

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## CIENFUEGOS.

June 5th, 1898.

This city of the fiery name lies a long way west from Santiago, but on the same side of the island. Like Cortez when he passed the way to the conquest of Mexico—according to his chronicler, Bernal Diaz—"we sailed at hazzard, toward that part of the horizon where the sun set." At least it seemed "at hazzard" when, a few hours after leaving Santiago, we rounded Cape de Cruz and skirted the bank of Buena Esperanza (Good Hope), and found ourselves among the green cays of Doce Leguas. These are the innumerable islets named by Columbus "The Queen's Gardens," in the mazes of which his caravals wandered aimlessly many days. Nowadays the regular steamers take their course far around them, in deeper water out of sight of land; and probably that is the reason why modern visitors to Cuba seldom speak of this most beautiful and interesting archipelago. For ideal journeying in the Antilles, at a favorable season of the year and when time is "no object," by all means take a yacht, or some local coaster, and stick close to shore. You will wind in and out a thousand bights and cover of translucent blue, whose silvery beaches are fringed with cocoa-palms; and always inland is a glorious picture of cloud and mountain, the tranquil waters you are threading shut off by green islets from the uncertain Carribean.

Hardly had the dark Cobre range, stretching from Santiago to Cape Cruz, faded from view, before the Trinidad mountains sprang out of the mist to meet us. The latter are not so imposing or so rich as the Cobre heights—with their Pico Turquino, the highest peak in Cuba and their exhaustless deposit of copper and iron—but are much more beautiful, being densely wooded to the clouds that veil their summits.

The only city we pass is also called La Trinidad, in honor of the Holy Trinity, and is one of the oldest and quaintest on the island, with a famous and fertile valley of the same name behind it. Then another long line of mountains whose highest peak is Tuer-to; and then, after a while, break in the coast line, a light house, and another Morro reveals the entrance to Cienfuegos harbor.

It seems a pity to take the romance out of any story of the olden time; but sometimes the truthful chronicler is compelled to do it—as in the origin of the singular name of its place. We have all heard how it was bestowed on account of a remark made by Columbus, as he glided by in his caraval. Tradition says that when the discoverer crossed the wide bay to the eastward, he suddenly saw before him at nightfall the flashing of many fires in the forest that lined the shores and exclaimed to his companions, Mira! Los Cien Fuegos! ("Look! A hundred fires!") For the Indians, who had become alarmed at the doings of the white strangers at other points, were warning their fellows farther along the coast in the direction the caravals were taking, by firing tall trees as danger-signals. But I am sorry to say that this was not the way of it; nor was the fiery cognomen bestowed on account of the heat, as one might well suppose who arrived here on a summer's day. The original Spanish town, which was founded soon after the conquest, disappeared two centuries ago. The present city was christened about 1818 in honor of Don Jose Cienfuegos, then governor general of Cuba, whose administration was signalized by such

important events as the cession of Florida to the United States, the concession to the colony of Unrestricted trade and a mighty agitation for the suppression of slavery. Cienfuegos was created by the sugar trade and has ever since been devoted to its commerce. Many of the finest plantations of the county are connected with it, either by railway or water, it being the terminus of the American line of steamers, and of the western railway system of Cuba. There are three routes from Cienfuegos to Havana, and in whichever the traveler decides to take, he will wish he had taken another. One is a zig-zag journey by rail, involving an all day's ride beginning and ending in darkness, five changes of cars and no end of discomfort. I never saw more uncomfortable railway traveling than in the interior of Cuba. Neither water nor food are to be had on the way. At every station one may readily find harsh red wines and the rum of the country, but no good water to drink and it is necessary to take along enough fluid of some sort to last till your destination is reached. The second way is by steamer to Batobano, requiring a night and a morning on the sea, and a two hours ride by rail across the island; and the third is an all-the-way-around ocean trip.

