

CORRESPONDENCE.

ISLA DE LOS PINAS.

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Maps of Cuba are so numerous nowadays that you will have no difficulty in locating the Isle of Pines, although it does not figure in the present war and has seldom been heard of in the United States. But the world is not long to remain in ignorance of it. Soon as peace is restored and some level-headed Yankee develops its wonderful springs, it will hold the same relation as a sanitarium to our continent that the Furnas Valley of St. Michaels, in the Azores, does to Europe. It lies off the southern coast of Cuba, about 90 miles due south of Havana city and equidistant from the western tip, and is the only islet of size and consequence among the thousands that encompass the Queen of the Antilles. I visited it early last spring, sailing westward from Cienfuegos; but the future tide of travel will come down from New York or Tampa to Havana; thence two or three hours by rail across the narrowest portion of Cuba to the dirty little southern port Batabano; and then by steamer, across 54 miles of tranquil sea to Pine Island. A native coaster used to make the trip every Thursday from Batabano, until our blockade cut short its career. It is a most delightful journey, similar to that among the keys of the Florida coast—winding in and out among innumerable green islets whose glistening beaches are fringed with cocoa palms, over waters blue as the tropic sky, smooth and uminous as a mirror, and so beautifully translucent that star-fish lying on the silvery bottom and sea-flowers growing far below, look as though seen through glass. The air is deliciously balmy, the same in mid-summer as in winter, and your eyes are continually feasted upon the beauty of the verdure-clad shore close by and the distant mountains veiled in mist—the Guanahua or "Golden Range."

The Isle of Pines, also known as "Reina (Queen) Amalia," is the same that Columbus discovered on a June day in 1494, and named La Evangelista. It is about 60 miles long by 50 broad and of exceedingly picturesque appearance—crossed from end to end by two hill-chains known as the Sierra Canada and the Serra de la Dagulla, both averaging 1,500 feet in height. Between these ranges are broad green valleys and many beautiful rivers, some of them of considerable depth and navigable four and five miles. A great swamp or junco, like the everglades of Florida, extending across the island from east to west, divides it into two unequal parts; and everywhere the tall pine trees, which have given the island its later name, loom darkly against the sky. It is a singular fact that the pine family peculiarly a product of cold and elevated regions, should have many species also in the tropics and at sea-level. We are wont to think of pine as upon the mountain tops, and palms and yuccas in the torrid low-lands; but here they grow amiably side by side. Two varieties of pines found in this island are extremely rare and of great interest to botanists. By being surrounded submerged cays, reefs, islets and impassable marshes, the channels of approach to Isle de Pines are so few and intricate that in earlier days the piratical fellow who infested these waters, found it a safe and convenient hiding place.

For 200 years they made it a favorite depot for supplies and stolen treasures, and sallied forth from here on many a murderous expedition. When discovered by Columbus, it was densely populated; but now has hardly 2,000 people and only two insignificant villages, yet the

small island is priceless territory, for three things—fine marbles, wonderful thermal springs and a climate of such unrivalled salubrity that Cubans consider it an unfailing panacea for consumption. The mountain ranges are almost entirely composed of beautiful marbles, of all qualities and colors—a perfect mine of riches, waiting to be developed by enterprising Northerners. One remarkable mountain, called Loz Casas, (The Houses), seems to contain every sort of marble known, in all the colors of the rainbow, piled as by art in contrasting strata varying from black, brown and gray to palest tints of pink, blue and green. Another low mountain, called Los Cristales, is even more curious, its steep sides being literally coated with beautiful green rock crystals, though not of great height, some of these hills are wild and impressive, presenting to seaward a succession of sheer precipices, 150 feet high.

