

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE NORTHERN COAST OF CUBA.

July 19th, 1898.

Continuing our journey around the edges of Cuba, about twelve hours sailing, northwesterly from Baracoa, brought us to Gibara—another port of local consequence, though comparatively unknown to the world at large. No other island of its size has so many ports and sheltered landings as Cuba—more than 200, all told. Half of them are accessible to vessels of eight hundred and a thousand tons, and several to ships of any size. Though Gibara is only fifty miles from Point Maisi, at the eastern end, following the undulating shore line, it is a full degree farther north, owing to "the lay of the land."

By the way, many people find it hard to understand how Cuba, stretching long and narrow between the Mexican Gulf and the Caribbean Sea, can present such differences of climate—why, for example, Santiago on the south shore can be so much hotter than Havana on the north, when the island is nowhere more than forty miles wide. They fail to take into account that Cuba is almost crescent shaped, and that a curved line, 750 miles long, drawn through its center, extends through three and a half degrees of latitude—the difference between Havana and Santiago being about the same as between Boston and Memphis.

Gibara is often begun with a J, but in either case is pronounced as if spelled He-bah-rah. It is the port of the important interior town of Holguin, connected therewith by the old camino real, or "royal road" built by the early Spaniards; and all around Holguin lie rich sugar, coffee and tobacco lands. The steamers that make this circuit of the island in time of peace, stop here a whole day, taking on cargo, so that the tourist has ample time to inspect all its points of interest. Most historians, you know, mention this as the first landing-place of Columbus in Cuba; and it is not unlikely, owing to its relative position to the island of the mid-Bahamas, whence he came. The approach to Gibara is most picturesque, with detached mountains looming dark above green forests and low hills. The open bay is partially sheltered by sand-bluffs from the white-crested waves that break outside, and off the harbor rise the four tall peaks which Columbus mentioned in his journey as "conspicuous landmarks." Though very capacious, the bay is not deep enough to allow vessels to approach its wharves; so they have to anchor some distance outside and be loaded by lighters. The entrance is guarded by a tiny fort whose two or three antiquated guns keep up a brave show of defiance, but which looks as if a good strong breeze, to say nothing of a cannon-ball, would scatter it over the adjacent country. The town presents that desolate, half-ruined aspect common to so many outlying settlements of Cuba, which since time out of mind, have been harrassed equally by mountain robbers and insurgent bands. A high wall has been built around the inside of Gibara for defense against the "patriots" but it does not seem to have been much more effective than the cardboard fort in front. There is a little plaza with a few palm-trees in it, a quaint old church, a fine new casino, a theater and a dozen shops; but the dwellings are few and shabby and the general aspect of the place is decidedly down-at-heel. At the time of my visit, three months ago, the citizens looked hungry and discouraged enough—and heaven knows how they may be

fairing today, shut off by land and sea from communication with the world.

At Gibara the connoisseur in canes may indulge his fancy in some odd specimens. One variety in particular is worth seeking far and wide. It is made from the skin of that strange, gregarious, squat animal—the manati—sea-cow, or sea-lion as he is variously called, which frequents these shores as nowhere else in the West Indies. Any day you may see a herd of them floundering clumsily in the marshes around Gibara point. At first glance the sea-cow looks like a Chesapeake Bay porpoise—only it is much too large. Then you think it must be a whale—but who ever saw a whale eating grass? And then, noticing the hand-shaped flippers, or fore-fins and the queer projections curved, like horns, over the eyes, you recognize the far-famed manatee, whose species are extremely rare on this side of the globe but abound in the Indian Ocean and on the shores of Africa.

In the East, they are hunted for their food and fat; and here, their tough hides serve as many useful purposes as the papier mache of China and Japan. In some way, known only to the natives, manati-skins are converted into canes, beautifully mottled, transparent as glass and strong as steel. When mounted in gold or silver they cost at Gibara from \$10 to \$20, gold; but in Havana, if you find them at all, they will be as high as \$50. Another beautiful cane is made in the coast villages of eastern Cuba from the shells of a very large turtle. The shell is boiled to a thin liquid, into which a strong, straight stick of proper length is dipped. After being allowed to harden, the process is repeated again and again, until the required thickness is attained. Then the outer coating is sand-papered to a brilliant polish, headed, feruled and is ready for market. It has the appearance of solid tortoise-shell and readily sells for five dollars and upward.

