

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## CARDENAS.

Cardenas, May 17, 1898.

When the American guide-book man writes up Cuba, a year or two hence, he will speak of Cardenas as the Philadelphia of the island. Though only an infant town, as compared with its three hundred year old neighbors—having been born after the first quarter of the present century, (about the year 1830, I believe)—it has already played a leading role in Cuba's commercial affairs. Lying at the head of a safe and spacious bay, fifty miles east from Matanzas, and one hundred and fifty from Havana, it is the last port of consequence on the north coast of the island. Beyond Cardenas, going eastward, all the seaboard industries are shifted to the south coast, and with the sole exception of Sagua la Grande, (an unimportant port at the mouth of a river), one may sail along the entire two-thirds remaining length of the island, rounding Cape Maisi at the eastern tip, and then going west on the other side as far as Santiago, without finding a place worth visiting. Cardenas, with a population of 25,000, is not only the capital of a fertile district, and one of the main outlets of Cuba's richest province, Matanzas—but is also the great railway center of the island; or, more properly speaking, it ought to be, as all the railroads of the country form a junction fifteen miles inland at an insignificant station called Jovellanos. In time of peace Cardenas enjoyed a thriving business, particularly in sugar and molasses—its exports of the former sometimes amounting to one hundred thousand tons a year. To the west and south stretch the great sugar estates which have made this fraction of Spain's dominion a prize to be fought for, with their sugar mills and refineries—now all in ruins. The water side of the town is fed with long wharves and lined with warehouses, and its extensive railway depot would do credit to any metropolis. There are a few pretentious public buildings, including the custom house, hospital and college; its cobble-paved streets—considerably wider than those of Havana—have two lines of horse-cars; there is gas and electric lighting, and more two-storied houses than one is accustomed to see in Spanish America. But, notwithstanding the broad blue bay in front and the Paseo, whose tall trees seem to be touching finger tips across the road, congratulating each other on the presence of eternal summer—Cardenas is not an attractive town. You miss the glamour of antiquity and historic interest which pervades Havana, Matanzas, Santiago, and feel somehow defrauded by a town which is new without being modern—young but not youthful. Why a place of so much commercial importance has not been more strongly fortified, it is impossible to say. Plenty of bee-hive forts are scattered around the edges and there are other rude defenses on the land side to keep the insurgents out and the reconcentrados in; but no massive stone wall fortresses, like the Morro, Cabanas, San Severino, imposing though comparatively worthless, with their antiquated guns. By the way, did you know that Cardenas was stormed and taken by a force which started from the United States, about fifty years ago? It was the filibustering expedition of General Narciso Lopez, who sailed from New Orleans in the spring of 1850—when the idea of annexing Cuba and her half million slaves found considerable favor among the slave-owners of our Southern states. Lopez was a Spaniard, (born in Venezuela), who had won many laurels in

fighting Spanish American rebels. He was sent to Cuba in 1841, to fill some important post under the home government and in Havana he fell in love with and married a beautiful and wealthy Cuban girl. Perhaps it was owing to her influence that he soon resigned his official position, and afterwards took part in a seditious undertaking. The conspiracy was discovered and nipped in the bud, as so many incipient revolutions have been, before and since; and in 1849, General Lopez found it expedient to emigrate "between two days." He went to New York—that paradise of Cuban refugees and disappointed revolutionists, where he identified himself prominently with the large colony of conspirators. The following year he undertook his first expedition to Cuba, sailing from New Orleans, May 19, 1850, in the Pampero, with 610 men. His object was to assist what was known as the Separatist revolt, and he expected that then powerful faction in Cuba to rally to his support. Landing at Cardenas, he took the city without much trouble—but held it only two days, when he was compelled to retire. The Cubans did not sustain him, as he had anticipated. They remembered that he was a Spaniard, who had gained his high rank in the army of the oppressor, and naturally they distrusted him. The following year he came again with 600 men. There was no pretence of disguise in our Southern States of the object of the expedition, and the details of it were recklessly given, so that the Spaniards were amply warned and had time to lay a trap for Lopez. They knew that he meant to land in the eastern part of the island. Letters were sent to him, purporting to come from Cuban patriots, persuading them to land in the western portion and promising to support him. He stopped at Key West to take coal, landed as the Spaniards had planned at Bahia Honda, and marched into the interior where the insurrection was to take place; while his second in command, W. S. Crittenden—a graduate of West Point and a Mexican war hero, though only twenty-eight years old—remained at the seaside as a base of operations. Hearing nothing from Lopez and knowing therefore that his movement had been a failure, Crittenden made a desperate attempt to escape in open boats; but was discovered and captured. The United States consul was appealed to for assistance, but declined to interfere; and, it is said, did not even visit the unfortunate men because he feared for his own safety. Proceedings were prompt. The filibusters were taken to Havana, Lopez was not permitted the death of a soldier but was publicly garrotted. Forty-nine of his men were shot and one hundred and six others were loaded with chains and sent to Spain, where they were held in servitude seven months. Poor Crittenden, a promising young fellow under thirty, and fifty of his men, were shot in groups of six under the walls of old Fort Atares. He refused to kneel with his back to the firing party, according to the Spanish fashion, but faced them erect, saying that he kneeled only to his God. Report says that the bodies of the victims were treated to frightful indignities.

