A CHRISTMAS IN CUBA.

Strange Ceremonies which Attend the Meeting of the Year in Cuban Homes; Posadas and the Nacimiento—Religious Fiestas in the Valley of Trinidad.

Special Correspondence.

Havana, Cuba, Dec. 25, 1898.—The Christmas of which I write occurred four years ago; but as the customs of rural Cuba have changed little in four centuries, it is safe to say that similar scenes will attend the coming of the years in thousands of homes throughout the island this season of '98-99, and so long as Spanish Catholic ideas prevail in Cuba.

The Christmas in question found me in the valley of Trinidad—the city heart and picturesque of the island. The Trinidad city, and the valley, city and bay of the same name are called in local parlance, have not figured at all in the late war, and therefore are comparatively unknown to the world at large; but the time is at hand, with American occupation, when the region will be resurrected to become one of the most beautiful and valuable in the western hemisphere. Trinidad City, found by Trinidad bay, lies at the sea-coast edge of Trinidad valley, in Santa Clara province—almost exactly in the center of the south shore of the island. You may reach it from Havana, from Cienfuegos, or from Sancti Spiritus, by rail, or by railway to Cienfuegos and thence 16 miles by steamer; or, as I did, by rail to Sancti Spiritus (in the west of Havana province), and then on a leisurely ride of a hundred miles or more over the mountains of the Trinidad valley. In each case you are certain to approach the Trinidad by sea, as there is no all-land route thereto from other parts of the island. Very properly, Trinidad bay has a trinity of portals, the ruins of two forts that stand like the sole, and a little land called Cuba. The last named fort is generally used, although its water is so shallow that vessels must be loaded by means of lighters and are so as to quickly as possible, to avoid sticking fast on the sandy bottom. The landing-place is lined with extensive wharves and warehouses and there is a business street close by, the valley which runs the forty miles thirty miles, connecting half a dozen villages and bringing to market the products of the plantations down for shipment. Trinidad City, three miles inland—rather, up-land—from the landing, is reached by the road. The picturesque town, which Don Diego de Velazquez chartered in solid stone, is built on a terrace early as 1513, is one of the oldest in Cuba, founded only a year later than Baracoa, and antedates Santiago, after Santa Domingo, the oldest city this side of the world. Though so little is heard notice-able of this region, its history is both entertaining and instructive, for it was the famous battle-ground of three British men-of-war against the Spanish under Admiral Cornwallis, in which the English were defeated after three days' fighting. Though two long centuries have passed, the city has finally harassed by pirates and buccaneers, and more than once was entirely destroyed by fire. Its last fire was turned by the English overall, but it is whispered that many proud Spaniards prefer to a French crew in Value of Trinidad was their robes in plate of grandfathers. When piracy went out of fashion, the old warehouses turned respectable. The sugar vast plantations with 40-mile sales have come to be the mecca for adventurers and become affiliate of church and state, seldom in all good works—particularly in the matter of bringing thieves to account.

One who does not mind climbing, finds Trinidad a most delightful place. Its low-roofed sugar and palm-tree gardens, cling to the side of Vigia mountain, 400 feet above the bay. Its upland streets are narrow as the street in Scotch-America and the business quarter realizes Bellamy's dream of an underground metropolis, having wagings stretched across from wall to wall in mediterranean series, although commonly the roofs are open sun. Most of the houses are of stone, tinted with red lime, and many are tumbling, with stones fallen from the crumbling carved marble and high-reaching lime above the floors. They differ from the houses of Havana in not having dividing walls between the houses, only the kitchen and stable apartments being partitioned half way up to the ceiling. The rear are a series of wooden stables, high enough—affording free entrance of air and sunshine—to accommodate three of mettle from the street, each fronted and antique furniture.

It was in one of these beautiful cases, perched on the brow of a hill overlooking the valley, that I passed the evening Christmas, the guest of a family of Senor Salvio Corrasco, who was among the wealthiest land owners in Cuba. Their estate, "Santa Rosa Ingenio," was now the property of the Marquis de Carrasco and his descendants, who on Sundays and holidays, as now was their titled ancestors in Spanish-settled days. The plantation, more properly called a "ranch," produces cocoanut flocks and bonds, orange and coffee groves, and sugar-cane filling yellowish-green to the outskirts far as the eye can see.

The case of solid stone, whose owners boast that it was built two centuries ago, has been like a medieval fort or feudal castle, with its thick walls and its iron-barred windows from the ground, protected and reinforced within high walls, with sentry-boxes and loop-holes for guns. The house itself resembles nothing so much as a Moorish inner court, would more than a New York city block. Its hallways are floored with marble, the and brick stairs with Persian rugs, skins of wolves and tigers, and the floors are of hardwood grain, all the windows are iron-barred, like those in prisons, and opening upon the inner court yard, where an antique fountain plashes by cooling stony sinuous Moorish, fig trees and spreading bananas. The massive doors, of carved oak and mahogany, are each a study and some of the rare old paintings and quaint articles of furniture brought from Spain by the titled ancestors a hundred years ago, before one was in the air of revolutionary or author modern could do. Like most homes of the better class in Cuba, it contains a private chapel, over whose richly carved altar burns a lit-dead, distracting fire, one of the living relics upon the place. At the first, stately, crape-and-dressed house of the Virgin Mother and a much complimented San Juan and wooden effigies of the Christ and God, the old mistress and a hundred and a half years ago, the old mistress and a hundred years ago, the old mistress and a hundred years ago, before the age of electricity, in the Diamond Days of the Creoleral Marquess received her guests with a blaze of brilliants, while the Diamond Days of the Creoleral Marquess received her guests with a blaze of brilliants, while the Diamond Days of the Creoleral Marquess received her guests with a blaze of brilliants.

The ancient Christmas ceremony called Las Posadas is still practiced by many families, as in old Spain and all her former colonies—especially among descendants of the aristocracy, the great estates, whose hereditary communities capacity extreme an distinctness in holiday their ancient Spanish ancestors, or ancestors, the old mistress of the Paradise which now is an enclosure of children for the amusement of children rather than a row of religious exercises. The young and old, attired in their ancient dress and manners, take active part in it. The ceremony is intended to typify the time when Joseph and Mary journeyed from "all the world shall be taxed," and Mary and Joseph, being refused entrance at Bethlehem, were compelled for the occasion, food bethlehem so full of people who had arrived in the south of Judea. The ceremony is, of course, wandered, chase without giving admittance to one known in his and on the sixth day that Christ was born, and that Christ was born. The wind sounds means one, and the no especially the wanderings of Joseph and Mary, and the Christmas eve, there was unknowed two hours earlier than usual. In order to give an opportunity for the wanderers to reach the remote and secret works in secret and expensive preparation and to allow the children to have a good time, the great dining hall, where the performance begins and ended. All the household, including the servants, are dressed and each child's dress is fitted to the suits, are somewhat alike in the suits, are somewhat alike in the suits, are somewhat alike in