The planters in the grassy plains beyond Holguin raise many cattle, and usually while waiting in Gibara bay for the taking-on of cargo, you are treated to a spectacle which rivals the Spanish bull-fight in cruelty. It is the Cuban method of loading animals.

A lighter, filled with cattle comes along-side the steamer and makes fast; a rope is thrown down, one end of which is attached to the steamer's hoisting-winch, and at the other in a running noose. The noose is thrown over the horns of an unfortunate animal, the winch is started to tighten the knot, and then with sudden jerk, goes ahead at full speed, hoisting the unhappy beast high in the air. Sometimes there are two animals in the same noose, frantically pawing each other; and the tortures they undergo can only be dimly imagined, as the cruel rope tightens around their horns and cuts into the flesh by the terrible strain of their weight. Often the horns are actually pulled from their sockets, and the poor beast drops into the sea. Otherwise, hoisting to a sufficient height, they are swung up over the deck, spinning round and round like huge tops, until dropped heavily upon the deck, where they lie awhile, stunned and motionless. Though so ghastly a spectacle, it is characteristic of the native taste that women and children lean over the taffrail in high glee, enjoying every detail, as at the bull-fight.

A few hours after the headlands of Gibara had faded from sight we came into the historic bay of Nuevitas. Its

entrance is through a river with high banks, like a winding canyon, four or five miles long, which widens out in its course into two bays. The first bay is named Mayacebo, the second Nuevitas; and into each, two rivers empty. What a glorious morning it was, when we awoke to find our ship swinging at anchor in the superb inner bay! It was the very perfection of spring weather, but an April day as Northern eyes have seldom seen, with the wonderful blue of the sky, the brightness of the verdure, the purity of the atmosphere; the nearness of the waters. Speaking of this place, Irving says that "Columbus was struck with the grandeur of its features, its high mountains, which reminded him of Sicily, its fertile valleys and long promontories and stretching headlands, which melted away into remotest distances." The inner bay is no less than 57 square miles in extent, and therefore the discoverer named it Puerto Principe, (Principal Port)—not dreaming that there were several grander ones along the coasts of Cuba. He set up a cross upon the neighboring height in token of possession, and in 1513, Diego Valesques and founded a town, which he named Santa Maria—where Nuevitas now stands, the sad-looking port at the extreme southern end of the immense sheet of water. Afterwards, owing to the savages of some local calectura, the Spaniards moved on, to the Indian village Cacao and later to Camaguey, now Puerto Principe, 45 miles inland. The original Santa Maria, however, was never quite deserted, though in course of time it took on several aliases, and is now known as San Frenando de Nuevitas. Seen from afar, its white-walled houses, shining in the sun against the gentle slope of a palm-crowned hill, it looks like the city of a dream. But like others in neglected Cuba, "This distance lends enchantment," and nearer view discloses abounding filth and poverty. Its population numbers perhaps 6,000, and its only importance is, on the port of entry for Puerto Principe and the place of shipment for large quantities of hides, sugar and molasses. A 45-mile railway connects the two places—when roving bands of patriots do not tear it up as they have done a dozen times within the last three years. Puerto Principe, capital of the province of the same name, is in the heart of the cattle-field, one of the richest and most interesting cities of Cuba, as well as the quaintest and farthest behind the times. Within it, old Tempus seems to have forgotten his fuging and been standing still since Columbus' day. With a population of 60,000 or more, it has never boasted of a hotel, nothing better than posadas, as poor as that in which Joseph and Mary found refuge. However, the Cubans are so hospitably inclined that they never allow a friend to put up at public house, and even strangers may be sure of entertainment. The narrow, crooked streets are mostly unpaved, and the low houses of antiquated architecture and shabby in the extreme.

There are several old churches, and a number of convents, a theater a bull-ring, and a group of more modern buildings for government offices; but on the whole, you are inclined to think that its high-sounding title—Santa Marie del Puerto Principe—is rather a misfit, being too large for the place.

Immediately west of Nuevitas bay the cays begin, 570 of them by actual count, stretching all the way between Nuevitas and Havana.

Uniformly long and narrow, their glistening silver sands fringed with cocoa-palms and mangrove bushes, they are of all sizes, from a few yards to miles in extent. The largest is Cays Roman—a second "Long Island," con-