

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Vol. 2. No. 22.

Lincoln, Nebraska, June 20, 1902.

Whole No. 74.

THE PEARL OF THE ANTILLES

Article Written by Mr. Bryan for Collier's Weekly and Reproduced by Courtesy of that Journal.

(Copyright 1902 by F. F. Collier & Son.)

Cuba, the largest, richest and most populous of the West Indian islands, lies about ninety miles south of Key West, the southernmost point of Florida. It is separated from the mainland by that mightiest river of the earth, the Gulf Stream, whose resistless current sweeps to the northeast through a channel half a mile deep and carries the warmth of the southern seas far into the Temperate Zone.

"The Pearl of the Antilles," as Cuba is called, is about nine hundred miles from the east to the west, and so narrow (about one hundred and twenty miles at its greatest width) that it looks on the map like a small arc of a great circle. Its coast line is broken by innumerable bays and harbors, many of them admirably adapted for commerce. A large part of the surface of the island is made up of rolling prairies and the land is generally fertile. In the east a mountain range rises to a considerable height, terminating in Pico Turquino, which lifts its peak to an elevation of six thousand nine hundred feet. The rivers are abundant, but are not navigable to any great extent. There are a number of excellent turnpikes, many of them lined on either side with shade and flowering trees. The stranger is at once attracted by the Royal Ponciana (flamboyant), a tree which grows to the height of thirty or forty feet, spreads out like a great umbrella and is covered with clusters of bright red flowers. The royal palm is the most important tree of the island. Its slender trunk rises to a great height, and it presents an imposing appearance. Its foliage furnishes the material commonly used for the thatching of the roofs of the huts, and the bark which it sheds each year furnishes the material used for making baskets, for the siding of houses and for the baling of tobacco. The wood of the royal palm, while not hard enough for building purposes, is still useful for fences and light work. This tree is so indispensable to the people of the island that it has been made a part of the Cuban coat of arms.

Cuba also produces a large variety of hard woods, the best known being mahogany and ebony; but there are others almost as beautiful and as useful. The employes of Colonel Bliss, the collector of customs at Havana, presented him a beautiful desk and cabinet upon his departure from the island. It was made by Senor Nicolas Quintana, and eighteen different kinds of wood were employed in its construction. It not only shows the variety of hard woods, but is an excellent specimen of the cabinet-maker's skill.

THE CLIMATE AN EQUABLE ONE.

The climate of Cuba is mild and the temperature quite uniform. Even in the warmest part of the summer the mercury seldom rises above 92 in the shade and in the winter it does not fall below 40 or 45. The sun, however, is very hot, and for eight or nine months in the year work is practically suspended during the middle of the day.

A visitor to the island even in the month of May finds the Panama hat an indispensable com-

panion of the men and the fan a necessary part of the apparel of the women; and it may be added that the hats range in price from a few dollars to one hundred and the fans from a few cents to five hundred dollars. In purchasing it is well to have some one along who is a good judge of the quality of these articles, because the stranger often finds it difficult to measure the value except by the price placed upon the article and this price is sometimes adjusted according to a sliding scale.

The rainfall in Cuba varies; sometimes it amounts to one hundred inches in a year and at other times it is considerably less. The rainy season usually begins in May and ends in October or November, and during this period a rainfall of ten or twelve inches in a day is not rare; and yet the land is not badly washed.

The island is full of springs, many of them of considerable size. The city of Havana is supplied from an enormous spring which issues from the side of a hill about ten miles south of Havana. The water is clear and wholesome. The only fault that it has is a trace of lime, a characteristic of most of the spring water of the island. This spring not only supplies all the water that Havana needs, but nearly forty per cent of the flow is turned into an adjoining river as waste. The water is carried to the city through an immense aqueduct which was constructed by a Spaniard named Albear, who came from his native country with plans which were accepted and carried out by local authorities. While the expense was very great, the work was well done and is a monument to the genius of the engineer. I call particular attention to Havana's water supply because in contemplating a visit to the island the character of the water gave me most concern, and I had resolved to rely upon Apollinaris or some other mineral water. The first day in the city, however, convinced me that the water was pure, and I drank it freely during my week's stay.

RESOURCES AWAITING DEVELOPMENT.

The resources of the island have not been fully developed, and many things that are imported might as well be raised at home. The diversification of the industries of the island ought to be one of the first works to engage the attention of the minister of agriculture. The cocoanut, orange and pineapple are found in reasonable abundance; a small but very palatable banana and a small lime are grown. Tomatoes, cabbages and a number of other vegetables are being cultivated, but truck gardening has not reached the perfection that it has in the United States.

At present the sugar and tobacco industries are given almost undivided attention. The sugar crop of Cuba amounted to 1,054,214 tons in the season of 1893-94. During the war it fell to as low as 212,051 tons—that was during the year 1896-97. There has been a gradual increase from that date to the present year, when it is estimated that the crop will equal 700,000 tons. This is almost all raw sugar and is sent to the United States; the exports of refined sugar do not average \$3,000 per

year, and the average amount exported to countries other than the United States does not exceed 1,000 tons. Cuba is exceptionally fitted for the production of sugar. The cane grows throughout the entire year and does not require replanting. A crop can be harvested every nine or ten months and one planting will last for from eight to fifteen years, according to the soil and care. In fact, there are instances of fields that have not been replanted for thirty or forty years.

Tobacco is not so important a crop as sugar, and yet in Pinar del Rio, the western province of the island, there is produced a variety of tobacco that has made the Havana cigar famous the world over. The tobacco exports were valued at \$21,084,750 in 1899 and at \$26,084,971 in 1900.

Horses and mules are sometimes used for carrying burdens, an immense sack with a large pocket on either side being thrown across the back of the animal. The ox, however, is usually employed for the cultivation of the soil and for the carrying of farm products. The American who visits the island will notice the yoke. Instead of putting the burden upon the shoulders as the American yoke does, it is fastened around the horns like the Assyrian yoke, so that the animals push the load with their heads.

One notices the scarcity of milk and butter. Upon inquiry I was told that the milk yielded very little cream and that the natives used butter scarcely at all. American residents, however, insisted that it was due to the fact that cows were not cared for as in the United States, and one who has had considerable experience in Cuba declared that he had fed grain to his cows and secured as good a result in both milk and butter as could be secured in the United States. The pasturage is excellent, and several Americans are planning to make an experiment in cattle raising. They claim that a steer can be raised and fattened on half the sum required in the western states. They believe that sufficient meat can be produced to supply the entire island and leave a surplus for export. Little attention has been given to the breeding of high grade hogs or cattle, and goats are apparently more numerous than sheep.

CUBA'S POPULATION.

The population of Cuba numbers about one and a half million, according to the best estimates, of which the negroes constitute about one-third. Slavery was formally abolished in 1856, but the traffic continued until 1886. The slave trade thrived in Cuba after it had been abolished in the United States; and it is said that a cargo of Congo negroes was sold on the island as late as 1878.

The population is made up of Spaniards and their descendants—the former are called Spaniards and the latter Cubans. The Spaniards own the bulk of the personal property and much of the real estate, while the latter make up the majority of the voting population. During the wars which have ravaged the island the Cubans have suffered most because much of their property was confiscated or burned, while those Spaniards who