

CORRESPONDENCE.

TRINIDAD DE CUBA.

June 21st, 1898.

Outside of Cuba, one hears little about the valley of Trinidad; yet it is the very garden-spot of the island—not only for extraordinary beauty, fertility and perfection of climate, but is the place par excellence, for growing coffee and sugar. I have been told, but cannot say with how much truth, that the English and American syndicates who have secured rich concessions in the valley, are keeping their operations as secret as possible, to avoid competition.

Trinidad city lies at the seaward edge of the valley of the same name, on the south shore of Santa Clara province, about 50 miles east from Cienfuegos. You may reach it from Havana, going all the way around by water; or by railway to Cienfuegos, and thence by steamer; or, as I did, by rail to Batabano, the southern part of Havana province, and then on a leisurely cruise of 150 miles among innumerable cays and islets. At any rate, you are certain to approach the region of the Holy Trinity by sea, as there is no all-land route from other parts of the island, except dangerous trails over robber-infested mountains.

The first view of the old town, which Don Deigo de Belazquez christened as early as 1515, is something to be remembered. Having rounded La Punta de los Megros, the long, narrow point of land which defines Trinidad bay on the southwest—you see a white-walled city, glistening in the golden light, cuddled up on the mountain side, like a babe asleep on its mother's bosom. Quite appropriately, Trinidad has a trinity of ports. They are La Boea, on the southeast, where the Tayado river empties into the sea; the mouth of the Rio Muse; and Casilda, a small village at the head of an inlet. The last named port is now generally used, although its anchorage is not of the best, the water being so shallow that all vessels must be loaded by means of lighters, and put to sea as quickly as possible to avoid sticking fast on the sandy bottom. The landing place, however, is lined with wharves and extensive warehouses, and there is a handsome depot for the railway, which runs north 20 or 30 miles, connecting several villages and bringing the product of rich plantations down for shipment. Trinidad city is three miles inland—or perhaps we should say upland, from Casilda. As the trains do not run on schedule time, but only when there are full loads of freight to be carried, you will do well to avoid a tedious time of waiting in the hot, flea-infested port, by being driven up in a volante; although the charge therefor is \$2.50, while the cars would take you for 20 cents.

Trinidad is one of the oldest towns in Cuba, founded only a year later than Santiago, and 19 years after Santa Domingo, the first on the western hemisphere. Though so little is heard of it nowadays, the region is not without its stirring and romantic history. Trinidad bay is the famous battle grounds of three British men-of-war against the Spaniards under Don Luis Bassecourt, in which the English were worsted, after three days of hard fighting. Perhaps the most destructive attack on Trinidad city was that of the English corsair Grant, in 1702, through two long centuries it suffered almost continually from piratical attacks, and many bloody traditions are connected with the place. Indeed, it is said that the wealthiest families hereabouts are descendants of the old sea-robbers, who turned respectable when piracy went

out of fashion. They bought land and built Casas with their ill-gotten gains, gave a lot of money to the church for absolution, and became substantial, law-abiding citizens.

One who does not mind hard climbing, finds Trinidad the most charming place in the world, with views on every hand which would drive an artist wild with enthusiasm. Rambling and hilly, with antique casas and palm-shaded gardens, the old town clings to the side of Vija ("Watch Tower") mountain, 600 feet above the Caribbean. Exposed to both mountain and ocean breezes, with neither excessive heat nor cold from year to year, its climate is about the most perfect under the sun. Surely this is the heart of that "land wherein it is always afternoon!" Everybody seems to sleep through the hours of sunshine. In a long walk at mid-day, through the town of 30,000 inhabitants—you meet only here and there a lazy donkey or a sleeping dog—not a human being except at rare intervals a barefooted servant shuffling along the shady side of the wall. The only drawback to the place is its loneliness, and the feeling which possesses the foreigner of complete isolation from his kind. There are several mesones and third-class inns; but you are not obliged to stay in them long, especially if you have letters of introduction. The citizens are proverbially hospitable, and to them the visit of a foreigner, bringing a fresh breath from the far-away world, is a godsend.

