

Baltimore Morning Herald
January 14, 1901

Terse and Terrible Texts

“After the soldier goes the missionary and after the missionary the vender of malt and rye.” This, until a few years ago, was the fundamental axiom of expansion. The three great apostles of civilization—the repeating rifle, the Westminster hymnal and the corkscrew—marched far ahead, as scouts, in the rocky path of progress. The vanguard was far behind them; the main body was out of sight in the rear. No other marcher was bold enough to push forward to their side.

This was a few years ago. Today they have company. The printing press is with them—ahead of the hymnbook and the corkscrew and but a pace or two behind the rifle. When the missionary arrives in the forbidden land he finds his coming chronicled in an eight page paper; when the beer dealer drops his burden and hangs out his sign an advertising solicitor calls upon him and sets forth to him the advantages of a double column six inch “ad.” The dull roar of the press breaks in upon the rattle of the rifles, and is already a familiar sound before the missionary’s voice is heard in the field tabernacle. By the time the beer dealer’s customers are numerous enough to disturb the peace the native has become so accustomed to it that he does not hear it.

To the American volunteer is due the credit for this change of conditions. He went to Cuba with the thirst for news in his soul, and as soon as he had cleared a space upon the beach he let it be understood that the establishment of a newspaper would please him mightily. An enterprising knight of the composing stick heard him and set about gratifying him. He went to the Philippines and Porto Rico and blazed the way for the printer, as his forerunners once made room for the ecclesiastic and the man of alcohol. As a result the press of the American colonies is fit today to stand comparison with the press of most of the countries of Europe. It presents the news, and all of the news, in an attractive, rational and enterprising manner, and wields an influence which the powers that be in the future must take into account.

To the New York Journal belongs the honor of having issued the first American colonial paper. It was called the Cuban Journal, and made its appearance on board the dispatch boat *Silvia* some time before the fall of Santiago. G. E. Pancoast, a Journal correspondent, was the editor of this unique publication. The mechanical equipment consisted of a Washington hand press and two cases of type. Four men constituted the composing room force.

When Santiago fell the Journal moved ashore, but after a brief existence it died a natural death and its editor and machinery journeyed home. While it lived it was distributed without money and without price to the men of the American army and navy. In the absence of home papers it was what the rural editors call a “welcome visitor.”

After the drones had packed their grips and left Santiago forever several English papers started into being. In Havana, also, the noble science of journalism secured a firm foothold, and it was not long before Cuba was as badly newspaper ridden as New York. But one by one the

earlier sheets dropped by the wayside, until only a few of the more sturdy ones remain. At present there are half a dozen English papers upon the island.

In Porto Rico the press followed the flag with similar speed, but the welcome that it met was exceedingly chilly, and today but one paper—the San Juan News—is printed in English. Ponce was the birthplace of the first American journal. It entered the arena in October, 1898, and bore the name of the Porto Rico Mail. Theoretically, it was a translation of the *Correo de Puerto Rico*, though, as a matter of fact, much of its news was highly original. It consisted of a single sheet, 20 inches long by 12 inches wide, and appeared on the average, three times a week. Each issue contained three or four “telegrams” from the United States, one wildly ungrammatical editorial, half a dozen “want ads,” and a couple of pathetic “poems” by the editor. It was printed, apparently, with a clothes wringer, and cost three centavos a copy. After a few months’ struggle the editor decided that the bucolic Port Ricans were not sufficiently civilized to appreciate his endeavors. Thereupon he sold the plant for scrap iron and secured a position as interpreter for a traveling Indian medicine man.

The Porto Rico Journal appeared in November, 1898, and lived but a few weeks. A copy of it in the National Museum at Washington is labeled “The first American newspaper published in Porto Rico.” This, of course, is an error, as the Mail antedated it by at least a month.

The San Juan News was started in November, 1898, by a man named De Rackin, who afterward established an American newspaper in Manila. It began life as a full-fledged yellow journal, and for a while aroused much ill feeling among the native population. But later it became more polished, and today it is an excellent paper from every point of view. Ordinarily it consists of six pages—two of English news items, two of Spanish and two of “boiler plate.” In make up and printing it is of much merit. Each day about a column of cablegrams are received from the New York Sun. Hobar S. Bird is the editor and proprietor.

The *Bolein Mercantil*, of San Juan, a Spanish paper, prints telegrams in both English and Spanish, and occasionally publishes an English edition. The *Diario de Puerto Rica* did likewise until one of its editorials aroused the ire of the sturdy rural yeomanry, and its office was sacked. The editor is at present engaged in rescuing his type from nearby gutters. During the riot he narrowly escaped with his life.

Korea, the hermit nation, has a Coxey’s army on its hands, and great indeed is the gnashing of teeth among the slant-eyed Koreans. So far the dispatches received from the scene of the mustering have not included the name of the leader, but it is known that the men of the force are nearly all of the “tonghak” or “hobo” class. They are rendezvousing in the vicinity of Wiju, in the far northern part of the empire, and have already taken possession of the towns of Kusong, Yongchou and Choisan. Wherever they have marched the villagers and farmers have been forced to provide them with free board and lodging and in general to look after their comfort without recompense. The “soldiers” announce that they intend to march upon Phyong-yang and Seoul to petition the government for a redress of their grievances, though what these grievances are is rather uncertain. One report has it that they will demand that the government pension all gentlemen of leisure who reach the age of 60 years or complete 30 years of continuous service. Another says that they will request that the space between the rails of all railroads constructed in the future be paved with sheet asphalt. The authorities think that they are simply hunting for an excuse to enter the capital city and foment disturbances which may lead to a week or two of free loot.

Troops are being rushed forward to discourage them.