

THE SPANISH FLOTILLA.

Preparations for Departure—Scenes at the Foot of Thirteenth Street—Precautions Against a Raid—Description of the Vessels.

The Spanish gunboats are rapidly preparing for sea, and eighteen of them will leave in a short time for Havana. These have already received nearly their entire outfit, a few hours only being necessary to complete them. All lie together in the dock between Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets, with planks extending over their decks, affording a passage above the bulwarks across thirteen of them.

The scene at this place yesterday was of the most animated description. Several of the gunboats had steam up, and a large force of workmen were busily engaged in putting the finishing touches on the vessels, while gangs of laborers were hurriedly conveying furniture, parts of rigging, hammocks, coils of hose and other equipment on board. Carts heavily loaded with coal were detached from the horses, hoisted by the derrick out over the gunboats and dumped into the hold, and cords of dry pine wood for starting fires were swung over the heads of the spectators and workmen in a similar manner. A number of young Spanish officers from the Pizarro were all day scrambling over the gunboats to inspect their future quarters, and everything was conducted with a degree of bustle and excitement that brought vividly to mind some of the scenes about the wharves during the late war. The presence of the gun carriages on the vessels gave quite a warlike aspect to affairs, and it was not difficult to imagine the dissatisfaction and uneasiness of the Cubans at the hurrying preparations.

A large crowd of spectators was present throughout the day, attracted by the report that some of the gunboats would go out on a trial trip. The smoke issuing from the funnels of some of the vessels encouraged this belief; but it seems that fires were only kindled to get the engines in perfect working order preliminary to their departure. Previous trials have satisfied the Spanish officials respecting the gunboats and it is not probable that any of them will leave the wharves until all of the eighteen are ready to proceed to Cuba. These will be officered from the Pizarro, which brought thirty-six officers for this purpose. Engineers will be obtained in New York, and when the gunboats reach Havana they will receive their guns, ammunition, crews and full complement of officers. As soon as the first eighteen shall have been despatched, the remaining twelve will be speedily completed. It is understood that the whole number, thirty in all, were contracted for with Mr. Delamater for \$300,000 in gold.

The contract for these vessels was signed on the 3d of May last, and on the 19th the first keel was laid. The first gunboat was launched June 23 and the last on September 3, at which time fifteen of the vessels had received their engines and boilers. The gunboats are all constructed after the same pattern, and are models of strength, compactness and convenience. Their dimensions are 107 feet in length on the water line, 22 feet 6 inches beam, 8 feet depth of hold, and 4 feet 11 inches draught of water. The lines are full at the bow in order to afford space and solidity for the 100-pounder pivot gun, and in place of the ordinary rail a low, heavy timber bulwark, lined with sheet iron and provided with water ways, has been substituted. The foremast carries a yard and square sail. The jib stay is dispensed with in order to admit of the gun being fired on a line with the keel, and in its stead are two separate stays attached to the bulwarks, one on each quarter. Under canvas a temporary jib stay is secured to a shackle bolted to the outside of the stem. The engines are very powerful for their size, and the twin screws rest in adjustable bearings of a new and peculiar character. The coal bunkers are located on each side of the boilers, and extend forward and aft of the centre of displacement. The magazine is between the engine room and cabin, and in addition to being lined with lead and covered outside with sheet iron, has three different appliances for flooding in case of fire. The quarters of the crew are forward of the boilers and next to the shell room, which is located under the bow gun. The armory is entered from the cabin, and has racks for thirty carbines, thirty revolvers and a number of cutlasses, hatchets, pikes, &c. Arrangements are provided for carrying 100 rounds for the pivot gun. The cabin is handsomely furnished, and the gunboats, with their raking masts and wire rigging, look more like pleasure yachts than vessels of war. Two trial trips have been had—one in September to West Point and the other in October. At the latter trial the gunboat ran from Fourteenth street to 129th street and return, making the first run of 5.81 statute miles against the tide in thirty-two minutes thirty-five seconds, and returning in twenty-nine minutes thirty-five seconds—a total of 11.62 miles in sixty-two minutes ten seconds. Captain Rafael de Aragon has represented the Spanish government in superintending the construction of the gunboats.

There is still considerable apprehension of an attempt by Cubans to injure or destroy the gunboats, and every precaution is taken to prevent any such casualty. A large number of watchmen are kept constantly on duty, and in addition to the Spanish war steamer, which lies with her broadsides bearing on the gunboats, a tug, with a howitzer on board, is employed to cruise during the night in the vicinity of the vessels. It is impossible for any serious damage to be done to the gunboats, however bold the attempt might be, and there is every probability that all of the gunboats will soon be on duty cruising around the island of Cuba.

The Cubans seem to have abandoned all hope of preventing the departure of the gunboats and speak despondently of their cause. These vessels, they say, will encircle the revolution as with an iron hoop, shutting out all assistance and stifling the young republic. Their chief trouble is, however, at the attitude assumed by the United States in releasing the gunboats, and they argue that no reliance can now be placed upon any official action being taken on their behalf.