

CORRESPONDENCE.

TO SANTIAGO DE CUBA

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The first passenger steamer to enter this port since it became an American possession, was the Philadelphia, of the Red D line, chartered for one trip only by the Ward company, whose own boats, which lately plied these waters, were purchased some months ago by our government. Naturally, the departure of the Philadelphia created a ripple of excitement in New York harbor. Hours before sailing time, (1 p. m. Saturday, July 23rd), so crowded was the steamer that it appeared as if several hundred civilians had taken advantage of this first opportunity of getting into Cuba. Nearly every prominent member of the Junta was on board, chattering and gesticulating as only Cuban-Spaniards can. Reporters interviewed recklessly. Dusky-eyed *Senoritas* wept upon the bosoms of the departing and a thousand loving messages were dispatched to friends who yet remained in Cuba. Then what a skurrying over the gangplank when the last whistle sounded; and when the steamer finally slipped her moorings and slid away from shore, amid cheers and tears and waving handkerchiefs, it was discovered that but a handful of the throng was booked for the passage. Nobody went for pleasure only on this long journey to the beleaguered seat of war, but each of the forty odd passengers had his special, important mission. For example; there was the elderly editor of *El Porvenir*, the Cuban newspaper, published in New York, sent down by the Junta to placate the disgruntled patriots, who are at outs with their American allies thus early in the game because not permitted to loot and murder in the taking of Santiago. There was Mr. R. C. Smith, agent for the Ceballos company, of the *Compania Transatlantica Espanola*, which has secured the contract for transporting to Spain the army surrendered by Gen. Toral at Santiago, going to complete arrangements for relieving Uncle Samuel of 15,000 hungry boarders as soon as possible. There was Mr. W. A. Donaldson, of Far Rockaway, who was last week appointed by President McKinley to collect duties at our new port, going to establish a United States custom house at Santiago and revive in Cuba the tonnage tax, which Spain long ago abolished. Under Spanish rule, there has been a tax of \$1 per ton on all cargo loaded or delivered at any Cuban port, the sole exception being in favor of coal, which paid no tax, and iron ore, which paid only 5 cents the ton. The department at Washington retains the latter discriminations but has revived the long-abolished tonnage tax, fixing it at 20 cents the ton, on the registered net tonnage of all other vessels, to be paid on entering the harbor. The Philadelphia also carried a dozen or more engineers and mine-owners, American, German and Cuban, going to reopen their iron and copper works in the mountains around Santiago, Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York are especially interested in these mines, in the order named. In times not long past a great deal of Santiago iron-ore was shipped to points along the line of the Pennsylvania and Reading railroads. These mining companies have two or three short railroads, running from the port to their works in the Cobre hills. Not least among their losses by the war has been the dumping of some

rolling stock into the bay. The Philadelphia brought along a lot of hoisting apparatus with which to recover the submerged engines. The miners are jubilant over the certainty of being able to resume work at once—not only for their own interest, but because they can furnish employment to several thousand impoverished Cubans.

Among the Philadelphia passengers was Mr. Kingsbury from the Washington weather bureau, sent to inaugurate our signal service in Cuba. The manufacturers of Quake Oats with their usual enterprise, sent a man thus early to pioneer the business in the new land of promise; and a condensed milk firm had also a representative on board.

