

Christmas Number

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AND SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

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Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, D.D., Editor.

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“ON CHRISTMAS MORN, WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN.”

THE METROPOLITAN PULPIT

The Shut-In.

A Sermon by...

Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, D.D.

Text:
Genesis 7:16:

The Lord shut him in.

COSMOGONY has no more interesting chapter than the one which speaks of that catastrophe of the ages, the submersion of our world in time of Noah, the first ship carpenter. Many of the nations who never saw a Bible have a flood story—Egyptian flood story; Grecian flood story, of which Ducalion was the Noah; Hawaiian flood story; New Zealand flood story; Chinese flood story, American Indian flood story—all of which accounts agree in the immersion of the continents under universal rains, and that there was a ship floating, with a select few of the human family and with specimens of zoological and ornithological and reptilian worlds, although I could have wished that these last had been shut out of the ark and drowned.

All of these flood stories represent the ship thus afloat as finally stranded on a mountain top. Hugh Miller, in his *Testimony of the Rocks*, thinks that all these flood stories were infirm traditions of the Biblical account, and I believe him. The worst thing about that great freshet was that it struck Noah's *Great Eastern* from above and beneath. The seas broke the chain of shells and crystal and rolled over the land, and the heavens opened their clouds for falling columns of water which roared and thundered on the roof of the great ship for a month and ten days. There was one door to the ship closed after he had entered. "The Lord shut him in." So there are many people now in the world who are as thoroughly shut in—some by sickness, some by old age, some by special duties that will not allow them to go forth, some surrounded by deluges of misfortune and trouble, and for them my sympathies are aroused, and from them I often receive messages, and this sermon, which I hope may do good to others, is more especially intended for them. To-day I address the shut-in. "The Lord shut him in."

Notice, first of all, who closed the door so that they could not get out. Noah did not do it, nor his son Shem, nor did Ham, nor did Japheth. I will tell you how it was done. A hand was stretched down from heaven to close that door. It was a divine hand as well as a kind hand. "The Lord shut him in."

And the same kind and sympathetic Being has shut you in, my reader or my hearer. You thought it was an accident, ascribable to the carelessness or misdoings of others, or a mere "happen so." No! no! God had gracious design for your betterment, for the cultivation of your patience, for the strengthening of your faith, for the advantage you might gain by seclusion, for your eternal salvation. He put you in a school-room, where you could learn in six months or a year, more than you could have learned anywhere else in a lifetime. He turned the lattice or pulled down the blinds of the sick-room, or put your swollen foot on an ottoman, or held you amid the pillows of a couch which you could not leave, for some reason that you may not now understand, but which he has promised he will explain to you satisfactorily, if not in this world, then in the world to come, for he has said, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter!"

The world has no statistics as to the number of invalids. The physicians know something about it, and the apothecaries and the pastors, but who can tell us the number of blind eyes, and deaf ears, and diseased lungs, and congested livers, and tangled nerves, and neuralgic temples, and rheumatic feet, or how many took no food this morning because they had no appetite to eat, or digestive organs to assimilate, or have lungs so delicate they cannot go forth when the wind is in the east, or there is a fog rising from the river, or there is a dampness on the ground or pavement because of the frost

coming out? It would be easy to count the people who every day go through a street, or the number of passengers carried by a railroad company in a year, or the number of those who cross the ocean in ships; but who can give us the statistics of the great multitudes who are shut in? I call the attention of all such to their superior opportunities of doing good.

Those of us who are well, and can see clearly, and hear distinctly, and partake of food of all sorts, and questions of digestion never occur to us, and we can wade the snowbanks and take an equinox in our faces, and endure the thermometer at zero, and every breath of air is a tonic and a stimulus, and sound sleep meets us within five minutes after our head touches the pillow, do not make so much of an impression when we talk about the consolations of religion. The world says right away, "I guess that man mistakes buoyancy of natural spirits for religion. What does he know about it? He has never been tried." But when one goes out and reports to the world that that morning on his way to business he called to see you and found you, after being kept in your room for two months, cheerful and hopeful, and that you had not one word of complaint, and asked all about everybody, and rejoiced in the success of your business friends, although your own business had almost come to a standstill through your absence from store or office or shop, and that you sent your love to all your old friends, and told them that if you did not meet them again in this world, you hoped to meet them in dominions seraphic, with a quiet word of advice from you to the man who carried the message, about the importance of his not neglecting his own soul, but through Christ seeking something better than this world could give him—why, all the business men in the counting-room say, "Good! Now, that is religion!" And the clerks get hold of the story and talk it over, so that the weigher and cooper and hackman, standing on the doorstep, say, "That is splendid! Now, that is what I call religion!"

