

New York Journal
September 13, 1898

Havana's Hate Dying, Says Stephen Crane

HAVANA, Aug. 25—Conditions in this interesting city are much better than anybody on our side has supposed. The people await the coining of the Commission with a rather brave steadiness when you come to remember that they will not concede for a moment that Havana itself was ever in the remotest danger of being captured by the Americans.

The new condition of tranquility has been established by the city's newspapers, which are printing Spanish news from Santiago, Porto Rico and Manila, descriptive of the temperance and justice of the Americans, as well as of their courage and prowess.

When I first landed here it was difficult to withstand the scowls that one met everywhere, particularly from Spanish officers, who at that time were all exaggerating their gaits and generally improving and rearranging their "fronts."

That has now changed for the better, and one can now inhabit the hotels, cafes and streets without meeting any particularly offensive looks.

Even some good manners have been publicly exploited by the police. What might be called a correspondent's corral was established out in the harbor, and nine birds fluttered therein. On a certain night one escaped and was trying his wings in Havana when the police swooped down on him. It is said that the air of distinguished consideration which surrounded the incident was beyond words. Spectators informed me the next morning that at a late hour they had left the correspondent and four police officials drinking cognac with almost supernatural courtesy in the Cafe Inglaterra.

It becomes obvious that as time goes on many officials of many kinds here are arriving at the old Porto Rico proposition of playing both ends against the middle. This is a tremendous change for the Spanish officials.

The Spanish merchant, however, has a supreme admiration for the American as a customer. He will wait for him and give him a welcome in which Peninsula patriotism plays no part.

There are four gunboats in the harbor besides the emaciated cruiser *Alfonso XII*, with no engines and no guns. The gunboats have been very useful in this war, but really they are boats which could have steamed out and destroyed the blockade at any time since our heavy ships have been away to Santiago. That is to say, they could have done so if their engines had been all right; but one can't tell whether it was a case of boilers or incompetence.

Their guns are all equivalent to six- and twelve-pounders, and they could have wiped the ocean with ten or a dozen converted towboats if the Spaniard was only a sailor, and if the American was not such a fine sailor.

It is in the harbor where the war has marked Havana. The harbor is a soundless vacancy save for the gunboats. In the streets the change has not been so great. The cabmen charge fifty

cents where once they charged thirty cents, and the commercial streets are dull, but it is on the waterfront where havoc has been wrought.

The prices for provisions have been about as known. The staples never went to really killing prices, if you limit the staples to rice, beans and meat. The proprietor of the Hotel Pasaje tells me, however, that at one time he had to pay fifty cents for a piece of bread as large as your hand in order to provide his customers at the hotel table. The luxuries simply passed out of sight, but then, to deprive people of luxuries is not necessarily to enforce a good blockade.

The spirit of the people here has not been broken, and as usual they regard the prospective ending of the war as some new betrayal of ignorance of the government at Madrid.

“Oh, yes, Santiago, I know. But Havana? Never!” Still, their opinions of the Americans have entirely changed, and names like Sampson, Schley, Shafter and McKinley are spoken now with a change of voice.

Nobody—popularly speaking—has ever heard of Dewey, mainly because the existence of the Philippines is not a particularly well established fact.

The Spaniards may hate us, or, at least many of them may hate us, but they will never again despise us.

The editors of the Havana papers have peculiarly difficult parts to play in this suspended crisis, and they are playing with splendid finesse and judgment.

Prominent citizens here do not see a convulsive future, the worst imagined being a time of festivities for the volunteers, when there is likely to be more or less ill-judged shooting. When that time comes certain prominent American journalists are likely to be seen writing their dispatches in the tops of tall trees.