stratum of deceit, but it is furnished mainly by the peasantry, who have been forcibly taught that the Spaniards are invincible and are sure to return. Meanwhile the American soldier expresses his opinion of this probability in a new word—

Spinachers. The Jamaica negro cannot say Spaniard. His comic tongue makes him say Spuniard. The American soldier says Spinacher because when a thing becomes common he is nationally bound to extract from it whatever it may convey of our kind of irony.

Ponce, of course, bears the stamp of Spain, that stamp which shall remain forever upon Mexico and the states of Central America and South America, even as they are indelible in Cuba. It is a thing which cannot be conquered even by such superb troops as United States regulars. You can shoot a man through the head, but you cannot remove from his brain a love for the bloody death of a bull. There is the inevitable little plaza in the centre of the city, shaded with beautiful trees and threaded with wide walks. In the Moorish band stand a Spanish band operated but yesterday. Sometimes now an American band plays there of an evening. In the plaza there is also the cathedral, a fine old Spanish sign, such as one sees even in California. From the plaza radiate such streets and such scenes as one can find in the City of Mexico, the only thing lacking being the persistent, harsh cries of the street vendors. The principal hotel is the usual, quaint place, with a courtyard in which men sit and have their cognac or coffee. The walls are decorated with lamentable pictures in oil—fat and shapeless lions, palm trees, absurd urns, white palaces, lakes. The tropic sun blisters the paint, and pieces of Hon, tree, palace have fallen to the ground. Dilapidation is carefully prominent here as in all the city. Every door, every window is as high as aspiration and almost as dingy as fulfilment. The Spaniard, when he is once persuaded to polish, is a terrible person. He creates a newness a thousand times more ghastly than his ordinary dirtiness. A clean and newly painted house in a Spanish town is unreal and terrifying. And so the old city lies in the sun, dirty, romantic and patrolled by Wisconsin.