

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## MATANZAS AND VICINITY.

Matanzas, Cuba, May 5, 1898.

The old city of Matanzas—with four centuries behind it and a yet more brilliant history ahead—has long been called "a nest of rebellion" by Spanish officials and "the birth-place of patriotism" by the patriots themselves. It is Cuba's second city in population, wealth and commercial importance—perhaps first in beauty and healthfulness, and it is destined to become of greater interest in the near future as the capital of the Cuban republic. Its population of about 60,000 in time of peace was largely made up of the descendants of titled grandees from Old Castile; yet its sudden decline to half those figures was due to the fact that thousands of its best citizens, including professional men, merchants and sons of wealthy families, went to join the insurgent army. The vice president of the embryo republic and his secretary of state—Senor Mendez de Capote and Moreno de la Torre—were both born in Matanzas; also the Gutierrez brothers, Jose M. Galvoz, Alberto Ortez, and many other prominent revolutionists. Gomez's forces are already at the door of their new capital, so to speak, being encamped within the province—prepared, soon as our troops are landed, to establish headquarters here and transfer their seat of government from Cuitas. They might have done so long ago, had the times been ripe for holding the easy conquest. Of course Matanzas can be more readily taken than Havana, and—what is equally to the purpose, will be retained with less difficulty, in spite of any force which Spain may bring by land or sea. Habana will doubtless be the ultimate capital of the reconstructed country, on account of its superior natural advantages, larger harbor and handsome public buildings—but not for years to come. A long time will be needed to make it habitable, according to modern ideas, after this cruel war is over. Think of the hundreds of thousands who have died in it during the last three years, of starvation and disease, in the teeming hospitals and prisons and Los Fossos—to say nothing of the numbers killed in battle; and all these dead buried in shallow rented graves, from which they are speedily evicted to the charnel yard. Think of the absence of sewerage and other sanitary regulations in a populous city amid all these horrors, and the eternal presence of smallpox and yellow fever; and you cease to wonder why the broad bay, washing its shores, so reeks with impurities that no fish can live in it. If ever a thorough "house-cleaning" was required, after 400 years of neglect and no scavengers but the carrion birds, it is Havana!

Meanwhile Matanzas, 60 miles to the eastward, on another broad and beautiful bay, will do well for a temporary capital, as Philadelphia served us before Washington was ready. Its shallow harbor is sheltered within an amphitheater of hills, and may be strongly fortified—if Uncle Samuel will furnish his ward the money. At present it has only the old castle of San Severino and another stone-walled fort of equally ancient date, at the entrance of the harbor, several miles from the city, and the remains of the new earthworks which our guns destroyed the other day. By the way, the report of Captain General Blanco to his government, concerning "the bombardment of Matanzas," was a fair sample of Spanish bombast. Both forts and the earthworks are so far from the city that the latter was

in no danger, and not a single shell struck within three miles of it.

Late last March I spent several days in Matanzas, a guest in the palace of Senor Don de Armos, the new autonomist governor of the province. This gave me a fine inside view of things in the city which will presently figure in our news columns as the seat of the Cuban republic. The so-called "palace," on the Plaza d'Armas, in a very large two-storied, flat-roofed casa of stone, stucco and adobe, faced by covered archways, or "portales," as they are called. According to Spanish custom, the ground floor is given up to offices, store-rooms, quarters for soldiers and police, stables, kitchens, etc., while the upper story is the official residence of the rulers of Cuba's richest province. A wide flight of stone steps, worn into deep hollows by the passing feet of 300 years, leads to enormous rooms, each like a town-hall. In the vast, echoing salas, with their marble floors and long lines of crystal chandeliers, more fortunate governors than the present incumbent have given splendid receptions to the beauty and chivalry of Matanzas. The state dining room, where ceremonious banquets of many courses are solemnly partaken, is so big that a telephone service between host and guests would be an improvement. In the great sleeping apartments, the high posted brass bedsteads, with crowns atop—brought from Barcelona generations ago, all canopied, curtained, beribboned and beruffled in the gorgeous style of the mother country—are set exactly in the center of the bare expanse of marble flooring, and looks exactly like an oasis in the desert—a speck in the ocean. In truth, the most attractive part of this mediaeval palace is outside of it—in views from its balconies. On one side of the casa, you have an incomparable picture of the beautiful bay, blue as the skies above it, reaching out to the ocean. Another side overlooks the Cumbre hills, in which insurgent campfires are nightly seen, and the historic old Montserrat chapel, perched on a nearer spur. Those green heights enclose the world-famed Yumuri valley—"Vale of Paradise"—an emerald gorge with a river running through, dotted with stately palms and now ruined villas. Directly below, the Plaza d'Armas is surrounded by the several departments of the colonial government, and the finest shops, cafes and club houses of an aristocratic and once prosperous people. The Plaza is laid out in the usual fashion of Spanish-American—walks, lined with flowers and shrubbery, radiating like the spokes in a wheel from a central point, which in this case is a fine statue of Ferdinand XII. In this historic square many native patriots have met death in Spain's effort to maintain her blighting hold upon this remnant of her western territory. Among the last who died here was Gabriel Concepcion de la Valdez, the mulatto poet and one of the noblest men Cuba has produced. He was accused of complicity with the slave insurrection of '44, and condemned to be shot by soldiers of the line. The first volley failed to touch a vital spot. The brave man, bleeding from many wounds, still stood erect and undaunted, and pointing to his heart, said in a clear, calm voice, "Ain here." Another volley, and another victim was added to the long list of Cuban martyrs.

