GOODMAN WALTER

THE PEARL OF THE ANTILLES, OR AN ARTIST IN CUBA

Walter Goodman

The Pearl of the Antilles, or An Artist in Cuba

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24936029
The Pearl of the Antilles, or An Artist in Cuba:

Содержание

Walter Goodman
The Pearl of the Antilles, or An Artist in Cuba

PREFACE

Cuba having lately become a prominent object of attention, both to Europe and America, I venture to think that any trustworthy information that can be given respecting it, may prove acceptable to the reader. I approach my task with no great pretensions, but yet with an experience acquired by many years' residence in the Island, and an intimate intercourse with its inhabitants. I arrived there in 1864, when Cuba was enjoying uninterrupted peace and prosperity, and my departure took place in the first year of her adversity. Having thus viewed society in the Island under the most opposite conditions, I have had various and ample opportunities of studying its institutions, its races and its government; and in availing myself of these opportunities I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to avoid those matters which are alike common to life in Spain and in Cuba.

As I write, Cuba is passing through a great crisis in her history. For this reason my experiences may prove more interesting than they might otherwise have done; nor do I think that they will be

found less attractive, because it has been my choice to deal with the subject before me from the point of view rather of an artist than of a traveller or a statistician.

Perhaps I may be allowed to add, that the matter contained in these pages will be almost entirely fresh to the reader; for, although I have included a few papers which I have from time to time contributed to *All the Year Round*, *Cassell's Magazine*, and *London Society*, I have taken care to introduce them in such a manner as not to break the continuity with which I have endeavoured to connect the various parts of my subject.

In explanation of the title chosen for this volume, I may remark that 'the Pearl of the Antilles' is one of the prettiest in that long series of eulogistic and endearing titles conferred by poets and others on the Island of Cuba, which includes 'the Queen of the Antilles,' 'the Jewel in the Spanish Crown,' 'the Promised Land,' 'the Summer Isle of Eden,' 'the Garden of the West,' and 'the Loyal and Ever-faithful Isle.'

Walter Goodman.

22 Lancaster Road,
Westbourne Park,
London: 1873.

CHAPTER I.
A CUBAN WELCOME

Our Reception at Santiago de Cuba – Spanish Law – A Commemorative Feast – Cuban Courtesy – Coffee-House Politeness

My companion and brother-artist, Nicasio Rodriguez y Boldú, is a native of Cuba, and as he has signified his intention to visit his birthplace in the West Indies, we bid 'addio' to fair Florence, where for three years we have dwelt together and followed our profession, and, embarking in a French steamer at St. Nazaire, we set sail for the Pearl of the Antilles.

Our official reception at Santiago de Cuba is far from cordial. Before we land, the Spanish authorities meet us on board, and, after a careful inspection of our passports, present each of us with what they call a 'permit of disembarcation,' for which we have to pay sixteen reales 'fuertes.' Having, so to speak, purchased 'tickets of admission' to the Spanish colony, and having also deposited our luggage in the 'cloak-room' of the establishment – which in this instance is represented by a custom-house – we naturally expect to be favoured with a 'bill' of tropical performances. No such bill is, however, presented to us; but

as a substitute, we obtain full particulars by application, within a month after our arrival, to the chief of police. From this functionary we learn that our 'tickets of admission' are available only for one quarter's sojourn in the island, and that if we desire to remain for a longer period, an official 'season-ticket' must be procured. The authorised programme of the 'Loyal and Ever-faithful Isle' is divided into a great many Acts. One of these acts announces that 'no foreigner is allowed to reside more than three months in the island without procuring first a carta de domicilio (habitation license), which he may obtain by a petition supported by the consul of his nation.' The carta de domicilio will enable the foreigner in question to dwell unmolested in this strangely governed country for a period not exceeding five years; but he may not leave the island, neither may he remove to another town, without a pass from a Capitan de Partido, a Celador, or some such official.

The chief of police moreover tells us that, conformably with another act or article in his code, the 'applicant' must represent himself as a Catholic; that he must take the oaths of fidelity and vassalage before the governor, and that within the prescribed five years 'a foreigner must be either naturalised, or he must leave the country.'

Yet another act proclaims that during the first five years of his residence, 'the said foreigner may not carry on nor may he possess a shop, a warehouse, or become a captain of a vessel. He may, however, have a share in a company or firm of Spaniards.'

But the strangest mandate of all is that which denies to 'any inhabitant whatsoever' the privilege of moving from one house to another 'without giving notice of such removal to the chief of police!'

Thus much for our welcome by the authorities of Cuba!

The Cubans themselves are, however, more obsequious. Long before we have anchored in the Cuban bay, the news of our arrival has reached the ears of my companion's friends, who hasten to greet us from little canoes with white awnings to ward off the rays of the scorching sun. Having landed, and satisfied the authorities, we are escorted by a number of these friends to our future residence, which we had decided should be an hotel. But my partner's friends will not hear of our lodging at a strange place, and one of their number, who claims close relationship with Nicasio, succeeds in persuading us both to become his guests. He accordingly hails his two-wheeled quitrin, and drives us to his dwelling. The rest of our friends follow on foot, and are invited by our host, Don Benigno, to partake of the sumptuous banquet which has been prepared in honour of Nicasio's return to his native country. Several ladies are present, and with these in light muslin dresses – the gentlemen in their suits of white drill – the long table with its white covering – the spacious dining-hall with its white-washed walls – and the glare of the sun which pours in from numerous windows and open doors – the scene is enlivening, to say the least of it; while a singular contrast is supplied by the sombre appearance of the slaves who serve round

the condiments.

Of course my companion is lionised and made much of on this occasion, and his friend – whom everybody addresses, on account of his nationality, as 'el Caballero Inglés,' is treated with every show of attention. Being fresh from Europe we are both examined and cross-examined upon the questions of news, and to satisfy all demands requires no inconsiderable amount of oratory. Healths are drunk and responded to by some of the company, and Don Benigno's nephew, Tunicú, delivers some appropriate verses of his own composition, which he has dedicated to his kinsman Nicasio.

It is not the custom in this country for the ladies to retire after a meal, and leave their lords to their cups and conversation, but everybody remains seated until black coffee and big Havana cigars are handed, the cloth has been removed, and our host's baby – a girl ten months old attired in nature's vestments – has been placed for general inspection and approval in the centre of the festive board.

When everybody has sufficiently devoured with his or her eyes this kind of human dessert, Don Benigno's lady – Doña Mercedes – proposes to adjourn for music and dancing to the reception-room – an apartment which is little better than a continuation of the dining-hall; the boundary line between the two chambers being defined by a narrow slip of wall.

The musical entertainments begin with a performance on the piano by a sun-burnt young lady attired in a low-necked, short-

sleeved dress, who accompanies another young lady who essays a patriotic song commencing:

Cuba, Cuba! mi patria querida,

in which she assures her audience, in Spanish verse, that there is no place like Cuba, and no country more fertile and picturesque than the Pearl of the Antilles. This favourite ditty is called a Melopea, or words without a melody – the words being simply 'spoken,' and closely followed on the piano by lively music.

This song and another having been disposed of, partners are selected and the Danza Criolla – a popular Cuban valse – is for the rest of the afternoon (for it is still broad daylight) performed. The guests then depart; and after a little conversation with Don Benigno and his family, Nicasio and I are conducted by a black domestic to our dormitories. Here we indulge in a siesta, and otherwise refresh ourselves till the hour of dinner.

Those of Nicasio's friends who have been foiled in their attempt to secure us for their guests, console themselves by exhibiting their hospitality in other ways. We are overwhelmed with invitations to pass the temporada, or season, at their estates in the country, and so numerous are these invitations that, were we to accept them all, two years would scarcely suffice for the fulfilment of our engagements.

During the first weeks of our residence in Santiago, the hospitality which we receive in various ways is sometimes

overpowering. Wherever we may wander some unknown friend has anticipated our arrival, and secretly provided for our wants. We turn into a café for refreshments, and when we offer to pay for what we have ordered, the waiter refuses to take our coin, while he assures us that our repast has already been paid for! Subsequently we discover that the proprietors of all the restaurants and cafés in the town have been instructed by some mysterious person or persons not to accept payment from 'Don Nicasio Rodriguez y Boldú and his English companion,' but to 'put it down to the account.' Whenever we visit the theatre, the same pecuniary objections are raised; and upon one occasion, the haberdasher to whom we apply for a dozen shirts à la créole actually refuses to favour us with a bill!

These attentions are, however, short-lived, for my partner, after permitting them to exist for a reasonable length of time, publicly gives out that unless this overpowering hospitality altogether ceases, he and el Caballero Inglés will remove to a less demonstrative town. This warning takes effect, but still the tendency to 'stand treat' – which is a special weakness in Cuba – manifests itself in other ways.

I go into a café where some creoles – utter strangers to me – are grouped around one of the marble tables. If I happen to be accompanied by a lady, every man rises and salutes us. If alone, I am offered a seat and refreshments; for under no circumstances, and in no locality, does a Cuban eat and drink without first inviting his neighbours to partake of his fare. 'Usted gusta?' (Will

you partake of this?) or 'Gusta usted tomar algo?' (Won't you take something?) is a Cuban's grace before meat.

These, attentions are not, however, confined to feeding. They are adapted to everything that a Cuban possesses. If I admire any article or individual belonging to a Cuban – no matter whether the object of my admiration be a watch-guard – a handsome cane – a horse – a gun – a slave, or a pretty child – I am invariably assured that it is mine (Es para usted), or that it is my servant (Un servidor de usted). When I ask a Cuban where he lives, he promptly replies: 'At your house,' in such-and-such a street, number so-and-so; and whenever such an individual favours me with a letter, I always find the document addressed: 'From your house' (Su casa).

In short, I never know what politeness means, nor what extensive West Indian possessions are at my disposal, till I live amidst the luxuries of the Pearl of the Antilles!

CHAPTER II.
DAILY LIFE IN CUBA

A Cuban Home – My Bed-Room – A Creole Breakfast – Don Benigno and his Family – A Cuban Matron – Church-going in connection with Shopping – An Evening Tertulia – A Tropical Moon

Like most of his neighbours, Don Benigno keeps 'open house' in more than one way. The huge street-door of his habitation remains unclosed at all hours of the day and evening, and anyone who pleases may walk in and partake of the Don's hospitality.

Don Benigno's house is constructed after the pattern of the good, old-fashioned Cuban dwellings, with an eye to earthquake, heavy rains, and excessive heat. So careful is a creole to provide against these casualties, that his residence serves less as an abode for comfort than as a place of shelter. It has a single storey, and is roofed with Roman tiles. The walls are of lath and plaster, or mamposteria, as it is called, and the beams which support the roof are visible from the interior as they are in a barn. Some of the apartments are paved with marble, while others are paved with brick. In the centre of the spacious reception-room, or sala, is laid a small square of carpet, like a misplaced hearth-

rug, on which stand twelve rocking-chairs, arranged face to face like seats in a railway carriage. They are accompanied by a few footstools and some spittoons. The rooms are not overcrowded with furniture and ornaments, and these scarce commodities stand out in bold relief against the white-washed walls and bare flooring. The chairs and sofas are all cane-backed and cane-bottomed. Tables are not plentiful, and curtains are employed as adornments for some of the doors instead of the windows, which are also devoid of glass. An elegant gas chandelier is suspended from one of the cross-beams of the sloping roof, and a couple of unserviceable console tables, with their corresponding pier-glasses, complete the decorations of the sala.

No fire-stoves are required in any chamber except the kitchen, and the latter being situated in the patio, or court-yard, at the back of the premises, the residents in a Cuban house are never troubled with any other smoke than that which is generated by tobacco.

