
Subtítulos

Dr. Agustín Stahl, physician and naturalist
Bayamón, P.R. november 19, 1898.

On behalf of Pres. Wm. McKinley
I request from you a report on the
flora, fauna & natural history of the Island.
Signed, Rev. Dr. H.K. Carroll, Special
Commissioner for the U.S. in P.R.
The natural history of P.R.
is yet unstudied.

What is known is from studies made
in the neighboring non-Spanish islands.
From references to our flora & fauna
by our historians and chroniclers
like Oviedo, Abad y La Sierra,
J.B. Muñoz & the Frenchman Ledrú.
and of course, my own efforts.
These writings, my collection.
my life dream: a museum of natural history
in P.R. What 's to become of it all?

What do we really know
of these animals,
plants and the very origins
of this marvelous Island?
In truth Dr. Carroll, my collection
may look like a grab bag
of found objects
These pieces and yet
at what cost to me

and how much hard work
to put it together.

All my life I've been on a mission:
to know how the island was formed
and its first inhabitants, what were they like
These people doomed to disappear?
I will never forget my first encounter
with the exuberant nature of this Island
the mysteries and secrets of the past:
my adventures exploring the
Rio Blanco in the Rain Forest.

The casual observer who has
traveled the island at the break dawn
feels in the fields and forests of
Puerto Rico transported.
Their spirits soar to the sublime
regions of the mind and spirit.
We live in a land where transportation
is nearly impossible
made worse in the rainy season
due to the lack of good roads
and our impenetrable forests.

The indians called their island Boriken.
Strategically located in the Caribbean
at the gateway between the Americas
its flor and fauna is a splendid mix
of tropical species, native and foreign.

Coffee came from Arabia, sugarcane & rice
from Spain, bananas and coconuts from Africa.

Native to the Isand are yuca,
malanga, avocado, tobacco,
and a wealth of crops and timber
all available for the common good.

On this journey I was accompanied
and assisted by my friend Miguel.

We made our way into the Yunque Rain
Forest via the Río Blanco de Naguabo
to look for rare species, some surely
unknown and never before classified.

The beauty and grandeur of our landscape
the coolness of dawn
the splendor of dew in the grass
awakens in quiet spirits the most
gentle thoughts and emotions.

Wrapped in the mist of nite
and spurred by the waking dew
my soul hungered to unearth
the unknown history
of the people who perished
and whose past still speaks to us

through found objects
and monuments they left behind.
The 4 seasons of the year are barely
distinguishable one from the other.
The summer rains and heat
go from June to October
coinciding with the hurricane season.
The lay of the land is irregular, the highland jagged
and the highest peak is the Yunque
in the Sierra of Luquillo.

Referencing my research were the
writings of travelers and historians
and especially the very monuments
left behind by our native peoples
and the evidence found in plants, rocks
and the fossil record
of our tropical Caribbean zoology.

Streams everywhere race down
mountain slopes to form our largest rivers.
Luko o Lukón is the name given by the indians
to the Yunque, our highest peak.

I was reminded of names found in
Anahuac suggesting a kinship between
our native peoples and our neighbors
of the Gulf of Mexico.

Looking into these mysteries I headed
into the heart of the sacred forest of the indians.
For days we explored up and down the river

and in and out of the forest.

By that river run I traced out the future line
of my work and research as a naturalist.

It was there I first questioned
what man and time
had left behind in what is today
our motherland.

—Miguel,

last nite I dreamt of her.

—Who?

—My first wife, the German.

I'm feeling her here, everywhere around me.

—Yes, I had a dream, too.

It was like a shadow.

My father used to say

You got a being haunting you

And I feel something pushing me.

Don't laugh. That's why

I push on.

So, you dreamt of your German wife.

What was it like over in Germany?

—Fantástico, Miguel, fantástico.

They're recording history,

writing the future.

We stroll through the Botanical Gardens.

tour the museums of Berlín.

The kind of museum you want

here in Puerto Rico, right?
—Exactly. That's my big dream,
A Museum of Natural History here in P.R.
with samples of our flora,
fauna & history all in one place
for people to study and appreciate.
And in the bargain you wouldn't mind me
collecting my own cut of pebbles of gold, right?
Surely not, Miguel, not at all.

Miguel and I always got back
loaded with samples.
Some we kept for the collection,
some we ate
and all of them we classified,
measured and sketched.

Here in our schools
studies of nature are taught
Using books with flora and fauna
totally different from our own.
All the names and examples
Are to plants
that are not known here.