The blackest page in the history of this fair island can never be accurately written, for Spain has made every effort to suppress the record of the

thousands of brave men who, suspected of having a hand in some plot to overthrow the iniquitous government, or of sympathy with one of the innumerable revolutionary movements, have been publicly shot or privately disposed of, or left to die by inches in some noisome dungeon.

A little more than four centuries ago this delightful situation was occupied by the populous Indian village, Yucayo. In 1693—just 200 years after the discovery of the island by Columbus—a Spanish hidalgo, named Manzaneda, purchased from Carlos II a few hectares of land, including the then long-deserted Yucayo, and settled thereon 30 families of Canary Islanders. The colonists arrived on a Saturday in October. The next day being Sunday, Bishop Compostello changed the heathen name of the place, with mass and solemn ceremonies, to San Carlos y San Severino; and on Monday, the third day, the corner stones were laid of the cathedral and the castle of San Severino, the most remarkable instance of expedition on record in this land of Manana—"tomorrow." The colonists afterwards acquired considerable more space in the adjacent Yumuri valley, for a cattle range, and devoted themselves to the raising of beef for the Havana market. Hence the place became known as El Matanzas—"the slaughter pen." In time the names of the Saints were left off altogether, and not only the settlement, but the bay, the district and the whole province, rejoiced under the name of "the slaughter pen."

Straight through the middle of the city runs the San Juan river—the portion on the south side of it being now known as "Pueblo Nuevo" (New Town) and that on the north as "Versalles." Several handsome stone bridges cross the river, among them the notable Puente Belem. The New Town contains the railway depot, and many beautiful villas. It has one of the handsomest streets in all Cuba, the Calzada de San Estevan, lined for two miles with imposing residences, all with pillared porticos in front, paved, like the terraces with mosaic of black and white marble, or blue and yellow Venetian tiles. These casas of the old time grandees are set flush with the pavements, but each has its beautiful gardens at the sides, filled with palms and flowers, surrounded by tall iron railings and stone pillars topped with urns.

Matanzas has experienced the vicissitudes common to West Indian towns, of attacks by buccaners and bombardments by naval forces, English, French and Spanish; but the worst calamity that ever befell her was the great conflagration of 43 years ago. After that, the well-to-do citizens built their residences on the heights above the city, where ocean breezes blow and the wide spreading bay forms a delightful picture. Two railway lines connect Matanzas with Havana, one of them running via Baruco and Cardenas; the other coming from the south-east, through Villa Clara, Sagua, and Cienfuegos, intersecting a rich sugar district and in peaceful times bringing a large amount of freight to the coast for shipment. Both lines are American built, drawn by American engines, equipped with American cars, and will no doubt soon be run by American engineers. Matanzas has a splendid new theater, said to be the finest in the West Indies, not even excepting "The theater of a hundred doors" in Havana. Most of the public buildings, however, are very old, uncomfortable and dilapidated. The musty cathedral, whose corner-stone was laid a little more than three centuries ago, and which has two towers, one much taller than the other, is rather imposing, by reason of massiveness and rough,