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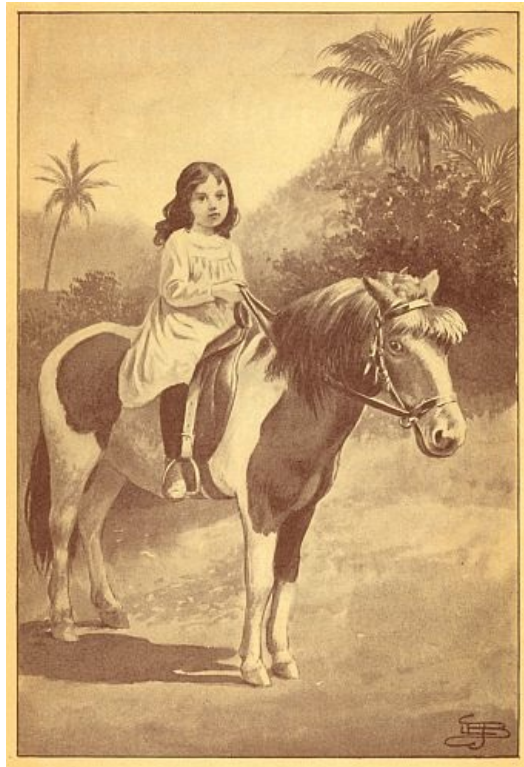
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MARIA



Our Little Cuban Cousin

By
Mary Hazelton Wade

Illustrated by
L. J. Bridgman



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[iv]

Preface

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LARGEST of all the fair West Indian Islands which lie in our open doorway is Cuba. The great south doorway to the United States and all North America, you know, is the Gulf of Mexico.

But recently, as we all remember, we have had war and bloodshed at this doorway. The Spanish government, in trying to subdue its rebellious province of Cuba, brought great hardship and suffering upon the Cuban people, our neighbours, and our government at last decided that such things must not be at our very doorway. So to-day Cuba is free, and the great trouble of war is over and past for her.

Yet, though war no longer troubles the Cuban people, they have many new hardships and difficulties to contend with, and need the friendly help of their more fortunate neighbours scarcely less than before. Now, in order that we may be able to help our friends and neighbours, the Cubans, we must know them better, and surely we shall all feel a stronger interest than ever before in their welfare. So we shall be glad to meet and know our little Cuban neighbour, Maria.

[vi]

We shall ask to have what Maria says translated for us, for most of us do not understand the Spanish language, which Maria speaks. We must remember, too, to pronounce her name as if it were spelled Mahreeah, for that is the way she and her family pronounce it. Our Cuban cousins, you know, like our cousins in Porto Rico, are descended from the dark-eyed, dark-haired Spanish people. Their forefathers came over seas from Spain to Cuba, as the English colonists came across the ocean to our country, which is now the United States.

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Yet we must remember that the Spanish people and the English people are near akin in the great human family. They both belong to the white race; and so we shall call our black-eyed little neighbour our near cousin. Welcome, then, to our little Cuban cousin!

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Our Little Cuban Cousin

[9]

CHAPTER I.

DANGER.

"MARIA! Maria! Maria!" was the low call from some unknown direction. It sounded like a whisper, yet it must have travelled from a distance. Low as it was, the little girl dozing in the hammock in the lemon grove was awake in an instant. She sprang out and stood with hands shading her eyes, looking for the owner of the voice.

She well knew what it meant. Ramon was the only one who had agreed to call in this way. It was a sign of danger! It meant, "The enemy are coming. Look out and get ready." Shouldn't you think our little Cuban cousin would have trembled and cried, or at least run for protection to her mother? [10]

Maria was only nine years old. She was a perfect fairy of a child, with tiny hands and feet and soft black eyes. But she was used to war by this time. She never knew when she went to sleep at night but that her home would be burnt down by the cruel Spaniards before the end of another day.

Ramon got up before sunrise this morning. He had been away from home for several hours. He had gone out in the country "to look around," as he said. From his own front door the burning roofs of the houses of old friends not a mile distant could be seen the night before. The Spanish troops must be near. Who could say but that the boy's own home would suffer next?

He was tall and active, and he longed very much to help his people. They had suffered much from their Spanish rulers and now they were working hard for freedom. But Ramon's father had been ill for a long time. He was growing weaker every day. The boy's mother looked very sad at times. Her eyes filled with tears when she said: [11]

"My dear boy, you must not leave us now. Your duty lies at home. You must be your father's right hand and protect your little sisters and myself."

The Diaz children lived in a cosy little home in the country. It was only a few miles from Havana. Their father had a small sugar plantation. He had been able to raise enough sugar to buy everything the family needed until lately. But now times were very hard. It was not easy to sell the sugar; besides this, the good man and his family were in constant danger.

What had they done? you ask. Nothing. They did not love their Spanish rulers, to be sure, and they believed their countrymen were fighting justly to free their beautiful island home. They [12]

would help these countrymen, or insurgents, as they were called, if they had a chance.

But Maria's father had never, himself, fought against the Spaniards. He was a quiet, kindly gentleman, and he had no love for war. What did the Spaniards care for that? They might say to themselves:

"This man has a pleasant home. He raises sugar. He may give food and shelter to those daring Cuban soldiers. Then they can keep up their strength and be able to keep up the fight against us all the longer."

So far Maria's home had been spared. Although many other houses near her had been burned, hers stood safe and unharmed yet. But "To-morrow is another day," the child often repeated to herself, after the manner of her people. That meant, "Although I am safe now, no one knows what will come next." Then Maria would sigh for a moment and look sad. But she was naturally merry and gay, and the next moment would be dancing about and humming a lively tune. [13]

What news was her brave brother bringing this morning? As soon as he came in sight, Maria ran to meet him. The sun was very hot and the little girl's head was bare, but she did not think of these things. The Spaniards! The Spaniards! made the only picture she could see.

As soon as she was within easy call, Ramon told her that a company of the enemy was only two miles away. He had been very close to them. He had even heard them talking together while he hid in the bushes.

"Just think, Maria," he exclaimed, "they were laughing at the easy time they would have in breaking our spirit. They said that before long they would starve us into giving up. I rather think they won't. Do you know, Maria, I believe God will send us help if we are only patient. The Americans live so near us, I don't see how they can help taking our part, when they know the way we are treated. But come, we must hurry and tell father the news. He will know what we ought to do to get ready for a visit to-day." [14]

The children hurried to the house, and soon every one was in a state of the greatest excitement. When Señor Diaz was told of the approach of the Spaniards, he said, in his gentle voice, "We would best have a picnic."

The children looked greatly astonished at the idea of a picnic at such a time, but their father went on to explain. He had often thought of the coming of the Spanish troops. He had made a plan in case he should hear of their approach. The house should be locked up; all the family should go down to the shore of a small lake a quarter of a mile back in the woods. The path that led to this lake was so hidden that a stranger would not know it was there. Ramon could lead the oxen; the father thought that he was strong enough to guide the horse to the picnic-ground. [15]

If the Spaniards found no one about the house, and no animals worth capturing, they might possibly pass by without doing any harm.

Señora Diaz and old black Paulina got a hasty luncheon ready. Maria said she must certainly take her sewing materials, for she was going to embroider some insurgent emblems. Her little sister, Isabella, carried her pet kitten in her arms, and cried because the parrot must be left behind.

"He'll be so lonesome," she said; "and I just know he'll call 'Isabella' all day long."

The dear little girl cried hard, but everybody's hands were so full that Mr. Poll was left in the house. A big linen cloth was stretched over the cage. If kept in the dark, he would probably be still, and not attract the attention of the soldiers, if they stopped and looked in. The black man servant, Miguel, stayed behind to shut up the chickens in barrels, but would follow the rest of the party in a few moments. [16]

The path led in and out through the beautiful southern woods. There were cocoanut-palms and ebony and mahogany trees, while underneath were creeping vines and bushes, making a close thicket of underbrush. There was no talking. The family crept along as quietly as possible, lest they should be heard and followed. For by this time the enemy must be very near.

CHAPTER II.

 [17]

THE PICNIC.

IN a few minutes the lake was in sight. It was a very pretty sheet of water. A tiny boat rocked to and fro close to the shore, for Ramon and Maria often came here to row about the quiet lake.

Ramon soon had two hammocks swinging between the trees for his father and mother. The lunch was spread out on the ground, as it was already past the time for the noonday meal.

"What did they have to eat?" you ask. There were some delicate white rolls, that Paulina knew how to make so nicely. There was guava jelly to eat on the rolls; fresh lemons and newly made sugar from which to make a refreshing drink. Besides these, there was plenty of cold fried [18]

chicken. Could any children have a nicer picnic lunch than this, even if a long time had been spent in getting ready for it?

The guava jelly looked just as clear and beautiful as that which is brought to America, and sold here at such a high price. Did you ever see it in the stores of Boston or New York, and think how nice it must taste? Perhaps your mother has bought it for you when you were getting well after a long illness, and wished to tempt your appetite by some new dainty. Maria has several guava-trees near her home. Paulina makes so much jelly from the ripe fruit that perhaps the little girl does not realise how nice it is.