As for the dormitories – the one which I occupy might belong to a holy friar. There is an aspect of cell and sanctity about everything in it. The furniture is nothing to speak of, and the bed, which is called a catre, closely resembles a tressled apple-stall with a canvas tray. When not in use, the catre is shut up and whisked away into an obscure corner. When required for sleeping purposes, it is opened, and the bed having been 'made' with a couple of sheets and a pillow, it is planted in a cool place, which often happens to be the centre of the apartment.

The monotonous appearance of the white-washed walls is relieved by coloured lithograph drawings of saints and virgins, and against one of the walls is placed a table decorated like a small altar with a white lace-trimmed cloth upon which stand some gilded candlesticks, vases containing artificial flowers, and a large wooden statuette, gorgeously painted and embellished. This image represents the patron saint, Santiago, beneath whose feet burns night and day a small oil lamp. The object for which this luminary is intended is ignored by me for many days, and meanwhile I use it, when nobody is looking, for the lighting of my cigarettes. My authority for this sacrilegious act is derived from my companion, Nicasio, who is a liberal-minded Catholic, and as I find he also performs the same ceremony in his own dormitory, my conscience is relieved. Equally mysterious are a couple of dry fonts which have in all respects the appearances of china watch-pockets. I make use of one for the accommodation of my time-piece, until I am informed that only holy water is allowed to repose within its sacred embraces.

In fine weather my slumbers at night are uninterrupted, but when it rains – and in Cuba it never rains but it pours in bucketfuls – my rest is at intervals sorely disturbed. I dream that a thousand belligerent cats are at civil war on the Roman-tiled roof above me, and that for some unknown reason I alone expiate their bloodthirsty crimes, by enduring a horrible penance, which consists in the historical torture of a slow and perpetual stream of liquid which dribbles upon my bare cranium.

I awake suddenly to find that my nightmare has not been unfounded. Something damp, proceeding from the sloping roof, drops at regular intervals upon my forehead. By the light of the patron saint who watches over me I perceive that the rain has found an inlet through a gotera in the roof. A gotera is a hole in the tiles, formed during the day by the action of the baking sun upon the mortar, which yields to its cracking influence and leaves an aperture. Rising hurriedly in the dead of night, I remove my catre to a dry corner, and at the same time place a basin beneath the spot from whence the drops of rain issue. Once more I awake under the same moistening influence. A fresh gotera has arisen over my dry place of repose. Again I shift my ground, and use an empty pail for the accommodation of the intrusive element; but fresh goteras appear wherever I pitch my catre, until, having circumnavigated all the safe coasts of my tempestuous apartment and exhausted every receptacle for water, I take up my bed and deposit it in an adjoining chamber, which happening to be unoccupied and free from goteras, allows my slumbers to remain undisturbed till morning.

Don Benigno's family take what we should call breakfast, but which they term 'tienta pie,' in their respective sleeping chambers. At six A.M. a dark domestic enters my dormitory with a cup of black coffee and a cigarette. Later, this is followed by a larger cup of milk qualified with coffee, or, if I prefer chocolate, the latter in an extraordinary thick form is brought. The beverage is accompanied by a Cuban bun or a milk roll with foreign butter:

for as the native cow does not supply the material for that luxury, the butter used in Cuba is all imported in bottles like preserves.

Eleven o'clock is the hour appointed for breakfast. This is a substantial meal and appears to be breakfast, dinner, and supper rolled into one. Every item of food is served as a separate course, of which there are more than fourteen different 'fuentes,' or dishes, on the table. A plate of eggs and sliced bananas fried in butter constitutes the first course. A second course is represented by a dish containing a combination of boiled rice and dried cod-fish, or 'bacalao,' with tomato sauce. 'Serence,' with 'congri,' is a Creole dish composed of Indian corn, rice, and red beans, and forms course number three. Sambumbia, anis, and chimbombó, are native vegetables prepared in a variety of palatable ways. An olla podrida of sweet yams, pumpkins, white beans, bacon, sausage, and cabbage is another favourite dish; and, lastly, fish, flesh, and fowl in a dozen different guises complete the bill of fare. This sumptuous repast having been washed down with Catalan claret, some West Indian fruits and solid-looking preserves are partaken of, and the indispensable cigar or cigarette and wholesome café noir are handed round.

Breakfast over, the Don's family disperse, each to his or her occupation. The children retire to their schoolroom, where the different masters (for in Cuba there are no 'out-door' governesses) engaged for their instruction arrive at their prescribed hours, give their lessons, and depart. A master is provided for every branch of learning and for teaching every

art except that of dancing, this accomplishment being naturally and easily acquired by the graceful little ladies and gentlemen themselves.

Don Benigno retreats, after breakfast, to his office, where he transacts his business affairs, which seem to consist chiefly in lolling in an easy chair with a long cigar between his lips, while he watches his escribano, or clerk, as that functionary makes up accounts and writes letters.

As for the Don's lady, Doña Mercedes, she may be described broadly as a sleeping partner, her department in the firm being literally the sleeping department. After disposing of her housekeeping duties, which are briefly accomplished by handing the black cook a certain sum daily for marketing purposes, the worthy lady passes the rest of the day with a fan in a rocking chair, in which she sways and fans herself cool. Doña Mercedes has a youthful appearance from her neck upwards, but being somewhat corpulent, her figure scarcely corresponds with the attractions of her face. Being, however, attired in a loose linen gown which falls like a sack, ungirdled and uninterrupted, from her fair shoulders to her remarkably small shoes, the protuberances of her person escape notice, and, with her jet-black hair neatly and tastefully arranged, she may be said to represent an agreeable type of the Cuban matron.

It is often a matter for wonder with me, how Señora Mercedes and her friends contrive to keep their hair in such perfect order. Cuban ladies being gifted by nature with a wealth of hair require

no artificial aid; but I am told that their heads being once 'dressed' for the day remain intact till night, a fact which I can easily credit, seeing that no ceole lady assumes either bonnet, hat, or other covering for the head, when she takes her walks abroad.

But Doña Mercedes is not always such a helpless member of society as I have represented her. She is possessed of a warm, generous nature, and this quality often prompts the good lady to perform many useful acts of kindness and charity to those who are in need of her benevolence.

Between one and three in the afternoon, Don Benigno and his family indulge in the wholesome luxury of a warm bath; for, despite the climate, a creole, when in town, rarely immerses his or her body in perfectly cold water. The water intended for bathing purposes is sometimes placed in the centre of the patio, or court-yard, where, under the powerful influence of the sun, it is soon warmed to any reasonable degree of temperature.

Ablutions over, the indispensable siesta is enjoyed by everybody, on catres or in hammocks; for the heat of mid-day is insupportable, and repose after a bath is considered salutary.

After the siesta, Doña Mercedes and her young daughters, accompanied by her adopted child – a girl of ten – do what the ladies of many other countries do late in the afternoon. They attire themselves fashionably and take a stroll in the Plaza or a drive in the Alameda, which is the Rotten Row of a Cuban town.

Whatever shopping Doña Mercedes contemplates is effected in the cool of the early morning after her devotions at the church,

whither she repairs at the hour of six A.M. Church-going is a serious undertaking with the good lady. Firstly, she and her daughters must be becomingly attired, and on this occasion black lace veils are included in their toilettes. Besides prayer-books, rosaries, and fans, the devotees must be provided with small squares of carpet and toy-like chairs of papier maché inlaid with gold and pearl ornaments. These articles of furniture are conveyed to the sacred edifice by some young negress servants, for with the exception of a few wooden benches, a Cuban church offers no relief to the weary flesh.

Having entered the church, Doña Mercedes proceeds to moisten the tips of her ungloved fingers in some holy water from a font, and after duly crossing herself, extends her hand to her daughters, who touch it and thus partake of the blessed liquid. The black attendants then spread the fragments of carpet, place the chairs, and retire to a dark corner of the building. The ceremonies begin. Doña Mercedes and her daughters follow the ecclesiastic in their miniature prayer-books, and alternately kneel and cross themselves when required to do so; gaze with a devout expression at their favourite saint, and tell their beads; take a mental note of their neighbours' dresses, fan themselves, and exchange nods of recognition with acquaintances – till a little bell from one of the side-chapels tinkles for the final ceremony of elevating the host.

Matins over, the ladies betake themselves to the principal thoroughfares, where the best shops are to be found, and when

their purchases have been made they return home, calling on the way at the houses of their friends.

When there is no performance at the theatre or the promenade in the military square, Don Benigno holds a tertulia in his balcony.

A tertulia is a reception, or social gathering, and may be held at any hour of the day; but the best time for a tertulia is the cool of the evening.

The five o'clock dinner being over and digested, Don Benigno sallies forth – cigar in mouth – upon his covered balcony, or coridor, as it is called, which in length and breadth strikingly resembles the platform of a small railway station.

'Traigan las balanzas!' drawls the Don, and in answer to his summons a couple of negroes appear with a number of rocking-chairs, which they place – when the moon is at its brightest – in a shady corner of the verandah. Here we all seat ourselves, and await the arrival of any guest who may 'drop in' for a sociable chat and a cigar.

Don Francisco – the chief doctor of the town – is usually the first to appear. He is followed by Señor Esteban, the lawyer, Don Magin, the merchant, Don Felipe, the sugar-planter, and one or two young creoles whose avocations are doubtful. As each guest appears, everybody rises and salutes him elaborately. The visitors are all attired for the evening in black alpaca coats, white drill trousers, and waistcoats, patent leather thin-soled boots, and bran new 'bómbas' – a bomba being the slang term for a tall beaver hat.

For some moments the company assembled remain speechless, and no sounds are heard in the silent evening but the swaying of the rocking-chairs and the creaking of the gentlemen's stiffly-starched trousers. Presently someone produces a neat home-made cigarette case, and before selecting a cigar or a cigarette for his own consumption offers it to all the males present, who accept of his generosity. The conversation, in which those who are not already asleep join, now becomes general. The weather, and the state of the coffee and cane crops, are all duly discussed, together with the theatre and the last ball at the Philharmonic. Politics are lightly touched upon, for two of the gentlemen present are Spaniards, and for obvious reasons a Cuban usually avoids all topics which concern the government of his country. Occasionally someone who is well-read in the day's newspaper, essays a mild discussion with somebody else who has not seen the paper for a week; but as Cuban periodicals are under official control, they are not remarkable for their political veracity, and the well-read member of the company usually gets the worst of the argument.

Learning that my companion and I contemplate establishing a studio for the practice of our profession in the town, everybody offers us his advice, and recommends to our notice certain houses suitable for art purposes. Don Esteban, the lawyer, favours us with his legal opinion, reminding us of the law which prohibits a foreigner from setting up in business on his own account; but we assure him of our intention to 'go into partnership,' and that

as one of us is a Cuban born, we have no uneasiness.

It is considered fatal to sit under the rays of a Cuban moon, so when that luminary is visible to any occupant of the balcony, his rocking-chair is immediately shifted into a shadier part. But, in doing so, extreme care is taken lest the occupant should reseat himself with his back inclined in the least manner towards his neighbour, as a Cuban would rather suffer any personal inconvenience than be discovered in this impolite posture.

No refreshment of any kind is offered by our host during the tertulia, but if one of the company feels thirsty he calls for a glass of iced water, which is accordingly brought to him by a slave, who, if necessary, qualifies the harmless beverage with 'panales,' which is a kind of cake prepared with white sugar.

