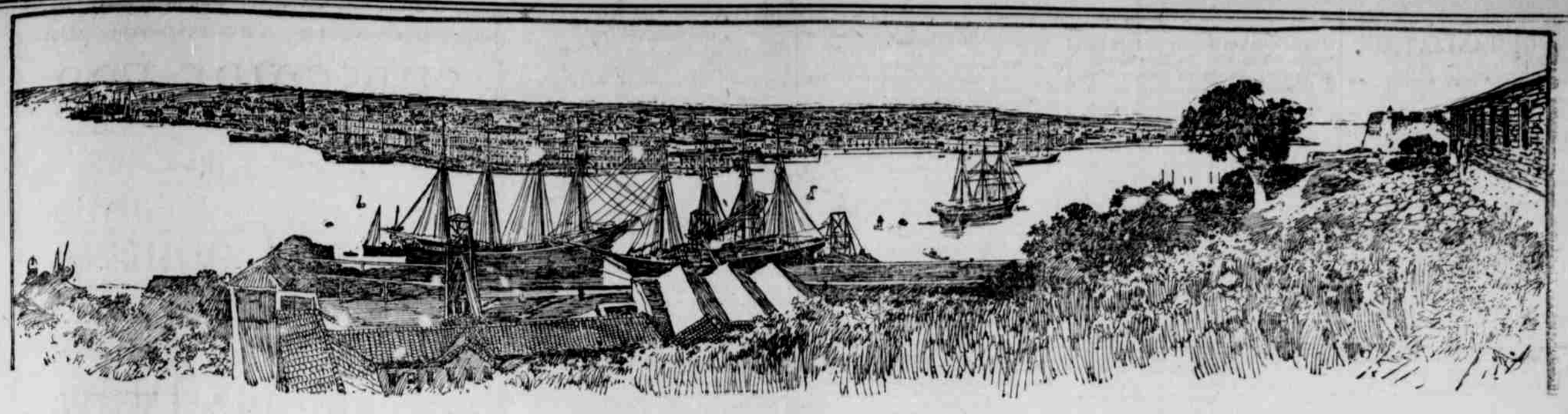

A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE HARBOR OF HAVANA.

PEARL OF THE ANTILLES.

THE STORY OF CUBA, HER PEOPLE AND HER RESOURCES.

Cuba! It is a name that now is familiar to every household in all the civilized earth. The suffering of its people, the dying groans of its tortured patriots, have formed the minor key of sorrow in the world's grand song of progress. And yet, in spite of the fact that it has long held the interest and sympathy of fair minded people, no land is so little known and so greatly underestimated. The traveler who glimpses for the first time her marvelous shores is overcome with astonishment at the panorama of immense possibility that lies shimmering before him, for even now, her richest vestments shredded, her body bleeding under the violent hands of an unnatural parent, Cuba remains the indestructible Pearl of the Antilles, with such wealth in her soil and under it as no earthly power can take away.

As everybody knows, the development of Cuba had been from its earliest occupancy retarded and at times practically stopped by the rule of Spain. Soon after the foot of Columbus touched her virgin soil the dark cloud of oppression began to hover over her, and it was only by the sheer force of her innate worth, coupled with the necessities of her inhabitants, that her glorious products became, even to a limited extent, available.

When in 1511 Columbus sent his son Diego, with a number of colonists, to Cuba, the big island was speedily settled, and measurements of its proportions were made by a party of official agramensores (surveyors), and these measurements were of such accuracy that they remain as standards today. The length of the island was found to be in round numbers 600 miles, its width at its narrowest point 21 miles and at its widest point 111 miles. This gives to the long, shark shaped island an area of approximately 43,000 square miles, or nearly the size of the state of Pennsylvania.

