

LIBERTY

The Story of Cuba

by
Horatio S. Rubens

New York 1932
BREWER, WARREN & PUTNAM INC.

was indispensable. Therefore he proposed, in view of Gato's previous generous contributions, that the remaining sum be loaned to the Delegation of the Revolutionary Party, to be repaid by subsequent collections as personally guaranteed by Martí himself. He further said that \$5,000 would explicitly cover the final move to revolution "and if the Revolution should be extinguished within the Island, with the aid we bring, and I remain alive,—I who can be worth \$5,000 (for I have given my earnings of \$8,000 a year to my country),—I who am now poor in purse but not in honor, am personally to repay you. The favor I beg you is so urgent, and such is the responsibility weighing upon me, that it is impossible for me to refuse to appeal to you. It will be to your satisfaction and glory as a son of Cuba if you can render this service. Will you give me these moments, perhaps the last of my life, in glory and peace; or will you leave me alone in my grief and responsibilities, surrounded by men who have already given all they can, dragging myself along to beg for the salvation of my country; begging in vain, licking the very ground like a dog? I will do it if you say so. I will do what you may decide. Would you lend \$5,000 to a merchant and not to Cuba? Give me one more reason to be proud to call myself a Cuban."

Gato sent the money.

Martí had now only to keep the conspirators in Cuba quiet until all could safely act in overt concert. His exact plan he wisely kept to himself. In preparation he had chartered two steam yachts, the *Amadis* and the *Lagonda*, and a steamship, the *Baracoa*. Arms and ammunition, bought in several lots, were to be shipped to N. B. Borden, a lumber merchant with his own warehouse and wharf in Fernandina, Florida. The ships calling there for their cargoes would go, then, to take on expeditionaries.

Ostensibly, the *Amadis* would take on boxes at Fernandina containing tools for a manganese mine in Cuba owned by D. E. Mantel (Martí). On board would be John Mantel

(Manuel Mantilla) and Miranda (Patricio Corona), who would pick up some friends of Mantel's at Costa Rica as well as some mine laborers. The "friends" were General Antonio Maceo and his brother José, and General Flor Crombet. Their companions would go as the laborers.

A 30-foot boat was put on board, and four stout, well-bunged empty barrels, and strong planks to make a serviceable raft in case of accident. There were hatchets to break open the "tool chests" upon landing.

The *Lagonda*, after loading at Fernandina, was to pick up the Cuban contingent at Key West, including the veteran Generals, Serafin Sanchez and Carlos Roloff. After leaving Fernandina, the *Baracoa* would pick up General Maximo Gomez at Santo Domingo. Likewise Martí would be aboard, and General José Maria Rodriguez, personal representative of Maximo Gomez, who was to be Commander-in-Chief of the uprising. General Enrique Collazo, representing the Island conspirators, was also to sail.

The Generals, Rodriguez and Collazo, asked Martí for no details. Not so Sanchez and Roloff, who quickly named a representative to "aid and advise" Martí.

The *Amadis* got to Fernandina first. The Federal Government promptly seized her. The same fate befell the other vessels the minute they tied up. An attempt was made to jettison the boxes already on the *Amadis*, but later they were salvaged. Mantilla and Corona escaped and were concealed in a Jacksonville house by Charlie Hernandez. The seizure was reported to Martí, who was lodged under an assumed name in the old Travellers Hotel in Jacksonville. Faced with this unhappy failure of his plan, almost before it was really under way, he telegraphed Quesada at New York to fetch the remaining funds. He turned over to me the protection of those involved in the Fernandina situation. General Collazo describes the meeting with Martí when he informed him and General Rodriguez of the status. He said Martí spoke with a hard and angry face, pacing his bedroom and insisting, "The

fault is not mine!" The Generals emphasized their continuing loyalty and tried to calm him, but his anger and disappointment seemed unappeasable.

Quesada brought \$1,500, all that remained of the funds, and a message from his mother-in-law, Luciana Govin de Miranda, who wished to furnish bail for those arrested in connection with the debacle. I must go to Jacksonville to report to Martí, having gathered all information at Fernandina and chosen a course of action.

Just as I was about to leave by train, Borden appeared to say I must not go, for a special Treasury agent had come to investigate. I urged him not to worry, saying some special agents were not specially intelligent, and, so long as he gave no information, he would be safe; I must go, but I would come back soon.