After the lunch, Señor Diaz stretched himself in one of the hammocks for a quiet rest. He was very tired after his walk through the woods. He was also troubled over the sad state of things in his country, and was worried that he was not strong enough to take a more active part against the enemy. His wife lay down in the other hammock for a noonday nap, after which she promised to help Maria in her sewing. [19]

Paulina gathered the remains of the lunch and put things in order, while the three children rowed around the lake.

"Won't you hear me read out of my primer, Maria?" said Isabella. "Ramon, dear, give your oars a rest, and float for a little while. You can listen, too, and I know you'll like my lesson to-day."

The little girl was just learning to read, and she had a book printed by the insurgents. No one had to urge her to study, for even her own little primer was made up of stories about the war. She had tucked her loved book in the loose waist of her dress when she left the house. No one had noticed it before.

"Why, yes, my darling sister, certainly I will listen, and help you with the big words, too," answered Maria, while Ramon drew in his oars, and lay back in the boat with a pleasant smile. Of course the words were all Spanish, because that was the only language the children had ever learned. Isabella read: [20]

"My papa is in the army of the Cubans. He fights to make us free. Do you hear the cannon roar? Our men will bring victory. Long live Cuba!"

When Isabella came to the word "victory," Maria had to help her. It was such a big word for the six-year-old child to pronounce. She looked at it again and again, repeating it slowly to herself. Then she said:

"I'll never fail on that word again, Maria, no matter where it is. How I would like to see it in great big letters on a silk banner! I'd wave it all day long."

This was a good deal for such a little girl to say, but then, you know, she was living in the midst of war.

"Good for you," said her brother; "we'll all live yet to see the words of your primer come true. Long live free Cuba! I say. But come, let's go on shore, and play war. You and Maria can be the Spaniards, and I'll be the insurgent army. You just see how I will make short work of taking you prisoners."

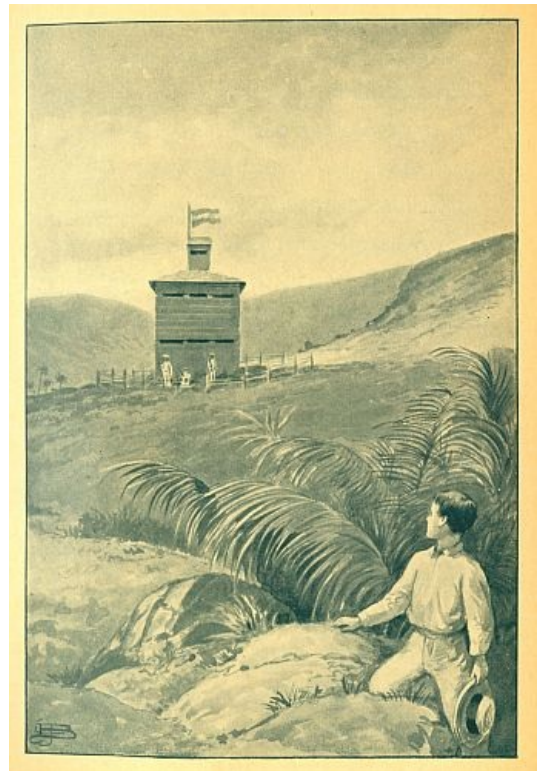
The children landed under a big cotton-tree. They made a fort out of dead branches which they gathered. This fort was to belong to the Spanish troops. The two girls placed themselves behind it, and stood ready to defend themselves. It was not many minutes before Ramon took them by surprise, and dragged them to the boat, which stood for the Cuban headquarters.

"Do you know," said the boy, when they stopped to rest a few minutes from their sport, "I counted three different forts of the enemy during my tramp this morning. The cowardly Spaniards don't dare to march very far away from those forts. They really don't give our men a chance to have a good fair battle. They think by having plenty of forts they can keep our soldiers from getting into the cities. Then they will scare the rest of us who live in the country from feeding them. In that way we will be starved into giving in. We'll see, that's all." [21]

By this time Maria could see that her mother had waked up and left the hammock.

"She will be ready to help me with my work now," said Maria. "Don't you want to come and watch me embroider, Isabella?"

The two girls were soon sitting beside their mother, while Ramon went with Miguel on a hunt for birds. The insurgent emblems which Maria was so eager to make were to be given to the Cuban soldiers. They were to wear beneath their coats. Suppose that an insurgent should stop at [23]



"I COUNTED THREE DIFFERENT FORTS OF THE ENEMY"

any place, and ask for food and rest; how would the people know that he was true to his country, and not a friend of the Spaniards? He could show his little piece of flannel with the watchword of the Cubans embroidered upon it. That was the only thing needed. The people would be safe now in giving him help.

Maria did her work very nicely. She made a scalloped edge with red silk all around the white cloth. A crimson heart on a green cross must then be made, with underneath these words:

"Be of good cheer. The heart of Jesus is with me."

Two hours went by before Ramon came back. Miguel and he were bringing a large net full of birds. Of course, they had done no shooting. That would not have been wise when Spanish soldiers might be near to hear the noise. No, they had searched through the woods till they found some sour orange trees. The fruit was ripe now and there were sure to be numbers of parrots around. They could be caught in the net that Miguel had brought from the house that morning. They had to creep along very quietly so as to take the birds by surprise. [24]

They had great success, it seemed; but what would the family do with a dozen dead parrots? Eat them, to be sure. Paulina would make a fine stew for dinner that very night. That is, of course, if they were fortunate enough to find the house still standing when they reached home. The flesh of this bird is tough, and one wonders that Ramon and Maria are so fond of parrot stew. In Cuba there are many nicer birds for eating. But each one has his own tastes. No two people are alike, we have found out long ago.

"I discovered something in the woods that I want to show you girls," said Ramon. "It's only a little ways off. Won't you come, too, mamma? It's the dearest little nest I ever saw in my life. It must belong to a humming-bird." [25]

Ramon's mother and the children followed him till the boy stopped in front of a low bush. Hidden away under the leaves was the tiny nest. It was no bigger than a large thimble. It was made of cotton, bound together with two or three horse-hairs.

"I'm sure I couldn't have sewed it as well as that," said Maria. "See how the threads are woven in and out. It's wonderful what birds can do. But look at the eggs, mamma dear. See! there are two of them. They aren't any bigger than peas."

Just then the children heard a fluttering of tiny wings. It was Mrs. Humming-Bird who had come home. She was troubled at the sight of the strangers.

"Did you ever before see such a small bird?" whispered Isabella. "She looks like a butterfly, and a small one, too. Aren't her colours beautiful?" [26]

"We would best let her go back to her nest, now, my dears," said Señora Diaz. "You can watch, Ramon, and find out when the baby birds hatch. We shall all like to see them, I'm sure."

They left the bush and turned back toward the lake. Ramon stopped again, however, when they came to a small lace-wood tree.

"You know you asked me to get you some of the wood to trim your doll's dress, Isabella. Here is a good chance to get it. I'll follow you in a few minutes."

Ramon took out his knife, and soon the young tree was cut away from the roots. It would take some time to strip off the bark. It must be done carefully and peeled off in one piece, so as to leave the pith of the tree quite smooth and whole. Several strips of delicate lace could be obtained from this pith. Now Isabella would be able to dress her doll in great elegance. She could ruffle the lace on the waist and flounces of the doll's skirt and make it look as beautiful as though it cost a good deal of money. Isabella herself has a dress trimmed with the lace, but Paulina needs to be very careful when she irons it. It was growing dark when Ramon arrived at the shore with his tree. [27]

"We will go back now," said Señor Diaz, "and see if the soldiers have left us our home."

All were soon making their way back to the house, which they found unharmed. Nothing had been touched by the enemy. Perhaps they had not thought it worth while to stop. At any rate, there was great joy in the Diaz family that evening as they sat on the balcony, sipping cups of hot sweetened water. The times were so hard they could not buy coffee, and *guaraba*, as they called it, was the next best thing. Maria is very fond of it. [28]

The children were so tired from the day's excitement that by eight o'clock they were quite ready to go to dreamland. Isabella started first. She went up to her father and, placing her tiny hands across her breast, looked up into his eyes with a sweet, solemn look. He knew at once what it meant. She was asking an evening blessing before leaving him for the night. Every one in the room stopped talking; all bowed their heads while the kind father said:

"May God bless my darling child, and all others of this household."

Maria and Ramon followed Isabella's example, and soon the children were sound asleep. Isabella dreamed that she taught her loved parrot to say "Liberty," and was delighted at her success.

LEGENDS.

THE next morning it rained quite hard, so the children had to stay in the house.

"What shall we do with ourselves?" said Maria. "Oh, I know. We'll ask father to tell us stories."

"What shall it be to-day?" he asked. "Do you want a tale of old Spain, or shall it be the life of Columbus; or maybe you would like a fairy story?"

