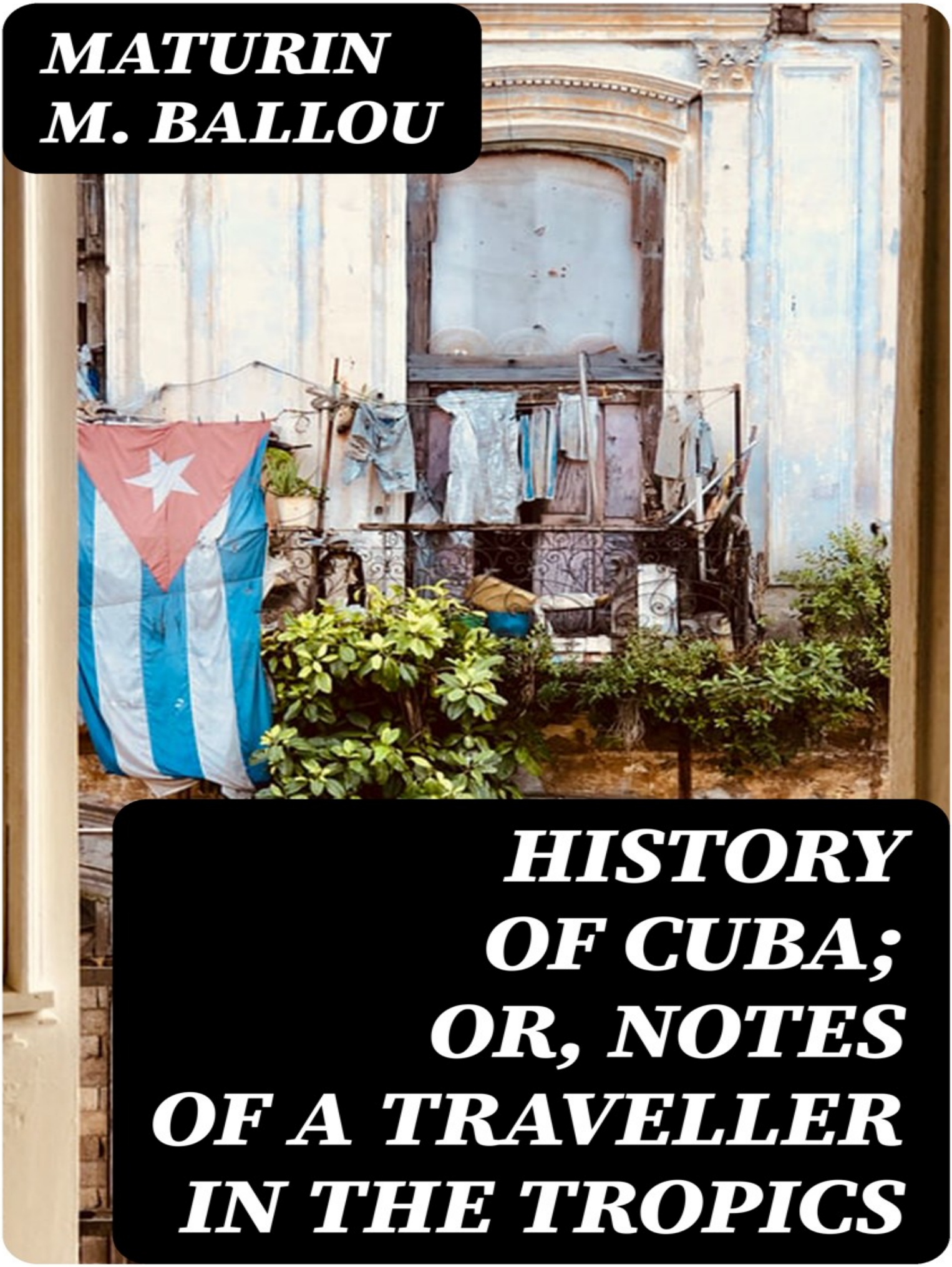
MATURIN M. BALLOU



HISTORY OF CUBA; OR, NOTES OF A TRAVELLER IN THE TROPICS

Maturin M. Ballou

History of Cuba; or, Notes of a Traveller in the Tropics

Being a Political, Historical, and Statistical Account of the Island, from its First Discovery to the Present Time

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PREFACE.