Martí heard me out, then told me his own misfortunes. Having himself seen to every detail, everything seemed in order when the first difficulty arose. The "representative" foisted upon him was detailed to ship some arms and ammunition previously bought in southern Florida. He shipped them as "military supplies"; Martí, hearing of this, had Mantilla divert the freight car, reshipping the material to Fernandina. He noticed also that the "representative" was displeased because he could not collect a commission on a late purchase of material. His name need not be divulged, since no purpose is served by giving people the fame of infamy.

He asked Martí whether the captain of the yacht on which his friends were to sail knew the true purpose of the voyage. Martí told him no. The man insisted that a reliable captain could and must be found, who could take charge if the present captain suddenly refused to obey orders. He knew, in fact, where there was such a man.

Much against his judgment, Martí agreed to meet the auxiliary captain. His surprise may be imagined when he found himself facing the broker through whom he had chartered the yachts. Nothing as to a "reliable captain" came

S.W., Paul
arrived on
evening
Jan. 16

of the conference, but Martí was introduced in his own name, and so the agent now knew too of the purpose of the charter.

Information was lodged with Federal authorities, and the seizures followed. The Cubans present exempted Martí from fault, reaffirming their faith in him. I made haste with my own program to save the personnel from arrest, then obtain possession of the *Amadis* cargo and the remaining materials seized in the Borden warehouse. General Collazo, commenting on this phase, said, "Not an hour elapsed after Rubens and Quesada arrived, before the state of our minds was completely changed. Martí declared that even if everything appeared lost, even though there was no money to continue the revolutionary work, the enterprise undertaken with so much determination and enthusiasm could not possibly be abandoned. Upon the depression caused by the tremendous, unexpected failure, there followed the faith that comforts, and the energetic resolution to keep on fighting to success."

Our immediate anxiety was to prevent arrests. Mantilla and Corona had been sent north. I decided to go with Martí to New York, where he could be concealed for a while in Quesada's house. General Collazo, his brother Tomas, Enrique Loynez del Castillo (he of the arms concealed in the Camaguey street cars) and Charlie Hernandez went south to Tampa and Key West.

Everyone was warned against attracting attention. In the station, Martí and General Rodriguez stayed in a corner while I got the tickets. Though I urged them to remain as quiet and inconspicuous as possible, Martí wandered off to buy magazines. As he and I returned simultaneously to the General, imagine our feelings when we noticed at the General's feet an enormous travelling bag across which was strapped a sword in a bright green cloth cover! While I indignantly demanded his reason for attracting attention in such a manner at such a time and went on to explain what I thought of his conduct, the General kept interjecting, "But

let me explain!" and was still striving lustily for a hearing when a tall American approached, picked up the bag and sword and went off with them. Suddenly I remembered that a fraternal organization had paraded the streets the day before in dress uniforms and swords. Martí too, as I apologized, acknowledged he had been finding the General guilty on circumstantial evidence.

In New York, though Martí ~~had~~ sent letters to warn all interested that the plans had failed, we found enthusiasm for the cause, and faith in Martí—so far from being blighted—actually increased. Those who had hitherto thought him a poet and dreamer were now more impressed by the magnitude and promise of his plan than its temporary frustration.

And what was the plan?

The Maceos were to be landed near Santiago. Maximo Gomez, the Generals Rodriguez and Collazo, and Loynez and Martí, were to disembark on the south coast of Camaguey Province, and Sanchez and Roloff on the southern shores of Santa Clara Province. They would have immediately organized the forces ready and clamoring to take the field. Though the plan had received such a disconcerting setback, the Islanders were insisting on immediate action. Local leaders assured Martí they could safely wait no longer.

Martí was in a hard position. He dared not give the word to open hostilities when he could not furnish supplies for the men in the field. Supplies were his first obligation. How soon could I assure him recovery of the Fernandina *matériel*?

I explained that the Government had no legal right to forfeit the arms. The vessel owners, however, had instituted other claims which, I believed, could nevertheless be cancelled with money. We planned that I should leave again at once for Washington and Fernandina. The moment I was satisfied I could recover the arms I was to wire in cipher, orders would be given for the uprising, Martí would embark for Santo Domingo, where he would meet General Gomez, and proceed to Cuba. I thought General Gomez might hesitate to go under

certain transport conditions I foresaw might easily arise. Martí brushed that aside. "He will go; at any rate, I shall tell him, 'I am going, and I know you will go with me.'"

