

CORRESPONDENCE.

SANTIAGO DE CUBA IN WAR TIME

Santiago de Cuba, Aug. 5, 1938.

It would be hard to find an odder state of things than exist in this three-century old town. Entirely un-American in aspect and conditions, its architecture as Moorish as anything in Morocco and its narrow, crooked, uphill streets reeking with vile odors and filth of every description—it is at present about the most cosmopolitan city on the hemisphere. Soldiers are everywhere, Spanish, Cuban and American, and in the latter army all the nations of the earth are represented. Walking the distance of a block, you may meet officers of every rank and "previous condition," handsome young Apollos in private uniform, some of them the sons of millionaires, titled Spaniards, sulky Cubans, lepers, and beggars of both sexes and all colors; and to encounter a corpse or two, stretched across the sidewalk or lying on its face in a doorway, is no uncommon occurrence. The cadaver may lie there for hours before attention is paid to it—not that people have become entirely indifferent to death, but because huddled in these parts has always had a habit of sleeping in the sun; consequently nobody notices when here and there among the wretched throng one enters the eternal slumber. Passing along Santiago's water-side street, at any hour of the day or night, you may see a thousand outstretched, motionless figures, their rags drawn over their faces; and should you examine them closely, you would doubtless find among them some bodies tenantless of a soul. As to the lepers; let me tell you one little circumstance, characteristic of the place. Everywhere in Cuba lepers roam the streets, without let or hindrance. There are two or three hospitals for them in Cuba, but no law to compel their isolation. About forty lepers, however, were corralled in Santiago hospital civil—until after the battles of July 1st and 2nd, when the hospitals were needed for the wounded Spanish soldiers. All the sick who could crawl were ordered out into the streets, to make room for the victims of war. The lepers were evicted with the throng in the water-side street, begging alms from passersby and receiving food from the Red Cross, often directly from the hands of our ladies.

In its best estate Santiago lacked every sanitary feature; and now, after two months of siege—crowded with the off-scourings of all the surrounding region, the sick, the wounded, the diseased, and cargoes of rotting stuff being dumped ashore from ships long-delayed in the harbor—the city is a veritable pest-hole, filled with stenches that absolutely stagger one. Decayed fruit, dead dogs, cats and mules, all manner of filth and carrion lies wherever it happened to fall, festering in the sun and rain, to quickly become a mass of living, wriggling abomination. A peculiarity of this hot, moist climate is the rapidity with which putrefaction takes place and the certainty that without greatest care maggots will breed in diseased flesh—a fact which adds untold horrors to hospital work.

Between military rule and a queerly mixed Spanish and American civil administration, Santiago's business affairs are decidedly complicated. Most of the Spanish officials of the former government have been retained, to the unbounded indignation of the Cubans. Those ministers,

they say, were never chosen by the citizens of Santiago, but were forced upon them by the queen of Spain. They have been fighting this very thing for thirty years; and after the victory, they naturally expected an other government, with officials of their own choosing. Still more dissatisfaction has arisen from the administration of port affairs, which were never in a worse condition when Spain held undisputed sway. To begin with, the same port officials are retained—a Cuban at the head who does not speak a word of English, assisted by three Spanish revenues officers; therefore the American merchantmen who are unacquainted with the language find it extremely difficult to do business at all. The harbor is crowded with vessels filled with American goods, which cannot be landed because the army has pre-empted all the wharves and lighters. A fair sample of that phase of the situation is the steamer Philadelphia, on which I came. She expected to discharge her important commission at this port in three days' time and be ready to return; she has now been here nine days, and will doubtless have to wait as many more before all her cargo can be taken ashore in the one lighter which she is able to occasionally secure for a few hours' service. In normal times there are plenty of lighters in Santiago harbor; but just now the all-powerful military are using them and refuse to let one go, whatever valuable cargoes may be spoiling. Never was mortal man more unpopular than General Shafter. Afloat and ashore, with both Spanish and American merchants, the captains of all vessels that visit the port, as well as with the intelligent citizens, and the soldiers to a man. The wonder is that some bullet, aimed by a vengeful hand, does not cut short his career in these lawless times, as he rolls about town in his carriage, or his great bulk is carried from camp to camp on a litter. Men are dying by hundreds because of somebody's criminal neglect, and naturally, to the chief officer on the spot is attributed a good deal that properly belongs to distant Surgeon-General Sternberg. Among other things, Shafter's action in regard to port charges is severely criticized. It was believed that when Santiago became an American port, the exorbitant duties exacted by Spain would be abolished. People were perishing here for everything in the line of food and other necessities of life. What then was the surprise of the American merchants who understood to supply a part of the demand, to find when they reached Santiago that they must pay an average of 100 per cent ad valorem on every article—the same old Spanish charges which furnished the Cubans with their main cause for rebelling. The merchants appealed to Gen. Shafter, and he told them in plain terms that they must pay the extortionate charges or leave the port without unloading, and be d—d quick about it, too! Many did the latter, and the few who remained found themselves encompassed by difficulties. The captains tendered drafts in payment of the unexpected duties; but the port officials refused the drafts and demanded American gold. Again was the military autocrat appealed to, and again Shafter upheld the Spanish custom officials and in his usual pointed style recommended the United States merchantmen to a place that is warmer if dissatisfied with the doings in this. Of course