Other tertulias are being held at neighbouring houses. Those who have no balconies to boast of, place their rocking-chairs in the passage or hall of their dwelling, while others, who have neither the one accommodation nor the other, deposit their receptacles for the weary on the pavement in the street. The black domestics form a tertulia on the door-steps or squat together in dark unoccupied parts of the corridors. Their jabber is incessant and occasionally requires a gentle reminder. Sometimes one of their company essays a wild melody, accompanying his song on a primitive instrument of his own manufacture.

Throughout the evening the streets are utterly deserted, and as, moreover, they are badly illuminated with gas, the aspect on a dark night is not cheerful. But on a bright, moonlit

night, such as that to which I have referred, artificial lighting is altogether dispensed with. The moon in the tropics is, for astronomical reasons, brighter than it is elsewhere; but as regards Cuba, another reason might be derived from the fact that, metaphorically speaking, a slave country and a badly governed one into the bargain, is about the darkest spot in the habitable globe. At least, in Cuba the lamp of Heaven shines with increased brilliancy, illuminating alike Spaniard, Cuban, freedman, and bondsman!

CHAPTER III.
ART-PATRONAGE IN CUBA

Our Studio – Our Critics – Our Patrons – Still-Life

Assisted by Don Benigno's nephew Tunicú, Nicasio and I in time meet with a residence suitable for art purposes.

Our habitation consists of six rooms on a single floor, with a wide balcony in front, and a spacious patio, or court-yard, at the back. We have no furniture worth mentioning; furniture in Cuba being represented by a few cane or leather-bottomed chairs, some spittoons, and a small square of carpet. But our walls are well hung with works of art in various stages of progress, which, in a great measure, compensate for the otherwise barren appearance of our apartments. Our studio is a spacious chamber on a level with the street which it overlooks. The windows occupy more than half of the wall space, are guiltless of glass, and are protected by iron bars. The accessories of our strange calling lend an interest to our domestic arrangements, and form a kind of free entertainment for the vulgar. To insure privacy, we have sometimes curtained the lower half of our enormous windows; but this contrivance has always proved ineffectual, for in the midst of our labour, the space above the curtains has

been gradually eclipsed by the appearance of certain playful blacks who have clambered to the heights by means of the accommodating rails. Gentlemen of colour have little respect for the polite arts; they look upon our sanctum as a sort of permanent peep-show, and upon us as a superior order of photographers. Primed with these delusions our Spanish Sambo comes for his carte-de-visite at all hours of the sunny day, persuaded that we undertake black physiognomies at four dollars a dozen; and when we assure him that ours is the legitimate colouring business, and that we have no connexion with Señor Collodión up the street, our swarthy patron produces a ready-made black and white miniature of himself, and commissions us to colour it in our best manner.

The press of Santiago dubs us 'followers of the divine art of Apelles,' and an inspection of our works of art is thus described in one of the local papers:

'We have lately visited those industrious gentlemen Don Nicasio Rodriguez y Boldú and El Caballero Inglés Don Gualterio who, as the public are aware, have established a studio in Cuba for the practice of the divine art of Raphael and Michael Angelo. It is the duty of every art-loving person to inspect all temples of the beautiful whether they be represented by the luxurious palaces of the great or the humblest cottages on earth. Knowledge reveals itself in the dullest as well as the brightest localities, for true genius can abide anywhere.

'He who, like ourselves, has frequently traversed the Calle

de Santa Rosa, must have observed that in that street stands a priceless casket, which being open leads to the studio of the two distinguished followers of the divine art of Apelles to whom we have referred.'

After continuing to indulge in this poetical strain for another paragraph or two, the enthusiastic writer is recalled to his duties of art-showman, and proceeds to describe in glowing colours all that is contained in the 'priceless casket,' open for his inspection. He lingers lovingly over a large copy of Titian's 'Venus' which, together with other pictures and unfinished sketches, we had brought with us from Italy. He is perfectly enraptured with the charms of the painted goddess, from whom he can scarcely tear himself away even on paper, and he concludes with the remark that, 'after contemplating this life-like representation of nature, the spectator is disposed to touch the canvas to convince himself that what he beholds is merely a painted shadow of the reality!'

Sketches and portraits next occupy his attention; 'and if,' he adds, 'the visitor's curiosity is not satisfied with the representations of men and women, he can relieve his vision by regarding beasts and birds, which, although only depicted upon canvas, appear to be endowed with animation!'

In spite, however, of these and other published tributes to our genius, we find that high art, at least, does not pay in our part of the tropics. Regardless of posterity, therefore, we abandon the sublime, and offer our art services for anything that may present itself. A bonâ fide painter is a rarity in the town I am describing,

so Nicasio and I are comparatively alone in the fine art field. Our patrons are numerous, but we are expected by them to be as versatile as the 'general utility' of theatrical life.

Nicasio finds a lucrative post vacant at the public 'Academy of Arts' – an institution supported by the municipality of the town. There is a great dearth of 'professors of drawing,' owing to the sudden resignation of a gentleman who previous to our arrival had been the sole representative of 'the divine art of Apelles.' The academy is a dreary apology for a school of art. The accommodation is scanty, and the 'models' provided for the scholars or 'discipulos,' as they are grandly styled, consist wholly of bad lithographic drawings. The post of professor, however, yields a fair monthly stipend, and it being offered to and accepted by my companion, contributes no inconsiderable item towards our united income.

We are overwhelmed with portrait work, but most of it is connected with defunct people, for we cannot induce our patrons to believe that a living person is a fit subject for our brush. And so it often happens that we are summoned from our homes, doctor-like, at all hours of the night, to hasten to the house of a moribund, for the purpose of making such notes as shall afterwards serve as guides for a replica of the late lamented in his habit as he lived.

One of our first applicants for this kind of patronage is Don Magin, the merchant, whose acquaintance we have made at Don Benigno's tertulia. The Don stops me in the street one day, and

with a disturbed countenance tells me that his only child – a girl of three – has been lately buried. Will I, or my partner, be so good as to restore her to life on canvas? I agree to undertake the work if Don Magin will provide me with a guide in the shape of a photograph.

'I am sorry to inform you,' says the Don, 'that my poor child never sat for her photograph.'

'Then,' I remark, 'I will be satisfied with a slight but faithful sketch, or even a coloured miniature.'

'I regret that I cannot supply you with any representation of my departed daughter,' replies Don Magin.

'How then can you expect to possess a portrait of her?' I enquire.

'Easily enough,' he answers. 'It is true that I have no actual likeness of the child; but equally good guides are at your disposal. I can provide you with the little dress, the little hat, the little shoes and socks which she was accustomed to wear. I have also taken the measure of her height, and the size round her pretty waist. I can furnish you with minute particulars respecting the colour of her complexion, hair and eyes, and I will show you a lovely child who resembles my own in many ways. Besides this, my Engracia was considered to bear a strong likeness to her father. Make her appear so also in the painting; introduce the accessories which I have mentioned; take a notion or two from the girl that I will send, and I am convinced that the result will be satisfactory to both of us.'

In vain do I endeavour to show the impossibility of such an achievement; the merchant will not hear of refusal, and as an inducement for me to make only a trial, he offers me a large price, promising to double the amount if I succeed to his liking.

It is a source of infinite consolation to the distressed old gentleman – who by the way is very grey and wrinkled – when I finally agree to make a trial; but I warn him that his anticipations about the result will never be realised.

Sanguine and happy, my strange patron departs, and in due course I receive the various articles he had specified. The pretty child serves well enough as a model for the proportions of the figure, and attired in the garb of her late lamented playmate, she enables me to devote every attention to the detail. I am also able to crown the little pink dress with an infantile face, whose hair, eyes, and complexion I colour according to instructions; and with the introduction of a landscape background and with a stray flower or two arranged in the foreground, the sum total is a pretty picture which, on that account, leaves at least a 'balance in my favour!'

The portrait (?) having been placed in its gilded frame, my patron is invited to inspect it.

For many long moments Don Magin contemplates the work without uttering a word. His countenance, which I watch with an anxious eye – as yet expresses neither approval nor the reverse.

Does this portrait on my easel remind the bereaved parent of his lost offspring?

It does! yes; there faithfully depicted are the very dress, the very little hat, and the still smaller shoes which she was wont to wear in life! The figure, complexion, colour of eyes and hair, are all hers to a shade. In short, a resemblance to his child gradually developes itself before the old gentleman's vision, till at last clasping both my hands, and with tears in his eyes, he declares that I have succeeded far beyond his best expectations.

In this instance everything terminates like the last scene in the drama, where the aged father recognises his long lost child. But work of this nature does not always end so satisfactorily.

Happily, portraiture is not our only resource. We hold important professorships in colleges, schools, and ladies' academies, where we impart every accomplishment in which drawing-paper and pencils are used, including the art of caligraphy, missal-painting, and designing for fancy needlework.

Whenever a strolling company of Spanish players encamp for the season at the theatre, our services are required as the company's special scenic artists. The demand for scenery at the Teatro Real Cuba is, however, small; a divergence from its standard repertoire being considered as next to an infringement on public rights; so our labours rarely extend beyond an occasional property, or 'set' in the shape of a painted 'ancestor,' a practicable piece of furniture, or a bit of bank for introduction into the elegant saloon, the cottage interior, or the wood scene. Once only are our scenic services in special request for a fairy piece, which the manager has announced

with 'entirely new decorations.' Though the public believe that four months have been employed in the preparations, we have barely as many days for the purpose, and during this short space we produce that gorgeous temple which is destined to form a conspicuous feature in the well-worn wood scene, and we add to the native charm of the elegant saloon and the cottage interior with suitable embellishments. Dutch metal and coloured foils, lavishly administered, cover a multitude of imperfections, and we have still the red fire and an indulgent public to fall back upon. Our efforts are rewarded by thunders of applause on the part of the audience, and eulogistic paragraphs in the local papers.

To oblige our worthy friend Don Benigno we are, upon another occasion, induced to paint and embellish his quitrin – a two-wheeled carriage of the gig class, the component parts of which bear one to the other something of the proportions of a spider and his web; the body of the conveyance being extremely small, the shafts inconceivably long, and the wheels of a gigantic circumference. The street-doors of most Cuban houses are constructed with a view to the admittance of such a vehicle, which when not in use is carefully enveloped in brown holland, like a harp or a chandelier during the out-of-town season, and is deposited in the hall or passage of the threshold, and in some cases in a corner of the marble-paved reception room. The presence in our studio of Don Benigno's quitrin is therefore not very remarkable. Many weeks, however, elapse before we can get rid of this unsightly piece of furniture. Several coats of

paint and varnish have to be applied, and innumerable coloured lines introduced, before it is ready to receive the more artistic touches. All devices connected with painting are by our Cuban patrons generalised under the head of 'paisaje' or landscape, and in the present instance the landscapes include two views of Don Benigno's crest together with his elaborate monogram.

A couple of mulatto art-aspirants whom we graciously receive as disciples for one hour daily, help considerably in this undertaking, and take such an especial delight in it that it is a sorrowful day for them when Saturnine – Don Benigno's black postilion – comes to wheel away their handiwork.

CHAPTER IV.
A CUBAN 'VELORIO.'

More Still-Life – A Night Wake – Mourners – Doña Dolores – A Funeral Procession – A Burial

To be summoned from his couch at all hours of the night is not an uncommon occurrence with a medical man, but for a follower of 'the divine art of Apelles' to be thus disturbed in his slumbers is, to say the least of it, an unreasonable proceeding.

Nevertheless one of us must rise and don his clothes at three A.M.; for a black varlet has come to inform us that his 'amo,' Don Pancho Agüerro y Matos, has just died, and that his bereaved family are desirous of preserving his image on canvas. Nicasio and I, as usual, draw lots for the questionable privilege of immortalising the late lamented, and as this time I am the unfortunate winner, it behoves me to gather together the implements of our craft, attire myself in my darkest garments, and follow the sombre messenger of death to the house of mourning.

