

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## A FLYING VISIT TO PORTO RICO

San Juan Bautista, Porto Rico, Sept. 15.—Nobody can stay long in southern Cuba, at this time of the year, and hope to entirely escape the climate. After several weeks of roughing it in Santiago, regardless of sun and rain and unaccustomed food, amid disease and death on every hand, even your robust correspondent began to experience what our soldiers call "the jim-jams."

Said the doctor, "If you do not get out of this P. D. Q. we will have to carry you out in a box." But I am a firm believer in the efficacy of self-forgetfulness in warding off most oddily ills, and had no idea of abandoning my post. The premonitory symptoms of calentura are sudden chills, chasing each other up and down the spinal column, alternating in irregular succession with fierce heats, which seem to scorch the flesh, and cold sweats that drench the victim like a plunge into ice-water; a head which appears to need hooping, and strange giddiness, as if the solid earth were billowing beneath the feet, and one grasps at near-by objects as the drowning clutch at straws. One morning when I came to breakfast the marble floor rose up to meet me, the faces of the family blended in shadowy composite, and voices sounded afar off, as though a trumpet. The table had become a gigantic spinning top, and when my customary place at the head of it came round, I sank into the chair and attempted to serve the coffee, with unusual dignity, on the cloth. Still firm in the faith-cure, I started on the daily round, to office, warehouse and hospital; but at every step encountered the same embarrassing multiplicity of objects. The narrow, down-hill street of San Geronimo converged a dozen different ways, like the spokes of a wheel, and its time-wrinkled, century-old casas danced an uncanny witch's jig.

Although so much is being done for our sick soldiers in Santiago, there is no place in the hospitals for women, and none of our over-worked force have no time to devote to one another. So I reluctantly consented to a compromise—not to leave Cuba "for good," but to try the benefit of sea-air in a little trip among the neighboring islands. It happened, by good fortune, that a coaster was leaving that day, bound for Porto Rico. Somebody piloted me aboard, kindly hands packed a few necessary belongings, and in less time than it takes to tell it, Santiago with all its horrors was left behind, and I was sailing the tranquil Spanish Main. The first day was a total blank. We touched at Jamaica, Cape Haitian, Santo Domingo, a possibly other places; but by the time our destination was reached, rest and quinine had wrought their effective work. Next to old-fashioned Michigan fever-and-ague, Cuban calentura is perhaps the meanest illness on the face of the earth. However, if seized by the throat at once and throttled with heroic doses, accompanied by change of air, it generally runs a sharp, swift course, leaving its victim weak and yellow, but with the "seven devils" cast out of him.

How beautiful Cuba's twin sister looked in the twilight of the morning when we dropped anchor in the historic bay which the early Spaniards so pompously named "The rich port of Saint John the Baptist!" As the sun rose and our new possession stood confessed in all its glory, I thought I had never seen so entrancing a picture—of green hill-spurs trending down to the sea and on their gentle slopes, silhouetted against a background of darker heights, the quaint red roofs of the town, with here and there a stately palm lifting its

plumed-head between; the broad bay, crowded with surrounding greenery along its edges. This is the same sheltered harbor which Columbus named El Aguadilla—the watering place—because he went ashore and filled his casks, before sailing to Santo Domingo, 60 miles away. It was on his second voyage to the New World that the great admiral and his crew, sailing in a southwesterly direction from the Caribbean, sighted this larger and lovelier island, before the group of "Virgins" had fairly faded from view. Coasting in and out among the many little bays along its southern coast—all fringed with cocoa-palms above beaches of glistening sand—the Spaniards feasted their eyes upon a succession of hills and mountains, clothed to the tops with magnificent forests; and though surfeited with the beauty of hundreds of islands before discovered, they unhesitatingly pronounced this one the most beautiful of all. Today, as then, cool, sweet waters gush forth in great volume from the fair island and miles of cocoa-palms fringe its shores, backed by softly rounded hills—the only visible change, after four hundred years, being that the hills are now cultivated to their summits.

Here too came Juan Ponce de Leon, governor of Santo Domingo, in 1508, I believe, to investigate the reports he had heard concerning the mineral wealth of Porto Rico. Landing at this very spot with his caravan of soldiers, he was hospitably received by the Carib Cacique, who—simple soul!—showed the greedy Spaniards some rivers with gold dust and tiny nuggets in them, and thus, unwittingly sealed his own doom and that of his people. History tells us how Leon hastened back to Santo Domingo, whence he soon returned with an armament and established the city of Caparra—across the bay, southwest from the present capital—and then proceeded to distribute the wondering natives among his rough followers, for slaves, as he had done in Santo Domingo. But the 700,000 Indians of Borinquen, the aboriginal name of the island, who had never been subjected to any restraint, revolted when they realized what was going on and killed many of the Spaniards, being almost exterminated themselves in the unequal contest.