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The remarkable degree of interest expressed on all sides, at the present time, relative to the island of Cuba, has led the author of the following pages to place together in this form a series of notes from his journal, kept during a brief residence upon the island. To these he has prefixed a historical glance at the political story of Cuba, that may not be unworthy of preservation. The fact that the subject-matter was penned in the hurry of observation upon the spot, and that it is thus a simple record of what would be most likely to engage and interest a stranger, is his excuse for the desultory character of the work. So critically is the island now situated, in a political point of view, that ere this book shall have passed through an edition, it may be no longer a dependency of Spain, or may have become the theatre of scenes to which its former convulsions shall bear no parallel.

In preparing the volume for the press, the author has felt the want of books of reference, bearing a late date. Indeed, there are none; and the only very modern records are those written in the desultory manner of hurried travellers. To the admirable work of the learned Ramon de la Sagra,—a monument of industry and intelligence,—the author of the following pages has been indebted for historical suggestions and data. For the privilege of consulting this, and other Spanish books and pamphlets, relative to the interests and history of the island, the author is indebted to the Hon. Edward Everett, who kindly placed them at his disposal.

Where statistics were concerned, the several authorities have been carefully collated, and the most responsible given. The writer has preferred to offer the fresh memories of a pleasant trip to the tropics, to attempting a labored volume abounding in figures and statistics; and trusts that this summer book of a summer clime may float lightly upon the sea of public favor.M.M.B.

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HISTORY OF CUBA

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CHAPTER I

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The island of Cuba, one of the earliest discoveries of the great admiral, has been known to Europe since 1492, and has borne, successively, the names of Juana,[1] Fernandina, Santiago and Ave Maria, having found refuge at last in the aboriginal appellation. Soon after its discovery by Columbus, it was colonized by Spaniards from St. Domingo, but was considered mainly in the light of a military depôt, by the home government, in its famous operations at that period in Mexico. The fact that it was destined to prove the richest jewel in the Castilian crown, and a mine of wealth to the Spanish treasury, was not dreamed of at this stage of its history. Even the enthusiastic followers of Cortez, who sought that fabulous El Dorado of the New World, had no

golden promise to hold forth for this gem of the Caribbean Sea.

The Spanish colonists from St. Domingo found the island inhabited by a most peculiar native race, hospitable, inoffensive, timid, fond of the dance and the rude music of their own people, yet naturally indolent and lazy, from the character of the climate they inhabited. They had some definite idea of God and heaven; and were governed by patriarchs, or kings, whose word was law, and whose age gave them precedence. They had few weapons of offence or defence, and knew not the use of the bow and arrow. Of course, they were at once subjected by the new comers, who reduced them to a state of slavery; and, proving hard taskmasters, the poor, over-worked natives died in scores, until they had nearly disappeared, when the home government granted permission to import a cargo of negroes from the coast of Africa to labor upon the ground, and to seek for gold, which was thought to exist in the river-courses.[2] Thus early commenced the slave-trade of Cuba, a subject to which we shall have occasion more fully to refer.

Cuba became the head-quarters of the Spanish power in the west, forming the point of departure for those military expeditions which, though inconsiderable in numbers, were so formidable in the energy of the leaders, and in the arms, discipline, courage, ferocity, fanaticism and avarice, of their followers, that they were amply adequate to carry out the vast schemes of conquest for which they were designed. It was hence that Cortez marched to the conquest of Mexico, —a gigantic undertaking—one a slight glance at which will

recall to the reader the period of history to which we would direct his attention. Landing upon the continent, with a little band, scarcely more than half the complement of a modern regiment, he prepared to traverse an unknown country, thronged by savage tribes, with whose character, habits and means of defence, he was wholly unacquainted. This romantic adventure, worthy of the palmiest days of chivalry, was crowned with success, though checkered with various fortune, and stained with bloody episodes, that prove how the threads of courage and ferocity are inseparably blended in the woof and warp of Spanish character. It must be remembered, however, that the spirit of the age was harsh, relentless and intolerant; and, that if the Aztecs, idolaters and sacrificers of human victims, found no mercy at the hands of the fierce Catholics whom Cortez commanded, neither did the Indians of our own section of the continent fare much better at the hands of men professing a purer faith, and coming to these shores, not as warriors, with the avowed purpose of conquest, but themselves persecuted fugitives.