It is a good thing to preach on a Sunday morning, the people assembled in most respectable attire and seated on soft cushions, the preacher standing in neatly upholstered pulpit surrounded by personal friends, and after an inspiring hymn has been sung, and that sermon, if preached in faith, will do good; but the most effective sermon is preached by one seated in dressing gown, in an arm-chair into which the invalid has with much care been lifted, the surrounding shelves filled with medicine bottles, some to produce sleep, some for the relief of sudden paroxysm, some for stimulant, some for tonic, some for anodyne, and some for febrifuge, the pale preacher quoting promises of the Gospel, telling of the glories of a sympathetic Christ, assuring the one or two or three persons who hear it of the mighty reinforcements of religion. You say that to such a sermon there are only one or two or three hearers. Aye! But the visitor calling at that room, then closing the door softly and going away, tells the story, and the whole neighborhood hears it, and it will take all eternity to realize the grand and uplifting influence of that sermon about God and the soul, though preached to an audience of only one man or one woman. The Lord has ordained all such invalids for a style of usefulness which athletics and men of two hundred healthy avoirdupois can not affect. It was not an enemy that fastened you in that one room or sent you on crutches, the longest journey you have made for many weeks being from bed to sofa, and from sofa to looking-glass, where you are shocked at the pallor of your own cheek and the pinchedness of your features; then back again from mirror to sofa and sofa to bed, with a long sigh saying, "How good it feels to get back again to my old place on the

pillow!" Remember who it is that appointed the day when, for the first time in many years, you could not go to business, and who has kept a record of all the weary days and all the sleepless nights of your exile from the world. Oh, weary man! Oh, feeble woman! It was the Lord who shut you in. Do you remember that some of the noblest and best of men have been prisoners? Ezekiel a prisoner, Jeremiah a prisoner, Paul a prisoner, St. John a prisoner, John Bunyan a prisoner. Though human hate seemed to have all to do with them, really the Lord shut them in.

All the men and women that tossed in that oriental craft had lived long enough to remember a great many of the mercies and kindnesses of God, and they could not blot out, and I think they had no disposition to blot out the memory of those brightnesses, though now they were shut in. Neither should the shut-in of our time forget the blessings of the past. Have you been blind for ten years? Thank God for the time when you saw as clearly as any of us can see, and let the pageant of all the radiant landscapes and illumined skies which you ever looked upon kindle your rapturous gratitude. I do not see Raphael's *Madonna di San Sisto* in the picture gallery of Dresden, nor Rubens' "Descent from the Cross" at Antwerp, nor Michael's Angelo's "Last Judgment" on the ceiling of the Vatican, nor "Saint Sophia" at Constantinople, nor the Parthenon on the Acropolis, nor the Taj Mahal of India; but shall I not thank God that I have seen them? Is it possible that such midnight darkness shall ever blast my vision that I cannot call them up again? Perhaps you are so deaf that you cannot hear the chirp of bird or solo of cantatrice, or even organ in full diapason, though you feel the foundations tremble under its majestic roll, or even the thunder-storm that makes Mount Washington echo. But are you not grateful that once you could hear trill and chant and carol and doxology?

Again, notice that during that forty days of storm which rocked that ship on that universal ocean of Noah's time, the door which shut the captain of the ship inside the craft, kept him from many outside perils. How those wrathful seas would like to have got their wet hands on Noah, and pulled him out and sunk him! And do all of you of the great army of the shut-in realize that though you have special temptations where you are now, how much of the outside style of temptation you escape? Do you, the merchant incarcerated in the sick-room, realize that every hour of the day you spend looking out of the window, or gazing at the particular figure on the wall-paper, or listening to the clock's ticks, men are being wrecked by the allurements and uncertainties of business life? How many forgeries are committed, how many trust funds are swamped, how many public moneys are being misappropriated, how many bankruptcies suffered! It may be, it is, very uncomfortable for Noah inside the ark, for the apartment is crowded and the air is vitiated with the breathing of so much human and animal life; but it is not half as bad for him as though he were outside the ark. There is not an ox, or a camel, or an antelope, or a sheep inside the ark as badly off as the proudest king outside. While you are on the pillow or lounge you will make no bad bargains, you will rush into no rash investments, you will avoid the mistakes which thousands of men are every day making.

