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Due South: or, Cuba Past and Present

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Содержание

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PREFACE

The public favor accorded to a late volume by the author of these pages, entitled "Due West; or Round the World in Ten Months," has suggested both the publication and the title of the volume in hand, which consists of notes of a voyage to the tropics, and a sojourn in Cuba during the last winter. The endeavor has been to present a comprehensive view of the island, past and present, and to depict the political and moral darkness which have so long enshrouded it. A view of its interesting inhabitants, with a glance at its beautiful flora and vegetation generally, has been a source of such hearty enjoyment to the author that he desires to share the pleasure with the appreciative reader. The great importance of the geographical position of the island, its present critical condition, and the proposed treaty of commerce with this country, together render it at present of unusual interest in the eyes of the world. If possible, Cuba is more Castilian than peninsular Spain, and both are so Moorish as to present a fascinating study of national characteristics.

M. M. B.

CHAPTER I

Departure. – On Board Ship. – Arrival at Nassau. – Capital of the Bahamas. – Climate. – Soil. – Fruits and Flowers. – Magic Fertility. – Colored Population. – The Blockade Runners. – Population. – Products. – A Picturesque Local Scene. – Superstition. – Fish Story. – The Silk-Cotton Tree. – Remarkable Vegetation. – The Sea Gardens. – Marine Animal Life. – The Bahama Banks. – Burial at Sea. – Venal Officials. – Historical Characters. – The Early Buccaneers. – Diving for Drinking-Water.

We left Boston in a blustering snow-storm on the morning of February 25th, and reached New York city to find it also clothed in a wintry garb, Broadway being lined on either side of its entire length with tall piles of snow, like haycocks, prepared for carting away during the coming night. Next morning, when we drove to the dock to take passage on board the steamship Cienfuegos, the snow-mounds had all been removed. The mail steamer sailed promptly at the hour assigned, hauled out into the stream by a couple of noisy little tugs, with two-inch hawsers made fast to stem and stern. Before sunset the pilot left the ship, which was then headed due south for Nassau, N. P., escorted by large fields of floating ice, here and there decked with lazy snow-white sea-gulls. The sharp northwest wind, though blustering and aggressive, was in our favor, and the ship spread all her

artificial wings as auxiliary to her natural motor. We doubled Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout well in towards the shore, sighting on the afternoon of the fourth day the Island of Abaco, largest of the Bahama Isles, with its famous "Hole in the Wall" and sponge-lined shore. The woolen clothing worn when we came on board ship had already become oppressive, the cabin thermometer indicating 72° Fahrenheit. With nothing to engage the eye save the blue sky and the bluer water, the most is made of every circumstance at sea, and even trivial occurrences become notable. The playful dolphins went through their aquatic pantomime for our amusement. Half a dozen of them started off just ahead of the cutwater, and raced the ship for two hours, keeping exactly the same relative distance ahead without any apparent effort. Scores of others leaped out of the water and plunged in again in graceful curves, as though they enjoyed the sport. A tiny land bird flew on board, and was chased all over the ship by one or two juveniles until caught, panting and trembling with the unwonted exertion. Presently it was given its liberty, partook freely of bread crumbs and drank of fresh water, then assumed a perch aloft, where it carefully dressed its feathers, and after thanking its entertainers with a few cheerful notes it extended its wings and launched out into space, no land being in sight. The broken mainmast of a ship, floating, with considerable top hamper attached, was passed within a cable's length, suggestive of a recent wreck, and inducing a thousand dreary surmises. At first it was announced as the sea serpent, but

its true nature was soon obvious. At midnight, March 1st, Nassau light hove in sight, dimmed by a thin, soft haze, which hung over the water, and through which the light, by some law of refraction, seemed to be coming out to meet the ship. Overhead all was bright, – almost dazzling with unnumbered stars and familiar constellations, like silver spangles on a background of blue velvet. We anchored off the island an hour before daylight, the harbor being too shallow to admit the ship. A forbidding sand bar blocks the entrance, inside of which the water is but fifteen feet deep. Indeed, Nassau would have no harbor at all were it not that nature has kindly placed Hog Island in the form of a break-water, just off the town. The vibrating hull of the Cienfuegos was once more at rest; the stout heart-throbs, the panting and trembling, of the great engine had ceased; the wheelhouse and decks were deserted, and one was fain to turn in below for a brief nap before landing on this the most populous of the Bahamas.

The island, which was settled by Europeans as early as 1629, embraces nearly a hundred square miles, forming an oasis in the desert of waters. It is sixteen miles long and about one half as wide, containing fourteen thousand inhabitants, more or less, who can hardly be designated as an enterprising community. On first landing, everything strikes the visitor as being peculiarly foreign, – almost unique. The town is situated on the northerly front of the island, extending along the shore for a couple of miles, and back to a crest of land which rises to nearly the height of a hundred feet. This elevation is crowned by the residence of

the English Governor-General, in front of which may be seen a colossal but not admirable statue of Columbus. The town boasts a small public library, a museum, theatre, several small churches, a prison, a hospital, and a bank. The government maintains one company of infantry, composed of black men, officered by whites. It must be admitted that they present a fine military appearance when on parade. Nassau has long been a popular resort for invalids who seek a soft, equable climate, and as it lies between the warm South Atlantic and the Gulf Stream it is characterized by the usual temperature of the tropics. There seemed to be a certain enervating influence in the atmosphere, under the effects of which the habitués of the place were plainly struck with a spirit of indolence. The difference between those just arrived and the regular guests of the Victoria Hotel, in this respect, could not fail to be observed. The languidly oppressive warmth imparts a certain softness to manners, a voluptuous love of idleness, and a glow to the affections which are experienced with less force at the North. Neither snow nor frost is ever encountered here, and yet it is as near to Boston or New York as is the city of Chicago. The temperature, we are told, never falls below 64° Fahrenheit, nor rises above 82°, the variations rarely exceeding five degrees in twenty-four hours. In Florida a change of twenty degrees is not unusual within the period of a single day. The thermometer stood at 73° on the first day of March, and everything was bathed in soft sunlight.

It is somewhat singular that an island like New Providence,

which is practically without soil, should be so remarkably productive in its vegetation. It is surrounded by low-lying coral reefs, and is itself composed of coral and limestone. These, pulverized, actually form the earth out of which spring noble palm, banana, ceiba, orange, lemon, tamarind, almond, mahogany, and cocoanut trees, with a hundred and one other varieties of fruits, flowers, and woods, including the bread-fruit tree, that natural food for indolent natives of equatorial regions. Of course in such a soil the plough is unknown, its substitutes being the pickaxe and crowbar. However, science teaches us that all soils are but broken and decomposed rock, pulverized by various agencies acting through long periods of time. So the molten lava which once poured from the fiery mouth of Vesuvius has become the soil of thriving vineyards, which produce the priceless Lachryma Christi wine. This transformation is not accomplished in a lifetime, but is the result of ages of slow disintegration.

Among other flowering trees, some strikingly beautiful specimens of the alligator-pear in full bloom were observed, the blossom suggesting the passion-flower. While our favorite garden plants at the North are satisfied to bloom upon lowly bushes, at the South they are far more ambitious, and develop into tall trees, though sometimes at the partial expense of their fragrance. The air was full of sweet perfume from the white blossoms of the shaddock, contrasting with the deep glossy green of its thick-set leaves, the spicy pimento and cinnamon trees

being also noticeable. With all this charming floral effect the bird melody which greets the ear in Florida was wanting, though it would seem to be so natural an adjunct to the surroundings. Nature's never-failing rule of compensation is manifested here: all the attractions are not bestowed upon any one class; brilliancy of feathers and sweetness of song do not go together. The torrid zone endows the native birds with brilliant plumage, while the colder North gives its feathered tribes the winning charm of melody.

The soil of these Bahama Islands, composed of such unpromising ingredients, shows in its prolific yield how much vegetation depends for its sustenance upon atmospheric air, especially in tropical climes. The landlord of the Victoria Hotel told us, as an evidence of the fertility of the soil, that radish seeds which were planted on the first day of the month would sufficiently mature and ripen by the twenty-first – that is in three weeks – for use upon the table; and also that potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, and melons were relatively expeditious in ripening here after planting. Our mind reverted to the jugglers of Madras and Bombay, who made an orange-tree grow from the seed, and bear fruit before our very eyes, at a single sitting.

The luscious pineapple, zapota, mango, pomegranate, guava, star-apple, citron, custard-apple, mammee, and other fruits abound. The profuseness and variety of beautiful ferns and orchidaceous plants will also be sure to attract the attention of the Northern visitor. The rocky formation of the soil produces good

natural roads, so that a long drive in the environs of Nassau is like a pleasure excursion over a well-macadamized thoroughfare. We were told of a delightful drive of fifteen miles in length which follows the sea beach the whole distance, but did not find time to test its attractions, though strongly tempted by the excellence of the roads. Here, as in other tropical regions, each month has its special floral display, although there are many, and indeed a majority, of the plants which continue to flower all the year round. We observed that the stone walls and hedges were now and again covered for short spaces with the coral-vine, whose red blossoms, so pleasing to the eye, emit no odor. The yellow jasmine was dazzlingly conspicuous everywhere, and very fragrant. Red and white roses, various species of cacti, and tube-roses bloomed before the rude thatched cabins of the negroes in the environs, as well as in the tiny front gardens of the whites in the streets of the town; while red, white, and pink oleanders grew as tall as trees, and flower here every month in the year. The night-blooming cereus abounds, opening just at sunset, and closing again at break of day. The outside leaves of this poetical flower are of a pale green, the inner ones of a pure wax-like white, and the petals light yellow. Complete, it is about eight inches long, and from twelve to fifteen in circumference.

While we drove through the suburbs, slatternly, half-clothed family groups of negroes watched us with curious eyes, and on the road aged colored men and women were occasionally met, who saluted us with grave dignity. No one seemed to be at work;

sunshine was the only perceptible thing going on, ripening the fruits and vegetables by its genial rays, while the negroes waited for the harvest. Like the birds, they had no occasion to sow, but only to pluck and to eat. There was, both in and out of the town, a tumble-down, mouldy aspect to the dwellings, which seemed to be singularly neglected and permitted to lapse into decay. With the exception of the town of Nassau, and its immediate environs, New Providence is nearly all water and wilderness; it has some circumscribed lakes, but no mountains, rivers, or rivulets. The island is justly famous for the beauty and variety of its lovely flowers. It is true that the rose is not quite equal in color, development, and fragrance to ours of the North; Nature has so many indigenous flowers on which to expend her liberality that she bestows less attention upon this, the loveliest of them all. The Cherokee rose, single-leafed, now so rare with us, seems here to have found a congenial foreign home. In the suburbs of Nassau are many attractive flowers, fostered only by the hand of Nature. Among them was the triangular cactus, with its beautiful yellow blossom, like a small sunflower, supported by a deep green triangular stem.

The pendulous cactus was also hanging here and there on walls and tree trunks, in queer little jointed, pipe-stem branches. The royal palm, that king of tropical vegetation, is not very abundant here, but yet sufficiently so to characterize the place. Its roots resemble those of asparagus, and are innumerable. Another peculiarity of the palm is that it starts a full-sized trunk;

therefore, not the diameter, but the height, determines its age, which is recorded by annual concentric rings clearly defined upon its tall, straight stem.

During the late civil war in the United States, when blockade runners made this place a port of call and a harbor for refitting, it was by English connivance practically a Confederate port. The officers and sailors expended their ill-gotten wealth with the usual lavishness of the irresponsible, the people of Nassau reaping thereby a fabulous harvest in cash. This was quite demoralizing to honest industry, and, as might be expected, a serious reaction has followed. Legitimate trade and industry will require years before they can reassert themselves. Sudden and seeming prosperity is almost sure to be equally transitory. We were told that, during the entire period in which the Confederates resorted here under the open encouragement and protection of England, the town was the scene of the most shameful drunken orgies from morning until night. Lewdness and crime were rampant. Officers played pitch-penny on the veranda of the Victoria Hotel with gold eagles, and affiliated openly with negresses. The evil influence upon all concerned was inevitable, and its poisonous effect is not yet obliterated.

Three quarters of the present population are negroes, but of course all trace of the aborigines has disappeared. It is curious and interesting to know what Columbus thought of them. He wrote to his royal mistress, after having explored these Bahamas, as follows: "This country excels all others as far as the day

surpasses the night in splendor; the natives love their neighbors as themselves: their conversation is the sweetest imaginable, and their faces are always smiling. So gentle and so affectionate are they that I swear to your highness there is no better people in the world."