As the first words that greeted the ears of the Plymouth colonists were "Welcome, Englishmen!" uttered by a poor native, who had learned them from the fishermen off the northern coast, so were the Spaniards at first kindly welcomed by the aborigines they encountered in the New World. Yet, in the north-east and south-west the result was the same: it mattered little whether the stranger was Roman Catholic or Protestant; whether he came clad in steel, or robed in the garments of peace; whether he spoke the harsh English, the soft French, or the rich Castilian tongue. The

inexorable laws which govern races were rigidly enforced; the same drama was everywhere enacted, the white race enjoying a speedy triumph. There were episodical struggles, fierce and furious, but unavailing; here Guatimozin, there Philip of Pokanoket—here a battle, there a massacre.

The Spanish general encountered a people who had attained a far higher point of art and civilization than their red brethren of the north-east part of the continent. Vast pyramids, imposing sculptures, curious arms, fanciful garments, various kinds of manufactures, the relics of which still strangely interest the student of the past, filled the invaders with surprise. There was much that was curious and startling in their mythology, and the capital of the Mexican empire presented a singular and fascinating spectacle to the eyes of Cortez. The rocky amphitheatre in the midst of which it was built still remains unchanged, but the vast lake which surrounded it, traversed by causeways, and covered with floating gardens, laden with flowers and perfume, is gone. The star of the Aztec dynasty set in blood. In vain did the inhabitants of the conquered city, roused to madness by the cruelty and extortion of the victors, expel them from their midst. Cortez refused to flee further than the shore; the light of his burning galleys rekindled the desperate valor of his followers, and Mexico fell, as a few years after did Peru under the perfidy and sword of Pizarro, thus completing the scheme of conquest, and giving Spain a colonial empire more splendid than that of any other power in Christendom.

Of the agents in this vast scheme of territorial aggrandizement, we see Cortez dying in obscurity, and

Pizarro assassinated in his palace, while retributive justice has overtaken the monarchy at whose behests the richest portions of the western continent were violently wrested from their native possessors. If "the wild and warlike, the indolent and the semi-civilized, the bloody Aztec, the inoffensive Peruvian, the fierce Araucanian, all fared alike" at the hands of Spain, it must be confessed that their wrongs have been signally avenged. "The horrid atrocities practised at home and abroad," says Edward Everett, "not only in the Netherlands, but in every city of the northern country, cried to Heaven for vengeance upon Spain; nor could she escape it. She intrenched herself behind the eternal Cordilleras; she took to herself the wings of the morning, and dwelt in the uttermost parts of the sea; but even there the arm of retribution laid hold of her, and the wrongs of both hemispheres were avenged by her degeneracy and fall."

So rapid a fall is almost without a parallel in the history of the world. Less than three centuries from the time when she stood without a rival in the extent and wealth of her colonial possessions, she beheld herself stripped, one by one, of the rich exotic jewels of her crown. Her vice-regal coronet was torn from her grasp. Mexico revolted; the South American provinces threw off her yoke; and now, though she still clutches with febrile grasp the brightest gem of her transatlantic possessions, the island of Cuba, yet it is evident that she cannot long retain its ownership. The "ever-faithful" island has exhibited unmistakable symptoms of infidelity, its demonstrations of loyalty being confined to the government officials and the hireling soldiery. The time will

surely come when the last act of the great drama of historical retribution will be consummated, and when, in spite of the threatening batteries of the Moro and the Punta, and the bayonets of Spanish legions, *siempre fiel* will no longer be the motto of the Queen of the Antilles.