In view of the necessity of the extensive exploration which was incident to this comprehensive survey it seems passing strange that no more of Cuba's richness was discovered and utilized for the development of the strength and value of the new colony. This dereliction, however, was probably not the fault of the really vigorous and progressive adherents of the son of the great discoverer. Indeed from a careful study of history, though exact dates are not to be obtained, it would seem that it was soon after its colonization that the greed of the mother country began to cripple the enterprise and mar the destiny of the new government that was forming on this new soil.

Cuba's Great Grievance.

The grievance of Cuba, which has lasted all these years, dates from this early period. It was in its nature and operation the parallel of the one which brought about the bloody but glorious birth of our own independence—that is to say, taxation without representation. But there was a vast difference in the situation of the Cubans. While our Revolutionist fathers were vastly inferior to the enemy in point of numbers, their proportion to the whole number of fighting Englishmen who could be landed on our shores was not of such smallness as to preclude all hope, whereas the mere handful of Cubans were so overwhelmingly overmatched by the armed force that Spain could muster as to be practically in her power after the first demonstration.

And so there have been insurrection after insurrection and defeat after defeat, and the consequent horrible butcheries of retribution, until Cuba, the beautiful, the rich, the wonderful, has been little more than a bloody abattoir wherein the lives and hopes of a weak but marvelously courageous people have been periodically sacrificed.

But the immortal longing for liberty could not be crushed out of the breast of the sons of these patriots, and they, in turn, have made the same struggle. But the results of these heroic efforts became in time of more and more importance to the people of Cuba and less and less satisfactory to the administration at Madrid, and thus, from years of weakness, strength grew, so that insurrection came to mean revolution, and there dawned upon the sight of the striving patriot the splendid vision of a blood bought but free republic.

But people know more of the struggles of Cuba than they do of Cuba itself. Every civilized inhabitant of the globe has followed with feelings of indignation and pity the story of Cuba's suffering. All the "insurrections," the "Separatist wars" and the other vain but valiant efforts of the Cubans to throw off the Spanish yoke have appealed to his chivalry and wrung his heart with grief and rage; but, as a rule, he is as ignorant of the scene of these struggles as if they had occurred in the viewless air. And yet, in the comparatively small compass of its watery boundaries, there is concentrated a greater variety of natural resources than are to be found in any other island, state, province or country beneath the sun.

This may sound extravagant, but the statement is verified by all reliable statistics and unprejudiced witnesses. And when those who cavil come to reckon up its advantages—its millions of acres of soil, richer than any in the United States, that will grow anything from a potato to a pineapple; its abundant yields of sugar and tobacco; its tremendous forests of mahogany and other precious woods; its uplands, upon which is grown every product of the temperate zone, and its fertile valleys, from which luxuriantly spring the most luscious fruits of the tropics; its mines of iron and copper and manganese; its hundreds of beautiful and excellent harbors, and the soft, healthful atmosphere of perpetual summer that forms the setting for this peerless "Pearl"—their doubts will be swallowed up in conviction.

A Complex Study.

A study of this wonderful island is complex from any standpoint. The geographer, with the best map in his possession, will find new inlets, the naturalist will add to his collection, and the mineralogist will revel in novelties, and even the blase cosmopolitan will recover in Cuba the zest which had gone out of his life. And all this is merely to say that a great deal of the accepted data with reference to Cuba is either inexact or wholly faulty. This, of course, like everything else that works injury to the island as to its relation to the rest of the world, is due to the autocratic and ignorant methods of the Spanish authorities, the tendency of whose "discipline" is toward handicapping every public spirited enterprise and retarding everything that is not done directly in the interest of the honor and glory and revenue of the power across the sea, for whom this poor, downcast people have been working out what has heretofore appeared to be a life subsidy.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, the enterprise of Americans and others foreign to the soil has led native industry in the right direction, and its commerce has grown in the teeth of riot and insurrection. The normal population, 1,700,000, composed of something near 1,000,000 persons of Spanish descent, 10,000 foreign whites, 43,000 Chinese and 500,000 negroes and colored people, is not a busy throng. The loitering Cuban of today can hardly be recognized as the descendant of those sturdy pioneers of the sixteenth century who fashioned the gigantic bastions of El Castillo de la Fuerza—the Castle of Strength—but still he can be brought to bestir himself if a sufficient financial inducement is offered. To be entirely just, it should be said that enterprise is not wholly wanting, even among the laboring classes. And so capital, which was at first largely American, was put to work, and as a result cities have sprung up, large plantations have been put under cultivation, mines have been opened up, and sugar, tobacco and the hundreds of other valuable products of the island have been made to enrich it. As is well known, a large and usurious part of the annual revenues of planters, miners and manufacturers has been taken for taxes, and at length it has found its way into the ever depleted coffers of the home government at Madrid. And still traffic increased until the beginning of the revolution in 1895, when there commenced the devastation which has cost Cuba so dearly.