Here a 'velorio,' or night-wake, for the departed is being held. The reception room is already crowded with the defunct's relatives and dearest friends, who are seated on chairs and low

stools against the walls. As soon as I appear everybody rises in accordance with the polite custom of the country, and the chief mourners crowd around me and give expression to their grief in a variety of ways. Some clasp my neck and waist; others cling to my legs, and pointing to an adjoining chamber, they beseech me to restore the late lamented to life – on canvas.

Encompassed as I am, it is no easy matter to reach the apartment where the deceased, surrounded by long wax candles and tall silver candlesticks, lies in state.

Though my duties are confined to the portrayal of the inanimate face before me, I often pause to take mental as well as pictorial notes of the surroundings. I observe that the defunct is attired in a suit of black, which has doubtless been provided by the undertakers; for the clothes are much too wide for his wasted anatomy, and give him the appearance of a misfitted dissenting minister. I remark that the dead man's relatives and friends bear their loss bravely; for some are endeavouring to drown their sorrows in the cup that cheers, and in lively conversation. I am reminded of the popular theory that tobacco is a disinfectant, from the fact that most of the company, including the elderly ladies, are indulging in that luxury. Occasionally a tray of cigars is handed round together with coffee, chocolate, sweetmeats, and biscuits. I note that these convivialities are only interrupted when a visitor is announced. That upon these occasions the mourners are inspired to give loud expression to their grief. That the women shriek, rave, and occasionally vary their proceedings by

swooning and going into hysterics. I observe that the new arrival is seized and surrounded as I had been and conducted into the chamber of death, where some of the mourners give vent to their sorrow by clasping the clerical-looking clothes or embracing the borrowed boots. I find that among the lady mourners the most demonstrative is Doña Dolores, who is said to be the nearest surviving relative of the departed; though from the language which she occasionally utters it is not clear to me what kind of relationship she claims.

Whenever a new mourner appears, Doña Dolores, who has been hitherto silently seated behind me, springs to her feet and in the following terms apostrophises the dead:

'Oh! Pancho. My little dear! (the defunct was a middle-aged gentleman). Answer me, my love. Where are you, my brother? Ah! it's all over with you now, Panchito. To-morrow you will be quite alone, with nobody to speak to you. Oh! my Panchito – my love – my life – my entraños! Pancho of my heart; of my soul! My brother – my son – my love – my father; for thou hast been more than father, lover, son, and brother to me!'

After a short pause the lady breaks out afresh:

'Virgen Santísima! Virgen de la Caridad! Where is my poor Panchito? What have you done with him? Where are you, Pancho? Answer me, my love! Maria Santísima; look at my poor brother all alone without the power to speak or rise! Make him answer me! Oh! my dear companion – my cousin – my godfather – mi compadre – my parent – my friend; speak! Tell me where

you are! Come to me, my Pancho; my Panchito. Oh! Pancho – Pan-cho! Pa-n-n-cho!!'

Once, in the middle of the lady's eloquence, the late Don Pancho startles everybody (myself included) by opening his mouth and drooping his head!

In order to facilitate my operations, the body had been propped up in a sitting posture, but by some mishap the props had given way. Until the real cause of the displacement is made manifest, Doña Dolores is beside herself with joy. Her Pancho has been restored to life! Her beloved 'stepfather, spouse, and compatriot' will drive with her to the Alameda to-morrow! He shall have a cigar and a cup of coffee now, and his portrait shall not be painted!

'Go,' says the Señora to me in a tone of authority; 'we don't want you any more. Panchito will accompany me to the photographer's, and save you the trouble!'

Fortunately the lady's friends intercede at this moment; for finding that I do not obey her commands, the exasperated Señora makes a wild dash at my sketch-book; over-turning in her movements my box of colours and one of the long candlesticks! Convinced, however, of the truth, the poor lady is pacified, and resumes her place behind me.

On the morning of the second day of the velorio, as I am putting the finishing touches to my sketch, certain strange ceremonies are observed.

An undertaker's man is announced, and, apparently with no

other object in view than to provide becoming robes of sable for the bereaved, proceeds to take the general dimensions of everybody present. But I observe that a separate length of white tape is employed in each case, and that when a sufficient number have been thus collected, the measures are consigned to the dead man's pockets, together with the mourners' white cambric handkerchiefs.

When these and other curious ceremonials – the precise object of which I cannot for the life of me penetrate – have been enacted, more undertakers arrive and proceed to prepare the body for decent burial. There is much lamentation when the coffin is finally borne from the house. The women shriek and swoon, grovel on the ground, and tear their hair. As for Doña Dolores – she is inconsolable, and continues to harangue the remains until her speech is inarticulate and she is carried away in a fainting condition to her chamber.

A procession, consisting of upwards of seventy mourners, follows on foot the richly-gilded and ornamented hearse. Everybody is attired in the deepest mourning, which, as fashions in Cuba go, includes a tall beaver hat adorned with broad crape, a black cloth coat and white trousers. The hired mutes, however, present a more sombre appearance, for not only are their habiliments black, but also their faces and bare hands; mutes in Cuba being represented by negroes of the darkest shade.

The funeral procession now leads on in the direction of the cathedral, where mass for the dead is to be performed. Those

who do not care to enter the sacred edifice will light their cigars and cigarettes, and will employ the interval which elapses before the burial service is over, by strolling about the neighbourhood, and chatting with acquaintances at their grated windows.

Service being over, the funeral will proceed to the cemetery at St. Ana's. Arrived at the gates of the burial ground, everybody will return home without waiting for the interment, which in Cuba is performed by a couple of black sextons who, unattended by either priest, mourner, or any other person, lower the remains into the hole which has been dug for it!

CHAPTER V.
CUBAN MODELS

Tropical Birds – The Cocos – La Grulla – Vultures – Street Criers – Water Carriers

My companion has a weakness for bird-painting, and it pleases him to have the living originals on the premises. Therefore does our spacious court-yard contain a goodly collection of the feathered tribe, with one or two animals without feathers. A large wirework aviary is filled with fifty specimens of tropical birds with pretty plumage and names hard to pronounce. A couple of cocos – a species of stork, with clipped wings – run freely about the yard, in company with a wild owl and a grulla, a tall crane-like bird five feet high. In a tank of water are a pair of young caymanes, or crocodiles. These interesting creatures are still in their infancy, and at present measure only four feet six inches from the tips of their hard noses to the points of their flexible tails. We have done our best to tame them; but they have not yet fallen into our domestic ways. Nor does time improve their vicious natures, for at the tender age of six months they have already shown signs of insubordination. If they persist in their evil courses we must needs make a premature end of them,

which is no easy matter, for their scaly hides are already tough as leather, and the only indefensible parts about them are their small eyes and open mouths.

The Cocos, male and female, are meagre-bodied birds, with slender legs, and beaks twelve inches long. They are an inseparable couple, and wander about our patio and rooms in a restless nervous fashion, rattling their chop-stick noses into everything. Now they are diving into the mould of flower-pots for live food, which they will never swallow till it has been previously slain. One of them has espied a cockroach in a corner, and in darting towards the prey a scorpion crosses its path. The venomous reptile hugs the belligerent beak in the hope of conveying to it some of its deadly sting; but the tip of Coco's horny appendage is a long way from his tender points, and Scorpio must travel many an inch before he can make the desired impression. Meanwhile the stork has teased Scorpio's life out, and jerked his remains into that bourn whence no defunct reptile returns. Our Coco's chief delight is to play with our painting materials, where much amusement may be derived by upsetting a bottle of varnish, or by distributing our long brushes in various parts of the room.

A fund of entertainment is found in the displacement of every object not too weighty for Coco to convey. Thus, when a wineglass or a small coffee cup is missing, it will be discovered in the most unlikely spot, such as the balcony, on the roof, or maybe in our neighbour's dusthole. By Coco's sleight of *beak*,

slippers part company and invite us to hunt for them, as if we were playing a certain old-fashioned game. As for the spoons, knives, and forks – they are disseminated everywhere like seeds in a ploughed field.

Has anyone seen my inkstand?

Yes; it has caught Coco's eye, and it has consequently been caught up by his chop-stick beak. With the agility of a sprite, he had hopped upon my open writing-desk, and having duly overhauled the contents and carefully transplanted each particular sheet of paper, envelope, pen and pencil, he devotes his attention to the ink; half of which he must surely have imbibed, for his beak remains parti-coloured for many days, and the inkstand, which I discover on the first fine 'retreta,' reposing within my best beaver hat, is perfectly empty!

To their credit, be it said, the two Cocos – male and female – never for an instant part company. Where one trips, there trips the other. If Señor Coco starts off on any important enterprise, his Señora gives a croak expressive of her readiness to follow, and is after him like his own shadow. Similarly, when la Señora Coco dives into the depths of an old boot in quest of emptiness, her lord assists at the investigation.

Once only, my Lady Coco is missing; having wandered from the house, and lost herself in an adjacent field. Until her reappearance, Lord Coco is inconsolable. The pastimes of the studio and the patio have no attractions for the bereaved bird. He fasts during the day, and croaks dismally at night. But when the

prodigal at last returns, Lord Coco is quite another bird, and in a moment of rapture he secretes our last tube of flake white in the water-jug!

The majestic Grulla is a better behaved bird. There is a dignity about her walk, and a formality about her ways, which are examples to her feathered companions. At night she is as serviceable as the best watch-dog, warning all trespassers by her piercing shriek, and by a furious dash at them with her strong neck and sharp-pointed beak. Grulla abominates all new-comers, and it was long before she was reconciled to the presence of her crocodile companions. When first their objectionable society was thrust upon the huge bird, she became nearly beside herself with vexation, and made savage onslaughts on the invaders' impenetrable hides. Once Grulla was in imminent danger of losing her neck whilst taking a blind header at the enemy's beady eye; for in a moment the reptile opened his yard of jaw for the easy accommodation of the bird's three feet of throat. My lady's behaviour at table leaves nothing to be desired. At the dinner hour she strides into our apartment without bidding, and takes her allotted place. The bird's two feet six inches of legs serve her instead of a chair, and her swan-like neck enables her to take a bird's-eye view of the most distant dish. But she never ventures to help herself to anything till the meal is actually placed on the plate before her; nor does she bolt her food like a beast, but disposes of it gracefully, like the best educated biped. Jerking the article for consumption neatly into her beak, and raising her

head high in the air, she waits till the comestible has gravitated naturally down her throat. The Grulla's favourite dishes are sweet bananas, boiled pumpkin, and the crumb of new bread; but she is also partial to fresh raw beefsteak whenever she can get it.

Everybody has his likes and his dislikes. Some people cannot abide a pig, and Grulla's antipathy is a big Aura.

An Aura is a vulture which sails gracefully over every Cuban town in quest of prey. The Aura is an invaluable bird in the tropics; the dead carcases of animals being by its means cleared away in a few hours. Its services are, in this respect, rated at so high a value that it is considered an illicit act to slay one of these useful scavengers of the air, and a heavy fine is imposed on the slayer.

Grulla, however, does not appreciate Aura's virtues; but whenever one of these vultures is visible from the patio, she shrieks like a maniac, flaps her large wings angrily, and turns wild pirouettes in the yard.

Besides our bird-models, the street criers, who pass our doors at all hours, are occasionally induced to lend their services to the cause of art.