"A fairy story! A fairy story!" all cried together.

"Very well, then, this shall be a tale that our people heard in Europe a thousand years ago.

"It was long before Columbus dreamed of his wonderful voyages across the Atlantic. It was before people had even thought of the idea of the roundness of the earth. They had such queer fancies in those days. Few men dared to sail far into the West. They believed that if they did so they would come into a place of perfect darkness.

[30]

"Still they had one legend of a land across the Atlantic that was very beautiful. Many of our greatest men believed in it. It was called the Island of Youth, and people who reached it could live for ever, and never grow old."

"What made them think there was such a place?" asked Maria, with wide-open eyes.

"They had heard that long ago there was a very brave young man. He had a wonderful horse as white as the foam of the ocean. Strange to say, this horse could carry him through the water more safely than the stoutest boat. As he was looking for adventure, he started off on the back of his fairy steed to cross the ocean.

[31]

"After he had travelled for some distance, he stopped to kill a giant who had enchanted a princess. When the giant was dead, and the beautiful maiden was free once more, he travelled on till he came to a land where the trees were loaded with birds. The air was filled with their sweet music.

"He stayed in this land for a hundred years. He was merry and gay all the time. He was never ill, and never tired."

"But wasn't he lonesome?" asked Ramon. "I should think he would wish for other company besides the birds."

"Oh, there were many other people there, of course, and as our traveller was fond of shooting, he had great sport hunting the deer.

"But at last something happened to make him think of his old home and friends. It was a rusty spear that came floating to the shore one day. It must have travelled across the ocean. The young man grew sad with longing for the scenes of his early days. He mounted his white steed once more, plunged into the ocean, and at last reached his own home.

[32]

"But think, children. It was a hundred years since he had seen it. His old friends were all dead. The people seemed like dwarfs. I suppose he must have grown in size and strength while away on the Island of Youth. At any rate, his own home was not what he expected to find it. He had no wish to live longer. He lay down and died. The Island of Youth had not been such a great blessing to him, after all.

"Another story used to be told in Spain of the Island of Seven Cities. It was a legend of our own Cuba, for all we know. People said that a thousand years before Columbus crossed the Atlantic, an archbishop was driven away from Spain. Why was it? He was untrue to his king. He sailed far from his country with a goodly company of men and women.

[33]

"After a long voyage they reached a land which they called Antilla. There were people already living here. They were kind and gentle.

"The archbishop divided the land into seven parts. He built churches and other fine buildings. He got the natives to help him. All lived together in peace and happiness.

"But look, children, the rain has stopped falling, and the sun is shining. You can go outdoors now, and amuse yourselves. Before you leave, however, let me ask you a question in geography.

"Cuba is shaped like what animal? Think how long and narrow it is, and of the ridge of mountains running through the centre of the island. I will give you until to-morrow to guess the answer.

[34]

"And, by the way, did you ever think that our home is really the top of a row of mountains reaching up from the floor of the ocean? Ah, what wonders would be seen in the valleys below us, if we could journey under the water, and explore it for ourselves!"

Just as the good man stopped speaking, Miguel knocked at the door. Two ragged little girls were standing at his side. They were strangers. Where had they come from during the hard rain of the morning?

It seemed that Miguel had been tramping through the woods after game. He did not care for the rain. He was a good-natured servant, and was always ready to make pleasant surprises for the family. When he was about four miles from home, he came upon an unexpected camp. There were about thirty people in it. There, on the mountainside, they had made rough huts to live in. There were not only men and women, but little children, also. They had been here for two or three weeks.

[35]

What a sad story they had to tell! It was the old story. They wished to be peaceful; they did not join the army of the Cubans. Still, they might possibly help them in some little way. But they did not go to the great city. They fled to the woods on the mountainside. They kept themselves from starving by gathering berries and wild fruit. Their children were sent out every morning to the country homes which were not too far off to beg for food and help.

"Poor little children!" exclaimed Maria, when Miguel had finished his story. "We will help you all we can, won't we, papa?" And the child's eyes were full of tears, as she said:

"We may be homeless like them, yet."

Isabella ran to call her mother and ask her help. Clothing was collected, and all the food the family could spare was put into baskets. It was far too large a load for the little girls to carry, so Ramon and Miguel went with them.

[36]

"What a good servant Miguel is!" said Señor Diaz to his wife, after they were gone. "So many of the blacks are lazy, and only think of their own comfort. But Miguel is always good-natured and ready to help."

CHAPTER IV.

[37]

NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOURS.

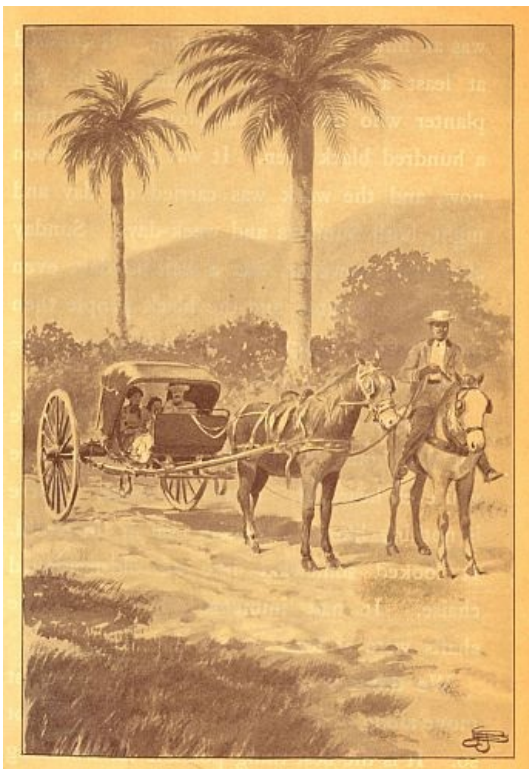
It was a beautiful Sunday morning. The birds were singing gaily outside. Maria opened her eyes. Perhaps she would have slept longer if she had not been wakened by a sound in the next room. It was Ramon who was calling.

"Say, Maria, what shall we do to-day while father and mother are gone to church? Let's go over to the plantation. You know we've been invited ever so many times, and it is such fun watching the men at work."

"All right," said Maria, "but there's no hurry. We will wait till after the folks have gone before we start."

Just beyond the home of the Diaz children was an immense sugar plantation. It covered at least a square mile of land. The rich planter who owned it employed more than a hundred black men. It was cutting season now, and the work was carried on day and night, both Sundays and week-days. Sunday afternoon, however, was a half-holiday, even in the busiest time, and the black people then gave themselves up to merrymaking, no matter how tired they were.

[38]



By nine o'clock Señor Diaz and his wife had left home in the oddest-looking carriage you ever heard of. It was a *volante*. There is nothing like it anywhere else in the world. It looked somewhat like an old-fashioned chaise. It had immense wheels, and the shafts were at least sixteen feet long.

We think at once, how clumsily one must move along in such a carriage. But it is not so. It is the best thing possible for travelling over the rough roads of Cuba. It swings along from side to side so easily that a person is not bumped or jostled as he would be in any other kind of carriage. But one does not see many new volantes in Cuba now. They are going out of fashion.

[39]

Señor Diaz was very proud of this carriage when it was new. It was trimmed with bands of silver. It had beautiful silk cushions. Even now, the good man and his wife looked quite elegant as they sat back in the low, broad seat. Isabella sat between them.

Miguel rode on the horse's back as driver. He wore a scarlet jacket trimmed with gold braid. He had on high boots with spurs at his heels. He felt very proud. It made very little difference to him that his coat was badly torn and the braid was tarnished. These were war-times and one could not expect new

"THEY SAT BACK IN THE LOW, BROAD SEAT" clothes.

"If the people at the great house invite you to stay till evening, you may do so," said Señor Diaz to his two older children just as he was driving away. "I know you will be gentlemanly, Ramon; and Maria dear, my little daughter will certainly be quiet and ladylike." [40]

Away swung the volante down the road, while Ramon and Maria put on their wide straw hats and started across the fields for the rich sugar planter's home. They looked very pretty as they moved along under the shade-trees. Both were barefooted; Maria wore a simple white dress, and Ramon a linen shirt and trousers.

They reached their neighbour's grounds in a few minutes. They soon found themselves in front of a large, low house with beautiful gardens and shade-trees around it. But of what was the house made? It was of the same material as Maria's home, yet we see nothing like it in our own country. It was neither brick, nor wood, nor stone. Maria would say to us:

"Why, this is 'adobe,' and it keeps out the sun's hot rays nicely. Don't you know what adobe is? It is a mixture of clay and sand dried by the sun. Some people call it unburnt brick. It was nearly white when the house was new, but now you see it is quite yellow." [41]

There was no glass in the window-cases. In such a warm land as Cuba glass would keep out the air too much, and the people inside would suffer from the heat. But there were iron bars across the casements; there were also shutters to protect the house from the sun and rain.

The children went in at the door, opened by a black servant. She looked kind and pleasant, and showed two rows of white teeth as she smiled at the young visitors. A gorgeous yellow bandanna was wound around her head.