The negroes are mostly engaged in cultivating patches of pineapples, and yams, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables; a large number of the males employ themselves also in fishing and gathering sponges. It will be remembered that from this locality comes the principal supply of coarse sponge for Europe and America. There is also a considerable trade, carried on in a small way, in fine turtle-shell, which is polished in an exquisite manner, and manufactured by the natives into ornaments. Though the Bahama sponges are not equal to those obtained in the Mediterranean, still they are marketable, and Nassau exports half a million dollars' worth annually. It is a curious fact that sponges can be propagated by cuttings taken from living specimens, which, when attached to a piece of board and sunk in the sea, will increase and multiply. Thus the finest Mediterranean specimens may be successfully transplanted to the coral reefs of these islands, the only requisite to their sustenance seeming to be a coralline shore and limestone surroundings. Another important industry which gives employment to a considerable number of the inhabitants is the canning of pineapples, a process which is equivalent to preserving them for any length of time. One firm on Bay Street, as we were informed, canned and exported nearly

a million of pines in one season, lately; and another, engaged in the fresh-fruit trade, shipped to the States fifteen cargoes of pines in one year, besides many thousands of cocoanuts. These are not all raised in Nassau, but this port is made the headquarters for collecting and disposing of the fruit grown upon what are termed the out-islands, as well as marketing the large product of its own soil. It is but a short drive inland to the extensive pineapple fields, where the handsome fruit may be seen in the several stages of growth, varying according to the season of the year. If intended for exportation, the fruit is gathered green; if for canning purposes, the riper it is the better. The visitor will also be impressed by the beauty and grace of the cocoanut trees, their pinnate leaves often a hundred feet from the ground, notwithstanding the bare cylindrical stem attains a thickness of only two feet.

The Royal Victoria Hotel, though bearing a loyal name, is kept by an American, and is a very substantial, capacious building, composed of native limestone, four stories high, three of which are surrounded by wide piazzas, which afford the shade so necessary in a land of perpetual summer. The native stone of which the island is composed is so soft when first quarried that it can easily be cut or sawed into any shape desired, but it hardens very rapidly after exposure to the atmosphere. The hotel will accommodate three hundred guests, and is a positive necessity for the comfort and prosperity of the place. It was built and is owned by the British government, who erected it

some twenty-five years since. At the time of our arrival there was gathered under the lofty Moorish portico of the hotel a most picturesque group of negroes, of both sexes and of all ages, their ebony faces forming a strong contrast to the background of well-whitewashed walls. Some of the women were dressed in neat calico gowns, and wore broad-brimmed straw hats; some were in rags, hatless, shoeless, and barelegged; some had high-colored kerchiefs wound turban-like about their woolly heads; and some wore scarlet shawls, the sight of which would have driven a Spanish bull raving mad. There were coquettish mulatto girls with bouquets for sale, and fancy flowers wrought of shells; these last of most exquisite workmanship. Specimens of this native shell-work were sent to the Vienna Exposition, where they received honorable mention, and were afterwards purchased and presented to the Prince of Wales. Old gray-haired negroes, with snow-white beards on a black ground, offered fruits in great variety, – zapotas, mangoes, pineapples, and grape-fruit. Others had long strings of sponges for sale, wound round their shoulders like huge snakes; some of these were good, but many were utterly useless. No one knows this better than the cunning negroes themselves, but strangers, only touching at Nassau, they do not expect to see again, and there is proverbially cheating in all trades but ours. A bright, thrifty-looking colored woman had spread out her striped shawl upon the ground, and on this arrayed a really fine collection of conch-shells for sale, delicately polished, and of choice shapes. When first brought to the surface by the divers

they are not infrequently found to contain pearls imbedded in the palatable and nutritious meat. These pearls are generally of a pinkish hue, and greatly prized by the jewelers. Now and then a diver will realize a hundred dollars for one of them. From the conch-shell also come the best shell cameos. A smart half-breed offered canes of ebony, lignum vitæ, lance, and orange wood, all of native growth. He was dressed in a white linen jacket, pantaloons to match, with a semi-military cap, cocked on one side of his head, – quite a colored dude. The women who sell native-made baskets are most persistent, but if you purchase of them make your own change, for they are apt to take money away for this purpose and to forget to return. Negro nature is frail, characterized at Nassau by theft and licentiousness, but great crimes are rare. If you have occasion to hire a boat for a sail in the harbor, be sure to find and employ "Bushy," a tall, intelligent darkey, the best boatman and stroke-oar in Nassau.

Bushy showed us what he called a fish-whip, made from the whipray, a fish quite new to us, but indigenous to these waters. With a body shaped like a flounder, it has a tail often ten feet long, tapering from about one inch in thickness at the butt to an eighth of an inch at the small end. When dried this resembles whalebone, and makes a good coach-whip. There is a great variety of fish in and about the Bahamas. We saw, just landed at Nassau, a jew-fish, which takes the same place here that the halibut fills at the North, being cut into steaks and fried in a similar manner. They are among the largest of edible fish, and

this specimen weighed about four hundred pounds. According to Bushy, at certain seasons of the year the jew-fish lies dormant upon the sandy bottom, and refuses to take the bait. In these transparent waters he is easily seen when in this condition, and the native fishermen then dive down and place a stout hook in his mouth! Though this may sound like a "fish story," we were assured by others of its truth. Bushy undertook to give us the names of the various fishes which abound here, but the long list of them and his peculiar pronunciation drove us nearly wild. Still a few are remembered; such as the yellow-tailed snapper, striped snapper, pork-fish, angel-fish, cat-fish, hound-fish, the grouper, sucking-fish, and so on. Both harbor and deep sea fishing afford the visitor to Nassau excellent amusement, and many sportsmen go thither annually from New York solely for its enjoyment.

The colored people of Nassau, as we were assured by one competent to speak upon the subject, form a religious community, according to the ordinary acceptation of the term. They are very fond of church-going, and of singing and shouting on all religious occasions. Nervously emotional, they work themselves up to a hysterical condition so furious as to threaten their sanity, but having naturally so little of that qualification, they are pretty safe. No people could possibly be more superstitious. They shut up and double lock the doors and windows of their cabins at night to keep out evil spirits. There are regular professional man-witches among them, persons a little shrewder and more cunning than their fellows. The very

ignorant believe in a sort of fetichism, so that when a boat starts on a sponge-fishing trip, the obeah man is called upon for some coöperation and mysticism, to insure a successful return of the crew. The sponge fishermen have several hundred boats regularly licensed, and measuring on an average twenty tons each. On favorable occasions these men lay aside their legitimate calling, and become for the time being wreckers, an occupation which verges only too closely upon piracy. The intricate navigation of these waters, dotted by hundreds of small reefs and islands, and which can be traversed by only three safe channels, has furnished in former years a large amount of shipwrecked merchandise to Nassau. The wrecking business at best is extremely demoralizing, unfitting any community of men for legitimate industry, as we know very well by the experience gained on our own Florida shore. Men who have cruised fruitlessly for months in search of a profitable wreck will sometimes be tempted to decoy a ship from her proper course, and lead her upon the rocks, by a display of false lights.

In front of the Victoria Hotel are some noble specimens of the ceiba, or silk-cotton tree, as it is called here, the finest and loftiest we have seen in any country. These trees, naturally slow growers, must be over a century in age, and afford, by their widespread branches, a shade equally graceful and grateful. Like the india-rubber trees of Asia, these ceibas have at least one half of their anaconda-like roots exposed upon the surface of the ground, dividing the lower portion of the stem into supporting buttresses,

a curious piece of finesse on the part of nature to overcome the disadvantage of insufficient soil. The tree bears annually a large seed-pod, packed with cotton of a soft, silky texture, and hence its name. It is, however, suitable neither for timber nor fuel, and the small product of cotton is seldom if ever gathered. The islanders are proud of a single specimen of the banyan tree of considerable size, which they show to all visitors; but it cannot be indigenous – it must have been brought in its youth from Asia. There is, however, in these West Indian isles, the black mangrove, with very similar habit to the banyan. The limbs spread to such an extent from the trunk as to require support to prevent them from breaking off or bending to the ground by their own weight; but to obviate this, nature has endowed the tree with a peculiar growth. When the branches have become so heavy as to be no longer able to support themselves, they send forth from the under side sprigs which, rapidly descending to the ground, take root like the banyan, and become supporting columns to the heavy branches above. So the writer has seen in Hindostan a vine which grew, almost leafless, closely entwined around the trees to the very top, whence it descended, took fresh root, and ascended the nearest adjoining tree, until it had gone on binding an entire grove in a ligneous rope. Long tendrils of the love-vine, that curious aerial creeper, which feeds on air alone, were seen hanging across some of the low branches of the Nassau trees, and we were told that the plant will grow equally well if hung upon a nail indoors. Emblematic of true affection, it clings,

like Japanese ivy, tenaciously to the object it fixes upon. One specimen was shown to us which had developed to the size of the human hand from a single leaf carelessly pinned by a guest to one of the chamber walls of the hotel.

There are said to be six hundred of the Bahama islands, large and small, of which Nassau is the capital, and there, as already intimated, the English Governor-General resides. This numerical calculation is undoubtedly correct; many are mere rocky islets, and not more than twenty have fixed inhabitants. Is there anything more wonderful in nature than that these hundreds of isles should have been built up from the bottom of the sea by insects so small as to be microscopic? All lie north of Cuba and St. Domingo, just opposite the Gulf of Mexico, easily accessible from our own shores by a short and pleasant sea-voyage of three or four days. They are especially inviting to those persons who have occasion to avoid the rigor of Northern winters. People threatened with consumption seek Nassau on sanitary principles, and yet it was found upon inquiry that many natives die of that insidious disease, which rapidly runs its career when it is first developed in a tropical climate. To the author it would seem that consumptives might find resorts better adapted to the recovery of their health. Intermittent fever, also, is not unknown at Nassau.

The sea gardens, as they are called, situated just off the shores of the island, are well worth a visit; where, by means of a simple instrument of wood and glass, one is enabled to look many fathoms below the surface of the water, which is here so

remarkable for its transparency. These water glasses are all of home manufacture, easily improvised, being formed of a small wooden box three or four inches square, open at the top, and having a water-tight glass bottom. With the glass portion slightly submerged, one is enabled to see distinctly the beautiful coral reefs, with their marvelous surroundings. There are displayed tiny caves and grottoes of white coral of great delicacy and variety, star-fishes, sea-urchins, growing sponges, sea-fans, and gaudy-colored tropical fishes, including the humming-bird-fish, and others like butterflies with mottled fins and scales, and that little oddity the rainbow-fish. The prevailing color of this attractive creature is dark green, but the tinted margins of its scales so reflect the light as to show all the colors of the rainbow, and hence its name. When bottled in alcohol, these fairy-like denizens of the deep lose their brilliancy, which they exhibit only in their native element. This unique display is greatly enhanced in beauty by the clearness of the Bahama waters, and the reflected light from the snow-white sandy bottom, dotted here and there by curious and delicate shells of opalescent lustre. One longs to descend among these coral bowers, – these mermaid-gardens, – and pluck of the submarine flora in its purple, yellow, and scarlet freshness.

It will be remembered that Columbus wrote home to his royal patrons that the fish which abounded in the seas partook of the same novelty which characterized everything else in the New World. This was about four hundred years ago, before the great

Genoese had discovered Cuba. "The fish," as he wrote, "rivaled the birds in tropical brilliancy of color, the scales of some of them glancing back the rays of light like precious stones, as they sported about the ships and flashed gleams of gold and silver through the clear water."

The surface life of these translucent waters is also extremely interesting. Here the floating jelly-fish, called, from its phosphorescence, the glow-worm of the sea, is observed in great variety, sheltering little colonies of young fishes within its tentacles, which rush forth for a moment to capture some passing mite, and as quickly return again to their shelter. One takes up a handful of the floating gulf-weed and finds, within the pale yellow leaves and berries, tiny pipe-fish, sea-horses, and the little nest-building antennarius, thus forming a buoyant home for parasites, crabs, and mollusks, itself a sort of mistletoe of the ocean. The young of the mackerel and the herring glance all about just beneath the surface near the shore, like myriad pieces of silver. Now and again that particolored formation of marine life, the Portuguese man-of-war, is observed, its long ventral fins spread out like human fingers to steady it upon the surface of the water. Verily, the German scientist who says there is more of animal life beneath the surface of the sea than above it cannot be far amiss. This seems to be the more reasonable when we consider the relative proportions of land and water. The whole surface of the globe is supposed to have an area of about two hundred million square miles. Of these only about fifty millions

are dry land. Within the harbor of Nassau the divisions of shoal and deep water presented most singular and clearly defined lines of color, azure, purple, and orange-leaf green, – so marked as to be visible half a mile away. All was beneath a sky so deeply and serenely blue as constantly to recall the arching heavens of middle India.