all this interferes greatly with business and is a serious loss to many people. Bankers and wealthy merchants in Santiago who are willing to honor the drafts of American houses to any amount, are at present unable to do so, having shipped their gold for safety to Spain and Jamaica. The local merchants, though eager to purchase the American cargoes that are now in the harbor, hesitate to do so, fearing that when the old-time duties are abolished, they will have to dispose of the goods at heavy loss. It shakes the confidence of the citizens in their American friends at the outset. They cannot understand why the United States should maintain the same extortionate duties which led to the war against Spain—especially at a time when starvation is abroad in Cuba. Thus hundreds of families of the better class, who are not yet destitute enough to seek charity, are prevented by Shafter's action from supplying themselves with food.

Fancy the steamboat passengers being obliged, unexpectedly, to remain two or three weeks in this poverty-stricken, fever-infested town!

Those who desire to "board" on the vessel—anchored a mile or two out in the bay—may do so at the rate of \$4, per diem, as long as supplies hold out, and may go ashore whenever they like, unless quarantine intervenes by paying the customary boat-charge of 50 cents each way. There are two swell clubs in Santiago, American and Spanish, where men may live, if rich enough; besides several tiendas, or low-class restaurants, which demand high class prices for poorest food. Even the citizens, ordinarily so hospitable, are too poor since the long war, to entertain guests; and therefore the traveler, without plenty of scrip in his purse, finds himself in the condition of the Son of Man, without where to lay His head. One of the Philadelphia's passengers perpetrated a huge joke on himself. Tiring of steamship fare, he thought he would try a change ashore and said to his fellow-sufferers, "Gentlemen, I am going to town to get a square meal: who will join me?"

Fortunately for his pocketbook, nobody accepted the invitation. Having heard that the clubs were expensive, he did not patronize either of them, but went to a modest restaurant and ordered such a meal as would cost in the United States about 50 cents. To be sure, some essentials were lacking. Butter, of course, was not expected; and there was neither milk, bread, nor "relish" of any sort. He had a broth, a stew of odds and ends, a chunk of boiled beef, (possibly horse or dog), half a pine-apple and a cup of bitter coffee, with brown sugar and the bill for this sumptuous repast was exactly \$23.75!

Your correspondent has met with no such trials, being safely housed in Red Cross headquarters. Miss Barton and her staff are comfortably established in a picturesque, well-furnished old casa, one of the finest in Santiago whose owner—a wealthy Scotchman, now in Europe—kindly placed it at her disposal. Here they sleep and eat, but their days, "from early morn till dewy eve," are spent in the storehouses down near the water's edge. Galley-slaves never work harder than do these ladies and gentlemen. As everybody knows, they not only give their time and services without salary, but have abandoned positions of prominence, ease and profit for philanthropy's sake.

All of them have grown noticeably thinner and paler since I bade them good-bye last spring in Havana, and an indefinable change of expression is apparent in their faces. When I mentioned it to Miss Barton, she said: "Do you remember an old poem by Mrs.