There was haunting difficulty in the fact that the infrequent steamer to Santo Domingo was soon to sail and, if Martí could not catch it, new complications would arise.

"I rely on you," he said to me. And I had no idea that those were the last words I would ever hear him speak.

I was able to arrange satisfactorily about the supplies and to telegraph in cipher. Therefore on January 29, 1895, Martí, and General "Mayia" Rodriguez, representing the Commander-in-Chief, Maximo Gomez, and General Enrique Collazo, representing the Island organization, jointly signed the order to fight. Paragraph III of the order set forth, "We assure you of the immediate aid of valuable *matériel* already acquired, and continued and untiring help from the exterior."

At a junction I met a train on which Quesada was proceeding to Tampa, and rode with him as far as Jacksonville. "I am sleeping on fire," he said apprehensively. "I have the orders for the uprising. They will go by messenger to Havana."

I said I must have money to pay the claim against the arms. Quesada wanted to know how far he could go in admitting the arms were for Cuba. "You can say that *some* say they are for Venezuela, *some* that they are for Guatemala, *some* even that they are for Cuba; but you know no more than that I am engaged in recovering them."

Quesada was an impassioned orator, and, at Tampa and Key West, he so enthused his hearers that he obtained the money to release the arms and also \$2,000 to cable to Martí at Santo Domingo. The date for the uprising was set at not earlier than the second fortnight of February. Juan Gualberto Gomez, at Havana, sent word to the provincial leaders that the date would be the 24th of February, selected partly because it coincided with the first carnival celebration. He cabled Martí at New York and his message, "Draft accepted,"

CHAPTER IX

THE LOST ART OF FILIBUSTERING

MEANWHILE, the Junta was sending military supplies to Cuba as steadily as possible. The Spanish Government, through its myriad agents, kept a sharp lookout and, though many expeditions got under way, many of them turned out to be purely abortive ventures, for the Spanish authorities frequently arranged seizures, and the United States Federal authorities were very active against us; so that what little time was not actually required for arranging for vessels to take men and consignments of arms and ammunition to Cuba was destined, it seemed, to be spent unravelling difficulties in the courts.

We had all sorts of adventures; some of them were more ridiculous than they were serious; there were trials in the courts which were as good as farces on any stage, and some which were not so funny.

Much has been said about the benevolence with which American authorities treated the filibustering expeditions, as they were widely known. Nothing could be further from the truth, either under the Cleveland or the McKinley administrations. Not only were practically all the revenue cutters on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts assigned exclusively by the Treasury Department to prevent sailings, but they were reënforced by many naval vessels. The special agents of the Treasury Department, the Secret Service of the United States, the specially hired army of American detectives, under the supervision of a then famous private detective agency acting for the Spanish Government, were all exceedingly quick to report suspected Cuban operations. The number of arrests and trials of Cubans,

and the phenomenal number of libels against vessels and arms, prove this superactivity of the American authorities.

It will be remembered that vessels upon which a great deal of hope had been pinned were seized at Fernandina. When Quesada had managed to raise more funds among the Tampa and Key West cigar makers, I set about disposing of the claims against the cargoes in Fernandina which had been filed against us by the vessel owners.

It was the task of the United States Government to prove a violation of the law. Mere purchase, possession, or even shipment, of arms was not illegal at that time.

I offered an agreed amount in settlement to an attorney representing one ship owner, in order that the libel might be cancelled early the next morning. As accommodations were scarce in Fernandina, I was obliged to share the same bedroom with this man overnight. He flatly refused to sign any papers or take any money "until tomorrow" and I was greatly mystified about the reason. Long afterward, when he had attained a considerable legal reputation, he told me that he had been so obdurate because he simply had not dared take the money and sleep in the same room with a filibusterer!

I felt that the supplies should be shipped from Fernandina and thence to New York, but this was unsatisfactory to associates there who feared they would be compromised.

Philadelphia seemed the next choice, so I shipped under my own name. General Emilio Nuñez, a veteran of the Cause though still a young man, took charge, together with an officer in his former command, a Colonel Braulio Peña. They saw to storing the boxes in a friendly stable and Spain added an extra guard for good measure, two faithful employees of the detective agency which served her busily throughout the war.

