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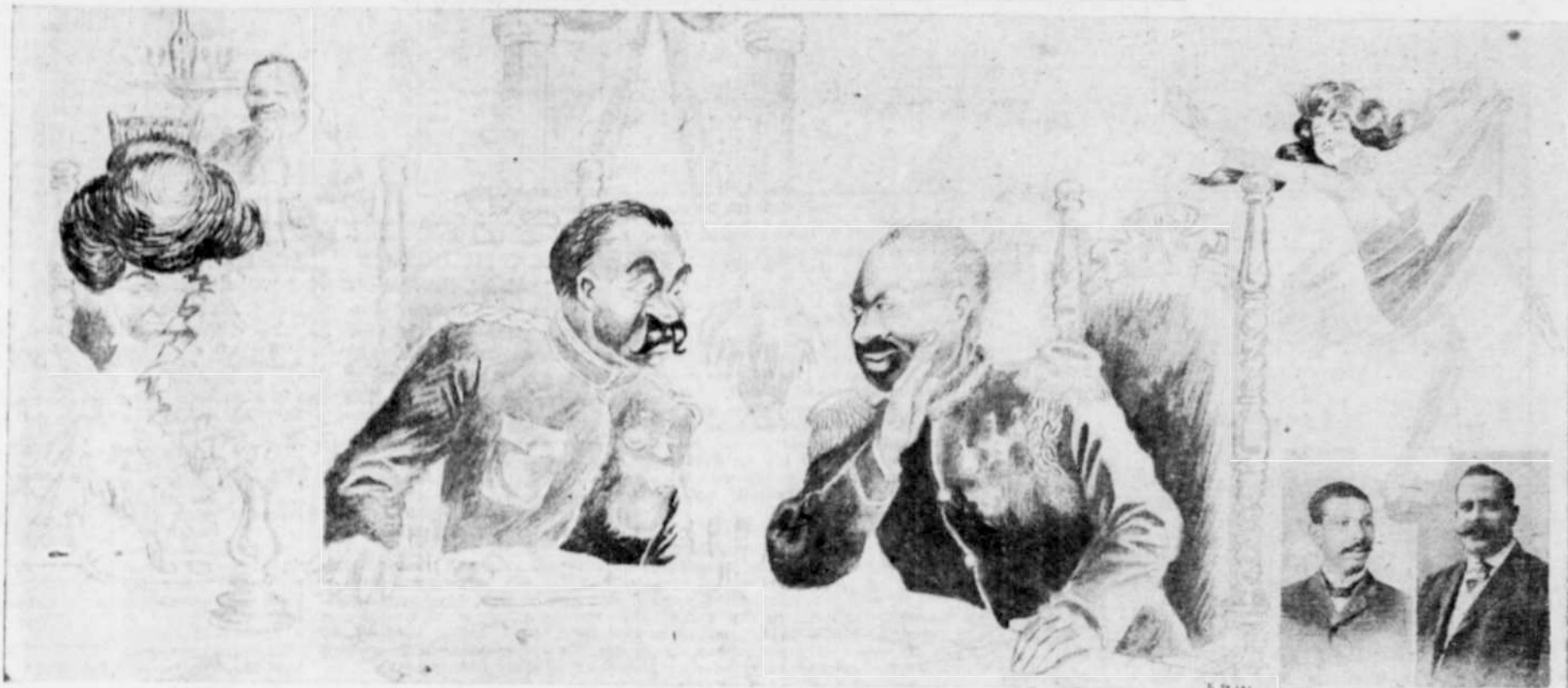
True Stories
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THE ILLUSTRATED FEATURE SECTION—June 6, 1931

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Iron Handed Black President of Santo Domingo



Heureaux invited his enemies to dinner first and then had them shot. "How did you like that dinner?" the President asked his General. "Excellent," was the reply. "Glad you liked it, old chap," laughed the President, "for it's your last. Have some more liquor and another cigar." Inset—President Ulises Heureaux, and Ramon Caceres, his assassin and successor in office.

In the twenty-one years before him, there were twenty-four presidents and twenty revolutions. In the first sixteen years after his death there were thirteen presidents and seven revolutions. Heureaux ruled the island for twenty years before he was assassinated. Conspirators against Heureaux and the government were invited to the palace and turned over to the firing squad.

General Ulises Heureaux, "strong man" of the Republic of Santo Domingo, was not only one of the ablest of the many Spanish-American dictators, but one of the most fascinating figures in the history of Latin America.

In that disturbed Republic he maintained unbroken peace for twenty years which was a record. In the twenty-one years preceding him there had been twenty-four presidents and twenty general revolutions.

Santo Domingo which constitutes two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola or Haiti, has had a very stormy career. Discovered by Columbus on his first voyage, that great navigator, himself, was its first governor. Under Bartholomew Columbus, his brother, and other Spanish governors, it rose to be very wealthy, but the rise of other colonies on the mainland, caused a withdrawal of home support and it declined.

In 1801, it was captured by Toussaint L'Ouverture and made a French colony and still later it was dominated by the Republic of Columbia. Thrice it has been won and lost by Spain; twice it has been a republic under its own rule, and once under the supervision of the United States. In addition it has had several wars with Haiti.