Notice, also, that there was a limit to the shut-in experience of those ancient mariners. I suppose the forty days of the descending and uprising floods, and the 150 days before the passengers could go ashore must have seemed to those eight people in the big boat like a small eternity. "Rain, rain, rain!" said the wife of Noah, "Will it never stop?" But after awhile it cleared off, Sunshine, glorious sunshine! The ascending mists were folded up into clouds, which instead of darkening the sky only ornamented it. As they looked out of the windows these worn passengers clapped their hands and rejoiced that the storm was over, and I think if God could stop such a storm as that, he could stop any storm in your life time experience. If he can control a culture in mid-sky, he can stop a summer hat that flies in at your window. At the right time he will put the rainbow on the cloud and the deluge of your misfortunes

will dry up. I preach the doctrine of limitation, relief, and disenthralment. At just the right time the pain will cease, the bondage will drop, the imprisoned will be liberated, the fires will go out, the body and mind and soul will be free. Patience! The last week of the Noachian deluge came, the last day, the last hour, the last moment. The beating of the rain on the roof ceased, and the dashing of the billows on the side of the ship quieted, and peacefully as a yacht moves out over quiet Lake Cayuga, Como, or Luzerne, the ark, with its illustrious passengers and freight, glided to its mountain wharfage.

Notice, also, that on the cessation of the deluge the shut-ins came out, and they built their houses and cultured their gardens and started a new world on the ruins of the old world that had been drowned out. Though Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after this world-wide accident and no doubt his fellow-passengers survived centuries, I warrant they never got over talking about that voyage. Now I have seen Dore's pictures and many other pictures of the entrance into the ark, two and two, of the human family and the animal creation into that ship, but I never saw a picture of their coming out; yet their embarkation was not more important than their disembarkation. Many a crew has entered a ship that never landed. Witness the steamer *Portland*, a few days ago, with 100 souls on board, going down with all its crew and passengers. Witness the line of sunken ships, reaching like a submarine cable of anguish, across the ocean depths, from America to Europe. If any ship might expect complete wreckage, the one Noah commanded might have expected it. But no! Those who embarked, disembarked. And I now cheer with this story all the inmates of sick-rooms and hospitals, and those prisons where men and women are unjustly undungeoned, and all the thousands who are bounded on the north, and south and east, and west by floods, by deluges of misfortune and disaster. The ark of your trouble, if it does not land on some earthly height of vindication and rescue, will land on the heights celestial.

If you have put your trust in God you will come out in the garden of the King, among orchards bending with twelve manner of fruits, and harvests that wave in the light of a sun that never sets. As the eight passengers got that craft of Captain Noah never got over talking about their seafaring experiences, so you who have been the shut-ins of earth will add unbounded interest to the conversation of heaven by recalling and reciting your earthly experiences, and the rougher those experiences, the more thrilling will they be to yourself and others who listen. As when we sit amid a group of soldiers and hear their story of battle, or a group of sailors and hear their story of cyclones, we feel stupid because we have nothing in our life worth telling, how uninteresting will be those souls in heaven who had smooth sailing all their lives and no accidents, while Noah tells his story of the deluge, and Lot his story of escape from destroyed cities, and Paul his story of the Alexandrian corn-ship, and you tell your story of the days and nights and years of the times when you were shut in. I hail all the shut-ins because they will be the come-outs. Heaven will be all the brighter for your earthly privations and environments. What a heaven it will be for those who were always sick, when they are always well; and after twenty years of pain to have millions of years of health! What a light will be the light of heaven for those who on earth could not see their hand before their faces! And what will the music of heaven be to those the tympanum of whose ears for many years has ceased to vibrate! Denied on earth the pleasure of listening to Handel, and Haydn, and Mendelssohn's Symphonies, at last reaching a world where there has never been a discord and hearing singing where all are perfect songsters, and oratorios in which all the nations of heaven chant! Great heaven it will be for all who get there, but a hundred times more for those who were shut in.