You may disembark at either of the two little ports—Nueva Genoa, (pronounced Hay-one-ah) or Santa Fe—both near the northern end of the island but on opposite sides of the great marsh. The regular steamer from Havana goes first to Nueva Gerona, which is situated about three miles up the river Casas—backed by hills and fronted by an emerald plain dotted with palm trees. It is the seat of what government there is on the island, it being a dependency of the province of Havana, has a tolerable hotel, some shops and at one time maintained a considerable Spanish garrison. But this so-called "Capital," with its third rate comforts and galeties, is a long way from the chief attraction of the island—the life-giving springs, and therefore most comers pass it by for the wretched little hamlet called Santa Fe, around on the northeastern side of the island. To reach it, you sail up a river of the same name, to a tumble down wooden landing place a few miles above its mouth, where a still more tumbled down volante waits to take you the rest of the way. The town is well named "Holy Faith," for it takes a good deal of that intangible commodity to make bearable its many discomforts. A wide, bare space in the center of the village, called by courtesy a plaza, is occupied by heaps of dust and garbage, discarded cans, and hungry dogs and wondering donkeys. Around this general dumping grounds the low, thatched houses are built, straggling off into irregular, unpaved streets. There is no inn, or other public accommodation for man or beast, except the plaza aforesaid. The sooner you get out of the wretched place, the better; so you rehire the delapidated volante, whose owner stands waiting, knowing from previous experience that no foreigner is going to stay long in Santa Fe. Now he has three miles harnessed tandem, and flourishing his whip over their heads, with many prolonged "mulas-ah-h-h-h!" he rattles you over the dusty road at a pace which threatens to disjoint yourself as well as the vehicle. Finally the low, green hills are reached, whose steep and gullied byways make such rapid transit impossible; cross a queer little bridge, beneath which ascending steam betokens some of the warm springs—and suddenly, you see standing before you several stately structures built of stone, surrounded by beautifully kept grounds, and many well-dressed people loitering under the trees or loling in hammocks on the wide verandas. The transformation scene between this and Santa Fe is indeed surprising. These stone and marble casas are the Spa hotels, and at the best of them, the "Santa Rita," you may find large cool rooms, an

obliging proprietor and some of the comforts of life. A great deal is lacking, however, which 'mine host,' under present circumstances cannot supply. By and by, when the war is ended and prosperity restored to long-suffering Cuba, some northern Bonifaces will come down here with sufficient capital to make of it an ideal resort. The climate is as near absolute perfection as can be found this side of heaven—the dry, pure air, cooled by breezes from the near-by ocean and odoriferous of the pine forests. At present only one of the springs that called "Templado," (temperate) is used as a bath. A house has been erected over it, divided into compartments for ladies and gentlemen, each bathing pool being twelve feet by six, with four inches of water on a floor of solid stone. The temperature of the water is 82 degrees Fahr., and is very strongly impregnated with oxygen, carbonic acid gasses, chloride of sodium, sulphate of lime, nitrate of lime, iron, magnesia, silicic acid, chloride of calcium, and nobody knows what other constituents, making about the nastiest drink imaginable. Besides it, the savor of added eggs, common to most mineral springs is an abrosia, and even the smell of it generally acts as a lively emetic on the new comers. The regulation cure here, as prescribed by the Cuban doctors for almost every disease known to materia medica, is four glasses a day of the water and two baths but it is probable that the pine odors, the warm, pure air and simple diet, and above all faith, have much to do with it. At any rate, a great many surprising cures have been effected, particularly of bronchial, rheumatic and scrofulous complaints. Invalids have been brought from the steamers on litters apparently just ready to give up the ghost, who in a week's time horseback, and in a month have gone home "good as new," and well as anybody. If the springs were managed by some sensible, wide-awake, judicious Anglo-Saxon, they would soon become the sanitarium of the continent, besides which Las Vegas in New Mexico, White Sulphur in Virginia, Saratoga and other of our Spa would hide their diminished heads. As it is, life here is not unendurable, though lacking many of the 'creature comforts' to which northerners are accustomed. Mere pleasure seekers would better stay away; but one whose health is at stake can afford to fight abounding vermin and put up with "short commons" for a season. Fleas, roaches, spiders, a thousand wriggling, crawling, stinging creatures beset you continually on the Isle of Pines. You find the pests between the sheets and in the food. They preempt your shoes at night, and the garments you are wearing by day; and if they do not take bodily possession of you, whole colonies of them settling down comfortably on your hair and ears and nostrils while you are catching "forty winks" of troubled slumber in the intervals of warfare, you are exceptionally fortunate. Even Eden had its serpent, you know; and doubtless a more advanced state of civilization here will evolve some means of diminishing the plague of vermin.

Expenses at this Spa are very moderate. The best hotel charges \$2.25 per diem, American money for its choicest accommodations, including baths. Saddle horses may be hired at for \$1.50 per day, and carriages at proportionate rates. There are many charming walks and drives in the neighboring hills and interesting all-day excursions may be made to sugar estates and pine apple plantations. The natives of Isle de los Pinos are a simple, kind-hearted people, whose greatest pleasure seem to be chattering with strangers and listening to their accounts of the outer world. To them all beyond the horizon's rim, or at