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In Havana as It Is Today

THE insurgent posts are not far from Havana on all sides, and such is the present condition here that the main trouble of visiting any of them exists in the fabulous sums charged by the livery people for any kind of transportation. However, three of us yesterday combined to expend our hopes of a pensioned old age and hired a trap to take us to the camp of General Rodriguez, insurgent commander-in-chief in Havana Province. The distance from Guanabacoa is twenty-six kilometres over one of the few good military roads in Cuba.

The ground in front of the Spanish lines is favorable to the deploying of large bodies of troops, and the cavalry would have had considerable work cut out for it. The dense thickets of the ground before Santiago here do not exist. The high main position is led up to by a series of rolling, grassy mounds probably four miles in extent. Primarily there would have been some handy picket fighting and skirmishing around and over these mounds.

One must not leave discussion of these Havana defenses without mentioning the barbed wire entanglements. They exist in profusion. They are not mere fences. Fences of barbed wire are the easiest of such entanglements. But these are laid in horizontal webs and meshes about nine inches from the turf, and so form a most formidable china shop for any living bull. The men who cut them would be within forty yards of the entrenchments, and men in these times do not cut barbed wire entanglements that are within forty yards' range of a rifle pit.

We had not gone three hundred yards from a pair of indolent cavalry pickets when we came upon five men in linen, yellow from dirt, who grinned at us in a most friendly fashion and arrived in some curious way at the position of order arms. As soldiers they were laughable. Yes, laughable, for those who do not know. Their pretence of coming to attention and doing us honor thereby was purely comic, but the first man in the file happened to resemble an insurgent whom I had seen killed at Cusco—really the tightest, best fight of the war—and thus I was enabled to know in some way that all was not to be judged by appearances.

They were armed with Remington rifles, every one of which was in more or less bad condition. However, in the Spanish army one never sees a rifle in good condition. In fact, the rifles of the insurgents are usually in better shape. They came to this grotesque attention and surveyed us with wide smiles—smiles of ivory purity on their black faces.

We supposed that, having passed this rebel outpost, we had entered the zone of the insurgents. But it was not so. To our military astonishment we found that the outposts interlaced. First you came upon the Spanish sentries; then an insurgent outpost; then a block house occupied by the Spaniards; then more insurgents; then another block house. During the war this road had been vigorously defended, and about all the Cubans could do was to cross it whenever they liked, but now, under the flag of truce, or peace, or whatever it is, the road seems to have come upon a manner of joint ownership, in which both sides exist on it without friction.

One incident will display the situation. A man in the coach, a Cuban, had come out heavily loaded with cigarettes for the patriots. Once he sighted an outpost and asked of a soldier: "How many are you here?"

The soldier answered: "Twelve men and a corporal, sir."

Whereupon our friend dished out a commensurate number of cigarettes. The soldiers were very grateful, very grateful indeed. They were Spanish soldiers. Our patriot kicked himself for some miles, but to no purpose. The cigarettes were gone, and they were gone firmly into the mouths of sundry hated Spanish infantrymen.

This happened to be the last Spanish post. Thirty yards from it were three serene insurgent pickets. They were apparently keeping out of sight of the enemy because of a sense of the deccncies of the situation, but plainly theirs was a lazy job. They smiled at us, too—the same cavernous, ivory smile.

The carriage rocked tremblingly over a mile of wood road. We came upon other sentries more formal and then at last we arrived at that most interesting thing called an insurgent camp.

Evidently that wide avenue of palms led to the relics of a plantation, but now this palm-lined avenue was only the main street of an insurgent camp.

Primarily, we had come to see an American, Lieutenant-Colonel Jones, on General Menocal's staff. Jones had been for three years on campaign. He had raised himself on his ability as an artilleryman. Artillerymen were almost as few as guns in the Cuban army, and every one was valuable. Jones, by his correct and intrepid handling of whatever guns went into action, was promoted steadily by Gomez until he has now reached a position second to no artillery officer in the Cuban service.

We had some money for Jones; we had some tobacco for Jones; we had some sandwiches and some rum for Jones. We expected a welcome. Did we get it? We did. We got one of those open-armed, splendid welcomes which are written for the coming of dukes. After all, we were of his kind. He had been three years in the woods and with others, but when he saw us he was almost childishly delighted. It mattered nothing who we were or what we were; it was only that we were of his kind, and the hours we sat with him were glad ones, because he was glad, glad to be chock-a-block once more with his own. We could see him breathe in the outright Americanism as if it were some perfume wafted from the folds of the flag and we were not too noble representatives, either.

When we first sighted him he was lying in his hammock. It is impossible to state how universal is this condition of lying in a hammock—especially at this time when there is no occasion for activity, no fighting. Once the insurgents in Havana Province had more high stepping and tall jumping to do than has come to the lot of any military force in the world, barring the Apaches for some occasions. This present complacence of nature startles them into a curious state of fretful rest which they account almost as a disease after their three years of jumping, flying, aerial life.

The furniture of Jones's hut consisted mainly of a hammock and a soap box. In the soap box were some newspapers—now become universal in every jungle—a tin cup, a bottle of ink, some writing paper. On a rafter of his rude dwelling hung his belt, with his machete and his revolver. Beside him lay his saddle, which looked as if dogs had chewed it. This was apparently and truly all he possessed. The house was wide to the air; there were no sides. Outside crouched two of those quick-eyed military servants which one can find in any Cuban camp. To their services they imparted a good-natured or, rather, a friendly quality, which was infinitely grateful to the senses. They dodged, swung, lifted, carried in a certain indescribable way which impressed one that the will was good, all true, all amiable, all kind.

Presently we went to visit General Menocal. General Rodriguez was commander of the forces in the province, but he had gone away somewhere on horseback, riding a good white horse, and, for a wonder, riding it well.

We found Menocal to be a young man—not more than thirty-five years. His coat was much in the manner of a duck coat of an American naval officer. It had the same wide, white braid, but on the collar shone two gold stars, the sign of a general of division.

He is a Cornell graduate of the class of '88. He talks English consequently, clean out of all courier and hotel runner latitudes. He is soon to be a major-general, and it is a promotion that strikes every one with its extraordinary correctness. Menocal is one of the men in the game. When Garcia was ploughing around the eastern end of Cuba Menocal was his chief of staff. Menocal had more to do with Garcia's success than we can talk about, and that is enough said. He will be one of the men who will comprehend the American point of view. He will know how honestly we mean in this affair.

The horseflesh to be seen was in bad condition, but no worse than the Spanish mounts. They were all odd, unmatched little beasts, with an infinite variety of accoutrement ranging from ragged and war-worn saddles with the padding leaking out to dazzling tan equipments from the best Havana saddlers, the latter being gifts of joyful friends since the pause in the conflict. In fact, the donations of Havana were everywhere plain. The officer of the day, for instance, wore a gorgeous crimson sash embroidered in white. The beloved, the sweetheart, has again entered the life of the lonely insurgent.

Food, if not exactly plentiful, was had in at least sufficient quantities for the troops. The pitiful sight was to see the last of the reconcentrados hanging about the camp, miserable women and babes, ragged, dirty, diseased, more than half famished. They are in desperate straits. Such, indeed, is the condition that a gift of a little bread sometimes brings the virtue of women to the feet of the philanthropist.