"Come right in, little dears. Massa and missus will be glad to see you; little Miss Lucia has been wishing for company to-day." [42]

She led Ramon and Maria into a large sitting-room with two rows of rocking-chairs opposite each other. They stretched nearly from one end of the room to the other. There was scarcely any other furniture.

A minute afterward, Lucia opened the door. She was about Maria's age and very pretty. But she was dressed like a grown-up young lady. She carried in her hand a dainty little fan, which she moved gracefully as she talked.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you," she cried. "But let us go out into the garden; it is much pleasanter there; don't you think so? I want to show you my sensitive plant. Did you ever have one?"

Maria and Ramon had heard their father speak of this plant, but they had never happened to see one themselves. They followed Lucia out on the balcony. A morning-glory vine was trailing up the trelliswork. It was bright with its delicate blossoms, pink and blue and purple. Close beside it was the sensitive plant. [43]

"It came up of itself," said Lucia. "That is, you know, it was not planted by any one. You see its leaves are wide open now. It is keeping the morning-glory blossoms company. Perhaps they are talking together. Who knows? But when night comes it will close up in the same way as the petals of its next-door neighbour."

"Now, Ramon, just touch the leaves gently."

"Why, it acts as if afraid of me, doesn't it?" said the boy. "See how it shrinks away, even before I take hold of it. I declare, it knows more than some animals."

"Would you like to ride around the plantation? We have three ponies; so each one of us can have one," said their little hostess.

Her visitors were delighted at the idea. While a servant was sent for the ponies the children sat down under a royal palm-tree. It stood at least sixty feet high. Its trunk was perfectly straight. Far up at the top was the wide-spreading plume of leaves. There were no branches at the sides. [44]

"I just love this tree," said Lucia. "It seems so strong as well as beautiful. Isn't it queer that the trunk of such a big tree should be hollow?"

"I think it queerer still that the roots should be so small and fine," answered Ramon. "Did you ever eat what is found at the top of the royal palm? Everybody says it is delicious."

"Yes, we had it boiled once for a dinner-party," said Lucia. "It was delicious, but you know it kills the tree to take it off; so father says it is almost wicked to get it. I think he is right."

CHAPTER V.

SUGAR.

By this time the ponies had been brought up, and the young riders started off.

How high the sugar-canes stood! The children could not see over the tops, even from their ponies' backs. The long, narrow leaves hung down much like our own Indian corn. Far up on each plant was a feathery white plume. The stalks were now a golden yellow colour. This was Mother Nature's sign that the cane was full of sap.

At Maria's home the cane had been already cut and made into sugar. But there were only two or three fields. Here, on Lucia's plantation, there were hundreds of acres. The men had been working for weeks already, and it was not yet half cut. [46]

"Oh, look, Ramon!" said Maria, "see that dear little black baby asleep between the canes. She can't be more than two years old. The other children must have gone away and forgotten her."

Ramon jumped down, and, picking up the little tot, lifted her up in front of him on the pony's back. She had been waked up so suddenly that she began to cry. But when the others smiled at her she rolled her big eyes around, and soon began to laugh. She was going to have a ride with white children, and that was a grand event in her life.

A turn in the rough road showed an ox-cart ahead. How small the Cuban oxen are! But they are such gentle, patient creatures, a child could drive them. How they pushed ahead with their heavy load!

When they were young a hole had been bored through the centre of their nostrils, and an iron ring was passed through. When the oxen were harnessed a rope was fastened on each side of this ring. The black driver held the ends of the rope, and guided the oxen. He had no whip, for it was not needed. [47]

"Let's follow him up to the top of the hill," said Lucia. "He must carry his load to the boiler-house that way, and I do like to watch the oxen go down a steep place. There, see! The man will not even get off; he's perfectly safe."

As the heavily loaded wagon passed over the brow of the hill, the oxen squatted down like dogs, and seemed to slide rather than walk, till they reached the foot.

"Bravo!" shouted Ramon. "I'd trust such creatures anywhere. They ought to be rewarded with a good supper to-night. And now that they have reached level ground see how well they trot along. These dear little ponies cannot do much better." [48]

The children still followed the ox-cart, and soon reached the sugar-mill. Immense machines were crushing the canes, and the sap was flowing into great tanks from which it was afterward taken to be boiled.

"What does the molasses come from?" you may ask. All Cuban children would tell you at once that it is the drippings from the newly made sugar.

Lucia's father does not sell his molasses, as do many other planters. He thinks it is not worth while. You cannot guess what use he makes of it. His work-people spread it on the ground to make it richer for the next year's crop.

His wife does not think of having it used in cooking, either, as American women do, and so Lucia has never tasted gingerbread in her life. Perhaps you feel sorry for her. Never mind. She enjoys sucking the juice from the fresh sugar-cane as well as the black children on her father's plantation; she has as much of this as she wishes, so she never misses the molasses cookies and cakes you like so much. [49]

"Lucia, how is it your father keeps on having the cane cut?" asked Ramon, as the children stood watching the sap boiling down to sugar. "You know, don't you, a new law has been passed ordering the work stopped? It is all because the Spaniards are afraid that the poor insurgents will get food and help from the sugar planters."

"Yes, I know," answered Lucia. "I heard father talking about it. He said he had paid the government a large sum of money to let him keep on. So he's all right. But perhaps I ought not to have said this, for it is his own business, and I should not repeat what I hear."

The children entered the sugar-mill, and stood watching the workers. Every one was so busy that no notice was taken of the young visitors. Here were great troughs full of the canes which were being crushed by heavy rollers; the juice was flowing fast into the tanks below. And there were the caldrons full of the boiling syrup; by their sides stood men with long, heavy skimmers stirring the juice, and taking off the scum which rose to the surface. [50]

There were large, shallow pans close by, where the sugar was placed to cool. The air was full of the sweet smell of the sugar; the engines were clanking noisily; the machines made a steady, grinding sound, and, above all, the cries of the negroes could be heard, as they called to each other at their work.

A few minutes was long enough for the children to stay in this busy, steaming place. Then they went out again into the bright, clear air. After giving the black baby into the charge of one of the negro girls who was standing near by, our little cousins mounted their ponies, and rode slowly back to the house. [51]

They passed field after field where men were

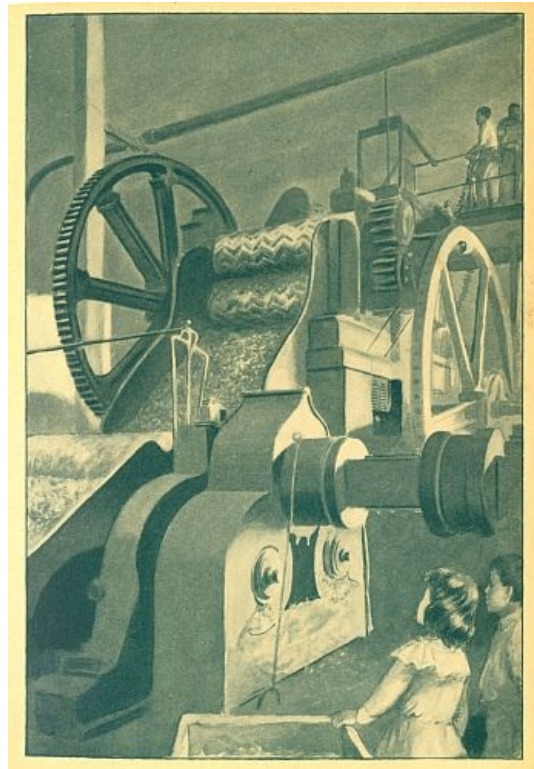
cutting down the tall sugar-canes. How rapidly they moved along, leaving the ground quite clear, as they passed over it! Was it such hard work? They certainly bent over very much as they lifted the heavy, clumsy tools in their hands. These tools looked somewhat like long cheese-knives, only they were much thicker and heavier.

Ramon would say, "Why, those are machetes. I wish I could use one now in defending my country. Many a brave insurgent has nothing else to fight with excepting the machete he brought from his little farm. No guns can be obtained, for the Spaniards hold the cities, and will not allow any weapons to get to the Cubans. But those machetes will do great good yet."

As the boy watched the men working, he was thinking how differently he would like to use the machete, but he did not say anything of this kind to Lucia. He was just a little afraid that her father was not as anxious for Cuba to be free as he and his own parents were.

When the children reached the house, Lucia's parents insisted that Ramon and Maria should spend the day, and a delicious luncheon was now waiting for them.

"This afternoon," said the planter, "you may go over to the quarters and see the fun. You know it is a half-holiday, and there will be great good times among the blacks."



"THE MACHINES MADE A STEADY,
GRINDING SOUND"

[52]

CHAPTER VI.

[53]

THE QUARTERS.

AFTER a little rest in the garden, the children started out once more. This time they chose to walk, taking Lucia's big dog with them for company.