The history of Cuba is deficient in events of a stirring character, and yet not devoid of interest. Columbus found it inhabited, as we have already remarked, by a race whose manners and character assimilated with the mild climate of this terrestrial paradise. Although the Spanish conquerors have left us but few details respecting these aborigines, yet we know with certainty, from the narratives of the great discoverer and his followers, that they were docile and generous, but, at the same time, inclined to ease; that they were well-formed, grave, and far from possessing the vivacity of the natives of the south of Europe. They expressed themselves with a certain modesty and respect, and were hospitable to the last degree. Their labor was limited to the light work necessary to provide for the wants of life, while the bounteous climate of the tropics spared the necessity of clothing. They preferred hunting and fishing to agriculture; and beans and maize, with the fruits that nature gave them in abundance, rendered their diet at once simple and nutritious. They possessed no quadrupeds of any description, except a race of voiceless dogs, of whose existence we have no proof but the assertion of the discoverers.

The island was politically divided into nine provinces, namely, Baracoa, Bayaguitizi, Macaca, Bayamo, Camaguey, Jagua, Cueyba, Habana and Haniguanica. At the head of

each was a governor, or king, of whose laws we have no record, or even tradition. An unbroken peace reigned among them, nor did they turn their hands against any other people. Their priests, called *Behiques*, were fanatics, superstitious to the last degree, and kept the people in fear by gross extravagances. They were not cannibals, nor did they employ human sacrifices, and are represented as distinguished by a readiness to receive the Gospel.

The capital of the island was Baracoa,[3] erected into a city and bishopric in 1518, but both were transferred to Santiago de Cuba in 1522. In the year 1538, the city of Havana was surprised by a French corsair and reduced to ashes. The French and English buccaneers of the West Indies, whose hatred the Spaniards early incurred, were for a long time their terror and their scourge. Enamored of the wild life they led, unshackled by any laws but the rude regulations they themselves adopted, unrefined by intercourse with the gentler sex, consumed by a thirst for adventure, and brave to ferocity, these fierce rovers, for many years, were the actual masters of the gulf. They feared no enemy, and spared none; their vessels, constantly on the watch for booty, were ever ready, on the appearance of a galleon, to swoop down like an eagle on its prey. The romance of the sea owes some of its most thrilling chapters to the fearful exploits of these buccaneers. Their *coup de main* on Havana attracted the attention of De Soto, the governor of the island, to the position and advantages of the port at which the Spanish vessels bound for the peninsula with the riches of New Mexico were accustomed to touch, and he accordingly commenced to fortify it. It increased in

population by degrees, and became the habitual gubernatorial residence, until the home government made it the capital of the island in 1589, on the appointment of the first Captain-general, Juan de Tejada.

The native population soon dwindled away under the severe sway of the Spaniards, who imposed upon them tasks repugnant to their habits, and too great for their strength.

Velasquez, one of the earliest governors of the island, appears to have been an energetic and efficient magistrate, and to have administered affairs with vigor and intelligence; but his harsh treatment of the aborigines will ever remain a stain upon his memory. A native chief, whose only crime was that of taking up arms in defence of the integrity of his little territory, fell into the hands of Velasquez, and was burned alive, as a punishment for his patriotism.[4] It is no wonder that under such treatment the native population disappeared so rapidly that the Spaniards were forced to supply their places by laborers of hardier character.

We have seen that the office of captain-general was established in 1589, and, with a succession of incumbents, the office has been maintained until the present day, retaining the same functions and the same extraordinary powers. The object of the Spanish government is, and ever has been, to derive as much revenue as possible from the island; and the exactions imposed upon the inhabitants have increased in proportion as other colonies of Spain, in the western world, have revolted and obtained their independence. The imposition of heavier burthens than those imposed upon any other people in the world has been

the reward of the proverbial loyalty of the Cubans; while the epithet of "ever-faithful," bestowed by the crown, has been their only recompense for their steady devotion to the throne. But for many years this lauded loyalty has existed only in appearance, while discontent has been fermenting deeply beneath the surface.