The streets of Trinidad are narrow as the narrowest in Spanish-America, and mostly unpaved; but extremely picturesque, with their low walled, rough tiled houses and high-sounding names over the doors. As in Havana, the business streets are a realization of Bellamy's dream of a universal umbrella because of an uninterrupted series of awnings stretched across, affording complete shelter from sun and rain. In the aristocratic quarter, the houses are mostly built of stone, and some of them are imposing, with arched entrances and much bestucoes facades resembling carved marble. They differ from those in Havana in not having any divided walls between the rooms, only the kitchen and sleeping apartments being partitioned to the ceiling. The rest are a series of open arches—vast, high ceiling expanses, affording free circulation of air and magnificent perspectives of marble floors, rich frescoes, mirrored panels and tasteful furnishings. One of the finest houses in town, if not in the whole land is owned by an American citizen, Mr. Baker by name, but here resides Senor Bah-quare. Perhaps the handsomest country home in the valley is owned by Mr. Stilwell, a New Englander, who has a large plantation and lives like a prince. The war has not yet effected this part of Cuba to any appreciable extent, and when I visited the place a few weeks ago things were going on as usual. Nothing short of Sampson's and Shafter's guns can wake the Trinitadians up to a realization sense of the true situation. They talk in a sleepy way of "political troubles in the island," but as of something which does not concern them in their Arcadian retreat. The nearest approach to life and gaiety in Trinidad is seen on Sunday and Thursday evenings, when the retreta takes place in the plaza Carillo. The square in the center of the town, opposite the governor's residence, is a beautiful place, and differs in some respects from any others I have seen. In the middle is a large dome-like arbor, from which stone walks radiate, bordered by flower-beds and shaded by or-

namental shrubbery. Around the outskirts of the park extends a very broad.

The Campo del Matre, is another fine, large plaza at the southeast end of the town, with barracks and drill-grounds for the garrison. But the most attractive resort of the place is what is known as the Vija, "watch-tower"—a point on the adjacent mountain which may be easily reached on horseback, or even in a volante. For those who are good climbers, it is the fashionable thing to go up before breakfast. There is a rustic road winding under pines and palms, past straw-thatched huts, the military hospital and the Ermita de la Pova; and he who has not seen the sun rise above the incomparable vale of Trinidad and illumine the heights around it, or sink among the green cays of the western ocean, has lived almost in vain. Speaking of American capitalists in this region; time was—and time will be again—when a well located sugar estate in Cuba was considered as safe and valuable an investment as one could possibly have. Of course the war has greatly depreciated values, but when it is over, things will be booming in "the ever faithful isle" as never before. Everybody knows how, during our civil war, sugar attained a phenomenal price in the United States, the best grades reaching 20 cents the pound. This circumstance induced Wm. H. Stewart, the New York millionaire, to purchase the magnificent estate called "La Carolina," in Matanzas province. Its annual yield was about eight million pounds of fine white sugar. He paid eight hundred thousand dollars in gold for the property and for years it returned to him at least 100 per centum on the original investment. In '62 Mr. Moses Taylor, another very rich and influential New Yorker, who had been a large importer of Cuban sugar, purchased a half-interest in the famous "San Martine" plantation. It was just the size of the District of Columbia, (10 miles square) and was superbly equipped, having a fine old castellated mansion of stone for a family residence. What Mr. Taylor paid for his half was never known; but for years the crop was simply marvelous, reaching for one season 13,965,000 pounds. It was said at the time that Taylor received back his purchase money in less than two years.

The great firm of Ojelro, Warburg & Co., of New York, is a heavy owner of sugar property in Santa Clara province. The Welshes, sugar refiners of Philadelphia, are also owners of large Cuban estates. It will be remembered that when President Grant named the eldest of the Welsh brothers to be minister to England, his confirmation was strongly objected to by a faction in the Senate, on the ground that he was the owner of slave-worked estates and profited by their labor. Just after our war, Mr. James McHatton, of East Baton Rouge parish, La., went to Cuba in search of a plantation which limited means could buy. He found it, near Matanzas—2,000 acres, of the light colored soil which in Cuba is called "Mullatto land," and which had been worked so long solely in sugar cane that it would yield less than half a crop. At the upper end of the estate Mr. McHatton found a series of deep caves, which if ever discovered before had been entirely forgotten; and these made his fortune. For ages, millions of bats had made this their haunt; and time and nature's chemistry had converted their droppings into the best fertilizer for worn-out sugar and tobacco lands yet known. Within three years the McHatton place was turning out eight thousand pounds of sugar to the acre, and the shrewd Louisianan found another great fortune in his bat