The chief products of the island are sugar and tobacco, and the amount annually realized from these products during the years just preceding the last uprising has been, on the average, 85,000,000 pesos (dollars), and the revenue from mineral sources has been grossly estimated at 3,500,000 pesos. The amounts derived from other sources (including cotton, of which a good deal is produced) were considerable, but these were the most important. And just here, as an instance of the slumbrous apathy that has resulted from years of hopeless subjugation and practical serfdom, the opening up of the iron mines in the province of Santiago de Cuba, at the eastern end of the island, may profitably be cited. These valuable mines, though discovered nearly a century ago, never felt the blow of a pick until 1883, when a party of New York capitalists determined to make an effort to purchase and develop them. Negotiations with the Spanish government were at once commenced, and in 1885, after two years of persuasion, concessions were obtained and work was commenced. Stock companies were organized in New York and Philadelphia, and bonds were floated. These companies were the Juragua, the Spanish-American, the Signe and others. From these mines the annual exportation grew to be more than 500,000 tons of iron ore and 40,000 tons of manganese, amounting to $3,000,000 in value at the lowest estimate.

Mining Is Easy.

Mining was nominal, as the ore could be readily broken up by surface blasting. In order to carry ore to the United States a large fleet of steamers was necessary. On the return trip from the United States these steamers at first went empty or with ballast only, but it finally dawned upon the owners of the vessels that loads might as well be carried, and the steamers began to take coal to the West Indies. And thus it came about that the shipment of iron ore to the United States facilitated the exportation of Pennsylvania coal to the West Indies.

The development of this industry was one of many enterprises that have been successfully pursued in this wonderful land despite the singularly unfavorable conditions that have existed. Cuba's greatest wealth must always come from the vegetable products of the earth. Her soil is wonderful. It is not only fertile, but inexhaustible. Three crops of cane grow from one planting. No fertilizers are used. The soil in places has the great depth of 27 feet. Tobacco needs no guano to make a crop and not nearly so much labor as is required in cultivation elsewhere. Anything that grows under the tropical sun can be grown in Cuba, although during recent years the soil has been given up to the production of sugar and tobacco.

Before the devastating torch of war had laid waste the canefields and destroyed factories and mills the busy hum of fruitful labor stirred all the air. The cost of making sugar was gradually reduced by the introduction of labor saving machinery, and the business settled down to a paying basis, and by the increased power of production the demand for cane grew, planters were encouraged, and the fruitful island began to wear a prosperous air. The tobacco planters and manufacturers also improved their methods, and this rival product kept even pace with its saccharine competitor. The annual sugar crop was worth $45,000,000, the tobacco crop $6,000,000. Then came the revolution. Somehow, when one writes of Cuba, everything comes back to that point and strikes it as against a dead wall after clearing the cruel hurdles of Spanish tyranny.