The Bahama Banks is a familiar expression to most of us, but perhaps few clearly understand the significance of the term, which is applied to a remarkable plateau at the western extremity of the archipelago, occupying a space between two and three hundred miles long, and about one third as wide. These banks, as they are called, rise almost perpendicularly from an unfathomable depth of water, and are of coral formation. In sailing over them the bottom is distinctly seen from the ship's deck, the depth of water being almost uniformly forty to fifty feet. Some years since, when the author was crossing these banks in a sailing ship, a death occurred among the foremast hands, and the usual sea burial followed. The corpse was sewn up in a hammock, with iron weights at the feet, the more readily to sink it. After reading the burial service the body was launched into the sea from a grating rigged out of a gangway amidship. The waters were perfectly calm, and the barque had but little headway. Indeed, we lay almost as still as though anchored, so that the body was seen to descend slowly alongside until it reached the calcareous, sandy bottom, where it assumed an upright and strangely lifelike position, as though standing upon

its feet. An ominous silence reigned among the watching crew, and it was a decided relief to all hands when a northerly wind sprang up, filling the canvas and giving the vessel steerage way.

So many years have passed since the occurrence of the scene just related that we may give its sequel without impropriety, though, at the same time, we expose the venal character of Spanish officials. The man we buried on the Bahama Banks had died of small-pox, though no other person on board showed any symptoms of the disease. On entering the harbor of Havana, three days later, we had been hailed from Moro Castle and had returned the usual answer. A couple of doubloons in gold made the boarding officer conveniently blind, and a similar fee thrust quietly into the doctor's hand insured a "clean bill of health," under which we were permitted to land! The alternative was twenty-one days' quarantine.

Fort Montague, mounting four rusty guns, "with ne'er a touch-hole to any on 'em," as Bushy informed us, stands upon a projecting point about a mile from the town of Nassau, the road thither forming a delightful evening promenade, or drive. The fort is old, crumbling, and time-worn, but was once occupied by the buccaneers as a most important stronghold commanding the narrow channel. These sea-robbers imposed a heavy tax upon all shipping passing this way, and for many years realized a large income from this source. It was only piracy in another form. Most vessels found it cheaper to pay than to fight. When the notorious Black Beard had his headquarters at Nassau, he sought no such

pretext, but preyed upon all commerce alike, provided the vessels were not too well armed to be captured. This notorious pirate had an innate love for cruelty, and often tortured his captives without any apparent purpose, after the fashion of our Western Indians. When the English lashed the mutineers of Delhi and Cawnpore to the muzzles of their cannon and blew them to pieces, they were enacting no new tragedy; legend and history tell us that Black Beard, the pirate of the Windward Passage, set them that example many years before. His rule was to murder all prisoners who would not join his ship, and those whom he took fighting, that is, with arms in their hands, were subjected to torture, one form of which was that of lashing captives to the cannon's mouth and applying the match. Fort Montague is not occupied by even a corporal's guard to-day, and is of no efficiency whatever against modern gunnery. The reader will thus observe that the principal business which has engaged Nassau heretofore has been wrecking, buccaneering, privateering, and blockade running.

Some noted characters have found an asylum here, first and last. After Lord Dunmore left Virginia he sought official position and made a home on the island. He was appointed governor, and some of the buildings erected by him are still pointed out to the visitor, especially that known as the Old Fort, just back of the Victoria Hotel, crowning the height. His summer seat, known as the Hermitage, is a quaint old place, still in fair condition, and surrounded by oaks and cocoanut trees, near the sea. Such matters do not often get into history, but legend tells us that some

strange orgies took place at the Hermitage, where the play was for heavy stakes, and the drinking was of a similar excessive character.

Another well-known individual who sought to make a home here, and also to escape from all former associations, was the notorious Blennerhasset, a name familiar in connection with Aaron Burr. After his trial, it will be remembered that he suddenly disappeared, and was heard of no more. He left his country for his country's good, changing his name to that of Carr. His objective point was Nassau; there his undoubted talent and legal ability were duly recognized and he was appointed government attorney, officiating in that capacity for a number of years. Having deserted his first wife, he found another to console him upon the island. At last wife number one appeared upon the island. She had discovered his hiding-place, and a domestic war ensued. Wife number two carried the day and the rightful spouse was sent away and paid an annuity to keep away. The pretended Mr. Carr is said to have finally lapsed into habits of excessive intemperance, and to have found a stranger's grave on the island.

Much of the drinking water, and certainly the best in use at Nassau, as well as on some of the neighboring islands, is procured in a remarkable, though very simple manner, from the sea. Not far from shore, on the coral reefs, there are never-failing fresh water springs, bubbling up from the bottom through the salt water with such force as clearly to indicate their locality. Over these ocean springs the people place sunken barrels filled with sand,

one above another, the bottoms and tops being displaced. The fresh water is thus conducted to the surface through the column of sand, which forms a perfect filterer. Such a crude arrangement is only temporary, liable to be displaced by any severe storm which should agitate the surrounding waters. If destroyed in the hurricane season, these structures are not renewed until settled weather. In so small and low lying an island as that of Nassau, it is very plain that this crystal liquid, pure and tasteless, cannot come from any rainfall upon the soil, and its existence, therefore, suggests a problem, the solving of which we submit to the scientists.

On the arid shores of the Persian Gulf, where rain so seldom falls, and where there are no rills to refresh the parched soil, fresh water is also obtained from submerged springs beneath the salt water. Here it is brought to the surface by divers, who descend with a leather bag, the mouth of which being opened over the bubbling spring is quickly filled and closed again, being drawn to the surface by those who are left there to assist the diver, who hastens upward for air. In descending his feet are weighted with stones, which being cast off at the proper moment, he naturally rises at once to the surface. This operation is repeated until a sufficient quantity of fresh water is procured. There is no mystery, however, as to the source of these springs. The rain first falls on the distant mountains, and finding its way downward through the fissures of rocky ledges, pursues its course until it gushes forth in the bed of the gulf.

CHAPTER II

Among the Islands. – San Salvador. – A Glimpse at the Stars. – Hayti. – The Gulf Stream. – The Caribbean Sea. – Latitude and Longitude. – The Southern Coast of Cuba. – A Famous Old Fortress. – Fate of Political Prisoners. – The Oldest City in Cuba. – The Aborigines. – Cuban Cathedrals. – Drinking Saloons. – Dogs, Horses, and Coolies. – Scenes in Santiago de Cuba. – Devoured by Sharks. – Lying at Anchor. – Wreck of a Historic Ship. – Cuban Circulating Medium. – Tropical Temperature.

After leaving Nassau we stood northward for half a day in order to get a safe and proper channel out of the crooked Bahamas, where there is more of shoal than of navigable waters, leaving a score of small islands behind us inhabited only by turtles, flamingoes, and sea birds. But we were soon steaming due south again towards our objective point, the island of Cuba, five hundred miles away. San Salvador was sighted on our starboard bow, the spot where Columbus first landed in the New World, though even this fact has not escaped the specious arguments of the iconoclasts. Nevertheless, we gazed upon it with reverent credulity. It will be found laid down on most English maps as Cat Island, and is now the home of two or three thousand colored people. San Salvador is nearly as large as New Providence, and is said to claim some special advantages over

that island in the quality of its fruits. It is claimed that the oranges grown here are the sweetest and best in the world, the same excellence being attributed to its abundant yield of pineapples and other tropical fruits.

There are so many of these small islands in the Bahama group that the geographers may be excused for the heterogeneous manner in which they have placed them on the common maps. To find their true and relative position one must consult the sailing-charts, where absolute correctness is supposed to be found, a prime necessity in such intricate navigation. The total population of the Bahamas has been ascertained, by census, to be a fraction less than forty thousand.

The voyager in these latitudes is constantly saluted by gentle breezes impregnated with tropical fragrance, intensified in effect by the distant view of cocoanut, palmetto, and banana trees, clothing the islands and growing down to the water's very edge. As we glide along, gazing shoreward, now and again little groups of swallows seem to be flitting only a few feet above the water for a considerable distance, and then suddenly disappearing beneath the waves. These are flying-fish enjoying an air bath, either in frolic or in fear; pursued, may be, by some aqueous enemy, to escape from whom they essay these aerial flights. The numerous islands, very many of which are uninhabited, have yet their recorded names, more or less characteristic, such as Rum Key, Turk's Island, – famous for the export of salt, – Bird Rock, Fortune Island, Great and Little Inagua, Crooked Island, and

so on, all more or less noted for the disastrous wrecks which have occurred on their low coralline shores. Our Northern cities are largely dependent upon the Bahamas for their early annual supplies of pineapples, cocoanuts, oranges, bananas, and some vegetables, in which they are all more or less prolific. Here also is the harvest field of the conchologist, the beaches and coral reefs affording an abundant supply of exquisitely colored shells, of all imaginable shapes, including the large and valuable conch-shell, of which many thousand dollars' worth are annually exported, the contents first serving the divers for food.

It was interesting to remain on deck at night and watch the heavens, as we glided silently through the phosphorescent sea. Was it possible the grand luminary, which rendered objects so plain that one could almost read fine print with no other help, shone solely by borrowed light? We all know it to be so, and also that Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn shine in a similar manner with light reflected from the sun. It was curious to adjust the telescope and bring the starry system nearer to the vision. If we direct our gaze upon a planet we find its disk sharply defined; change the direction and let it rest upon a star, and we have only a point of light, more or less brilliant. The glass reveals to us the fact that the star-dust which we call the Milky Way is an aggregation of innumerable single suns. Sweeping the arching blue with the telescope, we find some stars are golden, some green, others purple, many silvery-white, and some are twins. Probably there is no such thing as stars of the first and second

magnitude, as the common expression names them. It is most likely only a question of distance, which regulates the brightness to our vision. Science reduces the distances of heavenly bodies from our earth to figures, but they are so immense as to be simply bewildering. At the North the moon is silvery, but in tropical skies at night it becomes golden, glowing, and luxurious in its splendor, never pale and wan as it seems with us.

When the lonely lighthouse which marks Cape Maysi, at the easterly point of Cuba, hove in sight on the starboard bow, the dim form of the mountains of Hayti was also visible on the opposite horizon. A subterranean connection is believed to exist between the mountain ranges of the two islands.

When the outline of the Haytian mountains was in view, it was very natural to express a wish to visit the island at some convenient time. This led to some intelligent and interesting remarks from a compagnon de voyage, who had resided for two years at Port-au-Prince, the capital. "Unless you are compelled to land there," said he, "I advise you to avoid Hayti." He fully confirmed the reports of its barbarous condition, and declared it to be in a rapid decadence, as regarded every desirable element of civilization. In the country, a short distance from either Gonaives, Jacmel, or Port-au-Prince, where the mass of the negro population live, Voudou worship and cannibalism are quite common at the present time. The influence of the Voudou priests is so much feared by the government that the horrible practice is little interfered with. When the officials are forced to take

cognizance of the crime, the lightest possible punishment is imposed upon the convicted parties. The island of San Domingo is about half the size of Cuba, Hayti occupying one third of the western portion, the rest of the territory belonging to the republic of San Domingo. "As to Port-au-Prince," said our informant, "it is the dirtiest place I have ever seen in any part of the world." Nevertheless, the historic interest clustering about the island is very great. It was the seat of the first Spanish colony founded in the New World. Its soil has been bathed in the blood of Europeans as well as of its aboriginal inhabitants. For three hundred years it was the arena of fierce struggles between the French, Spaniards, and English, passing alternately under the dominion of each of these powers, until finally, torn by insurrection and civil war, in 1804 it achieved its independence. The city of San Domingo, capital of the republic, is the oldest existing settlement by white men in the New World, having been founded in 1494 by Bartholomew Columbus. It contains to-day a little less than seven thousand inhabitants.

We gave Cape Maysi a wide berth, as a dangerous reef makes out from the land, eastward, for a mile or more. The fixed light at this point is a hundred and thirty feet above sea level, and is visible nearly twenty miles off shore.

