

CUBA

THE NEW CAPTAIN GENERAL.

HIS ADMINISTRATION OF AFFAIRS.

ARRIVAL OF REINFORCEMENTS.

ATTACK ON THE INSURGENTS.

Valmaseda—His Personnel and Habits—His Career in the Island—The Charges of Cruelty Against Him—Their Foundation—His Famous Bayamo Order and the Jiguani Massacre—The Havana Volunteers to Assist in Suppressing the Insurrection—His Statements Concerning the Situation.

HAVANA, Dec. 22, 1870.

Undoubtedly a fat man and a tall one, is the natural suggestion on entering the presence of Don Blas Villate, Count Valmaseda, Captain General *ad interim* of the Island of Cuba; he who took the field against the insurrection upon its first outbreak and has made a name and fame connected therewith which, whether enviable or otherwise, extends throughout Christendom. On nearer approach it is observed that he is nearly forty-five years of age, with a clear olive complexion, hazel eyes, black hair, with mustache and imperial, and heavy, overhanging cheeks, justifying the charge of sensuality so often brought against him. Something of the air of a *bon vivant* is apparent too, yet there is that about the man which indicates a powerful will and great tenacity of purpose. Educated in France, he has rather the easy, affable manner of the Frenchman than the staid, formal dignity of the Spaniard. Still he assumes the first place very naturally and is evidently accustomed to command. One hesitates to believe in the stories of cruelty told of him while observing his genial, pleasant ways. He had occupied several important positions in the island previous to the insurrection, such as Segundo Cubo and Governor of Puerto Principe, and has had the reputation of being fond of sports, an attendant on bull and cock fights and addicted to all athletic exercises. He is of great physical strength, a magnificent horseman, an expert swordsman and a dead shot. These things, while making him extremely popular with the masses, have created the impression that he is not a man of much intellectual capacity, by no means a student, and that the prominent positions he has occupied resulted rather from accident of birth and the influence of friends than from any merits or capabilities of his own. I am satisfied that this is an incorrect view of his character, and that he is a man of unusual capacity and great ambition. From the time he assumed command of the Spanish troops, soon after the outbreak of Yara, until his arrival in Havana to assume the chief dignity of the island—now more than two years—he has never left his work for a moment, but with all the resources afforded him constantly combated the insurrection. Though a lifelong supporter of the Bourbons, he has, while maintaining a constant reticence in reference to affairs at home—though practically recognizing the new order of things—by his labors for Spain retained himself in position and been advanced to the highest dignity by his political opponents. With ready foresight, appreciating the power of the Spanish residents here, who had been formed into armed organizations by Lersundi, he has adopted such policy as was likely to be most pleasing to them, and has so successfully pursued it as to acquire the most unbounded popularity with them. By them the intrigues for his advancement have been carried on for more than a year past, during which time he has so conducted himself that no fault could be found with him, even by those whose place and power he desired to usurp. He has accomplished the object of all his labors; yet, in so doing and in pursuing the policy referred to, he has acquired the reputation of being the most cruel and bloodthirsty commander of the age, the embodiment of atrocity, and terms indicative of this, such as "assassin," "butcher" and the like, have been unsparingly heaped upon him. His orders and the acts thereunder have been made the subject of diplomatic correspondence and important state papers; remonstrances have been made in the name of humanity, and so great has been the odium attached to his name that his appointment has been considered in open defiance of the sentiment of the civilized world, and has given cancer to the friends of free Cuba by exciting hopes that foreign interference in her behalf would result.

Whether or no Valmaseda has been aware of this heretofore I know not. He certainly appreciates it now, deprecating it and earnestly denying that he has been subject to the charge of cruelty justly. Since his arrival in Havana he has several times referred to this in conversation with those whose minds he would naturally wish to disabuse of such ideas. The principal grounds for charging him with cruelty are two in number, and, unfortunately for himself and defenders, they are very clear and well understood. The first of these is his famous order, dated at Bayamo, April 4, 1869, the text of which is as follows:—

INHABITANTS OF THE COUNTRY:—
The forces which I expected have arrived. With them I will afford protection to the good and summarily punish all those who still rebel against the government of the metropolis.
Know ye that I have pardoned those who have fought against us armed; know ye that your wives, mothers and sisters have in me found the protection they admitted and which you rejected; know also that many of the pardoned are turned against me. After all these excesses, after so much ingratitude and so much villainy, it is impossible for me to be the man I was heretofore. Deceptive neutrality is no longer possible. "Let that is not with me is against me," and in order that my soldiers may know how to distinguish, I have ordered the orders given them:—
Every man from the age of fifteen upwards found beyond his farm will be shot, unless a justification for his absence is proven.
Every thatched house that is found uninhabited will be burned by the troops.
Every hamlet where a white cloth in the shape of a flag is not hoisted, in token that its inhabitants desire peace, will be reduced to ashes.
The women who are not found in their respective dwellings or in those of their relatives will return to Jiguani and Bayamo, where they will be duly provided for. Those who do not do so will be taken by compulsion. These orders will be in force on and after the 14th inst.
BAYAMO, April 4, 1869. Count VALMASEDA.