Meanwhile you have all divine and angelic sympathy in your infirmities. The mightiest test of character is physical suffering. Critics are impatient at the way Thomas Carlyle scolded at every thing. His seventy years of dyspepsia were enough to make any man scold. When you see people out of patience and

irascible and lachrymose, inquire into the case, and before you get through with the exploration your hyper-criticism will turn to pity, and to the divine and angelic sympathy will be added your own.

By a strange Providence, for which I shall be forever grateful, circumstances with which I think you are all familiar, I have admission through the newspaper press, week by week, to tens of thousands of God's dear children who cannot enter church on the Sabbath and hear their excellent pastors, because of the age of the sufferers, or their illness, or the lameness of foot, or their incapacity to stay in one position an hour and a half, or their poverty, or their troubles of some sort will not let them go out of doors, and to them as much as to those who hear me I preach this sermon, as I preach many of my sermons, the invisible audience always vaster than the visible, some of them tossed on wilder seas than those that tossed the eight members of Noah's family, and instead of forty days of storm and five months of being shut in, as they were, it has been with these invalids five years of "shut-in," or ten years of "shut-in," or twenty years of "shut-in." Oh, comforting God! Help me to comfort them! Give me two hands full of salve for their wounds. When we were three hundred miles out at sea, a hurricane struck us, and the life-boats were dashed from the davits and all the lights in the cabin were put out by the rolling of the ship, and the water which through the broken skylights had poured in. Captain Andrews entered and said to the men on duty, "Why don't you light up and make things brighter, for we are going to outride this storm? Passengers, cheer up! Cheer up!" And he struck a match and began to light the burners. He could not silence either the wind or the waves, but by the striking of that match, accompanied by encouraging words, we were all helped.

And as I now find many in hurricanes of trouble, though I cannot quiet the storm, I can strike a match to light up the darkness, and I strike a match: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." I strike another match: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." I strike another match: "We have a great High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and he was in all points tempted like as we are." Are you old? One breath of heaven will make you everlastingly young again. Have you aches and pains? They insure Christ's presence and sympathy through the darkest December nights, which are the longest nights of the year. Are you bereft? Here is a resurrected Christ, whose voice is full of resurrectionary power. Are you lonely? All the angels of heaven are ready to swoop into your companionship. Here is the Christ of Mary and Martha when they had lost Lazarus, and of David when he had lost his son, and of Abraham when he had lost Sarah, and of your father and mother when in time of old age they parted at the gates of the tomb. When last I was in Savannah, Georgia, at the close of the Sabbath morning service, I was asked to go and see a Christian woman, for many years an invalid. I went. I had not in all that beautiful city of splendid men and gracious women seen a face brighter than hers. Reaching her bedside, I put out my hand, but she could not shake hands, for her hand was palsied. I said to her, "How long have you been down on this bed?" She smiled and made no answer, for her tongue had been palsied; but those standing around said, "Fifteen years." I said to her, "Have you been able to keep your courage up all that time?" She gave a very little motion of her head in affirmation, for her whole body was paralytic. The sermon I had preached that morning had no power on others compared with the power that silent sermon had on me. What was the secret of her conquest over pain and privation and incapacity to move? Shall I tell you the secret? I will tell you: The Lord shut her in.

There is a good deal of fanaticism abroad about the recovery of the sick, but if we had as much faith as Martin Luther we would have Luther's success. His friend, Myconius, was very ill, and Luther fell upon his knees and said, "O, Lord, no! Thou must not yet take our brother Myconius to thyself. Thy cause will not prosper without him. Amen."

Then he wrote, "My dear Myconius: There is no cause for fear. The Lord will not let me hear that you are dead. You shall not and must not die. Amen." Luther's letter so excited Myconius that an ulcer on his lungs broke, and he got well. Would to God that like that we might be able to pray, that we might have similar results! Oh, men and women, visible and invisible! The probability is you will never write your autobiography. It is the most difficult book to write, because you are tempted to omit passages in your life that were not complimentary to yourself, and to quote from a diary, which is always incomplete, because there are some things which you do not think best to write down. As you will not undertake an autobiography, the story of yourself, I will take the responsibility of presenting your biography, which is the story of one's life by some one else. If you will give your love and trust to Him of Bethlehem and Calvary, this will be your biography: "Born at the right time, but the most important event in his life was when he was born again. Died at the right time, but long before that he had died unto sin. In his life there were many sorrows, wave after wave, storm after storm, but he outrode everything and landed in eternal safety. Why? Why? Because the Lord shut him in."