But let us revert to the first branch of the subject—the island proper in its entirety. The coast contour of Cuba is broken with hundreds of inlets, all of them harbors in greater or less degree, each having its small fortifications, its villages and its special industries. The profile of the island, to quote the language of the railroad engineer, is varied and picturesque, here a high peak, there a valley, there a plain. Beginning at Santiago de Cuba, the most easterly of the six provinces, and proceeding westward through Puerto Principe, Santa Clara, Matanzas Habana and to the land's end of Pinar del Rio, the tourist traverses magnificent stretches of plateau and crosses innumerable valleys, skirts high mountains and follows deep and picturesque gorges, but the mountains become hills, and these are gradually shaded down until in the extreme west a surface, generally level, is reached, although in the vicinity of the Queen City, Havana, small but rugged peaks, with precipitous sides, may be seen in many directions along the shore.

Picturesque Havana.

To say that Havana is picturesque and beautiful is but to give vent to the first superficial expression that comes to your lips. Spain itself cannot show a more curious or interesting city. Study it as you approach it from the sea, with mighty Morro set high upon the headland, time dyed in mottled splotches of yellow, gray and black, and the red and yellow flags above, with La Junta across the narrow channel, prim and white, save where the ugly dahlgren guns flash at you like venomous black eyes, and the city is as interesting and impressive a sight as human eye ever beheld.

As the capital, metropolis and chief seaport of Cuba it is one of the best known cities in the American hemisphere. Its splendid harbor, its commercial importance, its climate and the tinge of romance that ever attaches to its people have made its fame world-wide. Havana has about 260,000 inhabitants. It was founded but 23 years after the discovery by Columbus and has always been the commercial emporium of the Antilles.

Few cities have such beautiful parks and driveways as has Havana. The great Plaza de Armas is the chief. It comprises four parks, in the center of which is a statue of Ferdinand VII. Then there are the Alameda de Paula, bordering on the bay, and the Campo de Marte, used as a drill ground for the military. This is an enormous park. It has four handsome gates, named respectively Colon, Cortez, Pizarro and Tacon. The Paseo de Tacon is a magnificent drive with double rows of trees. It has numerous columns and statues, among the latter one of Charles III, ranking among the finest works of art in America.

The commerce of Havana is only surpassed in the new world by that of New York. Two-thirds of the products of Cuba find outlet through Havana. The exports of sugar alone are annually about 120,000,000 pounds.

Havana was first called San Cristobal de la Habana, in honor of Columbus, but gradually the prefix was dropped. Havana has been frequently attacked from the sea. Drake tried to take it in 1585, but failed. In 1762 a British fleet under Admiral Pocock bombarded the city and compelled it to capitulate, but it was restored to the Spaniards the next year by the treaty of Paris.

Not a Hot Country.

We are accustomed to think of Cuba as a hot country, situated as it is under the tropics, and the common impression is correct to the extent that the mean average temperature of the year is higher than in countries farther north, but the climate is more equable. There are not those sudden variations that in many parts of the United States are so severe on the human constitution. In Havana, for example, the average temperature of the hottest month is 84 degrees; of the coldest, 72. In Santiago de Cuba, a city often mentioned in the war dispatches, the average of the year is 80; of the hottest month, 84; of the coolest, 73. These are high figures, but not very high for an island lying in equatorial regions and surrounded by water that is warm to the hand all the year round. To a stranger from a dry country a feature more objectionable than the steady heat is the tremendous rainfall. The geographical and topographical situation of Cuba provides two seasons only, the wet and the dry. During the latter rains are not frequent, being atoned for, however, by the abundance of the dew, but in the rainy season Jupiter Pluvius seems to turn himself loose to excel all previous efforts, and from 125 to 140 inches of rain is not uncommon, there being about 102 days when the rain comes down not in drops, but in sheets, in masses, in tubfuls at a time, as though the windows of the heavens were opened and the floods of the great aerial deep had broken loose. So abundant is the rainfall, in fact, that, as a recent traveler remarks, the wonder is that any island remains; that the whole is not dissolved and carried off into the sea. But in Cuba no one minds the rain.