Even before they started, they could hear the sound of drums and shouting and laughter coming from the quarters. They did not have far to go before they came upon a crowd of black children. The boys were having a game of ball. It was so confused it would be hard to describe it. It certainly could not be called baseball, nor anything like it.

And here were the cabins, built close together. Coconut and mango trees shaded the little huts. Near each one was a small garden where the people raised the vegetables they liked best. Okra was sure to be seen here, for what old mammy could be satisfied with her Sunday dinner unless she had some of this delicious plant in at least one of the dishes? Here also was the chicota, much like our summer squash, and corn, on which the pigs must be fattened.

[54]

As for fruits, there were custard-apple and sour-sop trees, the maumee, looking much like a melon; besides many other things which grow so easily in the warm lands. Chickens were running about in every direction, while there seemed as many pens with pigs grunting inside as there were cabins.

How happy the people all seemed! That is, all but a baby here and there who had been forgotten by his mother and was crying to keep himself company as he sprawled about on the ground. And how grand the women thought themselves in the bright red and yellow bandannas wound around their heads!

[55]

You may be sure that all of the jewelry the people owned was worn that day. Maria could not help smiling at one young girl who had immense rings in her ears, three chains of glass beads around her neck, heavy brass rings on her fingers, and broad bracelets that clinked together on her arms. She strutted around as proudly as the peacocks near by.

They are handsome birds, but very vain and silly, like this poor black girl who seemed to admire herself so greatly. She tossed her head from side to side as she got ready to lead the dance.

The drummer bent to his work with all his heart; one pair of dancers after another took their places, and moved in perfect time with faster and faster steps. The crowd of bystanders watched them in admiration.

Under the shade of a mango-tree two black children were playing a game of dominoes.

[56]

"What a nice set it is," said Ramon to his sister. "I am going to ask them if they bought it. It must have cost quite a big sum for them to spend."

The older of the two players heard Ramon's words. He looked up with a proud smile that made his mouth stretch from ear to ear as he said:

"I made them all myself, little master. I got the wood from an ebony-tree."

"But of what did you make the white points set into the dominoes?" asked Ramon. "They look like ivory."

"I cut them out of alligator's teeth, little master. Now didn't I do well?"

This was said with another broad grin and a big roll of his eyes that made Lucia and Maria laugh in spite of themselves.

"Well, I should say so," answered Ramon.

"You deserve a medal. But can you read and write? A boy as smart as you ought to go to school." [57]

"No, little master. But that doesn't trouble me any. I don't need any learning," was the answer. And no doubt the little fellow had no idea but that he was as well off as any one need be. He could play in the sunshine all day long and he had plenty of good food. Wasn't his mother a fine cook, though! He was right in thinking so, too, for she could make the nicest "messes" out of the herbs and vegetables growing in the little garden behind the cabin.

There were melons and plantains in abundance; salt fish or jerked beef to eat every day, and a long sleep at night on a straw bed in the cabin. Oh, life was a lovely thing! And what should the little black boy know of the cruel war and the Cuban children who had been driven away from their homes? To be sure, he had heard sad stories in his life, but they were about the old times when his people were brought to Cuba as slaves. He had listened to his father's tales of slavery, although he himself had been free ever since he was a little child. [58]

The boy's grandfather was born far away in Africa where the sun was always hot. He had lived a wild, happy life in his little village under the palm-trees by the side of a broad river. As he grew up he hunted the panther and the elephant, and made scarecrows to frighten away the monkeys from the corn-fields. He was very happy.

But one day a band of white men took the village by surprise. They took many other prisoners besides himself. The poor blacks were put in chains and driven on board boats in which the white men had come to the place.

Down the river they sailed, never more to see their little thatched homes and have gay feasts under the palms. At last they came to the great ocean, where a large vessel was waiting for them. As they were packed away in the hold of the vessel, no notice was taken of their cries except a lash of the whip, now and then, across their bare backs. [59]

Then came the long voyage, and the dreadful seasickness in the crowded hold of the vessel. Many died before the shores of Cuba came in sight. But when those who still lived were able once more to stand on dry land they were too weak and sick to care where they should go next.

In a few days, however, they found themselves working under masters on the sugar plantations, and making new homes and friends among those who were slaves like themselves.

The little domino player told Manuel that his grandfather worked so faithfully that after awhile he was given a part of each day for his own use. In this way he earned money enough to buy his own freedom as well as his wife's. But he had children growing up who were still slaves. He wished them to be free also. [60]

Then came an order from the Spanish rulers that all the slaves should be gradually given their liberty. But this was not till many years after their black brothers in America had been set free by that great man, President Lincoln.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME AGAIN.

AFTER Ramon and Maria got home that night they told Paulina about their visit to the quarters, and their talk with the little domino player. Paulina knew him well, and said he was a very bright and good boy.

"Some of those little negroes are too lazy," she declared, "but Pedro is always busy. I wish he could go to school, for he will make a smart man."

She went on to tell more of the old days. There was one story of which she was very fond. It was of a cargo of slaves who were being brought to Cuba. They outwitted their masters. This was the way they did it.

After the ship had been sailing for many days, it began to leak badly. The water poured in so fast that all hands were kept busy pumping it out. It seemed, after a while, to rush in faster than the men could get it out. The ship's carpenter went around the vessel, and hunted in every part, but could not find a single leak.

[62]

"It is the work of the evil one," cried the captain.

The slaves wrung their hands, and wailed, while the crew worked at the pumps till they were quite worn out. When it seemed as though the ship must soon sink, an island came in sight. The Spaniards quickly lowered provisions and water into the small boats, and rowed away, leaving the slaves to die, as they supposed.

But they had no sooner got well out of reach than the ship began to rise out of the water. The black people could be seen dancing about on the deck in delight. The sails were set to the wind, and away sped the vessel.

[63]

How was it possible? This was the whole story. The prisoners had gotten hold of some knives, with which they cut through the outer planking of the vessel. Of course, it began to leak sadly. But when the carpenter searched for these leaks the slaves had cleverly filled the holes with plugs packed with oakum, and he could not find them.

In this way the whole cargo of negroes succeeded in getting out of the clutches of the Spaniards. Old Paulina chuckled as she told the story and thought of the cleverness of her people.

CHAPTER VIII.

[64]

STARTLING NEWS.

It was a pleasant evening in February. The children felt gay and happy, for their father was getting so much stronger. Why, this very day he had walked with them a mile in an excursion to a cave. Miguel had told them such wonderful things about it, they begged their father to take them there. Although they lived so near, they had never happened to visit it before.

When they reached the spot, they were obliged to crouch down in order to enter the cave. The opening was merely a small hole between the rocks. But, as they crept down under the ground, the passage grew wider, and led into a large room.

"Do you suppose Robinson Crusoe's cave was anything like this?" Maria asked her brother.

[65]

But the answer was, "I don't think so; you know it was not beautiful. And see here, Maria, look at those shining pendants hanging from the roof. They are as clear as diamonds. Oh, look down beside your feet; there are more of those lovely things; they are reaching up to meet those coming from above."

"What makes them, papa?"

Señor Diaz then explained to the children that there must be a great deal of lime in the rocks overhead, and that, when the water slowly filtered through the roof of the cave, it brought with it the lime which formed in these wonderful crystals.

"People pay great sums of money for precious stones," said their father, "but what could be more beautiful than these shining pyramids! The pendants hanging from the roof are called stalactites. Those reaching up from the floor of the cave are stalagmites. Do you suppose you can remember such hard words, my dear little Isabella? But come, children, I have something else to show you here."

[66]

He led the children to a little pond, in which they could dimly see, by the light of the torch, fish sporting about in the water.

"Those fishes are happy as can be, yet they are perfectly blind. I made some experiments years ago that led me to discover it. You see how dark it is. The creatures living here would have no use for eyesight, so they gradually became blind. We can only keep the organs of our body in good condition by using them."

It was no wonder the children enjoyed the day with their father, as he always had so much of interest to tell them. This evening, as they sat on the balcony, Maria was talking about the fish that lived in darkness, when Ramon suddenly exclaimed:

[67]

"Look! look! the garden is fairly alive with lights. The cucujos are giving us a display of fireworks. Let's catch them, and have some fun. Except in the rainy season, it is not often that we see so many." He ran into the house for a candle, and the three children were soon chasing the cucujos along the walks.

The light of the candle attracted the insects, then it was an easy matter to catch hundreds of them in a fine thread net. We should call them fireflies, but they are much larger and more brilliant than any insect we have ever seen.

As they floated along above the flowers, Maria said they always made her think of fairies with their torch-bearers. The light was soft and cloud-like, yet it was bright enough to show the colours of the flowers, although the night was quite dark.

"Why not make a belt of them for your waists, as well as necklaces and bracelets?" Ramon asked his sisters. "Then you can go in and show yourselves to mother. You can tell her you are all ready for a party." [68]

"All right," answered the girls. "But you must help us, Ramon."

How could the children do such things without hurting the beautiful little creatures, we wonder. But they knew a way, as they had done them before.