We were running through the Windward Passage, as it was called by the early navigators, and whence one branch of the Gulf Stream finds its way northward. The Gulf Stream! Who can explain the mystery of its motive power; what keeps its tepid

waters in a course of thousands of miles from mingling with the rest of the sea; whence does it come? The accepted theories are familiar enough, but we do not believe them. Maury says the Gulf of Mexico is its fountain, and its mouth is the Arctic Sea. The maps make the eastern shore of Cuba terminate as sharply as a needle's point, but it proved to be very blunt in reality, as it forms the gateway to the Caribbean Sea, where the irregular coast line runs due north and south for the distance of many leagues. It is a low, rocky shore for the most part, but rises gradually as it recedes inland, until it assumes the form of hills so lofty as to merit the designation of mountains.

There was on board of our ship an intelligent resident of Santiago, who was enthusiastic in his description of the plains and valleys lying beyond the hills which stood so prominently on the coast, – hills probably older than any tongue in which we could describe them. The Scriptural Garden of Eden has absolutely been placed here by supposition on the part of traveled people. The temperature is simply perfect, if we are to believe our informant; the vegetation is of a primitive delicacy and beauty unequaled elsewhere; the fruits are fabulously abundant and of the most perfect flavor; the water bubbles forth from springs of crystal purity, and the flora is so lovely as to inspire the most indifferent beholder with delight. "It is called the Garden of Cuba," said the American Consul of Cienfuegos, "but many go further, and declare it to be the location of the original Paradise." Certain it is that the few Americans who have sought this so

highly praised region, though compelled to deny themselves the ordinary comforts to be found in more accessible resorts, have admitted with emphasis that nature, pure and undefiled, was here to be enjoyed in unstinted measure.

The hills bordering the shore and extending some distance inland contain much undeveloped mineral wealth, such as iron, silver, and gold. A mine of the former product is now being profitably worked by an American company, and the ore regularly shipped to Pennsylvania for smelting. This ore has special properties which render it more than usually valuable, and it is even claimed to be the best iron mine in the world. There is a strangely solitary and inhospitable appearance about this portion of the island, devoid as it is of all human habitations, and fringed either with long reaches of lonely snow-white beach or rugged brown rocks. The volcanic appearance of the land is significant of former upheavals, and this immediate region is still occasionally troubled with geological chills and fever.

The nights of early March in this latitude were exceedingly beautiful, and solemnly impressive was the liberal splendor of the sky. The full moon looked down upon and was reflected by waters of perfect smoothness. River navigation could not have been more quiet than were these nights on the blue Caribbean Sea. The air was as mild as June in New England, while at night the Southern Cross and the North Star blazed in the horizon at the same time. As we steered westward after doubling the cape, both of these heavenly sentinels were seen abeam, the constellation

on our port side, and the North Star on the starboard. Each day, at the noon hour, the passengers were interested in watching the officers of the ship while they were "taking the sun," to determine the latitude and longitude. Shall we put the process into simple form for the information of the uninitiated? When the sun reaches the meridian, or culminating point of ascension, the exact moment is indicated by the instrument known as a quadrant, adjusted to the eye of the observer. The figures marked on the quadrant give the latitude of the ship at the moment of meridian. The ship's time is then made to correspond, that is to say, it must indicate 12 o'clock, M., after which it is compared with the chronometer's Greenwich time, and the difference enables the observer to determine the longitude. As fifteen miles are allowed to the minute, there will be nine hundred miles to the hour. The importance of absolute correctness in the chronometer will at once be realized, since, were it only three minutes out of the way, it would render the calculation as to longitude wrong by nearly fifty miles, which might be, and doubtless often has been, the cause of wrecking a ship upon rocks laid down upon the charts, but supposed to be far away. With the chronometer and the quadrant observation correctly ascertained, the sailing-master can prick off his exact situation on the chart. So long as the weather will permit a clear view of the sun at noon, the ship's precise location on the wide waste of waters can be known; but when continuous cloudy weather prevails, the ship's course is calculated by what is called dead reckoning, depending upon

the speed and distance run as indicated by the log, which is cast hourly under such circumstances, and becomes the main factor in calculating the position of the ship. Of course the result cannot be very accurate, but is a dernier ressort. When land is in sight no observation is necessary, as the bearing of the ship is then unmistakably defined.

The sea was like molten sapphire as we glided swiftly along the southern coast of Cuba, watching the gracefully undulating shore. The mountains rose higher and higher, until they culminated in the lofty peak of Pico Turquino (blue mountain), over ten thousand feet high, as lately ascertained by actual measurement. There are coves and bays along this coast where oysters *do* grow upon trees, ridiculous as the assertion first strikes the ear. The mangrove-trees extend their roots from the shore into the sea, to which the oysters affix themselves, growing and thriving until plucked by the fishermen. They are small and of an inferior species compared with those of our own coast, but are freely eaten in the island. Near the shore hereabouts are many islets containing from three to five square miles, some of which are quite barren, while others are delicious gardens, full of tropical fruit trees, flowers, and odoriferous plants, where Paul and Virginia might have felt quite at home, wandering hand in hand.

Soon after passing the remarkably sheltered port of Guantanamo, which was for nearly a century the most notorious piratical rendezvous in the West Indies, the famous castle of

Santiago is seen. It is known as Moro Castle, but it antedates the more familiar Moro of Havana by a full century. This antique, yellow, Moorish-looking stronghold – which modern gunnery would destroy in about eight minutes – is picturesque to the last degree, with its crumbling, honeycombed battlements, and queer little flanking turrets, grated windows, and shadowy towers. It is built upon the face of a lofty dun-colored rock, upon whose precipitous side the fortification is terraced. It stands just at the entrance of the narrow channel leading to the city, so that in passing in one can easily exchange oral greetings with the sentry on the outer battlement. What strikingly artistic pictures the light and shade together formed with those time-stained walls, as we steamed slowly by them! On the ocean side, directly under the castle, the sea has worn a gaping cave, so deep that it has not been explored within the memory of the people living in the neighborhood. The broad and lofty entrance is in form as perfect an arch as could be drawn by the pencil of a skillful architect. As is usual with such formations all over the world, there is a romantic legend concerning the cave related as connected with the olden time, and there is also a prevailing superstition, that no one attempting to explore it will live to return.

In passing up the channel two or three little forts of queer construction are seen, supplementing the larger one, placed upon jutting headlands. The Moro of Santiago is now used as a prison for political offenders; its days of defensive importance ended with the period of the buccaneers, against whose crude means of

warfare it was an ample protection. As we steamed past it that sunny afternoon, stimulated by the novelty of everything about us, a crowd of pallid, sorrowful faces appeared at the grated windows, watching us listlessly. Two days later five of them, who were condemned patriots, were led out upon those ramparts and shot, their bodies falling into the sea, and eight were sent to the penal settlement of Ceuta. Spain extends no mercy to those who dare to raise their hands or voices in favor of freedom; her political existence is sustained only in an atmosphere of oppression and cruelty. Every page of her history is a tableau of bloodshed and torture. The narrow winding channel which leads from the open sea to the harbor passes through low hills and broad meadows covered with rank verdure, cocoanut groves, and little fishing hamlets. Thrifty laurels, palms with their graceful plumes of foliage, and intensely green bananas line the way, with here and there upon the banks a pleasant country house in the midst of a pretty garden of flowering shrubs. So close is the shore all the while that one seems to be navigating upon the land, gliding among trees and over greensward rather than on blue water. Presently we pass a sharp angle of the hills into a broad, sheltered bay, and before us lies the quaint, rambling old city of Santiago de Cuba, built upon a hillside, like Tangier in Africa, and nearly as Oriental as that capital of Morocco. The first most conspicuous objects to meet the eye are the twin towers of the ancient cathedral which have withstood so many earthquakes. The weather-beaten old quartermaster on our

forecastle applies the match to his brass twelve-pounder, awaking a whole broadside of echoes among the mountains, the big chain rushes swiftly through the hawse-hole, and the ship swings at her anchor in the middle of the picturesque bay.

A boat was promptly secured with which to land at this ancient city, founded by Velasquez. From the moment one touches the shore a sense of being in a foreign land forces itself upon the new-comer. The half-unintelligible language, the people, the architecture, the manners, the vegetation, even the very atmosphere and the intensity of the sunshine, are novel and attractive. It is easy to convey our partial impressions of a new place, however unique it may be, but not our inward sensations. The former are tangible, as it were, and may be depicted; the latter are like atmospheric air, which cannot be seen, but is felt. The many-colored, one-story houses of Santiago are Moorish in architecture, ranged in narrow streets, which cross each other at right angles with considerable regularity, but with roadways in an almost impassable condition, lined with sidewalks of ten or fifteen inches in width. These thoroughfares were once paved with cobblestones, but are now characterized by dirt and neglect, a stream of offensive water constantly percolating through them, in which little naked children are at play. No wonder that the city is annually decimated by yellow fever; the surprise is that it does not prevail there every month in the year. The boys and girls of the lower classes, white and black, are not thought to require clothing until they are about nine years of age. A few negresses

were observed sitting on the ground, at the corners of the streets, beside their baskets containing sweet cakes, mouldy biscuits, bananas, and grape-fruit, the uninviting appearance of which seemed to indicate that they were in the last stage of collapse. Was it possible any one could eat such stuff? As we passed and repassed these patient waiters, certainly no purchasers appeared. How the forty-five thousand inhabitants manage to achieve a living it would be difficult to imagine, for the town seemed to be as dead and void of all activity as Cordova, in far-off Spain, the sleepiest city in all Europe. Santiago has not a single bookstore within its limits. No other place in Christendom, with so numerous a population, could exist, outside of Spain, without some literary resort. There are here three or four spacious two-story club-houses, with some pretension to neatness and social accommodations; but then no Cuban town of any size would be complete without these anti-domestic institutions, where the male population may congregate for evening entertainment. The interior arrangements of these club-houses were entirely exposed to view, as we passed by the iron-grated windows, devoid of curtains, blinds, or screens of any sort, and extending from ceiling to floor.

Santiago dates back to the year of our Lord 1514, making it the oldest city in the New World, next to San Domingo, and it will be remembered as the place whence Cortez sailed, in 1519, to invade Mexico. Here also has been the seat of modern rebellion against the arbitrary and bitterly oppressive rule of the home

government. The city is situated six hundred miles southeast of Havana, and, after Matanzas, comes next to it in commercial importance, its exports reaching the handsome annual aggregate of eight millions of dollars. It is the terminus of two lines of railways, which pass through the sugar districts, and afford transportation for this great staple. Three leagues inland, among the mountains, are situated the famous Cobre copper mines, said to be of superior richness, and whence, in the days of their active working, four million dollars' worth of the ore has been exported in one year. This was the amount shipped in 1841, and so late as 1867 six thousand tons were exported in ten months. Not content with realizing a very large income from the mines by way of taxes upon the product, the Spanish government increased these excise charges to such an extent as to absorb the entire profits of the works and kill the enterprise, so that the rich ores of Cobre now rest undisturbed in the earth. It seems there is an Indian village near the copper mines, whose people are represented to be the only living descendants of the aborigines, – the Caribs whom Columbus found here on first landing. Careful inquiry, however, led us seriously to doubt the authenticity of the story. Probably this people are peculiar in their language, and isolation may have caused them to differ in some respects from the inhabitants of the valley and plains, but four centuries must have destroyed every trace of the early inhabitants of Cuba. Having been from the very outset enslaved and brutally treated by the Spaniards, it is believed that as early as the year of our Lord 1700 they had

utterly disappeared, and some historians say no trace even was to be found of the native race one century after the settlement of the island by Europeans.

The head of the Church of Rome in Cuba is located here, it being an archbishop's see; and the elaborate ceremonials which occasionally take place attract people from the most distant cities of the island. We chanced to be present when the bishop was passing into the cathedral, clothed in full canonicals and accompanied by church dignitaries bearing a canopy above his head. Observing our little party as strangers, though in the midst of a stately ceremony, the bishop graciously made us a sign of recognition. The cathedral of Santiago is the largest in Cuba, but extremely simple in its interior arrangements; and so, indeed, are all the churches on the island. As to the exterior, the façade resembles the cathedral of Havana, being of the same porous stone, which always presents a crumbled and mottled surface. The inside decorations are childish and fanciful, consisting mostly of artificial flowers of colored paper, crudely formed by inexperienced hands into stars, wreaths, and crosses. One innovation was noticed in this church: a saint on the right of the altar was mounted upon a wooden horse, with spear in rest à la militaire, forming a most incongruous figure. In the church of Matanzas, visited a week or two later, the effigy of our Saviour was observed to be half dressed in female attire, a glaring absurdity which the author has once before seen in the Spanish convent-church of Burgos. In the Matanzas church alluded to,

boys and girls of nine and ten years were seen at the confessional. Could absurdity be carried to a greater height? These with negro women form nearly all the audiences to be met with in the Cuban churches, unless upon festal occasions. The men manifest their indifference by their absence, and white women are scarcely represented. Besides the cathedral, Santiago has three or four other old churches, small and dilapidated, within whose sombre walls one seems to have stepped back into the fifteenth century. Upon strolling accidentally into one of these we felt a chill suffuse the whole system, like that realized on descending into a dark, undrained cellar.

