

THE FIVE REPUBLICS OF CENTRAL AMERICA.
By Dana J. Munro. 332 pages. Oxford University Press.

The author spent some two years in these countries and derived his information as far as possible at first hand. It is the fairest presentation of conditions and problems yet made and is indispensable to everyone in the least interested in the Isthmian lands. After a brief description of the Isthmian region as a whole, Munro sharply distinguishes the three parts into which it actually separates — Guatemala, Salvador-Honduras-Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The large, northern republic of Guatemala has always had a dominant influence. In Spanish times it was the center of administration. Too rich and powerful to be willing to subordinate itself in a society of nations, it has always been the chief obstacle to every plan of union. With a population three-quarters made up of pure Indians, it has been a land of large estates, the successful development of which has depended upon the worst kind of peon labor. The three middle republics — Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua — have much in common. The population is almost wholly mestizo — mixed blood — there being few pure Indians. In Nicaragua and Honduras there is much undeveloped land and a scant population. Turbulence and revolution have been conspicuous. Salvador is, in many ways, the most interesting part of the Isthmus. It has the densest population in any American country, yet is the smallest republic of the New World continents. It exhibits an industry and enterprise beyond its neighbors and has ever been notable for advanced and liberal ideas in politics. Natural community of interests, general similarity of population, and geographical position unite it, however, with the other two; and there is no good reason why the three should not combine into one aggressive and developing nation, with Salvador as leader. The republic of Costa Rica has always pursued a rather independent line of development. The Indian is of no importance in her present population; the turbulent mestizo is less in evidence than in the three middle republics; Spanish blood is present in larger proportion than anywhere else in Central America. Land is chiefly in small holdings and the owners have been more inclined to occupy themselves in its development than elsewhere. The people have been ambitious, but politics have been sane; revolutions

have been few; though tenacious of her rights, Costa Rica has largely left her neighbors to themselves.

Munro studies the problems of Central America in detail. That the five republics might wisely unite has been recognized from the first. Almost immediately after their bloodless revolution against Spain, they did unite into a nation of Central America. That has not been the only attempt at union. Not only have general unions of all been attempted, but many efforts have been made to combine two or three of the middle republics. Revolutions have been so common in Central America as to become a byword. Still, where they have not been instigated by outsiders, there has usually been some actual principle or legitimate tendency involved. Wars between the republics have been frequent and unfortunate. Our own interference in Central American affairs has done little good and has been chiefly effective in arousing distrust and hatred. The Conference of Washington in 1907, held at our instigation, gave promise of result by the neutralization of Honduras and the establishment of the Central American Court and the International Office, but the influence of these has been more than destroyed by our inexcusable interference through years in Nicaragua and our defiance of the decisions of the Court when they are adverse to our schemes. There has been little of self-determination for the Central American republics since 1909, and our interference—dictated purely by commercial policies—has been continuous and selfish.