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A Spanish Renaissance Church and Monastery for Cartagena, Columbia, South America.
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and

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A Spanish Renaissance Church and Monastery for Cartagena, Columbia, South America.

The recent increase in trade between the United States and the Central and South American countries, should cause the cities and towns along the Caribbean Sea to grow in size and importance.

Cartagena, Columbia, should especially become a great seaport town. It is admirably situated and has a fine large harbor, the sixth or seventh finest in the world. The coast at this point is rough and dangerous, and although Cartagena lies directly in the sea, it can be approached only through a narrow passage called "Boca Chica" which opens into the southern end of a large land-locked bay, called the Bay of Cartagena, at the other or northern end of which several miles away the town is situated.

Historically Cartagena is one of the most
interesting places in South America. Its history is full of romance and adventure. Early in the 16th Century the Spanish began to settle this part of the country, and Cartagena was one of their earliest cities. Santa Maria, the oldest settlement in Colombia, was founded in 1525. Eight years later, 1533, Cartagena was begun by Pedro de Heredia, a Spanish soldier and adventurer, who named the place Palomar. This soon became one of the most prosperous places in this part of Spanish America because its port was found most convenient for the Spanish fleets. In those early days when pirates and buccaneers infested the Caribbean Sea, a strongly fortified port was a necessity, so the Spaniards built a great wall about the city, erected several forts in the harbor, and strongly fortified "Boca Chica," the harbor entrance.

Time and again was this famous old stronghold of Spanish power in the New World
been attacked and besieged by Englishmen, by Frenchmen, by Spaniards, by buccaneers and pirates, and many times in spite of its strong fortifications has it been captured and sacked.

In 1585, the English under Sir Francis Drake laid siege to Cartagena, took it, and practically laid it in ruins. About a hundred years later the city was again captured and sacked, this time by the French under Montier Le Pointi. In 1741 the English Admiral Vernon lost 700 men and part of his fleet in a vain attempt to capture the place.

Cartagena was the first city of “New Granada” to declare for independence from Spain and it was during this War of Independence that it gained the name of the “Néréis City” for in 1815 it was taken by the Spaniards only after a four months’ siege in which nearly all the garrison and the inhabitants perished.

Guided by the great Bolivar this War of Independence was successful and in the
year 1819, Columbia established herself as a republic. The capital of Columbia is at Bogota. It is called the most inaccessible capital in the world for it lies inland high up in the mountains. The principal cities of Columbia are Barranquilla and Cartagena.

Cartagena as seen from the liner harbor presents an interesting outline against the sky. Church towers, the old palace of the Inquisition and other buildings rise above the crumbling ramparts. Here and there are groves of Columbia Cedar, of palms, and other tropical trees. Cartagena itself has quite the character of a 16th Century Spanish town, and has quite a number of interesting bits of Spanish Renaissance, not however of any special value architecturally. Most of the streets are ill-paved, narrow and winding, and have unexpected sharp turns with picturesque views. To the west lies the ocean, separated from the bay of Cartagena by a narrow sandy spit. On the other side
eastward rises an abrupt eminence called "La Popa" hill. "La Popa" hill dominates the whole
and labor, the town, and can be seen far out to
sea. It is called "La Popa" because of its resemblance
to the poop deck of those galleons used in the
earby days.

Upon the summit of "La Popa" hill can be
seen the ruins of an old monastery, the
"Monastery of Madre de Popa." The history of
this monastery is closely connected with the
history of the town lying just below it.
Ecclesiastical buildings seem to be nearly always
among the first permanent structures of a
new place. The old monastery must have been
often the scene of stirring events.

The top of the hill is practically flat and
forms a plane not more than 300 feet square.
The best views are southward down the bay
of Cartagena and westward where the
view extends over the city at the foot of the
hill, far out to sea. A rough picturesque—
road leads down to the town.

Let us imagine now that the monks of the Monastery of Madre de Dora have found their quarters too small and inadequate for them, and that they are planning to tear down completely their present old dilapidated buildings, and erect in their place a suitable Church and Monastery.

Let us imagine further that they are sensible monks and have commissioned an architect to work up the necessary scheme for them.

The drawings which accompany this, their outline and the following brief text are supposed to be the results of the architect’s study.

Unquestionably, because of the strong Spanish character of Cartagena, the only suitable style of architectural expression for this Monastery and Church is the Spanish Renaissance style of the middle
period when the style became more classic and yet retained much of the minute new of detail characteristic of the Plateaques. This style the architect has adopted with the idea that the effect of the whole composition should be rather picturesque than too monumental. For this reason also the architect has decided to use a single tall tower not in the center of the group but off to one side, as a specially interesting accent. The dome of the church is to be of colored stone similar to the dome of the Church of the Well, Cuada de, Mexico. The Monastery and Church have been placed side by side practically on the same level with their main entrances on the West side, the Monastery on the south with the view for the library, Refectory, the Commons and the monks' rooms extending either southward over the harbor or westward over the city. The Tower has been located at the
north west corner of the whole group. It is a plain tower about 30½ square and rises to a considerable height. The top is richly decorated. The monastery is two-storied and surrounds an open cloistered court which is about 100 feet square. The facade of the monastery itself is designed somewhat after the style of the Convent of San Marcos, Leon. The arcades of the cloister is two-storied and forms the corridors of the monastery, since the tropics interior corridors are almost unnecessary. The cloisters are designed after the style of the Patio de del Palacio Arzobispal, Alcalá de Henares. The archways and windows follow the general type of arches and windows found in the Church and Cloisters of Sigüenza Cathedral.

A large picturesque portal leads to the inside of the Church, which is about 20 feet by 200 feet. In form the Church fits a cross, with a dome at the crossing. The span is
About 40 feet along the side are tombs and monuments. Pilasters, richly decorated, support a rich Corinthian entablature above which are several windows. The ceiling is flat and beamed. At the transept is the Jesus altar for the people who come up from the tomb to worship in this church. On either side of this small altar are small gateway in large iron screens or rejas. Back of these wrought iron rejas the people are not allowed. This space is for the monks and includes the transept, the chapel which is off the north transept, back to the apse, which is circular and contains the high altar. Now off to the right lead to the chistae. On the left opposite are located the sacristies, where the treasures of the church and manuscripts are kept.

For the construction of the church and the material to be used the architect has planned to use as far as possible native
laborers and workmen, and natural stone and wood. Some of the special features have to be done by imported skilled labor or foreign material - as for example special marble for the tomb.

The native timber especially the cedar is splendid. The choir stalls and the pews are to be built of this wood. Much of the local stone the architect finds fairly suitable for the general construction for the columns and the pilasters.

Although this scheme of the architect is not a frivolous one being only a tentative scheme, he feels he has studied the problem carefully and has presented, if not a perfect solution, at least an acceptable one.

Meade Bolton
May 26th, 1916.