The multiplicity and gaudiness of the drinking-saloons and bar-rooms were particularly noticeable in passing along the principal streets, and all were doing a thriving business, judging from appearances. The Cubans drink lightly, but they drink often, and are especially addicted to gin, which is dealt out to them at an extraordinarily low price. It appears that people can consume a much larger quantity of spirituous liquors here without becoming intoxicated than they can do at the North. It is very rare to see a person overcome by this indulgence in Cuba, and yet, as was afterwards observed in Cienfuegos, Matanzas, and Havana, the common people begin the day with a very liberal dram, and follow it up with frequent libations until bed-time, – tippling at every convenient opportunity. A few of the better class of private houses were constructed with courts in the centre, where flowers and tropical fruits were growing luxuriantly. These

dwellings were confined to no special quarter of the town, but were as often found next to a commercial warehouse or a negro shanty as elsewhere. The dogs, horses, and Chinese coolies were all in wretched condition. One might count the ribs of the first two a long way off, while the latter were ragged, lame, half-starved, and many of them blind. Animals are the recipients of the severest sort of usage both in Cuba and Spain. Few vehicles were to be seen, as merchandise is mostly transported on the backs of mules and ponies, and these animals are seldom shod.

The town is lighted with gas, or rather it was so illuminated a few weeks since; but it was quietly whispered about that the corporation had failed to pay for this service last year, and that the monopoly itself was on the verge of bankruptcy, like nearly everything else of a business character in Cuba. The gaslights certainly appeared pale and sickly enough, as though only half confirmed in the purpose of giving any light at all, and were prematurely extinguished in many of the streets. In the shops, whose fronts were all open, like those of Canton and Yokohama, the clerks were to be seen in their shirt sleeves, guiltless of vests or collars, coquetting over calicoes and gaudy-colored merinos with mulatto girls decked in cheap jewelry, and with negresses wearing enormous hoop-earrings. At the approach of evening the bar-rooms and saloons, with a liberal display of looking-glasses, bottles of colored liquors, gin, and glitter, were dazzling to behold. The marble tables were crowded with domino and card players, each sipping at intervals his favorite tipple. The

sidewalks are so narrow that the pedestrian naturally seeks the middle of the street as a pathway, and the half a dozen victorias and four volantes which form the means of transportation in Santiago, and which are constantly wandering about in search of a job, manage to meet or to overtake one perpetually; causing first a right oblique, then a left oblique, movement, with such regularity as to amount to an endless zig-zag. We did not exactly appreciate the humor of this annoyance, but perhaps the drivers did. After climbing and descending these narrow, dirty streets by daylight and by gaslight, and watching the local characteristics for a few hours, one is only too happy to take a boat back to the ship, and leave all behind.

A desire for a cold bath and a good swim is natural in this climate after sunset, but beware of indulging this inclination in the waters of Santiago. Under that smooth, inviting surface, glistening beneath the rays of a full moon, lurk myriads of sharks. They are large, hungry, man-eating creatures, the tigers of the ocean, and the dread of all local boatmen here. To fall overboard in these waters, however good a swimmer one may be, is simply to be devoured. At Singapore, Sumatra, or Batavia, a Malay will for a consideration dive into the waters of the Malacca Straits, armed with a long, sharp knife, boldly attack a shark, and rip open his bowels at the moment when he turns on his side to give the deadly bite. But on that coast this dreaded fish appears singly; it is rare to see two of them together; while Santiago harbor seems to swarm with them, the dark dorsal fin of the threatening

creatures just parting the surface of the sea, and betraying their presence. Lying at anchor between our ship and the shore was a trig Spanish corvette, – an American-built vessel, by the way, though belonging to the navy of Spain. It was curious at times to watch her crew being drilled in various martial manœuvres. While an officer was exercising the men at furling topsails, a few days before our arrival, a foretopman fell from aloft into the sea. Under ordinary circumstances and in most waters, the man could easily have been saved, but not so in this instance. He did not even rise to the surface. A struggle for portions of his body between half a dozen ravenous sharks was observed alongside the corvette, and all was quickly over. The foretopman had been torn limb from limb and instantly devoured.

The over-stimulated brain felt no inclination for sleep on this first night in the harbor, the situation was so novel, and the night itself one to suggest poetic thoughts. The moon was creeping slowly across the blue vault, like a great phantom mingling with the lambent purity of the stars. We sat silently watching the heavens, the water, and the shore; saw the lights go out one after another among the clustering dwellings, and the street gas-burners shut off here and there, until by and by the drowsy town was wrapped in almost perfect darkness. Only the ripple of the sea alongside the ship broke the silence, or the sudden splash of some large fish, leaping out of and falling back into the water. It seemed as though no sky was ever before of such marvelous blue depth, no water so full of mystery, no shore so clad in

magic verdure, and no night ever of such resplendent clearness. The landing-steps and grating had been rigged out from a broad porthole on the spar deck, where a quartermaster was awaiting the return of the purser and a party of gentlemen who were making late, or rather early, hours on shore; for it was nearly two o'clock in the morning, and the weary seaman, who had sat down at his post on the grating, was snoring like a wheezy trombone. The measured tread fore and aft of the second officer, who kept the anchor watch, was the only evidence of wakefulness that disturbed our lonely mood. A similar night scene was vividly called to mind as experienced in Typhoon Bay, below Hong Kong, a few years since.

In the harbor, next morning, a sunken wreck was pointed out to us, which was partially visible at low tide, not far from the shore. Only the ribs and stanchions are still held together by the stout keel timbers and lower sheathing. This wreck has lain there unheeded for years, yet what a story these old timbers might tell, had they only a tongue with which to give voice to their experience! – literally the experience of ages. We refer to the remains of the old St. Paul, one of the ships of the great Spanish Armada that Philip II. sent to England in 1588, being one of the very few of that famous flotilla that escaped destruction at the time. What a historical memento is the old wreck! After a checkered career, in which this ancient craft had breasted the waves of innumerable seas and withstood the storms of nearly three centuries, she was burned to the water's edge here in

the harbor of Santiago a few years since, and sunk, where her remains now lie, covered with slime and barnacles, – a striking emblem of the nation whose flag she once proudly bore. During the last years of her career afloat she was used for transporting troops from Europe, and as a Spanish guard-ship in these seas by the local government. It is doubtful if it is generally known that this relic of the Spanish Armada is in existence. Curio-hunters, once put upon the scent, will probably soon reduce these ancient timbers to chips, and a crop of canes and snuff-boxes, more or less hideous and more or less counterfeit, will ensue.

Here we got our first experience of the present currency, – the valueless circulating medium of Cuba. When one has occasion to visit the island it is best to take American funds, either in bank-bills or gold, sufficient to meet all ordinary expenses. Our bank-bills and our gold are both at a premium. This will also save all necessity for drawing on home through any local bankers, who have a way of charging for the accommodation quite after the style of everything Spanish. The hotel-keepers will require their pay on the basis of Spanish gold, but will cheerfully allow a premium of six per cent. on American gold or American bank-bills. As to the banks in Cuba, all are shaky, so to speak; several have lately failed, and the others might as well do so. It is not long since the president of the Havana Savings Bank placed a pistol at his temple and blew his brains out. Mercantile credit may be said to be dead, and business nearly at a standstill. Commercial honesty is hardly to be expected from a bankrupt

community, where the people seem only to be engaged in the sale and purchase of lottery tickets, a habit participated in by all classes.

What little gold and silver coin there is found in circulation is mutilated; every piece of money, large and small, has been subjected to the ingenious punch, and thus has lost a portion of its intrinsic value. American gold and silver, not having been thus clipped, justly commands a six per cent. premium.

The circulating medium upon the island is paper scrip, precisely similar to that used in this country before the resumption of specie payment. This scrip is dirty beyond endurance, and one absolutely hesitates to take it in making change.

When our currency became soiled and torn we could exchange it for new, but there is no such facility in Cuba. One dollar of our money will purchase $2.45 of this scrip. It passes current, and really seems to answer the necessities of trade, but even the Cubans are not deceived by it. They know that it is really worthless, being based upon nothing, and issued indiscriminately by a bankrupt government. The paper-mill grinds it out in five, ten, twenty, and fifty cent pieces as fast as it can be put into circulation, while no one knows how much has been issued. But one thing is known; namely, that every authorized issue of a given sum has been enormously exceeded in amount.

Within about five years, or less, an issue of bank-bills and of this small currency was entrusted to an establishment

in the United States, when fourteen millions of dollars were printed in *addition* to the amount authorized! All were duly receipted for and signed by corrupt Spanish officials, who coolly divided these millions among themselves! The Captain-General of Cuba during whose administration this financial stroke was accomplished came to the island a poor man, and returned to Spain in two years possessed of three million dollars!

There is no more beautiful or safe harbor in the world than that of Santiago de Cuba, commercially speaking, as it is completely land-locked and protected on all sides from storms; but for the same reason it is as close and hot an anchorage as can be found in the tropics. An intelligent resident gave us 80° Fahrenheit as the average temperature of the year, though the thermometer showed a more ambitious figure during our brief stay. There are but two seasons, the wet and the dry, the latter extending from September to May. The city might have an excellent water supply if there were sufficient enterprise among the citizens to cause it to be conducted by pipes from the springs in the neighboring hills. It is now wretchedly deficient in this respect, causing both suffering and ill health in a climate especially demanding this prime necessity of life.

CHAPTER III

Doubling Cape Cruz. – Trinidad. – Cienfuegos. – The Plaza. – Beggars. – Visit to a Sugar Plantation. – Something about Sugar. – An Original Character. – A Tropical Fruit Garden. – Cuban Hospitality. – The Banana. – Lottery Tickets. – Chinese Coolies. – Blindness in Cuba. – Birds and Poultry. – The Cock-Pit. – Negro Slavery, To-Day. – Spanish Slaveholders. – A Slave Mutiny. – A Pleasant Journey across the Island. – Pictures of the Interior. – Scenery about Matanzas. – The Tropics and the North contrasted.

To reach Cienfuegos, our next objective point, one takes water conveyance, the common roads in this district being, if possible, a degree worse than elsewhere. It is therefore necessary to double Cape Cruz, and perform a coasting voyage along the southern shore of the island of about four hundred miles. This is really delightful sailing in any but the hurricane months; that is, between the middle of August and the middle of October. It would seem that this should be quite a commercial thoroughfare, but it is surprising how seldom a sailing-vessel is seen on the voyage, and it is still more rare to meet a steamship. Our passage along the coast was delightful: the undulating hills, vales, and plains seemed to be quietly gliding past us of their own volition; the tremor of the ship did not suggest motion of the hull, but a

sense of delight at the moving panorama so clearly depicted. No extensive range of waters in either hemisphere is so proverbially smooth as the Caribbean Sea, during eight months of the year, but a stout hull and good seamanship are demanded during the remaining four, especially if coming from the northward over the Bahama Banks and through the Windward Passage, as described in these chapters.

The city of Trinidad, perched upon a hillside, is passed at the distance of a few miles, being pleasantly situated more than a league from the coast. The town of Casilda is its commercial port. This arrangement was adopted in the early days as a partial protection against the frequent inroads of the buccaneers, who ceased to be formidable when separated from their ships. Trinidad was once the centre of the prosperous coffee trade of Cuba, but is now, and has been for many years, commercially wrecked. It is very beautifully located, with Mount Vijia for its background, in what is declared to be the healthiest district upon the island. But it is an ancient city, comparatively deserted, its date being nearly contemporary with that of Santiago. Cienfuegos, its successful business rival, is on the contrary quite modern, exhibiting many features of thrift and activity, and is counted the third commercial city of Cuba. Like Cardenas, it is called an American capital. It has some twenty-five thousand inhabitants, a large proportion of whom speak English, nine tenths of its commerce being with the United States. In this immediate neighborhood Columbus, on his second

voyage, saw with astonishment the mysterious king who spoke to his subjects only by signs, and that group of men who wore long white tunics like the monks of mercy, while the rest of the people were entirely naked. The town is low and level, occupying a broad plane. The streets are of fair width, crossing each other at right angles, and are kept neat and clean. The harbor is an excellent and spacious one, admitting of vessels being moored at the wharves, a commercial convenience unknown at Santiago, Matanzas, or Havana. The navies of all the world might rendezvous here and not crowd each other. Three rivers, the Canudo, Saludo, and Danuyi, empty into the bay, and each is navigable for a considerable distance inland, a matter of great importance in a country so devoid of good roads. The parti-colored houses are of the usual Cuban type, mostly of one story, built with a patio or open courtyard in the centre, well filled with flowering plants, among which were observed the attractive coral-tree, which resembles a baby palm, and the universal banana.