Early in the morning la Lechera goes her rounds, with a large can of milk miraculously poised upon her head. The black milkmaid is attired in a single garment of cotton or coarse canvas; her feet and ankles are exposed, and her head is bound with a coloured handkerchief like a turban. We purchase daily of the Lechera a medio's worth of milk, but she grins incredulously,

when one day we invite her to enter our studio. She is a slave belonging to the proprietor of a neighbouring farm, and what would 'mi-amo,' her master, say, or more probably 'do,' if he heard that his serf employed her time by sitting for her 'paisaje?'

The Almidonero next favours us with a 'call.' This gentleman traffics in starch, an article in great demand, being employed for stiffening a Cuban's white drill clothes. The vendor of starch is a Chinese by birth, and, like other Celestials residing in Cuba, answers to the nickname of Chow-chow, from a popular theory that the word (which in the Chinese language stands for 'provisions') expresses everything in a Chinaman's vocabulary.

Chow-chow carries upon his head a wooden tray, containing a number of circular pats of starch, of the consistency and appearance of unbaked loaves.

The Panadero, or baker's man, visits us twice a day. In the cool of the early morning the little man – an Indian by birth – is extraordinarily active and full of his business, but during the heat of mid-day, when his visit is repeated, time to him seems of no importance. Our Indian baker is usually discovered sleeping a siesta on our broad balcony, and by his side lies a flat circular bread-basket as large as the wheel of a quitrin. Despite the scorching sun, he remains in this position hatless and bare-footed.

La Cascarillera frequently passes our door with her double cry of 'Las Cosi-tas!' – 'La Cascar-il-la!' The negress offers for sale a kind of chalk with which the ladies of Cuba are in the habit

of powdering their faces and necks. She also sells what she calls 'cositas francesas,' which consist of cakes and tarts prepared by the French creoles of Cuba. Many of the less opulent Madamas of the town employ their time by making French pastry, which their slaves afterwards dispose of in the public streets.

The Dulcera deals in 'dulces,' and her cry of 'Dulce de guayaba! Dulce de almiba!' proclaims that her tray contains various kinds of West Indian preserves. The Dulcera is also a slave, and consequently derives no pecuniary benefit from the sale of her sweets, unless, by pre-arrangement with her owner, a share in the profits has been allowed.

El Malojero is a dark young gentleman who perambulates the town on the back of a mule – or more correctly on the summit of a small mountain of long, freshly-gathered grass. This grass, or 'maloja' as it is called, together with maize, constitute a Creole horse's fodder, and being packed in bundles on all sides of the beast of burthen, only the head and hoofs of the animal are visible; while el Malojero, perched several feet above its back, completes the moving picture.

La Aguadora is perhaps the most attractive of all peripatetics of the pavement. It is she who provides the inhabitants with the indispensable fluid – water. The water supply of Cuba is derived from wells attached to certain houses; but those who, like ourselves, have not this convenience on the premises, have water brought to them from the nearest pump or spring. More than one Aguadora is employed to replenish our empty vessels,

and, like all popular characters in Cuba, each is favoured with a distinguishing nickname. One of our water-carriers answers to the pseudonym Cachon, another is called Tatagüita, a third Mapí, while a fourth is dubbed with the imposing title of Regina. In turn, these mulatto wenches arrive from the public font with small barrels and strangely-fashioned water-jars, and deposit their contents in our reservoir and in our 'tina.'

A tina is a filter on a gigantic scale. The exterior resembles a sentry box, and is furnished on all sides with ventilating apertures through which a current of air passes. At the top of the box or cupboard is fixed a huge basin made of a porous stone, through which the water slowly drips, and is received thus filtered in an enormous earthen jar. A tin pot with a very long handle serves to ladle out the filtered liquid, and the rim of this vessel is fringed with sharp projections like a chevaux de frise, as a caution to the thirsty not to apply their lips to the ladle!

Our nymphs of the pump are more serviceable as models than any of their sister itinerants. They have symmetrical forms, which are partially revealed through the scantiness of their clothing. Their coffee-coloured features are, besides, regular and not devoid of expression.

My companion becomes artistically captivated with Regina, who serves as a model for an important picture, which Nicasio paints, but unfortunately does not sell, in Cuba!

Mapí, a mulatto girl of tender years, is equally serviceable, and plays many parts on canvas; while Cachon and Tatagüita,

who are older and less comely, impersonate characters becoming their condition.

But alas for art patronage in Cuba! these and other fanciful productions do not meet with a purchaser in the Pearl of the Antilles.

CHAPTER VI.
CUBAN BEGGARS

Carrapatam Bunga – The Havana Lottery – A Lady Beggar – A Beggar's Opera – Popular Characters – Charity – A Public Raffle – The 'King of the Universe.'

Despite the dearth of patrons for the 'legitimate' in art, my companion and I continue to occupy our leisure moments in collecting such material as may prove attractive in a more art-loving country. Suggestions for pictures and sketches are not, however, wholly derived from the street vendors I have described. The beggars of Cuba are equally worthy of places in our sketch-books.

Spain's romantic 'Beggar on horseback,' in some respects meets with a prototype in her colony.

That apparently hapless mendicant shuffling along the white, heated road of a narrow street, is a blind negro, with the imposing nickname of Carrapatam Bunga. He is attired in a clean suit of brown holland, and he wears a broad-brimmed panama. His flat, splay feet are bare, showing where one of his toes has been consumed by a nigua, a troublesome insect which introduces

itself into the foot, and, if not eradicated in time, remains there to vegetate. Across his shoulders is slung a huge canvas bag for depositing comestible alms, and in his hand is a long rustic staff. Charity with a Cuban is a leading principle of his religion, and to relieve the indigent – no matter whether the object for relief be worthy or not – is next in importance to disburdening the mind to a father confessor. Mindful of the native weakness in this respect, Carrapatam Bunga bears his sorrows from door to door, confident that his affliction and his damaged foot will command pity wheresoever he wanders. But he is impudent, and a boisterous, swaggering fellow. Hear him as he demands compassion, with his swarthy, fat face upturned to the blazing sun, and with a long cigar between his bulging lips.

'Ave Maria! here's the poor blind man; poor fellow! Give him a medio (a threepenny-piece) somebody. Does nobody hear him, el pobrecito? Come, make haste! Don't keep the poor fellow waiting. Poor Carrapatam Bunga! He is stone blind, poor fellow, and his feet are blistered and sore. Misericordia, señores. Barajo! why don't somebody answer? Which is mi s'ñora Mercedes' house? Will somebody lead me to it? Mi s'ñora Mercedes!'

Bunga knows most of his patrons by name. Doña Mercedes appears at her iron-grated window, through the bars of which the benevolent lady offers a silver coin and a small loaf.

'Gracias, mi s'ñora; Dios se la pague su merced! (May Heaven reward your worship.) Who's got a light for the poor ciego?'

Somebody favours the ciego with a light, and Carrapatam

Bunga goes on his way smoking and humming a tune, and presently harangues in another street.

Will it be believed that this wanderer has a farm in the country, with slaves in his employ, and hundreds of dollars in his exchequer? When not on beggar-beat, Bunga retires to his possessions, where he lives luxuriously.

Like some of his begging fraternity, the negro occasionally varies his mendicant trade by offering for sale lottery tickets bearing what he calls 'lucky numbers.' The Havana lottery is a great institution in Cuba, and has an extraordinary fascination for rich as well as poor. Each ticket costs seventeen dollars, and is printed in such a form as to be susceptible of division into seventeen parts, so as to suit all pockets. The prizes vary from 100 to 100,000 dollars, and there are two 'sorteos,' or draws, monthly. On each occasion 35,000 tickets are offered for sale, and out of this number 600 are prizes. He whose number happens to approach within ten paces of the 100,000 dollar, or 50,000 dollar prize, receives a gratuity of 200 dollars as a reward for being 'near the mark.'

This lottery is a source of revenue to the Spanish state in Cuba, which claims a fourth share of the products yielded by the sale of tickets. As an instance of the enormous capital sometimes derived from this source, it is said that in a certain prosperous year, 546,000 tickets brought to the Havana treasury no less than 8,736,000 dollars!

Our friend Carrapatam Bunga often invests in fragments of

unsold tickets, and on one occasion he drew a prize to the value of 700 dollars, which good luck, together with his beggar savings, enabled him to purchase a farm and to hire a few labourers to work it with. Whether from habit or from love of gain, Bunga never forsook his favourite vocation, but continued to bear his sorrows from door to door, as if they still belonged to him.

In Cuba, at least, beggars may be said to be choosers. Saturday is the day which they prefer for transacting their business, because it precedes Sunday, when the faithful attend high mass in the church, and go to confession. Except on Saturday, and on some festive occasions, it is a rare event for a beggar to be seen asking alms in the public streets.

Every Saturday morning I pay my respects to Don Benigno and his amiable señora, Doña Mercedes, who, as I have already explained, keep open house in more than one way; the huge doors of their habitation being ajar at all hours. As I sit chatting with my worthy hostess, the street door – which has direct communication with the reception room – is boldly thrown open, and a white lady, attired in well-starched muslin, and adorned with jewels, enters. I rise, in accordance with the polite custom of the country, while Don Benigno offers the visitor a rocking-chair. The conversation proceeds on subjects of general interest, in which the visitor joins. Curiously, I am never introduced to the lady in muslin; but the unusual behaviour of my host is soon accounted for. After a few minutes the stranger señora rises, and approaching Doña Mercedes, offers her hand. Doña Mercedes

does not take the proffered palm, but simply places upon it a piece of silver coin of the value of a franc.

'May Heaven reward you,' says the lady-beggar, and takes her gift and her leave without another word.

Something like a Beggars' Opera may be realised whilst sitting before Don Benigno's huge window on Saturday morning, and watching the thriftless performers as they pass. The entertainment 'opens' at the early hour of six A.M.; from that time till the Cuban breakfast-hour of eleven, we are treated with begging solos only: mendicants who stand and deliver monologues like Carrapatam Bunga or Muñekon – an equally popular beggar. Sometimes the applicant for charity announces himself with a bold bang on the door, followed by the pious ejaculation, 'Ave Maria!' The lame, or otherwise afflicted, are content with simply directing attention to their misfortunes, while the less 'favoured' attract public regard by humming a wild air, to which a gibberish libretto is attached, or by descanting upon social and political matters. The ill-paved condition of the Cuban streets, the inefficient supply of water, the bad lighting of the town at night, the total absence of anything like proper drainage, are favourite topics with these open-air orators.

Like other Cuban celebrities, a characteristic *nom de guerre* is invented for every beggar.

That brown complexioned lady with a man's straw hat on her head, and a faded cotton gown clinging to her shrunken form, is called Madama Chaleco, from a popular tradition that the old

lady formerly donned a man's waistcoat or chaleco. From this cause she has become the butt of every street boy, who irritates the poor mulatto woman into frenzy by shouting her nickname in a derisive tone. The Madama has resided only a few years in Cuba; her birthplace being some neighbouring island where English and French are spoken: these languages being perfectly familiar to the old lady.

Madama Pescuezo is another foreign importation, and her alias is founded on a long sinewy throat or pescuezo which the dame possesses.

Isabel Huesito is famous for her leanness, and hence the appellation: huesito, or skinny.

Madama Majá is said to have magic dealings with snakes or majás.

Gallito Pigméo is noted for his shortness of stature and his attributes of a chicken.

Barrigilla is pot-bellied, and El Ñato has a flatter nose than his black brethren.

Carfardóte, Taita Tomás, Macundú, Cotuntum, Carabela Zuzundá, Ña Soledad, and Raton Cojonudo, are each named after some personal peculiarity.

Sometimes whole sentences stand as nicknames for these popular characters.

Amárrame-ese-perro is applied to a beggar who, like most negroes, has a dread of dogs, and his repeated, and often causeless, cry of 'Chain me up that dog!' earns for him this

imposing title.