But do not think that heaven is made up of an indiscriminate population. Some of my friends are so generous in their theology that they would let everybody in without reference to condition or character. Do not think that libertines and blasphemers and rejecters of God and His

PORTO RICO'S NEGLECTED CHILDREN.

Not a Single Sunday School on the Island, and Only One Protestant Church —
An Inviting Field Ripe for Home Missionary Effort.

WITH the conclusion of the labors of the Joint Peace Commission at Paris, and the acceptance of our terms by Spain, Porto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, in lading the Sulu Islands, become colonial possessions of the United States, and Cuba is also relinquished to our keeping to be hereafter disposed of as our government may decide. Our title to these vast new possessions has now been ratified, and the way is open for American civilization and enterprise to confer upon the people who have come under our charge the benefits of which they have been so long deprived.

One of the first considerations which naturally appeals to the thoughtful American is that the religious freedom guaranteed to our new possessions, heretofore kept in slavish ignorance and darkness by the medieval religious policy of Spain, should be made a reality with as little delay as possible. The islands offer a field for missionary effort such as can be found nowhere else on the globe, and the inhabitants, as far as can be learned from the most authentic sources, are ready to welcome Christian workers and the Gospel with open arms and responsive hearts.

While THE CHRISTIAN HERALD, in conformity with its policy on all previous occasions where Gospel effort was involved, will cheerfully render whatever

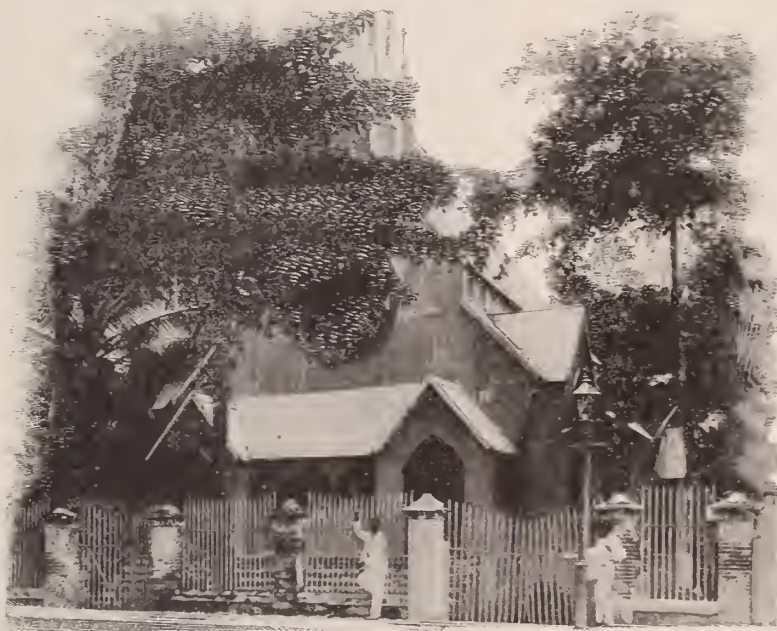
monial and devotional exercises of the Romish ritual, and taught the innumerable legends and traditions of the Catholic saints, instead of the rudiments of a common school education. Their school buildings are mostly mere sheds, while their cathedrals and military barracks are in a style that is palatial in comparison. Now that the island is under American control, our public school system will be introduced, and substantial and permanent advantages will be reaped by the children of Porto Rico.

There is at the present time *only one Protestant church on the whole island*—that shown in the photograph on this page. It is a cheap, temporary, unsubstantial building, located in the city of Ponce, a great commercial centre, and the second city of importance on the island. When our soldiers arrived at Ponce, after the capitulation, they found the little church closed, and it was quite evident that the "religious tolerance," boasted of by Spain in its West Indian dominions, had here a characteristic exemplification.