The Plaza of Cienfuegos forms a large, well-arranged square, where an out-door military concert is given twice a week, a universal practice in all Cuban cities. It is laid out with excellent taste, its broad paths nicely paved, and the whole lighted at night with numerous ornamental gas-lamps. The vegetation is both attractive and characteristic, consisting of palms, laurels, and flowering shrubs, mingled with which are some exotics from the North, which droop with a homesick aspect. Plants, like human beings, will pine for their native atmosphere. If it be more

rigorous and less genial at the North, still there is a bracing, tonic effect, imparting life and strength, which is wanting in the low latitudes. On one side of this fine square is the government house and barracks, opposite to which is an open-air theatre, and in front is the cathedral with any number of discordant bells. The little English sparrow seems to be ubiquitous, and as pugnacious here as on Boston Common, or the Central Park of New York. Boyish games are very similar the world over: young Cuba was playing marbles after the orthodox fashion, knuckle-down. It was very pitiful to behold the army of beggars in so small a city, but begging is synonymous with the Spanish name, both in her European and colonial possessions. Here the maimed, halt, and blind meet one at every turn. Saturday is the harvest day for beggars in the Cuban cities, on which occasion they go about by scores from door to door, carrying a large canvas bag. Each family and shop is supplied with a quantity of small rolls of bread, specially baked for the purpose, and one of which is nearly always given to the applicant on that day, so the mendicant's bag becomes full of rolls. These, mixed with vegetables, bits of fish, and sometimes meat and bones when they can be procured, are boiled into a soup, thus keeping soul and body together in the poor creatures during the week.

Cienfuegos is situated in the midst of a sugar-producing district, where soil and climate are both favorable, and over twenty large plantations are to be seen within a radius of two or three leagues. The export from them, as we were informed by

the courteous editor of "La Opinion," a local paper, aggregates thirty thousand hogsheads annually. The visitor should not fail to make an excursion to some representative plantation, where it is impossible not to be much interested and practically informed. One of these sugar estates, situated less than two leagues from the town, was found to be furnished with a complete outfit of the most modern machinery, which had cost the proprietor a quarter of a million dollars. It was working with the usual favorable results, though at the present price of sugar no profit can accrue to the planter. The plantation presented a busy scene. During the grinding season the machinery is run night and day, but is obliged to lie idle for eight months out of the year.

In the uncultivated fields through which we passed when driving out to the sugar estate, the prickly pear grew close to the ground in great luxuriance, as it is seen on our Western prairies. Its thick leaves, so green as to be dense with color, impart the effect of greensward at a short distance. On close inspection it was seen to be the star cactus, which like the Northern thistle kills all other vegetation within its reach. Here and there the wild ipecacuanha with its bright red blossom was observed, but the fields, except those devoted to the cane, were very barren near Cienfuegos.

Sugar-cane is cultivated like Indian corn, which it also resembles in appearance. It is first planted in rows, not in hills, and must be hoed and weeded until it gets high enough to shade its roots. Then it may be left to itself until it reaches maturity.

This refers to the first laying out of a plantation, which will afterwards continue fruitful for years by very simple processes of renewal. When thoroughly ripe the cane is of a light golden yellow, streaked here and there with red. The top is dark green, with long narrow leaves depending, – very much like those of the corn stalk, – from the centre of which shoots upwards a silvery stem a couple of feet in height, and from its tip grows a white fringed plume, of a delicate lilac hue. The effect of a large field at its maturity, lying under a torrid sun and gently yielding to the breeze, is very fine, a picture to live in the memory ever after. In the competition between the products of beet-root sugar and that from sugar-cane, the former controls the market, because it can be produced at a cheaper rate, besides which its production is stimulated by nearly all of the European states through the means of liberal subsidies both to the farmer and to the manufacturer. Beet sugar, however, does not possess so high a percentage of true saccharine matter as does the product of the cane, the latter seeming to be nature's most direct mode of supplying us with the article. The Cuban planters have one advantage over all other sugar-cane producing countries, in the great and inexhaustible fertility of the soil of the island. For instance: one to two hogsheads of sugar to the acre is considered a good yield in Jamaica, but in Cuba three hogsheads is the average. Fertilizing of any sort is rarely employed in the cane-fields, while in beet farming it is the principal agent of success.

Though the modern machinery, as lately adopted on the

plantations, is very expensive, still the result achieved by it is so much superior to that of the old methods of manufacture that the small planters are being driven from the market. Slave labor cannot compete with machinery. The low price of sugar renders economy imperative in all branches of the business, in order to leave a margin for profit. A planter informed the author that he should spread all of his molasses upon the cane-fields this year as a fertilizer, rather than send it to a distant market and receive only what it cost. He further said that thousands of acres of sugar-cane would be allowed to rot in the fields this season, as it would cost more to cut, grind, pack, and send it to market than could be realized for the manufactured article. Had the price of sugar remained this year at a figure which would afford the planters a fair profit, it might have been the means of tiding over the chasm of bankruptcy which has long stared them in the face, and upon the brink of which they now stand. But with a more than average crop, both as to quantity and quality, whether to gather it or not is a problem. Under these circumstances it is difficult to say what is to become, financially, of the people of Cuba. Sugar is their great staple, but all business has been equally depressed upon the island, under the bane of civil wars, extortionate taxation, and oppressive rule.

If you visit Cienfuegos you will take rooms at the Hotel Union, as being the least objectionable of the two public houses which the city contains, and there you will make the acquaintance of Jane, who is an institution in herself. Indeed, she will

doubtless board your ship when it first arrives, so as to enlighten you concerning the excellences of the Union over its rival establishment, which will also be sure to be represented. Jane is interpreter and general factotum of that delectable posada, the Union, and being the only one in the house who speaks either French or English, she becomes an important factor in your calculations. Jane's nationality is a pleasing mystery, but she may be classed as a Portuguese quadroon. Venus did not preside at her birth, but, by means of the puff-ball and egg-shell powder, she strives to harmonize her mottled features. Being interpreter, waitress, hotel-runner, and chambermaid, she is no idler, and fully earns the quarter eagle you naturally hand her at leave-taking. In visiting the neighboring sugar plantation Jane acts as your guide, on which occasion her independence will be sure to challenge admiration. She salutes slave or master with equal familiarity, conducts you through each process of the elaborate works, from the engine to the crushing mill, and so on, until you reach the centrifugal machine, where the glistening crystals of pure sugar fall into an open receptacle ready for packing and shipment. She takes you into the slave-quarters among the pickaninnies, hens, pigs, and pigeons, looking on blandly and chewing huge pieces of cane while you distribute the bright ten cent pieces with which you filled your pocket at starting. If Jane slyly pinches a papoose and causes it to yell, it is only for fun; she means no harm, though the dusky mite gets smartly slapped by its mother for misbehaving. The cabin floor of bare earth is

sure to be covered with these little naked, sprawling objects, like ants. On the way back to town Jane orders the postilion to drive into the private grounds of a palatial Cuban residence, where she boldly announces herself and party to the proprietor in good rolling Spanish. It is the home of Señor N – , a wealthy merchant of the city. We are received as though we belonged to the royal family. The hospitable owner speaks English fluently, and answers our thousand and one questions with tireless courtesy, takes us into his superb fruit garden (of which more anon), then introduces us to his domestic quarters, where everything appears refined, faultlessly neat, and tasteful. If you go to the railroad station, as usual the evening before departure, in order to secure tickets and get your baggage labeled, – for the cars start in the morning before daylight, – Jane will accompany you, riding by your side in the victoria. Excuse her if she orders the calash thrown back, as she appears bonnetless in a loud, theatrical costume, trimmed with red and yellow, and carrying a bouquet in her freckled hands. It is her opportunity, and she looks triumphantly at the street loungers in passing. If you are charged on your bill a Delmonico price for a mythical lunch to be taken with you on the journey to Matanzas, and which Jane has forgotten to put up, pay without wrangling; it saves time and temper.

The tropical garden which we visited just outside of Cienfuegos embraced a remarkable variety of trees, including some thrifty exotics. Here the mango, with its peach-like foliage,

was bending to the ground with the weight of its ripening fruit; the alligator pear was marvelously beautiful in its full blossom, suggesting, in form and color, the passion-flower; the soft delicate foliage of the tamarind was like our sensitive plant; the banana trees were in full bearing, the deep green fruit (it is ripened and turns yellow off the tree) being in clusters of a hundred, more or less, tipped at the same time by a single, pendent, glutinous bud nearly as large as a pineapple. The date-palm, so suggestive of the far East, and the only one we had seen in Cuba, was represented by a choice specimen, imported in its youth. There was also the star-apple tree, remarkable for its uniform and graceful shape, full of the green fruit, with here and there a ripening specimen; so, also, was the favorite zapota, its rusty-coated fruit hanging in tempting abundance. From low, broad-spreading trees depended the grape-fruit, as large as an infant's head and yellow as gold, while the orange, lime, and lemon trees, bearing blossoms, green and ripe fruit all together, met the eye at every turn, and filled the garden with fragrance. The cocoanut palm, with its tall, straight stem and clustering fruit, dominated all the rest. Guava, fig, custard-apple, and bread-fruit trees, all were in bearing. Our hospitable host plucked freely of the choicest for the benefit of his chance visitors. Was there ever such a fruit garden before, or elsewhere? It told of fertility of soil and deliciousness of climate, of care, judgment, and liberal expenditure, all of which combined had turned these half a dozen acres of land into a Gan Eden. Through this orchard of

Hesperides we were accompanied also by the proprietor's two lovely children, under nine years of age, with such wealth of promise in their large black eyes and sweet faces as to fix them on our memory with photographic fidelity.

Before leaving the garden we returned with our intelligent host once more to examine his beautiful specimens of the banana, which, with its sister fruit the plantain, forms so important a staple of food in Cuba and throughout all tropical regions. It seems that the female banana tree bears more fruit than the male, but not so large. The average clusters of the former comprise here about one hundred, but the latter rarely bears over sixty or seventy distinct specimens of the cucumber-shaped product. From the centre of its large broad leaves, which gather at the top, when it has reached the height of twelve or fifteen feet there springs forth a large purple bud ten inches long, shaped like a huge acorn, though more pointed. This cone hangs suspended from a strong stem, upon which a leaf unfolds, displaying a cluster of young fruit. As soon as these are large enough to support the heat of the sun and the chill of the rain, this sheltering leaf drops off, and another unfolds, exposing its little brood of fruit; and so the process goes on until six or eight rings of young bananas are started, forming, as we have said, bunches numbering from seventy to a hundred. The banana is a herbaceous plant, and after fruiting its top dies; but it annually sprouts up again fresh from the roots. From the unripe fruit, dried in the sun, a palatable and nutritious flour is made.

No matter where one may be, in town or country, in the east or west end of the island, Santiago or Havana, the lottery-ticket vender is there. Men, women, and children are employed to peddle the tickets, cripples especially being pressed into the service in the hope of exciting the sympathies of strangers and thus creating purchasers. It may be said to be about the only prosperous business at present going on in this thoroughly demoralized island. Half the people seem to think of nothing else, and talk of dreaming that such and such combinations of numbers will bring good luck. Some will buy only even numbers, others believe that the odd ones stand the best chance of winning; in short, all the gambling fancies are brought to bear upon these lotteries. Enough small prizes are doled out to the purchasers of tickets, by the cunning management, to keep hope and expectation ever alive in their hearts, and to coax out of them their last dollar in further investments. "If," said a native resident of Matanzas to us, "these lotteries, all of which are presided over by the officials, are honestly conducted, they are the one honest thing in which this government is concerned. Venal in everything else, why should they be conscientious in this gambling game?" No one believes in the integrity of the government, but, strange to say, the masses have implicit faith in the lotteries.