In my work I describe
our flora & fauna
using as examples common plants
and animals people here know.

Someone should publish
a textbook for use in our local schools,
an enviable chore I leave for
others.

In the midsts of this infinite variety
of species one inevitably asks
has nature provided this or the other
with any particular value or importance?

How strange, that in a country
Where gold abounded
in the early years of the conquest
and is rich in minerals
today is unable to help itself
and pay for part if not all
the public debt that hobbles its growth.
As Miguel broke stones looking for gold
I wondered if a secret connection
existed between the evolution of
the Island and its ultimate conquest?
First the forced labor of the indians
then African slavery all to feed
the insatiable greed of the colonizers for gold .
For thousand of years the rains and rivers
have transformed the face of the land,
rocks turned into pebbles then into sand
and finally shoring to the bottom of the sea.
There, immense pressure

and turbulent cataclisms
compacted sands and sedimentation
turning them once more
into the huge rocks that today
make up our peaks and mountains
and this has been so for millions of years.

Our giant hardwoods are excellent
for building ships, houses and furniture.

It's a shame that the need to cook
with charcoal threatens to reduce to ashes
our best hardwoods.

Trees like the yaya,maricao, ausubo,
and tortugo are now practically extinct.

We have but to examine the face
of the land to understand
the natural history of the Island.

Along the highest ridges
huge granite rocks
pile up helter skelter
in total disarray.

At some time in the distant past
the whole island must have been
buried at the bottom of the ocean

until a vast explosion
blew it up
above the surface of the sea.

Volcanic eruptions
continued to drive up
from the ocean bottom

the enormous granite masses
that cooled on the surface
to make up what today
are the jagged mountains
of Luquillo, Naguabo and Yabucoa.

The river reflected
the stream of thoughts
rushing through my mind.
To understand the flora & fauna
One has to know how the geography
and geology of the island came to be.
And how on these layers of soil,
plants and fossils our first inhabitants
left their mark before the arrival
of the Spanish conquistadors.

One day one of those
missing links to the past
made his appearance.
He was a dweller of the forest
and likely a direct descendant
of the famous Carabali
our legendary runaway slave
of bygone days.

I was running past here
looking for a place to hide
hoping to find the hut

my grandmother once had.

I kept moving and stumbled
on a huge snake
twisting and turning in her nest.

Dig away.

It's buried right there.

Get it.

That's it.

There it is.

I can see now,
our native people
hunted down by packs of dogs
starved to death, cut down by the sword.

Yeah, before me came others
and after me others will follow.

When I ran away
this stone doll saved me.
It was showing me the way.
I ran into another big snake
and didn't stop until this here spot.

The stone doll saved my life.

So don't take it from me.

This box I dug it up.

Go ahead, open it.

You open it.

There's not much here.

Looks like letters,
burned pieces of paper,
entries of a diary.
1868. Don't know what to do.
Father's death has been
A heavy blow to the family.
The rebellion in Lares doesn't help matters.
The Creoles and mulattos are up in arms.
Think I best sell the farm.

December 22, 1849. The law requiring
working papers is going nowhere.
Just another failed move
Typical of this government.
A black runaway is worth more...
That was me.
...than six of these weakling white squatters.
One runaway showed up recently
who's like a raging bull.
That was me.
It's Xmas eve.
It's All Saint's Day.
Father shipped our first harvest,
one ton of dried coffee beans.
We've been here now 5 years
in this God forsaken hole
that's more like
a living hell.

I saw how it all came down.
They stripped the forest. The coffee crop in ruins.
The Corsican bossman died.
Termites ravished the house.
Everything went to pot
and I was left with nothing. Look, see .
Ashes to ashes
and the rest, silence.

And so all came to an end, with the river
rushing through that stretch of solitude.

The river, like time carrying
in its flow the pain of cries
no longer heard.

After that encounter I was sure
that the origins of our indians
were to be found amongst the peoples
of our neighboring continent.

The stone objects left by our indians
Bear a striking resemblance
to those of ancient México & Yucatán.

I am convinced there was
a direct link between
the early peoples of Boriken
and those of the Gulf of Mexico.

My own is probably the largest collectiion

of ancient artifacts in the Antilles.

And keep in mind it represents
the efforts of a single individual
with no help at all from either
government or state institutions.

And this, moreover, in a country
where such intellectual pursuits
are viewed as mental aberrations.

The truth is, Dr.Carroll, that my
life's work may seem to be a
hopeless cause, but I hold fast
to the illusion, that one day,
be it in a far distant future,
my dream may still come true

The End
