

New York World
May 8, 1898

Stephen Crane's Pen Picture of C.H. Thrall

KEY WEST, May 7.-Charles H. Thrall is a graduate of Yale and has for years represented extensive American manufacturing interests in Cuba. We had been hearing a good deal about Thrall for a long time. Everybody was aware of his immensely precarious situation, and everybody heaved a sigh of relief when he at last was known to be safe on board one of the American warships.

Dressed in the universal linen or duck and with a straw hat on the back of his head, Thrall differs little from a certain good type of young American manhood. The striking thing about him now is his eyes. The expression of them will doubtless change as he breathes more of the peace of the American side, but at present they are peculiarly wide open, as if strained with watching. They stare at you and do not seem to think, and at the corners the lids are wrinkled as if from long pain. This is the impress of his hazardous situation still upon him.

As for his own deeds, he talks as little and wants to talk as little as most intrepid men. Ask him of the situation in Havana, however, and he is eager at once. He says that the first day of the blockade brought tremendous confusion to Havana. Even in the batteries everything was pell-mell. In the city white-faced people thronged the streets crying: "Oh! they are going to open fire! they are going to open fire!"

On the second day the populace was calmed, mainly because they were sleepy. They had been up all the previous night. On the third day almost everybody who went upon the streets was rounded up and put to work upon the fortifications. They were paid \$2 per day. As the days passed on and no bombardment ensued the spirit of the populace changed. They decided that the fleet was afraid. When Thrall left they were feeling very gay and content. It was also reported in Havana that the Spanish fleet had whaled the life out of Admiral Dewey's squadron in the East. Blanco is daily issuing proclamations about this thing and that thing. He issued one calling upon the insurgents to enlist in the Spanish army under the command of the traitor chieftain, Juan Parra. Thrall says that as far as he knows no aspirants for this distinction have appeared. As to the engagement of the *Marblehead* and *Eagle* with the defenses of Cienfuegos, the Spanish papers declare no shot reached within four miles of the town.

General Arolas, commanding at Havana, has embarked a stock of provisions for the *reconcentrados* sent in care of General Lee from the United States and turned it over to the commissary department of the army. Both silver and paper money have simply flunked, but in the way of provisions the Spaniards are good for two months, as everybody knows.

The 2d of May being a great patriotic fete day among all Spaniards, the people in Havana were certain that the American fleet would attack on that day and they were looking for it. They had a gambler's confidence in winning any game if it was played on their lucky day. Thrall's story of the American major, W. D. Smith, who was arrested as a spy in Havana recently, will

doubtless remain all that can be told of one of the melancholy and mysterious chapters of the war. The man must be dead by this time.

(Source: The Collected Works of Stephen Crane, University of Virginia Press, 1973)