Santo Domingo is as rich in history as any other country in the New World. Of all lands, Columbus loved it best and his dying request was to be buried there. He was interred in the old cathedral and his remains are still there, though the Spaniards hold that they transferred them to Spain before their withdrawal from the island.

Santo Domingo also has the oldest cathedral and the oldest fort in the New World and Negro slavery was first established there.

This republic differs from its neighbor, Haiti, in that it is predominantly mulatto, while the population of Haiti is nearer the pure African.

The majority of the mulattoes in Haiti were wiped out by massacres ordered by Christophe and Dessalines. Dessalines to create the Haitian flag, tore the white out of the French flag, leaving the red and the blue.

Later to mark the supremacy of the blacks, Dessalines inserted black, vertically. After the driving out of the Haitians, the Dominicans took the red and the blue Haitian flag and ran a white cross through its centre to mark peace and union between the black and white races.

The frequent changes of government in Santo Domingo together with long warfare with Spain and Haiti had created a state of chaos. War had bred a large crop of adventurers, totally disinclined to pursue commerce or agriculture. These soldiers of fortune found politics the quickest way of making an easy living. Ambitious and domineering leaders arose like mushrooms, with passions so heated that violence and bloodshed were the only arguments heeded.

Assassination followed assassination with startling rapidity.

After freedom had been won from the Spaniards, conditions were so unsettled that annexation to the United States had been suggested by certain leaders. With this end in view the United States had sent a commission, composed of Frederick Douglass and others to the island, but later the proposal was defeated because of opposition both in America and in Santo Domingo. Since then affairs had grown steadily worse.

The great trouble of the republic was financial. The state was heavily saddled with debt, the greater part of which was composed of foreign loans that had been contracted at ruinous interest. There were also the indemnities due to certain European powers, whose nationalists often demanded heavy damages for trivial reasons.

The story is told of a Danish mer-

chant who once demanded \$10,000 for alleged violation of concessions. When told by his consul that the Dominican government was poor, and that he would be fortunate if he received \$40, the Dane readily agreed to accept that. The paying of these crushing debts and indemnities has been the great handicap of the republics of Haiti and Santo Domingo — the real cause of all their internal strife. To meet payments other usurious loans had to be made, which in turn caused heavy taxation and discontent.

Such was the state of affairs when Heureaux came on the political scene in 1871, at the age of 26.

But first, a brief sketch of his previous career.

Heureaux was born in Puerto Plata, Santo Domingo, in 1845, of full-blooded Negro parents, though it has been said that he had a Syrian strain on his mother's side. His father, a

Haitian sailor, had given up the sea for business.

Young Heureaux, taken into his father's shop, found trade too unexciting and went off to join the army. The Dominicans were then fighting against Spain for their independence. Heureaux distinguished himself from the start and rose in a short time to be a general. He was then only 18.

His courage and daring were so conspicuous that he quickly gained the reputation of being the bravest man in the army. Nothing seemed to delight him more than to find himself surrounded by several of the enemy then to hew his way out with revolver or cutlass. His skill in the use of both these weapons was unexcelled. Many times he was dangerously wounded.

After the defeat of the Spaniards in 1865, Heureaux found peace and his father's shop again too dull. Mounting his horse and gathering a few followers, he rode off to the Haitian border, Santo Domingo had an old unsettled boundary dispute. Haiti claimed land that stretched well into territory the Dominicans insisted was theirs. Going into this disputed territory, Heureaux began raiding farms and driving off cattle.

But once more peace was made and again Heureaux found himself in an

occupation too tame to suit his taste. He had been given a post in the customs service. Only one path seemed open to him—politics.

At that time there were three parties, the Blues, headed by General Luperon, a black man; the Reds, led by General Baez, half-Indian, half-Spaniard, who had long opposed the Spaniards and the Haitians; and the Greens, under General Gonzalez, a mulatto.

Colors were chosen because political issues seemed to have been lacking. It was a case of the "ins" and the "outs." Heureaux, taking service under Luperon, aided him in defeating two successive presidents. But some time later when Luperon tried to elevate himself to the presidency, he found his dashing subordinate, Heureaux, barring the way.

Soon after, Heureaux was elected to supreme power. In the presidential chair, his popularity continued. Affable and generous, but precise and firm, he was the idol of the working people and all who welcomed a rest from the incessant strife. His manners were princely, and a subject of special comment by foreign visitors. The women adored him and he had the reputation of having broken many hearts. It was a case of the iron hand in the velvet glove.

His first step was to try to rid the country of the host of political aspirants that swarmed about the treasury. Some he won over by giving them lucrative posts, others by bribes and flattery. Those, however, who would be content with nothing less than the presidency, and tried to reach it by military force, he suppressed with the firing squad. He spared neither friend, foe nor former companion-in-arms.

One of his most trusted men was General Marcheno. In 1892 and 1894, he had sent him to Europe to negotiate loans, which Marcheno had done successfully. Later Marcheno opposed Heureaux for the presidency. Heureaux won easily and Marcheno began to plot against him, whereupon Heureaux had him shot with little ceremony.

Heureaux had a vein of dry humor, which became famous. For instance, hearing that his brother-in-law was plotting against him, Heureaux invited him to the palace, entertained him regally, and at the close of the meal, quietly asked him:



Map shows how island between Cuba and Porto Rico is divided between Haiti and Santo Domingo, the land Heureaux ruled.

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