Nuñez had had the important contents of the boxes abstracted and, packed in far more innocent appearing feed bags, taken through a rear gate to another, more private storage. The original boxes were filled with an odd miscellany of sand, coal and dirt for weight and sent to a regular storage

warehouse, the manager of which was friendly and dependable.

After a few months it seemed provident to stop the storage expense. Orders were given to break open the boxes so the contents could be dumped in a more suitable place. The two detectives, one on day and the other on night duty, were overcome at seeing how they had been duped and, quite sensibly, apprehensive of losing their jobs. They quickly proposed that the storage be continued—at their own expense. How could they confess having so failed to watch the arms that they could have been thus spirited away from under their noses? They did not wish to lose their jobs; it was winter, and far more comfortable to be sitting in a neighboring cigar store or saloon “on guard” than to be tramping the streets. We rather felt this little subterfuge to be their own business and offered no objection; so, for months more, storage charges came out of their own pockets.

There was a time when Martí sent word he wished a small sailing vessel purchased to transport certain men to Cuba. The *Rowena*, then lying at Lemon City near what is now Miami, was bought, and we decided that Charles Hernandez should take charge.

He was the son of a wealthy man who had given all he possessed to the cause of Cuba during the Ten Years' War. Charlie, as he was called by everyone who knew him, had been educated in Brockton, Massachusetts, and there acquired many New England qualities, thoughts and habits. He had repeatedly proved his worth to Martí as a confidential messenger.

His duties bore out Shakespeare's observation that one man in his time plays many parts. Now Martí said to him that he must give up his employment of the moment, to become a Pullman conductor. Or he might, again, be suddenly transformed into an expert in some other calling.

When Martí told him he had arranged for him to be a Pullman conductor, Charlie was filled with uncertainty about



TOMAS ESTRADA PALMA, DELEGATE PLENIPOTENTIARY AND HEAD OF THE CUBAN JUNTA (SEATED), AND GONZALO DE QUESADA, CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES AT WASHINGTON.

"I want you, sir, to do me a favor," he finally announced grandly.

I said I should be happy if I could.

"I want you, sir, to give me the honor of—of cutting your hair!"

The trials which grew out of the seizures of vessels and arms occupied us sufficiently to keep things far from being dull.

The first arrests occurred in September, '95. The material saved from the Fernandina failure was loaded on a tug from Wilmington, Del. A steamer out of Philadelphia had been chartered by General Nuñez to take the cargo, and 21 men, landing them in Cuba.

An accident befell the steamer and it missed the connection. Information was lodged with the Federal authorities by detectives in Spanish pay. The cargo was quickly captured and the men all arrested. Among them were General Francisco Carrillo, General Pedro E. Betancourt, Colonel Braulio Peña, Colonel Cosme de la Torriente, Eduardo Yero and other important men and youths.

Consternation reigned in the Junta, for this was the first prosecution arising out of an attempt to supply the firing line. Here was a test case, applied to men of importance in the uprising.

For the immediate preliminary hearing, a Wilmington resident, a Cuban, had engaged the law firm of George Gray, then Senator, and later an eminent Judge. The question was who should be sent as defense counsel for men and cargo. Estrada Palma wished to retain a prominent New York lawyer, well known in Cuban circles, but the man declined, not daring to risk offending his assortment of wealthy Cuban and Spanish clients.

A leader of the bar and eminent in politics as well, gave it as his opinion that, if the men were convicted, an appeal could be taken and perhaps, by that time, the Revolution would be over. His assistance stopped, however, with advice, for he too declined to act openly in the case.

Estrada Palma considered me too young to assume the responsibility of so strategic a case. In his opinion of youth, —doubtless based to some extent on his experiences with boys in his school—he differed from Martí who had brought storms about his own head by alluding to the importance of youth as a participating element in the Cause. In a speech for which he was lavishly criticized, he spoke of "the old pines and the new pines" and some of the veterans were deeply offended, believing he spoke with more feeling and appreciation of the "new pines" than of the old. That Martí really had a deep faith in the value of youth to the Cause is shown by the explicit burdens of confidence he reposed in such young men as Quesada, Manuel Mantilla, Frank Agramonte, Loynaz del Castillo, Gualterio Garcia, Charles Hernandez, Urbano Sanchez and me, not forgetting young Angel de la Guardia who was his sole companion when he was shot down.