The Cubans owe all the blessings they enjoy to Providence alone (so to speak), while the evils which they suffer are directly referable to the oppression of the home government. Nothing short of a military despotism could maintain the connection of such an island with a mother country more than three thousand miles distant; and accordingly we find the captain-general of Cuba invested with unlimited power. He is, in fact, a viceroy appointed by the crown of Spain, and accountable only to the reigning sovereign for his administration of the colony. His rule is absolute; he has the power of life and death and liberty in his hands. He can, by his arbitrary will, send into exile any person whatever, be his name or rank what it may, whose residence in the island he considers prejudicial to the royal interest, even if he has committed no overt act. He can suspend the operation of the laws and ordinances, if he sees fit to do so; can destroy or confiscate property; and, in short, the island may be said to be perpetually in a state of siege.

Such is the infirmity of human nature that few individuals can be trusted with despotic power without abusing it; and accordingly we find very few captain-generals whose administration will bear the test of rigid examination. Few men who have governed Cuba have consulted the true

interests of the Creoles; in fact, they are not appointed for that purpose, but merely to look after the crown revenue. An office of such magnitude is, of course, a brilliant prize, for which the grandees of Spain are constantly struggling; and the means by which an aspirant is most likely to secure the appointment presupposes a character of an inferior order. The captain-general knows that he cannot reckon on a long term of office, and hence he takes no pains to study the interests or gain the good-will of the Cubans. He has a two-fold object in view,—to keep the revenue well up to the mark, and to enrich himself as speedily as possible. Hence, the solemn obligations entered into by Spain with the other powers for the suppression of the African slave-trade are a dead letter; for, with very few exceptions, the captains-general of Cuba have connived at the illegal importation of slaves, receiving for their complaisance a large percentage on the value of each one landed on the island; for, though the slavers do not discharge their living freights at the more frequented ports, still their arrival is a matter of public notoriety, and it is impossible that, with the present system of espionage, the authorities can be ignorant of such an event. Nor can we imagine that the home government is less well-informed upon the subject, though they assume a politic ignorance of the violation of the law. Believing that the importation of slaves is essential to the maintenance of the present high revenue, Spain illustrates the rule that there are none so blind as those who do not wish to see. It is only the cheapness of labor, resulting from the importation of slaves, that enables the planters to pour into the

government treasury from twenty to twenty-four millions of dollars annually. Of this we may speak more fully hereafter.

In 1760, the invasion and conquest of the island by the British forms one of the most remarkable epochs in its history. This event excited the fears of Spain, and directed the attention of the government to its importance in a political point of view. On its restoration, at the treaty of peace concluded between the two governments in the following year, Spain seriously commenced the work of fortifying the Havana, and defending and garrisoning the island generally.

The elements of prosperity contained within the limits of this peerless island required only a patriotic and enlightened administration for their development; and the germ of its civilization was stimulated by the appointment of General Don Luis de las Casas to the post of captain-general. During the administration of this celebrated man, whose memory is cherished with fond respect by the Cubans, The Patriotic Society of Havana was formed, with the noble idea of diffusing education throughout the island, and introducing a taste for classical literature, through his instrumentality, while the press was also established in the capital, by the publication of the *Papel Periodico*.

In the first third of the present century, the *intendente*, Don Alejandro Ramirez, labored to regulate the revenues and economical condition of the country, and called the attention of the government to the improvement of the white population. But the most important concession obtained of the metropolitan government, the freedom of commerce, was due to the patriotic exertions of Don

Francisco de Arranjo, the most illustrious name in Cuban annals, "one," says the Countess Merlin, "who may be quoted as a model of the humane and peaceful virtues," and "who was," says Las Casas, "a jewel of priceless value to the glory of the nation, a protector for Cuba, and an accomplished statesman for the monarchy." Even the briefest historical sketch (and this record pretends to no more) would be incomplete without particular mention of this excellent man.

