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Spanish Deserters Among the Refugees at El Caney

During today's lull in the hostilities a steady stream of refugees has poured into our lines from the beleaguered city of Santiago. Women, by far, have been in the majority. Men, strong and able-bodied, have been few indeed. Spain has urgent need of such, wherefore Santiago has given up few more than wrecked and helpless creatures, too far upon the road to death to aid in staying our advance.

Yet, as the truce advanced, it changed the number and the character of these refugees. More men flocked in, young men and strong men. Certainly among them were deserters. There was the air of the true Spaniard about them. They had cast aside their distinguishing uniforms, to be sure, but they could not so easily disguise the ways and bearing of the soldier. Undoubtedly they were renegades. But, then—what matter? They were permitted within the lines, the one place where they would find safety from the impending avalanche of death soon to roll down upon Santiago from the hillside.

One saw in this great, gaunt assemblage the true horror of war. The sick, the lame, the halt and the blind were there. Women and men, tottering upon the verge of death, plodded doggedly onward. Beyond were our lines and safety. But so long had this same horror of war been before them that no longer could they feel its horridness. Their air was stolid and indifferent. It was a forlorn hope at the best. If this was safety, well and good. If death, what difference how it came.

In sharp contrast to this, one saw, now and again, women radiant with joy. These were the kindred of the insurgents. Some had been separated from those stout hearts in the field for many weary weeks—yes, months, and even years. At the crest of that weary slope they knew whom they should find. Toiling upward and onward they pressed, and finally, with glad cries, in the great gathering of troops they came upon the ones they sought. This, indeed, was another side of war.

Again, in the throng toiling on to safety were men and women carried in chairs and litters, some even in cot-beds. Our ambulances went forth to meet them. Then when these stolid, hopeless, unimpassioned ones found the dreaded enemy receiving and aiding them with kindness they showed, for the first time, some trace of feeling. What! Should these mad, despised Americanos spend time aiding the weak and aged! This was a wonder, indeed.

But, though the Americans' hands were turned to doing gentleness, it was otherwise with those Spanish miserables, Spain's ignoble pride, the guerillas. They lurked along the roadsides, eager and ready for bloodshed, plunder and unnameable wickedness. To drive them back the American cavalry patrolled the road of the refugees, whereupon the guerillas withdrew.

At the church in Caney the American surgeons were laboring among the enemy's sorely wounded. Here fifty-two Spanish were under treatment. Their amazement was profound. In the centre of the church lies one of the Spanish commanders, sorely wounded. There never was a

more astonished man than he. Like the others, he believed his position impregnable. How any mortal could cross the zone of fire and survive was a matter beyond his ken. By the saints, it was a miracle! Three thousand Mausers, he knew to his own knowledge, were trained down the one slope he guarded. Yet had the Americans plunged through the rain of death and driven all before them.

Almost as great was his amazement at our treatment of himself and his wounded men. Why should we waste time upon them, when so many of ours had been stricken? Why this kindness? They had expected to lie where they had fallen, waiting but to die. It was the fortune of war. Why should it not be?

Inside the limits of this town the foreign consuls have made their headquarters. Here each one is ready to provide for the people of his flag. Also they are aiding in the care of the other refugees, so far as they are able. None of the refugees brought food—there was no food for them to bring. The Spaniards had planned to restock their commissary with the supplies they had arranged to capture from the Americans. It was a sad blow that the Americans declined to be captured.

Our course to all at Caney has been moderation. Sometimes we have been too kind. Everybody knows the story of the road from the battlefield—the guerillas hanging to the flanks of the long line of wounded going to the rear. Though these men of ours could fight no longer, though they were in sore distress, these fiends incarnate fired upon them. They picked off, where they were able, the ambulance men, the bearers of the Red Cross flag and the surgeons at their work. They bowled them over at every chance. Yet three of these miscreants, caught among the trees, wearing clothes stripped from our dead, have been set at work about headquarters.