Most prominent among the spectators was the son of a well-known Washington produce dealer, with several thousand live chickens, in coops, stowed away somewhere below. Having read the chickens are selling in Cuba at \$3 apiece the young man invested in "broilers" which bring about 25 cents each at home, expecting to realize an instantaneous profit of several hundred per cent, at the least calculation. It seemed a pity to blight the bud this budding genius of American trade. The poor chickens, crowded as closely together as sardines in a box and with almost as little air, the coops being piled in pyramids from floor to ceiling of the lower deck, suffering for want of primal elements of the universe, earth, air and water, as well as from sea-sickness, fright and long confinement, died by the dozens, especially during days and nights of rough weather. When the region of tropical sultriness was reached, the odors from those coops bore no comparison to those of Araby the Blest. The passengers complained, some of them in good English swear-words; The captain threatened to make ducks and drakes of the whole investment by dropping it into the sea, and the young speculator's hopes fell accordingly, from \$3 the broiler to half that sum in the lump. I may as well tell you the rest of the story, while on the subject, though somewhat out of sequence. When we arrived in Santiago harbor after six days' passage, the remnant of the fowls were so diseased and reduced to bones and feathers, their owner concluded that he would not stand on high profits but dispose of the lot at \$3 a head. When he finally got them ashore, after 24 hours' delay for lack of lighterage, he could hardly give away the wretched few in which the breath of life yet lingered, though he hawked them in person, at the doors of drug stores and dry goods houses, as well as in markets and restaurants, for less than their transportation had cost him—to say nothing of his own passage money, \$40, for the round trip between the harbors of New York and Santiago. The last time I saw the young man, he told me with tears in his eyes that he had rented a piece of ground and turned the survivors loose, hoping that some of them might recuperate and become saleable; but that in any event he was "out" fully \$1,200. The trouble was not so much with the chicken business in the island of Cuba, as with the speculator's methods. If live fowls are to be transported on a long, tropical voyage, they should be provided with healthful conditions, for pecuniary consideration, if not in the interests of humanity. Instead of being too greedy to take advantage of

people's necessities, he should have remembered that with few exceptions the impoverished Cubans have absolutely no money for the necessities of life and cannot pay fancy prices for imported chickens. If he had brought dressed fowls, on ice, to be sold at reasonable rates, he might have done better, or if he had established a "chicken farm," with incubators, anywhere on the island and waited for better times and his plant to grow together, he would doubtless have done very well indeed.

Our week's voyage was much like others in this direction. It would be rare indeed were not some squalls encountered in the 1,367 miles that stretch between New York and Santiago! Hardly had the Brooklyn bridge, the bronze Goddess and other landmarks and watermarks of Gotham faded from view, before the passengers began disappearing, one by one. Not a soul confessed to *mal de mer*—oh no! Perish the thought. Only, somehow, the sight of food suddenly became a horror and the desire to recline in seclusion was simultaneous and universal. All the omens and portents known to mariners held true—such as

"Rainbow in the morning,
Sailors take warning."

"If the Bermudas let you pass,
You must beware of Hatteras."

The first long Sunday was a blank. We knew we were sailing the *Sarragosa* sea, amid patches of wonderful sea-weeds accompanied by those other navigators, the nautilus and the flying fish—but the inclination for a recumbent attitude in private was still so strong that few ventured forth. Days followed days on the sunlit sea, all so much alike that one lost track of time and hardly knew whether he had been from home a week or a year. The skies grew bluer and bluer, and the waves white-capped above the bluest blue eyes ever beheld. Some of the nights were passed in a struggle to hold ones self in bed, so bolsterous were the long Atlantic swells; and anon, rocked in the cradle of the deep more gently, one gazed through the port-hole at a disk of star-illumined sky and thought of the dear home faces till tranquil slumber came.

A notable circumstance of this journey was that in the whole thirteen hundred miles we encountered but three vessels—two transports and a man-of-war. Our route—on the usual course, at an average distance of 100 miles from shore—was the great ocean highway of the Antilles, formerly plied by thousands of merchantmen and other craft; but now commerce and travel are alike suspended because of Uncle Samuel's participation in the quarrel of his neighbor, San Salvador—the first bit of the Western World which Columbus saw, you know—was passed, unnoticed in the darkness of night. Early on Thursday, the sixth day out, we caught the first glimpse of Cuba—low hills topped with clouds, so vague in the morning twilight that none could trace the lines of demarkation between sea and sky and shore. But it was surely Cuba—the land of tragedy, within whose small compass upwards of 600,000 people have died within three years—where more than a third of the population have been annihilated during that short period, by starvation, disease and the red hand of war. By and by *Maisi* light, holding aloft its beacon-signal, sprang out of the mist to greet us. Its tall white shaft, set on the eastern tip of the island, looks enough like the Washington monument to give the wanderer a home sick pang. The low hills that encompass southeastern Cuba, rising in natural terraces from the water's edge, remind me of the artificially terraced slopes of the Peruvian Andes,