Another equally nervous negro fears horse-flesh, and his constant ejaculation of 'Pull up! you horse-faced animal,' gains him the nickname of Jála-pa-lante-cara-de-caballo!

Our Beggars' Opera concludes with a brilliant chorus of mendicants, who, at twelve o'clock, visit their patrons in large companies. At that hour, one of Don Benigno's slaves enters with a large flat basket containing a quantity of small two-penny loaves, which the negro places upon the marble floor in front of the open door. Soon a crowd of beggars of all shades and castes, who during the last half-hour have been squatting in a row under the broad shade of the opposite houses, approach, and, without bidding, help to empty the capacious bread-basket. Further up the street they go, picking up more crumbs at rich mansions, whose owners occasionally vary their entertainment by providing for their vagrant visitors a little 'ajiaco,' or native soup.

Cuban people are not fond of bestowing their charity through the medium of a public institution. The only place of the kind in that part of Cuba which I am describing is called the Beneficencia, or almshouse, which is under the superintendence of the Sisters of Charity. Wealthy ladies contribute largely towards the support of this establishment, but, in order to provide funds, public raffles are indispensable. Nothing succeeds in Cuba so well as something in which chance or luck, combined with amusement, is the inducement of the venture, and a raffle in aid of funds for the famished is always popular.

Doña Mercedes, the most benevolent of ladies, tells me that she and the prosperous Señoras already referred to have in project a grand bazaar for the benefit of the poor, to which everybody is expected to contribute. The articles received for the purposes of the bazaar are to be exhibited in one of the big saloons of the Governor's house, which overlooks the Plaza de Armas, and they will be raffled for during three special evenings. For weeks Doña Mercedes and her charitable sisters are busy collecting and numbering the contributions as they arrive, or twisting the paper chances into the form of cigar lights.

The military square presents an animated scene on the evenings of the raffle. Twelve tables, bearing rich cloths and silver candelabra, are distributed about the broad promenade of the plaza. Around each table are seated a score of the fairest of Cuba's daughters, elegantly attired in evening costume, without any head-covering, and with only a scarf or shawl lightly protecting their fair shoulders. Doña Mercedes looks charming in a pink grenadine dress, and with her luxuriant black hair tastefully arranged, as a Cuban Señora alone knows how. Each lady adopts her most insinuating manner in order to dispose of her twisted tickets, the greater portion of which contain, of course, blanks, or a consolatory couplet, like a motto in a cracker, for the gratification of the unsuccessful purchaser. There is loud cheering when a prize is drawn, especially if it happen to be of importance, like the 'grand prize,' which consists of a prettily worked purse containing six golden onzas (twenty pounds

sterling).

Crowds of beggars are assembled within range of the plaza, and some of them occasionally invest in a medio or peseta's worth of tickets, but as coloured people are never permitted to mix with white folk in public, their tickets are handed to them by officials appointed for that purpose. Some of these blacks are 'retired' slaves: in other words, negroes who have become free, either by devoting the savings of many years to the purchase of their liberty, or by having their freedom left them as a legacy by an indulgent master. Those who have ability and industry make the most of their precious gifts by devoting their energies to trade or to music, for which accomplishment negroes have often a natural inclination; but the infirm or the inactive – and of these there is always a majority – are reduced to penury, in which condition they fall naturally into begging ways, and prosper accordingly.

That intelligent-looking black who craves of me a peseta in order to buy a small bundle of tickets for the raffle, is a well-known beggar. His name is Roblejo, and he owes his freedom to the publication of a book of poems written by himself. Assisted by a benevolent *littérateur*, Roblejo was enabled to put his poetic lucubrations into readable form, and the novelty taking the public fancy, subscribers were found sufficient for the purpose of printing the book, and effecting the author's emancipation.

'Holá, Don Pancho! How goes it with thee?' The individual whom I address is probably the most popular beggar in the

town. His real name is Pancho Villergas, but he is commonly known as El Rey del Orbe (the King of the Universe). I have often endeavoured to secure a faithful likeness of this illustrious gentleman, but Pancho cannot be prevailed upon to sit either to an artist or to a photographer. Whenever the subject is broached by me, El Rey del Orbe grins, shakes his head knowingly, and observes, in the only English with which he is conversant:

'Oh, ye – s; vary vel, no good, good mornin'.'

Pancho is a genuine white man, but age and exposure to the sun and wind have bronzed him to a mulatto colour. He has a picturesque Saint Francis beard, and a benign, strongly marked countenance. He wears a coat purposely patched with many shaded cloths; each shade being considered by him to represent one of his numerous dominions. Being buttoned up to his neck, the coat gives him a military appearance, while it economises his linen. Upon his head is a tall beaver hat, which has seen better days, but which the Universe-King is careful to keep well brushed. Pancho is slightly crazed, and his monomania consists in the belief that he is not a beggar, but a benefactor to his country. With this notion, no persuasion will induce him to accept a donation in the shape of coin. Those who are acquainted with Pancho's weakness, and desire to relieve his wants, must do so through the medium of stratagem. If they succeed in imposing upon El Rey del Orbe by prevailing upon him to 'borrow' food or raiment, they consider themselves amply rewarded for their act of charity. The only article which the King of the Universe will

deign to accept is foolscap writing-paper, because he believes that the use to which he applies it will be beneficial to mankind in general, and to Cuba in particular. He fills his foolscap with correspondence, which he addresses to the highest authorities; the favoured recipients being His Excellency the Governor, the alcalde mayor, and members of the town council. Whenever any political or social question is raised, the King of the Universe is sure to despatch an important document bearing his opinion and advice. His majesty is usually his own letter-carrier, unless he can meet with a trustworthy messenger in the shape of a priest, an officer, or a policeman. The matter contained in these momentous memorials occupies from eighteen to twenty closely-written sheets, and is always prefaced with the imposing heading: 'Yo, el Rey' (I, the King).

Pancho's indigence and infatuation have a romantic origin. This old, shabby-looking object before me was at one time a well-to-do planter, and held a high position among merchants. One fatal day he became enamoured of a creole coquette, who cruelly jilted him. The disappointment turned his brain. People attributed his harmless insanity to eccentricity, and merchants transacted business with him as of old, till one heartless scoundrel, taking advantage of his misfortune, swindled him out of a large sum of money, and this deed eventually led to Pancho's insolvency and utter ruin.

CHAPTER VII.
THE BLACK ART IN CUBA

A Model Mulatto – A Bewitched Watchman – Cuban Sorcery – An Enchanted Painter

It is not always easy to secure the services of a better class of model than our peripatetic of the pavement. Before we can induce such a person to walk into our studio, many arts, unconnected with our calling, must be employed, especially if the object of our solicitation happen to be young and fair. Having directed our professional gaze upon such a Señorita, it behoves us first to visit her family, and make friends with her parents, brothers or sisters, in order that their consent may be easily and naturally obtained. Thus, when I cast my artistic eye upon the pretty Perpetua, I have to proceed with extreme caution, lest her parents should misinterpret the nature of my demand. For Perpetua belongs to the octoroon 'species' of mulatto. Her father is a white man, and her mother is a free-born quadroon-woman, and they reside with their daughter in an humble dwelling near our studio. Don Ramon being a small tobacconist, and his wife, Doña Choncha, a laundress, we have sometimes patronised the little family, and in this manner I make the acquaintance of my

future model. It is, however, far from easy to persuade the old lady that my admiration for her daughter is wholly confined to the picturesque; for when I broach the model-subject, Doña Choncha smiles incredulously, and says she will consult her friends. While she is doing so, an extraordinary revelation respecting the brown old dame is made to me by Mateo, the 'sereno' or watchman of our district.

Armed with a pike, lantern, revolver, and coil of rope for pinioning purposes, the watchman wanders about our neighbourhood, halting every quarter of an hour to blow a shrill whistle to inform the inhabitants of the time of night, and whether it is 'sereno' (fine) or 'nublado' (cloudy).

One dark night the sereno pauses before our balcony, and after assuring the somnolent, in recitative, that it is 'three-quarters past eleven and nu-bla-do!' approaches me, and in a mysterious whisper enquires whether I carry 'contradaños,' or charms against evil, about my person. Finding that I do not possess such articles, the watchman recommends me to apply without delay for a talisman or two. Raw mustard, powdered glass, and sulphur, he says, are highly effectual as charms. At that very moment Mateo's pockets are full of these safeguards, and when threatened with any danger, he has only to sprinkle around him some of the antidote against evil.

The watchman then tells me that Doña Choncha is in league with 'brujas' (witches), and that if I continue to visit at her house I shall do well to take the precautions he has suggested.

Mateo is himself a firm believer in the Black Art, and gives me some interesting particulars respecting a secret society of sorcerers, who hold certain midnight revels in an empty saloon of a house somewhere in the town. There is a kind of freemason mystery attached to their proceedings, and none but members are in the secret. It appears, however, that their dark deeds consist chiefly in a dead-of-night dance around a defunct 'majá' or enchanted snake, by a number of people, most of whom are attired in nature's vestments.

The watchman likewise tells me that the practice of witchcraft in Cuba is sometimes attended with serious and fatal consequences, and that crimes of the worst description are frequently the result of it. An individual unwittingly takes his neighbour's life in obedience to commands from a sanguinary sorcerer, who requires a certain weight of human blood to complete the ingredients of an enchanted preparation. 'Bring me a couple of handfuls of hair, and four ounces of blood from Fulano,' says the weird, who has been applied to for spiritual absolution, 'and I will prepare you a contradaño – a charm – that shall rid you of your evil genius, and help you out of your present difficulty.' Fulano objects to part with his 'personal' property, when the request is made to him in a friendly way; so he gets a hard knock on the head one day, when he least expects it, and if he escapes with his life he is lucky.

Such instances of witchcraft as these, the sereno says, are found only among the coloured population of Cuba, and when

discovered the perpetrators of the nefarious acts are brought to justice and severely punished; but belief in necromancy exists even among the more enlightened inhabitants of Cuba, and it is far from uncommon to hear of highly respectable whites taking part in the practice of it.

Mateo then gives me his own personal experiences of the Black Art as a warning against the danger which, he says, will surely threaten me if I continue to visit the tobacconist family.

The watchman assures me that for many long weeks he had laboured under the depressing influence of a spell. The unfortunate occurrence began with an anonymous letter conveying the unwelcome information that a certain enemy of Mateo's was engaged in brewing some dreadful mischief for his especial benefit. In his professional capacity, the watchman has more than one foe in the town, and it is therefore difficult to 'spot,' and afterwards capture, the actual offender. The warning letter, however, admonishes him that so long as he does not walk in a certain locality, no harm to him can possibly accrue. It is not easy for Mateo to avoid the indicated thoroughfare, as it happens to come exactly within our watchman's beat at night; but he surmounts the obstacle at the risk of incurring his employers' displeasure, by exchanging beats with a brother watchman. The irregular act is, however, made known to the authorities, and Mateo is threatened with instant dismissal if he persists in avoiding the street in question. Fortunately, the sereno receives a second missive from the anonymous correspondent,

containing the assurance that there is still hope for immediate and radical disenchantment if Mateo will only follow the writer's advice. This consists, first of all, in depositing a piece of coin under the door of his correspondent's habitation. At an early hour, the money will disappear through some unseen agency, and will afterwards be consigned to a disenchanting locality in the Cuban bay. The sereno is next enjoined to examine the lining of his bran-new panama, which he has lately purchased to wear only on festive occasions. If all goes well, he will assuredly discover certain black pins and human hairs crossed, entwined and affixed in a peculiar fashion to the crown of his hat. The same evil omens will likewise appear at the ferule end of his gold-knobbed walking-stick. Satisfied that there is 'no deception,' the proprietor of the enchanted hat and cane wraps up those articles carefully in several folds of paper, according to instructions, and early one Sunday morning deposits the parcel in a certain hole in an undesirable field on the confines of the town.