At one corner of our hotel in Cienfuegos, there sat upon the sidewalk of the street a blind beggar, a Chinese coolie, whose miserable, poverty-stricken appearance elicited a daily trifle from the habitués of the house. Early one morning we

discovered this representative of want and misery purchasing a lottery ticket. They are so divided and subdivided, it appears, as to come even within the means of the street beggars! Speaking of blindness, the multiplicity of people thus afflicted, especially among negroes and coolies, led to the enumeration of those met with in a single day; the result was seventeen. On inquiry it was found that inflammation of the eyes is as common here as in Egypt, and that it runs a rapid and fatal course, – fatal to the sight after having once attacked a victim, unless it receives prompt, judicious, and scientific treatment.

The Chinese coolies, who are encountered in all parts of the island, but more especially in the cities, are almost invariably decrepit, poverty-stricken mendicants, and very frequently blind. They are such as have been through their eight years' contract, and have been brought to their present condition by ill-treatment, insufficient food, and the troubles incident to the climate. In the majority of cases these coolies have been cheated out of the trifling amount of wages promised to them, for there is no law in Cuba to which they can appeal. There are laws which will afford the negro justice if resorted to under certain circumstances, but none for the coolies. There are some few Chinamen who have survived every exigency, and are now engaged in keeping small stores or fruit stands, cigar making, and other light employments, their only hope being to gain money enough to carry them back to their native land, and to have a few dollars left to support them after getting there. There are no Chinese laundries in Cuba;

John cannot compete with the black women in this occupation, for they are natural washers and ironers. John is only a skillful imitator. He proves most successful in the cigarette and cigar factories, where his deft fingers can turn out a more uniform and handsome article than the Cubans themselves. Machinery is fast doing away with hand-made cigarettes. At the famous establishment of La Honradez, in Havana, which we visited some weeks later, one machine was seen in operation which produced ten thousand complete cigarettes each hour, or a million per day! Still this same establishment employed some fifty Chinese in order to supply its trade with the hand-made article, for home consumption. The Cubans prefer to unroll and readjust a cigarette before lighting it. This cannot be done with the machine-made article, which completes its product by a pasting process. The three machines (an American patent) at the Honradez factory turn out three millions of cigarettes per day, and this is in addition to those which are hand-made by the Chinese.

The landlord of the Hotel Union, at Cienfuegos, will give you plenty of fruit and cheap Cataline wine, but the meat which is served is poor and consists mostly of birds. Any other which may be set before you will hardly be found to be a success, but then one does not crave much substantial food in this climate. There is a small wild pigeon which forms a considerable source of food in Cuba, and which breeds several times in a year. They are snared and shot in large numbers for the table, but do not show any signs of being exterminated. Ducks and water-fowl generally abound,

and are depended upon to eke out the short supply of what we term butcher's meat. Three quarters of the people never partake of other meat than pigeons, poultry, and wild ducks. Eggs are little used as food, being reserved for hatching purposes. All families in the country and many in the cities make a business of raising poultry, but the product is a bird of small dimensions, not half the size of our common domestic fowls. They are very cheap, but they are also very poor. The practice is to keep them alive until they are required for the table, so that they are killed, picked, and eaten, all in the same hour, and are in consequence very tough. As the climate permits of hens hatching every month in the year, the young are constantly coming forward, and one mother annually produces several broods; chickens, like tropical fruits, are perennial.

Sunday is no more a day of rest in Cienfuegos than it is in other Roman Catholic countries; indeed, it seemed to be distinguished only by an increase of revelry, the activity of the billiard saloons, the noisy persistency of the lottery-ticket venders, the boisterousness of masquerade processions, and a general public rollicking. The city is not large enough to support a bull-ring, but cock-pits are to be found all over the island, and the Sabbath is the chosen day for their exhibitions. It must be a very small and very poor country town in Cuba which has not its cock-pit. The inveterate gambling propensities of the people find vent also at dominoes, cards, checkers, and chess in the bar-rooms, every marble table being in requisition for the purpose of the

games on Sundays. Having noticed the sparse attendance at the cathedral, we remarked to Jane that the church was quite empty, whereupon she replied with a significant leer, "True, Señor, but the jail is full." More than once an underlying vein of sarcasm was observed in the very pertinent remarks of which Jane was so happily delivered.

There are comparatively few slaves to be found on the plantations or elsewhere in the vicinity of Cienfuegos: in fact, slavery is rapidly disappearing from the island. "Slave labor is more costly than any other, all things considered," said a sugar planter to us. "I do not own one to-day, but I have owned and worked six hundred at a time," he added. "We pay no tax on the laborers we hire, but on slaves we pay a heavy head-tax annually." An edict has been promulgated by the home government, which went into force last year, and which frees one slave in every four annually, so that on January 1, 1888, all will have become free. In the mean time the commercial value of slaves has so decreased in view of their near emancipation that they are not appraised on an average at over fifty or sixty dollars each. The law has for a period of many years provided that any slave who pays to his master his appraised value shall at once receive his free papers. Many purchase their liberty under this law, and then hire themselves to the same master or to some other, as they may choose, – at low wages, to be sure, but including food and shelter. Slaves have always been entitled by law in Cuba to hold individual property independent of their masters, and there are

few smart ones who have not accumulated more or less pecuniary means during their servitude. They have had no expenses to meet in the way of supporting themselves. That has devolved upon their owners, so that whatever money they have realized by the several ways open to them has been clear profit. Many slaves have anticipated the period of their legal release from servitude, and more will do so during the present year. We also heard of planters who, realizing the inevitable, have manumitted the few slaves whom they still held in bondage, and hiring them at merely nominal wages, believed they saved money by the operation.

It will be seen, therefore, that slavery as an institution here is virtually at an end. Low wages will prevail, and this is necessary to enable the planters to compete with the beet sugar producers of Europe. In truth, it is a question how long they will be able to do so at any rate of wages. The modern machinery being so generally adopted by the sugar-cane planters, while remarkably successful, both, as to the quality and the quantity of the juice it expresses from the cane, not only is expensive in first cost, but it requires more intelligent laborers than were found serviceable with the old process. To supply the places of the constantly diminishing slaves, emigrants, as they were called, have heretofore been introduced from the Canary Islands; men willing to contract for a brief period of years, say eight or ten, as laborers, and at moderate wages. These people have proved to be good plantation hands, though not so well able to bear the great heat of the sun as were the negroes; otherwise they

were superior to them, and better in all respects than the Chinese coolies, who as workers on the plantations have proved to be utter failures. The mortality among these Mongolians, as we learned from good authority, had reached as high as sixty-seven per cent, within eight years of their date of landing in Cuba, that being also the period of their term of contract. None have been introduced into the island for several years. This coolie importation, like the slave-trade with Africa, was a fraud and an outrage upon humanity, and never paid any one, even in a mercenary point of view, except the shipowners who brought the deceived natives from the coast of China. Slavery in Cuba and slavery in our country were always quite a different thing, and strange to say the laws of the Spanish government were far more favorable and humane towards the victims of enforced labor than were those established in our Southern States. When the American negro ceased to be a slave, he ceased to cultivate the soil for his master only to cultivate it for himself. Not so in the tropics. The Cuban negro, in the first place, is of a far less intelligent type than the colored people in the States; secondly, the abundance of natural food productions in the low latitudes, such as fruit, fish, and vegetables, requires of the negro only to pluck and to eat; clothing and shelter are scarcely needed, and virtually cost nothing where one may sleep in the open air without danger every night in the year; and finally, the negro of the tropics will not work unless he is compelled to.

There is a certain class of the Spanish slaveholders who have

always fought against negro emancipation in any form, – fought against manifest destiny as well as against sound principles, fought indeed against their own clear interest, so wedded were they to the vile institution of slavery. Yet to every thinking man on the island, it is clearly apparent that human slavery in Cuba, as everywhere else, has proved to be a disturber of the public peace, and has retarded more than anything, else the material and moral progress of the entire people. It is but a short time since that the editor of a Havana newspaper, the "Revista Economica," was imprisoned in Moro Castle, and without even the pretense of a trial afterwards banished from the island, because he dared to point out the fact in print that the freeing of the slaves would prove a mutual benefit to man and master, besides being a grand act of humanity. Two years since the slaves on a large plantation near Guines refused to work on a holiday which had always heretofore been granted to them; whereupon the soldiery were called in to suppress what was called a mutiny of the blacks, resulting in nine negroes being shot dead, and many others put in chains to be scourged at leisure. Doomed as we have shown slavery to be, still it dies hard in Cuba.

In the vicinity of Cienfuegos, Santiago, and Trinidad, in the mountain regions of the eastern district, there are many lawless people, – banditti, in fact, who make war for plunder both upon native and foreign travelers, even resorting in some cases to holding prisoners for ransoms. Several aggravating instances of the latter character came to our knowledge while we were

on the spot. Since these notes were commenced five of these robbers have been captured, including the leader of the band to which they belonged, a notorious outlaw named Clemente Martinez. They were taken by means of a stratagem, whereby they were decoyed into an ambush, surrounded, and captured red-handed, as they fought furiously, knowing that they had no mercy to expect at the hands of the soldiers. It was the civil guard at Rancho Veloz who made this successful raid into the hills, and every one of the prisoners was summarily shot. Such, off-hand punishment is dangerous, but in this instance it was no more prompt than just. It is necessary, therefore, to carry arms for self-defense upon the roads in some parts of the island, and even the countrymen wear swords when bringing produce to market. Residents having occasion to go any distance inland take a well-armed guard with them, to prevent being molested by the desperate refugees who lurk in the hill country. Undoubtedly many of these lawless bands are composed of former revolutionists, who are driven to extremes by want of food and the necessities of life.

Our journey was continued from Cienfuegos to Havana, by way of Matanzas, crossing the island nearly at right angles. The traveler plunges at once by this route into the midst of luxuriant tropical nature, where the vegetation is seen to special advantage, characterized by a great variety of cacti and parasitic growth, flowering trees and ever graceful palms, besides occasional ceibas of immense size. Though the landscape, somehow, was

sad and melancholy, it gave rise to bright and interesting thoughts in the observer: doubtless the landscape, like humanity, has its moods. Vegetation, unlike mankind, seems here never to grow old, never to falter; crop succeeds crop, harvest follows harvest; nature is inexhaustible, – it is an endless cycle of abundance. Miles upon miles of the bright, golden-green sugar-cane lie in all directions, among which, here and there, is seen the little cluster of low buildings constituting the negroes' quarters attached to each plantation, and near by is the tall white chimney of the sugar-mill, emitting its thick volume of wreathing smoke, like the funnel of a steamboat. A little on one side stands the planter's house, low and white, surrounded by beautiful shade trees and clustering groups of flowers. Scores of dusky Africans give life to the scene, and the sturdy overseer, mounted on his little Cuban pony, dashes back and forth to keep all hands advantageously at work. One large gang is busy cutting the tall cane with sharp, sword-like knives; some are loading the stalks upon ox-carts; some are driving loads to the mill; some feeding the cane between the great steel crushers, beneath which pours forth a ceaseless jelly-like stream, to be conducted by iron pipes to the boilers; men, women, and children are spreading the crushed refuse to dry in the sun, after which it will be used for fuel. Coopers are heading up hogsheads full of the manufactured article, and others are rolling up empty ones to be filled.

Some years ago, when the author first visited Cuba, the overseer was never seen without his long, cutting whip, as well

as his sword and pistols. The latter he wears to-day, but the whip is unseen. The fact is, the labor on the plantations is now so nearly free labor that there is little if any downright cruelty exercised as of yore. Or, rather, we will qualify the remark by saying that there has been a vast improvement in this respect on the side of humanity. The shadow of the picture lies in the past. One could not but recall in imagination the horrors which so long characterized these plantations. The bloodthirsty spirit of the Spanish slaveholders had free scope here for centuries, during which time the invaders sacrificed the entire aboriginal race; and since then millions of Africans have been slowly murdered by overwork, insufficient food, and the lash, simply to fill the pockets of their rapacious masters with gold. Few native Cubans are sugar-planters. These estates are almost universally owned and carried on by Spaniards from the European peninsula, or other foreigners, including Englishmen and Americans.