Each cucujo has a tiny hook near its head, which can be fastened in a person's clothing without harming it in the least. Grown-up ladies in Havana often adorn themselves in this way when going to a party. They look very brilliant, I assure you.

It was not many minutes before Maria and Isabella were fairly ablaze with lights. Then they danced into the house to be admired by their parents.

"Now let's take them off and put them in those wicker cages you made last summer, Ramon," said Isabella. "I'm sure the poor little things are tired of hanging from our clothes. They must wish to fly around once more. They will not mind being shut up in the cages for a day or two, if we give them plenty of sugar to eat." [69]

"All right, but I wouldn't keep them shut up long enough to make pets of them," said her brother. "I cannot help believing they would rather be free."

As he said these words, there was a step on the garden walk, and a moment later a strange man stood in front of the children.

"Is your father at home?" he asked. "I have a message for him."

Ramon hurried into the house. Señor Diaz came out and spoke with the stranger in low tones. When he went back into the sitting-room he carried in his hand a piece of paper that looked perfectly blank. The stranger had disappeared again into the darkness. [70]

"What did the children's good father do with that paper?" you ask.

He went quickly to his desk and put it under lock and key. Nothing could be done with it till the morning sun should light up the eastern sky.

"Then what?" you curiously ask again.

If we could have watched Señor Diaz, we should have seen him go to his desk once more, take out the precious paper, and go over it with a hair pencil dipped in a bottle of colorless liquid.

After that, we should have seen Maria running with the paper to the window, where the sun's rays would dry it quickly. Lo and behold! writing began to appear which threw the whole family into a great state of excitement. These were the words:

"The U. S. warship *Maine* has been blown up. The Americans are roused. They believe without doubt that the Spaniards are the doers of the terrible deed. Victory shall be ours at last, for the United States will now surely take our part against Spain." [71]

There was no signature to the letter.

That very night Maria's household were wakened by a brilliant light pouring into their windows. It came from the burning plantation where Lucia had her home. When morning dawned there was no trace of a building left on the whole place. No person was injured, however, but Lucia and her parents went to friends in Havana. The rich planter had become a poor man in a single night.

Who had set the fire? It was probably the insurgents, who had discovered that the planter was a friend of the Spaniards and was secretly working against the freedom of Cuba.

CHAPTER IX.

 [72]

FIRST YEARS IN THE NEW WORLD.

"PAPA dear," said Maria, one evening not long after this, "why did our people ever leave Spain and come here to make a home for themselves? Of course, they had heard what a beautiful island it is, but was that the only reason?"

"They had indeed heard this, my child, but they also believed they could become rich by raising sugar-cane or tobacco. Great fortunes were made in the old days on the plantations here. My own grandfather was a very wealthy man.

"But you know the story of Cuba since then. The heavy taxes and the cruel laws of Spain

caused my relatives, as well as thousands of other families, to lose their fortunes. We have tried to free ourselves many times but have not succeeded yet."

[73]

"Well, don't be sad, papa dear; the good time is coming quickly now, you know. We have not had as hard a time as the poor savages Columbus found here, anyway. How I do pity them!" said Maria, with her eyes full of tears.

"Yes, they had a sad time of it indeed," her father went on. "They thought at first the white men were angels and the boats they sailed in were beautiful birds that had brought the visitors straight from heaven. But they soon changed their minds.

"Columbus was greatly excited when he looked upon the plants and trees so different from any he had ever seen. He said: 'I will call this place the "Pearl of the Antilles,"' and so it has been called to this day. He also wrote of it, 'It is as much more grand and beautiful than any other land as the day is brighter than the night.'

[74]

"I suppose you know, Maria, that Columbus visited Cuba four times, and yet he never discovered that it was an island."

"I wish you would tell me more about the savages he found here," Maria said. "Of course, I know there is not a trace of them left in the land. Their hard work in the mines and the cruel treatment of the Spaniards soon killed them off. Oh, it is a wicked, wicked shame!"

"Their skins were bronze in colour, like the Indians of North America; but they did not know where their own people came from. Once they were asked this question by one of the white strangers. They only answered by pointing their hands upward. It was as much as to say, 'From heaven!'

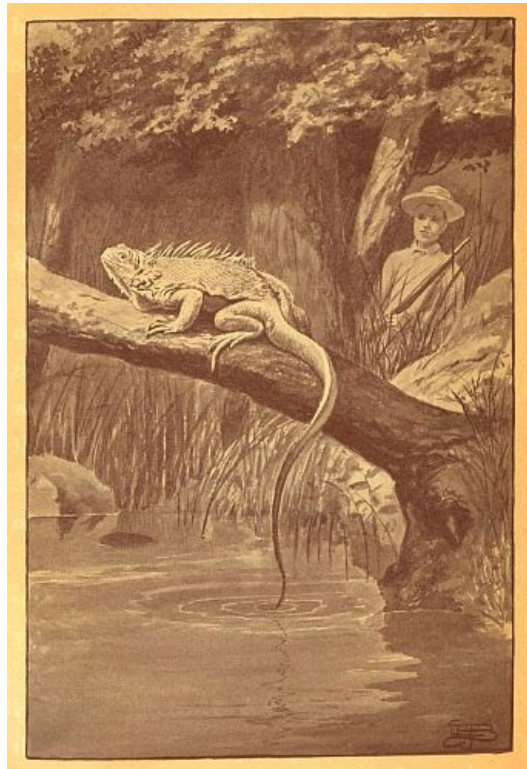
"The women had long and beautiful hair, but the men had no beards whatever. They painted their bodies with the red earth so common on the island, and adorned their heads with the feathers of brilliant birds.

[75]

"They lived mostly in the open air, and slept in hammocks under the trees. They made their hammocks out of the wild cotton you have seen growing in the fields. The women spun and wove this into the only cloth they ever used.

"They had no gardens. They had no need to plough and plant, for nature gave them all they needed. There were many fruits growing wild then, as now. They picked the delicious mangoes, bananas, and custard-apples which were so plentiful. They gathered the yams and maize which also grew wild all over the island. What more could they wish?"

"I should think they would have liked a little meat once in awhile," said Maria, who had been very much interested in everything her father said.



"IT IS LIKE A BIG LIZARD"

"Certainly," he replied, "these savages liked hunting, and often brought home game to be roasted. They were very fond of the meat of the iguana. You have often seen this reptile, Maria."

[76]

"Oh, I know," she replied; "Ramon shot one only the other day. It is like a big lizard."

"Yes, that is true. The Indians also hunted the voiceless dog, as we sometimes call the creature even now. I hardly know why the Spaniards gave it such a name. It is more like a rabbit than any other animal. There were great numbers on the island in the old times."

"You said the Indians slept mostly in hammocks," said Maria. "Didn't they have any houses?"

"Oh, yes, but they stayed in them very little, except during the rains. They built them of wood and palm leaves. They were clustered together in villages. Sometimes there were two or three hundred houses in one settlement, while several families used one house in common."

[77]

"How did they defend themselves?" Maria asked, as her father stopped speaking.

"They had lances pointed with sea shells, and wooden swords," he replied. "These were more for show than for use, for you know they were a sober, peaceful people. Such weapons would have been of

little use if they had tried to fight with the Spaniards. The easiest thing would have been for them to leave the island and seek a new home. But they were not wise enough for that, although they had large canoes in which they might have travelled to some distance. They dug them out of the trunks of trees. Some of them were large enough to hold fifty men. Their oars were well shaped, but they used them only as paddles. They had no row-locks.

"They were a happy people, although quiet and serious in most of their ways. They used to dance and sing at their merry-makings, and their music was quite sweet."

[78]

"Papa dear, if you are not too tired, won't you tell me again about the great Spaniard who was entertained by the Indians? It was before they learned to fear the white strangers, and they still believed they were friends."

"Let me see, little daughter. Oh, yes, now I know whom you mean. I told you that story long ago. I am surprised you should remember it."

"It was Bartholomew Columbus, who was sent to act as governor during the admiral's absence. He passed from one place to another on the island to collect tribute from the chiefs. These chiefs had already learned how eager the Spaniards were for gold; so they gave it to the governor freely and cheerfully. That is, of course, those who had it. But if they could not give this they presented the white man with quantities of the wild cotton."

"There was one chief who prepared a grand entertainment in honour of his visitors. A procession of women came out to meet them, each one bearing a branch of the palm-tree. This was a sign of submission. After the women, came a train of young girls with their long hair hanging over their graceful shoulders."

"A great feast was spread in the chief's palace and the visitors were entertained with music and dancing. When night came, a cotton hammock was given to each to sleep in."

"For four days the feasting and games and dancing were kept up. Then the visitors were loaded with presents and their dark-coloured hosts kept them company for quite a distance as they journeyed onward to the next stopping-place."

"Could any people do more to show themselves friendly than these poor, gentle savages? Ah! how sadly they were repaid for their trust in the white men!"

[79]
[80]

"But come, we have thought enough about the past. Let us return to the present and the great things that are daily happening around us."