Under this decree the most unheard of atrocities were perpetrated. I can give you no better idea of them than by quoting from an account which appeared in the **HERALD** under date of September 29, '63, as follows:—

A foreigner resident near Bayamo since the commencement of the struggle, while acknowledging that he was personally well treated by Valmaseda, states that his horrible proclamation was literally carried out. The day following its promulgation, and before it became known to the people, a body of one hundred troops was sent out. Approaching a ranch, the following conversation would occur between the commanding officer and the citizen:—

OFFICER:—Why have you not the white flag over your house?
CITIZEN:—I don't know what you mean by the white flag.
OFFICER (to his men):—Take him out and shoot him!
And he was shot down like a dog, in the presence of his trifled wife and children.
Again, in answer to the question concerning the flag, the citizen responds, "If I put it up the insurgent's will shoot me."
OFFICER:—Why do you not come in, then?
CITIZEN:—The insurgent would shoot me on the road.
OFFICER:—Take him out and shoot him!
Again, the officer inquires for grain, cattle or other supplies. "I have none," says the citizen; "the insurgent has taken everything from me."
OFFICER:—You gave it to them.
CITIZEN:—No, sir, I did not; they took it by force.
OFFICER:—Shoot him!
On approaching those houses where the men were absent the women were called together and the fact of absence being ascertained every house was immediately burned to the ground and the inmates, old men, women, little ones and children in arms, ordered to proceed to Bayamo or Jiguani, oftentimes many miles distant, with no provision for food and shelter on the way. From these dreary cavalcades many laid down by the wayside and died, and others were killed by insurgent gangs who maltreated them for endeavoring to reach the Spanish lines. Of the horrible outrages perpetrated on the defenceless women, they may be imagined, as described. * * * So horrible was this carnival of blood that the soldiers finally refused to go out, exclaiming, "We are sick of brains and blood!"

Such were the results of this order, and he who promulgated it was in immediate command of the troops. In his response to this proclamation the Cuban General Donato del Marmol, in an address to his fellow citizens, said:—

The Spanish General Valmaseda issued a proclamation on the 4th inst. to the inhabitants of the country, the object of which is to authorize arson, murder and disregard of property, and to sanction all the horrors which vile mercenaries, without conscience or religion, are capable of committing. While the illustrious Count, hiding his obesity behind a tower of Zarragona, keeps up the appearance of an elegant tyrant, his soldiers and the volunteers, hateful of children and old men; burn houses, rob, violate the bodies before her very husband, kill the child before its father, invent in their fury horrors that the most barbarous society would shudder at.

The second ground for charging Count Valmaseda with cruelty is the assassination of the Jiguani prisoners, which will be recollected as one of those cold-blooded massacres which, fortunately for humanity, are seldom in the centuries, and which demonstrate that man, with all his boasted civilization, may relapse into the savage. The details of the affair are too fresh in the minds of your readers to need recapitulation, and I will only mention the main incidents. During the month of July, 1869, a number of the more prominent Cuban residents of Santiago de Cuba, having been arrested on the denunciations of a spy, were sent to Valmaseda at Bayamo. Investigation at Santiago had failed to show any evidence of their complicity with the insurrection. On their arrival at Bayamo they were placed in confinement, together with some Cuban prisoners from Manzanillo. On the 24 of August

they were apprised by Valmaseda that he had determined to send them to Jiguani for trial. Seven Cuban gentlemen of Bayamo volunteered to accompany them, and they were placed under the escort of Colonel Palacios, who was the investigator of the accusation against the Santiago prisoners. They left on the morning of the 3d, and at three P. M. the escort of about fifty men fell upon them, shot them all, both prisoners and friends, mangled their bodies with their bayonets after rifling their pockets of \$1,500 in money and jewelry. These facts, as thus stated, were officially reported to the United States government, together with the protest of the Santiago prisoners, against being sent away from their homes to a small obscure town, held by troops, for trial. The statement made by Colonel Palacios was that his prisoners revolted on the road, attempted to escape, and to save himself and men, as well as to prevent the escape of prisoners, he had to shoot them. As the report says, "this satisfied Valmaseda, and all things connected with it show that it was premeditated even before the arrest of the unfortunate Cubans at Santiago de Cuba." Four of the victims were wealthy gentlemen of Bayamo, whose property, like that of the others, was confiscated by the officials, who are believed to have connived at their death. A servant of one of them, an innocent, harmless person, was also shot down. In despite of the efforts to conceal this most atrocious deed the truth leaked out at once, and so great was the outcry made that Palacios was placed under arrest and ordered to Havana, whence he sailed for Spain soon after to report himself to the supreme government for trial. Nothing more was heard of it, and so the Spanish government, by its silence, assumed the responsibility of the deed, and the world still believes it the work of Valmaseda, now Captain General of Cuba.

In the administration of affairs here he continues the politic course which has made him so popular with the Spanish residents, and is selecting his advisers and officials from among those who are in entire sympathy with the *Casino Español*. Though in his proclamations and addresses to the volunteers he affects to treat the insurrection lightly, in private he freely admits the difficulty of its suppression, and that it is the work of long time. He will, if practicable, send some of the Havana volunteers to aid in the work, and to this end recently called a meeting of the officers, to whom he stated that the insurrection was nearly vanquished, and that it only needed one strong blow to destroy what was left. He stated that he should go to the interior himself and asked for their co-operation, to which they responded, offering in the name of all the volunteers to follow wherever he would lead them. One of the journals here recently stated that from credible sources it had learned that the volunteers of this city are to garrison some of the more important towns of the island—the object being to relieve the troops there, that they may be sent to the field. Efforts will be made to mobilize a battalion or more, to be sent to the field. But the horrible stories of suffering and neglect of their wants told by those who have returned will make this very difficult.

The Count is drawing the reins of military discipline closer, and the officers and soldiers who have been accustomed to wander about the city at will, frequenting places of public resort, are now required to show their license for so doing.

In closing this account of the present distinguished head of the island, in which I charge nothing, but give the facts as they were at the time reported, I may mention that he is an intelligent student of the situation of affairs in his own country and in Europe—his rooms containing many maps of the present seat of war, to which his attention often turns, and that from his character and abilities, as they seem to me, he is calculated to take a prominent part in the uncertain future of this country.