Wherever you go in Cuba, the familiar sentence will recur to mind, "We came into a land wherein it seemed always afternoon." But Cienfuegos comes nearest to being wide-awake than any place in the country. Bright, clean, progressive, it has been not inappropriately dubbed the Yankee town of Cuba. Instead of the narrow, crooked lanes, rambling up hill and down, which distinguished its older neighbor, Santiago, its straight, well paved streets are laid out on a dead level and were long ago lighted with gas while those of Havana were yet depending on oil lamps. The fact is, it is too Yankeeified and devoid of picturesqueness to be attractive to the average curiosity hunting American traveler. Its commonplace, two story houses might belong to any Northern town, and are all so nearly alike that a man coming home late at night, must needs be comparatively sober not to mistake his neighbor's casa for his own. The present population is officially reckoned at 45,000, and there are, (or were before the war) a number of English and American merchants and planters, engaged in the sugar and tobacco trade. It has a fine harbor, and is one of the few tropical ports where steamers come up to the wharf, as they do in New York, permitting passengers to land without the aid of small boats.

The instant our gang-plank was thrown out, we were surrounded by a crowd of hollow-eyed spectators, who seemed to spring up from the earth. They were all products of this long and terrible war, mostly homeless reconcentrados, who had been lying about the wharf for want of a better place to stay. They would have swarmed upon the boat in their desperation of hunger had not Spanish soldiers driven them off at the point of the bayonet, and the skeleton hands outstretched and pitiful appeals for alms made us regret that we had ever seen the unhappy island. Being the commercial center of thirty or forty of the largest sugar estates on the island, as well as many extensive tobacco plantations, Cienfuegos enjoys a large export trade in time of peace. There are three tolerable hotels, a government

"palace," an opera house, market place, military and public hospitals, and a fine alameda or "grove of elms," driveway and promenade. The few which serve as a fashionable noteworthy public buildings are mostly grouped around the central plaza. The latter is a large, handsome square, well lighted by electricity and enormous ornamental gas lamps. Its broad pavement of marble tiles, bordered by palm trees and beds of flowers, is guarded by two lion-surmounted pillars, while pedestals here and there support white-washed statues. On one side of it stands the cathedral—too new to be very interesting, with an esplanade in front and two towers, one much smaller than the other, filled with little bells, perpetually jangled out a tune. On another side of the plaza is the government house faded with impressive colonades and flanked by a long line of barracks. On the opposite side is an open-air theater, a popular cafe and an extraordinary club house, built and owned by Chinese. Its president is a Chinaman who was educated at Harvard and speaks a good deal better English than some native Americans I have known. The place is well worth visiting, being fully up to the best of its kind in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco. A broad hallway, paved with marble tiles, leads to an extensive sala, also marble-paved, which opens into a quadrangular courtyard, in which palm and flowering shrubs grow around a central fountain. In a big reception room on the second floor, above a shelf where Jos sits surrounded by other gods, hangs a framed parchment upon which are recorded the names of the 550 Chinamen who compose the membership of the club.

To get a general idea of the town, you should climb to the top of Reservoir hill, the only commanding point in the vicinity, from which the city stretches west a couple of miles, while countryward are the plantations with their neat villas and sugar mills and scattered groups of palms. The particularly colored casas—pink, blue, purple and green, often all the colors of the rainbow combined on the wall—are built in the usual Cuban style interiorly, with an open courtyard in the center, well filled with flowering plants. A few of the more ambitious display lavish adornment of iron work, carvings or stucco, balustrades and marble floors.

It happened that we arrived on a Sunday, the gala day of the week in all Spanish-America; and although so much suffering and hunger were everywhere apparent, Cienfuegos was not without its show of gaiety—mostly kept up by the Spanish residents, who still maintain a brave front of ignoring the gravity of the war situation. In these parts the clergy are so accommodating as to have the last service in the church over by nine or ten o'clock in the morning. This leaves nearly a full day for cock-fighting, bull-bating, horse-racing, gambling, and the other favorite diversions of Spanish-America. In the evening a military band renders excellent music in the plaza, and all the local world turns out to enjoy it. The broad marble walk upon which the senioritas in their best clothes parade to and fro, was lined on one side with indulgent chaperones and duenas, sitting upon stone benches and conventionally keeping but half an eye upon their flirtatiously inclined charges; and on the other side by a solid phalanx, several rows deep, of admiring male on-lookers, while the farther edges were darkly fringed by hopeless and hungry poverty. During all the week the senioritas are never allowed to go out alone; but are kept under rigid restraint, constantly watched and always accompanied by their elders or by servants in their walks to church and