CHAPTER X.

[81]

THE MERRIMAC.

EVERY day now was full of excitement for the Diaz family. Letters were often brought to the house by some secret messenger. Each time they told of some new and surprising event.

The insurgents were braver than ever before. They dared more because they knew of the good friends coming to help them. Yes, the United States was getting troops ready to meet the Spaniards on Cuban soil. And our great war-ships were gathering also. They, too, were coming to help Cuba.

The great battle-ship *Oregon* was speeding through two oceans that she, also, might take part. The eyes of the whole world were watching her voyage, and millions of people were praying for her safety. How we love the *Oregon* to-day and the brave captain and sailors who brought her safely through her long journey!

[82]

One little American boy, only nine years old, felt so sorry for the suffering children of Cuba that he wrote these words:

"War, war, war on Spain,
Who blew up our beautiful, beautiful *Maine*.
Think of the poor little Cuban dears,
Think of their hardships, their sorrows, their tears,
Who die every day for the want of some food;
Wouldn't you be in a fighting mood?
Then hurrah! for the soldiers who nobly do fight
In the cause of the weak and for Nature's great right."

This is not very good poetry, but it shows the deep feeling of our children for their little Cuban cousins.

Maria, in her pretty little home under the palm-trees, was spared, yet, as she and we knew, there were thousands of children no older than herself who suffered and died before Cuba was free. Our little cousin was delighted when she knew that the American fleet was actually close to the shores of her land.

[83]

But the Spanish war-vessels were here too. They were lying in the harbour of Santiago. It was at the other end of the island, but news passed from one to another very quickly among the insurgents. Ramon drew pictures of the two fleets as he imagined they looked. He made new pictures every day. How he longed to see them with his own eyes! I really fear that he would have run away from home and joined the army at this exciting time, if he had not loved his

parents so dearly.

Why did the Spanish fleet stay in the harbour of Santiago? Why did they not go out and meet the American war-ships? Were they afraid? It certainly seemed so. They believed they were in a very safe place. There was only a narrow entrance to the harbour. It was defended at each side of this opening, for on the left were new batteries which had lately been set up, and on the right was the grand old Morro Castle which had stood there for hundreds of years. In the olden times it had defended Cuba against her enemies more than once.

[84]

"Morro" means hill, and the fortress at Santiago was well named, for it is built on a rocky promontory several hundred feet high, at the junction of the open sea and the San Juan River.

Mines were sunk in the narrow entrance to the harbour so that, if the American ships should dare to enter, they would explode these mines and be destroyed like the *Maine*. It was no wonder the Spanish admiral thought they were safe in staying where they were.

Then it happened that a young American thought of a plan by which the Spaniards might be caught in a trap. His name was Lieutenant Hobson. It was a very daring plan, but he was a wonderfully brave man.

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He said to Admiral Sampson, who commanded the American fleet:

"Let me take the *Merrimac*. It is a coaling vessel and very heavy. It has six hundred tons of coal on board. We can place torpedoes in different parts of the ship. A few men can help me sail her into the channel. When the narrowest part is reached we will fire off the torpedoes and escape from her before she sinks. That is, we will do so if we can. But the *Merrimac* will be across the narrow channel and the Spanish ships cannot get out. Our own ships will then be free to attack another part of the island. The Spanish seamen will have to remain where they are till they are glad to surrender."

Admiral Sampson had thought of many plans, but he liked this one of Lieutenant Hobson's best of all.

But who should be chosen to go with the brave man on this dangerous errand? Chosen! Why, there were hundreds who asked to share his danger, and only six could go with him. You would have thought it was some great festival they longed to take part in, if you could have seen how disappointed the men were, who had begged to go and were refused.

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But no, it was a fight with death. To begin with, the *Merrimac* must pass the batteries and Morro Castle. She and those on board might easily be destroyed before she reached the place where the work was to be done. And then, when her own torpedoes should be fired off, how could Hobson and his men expect to escape from the sinking ship?

But they were risking their lives in the cause of those who needed their help. You and I know now that they were brought safely through all the dangers which surrounded them.

The *Merrimac* passed the guns of the Morro unharmed, for the Spaniards were poor marksmen. She reached the narrow channel where Hobson meant to do his great work. But a shot from the batteries knocked away her rudder, so they could not steer her across the narrow channel. Then a great mine exploded under her and tore a big hole in her side. She began to sink.

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Hobson and his men lay flat upon the deck. Shells and bullets came whizzing about them. They dared not rise, even though the ship was breaking apart as the shells crashed through her sides.

At length the *Merrimac* had sunk so low that the water was up to her deck. A raft floated close to the men. It was one they had brought with them to help in escaping. They caught hold of the edges and kept their heads above water.

Just then a Spanish launch drew near. The men on board were about to fire when Hobson cried out and asked if an officer were in the boat, as he wished to surrender. Admiral Cervera, the commander of the Spanish fleet, had himself sent the boat. He ordered the firing to cease and accepted Hobson and his men as prisoners of war.

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When the news of Hobson's brave deed reached Maria, she could think of nothing else for days afterward. She would picture him in his cell at Morro Castle, looking out to sea where the American fleet were still cruising.

"How proud of him they must all be!" she cried to Ramon.

"They can't be any prouder of him than we are to have such friends as he," the boy replied. "Why, he will be looked upon now as one of the greatest heroes the world ever knew. I shall always be proud of Morro Castle because of his having been confined there."

"You know, we went all over the place when we were little, Maria. I believe he is kept prisoner in that part of the castle which is built over the water cave. You know we heard that he can look far out on the sea from his windows."

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"Think of the dungeons underneath, where people were locked up years ago. We peeked into one of them that day we visited the fortress and I remember how dark and damp they were. I do hope Hobson is treated well and won't have to stay at Morro very long."

VICTORY.

It was only a few mornings after the news of Hobson's brave venture. The children were out in the garden, where Ramon had discovered a chameleon on a grass plot. It was a sunny day, so perhaps that was the reason the chameleon's skin was such a bright green.

"You know how gray they look on dull days," said Ramon. "Perhaps if I should put him on the branch of that tree, now, he would change to a brownish tint, to look as much as possible like it. He's a stupid little thing, though. If he does change colour, I don't believe he knows it himself. Mother Nature takes care of him, you know, and makes him change as a kind of protection. He has no way of defending himself, but if he is of the same colour as the substance around him, it is hard for his enemies to find him." [91]

"Oh, dear! it makes me laugh when I think of a battle I once saw between two chameleons. They stood facing each other. Their small eyes glared as they slowly opened and shut their jaws like pairs of scissors. They moved about once a minute. I did not have time to see which won the battle; it took too long a time for them to do anything."

As the children stood watching the lizard they heard the sound of hoofs down the road. Then there was a cloud of dust as a horseman came riding rapidly along. He turned in at the driveway.

"What news? What news?" cried Ramon, who rushed to meet him.

It was an old friend of the family who had given secret help to the Cuban soldiers throughout their struggle for freedom.

"Of course, you knew the American troops had landed, didn't you? Well, run in and ask your father to come out. I can only stop a moment and I have much to tell him." [92]

The gentleman had hardly stopped speaking before Señor Diaz appeared on the veranda. He was told about the position of the Americans not far from Santiago. They had met General Garcia, the brave leader of the insurgents. The Cuban and American armies were now working together. Battles had already been fought with the common enemy.

But that which interested the children most was the story of the Rough Riders and their daring charges at El Caney and San Juan Hill. Many of these Rough Riders were men who had led a wild life on the plains in America. Some of them had no book-learning; they were not what one usually calls "gentlemen;" but they were great horsemen and brave soldiers. They feared nothing in the world.

They were commanded by Colonel Wood, and had been recruited by Lieutenant-Colonel Roosevelt, who had been out on the plains among them when a young man. He admired their spirit and was glad to be their commander now. He knew their ways. He led them up the San Juan heights when the enemy was protected by forts and shooting right and left at the Americans. But the Rough Riders charged onward with great courage and gained the summit. They took possession of the blockhouse at the top, and killed most of the Spaniards and drove the rest away. It was a glorious fight and a glorious victory. [93]

"A few more deeds like that, and war and trouble will be ended for us," said the gentleman as he rode away to carry the good news to others.

"Hurrah for Lawton and Roosevelt!" shouted Ramon as he danced about the garden. "Santiago will soon be out of the hands of the Spaniards, and they will be clearing out of Cuba altogether. It seems as though I could not rest without shaking hands with our American friends." [94]

The dear boy did not have long to wait, for the very next day came the news that the Spanish fleet had been destroyed. It had tried to escape out of the harbour, but had been discovered by the watchful Yankees. In a few hours all of Spain's war-ships had been sunk or driven ashore.

What was now left for Cuba's tyrants? The battle-ships of the Great Republic were ranged along her shores unharmed and strong as ever. The Spanish troops were shut up in the city without hope of escape. Surrender was the only thing possible to ward off great loss of life on both sides.