With nearly a quarter of a million children, Porto Rico has *not a single Sunday School*. Mariolatry, image-worship, and every form of monkish belief and superstition, the Romish church inculcates on young and old, but religious education, and especially for the children, is unknown. It is not surprising that they should grow up with a confused notion of spiritual things, with no conception of the Saviour and his Divine mission, and without chart or compass to guide them on the voyage of life. These children are now Americans. They belong to our beloved Union just as much as do our little ones of the West and South and North and East. We have taken them into the fold, and shall we deny them the advantages our other little ones enjoy? They are not in need of material things, for their fertile island supplies all that is necessary from its own rich soil, but they need our help, nevertheless. We will shortly send them teachers and school books and all the paraphernalia of properly equipped class-rooms for secular education. Let us not forget to give them, also, the higher training in things spiritual. THE CHRISTIAN HERALD believes it to be one of the first duties incumbent upon us in Porto Rico, to *open Sunday Schools* and to gather in the children in every city, town and village under the banner of that blessed One who said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

This is a Christ-like work in which our readers, who have already done so much for the children of our land, can heartily join. Through their generous co-operation, many Sunday Schools have been founded in our Western and Southwestern States, from some of which churches have sprung where the Gospel is now preached with power and blessing. If only a beginning of Sunday School work were made in Porto Rico, where the field is ripe for the harvesters, who can say what glorious results might not follow? With schools established at Ponce, San Juan and Mayaguez, the movement would quickly extend to all parts of the island, and thousands of the dusky-skinned Porto Rican girls and boys, who, till now, have never heard a line or syllable of the beautiful Gospel message, would learn of the gentle Saviour.

Teachers, Testaments in the native tongue, Sunday School cards and general material for the work will be needed, but these it will not be difficult to supply. THE CHRISTIAN HERALD would be pleased to hear from any of its readers who may feel drawn to this work among the little neglected children of Porto Rico. It is not a mission to far-distant Africa or China, but a home mission, right at our doors and among those who are members of our own family and household, and whom we should love to lead into the light of Gospel truth and liberty. Any contributions for the work forwarded to THE CHRISTIAN HERALD, 2 Bible House, New York, will be acknowledged and applied toward the establishment of pioneer Sunday Schools in Porto Rico. Announcements of the work will be made in these columns from time to time as it progresses.



THE ONLY PROTESTANT CHURCH IN PORTO RICO.

It is at Ponce and was found closed when our soldiers arrived there. The illustration is from *The Story of Beautiful Porto Rico*, published by Laird & Lee, Chicago. Copyrighted, 1898.

Gospel have "letters of credit" that will draw anything from the Bank of Heaven. Pirate crafts will not be permitted to go up that harbor. If there are those who as to Heaven are to be "shut-ins," there are those who will belong to the "shut-outs." Heaven has twelve gates, and while those twelve gates imply wide-open entrance for those who are properly prepared to enter them, they imply that there are at least twelve possibilities that many will be shut out, because a gate is of no use unless it can sometimes be closed. Heaven is not an unwashed mob. Show your tickets or you will not get in—tickets that you may get without money and without price, tickets with a cross and a crown upon them. Let the unrepentant and the vile and the offscourings of earth enter heaven as they now are, and they would depreciate and demoralize it so that no one of us would want to enter, and those who are there would want to move out. The Bible speaks of the "without" as well as the "within." Revelation 22:15: "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Through the converting, pardoning, sanctifying grace of God, may we at last be found among the shut-ins and not among the shut-outs!

assistance lies within the scope of its influence to the spiritual workers in our new territories, it meanwhile invites the attention and sympathetic interest of its family of readers to the opportunities Porto Rico affords for the beginning of a work specially calculated to enlist their energies and to repay their efforts. The population of Porto Rico is estimated at 800,000—now all Americans, and looking to the Stars and Stripes not only for protection, but also for enlightenment and blessing. Their country is pictured by those who have visited almost every nook and corner of it as the "garden spot of the world." Columbus, who discovered it on Nov. 16, 1493, during his second voyage, gave it the name of Puerto Rico, or "Rich Port." It has an area of 3,668 square miles, and many beautiful towns and villages. It is the healthiest of the West Indian group and one of the richest in varied products. Yet with all its natural advantages, Porto Rico lacks many of the elements that are essential to the happiness of its people.

Although education has been nominally free, only about seven per cent. of the population can read and write, the reason being that the 31,541 pupils in the schools of the island, under the direction of the Catholic Church, are drilled in the cere-