'When I had done so,' concludes the watchman, pausing to inform the inhabitants that it is three-quarters past midnight and nu-bla-do! – 'when I had done so, I walked without fear along the forbidden street, and I have walked there in safety ever since!'

The watchman enjoins me to be warned by his story, and once more advises me to provide myself with a few contradaños.

'Had I taken the same precautions,' observes Mateo, 'I should have escaped all my troubles.'

'And preserved your panama and gold-headed cane!' I add.

'Past one o'clock and seren-o!' sings the watchman as he takes his leave of me.

My interest in the tobacconist's family is considerably increased by what I have heard, and my visits are none the less frequent because of the friendly admonitions which I have received. I do not provide myself with the talismans which the sereno has recommended; but I watch the old lady's ways more narrowly than I have before done, till I begin at last to detect something like a malignant expression in her shrunken, yellow-brown countenance.

I observe no change in her pretty daughter, though I must confess that in one way, at least, La Perpetua is more 'charming' than ever. The young girl is full of her approaching 'fiesta,' or saint's day, which annual event is to be celebrated by an afternoon ball and early supper at her humble home. The presents she expects to receive in the shape of trays of dulces and confectionary will, she assures me, exceed those of the past fiesta. Perpetua is the acknowledged belle of the 'barrio,' or district, where she resides, and she has many admirers. But unfortunately the young creole is not so white as her fair complexion would lead one to suppose. Don Ramon is undoubtedly a white man, but his wife belongs to the mulatto tribe, and Perpetua's origin is unquestionably obscure. Still Doña Choncha has great hopes that her pretty daughter will command a white alliance among her husband's friends in spite of this drawback, and it is whispered that the ambitious old dame has

her eye upon more than one eligible suitor for her child's whitey-brown hand. Mateo, the watchman – ever hard on Doña Choncha – declares that it is her 'evil eye' that is being exercised in Perpetua's behalf; but I heed him not, though I am now more than ever cautious in my behaviour at the tobacconist's.

Whatever truth there may be in the watchman's assertion that I am the object of enchantment, at present I have received no practical evidence of it. When I probe Perpetua privately on the subject, I find that she has little to tell, except that her mother is in the habit of visiting a locality in the town unknown to Perpetua and Don Ramon, and that, upon one occasion, she administered a harmless drug to her daughter, assuring her that it was a protection against cholera.

As for Don Ramon – that good-natured gentleman is altogether a disbeliever in witchcraft, and though he admits that the art is popular among a certain class in Cuba, he is of opinion that the Cuban bruja, or witch, is simply a high order of gipsy, whose chief object is pecuniary gain. The government of the country, with its accustomed inertness, has not yet established a law for the suppression of this evil; 'and so,' says the tobacconist, 'sorcery flourishes, and the brujas prosper.'

I am beginning to abandon all hope of obtaining La Perpetua for a model, when one day I receive an anonymous letter, the handwriting and diction of which seem to be the production of an uninstructed Ethiop. The writer assures me that somebody or other is at present engaged in the useful occupation of working

for my complete overthrow and subjugation, and that if I require further particulars on the subject I may easily obtain them for the small consideration of a 'punctured peseta' (a coin with a 'lucky' hole in it).

When I exhibit the mysterious document to the watchman, that individual is of course highly pleased to find that I have, at last, received some evidence of the existence of such mighty people as brujas, and his advice resolves itself, as usual, into sulphur and powdered mustard. He has now not the least doubt that Doña Choncha has made application to the brujas for a spell, and he recommends me to pay the peseta asked of me by my anonymous correspondent.

A communication from a live witch is worth all the money demanded for it, and I accordingly place the coin, as directed, in a crevice under my door. Sure enough, it disappears before daylight, and in return I obtain a second sheet of magic manuscript, which, like its predecessor, is unpleasantly greasy to the touch and offensive to the nose; but it is full of information, and concludes with an offer to effect my permanent disenchantment if I will but follow the writer's instructions. If I am disposed to do so, I must first meet the writer, or his deputy, alone in a certain unfrequented locality of the town at a late hour; arming myself with a contradaño in the shape of a media onza. Thirty-four shillings may appear a high rate for disenchantment, but the watchman assures me that the operation often costs four times that amount, and that if the unknown bruja

fulfils his promise I shall have made a great bargain. As I do not value my malignant spirit at any price, I decline for the present to avail myself of this opportunity to be relieved of it.

My occupations prevent me from paying my accustomed visits at the tobacconist's for some days, but one sunny morning I venture to look in at the little establishment.

Don Ramon, I am told, is passing some weeks at his 'vega,' or tobacco farm; but his black assistants are at their wooden benches as usual, rolling tobacco leaves into cigars. I pass through the section of a shop (which has neither wall nor window in front of it) into the inner apartment, usually occupied by Doña Choncha and her daughter, and find the former engaged in sorting tobacco leaves on the brick-floor, and the latter in swaying and fanning herself in a cane rocking-chair. Both ladies salute me respectfully, and make kind enquiries after my health. These formalities over, Doña Choncha collects together her tobacco leaves, and, without a word of explanation, adjourns to the 'patio.' For the first time, since my acquaintance with the tobacconist's family, I am left alone with the pretty Perpetua!

All is not well with her weird-looking mother, as I very shortly have reason to find. I have been scarcely ten minutes in Perpetua's agreeable society, when she is summoned by her mother to the court-yard. Upon her return I am offered some 'refresco,' made from the juicy fruit of the guanabana.

'Who mixed this drink?' I enquire, after taking a sip of it.

'La máma mixed it,' replies Perpetua.

Has the old hag added some infernal drug to the refreshment? I wonder; for there is something besides guanabana in the libation!

While I am speculating about this, lo! a strange odour is wafted into the little chamber, and presently some smoke is seen to issue from an aperture in the door.

Is the house on fire? Perpetua is again summoned by Doña Choncha; but before leaving the apartment she begs me not to be alarmed, as it is only her mother at her duties. I would willingly believe what she says, but being sufficiently familiar with the process of drying tobacco leaves, I am convinced that sulphur, hair, mustard, and heaven knows what besides, are not employed in it. The fumes of these burning substances are, however, entering the apartment, and the atmosphere is most oppressive – so much so, that my pulse beats high, and my head begins to swim.

Without waiting another moment, I seize my walking-stick and panama hat, and escape from the enchanted chamber into the street. The hot air does not dispel the giddy feeling which had come over me, and not until I have reached my well-ventilated abode, changed my damp linen, and sponged my fevered body with 'aguardiente' and water, do I feel myself again. I am better still after having taken a refreshing siesta in my swinging hammock, in which condition I dream of black pins, burnt hair, raw mustard, and sulphur. When I awake, I examine carefully the lining of my panama, and the ferule end of my walking-stick, to satisfy myself that no burglarious bruja has taken advantage of

my repose to tamper with my property. But whether it is that my stick and hat are of no great value, or that the defences of our studio are impregnable, no bruja has offered to take 'charge' of these things by labelling them with their infernal tickets.

My partner, to whom I record the events of the day, is of opinion that if all models are as difficult to secure as La Perpetua, we had better abandon our researches in this direction, and abide by our street criers and mendicants. He also suggests a little landscape-painting by way of variety, and, with this object in view, we plan certain walking expeditions into the surrounding country. What subjects for landscape pictures we meet with, and whether or not we are more successful in our quest after inanimate nature, will be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.
A TASTE OF CUBAN PRISON-LIFE

Two Views of the Morro Castle – The Commandant – The Town Jail – Cuban Policemen – Prisoners – A Captive Indian – Prison Fare – A Court of Justice – A Trial – A Verdict

I dream that I am Silvio Pellico, that the prisoner of St. Helena is my fellow-captive, and that an apartment belonging to the Spanish Inquisition is our dormitory. Clasps of iron eat their way into our ankles and wrists; gigantic rats share our food; our favourite exercise is swinging head downwards in the air, and our chief recreation is to watch the proceedings of tame spiders.

I awake and find my bed unusually hard. My bed-clothes have vanished, and in their stead are a couple of hard benches, with my wearing apparel rolled up for a pillow. By a dim light I observe that my apartment is remarkably small, bare, damp, and dome-shaped. The window is a barred aperture in the door; is only a foot square, and looks on to the patio, or narrow passage, where unlimited wall stares me in the face. Do I still dream, or is this actually one of 'le mie prigioni'? I rub my eyes for a third time, and look about the semi-darkened vault. Somebody is snoring.

I gaze in the direction whence the sound proceeds, and observe indistinctly an object huddled together in a corner. So, this is no dream, after all; and that heap of sleeping humanity is not Napoleon, but my companion, Nicasio Rodriguez y Boldú.

We are both shut up in one of the subterranean dungeons of the Morro Castle; not the Havana Morro, but the fortress at Santiago de Cuba, alluded to by Tom Cringle.

Why are we here?

What were we doing yesterday afternoon?

Well; we were taking a seven miles walk to the Morro Castle, the picturesque neighbourhood of which we had not yet visited, and as the grounds attached to the fortress are always open to the public, we proposed a quiet evening saunter over them.

We had a negro with us, an old and faithful vassal, who at the present moment is enjoying solitary confinement in another part of the fortress. We reached the castle grounds, where a group of Spanish 'militares' were seated. We gave them the 'Buenas tardes:' they returned our salute, and their chief, who was no less a personage than the commandant of the Morro, offered us refreshment, and permitted us to wander about the grounds. In our ramble we paused here and there to admire the picturesque 'bits' of scenery which, at every turn of a winding road, broke upon our view. By a narrow path cut in the grey rock we descended to the sea-shore, and stood before the entrance of the Cuban harbour. We watched the French packet as she steamed into port on her way to the town, and saw the gun fired

which announced her arrival. The steamer was so near, that we could scan the faces of everybody on board, and hear enthusiastic congratulations on their safe arrival after their tedious voyage. The skipper conferred with the Morro guard. What was the ship's name? Where did she hail from? Who was her captain? Where was she bound for? A needless demand, I thought, seeing that there is no water navigable beyond the town; but it was in strict conformity with Spanish regulations.

As evening advanced, we prepared to return to our temporary home, where a good dinner doubtless awaited us, with a cup of café noir to follow, and correspondence – ah! my friends never missed a mail – to open and to devour.

'Alto allá!' The ominous command to halt where we stood, still rings in my ear. A party of soldiers, with pointed muskets and fixed bayonets, ran with all speed in our direction.

'Car-amba!' Were we the object of their precipitation? We were!

They conducted us to an eminence, where stood a podgy, high-shouldered, short-necked man with a squeaky interrogative voice and gold spectacles. This was the commandant. Without explanation, that officer, in brief words, ordered us to be arrested.

The soldiers obeyed. They bandaged our eyes with handkerchiefs. They led us along hollow-sounding alleys; beneath echoing archways; down scores of stone steps; through mouldy passages. Lower yet, where a strong flavour of cooking

assailed our sense of smell. A couple more downward flights, and then we paused – heard a jingling of big keys – an opening of ponderous doors – and here we were.

Here, in a subterranean vault, I know not how many feet below sunlight. The air is close and vaporous; the domed chamber is damp and musty. They have divested us of all our portable property save a few cigarettes which we have secreted in a dark corner, and there is nothing to be had in the way of refreshment for love or money.