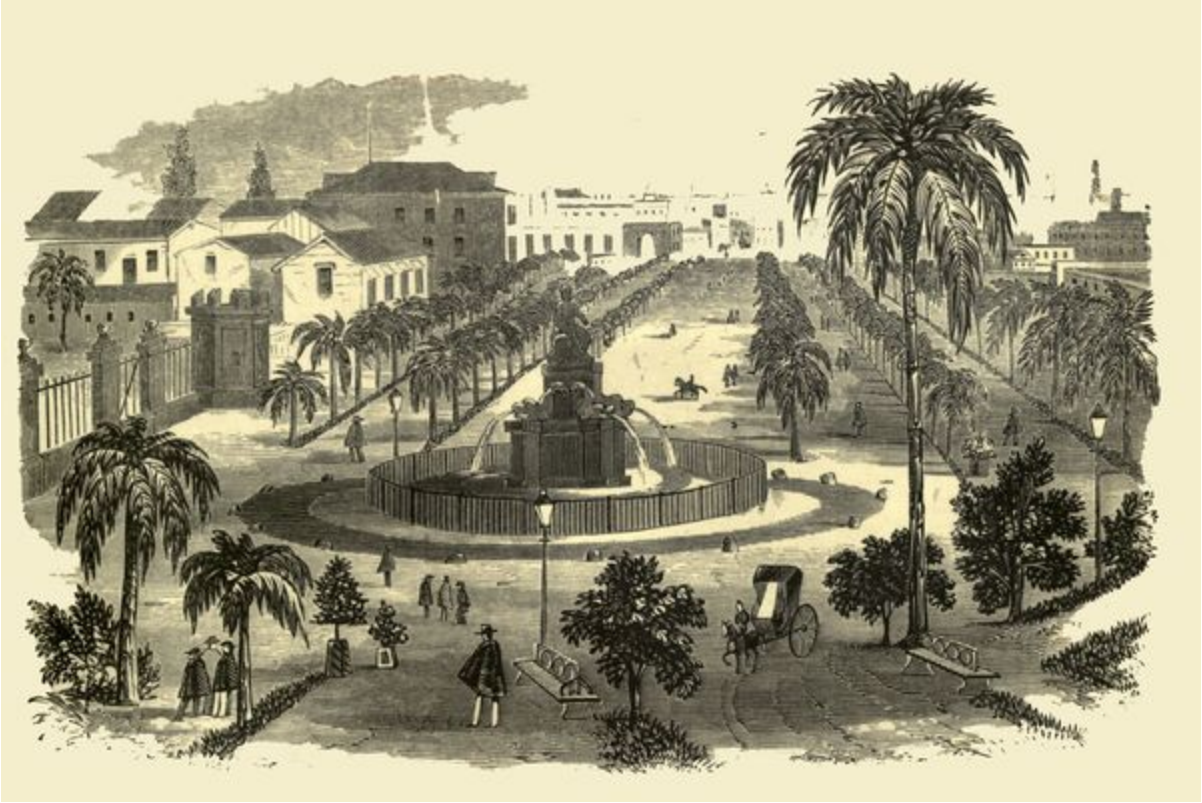
He was born at Havana, May 22d, 1765. Left an orphan at a very early age, he managed the family estate, while a mere boy, with a discretion and judgment which would have done honor to a man of mature age. Turning his attention to the study of the law, he was admitted to practice in the mother country, where for a considerable period he acted as the agent for the municipality of Havana, and, being thoroughly acquainted with the capabilities of the island, and the condition and wants of his countrymen, he succeeded in procuring the amelioration of some of the most flagrant abuses of the colonial system. By his exertions, the staple productions of the island were so much increased that the revenue, in place of falling short of the expenses of the government, as his enemies had predicted, soon yielded a large surplus. He early raised his voice against the iniquitous slave-trade, and suggested the introduction of white laborers, though he perceived that the abolition of slavery was impracticable. It was owing to his exertions that the duty on coffee, spirits and cotton, was remitted for a period of ten years, and that machinery was allowed to be imported free of duty to the island.

