

New York Journal
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Stephen Crane Fears No Blanco

HAVANA, Aug. 28.—The change in the spirit of this city is something wonderful. It is signified by the increased use of a certain proverb. The proverb reads thus:

“It is better to be a lion’s tail than a rat’s head.” If this doesn’t edify any American who remembers the old rabid cries of the Havana populace, then all words have lost their significance.

Meantime everybody waits for the commission. Rumors both comic and serious fly in the streets. They do little more than indicate the desires of certain classes or parties. Today it was said that the United States government was going to buy for cash all the public buildings in Cuba, and that Spain was going to get the money to pay her troops.

An evening newspaper of yesterday printed an interview of over a column with Captain Stewart M. Brice, greatly to that young officer’s astonishment. It seems that the interviewer breakfasted in Captain Brice’s company, but as neither could speak the other’s language none can tell why the interviewer thought he was interviewing anybody. Nevertheless, the article, apparently an outspoken statement by one of General Shafter’s aides, set every tongue wagging. It was distinctly hostile in its estimate of the Cuban character, and Spaniards were much tickled.

All the newspapers comment on it solemnly this morning. Four Americans who were also at the breakfast say that Brice and his supposed interviewer did not exchange five words. They couldn’t.

Many of the Cubans think as soon as the Americans come they are going to put the Spaniards out bag and baggage. They are happy over it. Columbus’s bones are being dragged into the general misunderstanding today. Some high-priced dreamer got it into his head that the United States was going to seize the bones of the venerated discoverer. “These bones are ours, ours alone, and Spain cannot abandon them to the insults or indifference of an inimical race,” he exclaims.

El Noticiero Universal this evening makes a laughable attempt to locate the future position of the Spaniards in Cuba. The article also indicates some of the popular misconceptions as to the intentions of the American government. It begins with an expression of satisfaction that the American press has more or less changed its opinion of the Cubans, but sees very little on the horizon for the Spaniards, no matter which way the cat jumps.

“What are the Spaniards to do, facing this black future?” it asks. “Are we inclined to help the insurgents or are we inclined to favor the Yankees. The sentimentalism of blood and race alone calls us to the insurgents. If they rule we will have to leave this country in order not to become the victims of their hatred.

“The instinct of preservation calls us to the Yankees, because we are at least bound to confess without hypocrisy that they are a people of order. But sooner or later we will be driven

out of the island by them, and we will never be able to forget that they are the people who ruined us. What, then, have we to do? This is our opinion.

“We must be only Spaniards; amalgamate, form a powerful colony detailed in every way to help the prestige of the fatherland. Leave the insurgents and the Yankees to settle their own disputes, and when they have solved the problem we will decide as to our future course, after having studied the pros and cons of our own interests.”

For a reason unannounced the authorities have raked up an old law which declares that no prisoner shall wear chains, although chains have been in vogue here for twenty-five years. The convicts who work on the streets are no longer to wear leg chains. People believe that the authorities are now willing to let prisoners escape in order to avoid the expense of them.

An American who has been in Morro Castle, who has been mobbed in the streets of Havana, who has been pelted and hooted throughout the Province of Havana because he was an American, said to me to-day:

“Oh, to see the regulars come up Obispo Street. We are all waiting for it.” He had a memory for his wrongs, but we are all the same about one thing—we want to see the regulars march up Obispo Street. There are few enough Americans here—maybe thirty Red Cross members, tobacco buyers and correspondents.

“We are waiting to see our calm, steady, businesslike regulars swing up from the wharves to the Prado. It will be a great day in Havana.”

To illustrate what I have previously said about the change of sentiment in Havana I must describe something which occurred this afternoon. With some friends I went to visit the graves of the dead sailors of the *Maine*. An old man conducted us to the pitifully bare little plot. As we were going he came to the side of the carriage and said:

“There are a great many people sitting by the gate, and as you go out would you mind looking back and bowing to me? I want to show them what great and fine people are my friends.”

We grinned at each other in abashed fashion at the idea of our being called great and fine, but at the gate we turned our heads and bowed fraternally to the old man, thus allowing him to work the cold bluff on the populace that he is on intimate terms with all the Americans.

In fact the position of an American changes from day to day. At first scowls, then toleration, then courtesy. For my part I came into Havana without permission from anybody. I simply came in. I did not even have a passport. I was at a hotel while the government was firmly imprisoning nine correspondents on a steamer in the harbor. But no one molested me.

I don't doubt I could have been insulted if I chose. I often suspected Spanish officers of leaving a foot or an elbow too far in order that I might strike it and become involved in an altercation, but I dodged them all easily, without seeming to pay any heed. All I had to do was to keep from forcing any official recognition upon the government, in which case they would have been obliged to deport me or to take some other means of disposing of me.

At present the position of an American in Havana is one that many another here envies. There is one thing which we have forgotten in our intercourse with the Spanish-Americans. People of this class not only admire splendor, they reverence it. They mistake it for excellence and power.

One remembers the visit of the British deputation to the court of King Menelek. The men were decked out in all sorts of magnificence. They wore the shining uniforms of the Horse Guards, the Grenadier Guards and other lurid organizations. The sight smote the African soul of the monarch, and he promptly conceded more than he intended, even if that was not much.

The illustration is not perfect, but in dealing with a people of this kind we would find our path made much easier if we threw a few peacock feathers into our business.

I have said that the Spaniard here is going to make no trouble for the American. That is true; but there may be trouble. If so, it will be made by the man who is left behind—the Spaniard whose home and wealth is in Cuba and not in Spain. He is extremely likely to heave a few convenient rocks at the departing Spanish regiments.