Yes, for money. I have bribed the sentinel, who occasionally eclipses our square of window, with all my ready cash, and he has brought us contraband cups of weak coffee. Will he treat our dark domestic as well? We try him, and find that he won't.

What's o'clock? We have no means of ascertaining this, as Phœbus, who might have suggested the time of day, is a long way out of sight. Our sentinel says it is early morning.

Hark! A sound of many footsteps; a rattling of arms and keys. Enter our military jailer with a dozen soldiers to release us from our present quarters. Our eyes are bandaged as before, and after passing up several flights of steps in another direction, our sight is restored: the scene changes, and we are discovered, like the Prince of Denmark, upon another part of the platform. Our faithful vassal is with us, looking as much like a ghost as it is possible for a negro to appear. They have tied his arms behind him with cords, and serve us in the same manner; while eight soldiers encircle us at respectful distances, and deliberately

proceed to load their weapons. The negro trembles with affright, and falls on his knees. Misericordia! they are going to shoot us, he thinks; for he is ignorant of the Spanish custom of loading in the presence of the prisoner before escorting him from one jail to another.

To another? Santo Dios! Then we are prisoners still? I think of the victim of Santa Margherita and his many prisons, and begin to wonder how many years of incarceration we shall experience.

'En marcha!' Eight 'militares' and a sergeant place us in their midst, and in this way we march to town, a distance of seven miles. Our sergeant proves to be more humane than his superior, and on the uneven road pauses to screw up cigarettes for us, and, in consideration of our helpless condition, even places them in our mouths.

It is Sunday morning, and when we reach the town all good Catholics have been to high mass, and are parading the narrow thoroughfare dressed in fashionable attire. Crowds gather around us and speculate as to the particular crime we are guilty of; and, to tell the truth, our appearance is by no means respectable. Have we shot the commandant? Undermined the Morro? Poisoned the garrison? Have we headed a negro conspiracy, or joined a gang of pirates? Friends whom we recognise on our way endeavour to interrogate us, but are interrupted by the sergeant. We halt before the governor's house; but his excellency is not yet out of bed, and may not be disturbed. So we proceed to the town jail, where everybody is stirring and where they are happy to see us,

and receive us with open doors. A dozen policemen, dressed in brown-holland coats, trimmed with yellow braid and silver buttons, with panama hats, revolvers, and short Roman swords, are seated on benches at the prison entrance. Passing them, we are hurried into a white-washed chamber, where a frowning functionary, in brown-holland and silver lace, with a panama on his head, and a long cigar in his mouth, sits at a desk scribbling something on stamped paper. He pauses to examine and peruse a large letter which our sergeant hands him, and which contains a statement of our arrest, with full particulars of our misdeeds. The document is folded in official fashion, is written, regardless of economy, with any quantity of margin, and is terminated by a tremendous signature, accompanied by an elaborate flourish, which occupies exactly half a page. The gentleman in brown-holland casts a look of suspicion at us, and directs a couple of policemen to search us, 'registrar' us, as he calls it, which they accordingly do; but nothing that we could dispense with is found on our persons, except the grime upon our hands and faces, and a pearl button, which has strayed during the journey, and somehow found its way into my boot.

Nothing further being required of us for the present, we are conducted into the centre of the jail to an extensive court-yard, where a crowd of prisoners of all shades and castes lie basking in the sun. We are led to one of the galleries which surround the patio, our arms are untied, and we are introduced into three different chambers.

The apartment alloted to me is spacious and airy enough, and has a huge barred window that overlooks the main thoroughfare. In these respects, at least, my quarters resemble an ordinary Cuban parlour in a private house. But the only articles of furniture are a couple of hard benches and a straw mattress; and although a Cuban parlour has a barred window, a brick floor, and white-washed walls, it has also a few cane-bottomed chairs, an elegant mirror, and a gas chandelier.

The prison in which I am confined was originally a convent, and now it is not only devoted to the use of malefactors, but also accommodates mad people, whose shrieks and wild laughter I occasionally hear.

From my window I can see into the private houses opposite, where ladies are swaying and fanning themselves in 'butacas,' or rocking-chairs, while half a dozen naked white and black children play in an adjacent room. Friends passing along the street recognise me; but I may not converse with them, or the sentry below will inform, and I shall be removed to a more secluded part of the stronghold.

I am not alone. My chamber is occupied by a native Indian, whose origin is distinguishable by his lank, jet-black hair, his gipsy-like complexion, and finely-cut nostrils. He is neither tattooed, nor does he wear feathers, beads or animals' hides; but with the exception of his face and hands (which are very dirty) he has all the appearance of a civilized being.

The Indian has been himself arrested on suspicion, but his trial

has been postponed for many weary months, and he is at present quite ignorant of the charge on which he may stand accused. Having no friends to intercede for him, or golden doubloons wherewith to convince the authorities of his innocence, the poor fellow is afraid things will go hard with him.

The Indian is eloquent on the subjects of slavery and Spanish rule, both of which he warmly denounces. He is careful to remind me, that although he speaks the Spanish language, and is governed by Spanish laws, he is no more a Spaniard than is an American an Englishman. There is something in common between these nationalities, he says, whereas between a Cuban and a Spaniard there is a very wide gulf!

My patriotic friend gets so excited over these and other favourite topics that, afraid of the consequences of his conversation, I propose a smoke.

'What!' he exclaims, approaching me in what seems a threatening attitude. 'Is it possible that you have any tobacco, and that you are going to smoke some here?'

Lest the Indian should be no smoker himself and dislike the odour of tobacco, I tell him that if he objects, I will postpone my harmless whiff until after captivity.

He does object; but after contemplating my scanty supply of cigarettes as I restore them to my pocket, he observes with a sigh:

'I was once an inveterate smoker!'

'Till you very wisely gave up the vice,' I add.

'No!' says he, 'I did not give it up. It was my accursed captors

who withheld it from me. I have not smoked for many long months, and I would often give ten years of my life for one little cigarette!'

'Try one of mine,' I suggest, extracting the packet again which alas! contains my last four.

'Gracias; no,' he replies, 'I shall be depriving you, and you will find cigarettes scarce in these quarters!'

'If you are a true Cuban,' I observe, 'you will remember that it is next to an insult to refuse a man's tobacco. Besides, if you object to my indulging in the luxury upon the plea that the delicious perfume is unendurable in another, both of us will be deprived of the pleasure!'

'You are right,' says the Indian, 'then I will take just one.'

So saying, he accepts the little paper squib which I offer, and carefully divides the contents into two equal parts; explaining, as he does so, how he intends to reserve one half of the tobacco for another occasion.

While thus engaged I am reminded of the awful fact that I have no means of igniting our cigarettes. When I mention this unfortunate circumstance to my companion, he smiles triumphantly, and after placing his ear to the door in melodramatic fashion, proceeds to raise a particular brick in the floor of our apartment under which at least half a dozen matches are concealed.

'These matches,' he remarks, 'have been treasured in that hole ever since I came to lodge in this jail.'

'Have you resided here long?' I inquire.

'It has appeared long to me,' he answers, 'eighteen months, more or less; but I have no record of the date.'

'You must have found the hours hang heavily on you,' I remark, 'or, maybe, you have a hobby like the political prisoners one reads of. You have a favorite flower somewhere? Or, perhaps, you are partial to spiders?'

'There are plenty of gigantic spiders here,' he replies, 'together with centipedes and scorpions; but whenever one of those reptiles crosses my path – I kill it!'

When my fellow-captive learns my nationality, his surprise and pleasure are very great.

'I like the English and Americans,' says he, 'and I would become one or the other to-morrow, if it were possible.'

'You are very kind to express so much esteem for my countrymen,' I say.

'It is not so much your countrymen,' he says, 'as your free country with its just and humane laws, which every Cuban admires and covets.'

I remind him that, under existing circumstances, I am no better off than he is, though to be sure as a British subject, my consul, who resides in Santiago, will doubtless see me righted.

The Indian is, however, of a different opinion. He assures me that my nationality will avail me nothing if I have no interest with some of the Spanish officials. He gives me instances to prove how it is often out of the power of a consul to assist a compatriot

in difficulties.

'Not long since,' says my friend, 'a marine from your country, being intoxicated, and getting mixed up in a street brawl, was arrested and locked up with a crowd of insubordinate coolies and Spanish deserters. His trial was, as usual, postponed. In the meanwhile, the jail had become overcrowded by the arrival of some wounded soldiers from San Domingo, and your countryman was shipped off with others to another prison at Manzanillo, where he was entered on the list of convicts, and has never been heard of since.'

'In this very jail,' continues the Indian, 'are a couple of American engineers, both of whom stand accused of being concerned in a negro conspiracy, and who have been locked up here for the last six months. They are ignorant of the Spanish language, have mislaid their passports, and have been denied a conference with their consul, who is, of course, unaware of their incarceration.'

I make a mental note of this last case, with a view to submit it to the proper authority as soon as I shall be able to do so.

My attention is presently arrested by a sound which reminds me of washing, for in Cuba this operation is usually performed by placing the wet linen on a flat board, and belabouring it with a smooth stone or a heavy roller. My companion smiles when I give him my impression of the familiar sounds, and he tells me that white linen is not the object of the beating, but black limbs! An unruly slave receives his castigation at the jail when it is found

inconvenient to perform the operation under his master's roof. No inquiry into the offence is made by the officers of justice; the miscreant is simply ordered twenty-five or fifty lashes, as the case may be, by his accuser, who acts also as his jury, judge, and occasionally – executioner!

Whilst listening to the unfortunate's groans and appeals for mercy, I watch the proceedings of a chain-gang of labourers, some twenty of whom have left the jail for the purpose of repairing a road in an adjacent street. They are dressed in canvas suits, numbered and lettered on the back, and wear broad-brimmed straw-hats. Each man smokes, and makes a great rattling of his chains as he assists in drawing along the heavy trucks and implements for work. A couple of armed soldiers and three or four prison-warders accompany the gang; the former to keep guard, the latter to superintend the labour. Some of the prisoners sell hats, fans, toys, and other articles of their own manufacture as they go along. One of these industrious gentlemen has entered, chains and all, into a private house opposite, and while he stands bargaining with a highly respectable white, his keeper sits, like Patience, on the doorstep smoking a cigar.

I withdraw from the window to meet my jailer, who has brought – not my freedom? no; my food. It is the first meal I have tasted for many long hours, and I am prepared to relish it though it be but a banana and Catalan wine.

These are, however, the least items in the princely fare which

the jailer has brought. The whitest of tablecloths is removed from the showiest of trays, and discloses a number of small tureens, in which fish, flesh, and fowl have been prepared in a variety of appetising ways. Besides these are a square cedar-box of guava preserves, a pot of boiling black coffee, a bundle of the best Ti Arriba cigars, and a packet of Astrea cigarettes; all served on the choicest china. This goodly repast cometh from La Señora Mercedes, under whose hospitable roof I have lodged and fed for many months. Doña Mercedes has heard of our captivity, and, without making any enquiry into the nature of our misdemeanour, has instantly despatched one of her black domestics with the best breakfast she can prepare.

The Indian assures me that the admittance into jail of such a collation augurs well. I have doubtless friends who are using their influence with the officials in my behalf, and, in short, he considers my speedy release a certainty.

'Usted gusta?' I invite my companion to share the good things, but he excuses himself by saying that, with his present prospects, he would rather not recall the feeling of a good meal. He, however, partakes of some of my coffee, the odour of which is far too savoury for his self-denial, and helps me with the tobacco.

Breakfast over, I take a siesta on half the furniture, and after a few hours' delicious oblivion am awakened by the jailer, who comes with the welcome news that the court is sitting, and that my presence is required.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.