By the way, Ponce de Leon is undeservedly famed for being one of the most generous and chivalrous of all those iron-hearted old Conquistadores—perhaps because he is so often confounded with his equally illustrious namesake—Luis Ponce de Leon, the priest and poet, who died in Madrid late in the same century. Juan Ponce, though a religious enthusiast, who never neglected the "conversion" of Indian souls, while converting their persons and property to his own uses, employed the most barbarous methods for subjugating the peaceful people who had shown him nothing but kindness. The fame of his ferocious blood-hound, the great dog Betezillo, which at the master's commands sprang upon men, women and children and tore them in pieces, has survived nearly four centuries—while millions of mere human beings have lived their little day and died and been forgotten. It is related that the services of the vicious brute were so highly valued by the conquerors that he drew the pay of a crossbowman—which of course, went into his master's pockets.

For some unexplained reason Caparra—now known as Puerto Viejo (Old Port), was abandoned after a time; and in 1511 Leon founded another city—the same San Juan Bautista de Puerto Ri-

co that stands today, the capital and chief town of the island. But it is by no means the leading one in point of population, having only about 25,000 in time of peace; while Ponce on the other side of the island is credited with about 38,000, according to the latest census, and San Gremain something over 30,000. Owing to the course of trade and the great ocean-liners the world has heard less about this island than others of the West Indies, until the war with Spain brought it into our possession. Yet it is only a few days' pleasant sailing from New York (about 1,700 miles, I believe), and perhaps a thousand miles southeast from Havana. Owing to its favorable position the hurricanes that so often visit Martinique, St. Vincent and other islands to the southward, do not disturb Porto Rico. In normal times it is an ideal winter "resort," with the very perfection of climate, where the thermometer never falls below 60 degrees and seldom rises above 80. Earthquakes and volcanoes are alike unknown here. Snakes and other venomous creatures are as scarce as in Ireland after St. Patrick's visit, and there are no end of places in the highlands where yellow fever and kindred diseases can never climb. Though populated to the number of 900,000, or thereabouts, mainly Spanish Creoles, and negroes, with a mixture of Germans, French, Danes, Swedes, Russians, Chinese, Canary Islanders and Chuetas, or descendants of the Moorish Jews—there is plenty of room for more. Unlike most of the other West India islands, there are a good many more white than black citizens here—the proportion in Porto Rico being not so great as in the capital of our own country, where, as is well known, about two-thirds of the resident population is "colored."

In spite of its sprawling cognomen, there was never a more compact little city than this "Saint John the Baptist." It is situated on a long, narrow island, connected with the north shore by a bridge and a causeway. The peninsula like island has a strong fort at either end and is entirely surrounded by massive walls of stone and mortar rising in places to a height of from fifty to one hundred feet. The houses are all of stone—no wooden buildings having been allowed by the Spanish authorities except along the wharves outside the walls. Like other casas built by descendants of the Moors, these are mostly one-storied, painted in all the colors of the rainbow, rose, pink, sky-blue and yellows predominating, with iron-barred windows and enormous doors. Some of them have iron balconies, shutters and jalousies, but there is not such a thing as a chimney in all Porto Rico, and few glass windows. Not far from the landing is the Marina, the park and parade-ground of the city, adorned with statues and flowers. It has a wide, central walk, lined with benches, while rows of palm and pepper trees strive to hide the frowning walls which enclose it, with their antique sentry-boxes, projecting here and there. At its seaward end is the main fortress, of course called the Morro, and very like its name-sakes in Havana and at Santiago, only on a smaller scale. Within its grim walls is a little town by itself, with houses, chapel and barracks. A tower dominates the whole, equipped with ancient guns; and there are covered passage-ways, subterranean dungeons and other mysteries, which could no doubt tell some gruesome tales of murder, torture and death, had they the power of speech. The rusty cannon have done good service in times long gone and rendered historic this old Castillo the Morro. They could not prevent the sacking of the capital by Drake, the English buccaneer, in 1595; nor again, only three years later, by the earl of Cum-