The Spanish commander made a formal surrender to General Shafter, and Spain's empire in the West Indies came to an end almost on the very spot where it had begun four hundred years before. [95]

And now the mines were taken out of the harbour and our battle-ships could enter in safety. As our vessels glided inside one after another they made a wonderful picture. The harbour seemed alive with boats, and it looked like a floating city.

Still grander was the sight on land when thousands gathered around the governor's beautiful palace at Havana to see the stars and stripes of America unfurled. As the flag spread its folds to the breeze, the band struck up the air we love so well. It was the "Star Spangled Banner." Boom! boom! went the cannon, and thousands of American and Cuban hearts were filled with joy.

"Victory! Victory!" shouted Ramon, when the good news reached him that night. And "Victory!"

cried little Isabella, who added with all her childish might, "Long live Cuba." Even the parrot echoed the words of the children. He seemed to feel that something very great must have happened, for his voice was shriller than usual.

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In fact, the family could have no peace in the house, even if there were peace all over Cuba, till Master Poll's cage had been covered with a thick, dark cloth, and he was made to believe that night had suddenly fallen upon his home.

CHAPTER XII.

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HAVANA.

"CHILDREN, would you like to go to Havana and visit our good friend Señor Alvarez for a week? He has invited us all to come and talk over the good fortune that has come to our land. You can have a good time seeing the sights."

Of course the children were delighted at their father's words; so it came to pass that Maria found herself, a day or two afterward, in a beautiful home in the very heart of the great city.

It was a grand house to her childish eyes. It was all of stone, covered with a yellowish stucco. It was at least a hundred years old, she was told. It was built around the four sides of an open square, and had no piazzas on the outside like her own home. But the court inside was very beautiful. A fountain played here all day long, and there were blossoming plants standing in pots on the marble floor.

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The family spent much of their time on the verandas in this court. It was far pleasanter than inside the house, where the windows were so heavily barred that they made one not used to the custom feel almost as if he were in a prison. The doors of the house were bullet-proof to make it safe against attack. There was but one entrance to the house, and that led directly into the court. Here the family carriage always stood unless it was in use.

The gentleman who lived here had one son, a little older than Ramon. He showed the children all around the city. As they went from place to place, he told them how hard his father had worked to raise money for the Cuban soldiers. His mother sold all her jewels, that she might help, too. But they had to do this secretly, of course. If the Spaniards had discovered it, they might have lost their lives. This boy's name was Blanco. He was a fine, manly fellow, and was looking forward now to coming to America.

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"I shall go to Harvard College," he told Maria. "I wish to be a minister, but I'm afraid if I do become one, I shall not feel like praying for the Spaniards."

The boy's heart was still bitter, but perhaps he will feel more kindly when he grows older.

One day he took his young friends out to Morro Castle. Havana has a hill fortress of that name, as well as Santiago. Although Hobson and his men had never been imprisoned in this one, yet the Diaz children were glad to see it.

It stood on a rocky point reaching into the sea. The great guns were still pointing out between the masses of yellow stone. But they were silent. The American flag was waving and peace ruled in the land, although soldiers were on guard here and all through the city.

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At the far end of the fortress was a tall lighthouse. It stood like a sentinel to stand watch against possible danger. Once upon a time a wall reached from the great fort in both directions around the city of Havana. But now there was scarcely a trace of it left.

"How narrow and dirty the streets are," said Maria as they left the Morro. "I must say I would rather live in the country, if I could choose for myself."

"It doesn't matter so much about the width of the streets," said Blanco, "or the poor sidewalks, either. Because, you know, we almost always ride. The working people are the ones who walk. But I do not like the dirt. That is all the fault of the Spaniards. They taxed us enough, but they kept the money for themselves."

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"Last summer I was very sick with yellow fever. Mother thought I would not get well. She said she believed we had so much of this dreadful disease because the city is allowed to be so unclean."

"But look quickly at that Punch and Judy show! Let's stop and watch it. There is a man playing the harp to make it more entertaining."

The children leaned out of the carriage to see the show. Isabella had never seen Punch and Judy before, and she was greatly delighted. In a few minutes they moved on, but soon stopped again, for here stood a man turning a hand-organ with a monkey beside him dressed in a most ridiculous little suit of clothes. The monkey was dancing to the music. Suddenly he gave a spring and landed in the carriage right in Maria's lap.

Off came the monkey's cap into his little hands, and

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with the most solemn look it was held up to each of the children in turn.

"Take that, you poor little beggar," said Ramon as he put a silver coin into the cap. Down jumped the monkey and off he scampered to his master.

There were many odd sights for the little country cousins. Among them were Chinese peddlers showing the pretty ornaments which had been brought across the ocean. Once the children passed a cow that was being led home after her morning's work. She had gone with her master from house to house, stopping long enough at each place for her to give as much milk as the people wished.

The cow was followed by a man leading a long train of mules. They were laden with empty baskets. They, too, were going home, as they had left their loads at the markets in the city.

The sun was quite hot and the party hurried home to rest during the noon hours, for, of course, every one took a nap at this time of the day. They might not all lie down; perhaps some of those who had stores in the busy part of the city would not leave their places of business; they might only lean back and doze in their chairs; but they would certainly keep quiet and close their eyes, if nothing more. It made one think of the story of the "Sleeping Beauty" to see Havana at twelve o'clock, noon, in the summer season.

As for Maria, the dainty maiden quite enjoyed her rest at the great city house. She could lie very comfortably in a hammock while a little negro girl kept off the flies and mosquitoes with a big fan. She needed the nap in the city more than at home because she was awakened so early by the bells.

Perhaps the children enjoyed Sunday more than any other day during their stay in the city, for it was then that they visited the cathedral containing the tomb of Columbus. There were many churches and grand buildings in Havana, but none could interest the children like this.

It was not very far from the house, but they all went in the carriage, carrying with them the mats to kneel on during the service. It was a grand old stone building, overgrown with moss. There were many bells in the two high towers. They were pealing loudly as the party drove up.

"Just think how old it is," whispered Maria to her brother as they entered the building. "Blanco says that some of the bells were brought from Spain more than two hundred years ago. Do look at the beautiful marble pillars, Isabella. Isn't it a grand place?"

It was not yet time for the service to begin, so Blanco led the children to the tomb of Columbus, where his ashes had rested for so many years. It was at the right of the high altar. All that could be seen was a marble tablet about seven feet square. Above it stood a bust of the great discoverer.

"They say that Spain has asked the right to have the ashes, and America is going to let her take them. But we shall still have the tomb and the grand old cathedral where they have rested so long," said Blanco.

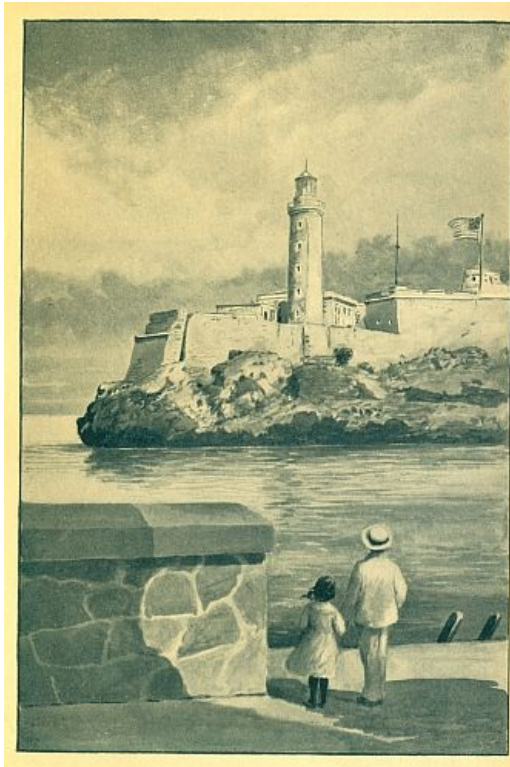
"Now come and admire the altar."

It stood on pillars of porphyry and was fairly covered with candlesticks, images, and gaudy decorations. Somehow they did not go well with the simple beauty of the rest of the church. But the children admired it, for they were ready to admire everything.

When the service was over, they drove out by the governor-general's palace. It was his no longer, however. The American general who had charge of the city lived here now. No doubt he enjoyed the beautiful gardens and ponds. He was very active in improving the city. Yes, the work had already begun, and in a few months Maria would no longer be able to complain of the dirt in Havana.

She could say again, but with a different thought in her busy little mind, "To-morrow is another day."

Yes, although it is but a short time since Maria's visit to Havana, even now everything is changed in the Diaz family. The good father no longer worries; he is fast getting to be a strong, healthy man. He has a fine position under the new government, and Maria lives in a new home just outside the city of Havana. She is rapidly learning to speak English, while one of her dearest friends is a little American girl who has lately made her home in Cuba.



**"THE AMERICAN FLAG WAS WAVING
AND PEACE RULED IN THE LAND"**

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[2]

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[1]

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[2]

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[3]

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[4]

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[5]

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[6]

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