Notwithstanding the peculiarities of its coast line, Cuba has more than 200 excellent ports. The principal of these are Havana, Bahia Hondo, Puerto de Gabanas, Matanzas, Cardenas, Sagua la Grande, La Guanaja, Nuevitas, Malagueta, Manati, Puerto del Padre, Santiago de Cuba, Manzanillo, Canto, Santa Cruz, Cienfuegos, Cochinos and La Broa. The rivers of Cuba are not large, but numerous, there being no fewer than 200 of them, all told, and that is exclusive of small creeks and dry beds of torrents, called arroyos. The Canto, the only really navigable stream, rises in the Sierra del Cobre and has its outlet on the south coast near Manzanillo. There are a few other streams which are navigable for small boats for a distance of from 8 to 20 miles. Next in importance are the streams Guines and Ay. At one time it was the intention to cut a canal through the land intervening and bisect the island, but the idea was finally abandoned as impracticable.

Cuba contains many mineral springs which are famed for their valuable healing properties, principal among them being those known as the baths of San Diego.

The temperature of the water is 82 degrees F., and it is very strongly impregnated with oxygen, carbonic acid gases, chloride of sodium, sulphate of lime, nitrate of lime, iron, magnesia, silex and chloride of calcium. Four glasses of it a day and two baths are the regulation cure for almost every disease known to materia medica, but it is probable that the warm, pure air, simple diet and faith have much to do with it. At any rate, a great many surprising cures have been effected, particularly of bronchial and scrofulous complaints. People have been taken from the steamer on litters, apparently just ready to die, who in a week's time have been riding over the hills on horseback and in a month have gone home as "good as new" and well as anybody. If these springs were in the United States, with the same air to accompany them, or if managed where they are by some sensible, wide awake Anglo-Saxon, they would become the sanitarium of the world, beside which Saratoga, Carlsbad, Las Vegas and White Sulphur would hide their diminished heads.

All Kinds of Minerals.

Nearly all metals and minerals that are useful in any sort of industry are found in Cuba—gold, silver, iron, copper, quicksilver, lead, asphaltum in all its forms, antimony, arsenic, manganese, copperas, red lead, etc. In the Saramaguacan and several other rivers gold has been found, though not in paying quantities. Silver of a certain grade abounds in Pinar del Rio, San Fernando and Yumuri. Almost all the metamorphic rocks contain copper, and these are scattered all over the island. It is usually found in the form of pyrites and sulphurets.

In the eastern part of Cuba, about 12 miles from Santiago, the rich copper mines of El Cobre were worked for a good many years by an English company. They were abandoned during the last revolution. There are other mines not yet open and some not yet exhausted.

The city of Santiago, by the way, is worth more than mere passing mention, it being the chief city of the eastern department. It lies 600 miles southeast of the present capital and ranks third in commercial importance—Havana first and Matanzas second. It is the archbishop's residence, and to it people flock from all parts of the island during certain yearly religious festivals, which are celebrated with remarkable pomp and ceremony. It is also the terminus of two railway lines, one of which is the outlet of Lomas de Cobre, the famous copper mines, and the other, passing through the richest sugar district, affords transportation for that great staple. The exports of the port reach the handsome annual aggregate of $8,000,000, three-fourths of which is in sugar, the rest cocoa, rum, tobacco, honey and mahogany.

Of the fertility of Cuba's soil too much cannot be said. In the western part the celebrated Vuelta Abajo tobacco is raised. It has no equal in the world. In the eastern part, near Santiago, there are some tracts of land which yield excellent tobacco, almost as fine as that of Vuelta Abajo.

Even Coffee Thrives.

The sugar cane grows all through the island and yields the largest percentage known of saccharine matter. In some parts of the island the coffee tree thrives very well, and the quality of the bean is equal to the best Maracaibo or Central American. The banana and the plantain also flourish. Large quantities of the latter are raised and consumed in the country. It is an exceedingly nourishing food. Of the former, in the eastern part, there are great plantations, and several million dollars' worth are exported every year to the United States.

The orange and the pineapple abound in the island and about 12 other species of most delicious fruits, as the guava, the mango, the mamey, the anona, etc.