The *Junta de Fomento* (society for improvement) and the Chamber of Commerce were the fruits of his indefatigable efforts. Of the latter institution he was for a long time the Syndic, refusing to receive the perquisites attached to the office, as he did the salaries of the same and other offices that he filled during his useful life. While secretary of the Chamber, he distinguished himself by his bold opposition to the schemes of the infamous Godoy (the Prince of Peace), the minion of the Queen of Spain, who, claiming to be protector of the Chamber of Commerce, demanded the receipts of the custom-house at Havana. He not only defeated the plans of Godoy, but procured the relinquishment of the royal monopoly of tobacco. His patriotic services were appreciated by the court at Madrid, although at times he was the inflexible opponent of its schemes. The cross of the order of Charles III. showed the esteem in which he was held by that monarch. Yet, with a modesty which did him honor, he declined to accept a title of nobility which was afterwards offered to him. In 1813, when, by the adoption of the constitution of 1812, Cuba became entitled to representation in the general Cortes, he visited Madrid as a deputy, and there achieved the crowning glory of his useful life,—the opening of the ports of Cuba to foreign trade. In 1817 he returned to his native island with the rank of Counsellor of State, Financial Intendente of Cuba, and wearing the grand cross of the order of Isabella. He died in 1837, at the age of seventy-two, after a long and eminently useful life, bequeathing large sums for various public purposes and charitable objects in the island. Such a man is an honor to any age or nation, and the Cubans do

well to cherish his memory, which, indeed, they seem resolved, by frequent and kindly mention, to keep ever green.

Fostered by such men, the resources of Cuba, both physical and intellectual, received an ample and rapid development. The youth of the island profited by the means of instruction now liberally placed at their disposal; the sciences and belles-lettres were assiduously cultivated; agriculture and internal industry were materially improved, and an ambitious spirit evoked, which subsequent periods of tyranny and misrule have not been able, with all their baneful influences, entirely to erase.

The visitor from abroad is sure to hear the people refer to this "golden period," as they call it, of their history, the influence of which, so far from passing away, appears to grow and daily increase with them. It raised in their bosoms one spirit and trust which they sadly needed,—that of self-reliance,—and showed them of what they were capable, under liberal laws and judicious government.



VIEW OF THE IMPERIAL DEL PASEO.

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[1] In honor of Prince John, son of Ferdinand and Isabella. Changed to Fernandina on the death of Ferdinand; afterwards called Ave Maria, in honor of the Holy Virgin. Cuba is the Indian name.

[2] "Thus," exclaims the pious Arrati, "began that gathering of an infinite number of gentiles to the bosom of our holy religion, who would otherwise have perished in the darkness of paganism." Spain *has* liberal laws relative to the religious instruction of the slaves; but they are no better than a dead letter.

[3] Here Leo X. erected the first cathedral in Cuba. Baracoa is situated on the north coast, at the eastern extremity of the island, and contains some three thousand inhabitants, mixed population.

[4] The words of this unfortunate chief (Hatucy), extorted by the torments he suffered, were, "*Prefiero el infierno al cielo si en cielo ha Españoles*." (I prefer hell to heaven, if there are Spaniards in heaven.)

CHAPTER II.

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The constitution of 1812—Revolution of La Granja—Political aspect of the island—Discontent among the Cubans—The example before them—Simon Bolivar, the Liberator—Revolutions of 1823 and 1826—General Lorenzo and the constitution—The assumption of extraordinary power by Tacon—Civil war threatened—Tacon sustained by royal authority—Despair of the Cubans—Military rule—A foreign press established—Programme of the liberal party—General O'Donnell—The spoils—Influence of the climate.

When the French invasion of Spain in 1808 produced the constitution of 1812, Cuba was considered entitled to enjoy its benefits, and the year 1820 taught the Cubans the advantage to be derived by a people from institutions based on the principle of popular intervention in public affairs. The condition of the nation on the death of Ferdinand VII. obliged Queen Christina to rely on the liberal party for a triumph over the pretensions of the Infante Don Carlos to the crown, and to assure the throne of Donna Isabella II., and the *Estatuto Real* (royal statute) was proclaimed in Spain and Cuba. The Cubans looked forward, as in 1812 and 1820, to a representation in the national congress, and the enjoyment of the same liberty conceded to the Peninsula. An institution was then established in Havana, with branches in the island, called the Royal Society for Improvement, already alluded to in our brief notice of Don