

Letter from a Foreign Merchant in Havana.
The Casino Espanol Acting as a Vigilance Committee—The Way Citizens are Arrested—Fight on Political Questions by Two Ladies in a Bath—One of Them Sent to Spain—The Atrocities Under Valmaseda's Famous Proclamation—Soldiers Sick of "Brains and Blood"—The Prospects of Peace—It Can Only Come by Negotiation—Nothing Doing in the Field—The Destruction of Estates—American Protection at a Discount—A Model Consulate—Examination of the Matter.

[A private letter received here from a prominent foreign merchant in Havana has interesting information of the condition of affairs there. We are permitted to make the following extracts:—]

HAVANA, Sept. 19, 1899.

While there is less turbulence and disorder here than when the volunteers were paving the way for the deposition of Dulce, matters are in no respect improved nor has General Rodas any more power than had his predecessor. The Casino Espanol has concentrated in itself all of the mutinous and perturbed elements, far stronger than heretofore through union and organization. This club is one powerful, secret, all-prevailing vigilance committee, holding in its hands to enforce its wishes the 15,000 or 20,000 armed volunteers, and having its spies everywhere; in the various places of public resort; dropping in, with social intent, upon the various places of business where suspected persons may be; at church; catching at a chance remark on the street; in the offices; on the police; everywhere. Man is prudent before his most intimate friend, and the air of having seen a ghost meets one at every turn. The slightest suspicion, not seldom a personal enmity, is sufficient. Some foolish charge is trumped up and carried to the authorities, themselves generally members of the club, and though as innocent as the child unborn, the unfortunate victim is caught up at some unseasonable hour, may be when entering his house late in the evening, or moving through a lone street, anywhere, so no one can report the fact, hurried into a hack and driven off to prison by some creature of the club, who has dogged his steps for days, placed *incommunicado*; so only by his continued absence do his friends know of his fate. His nationality no more than his innocence is a protection against the arrest (several foreigners have been thus imprisoned recently), and though the unfortunate may be released, through the intervention of his Consul, it is with an intimation from the Captain General that he had better, for his own safety, leave the island, at least temporarily, as no protection can be afforded him. There is not a day passes in which the comity of nations and the treaty stipulations in reference to foreign residents are not grossly violated, and no one realizes this better or deplors it more than Caballero de Rodas. In case the arrested is a Spanish subject, and innocent of any offence, he is ordered to Spain by the next correo, which signifies, "There is nothing against you, but the government will be compelled to punish you if you remain here." Not seldom the entire interests of the victim are thereby sacrificed and he is pecuniarily ruined. An amusing example of this sudden punishment occurred recently. Two ladies, both natives of Spain—the one a Madrildina, the other a long time resident of the island—were together in a bath by the sea shore, not far from the city. Speaking of political subjects, the lady from Madrid remarked, "I hope to see the government make a stable of Aldama's house." The other retorted, "I hope to see Cespedes in the Palace occupied by De Rodas." Immediately the first seized her fair antagonist, thrust her head under the water and having drowned her had not others interfered. Hurrying on her garments the Spanish sympathizer went in hot haste to the palace, and when the other returned to her house she found the official already there with the orders directing herself, her husband and entire family to proceed to Spain by the next mail steamer, meanwhile to remain under surveillance. A long time attaché of a prominent New York journal was thus arrested but recently, and will have to leave the island, and it is intimated that his successor—a fair-haired young man of retiring habits—is in danger. Naturally enough the arrival of the anticipated squadron from the United States is anxiously looked for, and all foreigners here will feel a sense of relief when it comes.

Of the atrocities concerning which you speak no idea of them can be exaggerated. I know nothing of the details as given in the newspapers; doubtless many of them are incorrect; but the fact that appalling barbarities are habitual on both sides cannot be questioned. 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 100 troops were 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 terrified wife and children.

Again, in answer to the question concerning the flag the citizen responds, "If I put it up the insurgents will shoot me."

OFFICER—Why do you not come in, then?

CITIZEN—The insurgents 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 insurgents have 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 when the men were absent the women were called, and the fact of absence being ascertained, every house was immediately burned to the ground and the inmates, men, women, little ones, 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 roadside and died, and others were met 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, not described. Those families concerned, which the Spanish papers so vauntingly speak as coming to Valmaseda for protection are of those so ruthlessly murdered by his soldiers, and, their houses destroyed, have been compelled to come to him. So horrible was this carnival of blood that the soldiers finally refused to go out, exclaiming, "We are sick of brains and blood." Thenceforward the men were brought in rather than shot down. Fearful as is this picture it is that of an eye witness. A foreigner and one whose personal interest would be enhanced by the success of the Spanish cause.

As to the ultimate result it is useless to speculate. Everything is hoped for through American intervention. The proposition of the United States and the response of Spain as contained in the New York Herald of recent date has excited most confident expectations here. It is true that only in this way can peace be achieved. Of one thing I am satisfied—that if the United States guarantees anything, not based on the unconditional submission of the Cubans she can only do so by introducing troops into certain prominent points of the island to keep down the turbulent Spanish element, which, in defiance of the government, would not be unlikely to inaugurate a massacre of the Cubans and perhaps the Americans.

Nothing can be hoped for from the combatants in the field. Large reinforcements from Spain, such as are promised this fall, might, perhaps, scatter the larger organized forces of the insurgents, but they can easily keep up their desultory warfare until another sickly season, when the Spaniards would again become powerless, and before winter came around again an equally large reinforcement would be required, again to be ground between upper and nether millstones. Meanwhile, the insurgents have adopted a systematized course of destruction. Dreadful as the idea is, they have determined to make the island a desert, in order that, through its sugar and coffee, it may cease to pour its treasures into the coffers of Spain and so enable that Power to continue the war against them. Every day we are growing poorer, for every day comes news of the additional destruction of estates, and the half is not told. The great mass of these burnings are not reported; the papers, doubtless, at the suggestion of the government, say nothing about them, fearing the moral effect abroad. * * * It is true the Spaniards are very confident of their ability to suppress the insurrection before the year is over, and this confidence is shared by the authorities.

As to your coming down here I hardly know what to advise. It would, perhaps, be better to let the matter stand and await developments. If you could get British papers—a thing impossible, of course—it would be better. American papers were never of much use for protection in this island, and now less than ever. American engineers coming here have by deception often obtained certificates of citizenship from the British Consul, much preferring them as rendering greater safety. One is in no danger here from the authorities. It is rather from the prejudices of the volunteers, who look upon newly arrived Americans with suspicion. * * *

You have an extremely diplomatic consular representative here, one of great discretion, which is necessary. He avoiks Cubans and his own countrymen as suspicious. He associates with the Spaniards, that he may have influence with the authorities and get good dinners, of which he is said to be fond. Should you come down here and be arrested, you are safe. He will call upon the Captain General with a black coat and get you out, with much sweetness apologizing for the trouble caused. Don't expect more—to get out is much. He is said—Mrs. Rumor says it—to be married to a fair *condesa* who has large estates, which may be destroyed; therefore it would be well to have the insurrection suppressed. That is another reason for cultivating Spanish society, which is the best. The Consulate is a Legation in its air of official haughtiness and reserve. More than that, it is the vestibule of greatness. The clerks, of which there are several, paid out of the Consulate salary of \$4,000 a year, have a scared look and speak to you in whispers. Sea captains, who have no manners, enter and speak loud and

here.
In reference to the well to do, who will habitually be sure of the life of some statement hanging up in the American their protection, but stopped much of the correction his office, fearing it might be reasonable or at least injurious to the Spanish government, this does not