Since Lopez's day, Uncle Samuel has three times seriously considered the acquisition of Cuba—twice by purchase and once by conquest. Late in the "fifties" a bill was introduced in both houses of Congress declaring it highly expedient that the key to the Antilles should be in possession of the United States, and that negotiations should

forthwith be opened with Spain, looking to the purchase of the island, for a sum not exceeding one hundred million dollars. It had been expected that the "Solid South" would particularly favor the scheme—and why it did not turn out so, I do not know. When the matter came up for discussion in the Senate, Mr. Soule, of Louisiana, led a strong opposition. He wanted the island, but not by purchase. He was an exceptionally brilliant speaker and his slightly foreign accent, graceful figures of speech and personal magnetism added to the charm of his oratory. In conclusion he said: "Let the United States go and take the captive queen of the Antilles. I hope I shall live to see the day when the golden and bloody flag of Spain shall float no more over any territory, be it island or city, which of right should be dominated by the American nation; when the flag of cruelty and tyranny shall be replaced by that which today flies above the Capitol, the flag of the free." The bill was lost in the Senate and never came out of the committee of foreign relations of the House; and so ended our first formal attempt to buy Cuba.

Meanwhile other influences were quietly at work. Colonel E. V. Sumner, who was then in Europe, was commissioned to ascertain how a movement tending to the purchase of the island would be regarded by France and Spain. Hon. John Y. Mason was then our minister to the court St. Cloud; but he was considered unwise to risk becoming persona non grata by pressing the American project before the intensely pro-Spanish French premier, in case the tentative inquiry should be unfavorably received and result in unpleasant diplomatic relations with the foreign office. The answer showed that the precaution was well taken. Duke de Morny, the emperor's half-brother, who was then the ruling spirit of the French foreign office and greatly influenced by the Empress Eugenie, declared himself strenuously opposed to any attempt being made to compel Spain to yield any of her possessions either under threats or moral pressure; and that if the United States persisted in her efforts to acquire Cuba, contrary to the wishes of the Spanish queen and cortes, the act would be considered by France as unfriendly.

Then for a whole decade nothing more was heard about the purchase of Cuba. In 1868, soon after our Civil War had been fought and slavery was dead, a suggestion came from Spain herself. It was when General Prim, General Serreno and Marshal O. Donnel—the three great liberal leaders of Spain, who had all been banished by Queen Isabella, returned to their native land, and were so successful in pushing their revolt that Queen Isabella in turn, had to flee. Serreno became regent; but Spain was absolutely without money—and money the new Liberal government must have. There was no applying to any European sovereign to help maintain the Liberal idea, which was an open menace to all monarchies; and so General Prim suggested the sale of Cuba. He was confident that the United States would gladly purchase, and proposed the opening of negotiations at once. How different would have been the subsequent history of that unhappy island, and of Spain—and heaven knows how much money and how many lives to be sacrificed in the present war it would have saved the United States had the matter been carried through. But at that time our own national debt was very large, and Senator Sumner and other prominent Republicans thought it should not be increased. General Grant was "up" for the presidency, and should the purchase of Cuba be attempted during the campaign the Democrats would certainly make party capital out of it.