As has been said, the forests of the island contain a great number of valuable hard and cabinet woods, among them the mahogany and the cedar, of which there are very large quantities.

There are plantations of the cocoanut tree, and millions of the nuts are exported yearly. The cocoa tree also grows very well, and the bean is of a very superior quality.

The cedar furnishes the material of the cigar boxes. The fruits of the island comprise nearly all those found in the tropics. The pineapple is indigenous to the soil. There were at the time of the discovery of the island six varieties of the sweet potato cultivated by the native Indians, as well as the yucca or cavassa and Indian corn. Although the forests are dense, very nearly impenetrable, they are inhabited by no wild animals larger than the wild dogs, which are, in fact, small wolves. These are pests to planters, as they destroy quantities of poultry and young cattle. The jutia, a small animal resembling a muskrat, living in trees and having the habits of the raccoon, is the only other animal of importance that is found. Birds in great number and variety here make their homes, and many migratory fowls use the island for a breeding place.

Characteristics of the People.

The spirit of the people is light and gay. The Latin mind is volatile and not given to mourning. Grief here, like hatred, is violent while it lasts, but smiles and laughter follow swiftly.

The race characteristics are distinctly Latin. The Cuban lady is charming. She moves with simple elegance, invariably having that great desideratum of most American women—an unaffected and graceful carriage. Bonnets and hats are things which, for the most part, she happily knows not at all, but she wears across her glancing shoulders or lightly thrown over her head a shawl of white or black lace. The highest examples of her are almost matchless as types of glorious, dark, feminine beauty, with their slight, well rounded figures, their wealth of billowy, blue black hair and the finely chiseled features of their sweet oval faces, which seem, after all, but the fit setting of glorious eyes, dark as night, soft as velvet, yet bright as winter stars. That the Cuban lady is not lacking in mentality, in native wit, cleverness and understanding she has often proved when transplanted to more stimulating climates. She has been a leader in the brilliant intellectual salons of Paris, and if at home she is seldom distinguished by high intellectual accomplishments it may charitably be supposed to be chargeable to a climate which renders protracted mental effort a real pain even to trained minds.

Under the favorable conditions of peace, when homes have not been marred and polluted by the rough and degrading touch of the trooper, the Cuban girl of quality is reared in the strictest refinement, and even the poor are more regardful of the proprieties than they are under the demoralizing influence of war. But the education of Cuban children has been sadly neglected. As late as 1855 not a primary school could be found in towns boasting 2,500 or 3,000 inhabitants. In 1851, when Cuba was compelled to contribute $9,000,000 in support of the army of Spain, the amount appropriated for public instruction in the island was less than $30,000.

A few years ago Baracoa, with 1,365 children, had no more than two public schools, with accommodation for 136 children, and costing for teachers' salaries, rent of building and other expenses the yearly sum of $780. Manzanillo, with 3,079 children, had four public schools, with an attendance of 185, their full capacity, at a yearly expense of $3,636 for salaries, rent of buildings, school material, etc. Las Tunas, with 1,297 children, had two schools, with 156 children, at an annual total cost of $1,160. The children of the well to do families were either educated at home or at private schools at a cost entirely beyond the means of the lower classes.

The gentleman of Cuba is well known. His hot blooded impetuosity and his open handed generosity are characteristics with which all the world is acquainted.

And now, when his visit is at an end, and his explorations are completed, and he dwells in pleasant retrospect upon the illimitable richness of this singularly interesting isle, the stranger is forced to admit that, with all her wealth of resource, Cuba must be accepted, as it has been classed by Cubans, as the country of manana (tomorrow), for, though partially developed, her resources are to a large extent lost to all good purposes, and it is to the morrow of liberty, the advancement of education and the concurrent emancipation of thought and action that Cubans must look for the rehabilitation of their loved isle and her acquirement of that place in the grand march of nations to which her innate wealth and worth entitle her.

WALTER J. DAVIS.