My own attitude had been made plain to Estrada Palma. I had given my pledge to Martí. Martí was dead, but my promise remained and I was anxious to continue helping wherever there was a place, in the United States or in Cuba.

Some of those attached to the Junta insisted I should go to Wilmington immediately. The problem was suddenly solved by a telegram from those under arrest explicitly requesting my appointment to defend them.

Before I could get there, they had all been indicted. The Government, spurred by Spain, demanded a speedy trial, a demand which pleased us. The prisoners were philosophical; Wilmington people had begun to show an intense interest in the case. Colonel Braulio Peña kept everyone in good humor. He had been a companion to General Emilio Nuñez in "The Little War"; they had had interesting adventures together and become fast friends. Neither had been simply courageous; each had shown a recklessness as dashing as it was effective.

On one occasion they had entered a barracks alone and, while Nuñez covered the men found there, Peña collected their

"Well, sir, I cannot agree, because I saw the accused spit out the piece of the other man's ear!"

"So," the Senator concluded, "I have learned never to go too far in cross-examination."

A package had been seized which was in possession of the arrested Cubans. It had the general contour of a ham.

Investigating, I learned that Quesada, wishing to take practical personal advantage of the expedition, had written a friendly letter to the General-in-Chief, another to the President of the Cuban Republic and bought some stylographic pens (which he had had suitably inscribed), not to mention the revolver he had carried in Mexico, and was sending the whole to be distributed as remembrances. The revolver was for General Rodriguez. In the letter to General Gomez he said, "If these arms arrive safely in Cuba it will be due, in the first place, to our friend Rubens." This unfortunate disclosure referred to the material I had released at Fernandina.

Thus I found myself in the delicate business of defending 21 men accused of filibustering with only suspicious circumstances against them, but with some written evidence outstanding against me, which we must expect, moreover, would be promptly introduced at the trial. It seemed clear that I might very well have to join my clients at the bar sooner or later, making a twenty-second prisoner. Sufficient unto the day, however.

The package, seemingly unopened, was duly offered in evidence.

We raised the question of constitutional privilege for the accused, holding that the prisoners could not be compelled to testify against themselves, even by documentary evidence, as long as that documentary evidence was not in itself a means of committing the crime. The argument on this point was protracted, but ended just before the luncheon recess with the Judge deciding in our favor. I demanded possession of the mysterious package and after another wordy battle walked away with what unconcern I could muster, having it tucked

under my arm. As I was leaving the court-room, an elderly man urged me to let him "touch the package for luck."

I was curious.

"You would not have spent nearly all yesterday afternoon and this morning arguing about the package unless it was to be lucky for you to keep it out of the case," he explained. So I let him touch it, and then I speedily had the letters destroyed, and the gifts returned to their donor.

When the prosecuting officer got to making his final address to the jury, I suspected that, having lost the chance to use the contents of the package to prove the destination of the accused, he would revert to the argument parodied by Colonel Peña. So I set about some arrangements of my own.

In the midst of his eloquence the prosecutor turned slowly and, with a sweeping gesture, hands turned palms upward, exclaimed severely, "Do I have to prove that they were going to Cuba? Look at them. I say just look at them!"

I whispered to General Francisco Carrillo, "Now!" The General nudged his neighbor on the other side who spoke a little English and was also slightly deaf. The man rose slowly and met the eye of the District Attorney as the latter was saying, loftily, "Just look at them!" The prisoner facing him had the unmistakable countenance of a good Irishman. The prosecutor gasped, the visitors at the trial roared with laughter, and the jurymen did not hide their smiles. The Judge, a very austere man, did what he could to maintain his dignity and the dignity of his court. The prosecutor's eloquence was all too obviously broken. He went on, speaking in dispirited, inept phrases, and, though he shortly seemed to be recovering his official self-confidence, it took only a grin from me, facing the jury, to have someone in the box respond in sympathy and again tend to dam the flow of accusation. At first the "Irishman," thinking the laughter was directed at him, colored with anger; but when General Carrillo whispered to him that he had been a help to me for the common good, he shrugged his shoulders in somewhat fogged resignation.