Occasionally, in the trip across the island, we passed through a crude but picturesque little hamlet having the unmistakable stamp of antiquity, with low straggling houses built of rude frames, covered at side and roof with palm bark and leaves; chimneys there were none, – none even in the cities, – charcoal only being used for cooking purposes, and which is performed in the open air. About the door of the long, rambling posada, a dozen or more horses were seen tied to a long bar, erected for the purpose, but no wheeled vehicles were there. The roads are only fit for equestrians, and hardly passable even for them. At

rare intervals one gets a glimpse of the volante, now so generally discarded in the cities, and which suggested Dr. Holmes's old chaise, prepared to tumble to pieces in all parts at the same time. The people, the cabins, and the horses, are all stained with the red dust of the soil, recalling the Western Indians in their war paint. This pigment, or colored dirt, penetrates and adheres to everything, filling the cars and decorating the passengers with a dingy brick color. It was difficult to realize that these comparatively indifferent places through which we glided so swiftly were of importance and the permanent abode of any one. When the cars stop at the small way-stations, they are instantly invaded by lottery-ticket sellers, boys with tempting fruit, green cocoanuts, ripe oranges, and bananas, – all cheap for cash. And here too is the guava seller, with neatly sealed cans of the favorite preserve. Indeed, it seems to rain guava jelly in Cuba. Others offer country cheese, soft and white, with rolls, while in a shanty beside the road hot coffee and "blue ruin" are dealt out to thirsty souls by a ponderous mulatto woman. There are always a plenty of the denizens of the place, in slovenly dresses and slouched hats, hands in pockets, and puffing cigarettes, who do the heavy standing-round business. Stray dogs hang about the car-wheels and track to pick up the crumbs which passengers throw away from their lunch-baskets. Just over the wild-pineapple hedge close at hand, half a score of naked negro children hover round the door of a low cabin; the mother, fat and shining in her one garment, gazes with arms akimbo at the scene of which she

forms a typical part. The engineer imbibes a penny drink of thin Cataline wine and hastens back to his machine, which has been taking water from an elevated cistern beside the track, the bell rings, the whistle sounds, and we are off to repeat the process and the picture, six or eight leagues further on. Take our advice and don't attempt to make a meal at one of these stations. The viands are wretchedly poor, and the price charged is a swindle.

As we approach Matanzas the scene undergoes a radical change. Comfortable habitations are multiplied, passable roads appear winding gracefully about the country, groves and gardens spring into view, with small and thrifty farms. Superb specimens of the royal palm begin to appear in abundance, always suggestive of the Corinthian column. Scattered over the hills and valleys a few fine cattle are seen cropping the rank verdure. There is no greensward in the tropics, and hay is never made. The scenery reminds one of Syria and the Nile.

One sees some vegetable and fruit farms, but sugar raising absorbs nearly every other interest, the tobacco leaf coming next, now that coffee is so neglected. The farmer ploughs with the crooked branch of a tree, having one handle with which to guide the crude machine, – just such an instrument as is used for the purpose in Egypt to-day, and has been used there for thousands of years. The cattle are mostly poor, half-starved creatures, – starved amid a vegetation only too rank and luxuriant. The dairy receives no attention in Cuba. Butter is seldom made; the canned article from this country, thin and offensive, is made to

answer the purpose. The climate is too hot to keep butter or cream without ice, and that is expensive. Human beings, men, women, and children, look stunted and thin, possessing, however, wonderfully fine eyes, large, lustrous, and ebony in hue; eyes that alone make beauty; but the physiognomists have long since learned that eyes of themselves are no indication of character or moral force.

The thermometer had stood since early morning at 83°, during the long ride from Cienfuegos. It was hot and dusty. Notwithstanding the ceaseless novelty of the scene, one became a little fatigued, a little weary; but as we approached Matanzas, the refreshing air from off the Gulf of Mexico suddenly came to our relief, full of a bracing tonic, and rendering all things tolerable. The sight of the broad harbor, lying with its flickering surface under the afternoon sun, was beautiful to behold.

After all, these tropical regions lack the delicious freshness of the greensward, of new foliage, and the fine fragrance of the rural North; they need the invigorating sleep of the seasons from which to awake refreshed and blooming. Where vegetation is growing and decaying at the same time, there can never be general freshness and greenness; eternal summer lacks interest; we crave the frost as well as the sunshine. Compensation follows fast upon the heels of even a Northern winter. The tropical loveliness of the vegetation in this attractive land indicates what Cuba should be, but is not.

Having accompanied the reader across many degrees of

latitude, effecting a landing and reaching the interior of Cuba, let us now pass to other considerations of this interesting and important island.

CHAPTER IV

The Great Genoese Pilot. – Discovery of Cuba. – Its Various Names. – Treatment of the Natives. – Tobacco! – Flora of the Island. – Strange Idols. – Antiquity. – Habits of the Aborigines. – Remarkable Speech of an Indian King. – A Native Entertainment. – Paying Tribute. – Ancient Remains. – Wrong Impression of Columbus. – First Attempt at Colonization. – Battle with the Indians. – First Governor of Cuba. – Founding Cities. – Emigration from Spain. – Conquest of Mexico.

The island of Cuba was discovered by the great Genoese pilot, on the 28th day of October, 1492. The continent of America was not discovered until six years later, – in 1498. The name of Columbus flashes a bright ray over the mental darkness of the period in which he lived, for the world was then but just awakening from the dull sleep of the Middle Ages. The discovery of printing heralded the new birth of the republic of letters, and maritime enterprise received a vigorous impulse. The shores of the Mediterranean, thoroughly explored and developed, had endowed the Italian States with extraordinary wealth, and built up a very respectable mercantile marine. The Portuguese mariners were venturing farther and farther from the peninsula, and traded with many distant ports on the extended coast of Africa.

To the west lay what men supposed to be an illimitable ocean, full of mystery, peril, and death. A vague conception that islands hitherto unknown might be met afar off on that strange wilderness of waters was entertained by some minds, but no one thought of venturing in search of them. Columbus alone, regarded merely as a brave and intelligent seaman and pilot, conceived the idea that the earth was spherical, and that the East Indies, the great El Dorado of the century, might be reached by circumnavigating the globe. If we picture to ourselves the mental condition of the age and the state of science, we shall find no difficulty in conceiving the scorn and incredulity with which the theory of Columbus was received. We shall not wonder that he was regarded as a madman or as a fool; we are not surprised to remember that he encountered repulse upon repulse as he journeyed wearily from court to court, and pleaded in vain to the sovereigns of Europe for aid to prosecute his great design. The marvel is that when door after door was closed against him, when all ears were deaf to his earnest importunities, when day by day the opposition to his views increased, when, weary and footsore, he was forced to beg a bit of bread and a cup of water for his fainting and famishing boy at the door of a Spanish convent, his reason did not give way, and his great heart did not break with disappointment.

But he felt himself to be the instrument of a higher power, and his soul was then as firm and steadfast as when, launched in his frail caravél upon the ocean, he pursued day after day

and night after night, amidst a murmuring, discontented, and even mutinous crew, his westward path across the trackless waters. No doubt he believed himself to be inspired, or at least specially prompted from above. This was shown by his tenacious observance of all ceremonies of the Church, in his unaffected piety, and in that lofty and solemn enthusiasm which was a characteristic of his whole life. This must have been the secret in no small degree of the power he exerted so successfully over his semi-barbarous followers, who were more affected by awe than by fear. It was the devout and lofty aspect of their commander which controlled his sailors under circumstances so trying. We can conceive of his previous sorrows, but what imagination can form an adequate conception of his hopefulness and gratitude when the tokens of the neighborhood of land first greeted his senses? What rapture must have been his when the keel of his barque first grounded on the shore of San Salvador, and he planted the royal standard in the soil, as the Viceroy and High-Admiral of Spain in the New World! No matter what chanced thereafter, a king's favor or a king's displeasure, royal largesses or royal chains, that moment of noble exultation was worth a lifetime of trials.

Columbus first named Cuba "Juana," in honor of Prince John, son of Ferdinand and Isabella. Subsequently the king named it Fernandina. This was changed to Santiago, and finally to Ave Maria; but the aboriginal designation has never been lost, Cuba being its Indian and only recognized name. The new-comers

found the land inhabited by a most peculiar race, hospitable, inoffensive, timid, fond of the dance and the rude music of their own people, yet naturally indolent, from the character of the climate they inhabited. They had some definite idea of God and heaven, and were governed by patriarchs or kings, whose word was their only law, and whose age gave them undisputed precedence. They spoke the dialect of the Lucayos, or Bahamas, from which islands it is presumed by historians they originated; but it would seem more reasonable to suppose that both the people of the Bahamas and of the West India isles came originally from the mainland; that is, either north or south of the Isthmus of Panama. In numbers they were vaguely estimated at a million, a calculation the correctness of which we cannot but doubt. Reliable local authority, Cubans who have made a study of the early history of the island, assured the author that the aborigines at the time of Velasquez's first settlement, say in 1512, could not have exceeded four hundred thousand. They had but few weapons of offense or defense, and knew not the use of the bow and arrow. Being a peaceful race and having no wild animals to contend with, their ingenuity had never been taxed to invent weapons of warfare against man or beast. The natives were at once subjected by the new-comers, who reduced them gradually to an actual state of slavery, and proving hard task-masters, the poor overworked creatures died by hundreds, until they had nearly disappeared. The home government then granted permission to import negroes from the coast of Africa

to labor upon the soil and to seek for gold, which was known to exist in the river courses. Thus commenced the foreign slave-trade of the West Indies, King Ferdinand himself sending fifty slaves from Seville to labor in the mines, and from that time this plague spot upon humanity has festered on the island. It should be remembered in this connection that previous to the discoveries of Columbus, negro slavery had been reduced to a system by the Moors, and thus existed in Spain before the days of the great Genoese.

The Spaniards were not content with putting the aborigines to labor far beyond their power of endurance on the soil where they were born, but shipped them by hundreds to Spain to be sold in the slave-market of Seville, the proceeds being turned into the royal treasury. Columbus himself was the promoter of this outrageous return for the hospitality he had received at the hands of the natives. Irving apologetically says he was induced to this course in order to indemnify the sovereigns of Castile and Leon for the large expense his expedition had been to them. The fact that the great navigator originated the slave-trade in the New World cannot be ignored, though it detracts in no small degree from the glory of his career.

Although the conquerors have left us but few details respecting these aborigines, still we know with certainty from the narrative of Columbus, and those of some of his most intelligent followers, that they were docile, artless, generous, but inclined to ease; that they were well-formed, grave, and far from possessing

the vivacity of the natives of the south of Europe. They expressed themselves with a certain modesty and respect, and were hospitable to the last degree. Reading between the lines of the records of history, it is manifest that after their own rules and estimates, their lives were chaste and proper, though it was admissible for kings to have several wives. Moreover, though living in a state of nudity, they religiously observed the decencies of life, and were more outraged by Spanish lasciviousness than can be clearly expressed. This debasing trait, together with the greed for gold exhibited by the new-comers, disabused the minds of the natives as to the celestial origin of their visitors, a belief which they at first entertained, and which the Spaniards for mercenary purposes strove to impress upon them. The labor of this people was limited to the light work necessary to provide for the prime wants of life, beyond which they knew nothing, while the bounteous climate of the tropics spared the necessity of clothing. They preferred hunting and fishing to agriculture; beans and maize, with the fruits that nature gave them in abundance, rendered their diet at once simple, nutritious, and entirely adequate to all their wants. They possessed no quadrupeds of any description, except a race of voiceless dogs, as they were designated by the early writers, – why we know not, since they bear no resemblance to the canine species, but are not very unlike a large rat. This animal is trapped and eaten by the people on the island to this day, having much of the flavor and nature of the rabbit.

The native Cubans were of tawny complexion and beardless, resembling in many respects the aborigines of North America, and as Columbus described them in his first communication to his royal patrons, were "loving, tractable, and peaceable; though entirely naked, their manners were decorous and praiseworthy." The wonderful fecundity of the soil, its range of noble mountains, its widespread and well-watered plains, with its extended coast line and excellent harbors, all challenged the admiration of the discoverers, so that Columbus recorded in his journal these words: "It is the most beautiful island that eyes ever beheld, – full of excellent ports and profound rivers." And again he says; "It excels all other countries, as far as the day surpasses the night in brightness and splendor." The spot where the Spaniards first landed is supposed to be on the east coast, just west of Nuevitas. "As he approached the island," says Irving, "he was struck with its magnitude and the grandeur of its features: its airy mountains, which reminded him of Sicily; its fertile valleys and long sweeping plains, watered by noble rivers; its stately forests; its bold promontories and stretching headlands, which melted away into remotest distance."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.